

Randi Weingarten
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A North American Labor Assembly on Climate Crisis
UFT, New York City

I'm only here because I'm a facilitator of space. It's hard when Cornell calls about a conference like this, it's hard to say no, particularly since these were the reasons why we invested in and built this space.

Too often, we're so busy doing all the things we have to do, putting out all the fires we have to put out. No pun intended. No global omissions with that! We're so busy doing these things that we rarely stop, meet and plan. This kind of conference is about stopping, meeting and planning, and in order to do so you actually have to have a space where people can get together. In some ways it's like all those corporate gurus who have their gazillion dollar spaces.

After "9/11" when we were thinking about a new location for the UFT, we decided that we wanted to be in a space where we could create a community. We were actually the first people who came downtown after 9/11. We bought the building next door and rented this space for a gazillion years. We decided we were going to create this space, so we can create community.

It is really an honor for me to tell this story because this is the kind of conference you want a labor union to be able to hold, to house, and where all of you can be here to be able to think through these issues.

Concern for the environment is obviously not a new issue for unions, if you think about it, and I know that some of our health and safety people are here. We've always been involved in health and safety issues from shortening the work day and work week, to building aggressive health and safety committees, to pioneering work place safety laws, and to think through how to attack health and safety at a global level. How to do it in a way that doesn't create a zero sum gain between workers' jobs and the environment is something that all of

you are uniquely qualified to do. I really applaud you for being here and for thinking through these kinds of issues.

This is the last thing I'll say. Two and three years ago, when people started talking about green and environment and things like that, it was still viewed as this fringe issue. These days, every other minute you hear people thinking and talking about what's happening in the environment and what's happening with global warming. I think Al Gore probably did a lot to help that, however there are lots of groups including the one your next key note speaker [Carl Pope from the Sierra Club] which have been in the wilderness talking about this for years and years and years. I say this for another reason, which is many times these days in the labor movement, we feel like we are talking to no one and that no one is listening to the issues we champion. But if you look at what has happened in terms of the environmental movement, you see that with persistence, focus and having right on your side, as we so often do in the labor movement, particularly if we are starting to join forces with the environmental movement, nobody's going to stop us.