

**Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employes Division
of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters**



NEWS CLIPS

February 3, 2012

Randall Brassell, Director of Communications
Telephone: 615-521-4097 (Fax) 615-824-2164
Email: rbrassell1@aol.com

Union membership grew slightly last year

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Published 11:29 p.m., Friday, January 27, 2012

WASHINGTON - Union membership grew slightly last year, giving labor leaders hope that a period of steep declines has finally bottomed out.

The number of unionized workers increased by about 50,000 to nearly 14.8 million members in 2011, the **Bureau of Labor Statistics** reported last week. The increase comes after unions lost nearly 1.4 million members over the previous two years.

Still, unions' share of the overall workforce fell, from 11.9 percent to 11.8 percent, as state and local governments trimmed thousands of jobs to address budget shortfalls. That's the lowest percentage of union workers since the Great Depression in the 1930s.

Unions saw losses of about 61,000 workers in government employment. But they grew by 110,000 workers in the private sector, mainly in construction and health care. Despite that growth, unions still represent just 6.9 percent of all workers at private companies, unchanged from 2010.

"The devastating losses from 2009 and 2010 have stopped, and that's got to be good news for the labor movement," said **John Schmitt**, a senior economist with the **Center for Economic and Policy Research** in Washington.

Schmitt said another positive for unions is that private sector membership grew at about the same rate as overall job growth.

Union membership has declined steadily from its peak of about a third of all workers in the 1950s, and about 20 percent in 1983. The losses have been especially steep in private industry with the loss of manufacturing jobs that traditionally are heavily unionized.

"It is telling that as our country begins to recover the jobs lost during the Great Recession, good union jobs are beginning to come back," AFL-CIO President **Richard Trumka** said.

However, last week the **Indiana House** voted 54-44 to make Indiana the 23rd right-to-work state. The measure faces little opposition in Indiana's Republican-controlled Senate. If Gov. **Mitch Daniels** signs the bill as expected, it will make Indiana the first Rust Belt state to ban contracts that require workers to pay mandatory union fees for representation.

As private sector union membership eroded in the U.S. in recent years, labor leaders turned increasingly toward workers in state and local governments, where there was often less resistance to organizing. About 7.6 million employees in the public sector belonged to unions last year, compared with 7.2 million union workers in the private sector. But future public sector growth in union membership is in doubt.

States and municipalities laid off tens of thousands of workers to balance their budgets after tax revenues fell.

Union member to Romney: 'I'm not a stooge'

Mitt Romney got some push-back this morning from organized labor in the wake of his characterization of President Obama's NLRB appointments as "union stooges."

At a Chamber of Commerce breakfast in Nashua, UAW regional director Julie Kushner jumped into a question and answer session with Romney to ask him why he objected to the Obama administration's bankruptcy plan for GM, which Kushner said saved a million union jobs that otherwise would have been lost in a conventional bankruptcy.

Romney, who initially hesitated to answer because Kushner hadn't been called on and didn't have a microphone -- "I'm not the decider here," he said -- told Kushner he favored a "managed bankruptcy" that would not have cost jobs but would have left GM's senior creditors with ownership "instead of being owned by the UAW. ... The market works better than the president stepping in and taking care of his friends."

Dawn Roy, a Nashua City employee, came to the breakfast with her father Tom, who held up a sign reading "Romney hurts the middle class."

"I'm not a stooge," Dawn Roy said. "I'm a person who wants fair pay for a fair day's work. And I want a say ... I'm a union employee and I just take total offense to this."

With an eye on the next primary in South Carolina, Romney has been criticizing the National Labor Relations Board for its complaint against Boeing for moving jobs to South Carolina, a right to work state, allegedly in retaliation for labor strikes against Boeing in Seattle.

He told the Nashua Chamber that states passing right to work legislation is key to the revival of manufacturing. New plants "aren't going to the union states. They're going to the right to work states."

Wisconsin Recall Drive More Popular Than GOP Presidential Candidates - Combined

By John Nichols

America is almost four weeks into the [voting stage of the Republican presidential race](#). The candidates are debating. The media is covering the competition 24/7, and in such minute detail that Rick Perry's quitting of the contest was treated as news. And Republicans in three states have caucused and voted in numbers that party leaders, pundits and the talk-radio amen corner tell us are significant.

Yet at the same time, those same party leaders, pundits and radio talkers continue to dismiss [the movement to recall Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker](#) as a false construct with little real hope of prevailing.

