



WILLIAM BRENNAN INSTITUTE FOR

# LABOR STUDIES

## From the director

Throughout this nation's history, the labor movement has not only fought for better wages, benefits and employment conditions for wage earners, but also to ensure employees are afforded the dignity and respect they deserve. Sadly, employers haven't always treated workers in a humane way. During the mid-19th century, prejudice against immigrants coming from European countries was widespread, which led to wholesale discrimination. For example, "Help Wanted-No Irish Need Apply" signs flooded sidewalks and storefronts during this time.

However, these waves of mass immigration, initially considered to be crises at the time, are now celebrated as major contributions to a "nation of immigrants." In the cities and states in which these immigrants settled, a new vitality helped transform American society and culture. Today, the issue of immigration continues to be demagogued by some, but the labor movement stands strong and resolute to prevent millions of immigrant workers from exploitation.

I encourage you and your members to please register to attend the annual Nebraska Works! Conference sponsored by the William Brennan Institute for Labor Studies. The conference will be held on Friday, April 21, from 8 a.m. to noon at the Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center on the UNO Dodge campus. This year's topic is Advancing Humane Immigration Reform. Along with other presenters and panel discussions, our featured speaker is Shannon Lederer, director of Immigration Policy for the AFL-CIO.

I look forward to seeing you at the conference for this critical discussion on a timely topic and its impact on the Nebraska economy and the labor movement going forward.

In Solidarity,  
Jim



*Jim Begley, director of the William Brennan Institute of Labor Studies*

# Shannon Lederer: passionate leader and labor rights activist

Samantha Childers

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*Shannon Lederer presents at a labor conference*

Shannon Lederer has devoted her life to advancing inclusive policies that protect and promote worker's rights. As director of immigration policy for AFL-CIO, Lederer works with unions and allies in all sectors of the community to advocate for labor rights.

"My goal as director is to ensure that all workers in our country have equal and enforceable rights," Lederer says. "Any time we have tiered rights for workers, we all lose. Our unions will never accept policies that relegate millions of workers to an exploitable subclass with severely constrained rights."

She first became interested in the

labor movement when she coordinated a U.S.- Russia teacher exchange. Lederer soon realized that she enjoyed working for a union and wanted to learn more about its history. She enrolled in a graduate program in the Union Leadership and Administration at the University of Massachusetts.

"I hope that all those committed to closing the racist and sexist gaps in pay and conditions in our country will join our efforts to strengthen unions and help diversify the leadership within our movement," Lederer says.

While working for the American Federation of Teachers, Lederer says she worked with

brave Filipino teachers who had been trafficked into U.S. public schools jobs through abusive guest worker Visa programs.

"The experience taught me that we cannot expect to lift labor standards in our country until all working people are assured fundamental rights and protections," Lederer says, "and it reshaped my career."

Among Lederer's accomplishments are helping to secure important new protections from the Biden administration and negotiating frameworks to protect migrant workers through the International Labor Organization. Lederer is currently working on...

two projects: The National Labor Citizenship Campaign and the Injury2All campaign. The goal is to help eligible workers and their families file the paperwork to naturalize and claim their full rights as citizens. The second campaign aims to secure temporary status protections for immigrant workers who are organizing or taking action to enforce our labor laws.

“As a labor movement, we fight for all workers in this country and connect with the shared

struggle of workers around the world,” Lederer says.

Lederer stressed the importance for the public to know the truth within the labor movement.

“Politicians at the highest levels have attempted to scapegoat immigrants as the source of the problems with our economy and society,” Lederer says. “We should not take the bait. No worker ever took away our health-care, or moved a plant overseas.

Workers are never the enemy.”

Despite the pressures of her job, Lederer enjoys being an advocate for the labor movement.

“By far, the most rewarding part of my career has been the opportunities I have had to support workers in their collective fight for justice,” she says.

## Josie Schafer’s research highlights obstacles faced by Nebraska’s workforce

Natalie Veloso

Josie Schafer P.h.D, director of the University of Nebraska at Omaha’s Center for Public Affairs Research, has dedicated much of her work to finding solutions that help the workforce.

Schafer stepped into her current position in 2018 to manage a team that includes six full-time professionals, three to five graduate assistants per year, faculty affiliates, part-time workers, and external contractors. She previously was a member of the administration faculty at Kansas State University.

Each year, Schafer manages a portfolio of projects that total over \$1 million and has personally overseen about \$2 million during her tenure. Her achievements are a result of unwavering dedication.



*Josie Schafer P.h.D leads UNO’s Center for Public Affairs Research*

“To do this work well, I try to innovate, advocate and be a good steward of resources,” Schafer says. “For instance, I have increased the number of faculty engaged in our research teams, funded more graduate students, engaged advisory boards and community members in strategic planning efforts, shaped institu-

tional policies, reimagined our online presence and have continuously increased funded research.”

With Schafer’s leadership, the Center for Public Affairs Research (CPAR) collaboratively produces and disseminates high-quality public scholarship about topics that im-



pact the lives of Nebraskans.

“Across a range of metrics... Nebraskans are hard-working; We have a high labor force participation rate and low unemployment,” Schafer says. “Nebraskans tend to work longer and start work earlier than many.”

In recent years, CPAR has focused on such workforce topics as equity and increasing the number of high-demand, high-skill and high-wage jobs in Nebraska. Current projects on work

“Hardworking Nebraskans are a valuable resource, but such hard work also needs to be rewarded and protected,” Schafer says.

“The research that CPAR does and outreach like what the William Brennan Institute for Labor Studies does can be helpful to advocate for workers in Nebraska.”

Notably, a major part of CPAR’s research centers on brain drain or net-outmigration of people with bachelor’s or advanced degrees. This negative trend has

high-wage jobs,” Schafer says. “So it would make sense that there would be more job opportunities or better pay in another state for those highly educated, high-demand workers.”

