

Chiropractors and the AFL-CIO: In Unity There Is Strength!

John J. Sweeney, President, AFL-CIO

Whether it's the Medicare "reforms" slithering through Washington, the debates raging in the halls of state capitols, or the burning issues on the organizing and bargaining fronts, the same questions dominate: Who gets health care? What choices do patients have? And how much freedom do clinicians have to practice their professions? These are the questions driving chiropractors to look to union representation.

Few would have predicted that physicians and doctors of chiropractic would be seeking union representation as we approach the end of the twentieth century. Yet few would have predicted that America would have come so far -- winning the Cold War -- only to find itself the last great power whose citizens lack national health insurance.

Wall Street analysts tell us fewer than five huge firms will control the managed care market within the next 10 years. Required by law to meet the demands of their shareholders for ever-increasing profits, they continue to improve their product -- the only one of its kind sold in the commercial market, where consumers must pay higher and higher prices to get less and less of what they want.

Last year, 4,500 chiropractors in New York took the first step to fight back. They formed the National Union of Chiropractic Physicians and joined the AFL-CIO's affiliate, the Office and Professional Employees International Union. They acted together to stop Governor George Pataki and managed care companies from denying New Yorkers the right to choose chiropractic physicians if they wished to do so. The battle continues in New York and across America.

Unions are the natural leaders of this great struggle. My predecessors at the AFL-CIO sought to convince every president this century that the only just solution is national health insurance. We took that fight to the bargaining table and to the White House time and time again. We helped President Johnson win Medicare and Medicaid when doctors in the AMA tried to stand against the elderly and the poor. And we've battled employer after employer to gain the same health care America's CEOs take as their God-given right.

The Service Employees International Union (over 500,000 doctors, nurses and health workers of all kinds) is a leader in our struggle for the rights of health care workers in America. The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (over 350,000 doctors and health workers) is another great leader in this cause.

But we in Labor know that it isn't the worker on the job alone who needs representation. It's the consumer who buys the service and the product who needs protection from the greed of Wall Street. That's why unions like the Building Trades and the UAW, the Machinists and the Steelworkers, Farmworkers and Mineworkers join together time and time again to aid each other and their fellow

health workers who struggle against the constant squeeze of managed care.

Some of you may have heard of the recent agreement we reached with Kaiser Permanente. A national partnership was born out of just such a unified struggle. All of Labor made it possible. And all of Labor, indeed all Americans, will gain as Kaiser grows and challenges the greed and excesses of managed care.

So we welcome chiropractic physicians across America to our cause. Join us and help yourselves, but most important, help your fellow citizens get the health care they need and deserve!

John J. Sweeney
AFL-CIO President

About the author: John J. Sweeney was elected president of the AFL-CIO at the federation's biennial convention in New York, October 1995. At the time of his election, Sweeney was serving his fourth four-year term as president of the Service Employees International Union, which grew from 625,000 to 1.1 million members under his leadership. He also was vice president of the AFL-CIO and chair of the Executive Council committees on Health Care and Organizing and Field Services.

Mr. Sweeney's first job in the labor movement was with the International Ladies' Garment Workers, which earlier this year merged with the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union to form UNITE. He began his SEIU career in 1961 when he first joined Local 32B in New York City. He was elected president of Local 32B in 1976, and led two city-wide strikes of apartment maintenance workers during the 1970s. He was elected SEIU president in 1980.

In 1996, Mr. Sweeney wrote the book, *America Needs a Raise, Fighting for Economic Security and Social Justice*, published by Houghton-Mifflin. He co-authored *Solutions for the New Work Force* in 1989, and co-edited the UNA-USA Economic Policy Council's *Family and Work: Bridging the Gap* in 1987. John Sweeney was born May 5, 1934 in the Bronx, and graduated from Iona College in New Rochelle, N.Y., with a degree in economics. He lives in Washington with his wife Maureen, a former New York City school teacher, and their two children, John and Patricia.

AUGUST 1997