



## ATU 61st International Convention Daily Proceedings

# International President Costa Convened the 61st International Convention to Order

The 61st International Convention of the Amalgamated Transit Union convened in high style, Monday, August 18, at 8:40 a.m.



Day One began with the rousing sound of International Secretary-Treasurer and Temporary Chair Kenneth Kirk opening the proceedings, with a call and response of “Fired Up!” and the delegation responding with “Ready to Go!” setting the tone for the morning followed by a dazzling classic New York Rockettes style performance to ‘New York, New York’ and ‘All that Jazz.’

Next, the New Jersey Transit Police Honor Guard and Police Pipe Band, marched onto the convention floor, filling the room. The attendees then joined the vocalist, Robert McMurray from Local 1614-Dover, NJ, who sang a beautiful rendition of the Star-Spangled Banner and Oh, Canada.



Kirk then brought Father Anthony Sorgie from the Immaculate Conception of Assumption Our Lady Church to give the invocation to start the Convention. “From our Pope Leo XIII, who taught that the rights of workers must be protected, to our own Pope Leo, who reminds us that the



poor and the worker must never be forgotten and that the church has stood alongside those who labor. Unions have long been a voice for fairness and solidarity. May that same spirit guide the gathering today,” said Father Sorgie in an inspiring invocation.

## Welcome to New York

Host Local Presidents Danny Cassella, 726-Statens Island, NY, Luis Alzate 1056-Flushing, NY, Jose DeJesus 1179-New York, New York, and Tomas Fret 1181-New York, NY, took the stage to offer welcome remarks, which was followed by Kirk’s introductory address.



Kirk spoke about the importance of the week’s convention. “And now, delegates, representing your Locals, you will have the special responsibility of charting the future of our great Union. The convention is the highest authority in the ATU. The offices and board members we elect this week will carry out the vision that you delegates determine here at this convention. As the ATU has done at the last 60 conventions, I have every confidence that we will meet the challenges that we face this week. Our Union will not only fight back but thrive in the future.”

## Passing of the Gavel

The IST then passed the gavel on to International President John Costa, who Kirk said had “the difficult task of leading



our union through some of the most difficult times in our history.” Costa came to the podium amidst rousing cheers and applause as the song “Friendship Train” played.

International President and Convention Chair Costa introduced himself, saying, “Hello, New York. Brothers and Sisters, members of this proud union, welcome. Welcome to the 61st International Convention of the Amalgamated Transit Union.” Costa continued, “Look around. Look



around you. Here and beyond these walls, we are over 200,000 workers strong. Across two nations and every corner of this continent. We speak many languages. We drive buses, trains, maintain railcars, operate power transit, clean vehicles, dispatch, and keep this city and these cities moving. We are the fathers and mothers and daughters and sons of immigrants, veterans, fighters, and dreamers. We are the working-class backbone of North America, and we are the Union.”

In recapping the last three years since our last convention, Costa declared, “Let the record show from 2022 to 2025, through strikes and pandemics, through picket lines and press conferences, the ATU stood tall. And when others blinked, we stared them down. And when others compromised, we confronted. And when others asked, ‘How will we get through this?’ We said, ‘Together.’ So let this convention be more than a gathering. Let it be a line in history. A declaration that the ATU isn’t just a union. It’s a movement.”

## ‘None Of It Is Possible Without You’

After Costa’s inspirational speech, he introduced Liz Shuler, President of the AFL-CIO, who praised the ATU and our members for their commitment to keeping North America moving. “All I can say is, when you are in a City like New York, it is impossible not to think about the scale of what our transit workers make happen. Not just here but all over North America, and I know I see it in DC every single day, every bus ride, every trip on the Metro. That’s someone getting their



kids to school, that is someone getting someone to work, someone making it home at night to get home to their loved ones, and literally none of it would be possible without you.”

## Committee Appointments

The appointment of members of the Credentials Committee followed Shuler’s motivating speech.

International President John Costa then honored the attending widows of former international officers, Mrs. Betty Owens, Mrs. Thelma Handley, Mrs. Teresa Baker, and Mrs. Josephine McGee.

Next the ATU’s retired international officers were introduced.

Costa then introduced International Executive Vice President Yvette Trujillo and the current members of our International General Executive Board, our International Representative, and ATU Canada President John Di Nino.



Delegates and guests then watched a moving opening video summarizing the past three years, including the struggles and victories of the ATU.

Sergeant-at-Arms were then introduced and thanked for their service, followed by the Initial Report of the Credentials Committee, which was unanimously adopted by voice vote.

