

Report of the President **TO THE CONVENTION**



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IN THE 50 YEARS since the creation of the AFL-CIO, much has changed—but the values that guide America’s union movement have not.

If anything, our commitment to improving life for working families has grown, and our experience and ability to do so have grown as well.

But the voice of working families is diminishing in our workplaces, our communities, our government and the global economy. And the problems of workers and their families are urgent: Job quality is eroding, wages are shrinking, retirement and health care security are increasingly out of reach and unbridled and unprincipled corporate power threatens to make it more difficult for working families to achieve the American dream.

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level that will strengthen us to win for working families, now and in the future.

This Convention follows months of vigorous debate about what form those changes should take. Debate and discussion are healthy and welcome—they prod us all into finding the best in ourselves and our ideas. In recent months, much of the debate has been about the state of the labor movement. Much of it has been constructive. Much of it critical. Some of it controversial. And some has divided and diverted us from discussing what’s at stake for the future of the union movement.

Our job at this Convention, as leaders of the unions that represent 13 million hard-working men and women, is to move beyond division, to make our decisions together, to move forward in solidarity and get about the business of building a better future for working families.

Winning for Working Families

In November 2004, I asked every union, constituency group and allied organization to share their ideas and proposals about how we should strengthen the union movement for the future. In response, we received 23 extensive proposals from national unions, 40 from state federations and central labor councils, four from AFL-CIO trade departments, five from constituency groups, two from AFL-CIO Executive Council committees, two from community partner organizations, 20 from academics and other individuals—and more than 8,500 comments and recommendations from rank-and-file union members.

Core areas of common concern and commitment emerged:

The union movement must grow by directing increased resources to organizing workers, reaching out especially to women, people of color and others who stand to gain so much from union membership.

To advance a working families' agenda, **we must build on the success of Labor 2004 by creating long-term, year-round issues and member mobilization** through a permanent grassroots network, ensuring the capacity to boot anti-worker politicians out of office and elect a pro-worker government.

We must strengthen state and local union movements to build the capacity for all this work. We have made a start by bringing state and local labor movements together through the New Alliance program and through the Union Cities program.

The federation must become leaner, eliminate areas of duplication with affiliate union work and focus more intently on top priorities.

Anchoring this vision are two interdepend-

ent strategies: helping affiliated unions organize and engaging working people in deeper, broader, ongoing mobilization to win legislative and political gains that build a strong future for working families. Much of the recent debate about the future of the union movement has created a false dichotomy that pits organizing against political and legislative action. The choice facing us is not *either* organizing *or* political and legislative action. The road map to success is clear: Overcoming the odds working people face today demands that organizing and politics work hand in glove—as they always have—from the day the Wagner Act was passed more than 70 years ago. Our strategies will not surmount the odds unless we concede that there's an umbilical link between political action and winning workers' rights. Neither should be sacrificed at the expense of the other.

In March 2005, the AFL-CIO Executive Committee took an initial step toward achieving these twin goals by directing that the federation prioritize the interconnected goals of organizing and political and legislative mobilization. Since then, our discussions for bettering the lives of working families increasingly have found common ground. At this point, the divergence in the debate is basically about money—the size of federation rebates or incentives to affiliate unions that are organizing.

We need to recognize a fight about dollars and cents for what it is—details that can be overcome when debating in good faith. Details are critical, of course, but cannot be allowed to threaten the solidarity of the union movement. At this Convention we are going to put plans in place to:

- Build power through organizing.
- Build power through issues mobilization and political action.

The union movement must grow by directing increased resources to organizing workers, reaching out especially to women, people of color and others who stand to gain much from union membership.

- Build power at the grassroots union movement level.
- Build power through our diversity.
- Build power by strengthening our governance.

Build Power Through Organizing

We will increase the resources the AFL-CIO devotes to organizing and create a Strategic Organizing Fund, allocated between creating incentives to encourage affiliate organizing and assisting national union affiliates in building capacity to take on larger-scale, more strategic growth campaigns of importance to the entire union movement. We will continue to provide top-level assistance to national unions in building strategic organizing programs as well as training for affiliate organizing staff. It is the collective effort of every union investing in strategic organizing that can grow the union movement. We will actively facilitate voluntary mergers of unions, especially those with common core jurisdictions, to increase union bargaining power and growth.

We will mobilize federation-wide support for the United Food and Commercial Workers in its drive to stop the Wal-Marting of good jobs. Through the AFL-CIO Wal-Mart Task Force, we will mount a major global campaign to expose the greed of the world's largest employer and hold it accountable. Expanding the Voice@Work and Employee Free Choice Act campaigns to restore workers' freedom to form unions is core to these endeavors.

