

## RESOLUTION 3

# The Values That Unite Us as a People and a Movement

Submitted by the AFL-CIO Executive Council

Ensuring Economic Security  
Protecting and Strengthening Income Security  
Extending Opportunity to All  
Fulfilling the Promise of Equality

**W**E ARE A MOVEMENT BUILT UPON VALUES—and a movement that fights for what we value.

Some of our values are intrinsic to the American condition, as natural to us as breathing. Democracy. Liberty. Faith. Patriotism. Blessed as we are to live in a nation that confers these values as birthrights, we take none of them for granted—and bow to no one in our determination to protect them. We are fierce patriots. We love our country. We fight for our country. And we expect our country to fight for us.

We also fight for the values that shape economic security and opportunity for America's working families.

We value work and respect for workers. We believe our nation, blessed with such rich material and human resources, can and must create and sustain good jobs that support families and communities.

We value fundamental economic security. We believe our nation, blessed with such rich prosperity, can and must ensure basic economic security for every family.

We value opportunity. We believe our nation, blessed with such rich potential, can and must

provide all our children the foundation they need to get ahead in life and to realize their dreams.

We value equality. We believe our nation, blessed with rich diversity, can and must celebrate our differences, end invidious discrimination, ensure fair treatment for all and secure a just society for all in America.

These values are not empty rhetoric: They are core to who we are. They are the building blocks for strong families, strong communities and a stronger America. We all have a stake in protecting the institutions, programs and policies that give voice to these values and that seek to realize them in the everyday lives of ordinary Americans.

These values are who we are and what we must fight to create and preserve.

## Ensuring Economic Security

America's families are stretched thin—struggling to make ends meet today and worried about the future. Now perhaps more than at any time in recent decades, they need guarantees that the basic building blocks of economic security—good jobs, health care they can afford and reliable income support—are in place.

Our statement on Good Jobs for America's Workers reaffirms our commitment to fighting for jobs that provide decent wages and benefits, guarantee workers' freedom to form unions and bargain collectively, are fair, safe and healthy, give workers the flexibility and support they need to nurture their families, and provide them with skills and opportunities for advancement.

Beyond the ways in which good jobs provide economic security for America's workers and their families, Americans have long relied upon and supported core public programs—Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP)—for the basic family economic security they provide. Today these programs face tremendous challenge, strained by financial pressures and attacked by ideological opponents bent on dismantling them.

In the face of these attacks, we reaffirm our determination to preserve and strengthen the public programs that form the basis of health care security for millions and provide income security guarantees to all of us, cementing Americans' economic security.

### **Protecting and Strengthening Health Security**

The deepening health care crisis and private insurers' unresponsiveness to it have neither stemmed attacks by conservative politicians on the nation's major public health care programs nor yielded a consistent national commitment to support and fund them adequately. Our government-funded national health care programs meet the needs of our most vulnerable populations. Medicare plays a vital role in extending health care to nearly all of the nation's seniors and to certain persons with disabilities. Medicaid serves as a health care safety net for low-income individuals, both elderly and nonelderly, providing comprehensive health benefits and long-term care coverage. And the state-operated SCHIP program and the Women, Infants and Children nutritional program work in tandem with Medicaid to broaden coverage to other low-income uninsured children and, in some instances, their parents.

These public programs are indispensable to ensuring the physical well-being of tens of millions in America.

In conjunction with comprehensive, sound and stable employer-based coverage, our public programs could move us closer to the goal of universal health coverage. But like the employer-based system we discuss in Good Jobs for America's Workers, our public programs face serious challenges that must be addressed if they are to serve their intended beneficiaries.

First and foremost is the devastating impact of uncontrolled health care cost inflation. Without a long-term strategy for restraining health care cost growth, the pressure on public programs will mount. The same inflationary factors that bedevil employment-sponsored coverage—unproven pharmaceutical technology, overuse of expensive diagnostic procedures, dysfunctional competition among health care providers, widespread but preventable errors in the care process and duplicative insurance mechanisms—threaten public programs.

To slow the trajectory of health cost inflation, the way care is delivered needs to be transformed. We will continue to work for federal funding for research on the comparative effectiveness of new drugs so consumers and their doctors have independent, reliable data on which to make decisions about drug treatments; for the rapid advancement of reporting on standardized measures of performance in important clinical areas; for the expanded use of information technology that enables safer care of higher quality and ease in collecting performance data; and for comprehensive systems at the state and federal levels that provide for the reporting and analysis of medical errors and public alerts of the causes of errors with recommendations for changes that reduce the risk of occurrence in the future.

