

...Republican platform calls for national 'right-to-work' law

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to PLAs and calls for repeal of the Davis-Bacon Act, the 1931 law that re-

quires the federal government to pay the prevailing wage on construction projects.

In 2008, the GOP platform affirmed

"both the right of individuals to voluntarily participate in labor organizations and bargain collectively and the right of states to enact right-to-work laws."

This year's platform drops explicit support of workers' rights to be in a union, and outright encourages states to pass right-to-work laws. It also supports passage of a national right-to-work law.

The Republican platform also opposes the Employee Free Choice Act, which would have given workers the choice to unionize via "card check," a check of signed authorization cards. It pledges that Republicans will work to pass legislation to bar employers from recognizing the union based on card check. Card check has been a legal avenue to union recognition since 1935; it's just that it's up to employers whether to recognize unions that way.

The GOP platform also pledges increased enforcement of a federal law against "labor violence."

And it pledges to pass the Raise Act, a bill introduced by Indiana Congressman Todd Rokita that would let employers give "merit-based" bonuses, raises, or other increases irrespective of what the union contract says.

The platform also criticizes efforts by Obama appointees on the National Labor Relations Board to speed up union certification elections and recognize some union rights of workers even when they don't have a majority in a workplace.

In a nod to Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, the platform "salutes" Republican governors who have reformed laws governing public employee unions, and urges others to follow their lead. It says no government employer should collect union dues or workers' voluntary political contributions.

The platform calls for the federal workforce to be reduced, by attrition, at least 10 percent. It promises to "rein in" unspecified Occupational Safety and Health Act regulations. And it says the government should explore partial privatization of the U.S. Postal Service, specifically, "a greater role for private enterprise in appropriate aspects of the mail-processing system."

Flying directly in the face of concerns it expresses about the federal budget deficit, the Republican platform calls for reducing the corporate tax rate, reducing tax rates across the board by 20 percent, extending the Bush tax cuts, eliminating the estate tax, and eliminating the alternative minimum tax.

On trade, the Republican platform specifically praises "free trade agreements," and criticizes Obama for slowness in completing further agreements, calls for passage of the Trans-Pacific Partnership — a NAFTA-style trade treaty being negotiated in secret among Pacific Rim nations. And it calls for restoring presidential authority to negotiate trade deals that Congress can't modify, a provision known as "fast track."

DEMOCRATS REAFFIRM WORKERS RIGHTS, MOSTLY

Only slightly different from the Republican platform's stance on trade, the Democratic platform pledges to work towards "fair and free trade." The platform calls for more trade pacts between

the U.S. and unnamed Latin American nations, and pushes for "permanent normal trade relations" with Russia and letting Russia into the World Trade Organization, contingent on its human rights record. It also advocates signing the Trans-Pacific Partnership "while ensuring workers' rights and environmental standards are upheld, and fighting against unfair trade practices."

But in contrast to the Republicans, the Democratic platform repeatedly affirms commitments to workers' rights and the value of the union movement.

Under the heading "Standing Up for Workers," the platform declares that unions helped build the greatest middle class the world has ever known. "Their work resulted in the 40-hour workweek and weekends, paid leave and pensions, the minimum wage and health insurance, and Social Security and Medicare — the cornerstones of middle class security."

"We oppose the attacks on collective bargaining Republican governors and state legislatures are mounting in states around the country," the Democratic platform continues. "Democrats believe the right to organize and collectively bargain is a fundamental American value: Every American should have a voice on the job and a chance to negotiate for a fair day's pay after a hard day's work."

The platform pledges that Democrats will vigorously oppose "right to work" and "paycheck protection" efforts. It also says Democrats will "fight for labor laws that provide a fair process for workers to choose union representation, that facilitate the collective bargaining process, and that strengthen remedies for violations of the law." That's code for the Employee Free Choice Act, though unlike 2008, this year's Democratic platform doesn't mention that legislation by name.

The platform also pledges that Democrats will "continue" to fight against the fraudulent misclassification of workers as independent contractors or salaried workers, an employer abuse meant to evade taxes or deny benefits and overtime pay.

It endorses a constitutional amendment to overturn the U.S. Supreme Court's Citizens United ruling, which says corporations — and unions — have the same rights to influence political campaigns through unlimited spending as individuals do.

And it calls for raising the minimum wage, and indexing it to inflation.

The platform fails to say anything about the future of the Postal Service.

Four years ago, the Democratic platform pledged to "fight to ban the permanent replacement of striking workers, so that workers can stand up for themselves without worrying about losing their livelihoods." It also specifically stated support for Davis-Bacon. Both planks are absent from the 2012 Democratic platform.

(Editor's Note: Mark Gruenberg of the PAI Union News Service contributed to this report.)

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