

Senator Joe Lieberman  
**American Postal Workers Union National Convention**  
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As Prepared For Delivery

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Thanks, Bill (Burrus; President, APWU). It's a pleasure and honor to stand with a progressive President by the name of Bill. Brings back some great memories, doesn't it? And just like the last progressive President named Bill, this one has surrounded himself with a principled, constructive, and hardworking cabinet and staff.

Cliff Guffey (Executive Vice-President, APWU), Bob Tunstall (Secretary-Treasurer, APWU), Roy Braunstein (Legislative Director, APWU), Myke Reid (Assistant Legislative Director, APWU), state and local leaders and members...

I am honored to be here with you because you are not just the world's largest postal union, but the heart and soul and brains of the world's best postal service.

It is your hard work and devotion that is leading the Postal Service through these tumultuous times. The men and women of the USPS not only keep one of the world's most important communications backbones strong, but you're now on the frontlines in the war against terrorism. This much never can be said enough: you are heroes.

I know there are a lot of people in Washington today who like to bash unions. But let me remind them that the police officers and firefighters who ran up into the World Trade Center towers and risked and gave their lives for others' safety, and the postal workers who were exposed to anthrax, and still kept our postal system running—they were proud union members. So being a union member certainly didn't stop those heroes from serving the public. I know I'll never forget that. And America won't forget that. All of you in the APWU and in other public employee unions deserve respect and support, not harassment and intimidation.

This is a new world in so many ways—but one thing has not changed. Leadership counts. The APWU has proven that in the postal service. And the same is true at the national level. After September 11<sup>th</sup>, our country needs leaders who will unite the American people so that we can live with a sense of personal security and enjoy economic security.

We need leaders committed to putting into action the values that have made our country unique in human history—values like faith, family, patriotism; tolerance, hard work; equal opportunity for all and responsibility from all. We need people who will meet a standard for leadership as old as our Constitution: to provide for the common defense, to promote the general welfare, and to help form a more perfect Union. And with your help, America will get that leadership.

### **The Economy**

I don't need to tell you that our nation is in desperate need of economic leadership today. I wish I could say that President Bush has guided us with vision and strength through the choppy economic waters in which we find ourselves, but sadly I cannot. I've supported and continue to support the President's successful leadership in the fight against terrorism. But in the fight to get our economy moving again, this President isn't leading and he isn't succeeding. Instead he's made a habit of waiting, vacillating, and—in the end—frustrating real attempts to get the stock markets back up, unemployment back down, and our economy headed in the direction it was when that other President named Bill left office.

The results are alarming: a growing national budget deficit, and along with it something that may be even more damaging in the long run, a growing national economic leadership deficit that's threatening the prospects for a strong and sustained economic recovery. Unlike the Postal Service, which delivers for every American, day in and day out, the Bush Administration's economic policies have only delivered for a select few at the expense of the interests of the nation as a whole.

- First, last year, the President pushed through Congress an over-bloated, under-achieving, high-income tax cut that wasted our hard-earned surplus.
- The tax cut spent money we didn't have—and the consequences have been severe. We've gone from a \$260 billion annual surplus in 2000 to a projected \$157 billion deficit this year. And the 10-year federal surplus projections have collapsed from \$5.6 trillion last year to less than \$1 trillion, and falling. But the real damage goes beyond the numbers—to the factory worker laid off, to the parents who can't find the way to send that first child to college, to the entrepreneur unable

to put together the money needed to start a new business, create new jobs, and live the American dream.

- My friends, for nearly 20 months now, our economy has cried out for leadership, for an economic growth strategy, for a proven prosperity plan. But the Bush Administration has come forward with no new ideas, and the economy keeps tottering. No ideas about how to spur the next wave of high-wage jobs. No ideas about how to improve job training. No ideas about how to give targeted tax cuts to middle-class Americans to help you send your kids to college.
- And the Bush Administration's economic leadership gap has been particularly pronounced in its belated and begrudging response to corporate misconduct.
- For months, as Enron, WorldCom, Tyco, Global Crossing and other companies shredded the integrity of our markets and with it the savings of millions of American families, the President and his economic team hemmed and hawed. They fiddled while the stock owned by millions of Americans burned. It was the Senate—led by Senator Sarbanes—that developed a potent prescription to beat back the waves of corporate abuse, and the President who came along for the signing ceremony.

