

Workers Welcomed Back to White House

President Obama signaled a new direction on labor in the White House, as he announced the formation of his White House Task Force on Middle-Class Working Families. "We need to level the playing field for workers and the unions that represent their interests," said the President. "I do not view the labor movement as part of the problem. To me, it's part of the solution. You cannot have a strong middle class without a strong labor movement."

The Task Force will be headed up by Vice President Joe Biden, a longtime labor ally. Biden welcomed labor back into the fold, remarking that it was good to see "our friends from organized labor" at 1600 Pennsylvania once again. "Welcome back to the White House."

Obama: "You cannot have a strong middle class without a strong labor movement."

President Obama's positive message on labor as the engine of the middle class was unmistakable, and national media took note. Both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* noted that President Obama's actions were in direct opposition to the Bush Administration's, as the three executive orders reversed previous orders signed by President Bush. And *Forbes'* headline on the event read, "President Backs Unions as Path to Middle-Class Prosperity."



Biden: "Welcome back to the White House."

The President made the announcement on Friday as part of a day for workers and labor in the White House, where he also signed three executive orders protecting the rights of workers to form unions and bargain collectively. Earlier in the week, the President signed into law the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, a major victory for women in the fight for equal pay.

Forbes: "President Backs Unions as Path to Middle-Class Prosperity."

UFCW International President Joe Hansen and other labor leaders were present at the White House for the announcement of the Task Force. As President Hansen said, "President Obama has made it clear that he truly understands the challenges working families face, that we have to level the economic playing field, and that he is committed to using all of the levers of government to restore and expand our nation's middle class."



The formation of the Task Force and the Obama Administration's actions on behalf of America's workers were praised by the UFCW and other labor unions. "The UFCW, and the millions of families that make up the American middle class, look forward to working closely with the task force to develop and implement policies that can, and will, get America's economic engine back on track," said President Hansen. **OP**

UFCW Calls for Immediate Confirmation of Labor Secretary Designate Hilda Solis
 Secretary Designate Solis has been a loyal champion for working Americans, and the UFCW calls for her immediate confirmation as Labor Secretary. UFCW members know that she will be an excellent Secretary of Labor, and are frustrated that Republican Senators are obstructing her confirmation during this economic crisis. While the economy continues to tank, our nation needs to have a Labor Secretary immediately to help solve our jobs crisis.

It is clear that those Republican Senators who seek to delay or prevent her confirmation would also like to prevent the Department of Labor from doing its job: in the words of the DOL's mission statement, by fostering and promoting "the welfare of the job seekers, wage earners, and retirees of the United States."

Secretary Designate Solis is President Obama's pick for Labor Secretary, and her expertise with labor issues, experience as a federally-elected official and longtime role as a champion of workers are reason enough for confirmation. She is eminently qualified, and Republican Senators should stop obstructing her confirmation. **OP**

Smithfield Workers Ratify New Contracts Improving Living and Working Standards

Two new contracts—one covering 1700 Smithfield/Farmland Foods workers in Crete, Neb., and the other covering 250 Smithfield/Armour Eckrich workers in Mason City, Iowa—raise living standards for meatpacking workers and their families. The contracts negotiated by members of UFCW Locals 271 and 6 provide solid wage increases, lower worker health care costs with improved health care benefits, and retirement security.

More than 10,000 workers at twelve UFCW local unions that are bargaining (or have recently settled) new contracts with Smithfield have been taking unified worksite actions over the past eight months. The One Union One Voice approach is sending a strong message to Smithfield that UFCW members are willing stick together for contracts that raise working conditions and living standards for meatpacking workers across the

industry. Unity bargaining is producing the best contracts in the pork industry and improving the lives of workers. **OP**

UFCW Victory Helps Strengthen Union Membership in South



The UFCW victory at the world's largest packing plant in Tar Heel, N.C., may have helped maintain union membership in southern states, notes a new study from the Institute for Southern Studies. The study found that union membership in southern states held steady in 2008 despite the economic crisis. Among the 13 southern states, seven showed gains in union membership. North Carolina was among the southern states with biggest gains in union membership, in part due to the UFCW victory in Tar Heel. The efforts of hundreds of organizers from across the country who helped make the Tar Heel campaign successful have shown North Carolina workers they can have a voice on the job and build a strong worker movement. **OP**

Former Wal-Mart Workers in Canada Get Their Day in Court

Four years after Wal-Mart closed its store in Jonquière, Québec, after workers there voted to join UFCW Canada Local 503, former workers finally got their day in court. At the end of January, the Supreme Court of Canada heard arguments that workers' Freedom of Association rights to form a union were violated when Wal-Mart shut down the store.

In April 2005, Wal-Mart closed the Jonquière store after the province mandated arbitration for a first contract between Wal-Mart and Local 503. At an earlier Québec Labour Commission hearing, Wal-Mart claimed it shut its Jonquière store because the store was losing money, not because workers had voted to unionize. Wal-Mart gave the same defense in front of the Supreme Court in January.

The Supreme Court of Canada is expected to decide on the case before September. **OP**