



BARACK OBAMA: FIGHTING FOR AMERICA'S WORKERS

"What we have to make real today is the idea that in this country, we value the labor of every American. That we're willing to respect that labor and reward it with a few basic guarantees - wages that can raise a family, health care if we get sick, a retirement that's dignified, working conditions that are safe. . . . This is the legacy you inherit today. It's a legacy of courage, a legacy of action, a legacy of achieving the greatest triumphs amidst the greatest odds. It's a story as American as any - that at the edge of despair, in the shadow of hopelessness, ordinary people make the extraordinary decision that if we stand together, we rise together."

[Speech in Chicago, IL, 8/07/06]

BARACK OBAMA SUPPORTS AMERICAN LABOR

Throughout his career, Barack Obama has been a consistent champion of the organized labor movement, fighting for workers' rights and to improve the lives of working families. He began his career as a community organizer in a South Chicago neighborhood devastated by steel mill closings. He built coalitions of residents, labor unions and churches to bring job training and economic development to the blighted area.

In recent congressional voting scorecards, Obama had a 94 percent rating from the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and 96 percent rating from the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). As a state senator, Obama had a 91 percent voting record with organized labor.

WORKER RIGHTS

Ensure Freedom to Unionize: Barack Obama believes that workers should have the freedom to choose whether to join a union without harassment or intimidation from their employers. Although an estimated 60 million Americans would join a union if given the opportunity, companies too often deny workers the opportunity to organize and improve their lives. Obama cosponsored and is strong advocate for the Employee Free Choice Act, a bipartisan effort to assure that workers can exercise their right to organize and secure initial agreements with their employers. The act requires employers to recognize a union if the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) finds that a majority of employees have signed cards designating the union as its bargaining representative (a "card check"), mandates arbitration if negotiations over a first contract stall, and imposes penalties on employers that illegally coerce workers not to join unions. As president, Obama will continue to work for EFCA's passage and sign it into law.

Increase Collective Bargaining Rights Across the Economy: Barack Obama believes that employees in many non-unionized sectors should have the right to work together to build stronger and safer workplaces. Obama supports the Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act, which would provide public safety workers who put their lives on the line every day the right to bargain collectively.

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Uphold Overtime Pay: Barack Obama opposes proposals to roll back protections now granted to workers under the Fair Labor Standards Act, including proposals to allow employers to use comp time, whereby employees who work longer than 40 hours a week get added vacation time instead of getting overtime pay. As a state senator, Obama passed a bill to restore overtime pay to 375,000 Illinois workers.

Hold Corporate America Responsible: Barack Obama has joined union efforts to get Wal-Mart to improve working conditions, wages and health coverage.

Oppose ‘Right To Work’ and ‘Paycheck Protection’ Bills: Barack Obama opposes a national “right to work” bill that would limit union membership. Obama also opposes so-called “Paycheck Protection” Bill that would put burdensome and unnecessary administrative regulations on unions.

Support Davis-Bacon Act: Barack Obama supports the worker protections under the Davis-Bacon Act, which ensures local prevailing wages are paid on federal construction projects and transit employee collective bargaining protections. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Obama fought to ensure that Davis-Bacon protections were preserved for response personnel.

Strengthen Occupational Safety and Health: Barack Obama will increase funding for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, including more job site inspections and grants for safety and health training programs for small business employers, and employees and workers in high-risk jobs such as construction. Obama is also a proud cosponsor of the Protecting America’s Workers Act. The legislation would increase penalties for safety violations that result in a worker’s injury or death, expand Occupational Safety and Health Administration protections to the 8.5 million public workers who are currently left to fend for themselves, protect whistleblowers who expose unsafe working conditions, increase accountability by giving workers greater access to Labor Department investigators and require that employers pay for the safety equipment their workers need.

Fight Attacks on Workers' Right to Organize: Barack Obama has fought the Bush NLRB’s efforts to strip workers of their right to organize. He is a cosponsor of the Re-Empowerment of Skilled and Professional Employees and Construction Tradeworkers (RESPECT) Act, which will overturn the NLRB's “Kentucky River” trilogy of decisions classifying hundreds of thousands of nurses, construction, and professional workers as “supervisors” who are not protected by federal labor law. Obama believes that the Bush NLRB’s decisions could put millions of workers at risk of losing their rights to organize and bargain collectively simply because they participate in modern managerial approaches like team production or direct others’ work as part of their professional responsibilities. The RESPECT Act reaffirms Congress' original intent to exclude from the NLRA's protections only supervisors truly vested with managerial responsibilities.

Protect Striking Workers: Barack Obama supports the right of workers to bargain collectively and strike if necessary. The system of collective bargaining is out of balance when workers who exercise their right to strike can be permanently replaced, effectively losing their jobs. As President, Obama will work to ban the permanent replacement of striking workers, so workers can stand up for themselves without worrying about losing their livelihoods.

