

**Keynote Address  
of  
President Edwin D. Hill  
37<sup>th</sup> IBEW Convention**

**Cleveland, Ohio  
September 11, 2006**

Brothers and sisters, thank you, and I do mean thank you, again, from the bottom of my heart. I thank you for the confidence that you have shown in me by honoring me with re-election as President of the greatest trade union in the world, with no offense intended to our British and our Australian friends.

Again, I thank my family. Without their support, I wouldn't be here before you today.

I want to express my gratitude to the Vice Presidents and to the IEC members and the staff of the IBEW. Without their hard work and without their loyalty, we wouldn't be able to accomplish the high goals we have set for ourselves.

We're talking about the rhythm of the past, but we can't forget those who helped us create it. We honor the memory of the great International President who was called home by God last year, a man who did so much to energize and make organizing our number-one goal once again. And I owe a debt of gratitude, as do we all, to the late International President Emeritus Jack Barry.

His wife Kitty Barry is here as our special guest and we're glad that she could join us.

Having had the honor to serve as International Secretary-Treasurer, I truly appreciate the efforts of the men who held that position before myself, and I would like to thank three of them specifically, Ralph Leigon, Secretary Emeritus, who could not be with us today. But as always, Ralph sends his very best wishes. Jack Moore, my predecessor who did so very much to improve the lives of our members. Jerry O'Connor. A true friend and a tremendous working partner.

All of them worked tirelessly to advance the cause of the IBEW and left behind a list of accomplishments that would be the envy of any local union officer. I thank them on behalf of this whole Brotherhood.

And, of course, of course, the incumbent International Secretary-Treasurer whom you so wisely re-elected this morning. Jon Walters has worked hard throughout his career to make the IBEW a stronger and more effective union. He's in the thick of the fight again today, as he always is on our behalf. And I thank him for his support, his counsel and those frank discussions that we have. I'm proud to call Jon my friend and my brother. Jon, thank you very much for all that you do.

I thank my International Senior Executive Assistant, Larry Neidig, who has worked closely with me for an awful long time. He's always in the office early in the morning doing the work of the Brotherhood. And believe me, he does more to keep us moving forward than you could know.

Liz Shuler, my Executive Assistant. She's another hard worker and as competent as they come. She's a true asset to this union, brothers and sisters.

And I thank you, all of the delegates, who represent hundreds of thousands of our members. You're on the front lines of the struggle for what is right and decent in this society, the ability to earn a decent living from the sweat of one's brow as one of the most noble causes that exists on the face of the Earth. Thank you for what you do every day to advance these causes.

We gather here in Cleveland to honor the Rhythm of the Past and to begin -- to begin, brothers and sisters, the "Drumbeat of the Future" of the IBEW.

The "Rhythm of the Past" is always with us. You see it in the grainy photographs up here, of the ten brave men who founded our union against incredible odds. That rhythm beats through the history of the boom and the bust and the war and the peace and the depression and prosperity and through every negotiation, every organizing campaign, every grievance, every community activity that we work ourselves into, at every get-out-the-vote drive. The heart and the soul and the courage of every man and woman who ever proudly carried an IBEW card did his or her part to leave a legacy for the future is part of our rhythm. It has changed lives -- our lives and it is part of who we are.

Few unions can match the long and storied history of the IBEW. It's a history to be honored, respected and remembered. And the best way to honor and respect and remember is to make history, brothers and sisters, make history of our own, to create our own drumbeat for the future. Brothers and sisters, this is our time, this is our task and this is our mission. The future of the IBEW starts right here in Cleveland, Ohio, today.

It will take courage, it will take spirit and tenacity. But together, we'll do it. We will beat the drums of change that will create the kind of future that we really want.

You know, when I was working on this speech this year, I was tempted to pick up from September 2001 and talk about all the things that have happened since then that have led us to this place in time. Then I threw it away. This is not the time to dwell on what all of us have lived through. Since 2001, we've lived through all of it. You were there. You know the score.

