

# **ACTION IN THE AFTERMATH**

**An AFL-CIO Disaster  
Preparedness and  
Response Manual**

**For Unions and Working Families**

**Disaster Support Hotline: 877-235-2469 or 877-AFL-CIO9**



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# INTRODUCTION

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The AFL-CIO has been coordinating the union response to natural and man-made disasters in communities across America for more than half a century. When working families are devastated by storms, floods, fires, industrial accidents or terrorist attacks, America's unions are there with resources and skilled volunteers to help those in need and to rebuild communities.

In 2005, the epic destruction and loss of life caused by hurricanes Katrina and Rita along the Gulf Coast redefined our understanding of the scope of damage and displacement of people that a massive storm can cause. Responding to the challenge of helping millions of evacuees and rebuilding an entire region of the country required new awareness, new resources and new strategies.

America's unions responded generously and effectively to their members affected by the storms of 2005, to the communities that were destroyed and to the communities that took in thousands of people evacuated from coastal areas. In doing so, we learned some good lessons about what works and where we need to prepare more-effective responses.

This manual, which was prepared with the assistance of AFL-CIO and union staff, volunteers and storm victims, is intended to guide our future disaster preparedness and response. The manual will be available at <http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/allies/csn.cfm>.

## Government Has Primary Role in Response

As this manual illustrates, the union movement can play an important role in helping government and community leaders respond to disasters. However, the federal and state governments have the primary responsibility for carrying out the fundamental role of protecting and responding to people when disasters strike.

The hurricanes of 2005 exposed significant and serious flaws in our nation's preparation for catastrophic events and our capacity to respond to them.

Emergency plans at all levels of government came up severely lacking—particularly the federal government's ability to coordinate actions by its agencies and to integrate them with state and local plans and actions by union and community partners.

The AFL-CIO believes it is imperative that the federal government implement and adequately fund a National Preparedness System to make certain that we have a fully national system that provides a comprehensive response to all natural and man-made disasters.

## Being There for Working Families

When disasters affecting large numbers of working families occur anywhere in the United States, the response of America's unions must be swift and effective.

The AFL-CIO's ability to respond effectively includes both mobilization of federation resources and the capability to assist America's unions as they respond to the needs of their members. National and international unions are a major resource for union member disaster victims in terms of assistance, employment counseling and special services for rebuilding their lives.

The AFL-CIO Community Services Network, composed of central labor council and state federation liaison staff with local United Ways and local Red Cross chapters and millions of union volunteers, provides a valuable first-response resource. Many Community Services staff and union volunteers are trained and experienced in helping people and communities get back on their feet after a major disaster.

AFL-CIO state federations and central labor councils, with the support of the national officers and staff, provide the overall leadership and coordination in communities where disasters occur. They work with local unions and their members, as well as community allies and service organizations, to respond to those hard-hit by disaster.

# THE AFL-CIO NATIONAL DISASTER RESPONSE PLAN

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The AFL-CIO National Disaster Response Plan has been developed to provide a blueprint for action by the federation and by unions across America, both nationally and locally.

Following are detailed descriptions of the goals and elements of the AFL-CIO plan.

## Goals of the AFL-CIO Disaster Response Plan

The goals of the AFL-CIO national plan are to:

- Mobilize union resources, both human and monetary, to help meet the human service needs of households impacted by disasters.
- Work through partnerships with national and community-based allies to maximize public and voluntary agency response and to ensure that resources and services to victims are provided in a fair and nondiscriminatory manner.
- Work in appropriate ways to ensure that union disaster response activities dovetail with union member participation in the AFL-CIO political action, organizing and Voice@Work programs.

## Elements of the AFL-CIO Disaster Response Plan

The AFL-CIO national plan is being developed to include these elements:

- The AFL-CIO has established a permanent **Disaster Support Hotline**, a toll-free number for affiliates and disaster victims. The number is **877-235-2469** or **877-AFL-CIO9**. The hotline number will be widely publicized through national and international unions, AFL-CIO central labor councils and state federations. The hotline will provide information and referral and other assistance to those in need. It also can be used to identify, recruit and mobilize union volunteers.