Fair enough, let's compare.

Since January 3, Republican caucuses have been held in Iowa (with an electorate of 2,231,589), and Republican primaries have been held in New Hampshire (electorate of 998,799) and South Carolina (electorate of 3,385,224).

That adds up to a total electorate of 6,615,612 in the trio of first- (and second- and third-) in-the-nation states.

Turnout for the [Iowa caucuses](#) is now pegged at 121,479. Turnout in the [New Hampshire primary](#) was 248,448. Turnout in the [South Carolina primary](#) was 601,166.

That adds up to [a total turnout of 971,093, or about 14.5 percent of the possible voters](#) in the three states.

And what of Wisconsin?

The state has an electorate of 4,170,501.

The [United Wisconsin petition drive](#) to recall anti-labor Governor Scott Walker collected significantly more than 1 million signatures.

Rounding to a million, that's about 23.9 percent of the possible voters in the state.

So here's what we know:

1. If you add up all the caucus and primary votes that have been cast so far for Mitt Romney, Newt Gingrich, Ron Paul, Rick Santorum, the former Rick Perry, the former Jon Huntsman, the former Michele Bachmann and the eternal Buddy Roemer, they still have not attracted as much support as has the drive to recall Scott Walker.

2. If you compare the percentage of the electorate in the three caucus and primary states that has expressed support for all the Republicans who would be president, it is dramatically lower than the percentage of the Wisconsin electorate that wants to recall Scott Walker.

3. If you add the total number of names on petitions filed January 17 to recall other Republicans in Wisconsin—Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch, state Senate majority leader Scott Fitzgerald and three of Fitzgerald's colleagues—the [total number](#) of signatures filed in support of the recall of Walker and his cronies is close to 1,940,000. That figure is just about double the number of votes cast in all the Republican presidential contests for all the Republican presidential candidates so far this year.

Conclusion: if the Republican presidential race is a serious endeavor, the Wisconsin drive to recall Scott Walker, Rebecca Kleefisch, Scott Fitzgerald and their compatriots is doubly serious. And far, far more popular with the available electorate.

Worth Mentioning:

The Ron Paul for President Campaign released the following statement:

2012 Republican Presidential candidate Ron Paul authored a congratulatory letter to Mark Mix of the National Right to Work Committee, applauding the organization's success in helping to pass a right to work law in the lower house of the Indiana General Assembly.

Mark Mix
President
National Right to Work Committee
8001 Braddock Road, Suite 500
Springfield, Virginia 22160

Dear Mark,

Congratulations!

Last night, my staff informed me that the Indiana House just passed Right to Work on a truly historic vote, and that Indiana is on the verge of becoming America's 23rd Right to Work state.

Of course, it is my hope the Indiana Senate will soon follow suit, and that Governor Daniels will quickly sign Right to Work into law in Indiana so that no Hoosier worker can be forced to pay union dues just to get or keep a job.

I want to congratulate you and your staff on this latest success. You have persevered against the full weight of the union machine, and every American owes you a debt of gratitude for your leadership and dedication.

While Americans should be free to join a union, it's just common sense that no worker should be forced to do so as a condition of employment.

As you know, in Congress, I have been a strong supporter of a National Right to Work Act, and I have made passing such legislation a centerpiece of my presidential campaign. My administration would work closely with your organization and leaders like Senator Jim DeMint and my son, Senator Rand Paul, for its passage in Congress.

Thanks again for all of your hard work to guarantee every American can enjoy the fruits of his labor free from interference by Big Labor bosses.

For Liberty,

Ron Paul

Note: No mention of interference by Big Corporate Bosses

Buying Our Future

January 30, 2012

By Jim Hightower

Already, four of the top GOP presidential contenders have dropped out. Michele Bachmann went first, because she was too wacky, followed by Jon Huntsman, because he was too sane. Herman Cain gave up because he was too exposed, and Rick Perry because he was too dim-witted.

But the greatest surprise is the sudden surge of the Adelson campaign. Little-known until now, Adelson was the big winner in South Carolina, has made his mark in Florida, and looks to have the political kick needed to go the distance.

Never heard of the Adelson campaign? It's the married duo of Sheldon and Miriam, neither of whom is actually on the ballot. Rather, they are running on the cash ticket.

Sheldon Adelson, a Las Vegas-based global casino baron who has long been a major funder of far-right-wing causes, is Newt Gingrich's very special political pal.

