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Hello Brothers and Sisters! It's so good to be here in the beautiful state of Florida and to take part in your statewide conference. I would especially like to thank my SEIU/longshoreman brother State Senator Tony Hill for inviting me, and all of you for joining forces to empower our community. I would also like to give a shout out to my SEIU brothers and sisters and to acknowledge SEIU executive board members Monica Russo and Martha Baker.

I've been asked to speak about the importance of organized labor setting up partnerships with community and civil rights organizations. Together we help to

transform our vision of civil and human rights into something real.

I think we owe it to all our constituents to look ahead and recommit ourselves to what needs to be done and then to do the right thing.

In simple terms, that means stepping up to the plate, being bold and unapologetic about forging an agenda that stands for the advancement of the African American community, and social justice not only for us, but for everyone.

[Pause]

It also means reaching out and enlisting – not the 40 percent who are registered to vote – but the rest of the *potential* electorate, unregistered and disaffected voters.

Here in Florida it may have more meaning than anywhere else. In fact, the nation is looking at Florida and waiting to see what you – especially people of African descent – will do in the 2004 Presidential race.

I know that each and every one of my brothers and sisters in the NAACP throughout Florida is working hard to see that we don't have a repeat of what happened in 2000.

I know you will see to it that no one will ever steal another election from us. Never again are we going to see people in our community and in our union disenfranchised like we did in 2000. And you've demonstrated just that!

After they stole the presidency, you filed a lawsuit and demanded an end to business as usual – and you won. The state of Florida has been put on notice, but there's more work to be done in organizing and registering those disaffected voters.

[Pause]

People of African descent in organized labor and the civil rights movement are joined at the hip. Not only are we the most reliable base of support for our respective communities, but our fates are inseparable.

The bond is sealed with our shared destiny of being forgotten, disrespected or taken for granted. But also, of standing up for people who don't have a voice. We must reach out to allies who stand for the values and ideals that we fight for every day.

This has been an eventful time for the civil rights movement and for the labor movement, a time for reflection and a time for action.

In August we marked the 40th Anniversary of the March on Washington. When it happened four decades ago, it could not have been successful without the NAACP leadership and the masses of NAACP branches and members from across the country. And I am proud to say that historic March was ignited in the first place by one of our nation's greatest trade unionist -- A. Phillip Randolph.

He understood that freedom for black people was inseparable from the struggle of working people, and it was not solely rooted in economic empowerment, but also political mobilization.

[Pause]

I firmly believe that being a union member is not just about a fatter paycheck. It's about being part of a movement that believes in the worth and dignity of every human being.

Just as Black folks marched, bled, were beaten, hosed down, and threatened with dogs, unionists also died so we could have a 40-hour work week and child labor laws so our children would not be exploited. Many sacrificed their jobs so we could have a 15-minute break, a minimum wage, and the right to organize.

But they did not do it alone. They did it by uniting with allies, knowing that in unity there is strength.

[Pause]

Borrowing a page from the civil rights movement, more than 1,000 Immigrant Freedom Riders boarded buses in Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, and headed across the country in September. These modern day Freedom Riders traveled from the West Coast to the East Coast to put immigration issues squarely on the national agenda.

The Freedom Riders arrived in Washington, DC on October 1st to meet with members of Congress. They had spent nearly two weeks traveling across the country, stopping in more than 100 cities along the way, to gather support and to show that immigration is a civil rights issue.

Immigrant people work hard, pay taxes, and serve in our armed forces. A recent study estimates that they contribute at least \$300 billion to the U.S. economy annually, and 58,000 immigrants serve in our military services. And even though they deserve a fair chance at the American Dream, their rights are routinely violated.

We can't close our eyes to this. When one group of workers is exploited, it hurts all workers.

And immigration is a Black issue, just as it is a Brown issue. Brothers and sisters, we are a nation of immigrants. Eleven percent of the Black population in this country are immigrants.

As the nation's largest and fastest growing labor union, SEIU has made organizing around immigrant rights one of our highest priorities.

We are working to build a united front so that these workers who happen to have not been born in this country will not be exploited by employers who just see them as cheap labor, and who use immigrant workers to play the divide and conquer game.

I am proud that SEIU was an important part of the Immigrant Freedom Rides. This was an historic moment in the struggle for working people. And I tell you it was heartening to see brothers and sisters supporting the Freedom Riders. Those who came out understood that unity gives us strength.

But it was not enough of us there to really demonstrate that our destinies are intertwined. We must use events like the freedom rides to send a message and make a statement for the communities in which we live and serve.

[Pause]

You probably know that this administration has pretty much written off the Black community as a source of support for the 2004 election. But they have a strategy to court Latinos and try to capitalize on the Latino vote even as they implement policies that undermine the interest of the Latino community.

It is important for us to understand that, and not let their divisive tactics work. Our goal should be to build multiracial coalitions whenever possible.

No ethnic or racial group has a lock on any issue – especially not injustice.