We will also continue to fight for safe staffing ratios and the prohibition of mandatory overtime for nurses, as well as full involvement of frontline health care workers in decision making on care.

These efforts to change the health care system to improve quality and slow health care inflation have been and must continue to be nonpartisan. We will keep up our work with Republicans and Democrats in Congress, with Bush administration officials and

with elected state leaders from all parties, as well as with employers, health care providers and insurers that share our objectives to effect change as quickly as possible. The survival of public and private health coverage—and the safety of patients in the care process—depend on it.

Medicare is at risk from those who would turn its guaranteed entitlement to care over to private insurers and undermine its universality. Despite the failure of experiments with private insurers in the Medicare managed care program, the Medicare Modernization Act (MMA) of 2003 included devastating structural changes that tilt the entire Medicare program toward private plans. Private plans get the benefit of both a \$10 billion stabilization fund that the government can use to entice private insurers to offer and maintain coverage and inflated payments that amount to between 7 and 25 percent more than traditional Medicare is paid. This will create a two-tiered system that allows private managed care plans to offer better benefits and lower premiums than seniors could get under the traditional Medicare program. In addition, the law establishes a premium support demonstration project to begin in 2010 in six major metropolitan areas, converting Medicare to a voucher program that pits traditional Medicare against well-funded private plans in competition for beneficiaries. Furthermore, the MMA introduced for the first time means testing for Medicare premiums, undercutting the universality of the system.

MMA established a long-awaited but deeply flawed prescription drug benefit for Medicare beneficiaries. The law will provide too little help for seniors' drug costs, with the coverage provided through private plans that are uncertain and unstable, and will worsen drug coverage for millions. The new program imposes a gap in coverage that leaves seniors liable for \$2,800 in drug costs entirely from their own pockets, even while they continue to pay monthly premiums. MMA does nothing to control skyrocketing prescription drug prices. In fact, it prohibits Medicare from negotiating with drug manufacturers for lower prices.

We call on Congress and the president to address the troubling flaws in the prescription drug benefit. Reimportation of drugs from Canada should be permitted, and the Secretary of Health and Human Services should be required to negotiate for lower costs for drugs purchased through Medicare. Congress should eliminate the overpayments for private plans that put traditional Medicare at a disadvantage and use the savings to fill the gap in drug coverage. Congress must ensure retirees with employer-sponsored coverage are not made worse off. Medicare needs to be modernized to secure its financing and to provide more preventive care, as well as voluntary buy-in for early retirees and laid-off workers 55 and older. But all Medicare benefits must be part of the Medicare program. Any renewed attempts to privatize part or all of the system must be turned back to ensure a guaranteed entitlement continues.

The challenges facing Medicaid are the very same challenges facing our health care system overall. Health care costs are soaring for public and private health programs alike (though still significantly slower for Medicaid than private insurance). As employer coverage has dropped, by almost 5 million from 2000 to 2003, Medicaid coverage has grown by 5.8 million. While Medicaid's growth has held down the increase in the number of uninsured, it has added significantly to Medicaid's costs. And the lack of affordable and meaningful long-term care coverage has turned Medicaid into the primary source of such coverage, particularly for the oldest Americans.

Now is not the time to turn our backs on the nation's publicly funded and publicly administered health care programs for seniors, people with disabilities, the poor and low-income children. Instead, we must do more to improve the capacity of these programs to meet the needs of their intended beneficiaries.

The union movement has an abiding commitment to a publicly financed and publicly administered Medicare program; we will fight every effort to privatize Medicare. Instead of allowing Medicare opponents to dismantle and dilute the program, we will work for thoughtful reforms that boost its

solvency while improving benefits and containing participant costs.

We believe unions are uniquely well qualified to play an active and sustained role in any efforts to improve Medicare. Union health plans offer the best care options and prescription drug coverage in the country; some plans have health management programs that maximize the quality of care while keeping costs in line. These and other models should be explored for their potential replication within Medicare. Also, we will argue for improved incentives within MMA for employers to maintain their retiree prescription drug coverage and closely monitor the implementation of the employer drug subsidy so retirees are not made worse off. Finally, we will continue to provide information and advocacy tools to our members so they may be engaged fully in debates about Medicare's future and in the implementation of the MMA.

