Clinton Gets Endorsement from Organized Labor

By Frank Sesno

Organized labor Monday endorsed Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton in his presidential nomination in an effort to put a rest to any idea of a brokered convention and assure the party's leaders the party begin focusing on the general election to any North American Free Trade Agreement.

To the consternation of organized labor and many politicians both endorsed giving the Bush administration fast track authority for approving a trade agreement, but in a search of a middle ground to satisfy labor Clinton has not yet quoted Gephardt's doubts about whether the sort of the administration's trade negotiating would suitably protect the interests of American workers.

The AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland said Monday ordered its state and local political operations to immediately begin working for the Clinton campaign.

Kirkland said labor decided to act because there is now impossible for Brown to get enough votes to win the nomination. "I have no sense of there being some white light that would lead us to the promised land," he said.

One union political source said organized labor was designed to prevent Brown from winning significant union support as the campaign heads into primary states such as Pennsylvania, Indiana and North Carolina. He said it also would build any serious hope some union might have that another candidate could be produced by a brokered convention.

"The committee's vote is a reflection of the feeling across the breadth of labor that now is the time to act," AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland said.

The action came after a telephone conversation Monday morning between Kirkland and Clinton in which the Arkansas Democrat essentially endorsed the trade position taken by House Majority Leader Richard A. Gephardt (D-Mo.) to provide protections for American jobs and worker rights in any North American Free Trade Agreement.

By Scott KraR

The AFL-CIO is still uncertain about its endorsement of former California Gov. Brown for the Democratic presidential nomination contest against President Bush.

"Gov. Clinton has really been prepared for both the convention and "never got a campaign going." By making the endorsement now, Kirkland said, labor could help "give the candidate a chance to prepare himself for the convention and the campaign. It's that important."

"The fact that he won New York showed he had some guts," the source said. "He didn't run from the issues.

"Monday Kirkland praised Clinton's courage in the campaign. "Gov. Clinton has really been through the gauntlet," Kirkland said. "It's the toughest gauntlet I can remember and he's stood up extraordinarily well under it." He said Clinton "deserves a great deal of admiration" for standing up under attack.

Kirkland said labor wanted to help Clinton avoid what happened to Democratic presidential nominee Walter Mondale in 1984 when he had to fight for delegates up to the opening of the convention. As a result, Kirkland said, Mondale was unprepared for both the convention and "never got a campaign going."