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## Union locals pledge to halt GOP in 2014

By Zachary Dowdy

**W**ith sights set on the November 2014 elections, Graphic Communications Conference and International Brotherhood of Teamsters leaders are pledging to work tirelessly for pro-labor candidates and assure there is no repeat of the disastrous midterm contests of 2010.

What they aim for is to prevent a repeat of the mid-term results four years ago. That's when, analysts say, a Tea Party-fueled backlash against Democratic President Barack Obama and his signature Affordable Healthcare law ousted 63 Democrats from the U.S. House and six from the Senate.

The GOP momentum spread to states like Wisconsin, where right winger Scott Walker was elected governor and, with Republican state legislative colleagues, quickly enacted legislation that stripped basic bargaining rights from public employees.

GCC/IBT leaders vow not to be caught flat-footed this time around.

"We let down our guard in 2010," said union President George Tedeschi. "It won't happen again." Other union leaders voiced similar sentiments.

"I would tell people that labor should reward



its friends and punish its enemies," said Frank Golden, business representative and organizer for District Council 4 in the Chicago area, quoting American Federation of Labor founder Samuel Gompers. "I use that as a stepping stone and tell these people, because we got a little time to go, and just throw that straight at them as a reminder."

It's a general rule of politics that midterm election results are largely determined by a president's job approval rating. If the chief executive

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is well-regarded, voters are apt to favor his party. A president with low public opinion scores can be a detriment.

"Using the president's approval rating, even in a midterm election, is useful because, for better or worse, a president is the face of his party,"

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wrote Charlie Cook, editor of The Cook Political Report and one of the nation's leading political analysts. "Although voters rarely reward a party for having a popular president, they are quick to register their displeasure with a chief executive by voting against the candidates of that party in a midterm election." That's especially true in a president's second mid-term.

In 2006, GOP President George W. Bush was struggling and Republicans lost 30 House seats, six Senate seats and majorities in both houses of Congress. Polls show history may repeat itself.

That's because Obama also has lost ground recently. By mid-June, an average of 49 percent of those surveyed, in dozens of polls compiled by Real Clear Politics, said they disapproved of the president's performance.

Obama's slide was tied to several embarrassing episodes -- Internal Revenue Service agents allegedly hounding tea party-affiliated groups, secret collection of data from Associated Press reporters, and the National Security Agency's surveillance of phone calls and overseas Internet use.

Next year, all 435 seats in the GOP-dominat-

ed U.S. House are up for election in the president's second mid-term. And 33 Senate seats, a majority of them Democratic-held, will be contested.

Overall, Democrats hold 52 Senate seats, Republicans hold 45, and independents, two. Sen. Frank Lautenberg, D-N.J., who died in June, held the other. GOP Gov. Chris Christie appointed a Republican to replace Lautenberg until a special October election, upping the GOP's Senate total, temporarily, to 46.

There will be 36 statehouse battles in November 2014, with most in GOP hands. Among the most closely watched will be the gubernatorial race in Wisconsin, where Walker is running for reelection. The GOP governor beat back a recall election in 2012 despite efforts by organized labor to oust him after Walker pushed legislation virtually killing collective bargaining for most of the Badger State's 200,000 public workers.

Similar pieces of legislation also were proposed in Ohio and Michigan, now a right-to-work state.



Zachary Dowdy writes for the Graphics Communicator.

## The White House and "Cold War mentality"

By PW Editorial

**P**resident Obama told a Tonight Show audience Aug. 6 that there are times the Russians "slip back into Cold War thinking and a Cold War mentality."

The next day, the administration said the president would not go through with his planned summit next month with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Besides Putin's announcement that Russia is giving U.S. whistleblower Edward Snowden temporary asylum, the president's press secretary also cited "lack of progress" on issues including arms control and missile defense, and civil society.

Despite the summit's cancellation, the president will travel to Russia for the G-20 summit Sept. 5 and 6, and Secretary of State John Kerry and Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel are set to meet face-to-face with their Russian counterparts in Washington Aug. 9. Big differences do exist in the two countries' positions on international issues. But refusing to talk at the highest level will not help resolve these concerns. Instead, it seems to illustrate the Obama administration's own in-

dulgence in "Cold War thinking and a Cold War mentality." In fact, asylum for Snowden after his revelations about massive U.S. surveillance, with their profound implications for U.S. civil liberties and relations abroad, is an odd pretext over which to cancel the meeting.

A far more constructive path would be for the two presidents to hold their summit. Greater willingness by the U.S. administration to hold high-level one-on-one talks with leaders in Iran and North Korea, as leaders of those nations have urged, could open the doors to progress there as well. So would serious diplomatic efforts in many international contexts. Recent commemorations of the 68th anniversary of the U.S. nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki should remind us that it is more important than ever for the world's two most nuclear-armed nations to continue the process they have begun, to make major reductions in their nuclear arsenals.

President John F. Kennedy once famously repeated Winston Churchill's words: "It's better to jaw, jaw, than to war, war." That's a comment well worth listening to today.

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# Thousands shut down streets at ALEC meeting

By John Wojcik

**T**housands of union and non-union workers and their allies shut down the streets around the posh Palmer House Hilton in Chicago, protesting the right-wing American Legislative Exchange Council meeting at the hotel.

The demonstrators, organized by the 500,000-member Chicago Federation of Labor and a host of community allies, say ALEC is hurting just about everyone in America who is not part of the top one percent.

ALEC is behind hundreds of bills its lawmaker members push through state legislative bodies - bills that destroy collective bargaining rights, lower wages, limit voting rights, weaken environmental protection - and it is behind the notorious "stand your ground" laws backed by the National Rifle Association.

