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Focus is on Growth, Historic Allocation of Resources for Organizing, as Laborers' Union Convention Opens

Potential Presidential Contenders – Sens. Edwards and Clinton, Gov. Richardson – to Address Delegates from Across North America

Las Vegas (September 11, 2006) – The Laborers' International Union of North America opened its four-day, 23rd General Convention Monday with a focus on allocating historic resources for organizing and growth.

“We must become so strong that any employer who basks in the culture of greed shudders at our name. We must become so well-known that every laborer in need calls out our name,” General President Terence M. O’Sullivan told the 1,700 convention delegates as he opened the convention. He said the convention marked the moment when union leaders “decide and determine that we will be a union not of hundreds of thousands, but of millions of workers.”

On Tuesday, convention delegates will consider a resolution that would dramatically increase resources for organizing to about \$104 million a year – more than any other construction workers’ union and more than virtually any other union in North America.

The increased funding would be married to organizing strategies regionally and nationally to help organize hundreds of thousands of non-union workers in the union’s core sectors of building and heavy and highway construction. The union has also committed to a comprehensive organizing effort in the residential construction industry, in which virtually all workers currently have no union.

At the Laborers’ Union 2001 convention, delegates adopted a resolution mandating an increase in its market share by 20 percent by 2006. The union exceeded that goal, increasing market share by 31 percent.

On Monday, O’Sullivan again challenged delegates to increase market share by at least 20 percent over the next five years. Currently the union has about 700,000 members, predominantly in the construction industry.

Also on Monday, delegates heard from North Carolina Senator John Edwards, the 2004 vice presidential candidate on the Democratic ticket.

(more)

“There are those who say the wrong name topped that ticket, and speaking personally I heartily agree,” O’Sullivan said in introducing Edwards. “He was the candidate who was never afraid to say the word ‘union.’ ”

Delegates on Monday also heard from New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson and Illinois Senator Barack Obama, and later this week delegates are scheduled to hear from New York Senator Hillary Clinton.

On Tuesday, delegates are to consider a resolution to increase fundraising to strengthen the union’s voice in politics and government.

“It’s time we elected politicians who understand the issues that matter to our members and to all working people,” O’Sullivan said.

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The Laborers’ Union is among the largest and most progressive construction trades unions. Its members work throughout the construction industry building commercial and residential structures, highways and bridges, transportation and manufacturing infrastructure, and in hazardous materials remediation. In addition, members work for the U.S. Postal Service and for various public service agencies.