

## Presidential Impact on Unions

If you search the internet you will find plenty of articles regarding pro-union politicians. Most will even claim that they are the “most pro-union” politician in history. While I don’t think anyone singlehandedly can be named the “most pro-union” politician in history, we can agree that there have been tens of thousands of politicians who have helped shape labor unions since the first labor union was formed in 1794. That was 214 years before I was born!

In the first century and a half it seemed government continued to support companies over trade unions. We saw this in 1894 when the Pullman Railroad Line organized a strike and President Grover Cleveland responded by sending in federal troops. History was repeated twenty years later when the National Guard set fire to tents of striking Colorado mine workers killing up to an estimated 200 people under the leadership of Woodrow Wilson. Even into the 1980’s, President Ronald Reagan and administration argued that those working for public benefit should not be allowed to strike and responded by firing unionized air traffic controllers who went on strike.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt was the only four-year term president that led us through the Great Depression and WWII. During his tenure, the National Labor Relations Act ensured the right for workers to organize into unions and strike. The Fair Labor Standards Act guaranteed a minimum forty-hour work week and an end to child labor. While this seems to sum up what a union is, and most would probably name FDR as the President who is the most pro-union, future executive orders from Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy would also expand unions. JFK’s executive order changed our union forever, and for that reason I would name him the most pro-union President in history.

John F. Kennedy was the 35th President of the United States where he served from 1961 to 1963, before being assassinated. He was the youngest man to be elected into office and won the votes of many traditional Democratic voters-members of labor unions. His very memorable statement “Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country” sums up his mind set to launch our country into its longest sustained development following WWII. JFK issued Executive Order 10988 on January 17th, 1962 granting federal employees stronger workplace rights and recognizing the value that an empowered workforce brings to public service by granting collective bargaining. This Executive Order was revolutionary for public sector workers who were previously not protected. While my step-dad is in the IUPAT DC7 union, my mom has been a government employee for many years. President Kennedy understood the importance of unions AND public service and allowed unions and federal employees to come together to secure a better future for future generations like mine. Without this bid for change, we may not have the future generations of public servants as we do. Executive order 10988 led the way for other Presidents such as Richard Nixon who expanded those rights with Executive Order 11491 in 1969 and Lyndon B. Johnson who formed the Presidential Review Committee on Employee-Management Relations in the Federal Service thus making President John F. Kennedy the most pro-union President in history.

Today, unions continue to serve the same purpose that those sought for when originally founded. Union employees want fair wages that increase, safe working conditions and increasing benefits for their families. This raises the standard of living for the working class. In a world with exploding executive and CEO salaries, the working class without unions suffer from layoffs, unemployment and stationary wages. As new generations enter the workforce, we need the collective voice and bargaining power that unions provide to keep our workplaces safe and fair. Today, and in the future, labor unions will continue to be important to our country's workforce and their families.