Our members are not going to ask us how we did on a history test when we come back from this convention. They want to know what we're going to do now and what we're going to do for them in the future. That's the beat that they want, brothers and sisters, and that's what we're here to talk about and that's what we're here to do.

So let's talk about that. Every day new reports come across my desk. Areas that once had contentious relationships with contractors are now practicing cooperation. Industries that once wouldn't give our union journeymen wiremen a sniff of their construction work now can't praise us enough.

Nonunion contractors who once saw the IBEW as an enemy are beginning to use our members on key jobs. Corporate executives are talking to us and including us -- us, brothers and sisters -- in their plans for the future.

The Code of Excellence, pioneered in the Eighth District under the leadership of Jon Walters, is being voluntarily adopted in local after local in this Brotherhood.

Non-union workers who once thought that the IBEW had no place for them are finding a home in our ranks.

Business managers and their staffs are using ever more creative tactics to reach out to nonunion contractors and customers to get all of their work.

You know, it sounds so simple, but it went against our grain for, oh, so many years. This isn't pie in the sky, brothers and sisters. This isn't smoke and mirrors. This is real. We made it real by seeing that we had to jumpstart ourselves on the road to success. And the place that we found to do it was Florida. I think most of you know about that because of all the articles that we've had in the *Journal* and I've talked about them in my speeches all over the country at all of our conferences and progress meetings and we gave it special attention on our Web site.

Florida has been a full-court press where we're exploring and planning and taking action on gaining new members for all the branches of our Brotherhood. It's not just construction, brothers and sisters, it's all branches of this Brotherhood. We've invested the resources of the International, organized our local unions, and gotten the rank and file involved.

Florida was the place where we were in danger of falling off the map. And if we couldn't compete or make our presence known in one of the fastest-growing states in the United States, then our future everywhere was very bleak. And if you don't believe me, NECA National President Milner Irvin will be here tomorrow, and he'll talk about the same thing.

We've been at it for about a year-and-a-half now. We know that if we just went in there with an old-fashioned organizing drive, we'd get our heads handed to us. Not only that, we would squander your dues money. Instead, Florida has been a laboratory for new ways of operating and organizing and taking on the challenges that we once thought were just too tough to handle.

Florida is the place where our small works agreement was expanded, which allowed our contractors, all of our contractors, and our members to compete for residential and other work that we have been shut out of for so very long.

Florida is the place where the new construction wireman and construction electrician classifications have been used to good effect. These classifications not only give us a place to slot newly-organized workers, but they also help us to fight and win new jobs and a growing share of the market.

And for those of you -- those of us who thought that these classifications represented a diluting of our standards, I can only say that as we win more work, we're putting more journeymen wiremen to work on these very same projects. And now we have a way of putting formerly nonunion electricians to work right away, giving them an immediate stake in our Brotherhood.

This has not been a result just in Florida, you understand, but in virtually every jurisdiction where the construction wireman and the construction electrician classifications have been adopted by the IBEW and their NECA signatory contractors. If anyone's got a better alternative to doing what we're doing that actually works -- there's all kinds of ideas--then please let us know. Come and see me. It's all about results, brothers and sisters. If we don't get the work, we have no chance.

By getting work using new tactics, we open up opportunities all across the board. And thanks to our increased competitiveness, the IBEW's share of the huge Florida construction market is up -- now, this may sound small -- it's up to 14 percent. But you have got to understand it was below 10 percent. This is only the beginning, but it's a great start after one year.

Florida is where we've made our first breakthrough in organizing satellite installers, a growing workforce within the telecommunications branch that has been treated miserably by employers and shut out of all the profits generated by their work in that growing industry.

We're building on that initial success, and we're taking the campaign to many other areas and many states.

Florida is where we're scouting out manufacturing plants to organize, including some companies where we are already representing people. We're not giving up on manufacturing, not in the least. We're going to do what it takes to grow this sector as well.

Florida is where we most clearly understand that we have plenty of targets within companies we already have a presence in, particularly in utility among linemen and power plant workers. We're mounting a campaign to increase our membership substantially at Florida Power & Light. The full-court press pioneered in Florida is not a one-shot thing, brothers and sisters. We've begun early stages of that effort in Central Pennsylvania and another area where we have lost much of our presence in all of our branches and we need to get it back.

