CWA District 6 Retiree Informer

FEBRUARY 2014 VOLUME 14/02

Retiree Outreach

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

A NEW CHAPTER BEGINS!

By Claude Cummings, Jr., Vice President CWA District 6

Welcome to the first edition of the District 6 Retiree Outreach Newsletter. My name is Claude Cummings and as your Vice President it is with great pride that I see our District 6 Retiree Outreach Program taking flight. We have added a page to our website that is dedicated entirely for Retiree news and announcements. In addition, we have a District 6 Outreach Facebook page, as well as a Benefits Representative to provide you with another resource to get answers to your questions and assistance with difficult benefit issues. Far too often, when I speak to Retirees the standard comment is, “The only time we hear from CWA is when they want our support." I am determined to remove that perception. In District 6 we have made it a priority to accomplish that by reaching out to and engaging our Retirees. In the coming months our Outreach Program will work to contact all of our Retirees to ask your opinion on issues, find out what concerns are important to you and to ask for your continued support in keeping CWA strong and vibrant. In this day and age, none of us can afford to view retirement as the end of our affiliation with CWA. This is not the end of the story, but the beginning of a new chapter. CWA is as important to Retirees as it is to active Members. We have a Retired Members Council as well as Local Chapters that we encourage you to join and be an active part of. I strongly believe wherever CWA people are meeting---great things will come. There are so many challenges that we are facing that threaten the CWA way of life.

The Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) threatening the outsourcing of more American Jobs to AT&T increasing the price of Retiree Healthcare to levels that place extreme financial hardships on our retirees; especially those with families. District 6 as always will stand in opposition to changes that will be harmful to our Members and Retirees. We cannot rely on active Members alone to win these battles. I am proud to hear that ALL Retirees plan to UNITE and TAKE a Stand by demonstrating in front of the Dallas AT&T headquarters this coming April against the rising Healthcare cost.

I commit to support you all in this endeavor in every way possible and I assure you I will be marching along side of you! It will take all of us to join together if we are to prevail. Together we can keep OUR UNION strong and work to ensure a Retirement of dignity and respect for all of us---We not only deserve it---We have earned it!

The Trans-Pacific Partnership: Don't Fast Track a Bad Deal

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) also known as "NAFTA on Steroids" is poised to become the largest free trade agreement ever. Current negotiating countries include the U.S., Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam. This grouping accounts for 38% of global economic activity.

The TPP has been shrouded in secrecy. All journalists and public interest groups, and the majority of Congress have been denied effective access to the negotiating texts. However, 600 corporate advisors - representing the giants of Wall Street - have been given access.

Now, TPP supporters want to "fast track" the TPP with legislation that would prevent members of Congress from amending a single provision of it – provisions crafted in secret with the help of corporate lobbyists. Instead of giving a blank check to these corporate interests and the Administration, Congress should assert its constitutional authority and vet every word of the TPP to make sure the agreement's many provisions are in the interest of American families.

What is Fast Track?

Fast Track (also called Trade Promotion Authority) is a procedure by which Congress agrees to delegate its Constitutional authority over trade polity to the U.S. President. The U.S. Constitution gives Congress *exclusive* authority to set U.S. trade policy and gives the executive branch authority to conduct international negotiations. This smart check and balance means the President cannot negotiate trade deals - unless Congress gives authority to do so. But in 1974, then President Nixon developed Fast Track as a tactic to grab control over all trade policy for the White House.

How Fast Track Works

Fast Track provides expedited procedures for moving trade agreements through Congress. Congress makes these expedited procedures available in a trade "implementing bill."

Negotiation – Keeping Congress out of the Negotiations

- 90-day notification by the President to Congress of intent to begin negotiations. This is a formality that does not require any action by Congress.
- There are no enforceable requirements that Congress be involved in negotiations.
- 90-day notification by the President of intention to sign an agreement.

