

*Remarks by Tom Buffenbarger, International President
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Cedar Rapids Labor Rally, Cedar Rapids, IA
December 15, 2007*

I see that this is a card carrying, proud-to-be union crowd. So we know all about seniority.

Most of us remember starting out on the graveyard shift, working from 11 to 7, working weekends ... seldom seeing our families.

After a while, we worked second shift from 3 to 11, managed a few weekends off each month, and saw a little more of our spouse and kids.

But for many, our goal was always the same – first shift -- working 7 to 3 and a more “normal” family life.

Seniority moved us from the graveyard shift to the day shift. So did our increasing skill level.

To master the jobs we do – machinists, letter carriers, public employees and teachers – takes time. In my case, my apprenticeship took four years and 4,000 hours, plus college courses before I became a journeyman machinist at GE.

Each of the unions represented here today has their own pathway to mastering their craft. And ours is a craft – art and science combined with real skills.

And each of us saw the new hires come on to the job. We saw them walk through the shop, office or classroom with a swagger. We heard them talk about how simple and easy our jobs looked. We knew they thought that they could do our jobs better, faster, perhaps cheaper.

When we saw them pal around with the foreman, director or principal, we knew trouble was brewing.

Those newbie's had lots to learn. Some picked it up quick. Some learned the hard way.

But everyone learned this: Seniority has a special place in a union work site. It protects those who have paid their dues. It preserves all of us from the petty power plays of management.

*Now, what does seniority have to do with presidential politics?
The answer is: 276 and 296.*

No, those are not the number of electoral votes needed to win the White House. Close, but no cigar.

276 and 296 are the number of days the United States Senate was in session from the day Barack Obama and John Edwards took their oaths of office to the day their presidential committees first filed with the FEC.

That's right, nine months and six days for Obama. Nine months, three weeks and five days Edwards.

Brothers – and I know our sisters already know this – the gestation period for an infant is 266 days!

Obama beats that number by ten days, Edwards by thirty days. These babies may be cute; they may be cuddly; they may coo and cry for attention. But we don't nominate a new born for the toughest job on the face of the earth.

Senator Obama's supporters will point to his eight years as a state senator. What they fail to tell you is this -- the Illinois legislature meets only half the year.

Okay, so he was a PART TIME state senator. His PART TIME work has the folks in Beijing and Moscow rocking with laughter. The Grand Old Party lions in our Congress and the GOP regulars buried deep in the Federal bureaucracy must be absolutely giddy.

For me, having watched how hard Senator Obama worked for our folks at Maytag when their plants closed and moved to Mexico – or for our folks at United when their pensions, health care and wages were slashed – that newbie has a lot to learn about HARD WORK.

Yes, Senator Edwards has more seniority than Senator Obama – twenty days more!

And in a union work place, those three weeks count.

What did John Edwards do before visiting the pit stop called the United States Senate? Well, he sued big corporations for the torts they committed that injured working folks.

Now, that's a good thing. Someone has to do it. And as he keeps reminding us, John Edwards spent his whole career fighting for the little guy in America's courtrooms.

What his ads and supporters don't say is how lucrative his career was. He fought for the little guy ... and took a third of his pain and suffering, a third of his punitive damages, a third of his lost time.

Ever wonder how John Edwards can afford \$400 haircuts and a 40,000 square foot mansion? It's easy, when you're scalping the little guy for one-third of what a jury decides would make him whole again, those dollars stack up over time. Senator Edwards spent all of 296 days in Senate session before formally launching his first presidential campaign. But he must have been planning that launch long before that.

Maybe that's why, when five thousand Machinists at US Airway were being laid off after 9-11 and were walking out the front door, John Edwards instead of visiting the workers walked into US Airways' corporate offices. It takes time to learn to walk; it takes time to learn how to talk. And 296 days is just not enough time, apparently.

Now John Edwards says there is a wall around Washington. Now he says it "protects a system that's rigged." Now he says that "on the inside, are the powerful, the well-connected and the very wealthy."

But in his first 296 days in the Senate, John Edwards NEVER, EVER said anything remotely like that.

Instead, HE was on the inside. HE was protecting the system. HE was one of the "powerful, the well-connected and the very wealthy."

But I digress. I wanted to talk to you today about seniority.

I wanted to talk about our endorsed candidate: Senator Hillary Clinton.

You see, Senator Clinton logged in 875 days – three years, two months and 10 days – before launching her campaign.

That's 599 days more seniority than Senator Obama and 579 days more seniority than Senator Edwards.

And before entering the United States Senate, Hillary Clinton did the graveyard shift, swing shift and day shift in the White House. Eight hard years – 2,920 days – in the most intense work site on this globe.

So you could say that Senator Clinton had 3,800 days on the job. And as we've seen, she has used that time to hone her skills. So when your friends ask you why you support Senator Clinton, just say: SENIORITY.