News



April Verrett, right, receives an SEIU presidential oath from Emeritus Mary Kay Henry in downtown Philadelphia on May 19, 2024. (Verrett/X)

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The Catholic organizer April Verrett has been elected president of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the second-largest union in the United States, making history as the first Black person to serve in the role.

The nearly two-million-strong labor organization announced the news on Sunday in Philadelphia. There, a march and rally was held downtown with various national unions to announce new SEIU leadership and kick off its 2024 convention.

"I am thankful that hardworking SEIU members have trusted me to lead this union as we unleash a new era of worker power," said Verrett following her election to succeed two-term incumbent and fellow Catholic Mary Kay Henry.

"By joining together, organizing, and — in many cases — striking, working people are taking power back from corporate interests and using that power to lift up their families and communities."

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A Chicago native and granddaughter of an SEIU union steward, Verrett comes to the presidency after serving SEIU as secretary-treasurer since 2022, when she was elected out of the Local 2015 chapter in Los Angeles — the state's largest local union.

She has served in labor organizing for more than two decades, and was previously chair of the SEIU National Home Care Council and co-chair of the union's National Organizing Committee. Like her union, Verrett is also active in support of the Democratic Party, in which she has served as state controller for California since 2021.

Verrett became one of the nation's leading healthcare labor voices during the global COVID-19 pandemic, when many frontline workers worked under harrowing conditions due to the threat of the deadly virus. She testified before Congress in 2020 about the conditions and met with President Joe Biden as recently as last year to address successes fostered by the American Rescue Plan, which was signed into law in 2021.

She now ascends to the head of SEIU, which has increasingly diversified its leadership in recent years. The union represents more than a hundred occupations across the United States and Canada, including overseas territories. It has over 150 local branches and is headquartered in Washington, where Verrett will now serve.

"I'm passing the torch with pride and optimism!" said president emeritus Henry on social media. "Her vision, determination, and fearlessness will propel us to the future working people deserve."

Verrett's election comes during a tenuous moment in labor relations nationwide. The Biden presidency has shown some promise on this point, but various concerns at the federal and local levels continue to threaten worker rights and flourishing, including low wages and a lack of concern for physical exertion and mental health.

National strikes have brought several industries to a halt since 2020, including an essential workers general strike that year and various walkouts since in the airline, entertainment, auto, and healthcare industries. Labor laws have also seen a rollback in several GOP-led states, especially in the area of child workers.

Verrett says she is up for the challenge, though, and cited the SEIU commitment to diversity as a strong factor in combating corporate greed and legal setbacks.

"Make no mistake — working people are under attack and the stakes have never been higher; but the real challenge and opportunity of leading our union in this moment is meeting the momentum of workers across the country — especially the young people of color — who are showing us what's possible," said Verrett.

"I'm energized and honored to take on that challenge, and I believe that together we can end poverty wages once and for all."