When Newt's presidential bid nearly flat-lined after his electoral collapses in Iowa and New Hampshire, Sheldon rushed in with emergency CPR: Cash-Powered Resuscitation. This one rich guy wrote a \$5-million check to Gingrich's Super PAC, which is named "Winning Our Future." The PAC injected Sheldon's money directly into toxic attack ads against Mitt Romney in South Carolina's primary, jolting Newt's campaign back to life.

However, Gingrich still lacked the financial vitality to match Romney's media buy in Florida's pricey primary. No worries, though — Miriam Adelson stepped in to infuse Winning Our Future with another

\$5-million jolt of CPR. The Gingrich campaign, you see, is a vessel for the Adelman campaign, and word is that this one power couple is prepared to spend another \$10 million to make their boy the GOP nominee, with more to come if he's the one to run against President Barack Obama.

Forget "Winning Our Future." The ultra-rich Adelsons are "Buying Our Future."

Unions denounce FAA spending bill compromise, want Senate to reject it

By Associated Press, Published: January 30

WASHINGTON — Union leaders on Monday denounced a deal in Congress that would make it harder for them to organize airline and railroad workers, saying it was reached without their input.

The deal, struck 10 days ago by top House Republicans and Senate Democrats, was part of an effort to pass a long-term funding bill for the Federal Aviation Administration.

More than a dozen unions — including the Teamsters, Communications Workers, Machinists and Flight Attendants — issued a statement calling on the Senate to reject the compromise.

“Unilaterally changing that law without labor’s input and without due deliberation threatens to unravel its carefully balanced goals of labor stability and uninterrupted commerce,” said the statement, which was delivered to House and Senate members.

The statement was a rare public rebuke by unions that are typically cozy with Democratic leaders and try to work out differences behind the scenes. It reflects the belief among many union officials that Democrats gave up too much ground to Republicans who want to make it tougher for unions to organize.

A spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., declined to comment. Reid previously had called the deal “a good example of the common-sense results that Democrats and Republicans can produce when they work together.”

At issue is a 2010 ruling by a tiny government agency — the National Mediation Board — that allowed airline workers to form a union by a simple majority of those voting. Previously, workers who didn’t vote were treated as “no” votes.

Unions had lobbied hard to have the rule changed, but the GOP-controlled House wanted to completely overturn the ruling in the FAA bill, saying it unfairly reversed 75 years of precedent. Senate Democrats opposed the provision.

The dispute was partly responsible for a standoff last summer that led to a two-week partial shutdown of the FAA and the furlough of nearly 4,000 workers.

Under the compromise, the new voting rule would remain. But the bill would include changes that increase the hurdles for a union to hold an election. Unions would have to collect signatures from 50 percent of workers to indicate their support for an election to be held, raising the previous threshold of 35 percent.

And the bill would allow a run-off election between the top two vote-getters, even if one of those two is the option of “no union.”

Despite organized labor’s complaint, the deal appears unlikely to change given the strong desire on both sides to get the FAA bill passed. Democrats say the deal saved unions from even more drastic changes demanded by House Republicans.

Justin Harclerode, a spokesman for House Transportation Committee Chairman John Mica, R-Fla., did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

1/31/2012 10:30:00 AM Labor

18 transportation unions band together to oppose FAA reauthorization bill provisions

Eighteen transportation labor unions recently joined forces to urge Congress to “defend railroad workers from legislative provisions that would significantly weaken their legal rights,” union officials said in a joint statement. The coalition includes 10 rail labor unions.

A proposed bill in Congress that would reauthorize the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) also would weaken the Railway Labor Act (RLA), which governs labor-management relations in the rail and aviation industries, union officials said. The proposed RLA changes would end the National Mediation Board’s (NMB) discretion in deciding when a representation election will be held, and would increase the “showing of interest” necessary to compel an election for an unrepresented bargaining unit by more than 40 percent, they said.

“In fact, the proposal would result in a higher threshold to hold a representation election than for a union to prevail in the election,” union officials said. “The change also would promote legal challenges by railroads and make it extremely difficult for unions to continue to exist on smaller carriers that are merged with a larger, non-union carrier.”

The bill also would change runoff election requirements and subject the NMB to more oversight.

“An aviation safety and security bill is no place to impose unrelated and controversial labor provisions that will ultimately serve to harm both airline and railroad workers,” union officials said.

