

**CAMPAIGN FOR AMERICA'S FUTURE**

**TAKE BACK AMERICA 2006**

**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14, 2006**

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

**12:45 – 2:40 P.M. CLOSING LUNCHEON:  
YOU HAVE THE POWER**

**SPEAKER:  
GERALD MCENTEE,  
PRESIDENT, AFSCME**

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

ROBERT BOROSAGE: This conference has been a coalition effort, and you can't talk about progressive coalitions without talking about our first speaker, Gerald McEntee. Jerry McEntee is the president of one of the most powerful and fastest-growing unions, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. Jerry plays a crucial role in politics as the chair of the AFL-CIO's political committee. You can find signs of his leadership everywhere, from our Progressive Budget Coalition to his role in starting the Economic Policy Institute. But before I bring him on, I want to remind you of something really big Gerald McEntee did recently. He took on the president of the United States on his number-one domestic priority, Bush's plan to privatize Social Security, and he won. (Cheers, applause.) And in doing so, he effectively turned Bush into a lame duck president in the first year of his second term.

Now, by the time Bush was reelected and he announced this priority, we had already discredited this bogus notion of privatization, but the president of the United States vowed to devote all of the power of his office and his conservative congressional majority to winning the dismantling Social Security, and the Washington press corps really thought that he could do it. So President McEntee summoned all the power of his office and his friends to create a massive, intensive and professional campaign, like a presidential campaign, to take this fight to the heartland. We call it Americans United to Protect Social Security, and it would not have happened without Jerry McEntee. Jerry put up significant money, convinced others to do the same. He went to the Democratic leaders and he told them, you've got to stay together, you've got to stay united; we can win. And he created a field operation in key states, combining U.S. Action and ACORN and professional organizers all over the country who unleashed a force of citizen democracy and put pressure on the right people and won. We won. We beat them. (Applause.)

So George Bush's last comment was, there seems to be a diminished appetite for privatization. And he was right. Everywhere the president went to sell his plan, Americans United to Protect Social Security was there ahead of him, and after a while the president thought – as the president talked more and more about it, the more the public lost their appetite. Now, Americans United hasn't gone away. We're working on the Medicare prescription drug plan and our plan to fix it and to challenge candidates who refuse to fix it. And Americans United is now a permanent and valuable resource for our progressive movement, and so is Gerald McEntee. With a great deal of gratitude for his leadership that I ask you to please welcome Jerry McEntee.

(Applause.)

GERALD MCENTEE: Sisters and brothers, how'd you like that lunch? Did you get it yet? Well, you're going to like it. (Laughs.) It will be served – as you, I think, have been told – by the members of United Here, Local 25. You should give them a

round of applause. (Cheers, applause.) All right. That's a lot of applause, so I think I'll leave on that note. (Laughter.)

Roger said I stopped the privatization of Social Security – very nice of him to say that. But the point of the fact is we – we – that's what this is all about – we stopped the privatization of Social Security, and if we try hard enough, we can stop any of Bush's policies in this country. (Applause.) Now, have you had enough of one-party rule?

AUDIENCE: Yes!

MR. MCENTEE: Have you had enough of corruption?

AUDIENCE: Yes!

MR. MCENTEE: Enough of right wing, anti-worker politicians who give rich people tax cut after tax cut for the top 1 percent of the people and tell the rest of us to go to hell?

AUDIENCE: Yes!

MR. MCENTEE: Now, you have the power. We, collectively, have the power. Have you had enough of an administration that has thrown our Constitution and our system of checks and balances into the proverbial toilet? Well, good afternoon, sisters and brothers. We're tired of George Bush, the Republicans in Congress who have literally hijacked our government. (Applause.) We're ready – tell me when you get to the string beans. (Laughter.) We are ready, willing and able to take on these anti-working family politicians, so-called, to throw them out on their asses come this November in the House and the Senate. (Cheers, applause.) We want an America for all of us, not just the privileged few.

Sisters and brothers, this reminds me of a meeting that I attended in this ballroom some years ago. It was the day that George Bush announced the Iraqi war, and I'm proud to say that our union was the first – the first union to come out with a resolution of their convention – come out against it. We said it was wrong then, we say it's wrong now, and we say we ought to bring the troops home. (Applause.) I heard Karl Rove say the other day – and of course all of his political strategy for November is Iraq. Fear – put fear in the hearts and minds of Americans. I heard him say that if we had withdrawn, Zarqawi would be free. Well, I don't know about Rove, but I wouldn't trade 2,500 American soldiers and Marines for one Zarqawi. (Applause.)

