

## **Talking Points**

### **Economic Stimulus – Build America so America Works**

*We can get our economy back on track and put America back to work if we invest in building America – the transportation, energy and education systems that we all rely on every day, but which have deteriorated due to years of neglect and misplaced priorities.*

***The answer to the current economic crisis is simple: Build America so America Works.***

- Recent economic stimulus efforts have failed. They were primarily handouts for corporations and the wealthy or a small amount of cash for working people. They had no lasting impact.
- Working America needs paychecks. Our economy needs jobs. Building America is the best way to achieve that.

***There is a lot of work to do taking care of America – and millions of Americans need work.***

- We support Barack Obama's proposals for the largest transportation investment since the Interstate Highway System was built and for a "green jobs" initiative.
- Today, 26 percent of our nation's bridges need repair or replacement. A third of our roads are in less than good condition, wasting gas, wasting time and risking lives. Our kids are crowded into 220,000 temporary classrooms. There are 3,650 dams and levees that are unsafe. Broken sewer pipes result in the release of billions of gallons of raw sewage into waterways every year.
- The American Society of Civil Engineers estimates conservatively that we have a \$1.6 trillion problem when it comes to the fundamental infrastructure of our country. We can't nickel and dime a \$1.6 trillion problem.
- By investing in green jobs, we can put people back to work helping to free our country from foreign oil by weatherizing and retrofitting buildings, upgrading our electrical grid, and building solar, wind, bio-fuel and clean coal power plants.

***Construction jobs are good jobs, providing family-supporting pay to the people who are among the hardest hit by the current economy. Yet among construction workers, unemployment is now 13.5 percent with 1.4 million construction workers jobless.***

- Current economic stimulus proposals ranging from \$400 billion to \$700 billion are a good start. At least a third of any stimulus should be used to put people back to working building America.
- Across the country – in every city and state – projects are shutting down due to the economy. There are thousands of ready-to-go projects that could build our country, put people back to work and help get our economy back on track. According to the Department of Transportation, for every \$1 billion investment, 34,800 jobs are supported.
- We can build America, put people back to work and leave a positive legacy for future generations – and something good will have come from this economic crisis.

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### **The Need for National Health Care Reform**

*LIUNA supports comprehensive health care system reform that guarantees access to affordable, quality health care for all Americans, and eliminates unfair cost-shifting to LIUNA's health and welfare funds and the hundreds of thousands of workers and families they serve. Our support for President Obama has been based in large measure on his call for comprehensive, national health care reform.*

***Good health care should be a birthright for all Americans, as in most other industrialized societies. But today in America, 47 million people do not have health care coverage.***

- Even more Americans are likely to lose coverage due to the current global economic crisis.
- Health care reform is vital to our nation's economic recovery and progress. Reform must:
  - Provide quality health care coverage to everyone.
  - Control costs.
  - Fairly distribute the costs.
- Reform must not impose new health benefits taxes on workers or their health and welfare funds, or penalize workers whose health coverage is better than average.

***The typical LIUNA member loses 60 percent of increases won at the bargaining table to escalating health care costs, and as much as a third of total compensation goes to health care. The current system gives non-union employers an unfair competitive advantage over union Laborers and their employers.***

- Non-union employers do not provide health insurance for their employees because they are not required to and save on labor costs.
- Uninsured non-union workers and their dependents receive care at hospitals, which pass the cost on to insured patients, including union workers. Unionized laborers are forced to pay for their competition's health care.

***We need national reform, rather than state-by-state experimentation and fixes.***

- Reform must not impede national and multi-state health and welfare funds, impose unnecessary costs and regulations, or restrict the ability of health and welfare funds to provide the benefits their participants want on a cost-effective basis.
- More than a thousand different state laws saddle insurance plans with mandated benefits and unwanted costs.

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### **The Employee Free Choice Act**

***America needs good jobs – and unions make jobs better.***

- Workers in unions earn on average 28 percent more, they're 62 percent more likely to have employer-covered health care, and much more likely to have a secure pension.
- In the construction industry, the advantage is even greater – and workers have the opportunity for advancement through training programs that open the doors to more skills and opportunity.

***Workers with unions can help America compete in today's tough economy.***

- There are many successful employers who agree that their employees should have a free choice in deciding whether to join together in a union. There's a good reason for that – when workers earn better pay, have secure benefits and a voice at work, they care more about their company.
- Numerous studies show that when construction workers have a union, they're more productive, safer and save employers money. On public construction projects, workers with unions are able to give taxpayers the most for their money.

***Too often workers who want to join together in a union are blocked by unscrupulous employers who blame workers for their own failures. The law today lets them get away with it.***

- High-paid CEOs have gone too far – they're cutting hours, health care benefits and raises. When workers try to form unions to fight back, they're met with harassment. In fact:
  - 25 percent of employers deal with an effort by workers to join a union by firing their own employees.
  - 51 percent threaten to shut down the worksite.
  - 91 percent force workers to attend one-on-one anti-union propaganda meetings.

***We need policies and solutions that bring back balance in America. More than half of America's workers say they want to join a union. We need changing rules for changing times.***

- When America was more prosperous, working people were free to choose to join together for better lives. Today, corporations get to decide how workers join a union. The Employee Free Choice Act will give working people – not corporations – the choice of joining together in a union by simply signing up, or if they choose, through secret ballot elections.
- And Free Choice would require employers to negotiate with workers who want a union, or be faced with arbitration, preventing employers from dragging out negotiations in order to crush workers' efforts to join together.

