Retiree Outreach

There has been a lot in the news recently about the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), but a lot of people still don’t understand what it is, why it is controversial, and what it means to them individually. Since this is something that CWA is going to be discussing a lot in the coming months, here is some information for you.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership is a proposed regional regulatory and investment treaty. As of 2014, twelve countries have participated in negotiations on the TPP: Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United States, and Vietnam. Originally begun in 2002 as trade negotiations between three countries (Chile, New Zealand and Singapore), the name and member countries changed over the years. In 2008, during the Bush administration, the US agreed to enter talks, and the first round of talks involving the US began in early 2009. Currently, Taiwan and the Republic of Korea (South Korea) have announced interest in joining the talks, but are not yet considered part of the group of countries participating. Since the US joined the talks in 2009, 19 formal rounds of TPP negotiations have been held. The subjects of the potential treaty are vast: agriculture, services, investment, government procurement, competition, environment, labor, telecommunications, e-commerce, textiles, customs, market access for goods, financial services, intellectual property, textiles and apparel, trade remedies, and much more.

Since the negotiations of the treaty are secret, there are many concerns of what could lie in the finished treaty. After WikiLeaks exposed the Intellectual Property Rights and Environmental chapters of the TPP, concerns grew over the enforcement of patents and copyrights alleged to be present in the US proposal. It is deemed to be overly excessive and restrictive, providing intellectual property restraints beyond those in the current Korea-US trade agreement and the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA).

One of the most frightening parts of the TPP is the right for multinational companies to sue. They do not sue a person, or even another corporation, but they sue the government. This first came about, at least for the US, under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Many countries have been sued under trade agreements. For instance, Egypt

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As the Missouri Legislature is in session again the attack on Organized Labor and working men and Women in this State continues. Right to Work, and Paycheck Deception Bills are making their way through the Missouri House and Senate, with both Houses heavily dominated by Republican Members. Since Missouri is the last State in our District that is not Right to Work we must fight the hard fight for our Members and Retirees who live and work in this State. In a State like Missouri where economic recovery has not followed pace with the rest of the Country passing a Right to Work law could be a damning blow to the average worker in Missouri. As we all know Right to Work has nothing to do with a person’s right to seek employment, instead what it does is prevent Unions from negotiating union security language in contracts and allows freeloaders or non-members to reap the benefits of a Collective Bargaining Agreement without having to pay a price or their fair share from enjoying those benefits. Those who support Right to Work laws are really carrying forth the agenda of big business. They claim that these so-called laws make a state more attractive to business investment and will ultimately lead to job growth. I believe if you look closely at these claims and the facts any reasonable person will tell you just the opposite seems to be true. Several studies have shown that job growth is more likely to be created in Right to Work States by encouraging Business Investment and Development rather than just passing a Right to Work Law. Right to Work Laws also lower average wages by as much as $4.00 per hour according to a Department of Labor Statistics from 2013 as well as a constant erosion of the state’s workforce. In my opinion it is not a logical conclusion if a state is looking to ramp up job growth and add tax revenues to their coffers to increase the services they are providing to their citizens that Right to Work will be of any benefit other than promoting the agenda of Big Business and those who oppose a person’s right to form and join a union. If a worker’s salary is on an average $4.00 less an hour they will have less money to spend and that will lead to less tax money for the states and cannot possibly help increase the vitality of the economy or serve the population of that state. According to Michigan Economist Roland Zullo, unions spend significant resources on occupational safety and negotiate safety standards that far exceed OSHA thus passing Right to Work legislation could lead to making the working environment far less safe than they are today. As I mentioned earlier the only reason I see why we continue to see Right to Work laws brought forth for consideration is the obscene amount of money those who support the suppression of unions and working men and women continue to spend on this cause by trying to convince legislators there is a pot at the end of the rainbow. While there may be a pot I am fairly sure it is not full of gold for the working men and women in Missouri. I urge all CWA Members and Retirees to stand united in the battle to defeat Right to Work and Paycheck Deception laws in Missouri.
Seniors and the TPP

