

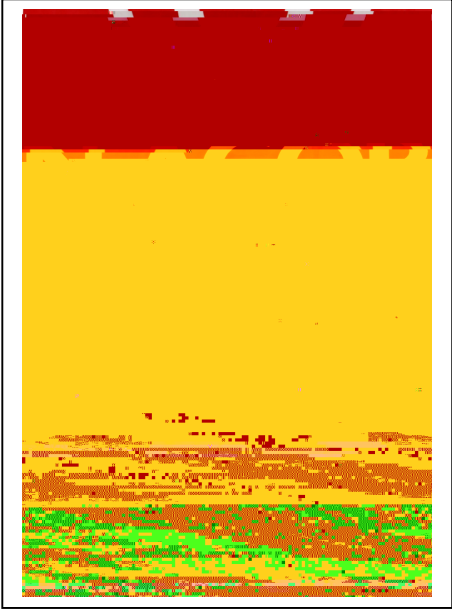
And we are being recognized as the premier organizing group. We stuck to our guns and stuck to organizing all of this time. President Obama was an organizer and he thinks like an organizer.

I have to tell you about the attacks on us from the Right. You know, nobody likes to be attacked and called names. But I do have to say that at the end, it'

How would you describe AC's relations with the union movement or with the labor movement in general? Do you see it as a unionist or as an activist organization?

BL: We've always been pro-labor. We certainly are accused of being in labor's pocket. But, like I say, we model ourselves like a community union. Now, is that to say that we agree with all our brothers and sisters in the labor movement? No. Is that to say that we're not critical? We definitely support the right-to-organize movement that they have, and workers' rights, and the right of household workers to choose to be in a union. We think America is better if it has stronger unions. We think any worker -- any worker -- should be organized in some way. So we are very pro-union.

The union movement is changing. I think a lot of our brothers and sisters in the labor movement see that they fell away from organizing, you know? Instead of having organizers, they had business managers. We've been forming partnerships, labor-community partnerships, because there are some in labor who know that they need to use community organizations and community folks, grassroots folks, to get into the neighborhoods. And to get their rank and file into more issues than just workplace issues. So the labor movement in practice -- and this is changing -- they understand that they will die. They needed to turn themselves around. We've always been there, and now I think the partnership is just deepening. They used to treat us as little brothers and little sisters. Now they see us as equals.



AC's survey says that you would say that you would say about the research and your efforts.

BL: Critical. I think that's the difference between organizing and mobilizing and advocacy. I don't think we get enough credit (and it may be our own fault) for doing research and intellectual work. Because as an organizer, if you're going to map out a campaign you've been out there knocking on doors, and a majority of people keep coming up with pretty much the same issue, and they're saying, "We want to fight, and we want to see change on this particular issue."

When you work with your members, the first thing you do is lay out a campaign plan, and one of the first things that you do when you're laying out a campaign plan is ask: what is the research we need to do? We

may assume that X is true, but we need to be able to find out whether X is really true. And we need to know this particular area.

So research is always one of the first things, you know. Then you figure out, how many other people does this affect? What other people? Who are your allies? Who are your opponents? What kind of media strategy? What kind of legal strategy? What is your street strategy? In your research, did you publish something? Do you do a survey? Has somebody already done this? So this is the bricks and mortar of a campaign, and I don't think we always get enough credit for doing it, but it is critical to us. We never, ever do any kind of campaign without doing some research.

Do you do your research in-house or do you also reach out to other groups to do it or you

BL: We do it both ways. You know, we've worked with the Brennan Center [at NYU Law School] a lot, because we may not have the in-house expertise and reso

Politicians, you know? Governors, senators, state lawmakers who are saying, “Yeah, stay in your home. Don’t move.” I mean, Barney Frank just the other day had said that he had been skeptical, because we’d been calling for a moratorium. And he was like, “No, no. That’s not necessary.” Barney Frank stood up on the House floor and said, “That’s it. You know, we’re not moving f

If you don't have a willing partner, if you have people who only do it begrudgingly or because they're forced to or they're put into a shotgun relationship, it never works. But you have to have that willing partner, and you need to be big enough and have the strength and have enough expertise and be able to bring the political capital to the table.

What do you see as the main causes of the current housing crisis? What are the main factors?

BL Greed and lack of real housing policies and regulation. For instance, on the home ownership front, banks

Miami, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Houston, Dallas, New Orleans – which is really appalling. After (Hurricane) Katrina you would think they would want to get people back. But there, in New Orleans, they're talking about tearing down the only public housing that there was. And that housing was largely unscathed by Katrina, it was on higher ground. But there has been a sense in this country of not wanting to take care of anything that accrues to the well-being of low- and moderate-income folks. So this is an epidemic. You take any urban environment, you take any inner-ring suburb, and it's across the board.

Public housing is a national crisis

BL It absolutely is. One of the reasons that we embarked here in New York on the fight to save Starrett City was because Starrett City was the largest federally funded housing complex in the country. Public housing projects had been blown up, torn down all through the HOPE VI program through HUD for years. You know, that was a national disgrace. PubYoPub70(f)33(o)-20(r)-u.68 Td lut,0(w)2(n)20()-70(up,s)9(k(e)4(.)-10()-210(P)-4

I would have liked to have seen more tax cuts for the middle class and have the taxes that Bush cut for the wealthy restored, you know? They had a long line for eight years. But, all in all, I think it was probably the most extraordinary thing that we could do in this quick a time.

I also like to ask you a few questions regarding your role as Co-Chair of the Working Families Party in New York. You are a true grassroots organization that has won over 10 million votes in the Working Families Party in Connecticut. I understand. Do you expect to see the Working Families Party continue to grow in the future?

BL: It's truly phenomenal that in the short lifespan when we were all thinking about this ten years ago. It's truly phenomenal, what we've been able to do here in New York and Connecticut. We believe in fusion. We believe that it is a political strategy.

We called it Working Families Party for a reason. You know me, I'm always saying, "Don't get lost when the Democrats tell us." You need a piece of real estate: a party that's not afraid to just go straight to working people's issues and community people's issues.

They can see if there's a Working Families Party candidate, it has an imprimatur, you know? It's the *Good Housekeeping* Seal of Approval. Imagine if you had a Working Families Party in all eight states where fusion is legal. Now you have a force that really can affect national and local politics, and it gives community people, poor people, working people, union people a place where their vote actually counts and stands out. And I also, quite frankly, believe that a third-party fusion strategy is the strategy for black and brown people in this country. It's just my belief.

Do you see the Working Families Party expanding into a lot of states any time soon?

BL: If I have anything to do with it, it will. That's our goal. Our current goal is to slug it through. We had to build here, then we went to Connecticut, and we are going on. We don't care. We're going to slug it out. You know, we've got to do California, Mississippi. Yes, that's our goal, and I think that is what we want to happen over the next five to ten years, absolutely.

Both Governor Paterson and Mayor Bloomberg have said that they're

told constantly that we can't mess with Wall Street.

hopeful about actually being able to pass progressive legislation. I'm very hopeful about the economy. Because people now recognize that organizing is it.