

# Obama to union leaders: 'I can't do it without you'

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — Democratic presidential nominee Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) told more than 2,500 union leaders nationwide that "I can't do it without you" if he is to win

the White House this fall and advance workers' causes when he gets there.

In a nationwide 15-minute conference call arranged by AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, Obama, speaking

from Iowa, reiterated his pro-worker positions, specifically twice mentioning his determination to push and sign the Employee Free Choice Act, the legislation designed to help level the

playing field between workers and bosses in organizing and bargaining.

"If I'm elected president, I'll sign EFCA because if the majority of workers want a union, they should have one," he declared.

"And we're going to have a president who isn't afraid to say labor needs to be strong, a Department of Labor that works for workers and a National Labor Relations Board that follows labor law, not management dictates," he added.

Obama also promised to negotiate new international trade agreements with worker rights in them, create three million new "green" jobs, and create two million jobs "building locks and dams and roads." A lot of union workers, he noted, would get high-paying jobs "aboard those earth movers" and other construction equipment in those projects.

But, drawing on his experience as an organizer on Chicago's South Side — before he entered the Illinois Legislature and the U.S. Senate — Obama warned unionists that he could not win the election by himself. Grass-roots organizing, he said, is much more important and effective than top-down commands.

And the unionists' efforts would be doubly important, Obama said, because the Republican Party "doesn't have any new ideas, so they'll spend their time attacking me, instead."

The attacks, from Republican nominee Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), have already started.

"So we depend on you to tell them about where I am on workers' issues," Obama said. Those issues include not only EFCA, but universal health care, the suffering economy, and what to do about rising unemployment and foreclosures.

"It's a simple idea" that Obama

wants the unionists to advocate: "We have mutual obligations towards each other" economically and elsewhere. "I am my brother's sister, I am your sister's kids." By contrast, the Republican idea is "you're on your own," he said.

Obama got a rousing ovation at the start of his call from a crowd jammed into the large hall at AFL-CIO headquarters, and Sweeney introduced him by saying that "it would be nice to look across the street" at the White House "and see we have a friend there" after eight years of President George W. Bush.

Neither the senator nor Sweeney took questions after Obama's talk. Obama's phone line was electronically dropped. The operator tried but failed to reconnect him.

Obama's economic emphasis followed a closed-door meeting on July 28 with 20 economic advisers from both parties, as well as Sweeney and Change to Win chairwoman Anna Burger. What impressed the group, Sweeney said, was Obama's willingness to listen to new ideas, not just talk about his plans.

"He has a great understanding of the problems faced by working families," Sweeney said. Neither divulged specifics of what was discussed, but Sweeney told Washington Post columnist Harold Meyerson after the session that "people need to be confident that the next president will help create jobs that actually enable families to keep up with rising prices."

And Economic Policy Institute head Jared Bernstein, another participant, called Obama "an 'and' guy, not an 'or' guy" in considering economic plans. Bernstein said the senator agreed that a second economic stimulus package is needed.



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