The 18 unions include the United Auto Workers; Communications Workers of America; Association of Flight Attendants-CWA; International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers; American Federation of Government Employees; International Association of Machinists; Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen; Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division; Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen; Service Employees Local 32BJ-National Conference of Firemen and Oilers; Sheet Metal Workers International Association; United Steelworkers; International Brotherhood of Teamsters; American Train Dispatchers Association; Transportation Communications Union-IAM; Amalgamated Transit Union; United Transportation Union; and Unite Here.

2/1/2012 10:30:00 AM Trend

Lackluster U.S. rail traffic means no economic ramp up on tap, Fitch Ratings says

There was little evidence of a notable ramp up in U.S. economic activity in January based on freight volume trends as rail shipments of major industrial commodities were growing at a lackluster pace, according to Fitch Ratings.

[Association of American Railroads](#) data through Jan. 21 shows generally sluggish demand growth across most commodity groups, Fitch Ratings officials said in a prepared statement.

Class I management teams have painted a picture of relatively restrained volume growth for 2012 after carload growth slowed in 2011's second half, they said.

"Relatively strong operating fundamentals for Class I rail operators such as CSX Corp. and Union Pacific Corp. continue to be driven more by pricing than volume," Fitch Ratings officials said. "Revenue-per-carload growth rates again outpaced volume growth in the fourth quarter, reflecting the strength of the rail pricing environment and higher fuel surcharges."

Early indicators of rail activity in 2012 support the view that the U.S. economy continues to grow slowly, following a fourth quarter in which growth was heavily influenced by inventory restocking and a pick up in auto-related shipments, they said. Shipments of high-volume commodities, such as coal and chemicals, remain flat or declining on a year-over-year basis.

"We note that autos and energy-related freight volumes stand out on the positive side as areas of the economy that are growing briskly," Fitch Ratings officials said. "All of the major railroads noted in their earnings calls that they expect volume growth in these sectors to deviate from the broader trend of sluggish expansion."

Auto sales appeared to be growing at a healthy pace in January, "consistent with our view that U.S. light-vehicle sales volume will likely top 13 million units in 2012," they said. And energy-related activity remained strong primarily from crude oil resources in emerging shale plays, such as the Bakken and Eagle Ford. Energy sector inputs, such as frac sand and steel drilling pipe, were driving growth in carload volumes.

However, the soft markets include grain, chemicals and coal. Weak coal shipments might depress U.S. rail volumes this year as utility coal demand continues to be soft due to low natural gas prices, high stockpiles and mild winter weather across the nation, Fitch Ratings officials said.

February 1, 2012

Indiana Governor Signs a Law Creating a 'Right to Work' State

By [MONICA DAVEY](#)

Gov. [Mitch Daniels](#) of Indiana, who had once said that he did not wish to add a “right to work” provision to the state’s labor laws, signed a bill on Wednesday doing just that.

The legislation, which bars union contracts from requiring non-union members to pay fees for representation, makes Indiana the first state in more than a decade to enact right to work legislation and the only one in the Midwestern manufacturing belt to have such a law.

Mr. Daniels, a Republican who is prevented by term limits from seeking re-election this year, signed the [measure](#) only hours after it cleared the Republican-held State Senate — an unusually speedy journey through the Statehouse aimed, many said, at ending what had become a rancorous, partisan fight before the national spotlight of the [Super Bowl](#) arrives in Indianapolis on Sunday. The bill, which takes effect immediately, makes Indiana the 23rd state in the nation with such a law.

It remained uncertain whether final approval of the bill would prevent union protests at events related to the Super Bowl, and on Wednesday thousands of union members and supporters marched, chanting in protest, from the Statehouse to [Lucas Oil Stadium](#), the site of the football game.

“Seven years of evidence and experience ultimately demonstrated that Indiana did need a right to work law to capture jobs for which, despite our highly rated business climate, we are not currently being considered,” Mr. Daniels said in a statement that his office released after he signed the bill. For a month, the issue had loomed over Indianapolis, and hundreds of union members crowded, day after day, into the Statehouse halls. Democrats, who hold minorities in both legislative chambers, had refused at times to go to the House floor, hoping to block a vote on the matter, which they argued would weaken unions and lower pay and wages for workers at private-sector companies. Even on Wednesday, when it was clear that passage was certain, tensions were high. As senators spoke on both sides, protesters in the halls chanted loudly and a few people inside the chamber called out objections during the proceedings. In the end, senators voted 28 to 22 in favor of the measure, which was approved last week by the House.