The appointment of members of the Rules Committee was next.

## A Dignified Life

Costa then brought up ATU Canada President John Di Nino to introduce our next speaker, Bea Bruske, President of the Canadian Labour Congress, who sent a video message of solidarity, amidst the historic Air Canada strike that prevented



her from being here in person. “ATU has done a tremendous job of fighting for your members by calling on levels of government and employers to do everything necessary to keep transit workers safe,” said Bruske. “You are educating the public about the challenges that your members are facing, and we know that you don’t just fight for yourself. You fight for every rider, every community member. You fight for access to safe, affordable, and accessible transportation. This is critical to building strong communities, to fighting climate change, to giving people the ability to get to work, to school, to see their loved ones, and to live a dignified life because they can get to where they need to be.”

After Bea’s speech, the delegates recorded a message of solidarity to CUPE members on strike at Air Canada.

Then, more assignments to convention committees were made, including:

- Appeals
- Resolutions
- Laws
- Maintenance and Work Force Development
- Paratransit
- International Presidents’ and General Executive Board’s Reports
- International Secretary/Treasurer’s Report
- Balloting
- Civil Rights
- Health & Safety
- Operations Workforce Development
- Collective Bargaining
- School Bus
- OvertheRoad
- Political Action

## Make Your Voices Heard

Costa then introduced New York AFL-CIO State Federation President Mario Cilento, representing 2.5 million members. “When we are at our best, when we are successful, when we are thriving as a movement, it’s a result of a few things. First, because we are active. Everybody here is an activist at heart. Next, we



participate. You are all participating in this convention. You participate in everything this union does. Next, you educate yourselves on the issues. No one is more educated on the issues than you, and so then there’s no doubt that when you go back to your members across this country, you, your members, your local, and this union will make your voices heard on the issues of the day because that is what you do. So, what you are doing here is, you are making the most of who you are, and that always has to be our priority. Make the most of who we are as a movement.”

After a recess, the Rules Committee gave its report, which was adopted by voice vote, followed by the Credentials Supplement Report, which was adopted by voice vote.



## Our Greatest Power

Next up, IEVP Trujillo introduced Evelyn DeJesus, National President of the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA). “We come together here today in



a time of great uncertainty. A time when problems, both visible and invisible, are testing our strength. But I stand before you with one undeniable certainty: together, we are stronger. When our communities are harmed, when our workplaces are unjust, when our families are under attack, we cannot stand alone. These challenges are not individual. They are collective. And in that shared struggle, we will find our greatest power.”

## Oscar Awards

Next up was the Financial Secretary-Treasurer Awards, the Oscars, honoring the unsung heroes of our local unions who have distinguished themselves with service to their members with the ultimately challenging job. Joining Ken Kirk this year to give the awards were our late Financial Secretary Oscar Owen’s widow, Mrs. Betty Owens and his son Deshawn Owens. Award recipients were:



- Alice Hobley, Local 558-Shreveport, LA
- Jeanna Mowen, Local 1108-Quincy, IL
- Ronald Rose, Local 1517-Idaho Falls, ID
- Paul Jason, Local 164-Wilkes-Barre, PA
- Brendan Burke, Local 714-Portland, ME
- Caitlin Gardner, Local 1039-Lansing, MI

- Kenneth Kephart, Jr. Local 22-Worcester, MA
- Tim Ripper, Local 741-London, ON
- Patrick Smith, Local 823-Elizabeth, NJ
- Jeffrey DiPerna, Local 85-Pittsburgh, PA
- Steven Sousa, Local 618-Providence, RI
- Mohinder Sidhu, Local 1505-Winnipeg, MB

## Costa Recognition Award



International President Costa then introduced a new award, the ATU International President John Costa Recognition Award. The very first recipient of the award was Local 1091-Austin, TX, Financial Secretary Lawrence C. Prosser.

## Honesty and Truth

Next up, IST Kirk introduced our last speaker of the day, the National President of the A. Phillip Randolph Institute, Clayola Brown. “When I heard you were over 200,000 people. That is real. That is an accomplishment that not many unions can talk about. Even if they are bigger, badder, older, all of the rest of it, the growth that you all did in these last few years is the kind of honesty and truth that makes an ATU member step up a little bit prouder.”



After Clayola, the Resolutions Committee gave its report, which was adopted by voice vote.

The Convention was then adjourned until 8:30 a.m., Tuesday, August 19, 2025.