

Thank you Lew Moye for that kind and gracious introduction. This is a special meeting in a very special place. We have been welcomed by the political leadership of this state, Governor Napolitano and Phil Gordon the mayor of this great city and we appreciate it so much. The state and local labor movement have opened their arms to us and made us feel so welcome. We have found volunteers from every sector in this city to help us with our pre-convention logistics and we thank them.

We owe a special thanks to city vice mayor Michael Johnson for his full cooperation in support of our efforts. This is not a meeting that is put together easily. A lot of people must give up their time, effort and energy to make this meeting a success. I would ask all of the staff and volunteers to stand for just a moment and allow this convention to express their appreciation to you.

I said earlier that this meeting was taking place in a special place. This region is a special place in our nation. This is the great southwest, running north from the Rio Grande River to the slopes of the Colorado Rockies. The land where the men of the Buffalo Soldiers etched their names into the history of this nations westward expansion.

This is the land of the great tribes of native Americans, the Lakota Souix, the Cheyenne, the Arapaho, the Navajo, the Commanche and from this immediate area the Great Apache Nation, the white mountain Apache, the Mescalero and the Chiracana, great tribes lead by great leaders and great warriors, Geronimo, Victorio and Cochise. This land is steeped in the history of struggle and it is fitting that this convention is being held in Phoenix, Arizona.

So let me say good morning brothers and sisters, welcome to the thirty-fourth convention of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists. The thirty-fourth meeting of trade union rank and filers, activists, elected leaders of locals, councils, national union vice presidents and in some cases presidents of national unions. We have in a number of cases appointed staff--selected and--elected, carrying out some of the most critical and important functions on behalf of their unions. We have administrative staff from many affiliates and the AFL-CIO itself. This morning we will have an address from the president of the AFL-CIO himself. Brothers and sisters we have come a long ways since the outcast group of trade union leaders dared challenge the position of neutrality in the presidential election of 1972.

Our recognition of that contradiction then and our success now is a testimony to their vision and their leadership. Nelson Jack Edwards and Horace Sheffield from the United Auto Workers; Cleveland Robinson of District 65 whose dedication and commitment to the cause of working people has set a standard by which all of us should be measured; the legendary Charles Hayes of the Amalgated Meatcutters who merged with the Retail Clerks to form the powerful United Food and Commercial Workers, later going on to serve as Congressman from the second Congressional District of Chicago becoming Mr. Labor in the U.S. House of Representatives; William Simons, president of Local 2 of the American Federation of Teachers-- a man of immense integrity and commitment who continues to serve this organization wherever and whenever he's called upon to do so. There were a number of sisters who stepped up to the plate to associate their names and risk their careers to identify with this movement-- Sister Addie Wyatt; Sister Ola Kennedy of the United Steel Workers; Sister Ora Malone of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers; Sister Lillian Roberts from AFSCME; Sister Barbara Merrill of the AFT; Sister Jackie Vaughn of the Chicago Federation of Teachers; and Geraldine Johnson and many more who fought to make our movement and the labor movement more relevant to all workers.

For thirty-three years, we have pushed labor's agenda within the movement and our community, we have sought to defend labor in general against the old claims of discrimination and indifference to the issues important to our communities. We have built bridges to social and service organizations in addition to establishing a solid linkage with major portions of the religious community.

It was our view then in 1972 and it is our view today that there are no more common allies than the broad community and organized labor and there are no more natural allies than organized labor and the African American Community. We will not walk away from that premise and whether we are accepted by the powerful players in labor or not, we will continue to work to build on those relationships. We will come to the aid of unorganized workers whenever we can with or without the help of the so called big players. We will help to mobilize our community with or without the help of the so called big players. We and others have spent a lifetime trying to prove our value to the political process, speaking for the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists. I pledge to this convention that we are out of the begging business. We are who we are, we do what we do. Anyone who wishes to join us to empower our communities we welcome you.

If you have a program that we can contribute to we will, but we cannot waste our time, energy and effort chasing rainbows while our community suffers continuing loss of power. We must refocus our effort at educating our community on issues critical to its well being. We must use our organizing skills to build community power block by block and neighborhood by neighborhood.