Build Power Through Issues Mobilization and Political Action

Complementing our efforts to expand organizing outreach and mobilization, we will build year-round, year-in-and-year-out capacity for informing and mobilizing union members around legislative and public policy issues and for political action at all levels. By integrating our local, state

and national legislative fights with our political mobilization, and expanding our work with community allies, we will advance the efforts of all working people at every level.

We will set our political and legislative agenda and priorities based on the interests of working families, not the interests of any political party or specific candidate. We will work on a bipartisan basis to elect candidates to public office who support a pro-working families' agenda, recognizing that neither political party is entitled to our automatic support. Democrats should not expect to be endorsed by labor without earning that support, and Republicans who want to work on behalf of working people should be given an opportunity to meet with representatives of state and central labor bodies as part of an open and transparent endorsement process.

Through political mobilization, we will assist and strengthen efforts to mobilize people of color, especially in southern states, and build stronger coalitions with the Latino community. At the same time, we will increase our efforts to recruit, train and elect union members to local, state and federal public offices.

Because so many workers say they would join a union on the job if they had a chance but are prevented from doing so because of employer hostility, weak labor laws or lack of opportunity, we launched WORKING AMERICA in 2003. As a community affiliate of the AFL-CIO, WORKING AMERICA has enabled more than 900,000 workers to take action while tapping into their potential political and legislative power. Side by side with our issues mobilization and outreach efforts, we will expand WORKING AMERICA recruitment, aiming to increase membership to 2 million by the end of 2006, and mobilize current

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and new WORKING AMERICA members for support in electoral battles and in the fight for corporate accountability.

Build Power at the Grassroots Union Movement Level

To design and lead effective issues, legislative and electoral member mobilization campaigns in partnership with affiliates and state and central bodies, we will build state and local labor federations that will strengthen and grow the labor movement.

We will establish performance standards for state and local central bodies, and we will lead strategic planning and budgeting processes to build strong, unified, effective organizations at the state and local levels.

The national AFL-CIO, state federations, central labor councils, national and local unions and constituency groups must all be represented in this work, and these efforts must be supported by all levels of the labor movement.

Build Power Through Our Diversity

Creating a vibrant union movement means increased training and leadership development among women and people of color—and one of the best ways to do this is to reach out to today's young people. We must attract and recruit a diverse pool of young people into the labor movement through Union Summer, as well as through public outreach.

We will act decisively to expand leadership diversity *and* to strengthen democracy. Working with national unions, state federations and central labor councils, we will create paths for the stewards and work-site mobilizers who will lead the renewal of the union movement to become the union leaders of tomorrow. And we will structure our governance to allow our affiliates increased and active involvement that

will enrich decision making, facilitate communication and lead to the mutual accountability without which a successful, growing, unified movement is not possible.

Build Power by Strengthening Our Governance

Maintaining the current size of the Executive Council will ensure diversity in size of union, industry sector, race, ethnicity and gender. To streamline the decision-making process, we should reduce the size of the AFL-CIO Executive Committee and expand the General Board to include representatives of central labor councils and AFL-CIO constituency groups, in addition to the current membership of the presidents of all national unions and representatives of trade departments and state federations. The General Board will serve as the highest governing authority between conventions.

Moving Forward

By building power in organizing and political and legislative action, strengthening our governance and making the most of our diversity, we can equip today's union leaders to confront and address the problems facing each worker—and the entire union movement—and ensure tomorrow's union leaders are well prepared when they take on the mantle of leadership.

The challenges we face in our nation and throughout the global economy are great. Divided, we cannot meet them. United, we can move forward in ensuring working families reap the rewards they earn with their dedication and hard work—a goal that has shaped the heart of the union movement from its inception and one of which we must never lose sight. Together, we can explore our differences with an aim to resolving them in the interests of working families.

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Among the thousands of grassroots union member responses on the AFL-CIO website regarding the future of the union movement, Larry Grant, a member of Iron Workers Local 10 in Kansas City, Mo., spoke for so many of our union members when he wrote: "Our greatest strength is our ability to be one voice when needed. Being willing and able to help each other in times of crisis, be it injury or illness, is another."

One of the most critical lessons we have learned throughout the history of our union movement is the power of solidarity. Now is the time to come together, to pull

our load in one direction, to combine our strength. Union members and all working people are counting on the leaders of today's unions to work together in good faith for a strong, united union movement that can win for working families.

We as a union movement must never lose sight of what's at stake for America's workers, their families—and the nation. In the words of the powerful labor leader John L. Lewis:

"The future of labor is the future of America."

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John J. Sweeney