President Provides Legislation and Reports to Congress AFTER an agreement is signed

- Within 60 days after an agreement is signed, the president provides a list of the changes to all domestic laws that are needed to ensure compliance with the language of the trade agreement.

President – at a date and time of his choosing — submits the following to Congress:

- *a copy of the final legal text of the trade agreement*
- *a draft implementing bill*

Expedited Legislative Procedures. The normal rules of the House and Senate are suspended.

- Mandatory introduction of the implementing bill in both Houses and immediate referral to the appropriate committees.
- Automatic discharge from the congressional committees after a restricted and short period of time which also limits the ability of the public to review and weigh in as well.
- Strict limits on floor debate and normal procedures are waived such as Senate unanimous consent, debate and the ability of opponents to filibuster the legislation in the Senate.
- The bill – and supporting legislation to change laws to conform to the agreement – must be voted on within 90 legislative days.
- No amendments can be offered.
- Each House must vote either up or down on the bill which passes with a simple majority.

Fast Track weakens Congress and transfers Congressional authority to the President.

Originally, Fast track dealt with trade deals that were focused on reducing tariffs. However, over the years, trade deals have increasingly become economic integration agreements affecting almost every aspect of our lives

Continued from page 2

including jobs, food safety, generic drugs, labor, environment and national sovereignty. Fast Track is a 20th century approach to 21st century economies.

Fast Track uses trade agreements as a backdoor way to change domestic laws.

- Fast track authorizes a President to negotiate and enter into agreements that set U.S. policy on non-tariff, non-trade issues that touch almost every aspect of our lives. For example, only 5 of the TPP's 29 chapters directly deal with trade.
- U.S. laws must be changed to conform with the trade agreement – not the other way around.

Negotiators and their 600 corporate advisors set policy without any ability of Congress to offer amendments or ensure that the provisions of the trade agreement benefit US families.

Congressional authority is severely weakened.

- Allows the executive branch to select countries for, set the substance of, negotiate and then sign trade agreements – BEFORE Congress votes.
- Empowers the Executive Branch to write lengthy implementing legislation on its own, without Congressional input or mark-ups in committees.
- Congressional legislative objectives are not binding and Congress retains no leverage to ensure that its objectives were met.
- Congress doesn't get to write the legislation to approve the deal, which changes scores of U.S. laws.
- Recent trade deals – including the TPP – commit the U.S.to be bound by decisions of international trade tribunals that can overrule laws passed by Congress thereby undermining U.S. sovereignty.
- Allows the President to control the Congressional voting schedule and voting procedure.

Fast Track is not needed to pass trade and investment agreements

- Hundreds of trade deals have been enacted without Fast Track. For example, the Clinton administration negotiated and passed 130 trade and investment deals without Fast Track.
- Fast Track was defeated on the House floor in 1998 and there was no Fast Track from 1995-2000 and from 2007 to the present.
- Fast Track has been used for only 15 trade deals since 1974 – typically for the trade deals that were the most controversial and most expansive in terms of non-trade policies.

The major trade agreements utilizing Fast Track have devastated U.S. working families.

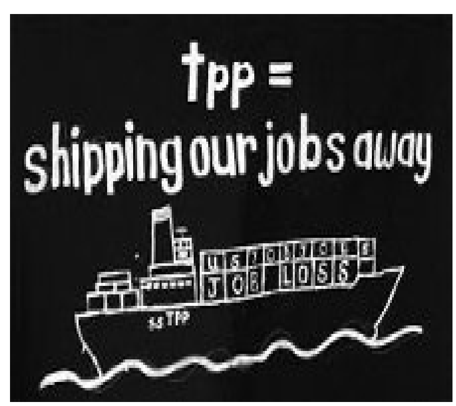
- **3.7 million jobs have been lost** from China's inclusion into the WTO (2.7 million jobs); Mexico's inclusion in NAFTA (700,000 jobs) and the Korean Free Trade Agreement (40,000 jobs lost in just one year).
- **A 926% increase in our trade deficit** from $42 billion in 1992 (the year before NAFTA was signed) to $431 billion in 2012 after adjusting for inflation. In 1992, our trade deficit amounted to -0.5% of our Gross Domestic Product; by 2012 this figure was -3.4%. In 2012, the U.S. would have generated 3 million more jobs if we had enacted policies that supported balanced trade as opposed to fast tracked trade deals that generated massive trade deficits and lost jobs.

