

## **2026 Sandoval Scholarship Winner - Vincent Navarro**

### **How Have Nonunion Workers Benefited from Union Collective Bargaining?**

When people think about unions, they usually think they only help the workers who are actually in the union. But that's not really true. Even workers who are not in unions have benefited from union collective bargaining. When unions negotiate for higher pay, better benefits, and safer working conditions, those changes often spread to other workplaces too. Because of that, nonunion workers can end up making more money and getting better treatment, even if they never joined a union.

One major way nonunion workers benefit is through higher wages. When unions fight for better pay, companies often raise wages for other workers to stay competitive. According to the Economic Policy Institute, unions help raise wages not just for their members but also for nonunion workers in similar industries. When union wages go up, employers feel pressure to increase pay so they don't lose employees to union jobs. This shows that collective bargaining doesn't just help one group — it can raise the standard for everyone.

Nonunion workers also benefit from better working conditions. When unions negotiate for things like paid sick leave, health insurance, or predictable schedules, other companies sometimes follow those standards. A Harvard Business Review article explains that unions can influence company policies across entire industries, even in workplaces that are not unionized. For example, after big union strikes in industries like auto manufacturing and shipping, other companies improved benefits to avoid losing workers. This means that unions can improve conditions for people who never even voted to join one.

Unions have also helped push for broader legal protections that apply to all workers. Many workplace safety rules, overtime protections, and anti-discrimination laws were strongly supported by unions. Organizations like the AFL-CIO have backed laws that protect workers' rights nationwide. Even if someone works at a nonunion job, they still benefit from safety regulations and labor laws that unions fought to strengthen.

I've seen something like this in my own life. A family member of mine worked at a warehouse that wasn't unionized. After nearby union warehouses negotiated higher pay and better scheduling, her company increased wages and made schedules more predictable. She didn't join a union, but she still benefited from the pressure unions created in the area. That made me realize that collective bargaining can have a ripple effect. When some workers stand up for better treatment, it can improve conditions for others too.

In conclusion, union collective bargaining does more than just help union members. It raises wages, improves working conditions, and strengthens worker protections across entire industries. Nonunion workers may not always realize it, but many of the benefits they receive today exist because unions pushed for higher standards. Collective bargaining helps create fairness and opportunity not just for a few workers, but for many.