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General Display • Schools & Instruction • Legal Services • Legal Notices • Classifieds • Organizations

News
News of the week
Editorial
Editor's "Razzle Dazzle" Column
Letters to the Editor
Professionals' Column
Civil Service Exam Stories
News Archive
Services
Advertiser Index
Who We Are
Contact Info
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## Unions Mobilize in D.C. In Anti-Beck Response

Urge Strong Election Turnout  
By DAVID SIMS



**UNIONS PUSH BACK AGAINST BECK:** Two signs at the Oct. 2 'One Nation' rally in Washington display the messages the attendees were trying to send, both pushing back against right-wing standard-bearers like Glenn Beck and the Tea Party and trying to galvanize progressives in the month before election day to return Democratic majorities to Congress.

*The Chief-Leader/David Sims*

An estimated 175,000 people, including a large delegation of New York union members and community groups, rallied Oct. 2 on the Washington Mall for jobs, immigration reform and economic justice, seeking to kickstart the progressive movement as the November midterm elections draw near.

Speakers at the "One Nation Working Together Rally," organized by groups like the AFL-CIO, the NAACP and the Sierra Club, challenged the hostile approach of right-wing protesters. An Aug. 28 rally at the same spot by Fox News host Glenn Beck had troubled many because it took

place on the 47th anniversary of Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream" speech at the 1963 March on Washington.

### Push Back At Anger

United Federation of Teachers President Michael Mulgrew led a delegation of members to the event, with his union chartering an Amtrak train and filling more than 100 buses. In an interview, he said that the goal of the rally was to push back against the politics of fear.

"I was in Washington D.C. the day of the Glenn Beck rally," he said. "I went down by the Mall afterwards; there was so much anger there. This was different, and that's really how we're going to move the country forward. If people are allowed to make decisions based solely on anger and drive the issue solely on anger, it's really going to be a bad choice."

The goals of the One Nation rally were as vague as Mr. Beck's August event, which was titled "Restoring Honor" and had a religious bent in its choice of speakers. But the message delivered by figures like AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, the Reverend Al Sharpton and American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten was a mix of progressive populism and encouragement to get out and vote on Nov. 2.

"The power is in the community and the power is in the voting booth. That seemed to be the message I took out of the day," Mr. Mulgrew reflected after the event. "New York definitely was there. I met people from Chicago, from Los Angeles, from Denver, all up and down the eastern seaboard, a big spread. There were so many different groups and organizations there, different issues, but we were all able to come together in one place. It wasn't fueled by anger or hate, it was fueled by hope and bringing these

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**NEW YORK GOES TO WASHINGTON:** Several major New York elected officials accompanied the United Federation of Teachers to the Oct. 2 'One Nation' rally in Washington. From left to right: City Comptroller John C. Liu; Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer; City Councilman James Sanders, chair of the Council Civil Service Committee; UFT President Michael Mulgrew, New York State United Teachers President Richard Iannuzzi and Public Advocate Bill De Blasio.

*The Chief-Leader/David Sims*

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hopes together.”

### In the Company of Dems

Mr. Mulgrew traveled to the capital with some of the city’s biggest powerbrokers, including Speaker Christine Quinn, Public Advocate Bill De Blasio, Comptroller John C. Liu, and Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, all of whom are considered potential future mayoral candidates. But all seemed happy to set aside thoughts of city politics for the day and soak in the national nature of the event.

Even as they rode to Washington on the non-stop train, many Teachers on the train did not take it as an opportunity to relax, grading papers in their seats at 7 in the morning.

Patty Crispino, who works at the High School of Graphic Communication, said that she didn’t mind giving up part of her weekend for the trip. “I didn’t need motivation, because it’s what we need to do. I usually need motivation for something I don’t want to do,” she said.

### ‘America is Here Today’

“You look like one beautiful nation,” Mr. Trumka said to the crowd, which many noted was more diverse than the crowd at a typical Tea Party event. “If you watch too much TV, you may think that we’re a nation full of hate, but that’s not America. America is here today.”

There were some major differences between the rally and the last major labor-inspired gathering in Washington 29 years ago, when 260,000 people turned out. In that instance, the unions were looking to send a message of rebuke to President Ronald Reagan, who the previous month had fired striking Air Traffic Controllers and moved to decertify their union, steps that came to be viewed as pivotal in setting an anti-labor tone that led to a sharp decline in private-sector union participation. In this case, the unions remain loyal to the President they helped elect despite some disillusionment with some of his political positions and cases where even his accomplishments fell short of their hopes.

Mr. Trumka’s remarks served to both entreat the Obama administration to continue pursuing progressive policies and implore the audience to help prevent a Republican takeover of Congress. Mr. Trumka, like many speakers, was careful not to praise the Democratic administration too highly, while also seeking to encourage voters to go to the polls in November.

“We have to ensure that working men and women have the freedom to make every last job a good job by joining together in a union, to bargain for a good life,” he said, referring to the Employee Free Choice Act, which has stalled in Congress. “You need to promise that you’ll make your voices heard for jobs and justice today and on Election Day.”

### ‘Make America Breathe’

In one of the day’s most-rousing speeches, Mr. Sharpton said, “We’ve gotta go home and we’ve gotta hit the pavement. We can’t stop at ’08, we’ve got to get ready for ’10. They say we’re apathetic, they say we’re not energized. . . but we can make America breathe and make America live as one nation under God.”

Ms. Weingarten focused on education, saying that unions needed to take ownership of the issue and demand better schooling nationwide. “No more will we speak of ‘those kids,’ or ‘other people’s kids.’ Our kids are our kids,” she said.

Luz Minaya, a Teacher from I.S. 528 in Washington Heights, spoke as part of a group of union workers, one of the only New Yorkers to address the crowd. “I need everyone to hear the voice of our educators. . . it’s wrong to paint us as the problem,” she said. “A good education and good jobs go hand in hand.”

Speaking after the rally, Mr. De Blasio said that he felt it had served its intended purpose. “I think that there’s a lot more power and energy amongst progressives than we often give ourselves credit for. Sometimes you need things like this to help you see it and feel it, and I think it will inspire a lot of action over the next four weeks,” he said.

### He Says Fight Back

He also spoke of a need “to reclaim the physical space here” after the Glenn Beck rally. “Everyone has a right to free speech, but what Beck did was too cute by half in terms of a conservative message in a place like this. I think it’s a sort of corrective action,” he said.

“We have allowed ourselves as progressives to be a bit demoralized by counter-attacks from the right,” he continued. “That’s something we’ve got to learn to start resisting; we can do better, and this is an example of standing up and saying, it’s time to move forward.”





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