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ON THE WEB

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## Labor Group Sets \$53 Billion Election Budget

By [Steven Greenhouse](#)

Big labor did some big-time muscle flexing today, as the A.F.L.-C.I.O.'s executive council approved a record \$53 million political budget to educate and mobilize voters during this political cycle.

Even though the A.F.L.-C.I.O. has not yet been able to muster a two-thirds majority to back a presidential candidate, it promised to deploy more than 200,000 political volunteers next year to knock on doors and make phone calls – both to educate voters and to get them out to vote.

“Today the A.F.L.-C.I.O. is sending a powerful message that we are going to change the course of our country in 2008,” the labor federation’s president, John J. Sweeney, said after the executive council met in Washington. “America’s workers are more energized than ever before.”

The A.F.L.-C.I.O. said it plans to help elect “a pro-worker president” and help gain three to six “pro-worker seats” in the Senate and add five in the House by focusing on Congressional districts with many union members. The labor federation, a grouping of 55 labor unions representing nearly 10 million workers, often says that it doesn’t favor any political party in particular, but in a typical election year, more than 90 percent of the Congressional candidates it endorses are Democrats.

“Our members are building an army to make more calls, knock on more doors and turn out more voters than ever,” said Gerald McEntree, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees and chairman of the A.F.L.-C.I.O.’s political committee. “We’re going for the trifecta: the House, the Senate, and the White House.”

The \$53 million political budget for this cycle is up from \$50 million in the presidential cycle of 2003-04 – which was before the service employees, the Teamsters and several other major unions quit the A.F.L.-C.I.O., causing a severe budget crunch at the labor federation.

The rival union federation, Change to Win, is holding its convention next week in Chicago, and Change to Win officials say they doubt the group will muster the supermajority needed to endorse a presidential candidate in the Democratic primary.

The A.F.L.-C.I.O. federation said it had identified 23 states as priorities for next year’s elections, including Ohio, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin. The federation said that it would seek to reach out to more than 1.4 million voters in Ohio alone, through a new affiliate,

Working America, that would enlist workers not in regular unions. That group says it plans to increase its membership to 2.5 million by next summer, from 1.6 million at present.

As part of its muscle-flexing, the A.F.L.-C.I.O. boasted today that it mobilized 13.6 million voters in 32 states during the 2006 elections, helping shift the balance of power in Congress.

“All across the country union voters are going to make the difference in race after key race,” said Karen Ackerman, the federation’s political director.