► The AFL-CIO has created and maintains a **Disaster Response Database** of members assisted and volunteers recruited and deployed. The database can be used to enhance follow-up on assistance to disaster victims and provide volunteer recruitment contacts for organizing, political action and future disaster response. It also can be used to provide affiliates with information about union members affected and assistance provided by the AFL-CIO.

- The AFL-CIO is developing a national **Disaster Response Team** composed of AFL-CIO Community Services liaisons, AFL-CIO and affiliate staff and union volunteers. Team members have both AFL-CIO and Red Cross training and can be released from their jobs to go to affected areas quickly. The names and contact information for team members are maintained on the Disaster Response Database. Members of the Disaster Response Team can be sent anywhere in America following disasters to begin response and recovery efforts.
- The AFL-CIO has identified locations for local **AFL-CIO Disaster Response Centers** in many communities, and they can be up and running within 48 hours of a disaster. These locations, which are union halls or training facilities, community centers and other available facilities, are particularly important in areas prone to storms, earthquakes or floods. These centers, which ideally are pre-wired with separate disaster response telephone lines and generators wherever possible, will help local unions find members and connect them with services from their local and national unions. They also will help access Red Cross and United Way resources and services, and transport, store and process materials for local union distribution to their members. CLCs in disaster-prone areas will arrange resources, develop agency relationships and volunteer support for the centers in advance to increase the speed and effectiveness of response to human needs.

- The **Disaster Response Centers** also will help CLCs and state federations recruit, train and mobilize volunteer members to support recovery activities for working families. Where available, AFL-CIO Community Services liaisons who work with the Red Cross and the United Way will help staff and support the centers.

Using models such as the programs developed by the Consortium for Worker Education in conjunction with the New York City CLC following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and the Hurricane Recovery Program of the Louisiana AFL-CIO following hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the AFL-CIO can help establish **Worker Training and Recovery Consortiums** as part of long-range strategies to assist workers affected by disasters. These consortiums will attract public and private funding to provide human services, re-employment and job training services, housing assistance, mental health services and other needed support for disaster victims.

An **AFL-CIO National Disaster Response Committee**, composed of designated staff from the AFL-CIO, affiliated national and international unions and the designated labor liaison staff from the Red Cross, United Way and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), will meet at least quarterly. The committee will work to coordinate union planning and response to disasters; design and distribute disaster preparedness and response strategies and materials to local unions and working families year-round; and help formulate recommended legislation, policies and strategies for public and voluntary agencies serving disaster victims.

Working through the **AFL-CIO Union Label & Service Trades Department** and Gifts in Kind America, the AFL-CIO will pre-arrange donations and cost-effective purchases of bulk material and supplies needed to assist people after disasters.

The online **AFL-CIO Working Families Toolkit** ([www.workingfamiliestoolkit.com](http://www.workingfamiliestoolkit.com)) will be used to provide an easy way for state federations, CLCs and local unions to create fliers for worksite distribution and mailings to members on preparedness and response to members' needs.

## NATIONAL UNION RESPONSE PLANS

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Most unions take prompt action following disasters, providing donations and resources to help devastated communities and reaching out to their members in the disaster area. Many unions assign staff to the disaster impact area to help coordinate their response efforts.

The Gulf Coast hurricanes of 2005 presented a new challenge to unions seeking to help their members and their families: how to locate them when hundreds of thousands of people were evacuated to communities in 48 states.

As part of a revamped structure for helping unions in assisting their members and their communities, the AFL-CIO offers the following suggestions for national union disaster response. It is suggested that each union:

- Designate at least one national staff member to participate on the AFL-CIO National Disaster Response Committee, to meet quarterly with counterparts for the AFL-CIO and other unions. The committee will work to increase the disaster preparedness of working families and local unions and to improve coordination and cooperation among the AFL-CIO, unions and human service agencies in the event of a catastrophic event.

The list of national union disaster response coordinators, with contact information, will be included as an appendix to this manual.

