

General Electric National Negotiations – Opening Remarks

Bob Santamoor, Chairman IUE-CWA GE and Aerospace

Conference Board

May 21, 2007

Good afternoon. My name is Bob Santamoor. I have been here, at national negotiations as a negotiating committee member and as a staff representative. Today I appear before you as the chairman of the IUE-CWA GE and Aerospace Conference Board. And I am here to say it's a new day and for you, I'm sure, it will be a new experience.

We are not going to sit back and wait for you to outline your agenda. This must be a meeting of equals, with a shared goal of moving us both forward. For too long this discussion has been one way. You sit back and tell us what you want and ignore our proposals. No longer. No way. No how.

What you don't realize and never have acknowledged is that you cannot succeed without our members. And when I say "our" I mean the entire CBC membership. Four years ago you challenged us. You thought you could easily take advantage of the contract and increase our health care costs. You certainly could up the costs, but the contract did not allow you to do it without a cost to you. Our members were out on the line uniformly, across the country, without regards to their seniority or the weather. If you think this year is any different you are sorely mistaken. We are ready and we are willing ... and that's just the first issue.

Next up. Job security. I believe your plan is to starve us down to the point that the surrounding communities don't even think the GE plants are relevant. But we have challenged you in lighting and we will keep challenging you. We have demonstrated our willingness to help GE remain competitive. But we have not always seen the reverse from you. Where are our sacrifices acknowledged? When do we get our rewards?

Job security is our members' number one demand. We are willing to sit at the table and determine the future of our employees, their wives, husbands and children, if you are willing to accept that responsibility as well.

The American public is fed up with U.S. companies sending jobs offshore, and pocketing the profits. We need to see a commitment to this country ... or you shouldn't get any more tax breaks or other benefits given to you by the government. It's time to be American and it's time to be patriotic.

You have a responsibility when it comes to health care. A company this large, with this many employees, with this much influence, has to take a stand. We will not sit here and listen to you complain about health care costs when you have no solution except to shift costs onto our members.

GE is a major player in the health care field. You could be a major leader in solving this country's health care dilemma. But instead, you want to profit from your health care products and stick it to you workers at the same time.

Pensions are just a numbers game. No one can figure them out. But what we do know is that our members deserve a higher replacement value, and our retirees are dying on the vine, while GE refuses to recognize their despair.

I know that the pleas of the retirees have been repeated so often, in the same manner, that they may not seem important. But when you hear from the individuals who are suffering by your refusal to grant any increase, you must be made of stone to ignore them. Rest assured that we will not ignore or forget our current and future retirees. In case you didn't get that reference, check offline with Dale Luce, who will state it much more clearly.

And, in case you didn't get the message we expect a lot more for our current employees when it comes to pensions. A \$16 billion overfunded pension by your own numbers, means you have a lot of room for improvements. Our members know this, and they expect major advancements.

On the contract language front, I know that neutrality is not a big issue for you. You certainly proved it in Florida just a few short weeks ago with your despicable tactics. I don't need to elaborate. As President Cohen stated, you need to step up and take leadership on this issue ... though if I was a betting man, I would predict that will never happen. But that doesn't mean we will remain silent or complacent.

On the economic issues we know you always deliver. But we will not be fooled by wage increases our members receive and then must give up to ensure the survival of their jobs.

We understand the profit and investment needs of your company but we are all here to make sure that GE understands the needs of working families. We are all here to talk about some serious problems facing our company and our workers. And it takes serious people to take these issues on. These issues we are about to take on do not just affect another line item on your budget, but affect our members' ability to raise and support a family ... to send their children to college ... to see a doctor ... to enjoy life.

These negotiations affect real people and real families. These issues should never be about numbers or spreadsheets. When GE realizes this, you will finally understand what it means to represent a working family. That is what I am proud to do, and I hope at the end of these talks you can say the same.

