

RESOLUTION 59

AFL-CIO Convention Resolution Honoring President John J. Sweeney

Submitted by the Executive Council

FOR MORE THAN FIVE DECADES, John Sweeney has worked to foster a stronger labor movement and improve the lives of working people in the United States and around the world. Gathered in Pittsburgh, the delegates to the 26th Constitutional Convention of the AFL-CIO express our sincerest appreciation for his years of service and for the many accomplishments of his distinguished career.

John Sweeney was born to Irish immigrant parents in the Bronx; his father was a union bus driver and his mother was a domestic worker. He was raised a devout Catholic, called to work for social justice and at a young age entered the high-powered world of politics and labor in New York City.

He began his labor career with the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU), then joined the staff of Local 32B of the Building Service Employees International Union (BSEIU), which later became the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). He became president of his local union in 1976, soon leading a successful citywide strike of 40,000 janitors. Just four years later he was elected to lead his national union, SEIU.

At SEIU, Sweeney pioneered sophisticated organizing and bargaining campaigns on behalf of service workers, health care workers and public employees. Under his leadership, SEIU grew from 625,000 to 1.1 million members.

In 1995 John Sweeney led a "New Voice" slate to election victory and became the fourth

president of the AFL-CIO. In 14 years at the helm of the federation, he raised the voices of working families through a powerful political program, increased organizing, built stronger AFL-CIO state and local organizations, created a more diverse leadership structure and forged new partnerships with the greater community. He founded Working America, which grew to 3 million members in just five years, to give voice to working men and women who do not have a union on the job. He created the Alliance for Retired Americans to help mobilize nearly 4 million retired members. He helped revitalize the international labor movement around a common commitment to global workers' rights and forged strong alliances with labor movements around the world.

His years in office have been marked by an unwavering commitment to the core mission of the American labor movement—fighting for social and economic justice. He has led the AFL-CIO with decency and integrity and championed the vital importance of union solidarity.

John Sweeney steps down from the presidency of the federation at a time of enormous opportunity for our movement. In recognition of his contribution to our cause, we recommit ourselves to the work to which he has dedicated his life. We honor him by pledging that together we will secure the freedom of workers to bargain for a better life, guarantee health care to all, forge an economy that works for everyone and help working women and men earn the respect and rewards so crucial to achieving their dreams.