- Establish an emergency phone number and/or e-mail address at the national headquarters for evacuated members to contact when displaced. Publicize the number and e-mail through local unions, conferences and union publications and emphasize the importance of members establishing contact with their union following a disaster or evacuation. The union contact number and e-mail could be provided to members on handy and portable objects such as cards, key chains, refrigerator magnets and cell phone stickers, as well as on posters at union halls and employee break areas at work.

- ▶ Develop lists of e-mail addresses and cell phone numbers of local union leaders and other key members who need to be contacted quickly to help coordinate union response to disasters.
- ▶ Encourage local union leaders and staff to get disaster response training and Union Community Activist Network (UCAN) training through the AFL-CIO and the Red Cross. Trained staff and volunteers could serve on AFL-CIO Disaster Response Teams in other areas, gaining valuable experience that will improve their skills if ever confronted with a disaster in their own communities.
- ▶ Provide opportunities at national union conventions and conferences for disaster response training and meetings of disaster response volunteers.
- ▶ Provide information to members on the union's disaster response plan and family preparedness. Unions might provide information on wind and flood damage mitigation, grab-and-go kits, emergency services phone numbers and other information to help members in time of disaster.
- ▶ Involve your health and safety staff in developing a plan of action that will ensure that your members and their families are protected from the hazards that result from a disaster.

## **STATE FEDERATION RESPONSE PLANS**

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**T**aking the lead on legislative responses to a disaster and monitoring legislation submitted by public and private employers are important roles for AFL-CIO state federations and union affiliates. State federations and their affiliates have a critical role in ensuring that elected state officials are accountable for their actions in response to a disaster.

Sadly, employers and their legislative allies often make cynical use of disasters to push an anti-worker agenda. In 2001, the Bush administration used organization of the vast Homeland Security apparatus to strip hundreds of thousands of federal workers of their legal right to union representation. In 2005, the Bush administration waived prevailing wage requirements, and the Louisiana legislature attacked public education and the rights of teachers in the wake of hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Moreover, Congress and state legislatures often respond generously to the disaster-recovery plans of corporations, banks and developers, while largely ignoring the more basic and compelling needs of working families. The work of AFL-CIO state federations in lobbying for pro-worker legislation and networking with unions and political allies to defeat anti-worker bills is especially important when disasters occur.

AFL-CIO state federations also can play a vital role in helping to coordinate humanitarian response on the ground after disasters occur. Many federations have well-established community services programs, and some have full-time AFL-CIO Community Services liaisons or labor agencies. These resources can be vitally important to rebuilding communities after a major disaster.

When a disaster strikes, particularly one that affects a vast area in which more than one AFL-CIO central labor council is involved or where a single CLC involved has limited resources, the state federation should help the CLC(s) and union affiliates coordinate union and community response at the local level. State federation community services staff and volunteers should work with service and relief agencies to provide prompt and effective assistance to victims.

State federations should compile lists of e-mail addresses and cell phone numbers of local union leaders, potential volunteers, and members who have skills or resources that could be helpful in responding to disasters.

Following are some elements that might be included in a comprehensive disaster response plan for an AFL-CIO state federation:

► **Working With CLCs and Affiliates:**

Federations should establish and maintain communications with CLCs and union leadership to ensure coordination and effective use of resources. A communication system should be prepared in advance and, when possible, used prior to the event during the forecasting of storms, for example, to prepare for the staging of materials and to plan recovery efforts.

Disaster Response Center locations, phone protocols, member database backup, evacuation plans, member outreach and shelter options should be reviewed.

► **Forming a Disaster Response Committee:**

Federations should establish a working group of key leadership to serve as the coordinating committee for preparedness and response. This committee should think through and establish a plan for communication and action on a statewide basis. Any organizational preparation in advance will pay huge benefits during the time of chaos that follows a disaster.

► **Working With State Agencies:** Federations

should maintain communication with and promote effective response by the Governor's Office, the state legislature, the state emergency management agency, the state department of labor and the state unemployment compensation agency.

► **Establishing a Disaster Response Center:**

Federations should help the CLC(s) in establishing a Disaster Response Center to distribute materials and resources provided by the AFL-CIO and national unions. The federation can serve as a repository and disbursement agent for funds donated through labor to assist disaster victims. State federations and unions should work together to identify in advance facilities that could serve as a Disaster Response Center—a place to gather, store and distribute materials, food, clothing and other needed items for working families.

