

How Unions Are Pushing Hollywood Workers to the Polls

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Highlight: With just a week before Election Day, Hollywood unions are making the last-minute case to their members to get out and vote - and, in some cases, touting the appeal of pro-labor 2020 candidates in the process.

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With just days before Election Day, Hollywood unions are making the last-minute case to their members to get out and vote - and, in some cases, touting the appeal of pro-labor 2020 candidates in the process.

The Screen Actors Guild, the Costume Designers Guild, IATSE and the Writers Guild of America West are among the unions currently appealing to members who aren't among the over 66 million Americans who have already voted early in 2020 to do their civic duty. SAG-AFTRA, which is non-partisan and does not endorse candidates but does lobby for policies that benefit their members, is organizing a "Get Out the Vote" panel (featuring actors yet to be announced) that will take place on Nov. 2 and be livestreamed to members. The union is also releasing several voting videos this week urging members to go to the polls or mail in ballots.

The WGA West, meanwhile, is opening the doors to its Writers Guild Theater in Beverly Hills from Oct. 30 through Nov. 2 to provide safe in-person voting in partnership with the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk. "We're very proud to be working with the LA County Registrar's office to make our theater available to people who want to vote in person or drop their ballots off this election," WGA West President David A. Goodman said in a statement. "While this most consequential of U.S. elections is hampered by disgraceful voter suppression campaigns across the country, we're fortunate that here in LA County our officials want to ensure that all eligible voters have the opportunity to exercise this cherished American right."

The WGA West PAC, meanwhile, set a record in 2020 by donating \$200,000 to political candidates, with money focused on existing Congressional allies and Senate races that could flip blue. The PAC has several candidates running in the 2020 election, including California Reps. Adam Schiff, Ted Lieu, Zoe Lofgren, Anna Eshoo, Tony Cardenas, Chris Bubser, Harley Rouda, Karen Bass and Katie Porter (the latter two appeared in a WGA West PAC speaker series this summer) and former vice president Joe Biden for president. The PAC is also urging members to vote "yes" on California Proposition 16, which calls for repealing a Calif. law outlawing discrimination or preferential

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treatment based on “race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin” in public institutions or state government, and “no” on Proposition 22, which sets out to exempt app-based transportation and delivery services from complying with California’s AB-5 law.

The Costume Designers Guild, which has already been circulating flyers encouraging members to vote, will continue to message those who haven’t turned their ballots in early, president Salvador Perez says. Members of the Guild’s Young Workers committee will also be volunteering at the polls. Earlier in the election, the Guild spotlighted pro-labor California political candidates including State Assemblywoman Christy Smith, Porter, Bass and current deputy attorney general with the California Department of Justice Nick Schultz through a “know your candidates” informational initiative. The Guild has also urged members to vote “no” on California Prop. 22 and “yes” on Prop. 15, which aims to reform taxation of commercial and industrial properties.

“The Costume Designers Guild is a labor union, so our goal this election season was to educate our members on the candidates who support workers, unions and the labor movement,” the head of the CDG’s Elections Committee and assistant costume designer representative on the CDG board, David Matwijkow, said in a statement. “We also informed them on ballot propositions crucial to the cause of working people, and provided comprehensive information and resources on the entire voting process. From registration and mail in voting, to how to find a polling place and what you legally can and cannot wear when you vote in person (we are costume people, after all). And yes, we are proud of this work to keep our union informed about something so precious to that other ‘Union’ we ALL belong to, and are working to perfect.”

Earlier in the 2020 election, IATSE International initiated its first-ever text-messaging campaign to urge members to vote, in addition to an email campaign. The union’s novel text-banking program has been a “targeted campaign,” said one IATSE representative, that has focused on people who are not yet registered to vote or are felons in states - like - where felons’ voting rights have been recently reinstated. Also relatively new for the union has been a program that launched in fall 2019 mandating that each local union appoint a political coordinator so that members have an in-person resource for political questions. As Election Day nears, IATSE will focus its voter-education efforts on instructing members how to track their ballots and learn if they have been accepted. IATSE endorsed Joe Biden for president , and locals have issued their own endorsements of more local candidates.

On a more local level, IATSE Local 600’s (The International Cinematographers Guild) Young Workers committee has text-banked and phone-banked in order to get out the vote, especially providing information on absentee and early voting. (By July, the committee had already contacted as part of the initiative.) The union also put out a call for that show members sharing why voting is important to them; the organization’s Active Engagement committee has chosen several to share online and via the guild’s weekly newsletter.

Of the political energy in 2020 among members, Christy Fiers, the first national vice president of Local 600, says, “We’ve always encouraged members to be politically active, but it’s never been to this degree before.”

The Animation Guild’s Political Action League Committee stumped for U.S. Rep. candidate Christy Smith and Rep. Katie Porter with a custom postcard campaign, according to Guild field representative and political coordinator Leslie Simmons. Members created and sent unique postcards supporting the candidates to other Guild members who will vote in Smith’s and Porter’s districts. The Guild has additionally supported Smith and Porter by inviting them to speak at the union’s September General Membership Meeting, where a representative of the “No on Prop. 22” campaign also spoke.

IATSE Local 800’s (the Art Directors Guild) Women’s Committee also participated in a postcard-mailing campaign, sending cards to members to remind them to vote and to support pro-labor candidates. Politically-active Guild members are also gearing up to participate in an IATSE Los Angeles phone-banking initiative in the next few days to support U.S. Rep. candidate Smith and “no” on Prop. 22.

“I think the last four years and the consistent and coordinated attacks on the rights of workers that we have seen in our country have shown that we can’t sit silent anymore and hope that somebody will take care of us,” the Guild’s associate national executive director, dooner, says of voting in 2020. “We have to engage in the process, we have

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to stand up and we have to fight back. If we don't do that, we will see the rights of workers continue to erode, we will see the protections of those that came before us and shed their blood to continue to achieve will be stripped away on our watch."

The Directors Guild of America implored members to vote in a striking November 2020 cover to its digital magazine, which simply read "VOTE." On Oct. 15, national executive director Russell Hollander additionally sent a letter to the House Committee on Oversight and Reform and Subcommittee on Government Operations chairs and ranking members. The letter asked the groups to "ensure that the United States Postal Service will continue to fulfill its duties-most critically, the duty to help America vote" given that DGA members are often shooting on location during Election Day.

"We must be able to rely upon the U.S. Postal Service to deliver our ballots this year, as it has always done," Hollander wrote.

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