



BARACK OBAMA

2008 DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

1) Congress adopted the Federal Employees Pay Comparability Act (FEPCA) in 1990 to close the gap between private and public sector pay. Unfortunately, no federal pay raise since FEPCA's enactment has provided the full pay raise called for under the law. As a result, the gap between public and private sector pay today ranges from 10 to 30 percent depending on the region of the country. Would you support legislation that would require comparability between federal employees and their private sector counter-parts?

In the private sector, efficiency upgrades are measured in profit margins. In government, the stakes are much higher. A better government provides a more educated citizen, an enhanced infrastructure, and a safe country. However, the importance of what federal government employees do on a daily basis is not reflected in wages that are respectful of that work. By allowing public sector pay to lag well behind the private sector, the government sends the message the people willing to devote themselves to public service should take a hefty pay cut to do so.

I was pleased to see the House's passage of H.R.2829, which would begin to remedy the discrepancy in pay between the public sector and private sector wages by raising federal government employee pay by 3.5%. I will support this pay increase in the Senate version of the bill as a first step toward reevaluating how we pay our federal government employees. A recent study by the National Bureau of Economic Research shows that the private sector's pay scale for highly-skilled labor is especially draining the federal government of its most valued asset – its highly skilled employees. As President, I will reevaluate the pay structures within government to ensure that serving your country as a public employee pays well enough to reverse this trend and keep highly skilled employees in the service of the American people.

2) The size of the federal government's contractor workforce has exploded in recent years. Numerous reports have detailed the lack of oversight of federal contracts, contract cost overruns and the lack of a basic system to even determine if contracting out has achieved any cost savings. What are your views regarding contracting out? Will you support and sign legislation to restrict contracting out?

There is honor in public service at every level. Our public servants deserve respect and fair treatment. But over the past several years, we have seen a new "Ownership Society" philosophy in Washington that says government has no role in solving our problems and that the services provided everyday by government employees are better left to the whims of the private sector. I have been a consistent critic of this philosophy.

We should not privatize public services for the sake of privatization. And we should be especially critical of what is driving the demand for privatization of any particular service. The benefits of privatization are often outweighed by the devastation caused to communities by a loss of jobs or health care benefits. And often, services that are contracted out were being done well and efficiently by public servants.

I would use strict guidelines when determining whether to contract out any government service. I will not contract out vital government services without first considering whether the private sector can actually provide a better service and whether so-called hidden costs of privatization are fully accounted for in the cost estimate. I will also require consideration of the economic impact of every privatization proposal for the federal government.

In the event that contracting out may be appropriate, it is important that the federal government attach serious conditions and provide accountability mechanisms to make sure that privatization is not used as an end-run around federal labor standards. We can mandate, for instance, that contractors continue to adhere to government hiring preferences and requirements. In the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the Administration waived Davis-Bacon requirements, which ensure that workers receive prevailing wages. I was an original co-sponsor of the bill to repeal this waiver; all federal contractors must be accountable to our nation's labor laws and workers must be ensured fair treatment and fair wages. In that vein, I also believe that we need to make clear that private contracts will not be awarded if minimum wage and benefit standards are not met.

Finally, I will provide an opportunity for union and employee input into all contracting decisions. These decisions should be made in an open forum that provides all stakeholders the opportunity to present their analysis of the quality and cost estimates that will inform the ultimate decisions. Moreover, unions and employees should be permitted to offer their own bids in competitive bidding processes. I will make sure that they have the opportunity to do just that.

3) In 2004, corporate tax legislation gave the IRS the authority to hire private collection agencies to collect federal income taxes. Private tax collectors are paid up to 25% of what they collect. Collecting taxes is a basic government function and should not be assigned to profit-making businesses. Outsourcing IRS tax collection carries an unacceptably large risk that taxpayer rights will be trampled and personal information stolen. NTEU is working with allies in Congress to repeal the IRS' authority to contract out collection. What are your views on using private collection companies to collect federal income taxes?

In recent years our government has contracted out too many government services, often at the cost of efficiency and quality and to the detriment of federal employees. We should be particularly concerned about the contracting out of something so essential to the functioning of our government as tax collection, with large risks for the violation of taxpayer privacy if the highest standards are not met. This case in particular is troublesome because IRS Commissioner Everson has indicated that private debt collection firms may actually cost more to the government, and hence to American taxpayers, than hiring additional IRS staff. I would thus support efforts to repeal the authority of the IRS to use private debt collectors. I was happy to see that the Tax Collection Responsibility Act of 2007 was passed out of the House and will support it in the Senate. As President, I will use strict guidelines to determine

if and when the contracting out of services by any agency is necessary.

