

**Remarks by John J. Sweeney
President of the AFL-CIO
IAM Legislative Conference
Washington, DC
May 9, 2005**

Thank you, Tom ... for inviting me to be with you today it's great to be here with you and Bob Thayer

..... as well as your officers and leaders from across the country

.... welcome to Washington you're all terrific!

I want to congratulate you, Tom -- as well as Rich Michalski and your entire leadership and staff – on this great turnout and the program you've put together

.... all the members of Congress you have coming Senator Clinton and DNC Chair Howard Dean

It shows that when it comes to legislative and political action, the IAM WROTE THE MANUAL for the ENTIRE labor movement ---

— you know how to get things moving IN Washington

.... and when that fails you know how to mobilize and move ON Washington

This is an exciting day at the beginning of an exciting week for all of us but our mood is dampened by the death last Friday night of Miguel Contreras, the Secretary-Treasurer of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, and one of the great leaders of our movement.

Miguel was only 52 ... but he accomplished more in that short period of time than most of us who are lucky to live much longer.

He began life toiling in the fields of Southern California beside his immigrant parents he ended it standing beside working families from coast-to-coast as one of the highest-ranking Latino labor leaders in our country.

He rebuilt our labor movement in Los Angeles by bringing together workers and unions across craft and class and income lines. And he revived our progressive political coalition in that great city by creating bridges between the Latino, African-American, Asian-Pacific-American and Native American communities.

Miguel would not want to be remembered with even a moment of silence ---- but rather the rallying cry of the farm workers he championed ----- so join me, please:

Si se Puede Si Se Puede Si Se Puede

Brothers and sisters, these are tough times for working families all around our country, but particularly here in Washington.

The stranglehold the enemies of working families have on us is unprecedented in our memory expectations for anything positive coming out of Congress are at an all-time low.

And so it gives me great pleasure to bring you several pieces of GOOD news this morning.

One piece of GOOD news is that CAFTA – the Central American Free Trade Agreement – is losing ground because several foreign countries have withdrawn their support

... including Costa Rica

.... and TEXAS!

Another piece of GOOD news is that we heard a giant THUD coming from the White House last week....

... and it turned out to be George W. Bush

... clutching his plan to privatize Social Security to his chest like a teddy bear

... and falling FLAT on his butt

And there's GOOD news on the filibuster front

Because of the work of the IAM and all of our unions protests are being mounted all around the country and we're going to HOLD the filibuster

... and prevent further penetration of our court system by RIGHT-WING, RACIST JUDGES

I want to thank each and every one of you for proving once again that even when things are at their worst the right-wing machine can be STOPPED by the power of WORKING MEN AND WOMEN UNITED in common cause ----

— it's called SOLIDARITY and it WORKS!

I also want to thank your great president for all he's doing as a Vice President of the AFL-CIO and a member of our Executive Council to help steer our labor movement through some turbulent waters.

As you know, there's a heated debate going on about our future direction and some of the voices we're hearing are SELFISH and DESTRUCTIVE.

At a time when we need to be united as never before, they are tearing at the fabric of our movement and you can almost hear George Bush ... Karl Rove and Tom DeLay chuckling with GLEE

Fortunately, we have some BIGGER, STRONGER voices making sure we emerge from this debate and MOVE FORWARD and one of the STRONGEST is that of your great PRESIDENT

I can assure you when you march on Capitol Hill tomorrow led by Tom Buffenbarger, NOBODY up there will be laughing NOBODY.

The debate we're having began last fall when some of the selfish voices from INSIDE OUR MOVEMENT provided COMFORT to our ENEMIES OUTSIDE OUR MOVEMENT just as we were trying to win the most important presidential election in our history.

I believed that our debate should include more than just a handful of short-sighted critics ... so after the election I opened up the discussion by inviting everyone from every corner of our movement to take part.

The ideas, suggestions and proposals came pouring in, and our Executive Council committees are working on proposals as we prepare for our convention in July.

