

# American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations



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## **Remarks by AFL-CIO President John Sweeney AFL-CIO Post-election Press Briefing November 5, 2008**

We at the AFL-CIO are delighted that we will have a new neighbor across the park.

Today is one of the brightest days in my lifetime of fighting for working men and women. And when I think of all the people I met who were working their hearts out for change – and I'm talking about state after state after state – I can safely say that today is one of the brightest days for working people across our nation.

Led by a candidate with an uncommon ability to inspire hope, we reclaimed our country from those who are serving corporate interests and the privileged at the expense of everyone else. We have taken the first crucial steps to build a better future for our children and grandchildren. And what we've seen – the stunning voter participation and the common call for change – is an indication of the history we can continue to make together.

With the election of these two remarkable leaders, Barack Obama and Joe Biden, together with strong new majorities in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, voters have delivered a resounding mandate for broad-based economic change.

America's working families and our unions were a steady force powering the engine of change throughout this campaign, knocking on door after door, talking to person after person. This year we expanded our battlefield, reaching out to more than 13 million union voters in 24 states – 13 Senate races, 60 House contests and hundreds of state legislative elections, as well as the presidential election. We put together an unprecedented mobilization and information drive. I went door to door, handed out leaflets and made phone calls with teachers and engineers, painters and nurses, steelworkers and construction workers. It was like nothing I'd ever seen before. I met activists from every union in our federation – people like Rachelle Pablo and Shane Hanley, who are here with us today.

In the last four days, 250,000 AFL-CIO union volunteers nationwide visited more than 3.9 million union households, made 5.5 million calls and distributed more than 2 million leaflets at worksites.

The result is that union household members turned out in huge numbers and voted overwhelmingly for Barack Obama and Joe Biden because we trust their commitment to strengthening the economy and turning around America for working families.

In the defining industrial states like Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Michigan and Minnesota, union voters were the firewall that stopped John McCain, voting for Obama by far greater margins than their working class counterparts who aren't in unions. In new battleground states like Colorado, Virginia, North Carolina and Florida, union members mounted a bigger effort than ever before, voting by a similarly large margins for Obama, and joined young people and other new voters to build a new majority for economic fairness.

And we expanded our constituency with Working America, our community affiliate which has been called "Labor's Secret Weapon," adding an amazing 2.5 million new members who got the same information campaign and voted decisively for change.

Our political director Karen Ackerman will show you the power of that vote in one state – Ohio – in a few minutes.

We have elected a Congress that is decidedly stronger on working family issues. You have a preliminary analysis: In state after state, we defeated candidates with lousy voting records on workers' issues and replaced them with candidates who will be champions for working people.

But the election is just Step One in delivering the change we need. Working men and women are poised to keep the energy pumping to help the Obama administration lead the change we need. There will be no gap or letdown. The AFL-CIO will keep much of our 2008 mobilization structure in place for an urgent lift-off as we go into this crucial period.

We are determined to enact a new economic agenda that will lift America's working families and restore confidence in the future for our children. We need to re-think the rules and strategies of our economy. We need changes attuned to today's world that are as bold and as visionary as the economic changes FDR made so many decades ago.

In the short term, working people need an economic recovery package that will jump-start the economy and put America back to work. We need extended unemployment benefits for the millions who still cannot find work, an expansion of food stamps, support for struggling state and local governments so they can maintain vital services and an immediate investment to create jobs by rebuilding our crumbling roads and schools and bridges.

In the longer term, we need to invest in a new economy of good, green jobs -- not financial bubbles. We need fundamental change to reverse the decline of the middle class and we must put common sense rules on Wall Street that protect working people's hard earned money - - their pensions, savings and homes.

No issue impacts working families more than health care. Costs are strangling families. And nearly 50 million have no health insurance at all, while millions more lack adequate coverage. Barack Obama has a plan to address our nation's health care crisis and we are ready to work with him.

And we must counterbalance corporate power. The gap between the wealthy and everyone else has grown from a gulf to a chasm under President Bush. We cannot rebuild the middle class and ensure that economic growth is shared unless we give working people back the freedom to improve their lives through unions and bargain for

better wages and benefits. Workers in unions, after all, make 30 percent more than those without a union, and are much more likely to have benefits.

And so our top priority is passage of the Employee Free Choice Act, legislation that will restore workers' freedom to bargain for a better life. In an economy that gives corporations far too much power, a union card remains the single best ticket into the middle class.

Together, we have helped lay the groundwork to turn around America – to honor every child's future, give opportunity where none has been, restore our nation's fundamental values of equality and fairness and restore respect for America around the world.

This is a proud day for America's working men and women and a historic new beginning for our nation.

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