

Cecil E. Roberts - Biography

Cecil Edward Roberts, Jr., a sixth-generation coal miner and one of the labor movement's most stirring and sought-after orators, became President of the United Mine Workers (UMWA) of America on October 22, 1995, having served as Vice President of the union since December 1982. Roberts succeeded Richard L. Trumka, who was elected Secretary-Treasurer of the AFL-CIO.

Growing up in a UMWA household on Cabin Creek in Kanawha County, WV, Roberts heard the stories of his family, including a great-uncle, Bill Blizzard, who was a legendary organizer during the West Virginia mine wars of the 1920's and a UMWA District President under John L. Lewis. Both of Roberts' grandfathers were killed in the mines.

After military service in Vietnam and college, Roberts worked for six years at Carbon Fuels' No. 31 mine in Winifred, West Virginia, where he served as a local union officer. In 1977 he was elected Vice President of UMWA District 17 by a 2-to-1 margin. In May 1981, he was reelected without opposition.

On November 9, 1982, Roberts was elected Vice President of the UMWA International Union, again by a 2-to-1 margin, running on a slate with Trumka and John J. Banovic, who was elected Secretary-Treasurer. The Trumka – Roberts – Banovic team was reelected without opposition five years later.

In 1989, Roberts was the on-the-scene leader, often referred to as field general, and day-to-day negotiator in the UMWA's militant and ultimately successful 10-month strike against the Pittston Coal Co., which had cut off health benefits to its retirees and was trying to walk away from its obligations to the UMWA Health and Retirement Funds. For his role in that successful strike, Roberts received the Rainbow Coalition's Martin Luther King award as well as awards from Citizen Action and the Midwest Academy.

On November 10, 1992, Roberts was reelected by an 80-percent margin to his third term as Vice President.

In October 1995, Roberts assumed the UMWA Presidency upon the resignation of Richard Trumka. In 1996, he reopened the UMWA's National Bituminous Coal Wage Agreement for the first time in the union's history and made significant improvements in the wage agreement. In August 1997, Roberts was elected by acclamation to the Presidency of the UMWA. In 1998, he negotiated a new National Agreement that was ratified by the highest percentage in the Union's history. The agreement included an historic 20-year-and-out pension provision regardless of age which has benefitted approximately 5,000 UMWA members to date.

In July of 2001 he became a member of the AFL-CIO's Executive Council. He serves as Chair of the Energy Committee, and serves or has served on the Civil and Human Rights Committee, Labor and the Environment Committee, Manufacturing and Industrial Committee, Safety and Occupational Health Committee, Senior Action Committee, Strategic Approaches Committee,

Political Education Committee, and Article XX Appeals Committee. In October of 2005, he was appointed to the Executive Committee of the AFL-CIO's Executive Council.

In 2000 he was again elected by acclamation as President of the United Mine Workers of America, and in 2001 he negotiated a new National Agreement that provided a first ever 30-year and out pension provision regardless of age which has benefitted approximately 3,000 UMWA members to date.

In 2004 he became the first President in the history of the United Mine Workers of America to be elected by acclamation by the membership for three consecutive terms.

At the end of 2008, he became the 2nd longest standing President of the UMWA, second only to John L. Lewis. In August 2009, Roberts was once again re-elected by acclamation to his fourth full term as International President.

He is on the board of the American Income Life Insurance Company.

In October 2014, Roberts was once again re-elected by acclamation to his fifth full term as International President.

Roberts graduated from West Virginia Technical College in 1987, and received an honorary Doctorate in Humanities from West Virginia University of Technology in 1997.

In 2017 President Roberts secured the healthcare for 22,600 retirees and their families, and continues to fight for the hard-earned pensions our nation's miners deserve.

Roberts is married to the former Carolyn Stewart. They have a son, Kyle, a daughter, Melissa, three grandsons, Aaron, Brandon, and Ki, two granddaughters, Savannah and Kathryn and a great grandson August.