

Bill Richardson for President

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Speech to the New Hampshire AFL-CIO Convention

04/30/2007

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I want to take this opportunity to thank and acknowledge all the hard working union members that are here with us today.

Today -- American workers are more productive than ever. But their real wages are shrinking---their pensions are threatened—and their health-care coverage is cut.

Meanwhile this administration cuts student loans, hands out tax breaks for companies that ship jobs overseas and wants to privatize social security.

America's workers are the backbone of our country and I am proud to stand with you here today ... and I want to thank you for standing with me throughout my career.

The men and women of the Labor movement are a primary reason why I have been able to accomplish so much in New Mexico.

- Creating more than 84,000 jobs in the last four years.
- Cutting one billion in taxes—not for the wealthy—but for working families
- And expanding access to health insurance to working families, and today every child five years or younger has access to health care coverage.

Their support helped me and the Democrats recapture state government after eight years of Republican rule. And it is only with the help of the hardworking men and women of Labor that Democrats will recapture the White House.

It's through that same hard work that the people of New Hampshire have a new minimum wage---a wage with dignity. After three years working side-by-side with labor, we've been able to do the same in New Mexico.

But I think we all know--raising the minimum wage is the best way to stand up for the working poor.

But, we need to stand up for the middle class too. And the best way we can do that is by supporting unions.

Raising state minimum wages is good, but not good enough. Raising the federal minimum wage is good, but not good enough. To renew America's middle class, we shouldn't stop until every worker's wage is a union wage.

And that starts with majority authorization. That doesn't just mean giving employees a chance to form unions by signing cards authorizing union representation. That also means swiftly punishing those employers who violate any worker's right to organize.

I believe the members organizations of AFL-CIO don't have to ask where I stand--

- As one of my first acts as Governor, I stood with the AFSCME, CWA, AFT and restored collective bargaining rights for public employees---with card-check recognition and fair share. There are no free riders in my state...period.

- I stood with the American Federation of Teachers—and together we created new standards, linked them to higher teacher salaries, and our teacher salaries have moved from 46th to 29th in the nation – and our teacher quality has jumped from 30th to 17th.
- I stood with CWA and together we a statewide project called Wire New Mexico to create a high-speed, high capacity data, voice and video communications backbone. That network will be installed, maintained and upgraded by union workers.
- I stood with the theatrical and stage employees union to invest state funds to train new technicians to work on more than \$1 billion dollars in film and television production over the last four years. That union has grown from 60 registered members to over 1400 and those productions are proudly stamped Made in the USA with a Union label.
- I stood with the New Mexico Building and Trades. When we financed the \$400 million construction for a new state hospital, we negotiated the first Public Works Project Labor Agreement in New Mexico history. That 100% union project is on-time and on-budget. And in my state, I made the prevailing wage a union wage. I also worked with the Building and Trades Department to create the toughest independent contractor law in the country. In New Mexico, we require independent contractors to be licensed as a business, have a written contract and control the work. Break the law—and you'll face a fine or spend some time in jail--a 100% union-built jail.
- And I stood with workers when I was President Clinton's Secretary of Energy. When I started, there was a disturbing number of staff, craftsmen, and many of your members who were sick or dying—I call them the "silent cold warriors." These brave men and women had served for decades supporting the critical research and tests to guarantee America's nuclear defense.

But, everyone was focused on what went into the air and water, not what was going into the bodies of our workers.

- First, I did what should have been done long ago—I apologized for the federal government's failure to protect these workers.
- Second, I worked with Congress and President Clinton to put together a nuclear worker compensation package--\$150,000 dollars per worker and payment of all medical expenses.
- I'm proud to say, to-date, it has dispensed more than \$2 billion to workers or their survivors—trying to right a terrible wrong.

(In New Mexico, labor sits at the head of the table). No I sit at the head of the table but we have union representatives on every commission affecting your membership, in my cabinet, all the way up to deputy chief of staff and former head of the New Mexico Building Trades, Brian Condit.

Over the years, unions and I have seen eye-to-eye a lot. As Governor I've been proud to receive the endorsement of every state labor union, the support of labor as Secretary of Energy, and in my 15 years in Congress I received an 88% rating from the AFL-CIO.

(And for the 12% who disagreed with me, I also have been endorsed by the NRA, and they would like to have a word with you. Just kidding)

I want to underscore an important point.

- In 1992 Unions households turned out 19% of the vote—the entire national vote—and Governor Clinton became the first Democratic president in a dozen years.
- In 2000 Unions turned out 25% of the vote—and Al Gore won.
- In 2006 Unions turned out in force and today, we have a Democratic Congress.

You've always done your part in helping Democrats. (Heck, you do more than your part).

It's now time Democrat's did ours.

Labor has a seat at my Cabinet table and a voice in my administration in New Mexico.

When I'm President, my Secretary of Labor will be from the ranks of organized labor.

You will sit at my Cabinet table and you will be the voice of labor--in my Administration.

Second, Democrats need to work to create new jobs---clean energy jobs.

Let me tell you about those 84-thousand new jobs in New Mexico. We're building biodiesel and ethanol plants, electric automotive and solar manufacturing sites, and providing new incentives to construct clean coal plants. We're reducing our dependence on foreign oil, beating global warming and creating thousands of high-wage jobs.

We've become the clean energy state. I want to make us the clean energy nation, and be America's first "Energy President."

Now, another President---Bill Clinton used to send me in to negotiate the freedom of American hostages and political prisoners. He'd say "Send Richardson, bad guys seem to like him."

And that's how I ended up negotiating face-to-face with people like Saddam Hussein, Fidel Castro, and the North Koreans. And every time, I brought Americans home.

I think we need the same sort of strong and focused diplomacy, with friends and foes alike, in order to adapt our foreign policy to the global nature of energy...the global catastrophe of global warming...and the disaster in Iraq.

We have to undo the damage...and the world is waiting.

But, if this president's foreign policy inexperience got us into this war, then it's going to take someone with real hands-on international experience to lead us out.

In the next nine months, I hope you will ask each candidate lot of questions.

Listen to what promises we make, but ask us what promises we've kept.

Listen to how we will unify our party, but ask us how we can unify the country.

Listen to how we will withdrawal from Iraq, but ask us how we will negotiate the peace.

Choose a candidate who's got the vision and experience—to win the presidency, to unify our country, and to renew our leadership in the world.

I believe I offer that vision and experience. I ask you to join me.

Let's end the division and bring our country together. Let's start fighting for things that matter—access to health care, quality education, better jobs, and creating a clean energy economy. Let's rebuild America's middle class by supporting every workers right to organize.

And because stubbornness isn't a foreign policy---Let's never be afraid to talk with our foes.

And let's have the courage to end this war in Iraq and renew America's diplomacy and reputation in the world.

Thank you.

God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.



