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AFL-CIO President to Speak to CBTU, the Nation's Top
Black Labor Organization in Phoenix, Thursday, May 26th
Labor Chief John Sweeney and the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, Sr.
Headline First CBTU Convention in the Southwest, May 25-30, 2005

Washington, DC -

AFL-CIO President John J. Sweeney will give his first major speech to black union activists since announcing that he will seek a third term as president of the labor federation in July. Sweeney's appearance at the 34th International Convention of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU) in Phoenix, Arizona, May 25-30, 2005, comes as the debate over the future of the American labor movement enters a critical phase.

Sweeney, who was first elected AFL-CIO president in 1995, has outlined a plan to revamp the federation and restore organized labor's clout in the workplace and in the political arena. Critics of Sweeney's 10-year tenure, however, have escalated their opposition to his candidacy. Meanwhile, CBTU has taken a strong, consistent position that the voices of women and people of color and the value of diversity must be seen as major components of building a stronger, more inclusive labor movement.

CBTU President William Lucy said Sweeney's speech and this year's convention come at a turning point for organized labor. "Black workers - like women and other people of color - are central to organized labor's attempt to become more relevant to an American workforce that looks less and less like the labor movement of the past fifty years."

Lucy, who is also the international secretary-treasurer of the 1.4 million-member American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), noted that African American workers are more likely to join unions than white, Asian or Latino workers, and black union households are still organized labor's most reliable political allies.

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“We bring a lot to labor’s table, and we make no apology for demanding that our value be empowered in the leadership, strategies, and budget priorities of the AFL-CIO and its affiliated unions,” said Lucy, who is also a member of the AFL-CIO Executive Council.

Founded in 1972, CBTU spearheaded the drive 10 years ago to increase the representation of women and people of color in leadership and staff positions at the AFL-CIO. CBTU and its allies succeeded, tripling the number of minorities on the federation’s executive council from four to 13 members.

More than 1,500 activists will attend CBTU’s convention in Phoenix, which will be held at the **Phoenix Civic Plaza**. The theme of the convention is “*Forging A New Vision for Tough Challenges Ahead.*”

Following Sweeney on Thursday, May 26th, the **Rev. Jesse L. Jackson**, will speak to the CBTU convention about economics, politics, and Social Security as they intersect with people of color.

Two town hall meetings will be held – Thursday, May 26th, “African American, Native American, Asian American and Latino Relations”; and Friday, May 27th, “Trade and Employment: The Flight of American Jobs,” a discussion that will be led by leaders of major unions in auto, steel, communications and textiles/apparel.

Lucy said African American households have been disproportionately hit by the flight of union jobs. According to federal labor statistics, 55 percent (or 168,000) of the union jobs lost in 2004 were held by black workers, even though they represented only 13 percent of total union membership. But more devastating, African American women accounted for 70 percent of the union jobs lost by women in 2004. That’s 100,000 black women victimized by job flight.

“The severe and growing impact of this jobs crisis on black families and their communities has not been fully and frankly discussed yet,” Lucy said. “This town hall meeting will help to break that silence.”

More than 2.1 million black workers are represented by unions, and Lucy said more of them are turning to CBTU for leadership and a voice in the labor movement. CBTU, which is the nation’s largest independent African American labor organization, has 59 chapters, including one in Ontario, Canada.

For more detailed information about the CBTU convention schedule,

visit www.cbtu.org