As we left the thirty-third convention in Atlanta, Georgia a year ago, the delegates, by adopted resolutions, asked the CBTU to make sure the voices of workers in general and minority workers in particular be heard on the major issues--on the social, economic and political agenda of this nation. They asked that we work on the issue of housing, healthcare, education environmental justice and crime. They asked that we work within our communities on the threat of Wal-Mart and its' impact of low wages and low benefits and the destruction of the economic base of our communities. They asked that we speak out and educate around the war in Afghanistan and Iraq, and focus on the distorted facts and judgements that led us there, as well as the economic consequences of our remaining there.

Above all in many resolutions, the delegates asked that we do all within our power and resources to raise the level of awareness within our communities to the critical nature of the November elections and that maximum participation from communities of color was absolutely necessary. Well brothers and sisters, let me say to you without fear of contradiction, we did our job. Along with LCLAA, CLUW, APRI, Pride At Work and APALA collectively, we did our job. Under the banner of the Labor Coalition for Community Action, in thirty or more cities, we did our job.

We will never make the New York Times, or the Washington Post or The Evening News in terms of our sophisticated knowledge of the mass media and focus groups. What we know is our community and our community nationwide educated itself on it's issues, looked at major policies and evaluated their relevance to them and then went to the polls in massive participation. Our community turned out, and as quiet as it is kept take our votes out of the mix and there would be a massive disaster for progressive candidates.

Brothers and sisters as we meet today I pledge to you we are out of the game of begging for resosurces to mobilize our communities.

We know what needs to be done, we know how it should be done, and we know where it should be done, so let's get up off our knees with our tin cup and figure out what we need and go out and find it.

We discovered the effectiveness of the constituency groups where we work together. We must continue the program of cooperation among all of the organizations because the education, mobilization and increased political participation of our communities depends upon it.

During the course of our 2004 education and mobilization program, we had ample opportunities to share with our community, issues that directly impacted their daily lives. We reminded them that five years ago our national economic picture looked so different. There was great optimism as employment for all groups in our nation reached an all time high with young adults and particularly minorities able to find jobs, and for the first time in generations getting their unemployment down below twenty percent, with overall unemployment for all workers reaching for four point seven percent, the lowest level in forty years.

The social benefits of this job growth and economic expansion could be seen in many areas. Hunger and poverty declined, crime declined for five consecutive years, home ownership reached an all time high, family income and family savings increased, net spendable income increased and workers began to share in the nations good times.

That's all changed now. Changed as a result of the same old economic policies that favor the rich and wealthy at the expense of all others in our economy. Changed as a result of an ill-conceived war, for the wrong reason, in the wrong place. Changed as a result of trade policies and trade agreements that force U.S. workers to compete against cheap labor, child labor, prison labor and sweatshop labor from China to Pakistan where workers have no union to protect them and they cannot protect themselves. Changed as a result of this administration embracing an economic policy that believes it is good for our economy if we ship good high paying jobs overseas. Changed because the Wal-Martization of our economy and our communities is based on a low wage, low benefit mentality and policy that undercuts unionized wages and benefits.

This sweeping change can be seen all across our economy. As we meet, the economy is stagnant--sputtering under the ill conceived economic policies of this administration. A national debt approaching eight trillion dollars, a budget deficit approaching five hundred billion, a trade deficit of five hundred billion, an unbudgeted war that has exceeded three hundred billion with no finality in sight and destined to linger far into the future. For the individual worker and his or her family, they can feel the impact--industrial and manufacturing jobs lost by the millions; net spendable income stagnant or declining; home foreclosures once again on the rise; personal bankruptcies at an all time high; hunger and poverty on the increase and crime once again on the rise.

In thirty or more town hall meetings and issue forums, we told our community that in addition to the wise economic planning, bad trade policies of this administration had cost this nation nearly three million private sector jobs and eighty six percent of them were lost in manufacturing. Job losses in manufacturing weakening our national economy, putting our nations security in the hands of other nations, and disproportionately affecting African American workers in the manufacturing sector.

