

Working Politics for Working Families

Submitted by International Association of Fire Fighters

“One of the strongest impulses in man is patriotism. It is the instinct that has ever inspired men to make great and heroic sacrifices—to give up interests, possessions, dear ones, and even life itself. Patriotism lifts men above expediency, safety and profits.”

SAM GOMPERS, AFL PRESIDENT

THE MISSION OF ORGANIZED LABOR is to improve the lives of our members. The two essential requirements in fulfilling that charge are organizing and politics.

We engage in political action for a single purpose: to have power to achieve gains for workers. At every level of government, it is our duty to elect officials who embrace the goals of the trade union movement.

Officials have the power to enact laws that improve labor’s ability to organize; to bargain collectively; to ensure fairness in the workplace; to set adequate safety standards; to guarantee that all have the opportunity to provide for their families; to provide health care and retirement security to workers, their families and retired Americans; and to set economic and trade policies that protect and create good jobs for Americans.

To succeed, labor must be able to influence those elected officials who control the levers of power. For the American labor movement, the principal guiding factor must be a candidate or incumbent’s position on labor issues and issues that matter to all workers.

As evidenced by the Democratic Party’s support for the North American Free Trade Agreement and the current Republican Party that is supporting the Dominican Republic–Central American Free Trade Agreement, we cannot judge the value of a politician or base a decision on an endorsement or contribution on a candidate’s party affiliation. Therefore, we must not be for Democrats or for Republicans. We must be for those who support trade unionism and America’s working families.

Our political principles must be from and for the union movement. Our political principles must work for working families. To be successful, we must be smart and we must be realistic. The labor movement must support its tried and true supporters. But, we must also expand and grow our outreach efforts.

We must build coalitions on each and every issue. We must embrace the idea that today’s opponent may be tomorrow’s ally. Labor will always have its stalwart supporters who champion our position on every issue. But the days of having a large enough majority, that in and of itself can do our bidding when called, are history. Today’s reality is accepting and understanding that most politicians will never

have a 100 percent COPE voting record and that judging all politicians by that singular measure is a fool's pursuit.

After labor acknowledges and accepts this hard reality, we must fashion a strategy to succeed. We must work both sides of the political aisle and develop meaningful and lasting relationships with both parties—regardless of which is in the majority.

We must move our issues forward and develop a workers' majority for union families. Labor ought not to talk in codes about achieving "Progressive Majorities." Our obligation is to the women and men who pay the freight—our dues paying members. Our mission and responsibility is to build a Pro-Worker Majority.

To win in our nation's capital and in our 50 state capitals and at city halls and town councils, we must also have a message that elected officials can embrace and that will inspire them to support American workers.

To help develop a message that resonates with our members and the general public, we must engage a nonpartisan pollster that the federation employs who has no hand in developing the political program or messaging campaign.

We must accept that our members' demographics are similar to the electorate in general. That they have interests and concerns beyond the workplace. That they are people of faith and are strong patriots who believe in a strong national defense. That they want to protect their families and secure their homeland, and they believe in individual rights and liberties. And we must develop our political communications to encompass those issues and frame them in a fashion that couples them to the labor movement's core issues.

The AFL-CIO boasts a long tradition of supporting our nation in time of peril. Labor has always rallied to our nation's defense. We must renew that commitment and make it clear to our members and the public that labor stands for a strong and safe America.

If labor succeeds in fashioning a message and political strategy that both politicians and rank and file members can embrace, we will succeed in fulfilling our mission. And that is to organize more workers and secure more influence, power, security and the ability to deliver for our members and all America's workers.

Working politics for working families is the key to a better future for our great union movement and future generations of trade unionists.

Based on the foregoing, the International Association of Fire Fighters submits this resolution:

WHEREAS, the key to a brighter future for the American labor movement and its members is rooted in effective political action; and

WHEREAS, the AFL-CIO must fashion a political and legislative strategy that focuses on improving the lives and livelihoods of union members; and

WHEREAS, our success will be contingent upon developing a political message and lobbying effort that will be supported by elected officials of all political parties; and

WHEREAS, our guiding principal must be putting the needs of union workers above the interests of any political party; and

WHEREAS, a legitimate nonpartisan political/legislative program offers the best prospect for advancing a pro-union, pro-worker agenda; and

WHEREAS, the only real measure of political success is winning; and

WHEREAS, the AFL-CIO recognizes that, in addition to being loyal trade unionists, our members are proud Americans, people of faith and defenders of individual freedom and liberties;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO engage in a nonpartisan political and legislative strategy that bases labor's support on union issues and worker issues, not political parties; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO go on record stating that organized labor is willing to work with both national political parties; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO communicates its values and respects the members of its affiliates and their commitment to faith and country and that we affirm our support of our members' personal rights and freedom; and

BE IT RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO president task the Political Committee to retain a nonpartisan or

academic pollster who will conduct a comprehensive survey and hold a series of focus groups to evaluate the attitudes, priorities and goals of union workers contrasted with a similar group of nonunion workers; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution be sent to each member of the U.S. Senate, the U.S. House of Representatives, the Democratic National Committee, the Republican National Committee and the governors of every state.