

FIRST RESPONDERS

The skill, courage and dedication of first responders have attracted nearly universal praise. Indeed, just in the previous 12 months we have seen first responders make a profound difference in a number of widely publicized disasters such as:

- The 19 Arizona fire fighters who died trying to contain a raging wildfire;
- The police officers, doctors, medics and others who attended to the injured and helped restore calm and safety in the wake of the Boston Marathon bombing;
- The cabin crew, police officers, emergency medical technicians, doctors, fire fighters and hospital employees who, through their timely and skilled response, held the loss of life to a minimum in the wake of the crash of a Korean jetliner in San Francisco; and
- The thousands of public employees, utility workers and more who still are helping residents of the East Coast recover from Superstorm Sandy.

These first responders have captured the imagination of the American public. But to anyone familiar with political and legislative developments over the past four years since the MTD's last convention, many of the seemingly heartfelt words of appreciation ring hollow.

We have witnessed a relentless attack on collective bargaining rights at the state and local levels, including those benefitting first responders. Men and women who are sworn to serve and protect their communities are seeing elected officials voting to cut pay and benefits, reduce pensions and eliminate jobs as a way to deal with the economic hardship faced since 2008. In other words, do more with and for less.

And for those who already have retired from years of public service – Detroit comes to mind – federal bankruptcy laws are allowing government entities to renege on years of contracted agreements to reduce or eliminate promised benefits and pensions.

Another example is the decade-long fight to secure compensation and health care benefits for first responders and workers who became ill after being exposed to pollutants in the wreckage of New York's World Trade Center following the attack of September 11, 2001. After tributes praised their bravery and dedication came years of bluster and blockage of legislation designed to help those harmed and recovering.

John Stewart, the talk show host/comedian, spoke for many when he said that not enacting such a bill "is an outrageous abdication of our responsibility to those who were most heroic on 9/11."

The AFL-CIO and a united phalanx of MTD-affiliated unions, many of whom represent first responders, kept the issue in the public eye. Finally, justice was done.

But more needs to be done for all first responders. Organized labor is united in its iron-clad commitment to highlight the efforts of these dedicated and selfless workers. Moreover, the MTD remains committed to advocating for legislation that will make the jobs of these workers safer.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Maritime Trades Department, AFL-CIO, its affiliates and its Port Maritime Councils urge elected officials to go beyond mere platitudes by providing for and enacting legislation that will improve the lives of America's heroic first responders; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the MTD, its affiliates and its Port Maritime Councils strongly oppose efforts to rob these workers of their innate and legitimate right to bargain collectively; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the MTD, its affiliates and its Port Maritime Councils thank all the women and men who serve their communities as first responders, and recognize their families who await their safe return home after each and every shift.