Prevent Workplace Discrimination: Barack Obama would increase funding for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and would fight to eliminate racial and sexual discrimination. He also would strengthen whistleblower protections.

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JOBS/TRADE

Raise the Minimum Wage: Barack Obama believes that people who work full time should not live in poverty. Before the Democrats took back Congress, the minimum wage had not changed in 10 years. Even though the minimum wage will rise to \$7.25 an hour by 2009, the minimum wage's real purchasing power will still be below what it was in 1968. As president, Obama would further raise the minimum wage, index it to inflation and increase the Earned Income Tax Credit to make sure that full-time workers can earn a living wage that allows them to raise their families and pay for basic needs such as food, transportation, and housing -- things so many people take for granted.

Provide a Tax Cut for Working Families: Barack Obama will restore fairness to the tax code and provide 150 million workers the tax relief they deserve. Obama will create a new "Making Work Pay" tax credit of up to \$500 per person, or \$1,000 per working family. This refundable income tax credit will provide direct relief to American families who face the regressive payroll tax system. It will offset the payroll tax on the first \$8,100 of their earnings while still preserving the important principle of a dedicated revenue source for Social Security. The "Making Work Pay" tax credit will completely eliminate income taxes for 10 million Americans. The tax credit will also provide relief to self-employed small business owners who struggle to pay both the employee and employer portion of the payroll tax. The "Making Work Pay" tax credit offsets some of this self-employment tax as well.

Support Job Creation: Barack Obama believes we need to double federal funding for basic research, expand the deployment of broadband technology, and make the research and development tax credit permanent so that businesses can invest in innovation and create high-paying, secure jobs. And Obama will make long-term investments in education, training, and workforce development so that Americans can leverage our strengths -- our ingenuity and entrepreneurialism -- to create new high-wage jobs and prosper in a world economy. As president, Obama will also work to bring additional high-skilled manufacturing jobs to regions across the United States where workers and communities have specialized knowledge from decades of manufacturing experience.

Fight for Fair Trade: At 7 percent of Gross Domestic Product, our trade deficit has never been higher. Barack Obama will fight for a trade policy that opens up foreign markets to support good American jobs. He will use trade agreements to spread good labor and environmental standards around the world and stand firm against agreements like the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) that fail to live up to those important benchmarks. Obama will also pressure the World Trade Organization to enforce trade agreements and stop countries from continuing unfair government subsidies to foreign exporters and nontariff barriers on U.S. exports. Obama will fight for stronger protections for U.S. intellectual property, and -- in the case of China in particular -- an end to an artificially devalued currency that puts U.S. companies at a perpetual disadvantage.

Oppose the South Korea Free Trade Agreement: Barack Obama is opposed to the South Korea Free Trade Agreement. Obama believes that while the agreement would be a boon for banks, telecommunications firms, and some in corporate agriculture, it fails to ensure that U.S. products -- especially our cars and trucks, rice and beef -- receive fair treatment in the Korean market. We have an \$11 billion deficit in automotive trade with Korea. Last year, Korea sold 700,000 vehicles in the U.S.; the U.S. sold only 4,556 in Korea. It's not just that Koreans do not like American cars, the South Korean government has set up a centralized regulatory and tax structure that discriminates against our cars. The U.S./Korea Trade agreement does not do enough to change these discriminatory practices or to enforce commitments by Korea to open up its market. Obama believes that American workers can compete against those everywhere in the world, but they should not be exposed to systematic discrimination by foreign governments.

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Improve Transition Assistance: To help all workers adapt to a rapidly changing economy, Barack Obama would update the existing system of trade adjustment assistance by extending such help to service industries, creating flexible education accounts that workers could use to retrain, and providing retraining assistance for workers in sectors of the economy vulnerable to dislocation before they lose their jobs.

End Tax Breaks for Companies that Send Jobs Overseas: Barack Obama believes that companies should not get billions of dollars in tax deductions for moving their operations overseas. Obama will also fight to ensure that public contracts are awarded to companies that are committed to American workers.

Reward Companies that Support American Workers: Barack Obama introduced the Patriot Employer Act of 2007 with Senators Richard Durbin (D-IL) and Sherrod Brown (D-OH) to reward companies that create good jobs with good benefits for American workers. The legislation would provide a tax credit to companies that maintain or increase the number of full-time workers in America relative to those outside the US; maintain their corporate headquarters in America if it has ever been in America; pay decent wages; prepare workers for retirement; provide health insurance; and support employees who serve in the military.

HEALTH CARE

Rising health care costs are a tremendous drain on our economy, making American companies less competitive than those in other nations with better health systems.