We also will continue working to boost health care coverage for working families with limited incomes through support for appropriate federal and state legislation, as well as outreach and education for our members and for other workers. We will fight for more funding for public systems such as Medicaid and SCHIP to maximize their potential to provide health care coverage to the uninsured. We will monitor states' implementation of these programs in the wake of proposed changes ostensibly promoting greater "flexibility" to ensure recipients continue to receive uniform, comprehensive benefits. And we will steadfastly oppose proposals to block grant or cap the federal funding for Medicaid, which would put an enormous burden on states and threaten beneficiaries and providers.

As part of our continued push for universal health coverage, we will increase our efforts at the state level, supporting the excellent work of state federations and local labor councils that have led the fight in recent years. In the current political context, the best route to national health care reform may well be through the states, where the energy to enact comprehensive programs has a better chance to prevail. In state after state, aggressive proposals for

universal coverage have garnered strong public support. Pushing state plans represents a bottom-up reform strategy that has the potential to redo the road map for national reform. We will expand our efforts in support of state and local federations and work closely with allied organizations to this end.

The AFL-CIO, its affiliates, state federations and central labor councils will work with community allies in targeted states to expand and improve Medicaid and SCHIP programs. Among other things, we will pursue opportunities for pairing public and private resources to make SCHIP and similar public programs available to low-wage working families, including expanding job-based coverage to uninsured family members. And we will work with our partners to improve outreach to boost enrollment among eligible poor and low-wage workers and their families. At the same time, we will blow the whistle on large and profitable employers that shift their health care costs to workers and taxpayers, stifling our public programs to boost their profits and undercut their competitors. Every person in America should have access to affordable, high-quality health care. But rich corporations should not take advantage of the availability of our strained public health care programs to advance their own financial interests.

## **Protecting and Strengthening Income Security**

Social Security is America's most comprehensive and important family income protection system and, as such, is the ultimate guarantor of economic security for America's families. It is an insurance-based program that builds individual family security through the combined contributions of everyone. Benefits are designed to replace lost wages and preserve family living standards. Benefit levels are set by law and are a function of a worker's lifetime earnings. This design allows the system to provide predictable, dependable benefits as a foundation for family security on which families can build, not just for retirement but also in case of the disability or premature death of a worker.

Although some refer to Social Security as a safety net program, in reality, it is important to all workers and their families, particularly middle-class families. Social Security is important in part because, as we discuss in *Good Jobs for America's Workers*, the private pieces of the retirement system—job-based pensions and retirement plans and individual retirement savings accounts—do not cover nearly enough workers and fail to deliver adequate retirement income to many of those lucky enough to be covered.

Against this backdrop of a secure Social Security system and a porous private system, we face projected shortfalls in Social Security over the very long run. According to the 2005 report of the Social Security Trustees, using conservative assumptions about the future, the system will have sufficient resources to pay full benefits for another three-and-a-half decades; beginning in 2041, the program would be able to cover 74 percent of current-law benefits if no changes were made.

Nothing in these projections, however, necessitates a rush to make changes without careful consideration of the impact on current and future workers, retirees and their family members. Given the crucial role Social Security plays in delivering retirement and family economic security, particularly for low-income families and the broad middle class, Congress and the president should take the time to get it right and avoid drastic and irreversible changes to the benefit structure.

Questions about how to finance Social Security adequately in the future have been seized on by some as a reason to radically restructure Social Security by replacing part of its guaranteed benefits with private individual investment accounts. Wall Street firms, which stand to reap huge profits from individual accounts, have taken a leading role in promoting privatization and have indicated they are ready and willing to spend tens of millions of dollars to convince the American public to buy into their plan. If successful, these firms could rake in as much as \$940 billion in fees. We will continue our successful efforts to challenge the conflict of interest that arises when investment firms support Social Security privatization.

Privatization threatens the integrity and hallmark of Social Security: its ability to provide families with a foundation of income security. Funding private individual accounts likely would require large cuts in both Social Security's guaranteed benefits and workers' total retirement income, and implementation costs would add trillions of dollars to the federal debt. And replacing Social Security's benefits with private accounts would cut the vital family protections so many have depended on for so long.

