

## **Union Hopes to Build on Houston Success**

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WASHINGTON -- Union leaders hope to use a successful effort to organize thousands of Houston janitors as a model for workers across the South and Southwest where unions are relatively uncommon.

Eliseo Medina, executive vice president of the Service Employees Union, said Wednesday the Houston janitors, who begin negotiating a contract next month, have provided momentum for efforts in the 17-state region.

The union is trying to repeat the effort in Miami, organizing janitors and workers who clean condominiums and janitors at the University of Miami.

"I think we've shown that workers in the campaign in the South and Southwest want to be organized and need to be organized and if unions come forth with a plan and a vision, workers will answer the call," said Medina who spoke to a group of reporters.

All but two of the 17 states, New Mexico and Colorado, are right-to-work states, meaning workers in those states always have the right to decide whether to join a union. Union membership in all the states, except Nevada, is between 2 percent and 4 percent, Medina said. Nevada's is about 14 percent, largely because of the gaming industry there, he said.

President Bush won all of the states in the 2004 election.

The union says it has 1.8 million members and represents more immigrants than any other union.

The janitors who organized in Houston represented four of the five largest cleaning companies in the city and the companies agreed to allow the union to try to organize their employees. That agreement came after the union organized a 10-day strike by Houston janitors.

Houston workers also were supported by unionized janitors in other parts of the country. Medina said the tactic of "multiplying organizing" is the heart of the Change to Win Coalition campaign.

The coalition is made up of about half a dozen unions, including SEIU and the Teamsters, that broke away from the AFL-CIO beginning last summer.

"The place I hope all this is tried out is in the South and Southwest," Medina said.