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Unions for Kids comes up BIG for Doernbecher

Members of the all volunteer, non-profit Unions for Kids present a check for \$30,000 to Doernbecher Children's Hospital July 17. The money was raised at the fifth annual Motorcycle Poker Run June 9. In addition to registration fees, funding comes from a raffle for a new Harley-Davidson motorcycle, a silent auction, 50/50 drawing and other raffle ticket sales. This year's Harley winner was Rick Wardell of Vancouver, Wash. Participants and committee members pictured from left to right are Lou Francis, June Francis (holding Vida Brooklyn), Nancy Reames of IBEW Local 48, Dave Tully of Teamsters Joint Council 37, Amy Streifel (daughter of Kathy Streifel of IBEW Local 48), Lee Duncan of IBEW Local 48, Mark Kenney of IBEW Local 275 in Muskegon, Michigan and Shannon Walker of Office and Professional Employees Local 277. Accepting the check is Iris Smith of the Doernbecher Foundation. In five years, Unions for Kids has raised approximately \$71,000 for Doernbecher.

AFL-CIO to host presidential forum Aug. 7 in Chicago

CHICAGO — Democratic presidential candidates will meet union families Tuesday, Aug. 7, at a AFL-CIO Presidential Candidates Forum in Chicago.

MSNBC and XM Radio will carry the 90-minute forum live from Soldier Field starting at 4 p.m. Pacific Time. "Countdown" television host Keith Olbermann will moderate, but unlike other televised debates and forums, union members will ask questions of the candidates, with the focus on issues such as jobs, wages, health care, retirement, education and Iraq.

Among those attending the forum will be Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain and Oregon AFL-CIO Political Director Duke Shepard. Shepard also will be a panelist at an AFL-CIO Voice@Work conference in Chicago the weekend preceding the forum.

The day after the forum, the AFL-CIO Executive Council will decide whether and when to call a meeting of the national labor federation's General Executive Board to vote on an endorsement for the 2008 presidential primary. An endorsement requires the votes of union leaders representing two-thirds of

the federation's 10-million-plus members.

The national AFL-CIO has held seven town hall meetings with presidential candidates and it launched an interactive "Working Families Vote 2008" Web site in an effort to involve more union members in the endorsement process.

As another part of that effort, the AFL-CIO sent working family issues questionnaires to all major candidates, both Republicans and Democrats. Only Democratic candidates have responded. Questionnaires are posted online at www.aflcio.org/issues/politics/questionnaires.cfm.

Candidates slated to appear at the Democratic presidential forum are Joe Biden, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Chris Dodd, John Edwards, Dennis Kucinich, Barack Obama and Bill Richardson.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The AFL-CIO originally had planned to hold the presidential forum at Chicago's McCormick Place Convention Center, but more than 12,000 union members wanted to attend, so it was moved to a larger venue.

UAW faces tough task in talks with Big Three automakers

By JAMES PARKS
National AFL-CIO

In the four years since the United Auto Workers (UAW) signed the current contracts with the Big Three automakers, the industry has undergone significant changes. But throughout, UAW members' willingness to address critical issues, such as health care costs, has protected the wages and benefits of active and retired members, while saving employers billions of dollars.

Now as the two sides go back to the bargaining table — new contract negotiations covering 178,000 workers began July 20 and 23 — the stakes are high. Negotiating under the theme "Fighting for America's Future: Good Jobs. Strong Communities," the workers are determined to continue to create a high-quality, high performance workplace where everybody wins.

But the employers may be thinking along other lines. The Wall Street Journal reports the car manufacturers will threaten to move more production

offshore unless they get deep concessions from workers on wages and benefits, especially on retiree health care.

Ford, Chrysler and General Motors have announced plant closings and deep job cuts in recent years, cutting more than 70,000 jobs from their payrolls. But UAW President Ron Gettelfinger says cutting wages and benefits is not the way to save the auto industry. He points to studies that show labor costs represent less than 10 percent of the cost of a new vehicle.

So it is evident that the cost structure of the U.S. auto industry cannot be adjusted in a meaningful way by focusing on less than 10 percent of costs, while ignoring the other 90 percent.

Autoworkers are among the most productive in the world, he says, citing figures from the U.S. Census Bureau that show each autoworker adds value of \$206 per worker per hour, far more than the workers are paid.

Even the Alliance of Auto Manufacturers, the

carmakers' trade association, admits autoworkers produce a higher level of output than any other single industry. At the same time, the U.S. auto industry directly supports more than 13 million jobs, accounting for 25 percent of all manufacturing and some 4 percent of the gross domestic product.

Before the automakers start pushing an agenda to cut costs on the backs of workers, Gettelfinger says they need to look at the other factors that have contributed to the industry's crisis that cannot be solved at the bargaining table, issues such as design, engineering, marketing and auto financing.

And the employers must join with the union to confront political leaders to make changes in trade policies, national health care and workers' rights that make automakers less competitive.

To strengthen the automotive industry, the AFL-CIO and the UAW have called for Congress to establish a Marshall Plan to help re-tool the U.S. auto industry to accelerate domestic production of advanced technology and alternative fuel vehicles

and their key components.

At the table, Gettelfinger says workers will fight to defend good wages, secure benefits and decent pensions; maintain job and income security, along with opportunities for lifelong training and education; bargain for an enhanced role in ensuring product quality and find joint ways to enhance productivity.

Recognizing the value of the industry to the nation, Gettelfinger says negotiations are important for the entire nation.

"Last time around we talked about bargaining for families," he said. "This time around we're bargaining for our country as a whole. We're proud to stand up for what we believe is right. We believe in America. We care about jobs. We care about communities. We care about families and we have values just like everybody else. We are...defending the middle class. But these negotiations are not just about us. These negotiations are about everybody."