4) Legislation enacted in the 108th Congress gave the Department of Homeland Security the right to waive many important employee protections, including meaningful collective bargaining rights, from the employees of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). NTEU seeks the reinstatement of the statutory right for employees to organize, bargain collectively and participate, through labor organizations of their own choosing, in decisions which affect them. NTEU also seeks to reinstate a fair due process system for employees of DHS to ensure that their rights are protected. Would you support reinstating these important safeguards for employees of DHS?

The Bush administration has aggressively sought to undermine the ability of federal workers to have a voice in the workplace. From the revoking of Executive Order 12933, which mandated Labor-Management partnerships in all federal agencies, to the revoking the right of DHS employees to bargain collectively, the Bush administration has consistently and forcefully made it clear that it does not think workers should have a substantive voice in the workplace.

Collective bargaining plays a vital role in giving workers a voice in the work they do. When workers have a voice, they are able to increase productivity and reduce costs. We know from an Office of Personnel Management report that when labor and management cooperate in the federal government, productivity increases and costs are cut. These actions by the Bush administration have only sought to aggravate labor-management relations, reducing worker productivity and increasing costs to American taxpayers.

At DHS, however, costs are not only monetary. When we fail to ensure workers have a voice and are making our government's work as efficient as possible, we also compromise our national security. As a Senator I will support the current legislative efforts to restore collective bargaining rights to DHS employees, and as President I will make sure DHS and other federal employees have a real voice in the work they do.

5) Despite the size of the pool of participants in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP), premiums continue to increase. Since 2001, FEHBP premiums have risen by more than 50%. NTEU believes more needs to be done to bring down the costs of FEHBP premiums. What would you do to make health care more affordable for enrollees in FEHBP?

The rising premiums and flat pay for FEHBP enrollees mirror the country's experience over the last 6 years, as health care premiums have risen four times as fast as wages nationwide since 2001. My plan will provide quality, affordable, and portable health care coverage for all Americans, and reduce costs for the typical American family by up to \$2500. By reforming the health care industry to reduce errors, increase efficiency, and cut waste my plan will reduce costs across the health industry.

FEHBP participants will also benefit from these savings from system-wide reform. I will invest \$10 billion over the next five years in health information technology systems to

provide electronic medical records that will reduce the costs of record keeping and promote efficient information sharing between doctors. This will reduce medical errors and avoid redundant treatment, reducing costs for consumers. I will also lower drug costs by allowing importation of safe medicines from other developed countries and increasing the use of generics in public programs. To empower patients to make informed decisions about their treatment options, I will require hospitals to collect and publicly report measures of health care costs and quality, including data on preventable medical errors. Providers will be assisted by comparative effectiveness research on drugs, devices and treatment strategies. This information will help providers and patients identify the most effective treatment, and avoid overpaying for other unnecessarily expensive drugs or procedures that provide no added benefit compared to less costly treatment regimens.

In addition, as President, I will reform the market structure in our health care industry, to reduce monopolization and increase competition. In markets where the insurance business is not competitive, I will force insurers to pay out a reasonable share of their premiums for patient care instead of keeping exorbitant amounts for profit and administration. My new National Health Insurance Exchange will increase competition among insurers. By implementing these cost and life-saving strategies and covering the uninsured, my plan will significantly reduce costs for FEHBP participants.

In addition to these general strategies, I have and will continue to pursue strategies to reduce costs for FEHBP participants in particular. I introduced the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program Efficiency Act in order to leverage the purchasing power of the federal government to reduce costs. My bill would require all health plans participating in FEHBP to develop systems for hospitals and doctors to submit bills electronically within four years. Experts estimate that the use of this technology could reduce premiums by up to 2%. As President, I would direct the Office of Personnel Management to implement more stringent quality and efficiency standards for all participating health plans, which will further drive down costs. I would also make sure that FEHBP benefit packages are structured to encourage use of high value services and ensure preventative care and chronic disease care is fully covered with minimal copays by all FEHBP plans, in order to improve the health of FEHBP enrollees and garner long-term savings.