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**Editorial**

## **The Labor Department Wakes Up**

The Department of Labor has begun a long-overdue campaign to protect workers' rights, a core part of its job that was sorely neglected in the fiercely antiregulatory Bush era. The campaign, "We Can Help," uses public-service announcements, [a Web site](#) and a phone hot line to encourage workers — particularly those in construction, janitorial fields, hotels, food services and home health care — to report employer abuses. It also adds 250 investigators, a one-third increase, to the department's wage and hour division.

We hope this opens a concerted effort by Hilda Solis, the labor secretary, to energize her department's somnolent bureaucracy. Workers need the protection.

Last fall, a comprehensive investigation uncovered rampant abuses of low-wage workers in factories, stores, construction sites, offices, warehouses and private homes. [The study](#), released by the Center for Urban Economic Development, the National Employment Law Project and the U.C.L.A. Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, surveyed more than 4,000 workers in Los Angeles, Chicago and New York.

The workers — many undocumented immigrants — told of employers who ignored the minimum wage, denied overtime, illegally docked their pay for the cost of tools or transportation, or forced them to work without pay before or after their shifts. More than a quarter had been paid less than the minimum wage, often by more than \$1 an hour. Violations

typically robbed workers of \$51 a week, from an average paycheck of \$339.

The new campaign rightly points out that all workers, including the undocumented, deserve to be paid for their labor. These are truths too often forgotten. If you work in this country, you are protected by its laws. And if unscrupulous employers can exploit the most vulnerable employees, no workers are safe. The best way to improve jobs and lives for all workers in America is to give those who are silent and exploited the courage and means to speak up.

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