There IS an Alternative —

Congress should reassert its Constitutional authority to promote FAIR TRADE as opposed to disastrous free trade agreements.

In this way, Congress would ensure that trade agreements would lift up working families and our standard of living. We believe that there are alternatives to the previous Fast Track laws that would allow Congress to maintain a vibrant role in the process and provide for enhancing labor, environmental and public health standards both in the U.S. and around the world.

For more information
www.stopthetpp.org



One Retirees Opinion

By Kevin Kujawa, Retiree Outreach Coordinator

After a thirty-two year career working at AT&T, I had hit the promised land of retirement with a certain satisfaction that the time and labor I sold to the phone factory was rewarded with certain rights secured by my union such as a decent pension and affordable health care for me and my family. I certainly was aware of the rising cost of health care in this Country and the desire of AT&T management to pass more of these costs onto CWA Members and Retirees. AT&T is certainly not the only company to make this move but needless to say it is the one I am most familiar with. As open enrollment came upon us last fall I think most of us prepared for the worse when the little package came and it was our turn to enroll and what do you know in most cases we got worse than the worse we could have expected. Now if you were just a single Retiree your cost in most cases doubled or went just a little higher than that, but if you had a dependent, or two and chose the Company Self-Funded option, or as some call it the “Cadillac Plan” you may have just taken on another car payment. By the way it is my opinion they call it a “Cadillac Plan”, because it cost you about as much a month as a new Cadillac would.

Well we all know the saying getting old isn’t easy and doing it without affordable health care is even harder. Those of you who are reading this and retired from AT&T would have went through at least 10 or 11 collective bargaining cycles for new contracts and in most cases would have seen AT&T go from a regulated telephone company to the hell of divesture which cost CWA members thousands of jobs to remerging as a top 50 company and the so called leader of the telecommunications industry. This was all done on the backs of CWA Members. Now the current leadership at AT&T will tell you they provide industry leading benefits for their retirees in a day and age when most corporations do not provide any, this may be true but this is not the promise we were made through all those years of labor and to make matters worse the rate increases that they put forth do not come through negotiations with our Union. It seems AT&T has adopted the strategy that they refuse to discuss Retiree Benefits at any bargaining table, they refuse to let the Union offer alternatives to reduce cost. This action by AT&T Brothers and Sisters is simply unacceptable. As retirees we can take two courses of action we can simply sit by and do nothing, accept the cost increase and hope the day never comes where we can no longer afford to pay the cost, or we can band together as a collective cause and demand what has been promised to us. As retirees we can no longer sit by and let the active CWA members fight alone for our benefits. We must become a force in this battle to maintain the strength of our UNION. CWA will always be there for us, now is the time we must be there for CWA. In the coming months Retirees across the Country will be taking action to let AT&T know of our displeasure with the tactics they have chosen, it will be up to you to decide if you want to stand and fight for what is yours or accept what is given you. I have always taken the stand and fought and I hope you will also. My name is Kevin Kujawa and that is one Retirees opinion.

> *“If you say you can or you can’t you are correct.”*
>
> Henry Ford

AT&T to Create Private Insurance Exchange for Medicare Retirees

Joining ranks with other employers who are moving away from employer-administered and -managed health plans, AT&T advised CWA on Friday, October 4, that it will be providing Medicare-eligible retirees access to health care through a Medicare Exchange model beginning in 2015. This model has recently been adopted by CenturyLink, Avaya, OFS, GE, Time Warner, IBM, Caterpillar, Dupont, and Walgreens, among others.

