

Obama hosts labor leaders; will undo Bush orders

AP Associated Press

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WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama is playing to one of the Democratic Party's most reliable constituencies — organized labor — reversing a number of his predecessor's executive orders that critics regard as anti-union.

Labor leaders were to visit the White House for a second consecutive day Friday, where, a union official said, Obama was to abolish four Bush-era directives that unions opposed and then reintroduce Vice President Joe Biden's task force focused on the middle class.

Both were meant as a way for the new administration to connect with workers at the end of a week that has seen U.S. companies announce thousands more jobs cuts.

"Over the last 100 years the middle class was built on the back of organized labor. Without their weight, heft and their insistence starting in the early 1900s we wouldn't have the middle class we have now, in my view," Biden told CNBC on Thursday. "So I think labor getting a fair share of the pie is part of it."

Officials planned to re-announce a Middle Class Task Force aimed at finding ways to help an economic group that has been hammered by the recession. Biden will lead the task force, comprising a panel of advisers and four Cabinet members.

Among the George W. Bush-era executive orders that Obama was to reverse was one that allowed unionized companies to post signs informing workers that they are allowed to decertify their union. Critics claimed it was unfair because nonunion businesses are not required to post signs letting workers know they are legally allowed to vote for a union.

Two Democratic sources also said Obama would prevent federal contractors from being reimbursed for expenses that were intended to influence workers' decisions to form unions or engage in collective bargaining. A third Obama order would require federal vendors with more than \$100,000 in contracts to post workers' rights under the National Labor Relations Act.

The final order would require service contractors at federal buildings to offer jobs to qualified current employees when contracts changed. For instance, rank-and-file workers could continue working on the same federal project even if the administrative contract expired.

The officials disclosed the plans on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to pre-empt the White House's announcements.

Labor leaders also visited the White House on Thursday, where Obama welcomed them to the East Room as he signed his first major piece of legislation, an equal-pay act that organized labor and women's groups championed.

Unions have been lobbying the Obama administration to repeal scores of executive orders they view as hostile to their cause. Officials gave administration officials their top 10 executive orders they wanted to see dismantled quickly.

Many executive orders are enacted and repealed based on which party controls the White House. One of the rules Obama planned to repeal Friday was approved by President George H.W. Bush, removed by President Bill Clinton and reinstated by the second President Bush.

On the Net:

White House: <http://www.whitehouse.gov>

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