Schafer says Nebraska’s economy is actively undergoing a dynamic shift.

Today, more Nebraskans work in occupations that pay below the median wage in the state — \$41,000 — than earn above the median wage. The jobs in question are critical to our economy, including manufacturing, material moving and healthcare support.

**“Nebraskans tend to work longer and start work earlier than many.”**

force growth and equity within CPAR include Women in STEM, an Inclusive Entrepreneurship Ecosystem grant from the Kauffman Foundation, and the Nebraska Tech Collaboration tech dashboard.

Schafer says unions and the work of the William Brennan Institute for Labor Studies are contributing sources for effectively studying these topics.

peristed in Nebraska since 2010. College degree-holders are leaving the state at alarming rates. Research from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that the major reason people leave is for a new job or job transfer.

Schafer says college graduates tend to steer away from low-wage jobs in Nebraska. “Folks with bachelor’s degrees are much more likely to be in

“While wages and protections for these frontline workers have increased over time to ensure these people make wages that let them stay and flourish in Nebraska, labor unions and broader advocacy are needed,” Schafer says.

“As high-wage jobs grow nationally — jobs in computer science, math and technology, for example — it is important to stay focused on such a large and important group in Nebraska.”

## Learn more about CPAR’s ongoing work:



Ongoing projects from CPAR include: policy analyses for the Planning Committee of the Nebraska State Legislature, the Nebraska Rural Transit Project, governing.unomaha.edu, and designation by the U.S. Census Bureau as a statewide liaison for disseminating a range of data products.

*To learn more about CPAR and access many of their data resources, visit [cpar.unomaha.edu](http://cpar.unomaha.edu).*

# Anna Deal's passion for the law helps ensure immigrants' rights

Macy Walczer



*Anna Deal works hard to meet the legal needs of immigrants*

**A**нна Deal has committed her career to helping immigrants and their refugee families stay safe and grow strong.

She is currently the legal director at the Immigrant Legal Center (ILC), an Omaha-based nonprofit that works to welcome immigrants into Nebraska communities by providing high-quality legal services, education and advocacy.

As legal director, Deal oversees the organization's legal team and legal service delivery. ILC specializes in legal representation for the most vulnerable immigrants in the complex and long-pending cases. Most of these cases represent those in primarily humanitarian or family-based

situations including asylum representation for abandoned or neglected minors under special immigrant juvenile status.

She specializes in direct service work, handling her own caseload. Many of her clients are victims of domestic violence, human trafficking and other crimes. Other duties include managing employees, programs and grants.

Deal became interested in immigration law when she studied abroad in Spanish-speaking countries as a high school and college student. She spoke Spanish and loved the language, so she wanted to find a career that would use her skills to make an impact. While in law school, she served

as a research assistant for an immigration professor. She also participated in her law school's clinical program where she gained experience representing clients.

As a student, Deal says she loved the stories behind the case law and how immigration law allows for a level of creativity.

"Immigration law is kind of a mess," Deal says. "The statutes and regulations have evolved over the course of decades, and there are a lot of gaps and loopholes that are opportunities to make creative arguments." Deal says she feels passionate about immigration being a human right and a very natural characteristic of humanity. The family is a critical social unit. Their ability to migrate for their survival and their advancement should be a right. With this, families need the ability to remain together and not be separated by international borders and immigration enforcement.

Immigration services are important when it comes to every system, Deal says, whether it be labor rights, criminal justice, or treatment of abuse victims or any other sector of our state.

"Immigration is a differentiating factor that can be leveraged against individuals who are non-citizens in a variety of ways," Deal says...

Deal also explains that immigrant workers without employment authorization are less empowered to assert their labor rights under U.S. law, regardless of their work authorization status.

Deal works with projects that involve educating non-citizen populations about their rights in specific contexts and informing them about immigration remedies that may be available. She says that education can be a

powerful tool to enable non-citizens to “assert their own” and advance and defend their rights.

Additionally, in partnership with the Women’s Fund of Omaha, Deal has helped to craft and secure the passage of LB518 (2020). This bill brings uniformity to how Nebraska law enforcement agencies adjudicate victims’ requests to certify certain crimes such as domestic violence,

sexual assault and human trafficking. The law also provides access to victim-based immigration relief.

When not working, you can find Deal running, doing improvement projects on her old 1907 house and exploring the Midwest with her husband Mark and her dog Leon.

## Get involved with WBLIS today

*We believe that everyday wage earners and their unions should have access to quality educational programs through the University of Nebraska system—the same access to public resources that business and industry enjoys.*

### 2023 EVENTS:

- 08/29: Labor Night at the Movies
- 09/26: Leadership Workshop
- 10/03: Leadership Workshop
- 10/10: Leadership Workshop
- 10/17: Leadership Workshop
- 10/24: Leadership Workshop

### 2023 CLASSES:

- Steward Training
- How to Effectively “Talk” Union
- Increasing Political Effectiveness
- Grievance Handling: The Basics
- Common Sense Economics
- Preparation for Collective Bargaining

### SOCIAL MEDIA:

- Twitter: @WBLIS
- Facebook: Facebook.com/WBLIS
- LinkedIn: LinkedIn.com/WBLIS

### PODCAST:

Did you know we have a podcast?

In “What Does Labor Want?” we discuss relevant and timely issues with guests who play a key role in improving the lives of Nebraska wage earners, union members, and the labor movement.

Find us on Spotify or Anchor FM!



Scan this QR code to learn more about our mission and opportunities. Interested in signing up for or hosting a class? Scan the QR code to see the full list of courses and contact Jim Begley at [jamesbegley@unomaha.edu](mailto:jamesbegley@unomaha.edu) to learn more.