

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

We need to talk. As I am sure most of you have heard by now, the AFL-CIO, at its October convention, voted to endorse Vice President Albert Gore's candidacy for President of the United States.

The endorsement was adopted by majority vote of the unions present. The IBEW was not one of the unions voting to endorse, and you need to know why.

The IBEW believes that an endorsement at this stage is premature. This view has nothing to do with the inside baseball of politics. It matters not to me how the failure of the AFL-CIO to endorse would have been viewed by the pundits in the media. It matters little what the candidates wanted. This isn't about any of them; it's about you.

The labor movement has rightfully celebrated in recent years our return to grassroots political action. Our strong showings in the 1996 and 1998 elections in the United States, and especially our outstanding victory in defeating Proposition 226, the paycheck deception initiative in California, were based on greater levels of rank and file member involvement.

In addition, the AFL-CIO itself led the way in seeking the views of rank and file members on what they want and expect from their unions regarding politics. The clear message yielded by that research was that members generally trust their unions but don't want to be told how to vote. Members want information and guidance from their union, and then they make up their own minds.

If there is one thing in which I have come to trust in my years in the IBEW, it is the good sense and judgment of our members. Like many of you, I have seen firsthand what a powerful force for positive change we can be when we work together. The same is true for the 2000 Presidential elections in the United States, but to do so we must first foster that unity of purpose. We cannot wade into the political battles of 2000 without a solid

consensus. We cannot have a strong grassroots movement while seeming to dictate choices a full 13 months prior to the election.

That is why we opposed the endorsement. Even though the AFL-CIO has made its choice as an institution, we still need to make ours as members of the IBEW. To start the process, we have included in this issue (mailed to active members and retirees in the United States), a special insert in which we ask you to state your preference for President of the United States. A self-mailer is included for you to return your ballot. We have provided the web site addresses of the various candidates so that you may obtain their views on key issues. If you don't have a computer, you can visit these web sites at almost any library. We ask that you return this ballot to us by December 1, 1999.

This poll is the first step. We will publish additional information about the candidates and their stands on the issues in upcoming *IBEW Journals*. Our goal is to build a consensus in order to move forward in unity to support a candidate, whether that turns out to be in the primaries or in the general election campaign. Of course, in an organization as vast as the IBEW, we will never achieve unanimity, and our respect for each other's opinion remains one of our foremost principles.

The IBEW will be an active participant in the 2000 elections. The issues facing working people in the U.S.—Social Security, Medicare, the de-industrialization of North America, the right to organize—are too important for us to sit by the wayside. Above all, we must do so as a unified Brotherhood. Please make your voice heard and return your ballot as soon as possible.

Preparing To Vote

J. J. BARRY



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