For these reasons, the union movement has fought and will continue to fight efforts to privatize Social Security. Displacing any part of this system to create costly individual investment accounts would undermine Social Security's foundation of family income security and weaken its retirement, disability and survivors' protections. So, too, would replacing any part of the remarkably efficient and effective Social Security Administration (SSA) with private contractors.

The AFL-CIO strongly opposes any attempt to force existing or future noncovered public employees into the Social Security system. For over a half-century, public employees have structured their own, independent retirement systems. Mandatory coverage would impose a financial burden on both the employees and the jurisdiction that would undermine the solvency of existing public retirement systems and exacerbate already exigent budgetary issues.

The AFL-CIO supports proposals that will address concerns about Social Security's future while strengthening family economic security. The system's long-term financing needs can be addressed through modest, progressive changes, such as raising the payroll tax cap or canceling the phase out and repeal of the federal estate and gift tax and dedicating some of the revenue from it to Social Security. We also call on Congress and the president to honor their promise to pay back the money they have borrowed from the Social Security trust funds to finance tax cuts and other programs. Any reform must also include improvements in benefits for women—for example, reducing the penalty women incur in the form of lower benefits because of the years they

spend out of the workforce caring for family members and increasing benefits for elderly widows.

We believe the AFL-CIO's aggressive and highly effective member education and advocacy program played a significant role in derailing earlier efforts to privatize Social Security. Hence, we renew our commitment to providing an ongoing education program and advocacy tools that keep working families informed and help them become active participants in saving Social Security.

We also call on Congress and the president to provide the SSA with enough funding to ensure the agency will have sufficient staffing and resources to deliver the high level of service the public deserves. Without attention to the needs of SSA, which has been downsized severely and faces a surge in its workload as baby boomers retire, the public will be harmed.

Social Security plays a crucial role in the economic lives of Americans because of how it is designed as well as longstanding limitations and inadequacies in the private retirement income system. Its importance to American families is unlikely to change for current or future retirees, making it all the more important that we act to strengthen Social Security and do so with great care.

## **Extending Opportunity to All**

Families and the home are the first and foremost institutions shaping opportunities for Americans, especially for our children. As a society and a movement, we have a profound obligation to make sure the primary public institution supporting families—our public school system—has the capacity and commitment to give every child in America a real and tangible opportunity to succeed.

We know we cannot create real opportunities for our children without strengthening public education, but our public schools and public school teachers, paraprofessionals and other support staff are in a tough spot. Often the scapegoats for problems they neither created nor can solve, the nation's teachers

are expected to do more with less and are subject to relentless attack from the right and, occasionally, the left. No one is served by the demagoguing against public schools or by starving them of resources they need to extend the promise of opportunity to the nation's children. Yet all too often, that is the rhetorical and budgetary course national and local leaders pursue.

We disagree with that approach. We believe the best way—the only way—to open wide the doors of opportunity for all of America's children is to maintain, improve and adequately fund our system of free and universally available public education. We reaffirm our commitment to that system and our determination to fight for it.

### **K–12 Public Education**

For most Americans, K–12 education provides the foundation of their formal education and plays a pivotal role in determining lifetime opportunities. Because of the crucial importance of these years, we wholeheartedly endorse efforts to strengthen our public schools' capacity to provide first-class education to children in these grades. Such efforts include setting high standards of academic achievement for students and for teachers; providing adequate resources to prepare students to meet the standards; competently designing and administering tests that accurately measure relevant performance; and providing appropriate remedial assistance for students struggling to meet the standards.

We also recognize the indispensable role that high-quality teachers, paraprofessionals and other support staff play in giving students a solid foundation and improving their performance. We reaffirm our support for steps that will encourage and facilitate first-rate teaching. These include salaries commensurate with education, experience and the challenging and complex tasks teachers perform; reasonable measures to assess teacher quality; solid licensing and certification requirements consistent with professional teaching standards; access to resources and support needed to meet these standards; meaningful opportunities for professional development; and, where necessary, fair, timely intervention and dismissal procedures. Paraprofessionals and other

support staff are essential to schools' overall success; they should receive adequate resources, support and protections to perform effectively and well.

Beyond these steps for measuring and improving performance, our schools, our students and our teachers will better meet the challenges they face if classes are smaller, particularly in lower grades. In addition, schools serving disadvantaged students will have a greater shot at success if they receive the resources they need to deal with the many challenges their students face. Because of funding shortfalls, critical federal programs, such as Head Start, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Title I, all of which target extra help for disadvantaged students, serve only a fraction of eligible children. Lower-income students also have limited access to enriching summer and after-school programs, which hold great promise for improving student achievement.