## **LIUNA's Green Skills: Building America so America Works**

*LIUNA is uniquely positioned to help build the energy systems, transportation systems and green buildings of tomorrow. With its green skills training, LIUNA is helping to transform our country's energy systems and reduce negative environmental impacts.*

***A green economy is about both a healthier world and creating good family-supporting jobs to put people back to work. LIUNA is ready.***

- LIUNA provides the best adult continuing education system in the world with training in a variety of skills, including green construction – and it's free.
- Many skills required for green construction are not new – for example, building concrete pads for wind farms or rail for mass transit. Other skills – such as identifying reusable materials on construction sites or aspects of weatherizing homes – are part of new LIUNA training programs.

***Weatherizing homes, which account for 22 percent of America's energy consumption, can free us from millions of barrels of foreign oil and create tens of thousands of jobs.***

- LIUNA trains workers in weatherization that substantially reduces a building's energy use, putting people back to work in their communities and equipping them with skills for the future.
- Every million homes weatherized supports 78,000 jobs and saves 3 million barrels of oil. The U.S. Department of Energy estimates a \$1.53 return for each \$1 invested in weatherization.

***Due to neglect, transportation systems are in urgent need. Modernizing our transportation systems will save energy, reduce carbon emissions and put men and women back to work.***

- Americans waste nearly 4 billion hours and hundreds of millions of dollars in gas a year due to decaying and over-crowded roadways and transit systems.
- Fixing our transportation systems would create more than a million jobs – for every \$1 billion invested in transportation, federal officials estimate 34,800 jobs are supported. According to the American Society of Civil Engineers, existing highways are shortchanged by \$30 billion every year and existing transit systems by \$8 billion a year.

***LIUNA members are already at work building renewable energy systems. Stepping up construction of wind and solar power, and modernizing our electrical grid, would dramatically reduce carbon emissions and put hundreds of thousands of Americans back to work.***

- Building wind power is not new to LIUNA. Since 2003, LIUNA has been working with contractors in 17 states to help build wind farms. In addition, LIUNA members are prepared to build solar farms and help modernize our inefficient and outdated electrical grid.
- For every \$1 billion invested in these green projects, 20,000 jobs are created, according to the Center for American Progress.

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### **Protecting Immigrant Workers' Rights Benefits All Workers**

*In 1903 immigrants working to improve their lives and the lives of their families founded the Laborers' International Union of North America. Then, just as now, LIUNA members – immigrants, citizens and those struggling to be so – are building America.*

***LIUNA is anxious to see the new Administration and the new Congress pass comprehensive immigration reform. Reform should include:***

- Strong, humane and workable border enforcement.
- Reform of guest worker programs.
- A path for undocumented workers to come out of the shadows and earn their citizenship.
- Strong wage protections.
- Gradual implementation of a fair and efficient employment verification system.
- Respect for the unity of immigrant families.

***Unfortunately, current border enforcement policies have failed to stem the flow of undocumented immigrants while benefiting smugglers and unscrupulous employers seeking cheap labor.***

- The exploitation of millions of undocumented immigrant workers laboring in the shadows applies downward pressure on the wages and working conditions of all workers.
- An archaic visa policy and failed guest worker programs have created incentives for workers to overstay their visas and work without authorization. Long waiting lists and bureaucratic backlogs keep families apart for years, causing suffering while fueling more unauthorized immigration.

***LIUNA opposes the creation of new guest worker programs because of the history of worker abuse in U.S. guest worker programs.***

- The U.S. has yet to prove that it can implement a low-skill guest worker program where workers are not abused, under-paid, or treated as indentured servants. From the Bracero program in the 20th Century to workers here today with an H2B visa, temporary workers have been treated inhumanely and are frequently exploited.

***A central component of immigration reform must be an earned path to citizenship for the 12 million undocumented workers and their families currently working without basic worker rights.***

- While we recognize these workers lack work authorization, we also understand that deporting millions of workers who are currently laboring in a wide range of U.S. industries is unrealistic.

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### **A Jobs Opportunity – the Next Surface Transportation Bill**

*To remain competitive in the global economy and ensure that working people and employers have access to transportation that works, America must invest in its transportation system. A major opportunity to do that will be in the fall of 2009 with a bill to replenish the Highway Trust Fund.*

***The current transportation investment law – called SAFETEA-LU, or the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users – expires September 30.***

- The Highway Trust Fund is currently replenished through the gas tax. Because of the spike in gas prices and an overall decrease in driving, there will be a major shortfall in the fund.
- Congress has begun considering how to increase Trust Fund resources. As our country shifts to cleaner fuels and greater use of mass transit, the gas tax will not provide enough revenues to improve and build the roads and bridges our country needs.

***The last bill invested \$286 billion – far short of needs. The upcoming bill must authorize at least \$500 billion to simply meet existing needs.***

- Finding alternative sources of investment and ways to create dedicated revenue for the Highway Trust Fund will be a top priority for LIUNA in the next Congress.
- Building and maintaining a world-class transportation system is inherently a federal responsibility. We must maximize all existing revenue – including capital expenditures, Treasury appropriations, and if possible in the future, an increase in the gas tax as a stopgap measure.
- We are not against innovative financing, particularly for large projects of national significance. And while PPPs, or public-private partnerships, may have a place, they cannot stand for “picking the people’s pockets” or a sell-off of national assets.

***We must restore and grow the Highway Trust Fund so America remains a competitive nation.***

- While developing nations are striving for first-class transportation systems, we’re falling behind. India and China, for example, invest 8 to 9 percent of their gross domestic product in basics like transportation – compared to 2 percent in the U.S.
- Both employers and working people depend on transportation every day – it must be accessible and reliable.
- As we build America’s transportation system for the future, we must make sure the jobs we create and support are good jobs. That means that regardless of the source of investment, comprehensive provisions of the family-supporting Davis-Bacon Act must apply.