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was sued for raising the minimum wage in their country. Australia was sued for trying to protect the health of its citizens. When corporations sue, they go before the Investor State Dispute Settlement process. The process is done in a private tribunal, with the corporation making a case for loss of “future expected profits” due to the things done by the country they are suing. To date, more than $3 billion has been paid out to foreign investors under US trade and investment treaties, and over $14 billion in claims are pending. Under TPP, Buy American campaigns and laws would be illegal. Any law that would give preference to American goods and services would be challenged by any nation signing on to the TPP. Are you starting to get the picture? Both NAFTA and the TPP were built for one thing only—to make multinational corporations get rich and then richer still. So, what is Fast Track, and why does it matter? If Fast Track negotiation is passed by Congress, the President will have the power to negotiate in secret to finish up the TPP. Then, Americans would have to wait a year to see what was written in it. This sounds like something a preschooler might make up, but it is totally true. Fast Track is wrong, and the TPP is wrong. It will harm our economy and our jobs. It will create secret negotiations that any citizen in this country has a right to know about. As Senator Elizabeth Warren has said, “Why are the trade talks secret? I actually have had supporters of the deal say to me, ‘They have to be secret, because if the American people knew what was actually in them, they would be opposed.’” So how does this impact Seniors? Over the past 20 years, NAFTA took away 700,000 manufacturing jobs out of the US, made wages stagnant, and redistributed the income, wealth and political power of the middle class to the very rich. What the TPP will do may make NAFTA appear to be nothing. NAFTA involved three countries; many people believe that the TPP will usher in a new world order, with many participating countries forced to do the things they don’t want to do or not do the things they want to do. If you think prices of food, drugs, and healthcare are high now, think about what cost they may be under TPP. If your children, grandchildren, or even great-grandchildren have had trouble finding a job in the last few years, it very well may be much harder under the TPP. This is not fiction, this is reality, and it is scary.

CWA, in the coming weeks and months, will be asking our retirees to take action against the TPP and against Fast Track negotiation. These actions may require calling your congressperson, writing a letter, attending a rally if possible, or other actions. Please be ready to assist in these activities. This is our country, our future, and our lives. These actions matter.

AT&T Bargaining set to begin in March

CWA and AT&T will be at the Bargaining Table for three contracts in the core industry this year. AT&T Retirees all across the nation will be watching as Bargaining Teams for AT&T Corp (Legacy T) and AT&T Midwest both have contracts that expire on April 11, 2015. AT&T Southeast will also bargain for a new agreement this year. The old agreement is set to expire August 6, 2015. What will be at stake for Retirees will be, can the bargaining teams move AT&T to discuss Retiree Health Care and negotiate improvements to the cost and coverage of plans being offered to retirees now? Most Retirees we have spoken to believe AT&T should live up to the promises we heard most of our careers that we make take less in wages to keep our Retiree Health Care. AT&T in recent years has increased the amount Retirees pay for Health Care dramatically and they have even shifted Medicare Eligible Retirees and Spouses out of the Group plan to purchase their own coverage through the AON Retiree Health Exchange. This move alone caused a great deal of hardship and stress to thousands of Retirees who at a stage in their life when it is the most difficult had to find adequate insurance coverage through an exchange that a lot of retirees believe did not provide the customer service they promised to deliver. While the District 6 Southwest contract does not expire until 2017, it would be naive for us to think what happens in the 3 contracts this year will not affect D6 AT&T Retirees in the future. In fact with AT&T being a so-called industry leader the contracts we bargain there may affect the contracts for other Companies. More so than ever it would be in the best interest of D6 Retirees to support our Brothers and Sisters from the TNT, District 4, and District 3 as they are the first to attempt bargain new agreements and move this Company from their position of refusing to bargain for those who built that company. This publication will make every attempt to keep you up to date on the progress of negotiations and any Mobilization activities that we may be able to participate.

If you know a fellow CWA Retiree who is 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.
For AT&T Members and Retirees who enroll in CarePlus:

A benefit many Members and Retirees may not be aware in their CarePlus coverage is a Hearing Aid Benefit. According to the Summary Plan Description, the Program will reimburse up to $1,000 toward the purchase of hearing aid(s) for routine hearing loss during a rolling 36-month period beginning on the first date of purchase. This benefit is available only if you are eligible for Expanded Benefits and the following conditions are met:

- You have exhausted your Base Medical Program benefits for hearing aids or benefits for hearing aids under other health coverage you are enrolled in;
- If you have no Base Medical Program benefits or coverage under another health plan to exhaust, then the hearing aid must be determined by an Audiologist to be medically necessary. This benefit is limited to the cost of the hearing aid. This benefit does not cover any of the following:
  - Office visits with an Audiologist
  - Diagnostic or routine hearing exams  Hearing aids provided for cosmetic purposes
  - Hearing aid repairs
  - Replacement batteries

For more information on this benefit you can go to your Benefit Website at resources.hewitt.com and print out or read the Summary Plan Description the section that addresses this benefit is on pages 39, 40 and 41 or the plan is administered by United Healthcare and you may call them at 877-261-3340.

