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Good afternoon brothers and sisters! Thank you Andy for that introduction. And thank you all for that warm reception.

It's so good to be here in San Francisco with all of you. And it is especially wonderful to join my brothers and sisters from my home union, Local 616.

I can truly say that this afternoon is special because I am returning to where I began. And it is here that I get revived and replenished.

So in short, brothers and sisters, it is good to be home.

[Pause]

Three decades, a total of 31 years, I have devoted to the Service Employees International Union: as a union activist; an organizer; a negotiator; a leader – but always as an advocate for working people.

I have learned so much from so many of you, especially from my rank-and-file brothers and sisters. Your instincts and grasp on issues are extraordinary.

From the very beginning, you taught me the importance of forging a political program built on partnerships with the community, political action and social justice.

So I leave you, not ending that work, but continuing it.

With the same commitment to political organizing, I join the Coalition on Black Civic Participation, heading up the Unity '04 Campaign.

I am so excited to embark on this new path because it gives all of us a greater opportunity to expand and deepen our alliances beyond organized labor.

A united front that is bigger than us is so essential for what we need to do in the next five months. That's why I want to talk just a little about the political challenges that face us today.

Four years ago I stood before you at our Convention and talked about what our work and our world would be like under George W. Bush.

[Pause]

Well, there's no need to speculate. We know all too painfully well the answer. And the terror was unimaginable.

That makes me want to take a moment and talk about the seriousness of the charge before us. We must soundly put an end to the phenomena of what I call Bushism.

What is Bushism? It amounts to turning what's right inside out; and what's just upside down.

It's double-talk -- a foreign language understood only by a tiny clique of right -wing ideologues who embody the George W. Bush legacy.

[Pause]

And what is this legacy?

This is a man who, in the first year of his presidency, used his executive orders to attack workers' rights and unions, including stripping federal workers of their union representation.

He overturned the nation's first standards to protect workers from repetitive strain and other ergonomic injuries.

He selected a man for attorney general – John Ashcroft – whose career has been marked by the most reactionary views on civil rights, women's rights, civil liberties.

And now, he is poised to outsource 850,000 of the 1.7 million federal jobs, decimating federal trade unions. [Pause]

We all know about the disputed election and the question of whether he should even be in the White House. But what does he do when he gets there?

Spends the surplus.

Bankrupts the treasury.

And creates the biggest annual deficit in history.

He presides over the biggest plunge in the stock market; and surpasses all presidential records for campaign fundraising.

He cuts unemployment benefits for more jobless Americans than any president in history;

He presides over the highest gasoline prices in history and the worst energy crisis ever;

He signs more laws and executive orders amending the Constitution and removes more freedoms and civil liberties than any president in history.

He declares war over weapons of mass destruction that never existed.

We all know he went AWOL from the National Guard. But he has no problem sending young men and women to fight his unjust war in Iraq.

His war is killing untold thousands of Iraqi people, and the body bags of U.S. soldiers keep coming home.

In fact, brothers and sisters, the weapons of mass destruction are being deployed right from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue -- not only on the Middle East, but on the American people! [Pause]

I cannot over-emphasize the importance of our voter registration, voter education, voter mobilization and then voting!

We must overwhelm Bushism with our collective power.

[Pause]

And just as our political fight is important, our fight for social and economic justice must be redoubled.

Four years ago on the floor of this convention, I spoke to the social justice resolutions submitted by my Local Union 616, and my adopted Local Union 617. I am proud to say I was the author of many of those resolutions that would be the foundation of our social justice program.



Those resolutions didn't emerge out of thin air. I heard you. Those resolutions I advanced were about supporting and strengthening our civil and human rights caucuses:

- Immigrant rights
- Labor constituency organizations
- Health care
- Driving while black and brown
- Partnerships with community and civil rights organizations

Your overwhelming support of these issues led to President Stern's appointment of a social and economic justice committee. I was given the privilege to help guide the important work of the committee.

