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Good Morning. It's great being here in New Orleans with my southern region brothers and sisters. Thank you for the invitation and your southern hospitality. The Southern Region is to be commended for having the dedication, tenacity and commitment to continue with regional conferences. As you may know, I am a proponent of regional conferences. It is important for members and leaders across the region to assemble, share ideas and strategies, and support with each other. Almost every progressive program in this union has come through gatherings such as this one. So I thank you, and I salute all of you for being here in New Orleans.

This gathering is a statement on your commitment to building on our collective strength and using that momentum to grow stronger!

I am here to 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. In the Southern Region, you all know this better than anyone.

You have refused to allow the barriers of a reactionary tradition to be an impediment. By your presence and your consistently growing ranks you are making an important statement that a progressive union movement is unstoppable, even in right to work states.

Your commitment provides the inspiration for the building of a political movement throughout the South and across the country.

Brothers and sister, I want to stress that 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!

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 bad policies.

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

[Pause]

This forum with you this morning comes as the Bush administration continues to wage its war in Iraq and its war on the American people. Despite Bush’s declaration of victory, the bombs have not stopped dropping in Iraq.

As we know from the news this week, the Administration has declared a new victory with the killings of Saddam's sons.

But look no further than the daily headlines and we know that the Iraqis are not the only ones suffering casualties. Every day since the so-called shooting war has ended, we get news of another U.S. soldier dead at the hands of Iraqi guerilla warriors.

Many of the U.S. service people are begging to come home and are wondering – just like the Iraqi people – why they are still there.

The administration calls it peace keeping, but all we see is instability, occupation and death. We can count the toll to the billions that are spent each month as the U.S. occupation continues (over three *billion* a month).

And at the same time the toll is being felt by U.S. service people in Iraq, their family members at home are also suffering.

Like many other Americans, they are reeling from the impact of an economic recession that has plunged this country into all kinds of historic lows.

Bush and his history-making reign - I will come back to that later.

[Pause]

But 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 activist, a local leader or part of our rank-and-file.

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, we cannot be successful in our work and advocacy when all the important decisions – about the economy, about war and peace and our basic legal and civil 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]

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. Consumer confidence is at an all-time low, and our civil liberties are eroding daily.

(NOTE: tell them a Moussaui story)

Don't take my word for it. Let me share a little history lesson on what I call Bushisms.

These facts, compiled by a professor at Indiana University, include some little-known realities. But all of them are a sad and telling commentary about the so-called leader of the Free World.

He bought an oil company, but couldn't find any oil in Texas. The company went bankrupt shortly after he sold all his stock.

He brought the Texas Rangers baseball team in a sweetheart deal that took land using tax-payer money. His biggest decision while at the helm of the Rangers was to trade Sammy Sosa to the Chicago Cubs.

What troubles me is not only what we know about him, but also what we don't know.

We know about at least one conviction for drunk driving in Maine, but his Texas driving record has been erased.

He went AWOL from the National Guard and deserted the military during the Viet Nam war. But he refused to talk about that period in his life.

Despite wide speculation about his drug use, he would not take a drug test or answer any questions about drug use.

All records of any Security and Exchange Commission investigations into his insider trading are sealed. So are all minutes of meetings for any public corporations he served on.

With Daddy's help, and no experience except running for Congress and losing, he got elected Governor of Texas.

He cut taxes and bankrupted the Texas government to the tune of billions in borrowed money. He also set the record for putting more people to death than any Governor in American history.

[Pause]

Then, he goes on to become President of the United States. We all know about the disputed Florida election and the question of whether he should even be in the White House.

While that's a subject of debate in some circles, it is an undisputed fact that he lost the popular vote and was installed in office by Supreme Court justices appointed by his Dad.

What does he do in the White House?

He spends the surplus. Bankrupts the treasury. And creates the biggest annual deficit in history.

He sets the record for the biggest ever-plunge in the stock market. And that's only the beginning!

He has scored a number of other noteworthy firsts:

The first year in office he rakes up more vacation days than any president in history.

Surpasses all presidential records for campaign fundraising trips.

Raises more money than any president in history and holds the all-time record for the most corporate campaign donations of any office holder in history.

Cuts unemployment benefits for more jobless Americans than any president in history.

Presides over the highest gasoline prices in history and the worst energy crisis ever.

Selects cabinet members who are collectively the richest ever to hold those positions.

Signs more laws and executive orders amending the Constitution than any president in history.

Removes more freedoms and civil liberties for Americans than any president in history.

Creates a country that has not been as divided since the civil war.

Dissolves more international treaties than any president in U.S. history

Sparks the United Nations to remove the United States from the human rights commission for the first time in history.

Wins the distinction as the first U.S. President viewed as the biggest threat to world peace and stability, according to the majority of Europeans polled on the subject.

He's the first U.S. president in history to unilaterally attack a sovereign nation against the will of the United Nations and the world community.

And sets the all-time record for sparking protests worldwide, sending 15 million people to the streets to protest his policy on Iraq. (*NOTE: Add comments about Bush's Africa photo-op*)

[Pause]

Brothers and sisters, I could go on and on about this incredible record. But instead of focusing any more of my attention on George W. Bush, I have to ask the question:

“What are we going to do about it?”

Can we allow Bush to add to this dubious resume another unbelievable fact that he served a second term in office?

I can only shiver at the notion. Think about the state of the planet as a result of four more years of George W. Bush. If our children and our grandchildren are to have any kind of quality of life, we must get rid of this man!

We have work to do. We must consider our role as foot soldiers in an army in which the enemy is our own complacency. We must unleash a new momentum that not only turns Bush out of office, but that makes our slogan, “Stronger Together” more than words.

I am convinced that the struggle for social justice makes all of us stronger. And there is no more important

struggle than reversing and stopping new Bushisms in the next Presidential election.

[Pause]

It's not just about the election. It's about the blood and sweat of activists who came before us.

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]

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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