

**Remarks by John J. Sweeney,  
President of the AFL-CIO**

**The Peggy Browning Fund's 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration**

**Philadelphia, PA  
March 22, 2007**

Thank you, Bill [George], for those kind words and my thanks to you, Dennis [Walsh] and to Joe [Lurie] and the Fund for this award. I accept it on behalf of the more than 10 million members of AFL-CIO unions that I am privileged to serve.

Let me express my special thanks for the work that Dennis and Joe do - both in founding this organization - and of course for the other very important roles you play. And let me acknowledge the great work that so many of you do - thanks especially to Gov. Rendell and Congressman Bob Brady.

I am especially honored to receive recognition from this organization, which has blossomed and filled such a void. It has done so much to bring young attorneys into our movement and God knows we need them with the state of workers' rights in our country.

The Peggy Browning Fund is not only an important counter to the corporate lures that sing such a siren song to law school graduates today. It has become a valuable ally to law schools, unions, the National Labor Relations Board, and non-profit worker organizations.

It has also been a tremendous inspiration to all at the AFL-CIO where under the eye of General Counsel Jon Hiatt we now have a vital "Law Student Union Summer" program, as well as a Minority Outreach Program that each summer has 35 participants working in union-side labor law firms and legal departments of unions around the country.

So thank you very, very much.

What we're really doing tonight is honoring Peggy and I'm glad to play a small role in that. She embodied everything anyone could ever hope for in a public servant, everything anyone in the profession would ever need as a role model.

Peggy was a path-breaker. As a woman in a field - union-side labor law - still dominated by men, and as the first person with a background representing unions ever appointed to serve on the National Labor Relations Board, she was always very conscious of setting an example for those who would follow.

She would have been incredibly proud of what Joe has accomplished in her memory - and of what all of you have done.

Peggy combined a great zest for life with a passion for social justice.

Like so many of you Peggy was a passionate advocate for workers and our unions -and the freedom to organize and bargain collectively -- and I'm sure she'd agree that we are in a critical period when it comes to the current state of the National Labor Relations Act as well as the NLRB.

She'd be the first to step forward and say that we need fundamental legislative change in order to correct the inadequacies of the Act and restore the values laid out in its preamble.

I'm sure she'd also agree that we deserve an NLRB that promotes those values instead of trying at every turn to thwart them.

We have an opportunity over the next couple of years to remedy some of the faults in our labor law and re-direct the efforts of the NLRB -- through passage and enactment of the Employee Free Choice Act -- and I'd like to say a few words about its importance.

Thanks to the leadership of Rep. George Miller and Speaker Pelosi we passed the Employee Free Choice Act by an overwhelming majority in the House of Representatives and now it is in the Senate, with the first hearing by Sen. Ted Kennedy next week.

The debate we've stirred up in the process is one that is long overdue in our country --it's a debate not just about workers' rights and union rights, it's also about the survival of a middle class that transformed a struggling new nation into an international symbol of hope for working families.

Like many of you I am the child of immigrant parents who came to this country determined to give their children a better life --my mother was a domestic worker on the upper East Side in New York City and my dad was a New York City bus driver.

Tom Brokaw called our parents "The Greatest Generation" for what they did on the battlefield to protect our values and make the world safe. They should also be called "The Freedom Generation" for what they did to protect workers from the flaws of capitalism and the inhumanity of corporatism.

Our mothers and fathers built our unions and those unions became a counterweight to the excesses of the marketplace, a collective strength that helped assure them of an adequate slice of the wealth they helped create.

They knew that if they worked hard and played by the rules they could lift themselves up and they created the largest middle class, the most dynamic economy, and the most inclusive democracy in the history of the world.

Today, the world they created with the sweat of their brows and the boldness of their actions is sliding away.

You know the litany: We have the widest wage and wealth divide of any industrialized nation; CEOs are making 431 times what workers are making; productivity

and profits are up while workers' wages and pensions and health care are down; good jobs are being replaced by Wal-Mart jobs; and if you try to fight back by forming or joining a union you run the risk of ending up with no job at all.

The Employee Free Choice Act won't change all that overnight. But it will restore the freedom of workers to organize and there are 60 million men and women in our country who say they will do just that, if given an even chance.

And it will give our unions a fighting chance to help put our country back on a high road to a community where burdens as well as prosperity are shared.

Not surprisingly, the enemies of Employee Free Choice are the same as they've always been in workers' battles --the Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, and industry trade associations are spending millions of dollars to defeat us.

And even if we are able to overcome a filibuster in the Senate -which is a very long shot --our current President will veto the bill.

That makes our course clear: In 2008, we have to replace more than a handful of Senators, like you in Pennsylvania did last year, and we must elect a Chief Executive who will once again act on behalf of the working men and women who make this country what it is --and what it can be.

I ask you all to work with us over the next few months to tell the story of what's happening to working people in our country and why we so desperately need legal change that can help us drive a culture change -- and social change -- and then work with us over the next 20 months to make the political change that is necessary if we are to make our country more like the vision we share.

Thank you again for this wonderful honor and thanks to the Peggy Browning Fund for preserving the legacy that keeps us struggling in solidarity.

God bless you and your families.

-End-