

UE STEWARD

FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE

UNITED ELECTRICAL, RADIO AND MACHINE WORKERS OF AMERICA • JUNE 2018

“There is a difference between political action and playing politics. When we fought the politicians and we won what legislation we did, UE didn’t play politics; we engaged in political action. We didn’t rub bellies with the politicians. There was plenty of air between us. You could see light. Today, try to find some air and light between the bellies of labor leaders and the bellies of politicians. No go. You won’t find it. They are playing politics.”
— **UE Leader James Matles, addressing the 1975 UE National Convention.**

There is a major difference between member-driven political action based on sound UE principles, and “playing politics” with lawmakers and candidates. With critical national and state elections coming up on November 6—and some important primary elections before that—every UE steward and leader must take some time to become familiar with our union program, as well as the nuts and bolts of the electoral system. While for some people political discussions can be controversial and stressful, as unionists we have to participate in the political process to protect what we have worked so hard to negotiate at the bargaining table. These days, union political action is a necessity, not a choice.

Our Political Action Program: UE Policy

Our union decides—with full rank-and-file input and with discussion and voting at our convention—what positions we will take on political issues and what we will do about them. The 75th UE National Convention in August 2017 debated and adopted 33 resolutions dealing with a range of political issues that impact working people and our union. These resolutions are compiled in the booklet, “UE Policy 2017- 2019”, which has already been distributed to every UE Local. If you haven’t seen it, ask your local officers for this booklet. You can also find UE’s policy on UE’s website: ueunion.org under the tab: “ABOUT UE.”

Take some time to read the current UE Policy, and pay special attention to the Report of the Policy Action Committee, which included the main “action items” set as the union’s priorities by convention delegates. The Policy Action Report guides our union to focus on the most critical political action tasks that confront us.

The Need for Political Action

Like the old saying “elections have conse-



quences,” the 2016 elections were a huge setback for the U.S. working class. The election of Donald J. Trump and a Republican-controlled Congress has unleashed a full-scale attack on workers’ rights. UE’s resolution on Independent Rank-And-File Political Action, adopted by delegates at UE’s 75th National convention, pointed out: “Trump has attempted to revoke every pro-labor executive order that Obama signed, has appointed anti-union executives to run the Department of Labor and the National Labor Relations Board, as well as anti-labor federal judges, and has stacked his cabinet with a corporate elite intent on depriving the working class of what little they have left. Trump’s nomination of Neil Gorsuch to the U.S. Supreme Court virtually guarantees that “right-to-work” will soon be imposed on all public-sector bargaining units nationwide.”

The UE resolution also pointed out that the 2016 elections at the state level weren’t much better: “One of the worst effects of the November 2016 election was the Republican “trifecta” in Iowa — the GOP gained control of the state house of representatives, state senate, and governorship and, despite a tremendous fightback by members of UE and other unions and their allies, promptly passed an even worse union-busting law than Wisconsin’s. Additionally, a host of

states have passed or are considering other attacks on labor unions, both public sector and private sector.”

In the aftermath of the 2016 elections, working people, including UE members, have been organizing and fighting back against these attacks. Elements of Bernie Sanders’ presidential campaign have organized Our Revolution to continue the fight for the issues that Bernie campaigned on and to support candidates who run on these issues. UE and the other unions that supported Bernie’s campaign have formed Labor for Our Revolution (LfOR) to build a pro-working-class political movement. All three UE regions and the GEB have voted to affiliate with LfOR.

UE members have also been active in electoral work since the 2016 elections. UE Local 150 members in North Carolina were active in city council races in Greensboro and Durham, which resulted in pro-union city council candidates getting elected. The pro-union majority elected to Durham City Council then went on to pass a resolution calling on the state to revoke the ban on collective bargaining for public workers. UE Local 170 members in

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West Virginia organized a forum to interview candidates running for the state legislature in 2018, where nearly three dozen candidates attended. The UE Eastern Region endorsed two members of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) running for the Pennsylvania Legislature in the Pittsburgh-area, who went on to win their primary races against two entrenched, establishment Democratic state representatives.

The 2018 mid-term elections are going to determine which party controls the U.S. Congress, 50 state legislatures and the governors of 36 states, including California, Connecticut, Iowa, Illinois, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Hampshire, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Vermont and Wisconsin.