Republican leaders defended the unusually swift passage of the measure, noting what they described as “overt threats” by union members and others about intentions to raise the right to work issue during the Super Bowl.

“We sized up early on that passage prior to the Super Bowl would be appropriate,” Brian Bosma, the speaker of the House, said Wednesday, adding that the law enforcement authorities were prepared for any efforts to disrupt the city’s first Super Bowl. “That would be extremely unfortunate,” he said, “and, I think, tremendously unpopular.”

For their part, union leaders said the Republicans had overblown the union’s intentions on the football game.

“They’re trying to make working men and women look like thugs, like we’re going to ruin an event,” said Jeff Harris, a spokesman for the Indiana A.F.L.-C.I.O., who added that their expectation for the Super Bowl was to have “a presence but an informational presence,” handing out leaflets on the issue.

10:02 a.m. Amendment Targets CA High Speed Rail; Rahall Moves to Postpone Markup
Feb. 2, 2012

by [Kathryn A Wolfe](#), CQ Roll Call Staff

The House T&I markup of the surface transportation bill ([HR 7](#)) is now underway, with some 91 amendments filed -- one of which takes aim at California's troubled high speed rail project.

The amendment, by Rep. Jeff Denham, R-Calif., would prohibit any funds in the bill from being used for high speed rail in California. Denham, a frequent critic of the controversial planned bullet train, believes the project should be canceled. Read his amendment [here](#) (PDF).

"The money should go towards repairing our roads and highways, these are immediate, shovel-ready infrastructure projects that will create jobs and help build our local economies," read a statement from Denham's office.

The markup's barely gotten underway and it's already contentious.

Ranking Democrat Nick J. Rahall II of West Virginia, made a motion to postpone the markup until Feb. 8 and made it clear that if that motion is denied, said Democrats are prepared to offer "many" amendments. Some of them appear calculated to force the GOP to take uncomfortable votes on items such as employment benefits for veterans.

The motion was tabled 28-21, but not before Rahall asked for debate time on the motion -- there was none -- and also forced the clerk to read the motion in full. All of this indicates Democrats won't be playing nice, and that Rahall himself will do everything he can to draw the markup out and generally make it unpleasant for the majority.

Mica said votes on the House floor today are not going to be rolled over to another day, meaning if the current schedule of votes, where the last votes are expected around 5 or 6, the committee could potentially have all day to work through amendments.

2/2/2012 9:30:00 AM Federal Legislation

House, Senate committees take up long-term surface transportation bills

Today, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs committees are scheduled to mark up major transportation legislation.

Both bills are a reflection of the major differences between House Republicans and Senate Democrats over how to fund the nation's transportation programs.

On the House side, Republicans on Tuesday unveiled the "American Energy and Infrastructure Jobs Act," a \$260 billion bill that proposes to fund transportation programs over five years.

The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee today began considering amendments to the bill, which likely will include an amendment to address provisions that would allow states to increase truck weight and size limits. Those provisions are strongly opposed by a coalition of stakeholders, including the [Association of American Railroads](#).

According to various rail industry-related associations, the House bill's other provisions of interest include: eliminating the congestion grant program; streamlining the environmental review process for transportation projects; cutting by 25 percent Amtrak's authorized funding levels; requiring Amtrak to contract out its food service program; increasing the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) loan program from \$122 million to \$1 billion per year; enhancing the Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing (RRIF) program to make it more efficient and predictable; and extending the positive train control implementation deadline from 2015's end to Dec. 31, 2020.

On the Senate side, the Banking Committee is scheduled to mark up the "Federal Public Transportation Act of 2012," a two-year reauthorization and reform of federal public transportation programs. The committee is responsible for authorizing the transit portion of the federal surface transportation programs, including urban mass transit and rural bus transit systems.

"The new [Senate] bill eliminates earmarks while maintaining current funding levels, improves safety oversight and streamlines the construction of public transportation projects," said U.S. Sen. Tim Johnson (D-S.D.), who chairs the committee, in a prepared statement.

Whether Congress will be able to overcome partisan political differences to pass a long-term surface transportation reauthorization bill this year is a big issue, said Chuck Baker, president of the [National Railroad Construction & Maintenance Association Inc.](#), and a partner at government affairs firm Chambers, Conlon and Hartwell L.L.C.

"There are some very big issues to be sorted out, with the highest profile ones being how to pay for the bill and how long the bill should be," Baker said, referring to the House's five-year, \$260 billion bill, and the Senate's two-year, \$109 billion bill.