The jobs of three hundred thousand African Americans disappeared. Two hundred and thirty thousand dropped out of the labor market and seven hundred thousand more now live in poverty. These are the historical legacies of the Republican Party economic policies that favor the rich and wealthy at the expense of workers and their families.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt recognized the need to balance the equation between the rich and powerful who ran this nation, and average people and workers. As he brought the country back from economic ruin under the Hoover Administration, he gave the nation the policies of the Real Deal. To bring an end to soup kitchens and soup lines all across the country, he created massive job programs to bring work to an unemployed country. Jobs in conservation, land, water, forests, he built roads, dams, buildings. He gave the nation education and healthcare to meet the needs of a looming end generation. To protect the American people from the abuse of power by the rich and powerful. He gave us regulatory government. The crown jewel of the New Deal programs was Social Security.

To protect the American people from the abuse of power by the rich and powerful, he gave us regulatory government. The centerpiece of the new deal programs was social security.

The insurance program for workers, their survivors, the disabled, a safety net for practically every citizen to provide a measure of decency in their golden years or in the event of injury or death. The social security program has been and remains the most successful social program this nation has ever had. No individual who was entitled ever missed a check and the government has never missed a payment. The Social Security program, like other key parts of the New Deal programs have already been changed or eliminated by this administration and is now being set up for privatization. We must defeat this effort at all cost.

Brothers and sisters, seventy two years ago as this nation wallowed in economic depression brought on by the greed and excesses of the rich and wealthy, Franklin Delano Roosevelt raised a profound and fundamental question. He said do you judge the greatness of a nation by how much more it gives to those who already have too much or by what it gives to those who have too little.

Roosevelt's New Deal programs leveled the playing field between the rich and powerful that ran this nation and average Americans who sought only a better life. The Bush Administration has now labeled the Social Security system a crisis. We and one hundred and forty thousand of our troops are still dealing with the last crisis he defined.

The crisis in the Social Security program is hidden in the same place as the weapons of mass destruction from his first crisis. In response to this self described crisis, the administration proposed for Social Security some personal private accounts for young workers and some voodoo economic for seniors as a proposed cure.

*First of all, as has been said by others – here is what we know.

1. Private accounts will cost Social Security and the U.S. Government trillions of dollars--4.9 trillion over the next twenty years, less than half way to the year 2052, in which the current system would be totally solvent.

2. The current system is a guaranteed benefit, while the private personal accounts would risk benefits in a volatile stock market.

3. The notion that this is your personal account is a little misleading – Wall Street and the Government will control it, and you will finance it.

There are enough downsides to this whole issue, you have to ask yourself what is it that would make a president--emeshed in a war with no apparent end, a growing national debt approaching, eight trillion dollars, a trade deficit approaching, seven hundred billion dollars, a national budget deficit of four hundred billion, a stagnant economy--pursue such a course of action. We have seen these economic signals before.

We are seeing our worst fears manifested in the policies of the right wing ideologues of the Republican Party and this administration--increased tax breaks and tax cuts for the already wealthy, a shameful effort to fill the Federal courts with individuals outside the mainstream of American life, a flagrant abuse of the voting systems of this nation and an overt assault on the voting rights act itself.

A dangerous foreign policy that threatens global stability without making our country more secure. An aggressive pro-business, pro-war mentality that has erased the gains of minorities and saddled us and our children and grandchildren with debt for generations to come.

While millions of our people slide back into poverty, while millions of our citizens have no access to affordable healthcare, while millions of our people live with their growing insecurity about their life and their jobs, while millions of our people can no longer afford higher education for their children, this administration's primary focus is tax cuts for the rich, a phony war about a phony democracy, and favorite nation status and a seat on the World Trade Organization for China.

This administration's economic and trade policies, if history is a predictor of the future, is a clear and present danger for African American workers and the African American community.

As workers, displaced by trade policies and a stagnant economy, struggle with maximum debt, this administration argues for minimum wages.

They say privatization is good, outsourcing is better and Wal-Mart is the wave of the future. We reject this notion. We will fight this administration and its detrimental policies all across the nation. We will fight Wal-Mart in every community we can. We will educate our leaders and our community to the threat of Wal-Mart. Brothers and sisters this Administration with one hand on the Bible and the other holding the flag has practiced deceit and deception on a scale unmatched in the history of our nation.

