

Rick Bender Speech
WSLC Convention -- August 4, 2008

- ❖ Brothers and Sisters, eight years ago we had a bad feeling about George Bush.
- ❖ We expected he would have some negative effects on working conditions, we knew it could get bad but we didn't expect that conditions for workers across our country would be dragged back to the pre-depression era.
- ❖ And that, brothers and sisters, is just about where we stand today.
- ❖ Corporate dominance looms over working families.
- ❖ And with the permission and encouragement of the Bush Administration, corporations are heaping profits upon profits and all at the expense of the people who do the real work.
- ❖ At the expense of the working men, women and families who are struggling under the burdens of simply living day to day.
- ❖ In 2004 top executive salaries were 350 times higher than average workers salaries.
- ❖ By 2008 the gap has gotten wider
- ❖ Top executive pay is 700 times average worker pay.
- ❖ That is result of the idea of the "Trickle Down Economics" that Bush re-introduced from the Reagan era.
- ❖ But this time the corporate powers refused to turn to turn the spigot on so anything would trickle down to the workers.
- ❖ And now that Bush is set to leave office, even he is recognizing the folly.
- ❖ Last week he was overheard – at an event where cameras were supposedly not allowed – but cell phone cameras caught it nonetheless – Bush was caught blaming Wall Street for being "drunk" with greed and said they need to sober up.
- ❖ President Bush has been the enabler-in-chief in this profit-drunk rampage.
- ❖ And the victims in this eight-year drunken orgy are the American Workers.

- ❖ Worker pay is stagnant.
- ❖ Doesn't it just kill you to hear those news reports every quarter that say:
- ❖ "Worker productivity was up this quarter, while labor costs held steady."
- ❖ Are they expecting us to cheer at that?
- ❖ We are working harder than we have ever worked – and our pay is either stagnant or being slashed to keep corporate profits rising.
- ❖ The Bush Administration even tried to kill the concept of overtime pay.
- ❖ And let me remind you that John McCain voted in favor of that idea every time it came to the floor of the Senate.
- ❖ The Bush Administration fought the idea of raising the minimum wage and even tried to abolish it at the Federal level.
- ❖ (Oh, John McCain was with him every step of the way on that one too – voting time after time against raising the minimum wage and against the Davis Bacon prevailing wage laws).
- ❖ The Bush Administration has devastated worker protections on all levels.
- ❖ In the last seven and a half years under Bush, OSHA has implemented only one new workplace safety rule—and that only came as the result of a court order.
- ❖ A report published in the New York Times in April 2007 notes that since 2001, OSHA "has killed dozens of existing and proposed regulations and delayed adopting others."
- ❖ Safety at the workplace is in shambles.
- ❖ Despite crane collapses, which have killed at least 17 workers nationwide and injured dozens of other people, since May 30, Bush's Labor Department has done nothing at all.
- ❖ Crane safety standards have not been updated in 35 years.
- ❖ Now, with time running out on the Bush White House, they are fast-tracking a secretly written rule – long sought by the business community – that could increase workers' exposure to dangerous

chemicals and toxic substances on the job and tie the hands of future administrations trying to improve workplace safety.

- ❖ This type of blatant disregard for worker protections has seeped into the very infrastructure of America.

- ❖ A report by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials issued just last week, on the anniversary of the devastating Minneapolis bridge collapse, said that 25% of America's bridges are in desperate need of repair.

- ❖ The costs are already projected at \$140 Billion – but that is \$140 billion that would not only keep Americans safe, but would put Americans to work in good family wage jobs rebuilding our roads and bridges of our nation.
- ❖ According to the U.S. Transportation Department, every \$1 billion of federal highway investment supports 34,779 jobs.

- ❖ I don't need to remind you about how this Bush Administration has put the squeeze on the nation's economy.

- ❖ At the gas pump, in the grocery store, even when you are sitting at home -- the cost of heating that home with natural gas during the winter has increased by 90 percent since Bush took office.

- ❖ Each time you go to the ATM you can watch your account dwindling faster than it ever has before. It is enough to make you sick.

- ❖ But we can't afford to be sick.

- ❖ The cost of family health insurance has skyrocketed 78 percent since 2001.

- ❖ Meanwhile, the number of uninsured Americans has increased every year since President Bush took office, from 39.8 million in 2000 to a record high of 47 million in 2006.
- ❖ And the numbers continue to climb as employers drop retirees off their plans and so many people union and non-union face layoffs in so many industries.

- ❖ But we have a chance to turn this country around with the election of Barak Obama.

- ❖ He is the candidate of hope, the candidate of change.

- ❖ Obama is the candidate who believes that we have mutual obligations to each other, that we rise and fall with each other.

- ❖ He understands that this country belongs to all the people, not just the rich and powerful special interests that George Bush caters to.

- ❖ Barack Obama has promised, if elected, to help pass the Employee Free Choice Act.
- ❖ He understands that strengthening the collective bargaining power of unions will shore up the entire middle class.

- ❖ His opponent, John McCain has spoken out against unions and consistently voted against collective bargaining rights for workers.

- ❖ He just doesn't get it.

- ❖ McCain voted against the Employee Free Choice Act but for a National 'Right to Work' for Less Law.

- ❖ He voted to allow employers to hire permanent replacements during a strike.

- ❖ The man has a record a mile long of voting against the rights of workers and in favor of big business and huge tax breaks for corporations.

