

AFL-CIO: Unions Will Impact 2008 Race

AFL-CIO Leaders Say Union Movement Strengthening As 2008 Elections Near

By **JESSE J. HOLLAND** AP Labor Writer

The Associated Press

CHICAGO

Union membership is down. The labor movement has split in two. Conservatives control the White House, the Supreme Court and, until last year, Congress.

Yet AFL-CIO leaders say things are looking up as the nation's largest labor federation heads toward the 2008 presidential elections.

"We're stronger in many ways," said AFL-CIO president John Sweeney, in Chicago for the federation's executive council meeting and Tuesday forum with the Democratic presidential primary candidates.

Organized labor played a large role in Democrats taking over Congress in the midterm elections, Sweeney said, and is trying to hold on to that momentum going into 2008.

"What we see going on now leads us to believe that this will probably be the most ambitious mobilization in the history of the labor movement," Sweeney said in an interview with The Associated Press. "Workers are angry about how they're being treated, and they want to see a change."

Things have not gone well for unions since the last presidential election.

In 2004, 12.9 percent of the labor force were union members. In 2006, that number dropped to 12 percent, according to the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics. More than one-third of U.S. workers, about 35 percent, were union members in the mid-1950s.

In addition to the dropping membership numbers, the labor movement has now split in two. Seven unions consisting of 6 million members bolted the AFL-CIO in 2005 to form the group Change to Win. Those unions will meet in Chicago in September.

The AFL-CIO has 55 member unions and represents 10 million workers. They also have an affiliate, Working America, who represents 1.6 million non-unionized workers.

President Bush and Republicans in Congress have thwarted much of organized labor's initiatives, including a bill that would have made it easier to organize U.S. workers.

But organized labor is heartened by the fact that they helped push Democrats to take over the House and the Senate in the 2006 midterm elections. Unions spent more than \$66 million in that election cycle a record total most of it going to Democratic candidates.

"It has given the members purpose, and they see what kind of power they can exert in the political system," said Gerald W. McEntee, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. "When you put it all together, the effort in 2008 will be larger than it was in 2004, larger than it was in 2006 and more

effective than both."

The AFL-CIO hopes to show off its strength by packing Soldier Field, the home of the NFL's Chicago Bears, for an outdoors presidential forum on Tuesday. All the major Democratic presidential primary candidates will be there, and labor officials are busing in union families from all around for the event.

The weather forecast for Chicago Tuesday is for scattered thunders howers. Just in case, the AFL-CIO has ponchos for the crowd, and the candidates are set to speak on a covered stage.

"A couple of people have asked me already this morning what will happen if it rains," said Michael Carrigan, president of the Illinois AFL-CIO. "The answer is: The show goes on."

The AFL-CIO's executive council will meet Wednesday to decide whether to begin a primary endorsement process immediately or wait until later. The AFL-CIO requires a two-thirds vote for an endorsement, a threshold no candidate met during the 2004 Democratic presidential primary.

Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., was endorsed after he became the party's nominee.

Unions are split on whether they should wait until after the primary to make endorsements.

The International Association of Firefighters whose endorsement helped save Kerry's 2004 primary campaign plans to endorse in September regardless of what the AFL-CIO does. "I made it clear to the political committee today," said Harold A. Schaitberger, IAFF president. "We're going to make a decision."

But the American Postal Workers Union will not endorse anyone in the primary, said William Burrus, the group's president.

"I'm a believer and my union is a believer that we've got to wrest control from the capitalists from the Republicans, from their friends in the White House as well the Congress," Burrus said. "It's unimportant who it is that does that. I don't want to play favorites in the primary."

At least one union plans to endorse in both the Republican and the Democratic primaries. The International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers will do so after a late August debate, a first in the union's 118-year history.

Democrats should not take their endorsement for granted in the final race, said Tom Buffenbarger, president of the machinists' group. IAM is one of the nation's largest trade unions, representing more than 720,000 active and retired members.

Thirty-five percent of IAM members are registered Republicans.

"We want to encourage our Republican members to get involved and active in their party and find the kind of candidate who looks out for working people, has a vision for working men and women, not just the oil barons and the Wall street tycoons," Buffenbarger said.

Sweeney noted that 20 percent of AFL-CIO members also are registered Republicans, and they invited GOP presidential candidates to participate in the forum but got no response. The machinists "have the right to do what their membership wants them to do," Sweeney said.

On the Net:

AFL-CIO: <http://www.aflcio.org>

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A.F.L.-C.I.O. Decides Not to Endorse for Now, Freeing Unions to Do So

By [STEVEN GREENHOUSE](#)

CHICAGO, Aug. 8 — The [A.F.L.-C.I.O.](#)'s executive council voted on Wednesday against endorsing any presidential candidate, reflecting divisions over which Democrat to support and setting the stage for its 55 member unions to make individual endorsements.

Labor leaders said several large unions were leaning strongly toward Senator [Hillary Rodham Clinton](#) of New York and others toward former Senator [John Edwards](#) of North Carolina.

The labor federation, which represents 10 million union members, gave the green light to its member unions to issue endorsements a day after it sponsored a spirited outdoor debate by seven Democratic candidates before more than 10,000 union members at Soldier Field here.

The A.F.L.-C.I.O. made no endorsements because it could not muster the two-thirds support for a specific candidate. Labor leaders are highly enthusiastic about the Democratic field.

"We've got so many good friends on the Democratic side in this race," said Harold A. Schaitberger, president of the International Association of Fire Fighters. "Any one of them would be far better for workers and working families than the current president."

Union leaders say two giant public sector unions, the [American Federation of Teachers](#) and the [American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees](#), are leaning toward Mrs. Clinton. But the strong support that those unions' locals in the Midwest feel toward Senator [Barack Obama](#) of Illinois could prevent their parent unions from backing Mrs. Clinton.

Many industrial unions, most notably the United Steelworkers, are especially enthusiastic about Mr. Edwards because of his backing of many labor causes and his strong views on limiting international trade accords. Union leaders say there is a good chance that the [Teamsters](#) and Unite Here, which represents apparel, hotel and restaurant workers, will back Mr. Edwards.

Divided endorsements could put organized labor in the same uncomfortable position it was in during the 2004 presidential primaries, when unions fought among themselves, dividing their endorsements among former Gov. [Howard Dean](#) of Vermont, Mr. Edwards, Senator [John Kerry](#) of Massachusetts and former Representative [Richard A. Gephardt](#) of Missouri.

In March, the A.F.L.-C.I.O.'s executive council asked member unions to hold off endorsing anyone until after this week's council meeting in Chicago. But many union presidents pushed to be freed to make an endorsement after the meeting.

Gerald W. McEntee, chairman of the federation's political committee and president of the state, county and municipal employees' union, said he was eager for his union to make an endorsement soon to increase its influence in the caucuses and primaries, which begin in January.

"In Iowa, if you don't have boots on the ground by November, you might as well not be there," Mr. McEntee said.