Problems or questions with your benefit plan?

You can contact the CWA District 6 Retiree Outreach Benefit Coordinator at 314.965.9024 or e-mail at D6Retirees@gmail.com

Share the news and build the cause. If you know a CWA Retiree who does not have internet access please print them a copy of this newsletter.
I came across this old quote recently and it bears sharing. To our CWA organizing Retirees team, thanks for all that you are doing! This is the BIG PICTURE for your edification and for times when we are tired of doing the phone calls to recruit new members into our Local Chapters.

It is particularly pertinent during February, Black History Month. The author of the statement which follows is Mr. A. Philip Randolph who was the organizer of the Sleeping Car Porters Union way back in the 20-30's (Ever see a movie called "10,000 Black Men Named George"?) who went on to be a major influence in the March on Washington as well as many other peaceful marches in the deep south during the birth of the Civil Rights Era.

Re: CWA and the old SWBT arena = there are many people today who don't know that it was the passing of the Civil Rights Act that helped women get into plant and men cross over into S/Rep and operator jobs - those which were historically gender-specific. young people today tend to think it was only people of color who saw improvements in their work life from that legislation - not true. Its how I got to be an installer back in the 70's when the end of the road for women at the phone company (in the rank and file) was operator or Service Rep. It's how black men were able to become craftsmen, not just supplies attendants in the old Plant. The list is long.

There is much history which our retirees know and can share with the younger folks as we organize our Retired Members Clubs - a reminder of how things which we have taken for granted were earned by political action, union organizing and collective bargaining. While some may view us as just retirees we not only built the phone company we built the union. Retirees engaged with their Local’s offer a vast resource of knowledge and experience as well as support. As I close this article I am reminded of an old union saying from my time that is still very relevant today “United We Bargain, Divided We Beg”. No matter what your status is with our union we must all stick together. My Name is Kay Samaripa and that is One Retirees Opinion.

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At the banquet table of nature there are no reserved seats.

You get what you can take, and you keep what you can hold. If you can't take anything, you won't get anything; and if you can't hold anything, you won't keep anything. And you can't take anything without organization.

- A. Philip Randolph
CWA STATEMENT ON PROPOSED SALE OF VERIZON ASSETS TO FRONTIER COMMUNICATIONS

Washington, D.C. – The Communications Workers of America issued this statement on the proposed sale of $10.5 billion of Verizon assets to Frontier Communications:

Verizon Communications has announced plans to sell its wireline operations in California, Texas and Florida and a Missouri-based call center operation to Frontier Communications. The sale must be approved by the Federal Communications Commission, the U.S. Department of Justice, and state regulators.

CWA, which represents workers in California, Texas and Missouri (workers in Florida are represented by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers), will be active in the regulatory review process, to ensure that good jobs and quality service are preserved and strengthened.

News from around the web

New Mexico's Nurse Hotline Touted as a Model in States

The Cost of a Decline in Unions

Judge rules Gov. Chris Christie broke state law by not making full pension payments
Benefit Plan Contact Numbers

Verizon 855-489-2367
AT&T 877-722-0020
Avaya 800-526-8056
Lucent Aetna POS 800-872-7136
Blue Cross/Blue Shield (Oklahoma) 800-6610083
HMO Medicare Option 888-232-4111
AON Retiree Exchange 800-928-8027

Editors Note

This newsletter is published for the purpose of keeping CWA District 6 Retirees informed and educated on issues you may face in retirement as well as to keep you current with CWA. If you have an article or story you would like to see published please do not hesitate to contact us and we will do our best to meet your request. You can send your request or comments to D6retirees@gmail.com or you can leave a message on our phone line at 314-965-9024.