In addition, House Republicans have called for using new fees on expanded oil drilling to help fund transportation programs — an idea that Democratic leaders already have dismissed as a nonstarter.

Still, there are many influential stakeholders — such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, labor unions and transportation industry groups — that are clamoring for long-term transportation funding legislation, said Baker.

"There are still very, very meaningful hurdles to overcome," he said. "But, there is actually bipartisan agreement that we at least want a bill. There is a lot of pressure [on Congress] to get a bill done."

— Julie Sneider

Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen, American Train Dispatchers Association members ratify national contracts

February 2, 2012

This morning, the Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen (BRS) and American Train Dispatchers Association announced their members ratified national agreements with the National Carriers' Conference Committee (NCCC). The two unions represent more than 8,600 rail workers.

The BRS' six-year agreement resolves several issues, such as wages and health and welfare benefits, BRS officials said in a prepared statement. The pact also includes an expansion of a Managed Medical Care Program, health insurance cost containment provisions and an adjustment to the ratio of supplemental sickness benefits.

"Although some healthcare costs have been shifted to the employees, there are no work rule changes and our healthcare plan is still one of the best, and most affordable, in the country," said BRS President W. Dan Pickett.

The ratification of the pact follows more than two years of "difficult negotiations" between the union and NCCC, he said.

Now, contracts have been ratified by 12 of the 13 unions involved in national bargaining, covering more than 107,000 rail workers. The only union without a settlement — the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division — previously agreed with the NCCC to extend a "cooling off" period, which expires on Feb. 8.

U.S. weekly freight traffic called "mixed"

Written by [Douglas John Bowen](#)

U.S. freight carload traffic for the week ending Jan. 28, 2012 was down 2.8% compared with the fourth week of 2011, the Association of American Railroads said Thursday. By contrast, U.S. intermodal volume for the week rose 5.5% compared with the same week last year.

AAR said 11 of the 20 carload commodity groups it tracks posted increases compared with the same week in 2011, led by with metallic ores, up 59.2%, motor vehicles and equipment, up 25.1%, and petroleum products, up 22.2% Declining commodities included farm products excluding grain, down 24.3%, grain, down 19.8%, and primary forest products, down 10.7%.

Canadian freight carload volume did better than its U.S. counterpart, up 5.4% for the week ending Jan. 28 compared with last year. Canadian intermodal volume also gained, up 2.4%. Mexican freight carload volume did not fare as well, down 6.5% for the week compared with the same week last year. Mexican intermodal, however, rose 32.9% over the comparable week in 2011.

Combined North American freight carload volume for the first four weeks of 2012 on 13 reporting U.S., Canadian, and Mexican railroads edged up just 0.3% compared with 2011, while intermodal rose 2.5% compared with the first four weeks of 2011.

The U.S., by itself, saw freight carload volume up 0.1% for the month of January, while U.S. intermodal volume for the first four weeks of 2012 rose 1.7%.

“Total rail carload traffic in January was flat compared with last year, due largely to sharp declines in coal and grain traffic,” said AAR Senior Vice President John T. Gray. “However, a number of other commodity categories — including many that have historically been much more highly correlated with GDP growth than coal and grain—saw large increases in January. That’s a sign that the underlying economy is probably stronger than you would think if you just looked at the rail traffic totals.”

February 2, 2012, 10:04 AM

The War on Organized Labor

By [ANDREW ROSENTHAL](#)

You have to admit that the Republican Party is organized, methodical and persistent – especially if you’re a Democrat, because your party is pretty much the opposite.

Slowly but surely, across the country, Republican governors and state legislatures are making progress in their war against labor unions, especially ones that represent public employees. Just yesterday, there was bad news from two states.

In Indiana, Gov. Mitch Daniels signed a bill making Indiana another “right to work” state, which is one of those slogans, like “pro-life” and “family values,” that sounds unobjectionable, but isn’t. That law is relatively simple: It prohibits labor contracts from requiring workers to pay union dues. The spin is that this is better for everyone. The truth is that it is not only bad for labor but also bad for the economy.

Unions will reduce a company’s profits somewhat, because they get higher wages for workers. But economists have found that unionization has a minimal impact on growth and employment. Six of the 10 states with the highest unemployment have right-to-work laws in place. North Carolina, which has the lowest unionization rate in the country, 1.8 percent, also has the sixth highest unemployment, 10 percent.