Karen Ackerman, the A.F.L.-C.I.O.'s political director, said, "When there is a consensus candidate, and that might not happen until Feb. 5 or 6, then we'll come together in a unified program."

Ms. Ackerman said the federation's member unions might make an overall endorsement at that time because a likely Democratic nominee could emerge from all the primaries on Feb. 5.

Labor leaders say they expect organized labor to mount its biggest political effort ever in 2008.

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Democrats woo labor but bash each other

By: [Roger Simon](#)

August 8, 2007 05:54 PM EST

CHICAGO — If you were wondering if there is ever going to be a “Sister Souljah” moment in this presidential race, in which a Democrat actually stands up to a major special interest group, I think you can forget it.

At what was the third organized labor forum since February, all the major Democratic candidates gathered in the withering heat of Soldier Field and...withered.

They promised everything and demanded nothing. Except votes, of course.

With an estimated 17,000 union members in attendance here Tuesday, the moment was tailor-made for a candidate who wanted to stand up and stand out, by saying: “Union demands for their members, while understandable, can make American goods more expensive and can drive American jobs overseas. Are you, as union members, willing to give up anything to keep American jobs at home?”

That never happened. (And, in fairness, you almost never see Republican candidates stand up to the pillars of their party: big business and the wealthy.)

Pandering has become so second nature to the presidential campaign process that it is barely noteworthy.

Yet, even so, labor is not entirely happy with what they get from the Democrats. Or, to put it another way, they want more.

When I asked Gerald McEntee, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, if labor gets the seat at the table it wants from the Democratic Party, he said, “It’s been so long since we’ve been at the table, we don’t know.”

He said that while he looked forward to electing more Democrats to the House and Senate in 2008 as well as a Democratic president, “If we don’t see the results we want after that, there will be a difference in what we do in 2010.”

Well, maybe. There is one thing about being a pillar of the party: While you hold up the roof, you are also stuck in place. And labor is unlikely to wander over to the Republican Party anytime soon.

Still, when MSNBC moderator Keith Olbermann invited Barack Obama to address an important labor dilemma — cheap, foreign goods are very appealing to American families on tight budgets — Obama would not engage.

“Look, people don’t want a cheaper T-shirt if they’re losing a job in the process,” Obama said.

Which is true, but not the point. The point is whether people want cheap, foreign goods if it costs some other American a job. Many Americans vote with their wallets and say yes.

Not that labor issues are likely to get much attention in the days ahead.

And that is because the feud continued Tuesday between Obama and John Edwards on one side and Hillary Rodham Clinton on the other over Clinton's acceptance of campaign contributions from Washington lobbyists.

Edwards not only raised it during the forum at every chance he got, but he raised it even when he didn't get a chance.

"But the last thing I want to say," he said early in the forum, "and I want everyone to hear my voice on this — the one thing you can count on is, you will never see a picture of me on the front of Fortune magazine saying, 'I am the candidate that big, corporate America is betting on.' That will never happen. That's one thing you can take to the bank."

Actually, Hillary Clinton was recently on the cover of Fortune with the headline: "Business Loves Hillary! (Who Knew?)"

But, close enough.

Edwards and Obama consider this issue the chink in Clinton's armor and see it as a way to paint her as just another Washington insider and to exploit the public's desire for change.

More interesting than the attack, however, was Clinton's defense.

She knew the subject would come up and her campaign had plenty of time to prepare a defense based on how fine a line her two attackers are drawing.

As The Associated Press put it, "Neither Edwards nor Obama accept money directly from federal lobbyists but both take contributions from people who work at firms with lobbying operations." Also, Obama takes contributions from lobbyists outside Washington.

But that is not the defense Clinton made.

"I'm here because I think we need to change America, and it's not to get in fights with Democrats," she said. "I want the Democrats to win, and I want a united Democratic Party that will stand against the Republicans."

She went on: "And I will say that for 15 years I have stood up against the right-wing machine, and I've come out stronger. So if you want a winner who knows how to take them on, I'm your girl!"

It was interesting wording coming from a candidate who watches her words carefully.

Was she implying that Edwards and Obama are now part of the "right-wing machine" that has attacked her in the past?

And is her use of the word "girl" designed to imply that these two male candidates are battling to keep a woman from becoming president?

We will hear much more about this in the days ahead. What we will not hear much more about is labor issues.

Until the next time labor forum, that is, and the Democrats line up to pay their respects.

Labor Federation to Launch Push For Universal Health Care Coverage

BNA Daily Labor Report

Wednesday, August 8, 2007

CHICAGO--The AFL-CIO leadership Aug. 7 announced an upcoming Labor Day push for universal health care coverage for all Americans, with the aim of making the issue a key one in the 2008 national elections.

In a statement adopted Aug. 7 during its annual summer meeting, the AFL-CIO Executive Council said the campaign will mark the beginning of a "renewed effort" by the federation to overhaul the nation's health care system to "protect existing hard-won union benefits and extend coverage to all Americans."

The latest statement expands on a policy statement adopted by the executive council at its winter meeting in March. In that statement, the federation called for reforming the health care system by the expanding the Medicare program. In calling for reform based on the Medicare system, the AFL-CIO pointed out that Medicare has "guaranteed coverage, made health care more affordable, included a form of shared financial responsibility, significantly reduced administrative costs compared with those of private plans, and has been the largely unheralded financier of America's medical science advances" (44 DLR B-1, 3/7/07 a0b4c9j0m1).

Several weeks ago, AFL-CIO President John J. Sweeney appointed a group of AFL-CIO vice presidents representing a variety of industries and several state AFL-CIO officials to a committee on health care. The group is charged with formulating a program that the federation and its affiliates can adopt, according to Gerald McEntee, president of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, who is chairing the committee. McEntee added that the resolution adopted at the March meeting will be the basis for the "formulation of a plan."

To prepare for the campaign, the federation held focus groups and conducted new polling among union members. The poll found that although the war in Iraq is their number one concern, health care is close behind, even before terrorism, he said.

Jeffrey Levine, senior vice president of business consulting for the public relations firm FD (formerly Financial Dynamics), who conducted the poll for the AFL-CIO, told BNA that a "vast majority" of a representative sample of 600 AFL-CIO members and retirees support changes in the health care system, with a large number supporting universal health care and a role for government in health care.

Gerald Shea, an assistant to Sweeney for government affairs, told BNA that the campaign will focus, among other things, on electing a president and a Congress that will commit to enacting universal health care for all.

Linking National Reform to Work at State Level Planned

The campaign will be multifaceted, including communicating with union members and their families on the need for federal reform to "preserve their hard won benefits"; mobilizing union members to participate in the elections and demand that candidates support comprehensive reform; recruiting employers to support reform; linking national health care reform to work at the state level; and working with organizations with the same objectives to establish a broad alliance.

McEntee said to set the stage for the campaign, the federation plans to work to support re-authorization of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). SCHIP was created by Congress in 1997 to help states begin and expand providing insurance to low-income, uninsured children. Congress has approved an increase in SCHIP funding. The bill was passed by Congress earlier this summer, but President Bush has threatened to veto it.

