

12 building trades unions plan to boycott '12 Democratic convention

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — Twelve building trades unions have decided not to financially support or send members as delegates to next year's Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, N.C.

In a formal letter to the Democratic National Committee (DNC) chair, U.S. Rep. Debbie Wasserman-Schultz of Florida, Building and Construction Trades Department President Mark Ayers cited several reasons for the action. One is that North Carolina is hostile to unions and is a right-to-work state, and has laws banning collective bargaining by state and local workers. There are no union hotels in Charlotte, Ayers added.

Charlotte beat out cities with a heavy union presence, including St. Louis and the Twin Cities, for the Democrats' nod.

"We find it troubling that the party so closely associated with basic human rights would choose a state with the lowest unionization rate in the country due to regressive policies aimed at diluting the power of workers," Ayers wrote Wasserman-Schultz.

But another reason, said department spokesman Tom Owens, is that building trades union members are upset with the attitude of Congressional Democrats and the Obama Administration towards organized labor, taking unionists' support for granted.

"We just didn't want to financially contribute to the party," Owens said.

"We're strapped for resources" and would rather use money on member mobilization and organizing, he added.

"And we haven't seen any action on jobs" by anyone in Washington, D.C., Owens said. "So we didn't want to be funding sky boxes and suites" in Charlotte.

The DNC has not formally replied to Ayers' letter yet.

The building trades' reasons echo dissatisfaction with Obama and the Democrats elsewhere within labor. Union leaders fault politicians for not working to create jobs — especially construction and factory jobs — when unemployment nationally is 9.1 percent.

Unionists have also chafed at the Administration's refusal to lobby for the Employee Free Choice Act, which would help level the playing field between bosses and workers in organizing and bargaining.

And they got very angry when Obama repeatedly compromised away key parts of his health care overhaul, including the public option, before forcing unions to swallow taxes — starting in 2018 — on so-called high-value health insurance plans. Obama also never supported government-run single-payer health care, which 21 unions backed.

Besides the building trades, the International Association of Machinists (IAM) isn't going to the Democratic

Convention. General President Thomas Buffenbarger told Press Associates Union News Service earlier this year that was because his union is holding its own international convention at the same time in Toronto.

But IAM has never been enthusiastic about Obama, and vice-versa. The union backed other candidates in the 2008 Democratic primaries. The coolness continues: When union leaders recently met with the president to discuss the economy and jobs, Buffenbarger was pointedly not invited.

UNITE HERE was also upset by selection of Charlotte, but it has yet to respond whether it will either contribute or send delegates to the convention. President John Wilhelm strongly urged Democrats to select either St. Louis or the Twin Cities as convention sites. Both, like Charlotte, are in swing states, and both have enough unionized hotels to house delegates and other attendees.

But not all of the union movement is dismayed with Obama. Prominent unionists, led by retired AFL-CIO Executive Vice President Linda Chavez-Thompson, sit on the Democratic National Committee. She is a DNC vice chair. The National Education Association's convention earlier this year endorsed Obama's re-election, and a resolution passed at the Steelworkers convention Aug. 16 pledges the union to work for Obama's re-election.

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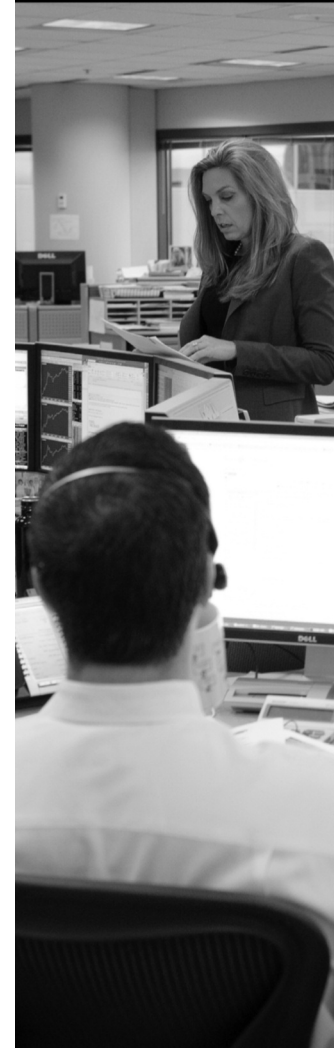
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"The basic goal of labor will not change. It is — as it has always been, and I am sure always will be — to better the standards of life for all who work for wages and to seek decency and justice and dignity for all Americans." --- George Meaney

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