

News

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**SECRETARY ELIZABETH DOLE
REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY
AFL-CIO CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION
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WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Thank you, Lane, for that gracious introduction. It is a privilege, indeed, to be here this morning with the members of the AFL-CIO.

As Labor Secretary, I have often spoken from the heart about the contributions of our unions to the fabric of American life. My words, however, are certainly not as eloquent as those of Lech Walesa.

Eight years ago, Walesa appeared, for the first time, before the International Labor Organization. And though he spoke of Solidarity, his words define you--the working men and women who are the AFL-CIO. He said:

"Members have different occupations and vocations, different philosophical and religious opinions. But they are joined by one common aspiration--that of ensuring for workers, blue-collar and white-collar alike, a life in civic freedom, freedom of thoughts and speech, and human dignity."

I know those aspirations are shared by Lane Kirkland, Tom Donahue, and the entire membership of the AFL-CIO.

And, Lane, thank you for the candor and cooperation you have provided during my first nine months as Secretary of Labor. Whether it was before the AFL-CIO Executive Council in Florida, or the International Labor Organization in Geneva, I have appreciated your wisdom, and found inspiration in your words.

Over the past months, my door has been open and our discussions frank. This does not mean that we haven't had disagreements. Of course we have. Will we continue to have disagreements in the times ahead? Of course we will.

But President Bush and I have also worked with you to find much common ground. And where there are disagreements, I believe

they are on the mechanics to reach goals, and not on the goals themselves. I am very pleased that the long process to reach one of these goals was completed last week with final passage of legislation to increase the minimum wage.

It was my pleasure to work with organized labor in negotiating and drafting the compromise, the first increase since 1981, which will help working men and women.

And let me assure you, whether the discussion at the Cabinet table concerns clean air, or a trade issue, such as steel VRA's, or "Super 301," I vigorously present the impact on jobs and America's working men and women.

I am reminded this morning of a story about George Meany. Meany called a particular cabinet officer to ask about a problem that had crossed his mind. The Cabinet Secretary made the mistake of failing to see why this issue would concern Meany and he said, **"George, What the blazes has that got to do with labor."**

"Sonny Boy," Meany replied, **"Everything that happens today has to do with labor."**

Those words are truer now than ever before. Labor, indeed, has to do with everything that happens today. For as we enter a new decade, we find ourselves in a new age. An age of increasingly competitive global markets, and increasingly complex jobs. An age which presents historic opportunities and challenges to our unions, because working men and women are the cutting edge that determines the success of any enterprise, and of America herself.

What seized my attention when I came to the Department of Labor, was the fact that we are on the brink of some revolutionary changes in American business and in the American workplace. These pose some complex challenges, and require some very fundamental, long-term changes in our workforce environment. They are challenges that are ill-served by short-term, quick-fixes that can tend to grab headlines.

Over the past months, I've spent a great deal of time consulting with workers and labor unions, with business leaders and educators, to receive their expertise and assessment on how we could effectively confront these problems.

If we are to take advantage of this new age, we must first work together to bridge a disturbing and increasing skills gap. Across the board, jobs are demanding better reading, writing, and reasoning skills. More math and science. Jobs that once required only manual ability, now require mental agility.

And this trend will continue. While manufacturing jobs have increased in real terms, the jobs experiencing the most growth now, and in the coming years, will be in the service, managerial, and skilled technical fields. Most notably, over half the jobs in our economy will soon require education beyond high school.

And the fact is, that we enter the last decade of this century, America also enters a workforce crisis.

A crisis resulting from the fact that 25% of our young people--perhaps as many as one million students a year--are dropping out of high school. And of those who do graduate, a surprising number can't even read their diplomas. And our problems extend beyond our future workers to include our current labor force. At least 20 million, and possibly as many as 40 million adults experience substantial literacy problems.

Two weeks ago, I proposed a series of initiatives to help address this skills gap. They involve some innovative, what some might call revolutionary changes in the way we think about business, labor, and education. And I need your help to implement these needed reforms.

I believe public education is a public responsibility. And all sectors of American society must work to make the changes necessary for our economic survival. Employers tell me constantly that the curriculum in our schools is not providing students with the skills required in today's jobs.