Whether its the House of Representatives, or the Senate, the Supreme Court, the agencies of government, this administration has practiced the politics of polarization and we are the victims. But we cannot simply wring our hands and moan. We must develop our own plan of action. Tip O'Neil, former Speaker of the House of Representatives gives us some insight in how to approach our delemia. O'Neil observed that to deal with the key issues that impact average people, we should think nationally and act locally, that was good advice then and it is good advice now.

Thirty-Five years ago, give or take a little, a handful of political and social activists frustrated with the politics of paternalism, sat down to talk about an agenda. An agenda that would focus on the ills of the broad community-- joblessness, crime, economic development, and a host of other issues.

At the end of the day someone said let's go to Gary, Let's go to Gary, Indiana and talk about it. Let's talk about political leadership. Let's talk about political power, Let's talk about a political agenda, an agenda that will energize our communities from one end of this country to the other. Let's call on our preachers and our teachers, our actors and artists, our academics and statisticians, our lawyers, our doctors, our business leaders, our political leaders real and imaginary. Let's go to Gary and develop an agenda that will move this nation, and we did.

Brothers and sisters, in two consecutive national elections, while our turnout has reached record levels they are still far below our potential. If we are honest with ourselves and truthful with others we will tell them that in both elections we had a party with no message and a message that could not find a party.

Workers in general and Black workers in particular have paid a heavy price. Unemployment is once again in double digits. Poverty is on the increase among all groups. Workers income is stagnant and declining. Crime is on the increase. Bankruptcies are at record levels. This administration, emboldened by deceit and deception, has this nation bogged down in a war that will not end searching for peace that will not come.

Brothers and sisters, it is time to go back to Gary . Go back to Gary to talk among ourselves as trade unionists, as social activists, as political leaders, as academics about what it will take to move our communities. It Is Time To Go Back To Gary.

It's time to go back to Gary and lay the foundation for a new deal for working people of America. A new deal for the African American community. A new deal for the Latino American community. A new deal for the Asian American community. A new deal for the Gay, Lesbian, Transgender and Bisexual community, and level the playing field for women to gain access to every aspect of our social, economic and political landscape. We must educate our communities about the clear and present danger of our ideological opposition.

We no longer hear of the John Birch Society. They still exist, but they are now supported by hundreds of think tanks, foundations, media outlets and media personalities, and pulpit pimps arguing that had God intended for you to be better off, he would have created you that way.

We know without fear of contradiction that the Roosevelt policies and programs created the conditions for the greatest economic recovery in the history of this nation. It worked then, it will work again. We know that unions gave this nation's workers the highest standard of living in the world, even with all the inequities, we know that skilled workers in the industrial and manufacturing sector made us the strongest nation, economically and militarily. We know that the benefits of union organizations brings better wages, better working condition and a more secure future. We must educate the rest of organized labor that you cannot have poverty, and plenty exist side by side without instability in our social system.

We must educate organized labor that overt racism and subtle discrimination must be eliminated from every segment of our movement and from every aspect of our movements programs.

We and our allies must think nationally and act locally.

We must find ways to bring labor's power to community development programs.

We must find ways for organized labor and our communities to share the good jobs brought on by economic development and capital improvements.

We must bring these programs of home ownership to workers in our communities.

We must establish clear partnerships with institutions engaged in community development.

We are responsible for our children, therefore we must become more involved in the programs and policies that affect them.

We must participate on an organized basis, in every aspect of the political life of our community.

The ideas we propose and the issues we project, views labor as our ally and our partner, and in that context we will continue to wage our struggle to be included in the policy making process at the highest level. I, for one, reject the notion that a select few shall dictate the needs of millions of current members of organized labor. The reality is that if labor's mission is to raise the standard of living and improve the quality of life for all workers, then labor as an institution must reflect not only its concerns for its current members, but the hopes and aspirations of the millions that would join based upon that mission.

Let's Go Back to Gary and build a movement where organized labor and the broad community can fashion an agenda of partnership.

Let's Go Back To Gary and fashion our own strategy for mobilizing and energizing our community.

Let's Go Back To Gary and figure out how to finance our politics and get up off our knees.

Let's Go Back To Gary and once again change the direction of this country.