If we really value our children and are committed to guaranteeing them meaningful opportunity in life, we cannot stint when it comes to investment in our public schools or our commitment to meeting the goals we have embraced. Many of these goals were embodied in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act: raising standards for all children and, in particular, meeting the needs of disadvantaged children; ensuring there is a well-qualified teacher in every classroom; providing extra support for low-performing students; and using fair and accurate accountability measures in our public schools. When NCLB became law in 2002, there was widespread hope it would be implemented in a way that would strengthen public education while raising the academic achievement of all students and that earmarked resources would be provided.

Flaws in the law, however, are undercutting NCLB's original promise. The central provision of NCLB, the adequate yearly progress (AYP) formula, does not really measure progress, fails to distinguish between effective and ineffective schools and sets unrealistic targets, undermining the legitimacy and goals of the law's accountability standards. The school improvement process is seriously flawed, failing to give adequate time and resources for the develop-

ment and implementation of a comprehensive plan and providing remedies that are not research-based and lack appropriate accountability and that divert needed resources before an adequate improvement plan can be developed and implemented. Furthermore, there are real problems with the implementation of the teacher quality and paraprofessional training provisions of NCLB.

Underlying all these issues is the pervasive problem of funding. Congress knew the goals of NCLB could not be achieved without additional resources, yet it is clear the increases in funding are far short of what is necessary to get the job done and what Congress anticipated would be required.

Fulfilling NCLB's original promise of strengthening public education will require changes in the law, proper implementation and necessary funding. The law's AYP standards must be overhauled fundamentally into a system that sets challenging but demonstrably attainable goals and judges school effectiveness by measuring the progress schools achieve with the same students over time. The school improvement process must include an intensive planning period so the school can develop an improvement plan that addresses the needs of the school and is based on research-based, proven programs. The process also must provide the necessary resources to implement the plan. All states must be required to create rigorous standards for determining whether teachers and paraprofessionals are highly qualified and provide realistic deadlines for staff to demonstrate their qualifications. Additional steps must be taken to assure staff quality, for example, by requiring states to develop high-caliber teacher induction systems and all districts to provide ongoing, job-specific professional development for paraprofessionals. Finally, NCLB must be fully funded at the levels authorized by Congress to provide enough money to improve the more than 1,700 secondary and 7,000 elementary schools struggling the most to meet high standards.

The union movement will work to win the changes needed to ensure the law meets the promise of its title—that America's schools will leave no child behind.

### **Early Education and Higher Education**

We have previously expressed our belief that education is a lifelong process that begins in early childhood. We know the difference that solid early childhood education makes in the lives of children and adults, especially those from economically deprived backgrounds. But we also know that quality preschool options remain unavailable to millions of children. We reaffirm our determination to make universal, affordable, high-quality, non-compulsory preschool education—an early building block of opportunity—available to every child in United States.

To maintain our economic and intellectual leadership, it is essential we provide opportunities for all Americans to obtain an education that carries them as far as their talents, ambitions and hard work will take them. Higher education should not be solely the preserve of the wealthy. A college education must be accessible and affordable for all students, regardless of their financial means. However, cuts in government support for public colleges and universities, as well as increases in tuition and fees, are shutting out hundreds of thousands of prospective students and seriously weakening the quality of education for those who remain. Therefore, we will work to make higher education more accessible and affordable for those who desire it. We also will continue to lobby and bargain for programs designed to enhance working families' access to higher education, such as employer-provided tuition assistance and the exclusion of such aid from income taxation, and for increases in Pell grants for low-income students.

### **Privatization of Public Education**

The union movement opposes private school vouchers, tuition tax credits and privatization of public schools that siphon public resources from public schools into private schools or into the hands of private profiteers.

The overwhelming majority of America's children attend public schools, which are open and free to all students and which must meet strict accountability standards. Vouchers and other such schemes take monies out of these public schools and shift them

to private schools, which are not required to administer the same tests, meet the same accountability standards or accept all students. The results from existing privatization and voucher programs demonstrate they also do not deliver on their promise of improved student achievement. Instead, vouchers and privatization are part of a broad ideological agenda hostile to the role public schools play in our democratic and diverse society. Robbing public schools of the resources they need to serve America's children is not the way to strengthen our public education.