McEntee said he believes the right has a strategy to defeat the final version of SCHIP as the first step in an upcoming fight over national health care reform. "If you can't pass SCHIP, it will hurt the overall program for national reform," he said. The fight for SCHIP "sets the battlefield for the difference between the neoconservatives and the middle class," he added.

Rose Ann DeMoro, executive director of the California Nurses Association/National Nurses Organizing Committee, who was elected to the executive council Aug. 7 and has been appointed to the health care reform committee, told BNA that she was impressed by the conversations on health care taking place at the meeting. She added that there is uniform agreement among the AFL-CIO affiliates that universal health care is needed but the "tactics and strategies" are now being discussed.

CNA, which is a strong advocate of single-payor health insurance, received a charter from the AFL-CIO in May (98 DLR A-7, 5/22/07 a0b4n7r3b5). Working with the AFL-CIO on obtaining health care reform was the impetus for delegates to a CNA convention in September 2005 voting to begin the affiliation process.

Politics Major Focus of Meeting

A major focus of the two-day meeting is the 2008 national elections. As part of its "Working Families Vote 2008" campaign, the AFL-CIO was sponsoring a forum scheduled for the evening of Aug. 7 with seven of the Democratic presidential candidates. The forum, which originally had been scheduled to be held at McCormick Place, had to be moved to Soldier Field because of the large number of union members and their families who wanted to attend.

According to AFL-CIO Political Director Karen Ackerman, the federation originally had expected about 5,000 people to attend, but that number has grown and now is expected to be between 12,000 and 15,000. She said union members are very "interested [in] and excited" about the upcoming elections.

Ackerman said the field of Democratic candidates is the "best of all possible worlds. It's a great situation to have so many good candidates" who are talking about issues important to workers, she said. She added that the presidential forum will be devoted to issues such as the right to bargain, trade, and health care. "That's a victory in itself," Ackerman said.

Following the candidates forum, the executive council is scheduled Aug. 8 to discuss the next steps in its presidential endorsement process including whether to convene the general board in the fall. The general board includes the members of the AFL-CIO Executive Council, the principal officer of each of the federation's 55 affiliated unions, the president of each trade and industrial department, and some regional leadership representatives. A two-thirds vote of the board is necessary for an endorsement. End of article graphic

By Michelle Amber

The Caucus

Political Blogging From The New York Times



August 7, 2007, 5:33 pm

Labor Sets the Stage for a Democratic Forum

By [Steven Greenhouse](#)



An Obama supporter stood outside Soldier Field in Chicago prior to tonight's debate. (Photo: Peter Wynn Thompson for The New York Times)

CHICAGO — Labor groups are ready to hand out 10,000 rain ponchos, but hope their members won't have to use them tonight when the Democratic candidates and

thousands of [union members and leaders gather at Soldier Field.](#)

A.F.L.-C.I.O. spokesman Steve Smith said today that the stage for the candidates and the press area will be covered in case of rain — there is still a possibility of thunderstorms — but those in attendance are not allowed to carry umbrellas into the stadium.

It is hot here, surpassing 90 degrees by mid-afternoon. The A.F.L.-C.I.O. leaders decided to move the debate to Soldier Field and risk having it disrupted by rain because unions in the Midwest had told them that at least 12,000 members planned to attend. That was far more than A.F.L.-C.I.O. leaders thought could be accommodated at the original debate site, Chicago's main convention center.

Gerald McEntee, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, called the debate, which starts at 6 p.m. here (7 p.m. Eastern) "the biggest job interview ever." All the Democratic candidates — except for former Senator Mike Gravel of Alaska — will be participating. MSNBC will broadcast the debate, with Keith Olbermann acting as moderator. He will ask questions and the candidates will face some

questions from union members.

By staging the debate before such a large crowd, labor leaders are hoping to demonstrate their political muscle in an era when the percentage of workers in union has dropped decade after decade.

The A.F.L.-C.I.O is sponsoring the forum at a time when the nation's unions are deeply split about which candidate to support. At the same time, labor leaders voice enthusiasm about the Democratic field.

They all back bills in Congress that would make it easier to unionize and give all firefighters and police officers the right to bargain collectively. Several candidates have backed universal health coverage, another labor goal.

“The six that I consider the major candidates, any of them has the ability to be the next commander in chief,” said Harold Schaitberger, president of the International Association of Fire Fighters. “And certainly every one of them would be far superior for workers and our country than our current president.”

Some unions are leaning toward Mr. Edwards, some toward Mrs. Clinton. This is the second forum the Democrats will attend within a week; a third sponsored by the Human Rights Campaign will be held on Thursday and will deal with issues important to gays and lesbians.

Mr. Edwards pounded home his populist message on Saturday at the Yearly Kos convention of liberal bloggers and activists here at McCormick Place, and he is expected to do the same tonight as he pursues the backing of various unions. While Mrs. Clinton has faced some criticism within the labor crowd because Burson-Marsteller, the firm of her pollster, Mark Penn, has done work that is considered anti-union, she and Senator Barack Obama have also pitched positions relevant to this segment of the Democratic fold.

The A.F.L.-C.I.O.'s executive council is scheduled to meet on Wednesday to consider its next step in the endorsement process. Union leaders say the council will either give member unions the go-ahead to endorse candidates on their own or will urge individual unions to hold off on endorsing until the federation decides in October or later whether to make an overall endorsement.

The labor federation's president, John Sweeney, said he doubted that any Democratic candidate could muster the support of unions representing two-thirds of the federation's members needed to obtain the A.F.L.-C.I.O.'s endorsement. He said that October was the earliest that the federation's executive council might seek to make a pre-primary endorsement.

Even though Dick Gephardt had the endorsements of 23 unions during the 2004 presidential primary season, he was unable to obtain the federation's endorsement that year.

The A.F.L.-C.I.O., a federation of 55 unions representing nearly 10 million workers, is widely viewed as one of the nation's most politically influential institutions. Its leaders boast that 205,000 union members did volunteer work in the 2006 campaign and that the federation's political program contacted more than 13 million members of unions and union households. The federation predicts that one in four voters in next year's election will come from union households—about the rate in the 2004 election.

To make sure that the Democratic candidates hear workers' concerns, the federation persuaded the Democratic candidates to attend town-hall-style meetings this spring where union members asked questions about trade, health care and other subjects. Mrs. Clinton attended such a meeting in Detroit, Mr. Obama in Trenton, New Jersey, and Gov. Bill Richardson in Phoenix.

A rival labor federation comprised of the service employees' union and six other unions that quit the A.F.L.-C.I.O. is scheduled to hold a meeting here in late September to determine whether to endorse a candidate.

Labor leaders said the Republican presidential candidates were invited to take part in the Chicago debate, but none of them filled out a labor questionnaire sent them — a precondition for participating in the debate.

Come back later, we'll be updating and blogging the debate.

www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-laboraug07,1,449790.story

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CAMPAIGN 2008

Democrats debate; unions delight

In national spotlight, candidates to court Big Labor in Chicago

By Stephen Franklin

Tribune staff reporter

August 7, 2007

They will probably sound like a giant barbershop quartet, singing different notes in the same song.