I stand before you at this convention to proudly state that a social and economic justice agenda will be brought before this body for adoption.

Your vast concerns were like the chords in a symphony; the collective instruments in an orchestra. But in order to strike harmony we must all be following the same rhythm.

Despite all our important individual concerns, let us keep our eyes on the prize. We must not be diverted or distracted from the issues that unite us.

When they try to divert our attention to issues like gay marriage, tell them, 'Let's talk about how to improve the deterioration of our public schools.'

When they raise the issues of morality, tell them 'Let's talk about the immorality of 81 million people in the wealthiest country in the world without health care.'

[Pause]

As I have said before, fighting for social justice must be a union priority. 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.

Ours must be a movement that says, "Yes, I am my brother's – and my sister's – keeper."

Our union cannot be successful in a society where your family's wealth and income are determined by the color of your skin.

We cannot improve the lives of our members at work if we ignore the problems they face at home, in their communities and abroad.

Many of us have struggled against injustice and discrimination that was based on the color of our skin, or where we came from, or who we love and marry; or our legal status.

Through these many battles, we have learned important lessons about solidarity and collective action.

The skills one learns fighting for justice are the same skills one needs to build a strong labor movement.

The struggle for social justice makes our union stronger. You have the might within your ranks to make “Stronger Together” more than a mere slogan.

Public sector workers -- you are the only workers who can hire and fire your bosses through effective political action campaigns.

Health care and home care workers – you are the angels of mercy that show the compassion and humanity of our work force.

And building services members – you blend hard work, technical expertise and smarts to make your job seem so easy that anyone thinks they could do it – until he or she tries – and doesn't last an hour!

Thank you all – through your deeds and actions – for demonstrating the potential and viability of our union.

Thank you to my government affairs staff for your commitment and steadfast understanding of our important mission.

I want to also thank two people who gave me my professional start in this labor movement:

Diane Winset, who hired me at Local 616; and Tim Nesbitt, who helped me to raise my voice on behalf of my members.

[Pause]

Brothers and sisters, my tenure as Executive Vice President has been tough and tremendous.

I came to the job with a full plate. But it has been gratifying to oversee the development of our political program: international affairs, government/legislative affairs; retired members program; young adults program, known as Generation S; our activists lobbying training program; and our civil and human rights programs.

I have been fortunate to travel throughout the country and around the world. It has helped me understand clearly how our destiny is intertwined with brothers and sisters from across the globe who are fighting against exploitation, not only as workers, but as human beings.

I have been able to see first-hand the ties between our movement and workers everywhere:

Child care workers in Venezuela without adequate toilet facilities or plumbing;

Nurses in a South African hospital assigned to care for as many as 15 patients per shift;

And government workers in Japan who have created model programs for occupational safety and childcare facilities.

SEIU continues to be the fastest growing union, but we remain a force that has not fully flexed its muscle.

I leave you with the challenge to be the conscience of this union. Whether rank-and-file activists, union staff or elected leadership, you have a responsibility to make SEIU live up to its rhetoric.

I leave you, turning the reins over to new leadership, hoping they learn that the most important constituents are the ones they don't hear or see. They are the ones who need your ear and whose voice gets sounded through your leadership and action.

I leave you feeling much richer than I began because I can draw on your friendship and solidarity.



But foremost, I draw on the blessings of my family. They are here with me in the flesh and the spirit.

I draw on the strength and conviction of my mother; the dignity and grace of my father; the courage and fight of my oldest sister. All of them I love and miss very much.

I draw on the protection of my brothers; the support of my youngest sister; the love and admiration of my son; and the joy and happiness from my grandchildren, nieces, nephews and the rest of my family.

To my union brothers and sisters, I urge that you take the time to listen to each other. If you can listen and learn, if you can agree to disagree, and discuss

the issues openly and honestly, then you will get it right.

You will find the answers that our members, our union, our nation and our world need.

Brothers and sisters, thank you for your support during my extraordinary journey!

Godspeed in your continued trod forward!