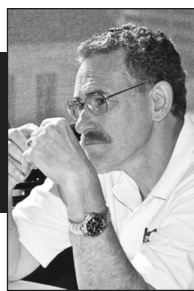


Who's On Our Side?

By Tom Chamberlain



Over my 30-year career in the union movement, I have been to scores of conventions. Few have really left me inspired, educated, motivated, or with a clearer vision of our road map for the future. Last week's national AFL-CIO convention in Los Angeles hit a home run.

The AFL-CIO wanted a convention that was a game changer, and they got it. Hundreds of "listening sessions" were held throughout the country over the past year. These listening sessions included affiliated leaders, rank-and-file members, activists, community members, educators, constituency group members ... I could go on.

Four listening sessions were held in Oregon.

The information gathered from those listening sessions were presented to three pre-convention committees: the Committee on Growth, Innovation and Political Action; the Committee on Shared Prosperity in the Global Economy; and the Committee on Community Partnerships and Grassroots Power.

I was assigned to the Committee on Growth, Innovation and Political Action. Our first meeting was held in Washington, D.C., in May to avoid the rushed review of important policies that happens at conventions. Oftentimes there just isn't enough time to delve into the details and provide real direction and vision. So, after four months of work, the pre-convention committees produced resolutions ranging from trade policy to organizing, from deepening our community relationships to building worker-centers, and from new forms of membership to transparency and accountability.

Collectively, these resolutions will transform our union movement into a workers' movement.

Not every American has an opportunity to have a union contract. But all Americans who work for a living need the support that the labor movement can provide. A transition to a workers' movement requires us to develop strategies that improve workers' lives at the ballot box, in state legislatures, in city halls, as well as through direct action, such as the Walmart and Fast Food campaigns.

We'll have to create new types of memberships that are community-based and bring like-minded groups together to create local community power.

Resolutions also were passed to develop a strategy to organize the South. The automotive industry is an example of a growing manufacturing sector in the right-to-work South. To grow our movement requires that we do not walk away from right-to-work states, but develop strategies and commit resources to increase union membership.

In Texas, the American Federation of Teachers is organizing teachers and gaining power through strong community relationships, and they're growing power at the ballot box. We can do this in other states.

The AFL-CIO convention placed a greater emphasis on state federations and central labor councils, understanding that they are the delivery system for our movement. This requires that all state federations and central labor bodies, as part of their annual strategic plans,

develop an organizing component. This is significant. For the first time, the national AFL-CIO and national affiliates recognize the potential for state and central bodies to help move an organizing agenda.

Resolutions also directed President Richard Trumka to appoint a committee comprised of national affiliates, leaders from state feds and central bodies, and AFL-CIO staff, to establish a criteria for a peer review process for all local bodies. Each year the committee will select 10 states to undergo a performance audit. The audit will include the selected state federation and all central bodies, and it could lead to guidance in how to improve programs, or suggestions for restructuring. The goal of the program is to ensure that we have high performing state federations and central labor bodies across the country.

In exchange, national unions will be asked to ensure that their members are affiliated in all state federations and central labor bodies.

These are big changes, and they only scratch the surface of what was discussed at the convention. It was inspirational. It was motivating. And it laid out a clear path forward for the labor movement: one that will cause some growing pains, but that will set us up to be a stronger movement, fighting for our members and helping all workers get ahead.

It made it clear whose side we must be on, and how to get ahead.

Tom Chamberlain is president of the Oregon AFL-CIO.

Two Oregon schools receive \$5,000 AFL-CIO 'Adopt-A-School' grants

Sitton Elementary School in Portland and the Clackamas County Children's Commission Head Start in Milwaukie have been selected as recipients of the AFL-CIO Adopt-A-School grant program.

The one-time \$5,000 grants were awarded to 21 public schools nationwide to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

The grant money will help support curriculum that shows students the historical connections between workers' rights and civil rights. Local labor leaders and workers' rights activists will be invited into classrooms to speak with students.

The two Oregon grants were an-

nounced Sept. 16 by the Oregon AFL-CIO and the Northwest Oregon Labor Council.

"We're extremely proud to present these awards and look forward to working with the schools to ensure that all students have access to quality education and that teachers have the resources they need to teach Oregon's next generation of leaders," said Bob Tackett, executive secretary-treasurer of the labor council.

Tackett will present the award to Sitton Elementary at a special student assembly on Wednesday, Sept. 25.

Plans are still in the works to present the grant award to the Clackamas County Children's Commission Head Start.

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