And if all goes as planned, there will be more and more campaigns rising up across the continent. That approach is not our only weapon. We needed to turn construction around as quickly as possible so we could get it back and the growth of the market that we had lost.

But the tactics that work in construction won't necessarily work and can't necessarily be applied to all of our other branches. Our other professional and industrial branches have different structures, different cultures and different ways of operating and different ways of doing business.

Over the past two decades, the International has conducted education programs on the need to organize, particularly in these branches. We've run several campaigns with some varying degrees of success and exhorted locals to get involved. The results have been a steady loss of our membership in all of our branches. It's time to stop the bleeding, brothers and sisters, and stop beating our heads against the wall and try something new.

Our plan, certainly contingent upon the outcome of the rest of this convention, is to establish organizing councils in defined geographical areas all across this Brotherhood. We're starting in places where we think we have the very best chance of winning and some successes that we can build on from there.

The first group of what I expect to ultimately number 100 new organizers has been hired. We've trained them. They've been trained by the International and will be assigned as needed in the first councils put into place. More are on the way.

The idea is not to supplant the local organizing efforts or to let locals off the hook for organizing. The idea is to provide the kind of genuine, solid support that's been missing from our strategy, support that will encourage rank-and-file participation, identify winnable targets, of which there are literally thousands -- and I hope to show you tomorrow -- and go after them in a coherent and well-planned manner. This is what has been done and what is already in the works, brothers and sisters.

I submit to you that we did not stem the losses by 8,000 members in this past fiscal year by dumb luck or by a fortunate up-tick in the economy. The plain fact is that the hard work put in by many of you and countless others who are not in this hall is paying off. It's happening because men and women, from veterans to rookies, are making it happen every day they go to work. And never forget this, brothers and sisters, change is taking place because we are the IBEW.

And we have what it takes to face up to reality. And we have what it takes to respond when duty calls. And we have the quality that you can look up and Google, if you will, and look up in your dictionary -- courage, fortitude, nerve, guts. We have it. That's why you can see the dawn of a new day. But we're not there yet. Even with all we've done, it's not near enough. It's been encouraging to watch the success stories all across North America, but that's only the first wave. Where does this lead us? That, brothers and sisters, is the big question.

It's imperative to continue the good things we're doing, the good things that you're doing every day on the job, every day out in the field. There will be no backsliding, not now, not after we've come this far. Most of us have been around long enough to remember the experiences when this union was wrought with complacency. It was the main factor behind our slide in the 1970s. If we allow complacency to set in again, brothers and sisters, it will destroy us. Complacency taught us some very hard lessons.

We've learned that good times sometimes only mask the need for us to confront some internal issues and some internal factors that were eating away at our very foundation. We found an acceptance of decline, an acceptance of decline rather than a willingness to think differently and fight this decline in new ways, ways that you can think of, more so than myself. We found the resistance to organizing was still alive in all of our branches. In construction we saw that too many locals wanted to run things like they did in the old days, ignoring the changes that had affected the industry for decades.

In short, we found ourselves in the early 21st century with a union still geared to the mid-20th century. I'm here to say that complacency is not going to be permitted to take root in the IBEW again as long as I have anything to say about it.

And believe me, when I tell you, I intend to have plenty to say.

We'll be pounding home the message that nothing less than a sustained commitment to excellence is acceptable. We're going to continue to preach, exhort, and do what it takes to build a positive attitude throughout this Brotherhood, not just the positive attitude on the jobs, but a belief in ourselves, that we can do anything we so desire and do anything to succeed.

The message in the "State of Our Union" video that I distributed last year is our watchword. The message is being tailored for other branches, and it will be distributed throughout our Brotherhood very soon. In order to keep the message out there, we've started Hour Power. And I hope you visit it. I hope you go and look at what we're doing. Hour Power is a separate Web site. It's geared directly to our membership. Hour Power isn't a place to hear a sermon. You're hearing that now, I think.

