

Legislature made Kentucky better for teachers, workers and families

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More freedom, prosperity and opportunity for future generations — to most Kentuckians, that sounds like the path to a better life.

But apparently not to failed U.S. Senate candidate Alison Lundergan Grimes. In a recent Herald-Leader op-ed, Secretary of State Grimes took a shot at my organization and the nearly 27,000 Kentuckians that have joined with us.

That's unfortunate. Because the policies we support are already helping thousands of teachers, workers, students and families improve their lives across the state.

That started in January with legislation making Kentucky the 27th right-to-work state. Right-to-work gives workers the freedom to choose whether to join or pay fees to a union, while also preserving their right to collectively bargain. Under this law, workers can no longer be forced to pay a labor union they do not support, just to keep their job.

Unsurprisingly, empowering workers has enormous economic benefits. From 2004 to 2014, right-to-work states experienced 5 percent higher average economic growth than non-right-to-work states. And after the recession, states with right-to-work came back stronger than states without it.

Right-to-work is also a proven job creator. Right-to-work states saw job growth of 8.6 percent from 2006 to 2016 — nearly double the rate of job creation in non-right-to-work states. While we missed out on those opportunities then, we're now positioned to take advantage of them in the future and bring more jobs into our state.

Also benefiting Kentucky workers is the repeal of our state's prevailing wage law. This outdated law forced construction companies to pay government-mandated wages on most public construction projects. Needless to say, this led to soaring construction costs. The Kentucky Legislative Research Commission found prevailing wage laws caused labor costs to go up by 51 percent and construction costs by 26 percent. The result has been fewer construction projects — and fewer jobs.

You'd think higher prices would mean better quality and more safety on the job, but you'd be wrong. According to the commission report and a nationwide study by the Cato Institute,

prevailing wages produced no tangible benefits to worker safety or building quality. Thanks to Kentucky lawmakers, state taxpayers will no longer foot the bill for this wasteful practice and more workers will have jobs.

Just as we advocated for the rights of workers, we did the same for the rights of Kentucky students. Thanks to new charter-school legislation, parents will have the freedom to choose a school that provides the right learning environment for their child.

Here again, the benefits of charter schools speak for themselves. Charters have been found to narrow performance gaps in reading and math for low-income students, while a national study by the RAND Corporation found charter students are 8 to 10 percent more likely to go to college. And they save taxpayers' money too; charter schools across America are funded at 64 percent of their district counterparts.

These historic reforms mean better lives for all Kentuckians — but it's just the start. Next are tax and pension reform, expected to come up during a special legislative session later this year. Gov. Matt Bevin rightly noted in February, "We've got to do these together ... if they're not done together, this state is going to become financially insolvent." Enacting reforms that lessen the tax burden on our families and the pension burden on our state budget will ensure our state is financially secure for generations to come.

Americans for Prosperity wants lawmakers to put hard-working families ahead of special interests. Grimes doesn't. That's why Kentuckians voted against her when she asked them to send her to Washington. They made a wise choice.