Increase Access and Lowering Health Costs: Barack Obama is committed to signing universal health legislation by the end of his first term in office that ensures all Americans have high-quality, affordable health care coverage. His plan will save a typical American family up to \$2,500 every year on medical expenditures by providing affordable, comprehensive and portable health coverage for every American; requiring that employers contribute to the health coverage of their employees; modernizing the U.S. health care system to contain spiraling health care costs and improve the quality of patient care; and promoting prevention and strengthening public health to prevent disease and protect against natural and man-made disasters.

Expand Paid Sick Days: Today, three-out-of-four low-wage workers have no paid sick leave. It is fundamentally unfair that a single mom playing by the rules can get fired or lose wages because her child gets sick. Barack Obama supports efforts to guarantee workers seven days of paid sick leave per year, a moderate proposal that will not impose an onerous burden on employers.

RETIREMENT SECURITY

Protect Social Security: Americans are increasingly at risk of working their entire lives only to face retirement in poverty. Social Security has been one of the most successful government programs in our nation's history, ensuring that people can retire with dignity and financial security. It is the primary source of retirement income for most Americans, with nearly two-thirds of beneficiaries receiving more than half their income from Social Security. Barack Obama believes we need to preserve Social Security by stopping any efforts to privatize it. Obama will work in a bipartisan way to maintain Social Security's solvency for future generations.

Secure Pensions: Barack Obama would insist that companies keep the promises they made to their employees. As a U.S. Senator, Obama worked closely with Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL) and the Association of Flight Attendants to help protect flight attendants' pension plans during the United Airlines bankruptcy crisis. He supports amending bankruptcy laws to keep companies from filing for Chapter 11 in order to stiff workers. Obama supported new rules to force companies to properly fund their pension plans so taxpayers don't end up footing the bill. He has also voted to shore up the funding of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation, the

federal agency that guarantees retirees receive at least some of their pension monies if their companies go out of business.

Eliminate Income Taxes for Seniors Making Less Than \$50,000: Lower and middle income seniors are struggling as their expenses on health and energy skyrocket while their incomes do not keep pace. This strain has been greater since 1993, when taxes on social security benefits were raised. Millions of seniors saw their net benefits go down. Seniors also had to take on the added strain – and sometimes cost – of filing a complicated tax return. And after going through all of these complicated calculations, many seniors find that they owe little or no tax, meaning that all of the hassle was for naught.

Barack Obama will eliminate all income taxation of seniors making less than \$50,000 per year. This will provide immediate relief to 22 million American seniors who will not need to file an income tax return, and will eliminate any income tax for nearly seven million seniors at a savings of roughly \$1,400 each year. For many seniors, this will eliminate the need to hire a tax preparer, resulting in even larger savings.

Encourage Retirement Savings: The personal saving rate is at its lowest level since the Great Depression. Only 55 percent of Americans working full-time hold a job with a retirement savings plan; the percentage is even lower for part-time workers and minorities. Barack Obama wants to make retirement saving easier, cheaper, and more automatic for working people who get only minor tax benefits to save. In the Senate, Obama supported the Save More for Retirement Act with Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM). The bill provides incentives for automatic enrollment in 401Ks. One study found that, among low-income employees with less than 15 months tenure, automatic enrollment increased participation from 12 percent to 79 percent. Obama would also expand savings by establishing automatic enrollment in IRAs for employees who are not covered by 401K plans and expanding and improving the Saver's Tax Credit to help more low and moderate income households save.

EDUCATION

Make College More Affordable: College tuition rates are rising almost 10 percent a year. These surging tuitions priced over 200,000 students out of college altogether in 2004. Two decades ago, the maximum grant covered 55 percent of costs at a public four-year college, compared with only 32 percent today. The very first bill Barack Obama introduced in the U.S. Senate was a bill to help make college more affordable by increasing the maximum Pell Grant amount to \$5,100. Barack Obama will also eliminate wasteful subsidies to private banks under the federal student loan program. Reforming this program will save taxpayers nearly \$6 billion dollars each year – money that Obama will direct to fund need-based grants, such as the Pell Grant.

Improve Public Schools: Barack Obama believes that public schools should provide our children with the skills and knowledge to succeed in the 21st-century economy. In the Senate, Obama introduced a plan to support school districts that try new methods to improve student achievement and reward effective teachers and school leaders. Under his initiative, 20 districts across the country will get grants to develop innovative plans in consultation with their teachers. High-performing teachers, and those who take on new responsibilities, such as mentoring new teachers, will be eligible for pay increases beyond their base salary. Effective school leadership, and effective teaching, can improve both the work environment for teachers and learning for students. These innovation districts will implement systemic reforms, and show convincing results that can be replicated in other school districts.