

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations



815 Sixteenth Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006
(202) 637-5000
www.aflcio.org

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Contact: Caren Benjamin (202) 637-5279

AFL-CIO Votes Holt-Baker New Executive Vice President Unions Welcome First African-American Top Officer

(Washington DC, Sept. 21) The AFL-CIO Executive Council today unanimously voted in Arlene Holt-Baker as the group's Executive Vice President, making her the first African-American ever to serve in one of the top three executive offices of the 10 million-member federation. Holt-Baker fills the unexpired term of retiring Executive Vice President Linda Chavez Thompson.

"We are really blessed to have someone with Arlene's talents and experience representing the needs and aspirations of America's working families at this crucial moment in history," said AFL-CIO President John Sweeney. "Like Linda Chavez-Thompson, Arlene is a true organizer and leader. I can think of no one better to elevate the voices of working people and make sure they are heard and heeded on issues like health care, jobs and economic justice."

Holt-Baker will work on a range of issues and concerns. She will devote special attention to leadership on health care reform as well as workers' freedom to form unions, and to working to strengthen grassroots union movements in states and cities.

"I am truly honored and humbled by this opportunity to serve America's working people and to follow in the footsteps of such a groundbreaking leader," Holt-Baker said. "Linda Chavez Thompson touched countless lives through the battles she fought and causes she championed with today's unions. I will do everything in my power to live up to her example and to support working men and women as they struggle for the rights and freedoms they so richly deserve."

Chavez Thompson will become the AFL-CIO's first Executive Vice President Emerita. She will continue to chair the AFL-CIO Immigration Committee and serve as head of the Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers (ORIT), the International Trade Union Confederation's (ITUC) regional organization for the Americas. She will also serve as an advisor to state federations and labor councils.

Holt-Baker's experience as a union and grassroots organizer spans more than 30 years and includes leadership roles in the AFL-CIO and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

One of seven children of a domestic worker and a laborer in Fort Worth, Texas, Holt-Baker got her first job in high school through President Johnson's poverty initiative. Working after school at the \$1.40 minimum wage, she earned higher hourly pay than her mother did working full time.

With AFSCME, she helped public-sector workers in California form unions and was a part of the team that helped workers win contracts providing better wages and pay equity for women. As International Union Area Director in California for AFSCME from the late 1980s to 1995, Holt-Baker, worked with AFSCME council and local leaders to mobilize union voters in numerous national, statewide, county and municipal elections.

In 1995, Holt-Baker came to the AFL-CIO where her work included the successful campaign to defeat the anti-worker Prop. 226 in California. She also was instrumental in organizing a massive labor movement-wide show of support for the more than 20,000 migrant workers who pick and process strawberries in California, as the workers struggled to join a union through the Farm Workers.

As the first director of the AFL-CIO's [Voice@Work](#) Campaign in 1999, Holt-Baker launched a dynamic movement to engage elected officials, clergy members, community leaders and others in support of workers' freedom to form unions.

In 2004 she led Voices for Working Families, which registered and mobilized thousands of women and people of color to vote in under-registered communities.

She returned to the AFL-CIO in 2006 to lead the federation's Gulf Coast Recovery effort, working closely with national and local advocates in fighting for the just rebuilding of the communities devastated by Hurricane Katrina. As Executive Vice President she will work with Pres. Sweeney and AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Richard Trumka to advance the priorities of working people.

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