[Pause]

Blacks. Asians. Latinos. Whether we're immigrants or not, we are all struggling for decent wages, adequate health care, safe communities and quality schools for our children.

As single and separate groups, we cannot achieve victories. Separately we are a minority, but united we are the majority!

Uniting people who are similar is easy. What's really hard is uniting people who are different and finding the common links that make us all the same. Dr. King understood this. When he left Alabama and went to Chicago, he quickly realized that it was not only about racial justice but it was also about economic justice.

That's why he started the Poor People's Campaign and died vowing to amass a new movement of people of all colors connected by the common struggle of economic justice.

That great organizer of farm workers Cesar Chavez also understood this. He united Filipino, Puerto Rican, Mexican and even Arabic-speaking workers into a great movement.

He always prided himself on seeking "minimum dramatics" to win maximum results. For Cesar Chavez, the struggle was about what he called "winning small victories constantly."

His was a movement that was built on its humility and might. It amounted to giving the poorest people who worked at producing food, food for themselves. Not just bread to eat, but dignity that would allow them to believe in their worth as workers and as human beings.

And Reverend Jesse Jackson understands this. He always reminds us that the majority of poor people in this country are not Black or Latino. They are White. And they don't all live in the Appalachians.

[Pause.]

The Freedom Ride could not have come at a better time. President Bush has failed to make citizenship more attainable and hard-working immigrants are increasingly under siege. They are facing a new kind of racial profiling since 9/11 under the guise of anti-terrorism. It's open

season on people who look foreign, especially people of color who may happen to be immigrants. They are being rounded up and held for months without being charged or having access to lawyers.

Just last week, the INS raided Wal-Mart stores across the country to arrest undocumented workers who were contracted by an independent cleaning service. Wasn't that a disgraceful display. Instead of cracking down on Wal-Mart – the largest employer in the world with one of the worst labor policies imaginable – they go after the janitors and service workers as if they were terrorists.

But Wal-Mart doesn't just discriminate against immigrants. Women are suing for sex discrimination, while thousands of workers are suing the company for forcing them to work overtime without pay.

[Pause]

These days a lot of policies are being made and money spent in the name of fighting terrorism.

I consulted with Webster's dictionary regarding the definition of terrorism.

Terrorism is defined as: *the act of terrorizing; use of force or threat to demoralize and intimidate; the use of a political weapon or policy; the act to coerce or create fear due to the threat or act of violence.*

So, based on Webster's definition, there is a terrorist living at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

[Pause]

It's an act of terrorism to declare a war against a country under a pretext that ends up being a big lie; placing our young men and women in harm's way, disrupting families and leaving an untold death toll of both U.S. troops and Iraqi people.

It's an act of terrorism to allocate untold billions to a battle that seems to have no end.

It's an act of terrorism to rob billions of dollars from the federal budget to give tax cuts to the rich, creating a deficit so large that our great-grandchildren will still be paying the debt.

It's an act of terrorism to divert precious resources from domestic spending that could be spent on the 43 million Americans without health insurance.

It's an act of terrorism to maintain an immigration policy that gives automatic entrance to any Cuban who steps on Florida's shores and common criminal status to all Haitians trying to penetrate those same borders; separating young Haitian children from their mothers and holding them in detention camps not fit for animals.

It's an act of terrorism to perpetuate a criminal justice system that enlists more African American men in prisons and the court system than in colleges and universities.

It's an act of terrorism to hold individuals in indefinite detention, denying them access to lawyers, or family members and not even charging them with any crime.

It's an act of terrorism to push through Congress laws that violate our civil liberties and to cynically call those laws the "USA PATRIOT Act."

[Pause]

The NAACP knows all about the Patriot Act. You know that thanks to the Patriot Act, the government can find out your medical history, your credit record, what books you buy, and where you go on the Internet without probable cause.

You know that thanks to the Patriot Act, the government can search your home or your job when you are away, take photographs and sometimes your property and not tell you until much later.

And you know because of *resistance* to the Patriot Act, John Ashcroft was criss-crossing the country recently, trying to convince Americans that those of us who value civil liberties and civil rights are wrong; that we should allow the government to do even more to “enhance” domestic security.

[Pause]

Our mission at SEIU is to organize and build a united and strong front of workers. But we also understand we have to be advocates for justice and dignity for all people. We have to be a voice for those who feel powerless.

That’s why SEIU is fighting against expansion of the Patriot Act. We have joined our allies, like the NAACP, and are supporting efforts to restore our civil liberties.

Every one of us in this room has to live up to that mission. Brothers and sisters, we are traveling right now through a very dark tunnel. We cannot rest until we see the light.

And as I close, I leave you with the words of the president emeritus of the SCLC Joseph Lowry; and I paraphrase: “We have come too far, fought too hard, marched too long and died too young to go backward.” So let’s get busy and finish the job we started in the 2000 Presidential election.

Thank You!