

...McCain supports Social Security privatization, right-to-work

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having to pay any share of the costs of union representation." Right-to-work comes from a provision of the anti-union Taft-Hartley Act, passed in 1947, which says states can pass laws banning union contracts that require workers to pay union dues as a condition of employment. Twenty-two states, mostly in the South, are right-to-work, and generally those states are where unions are weakest. In McCain's "right-to-work" Arizona, for example, less than 9 percent of workers belong to unions.

McCain also voted against the Employee Free Choice Act, labor's top priority, which would make it easier for workers to unionize and get a first contract, and would crack down on employer abuse of workers' rights. Obama voted for the Employee Free Choice Act, and has promised to sign it into law if elected president.

McCain came to be known as a "maverick" Republican mainly because his best-known achievement in the Senate is a campaign finance reform law that was opposed by most of his fellow Republicans. McCain be-

came a campaign finance reform advocate after he was tainted in the "Keating Five" scandal. In the 1980s, he was one of five U.S. senators who intervened with federal regulators on behalf of Lincoln Savings & Loan — after having received sizable campaign contributions from Lincoln executive Charles Keating. Keating went to jail; McCain got a rebuke from the Senate Ethics Committee for bad judgment. After that, McCain spoke out against the influence of big money in politics, and co-sponsored a bill with Wisconsin Democrat Russ Feingold. It finally passed in 2002, and it limits campaign contributions to political parties.

McCain also showed an independent streak when he opposed the 2001 and 2003 Bush tax cuts, which gave the biggest cuts to the wealthiest taxpayers. The cuts lowered the top marginal income tax rate (the nominal rate paid on income above \$300,000 a year) from 39.6 percent to 35 percent. [For comparison, the top income tax rate was 91 percent during the Eisenhower Administration, the era of America's greatest growth.] But McCain has since changed his position, and now he wants to make the Bush

tax cuts permanent. What does that mean? The Bush tax cuts were set to expire after 10 years as an accounting gimmick to get around a balanced budget law that is supposed to force cuts in government if Congress doesn't come close enough to balancing the budget. The Bush tax cuts led to the biggest federal budget deficits in U.S. history.

Obama has said he wants to repeal the tax cuts on the wealthy but keep the parts of the Bush cuts that reduced taxes for low and middle-income taxpayers.

On trade, McCain voted for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1993 and for every subsequent NAFTA-style trade treaty, including CAFTA, which created a free trade area for five Central American countries plus the Dominican Republic. Labor union leaders say the treaties grease the skids for corporations to off-shore U.S. manufacturing jobs.

Obama voted against CAFTA, but he voted for a NAFTA-style free trade agreement with the Gulf state Oman in 2006. On the campaign trail, he has said he would consider renegotiating NAFTA to strengthen labor and environmental commitments. Some doubt was cast on that pledge by a leaked memo describing a private meeting in which Obama's senior economic policy adviser told the Canadian ambassa-

dor that Obama's NAFTA-bashing "should be viewed as more about political positioning than a clear articulation of policy plans." But even if that's the case, Obama is nowhere near the ardent free-trader that McCain is, or that President Bill Clinton was when he fought for passage of NAFTA against the majority of congressional Democrats.

On health care, no major legislation has passed Congress since Obama joined the Senate. But Obama's and McCain's campaign proposals on health care are worlds apart.

Obama proposes requiring all children to be insured, and allowing individuals and small businesses to buy into a new national health plan that is similar to what members of Congress get. Large employers that don't already provide health benefits would have to pay something to support the program. Small businesses would get a tax credit reimbursing half the cost of providing health insurance to employees. Obama also wants to see a government watchdog agency set up to regulate and evaluate private insurance company offerings. And he proposes to make it legal for Americans to import prescription drugs from countries where government action keeps the price affordable.

McCain, on the other hand, is proposing to end the tax rules that encour-

age employers to offer health care. Instead, McCain wants government to offer tax credits to encourage individuals to buy private health insurance for catastrophic expenses and set aside money in special savings accounts to pay for routine medical expenses.

McCain has also said he supports privatization of Social Security along the lines Bush proposed in 2001. Obama opposes that.

"America's voters are faced with a fundamental choice," said AFL-CIO President John Sweeney in a Labor Day press statement, "to continue down the road we've taken and end up in a swamp of inequality where corporations and the wealthy always get more — or to turn around America and ensure health care for all, fair trade, the freedom to improve our lives through unions, and a fair share of the wealth that working people create."

"Senator Barack Obama has a record of putting communities — not corporations — first, and helping average people get our fair share," Sweeney said. "Senator John McCain plans to continue the Bush record of putting corporate profit over working families' needs."

The two candidates will face off in three televised presidential debates, scheduled for Sept. 26, Oct. 7, and Oct. 15. The election will be decided Nov. 4.



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