

**AFGE ENDORSEMENT - ACCEPTANCE REMARKS OF
SENATOR JOHN F. KERRY (TRANSCRIPT)**

*June 25, 2004 – Pittsburgh, PA
AFGE Victory in '04 Organizing & Mobilization Conference*

Good evening, AFGE. Thank you members of the American Federation of Government Employees for allowing me to speak to you. You make up one of America's strongest unions. Born during the Great Depression, you played a leading role in helping the economy to recover, and all of America owes you a debt of gratitude for that--certainly all workers do.

I want to thank you for getting involved in this campaign, because this election is the most important election in our lifetime. And that's not something that I'm telling you; that's something that you and others all across this country tell me every single day.

There's so much at stake, and your being here today helps move us closer to a stronger America. It helps move us closer to an America respected in the world. Your being here helps move us closer to the end of the Bush Administration.

The reason we're here is to fight for things that are real, that make a difference to the lives of workers. We're here to fight for good-paying jobs that actually let a worker get ahead after they've worked hard--for a week, for a month, for a year. People need to be able to pay their bills. People need to be able to try to raise a family without having to work two to three jobs.

We're here to strengthen working Americans' right to be able to organize without harassment in the workplace, without fearing for their jobs and their relationships in the place they've worked for years.

We're here to make health care a right, not a privilege that goes to the elected or the connected or the wealthy. And it ought to be a right for all Americans— long overdue.

We're here to make this nation energy-independent, so that no young American ever has to be held hostage to our dependency on oil in the Middle East.

And we're here to build a strong military and lead strong alliances, so that our young men and women in uniform are never overextended the way they are today--and so young Americans are never put in harm's way because we went it alone.

You know, working families all across our country are living every day by the oldest and greatest of American values: hard work, service and caring for one

another. I'm running for president because I believe that our government should live by those values, too.

It's time to remember a basic truth. A stronger America begins right here at home. A stronger America means working *with* you, not against you. It means protecting, not forcing AFGE agencies to privatize 850,000 American citizens. It means protecting 100 years of civil service law and merit system protections, so that we ensure that every worker gets a job based on their ability, not by who they know, what their connections are.

It means strengthening collective bargaining for our union members, because they are the bedrock institutions that strengthen our democracy and improve the quality of life for millions of hard-working Americans. In fact, so many Americans get up every day, go to work, have a safe workplace, have health care, have a pension, get a decent salary--and they're not members of unions. And the only reason they have what they have is because people were willing to go out and fight, and stand on a picket line, and literally demand to be treated fairly.

I will restore every single right that has been taken from you over the last three years. All of America should honor and respect the work that you do for us. You carry out the promises that we make to our veterans. You care for them in hospitals, clinics. And you make sure that they and their loved ones receive the benefits that they have earned.

You keep our military safe by ensuring that its equipment is well-maintained. You make sure that the products we buy, the food we eat, the water we drink, and the air we breathe are safe, and the labels that describe them are truthful.

You defend our borders, enforce our laws, keep our communities safe from criminals. You ensure that retirees and those who have lost a breadwinner receive their Social Security checks.

As president, I will not bankrupt Social Security and Medicare; I will strengthen them. I will not privatize Social Security.

Your support of our nation's public housing, public transportation, public schools, national parks, monuments, and museums is what makes a difference in the quality of our lives.

You carry out the medical research that leads to effective drugs and other treatments. You provide Americans with the best health care in the world. These are just a few examples of what you do every day. You do more for less, and you do it better than anyone else.

A career in the federal government is hard work. And after all you've been doing, we can say you keep America running. I salute your devotion to this country and

your commitment to America's highest values. I hope you have a wonderful conference. I hope you're ready to work hard, and that you're gonna take this out all through the next weeks and months.

Four and a half months will make the difference. You've seen what the last four years were like. We all have a vision of what the next four years can be. We've got a lot of work to do before November 2nd, and I look forward to going out there and doing it with you.

Take care, and God bless.