We believe the only way to provide every child in America with an equal opportunity to receive a high-quality education is through adequate funding and real support for our public schools. We will continue to fight every effort to siphon funds away from public schools.

### **Fulfilling the Promise of Equality**

Equality is not simply a value of our movement; it was an animating principle at the founding of our nation and a goal toward which we as a people have been striving ever since. Yet, despite undeniable progress, inequality and polarization persist in many American workplaces, schools and communities. We have not delivered fully on the promises of the watershed civil rights measures of the 1960s. We waited too long to extend protections to other disadvantaged groups, long the victims of arbitrary prejudice and exclusion. And we have yet to extend protections to others.

We are proud of our movement's long history in the great struggles for equality. But we recognize our work is not done and that we must soldier on.

More than 50 years after the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* overturned the doctrine of separate but equal, its promise that segregation in education and other areas of our society would no longer be the law or practice of our country has yet to be truly fulfilled. Instead, we face a society that in many quarters appears to be going backward to segregation

and inequality. The AFL-CIO calls emphatically for a renewed commitment to securing equality in education, ending educational discrimination and segregation and promoting educational opportunities and programs aimed at closing the achievement gap. We must do more than merely commemorate *Brown* a half century after its passage; we must work with urgency to achieve its promise and its purposes for today's students and for future generations of students.

Similarly, four decades after the enactment of the historic Civil Rights Act of 1964, we are reminded of how far we have to go to achieve the goals of this important law as well as the goals of subsequent civil rights enactments. Today, discrimination remains a stark reality for millions of Americans in housing, employment, education, health care, voting, lending practices, criminal justice and other critical aspects of life in our society. To make matters worse, some cynical political leaders argue that discrimination is no longer a serious problem. They promote judges who would cut back our civil rights laws, take steps to weaken civil rights enforcement agencies, seek to restrict important remedies such as affirmative action and attempt to use civil rights issues as a wedge to divide Americans against Americans.

We value equality for all in America. We cannot—and will not—go backwards in our quest to end discrimination and secure true equality. We therefore rededicate ourselves to the enduring struggle for civil and women's rights in our country.

### **Banning Hate Crimes and Racial Profiling**

We reiterate our support for measures outlawing and penalizing some of the more egregious and persistent acts of bias and discrimination, hate crimes and racial profiling.

Horrifying hate crimes designed to intimidate and harass individuals because of their membership in particular groups have no place in our society. We recognize and embrace our obligation and opportunity to do everything we can to prevent such acts of criminality and hate. We renew our call for Congress to pass and the president to sign hate

crimes legislation that will enable federal authorities to assist local prosecutions and, where appropriate, investigate and prosecute cases in which bias-motivated violence occurs because of the victim's race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender or disability.

We also reaffirm our opposition to racial profiling and our determination to bring an end to this practice. Despite growing awareness of the problem and the actions some states and localities have taken to address it, Congress has failed to act. We must send a signal—loud and clear—that we will never achieve color-blind justice if we countenance race-biased injustice by law enforcement. We call on Congress and the states to move quickly to enact meaningful prohibitions against racial profiling, including measures to gauge its incidence, and to extend meaningful remedies to victims of the practice.

### **Preserving Affirmative Action**

The union movement is committed to diversity and full participation, both within our unions and in society as a whole. We are taking important steps to eliminate any vestiges of discrimination and promote greater diversity in our own leadership. And today, we reaffirm our commitment to doing so in American society overall through our continued support for and determination to preserve affirmative action. Maintaining this important remedy is essential to securing the value of equality.

Despite our many prohibitions against unlawful bias and our long struggle to end it, discrimination and its legacy persist in American society. Consciously or unconsciously, employers favor white job applicants over people of color, banks extend credit more readily to men than women, and low-income homeowners wishing to buy or sell in certain neighborhoods encounter double standards in real estate appraisals and loans. This long history of discrimination produces results too obvious and painful to deny.

More than a quarter-century ago, a Republican president, Richard M. Nixon, implemented the nation's first federal affirmative action program explicitly designed to increase the hiring of

people of color. Since then, affirmative action as a necessary and appropriate remedy for discrimination and its effects has enjoyed bipartisan political support. Although affirmative action has its detractors, programs have been implemented around the country, businesses believe in it and the union movement has fought to maintain it. It was thus especially distressing that the Bush administration joined opponents of affirmative action two years ago, seeking to strike down the University of Michigan's affirmative action program.