Last week Secretary-Treasurer Rich Trumka ... Executive Vice President Linda Chavez-Thompson ... and I put forth our recommendations in a booklet called "Winning for Working Families."

It is now posted on our interactive website and I urge you to go there and read it and send us your comments.

SOME of our proposals are just common sense things we can and must do better ...

... but SOME are RADICAL because we must RESPOND TO OUR CRISIS — the crisis of working people — by INVESTING FAR MORE of our resources and commitment on both ORGANIZING and MOBILIZATION of our MEMBERS for LEGISLATION and POLITICS ...

ALL of our proposals are guided by the principles and values that have guided our movement for more than century.

The changes we make must PROMOTE SOLIDARITY and UNITY --- NOT UNDERMINE them ----

— I FUNDAMENTALLY DISAGREE that we can somehow STRENGTHEN our movement by DIVIDING IT.

The changes we make must recognize we have to INVEST MORE in our future, instead of investing LESS.

And MOST IMPORTANT we must MAKE CHANGES with RESPECT for the HISTORY, CULTURE and TRADITIONS of EACH and EVERY ONE of our national UNIONS

... and UNWAVERING RESPECT for the DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS of our MEMBERS!

We are UNIONS not CORPORATIONS

... there will be NO top-down dictates NO cramdowns

... and there will be NO MANDATORY MERGERS ...

Brothers and sisters, what you are up against here in Washington this week is a clear demonstration of why we CAN'T LET UP in our efforts to RESTORE THE VOICES OF WORKERS AND OUR FAMILIES in OUR COUNTRY.

Right now, everything we value is on the chopping block

Decent JOBS

Protected, defined-benefit PENSIONS...

SOCIAL SECURITY and MEDICARE

AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE ...

EDUCATION for our kids ...

HEALTH AND SAFETY at WORK.

These aren't the priority issues for just the members of the IAM

... they are the issues that DIRECTLY affect EVERY MEMBER of EVERY UNION in our COUNTRY

..... and EVERY WORKING PERSON IN AMERICA

..... so the ENTIRE labor movement is with you this week ---- believe me ----- as you lobby members of Congress HARD and persuasively.

Remember to talk to them about TWO OTHER ISSUES that are SO IMPORTANT to improve our ability to fight and WIN on ALL THE OTHERS.

One is the confrontation over the use of the filibuster in the Senate ---- if the right-wing destroys the filibuster when it comes to the confirmation of JUDGES, it's only a MATTER OF TIME until they KILL IT on all other issues.

A SECOND crucial fight is our campaign to pass the Employee Free Choice Act ... so we can guarantee the FREEDOM of EVERY WORKER to join a UNION and HELP MILLIONS of new members join our ranks.

Organizing and politics go hand-in-hand — so please tell everyone you meet with — in the House as well as the Senate — that labor is united behind the passage of the Employee Free Choice Act.

Tell them NO worker should have to risk their job to join a union ... and that voting NO on Employee Free Choice is NOT an option

Brothers and sisters, it's all of YOU working back in your local communities who will determine if our movement succeeds or fails in growing STRONGER and WINNING what AMERICA'S WORKERS NEED.

That's because the REAL labor movement lives in the WORKSITES and on the SHOP FLOORS of our country ---- not here in Washington, DC.

And the future DIRECTION of our movement won't be decided by union LEADERS meeting in comfortable boardrooms

.... it will be decided in LODGES AND UNION HALLS and PICKET LINES by UNION MEMBERS and LOCAL LEADERS and ACTIVISTS like all of YOU.

I know each of you is ready to help us FIGHT OUR WAY into that FUTURE and that we ALL share the belief that where there is SOLIDARITY there is HOPE ... and there is JUSTICE.

These are the VALUES that have served the labor movement for the LAST 50 YEARS since the merger of the AFL and the CIO.

These are the values that will sustain and strengthen us for the NEXT 50 years.

WE WILL NOT BE DIVIDED

WE WILL NOT BE DETERRED

and WE WILL NOT BE DEFEATED..

Thank you and God bless you and your families ... and God bless America.

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