

PUT AMERICA BACK TO WORK FIRST

Statement by Joe Hansen, President of United Food and Commercial Workers International Union

WASHINGTON - In stark contrast to 2008, the election of 2010 will be remembered because the results were fueled not by hope, but by anger, frustration, and fear. Working people have lost jobs, homes, and life savings. Young people have delayed college, and older workers are postponing retirements.

Empty and inflammatory rhetoric that derides health reform as “Obamacare” and demonizes leaders as socialists will not right the imbalance in our economy or help working people make ends meet. Our politics must rise to the challenges we face and provide sensible legislative measures that ensure a foundation for secure and stable communities.

When our new Congress convenes in January, will Republican lawmakers continue to obstruct the legislative process—as they have over the last two years—and continue to walk away from their responsibility to help govern? Or will they join with President Obama in an effort to put America back to work?

Working families have been losing ground for three decades. Household income has stagnated. Productivity is up, but wages are down. Hundreds of thousands of middle class jobs have been shipped overseas. And many of our elected leaders, complicit with Wall Street greed, stood by and let bankers make and break the rules, and when their house of cards collapsed working families paid the price.

All elected leaders should take on their responsibilities to govern and turn immediately to the pressing issues confronting working America with bold ideas, creativity, and solutions. To move forward, our country needs a national agenda that begins with an honest conversation about restoring fairness to our economy, and generating good-paying jobs that keep families secure and America strong.

We need an agenda that, in the short term, provides security for the unemployed with an immediate extension of unemployment benefits.

We need a dispassionate approach to legislation and policies that recognizes that service jobs—retail salesperson is the number one job in America—are the future of our economy and must become middle class jobs. We need to solve our broken immigration system, which would, if reformed, pump trillions into our economy and raise living standards for workers; create a sustainable energy program, and embark on infrastructure renewal that would put millions of Americans back to work.

American democracy goes beyond an angry vote at the ballot box. Working families care about building a better America because a better America means a better future for our kids and grandkids. The UFCW pledges to work with all elected leaders who are committed to restoring balance in our economy and rebuilding our middle class.