

UE STEWARD

FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE

UNITED ELECTRICAL, RADIO AND MACHINE WORKERS OF AMERICA • AUGUST 2020

Getting Out the Vote (During a Pandemic)

Engaging our rank-and-file members in our nation's political process can be a vexing challenge for any UE officer or shop steward, but it's important work that needs to get done, especially during an election year like no other - given the COVID-19 pandemic and the monumental presidential election and the other important down-ballot races this year.

Workers who ignore politics soon find their wages, hours and working (and living) conditions being undermined by big business and their paid-for-politicians in Washington,

D.C., our state capitols and local governments. So, it's very important for workers to be involved in politics. We can't allow

officials will be. We wouldn't want them to pick our union's officers and shop stewards, would we?



the bosses to determine who our elected

The working class still makes up the overwhelming majority of our nation's population and has the power to determine its future, but only if it's organized, educated and mobilized to exercise its power at the ballot box. Making sure our members are registered to vote, educated on the ins and outs of the political process, and informed on where the candidates stand on the issues important to workers is just as much the responsibility of UE officers and shop stewards as fighting to defend our members' interests at work.

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Rank-and-File Independent Political Action

UE's approach to elections and politics – political action – is very different from those of most other unions. UE certainly doesn't ignore politics – to the contrary, our union recognizes that election outcomes have a huge impact on our members and all workers. Our particular kind of political action also enables our union to discuss and then democratically decide the direction our union should take when it comes to the issues we support – or oppose.

UE calls its approach to politics “rank-and-file independent political action.” It's “independent” because our union does not, and never has, offered unconditional loyalty to any political party or to any politician.

It's “rank-and-file political action” because it centers on educating and mobilizing our members to make their voices heard, in order to push legisla-

tors and government officials to support policies favorable to workers. This includes rank-and-file lobbying – setting up meetings where members talk directly to elected officials about our issues. It also includes petitions, rallies, demonstrations, phone and email campaigns. We push hard to convince public officials to vote for pro-union legislation, to oppose attacks on working people, and implement policies that our union supports.

UE locals in several states conduct annual “political actions days” in their state capitols to present UE's legislative agenda to lawmakers, and when needed, to defend themselves from attack. The national union organizes periodic national political action conferences in Washington, where members receive information on key issues and visit the offices of their senators and representatives, seeking their commitment to support union priorities. And as critical issues arise, on the federal, state,

or local government levels, UE locals and regions organize and mobilize members to fight for workers' interests.

UE has never been shy about criticizing any politician – Democrat, Republican or otherwise – for actions that we believe are harmful to working people. UE has also been very cautious about making political endorsements, and the national union does not give campaign contributions to candidates, nor do we have a political action fund that donates money to candidates. Some UE locals maintain political action funds, with money raised from voluntary contributions, and sometimes make campaign contributions to candidates whom the local union membership has voted to endorse. It's more important for UE local unions to distribute information to members about the candidates, and support the campaign activities of candidates who have earned the union's support.

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UE officers and shop stewards need to have a plan to organize, educate and mobilize our members to get out the vote during an election year.

Don't get bogged down in endless debates about Democrats versus Republicans, liberals versus conservatives, etc. We need to stay focused on where the candidates stand on the issues important to workers. UE isn't beholden to either political party and only supports candidates that have earned our support. So, let's roll up our sleeves and get busy.

Here's a GOTV checklist:

- ✓ Put the November 3 elections on the agenda of your next union meeting. Activate your local's shop stewards' network – and review the following suggested activities in order to maximize voter education and turnout.
- ✓ Visit the UE website at www.ueunion.org for regular political action updates.
- ✓ Sign up for the **UE Activist Net** on the UE website. It's an email alert service that will send you periodic messages about the election as well as other UE action updates.
- ✓ Consider organizing a get-out-the-vote phone bank or texting bank for your local union. This is especially necessary since many workplaces are decentralized or spread over several shifts. Pick an evening or two in late September (for those who will be voting by mail) and late October (for those who will vote at a polling place in person) and get to work on the phones. This can be safely done remotely by having members make calls or send texts from their homes. But first you'll have to develop a script with talking points and provide lists of your members to call with their phone numbers.
- ✓ Reach out to other UE locals in your area and combine your efforts. It's always

better when you have some help. Don't hesitate to reach out to young activists, retirees and laid-off members for help.

- ✓ Connect with others in your community who are working to get out the vote. What other unions or organizations are helping turn out the? Contact them and plug in to magnify your efforts. Look for Our Revolu-



tion chapters at ourevolution.com.

- ✓ Organize a plant gate picket or roadside demonstration – while maintaining safe, social distancing - to encourage the people in your community to vote. Contact your local news media. A nice photo in your local newspaper or spot on the evening TV news of a rank-and-file group working to get out the vote will spread the news to other working people all through your region.

Need help brainstorming or have questions? Contact your UE regional leadership or staff person. Don't forget to take pictures, and send in reports to the UE News at uenews@ueunion.org.

Voting by Mail

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, more Americans will be voting by mail this year than ever before. All 50 states and the District of Columbia allow at least some form of voting by mail, but some states make it more accessible than others. You should strongly encourage your members who want to vote by mail to do it as early as possible so that

delays in the mail don't block their vote. To find out the voting by mail procedures in your state, go to vote411.org. Click on your state on the home page. You'll be able to read the procedures and deadlines for voting by mail for your state there.

Dealing with Voter ID Laws

If you live in a state that has adopted a voter ID law, find out now what to do for those who do not have a valid driver's license. Determine what other form of identification that will be accepted at the polling place and, if necessary, what action to take to get an ID that will be accepted.

In any of the states with a voter ID law, those who show up at the polls without an acceptable form of ID should be allowed to vote with a provisional ballot, and then to produce the necessary ID within a specified time period following the election. Many other states require first-time voters to show ID. To find out about voter ID requirements in your state, go to vote411.org. Click the tab for "Voting in Your State," then choose the topic "ID Requirements" and select your state.

Early Voting

Over the past several years, a number of states have offered voters the option of voting before Election Day. Unlike absentee voting, early voting generally involves voting in person at an election office or other designated government office. (Absentee voting, in most states, is by mail.) Also, early voting ballots are counted on election night, while absentee ballots are generally counted in the days immediately following the election. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, those who plan to vote in person should strongly consider voting early in order to avoid large crowds on Election Day.

More detailed information on early voting procedures for your state is available at vote411.org. Click on your state on the home page and then click on the tab "Early Voting" on the left-hand side of the page.