

Richard L. Trumka, AFL-CIO President
Speech calling for more diverse unions
2009 Diversity Summit
Pittsburgh, September 13, 2009

Thank you.

It's wonderful to be here looking out over all the faces of our movement, the future of our movement. Our commitment to diversity is on its way to becoming the reality, thanks to you and your hard work.

You're proving that the labor movement can change to reflect the diversity of our membership and our future membership.

I'm here to tell you that we **MUST** change. That is why we're seeking out and encouraging young people – people of color, people of all backgrounds and beliefs and sexual orientation. These are the labor leaders of tomorrow.

Yes, sisters and brothers, we **MUST** change – that is the secret to power. Your logo for this summit states it simply: **POWER** in diversity. It's people power – of all races and creeds and persuasions – coming together to advance us all. That's what unions are all about, brothers and sisters, that's the America we are.

When I am elected president of the AFL-CIO this week, I promise to recommit our movement to embracing diversity at every level. I am so proud to head a new leadership team at the AFL-CIO that is as diverse and as young as ever in our history.

I am very proud of Liz Shuler and Arlene Holt Baker for their leadership and their vision.

You know, Liz never stops thinking about tomorrow. She's got a lot of great ideas, youthful energy and tenacity. You heard from her earlier and especially about how we need to reach out to young workers – that's critical for our movement to grow.

I've been listening to Liz as she talks about the future and I couldn't agree more. Liz says – and I've heard this – that behind every great man are at least two great women. I couldn't agree more.

Women are not the minority in America and in American workplaces, and they should NOT be the minority in leadership of the American labor movement.

I was proud to see that three unions, the American Federation of Teachers, the Postal Workers and the Transport Workers, reported that more than 50 percent of their executive boards were either women or minorities, or both.

In AFT, 81 percent of the leadership is either women or minorities, or both. This is a union, I might add, that is led by a true champion of diversity – proudly lesbian and a champion of teachers and students and working families. We salute Randi Weingarten for her important contributions to our movement and I look forward to working with her to advance issues of diversity, teachers and professionals everywhere.

So I'm lucky that I have the counsel of labor leaders like Randi, as well as that of Liz and Arlene, my Dream Team. But we have a lot of work to do. For all of our promises, we have many challenges to achieve real diversity.

First, we must start with measuring our ability to change. Right now we don't know because we only have data from the 37 percent of our unions that participated in our survey.

And this is four years after the historic Resolution 2 at the 2005 Convention, when delegates unanimously declared that we must have diversity in our movement, particularly within union leadership. We must do better, and we will.

You know, everyone knows that this Diversity Summit is a result of the leadership of John Sweeney. He was determined to see it through, and we owe him so much.

John always has been inclusive. Under his watch our movement has grown more diverse. We salute him for his caring spirit and dogged determination to defend workers at every station.

I want you to know that I will be just as dogged in my determination to fulfill the goals of this summit and of our movement. I've always been committed to the goals of diversity in membership and in leadership.

With Resolution Number 2 in 2005, and Resolution Number 7 this Convention, we are raising the bar as we make our movement as diverse as our audience. And I use that term – audience – advisedly.

Our drive for diversity is more than just how we organize ourselves in our own unions. It's not just about our members. It's also about our future members, our potential members, and we can't forget that.

That's why your outreach to younger workers as a key goal for this summit is so important. Your unions are the testing ground for innovative new ways to reach new workers, and I applaud your efforts.

The Bricklayers are encouraging their locals to develop community partnerships, and the BAC International Masonry Institute has developed a program to mentor high school students. This is the kind of outreach we need and the Bricklayers and other unions are showing us how it can be done working at the local level.

AFSCME has a youth leadership development program that included a highly successful Next Wave Conference in Chicago last year. This is another model program and we salute you for your commitment to mentoring new leaders.

That is how we can foster diversity that works – and lasts – mentoring our young people so they will be ready to take the reins, to invigorate and energize our movement.

Our state federations and central labor councils are doing their part.

The South Carolina and the Massachusetts AFL-CIOs have sponsored youth conferences and workshops, and Massachusetts has designated a board position for a young worker.

The San Diego-Imperial County CLC has developed an intern program with San Diego State University and is actively seeking young members for its council.

These are examples of what our movement can do and I would say to those unions and AFL-CIO bodies looking for ways to make our commitment to diversity real, ‘Go ye and do likewise.’

Do like the Steelworkers, who have expanded their Women of Steel program and added a woman to the USW board.

Do like the Fire Fighters and the Utility Workers, who have expanded their human rights committees and developed training sessions on expanding diversity.

Do like the Communications Workers, who have added four members to their board to include more women and people of color.

Do like the Ironworkers, who have expanded their apprenticeship program to recruit minorities, and added an English-as-a-Second-Language component.

Do like the Missouri AFL-CIO and the Connecticut AFL-CIO, adding six or seven new members to the board, making their governing bodies more diverse.

Do like the state federations in Washington, Kentucky, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin – and the central labor councils in Philadelphia, New York, Houston and others – that are including members of our constituency groups in their leadership.

This is where real change occurs – at the local level – and I will encourage this grassroots regeneration in every way that I can.

Everywhere you can reach out and bring more women, more people of color, more young people into leadership. There are other success stories – works in progress – and we expect to see more. In fact, we will insist on it.

As a matter of policy, as a matter of principle, we'll make our movement more inclusive, more welcoming, more like the workers we represent, more like the democratic movement that we are. You have my promise.

The AFL-CIO won't stop thinking about tomorrow. I'll work tirelessly to grow our movement and to expand the opportunity for all to serve, and for all to lead. This is our chance to re-energize our movement. Let us work together to realize the power in diversity.

Thank you.