

The New York Times

The Caucus

The Politics and Government Blog of The Times

AUGUST 30, 2012, 10:58 AM

G.O.P. Platform Seeks to Weaken Powers of Unions

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Unlike in the past, this year's [Republican platform](#) in Tampa, Fla., does not contain any sympathetic nods to the nation's labor unions, which have become among the Republicans' most formidable political foes. Instead, the platform calls for numerous steps that could significantly weaken America's labor unions - public-sector and private-sector ones - and help speed organized labor's overall decline.

The 2012 platform urges elected officials across the country to change their laws regarding public-sector unions and follow the lead of Wisconsin's governor, [Scott Walker](#), who spearheaded an effort to curb the ability of his state's public employees to bargain collectively. The platform states, "We salute Republican governors and state legislators who have saved their states from fiscal disaster by reforming their laws governing public employee unions." Mr. Walker said that that legislation was needed to weaken overly powerful unions and balance Wisconsin's budget, while labor leaders said the legislation aimed to destroy public-sector unions and cripple them politically.

The platform - saying it would promote "greater economic liberty" - calls for enacting a nationwide "right-to-work" law. Such a law would prohibit union contracts at private-sector workplaces from requiring employees to pay any dues or other fees to a union. In states without such laws, workers at unionized workplaces generally have to pay such dues or fees. Right-to-work laws exist in 23 states, and labor leaders say these laws undermine unions' strength by reducing the flow of dues money.

The platform said a Republican president would protect public employees by proposing legislation to bar mandatory members' dues for political purposes. Such a move would likely weaken government employees' unions politically by prohibiting them from using any dues money for politics unless the member first gives individual authorization for his dues money to be used for political campaigns or legislative work.

In a move that would further deplete the coffers of public-sector unions, the platform says "no government at any level should act as the dues collector for unions." Nowadays many states, counties and cities do public-sector unions a big favor by collecting members' dues through a deduction from workers' paychecks. This proposal would force unions to make individual arrangements with each worker to collect dues.

The Republican platform also calls for barring the use of "card check" anywhere in the United States as a way for workers to unionize. Ever since the 1930s, the [National Labor Relations Board](#) has allowed, but not required, employers to grant union recognition once a majority of workers sign cards saying they want to to join a union.

Nowadays, unions often pressure employers to grant recognition through card check, and [President Obama](#) and Democrats in Congress supported, but failed to enact a law that would have given unions the right to insist on using card check, instead of a traditional secret ballot vote, to gain recognition. Employer groups argue that card check is far less trustworthy than secret ballot elections, asserting that union organizers pressure workers to sign pro-union cards. But labor leaders complain that election campaigns often turn into an unfair exercise in which companies intimidate workers and have far greater access and ability to persuade workers than the union has. Specifically, the platform calls for enacting a "Secret Ballot Protection Act."

The platform calls for repealing the Davis-Bacon Act, a law that Congress passed in 1931 requiring that all federal construction projects pay a prevailing wage, usually equal to or not far below union wage levels. The platform says this law "costs the taxpayers billions of dollars annually in artificially high wages on government projects."

The platform attacks the Obama administration, saying it has clung "to antiquated notions of confrontation and concentrating power in the Washington offices of union elites." The platform also attacks the National Labor Relations Board, saying that under President Obama the board has become "a partisan advocate for Big Labor, using threats and coercion outside the law to attack business."

In a move that teacher unions will no doubt oppose, the platform calls for getting rid of teacher tenure. It states, "Rigid tenure systems based on the 'last in-first-out' policy should be replaced with a merit-based approach that can attract fresh talent and dedication in the classroom."

Labor leaders, convinced and fearing that Republicans are intent on weakening the nation's unions, have vowed to mount their biggest political effort ever this year to help re-elect President Obama. On its Web site, the [A.F.L.-C.I.O.](#), the nation's main labor federation, condemns the Romney-Ryan ticket and vision, saying it "may be the dream of the extreme right, Tea Party Republican base and the wealthy, corporate financiers fueling the Romney campaign, but it is a nightmare for America's working families."

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