

**Remarks of OPM Director John Berry**  
**50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Executive Order 10988**  
**AFL-CIO offices**  
**January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2012**  
*As prepared for delivery*

50 years ago, President Kennedy set his pen to an Executive Order that inaugurated a new, cooperative era in the Federal service. For the first time, Federal employees had the right to organize and bargain collectively – as unions.

That 1962 executive order is founded on the idea, both simple and profound, that we achieve more when we work together.

I trace the source of that idea to the American Revolution, and the idea that the proper seat of power is in the hands of each citizen.

Hamilton, Franklin, Jefferson, Madison, Washington – these were all men wary of consolidated power. They were skeptical that any one man could be trusted to look out for the interests of millions. They overthrew exactly such a system, and when they had done it, they broke that political power into a thousand pieces and dispersed it among the people.

The checks and balances built by our forefathers enable our nation to settle its differences peaceably. It works. In our history, civil war is rare and civil discourse is common.

We see this when labor and management, or branches of government, sit down together to discuss and come to terms – fair terms – that lead to mutual benefit.

I come from a faith that says the strong must protect the weak. A faith that holds that it is good and righteous to seek justice when fairness is violated – even more so when the violator sits in power. Where, as Isaiah makes clear: “If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.” [Isaiah 58:10]

There are times in our history when the powerful have abused and oppressed the powerless. Times when the checks and balances in America were sorely tested. When Goliaths loomed large, and Davids trembled. When the scales of justice tilted towards the side with all the gold.

Today, some would have you believe that the pay you’re given will naturally match the value of your work and the needs of your family. That it doesn’t matter if the train from here to prosperity carries only one passenger.

Whether it’s George III or an unelected CEO, concentrated power is dangerous and not to be trusted. Even more so, as corporations now span the globe and concentrate more money and more power in fewer hands than ever before. A lone worker in a global workforce starts from a weak position. And management knows it. You know it.

It seems clear to me that if you want to protect your individual interests in America today, if you're a middle-class parent who wants the same or better for your child, you're going to need friends and allies. You need to band together with men and women who share your interests and your goals. You need a union. It was true in 1900 just as it is in 2012 – we need unions. Because together, we are stronger. Together, we can balance the scales.

Now let me be clear: I believe in capitalism. I even believe in a capitalism where you can fire people who provide poor service or shoddy work. But I also believe in a capitalism where the people who do the work have the right to walk away from a raw deal. A capitalism where a worker makes enough money to support his kids and has a weekend to spend with her family. Where a bad employer faces the same justice as a bad employee.

I believe employers and unions can reach deals that are fair to all parties, and should. I believe, as Kennedy believed, that we only get that kind of fairness when people are empowered and organized.

Like our forefathers, Kennedy provided a check and balance, assuring that labor and management sit at the same table, and together defend the public good.

Unions protect people who blow the whistle on corruption, illegality, and just plain dumb practices – even when their boss would rather not hear about it.

And when Federal unions and management work together, great things happen. Money is saved. Work conditions get healthier. People work smarter, and get the tools they need to succeed. Taxpayers get better service, at lower cost – because we work together.

That's the principle that Kennedy started us toward, fifty years ago. It's a principle we need even more today.

Let us together roll up our sleeves and work for that better future, for a just and fairer tomorrow, and for that more perfect union our children and grandchildren deserve.

God bless all who labor, and God bless the United States of America.

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