

CAMPAIGN FOR AMERICA'S FUTURE

TAKE BACK AMERICA 2006

MONDAY, JUNE 12, 2006

**WASHINGTON HILTON HOTEL
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

12:30-2:00 P.M. OPENING LUNCH

SPEAKER:

**LEO GERARD,
PRESIDENT, UNITED STEELWORKERS
AND RECIPIENT OF
THE APOLLO ALLIANCE "RIGHT STUFF" AWARD**

*Transcript by:
Federal News Service
Washington, D.C.*

LEO GERARD: I was warned by Jerome not to grab the astronaut by the head. (Laughter.) I want to thank Bob and Jerome and Larry for the kind words and this tremendous honor. I would be less than honest if I said that this honor belonged to me. It in fact belongs to our union. Many folks have never made the connection between the Steelworkers and the environment, but I want to give you a little bit of history.

Our union held its first conference on what was then called pollution abatement in the middle '60s. Our union led the fight to reduce coke oven emissions in the middle '60s. Our union led the fight to remove lead from the workplaces and fight for a lead standard in the '60s and '70s. We fought for a benzene standard. (Applause.) We joined with Dr. Selikoff to fight for the banning of asbestos and the elimination from our workplaces. (Applause.) With all due respect, we did this before we understood that it was going to be called an environmental fight; we called it an anti-pollution fight. We fought to remove acid rain in my hometown, which was the largest-single polluter in North America. And we did that under the leadership of many presidents.

But one of the most powerful moments in my time in leadership in our union came in 1990 – in 1990 at an international convention held in Toronto. Our then-president, our future president, our legislative director, and our director of the Occupational Health and Safety and Environment of our union created a document called “Our Children’s World.” And in that document in 1990, amongst many things that we said, a cornerstone of that document was that the issue of global warming was the defining issue of that decade and was the most serious environmental crisis facing the world today and that our union was committed to doing something about it. (Applause.)

And I want to take just a minute to introduce three of the people that are here today that were instrumental in creating that document: Mike Wright, who at the time was our director of our Occupational Health and Safety and Environment department; Jack Sheehan, who was the director of our legislative department, and our then-president, Lynn Williams, who is now the president of our Steelworker active retirees. Please stand. (Applause, cheers.)

Jerome and Larry and Bob made reference to a document that was just passed. On March 1st of this year, our international executive board unanimously endorsed a document called “Securing our Children’s World,” where we lay out the significant environmental challenges that face our society. We take on the challenges that few will be willing to take on. We make it clear that we’re not in favor of drilling in ANWR – drilling in ANWR. (Applause.) In many ways, drilling in ANWR is talking to that same ass that Larry was talking about – (laughter) – except this one isn’t as smart – (laughter) – because the reality is there is less oil in ANWR than we would consume in a year. What the right wing wants is to be able to drill in ANWR so that they can prove they can drill any damn place they want. And we have to stop them. (Applause.)

We have to make the case that we can have energy independence. We can have the case that we can reduce our dependence on foreign oil. We need to make the case that we need a diversified energy supply. We need to make the case that, quite frankly, if we just retrofitted our schools to current science, we can save more energy than we'd get out of ANWR – (applause) – and our kids would breathe better air.

I learned a fact just before coming up here, that currently the various trade deals that America signed that – they refused to have environmental standards in them. Our trade with China has reached 200-plus billion-dollar deficits. Our global trade deficit is excess of \$700 billion – this year might hit a trillion. How many people know in the public that on a smog-filled day in – (audio break) – upwards of 25 percent of the particulates have blown over from China, where they have no environmental standards, and we continue to sign rotten trade deals and send our jobs. We should export technology for renewable energy, not export good industrial family-supporting jobs. (Cheers, applause.)

Someone said to me, why did you join the Apollo Alliance? I said, we didn't just join; we helped found it. And we did that because it's a natural extension of our fundamental belief. It's not a choice between good jobs and a clean environment. That's a false choice. We will either have both or our kids and grandkids will have neither, and I want my kids and grandkids to have at least as good a shot in life as I had. (Applause.)