AT&T has not determined the vendor or any details of the plan. The company has been researching theapproach, and will continue to do so for some time. A final decision regarding the vendor will likely take place in early to mid-2014. AT&T suggested that it was making the announcement to retirees now in order to give them plenty of time to get accustomed to the idea, before the change takes place in 2015.

What does this mean for Medicare -eligible retirees?

AT&T's Medicare-eligible retirees now get coverage from two sources: First, traditional Medicare is "primary," paying first before any other coverage. Second, AT&T sponsors a group insurance plan that picks up some costs that traditional Medicare does not cover. After AT&T implements its new policy in 2015, AT&T's Medicare eligible retirees will continue to get primary coverage through traditional Medicare, but the secondary coverage will be an individual plan offered through a private Medicare supplemental insurance exchange.

What is an Exchange?

The private exchange will operate similar to the state-based exchanges under the Affordable Care Act. In this case, the exchange vendor (rather than the state or federal government) will contract with insurance carriers to offer Medicare supplemental Advantage plans. Enrollees are able to select among a menu of plans.

What is a Medicare Supplemental Plan? What is a Medicare Advantage Plan?

The Medicare Supplemental plans (also known as Medigap policies), cover medical expenses not covered by traditional Medicare, like copayments, coinsurance, and deductibles. prescription drug coverage (Medicare Part D) must be purchased separately. Medicare Advantage plans are similar to HMOs, with benefits fullyintegrated with traditional Medicare and Part D.

Employer Contributions for Exchange Coverage

In connection with the private exchange, employers can set up Health Reimbursement Accounts (HRAs) for each retiree, and make contributions to them. In the case of CenturyLink, for example, the company allocates the full amount of the negotiated company contribution cap to each retiree's HRA. In general, the terms of the HRA are determined by the employer, within some broad guidelines set by the IRS. The HRAs can be set up to reimburse for medical premiums and other unreimbursed medical costs, as well as dental and vision expenses. Some employers (IBM, for example) limit premium reimbursements to plans that are offered in the private exchange,others (CenturyLink, for example) permit retirees to use the HRA to reimburse premiums for any qualified plan. AT&T has not indicated whether it will include an HRA in its exchange offering.

Administration & Management by Third Party Vendor

Under the exchange approach, the employer gives up management and administrative duties. Instead, the exchange vendor is the direct link for retirees, handling enrollment, communications, and administration, and contracting with the insurance carriers. The vendor usually operates via interactive websites or call centers.

Keep Informed- As CWA learns more about AT&T's plans for Medicare retiree insurance exchanges, we will keep you posted.

Benefit Plan Contact Numbers

Verizon	855-489-2367
AT&T	877-722-0020
Avaya	800-526-8056

If you know a fellow CWA

Retiree who are not receiving this newsletter please have them got to the District 6 Website at http://district6.cwa-union.org/ and hit the For Retirees Tab to subscribe.

Follow us on Facebook

For the latest breaking news that all CWA Retirees need to know follow us on Facebook.

https://www.facebook.com/groups/CWAD6RetireeOutreach/

CWA District 6 Retiree Benefit Representative

Voicemail: 314-965-9024

Email: D6retirees@gmail.com

AT&T is Sending out Confusing Notices

AT&T Retirees and active Members who have dependents on their Health Care plans who are approaching their 19th birthday are receiving correspondence titled Initial Student Certification Notice. In the upper paragraph of this letter it states that your dependent will continue to be eligible for coverage only if the dependent is: a full time student, on a medically necessary leave or a part time student due to a serious illness or injury as defined by Michelle's Law or disabled. The letter then goes on to list your dependent along with the date coverage is scheduled to end. It is at the end of this letter that they state that dependents will remain eligible for medical and/or careplus coverage (if currently enrolled), through the end of the month in which he or she turns age 26. Do not be deceived by this letter your eligible dependents are allowed to stay on this plan until age 26. If you receive this notice it is advised you call the AT&T Benefits Center to clarify the situation and verify your dependent is not dropped.