And that's perfectly fine with leaders of the AFL-CIO, who are savoring the prospect of the Tuesday night debate among seven Democratic presidential candidates that the labor federation is sponsoring at Soldier Field.

"All of them are talented and all of them are our candidates," Gerald McEntee, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees told a group of union political activists this weekend in Chicago. The forum will be "the biggest job interview ever," he added with a broad smile.

The labor federation's glee is easy to understand.

The candidates' eagerness to court organized labor is viewed as a message that labor is still a major player in national politics, despite its steadily shrinking numbers and a deep division within its ranks that led to a splinter federation two years ago. Organized labor, with 16 million members, today represents about only 1 out of 8 workers in the U.S.

The AFL-CIO's leaders are similarly pleased by the fact that the candidates' wooing will be very public.

More than 12,000 union members and their families are expected to attend the 90-minute gathering that will be broadcast live on MSNBC and WMAQ-Ch.-5 and over XM Satellite Radio, starting at 6 p.m.

In fact, the meeting was switched from McCormick Place West to the massive open-air stadium when ticket requests soared beyond expectations, union officials said. More than 17,000 tickets have been handed out to unions in the Chicago area, added officials with

the half-million-member Chicago Federation of Labor.

MSNBC host Keith Olbermann will be the moderator. The candidates also will field questions from about 10 union members, who have been selected from across the U.S., as well as questions culled from several thousand submitted to the AFL-CIO over the Internet.

Just as the unions hope to gain from the much-publicized debate, the payoff for the candidate that wins labor's embrace can be critical.

As AFL-CIO officials point out, their ability to churn out voters has steadily improved since their political efforts were stepped up in 1996.

Nearly three-fourths of the union members taking part in the 2006 election voted for the union-endorsed candidate, the highest such figure ever, according to Karen Ackerman, the AFL-CIO's political director.

So, too, unions have been able to turn out large numbers of their members and families in traditionally union-friendly states. For example, union households made up 35 percent of the voters in Michigan in 2006 and 32 percent in Illinois, according to Ackerman.

\$200 million given in 2004

In order to get such numbers, unions have matched traditional techniques with high-tech support, she said. In 2006, union campaign workers knocked on 8.2 million doors, sent out 30 million pieces of mail and handed out 14 million fliers, she said.

In terms of campaign support, organized labor gave more than \$200 million in 2004 to its candidates, according to AFL-CIO officials, and that number is likely to grow in the coming year, labor officials predicted.

AFSCME alone expects to spend more than \$50 million, outstripping the \$48 million the AFL-CIO spent in 2004, and the Service Employees International Union intends to spend over \$60 million, said union President Andy Stern.

To measure the Democrats' ability to identify with workers, the SEIU has asked them to spend one day doing one of their union member's jobs, and several have already put in their time, said Stern, who was in Chicago last week for the YearlyKos convention.

One of the union leaders who spurred the competing Change to Win Federation, Stern said his 6-million-member group cooperated with the AFL-CIO in its political efforts last year and would continue to do so.

Ackerman agreed, but added that not all of the rival federation's seven unions have joined in.

A longtime critic of politicians who take unions' support but then ignore them once in office, Stern also noted his federation's role in helping set up a new political action committee meant to keep elected officials accountable, Working for Us PAC.

AFL-CIO President John Sweeney said he will be listening closely Tuesday to hear the candidates' views on health care. "They all have to recognize that the health care issue has to be addressed effectively after they get elected," he explained.

The AFL-CIO's leadership, which is meeting now in Chicago, has yet to decide on the endorsement timetable and spending, and Sweeney said the debate could have an impact on union leaders when they bring up these issues at a Wednesday meeting.

As for individual unions' early endorsements, Sweeney said that "nobody is making any quick decisions like they did several years ago."

Unlike 2004, when several unions rushed to back Howard Dean or Richard Gephardt, "they all want to make sure they make a decision their members can live with," Sweeney said.

"People want the process to play out a little more," suggested John Gage, president of the American Federation of Government Employees. Gage said he personally favors former Sen. John Edwards of North Carolina, but his union has yet to reach a decision on a candidate.

A GOP endorsement?

Edwards, who has played to labor's heart with a focus on poverty and working-class issues, told a union meeting Monday in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, that "it remains to be seen" who will win labor's support.

"Obviously, I have friends in organized labor because I've done a lot of work in the last several years on behalf of issues that I care about and they also care about. But I think it's very much an open question what the unions are going to do," he said.

Some unions are also looking at Republican candidates. About 1 in 5 members of AFL-CIO unions consider themselves Republicans, union officials said.

The International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, for example, plans to endorse a Republican candidate as well as a Democrat, marking the union's first such effort, said machinists spokesman Rick Sloan. "Some members are pretty adamant about supporting their brand of politics," he said.

Republican presidential candidates were also invited to take part in Tuesday's debate, but none returned the questionnaires sent to them, AFL-CIO officials said. Neither did Democratic candidate and former U.S. Sen. Mike Gravel of Alaska, they added.

In case of bad weather, AFL-CIO officials said they will have heaps of ponchos ready and lots of crossed fingers.

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Tribune political reporter Rick Pearson contributed to this report from Iowa

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Major Unions Set To Endorse -- But Will They?

Posted August 7, 2007 | 12:08 PM (EST)

Tomorrow is a significant day for the Democratic presidential race: the unions of the AFL-CIO will be freed up to endorse candidates. But, I suspect that a number of unions may hold back, at least until after Labor Day. Here are a few guesses, some based on information and some wildly speculative and pulled out of my...

All the [AFL-CIO unions](#) respected the internal process of the AFL-CIO, which dictated that individual endorsements not be made until after the federation's executive council met in Chicago today and tomorrow; tonight there is an AFL-CIO-sponsored presidential debate at Soldiers' Field in Chicago where, if the thunderstorms stay away, 15,000 union members are expected to attend. To get the federation's overall endorsement, a candidate would need to nail down support from two-thirds of the unions in the AFL-CIO. That isn't likely to happen, as much because a number of unions want to stay uncommitted to see how the race unfolds.

To state the obvious, labor support means troops and money to get out the vote. It's particular crucial in caucus states like Iowa and Nevada. At this point, the conventional perception is that, if unions went with their heart, they'd endorse John Edwards. But, many of the union leaders are being influenced by the measures that are influencing the media coverage and some public perceptions: polls, money and celebrity. And, as a result, some of the unions might decide to stay neutral for some time and, perhaps, even stay out of the primary fight period.

I would also say that Hillary Clinton has a significant base of support within certain unions. But, two things are hurting her. First, a number of unions still don't trust her instincts on trade, which, for a number of unions, is a bottom

line issue. Though she announced that she would oppose the South Korea so-called "free trade" deal, there is still a lingering suspicion, fairly or not, that she is much more likely to mimic Bill Clinton's support for so-called "free trade" (after all, NAFTA was promoted and pushed by Bill Clinton... And as an aside, Robert Reich, Clinton's labor secretary); unions have no desire to see more "liberals" elected who will push bad trade deals. Second, she can't shake the stories that have linked her senior advisor Mark Penn to public relations work that was done for anti-union companies (in fact, there is yet another story on the subject in [today's Los Angeles Times](#)); that fact, whether relevant or significant or not, is still lingering in the background.

