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Labor to mobilize 400,000 volunteers for 2012 elections

By John Wojcik and Mark Gruenberg

The AFL-CIO's executive council on Thursday gave final approval to a plan to deploy at least 400,000 union members to work on the re-election of President Obama, keeping the Senate out of the hands of the GOP and taking the House back from Republican control.

The plan was announced here by Jeff Hauser, who emphasized he was speaking with the full authority of the labor federation.

If unions succeed in deploying that number of volunteers, it will be what one labor leader described as the "biggest army of ground troops we have ever put out for an election." In 2008, when President Obama was elected, unions turned out 250,000 volunteers nationwide.

In addition to deploying more volunteer troops than last time, the political plan approved by the executive council involves an organized effort to reach more non-union members than ever before.

In the key battleground states, Hauser said, the expectation is that the number of non-unionists will exceed the number of people in unions who are reached by the union election volunteers. Efforts to reach non-union members will be carried out under the auspices of Workers' Voice, labor's new SuperPAC.

Worker's Voice is the labor movement's alternative to the multi-billion-dollar SuperPACs set up by big businesses and billionaires after the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision allowing unlimited corporate spending on elections. Work-



ers Voice will allow unions to campaign among non-union members "but not with the millions of dollars that the corporations have," Hauser said. "What we will have is the ground troops, the boots on the ground."

People in the AFL-CIO's political department hope that labor's edge in the "ground game" will enable labor to defeat the big-spending business and trade associations which have traditionally outspent unions by margins of 10 to 1 during election campaigns.

In another move, aimed specifically at deny-

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ing Republicans a chance at control of the Senate, the AFL-CIO executive council also voted Thursday to add Massachusetts to its list of bat-

In 2008, when President Obama was elected, unions turned out 250,000 volunteers nationwide.

tleground states. The decision was made because of the closeness of the race between Democratic nominee Elizabeth Warren and incumbent GOP Sen. Scott Brown.

The Brown-Warren race, a labor leader from Massachusetts said, “really should not be this close, but it is. Brown makes himself look like he is really an independent when we know that this is not true. He rides around in a pickup truck making himself look like a friend of workers while trying to portray Warren as an out-of-touch Harvard professor. The opposite is true and we are going to make sure voters realize that.”

The other six battleground states are Florida, Michigan, Nevada, Ohio, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania.

Participants in the executive council meeting made it clear that the labor movement will not limit election activity to these seven states.

The federation, its Working America affiliate and its SuperPAC, Workers Voice, will be involved in 20 other states according to Hauser, who noted that Working America, the federation’s non-union affiliate, has just added North Carolina and Min-

nesota to its list.

The political plan approved Thursday also maps activity for union volunteers in closely contested Senate races, including labor support for endangered Democrats like Sherrod Brown, in Ohio, Claire McCaskill in Missouri and Ben Nelson in Florida. In Nevada the unions will mobilize for Democrat Shelley Berkley. They will push in Virginia for Tim Kaine and in Wisconsin for Tammy Baldwin.

Also part of the plan is an operation aimed at taking back from Republicans more than the 27 seats need to wrest control of the House from the tea party extremists. Unions will mobilize to protect endangered pro-worker incumbents in some cases, Hauser said, and in other cases they will back pro-worker individuals contesting for open seats.



John Wojcik is PW labor editor.

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GOP stalls Violence Against Women Act

By Susan Webb

Renewal of the Violence Against Women Act is tied up in Congress. The reason: Republicans reject extending the law’s protections for women who are undocumented immigrants, Native Americans, LGBT, or students on campuses.

The Violence Against Women Act, originally enacted in 1994, requires periodic reauthorization. Usually that happens easily with substantial bipartisan support. In 2005 it was renewed nearly unanimously. This year, it passed the Senate with a bipartisan vote. But the Republican-controlled House, on a party-line vote, insisted on passing a version that excluded the added protections for those categories of women. Among those voting for the exclusionary version were Rep. Paul Ryan - Mitt Romney’s pick for vice president, and Missouri Rep. Todd Akin.

