



Building & Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO



Obama vs. McCain

For the Building Trades...The Choice was Clear

By Mark H. Ayers, President

On June 18th, the Governing Board of Presidents of the Building and Construction Trades Department has voted unanimously to endorse Senator Barack Obama for President of the United States .

This was a decision that entailed months and months of discussion, analysis and close examination of each candidate's record; issue positions; as well as their overall vision for the future of the United States of America .

In the end, it was a fairly easy decision...for it came down to a choice between the candidacy of John McCain who has fundamentally embraced the disastrous economic and foreign policies espoused by the Bush Administration, or the candidacy of Barack Obama, where the concerns of working families are placed front and center, and where, amid the partisanship and bickering of today's public debate, he still believes in the ability to unite people around a politics of purpose - a politics that puts solving the challenges of everyday Americans ahead of partisan calculation and political gain.

We honor John McCain's service to our country. But when it comes to having a true, innovative vision for America in the 21st century, John McCain offers nothing but warmed over Republican rhetoric from the 1980s. Tax cuts for the wealthy so that economic growth will then "trickle down" to American working families. We heard it from Reagan, and we heard it from two Bushes. And it never worked!

For all his talk of being a maverick, or his independence from the Republican Party, the centerpiece of the John McCain economic plan amounts to a full-throated endorsement of George Bush's policies. According to McCain, we've made "great progress" in our economy these past eight years." He likes to call himself a fiscal conservative. And on the campaign trail he is a passionate critic of wasteful government spending. Yet, he has no problem supporting hundreds of billions of dollars in tax breaks for big corporations along with a continued occupation of Iraq –

policies that have produced a mountain of debt which, in turn, will force us to eventually have to cut back on spending for such critical programs as job training and infrastructure improvements.

Our endorsement of Senator Obama is tantamount to a re-affirmation that what we, as a nation and as a society, have to embrace the idea that the government of the United States of America values the labor of every hardworking citizen. For too long, our unions and our members, and working people in general, have had to endure the brutal consequences of a federal government apparatus that was deliberately, with malice aforethought, directed to accomplish two objectives: 1) Re-constitute the basic purpose and objectives of the federal government so that they become in synch with the insatiable desires and wishes of corporate America; and 2) Unleash the full fury and resources of the federal government to dramatically weaken the American labor movement.

Senator John McCain, through his actions, statements and policy positions, has given every indication that he embraces this philosophical vision of American governance.

Further, Senator McCain is the chief architect of a disastrous guest worker proposal that will exacerbate an already untenable situation in the American construction industry – an industry where current estimates show over 25 percent of the workforce as being undocumented. Adding insult to injury, in 2007, during negotiations over an immigration reform/guest worker bill, McCain objected to a provision by Senator Edward Kennedy that would have required guest workers to receive the prevailing wage for the industry and the region in which they work.

It's no wonder Senator McCain has no perspective when it comes to America's working families. He's one of the richest people in a Senate filled with millionaires. The Associated Press reports he and his wife own at least eight homes! Yet McCain says the solution to the housing crisis is for people facing foreclosure to get a "second job" and "skip their vacations."

Many of McCain's fellow Republican senators say he's too reckless to be commander in chief. One Republican senator said: "The thought of his being president sends a cold chill down my spine. He's erratic. He's hotheaded. He loses his temper and he worries me."

And while McCain talks a lot about taking on special interests, his campaign manager and top advisers are actually highly paid lobbyists. The government watchdog group Public Citizen says McCain has 59 lobbyists raising money for his campaign, more than any of the other presidential candidates.

And perhaps most telling, from our perspective, is the fact that John McCain is the endorsed candidate of the Associated Builders and Contractors...whose sole mission is to destroy our unions! In the ABC's endorsement flyer, they applaud the fact that John McCain opposes Project Labor Agreements, favors repeal of the Davis-Bacon

Act, and a weakening of jobsite safety regulations and enforcement.

With Senator Obama as president, we believe that the federal government will be brought back into its original balance of being “of the people, by the people, and for the people.” And with an Obama presidency, we will once again have a government that is determined to respect a worker’s labor and reward it with a few basic guarantees— such as wages that can raise a family, health care if we get sick, a retirement that's dignified, and working conditions that are safe.

More specifically, we have endorsed Barack Obama because he is simply on the right side of the issues that matter to our collective membership. For starters, he has consistently voted to protect the Davis-Bacon Act, which requires the payment of prevailing wages on federally-financed construction projects. And, he will make it a priority to rescind the Bush Executive Order that bars the federal government from entering into project labor agreements.

Additionally, we are excited about Senator Obama's detailed and innovative plan to fund our nation’s desperate need for critical infrastructure improvements. Simply put, Barack Obama will make strengthening our transportation systems, including our roads and bridges, a top priority. As part of this effort, Obama will create a National Infrastructure Reinvestment Bank to expand and enhance, not supplant, existing federal transportation investments. These projects will create up to two million new direct and indirect jobs per year and stimulate approximately \$35 billion per year in new economic activity.

Senator Obama believes that workers should have the freedom to choose whether to join a union without harassment or intimidation from their employers. To that end, he has cosponsored, and is strong advocate for, the Employee Free Choice Act, a bipartisan effort to assure that workers can exercise their right to organize. He will continue to fight for EFCA's passage and sign it into law.

Further, Barack Obama has made it clear that he will ensure that his labor appointees support workers' rights and will work to ban the permanent replacement of striking workers. Senator Obama will also increase the minimum wage and index it to inflation to ensure it rises every year.

Obama has fought the Bush National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) efforts to strip workers of their right to organize. He is a cosponsor of legislation to overturn the NLRB's " Kentucky River " decisions classifying hundreds of thousands of nurses, construction, and professional workers as "supervisors" who are not protected by federal labor laws.

The decision to endorse Barack Obama can easily be summed up by comparing the views of each candidate through their own words.

Speaking about the issue of immigration and guest workers at the 2006 Building and

Construction Trades National Legislative Conference, Senator McCain had this to say when a delegate in the audience had the audacity to suggest that American businesses could find plenty of American workers if they would only pay them a decent wage:

Let me tell you something...I'll pay any of you fifty dollars an hour to come to Yuma , Arizona to pick lettuce. You won't do it...you can't do it!"

Senator Obama's vision for America provides a telling contrast:

I understand that the challenges facing our economy didn't start the day George Bush took office and they won't end the day he leaves. But I also know that this nation has faced such fundamental change before, and each time we've kept our economy strong and competitive by making the decision to expand opportunity outward; to grow our middle-class; to invest in innovation, and most importantly, to invest in the education and well-being of our workers.

We've done this because in America , our prosperity has always risen from the bottom-up. From the earliest days of our founding, it has been the hard work and ingenuity of our people that's served as the wellspring of our economic strength. That's why we built a system of free public high schools when we transitioned from a nation of farms to a nation of factories. That's why we sent my grandfather's generation to college, and declared a minimum wage for our workers, and promised to live in dignity after they retire through the creation of Social Security. That's why we've invested in the science and research that have led to new discoveries and entire new industries. And that's what this country will do again when I am President of the United States .

In the end, the choice was no choice at all.

###

Remember, keep checking the BCTD website for further updates and news from around the nation.

www.bctd.org