UE treats rank-and-file political action as a year-round necessity – not just an election-year indulgence – we recognize the critical importance of getting members to vote – even when we’re not all that pleased with the choices on the ballot. However, getting our members to vote is only one aspect of UE’s political action program.

Members of UE Locals 203 and 255 joined Vermonters from around the state to tell their legislature to raise the state’s minimum wage to \$15 an hour. UE members in North Carolina and West Virginia supported teacher strikes in their states, which were part of the red state teacher rebellion earlier this year. UE Local 150 members in North Carolina also successfully fought to raise the minimum wage for state workers to \$15 an hour. UE Local 170 members in West Virginia defeated their Republican governor’s attempts to sell off the state’s hospitals and nursing homes. UE members in Iowa continue to fight back against their state’s draconian legislation that gutted public employees’ union rights. UE Local 893 won six recertification elections and UE Local 896/COGS, which represents graduate employees at the Uni-

versity of Iowa, has found ways to continue to represent its members even without dues deduction and collective bargaining.

UE Independent Political Action

UE’s approach to elections is different from that of many other unions. Unlike most unions, whose candidate endorsements are chosen by their top leadership, UE’s rank-and-file members decide which candidates to endorse, if any. We look at where the candidates stand on the issues of greatest concern to workers, and we share that information with members so they can make a sensible decision for themselves. We look at their stated positions on the issues, their voting records, and their backgrounds.

UE does not give money to candidates, from either party. The national union has no political action fund for making campaign donations. (A few UE locals have small political action funds, raised from member donations, and make contributions to endorsed candidates.) UE focuses our energy on voter registration, education, voter turnout – and in mobilizing members on the issues we’re concerned about. We do that before, during and after elections.

Some unions support Democrats, almost automatically, and give them money regardless of the individual politician’s record. UE is independent of both major parties, and candidates need to earn our support.

First Things First – Voter Registration

The Policy Action Report adopted by our convention delegates last year encouraged locals to “carry out workplace activities to ensure that members are informed, registered to vote, and turn out to vote on election day.” Getting your

fellow workers to fill out voter registration forms may not sound like the most exciting thing you’ll ever do, but it is extremely important if we want to have an impact on Election Day. Here are some steps to take:

1. Visit the website eac.gov, sponsored by the United States Election Assistance Commission. Here you will find everything you need to know about registering your co-workers, family and friends to vote. Each state has different rules and forms, so find your state and download the voter registration form. Read how voter registration works in your state, and make sure you know what the deadlines are.

2. Find out who in your department or workplace is registered to vote, and who is not.

3. Develop a plan to approach those who aren’t registered, have a conversation with each of them about why it’s important for them get registered to vote and let them know you have the form to sign them up.

4. Be aware that you have the right to conduct voter registration at the workplace, particularly in break areas, lunch rooms, and other non-work areas.

5. Have people return the completed forms to you, so you can make sure they get mailed or delivered to the proper state or county election offices in time.

Here are some other good resources for political action:

UE website: ueunion.org
Our Revolution: ourrevolution.com
Center for Responsive Politics: opensecrets.org
Center for Public Integrity: publicintegrity.org
Project Vote Smart: votesmart.org
Federal Election Commission: fec.gov

UE rank and file delegates at our 75th National Convention adopted the resolution Independent Rank and File Political Action with the resolve that the 75th UE Convention

1. Calls on the union at all levels to:
 - a. Educate and mobilize the membership to defeat the war against the working class;
 - b. Support only lawmakers and candidates who take concrete actions to defend working people;
 - c. Mobilize the membership and work with allies to elect pro-labor candidates in upcoming elections;
 - d. Participate in coalitions, campaigns and events which promote working class issues, including Labor Day and May Day actions, rallies, and marches;
2. Calls on locals and regions to take the rank-and-file message to lawmakers on key issues through petitions, letters, phone calls, emails, lobby visits, visits to state capitols, political action days, town hall meetings, rallies, marches, civil disobedience, and other means;
3. Urges all locals to undertake workplace campaigns to register members and their families to vote;
4. Encourages UE regions, locals, and members to become involved in Our Revolution, and Labor for Our Revolution, Black Lives Matter, Fight for \$15, the Moral Monday, and other working-class movements for defense and justice;
5. Calls on the labor movement and our allies to begin the formation of a viable independent working-class party.