Vice President Joe Biden, who drafted the original 1994 bill, noted in an Aug. 1 op ed that the Violence Against Women Act “established several critical new protections: first, it provides law enforcement with new tools to prosecute domestic violence crimes and put offenders behind bars. Second, it helps victims find safe places to stay so they don’t have to choose between living on the streets or living with someone who is hurting them. And third, it gives women a crisis

hotline they can call when they need immediate help.” Since it was established the National Domestic Violence Hotline has received millions of calls from women. It takes calls in over 170 languages.

Each time VAWA has been reauthorized, the hotline website explains, improvements have been included. For example, the 2005 reauthorization added protections for immigrants; protected victims of domestic violence from evictions; provided new federal funding for rape crisis centers; added services for children and teenagers, and culturally- and linguistically-specific services for communities.

Terry O’Neill, president of the National Organization for Women, points out that women have for the last few years raised the fact that the law still has gaps. Two years ago, women from around the country visited all members of Congress “to make the case for a more inclusive VAWA. We went to both Democratic and Republican offices,” O’Neill said in an Aug. 9 statement. Among those they met with was Sen. Grassley, R-Iowa, ranking member of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

NOW is urging calls to Congress members urging them to support the Senate’s bipartisan, inclusive version of the Violence Against Women Act.

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13,000 jam Navy Pier to gain legal status

By Laura Cambron

On Aug. 15, Navy Pier transformed into New York's Ellis Island. Instead of seeing the Statue of Liberty welcome them, it was the Chicago skyline.

Thirteen thousand young immigrants lined up to seek legal status under a new Obama administration program. These immigrants were different from their forebears who applied for legal status on Ellis Island. They didn't arrive at the pier here in boats from overseas. They came instead by bus, by car, by train, and on foot from Chicago and other towns across the Midwest, because they have lived in this country for most of their lives.

The thousands who came out in the open yesterday with their undocumented status did so for the first time knowing that, as of yesterday, they were under the protection of an executive order issued June 15 by President Barack Obama.

"We are so glad about this huge turnout," said a jubilant Lawrence Benito, executive director of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, the sponsoring organization, "and we are so glad that people haven't listened to those voices telling us it was too dangerous to come out in the open."

Benito said that by 1 p.m., 11,500 people of the 13,000 who showed up had already been served and that people should check the coalition's website, dreamrelief.org, for information about additional application events.

The president's order frees more than 1.2 million youth nationwide from fear of deportation. Successful applicants must have a clean criminal record. Those granted approval would be given a two-year deferral from deportation and legal authorization to work.

The crowds of young immigrants, carrying everything from school records to plane and boat tickets as proof of time spent in the U.S., backed up half a mile into Millennium Park.

Among the most anxious on the lines were young mothers and fathers, sometimes carrying their U.S.-born babies.



One volunteer helping the applicants was Dr. Gloria Valiente, a pediatrician with a private practice in Chicago.

Teresa Lee, now in her 20s, was brought here from Brazil when she was two years old.

"We lived in a cramped apartment and had very little but there was a piano in the place and I started to play as a little child," she recounted.

By the age of 17 she was playing piano for the world-renowned Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

"Colleagues and teachers said, 'How about college and scholarships?' I had never told anyone about my undocumented status and now, suddenly, all my progress was going to be stopped. What would I do if they ever tried to send me back to Brazil? I can't even speak Portuguese," she said.

Lee is active now with the immigrant rights coalition and said she has great respect for the two Illinois Democrats, Rep. Luis Gutierrez and Sen. Dick Durbin, who introduced the DREAM Act.

In December 2010, it passed the House. Although it had the support of 55 Senators, a Republican filibuster blocked it from passing.

"President Obama deserves a lot of credit," said Gutierrez. "He kept his word. He wanted us to get the DREAM Act passed but when the Republicans blocked us in the Senate, he kept his word and took a brave stance by issuing this executive order."