It's about success stories. It's about information, information about your trade, and even some fun stuff, even some prizes and things. I had a guy come up the other day and said he won 50 bucks on Hour Power. I said, "Geez, I didn't know we gave that." It's a place for members to catch some spirit, spirit of what's happening in this Brotherhood of ours; and it will continue, we'll expand it.

I want to make it clear that while we recognize the need to do things differently, we're not going to undermine our values that we've had for years. In my keynote address in 2001, I talked about the need to stand up to our NECA partners on the issue of right to reject.

We've been negotiating and arguing over this point for five years, and we still don't have an agreement. They haven't gotten off their position and still want "call by name," which would cut the legs right out from under our referral system. And I'm going to tell you, brothers and sisters, I'm not going to take this membership down that road.

We're going to keep at it. We're going to keep at it until we get it right. This is one piece of business we're going to do the old-fashioned way, through hard negotiating, hard bargaining. Partners disagree sometimes, but we'll never stop talking to our partners and never stop trying to work out our common ground and issues confronting our industry. The good will and the right spirit are there, and we will get this done.

We'll not get discouraged if new programs take time to develop as intended. Some people are born as good organizers and with the ability to organize. But great organizers take time to train, they take time to mold and put through the test of time of being on the front lines. And we'll not just be giving them intensive courses and then cutting them loose. Our organizers will receive organizing training, utilizing online courses as needed. We'll be there for them all the time.

We're in this for the long haul, brothers and sisters, and I mean we're in it for the long haul. We are serious and will not just train International organizers, we'll bring in new educational programs which are already in the pipeline to our locals.

In the past we focused on why we needed to organize. And I've often said that we've trained our people so often on why we need to organize, they ought to have a doctorate degree in it.

Now is the time to focus on how to organize and insist that it be done. And I called on our Vice Presidents -- and they're with me, they're right behind us -- to insist that this get done. As I said, organizing is a union-wide mission, and we will give some locals all the tools, and I mean more than just lip service. But they have to do their part. This I can guarantee: If we do things the right way and we have faith in ourselves, we will not only see results, brothers and sisters, we will succeed.

Let there also be no doubt that we're committed to growth in all the branches of our Brotherhood. Our reach into all facets of the electrical industry has been our strength. Our strength has grown from union

density in all the electrical branches. While some unions have suffered tremendously when their core industry was on a downslide, we've managed to stay on our feet. Shaky sometimes, but we're still standing.

Our Brotherhood got started in the utility and the construction branches, but we've branched out early into telecommunications and manufacturing, railroads, government and added broadcasting as the technology changes. Our diversity gives us a foothold in areas of fast-emerging technology. It gives us contacts and potential organizing targets where any facet of our trade is practiced. Our density in every one of our core industries is just not good enough. We can do better; and believe me, with your help, we will.

In the IBEW, we have always taken pride in the fact that we're responsible for our own future. We refuse to use external forces as an excuse. But there's no doubt that we're not isolated from the world as we see it today. The decisions made by those with political power make our lives easier or tougher, depending on who holds the reins.

We can't deny that we've been living in a changing political and social environment. We don't try to. Perhaps our generation forgot what it took to win the kind of lifestyle and the compensation that we all took for granted. Over time, well-financed, right-wing elements patiently took apart our New Deal, our Great Society in the United States, and began the first stages of erosion of Canada's social system. It isn't paranoia. It's been documented over and over again in recent years.

What they've also succeeded in doing is eroding the sense of community that many North Americans once felt. I complain about this throughout the country as I go around and meet with our local unions. We have forgotten what it takes to belong to all the social clubs that we belonged to when we were growing up, what it was when the union hall and the labor council were the central point of focus for all working people in the area. That's been bad for all those institutions like unions, particularly because we're about people first.

The world is a better place for corporate executives and investment bankers, but it is not nearly so welcoming for working families. Let's all understand where the rule of the elites has taken us. They've put America up for sale. They put a selling price on it. They're selling it off piece by piece. You remember the yelling and the screaming when we learned that management of some of the ports, American ports, was being sold to a company in Dubai. They had to call it off, go backwards.