So, all that being said, here's a look at where some of the unions might go (I'll update this in the future)

[American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees](#)

[\(AFSCME\)](#): huge endorsement because AFSCME workers are everywhere. I gather that Clinton, Obama and Edwards have strong support in particular parts of the country. The union's president, Gerry McEntee, does not want a repeat of 2004, when he jumped publicly from candidate to candidate (and publicly called his at-the-time choice Howard Dean "crazy" after the Iowa caucuses). Wants to be with the winner so may wait a bit before jumping in.

[Steelworkers](#): almost surely likely to endorse Edwards. Steelworkers' president Leo Gerard is one of the most vocal opponents in labor to so-called "free trade." Very important resource for the Iowa caucuses.

[Firefighters](#): One of the most active unions in politics, you almost couldn't watch John Kerry give a speech at a rally without seeing a sea of Firefighter T-Shirts surrounding him, even in the days when Kerry was polling poorly in the primaries. Dunno. I'd guess this is between Edwards and Clinton.

[American Federation of Teachers](#): If I had to guess, if the union makes an endorsement, it would be Clinton. Sen. Clinton is very close to Randi Weingarten, the president of the huge New York city teachers' affiliate. But...the AFT has chapters in all 50 states and many of the candidates have very passionate supporters (Sen. Dodd, for example, is a favorite of the Connecticut teachers). So, it would not be surprising if the union holds back for a bit.

[International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers](#): this is not a large union but it is one of the fastest growing, percentage-wise. The

union's leadership is furious at Clinton for her support for expanding the H-1B visa quotas--which IFPTE believes costs their members jobs by increasing the number of foreign engineers. I suspect they would endorse Edwards, if anyone.

[Transport Workers Union](#): likely Edwards.

While we are on the topic of union endorsements, what are the Change To Win federation unions likely to do? The CTW internal process requires that before any of the seven CTW unions endorses, it has to raise the endorsement at a meeting of the CTW board. Such a meeting is taking place tomorrow in Washington, D.C. but endorsements aren't likely to be on the table because each of the unions has its own internal process to go through. However, CTW has a convention on Sept. 24th in Chicago and its entirely possible that endorsements will be annou

[Service Employees International Union](#): very strongly leaning towards Edwards. But, it has an internal process which is underway. SEIU's leaders are not thrilled that Clinton missed the union's August 1 deadline for the presentation of each candidate's health care plan. Obama has very strong support from the Illinois SEIU leadership, in particular, Tom Balanoff, President of SEIU Local 1 in Chicago.

[UNITE-HERE](#): almost certainly Edwards. That will be a big boon for Edwards in the Nevada caucuses because of the huge union presence in Las Vegas.

[Teamsters](#): certainly leaning towards Edwards, primarily because of the trade issue. But, both Obama and Clinton have very strong home-town Teamster support. The Teamsters have a board meeting one week before the September CTW convention so look for some signal at that meeting.

[Carpenters](#): very strong for Edwards. Might be the first CTW union to announce an endorsement.

[Laborers](#): I suspect that the union is leaning towards Edwards.

[United Food and Commercial Workers](#): the UFCW has a board meeting just before the CTW convention so look for something to perhaps emerge from then. Edwards took part in the anti-Wal-Mart bus trip so he has a large reservoir of good will there.

The bottom line, however, is that there is a strong desire within labor to retake the White House so, like many of the Democratic constituencies, the labor movement is ready to work hard for whoever emerges from the fray.

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Dan Balz's Take

Dean Endorsement Weighs on Labor's Thinking



As they prepare for tonight's forum with Democratic presidential candidates in Chicago, leaders of two of the nation's biggest labor unions are drawing lessons from their disastrous decision to endorse Howard Dean's presidential bid in 2004. (AP).

CHICAGO -- Four years ago, two of the biggest unions in the country stunned the political establishment by joining together and endorsing Howard Dean for president. This year they are on divergent paths -- having drawn sharply different lessons from the 2004 experience

As the Democratic candidates gather for tonight's AFL-CIO debate at Soldier Field, the two unions reflect the competing philosophies inside the labor movement about endorsement strategies. Should they try to pick a winner, or reward candidates most committed to their agenda?

In November 2003, Gerald McEntee and Andy Stern pulled off what looked like a coup when they unexpectedly joined forces and put the muscle of their two unions -- the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) behind Dean's campaign.

Within three months, Dean's campaign had imploded and the union leaders were left to pick up the pieces. McEntee bolted in a public divorce with the candidate. On the way out

the door, in an interview with Adam Nagourney of the New York Times, he described the candidate as "nuts." Stern loyally stood by the former Vermont governor until he pulled out of the race.

McEntee remains haunted by what happened. "I think it was a real learning experience for us," he said during a recent interview in his L Street office in Washington. "I think we jumped in when he was very popular in Iowa. But we didn't drill down far enough in terms of our own membership. It taught us that, as far as we can, find out where our members are, what kind of candidate they really want to support."

Another labor official said McEntee feels terribly burned by the experience. "I think he learned a very painful lesson," he said.

The SEIU came to the opposite conclusion. "Our members were very proud of the decision and very proud of the effort that they were engaged in," said Anna Burger, SEIU's secretary-treasurer, during a recent interview in her office overlooking DuPont Circle. "While they were disappointed in the results, they weren't disappointed by the decision to do it."

For the SEIU, finding a candidate who believes in labor's issues and in union workers is more important than picking someone because he or she is the likely winner of the nomination. Burger said when the SEIU membership was polled, that message came through clearly.

I asked Burger, "Isn't that good for John Edwards?"

"I think it is good for John Edwards," she said. "He's been very much out there on the street for working people."

Her comments came moments after she had criticized Hillary Clinton for being slow to put together a health care plan to achieve universal coverage. The SEIU set an Aug. 1 deadline for the candidates to release their plans. The interview with Burger came before that deadline, but Burger was then clearly frustrated with the Clinton campaign.

I asked what were the consequences of missing that deadline "I'm not sure that it's disqualifying," she said. "But I'm certain that it's disappointing. It's not that complicated."

The deadline passed last week without Clinton offering her health care plan. The union issued a release in Burger's name noting that Edwards, Barack Obama, Chris Dodd and Bill Richardson had met the deadline. "Senator Clinton has issued part of her plan, but we're still waiting to find out how many people she would cover and how she would pay for it," she said.

McEntee sees the choice as one of picking a winner. From his perspective, AFSCME could live with virtually any of the candidates on the issues -- although he too noted that Clinton's health care proposals need more fleshing out.

