

NC State AFL-CIO 64th Annual Convention



I attended the NC AFL-CIO executive board as a current VP on the board. After we concluded with the normal order of business it was on to prepare for the 64th Annual Convention. It was the first, in-person executive meeting in over a year. I have to say it was a room full of excited, passionate beings. Everyone was pumped and ready to join with union and labor activists (fully masked) from across the state and country, united for organizing and improving the lives of workers.

The convention was kicked off by none other than our fantastic Madam President MaryBe McMillan. We had a room full of delegates from unions across our state. Everyone was full of energy and anxious to get into full swing participation. The convention included terrific speakers.

We heard from AFGE President Dr. Everett Kelley. Dr. Kelley spoke to us on unity and solidarity along with organizing and the strength of us as a family. His speech had us all standing up to commit to "Count Me In!" to continue our work, our struggle, to remain strong and undeterred from winning our goal of building power and winning for workers in NC. Dr Kelley is a powerful speaker with a profound knowledge of labor history. He shared the success of the fight AFGE had with organizing and bringing TSA workers into the union for their benefits and the protection of all AFGE members. He spoke on us building a strong foundation of labor

organizations and allies to guide and grow our family.

We heard from Governor Roy Cooper who spoke to us about the connection of politics to our intention of building the power of working people. He is in support of our fight for racial justice, our policy agenda, and the need to organize more workers. He recognized that building power for workers means building political power by electing a pro-worker majority legislature. I know I may hear grumbles now from many as you want to keep politics out of our union. I agree politics is a touchy subject, but it is a part of us, our work, our union, and even our families. Every aspect of our lives is touched in some shape or form by politics. Our purpose in a political fight is strictly labor and workers' rights. Our actions are to be accountable to our members by finding the candidates we believe will put workers first.

The Executive Board of the NC State AFL-CIO invited all candidates for the US Senate seat up for election in 2022 to our convention and offered each candidate the opportunity to speak to us directly through a conversational style forum. We did have four candidates accept and show up. All four running for US Senate as a Democrat. I honestly can say after listening to them and having a chat with 3 out of 4 I will be ecstatic to have any of these 4 represent NC. Sadly, not a single Republican agreed to come and talk with us. If they won't talk to us directly *before* they are elected, why I ask you, would we believe that they fight for us, our unions or the issues that affect working people, after they are elected?

Another amazing speaker was Clayola Brown, National President of the A. Phillip Randolph Institute. She applauded us for our work in raising money and finding ways to bring people of all walks of life together for the cause of working people. She spoke on the education of our members and youth. She recognized the outstanding job of NC APRI and how we at NC AFL-CIO join and help to educate all workers. She was both

inspirational and delightfully funny. You could tell by her words she had years of experience with many of the delegates and allies in the room. She was in admiration of our work for racial justice and the workshops we have created to educate our members on how race is used to divide workers, even though they have the same economic interests. She knew we were on the forefront of speaking out against racism and white supremacy inside and outside of our movement. She supported our resolution to make racial justice a fixed part of our work and policies. She spoke on the true diversity in each of our individual unions and how our state fed reflects that diversity in it's board. We do recognize and know we need to educate more workers on how the fight for economic justice and racial justice are one and the same.

The convention allotted time for delegates to join in on table conversations and share our union stories. Building a stronger relationship with workers across this state from differing unions and industries helps us grow as a united body of workers. Together we will become a stronger, united front of labor champions. We shared how each of NC's eight Central Labor Council was building political power both locally at the city, and state levels as well as federally. We strategized on methods to engage our members to be an active voice politically and unite in organizing.

As with any gathering of union members, I believe the most beneficial aspect is the networking and ally building amongst ourselves. Being able to share stories and gain firsthand knowledge of different experiences allows us to formulate plans to build a coalition and achieve the power labor deserves. Yes, people may say this is just an example of pumping us up and getting us excited. I agree. Just as any professional sport team has the pep rally or uplifting talk so we as a professional set of labor organizers pump each other up and strengthen our team. I found the whole convention full of educated, devoted, and passionate people willing to say,

"COUNT ME IN".

We had an option of different workshops to attend, such as "Building Solidarity Across Race," this focused on labor history, how racism has been used to divide us and how workers have come together across racial barriers. Public Speaking & Telling Our Union Story, this gave us practice at speaking publicly and telling our union story as well as being an effective media spokesperson. Internal Organizing, "Right to Work & You" this focused on the "right to work" law in NC and how it effects internal organizing.

The delegates at this convention also had the task of electing the NC State AFL-CIO President for the next term. It was with outstanding, unanimous, overwhelming approval and support to re-elect MaryBe McMillan as President. Each Union caucus elected their VP's to serve on the board. The NC State Council of Machinists elected Theodore "Teddy" McNeal and Montez Davis to serve these positions.

I thank LL 1725 membership for allowing me the opportunity to attend this convention and to serve in the capacity I do with the NCSCM, the Southern Piedmont CLC, and the NC AFL-CIO. I gain great knowledge and newfound admiration for our union and state leaders with every meeting, picket line, worker led-action or convention I attend.

I encourage every member to get involved and grow in the fight to build our movement for working people. Again, I will state how important politics, voting, union members running for office is, as it is the only way we will achieve a "workers first" agenda. If anything over the last year and a half has shown us, it is that workers are the front line, we are the body, the builders, the doers. We need to be speaking out, acting out, creating the agenda that works for WORKERS! I say COUNT ME IN! I invite you all to join us.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Kelly