We – “we” – did our time in Iraq. We paid with boots and treasure, and the time now is for others, whether they're part of that imaginary coalition that Bush had, or whether or not they're Iraqi militia or Iraqi soldiers, it's time for them to carry the weight in Iraq, time to bring our people home. No more dead! No more injured! No more money! (Cheers, applause.)

For six years this administration has ruled – ruled, not governed. They’ve ruled with fear, deceit and deception. What has it brought us? What has this kind of government brought us? Well, you look at the country, you look at the states – I walked in here and – came from the outside, and it’s the spot where Ronald Reagan got shot. Sometimes I ride down Pennsylvania Avenue and there on the left is just a beautiful building, federal building called the Ronald Reagan Building. I now look at it and say, Ronald, where are you now that we need you? Because Ronald Reagan was bad enough, but he doesn’t even compare to this crowd in the White House. This is the worst. (Applause.)

Look at our country: privatization, Social Security, Katrina, false promises. Look at the price of gas – the price of gas, and they won’t even tell us who was on the Energy Commission – won’t even tell us their names of the people that were in the Energy Commission with Dick Cheney. Scooter Libby, Tom DeLay, Bob Ney – distortion, deception, thieves, tax cuts for the rich, cutbacks for the middle class, health care. We have 44 million people without health care, yet every time organized labor goes to the table, they want to cut the health care. Co-pays – they want to cut and make you pay more in deductibles. That’s what it’s all about. And it kind of came down from Washington, D.C. where the clones of Bush were in states. Mitch Daniels, the governor of Indiana, his first day took away from us, the UAW and the American Federation of Teachers, collective bargaining by executive order. They took away our union for people that we had built over a 20-year period. Right now he’s trying to sell the turnpike. Right now privatize the turnpike.

In Missouri the other clone by the name of Blunt – his father is the majority whip; his brother is the highest-paid lobbyist in Missouri – on the first day that he became governor, he called the secretary of labor into his office and said, do away with the executive order for collective bargaining. It only took us 20 years to get it in Missouri. And then he had her ejected from her office. Fletcher in Kentucky – deception, cheats. I mean, there is an individual that had enough, I guess, gumption – although that’s a kind word – had enough gumption to pardon all of this people that had been indicted in his cabinet in Kentucky.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Off mike.)

MR. MCENTEE: That’s right. Well, as a matter of fact, he’s not going to get reelected but he’s also going to go to jail. (Cheers, applause.)

They’ve attacked retirement security, whether that’s Social Security or it happens to be defined benefits – took it away from us in the dark of the night in Alaska, tried to take it away from us in California. Jeb Bush took it away from new employees, workers in the state service in Florida. They’ve come up with little Prop. 13s, called TABORs (sp) across the country, to put lids on spending, and that’s their way to stop benefits from flowing to the middle class and the people that need it – the people in need, the poor, those kinds of folks. They did it as well, or they’re trying to do it in Michigan as we speak. We call it “starve our state” in Michigan.

So, sisters and brothers, this is the kind of America that they have created. We've watched the – us in the labor movement – we've watched the UAW, whose footsteps used to walk across these United States with some 1,700,000 members. Today the UAW has 500,000 members. As we meet, and as you know, we've had layoffs at General Motors, at Ford – none at Delphi yet – or not at Delphi yet because it's in court. And they've used the bankruptcy laws – they've twisted and turned the bankruptcy laws in order to put the union not at a square table but a round table and be able to take away these benefits. We've watched airline workers over the last decade face layoff after layoff and cutback after cutback.

I don't know whether Leo was here from the Steelworkers. Was he? You take the Steelworkers. I come from Pennsylvania. At one point they had 250,000 members in Pennsylvania. Today, because of cutbacks, foreign steel, corporate greed, they have 30,000 members in Pennsylvania today. And you can multiply that across the country, whether it's the machinists – even the building trades in many places.

So I submit to you that we are – I hope – I know AFSCME is ready for change. That's why we're here at this Take Back America conference – not only here in Washington, D.C., but in this country. This is the right place to be to make a difference in people's lives, and this is how we're going to do it: Come November 2006, together we're going to kick butt at the ballot box and we're not going to stop kicking until we take the White House back in November of 2008. (Cheers, applause.)