"On issues, we could probably live or be happy with any candidate," he said. "If that's the case, as we go through the issues and really take a long hard look at them, then it will come down to who can win. Who has the best chance of winning. Because [AFSCME members] want to get in the White House. They've been banged around and battered around by the Bush administration and one thing they all believe firmly, they don't want anybody even resembling Bush in the White House for four and or eight more years."

Since their joint endorsement of Dean in 2003, AFSCME and SEIU have gone separate ways within the labor movement. Led by Stern, SEIU and other unions bolted from the AFL-CIO and set up the Change to Win. McEntee's AFSCME stood by AFL-CIO president John Sweeney in opposition to Stern's defection.

Both unions are engaged in lengthy evaluations of the candidates that may -- or may not -- lead to endorsements. At this point, based on Burger's comments, Edwards has some advantage with the 1.9 million member SEIU. But Clinton has strong support from SEIU members in New York, and Obama has support from Illinois SEIU locals. That could stymie the union in the end.

Edwards appears to have less support at AFSCME, according to knowledgeable sources, in part because he is seen as more of a long shot for the White House. In 1992, McEntee sided with Bill Clinton in a surprise move. His ties with the former president remain strong -- Clinton has talked to McEntee a number of times to inquire about the details of their endorsement process -- and the New York senator has also made a point of courting McEntee.

But the president of AFSCME is mindful of his 1.4 million members and he's less likely to do what he did four years ago by taking a gamble with the union's endorsement.

The divergent paths of AFSCME and SEIU this year are, as a result, as interesting and important as their unexpected marriage was in 2003.

--Dan Balz

Posted at 12:00 PM ET on [Aug 7, 2007](#) | Category: [Dan Balz's Take](#)

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Tuesday, Aug. 07, 2007

Unions Go Slow in Backing a Democrat

By Jay Newton-Small / Washington

In a campaign season that has started earlier than ever, one powerful group trying not to get swept up in the heat of the moment is organized labor. As members of the largest U.S. umbrella union, the AFL-CIO, gather in Chicago for the launch of their presidential endorsement process, no immediate endorsements are expected. And that is causing particular angst for the Democratic candidate who has worked hardest for the union vote: John Edwards.

Since Edwards's run for the Vice Presidency in 2004, he has gone to more than 200 organizing events for more than 20 unions. "There has been no presidential candidate in history that has done more for working people over the last three years than John Edwards," said David Bonior, Edwards's campaign manager and a former union-friendly Congressman himself. He cited a number of the former Senator's labor-friendly initiatives: a universal health care plan, his comprehensive proposal to fight poverty, a call to raise to minimum wage to \$9.50 and a plan, introduced Monday, to overhaul U.S. trade agreements to include labor and environmental standards.

Yet for all his actions, and his rhetoric, unions are not going gaga for Edwards the way they did in 2004 for former House Speaker Dick Gephardt or former Vermont Governor Howard Dean. "Dick Gephardt for 30 years carried the water for working people in this country," said Terry O'Sullivan, general president of the 500,000-member Laborer's International Union of North America. "In 2008 we have a second-term Senator, a one-term Senator and a first-term Senator as the top-tier candidates. We don't have any top-tier candidates that have been around like that for 30 years."

What's more, 2004 may have served as a lesson. With LIUNA and other unions supporting Gephardt, while others, like the 1.3 million-member Service Employees International Union, endorsed Dean, labor watched in dismay as John Kerry pulled out a surprise win in the Iowa caucus.

"The buzz changes all the time and it's just really too early," said Anna Burger, who oversees political affairs

for the SEIU. "It's very still fluid in terms of getting to know the candidates." Echoed O'Sullivan: "This time around, it's worthy of us to take a more cautious and thoughtful approach."

Labor sources say it is unlikely that any of the top candidates will succeed in drawing the two-thirds support of the AFL-CIO's 10 million members needed to win an endorsement before the primary season, a feat accomplished only twice in the organization's history: for former Vice President Al Gore in 2000 and Walter Mondale in 1984. "We're really pleased it's a really strong field this year," said Karen Ackerman, the AFL-CIO's political director. "All of the candidates have been actively involved with many of our members."

After hearing from the eight Democratic candidates at Tuesday's forum, the AFL-CIO's executive committee is scheduled to meet Wednesday to decide if and when they will hold an endorsement meeting this fall. All the organization's member unions are asked to hold off picking candidates until the AFL-CIO's executive board makes its decision. If it fails to muster a two-thirds majority for any one candidate, then it will release its member unions to back whomever they wish.

Bonior said the Edwards campaign expects to get "the vast majority of union support and endorsements" this fall. But while many union leaders admit Edwards has, in Burger's words, "set the standard" for the other presidential candidates, they are still looking closely at New York Senator Hillary Clinton and Illinois Senator Barack Obama.

"Whenever there was an organizing campaign [Edwards] was out there supporting workers, so I think that people are very impressed with what he's been willing to do and how he's been willing to give of himself," Burger said. "But Barack Obama's been incredibly supportive of working families in his home state of Illinois. And Hillary Clinton has done a lot of work with our locals in New York."

Clinton, the former First Lady, has worked to distance herself from her husband's free-trade record, which was unpopular with labor, going so far as to criticize the North American Free Trade Agreement as something inherited by her husband's administration. In the Senate she has voted against the Central American Free Trade Agreement and has announced her opposition to the pending South Korean Free Trade Agreement. In addition, she was only presidential candidate to turn up at a rally in front of Congress for the Employee Free Choice Act — a bill that facilitates union organizing, which was ultimately blocked by Senate Republicans. "We work better when you work with us," she told the crowd who braved 100-degree temperatures for the rally.

Bill Clinton's stigma with labor "might have some effect" on union support for his wife's candidacy, said Gerald McEntee, president of the 1.4-million member American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. But he added, "I don't know that you can blame the so-called sins of the husband on Hillary."

Some unions are also still pondering backing Obama, who is still in his first term as a U.S. Senator and has had much less time and opportunity to court the national union umbrella groups or their branches in early-voting states.

"We worked very closely with him on the immigration bill," said O'Sullivan of the Laborer's union. "He was very engaged." Obama this year introduced a series of amendments to the doomed legislation that helped labor protect the minimum wage and helped define certain technical visa terms.

Still, Edwards has done much more work on the ground with the unions. "John Edwards has a certain passion with people that he's walked the streets with because he stood up for them in a very serious way when they needed it," SEIU's Burger said. "People are going to look to see whether the other candidates are willing to do that, too."

One of the unions that Edwards has especially strong ties with is Unite, a textile union that endorsed him before the 2004 Iowa caucus. Since then he helped them roll out a campaign in February 2006 to pressure hotel chains to raise the minimum wage for more than 90,000 unionized hospitality workers. Unite, formerly the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees, left the AFL-CIO after the 2004 election and joined with the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union to form Unite Here, with more than 450,000 members. Edwards remains close with the union, which has a large presence in Las Vegas — which could give him an important boost in Nevada, which has moved its caucus to be the second in the nation after Iowa.