To address this mismatch, I will soon appoint a blue-ribbon panel, which will include top leaders from business, labor, and education, and I will charge them with the mission of hammering out national competency guidelines that reflect work readiness.

These guidelines, or norms, will serve as working definitions of what skills employers require and workers need on the job. Local schools and educators, as well as training programs, can use these guidelines to help develop relevant curriculum for promotion and graduation.

I want to redesign the Employment Service to equip it for the dynamics of the 1990's--not the 1960's. And, I will focus on the 40% of our high school graduates who don't go on to further education. These "forgotten youth" often kick around for a year or two trying to "find themselves." With our workforce growing at a rate of only 1% annually--the slowest rate in forty years--we can't afford this random, "catch-as-catch-can" approach to work any longer. The United States is one of the few modernized nations without a formal school-to-work transition. With your help, I will address this issue through partnerships to conduct model school to work transition programs.

The slow workforce growth means that issues once defined as social problems will be dealt with more out of economic necessity. In tighter labor markets, employers can't afford to discriminate; they cannot afford to put workers at health and safety risks; and they cannot afford to ignore workers' obligations to family. Employers who do will simply lose out to employers who don't. Such employers will falter or fail--and they deserve to.

I found the results of a recent survey of workers quite interesting--a survey which reported that nothing was more important to working men and women than a safe workplace. Public safety has been a mission of mine throughout my government career. It's a mission that continues at the Department of Labor.

I am sending a clear and unequivocal message to those who are responsible for the health and safety of workers: They must be aware of our standards, and they must comply with them fully.

If they fail to do so, we will proceed against them using our full authority under the Occupational Safety and Health Act. I can assure you that this is not mere rhetoric.

Already this year, I have sought to increase OSHA inspectors by 10%--the first enforcement budget increase for OSHA since 1981, and we have assessed the largest-ever OSHA penalty--\$7.2 million in a case involving USX. We have also used, for one of the few times in the history of the Act, the Department of Labor's authority to force a company to immediately abate an imminent hazard--and we have gone to the courts to make that stick.

Those are only a few examples. Where we have a law or standard to enforce, we will do so fairly, vigorously and without hesitation.

We will also not hesitate to increase safety standards, where necessary. For instance, fires and explosions due to inadequate ventilation of mines are the leading cause of mine fatalities. The Mine Safety and Health Administration is aggressively moving forward on revised standards which will incorporate new technologies to make mines safer.

Woodrow Wilson once said that "**Labor is not a commodity. It is...cooperation.**" Promoting that cooperation is also a guiding principle of mine as Secretary of Labor.

The tireless efforts of America's unions have resulted in protection for all workers, regardless of whether they are union members. Protections such as child labor laws, wage and hour benefits, worker safety, and pension benefits are the legacies of

organized labor.

And recent agreements, such as the one between the Communications Workers of America and AT&T, prove that you continue to be on the cutting edge of America's social agenda, as bargaining moves to benefits such as child care, elder care, and parental leave.

This spring, I also had the pleasure of seeing, first-hand, a fine example of union-management cooperation when I visited the New United Motors Manufacturing plant in Fremont, California. By listening to employees, whose creative ideas have increased productivity, NUMMI has positioned itself as a model organization ideally suited to the rapidly changing workplace.

My visit to the NUMMI plant underlines my commitment to productive labor-management relations, which I view as essential in an ever more competitive global market. This is a commitment--and a responsibility--I take very seriously.

In July of this year, I met with Paul Douglas, Chief Executive Officer of the Pittston Coal Company. I met with Rich Trumka, President of the United Mine Workers. And I met with Bob Baker, the Acting Director of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service. Mediation, Baker told me, would be underway the next day. I have great respect for the FMCS, but several months later, the parties were still meeting in separate rooms, and it was clear that no solution was in sight.

I travelled to Southwest Virginia to talk with the miners, and the following day, Paul Douglas, Rich Trumka, and I met at the Department of Labor. It was my view that the good offices of the Secretary of Labor should be used to facilitate the collective bargaining process. We talked for almost two hours. Each assured me he was committed to resolving this dispute. Each agreed with my decision to appoint a Super Mediator. And late last month, I named Bill Usery, former Secretary of Labor, and former Director of the FMCS, to serve in that role.

