



LABORERS' INTERNATIONAL UNION OF NORTH AMERICA

International Union of Operating Engineers

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Laborers' Union, Operating Engineers to Disaffiliate From AFL-CIO's Building and Construction Trades

*In Significant Change for Construction Industry, Largest Basic Trades Unions
To Forge New Path to Help Millions of Construction Workers Improve Lives*

(February 14, 2006) -- The Laborers' International Union and the International Union of Operating Engineers – two of the largest basic trades unions in the U.S., with 1.1 million members – will leave the AFL-CIO's Building and Construction Trades Department to form a new organization, the unions announced Tuesday.

Both unions will join several other construction trades unions in founding the National Construction Alliance, which will represent virtually all union basic trades workers in the U.S. The Alliance will focus on helping lift working and living standards for the nation's approximately 8 million construction workers, increasing the union share of the construction market and helping union contractors compete in today's construction industry.

Details regarding the National Construction Alliance, which will include several other unions representing in total about 2 million members, will be released on March 1. That is also the date on which the disaffiliations of the Laborers' Union and the Operating Engineers will be effective.

"The construction industry has changed," said Laborers' Union General President Terence M. O'Sullivan. "If our union is going to provide our members with good jobs, good wages, good training and safe workplaces, we must embrace change and opportunities. It is our obligation to stop decades of decline and begin a renaissance of unions in construction."

(more)

IUOE General President Vincent J. Giblin echoed the sentiment that a new direction was needed to promote growth in the unionized construction industry.

“We do not take this disaffiliation from the BCTD lightly or without due consideration,” he said. “Our best efforts over the past many months to remedy internally some of the inequities and ills thwarting the effectiveness of the department have been to no avail. We must – and we will – pursue a course of action that best serves the interests of our members, our local unions and the construction industry in which we work.”

Giblin and O’Sullivan said the key to that is reaching out to the vast majority of construction workers and their employers who do not have a union.

In little more than a generation, construction union membership has plummeted. In 1973, 40 percent of construction workers had the benefit of a union. By 2004, that had fallen to 14.7 percent, and in 2005, 13.1 percent. A decline in real wages and benefits corresponds with that decline.

The National Construction Alliance will aim to remove barriers to growth for construction unions and union contractors.

O’Sullivan and Giblin said persistent and lengthy attempts to reform the AFL-CIO Building and Construction Trades Department were not successful. They said needed reforms included changing the department’s governance structure and changing jurisdictional rules, which dictate which union members can do what type of work. Those rules no longer reflect the construction industry and hurt union contractors.

“The real question is not whether our action today is good for any particular institution, but is it good for millions of hard-working men and women,” O’Sullivan said. “We believe forging a new path for construction workers will be good for them and good for America.”

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