I'm happy to also tell you that last week – I lose track of days. I don't know which day June 7th was. I think it was, what, Wednesday? Last week in Washington at the National Press Club, on behalf of the 850,000 members of the Steelworkers Union and the close to 800,000 members of the Sierra Club, the Sierra Club and the United Steelworkers of America formally signed, creating the Blue-Green Alliance. (Applause.)

I'm not afraid to tell you, I'm going to catch some shit from some of our members – (laughter) – but I always remind them, shit's easier to throw than it is to catch. (Laughter.) I can't completely leave my plant vernacular behind. (Laughter.) But the reality is that in some segments of our newly merged union, the boss has been playing the card, just like the boss does in organizing drives or in collective bargaining when you want decent health care or decent pensions. They play the same card: If you want a good pension we won't have as many jobs; if you want a clean environment we can't have as many jobs. They're both a lie. They're both a lie. There is no reason why good jobs and a clean environment can't be available to all of us, as well as good pensions and good health care. (Applause.)

This is the richest country on Earth. There is not reason, economic or otherwise, why we can't have good jobs and a clean environment and sound policy for health care and pensions. The reality is that a country that's only had a democracy, who only returned to democracy for a very few years, is on the verge of having energy independence. That country is Brazil. And I'm happy to tell you that the president of Brazil is a former Metalworker union president who went to jail for the right to have a

union. (Applause.) He's going to be – Lula da Silva is going to be the first president of a major democracy that leads his nation to independence – energy independence. The question is simply in my mind: If Brazil can be the first country to have energy independence, why can't we be second, and what is stopping us?

Let me close by saying I will make sure that this sits in a place of honor – but I will bolt it so that no one can come in and steal the damn thing – (laughter) – because there are those in our union and other unions, there are those in the public who think we should sit back and accept the rhetoric of the rich and the powerful and the bosses that tell us you can't have a union or you can't have health care or you can't have pensions or you can't have a clean environment, and I say to them, kiss Larry's ass. (Laughter, applause.) I figure if a man of the cloth can do it, so can I. (Laughter.)

Let me close by telling you a short story. A friend of mine not too long ago was in San Francisco, and he was walking around looking for a unique gift that he could bring home. And his wife always liked different kinds of doorstops – unique doorstops for windy days to keep the doors open. And walking through a part of Chinatown he found this big bronze rat that just sat up and looked straight out, and the eyes just burned like they were – like almost it was real. And he thought, boy, that would make a terrific doorstop. And he asked the person in the shop, he said, how much is that bronze rat? He said, well, 15 bucks for the rat and \$250 for the story. The guy said, I don't need the story; I want it for a doorstop. He said, I'll just take the rat.

So he takes the bronze rat and turns over the money and he starts walking back to his hotel. Along the way he hears this noise behind him and he looks behind and there's a bunch of rats coming up, following behind him – you know, not many; a couple of dozen. (Laughter.) And he starts walking faster. He figured he could get away from the rats. Then he hears more. He looks behind him and now there's hundreds of rats. He starts walking even faster and hears more noise. He looks behind him and now there's thousands of rats. He starts to run as fast as his legs will carry him, and he's running towards the bay and he's running towards the bridge. And now there's this hissing and screeching and crawling and rats are climbing all over each other and he looks behind and there's like a million rats. He said, oh, my god; they want this bronze rat.

He gets to the bridge and he heaves the thing over the bridge, and down into the bay it goes, and all the rats run and jump off the bridge into the water, and millions of rats drown. He scratches his head, thinks for a little bit. He says, I'm going to go back to the gift shop. (Laughter.) He goes back to the gift shop and he walks in and the owner of the gift shop has got a huge smile on his face. He says, huh, I guess you're back for the story, eh? (Laughter.) The guy says, no; do you have a bronze Republican? (Laughter, cheers, applause.)

I'm going to take the Apollo challenge and I hope that all of you will as well. Thank you very much.

(End of remarks.)