

## RESOLUTION 10

# Public Communications

Submitted by International Association of Fire Fighters

*“If you would win a man to your cause, you must first catch his heart, and he will then follow the high road to reason.”*

*With public sentiment, nothing can fail. Without it, nothing can succeed.”*

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

**T**HERE WAS A TIME when no issue, proposal, political effort or governmental decision affecting American workers, our economy or our social and civil rights occurred without the federation being sought out for its position and views. The position of the AFL-CIO really mattered—because it was the face of American workers and an effective leader for change on Capitol Hill and in the workplace.

The federation must regain its voice and edge in the media and in the public discourse.

Communicating a strong, emotional message in forums that reach the general public is even more important today, as workers live longer distances from their workplace, in communities that are spread across wide geographical areas.

Where union members and nonunion workers used to get much of their information in the workplace and from co-workers, that happens less and less today, giving them little opportunity outside of the workplace to be together and to share how organizing a union can benefit their lives.

Even as our voice and message have been disappearing from the public debate, workers have increasingly

been looking to a wider variety of information sources outside of the workplace to form their views and opinions.

Workers rely more on news coverage, commentary and analysis on the Internet, television, cable networks and talk radio delivered 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Our absence in these media has resulted in the decline in knowledge of what unions have achieved on behalf of society and workers and what we can do now and in the future for the unorganized.

A February 2005 public opinion poll conducted by the AFL-CIO showed that 57 percent of nonunion workers said they “know just a little” or “don’t know too much” about unions.

And it is no coincidence that as workers have become less informed about our movement and our struggles to organize new members, that our political and legislative battles are intensifying.

To become more effective in organizing, and to be more successful in political campaigns and in advancing legislative initiatives, we must develop and deliver a powerful and emotional message that positions the movement as a force for workers. Then

we must project that message. We must become, in the minds of the unorganized, a movement fighting for issues important to them, that will add value to their lives and will make them want to be a part of organized labor.

We must frame our message in concise, easily understood, emotionally connecting and powerful ways, using simple phrases, instead of academic, logical arguments that lack a human dimension.

Only after our message is heard, understood and embraced will we be in a position to begin winning organizing campaigns in new and emerging industries.

To do that, the federation must:

- Take the movement's core issues and weave them together with strong faith and security messages. Then we must personalize them, dramatize them and frame them in simple thematic ways that force workers to think about their lot in life.
- The federation's message must be framed in such a way that it gives workers a sense of confidence and comfort. It must convey that we are committed to a strong national defense, and that faith and moral character are critical parts of our lives. It will communicate that we believe in freedom and individual liberties, and that we are committed to securing our homeland and protecting our citizens and families.
- Once we connect on those personal and emotional issues, workers will be more open to the traditional issues that are the responsibility and focus of our movement—like good jobs, health care, education and participating in the financial success of our country.
- The key is winning their hearts and then their minds. To do that, we can and should tie health care and retirement security to protecting the family and strengthening our nation's moral fiber. We can and should tie faith and religious devotion to the issues that improve the lives of the neediest in our country. To resonate, the

federation's message must connect with issues that relate to the hopes and fears of Americans today.

- Broaden the impact of our message by making it the federation's responsibility to communicate with all workers through the Internet, emerging technologies and other contemporary media. The federation should leave internal communications with union members to their affiliates, where that task belongs.
- The AFL-CIO must communicate using the information resources utilized most by potential members and voters to influence their views, rather than continuing to rely on leaflets at the workplace, brochures and direct mail to current members.

Based on the foregoing, the International Association of Fire Fighters submits this resolution:

WHEREAS, the general public knows less and less who we are and what we stand for, and this lack of knowledge has contributed to our inability to broaden political and legislative support for pro-worker candidates and legislation; and

WHEREAS, our movement is struggling to connect with unorganized workers in ways that convince them to be a part of organized labor; and

WHEREAS, the changing demographics of the workforce are such that workers form their views and opinions from a wide variety of information sources in which labor—and our message—have been noticeably absent; and

WHEREAS, as workers have become less informed about our movement, success in organizing new members and winning political and legislative battles on behalf of workers has become more difficult; and

WHEREAS, we must direct a powerful and emotional message at unorganized workers that demonstrates that the AFL-CIO is fighting for issues important to them;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO's responsibility will be to communicate with a broad national audience our message; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO will change the way it conducts its public affairs to focus its time and resources on communicating through the Internet, emerging technologies and other contemporary media, with the general public, leaving internal communications with union members to the affiliates, where that task belongs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO will develop and communicate through new methods a message that weaves our core economic and workplace issues together with individual rights, faith and security; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO will frame, create and provide affiliates with our new communications that are simple, thematic and will connect emotionally to workers' lives and to the work we do every day.