**Headline:** How Grassroots Union Activists Fight Trump, Republican Callousness

By David McCall

**Author Bio:** David McCall is the international president of the [United Steelworkers Union (USW)](https://www.usw.org/).

**Source:** Independent Media Institute

**Credit Line:** *This article was produced by the* [*Independent Media Institute*](https://independentmediainstitute.org/)*.*

**Tags:** Politics, Labor, Social Justice, Food, Economy, Health Care, GOP/Right Wing, North America/United States of America, Trump, Opinion, Time-Sensitive

**[Article Body:]**

Harmon Dent’s congregation “adopted” an apartment building in Beaumont, Texas, and started handing out gift baskets, food, and other treats to the disadvantaged children living there.

Dent, the pastor, also leads church members in donating money and time to a regional food bank that [serves about 12,000 households](https://setxfoodbank.org/mission-vision/) every month through an eight-county network of nonprofits.

There’s more. Rev, as he’s known, introduces kids to trades through the local labor council, helps disaster victims to rebuild, and assists Beaumont police on high-stress calls.

Unfortunately, it isn’t enough for the longtime union and social justice activist to fight chronic hunger, hurricanes, and homelessness these days. He also has to battle the callousness of Donald Trump and congressional Republicans, who have the power to help but prefer to inflict additional hardships on the people they ostensibly represent.

“They don’t care,” summed up Dent, citing the recent spending bill—passed entirely by Republicans, then signed by a [gleeful](https://www.npr.org/2025/07/03/nx-s1-5454841/house-republicans-trump-tax-bill-medicaid) Trump —that slashes [$186 billion](https://www.vox.com/today-explained-podcast/420613/trump-snap-benefits-cut-hunger) from nutrition programs and compounds the need that nonprofits [already struggled](https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-one-big-beautiful-bills-snap-cuts-would-strain-food-banks-amid-rising-food-insecurity/) to address.

“They’re taking food away from babies and giving money to the rich. They’re taking money away from senior citizens and giving it to people who are billionaires,” he added, noting the bill’s cuts to nutrition programs, [Medicaid](https://usw.org/letting-rural-health-care-bleed-out/), and other lifelines enable Trump to funnel [huge tax giveaways](https://mronline.org/2025/07/15/the-largest-wealth-heist-in-u-s-history-trumps-bill-sacrifices-lives-for-billionaires/) to the 1 percent.

It’s a mindset completely opposite to that of activists like Dent, a former member of United Steelworkers (USW) Local 13-243, who devotes much of his time to the growing needs in his community.

“There are a lot of people who are hungry,” said Dent, who leads Temple of Praise Church of God in Christ. “There are a lot of people who go to bed at night with their stomachs growling.”

Dent grew up poor himself, in a home without a telephone or plumbing.

But he landed a good job at ExxonMobil, made fair wages, and retired at 58, thanks to strong USW contracts that afforded him the wherewithal to give back.

The USW also exposed Dent to the power of collective action, fueled his concern for others, and he recalled, “helped to make me who I am today.” What’s more, union trainings and workshops provided him with a blueprint for action.

He joined the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR), co-founded a chapter of the Texas Alliance for Retired Americans, and participates in an NAACP scholarship program. He completed Beaumont’s [Clergy and Police Partnership](https://police.beaumonttexas.gov/clergy-and-police-partnership/) training and helps officers [defuse](https://police.beaumonttexas.gov/beyond-the-badge-adult-programs-citizens-can-get-involved-with-at-the-beaumont-police-department) mental health and domestic violence crises.

Dent also serves with the Jefferson County Long Term Recovery Group, which [rebuilds homes](https://www.jeffersoncountylongtermrecovery.org/) damaged by floods and hurricanes. And he participates in a childhood literacy program that’s essential to preparing young people for the family-sustaining jobs of tomorrow.

“I enjoy doing what I am doing,” he said. “To me, it is the greatest thing to say I helped a child or I helped someone to succeed or be successful.”

Sadly, Trump and congressional Republicans have other priorities.

Instead of supporting leaders like Dent, they undermine community-building and put more people at risk.

