



## Political Narrative

From the outsourcing of American jobs, to tax breaks favoring the super rich, exorbitant healthcare costs, attacks on employee rights, working families have been under attack. Under George W. Bush, workers witnessed America's massive budget surplus replaced with a breath-taking deficit. They saw laws created to benefit the wealthy at their expense, and their sons and daughters sent off to an unneeded and costly war. Moreover, they saw a deregulated Wall Street foster an environment of greed that allowed banks to speculate and mortgage brokers to prey on the vulnerable, leading to the worst economic recession since the Great Depression.

In 2008, exasperated and desperately wanting a new direction, SEIU members demanded change. The candidacy of Barack Obama presented a fresh choice and a real chance to have a president committed to making a difference for working families. SEIU members stood strong, arm in arm as they worked tirelessly to elect Barack Obama president of the United States and a Democratic-controlled Congress. As in elections past, SEIU members "voiced their choice," and took to the streets to engage their fellow members, their friends and family, and their community. Their support for Barack Obama was expressed in action. Members knocked on more than 3.5 million doors. They made phone calls to more than 16.5 million households. They registered more than 200,000 new voters, and increased significantly their contribution to COPE.

Following the Election, the country witnessed swift action by a more worker friendly administration and Congress with the enactment of three landmark pieces of legislation designed to: address the country's economic recession by saving jobs, assisting those most impacted, stabilizing state budgets, and investing in the future; fix the country's broken healthcare system; and reform Wall Street and the banking practices that led to the financial meltdown.

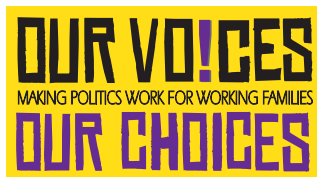
The first major action by the administration and Democratic leaders was the passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (February 2009), which some have estimated to have created or saved more than 300,000 state and local government sector jobs. It should be noted that as painful as the jobs crisis has been, it would have been much worse had President Obama and Democrats in Congress not passed the economic stimulus package, which helped to stave layoffs of police officers, firefighters, construction workers, teachers and other trusted public servants.

The Recovery Act was followed by the Affordable Care Act (March 2010), which expanded coverage to an additional 32 million Americans and reduced the power of insurance companies by, for example, denying them the ability to decline coverage because of a pre-existing condition. In July, on the heels of healthcare reform, President Obama signed into law the Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, which among other things created the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau—allowing consumers to have an independent advocate to protect them from predatory and misleading practices of the industry.

In addition to these major acts, President Obama and congressional Democratic leaders took action to address work disparities and support a middle class hit hard by the country's economic decline and job losses. Legislation such as the CARD Act, reined in credit card interest rates and fees, leading to lower interest rates for average cardholders. The Economic Stimulus Act gave tax cuts to 95 percent of all working families, and the Lilly Ledbetter Act ensured equal pay for equal work.

In 2010, President Obama and Democratic congressional leaders continued their work in support of working families reeling from the economic downturn. The administration invested \$2 billion in community colleges to provide education and career training programs for displaced workers. In response to widespread unemployment, the administration ensured that more than 14 million unemployed workers could continue to receive vital healthcare services by extending subsidies to help unemployed workers afford COBRA premiums. In addition, President Obama also guaranteed 11 million children received adequate health coverage by expanding the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

In 2010, we all celebrated these legislative achievements but real change does not come quickly or easy. Even amidst these



record accomplishments in the first two years, there were important issues to SEIU members that were not addressed. While President Obama and Democratic leaders repeatedly spoke about the need for comprehensive immigration reform and the importance of the DREAM Act, he and a Democratic-controlled Congress failed to pass either. Though the president has been an advocate for the right for workers to organize, the administration could not move legislation that would have made it easier for workers to form a union. Perhaps they assumed “time was on their side.”

However, the economy did not turn around as fast as officials hoped, and Republicans seized on the opportunity to paint the president’s economic package a failure. The 2010 midterm elections demonstrated voters’ increasing impatience, and reeling from persistent unemployment and a worsening economic outlook, voters rejected the party in office. The election ushered in a wave of conservative Republicans and Tea Party extremists that had a single-minded focus on silencing the voice of union workers and balancing the budget deficit on the backs of working families.

