

Jeff Smith Labor and Trade Policy

No issues better illustrate the difference between Republicans and Democrats than labor and trade. Simply put, Republicans don't seem to respect anyone who works for anyone else. They can't understand the priorities of a person who wants to provide for his or her family, but isn't willing to stab his or her brother in the back to get there. One of the reasons that I am running for Congress is to stand up to Republicans who equate greediness with godliness and then turn around and belittle the hard work of millions so that a few at the top can become lavishly wealthy.

- **Overtime Protections. I will fight for proper overtime compensation and against Republican attempts to force workers to work longer for less.** The best example of the Bush Administration's naked disrespect for work is the current proposal to slash overtime benefits. Under the Bush proposal millions of workers including police officers, nurses, and store supervisors would lose the right to overtime compensation and a steady schedule. The Administration even had the gall to single out some military veterans to lose overtime protection. These workers' schedules and pay would be at the behest of management.

- **Other Worker Protection:** A survey by the AFL-CIO found that 56% of American workers think new laws are necessary to protect workers from the dictates of management and corporations. From safety laws, to striker replacement to family leave, we must ensure that the laws of the land acknowledge the human dignity to all work, and the simple human truth that labor is more than a cost on a spreadsheet. As a Congressman, I will fight for **Clinton era ergonomics standards** that Bush repealed, **against Bush Administration cuts in OSHA**, other fair laws that force corporations to ensure workers are treated with the respect they deserve.

- **Trade – We cannot let jobs drain away to the lowest bidder.** American workers built this country and they must benefit from a global economy as much as Wall Street bankers. We need to ensure labor, human rights, and environmental standards in every trade agreement. **As a Congressman, I will not sign any trade agreement that doesn't have adequate and enforceable protections.** Since NAFTA took place, the average real wages in Mexico have actually *decreased*. It is not only illogical, but immoral, to put Americans out of work so that already impoverished Mexicans and others see downward wage pressure.
While we may not be able to replace every job that has left, we cannot continue to shirk our responsibilities to those left behind. **Corporations that move jobs overseas must be required to pay a larger tax that goes towards unemployment benefits and retraining.** Unemployment benefits should be extended to all workers for a full six months, not merely 13 weeks. We need to increase the funds for the Trade Adjustment Assistance bureau, and dramatically increase our commitment to vocational, technical, and re-training education.

- **Minimum Wage- Someone who works full time should not live in poverty.**
Unfortunately, right now someone making minimum wage earns just under \$11,000 a year which is about \$2,000 *under* the poverty threshold for a family of three. That fact should be a source of national shame. **We need to raise the minimum wage \$1.50 per hour to \$6.65 per hour and index the increase to inflation.** In the virulently anti-worker climate of today's Congress, we need to fight for the inflation index to ensure working families of the future do not face an erosion of purchasing power. Almost 7 million people would be helped from this raise, but almost unbelievably Republicans and the George W. Bush consistently oppose it.

- **Health Insurance. Our healthcare system is an unsustainable mess that squeezes working families and prevents business from investing in new jobs.**
We can't allow corporations to offer \$1 wage increases, and then try to take \$2 in premium increases. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, companies increased workers' average monthly premiums by 27 percent for single coverage and 16 percent for family coverage between 2001 and 2002, while hourly wages rose only 3.8 percent in 2001 and 2.9 percent in 2002. Accordingly, health care costs are the sticking point in most collective bargaining sessions these days. Here in St. Louis drastic premium increase was a major sticking point in the UFCW Local 655 contract negotiations.
As a Congressman, I will support reform towards a single payer system that would cover everyone in this country, not just those lucky enough to be wealthy or work for a good union. Though this is a moral issue, it is also a business issue. With the baby boomers set to retire and already high pension costs about to sky rocket, universal health insurance would allow businesses to spend more money on wages and job creation. Unless we do something dramatic about healthcare, the private insurance system will single handedly strangle our economy – workers and employers alike.