But what about the other smaller deals that don't get that kind of attention? Ever hear of National Grid? It's not a company that runs a football fantasy league. National Grid is a British-owned utility company with other such partial owners as a Saudi investment company. The Saudi investment company owns less than 5 percent, so they don't have to divulge their ownership. National Grid has bought six different companies in New England and New York, including Niagara Mohawk, an IBEW-represented utility. They're trying to buy Keyspan in New York, also represented by the IBEW. If they're successful, they'll be the third largest utility in the United States with 8 million customers. And that's not all.

Eon, a German company, and Scottish Power, have also been players in the American utility market. So that means that our chunk of membership now gets their paychecks by overseas owners.

Where does it stop? Take a look at the national debt. The debt is financed by the sale of government-backed securities. So many Americans hold government bonds. Some of you in the room probably do. But so do foreign nations, \$2.4 trillion worth of bonds in 2005. As of September 2005, Japan held more than \$680 billion worth of U.S. Treasury securities; China, \$252 billion; the United Kingdom, \$182 billion; Caribbean Banking Centers, \$103 billion; our good friends in OPEC, \$55 billion. Now, this is all according to the U.S. Treasury Department.

George Bush and his party talk about national security. You know, where in the heck is the security in having large segments of our economy controlled by overseas masters?

There's also a lot of talk about immigration these days. The subject gets twisted. It's twisted because they want you to be afraid. All of us are descendants of immigrants. So none of us -- none of us should have a problem with the legal -- legal, mind you -- immigration because that's how our ancestors got their opportunity at a better life and that's how most of us got our opportunity. But when where you see the borders where enforcement is nonexistent, then, brothers and sisters, we should have a problem. When we see desperate people from poor countries risking their lives to come here to form a pool of exploited labor, then we can't as a trade union be silent.

The same economic powers that are selling off our country are now clamoring for guest-worker programs and other measures to pit illegal immigrants against native born, worker against worker. It's an old game that's been played many times. It's been played over and over again. And shame on us if we fall for it.

We have a resolution on immigration. We'll talk about solutions later this week. But, in the big picture, the only solution is to change the balance of power in Washington, D.C., and get rid of the turkey in the White House.

As long as our votes count in this democracy, we can fight for sane policies and demand a government that works for everybody, not just the highest bidders. Our ability to organize goes hand in hand with the need to mobilize. We need to mobilize our members to join in organized labor's campaigns to reach out to unrepresented workers who share our economic interests. For too long, we've let the right wing divide us from our non-union counterparts, and even many of our own members, through manipulation of social issues.

Now, I'm not going to get into the social issues, but I have some very strong feelings about them. It's time for that nonsense to stop. If there's ever a need for working men and women in North America to identify with each other on working issues as a working class, this is it. The attacks on our very way of life have gone beyond all sense of reason and all sense of bounds of decency.

Our enemies have not been content with trading away our jobs, reducing our ranks and rolling back government. They've gone after our health care. They've gone after our pensions and even our ability to organize to try to stand up for ourselves is under attack.

We're talking about the basic union rights, the union right of freedom of association. The National Labor Relations Board is all but rendered meaningless anymore. It's undermined the principle of the eight-hour day, and they're trying to bar anyone who gives any kind of a direction, like a foreman, from being part of a union.

No matter how weak their political system and their political position may become -- and it's crumbling fast, by the way -- as long as they have the power, they will use it to smack us.

So it will be up to us this year to change the right-wing zealots, get them to pack their bags, sneak out of town and go collect the damn jobs that they bought with their votes.

I say to them, you have done irreparable harm to working men and women in this country. So go on home.

If you were at the political conference on Friday, you heard me quote Harry Truman. Here's another quote from "Give 'Em Hell Harry" he delivered on the campaign trail in 1948 before a union audience. President Truman said -- and we hope to have a little video of that later on -- "If you get an administration and a Congress unfriendly to labor, you have much to fear and you'd better look out."