These new anti-worker conservatives formed alliances with traditional corporate Republicans and their well-financed corporate supporters, and partisan extremist to form a multi-headed anti-union movement that has begun an unprecedented assault on working people, with a massive effort to eliminate workers’ rights to collectively bargain and their ability to earn an honest day’s pay for a honest day’s work. These are the same guys from Wall Street who broke the economy and now they want minimum wage workers to fix it. The attacks range from shifting the burden of the country’s debt onto the back of working people to cutting lifeline programs like Medicare and Medicaid, to turning away federal resources to create and maintain jobs for communities hardest hit by the economic recession.

Nowhere has the assault on working people come more clearly into focus than in Wisconsin. First, Gov. Scott Walker rejected millions of dollars in stimulus funds that could have put unemployed Wisconsinites back to work and generated much-needed investments in the local and state economy. Next, he introduced legislation to eliminate the collective bargaining rights of hundreds of thousands of working people. And to add insult to injury, Gov. Walker introduced and passed a budget that made minimum wage earners and poor people pay for the tax breaks and cuts that he gave to wealthy donors and corporations. The situation in Wisconsin is not atypical to what other Americans are experiencing.

If you look at national politics since the midterm elections, the political environment is just as toxic and at times even more. Partisan politicians and Tea Party activities have erected a virtual wall to block any progress. For example, although the DREAM Act previously enjoyed bipartisan support, virtually all Republicans in Congress have turned their backs on the legislation. To add insult to injury, immigration hardliners have introduced a flurry of laws that focus on enforcement rather than a comprehensive solution. This is not the only area of contention. In fact, conservative and Tea Party opposition to President Obama’s agenda is slowing progress in many other areas. For example, as beneficial as the healthcare law has already been (no lifetime limits on coverage, no pre-existing denial of coverage for children, insurance companies can no-longer drop you just because you are sick, and an extension allowing parents to cover their children until age 26) conservative Republicans in many states are passing laws to dismantle the legislation.

Partisan politicians, including most Republicans in Congress, simply want to see the president fail. John Boehner, the new speaker of the House, and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell made it clear at the outset where their priorities stood—Obama was going to be a one-term president and they would do everything in their power to see him fail, even at the country’s expense.

The recent debate over the debt ceiling painfully illustrates the lengths this new crop of conservatives will go to defend moneyed interest and the seemingly inability of Democrats to outmaneuver or outwork their political counterparts. Boehner and McConnell held the country hostage during negotiations to preserve tax breaks for the wealthy and protections for the very corporate entities which caused the economic crisis in the first place as a condition for voting to raise the debt ceiling.

Though the catalyst for this new movement may have been attacks on workers’ rights, the fight has quickly escalated into a national debate on protecting and preserving the middle class. While congressional Republicans make unrealistic demands and sharpen their political rhetoric, Americans are focused on jobs.



The work to rebuild that movement began with the first attacks on workers' rights this year in Wisconsin, and now we need you to add your voice and efforts to the cause.

By deeply engaging in the political process and mobilizing behind pro-worker candidates, we can protect the middle class and change the course of our country. We will know we've been successful if we are able to do the following:

- Stop anti-worker attacks that threaten workers' ability to improve their jobs and lives through a strong union voice to turnaround the trend and grow the labor movement
- Protect the implementation of healthcare reform and ensure 32 million Americans access to high-quality healthcare for all
- Preserve quality public services and the high standards set by the workers who provide them
- Pave the way for comprehensive immigration reform by expanding the electorate, opposing anti-immigrant initiatives, and building broad political support
- Create a fair system to ensure corporations are paying their fair share to support the communities that are enabled their success.

As we prepare for the 2012 elections, we must draw on the lessons of 2008 and 2010. We know from 2008 that delivering electoral wins is simply not enough to fundamentally change the makeup of power in our country and it won't deliver the change we need for working families. As we look at the current attacks on workers' rights and working families, we know the lesson of 2010 is that losing is not an option.

So we must help politics work for working families by going out and campaigning and winning elections for pro-worker candidates. But this alone will not turn around the attack on working families in the United States. We must build a movement of workers, united to change the politics in our country:

- Away from divisive hate-filled rhetoric to solutions
- Away from debates over how much larger the tax giveaway will be to billionaires and corporation to how we create good jobs that a working family can thrive on;
- Away from the politics of fear to a country that honors the work of all and creates a real solution to our broken immigration system
- Away from the attacks on workers' rights to a country that respects and promotes a worker's right to organize, gain a voice in the workplace and bargain for better wages and conditions.