We are committed to preserving affirmative action in critical arenas of American life. We will defend affirmative action from attacks by the far right; we recognize these attacks are often cynical ploys designed to create wedge issues to divide Americans for political gain. We will vigorously oppose federal and state legislation and local ballot initiatives that seek to end affirmative action.

We will also make sure we do our part to educate our members and the public about what affirmative action really is. Affirmative action is not about quotas, which are illegal, or about giving jobs to the unqualified. It is a commonsense approach to addressing the nation's long and sad history of discrimination through special outreach to those who have been excluded because of race, gender and national origin.

We look forward to the day when the nation no longer needs affirmative action, but until then, we will promote and defend it as one of the best and most effective strategies available to move us in the direction of an inclusive and equal society.

### **Extending Civil Rights Protections to All**

Discrimination based on sexual orientation is inconsistent with the fundamental value of equality; simply put, it is wrong. In our own movement, we have worked to advance the rights and interests of all our members, regardless of sexual orientation, by negotiating domestic partner benefits, which provide crucial access to health care, family and medical leave and other benefits for our heterosexual families and seniors as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender families. We have also

worked with our allies to pass state and local laws to guarantee the civil rights of all persons without regard to sexual orientation in public and private employment, housing, credit, public accommodations and public services. We will continue to support such measures, but we know from our historic civil rights struggles that piecemeal justice is never enough. We therefore reaffirm our support for federal legislation that ensures the full inclusion and equal rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in the workplace and in society. We also deplore and will resist divisive measures, such as the Federal Marriage Amendment, that would turn the U.S. Constitution into an instrument to deny rights to individuals and families and undermine unions' efforts to negotiate fair treatment for all their members.

### **Restoring the Right to Vote**

The 2000 presidential election was a wake-up call for many Americans who believed disenfranchisement was a thing of the past. Countless citizens were denied their constitutional right to vote as a result of failed voting systems, flawed processes and—by some accounts—deliberate intimidation and chicanery. The failure of voting systems around the country disproportionately disenfranchised people of color, people with disabilities, the poor and older Americans. Ultimately, these failures cheated us all.

After the 2000 election, "Never again" became a rallying cry. The union movement supported reforms around the nation and helped win passage of the 2002 Help America Vote Act (HAVA). HAVA made important changes to the voting process, including setting minimum standards, requiring the use of provisional ballots and improving voter registration. More recently, our movement organized a massive voter protection and education effort to help make sure every voter could vote and every vote would be counted in the 2004 presidential election.

Unfortunately, the 2004 election showed us we still have a long way to go. On Election Day, it quickly became clear that the HAVA reforms did not go far enough. Americans still faced serious systemic failings, and cynical organized efforts were

carried out to intimidate and suppress voters and discriminate against citizens based on their race and heritage.

If the United States is to remain a leader among the world's democratic nations in the 21st century, we must have an election system in which the fundamental right to vote is guaranteed to all. We renew our call for election reform at both the federal and state levels founded on four fundamental principles. First, voter registration should be simple and designed to encourage voting through universal registration at age 18 and same-day registration and voting. Federal laws should not prohibit voter registration in federally funded programs. Second, voting should be easy and the exercise of the right certain. To encourage voting and political participation by all Americans, we support creation of an Election Day holiday. Third, every vote must be counted. Finally, voting rights laws must be enforced aggressively, and penalties for violating voting rights must be strong enough to act as a meaningful deterrent. We should move ahead quickly on these reforms, at both the federal and state levels, to

ensure equality in voting rights the next time Americans go to the polls.

We also wholeheartedly support and will work to secure reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965, one of our nation's most important and most effective civil rights laws. Critical provisions of the VRA will expire in 2007. In particular, we will fight for renewal of the requirement that bilingual election assistance be provided in certain jurisdictions, that federal authorities monitor any proposed changes to voting laws or procedures in jurisdictions with histories of voter exclusion and disenfranchisement and that poll observers and federal experts be deployed to jurisdictions with histories of voter exclusion.

One of the missions of the AFL-CIO is to secure "social equity in the Nation." We believe we can do so only by remaining true to our values. We believe in good jobs, economic security, opportunity and equality for all Americans. It is these values that unite us, and together we will fight for them.