



# San Antonio Alamo Area Local Legislative Updates

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## Bernie Sanders Joins Verizon Picket Line

In a rare move for a major presidential candidate, Democratic hopeful Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) joined a picket line with Verizon workers in New York City. The decision to single out a major U.S. corporation by joining a worker protest is unusual for a serious presidential contender in the midst of a campaign. "Let me get to the point," Sanders said at the picket line, which took place at a Verizon Wireless store in midtown Manhattan. "Middle class in this country is disappearing and what Verizon is doing to their workers is exactly what has got to be fought if we are going to rebuild the American middle class."

Nearly 40,000 Verizon employees represented by Communications Workers of America union and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers are currently in a major contract battle with Verizon. CWA has also accused the telecom giant of retaliating against Verizon Wireless store employees who are union activists, charges the company has denied. Rich Young, a Verizon spokesman, said the company has been working since June to reach a "solid contract" with the workers, and he accused CWA of "distort[ing] facts."

"These PR stunts do nothing to help advance the bargaining process," Young told The Huffington Post, which is owned by Verizon. "Verizon remains ready to hold serious discussions and engage in meaningful negotiations that will result in a fair and balanced agreement. We truly hope union leaders are soon committed to the same."

While it may be unusual for a presidential candidate to join a picket line, it isn't unusual for the self-described democratic socialist from Vermont. Last year, before he declared his presidential bid, Sanders walked a picket line with workers at the telecom company FairPoint Communications, where 1,700 employees represented by IBEW were on strike in New England. He also marched with the Bakers, Confectioners, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers Union Local 100G in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, last month.

In a blog post at The Huffington Post, Cohen quoted from a message Sanders sent to Verizon employees in August, shortly before their contract expired: "I am hopeful you will reach a fair contract. But if you run into roadblocks, as in years past, know that I will be there with you until a fair contract is negotiated."

Sanders' long-running, vocal support for organized labor helps explain his appeal to many rank-and-file union members during the primary, even as frontrunner Hillary Clinton picks up more endorsements from establishment labor unions. Both candidates have placed economic inequality at the core of their campaigns as they seek the nomination.

"Bernie believes that working people are key -- their standard of living, their jobs -- to what kind of economy we're going to have," Cohen said. "And that needs to be front and center and not something you get into obliquely."