► **Building Community Partnerships:** Federations

should provide leadership on and help support CLC efforts to build community response partnerships with service providers, such as the Red Cross and the United Way, with community-based organizations, such as ACORN and the NAACP, and with worker-friendly programs for recovery and rebuilding.

► **Ensuring Health and Safety:** Disaster response

activities often can be hazardous. Emergency responders, health care workers, clean-up workers and utility workers all may face serious hazards. Workers and volunteers involved in response activities should be aware of the potential dangers involved, and they should be provided with the proper training and equipment to ensure that all proper safety precautions are taken. International unions, the national AFL-CIO and federal and state agencies can provide information about specific hazards and appropriate control measures. Much of this information is available on union and government websites and can be downloaded, printed and distributed. Where a disaster involves major ongoing safety and health hazards, the state federation should work with affiliated unions, the national AFL-CIO and state and federal safety and health agencies on coordinated efforts to protect the safety and health of disaster response and clean-up workers.

► **Job Counseling, Training and Placement:** After

a large-scale disaster that results in many workers being unemployed, the state federation may consider seeking state and federal Department of Labor funding for a worker-retraining and placement consortium linked to unions and unionized employers. Models to be considered are the programs established by the Consortium for Worker Education in conjunction with the New York City CLC following the 2001 terrorist attacks and the Hurricane Recovery Program developed by the Louisiana AFL-CIO after hurricanes Katrina and Rita. In addition to job training, the consortium should work with public agencies and public-sector unions to ensure there are adequate

staff trained and available to assist the unemployed with human service issues, such as housing, health, child care, transportation and substance abuse and mental health referrals

- **Creating and Maintaining Databases:** State federations may be better equipped than the CLCs to maintain databases of volunteers, community contacts and those receiving assistance to facilitate future responses and activities. This will not only facilitate follow-up on resolution of client needs, but will provide lists of union volunteers who may be willing to help in other areas.

## CENTRAL LABOR COUNCIL RESPONSE PLANS

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**W**hen a disaster strikes in a community, the AFL-CIO central labor council is the locus of response by the local union movement.

The CLC and local unions should address the needs of their members and their neighbors by providing emergency response and by assessing the needs of disaster victims for food, water, housing, transportation and medical supplies. They can provide skilled volunteers, use union halls for emergency supplies distribution and temporary shelter and transport tons of supplies to remote areas of the disaster zone.

The CLC also can act as a clearinghouse for member information on disaster relief services and networks with community allies and communities of faith to support their responses. More than 200 CLCs across America have full-time AFL-CIO Community Services liaison staff with the United Way and the Red Cross.

The disaster response plan of a CLC should include these elements:

- **Community Services Liaisons:** Where applicable, the AFL-CIO Community Services liaison officer with the United Way and the Red Cross

should take a lead role in coordinating the CLC response after a disaster. The Red Cross usually assigns one of its AFL-CIO Community Services liaison officers to any large disaster to help connect union response to the Red Cross program.

The list of AFL-CIO Community Services Representatives is contained in a booklet. *The People Who Help*, which is available at <http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/allies/upload/peoplewhohelp.pdf>. Other information about the AFL-CIO Community Services Network is available at <http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/allies/csn.cfm>.

- **Community Services Committee:** Disaster preparedness and response activities are another good reason why CLCs should have an active Community Services Committee. The committee can help promote home safety and disaster preparedness among working families year-round and serve as volunteer recruiters in the event of a disaster. The AFL-CIO central labor council and community services liaison can provide Union Community Activist Network (UCAN) training for the committee, and the CLC, local Red Cross and United Way can provide additional training and materials for the committee.

- **Meeting of Unions, Relief Agencies:** As soon as is practical after the disaster, the CLC should call a meeting with representatives of all local unions in the area. The meeting provides an opportunity for union reps to get information about where members can get help, to report on damage assessment and levels of unemployment among their members and to hear about where members are needed as volunteers. Representatives of local government, the Red Cross, the United Way, FEMA and other agencies providing assistance should attend the meeting to provide updates and reports. Additional meetings should be held regularly, at least every two weeks, to ensure continued coordination and communication. Conference calls can be utilized both before the disaster when it is predictable to check in on plans and contingencies and after to coordinate efforts between meetings.

