

Highlights from the 2011 BLS report:

- 7.6 million employees in the public sector belonged to a union, compared with 7.2 million union workers in the private sector.
- The union membership rate for public-sector workers (37 percent) was substantially higher than the rate for private-sector workers (6.9 percent).
- Within the public sector, local government workers had the highest union membership rate, 43.2 percent. This group includes workers in heavily unionized occupations, such as teachers, police officers, and firefighters.
- Private-sector industries with high unionization rates included transportation and utilities (21.1 percent) and construction (14 percent), while low unionization rates occurred in agriculture (1.4 percent) and financial activities (1.6 percent).
- Among occupational groups, education, training, and library occupations (36.8 percent) and protective service occupations (34.5 percent) had the highest unionization rates in 2011. Sales and related occupations (3 percent) and farming, fishing, and forestry occupations (3.4 percent) had the lowest unionization rates.
- 16.3 million wage and salary workers were represented by a union. This group includes both union members (14.8 million) and workers who report no union affiliation but whose jobs are covered by a union contract (1.5 million). Government employees comprised about half of the 1.5 million workers who were covered by a union contract but were not members of a union.
- The union membership rate was higher for men (12.4 percent) than for women (11.2 percent). The gap between their rates has narrowed considerably since 1983, when the rate for men was about 10 percentage points higher than the rate for women. Between 1983 and 2011, the union membership rate for men declined by almost half (12.3 percentage points), while the rate for women declined by 3.4 percentage points.
- Among major race and ethnicity groups, black workers were more likely to be union members (13.5 percent) than workers who were white (11.6 percent), Asian (10.1 percent), or Hispanic (9.7 percent). Black men had the highest union membership rate (14.6 percent), while Asian men had the lowest rate (9.1 percent).
- By age, the union membership rate was highest among workers 55 to 64 years old (15.7 percent). The lowest union membership rate occurred among those ages 16 to 24 (4.4 percent).
- 15,000 new 16- to 24-year-old union members.

...Union membership

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nonunion workers. Union women earned median weekly earnings of \$879, an amount 34.6 percent higher than their nonunion counterparts, who earned just \$653 by comparison.

"Prior reporting shows that union members have greater access to health care, retirement and leave benefits," commented U.S. Labor Secretary Hilda Solis. "These numbers make it clear that union jobs are critical to a strong economy. And a strong economy depends on a strong and growing middle class."

Oregon's 17.1 percent union density ranked tied for seventh with California out of the 50 states and District of Columbia. California lost 52,000 union members last year.

New York topped the union density

list with 24.1 percent of its wage and hourly workers belonging to a union. Alaska followed with 22.1 percent; Hawaii, with 21.5 percent; Washington, with 19 percent; and Michigan, with 17.5 percent.

Seven right-to-work states had union membership rates below 5 percent in 2011, with North Carolina the lowest at 2.9 percent. The next lowest rates were recorded in South Carolina (3.4), Georgia (3.9), Arkansas (4.2), Louisiana (4.5), and Tennessee and Virginia (4.6 percent each).

The data on union membership were collected as part of the Current Population Survey, a monthly sample survey of about 60,000 households that obtains information on employment and unemployment among the nation's civilian population age 16 and over.

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Unions split on Keystone pipeline

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI)— Union leaders split on the Obama Administration's Jan. 18 denial of a federal permit to build a 1,700-mile Keystone XL oil pipeline from the U.S.-Canada border to the Texas Gulf Coast. Construction unions called the ruling a "job killer," while five other unions sided with environmental groups against the project.

President Obama said the controversial project could not be constructed as planned by its sponsor, TransCanada, because it would endanger a valuable underground aquifer in Nebraska. He said TransCanada could reapply once it worked out a new route around the aquifer. TransCanada said it would do so.

Environmental groups strongly opposed the pipeline, saying it would pump bitumen-laden "dirty oil" from Albertan tar sands to the Gulf Coast, increasing the pollution that leads to global warming. The Transport Workers, United Steelworkers, Communications Workers of America, United Auto Workers, and Service Employees sided with them.

Construction union presidents were particularly upset because four unions had signed a project labor agreement (PLA) with TransCanada several years ago assuring the pipeline would be built with union labor. At that time, the

unions calculated the pipeline's construction would employ 20,000 workers directly and many thousands more indirectly.

An environmental impact statement by the State Department, which evaluated Keystone since it crossed the international border, put the construction job figure at 5,000-7,000. Still, it meant jobs, and Obama's decision led Building Trades Department President Mark Ayers to blast the politics behind it.

"Today, the words 'We Can't Wait' truly ring hollow for skilled craft construction professionals across this nation," Ayers said, referring to Obama's pro-jobs theme and his chastisement of the GOP-run House for not passing jobs bills.

"With a national unemployment rate in construction at 16 percent, it is beyond disappointing that President Obama placed a higher priority on politics rather than our nation's Number One challenge — jobs," Ayers said.

Unions and environmental groups that praised Obama issued a joint statement lauding his decision to go slow — and blaming House Republicans for forcing the ruling by mid-February for political purposes, while ignoring or killing other pro-jobs legislation.

"In a cynical move, the House Republican leadership called for a rapid

decision on the pipeline in exchange for agreeing to keep the payroll tax cut in place," the union leaders said. "The payroll tax cut enacted last year has been an important part of efforts to turn around our struggling economy. While the House Republicans wrapped job creation rhetoric around their pipeline demands, they have rejected numerous opportunities to support programs creating good U.S. jobs.

"A project this far-reaching deserved better than the 'politics as usual' strategy of a do-nothing Republican Congress. Their job blackmail agenda is simply wedge politics," the union leaders added.

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers President Ed Hill said his union is "disappointed" by Obama's decision, but he also cited the second chance Obama gave Keystone.

"We are treating today's decision as a temporary setback," Hill said. "We believe the decision-making process has been caught up in political gamesmanship. To Democrats who oppose the pipeline on well-meaning but misguided environmental grounds and Republicans who routinely vote against every jobs bill except Keystone, we pose this question: 'What are your plans to replace the 20,000 jobs that are now on hold?'"

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