While union membership has declined — it now accounts for just 12% of the workforce — its political activity has soared. In 2004 and 2006 unions were by far the biggest independent spenders. Getting union support could provide a much needed jump start for Edwards's flagging campaign. "He's been working hard for a long time — since he left the Senate — courting the union vote," said O'Sullivan, who met with Edwards in the spring of 2005 at his Georgetown townhouse. Still, he said, his union is not committed and, he predicted, few would be any time soon. As one labor official noted: why endorse now when you may be able to extract more promises later?



Find this article at:

<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1650385,00.html>

BLOG | Posted 08/07/2007 @ 9:16pm

Laboring Democrats

Marc Cooper

Before a crowd of 15,000 union members at Chicago's Soldiers Field Tuesday eve, the field of Democratic presidential candidates jabbed and sparred at an AFL-CIO sponsored forum, but no knockouts were delivered.

Both Barack Obama and John Edwards took some rhetorical swings at front-runner Hillary Clinton, chiding her for being too much of an insider and trying to exploit her affirmation over the weekend that she had no problem accepting campaign contributions from lobbyists. "You've got to have a president in the White House who is not subject to the whims of corporate lobbyists," Obama said in a direct reference to Clinton.

Edwards joined the attack saying: "You will never see a picture of me on the front of Fortune magazine saying I am the candidate that big corporate America is betting on," Edwards said, clearly referring to a picture of Hillary that recently appeared on the magazine cover. "That is one thing that will never happen. That's one thing you can take to the bank."

But Clinton didn't flinch under the pressure from rivals. She spoke with ease and visible passion, shrugging off the attacks. "The other campaigns have been using my name a lot," she said with a sarcastic grin. "For 15 years, I have stood up against the right-wing machine and I've come out stronger," Clinton said with a rising voice. "So if you want a winner who knows how to take them on, I'm your girl," she said to loud applause.

Obama and Edwards also found themselves on the receiving end of some verbal punches. Senator Chris Dodd tweaked Obama for his recent suggestion that, if President, he might use unilateral force to go after Al Qaeda in Pakistan. In perhaps his strongest moment during the debate, an indignant Obama responded by saying: "I find it amusing that those who helped authorize the biggest foreign policy disaster in our generation are now criticizing me for focusing on the right battlefield instead of the wrong battlefield in the war on terror." Senators Dodd, Biden and Clinton all voted to initially authorize the war in Iraq.

Edwards, who has aggressively courted labor and taken a series of populist stances, found himself at time upstaged by Ohio Congressman Dennis Kucinich. Though the latter is only polling about 2% among Democrats, his progressive discourse deeply resonates among labor audiences. His promise to repeal NAFTA and to institute single-payer universal health care if elected president drew loud ovations.

Tuesday's debate, however, might have little impact on who labor finally decides to endorse. The AFL-CIO is expected to release its individual unions to endorse whomever they please, foregoing a unified rubber stamp. Clinton is almost a sure bet for the powerful AFSCME public employees union, the real center of political gravity inside the Federation. The auto workers might go with Edwards. Ditto for the Steelworkers.

Still undecided is the 1.8 million member Service Employees International Union, the motor force of American labor's rival federation known as Change To Win. SEIU has leaned heavily toward Edwards but also contains within ranks strong pockets of support for both Obama and Clinton. The SEIU meets next month to consider its own endorsement choices.

All of labor has been a tad gun shy this cycle, still trying to assimilate the bitter experience of 2004. Early on in that previous contest, both AFSCME and the SEIU came out for insurgent Howard Dean only to see him collapse in the Iowa caucuses. AFSCME quickly recanted and switched to Kerry. The SEIU stuck with Dean even after it was clear his candidacy was doomed.

So as labor contemplates its choices, it finds itself today confronted with the dilemma that anguishes a lot of Democrats: do you go with who you like? Or do you go with who you think you are going to win.

Nothing about Tuesday's debate seemed to change that dynamic.

Cross-posted at www.marccooper.com

MARC AMBINDER

A REPORTED BLOG ON POLITICS

The AFL-CIO Support Card

07 Aug 2007 02:04 pm

CHICAGO -- Tomorrow, the AFL-CIO executive council is expected to free its members unions to endorse whichever presidential candidate they want. For the second cycle in a row, there will be no unified labor endorsement.

Here's who's looking at whom: (UPDATE: It seems like Jonathan Tasini [had the same idea](#). Compare his guesses to mine; some are the same, some are different.)

Expect Sen. John Edwards to receive several early endorsements. He has the inside track to get the nod of the politically-active United Steelworkers, according to labor observers, and is a lock for the Carpenters. Edwards's rivals expect him to be endorsed by several other industrial unions as well, including the United Auto Workers, which is otherwise occupied with contract negotiations this month. A UAW sanction would help Edwards in Michigan, which might hold a presidential nominating caucus in January of 2008.

Sen. Hillary Clinton has a shot at two union nods: it's likely that she'll eventually get the endorsement of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees -- AFSCME -- whose president, Gerald McEntee, is very close to Bill and Hillary Clinton. (McEntee endorsed Bill Clinton in 1992, breaking with other unions.) Clinton is also in the running for the American Federation of Teachers endorsement, but it's unclear whether they will endorse. NAFTA has forever closed doors to the entire Clinton family.

Three candidates are credibly vying for the the International Association of Fire Fighters endorsement: Clinton, Sen. Chris Dodd, and Gov. Bill Richardson.

Union insiders believe that the coveted SEIU endorsement -- and remember here that the SEIU isn't part of the AFL-CIO -- will go to John Edwards, Barack Obama or no one. Hillary Clinton is liked by some members of the SEIU board but a major SEIU player -- local 1199 chief Dennis Rivera -- has never really been a fan. Another Change to Win union -- UniteHere -- is partial to Edwards.

When the AFL-CIO admits its ability to reach a consensus, will John Edwards be blamed? He threw himself into the labor community after 2004, joining picket lines, stumping on minimum wage votes and raising money for labor-endorsed candidates. He

has proposed the most labor-friendly policies so far, culminating this week with his "smart and safe" trade initiative. That the AFL-CIO did not coalesce around him may say something about his electability or it may mean nothing at all.

Two other reasons why the AFL-CIO could not reach a consensus: Chris Dodd and Joe Biden. It's easy for John Edwards to talk about labor friendly policies; Biden and Dodd can cite a long record of actually working in labor's interests. They are too politically savvy (and realistic) to expect endorsements, but they do expect unions to not endorse anyone else.



Labor 2008: The Battle Begins

by [Seth Michaels](#), Aug 5, 2007

“You in the room are the people who are going to move a victorious 2008 labor program.”

That’s how Karen Ackerman, political director of the AFL-CIO, introduced the 2007 Battleground States Conference today in Chicago. It’s one of the most important political events in this election cycle. In front of an audience of labor leaders and activists from across the country, the AFL-CIO’s political team laid out the strategy to win in the 2008 elections and to improve life for millions of working families.