- **Communications Systems:** The CLC should plan for disrupted communications following a disaster. CLC leadership should have the cell phone numbers and e-mail addresses of key disaster coordinators and volunteers and know that text messaging can work when other communication will not. A pre-established phone tree can be effective to get information out and to mobilize volunteers. The CLC may wish to establish a Disaster Response Hotline for union members to call if they are seeking information on relief services or if they wish to volunteer to help others.
- **Health and Safety Measures:** Disaster response activities often can be hazardous. Emergency responders, health care workers, clean-up workers and utility workers all may face serious hazards. Workers and volunteers involved in response activities should be aware of the potential dangers involved, and they should be provided with the proper training and equipment to ensure that all proper safety precautions are taken. International unions, the national AFL-CIO and federal and state agencies can provide information about specific hazards and appropriate control measures. Much of this information is available on union and government websites and can be downloaded, printed and distributed.
- **One-Stop Relief Centers:** If large numbers of members are affected by a disaster, the CLC may consider opening a one-stop relief center, perhaps in partnership with state and local government agencies, the Red Cross, and the United Way. One-stop relief centers are convenient for members needing information or counseling from more than one agency or professional. Located in a union hall, community center or house of worship, one-stop centers should have representatives of various government agencies available for consultation and to provide service to disaster victims. Others to invite to have a table at a one-stop relief center include attorneys for consultation on insurance or other consumer issues, union contractors to discuss rebuilding options and job counselors. One-stop locations can be mobilized in rotating locations to ensure convenient access to members.
- **Disaster Response Center:** If applicable, the CLC leadership should work with the state federation to set up a Disaster Response Center to distribute needed supplies and resources to families in need. The area Disaster Response Hotline also should be located at the center. Identification in advance of facilities, including union halls and apprenticeship training facilities, that suit the need and are available can make opening a center when needed a much smoother operation. A building housing a Disaster Response Center should have plenty of storage space, a loading dock or rear door to facilitate loading and unloading and an interview/intake area for confidential interviews with those needing assistance.
- **Recruiting Volunteers, Creating a Database:** The CLC Community Services Committee should actively recruit volunteers (don't forget union retirees) to work at the Disaster Response Center, to deliver food, water and supplies and to assist the Red Cross with its activities. Information should be maintained on special skills and equipment that volunteers might offer (truck drivers, mental health, medical, computer skills, four-wheel drive trucks, portable generators, citizens band radios, etc.). If possible, maintain a database of contact information for both volunteers and members assisted or ask the state federation to help with this.
- **Community Partnerships:** The CLC should seek to form disaster response partnerships with local community groups and communities of faith around helping working families, the poor and the elderly and protecting the voting rights of evacuees. Community-based partnerships not only are effective in getting help to people in need but also foster community relationships that can be of great value to unions in other struggles on legislative issues and public policy battles.

# **LOCAL UNION RESPONSE PLANS**

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**L**ocal unions are encouraged to take the following actions to prepare to help their members and their communities in the event of a disaster in their area:

- ▶ Organize a local union Community Services Committee to be responsible for disaster preparedness and response planning and activities for the local. Have the committee members participate in Union Community Activist Network training through the AFL-CIO central labor council. An AFL-CIO Community Services liaison with the Red Cross or the area Central Labor Council can arrange Red Cross disaster training for committee members as well.
  - ▶ Make sure all members of the local know the union phone numbers (national and local) to call in the event of a disaster or mass evacuation. Post them prominently in the union hall and employee lounges at work. If the primary phone number is affected by the disaster, a backup number of a sister local or district office should be provided.
  - ▶ If your local has a union hall large enough to provide temporary shelter, emergency feeding facilities or space to store and distribute emergency supplies, talk to your CLC and local Red Cross chapter about how you can help during a disaster response in your community.
  - ▶ Create back-up files of information you will need if the union office is destroyed. Both computer and paper records of importance should be updated, duplicated and stored in a location away from the office in a secure place that would not likely be affected by the same event.
  - ▶ Sign up local union member volunteers willing to help in an emergency and create a local union database or volunteer call list with phone numbers and e-mail addresses. Collect informa-
- tion such as which members have large multi-passenger vehicles, which have special skills or equipment, who speaks a foreign language, who can drive a large truck, who can cook on scale, who can "sign" for the deaf, etc. In the event of a catastrophic event, the speed and effectiveness of volunteer response is determined by preparations made in advance.
- ▶ Make sure workers and volunteers are informed that disaster response activities can be hazardous. Response workers and volunteers should be aware of the potential dangers involved and provided with the proper training and equipment to ensure that all proper safety precautions are taken. Contact your international union and state and federal safety and health agencies for information about specific hazards and proper control measures.

## **HOME PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE TIPS**

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**T**he key to keeping your household ready and your family safe when a disaster strikes is being prepared and having a plan for action in place and practiced in advance.

No area of the country is immune from violent weather, fire, floods or industrial and environmental disasters. Here are some tips for making sure your family knows what to do in the event of a disaster:

- ▶ Plan with your family how to evacuate your home in the event of a fire and where to meet. Practice your plan.
- ▶ Identify an interior room or structure where the family should gather in the event of a tornado.
- ▶ Know how to respond in the event of an environmental calamity or a biohazard. The proper response may be to heed an evacuation warning, or it may be to take shelter inside with windows, doors and vents closed. Have a plan and practice it.

- In high-risk areas during hurricane and tornado seasons, maintain a stock of nonperishable foods, potable water, a first-aid kit, cleaning supplies and pet food. Include a portable radio, flashlights and batteries.
- The average notice given to evacuate is about 30 minutes. Keep your irreplaceable mementos and important documents, such as mortgage records, birth certificates, passports and insurance papers, in a secure, waterproof and portable container for fast evacuation.
- Keep exterior doors and windows free of floor clutter to facilitate rapid evacuation.
- Have available at all times the disaster response phone number for your union in case you are evacuated and need to establish contact for assistance.
- When you evacuate your home, cut off all utilities to prevent fire, electrical or water damage.
- Secure loose objects outside (furniture, toys, cans) to prevent their becoming airborne missiles in high wind.
- Monitor media bulletins on advancing storms and evacuate when instructed to do so by civil authorities.

## **DIRECTORY OF UNION RESPONSE COORDINATORS**

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**E**ach international union affiliated with the AFL-CIO should designate one of its response team members to be the contact for the AFL-CIO coordinated response in a disaster.

The union designee will represent his or her union in developing national and local AFL-CIO disaster response plans, work with the AFL-CIO

to respond to the needs of members and their families and help mobilize resources, where appropriate, to which the union may have access through their industry relationships.

The list of international union disaster response coordinators, with complete contact information, will be available in the online version of this manual soon.

## **AFL-CIO COMMUNITY SERVICES NETWORK**

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**T**he AFL-CIO Community Services network across America consists of more than 240 full-time AFL-CIO Community Services liaisons with local chapters of the United Way and the Red Cross and, in some communities, staff of independent labor human service agencies.

These liaisons are union members who work for AFL-CIO state federations and central labor councils. They are trained to assist workers and working families in times of need through information and referral and networking local resources.

In times of disaster or dislocation, union families needing referral to their nearest AFL-CIO Community Services program should call the AFL-CIO Disaster Support Hotline (**877-235-2469** or **877-AFL-CIO9**) or go to the Community Services Network website for designated online contacts at <http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/allies/upload/peoplewhohelp.pdf>.

More information about the AFL-CIO Disaster Preparedness and Response Program is available from Mike Cavanaugh, Director, Office of State & Local Affiliates at 202-637-5370 or [mcavau@aflcio.org](mailto:mcavau@aflcio.org) or Chris Marston, Community Services Coordinator, at 251-580-5205 or 251-752-0008 or [cmarston@aflcio.org](mailto:cmarston@aflcio.org).





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