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A Victory for NY Labor Unions

New law eases ability to organize

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Las Vegas — In a historic win for New York State's labor unions, Indian nations that sign compacts with the state to build casinos must agree to allow workers to organize under conditions favorable to labor unions.

Announced by Gov. George Pataki to the AFL-CIO national convention here, the legislation requires that union organizers have access to a company's worksites and that unions can sign up workers using the card-check method. Under card- check, an employer agrees to recognize a union once a majority of workers have signed cards authorizing the union to represent them.

"I restate my support for the men and women of New York . . . and my support for cooperative and progressive labor policies across America," said Pataki, speaking via satellite to about 1,000 union delegates from across North America. The legislation, which applies to businesses that make no more than $50,000 in interstate commerce, is directed at six casinos to be constructed on Indian land in the Hudson Valley and the Catskills.

Even as leaders honored the union heroes of Sept. 11 and celebrated their labor victory in New York, AFL-CIO president John Sweeney warned them that they must do more to organize new members. In 1955, the AFL and the CIO merged to represent 13 million workers — the same number its unions represent today, even though the size of the workforce has doubled.

"The American labor movement is failing to help new members organize at anywhere the level we need to — and this failure must be addressed by those of us in this hall or the future of this federation is at stake," said Sweeney, calling for unions to organize 1 million workers per year, double the expected number for this year.

The convention passed an organizing resolution yesterday pledging 30 percent of each union's resources toward organizing and increasing cooperation between unions. Though the resolution is non-binding, Service Employees International Union president Andy Stern said his union, the hotel and restaurant workers, the laborers and three other unions have already met the 30 percent goal.

"We will not rebuild this labor movement by taking small and cautious steps," said Stern, co-chair of the AFL-CIO's organizing committee. Stern's local affiliate, SEIU 32B-32J, is currently trying to organize One Source employees who clean Reckson Associates buildings on Long Island.

Hoping to organize 50,000 non-union short-haul truckers who work at the nation's ports, Teamsters president James P. Hoffa announced an agreement to settle jurisdictional issues with the International Longshoremen's Association and the International Longshore and Warehouse Union. The unions have fought over potential members in the past, but yesterday they agreed to hand over members to the relevant union.

One union president announced the addition of more than 25,000 new members after the Sept. 11 disaster.

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees head Gerald McEntee held an organizing convention Sept. 7-9 and applauded his organizers' ability to deliver new members even after tragedy struck.

This week, Delta's 20,000 flight attendants begin voting on a proposal to join the Association of Flight Attendants. And New York's labor movement continues to lobby for health care and unemployment benefits for those who lost their jobs and benefits because of the World Trade Center disaster.

The New York state AFL-CIO will start running a television advertisement in Washington, D.C. urging people to call their member of Congress about those two issues.

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