He went on to say that the Republican Congress at the time got a Republican president as well and then, I quote, "Labor can expect a steady barrage of body blows. And if you stay home like you did in 1946, then you deserve to get every damn blow you got."

As usual, Harry got it right back in 1948; but 58 years later, we're living under a Republican Congress and a Republican president; and we're damn sore from the body blows that we've taken. It's time to stop being the right wing's punching bag. We must take back our share of the political power in Canada and the United States.

It's all part of why unions remain vital to society. If we bring more members into our ranks and then we expose more workers to union principles, that makes us stronger at the bargaining table and in the political arena. That makes us the envy -- the envy, of non-union workers and a beacon for them to follow. And that helps us get stronger and so on as the ball rolls forward.

The wealthy and the powerful will always -- always, brothers and sisters, hold more cards than we do. But just like they did in the 1940s and 1950s, they can be and, shall I say, persuaded to give us a chance.

Now, you've heard me talk about corporate power in my speeches, in my *Journal* articles and elsewhere. And I firmly believe that they have too much of everything, too much of everything in today's global economy. But let's remember that those who have the power to make our lives miserable also have the power to make it better, if they would just stop fighting us and realize that we have a stake in this game as well as they do.

Throughout the Brotherhood's history, including the recent past, IBEW leaders, including myself, have met with corporate executives and talked sense, talked down-to-earth sense. We've tried to show them how much more practical it is to their bottom line just to work with us. We've endeavored to show them in practical terms that our skills and our commitment to our communities or our commitment to excellence can help them.

Now, some have listened. We have representatives of the corporate world here to speak at this convention, and I hope you will welcome them with the typical IBEW class and dignity. We need more

enlightened business leaders like those who will be here this week, and we need to convince more to take a similar path one way or another.

I've talked about some ambitious plans this afternoon, and this is only the beginning.

You know, five years is a long time, and none of us knows what the future holds. And at the end of September 10th, the first day of our 2001 Convention, we left a hall much the same as this one, on a high note. Everybody was happy. Everybody was elated. We were having a good time, only to have the world come crashing down around our heads the very next morning.

We can plan as much as we like, but the only certainty is that we will need to adjust and correct our course and react to the new challenges over the next five years. If we are to keep moving forward in that time, we need to ensure that we have the resources to do it. We know that the only sustainable long-term strategy in our Brotherhood is growth, growth in membership, growth in membership in every branch. We also know that even the best intentions mean nothing without the resources to back them up; and that is one of the issues that must be addressed responsibly -- responsibly at this convention.

This week, the Law Committee will report out a constitutional amendment to increase the per capita, to increase the per capita three times over the next five years, once in 2007, once in 2009 and again in 2011. This was proposed by Secretary-Treasurer Walters and myself.

We did not do this in haste but only after careful consideration; and we ask you to make that decision, your decision when you vote on that, make your decision in the same way that we made ours, after careful consideration of what the future may bring.

Consider this. We all know that a dues increase is painful, but think about the consequences of maintaining the status quo. Without the investment in our programs, our growth will be stunted. Without growth, our ability to represent and protect our current members and their families is jeopardized.

You'll see in your Officers' Report in your binders that our operating income is not sufficient to match our operating expenses. Our own membership numbers tell the story.

Our fiscal year runs from July 1 of a given year to June 30th of the next. In the IBEW fiscal year of 2002 -- we ended June 2002, our membership lost a total of 22,127 members. That's a hit for just one year.

For fiscal year 2003, we lost an additional 15,384. In the fiscal year 2004, 11,095. And in fiscal year 2005, 11,202. And in the fiscal year that concluded on June 30th, 2006, we found that our losses had been reduced to 3,922.

We made sound investments over the years that give us a good, solid economic foundation. But if we continue to dip into our reserves, then we will be living dangerously close to the edge and unable to implement our ambitious plans that are necessary for our future and necessary for our survival.