We need real leadership—and we need it now. We need to postpone the most expensive and least progressive parts of the Bush tax cut that have yet to go into effect. With the money we save, we can reduce the deficit. We can make targeted, high-return investments in education and job creation. We can shore up Social Security. At the same time, we should cut some federal spending, including unwarranted corporate subsidies. The bottom line is that together, we're going to have to take responsibility for bringing our budget back in balance and energizing this economy. That's the only way to produce new opportunities for the American people.

Today, the President is hosting an economic summit down in Waco, Texas. But instead of being a platform for progress and new ideas, it seems to me to be nothing but a new stage for the same tired, old ideas. Rather than having a serious discussion of our common problems, this Administration is producing a carefully calculated media event in Waco.

In fact, the only opportunities the Waco summit is likely to produce are photo opportunities for the President, his cabinet, and the few select big-donor friends they've invited to participate. What's happening in Waco today looks less like a summit and more like a valley to me. Let's hope it doesn't become a valley of despair for the American economy.

Instead of putting new ideas on the table, all they're serving up in Waco are leftovers from yesteryear. In fact, the marquee proposal at the Bush economic summit is expected to be a repeat of the call to make the President's mammoth tax cut permanent, taking us trillions of dollars deeper into national debt. That would be a gross and grotesque mistake, rubbing salt in our nation's economic wounds, and depriving the Baby Boomers of the retirement security they're counting on. It would be like a family whose income has dropped because Dad has lost his job, going out and taking a big mortgage to buy a new house. That's the road to bankruptcy.

Benjamin Franklin, America's first postmaster general, once said, "Never confuse motion with action." There's little doubt in my mind that the President's economic summit down in Waco is more motion than action, and I'm convinced that the American people will not be confused by it.

The American people deserve better. We need a real economic growth strategy. We need action—not more of the same stammering, slipping, and sliding. We need economic honesty—not more of the same transparent election-year spin. We need economic leadership—not more of the same ideological salesmanship. We need leadership that is pro-growth, pro-labor, pro-business, pro-middle class, and pro-America. Otherwise, President Bush will soon deserve more than a wake-up call. He'll have earned an overnight priority mail send off back to his old Texas zip code.

### **The Postal Service**

The United States Postal Service understands the value of economic leadership. You and your colleagues process and deliver billions of dollars in financial transactions every day, connecting eight million businesses and 280 million Americans to one another. Without you, millions of seniors wouldn't get their Social Security checks... employees wouldn't get their paychecks... and retailers couldn't reach out to customers.

No matter who you are, what you earn, or where in America you live, you can mail a letter for 37 cents. That's still one of the best deals around. You can send it anywhere in the country—to a business or

a house, to Alaska or Hawaii or right next door. What better expression is there of our values—of freedom and equality—than that?

I'm proud that the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee I chair oversees the Postal Service. It's a responsibility that I take very seriously. Some in Washington may not see things this way, but I consider the USPS an indispensable part of the head, heart, and soul of this country and of the services government provides to our people.

And the simple fact is, without the hard work of the men and women right here in this room, and all those you represent across America, the Postal Service just couldn't work. That American eagle couldn't fly. That's why you deserve our nation's gratitude, our cooperation, and our support.

For instance, when it comes to workplace safety, you deserve our support. That's why I fought for the adoption of the smart new workplace safety rules on ergonomics issued by the Clinton Administration.

But instead of supporting and protecting workers, the Bush Administration overturned those rules. And instead of developing new rules to prevent the 5,000 Americans who suffer work-related injuries every day—as they promised they would—the Bush Administration has backed away from strong standards.

That's just wrong. How many of you know postal workers that have repetitive motion injuries? How many other workplace health risks do you see everyday? You deserve government being on your side, protecting your health. And I'll fight to make that happen.

