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The Washington Connection

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November 6, 2012: What Is at Stake?

On November 6, Americans will head to the voting booth to determine not only the future leadership of this country, but most importantly, the course our nation will take to recovery. For nearly five years unemployment has averaged a little over eight percent. Working men and women have struggled to make ends meet, many losing their jobs and along with it their homes and hopes of maintaining a middle-class lifestyle. Those fortunate enough to hold on to their jobs often experienced cutbacks in hours, wages or benefits—a struggle nonetheless.

What has made the situation worse is the failure of our elected representatives on Capitol Hill to put aside their differences and come together in a bipartisan manner to put Americans back to work and strengthen the economy. This is a time when we would expect our representatives to put aside party loyalty and finger pointing and do what is right for the country. Instead we continue to see partisan politics and a divided Congress that has failed to represent our best interests. The American public's opinion of Congress has hit an all-time low, and they are angry and frustrated by its pass-nothing agenda.

Despite the frustration, we must focus on what is at stake this fall. Think back to the successful attacks on public employees unions in Wisconsin and Ohio by Governors Walker and Kasich, who gutted the rights of union members. Recall when Indiana became the 23rd state to enact right-to-work legislation, in spite of incredible efforts by organized labor to battle the initiative.

Public employees were not the only unions under attack. The building trades have to continually defend the use of project labor agreements and prevailing wages (Davis Bacon Act), which have both been under attack on federal and state levels by legislators with an anti-union agenda.

On three separate occasions this year alone, amendments

abolishing the use of PLAs on federal projects were included on house bills, and each time they were defeated by our friends in Congress. If it weren't for the bipartisan support we receive on these issues, they would have been our next casualty. PLAs and prevailing wage work constitute a significant amount of work for our members. Thankfully we have developed bonds with a number of Republican legislators who support the trades on these issues.

While anti-union legislation has been proposed or enacted in nearly every state, not all attacks have been successful. Many have been thwarted thanks to support from labor-friendly elected representatives. Without their support, the losses to organized labor would have been much worse.

No matter how frustrated we are we cannot get complacent and apathetic when Election Day rolls around. At risk is everything we have gained over the years, such as decent wage and benefits packages, work place safety and overtime provisions. Everything organized labor has achieved over the past century was accomplished through the legislative process, and those achievements can be legislated away overnight. If don't believe me just look at the public employees in Wisconsin and Ohio!

The assault on organized labor will continue. The past few years have been just a sampling of what is yet to come unless we make ourselves heard on Election Day.

HR 2962/SB 1575 "Roofing Efficiency Jobs Act" Update

As a footnote to the above article, I continue to lobby for support for HR 2962 the "Roofing Efficiency Jobs Act" and its Senate companion bill SB 1575. To date we have 73 House cosponsors, 18 of whom are from the very important House Committee on Ways and Means. On the Senate side we have ten cosponsors.

The Roofing Efficiency Jobs Act would modify the tax depreciation life for energy-efficient roofs on commercial properties. It is estimated that if passed it would create at least 40,000 new jobs among roofing contractors and manufacturers.

To date HR 2962/SB 1575 has more sponsors than any other tax depreciation bill on the Hill, and the response by legislators is very favorable. We will continue to push this legislation in spite of the current environment in Congress. ■