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Thank you Saul Parker, my homeboy, for that kind introduction. It's wonderful to see so many familiar faces from Northern California and from across the country.

And good afternoon brothers and sisters! We're glad you all joined us for this very important meeting dedicated to building on our collective strength and using that momentum to grow stronger!

I am told that my task is to help drive home the point that without organizing we have no future. But without a political center, our organizing has no purpose.

SEIU didn't get to where we are today – 1.5 million strong and growing – without infusing our campaigns with political activism.

But this political mandate doesn't begin nor end at our union doorsteps.

[Pause]

As we all know, every aspect of our lives is driven by politics in very basic terms from cradle to grave.

When we're born, it's a birth certificate. When we fall in love, it's the marriage license. When we fall out of love – for some of us anyway – it's the divorce decree. And when it's the end of our journey here, we can't even be buried without the death certificate.

Every aspect of how we function is affected by some law or policy adopted or administered by officials – elected or appointed. That’s power, isn’t it?

But the real power rests in the hands of the people who put them in office and who can change, defeat or remove the politicians and reverse their policies.

In fact, for those of us who are public service employees – we can safely say we have the power to hire or fire our bosses through our political action and simply by electing people who represent our interests.

[Pause]

This forum with you this afternoon comes as the Bush administration thrusts us into the threshold of war in Iraq. At any moment the bombs may be raining down on Baghdad and innocent Iraqi children.

My heart goes out to the millions of American families who are being torn apart, separated as young men and women – both in the regular services and the reserve corps – are being called off to war. I shutter to think of the untold numbers of human lives that face peril because of the reckless policies of the Bush Administration.

I stand before you eager to grapple with issues of justice – not only in the Middle East – but right here on the home front. Making those links is critical.

Keep in mind that our mission at SEIU is to organize and build a united and strong front of workers. But also to fight for justice and dignity for *all* working people.

Every one of us in this room has to live up to that mission – whether you are a member organizer, a local leader or part of our international staff.

We have an agenda that is driven by local, state and national issues. Each of us has a responsibility to understand and embrace our political program.

The future of our political program lies in encouraging and supporting our members to run for elected office, developing our Member Political Organizers program, increasing our COPE contributions and educating our rank and file members on the importance of registering to vote...and then voting!

This will ensure that we – not the politicians chart our future.

[Pause]

Brothers and sisters, one of the most important aspects of power is not simply knowing how to use it, but knowing that you have it in the first place.

We need to be reminded that many of our political allies understand this better than we do. They can count the real and *the potential* power that rests within our ranks.

So to simply say we are the largest or the fastest growing union is not enough. There's more untapped potential that benefits not only us, but also our allies who we've elected to political office or who know that with our backing they can remain in office.

Don't take my word for it. Let's take a look at this brief video presentation, and hear it directly from some of our political allies from across the country.

*[Six-minute video presentation includes sound bites and clips from local, state and national elected officials.]*

Well we heard from our allies, but what about the flip side of that coin? What about this new, compassionate face of the Republicans Party?

Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist is the primary messenger. He embodies that kinder gentler theme.

He has made millions from the family business, Health Care Associates.

Need I remind you this HCA reportedly defrauded Medicare, billed for ineligible expenses, and paid kickbacks to doctors for referrals.

All the celebration about the protests that helped oust Trent Lott as the Senate Majority leader rings hollow when we look at where we are today.

Frist voted with Senator Lott more than 90 percent of the time, rejecting measures of importance to SEIU and

working families, including election reform, an increase in the minimum wage, a prescription drug plan for the elderly and employment discrimination.

[Pause]

We know that it requires more than a change of face and a clever strategy to win our favor.

I think we within SEIU owe it to our members to look ahead and recommit ourselves to what needs to be done and then to doing 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 working people, social justice and not just equality – but equity as well.

[Pause]



What we have to do is straight forward and traditional. It means helping our friends to understand they should not run away from the label “liberal” as if it’s an incurable disease.

It means not allowing others to determine who our leaders are. It means going to our base because when the chips are down that’s who we can depend on.

And 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.

We must reach out to allies who stand for the values and ideals that we fight for every day.

We cannot be successful in a society where all the important decisions – about the economy, about war and peace and about our basic legal rights – are made by a tiny, self-interested elite group of wealthy, right-wing men like George W. Bush, Dick Cheney and John Ashcroft.

[Pause]

SEIU cannot shy away from battles against the enemies of social justice. The only way we can win is by standing up and standing together.

As trade unionist, we cannot improve the lives of our members if we ignore the problems they face at home and in their community. We must be politically active and engaged.

[Pause]

In this Bush era new figures show that jobless rates are higher than they've been in 20 years.

The budget deficit is swelling to historic proportions. Crime has soared. The stock market and our retirement funds are in the toilet. And consumer confidence is at an all-time low.

In some places, like here in Nevada, a gallon of gas is as much as \$2.50 and we are on the brink of war that many believe is about oil and power.

It is a war with a price tag that no one has even been able to truly estimate.

And on the home front, assaults continue on civil rights and civil liberties led by Attorney General John Ashcroft. Under the guise of antiterrorism, the Bush administration has imposed a dragnet on thousands of workers including 150 of SEIU's Local 1877 members in Los Angeles.

This administration's policy goes beyond targeting immigrants and airport security.

[Pause]

Fighting for social justice should be a union priority and it is with SEIU.

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.

The skills we learn fighting for justice are the same skills we need to build a stronger SEIU and a more united front with our friends in elected office.

I am convinced that the struggle for social justice makes all of us stronger.

[Pause]

This conference is vital because it gives us a compass for guiding new battles for home care workers, head start workers, health care workers, janitors, security officers and public employees.

Whether those struggles are around mandatory overtime, workers right to organize, to flex our political action muscle or collective bargaining, we need our allies and the partnerships forged by our political activism.

We must not let the sacrifices of so many of our heroes be in vain.

We have an obligation to continue the work they started and make stronger together more than a slogan.

We want to make the world better, not just for us, but for our children and the generations after them.

We in SEIU must continue to be the conscience of organized labor. We collectively have a responsibility to make politicians – friends and foes alike – live up to their rhetoric, or expose it for what it is.

[Pause]

In closing, I would be remiss if I ended without fulfilling the promise I made to a trade unionist I met during my visit last year to Kyoto, Japan.

This man was a newborn when the Atomic bomb was dropped on his home. He and all his family members are survivors of Hiroshima.

Like people all over the world, this Japanese trade unionist is truly fearful of this U.S. administration and the school yard bully-my-way-or-the-highway mentality.

Because he has an understanding of war that we have never experienced – even in the aftermath of September 11 – my Japanese friend views the Bush administration not, only as a world power, but a very dangerous power.

[Pause]

We must be mindful of this madness, and raise our voices against the fear and instability that the Bush administration has unleashed across the planet.

I leave you with this reflection: *Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding.*

The words of Albert Einstein.

And as a closing thought for those who may be tired as we continue the long but winnable trudge uphill, I paraphrase the Reverend Joseph Lowery of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference: We've come too far, fought too hard, marched too long and died too young to go backwards.

Brothers and sister, let's get busy.

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