We can make this happen. We can make this happen if we are together. Like you, I'm committed to taking back America for every working family. Isn't that why we're here, to build a better future for all Americans, a future that gives all Americans the chance to achieve the American dream, send a kid to college, retirement security, affordable health care, affordable prescription drugs, to have a good job – good job with good benefits. We're the kind of folks that built America, made it the kind of country that it is today.

As you know, big business and anti-worker politicians in all three branches of the federal government are against us. They show no mercy. Most recently the Bush Supreme Court made a couple of appointments – Alito one of them, and Alito was just the deciding vote, just very recently, in terms of whistleblowers in the public service – public service workers, where they took away the protection if you were indeed a whistleblower.

We are drowning in right wing conservative politics, the politics of corruption. (Applause.) There is only one way to change it. The politics of corruption from Abramoff to Scooter Libby, Ken Lay; the politics of special interest; the politics of the powerful over the people. That way is – and the only way – is to elect enough progressives to make a difference. (Applause.)

In 2004 the American labor movement, and progressives, registered and turned out a record number of union members and voters, ran an unprecedented door-to-door operation. But as you well know, at the end of the day, it wasn't enough. The election taught us some hard lessons. If we're going to mobilize enough voters to elect a pro-worker president and Congress, we have to do it in a different way. We relied too heavily on paid out-of-state canvassers. Now, there's nothing wrong with volunteers. There's nothing wrong with paid canvassers, but somebody from Ohio should be talking to somebody from Ohio and not somebody from Arizona – god love Arizona. They should be from the same state, the same neighborhood, the same community. While they knocked on a record number of doors, they amounted to a stranger-to-stranger strategy – no match for the Republican's neighbor-to-neighbor strategy.

Well, this year unions will mobilize our members, but we'll make sure that their friends, their neighbors, and their spouses and their household are mobilized as well. We know an organization that we worked for, or with, in Baltimore called BUILD (sp), a community organization. Well, we were able to take that organization out of Baltimore and move it into Cleveland where they became a volunteer organization. They set up their own. They did a program called the Mayor of the Block, and every place we had a community leader from there that was the mayor of the block, we won that precinct, we won that division. If we would have had more, we would have won Ohio, Kerry would be president and Bush out the door. (Applause.)

Now, sisters and brothers, I'm talking about cooperation, I'm talking about communities coming together. And guess what? The American labor movement has come together. The Change to Win unions and the AFL-CIO are working together on the 2006 campaign. We're coordinating everything – coordinating walks, addresses, SEIU, the Teamsters, UFCW, and every union inside the federation as well. Regardless of we have some different ideas about how things should be run, we have the same idea and the same conclusion about getting Bush and his right wing minions out of the White House and sent back to Texas. (Applause.)

As I said, we've got to empower one community at a time to effectively mobilize the grassroots around key issues like never before. You and I know that what happens this November – this November in the House and the Senate – will set the stage for the presidential election of 2008. That's all the more reason for us to hold anti-worker politicians accountable and work to get progressives and friends of labor elected, starting now.

You know, sisters and brothers, I sometimes think about our members, think about progressives all across America, and do you know something? Besides – take our members. Besides being good workers, good public employees, whenever there is a cataclysmic event in this country, whether it's 9/11, whether it's Columbine, whether it's an earthquake in California, or Katrina, public sector workers and volunteers – not people in limousines, not people from K Street – are the first ones there and they're the last ones to leave. (Applause.)

We're good citizens of our communities. You don't see somebody that's rich and a CEO serving as a volunteer firefighter. You see our people. We see you. The churches – our people work in the churches. They help in the churches. They help and work in the schools. Many of our members who work in the schools stay after school to help kids who have no place to go. Our folks serve in the armed forces. Our folks work in the Boy Scouts or the Girl Scouts or the Brownies or whatever. We're good citizens, and we are sick and tired of politicians in America, particularly the right wing, looking at us, talking about us, and not dignifying us for the work that we do every day on the job and the work that we do in our communities day after day and night after night.  
(Applause.)

So, sisters and brothers, I say to you – first, I thank you for all the work you've done in the past, and I'm sure for the work you're going to do in the future. If we do it right and if we do it together, we can put this country back together and we can put this country back in the hands of working men and women, where it belongs – where it belongs, who built it. (Applause.) And when that is finished and all the stars are in alignment and we can see the end of the road – when that is finished, once again we will be able to say, this land is our land.

God bless you and God bless America.

(Cheers, applause.)

(End of remarks.)