

YOUNG, ROLANDO HUDDLE WITH NATIONAL LABOR LEADERS

VICE
PRESIDENT
BIDEN,
LABOR
SECRETARY
TOUT
EMPLOYEE
FREE
CHOICE
ACT

President Bill Young and Executive Vice President Fred Rolando represented NALC at the meeting of the AFL-CIO Executive Council in early March. The meeting, held in South Florida, was historic given the grave crisis wracking the global economy and the opportunities presented by the election of President Barack Obama.

The Council met for five days to set the labor movement's agenda for confronting the crisis and to coordinate its activities to ensure that the promise of change resulting from the 2008 election is fulfilled. The new administration was well represented during the sessions, with appearances by Vice President Joe Biden, Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis and key White House staff.

The week kicked off at an IBEW union hall in Miami where Secretary Solis, recently confirmed by the U.S. Senate, spent several hours with the Executive Council and was warmly received. Solis, who was a House member representing California before taking the Labor post, is a daughter of union activists. She pledged to enforce the nation's labor laws and vowed to work with the nation's labor movement to improve the lives of America's workers. She and President Obama—who prepared a special video message for the meeting—reiterated their unwavering support for the Employee Free Choice Act.

President Young greeted his fellow Californian and conveyed to Secretary Solis the best wishes of her many NALC friends from greater Los Angeles. "Isn't it wonderful to have a secretary of labor who knows unions, believes in unions and will fight for the right of workers to form unions?" he asked.

The Council, made up of the federation's three top officers and 43 elected

vice presidents representing affiliated unions, debated and issued several important resolutions on the economic crisis and examined a wide variety of issues related to the economic recovery legislation enacted by Congress in February. The labor leaders also discussed the threat to the nation's pensions, the future of the auto industry and other manufacturing industries, and the need to resolve the meltdown in the country's financial sector in a progressive way. They also focused considerable attention on the AFL-CIO's parallel campaigns to win passage of both comprehensive health care reform and the Employee Free Choice Act.

The NALC took a leadership role in the field campaign for EFCA when President Young pledged to provide 20 percent of the affiliate activists needed for the AFL-CIO's pro-EFCA field campaign. That means some 31 letter carrier activists, many with direct experience gained during the highly successful Labor 2008 campaign, will be released to work full-time at the NALC's expense over the next two to three months to help mobilize union members in several crucial states to urge Congress to support EFCA.

"Letter carriers know that without a stronger labor movement, the revival of the American middle class will not happen and our economic recovery will falter over the long run," Young said, adding, "A bad economy and a weak labor market is bad for the Postal Service and bad for our members—we have to step up to the plate and do our part."

The highlight of the week was the visit of Vice President Biden, who told the Executive Council that meeting with them was "like coming home." Biden thanked the labor movement for helping to bring change to Washington.



NALC Trustees Chairman and Los Angeles, California Branch 24 President Larry Brown meets with then-Secretary of Labor nominee Rep. Hilda Solis, who represented a Los Angeles district.

REAL BALONEY SERVED HERE

Where do urban legends—those astounding but false stories told so often and so convincingly they become “true”—come from? Well, out of the mouth of CNN personality Lou Dobbs, for one.

The latest legend—a vicious lie, in fact—is the claim that members of the AFL-CIO Executive Council were staying in \$1,400-a-night hotel rooms during their meeting in Florida. Dobbs, a well-documented conservative, worked up a strong dose of pompous outrage and eagerly repeated the “fact.” Fox News, piling on but not keeping the story straight, snidely gloated that rooms in the hotel “often run \$400 or more a night.”

Too bad it’s just not true. “No room cost more than \$199, a price you’d be lucky to get in New York, Los Angeles or Minneapolis,” President Young said. The hotel has some pricey suites, but that’s not where the labor leaders were staying.

As for claims the union officers should have shunned the Fountainebleau Hotel for being “luxurious,” Young noted the federation chose the Miami Beach hotel in part to reward the owners for rebuilding the structure with union labor and for not resisting an organizing campaign that brought 2,000 hotel workers into UNITE-HERE. ☒

“I learned long ago in politics that you dance with the girl that brung you,” he said, “and it is time to start dancing.”

The vice president outlined his role as chair of the President’s Task Force on Middle Class Working Families and explained his assignment to oversee the stimulus spending authorized by the recovery legislation. “Our primary focus is to put American workers—and union workers—back to work,” he said. “We cannot afford to waste a single dollar.”

Biden spoke movingly about the plight of America’s unemployed workers, recalling his father’s struggles when he was a boy. He vowed to keep his door open to America’s union leaders and emphasized the administration’s support for EFCA. In a personal meeting, President Young thanked the vice president for fixing a budget mistake that would have harmed letter carriers (*see story, page 9*) and discussed the need to pass H.R. 22 to help the Postal Service survive the economic crisis.



Photo by Charlotte Southern

The future of the labor movement was another major topic in Miami, as talks on unification between the AFL-CIO and Change to Win continued under the mediation of former Rep. David Bonior. President Young observed, “If our nation can engage with Iran and North Korea, we can certainly sit down and talk with our brothers and sisters in the Change to Win unions.” He added, “Carriers should know that the negotiations have been productive, but no final agreements have been reached.”

Preparations for the 2009 AFL-CIO convention in Pittsburgh, where a new leader will be chosen to succeed President John Sweeney, also were outlined. In other federation news, President Young was reappointed to serve on the Council’s Executive Committee, which was created in 2005 to direct day-to-day activities of the federation. ☒

NALC President Young (c) speaks with U.S. Vice President Joe Biden (l) during the AFL-CIO Executive Council meeting in Florida, while AFL-CIO President John Sweeney (r) and Secretary-Treasurer Richard Trumka (c) look on.