

10/27/11 CCHCC Press Conference to Launch the Campaign for the American Dream

Statement By Ricky Baldwin Field Organizer for SEIU Local 73

I'm a member and on staff with the Service Employees International Union Local 73. We are 750 building service and food service workers here at UIUC, and 25,000 public employees in Illinois and Indiana. We belong to Central Illinois Jobs with Justice, a local coalition of unions and community groups, which endorses the Campaign for the American Dream.

For the last 40 years, real wages have declined as union membership has shrunk. History shows that when union density is higher, wages and benefits are better for all working people. When union membership is lower, all workers suffer.

But under both Democrat and Republican control, governments have increasingly intervened in the economy to make things worse for regular working people, better for their wealthy cronies. Reckless deregulation, destructive "free trade" deals, undermined labor laws, weakened enforcement authority for Labor Boards and Civil Service agencies – all were supposed to improve the economy, create jobs and lead to better lives for all of us.

But the reality is, this has been true only for a few. All these things have led to an accumulation of wealth at the top, and less and less in the middle and at the bottom. Even the economic boom in the 90s mostly enriched those who were already rich. Now the wealthiest 10% control fully 2/3 of the country's wealth. But, you ask, hasn't it always been that way? Actually no! The situation had improved with the New Deal and into the 1950s, 60s and 70s. But after 40 years of government intervention on behalf of the rich, now income inequality is at its highest ever, according to a new study from the University of California, including the Great Depression.

Decades of tax breaks, subsidies and bailouts for the wealthy have FAILED to create full employment and a better life for most people. Corporate America sits on an estimated \$2 trillion in revenue, and where are the jobs?

Officially unemployment stands at just under 10%. But a lot of people are not counted in that number. Official unemployment went DOWN in Champaign County over the last year, while the number of people out of work went UP by about 3000 people. That's because so many people don't count. People who have never had a job, the long-term unemployed, workers who have given up looking, or who have fallen ill and are unable to look for work, or people who have found work but only a couple hours a week, or had their hours involuntarily reduced to a few hours a week – add in these people and real unemployment is estimated at around 16%.

That still doesn't count students, anyone who goes back to school to help them find work, the disabled, or self-employed workers who find little or no work, or workers forced to accept short-

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term contracts. In fact one of the differences between the current economic crisis and previous recessions is the much higher numbers of people who can only get part-time or temporary work, still rising. Employers are increasingly replacing full time workers with part-timers or temporaries.

None of this is an accident. It is all the result of policy by Democrats and Republicans who support Wall Street banks and big corporations over the rest of us. Both parties have supported “free trade” deals that export jobs to low-wage dungeons where workers are afraid to speak up because they may be fired, beaten, tortured, or killed.

So who is fighting for a stronger economy and a better life for most people? Unions, community groups like CCHCC and Jobs With Justice – that’s why the Campaign for the American Dream is so important, to present an alternative platform, one that works for most people, not just the very wealthy.

We don’t need more of the same policies that got us into this mess. We need re-regulation of business, better monetary policy, higher capital gains taxes and a tax on speculation and wealth itself, not just income taxes and certainly not flat taxes or consumption taxes that impact the poor and working classes more than those who have the money, public works and other direct job creation programs, increased support for social service agencies, increased protections for union rights and benefits, and we need FAIR trade not “free trade,” which is not really free for most of us, but very costly.

But in order for that to happen, it’s not enough just to agree with it. It’s up to us to make it happen, and the best way to do that is to join and participate in unions and community groups like CCHCC and Jobs with Justice, and efforts like the Campaign for the American Dream.

Thank you.