Outside the hotel, on Monroe Street, the Musicians union band played "When the Saints Go Marchin' In" as wave after wave of members from every union in Chicagoland filled the sidewalk and the street.

Elevated CTA trains passing along the Wabash Ave. El blew their horns in support as hundreds who couldn't fit on Monroe Street spilled out to the adjoining street under the train trestle. The crowds roared every time they heard the train operators blow the horns.

"This is a beautiful gathering not just of union workers and non-union workers but of all our allies as well - a true coalition," declared Bob Reiter, secretary-treasurer of the CFL, in his speech



show them that."

"Save the workers, save the teachers, save the students, save the youngsters, save the carpenters, save the janitors and the machinists - save all your people," the Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr. implored from the podium. The crowd shouted approval after each group he mentioned.

Among the demonstrators against ALEC was Melissa Rakestraw, a letter carrier from Schaumburg, Ill. She explained why she came: "You know that \$5.5 billion mandate with Congress forcing the postal service to pay that out for future pensions? That's what's killing the post office and it was John McHugh, a Republican congressman - a member of ALEC - who pushed that through years ago. ALEC has its deadly fingers everywhere."

Kimberly Bowsky, a teacher at Seward Elementary School in Chicago's Back of the Yards neighborhood, was also intent on voicing her opposition to ALEC: "I see the scars in my neighborhood. I haven't lost my job yet, but I know these people are out not just to cut services but to kill public education altogether. Their idea is no public schools for our children. They prefer charter schools or better yet private profit-making prisons. It's got to stop. That's why I'm here."

**ALEC is behind hundreds of bills that destroy collective bargaining rights.**

## Dream Defenders convene legislative session

By Josh LeClair

**A**fter Florida's governor refused to call legislators back to hold a special session to discuss the state's Stand Your Ground law last week, the youth and students who have been occupying the state capital, decided to convene their own.

The Dream Defenders, a multi-racial human rights organization of youth who confront inequality with nonviolent direct action and coalition building, began their takeover of the Florida Statehouse last week. They demanded a meeting with Republican tea party Gov. Rick Scott and a special session of the Florida Legislature to address the "circumstances that led to the killing of Trayvon Martin over a year ago: the school-to-prison pipeline, stand your ground vigilantism, and racial profiling."

The vice president of the Dream Defenders at the University of Central Florida, Marie Paul, said, "In the state of Florida, young black and brown and poor children aren't safe. We have parents fearing for their young and babies fearing for their lives, and they have every right to be unsettled. They are being criminalized and penalized and stigmatized negatively and at alarming rates by a system that seems to be protecting everyone's rights but theirs. That's a problem.

"We're calling our own special session because lives are at stake and idleness will not be tolerated. The Scott administration seems to be more focused on their reputation than actually finding solutions," Paul said.

## Reformas en el mercado de vivienda

Por Alberto Ampuero

**E**l presidente Barack Obama habló esta semana en Phoenix (Arizona), una de las regiones más castigadas por el colapso inmobiliario. Propuso reformar el sistema de financiación de la vivienda en el que las hipotecarias Fannie Mae y Freddie Mac son un pilar fundamental.

Obama considera que el Gobierno debe seguir desempeñando un papel fundamental en el mercado hipotecario, sin embargo, plantea cambios para que haya una mayor participación privada. "El capital privado debería tener un papel más importante en el mercado hipotecario", dijo.

Bajo este plan, el gobierno mantendrá un papel regulador y el sector privado dejaría de beneficiarse de las protecciones con que ha contado hasta ahora.

Bajo el sistema actual, el gobierno garantiza más de 80 por ciento de los préstamos hipotecarios otorgados por las entidades privadas Fannie Mae y Freddie Mac, modelo que a decir de la Casa Blanca "no tiene sentido", ya que "Si las cosas van bien son ellos los que ganan pero si van mal es el contribuyente el que pierde".

Fannie y Freddie, que respaldan préstamos hipotecarios por valor de cinco billones de dólares, tuvieron que ser intervenidas hace cinco años para evitar un colapso de consecuencias impredecibles. El primer trimestre se anotaron ya los primeros beneficios y no piden ayudas públicas desde el se-

gundo trimestre del pasado año, que restituyeron ya en su mayoría.

Obama dijo que aunque el mercado continúa frágil, empieza a mostrar signos de recuperación tras siete años, con un alza de 50 por ciento en las ventas y de 75 por ciento en la construcción.

Pero ese proceso de recuperación no llegará muy lejos si los responsables políticos lo pisotean, especialmente si suben los tipos de interés, advierte Paul Krugman

"Ahora esa recuperación, dice, tiene que enfrentarse a unos costes de financiación que están aumentando drásticamente: los tipos de interés de las hipotecas a 30 años son un tercio más caros desde que la Reserva Federal empezó a hablar de relajar sus esfuerzos hace unos meses".

¿A qué se debe esto? Uno de los motivos, dice Krugman, es que la Reserva se ve sometida a una presión constante por parte de los halcones monetarios, que siempre quieren restricción en el crédito y tipos de interés más altos.

Pero Obama considera que se pueden adoptar medidas a corto plazo que pueden contribuir a apuntalar el repunte que desde hace un año vive la industria, que será un motor clave para la recuperación económica.

La prioridad del presidente es concentrarse en las comunidades más castigadas por la crisis, facilitando a más familias en apuros nuevas vías para renegociar las hipotecas y aprovechar aún los bajos tipos de interés y simplificando el papeleo.

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