“America is still not working for working families,” said AFL-CIO President John Sweeney. He pointed to the filibuster of the Employee Free Choice Act, the anti-worker decisions of John Roberts’ Supreme Court, the flawed “free trade” system and the failures of American health care. Sweeney said the union movement’s political victories in 2006 were just a start and 2008 will be a “breakthrough opportunity.” He described Tuesday’s AFL-CIO Presidential Candidates Forum as “the biggest job interview in history,” with thousands attending and millions watching on MSNBC and listening on XM Radio. (The broadcast, with “Countdown” host [Keith Olbermann](#) as moderator, begins at 7 p.m. Eastern, 6 p.m. Central. Find out more [here](#).)

“We are ready for the fight of our lives, and we are going to win,” said AFSCME President Gerald McEntee, who chairs the AFL-CIO’s Political Education Committee. No matter what the polls look like today, he said, the 2008 election is bound to be a difficult, close fight. He was enthusiastic and confident, though, about what the union movement will accomplish.

In 2006, the labor movement led its largest political outreach in history. It worked. Union members voted 74 percent for union-endorsed candidates, thanks to the education and mobilization their unions provided. This made the crucial difference in defeating party-line Republicans who had been blocking progressive policies, like an increase in the minimum wage. “No other entity in this country speaks to so many voters,” Ackerman said. “We have to make sure everyone knows this...unions make the difference in this country.” The people we elect need to know this, Ackerman said, so we can hold them accountable and make sure they deliver the policies working families need.

Last year the AFL-CIO reached out to 13.4 million voters in 34 states. Next year the program will be even larger, speakers at the conference said. It starts this year, when AFL-CIO unions mobilize to replace Kentucky Gov. Ernie Fletcher, notorious for allegations of corruption and for discarding collective bargaining agreements with public employees. It will continue in 2008, when the AFL-CIO will activate millions of working families to vote for pro-worker candidates all around the country, from mayors' offices and state legislatures all the way to the White House.

For a long-time political observer, there's a real thrill in being in this room, getting to see the roadmap to victories in 2008 for the union movement.



How Do We Get the Progressive Netroots to Care About Workers' Rights?

by [Tula Connell](#), Aug 3, 2007

Educating the netroots about the importance of workers' rights issues is critical for us in the labor movement. And also extremely difficult. While today's [Slugging It Out with the Christian Right](#) workshop by Working America here at [YearlyKos](#) drew a solid crowd—the workshop focused on grassroots political action—a handful took part in the Bread, Blogs and Roses workshop this afternoon. Is it because Bread, Blogs and Roses highlighted workers' struggles to form unions in workplaces where employers harass and intimidate them, rather than focusing on political action (the crowd here is very politically active)? Or was it just a matter of logistics—that is, the featured speaker next door drew the lions-share of the crowd with a discussion of his book on the “political brain”? Or do we really have a long way to go to convince the netroots that workplace issues are very much a part of our mutual progressive agenda?

The participants in the workshop, which featured staff at [American Rights at Work](#), the nation's worker advocacy group, took part in a lively and deeply felt discussion about communicating the importance of workers' efforts to form unions. Among featured speakers, registered nurse Maggie Nielsen, along with her co-workers at Resurrection Health Care, has sought to form a union with AFSCME here in Chicago. Nielsen shared her story (which you can read about [here](#); get the latest on Resurrection [here](#)) and described the short-staffing conditions that employees say have compromised quality patient care. In response, Resurrection management for the past four years has fought the efforts of the health care workers to form a union and improve that care.

Blogger and political activist [Nancy Scola](#), who blogged for us during the early months of the [Employee Free Choice Act](#) campaign this year, discussed her efforts to frame the workers' stories she heard at Resurrection and among Verizon workers attempting to form a union with the Communication Workers of America. Scola said she tried to reach the netroots by presenting workers' stories to in a way that made them engaging for blog readers. At the religion-oriented blog Street Prophets, for example, Scola said she framed the Resurrection campaign as one in which a Catholic-owned health system opposed workplace fairness. For the Verizon campaign, she focused on technical innovation.

Scola, who first got involved with the union movement when she took part in the Employee Free Choice Act campaign, helped frame the workshop discussion when she asked:

What can we do to make these issues connect?

Participants agreed that communicating our message means breaking out of the standard narratives about labor—the kind that stereotype union members and union workplaces. They also discussed how the nation’s historical emphasis on individualism—the American cowboy image—has worked against the idea of collective action. And they expressed the success they’ve had in framing economic issues by asking people if their children will be better off in the future than their parents.

At bottom, participants agreed, we need to make it clear to the netroots and the public that when we describe workers’ experiences on the job trying to form unions, the issue isn’t “only” about workers’ rights. It’s about improving the economy and taking back our nation for America’s middle class. And it’s about connecting union organizing with political action.

And oh, by the way. As I finish this post, a new workshop has begun in the room where Bread, Blogs and Roses just wrapped up. The topic is the political challenge of the Christian right. And the workshop is packed.

Labor in '07 not as big as Labor in '03

by [Jerome Armstrong](#), Wed Aug 01, 2007 at 10:26:07 AM EST

There's a [NYT's article](#) on the potential of Labor endorsements that is worth the read. The 55 member unions of the AFL-CIO will not endorse anyone until the federation has decided whether to make an overall endorsement, which would take a two-thirds majority to get their endorsement.

Last cycle, Gephardt & Dean wound up getting big support from labor, but that doesn't appear the route that the AFL-CIO's Sweeney, "We learned from the last time" and AFSCME's McEntee "We made a big error" are going to take this cycle. Change to Win is also not going to endorse; and though SEIU's Stern seems more open to it, it's not for sure that they will endorse.

So what's next:

If neither labor federation endorses, that would open the door to individual unions' endorsements. Union leaders said that the American Federation of Teachers and the Office and Professional Employees International Union were leaning toward Mrs. Clinton and that Unite Here, the Teamsters and the steelworkers were leaning toward Mr. Edwards. A Unite Here endorsement would be a boon in Nevada, because its Las Vegas local has 40,000 members and could dominate that state's Democratic caucuses.

While in the spin room after the SC Debate, I interviewed the campaign manager for Edwards, David Bonior, and asked him about the endorsements. He predicted that Edwards would receive the endorsement more than half of those unions that endorsed. He also predicted that "Culinary" (UNITE-HERE 622), which is [the big cahuna in NV politics](#), would go for Edwards.

Overall, it doesn't look like the Fall '07 labor endorsements will be as big a deal as were the Fall '03 labor endorsements. [David Sirota has an informative post up](#) on how Obama is not letting Edwards have the populist message all to himself. Obama is in a similar position, but any labor endorsements he gets will likely be Chicago-based, but he's got to make sure Edwards doesn't get labor endorsement momentum. And Clinton will be just as active in getting endorsements, or making sure that Edwards or Obama doesn't get them either, as well Dodd and Richardson.

The caveat that Bonior has there, *half of those that endorsed*, is that it might not be a very large number either way. The best-case scenario for Edwards, who was once presumed to have union support cornered, would seem to be him winning the Iowa caucus, and then getting the Culinary endorsement on the eve of the Nevada caucus; and Edwards/Bonior would likely have strong momentum to make the case going into the Michigan caucus.