Second, you deserve our support in the face of the new terrorist threats we face. Soon after the first anniversary of September 11<sup>th</sup>, we'll mark the first anniversary of the loss of Thomas Morris and Joseph Curseen—two APWU members who were among the first casualties in the war against terrorism, killed by anthrax sent through the mail. The tragedy of their loss was compounded by the confusing and contradictory signals sent to the workers at the Brentwood facility as they learned of the contamination.

If another attack ever comes, we just can't afford another third-rate response. We need to quickly and accurately communicate the facts, the risks, and the results to everybody—especially to those who are directly affected.

That's why I've formally requested a General Accounting Office investigation to determine whether or not there were miscommunications and misrepresentations when contamination was discovered at the Wallingford processing and distribution center in Connecticut last December. The simple fact is, no one will be able to move forward with confidence as long as our postal workers are convinced they're being kept out of the loop and in the dark. We need the facts. We need the truth. We need a full and fair accounting of what happened there and then so you can be safe across America tomorrow—and the mail can be delivered.

Let me recognize John Dirzius (pronounced "DURR-zhus"), President of the APWU Greater Connecticut Local, for his passionate advocacy on this matter. He's been strong and steadfast in supporting the men and women of his local—and I know that's exactly what all of the local leaders would do for their members in a similar situation. As Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy." By that standard, John and all the postal workers who were forced to face the threat of anthrax have been impressive indeed.

To deal with the challenges that war against terrorism faces, the Postal Service will need more resources. That's why I'm proud that we've been able to appropriate \$675 million in much-needed emergency support to help the Postal Service get the technology and equipment it needs to detect dangers and protect workers from future biological and possibly chemical attacks. And I promise you in the upcoming fiscal year I will be fighting for more of the funding you need to do the job you need to do.

Third, you deserve our strong support to protect your rights as union members and postal employees. Your collective bargaining rights have served the country well for more than 30 years now, and I will vigorously support their continuation, and work just as hard to stop any attempt to curb, curtail, or cut your right to collective bargaining. And let me add that I'm proud to have worked closely with President Clinton to reform the Hatch Act in 1993, giving you the fuller voice in the political process that you deserve.

I don't understand why some people in Washington think that collective bargaining rights are incompatible with serving the public efficiently and effectively, honorably and courageously. As we speak, President Bush is hell-bent on giving himself the right to remove the union rights of about 50,000 employees who will become part of the new Department of Homeland Security.

That's all mixed up. Those employees will be the foundation of the new department. It's their hard work that will determine its success or failure. So as they're being transferred to the new department,

don't they deserve the economic security of knowing that their collective bargaining rights won't be summarily stripped away? In my view, at a time like this union membership should be underlined, not undermined.

That's why together, we need to fight to stop those in Washington who see the urgent reorganization of our government as an opportunity to revoke longstanding labor rights. We cannot, will not, and must not let them do it. The President will have plenty of flexibility to manage this new department.

And finally, you deserve our support in your fight to keep universal service at uniform rates. I may rest on Saturdays for religious reasons, but the United States Postal Service does not and will not. Six day delivery is just too vital to the fabric of our nation for us to let it go the way of the Pony Express.

## **Conclusion**

Looking out at all of you, I am sadly reminded that there is one man who is not here today. As many of you know, Steve Peters, President of the APWU Local in Hartford, Connecticut, died recently—and unexpectedly. Steve was loved and respected by all those who knew him and were fortunate enough to be represented by him. I ask us to join now in a moment of silence to send our thoughts, condolences, and prayers to his family, coworkers, and friends in Connecticut and around the country.

Thank you.

My friends, there are great challenges ahead for our nation. But I'm confident that with principled, commonsense leadership and shared commitment, we will overcome them. But we can't do it without all of you.

In 1936, the great poet W. H. Auden wrote a poem about the travel of letters and parcels from England to Scotland. Decades later, in a different time and a different nation, his words gracefully sum up the human compact between America's postal workers and the nation they serve. Auden wrote:

*This is the Night Mail crossing the Border,  
Bringing the cheque and the postal order,  
Letters for the rich, letters for the poor,  
The shop at the corner, the girl next door.*

In the years to come, as the Postal Service and its workers continue to meet the challenges of a changing world, we must keep striving together to uphold that valuable vision. You will continue to deliver for us, and we must continue to deliver for you.

Thank you.