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## Presidential hopeful John Edwards visits Portland, Seattle

**2008** Democratic presidential candidate John Edwards chose a local union headquarters to make his first Portland campaign appearance. On May 2, several hundred Democratic Party faithful filled the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 8 hall to hear Edwards' positions on health care, global warming and the war in Iraq.

Though the earliest party caucuses and primaries are still eight months

away, Edwards is campaigning around the country — and making a special appeal to union voters. The previous day, he spent time with nearly 1,000 union members at the Machinists District 751 hall in Seattle, Washington. At Local 8, Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain was asked to introduce Edwards, and later that afternoon he also met privately with the candidate.

"What I see is a guy who's not afraid to talk about labor outside of labor circles," Chamberlain told the Northwest Labor Press.

Edwards told the Portland crowd that the United States needs comprehensive labor law reform, starting with the union-backed Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), which passed the U.S. House of Representatives March 1.

"If you can join the Republican Party by signing your name to a card, then anywhere in America you should be able to join a union by signing a card," Edwards said, alluding to the "card-check" unionizing method EFCA would set up.

"And while we're at it, to give unions more negotiating power, we ought to ban hiring permanent replacements for strikers," Edwards said. "I've walked picket lines with my brothers and sisters in the union movement. I've contacted employers. Basically I've done everything I know how to do to help unions organize, because there's work to be done if we want to save the middle class in this country."

Edwards' labor message drew frequent audience applause, and praise from labor leaders in the crowd.

"Nobody is talking about our issues in such a direct, straightforward way," said Ken Allen, executive director of Oregon AFSCME Council 75.

When the subject turned to global warming, Edwards' proposals echoed the labor-backed Apollo Alliance plan, which calls for national investment in

clean renewable energy — and the high-wage, high-tech jobs that would come with it.

"We ought to put a billion dollars into making sure the most fuel-efficient vehicles in the world are built in America by union workers," Edwards said.

The day before, at the Boeing Machinists Hall in Seattle, Edwards made other pledges aimed at wooing the union movement, including promises to tighten labor and environmental standards in foreign trade agreements, end tax breaks that encourage foreign outsourcing, and stop privatization of government jobs.

The Seattle event was the second of a series of town-hall forums organized by the national AFL-CIO to give union members a chance to meet and ask questions of Democratic presidential candidates — and help the labor federation evaluate candidates' appeal. The series will conclude with a multi-candidate forum Aug. 6 or 7 in Chicago.

No Republicans have thus far been invited to participate, but that's because the federation is only considering candidates whose public positions and records are generally in line with labor movement priorities, said AFL-CIO spokesman Steve Smith. So far, none of the Republican candidates have pledged to support EFCA. All the Democratic candidates have said they would sign the bill.

On the AFL-CIO's Working Families Vote 2008 campaign Web site, [workingfamiliesvote2008.org](http://workingfamiliesvote2008.org), visitors can check the records and watch video clips of every candidate, Democrat or Republican, and take part in online discussion about the candidates.

AFL-CIO unions have been asked to hold off making presidential endorsements until the AFL-CIO General Board meets in early Fall to consider whether it should make an endorsement before the 2008 primary season begins.

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