

Who's On Our Side?

By Tom Chamberlain



Jobs grew in June by 18,000 positions. 18,000! But with so few people retiring, our nation needs to create 150,000 jobs each month just to employee new workers coming into the workforce. Translation: America lost 132,000 jobs last month. While millions of American workers are struggling to find work, the debate in Washington isn't about job creation. It's about federal deficit reduction. It's about cutting those very programs that could put Americans back to work.

Congressman John Mica (R-Florida), chair of the U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, is proposing a six-year transportation reauthorization bill that cuts spending by 20 percent from the level President Bush signed into law. Rep. Mica's \$230 billion, six-year budget is less than half of the \$566 billion President Obama requested.

Meanwhile, the Federal Highway Trust Fund, financed by the federal gas tax, is stagnant. Federal gas taxes have not increased since 1993 and do not meet the demands of a crumbling infrastructure that needs an infusion of \$2.2 trillion just for maintenance and upgrades. Over the last few years the U.S. has spent \$35 billion from the general fund to make up for dwindling transportation funds.

According to AFL-CIO President

Rich Trumka, Mica's proposal could result in the loss of over 500,000 jobs next year.

Four Congressmen — Earl Blumenauer (D-Oregon), Steven LaTourette (R-Ohio), Jerrold Nadler (D-New York), and Mike Simpson (R-Utah) are speaking out. According to Blumenauer, "funding at these levels will result in hundreds of thousands of lost jobs, and roads, railways and bridges with structural deficiencies that threaten our communities."

It is unimaginable, in an economic atmosphere where the unemployment rate has inched up to 9.2 percent, that anyone would put a transportation proposal on the table that eliminates 500,000 jobs next year alone, and that Washington continues to focus on cutting programs.

What a track record: Elected leaders are not focused on job creation; they turn a blind eye to skyrocketing corporate profits and obscene Wall Street bonuses; and Republicans refuse to require millionaires and billionaires to pay their fair share to fund vital services, even though poll after poll shows that the American public thinks they should.

Their focus, instead? Cut more. Fix the deficit. Those cuts, however, usually come in the form of jobs, as we're seeing with transportation funding.

Every federal, state or local job we cut means one more person on the un-

employment rolls; one more person not contributing taxes to the shrinking pot of money; not helping to pay for vital public services like education, health care, public safety, and provide for those less able to provide for themselves. In short: one more person adding to the deficit. It's a vicious cycle.

Creating jobs, even if it comes at the expense of shorter-term higher deficits, will keep Americans working, keep money flowing in local economies (especially money spent on transportation, which will go to projects across the country), and in turn, help lower our deficit in the long run while continuing to rebuild our economy.

There are 132,000 Americans out of work simply because we didn't create enough jobs last month. Congress is proposing cutting 500,000 more. The drum beat for deficit reduction is growing.

It's up to us to turn the tide, dispel the misinformation and stand with Reps. Blumenauer, LaTourette, Nadler and Simpson. They're on the side of long-term growth and recovery. We must be too.

Tom Chamberlain is president of the Oregon AFL-CIO.

Apollo Alliance merges into BlueGreen

Two labor-environmental coalitions have merged as of July 1. The Apollo Alliance, launched in 2003 as a coalition of environmental, labor, business and community leaders, is now a project of the BlueGreen Alliance. BlueGreen Alliance was founded in 2006 by the United Steelworkers (USW) and the Sierra Club, and today is made up of nine unions and four environmental organizations. Both groups are focused on efforts to create jobs in the United States by developing a "clean energy" economy.

"We can't afford to sit on the sidelines while the U.S. misses the boat on the industries of the 21st century," said USW president Leo W. Gerard in a press statement.

Earlier this year, the BlueGreen Alliance launched Jobs21! — a campaign calling for investments in renewable energy, energy efficiency, transportation infrastructure, fuel-efficient vehicles, a smarter electrical grid, broadband Internet, recycling and green chemistry. Such investments would create new jobs and markets in manufacturing, construction, education and other sectors.

The Apollo Alliance takes its name from President Kennedy's 1961 call to restore America's technological leadership by landing the first man on the

moon within the decade. The group argues that the United States should make a similar commitment today to green technological development.

BlueGreen Alliance has chapters in 10 states, while the Apollo Alliance has chapters in 13 states; combined, they have state and local affiliates in 18 states, now called BlueGreen Apollo Alliances. Labor unions in the group are USW,

HBO tells workers' story in Stella D'oro strike

The documentary "No Contract, No Cookies," which began airing this month on HBO2, puts a very human face on what is becoming an all-too-familiar and tragic story. Byrnmood, a private equity firm, bought the family-owned Stella D'oro bakery, which had been a part of the Bronx community since the Depression. Many of its 136 employees, members of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers (BCTGM) Local 50, had worked there for decades.

The new owners forced workers to strike by demanding pay cuts of as much as \$5 an hour and stripped-down benefits. For 11 months, the employees, who hailed from 22 different countries, marched together in unity and solidarity.

Finally, an administrative law judge

Communications Workers of America, Service Employees, the Laborers, Utility Workers Union, American Federation of Teachers, Amalgamated Transit Union, Sheet Metal Workers, and United Food and Commercial Workers. They're joined by the Sierra Club, National Resources Defense Council, National Wildlife Federation, and Union of Concerned Scientists.

ruled in the workers' favor and ordered all the employees reinstated. But the joyous victory was short-lived and bittersweet. Just one day after the workers came back to the job, the new owners announced they were closing the factory and moving the work to Ohio. Now, two years later, the factory stands shuttered like so many other manufacturing plants in this country.

The documentary puts faces with the numbers. "No Contract, No Cookies" is all about the workers and what their experience has meant for them. In about a half hour, filmmakers Jon Alpert and Matthew O'Neill show what happens to communities and lives when greed trumps everything else.

It airs on HBO2 Sunday, July 31, at 6:15 a.m., and is available On Demand.

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