It is my hope and my prayer, that the process I have started in this very difficult and protracted strike, will help the parties to reconcile their differences.

Let me add how proud I was to sit with Lane Kirkland and Rich Trumka at the Labor Hall of Fame Ceremonies just days before the announcement of the historic re-affiliation of the UMW and the AFL-CIO.

Yes, these are historic times for America's working men and women. And there can be no doubt that they are also historic times for workers throughout the world. From Europe to the Far East, from Africa to the Americas, the world is being swept by

powerful tides of democratic change. Change fueled by mass movements of working men and women demanding a voice in their own economic and political future. Changes happening even as we meet, as the Berlin Wall crumbles under the force of freedom-loving people.

And when the story of our time is written, it will reflect the fact that one of the motivating forces influencing this tide of democracy was the AFL-CIO. As proof of this conclusion, future historians will point to Poland.

The birth of Solidarity in 1980 and 1981 captured the hearts of AFL-CIO members across America. Yours was a relationship based on common goals. The trademark of the American Labor movement has always been an unyielding commitment for human rights, individual dignity, and economic justice. And these were the simple yet stunning aspirations of Solidarity.

In December of 1981, however, the first rays of freedom's sunlight were snuffed out by martial law. And Lane Kirkland and Irving Brown, who shortly before his death in 1988, received the highest civilian honor this nation has to offer--the Presidential Medal of Freedom, committed themselves to assist Solidarity in every possible way. Your work was quiet, because you believed the permanent glory of freedom was more important than the temporary spotlight of fame.

And what a difference you made. Money channelled through the AFL-CIO's Free Trade Union Institute bought printing presses, ink, computers, cameras, broadcasting equipment, and food and clothes for the families of imprisoned Solidarity members.

Your support was so influential that the Communist government singled out Lane Kirkland for a distinct honor--they refused to let him enter Poland. I'm pleased that Lane will make that trip to Poland as part of our Presidential Mission, departing on November 29. Lane will join Bob Georgine, Agriculture Secretary Yeutter, Commerce Secretary Mosbacher, Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors Boskin, myself, and agriculture and business representatives, on this most important journey.

Our optimism for Poland, of course, must be tempered with realism. The road to economic and political freedom for Poland and her people remains very long. The transition from a state-supported economy to a free market economy will not be accomplished without some initial pain. Our support is needed now more than ever.

American experience and American know-how can help Poland in this transition. In August, I met with Prime Minister Mazowiecki and Lech Walesa in Poland and offered our assistance. We are now

nearing implementation of a comprehensive program which calls upon the expertise of government, business, and labor.

Specifically, our discussions in Poland to finalize their priorities will focus on: establishment of an effective unemployment insurance system to provide a safety net for workers during this transition; employment services to match workers with jobs; worker training and retraining; and reliable labor statistics, which are key to investment and policy decisions.

If Poland succeeds--and she must--the ramifications for democracy are limitless.

Our concern for the workers of Poland stems from a deep, moral belief in the basic rights of all workers. And, let's not kid ourselves, the abuse of fundamental worker rights abroad provides those who engage in such practices with an unfair trade advantage in competition with American products. More importantly, the abuse of basic worker rights anywhere in the world is immoral and wrong. I know that Lane and I share a commitment to work through the International Labor Organization to ensure human rights and worker rights throughout the world.

As we have in times past, America is asking much of working men and women. You are needed to shoulder the responsibility of producing not only for our people, but for freedom-loving people around the world.

And as we prepare for the upcoming century...as we prepare to meet our challenges, let us take heart from the words of a great President. Almost 100 years ago, Teddy Roosevelt confronted the 20th century and said:

"We are face to face with our destiny, and we must meet it with a high and resolute courage. For ours is the life of action, of strenuous performance of duty. Let us live in the harness, striving mightily; Let us run the risk of wearing out, rather than rusting out."

By continuing to work together toward shared goals and aspirations, we will run that risk and we will meet our challenge. America deserves it, history demands it, and our children will reward it.