



## **AFL-CIO leader to leave union to come home to S.A.**

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WASHINGTON — Linda Chavez-Thompson, the AFL-CIO's executive vice president, announced her resignation Wednesday, expressing a desire to return to San Antonio after 12 years leading the nation's largest labor federation.

Chavez-Thompson, 63, plans to raise a garden and spend time with family, but she vowed to stay active with labor issues, local causes and political candidates.

But she has no plans to run for office on her own.

"I haven't been able to do anything normal for 30 years," she said. "Because I was attending rallies, conventions, getting arrested — all the things that labor leaders do."

Chavez-Thompson delivered her resignation Tuesday to AFL-CIO President John Sweeney. She was the first Hispanic to hold a national leadership position with the organization.

"I think she's made a very important contribution," said Julius Getman, a University of Texas at Austin law professor and co-author of "The Future of Labor Unions: Organized Labor in the 21st Century."

"She brought a unique perspective to bear on organized labor," Getman said. "She's been an important part of what I see as a revival of organized labor, of doing things in a much more dynamic fashion in the last few years in terms of reaching new constituencies and using new techniques."

The organizing of women, minorities and immigrants was perhaps not a priority of the AFL-CIO in the past, Chavez-Thompson said, adding that her ascent led to a greater role for them.

"We've seen many efforts by our affiliated unions to bring diversity," she said.

Moreover, unions pay more attention to civil rights, human rights and local community issues, she said.

Chavez-Thompson traveled constantly, speaking to union and community groups across America. For millions, she was the face of the AFL-CIO's new union movement, Sweeney said.

"Linda has broken new pathways for the labor movement," Sweeney said. "Countless working women and men, not only in the United States but throughout the Western Hemisphere, have a better life because of all she's contributed."

Having Chavez-Thompson in high office boosted confidence among Hispanics in labor's leadership, said Jaime Martinez, national treasurer of the League of United Latin American Citizens.

"There were very few Mexican Americans in high-ranking positions," Martinez said. "Her defense of the immigrant's right to belong to unions was very key for the labor movement."

Cecilia Muñoz, a vice president in the National Council of La Raza, the largest Hispanic rights organization, said, "We are sorry to see her go. People will be watching the AFL-CIO to see if additional Latino leadership emerges."

Chavez-Thompson said she would continue to serve as chairman of the AFL-CIO Immigration Committee and advise state federations and local councils within the AFL-CIO. She will serve out her term as a vice chairman of the Democratic National Committee, which expires in 2009.

"It's been a wonderful 12 years," she said.

She said her resignation was voluntary.

"I just want to come home to San Antonio," she said, adding that she would remain active and "give a lot of good grief to people who don't agree with me."

The daughter of cotton sharecroppers, Chavez-Thompson was born in Lubbock and at age 10 hulled cotton for 30 cents a day alongside her parents. Looking back, she said, the absence of safety and health regulations spurred her interest in the labor movement.

Arriving in San Antonio 37 years ago to organize garbage workers for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Chavez-Thompson relentlessly rose through the ranks.

Her marriage to the labor movement was always a family affair. She joined her father's union in Lubbock in 1967. Her second husband, whom she wed in 1985, was Robert

Thompson, former head of the Amalgamated Transit Union in San Antonio. After his death, she didn't remarry.

One of Chavez-Thompson's most emotional moments and last ceremonial acts before moving to the national scene was to attend the christening of VIA Metropolitan Transit's Alamodome station, named posthumously in her husband's honor.

She maintained a home in San Antonio during her years in Washington.

After stints as international vice president of the AFSCME council here in 1988 and '92 and executive director of the statewide AFSCME council in 1995, Chavez-Thompson that year joined Sweeney and Richard Trumka in a revolt against the AFL-CIO national leadership.

Winning with a campaign against lavish spending and perks enjoyed by previous leaders, the new team raised dues on 13 million members and later reorganized efforts to elect Democrats to the White House in 2000 and '04.

Sweeney named an assistant, Arlene Holt-Baker, to fill the remainder of Chavez-Thompson's term as AFL-CIO executive vice president, which also expires in 2009. If approved by a vote Sept. 21, Holt-Baker will become the first African American woman to hold a leadership position.

Sweeney said Chavez-Thompson "has inspired tens of thousands of people to contribute through their own action, and wherever she's gone, she's earned tremendous affection."

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*Express-News Business Writer Adolfo Pesquera contributed to this report.*