

Parties stake out their campaign positions on Postal Service on unions on health care



Photo by Mallory Benedict/PBS NewsHour

Mitt Romney accepts his party's nomination at the 2012 Republican Convention. The party's platform includes a laundry list of attacks on the Postal Service and union workers.

As if to erase any doubt about its hostility to unions and the Postal Service, the Republican Party put on a convention in the last week of August that featured speakers bashing labor and adopted a platform that calls for privatizing the Postal Service.

The platform proposes downsizing and partial privatization (code words for contracting out and deregulation) of the Postal Service. Mocking the modern U.S. Postal Service and its essential role in the economy as nothing more than mail delivery from “the era of the Pony Express,” the platform puts Republican falsehoods and misunderstandings about the Postal Service on display. For instance, it claims that the Postal Service’s pensions are underfunded, when they are actually overfunded by \$50 billion to \$70 billion—cash the Postal Service earned, and needs access to now.

Along with the calls to downsize and privatize the Postal Service, the GOP platform advocates passage of a national “right to work” law aimed at destroying private-sector unions and further skewing the balance between labor and big business. Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney has already endorsed the idea of a national “right to work” law.

The platform also calls for the repeal of the Affordable Care Act, an action that would raise Medicare costs and cut Medicare benefits for current seniors. It also would raise premiums for letter carriers by leaving 50 million Americans uninsured—shifting their medical costs to others through rising premiums to pay for hospital bills that those without insurance don’t pay.

The Republican alternative is to end Medicare as we know it, converting it from a defined-benefit plan to a defined-contribution plan for workers under the age of 55, giving them inadequate vouchers to buy overpriced private insurance on their own.

The platform also endorses a 10 percent cut in the federal workforce, cutting

federal workers’ pay and benefits and repealing the Davis-Bacon law that requires payment of prevailing wages for public works projects—all ideas that Romney also supports.

NALC President Fredric Rolando sent an e-Activist Alert on Aug. 30 with details on the platform. He asked letter carriers to urge their fellow union members, active or retired, to join the e-Activist Network and to register to vote this November.

Demonizing unions

The platform added insult to injury. Keynote speaker Gov. Chris Christie of New Jersey made it clear that his party is still running to the far right by choosing divisive politics and hostility toward workers rather than negotiation. Christie’s target was teachers.

“They said it was impossible to speak the truth to the teachers union. They were just too powerful,” he said. “They [Democrats] believe in pitting unions against teachers, educators against parents, and lobbyists against children.”

With a stern look into the camera, Christie continued: “They believe in teachers unions. We believe in teachers.”

Christie’s cynical attempt to claim that teachers unions don’t actually speak for teachers hid the details of his actions in New Jersey. While Christie did work with teachers unions to reform tenure in the state, he also worked to cut teacher pension benefits, froze then cut teachers’ pay, and increased class size.

Christie followed a speaker who epitomizes hostility toward working people: Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker. Walker crowed about having survived a recall attempt last June after pushing through a law taking away collective-bargaining rights for most public workers in his state.

When their turns came to speak, the party’s nominees for president and vice president repeated the distortions

about the Affordable Care Act contained in the platform. Romney and his vice presidential candidate, Wisconsin Rep. Paul Ryan, both claimed that the ACA cuts Medicare. The truth is that the health care law did not cut traditional Medicare benefits—it *increased* benefits for traditional Medicare beneficiaries, including lower prescription drug costs and free annual wellness visits and cancer screenings.

The health care law did cut excess Medicare payments to insurance companies and hospitals—the same cuts contained in Ryan’s budget proposal, which was adopted by House Republicans. (See related story, page ____.)

A keystone of Romney’s budget plan is repealing the ACA, which he claims will save the taxpayers money. But the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office says repeal would actually increase budget deficits by \$109 billion over 10 years.

‘We will fight for collective-bargaining rights’

In stark contrast to the GOP platform, the Democrats adopted a platform at their convention in Charlotte, NC, that proudly declares support for workers’ rights.

“Because the President and the Democratic Party believe in the right to organize and in supporting America’s workers with strong labor laws, the President rolled back harmful labor policies designed to undermine collective-bargaining rights,” the Democratic platform states. “The President appointed members of the National Labor Relations Board and National Mediation Board who understand the importance of standing up for the rights of workers. He placed his bet on the American worker when he rescued the auto industry.”

On the other hand, “the Republican Party would return us to the failed policies of the last administration, vilifying

the American worker, undermining unions, and arguing that everyone should fend for themselves,” it says. “Democrats believe that the right to organize and collectively bargain is a fundamental American value; every American should have a voice on the job and a chance to negotiate for a fair day’s pay after a hard day’s work.

“We will fight for collective-bargaining rights for police officers, nurses, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, teachers, and other public sector workers—jobs that are a proven path to the middle class for millions of Americans.”

The Democratic platform also endorses tougher regulation of Wall Street to prevent another financial crisis.

Speaking at the Democratic convention, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka summed up the stakes of the struggle to protect decent jobs and the rights of workers.

“We have to rebuild our middle class—together,” Trumka said. “Our economy works best when it works for everyone, not just a select few. Our history teaches us that shared prosperity is the only kind that lasts.”

The political conventions followed NALC’s biennial convention in Minneapolis, where the union endorsed Barack Obama for president. Last month’s *Postal Record* included a full list of congressional candidates, Democrats and Republicans, whom the NALC’s political and legislative arm, the Committee on Letter Carrier Political Education (COLCPE), is backing.

“Our union makes endorsements based strictly on how each candidate would treat the interests of letter carriers,” President Rolando said. “We don’t consider political party. It’s unfortunate that most pro-letter carrier candidates come from only one party, but that’s the way they tend to line up these days. I look forward to the day when both political parties respect the rights of workers and support the middle class.” ✉

Does your state offer early voting or voting by mail?

To encourage participation and accommodate busy schedules and members of the military overseas, many states have made it easier to vote in this fall’s election. Thanks in part to lobbying by letter carriers, some states allow voting by mail. Several states will open the polls days or weeks before Election Day (Nov. 6) to allow voters to cast their votes in person. And some allow “no excuse necessary” absentee voting, giving voters the option to vote by absentee ballot for any reason, usually by mailing their ballot.

In all, 36 states offer one or more of these options. The rules vary from state to state, and sometimes even within a state. Voters in South Dakota and Idaho, the two states with the earliest in-person voting, could go to the polls beginning Sept. 21. In Idaho and most other states with early voting, however, voting ends briefly before opening again on Election Day.

For people with busy or uncertain schedules, early voting is a great way to ensure that your vote is counted. States with early voting, vote by mail or no-excuse absentee ballots are listed below. To find out what the dates and processes for voting in these states, contact your local voting registrar or visit earlyvoting.net/resources.

Alaska	Nebraska
Arizona	Nevada
Arkansas	New Jersey
California	New Mexico
Colorado	North Carolina
Washington, DC	North Dakota
Florida	Ohio
Georgia	Oklahoma
Hawaii	Oregon
Idaho	South Dakota
Illinois	Tennessee
Indiana	Texas
Iowa	Utah
Kansas	Vermont
Louisiana	Washington
Maine	West Virginia
Maryland	Wisconsin
Montana	Wyoming