

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

**W**e better watch out. We better not cry. We better not pout; I'm telling you why. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is coming to town. And they're going to activate their grass roots operation.

Hide the old folks and the children.

After two years of castigating working people and their unions as "special interests, boss-driven, compulsory-dues-for-politics, big labor" all-purpose villains, the Chamber has decided to stop mealy-mouthing and use real flattery on us. It's called imitation.

Chamber President Thomas Donohue (not to be confused with former AFL-CIO leader Thomas Donahue—what a difference a vowel makes) recently announced that the national business organization would spend some \$5 million on selected U.S. House and Senate races in 2000. "We have to be more aggressive if we expect people to support us on issues important to the business community," Mr. Donohue told the press.

But wait; there's more. The Chamber is also saying that it wants to be more active at the grass roots level in 2000. Grass roots? The only grass roots these guys have are in their well manicured lawns, which come to them courtesy of the labor of their gardeners. Of course, if the gardeners want health benefits or start talking about organizing into a union, the manure really hits the spreader.

In an open, democratic society, people have the right to organize, raise money legitimately and spend it to support like-minded candidates for public office. The IBEW has no problem with that. We only have a problem when people who would deny us the right to do the same (remember the "Paycheck Deception" movement in California and elsewhere in 1998?) suddenly get religion. We also hope that the Chamber pays a rigorous attention to the legality of its contributions as does our IBEW-COPE.

If the Chamber thinks that their efforts to roust executives out of the country clubs on November 7, 2000,

will help quash any hint of progressive political leadership in America, that's fine. We will be who we always have been and do what we do best. We are America's working families who don't begrudge a thing to the wealthy; we just want the opportunity to succeed too. We want a decent standard of living commensurate with our hard work. We want political leaders who act from the gut to help working people, not just the moneyed elite. We will be telling the truth about the issues and the candidates and moving heaven and earth to make sure that IBEW members and their families exercise their precious right to vote in 2000. That right might have been developed by the Founding Fathers, but it was nurtured, protected and guaranteed by America's soldiers, whether they fought on the front lines of the battlefield or the barricades of social justice over the course of our history.

When you enter a voting booth, no one asks how rich you are, how much education you have, how big your portfolio is or (no longer, thank God) what color you are or where your mother was born. It's just you and your beliefs. And even though the election is still 11 months away. I'm telling you now and will tell you throughout the year not to waste this opportunity next November. Let's show the Chamber who really makes up the fabric of American life. ☐

## Hey, Big Spenders

J. J. BARRY



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