

# Politics - WHY BOTHER?

**T**hat's a question that many members might ask themselves from time to time.

Why does our union get so involved in politics on the local, state and federal levels? Truthfully, there are many reasons.

Let's start with the most important one – protecting our jobs from a Congress that keeps toying with our livelihoods.

Imagine this job – it is a \$736 million project (that's the total as of this writing, but the meter is still running), it is a complex that is comparable to the Vatican in size, it has working space for 1,000 people, housing space for over six hundred (and growing) and sits on a 104-acre site that also boasts restaurants, indoor and outdoor basketball courts, a volleyball court and an Olympic-size indoor pool.

What is this complex? Where is it being built? How many of our fellow trades men and women are working on it? It is the new U.S. Embassy in Iraq and I can guarantee you that this was not a union job. That's just one example of what we are building over there.

We can spend billions of dollars in Iraq and Afghanistan for a war in which our members are fighting in and dying in but it took over a year to pass a highway bill to maintain, not fix, the infrastructure of the United States. A measure that not only protects lives, but means jobs for your fellow union members.

This is the kind of thing that many of us spend so much time arguing about on the job when we take a break or at the bar after work. We all have strong opinions on many issues - guns, religion, abortion and the Supreme Court. But, in order to enjoy the things we like in life we first and foremost need to protect our jobs. What does politics have to do with protecting our jobs? The Davis Bacon Act is under attack by legislators on a regular basis. The first day on the job for President Bush included

repealing the project labor agreements for federal jobs. That's what politics has to do with protecting our jobs.

This isn't a Republican versus Democrat argument. Everybody has a right to vote for whomever they want, but it's my job to support candidates (on either side of the aisle) that vote the right way for working families. That's why we have a lobbyist and political director on staff in the International. Both are members of this union and both know the issues their fellow members of the IUPAT care about.

Just recently we were up on Capitol Hill to push an infrastructure stimulus package for the repair and maintenance of highways and bridges that will not only mean more jobs for our current members, but help us organize new members as well. And then we have our other ongoing battles in Congress for the Employee Free Choice Act and, of course, health care reform. Two issues that directly affect our right to grow as a union and the wages we're paid for a hard day's work.

So, that's U.S. politics, but let's not forget our members to the north in Canada. We just finished our legislative conference in Ottawa and your International was one of



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the few unions that showed up with a national political action plan. Just like the United States, there are both national and provincial issues that directly affect the labor movement there. On the bright side, organizing laws are far more worker friendly in Canada than they are here. In fact, in the province of Quebec, it is mandatory that all construction workers be a member of a union. However, strong diligence on our part is required to ensure that always remains the case.

Some might wonder why we work so hard politically on the state and local level if we're doing so much on the federal level. Well, on page 42 of this edition of the Journal you can find indisputable proof of what can be gained for the labor movement through political action at home. In Washington state, the leadership of IUPAT District Council 5 and a number of its key

*Continued on page 58*

