Why Bernie Sanders is the Right Choice for Rail Workers; Workers in General

After the recent Texas district court ruling by recent Trump appointee Mark T. Pittman on crew staffing (see article on Page 2), we all know what is coming. As railroad workers we are facing difficult battles ahead. In order to be victorious, we will need to achieve the greatest possible rank and file solidarity, and to work alongside of allies in positions of power who are making the decisions which affect our workplace.

No potential ally has more power to affect our workplace than the President of the United States. From Judicial appointments like the one to the Texas court which dismantled the SMART-TD collective bargaining agreement, to appointments to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the National Mediation Board (NMB), as well as appointments to any Presidential Emergency Board (PEB) in the event of a national rail strike, the President has great ability to favorably or unfavorably impact rail labor. And as we saw with the recent CN Strike in Canada, the political leader of a nation can assist in labor victories simply by not exercising his/her authority to order railroad workers back to work.

The outcome of the 2020 elections in this country will have a major impact on our upcoming rail labor contacts. From picket lines to union halls, only one candidate has consistently stood with workers for decades now. Senator Bernie Sanders’ Workplace Democracy Plan promises to “make it easier, not harder, for millions of Americans to join unions and collectively bargain for better wages and benefits.” The highlights of this plan include increasing union density, establishing federal protections for workers, eliminating so called “right to work for less” laws, and including workers on corporate decision-making boards.

Not one to simply talk the talk, his own campaign for President is the first in U.S. history to have an organized workforce and a collective bargaining agreement. Sanders has had a 40-year commitment to fair trade deals which protect workers, and he has a near perfect voting record on support for workers’ issues, according to the AFL-CIO and most unions in the country.

But what most excites me about Senator Bernie Sanders, as a railroad worker, is his commitment to not only defending Labor in our industry, but his understanding that railroad infrastructure is critical to our national economy. In my home state of Iowa, where Bernie won an overwhelming majority of the popular vote in the recent caucus, one of his campaign Co-Chairs was former BLET locomotive engineer and current State Legislator Jeff Kurtz. Brother Kurtz, an RWU member, was able to have many conversations with the Sanders’ Campaign about issues we are facing on the railroad. Subsequent to those conversations, the Sanders campaign announced a proposal for a robust program to transform our energy production, infrastructure, and transportation to promote the creation of jobs that preserve the planet and benefit railroad, transit, and other industrial workers.

Representing railroad workers, as Co-chair of Railroad Workers United, the Sanders campaign asked me to join a panel of speakers in November. This event highlighted the merits of Bernie’s Green New Deal plan. Highlights in the plan include over $600 billion investment in regional rail that will create more than 700,000 good paying union jobs, jobs which would pay into railroad retirement. In addition to the rail investment, this plan dedicates another $2 trillion in order to repair infrastructure, and another $500 billion plus in modernizing the electrical grid. The best part is that the economic benefit of these plans outweighs their costs.

In addition to speaking on behalf of Senator Sanders plan, I was able to speak to the fact that freight rail is three times more fuel efficient than trucking and would reduce roadway congestion. I was also able to address issues affecting rail labor such as Precision Scheduled Railroading (PSR). His campaign has facilitated a platform for our issues, as rail workers, that has now reached hundreds of thousands of people.

No other campaign for President has demonstrated such a commitment to railroad workers – and to all workers - than has the Sanders campaign. No other candidate running for the highest office in the land stands to benefit railroad workers in our struggle to preserve and expand jobs, to win a better contract, better wages, benefits, and safer working conditions. In our lifetimes, union workers - and by extension railroad workers and all working people - have not witnessed an opportunity like the one now before us in the 2020 election for U.S. President. I’m pledging to do everything in my power to elect Bernie Sanders as the 46th President of the United States. I hope you will too!