Senator Ted Cruz of Texas supported the [spending bill](https://people.com/ted-cruz-criticized-vacationing-texas-weather-disaster-11768106), which [cut funds for weather forecasting](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/jul/07/ted-cruz-trump-weather-forecasting-cuts) in addition to nutrition programs, and then took a vacation to Greece as the flooding over the July 4 weekend [killed at least 136 and wiped out a youth camp](https://abcnews.go.com/US/body-missing-woman-found-2-missing-texas-after/story?id=123990782) in the state’s Hill Country.

Some Republicans even had the gall to joke about the pain they cause.

When a constituent warned about the lethal impact of Medicaid cuts, Senator Joni Ernst of Iowa retorted, “Well, we all are going to die.” Ernst followed that [flub with a ham-handed](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/sen-joni-ernst-we-all-are-going-to-die-im-very-compassionate/) Instagram post that doubled down on her cynical disdain for her constituents.

“She showed her true colors,” observed Randy Hughes, a SOAR activist and longtime member of USW Local 105 at Arconic’s Davenport Works.

Local 105 and SOAR have long worked together to serve veterans in the Davenport area, and Hughes and his wife, Deb, help to keep the tradition going.

They donate to a veterans’ organization. They volunteer for their SOAR chapter’s chili suppers, which benefit veterans and a family services nonprofit.

“We all pitch in. We serve, we clean, we do everything,” said Hughes, who knows his SOAR unit now will face growing demand for help.

Trump’s decision to kill [tens of thousands of jobs](https://www.13newsnow.com/article/news/national/military-news/va-cuts-target-30000-jobs-sparking-concern-from-military-families/291-3d126331-96d2-45a7-855b-ae1e7ec50fec) at the Department of Veterans Affairs will further burden the very veterans that Hughes and his fellow activists work to keep alive.

The spending bill’s cuts to nutrition funding will also increase pressure on local food distribution efforts, including, Hughes predicted, a hot-meal program and pantry operated by a coalition of churches that he and his wife support.

Hughes, who relied on government-provided staples while scraping by early in his marriage, said the gratitude of the people he serves only inspires him to give more. But he’s clear-eyed about the crises of Trump’s making.

“It’s only going to get worse,” he said.

Like Ernst, Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky brushed aside concerns about the bill’s impact on working people.

“[T]hey’ll [get over](https://www.msnbc.com/opinion/msnbc-opinion/mitch-mcconnell-medicaid-cuts-get-over-it-rcna214978) it,” he said.

But Kendall Kilgore, a SOAR member in northeastern Kentucky, knows that won’t be easy for those who are barely hanging on.

Kilgore volunteers at fundraisers for local fire departments, assists with teen dances, and otherwise helps to hold together far-flung rural communities with high unemployment and poverty rates.

“It’s just the right thing to do,” said Kilgore, a longtime USW leader at the former AK Steel mill in Ashland, Kentucky.

McConnell “doesn’t have to worry. He’s got plenty of money,” Kilgore said, noting that many others in the region have little to sustain them beyond the supports that Republicans just shredded.

For example, the Medicaid cuts that McConnell made light of will not only cost [hundreds of thousands](https://kypolicy.org/medicaid-cuts-effect-on-kentucky/#:~:text) of Kentuckians their health care but also imperil [dozens of rural hospitals](https://www.markey.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/letter_on_rural_hospitals.pdf) across the state and put health care workers’ [jobs](https://www.npr.org/2025/07/02/nx-s1-5440284/proposed-medicaid-cuts-threaten-the-future-of-kentucky-health-clinics#:~:text=GOODMAN:%20Opponents%20to%20the%20cuts,and%20it's%20nothing%20but%20dust.) at risk.

And Kentucky can’t afford to lose more jobs. Factories and other workplaces that once lined the Ohio River, including the AK Steel mill, [disappeared](https://www.kentuckytoday.com/commentary/ashland-steel-mill-s-closing-more-sad-than-surprising/article_501056d0-eb73-5f74-813c-a5ca6558caca.html) over the years amid McConnell’s failed leadership.

“There’s no work,” Kilgore said, stressing residents’ need for a safety net. “They could surely use the help.”