In 2010, wages of workers in unionized manufacturing companies in Indiana were 16 percent higher than in non-union plants. [One Harvard study](#), published this summer in *American Sociological Review*, concluded that the decline in unionization since the 1970s is responsible for one-fifth of the increase in hourly wage inequality among women, and one-third among men.

The other bit of news on Wednesday came from Arizona, where Republican lawmakers are pushing a bill that would ban collective bargaining for public-sector employees.

They are mimicking a similar – and I think ultimately unconstitutional – law in Wisconsin, which pioneered the idea of singling out the people who work for their government and denying them the right to collective bargaining.

There has been a backlash. Opponents of the bill in Wisconsin have managed to recall two state senators who worked on it, and they have their sights on Gov. Scott Walker. Last November, Ohio voters overturned a bill that would have stripped most public employees of their right to collective bargaining.

The Republicans are not just waging an anti-union campaign, but an anti-government campaign as well. Right-wingers believe government is the cause of all things bad in the economy and in society, and are willing to sacrifice those who toil in the public interest in their effort to hobble it.

Proponents of the anti-union laws have told me it's reprehensible for public employees to negotiate over wages, benefits and working conditions when their employer is the government to which we all pay taxes. When I ask, how is that different from negotiating with any employer, the answer I generally get is "it just is."

Unions have over-reached in many ways, clinging to wage-and-benefits agreements that are simply untenable in today's economy. But they are fundamental to maintaining fairness for workers. And governors in many states, including New York, have managed to get concessions from public employee unions without outlawing them.

January jobs report is good news for Obama

By [Rachel Weiner](#), Published: February 3

January's [jobs report](#) is welcome news for the president.

The unemployment rate dropped 0.2 percentage points to 8.3 percent; 243,000 new nonfarm jobs were created in the past month.

More important than the numbers is the trend: It's the seventh-straight month of job growth over 100,000, as well as a marked increase from December when the economy added 200,000 jobs. It's also the fifth straight month in which the unemployment rate dropped, and the lowest rate in nearly three years.

Below the top-line numbers were other encouraging signs: Hiring was widespread across many high-paying industries, pay increased, and 2011 numbers were revised upward.

If that trend continues, Obama's reelection prospects will continue to strengthen.

This chart from the New York Times' Nate Silver shows how, with some outliers, job growth correlates with incumbent success:

He [estimated](#) that if former Massachusetts governor **Mitt Romney** — a fairly generic Republican — is the GOP nominee, Obama will need to see growth of 150,000 jobs a month to win.

No president in recent history has been reelected with unemployment above 8 percent, and analysts [suggest](#) it would take growth of between 167,000 and 260,000 jobs a month to get there by November.

Just because unemployment is decreasing right now doesn't mean it will continue to do so for the next eight months.

And if discouraged Americans who dropped out of the workforce start looking for jobs again, it will nudge the unemployment rate up. Republicans, in the wake of past positive jobs news, have highlighted those who are no longer considered "unemployed" because they have stopped looking for work.

But the trend must be encouraging for the embattled incumbent.

In his State of the Union late last month, President Obama [took a gamble](#) — saying "America is back," he presented a country decisively on the right track. For now, it seems it was a good bet.

The Washington Post Company

SC's diverse union workers don't like bashing

By JEFFREY COLLINS
Associated Press

When the power goes out in South Carolina, chances are a union member repairs that line. When someone sends a letter or a package, the mail carrier or UPS driver is likely a union member.

There are 59,000 workers in unions in South Carolina, doing jobs as diverse as making paper, unloading ships, fighting fires and playing music. And a number of them are angry at the suddenly fiery comments Gov. Nikki Haley is making about organized labor.

Haley hasn't hidden her dislike of unions during her first year in office, using Boeing's battle with the national Labor Relations Board to boost her stance that unions don't help businesses. But in her State of the State address last month, some union members said she made things personal.

"We'll make the unions understand full well that they are not needed, not wanted, and not welcome in the State of South Carolina," the governor said.

Firefighter Roger Odachowski was stunned. "If you put in the word black or gays in there, how offensive would that be?" said the 39-year-old, who is currently on disability, has been a union member for nearly two decades and has been a firefighter in Anderson for 12 years.

Union members in 2011 make up just 3.4 percent of South Carolina's workforce, and just more than 1 percent of the state's population as a whole. More people identified themselves as Asians in South Carolina in the 2010 Census than as union members.

