

Luke Bladow

*“What role should organized union labor play in politics and why?”*

In the United States of America, labor unions directly affect the lives of 15 million union members and their families. Labor unions focus on negotiating on behalf of a group of employees with their employers to improve wages, benefits, and working conditions.

To do this, union members must play a vital role in politics to help shape various laws and bills in the U.S. by lobbying and electioneering at the state and federal levels. Labor unions should strive to play a proactive and aggressive role in politics to voice their concerns about the fair wages, reasonable hours, adequate benefits, and safe working conditions that workers need and deserve.

Today, the Republican majority in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives and the recent shift in the control of the executive branch to the Republicans make union action in politics more challenging. Conservatives are traditionally against labor unions because they believe giving workers the power to bargain collectively reduces a company's ability to act efficiently in the marketplace. This causes a misrepresentation of the working middle class in congress. The recent Republican power swing chiefly benefits the wealthy, upper class Americans, who are opponents of higher wages and worker benefits and favors the views of the affluent corporation executives. Undeterred by the long history of Republicans fighting against unions and their rights, the middle class workers have banded together to assemble stronger unions to preserve their rights with benefits equal to their executives.

I have had the extraordinary opportunity to experience the political involvement of labor unions personally when I accompanied my father in three of his trips to Washington D.C. to attend the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) Legislative Conference. During those trips, I was able to observe first-hand union lobbying to the Washington State elected

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Senators and Representatives about issues and bills on behalf of firefighters from Washington State. This experience taught me the powerful significance of union involvement with our nation's politics. Moreover, I saw how elected officials' decisions on the issues discussed could affect my own life.

My strong opinion that labor unions should play a prominent role in communicating with our lawmakers to represent their union members and vouch for the whole middle class grew out of my personal witnessing of the union lobbying process. Because of lobbyists going to congress to speak out for the protection of union members' rights year after year, my family, just like millions of others, have benefitted from the unions' intervention in congress.

Because of the constant campaigning and urging of union leaders in the past and present, millions of workers, including non-union members are able to enjoy better lives. Raising wages has a trickledown effect. Giving a voice to workers through unions provides workers with the necessary opportunities to negotiate a higher standard of living, while continuing to work for their current employers.

Raising wages not only benefits union workers, but also the whole middle class as wage standards are established. All working class families are better able to support a family, buy a house, educate their children, and create new opportunities for future generations to come. This is just another example of the multitude of ways that the working middle class of America is positively affected when unions play an active role in politics.

Organized labor unions will continue to play a vital role in politics by advocating for their members and the middle class to ensure the protection of their rights as workers. The continuing legislative action of unions' functions to preserve the workers' voice in government to enhance the standard of living for union laborers and the working class as a whole.