Consider too that other unions, including the CWA, Sheet Metal Workers, the Plumbers and Pipefitters, AFSCME and the unions of Change to Win, have all committed additional resources in some manner through recently-enacted dues increases.

Will we, the IBEW, the union that has led the way in organizing and excellence, lose our nerve? We can't lose our nerve now. We will risk emerging markets in the future if we do. Other unions would love, just love, to get their hands on some of the kind of work and jobs that we're going after, that we have a stake in our own future, that we've laid out there that belong to us.

And what should be your response? Do we have the courage, brothers and sisters, to do what is necessary to keep this Brotherhood on the right path or will we take the easy way and a more conservative course? Each of us must answer that question for him or herself this week.

There it is, brothers and sisters. It comes down to one word: courage. The courage that we've been asked to display in the first decade of the 21st century is only a portion, a small portion of the courage that our founders showed in the last period of the 19th century.

We have all the benefit from all that was built by Henry Miller and J.T. Kelly and the many others who came after them. We heard the voices and we saw the faces of some of the veterans in this morning's videos. We will honor and hear more as we go on during the week. We owe them all a thanks for their contributions to this Brotherhood.

But let me ask you to focus on the young members whom you also saw in the video and you'll hear more from this week. Think about the enthusiasm and the respect that they have already shown for the IBEW and how proud they are to be part of something this grand.

Think about how many of our other young members in your home locals feel the same way. What about the young brothers and sisters? What are we going to do to make sure that they inherit a strong union, a union with the same formidable tool of improving the lives of working men and women that we inherited?

What happens here, brothers and sisters, matters. What we do here makes a difference. The decisions that we make together here in Cleveland matter to the work of the International Office and to all of our district offices as well as our local unions. What we do here matters in the daily responsibilities of our local unions, the local unions that you represent. And most important, it has an impact on job sites, the job floors, in the belly of a ship, on a video shoot, in a rail yard, on a utility pole, in a garage or anywhere elsewhere that IBEW members work.

What the IBEW does matters to entire industries, to entire governments and all throughout the whole labor movement. So don't think that this week is inconsequential to you. It's all connected like a big circuit, and the tools are held by those of you in this room in attendance at this convention.

You are here because you decided to play a leadership role in your local union as an officer or a committed member. When each of you, each of us and you, all of us, chose the path of activism, we were signing on to do some heavy lifting and some heavy responsibility. Being a dedicated union leader means that you have to go to the mat with management and negotiate the terms and conditions under which your members work. It means pointing out the realities that no one wants to hear, not your boss, not your executive board, not your union members.

It means that we're being at work while others are eating dinner, watching television or down the corner having a beer. It means having to break the news that there's no work or that a plant's shutting down or that the company is cutting back. It means facing the anger or dealing with the anguish of a member who has just had his third child or one who has fallen short of qualifying for his pension and his benefits or one who has to tell his smart kid that there's no money for college.

It takes courage, brothers and sisters, to deal with situations like this; but we do it because the IBEW is the best vehicle -- the best vehicle that we have to change things. The IBEW is what gave us all a fighting chance at a good life in North America and a chance to do what we love.

The IBEW gives us hope that will help those members get the last years of the pension or another job or work in another shop to support their kids or to pay for an education. As long as we have this Brotherhood and as long as we have our solidarity, we have hope, we have opportunity and strength to change things for the better. And we do it because we feel the same sense of sacred obligation, an obligation to the memory of those who went before us and those who will come after us. They're counting on us, brothers and sisters.

And as I stand before this great group of union activists, I see men and women who have already done so much for their union brothers and sisters. I see people who feel the rhythm of the past and; by your presence, you want to be part of the drumbeat of the future.

I see men and women of rare and extraordinary courage who have done and are going to do -- get great things done together because we're not just a union, brothers and sisters. We are the IBEW. And we will give no less than our finest and best every day of our lives.

Brothers and sisters, we're going to work hard and get things done at this convention; and then we're going to come home and go forth from this great city of Cleveland and deliver a forceful message to one and to all. We are of the IBEW, and we're here and we're going to win. Let's rock.

Thank you. God bless you all.