- ❖ McCain even voted to protect big oils profits and to give \$3.8 billion dollars in tax cuts to the top five oil companies.

- ❖ McCain is just more of the same.

- ❖ But Obama believes in the change that can turn around America.

- ❖ We here in Washington know how much that kind of change can help working families.

- ❖ You see, in Washington, four years ago, we managed to elect a leader who believed in Obama's kind of change before we even knew who Barack Obama was.

- ❖ We elected a leader who knew that making changes to benefit the working men and women in this state would lead to a better life for all Washingtonians.
- ❖ We elected a leader who saw through the sham of the Bush Administration and acted in the best interest of working families.
- ❖ A leader who ushered in a law creating the highest minimum wage in the nation.
- ❖ A leader whose first act in office was to sign a bill guaranteeing that apprentices would be used in the construction of public works projects – assuring that we are building our workforce of the future and doubling the number of apprenticeship opportunities in the state.
- ❖ A leader who has bolstered the collective bargaining power of workers throughout Washington State including state workers, academic employees, adult family home providers and health care workers.
- ❖ A leader who has not only been recognized as “Public Official of the Year” by Governing Magazine – but who has presided over Washington State’s rise in union density – we are now 4th in the nation.
- ❖ And at the same time she has created a business climate that ranks Washington as the 3rd best place in the nation to do business.
- ❖ She has proven that a good, unionized working environment helps business succeed.
- ❖ Governor Chris Gregoire has led the way and has made significant accomplishments in virtually every sector at the same time George Bush has squelched any advancement.
- ❖ Governor Gregoire has created 222,000 new jobs while investing heavily in education to train the workforce of tomorrow.
- ❖ She negotiated and signed an education budget that invests over \$900 additional dollars per pupil in the K through 12 system, lowered class sizes, doubled the number of apprenticeship programs at community and technical colleges, increased salaries for Washington’s teachers and signed a budget including \$1 Billion dollars directed toward school construction.
- ❖ She is focused on ushering us into the new “Green” economy promising to create 25,000 new green family-wage jobs.

- ❖ She negotiated and signed an \$8.5 Billion dollar transportation package that is creating thousand of good, family wage jobs throughout our state.
- ❖ And just this year signed legislation authorizing the construction of six new ferries – which will shore up the maritime building industry and maintain Washington’s shipbuilding infrastructure.
- ❖ She has made sure that workers protections are in place at the state level – including crane safety – and has placed \$8 Million in Safety Health and Innovative Program grants.
- ❖ She has fixed the inequities in the Unemployment Insurance system that reduced benefits for women, people of color and low income workers;

- ❖ She rolled back four quarter averaging for UI benefits to make the system more equitable and – just this year, made sure that injured workers who were awarded UI benefits continued to get those benefits when an employer starts an appeal process.
- ❖ She signed legislation creating the Family Medical Leave Act and, in this last legislative session, signed the Working Family’s Tax Credit giving 350,000 low-wage working families a 5% tax rebate to help deal with today’s high cost of living.
- ❖ She provided healthcare coverage to 84,000 more of our kids and thousands more adults while establishing a goal of covering all kids by 2010.
- ❖ She also supports the Healthy Washington Coalition’s efforts to create comprehensive, affordable health care for all Washingtonians.
- ❖ This is a Governor who has truly demonstrated that Washington’s Working Families come first.
- ❖ Not everyone is aware of her growing list of accomplishments for Washington families.
- ❖ And now that she is in a race with Republican challenger and real estate agent Dino Rossi.
- ❖ We need to stand up and make sure that union members understand just how great this governor has been and will continue to be for working families.

- ❖ Her opponent, Dino Rossi, has clearly demonstrated through his past voting record of 6% that he is no friend to working families.
- ❖ He is locked hand in hand with the failed policies of George W. Bush.
- ❖ Rossi voted to lower the minimum wage and take away overtime pay – just like Bush.

- ❖ Rossi voted to cut unemployment benefits for laid-off workers and he voted to deny unemployment benefits to victims of domestic violence who had to quit their jobs to escape their abusers.
- ❖ Just like George Bush, Rossi wants no part in healthcare reform.
- ❖ He sided with pharmaceutical companies and opposed a bill to let the state negotiate lower drug prices.

- ❖ If Dino Rossi becomes our next Governor you can be sure that the people he appoints to lead our state's Labor and Industries and Employment Securities Divisions will be from business groups like the BIAW – the association that has been funding Rossi's campaign.
- ❖ The very same people who have likened the environmental community to Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party.

- ❖ You can be sure the people Rossi appoints will follow the path of George Bush's Labor Department and the people he appointed to OSHA.
- ❖ You can be sure that worker protections, collective bargaining agreements and prevailing wage laws will be rethought.

- ❖ You can be sure, if Dino Rossi becomes our Governor, that working families in this state will experience a shift away from the bright future that Governor Chris Gregoire has paved during her first term in office.
- ❖ Brothers and Sisters, we have an opportunity to be a part of history that only comes once in a lifetime.
- ❖ But it won't be easy, the rich and the powerful won't give up easily.
- ❖ We, the Labor Movement, must do our part in this election; we must do our part in this election.
- ❖ We must engage our members, we need to mail to our members, make phone calls, visit work sites, engage our Labor Neighbors, and get out the vote.
- ❖ If we do our part, we WILL make history!