But in one of her first news conferences of this year's Legislative session, Haley blasted unions. She touted an executive order she signed denying unemployment pay for striking workers, even though state law already bans that and officials can't remember the last time South Carolina had a strike. She also put her support behind a bill that would increase penalties for unions that break the state's right-to-work law and require unions to submit detailed financial and membership data to the state.

"Unions thrive in the dark. Secrecy is their greatest ally, sunlight their most potent adversary," Haley said in her State of the State address.

But the reality is quite the opposite, said 39-year-old Joe Shelley, who works in the safety department of the Capstone Paper plant in Charleston. Unions already disclose all the money they spend to the federal government and its members. Leaders are democratically elected, and contracts with employers are published.

Shelley decided to join the union his first week on the job in 2005, and he doesn't appreciate the governor and state leaders making him feel persecuted for a choice he thinks is best for him and his family. He can't believe people think the goals of unions are to destroy companies and damage prosperity.

"We want corporations to be successful, too. If we get them to the point where they don't make money, we're not going to have a job," Shelley said.

Union members said a lot of the condemning of organized labor comes down to money. South Carolina, the second-least unionized state in the country, ranked 45th in the nation in per capita income in 2010. The five least unionized states in the country were all in the bottom-third in that statistic. A federal report issued last week found union members across the country had median weekly earnings of \$938, while non-union workers were at \$729.

Ryan Leveille plays percussion in the Charleston Symphony, where all but a few of the two dozen or so musicians are members of the American Federation of Musicians. He said he can never figure out why Republicans who want to reduce government spending so badly don't like unions, which usually bargain for contracts to pay their workers enough to keep them off food stamps and secure them health insurance that keeps them off Medicaid.

"Union people are gainfully employed, and we're less likely to be on state assistance - monetary help or health assistance or things like that - because we've negotiated it," Leveille said. "We're not relying on the state to take care of us. You think people would support that."

South Carolina has a long and troubled history with organized labor. Seven striking textile workers were killed in Honea Path in 1934 when deputies fired on a fight between the union members and possible strikebreakers. Textile magnate Roger Milliken, beloved for his donations to charity, shut a textile mill in Darlington County and let 500 workers go in 1956 after they voted to form a union. Milliken had to pay a \$5 million fine after a lengthy court battle. Textile workers in the early 20th century managed to heavily unionize Newberry County textile mills, so officials retaliated against the county, making sure no major plants came for at least the next three decades.

State leaders today defend their stance on unions because they said it is good for business. Haley said during her first year in office that prospective businesses told her South Carolina's anti-union climate is a definite plus.

When asked for this story whether unions have a place at all in her vision of South Carolina's future, Haley answered with a statement.

"We are fighting every day to keep the direct relationships between employers and employees strong, balanced and fair. We are a strong right to work state, which means we fight for both employees and employers' rights. We will continue to do that," she said.

Georgette Carr isn't so sure Haley is fighting for her. The 55-year-old longshoreman at the Charleston port said she is saddened to see someone like Haley, the state's first female governor, fail to respect an organization that also makes sure she is not discriminated against in a male-dominated profession.

Carr became a longshoreman in 1999 after spending years as a residential assistant at a Charleston County drug treatment facility. In that job, she made \$6.94 an hour and needed help almost every month from her father to keep her lights on. Now, she has enough money to fix up her house and support her own family. She also has extra money that allows her to help others. She is very proud of the toy drive her union spearheads every Christmas.

"I'm a woman, she's a woman," Carr said. "She's embarrassed me. I hope that all she needs is a little education on what unions can do. But I'm not sure she would listen."

NCCC, BMW line up in accord

Written by [Douglas John Bowen](#)

The nation's freight railroads say they have reached a tentative agreement with the last of 13 labor unions, the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees.

The National Carriers' Conference Committee, representing 30 railroads, cautioned the pact has to be ratified by BMW member vote. But NCCC was optimistic that BMW would ratify the agreement, as other unions have done.

Indeed, contract ratifications were announced Thursday by the railroads with members of the American Train Dispatchers Association and the Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen, making 12 agreements ratified in all.

"These agreements demonstrate that voluntary bargaining continues to work in the rail industry," A. Kenneth Gradia, chairman of the National Carriers' Conference Committee, the railroads' bargaining representative, said in a news release. "The carriers and the unions, with the critical support of the National Mediation Board, have resolved their differences, ensuring they will continue to work together to help drive America's economic growth today and in the future."