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Akin, Ryan, rape and Republican hypocrisy

PW Editorial

Republican hand wringing over the crude remarks about “legitimate rape” made by GOP Senate candidate Todd Akin in Missouri is perhaps the starkest of many recent examples of that party’s hypocrisy.

The Romney-Ryan ticket is distancing itself from Rep. Akin, not because they disagree with his ignorant views about rape victims not having the right to abortions, but because they fear Akin will expose what they and their party are all about.

Fierce opposition to women’s reproductive rights, including the right to decide whether or not to bear a child, has been the agenda of the Republican Party for quite some time now.

The GOP platform adopted when George W. Bush was selected as the nominee for president included a no-abortion, no-exception, plank that would force rape victims to carry pregnancies to term.

When Sarah Palin was the party’s vice presidential candidate in 2008 she campaigned openly in favor of the position enunciated by Akin the other day.

In 2010 almost all the GOP candidates for the U.S. Senate and House embraced the Akin position.

Now we see Romney, Karl Rove, Mitch McConnell calling upon Akin to pull out of the Senate race.

Is there any demand for Rep. Paul Ryan to step down as the candidate for vice president? As co-sponsor with Akin of every single one of Akin’s radical anti-women’s-rights bills, Ryan and Akin are birds of a feather.

Paul Ryan also has the distinction of cosponsoring with Akin HR 3, the third bill passed when Republicans took over the House in 2010. That bill attempts to redefine rape, distinguishing between “forcible” and supposed other kinds of rape!

Wildfires - and Republican climate change cluelessness - continue

By Blake Deppe

Eight months into 2012, 39 large wildfires continue to burn across the western U.S., having destroyed nearly 7 million acres of land - more than any year since records were first kept. As the blazes continue to consume forests and destroy homes, the climate change that spawned them is continuously being denied or ignored by Republicans.

The summer drought, the worst since the Dust Bowl, is fueling the flames, said Ken Frederick, a public affairs specialist with the Bureau of Land Management at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho. With little relief expected over the next two months, the fires, which have left eight firefighters dead and charred a total area the size of Maryland, show no signs of slowing.

Meanwhile, right-wing climate change deniers continue to add insult to injury by rejecting science and painting activists as unbalanced conspiracy theorists. Rep. Todd Akin, R-Mo., on the other hand, has painted himself as a shining example of how clueless Republicans are.

In addition to insulting women everywhere by making a number of ignorant, controversial remarks about “legitimate rape,” the GOP Senate candidate proved he was just as backward on the subject of climate change, when he stated in 2009 that global warming struck him as, “if it weren’t so serious, as being a comedy, you know. I mean, we just went from winter to spring. In Missouri, when we go from winter to spring, that’s good climate change. I don’t want to stop that. Who in the world would put politicians in charge of the weather, anyway? What a dumb idea.”

By claiming that in the case of “legitimate rape,” the female body can “shut that whole thing down,” Rep. Akin has already demonstrated that his knowledge of science is virtually non-existent. But Akin’s cluelessness on climate change seems to be, by and large, a reflection of Republicans on the whole.

Grist.org writer David Roberts explained, “The [r]ight is rejecting reality, and adopting a stance of ideological opposition to anything the non-[r]ight” supports.

On Akin’s official website, he insisted, “The question of predicting future climate trends, as well as man’s ability to definitely influence them, is still an active field of scientific research. Scientists state that the planet has gone through many natural heating and cooling cycles over the years.”

Actually, that’s not at all true, unless by “over the years,” Akin is referring to “millions.”

Over in the western U.S., the effects of climate change are anything but “good” - the ongoing brushfires present a very real threat to people, property, and wildlife.

The most recent example came in the form of a 21,500-acre northern California wildfire, which yesterday destroyed 50 buildings and forced the evacuation of 3,000 people from their homes. More than 200 buildings still remain under threat as firefighters struggle to battle the blaze.

Princeton University climate scientist Michael Oppenheimer noted, “What we’re really seeing here is a window into what global climate change looks like. It looks like heat; it looks like fires; it looks like this kind of environmental disaster.”

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