

C&T speech at the District Three Conference – October 4, 2009

It's good to see the retirees all sitting here in the front row instead of in the back. You are the conscience of the CWA, sitting on our shoulders, a voice in our ears. We owe you so much.

Greetings from Ralph. He is very sorry he could not be here himself. I wasn't expecting to speak for him so I'm letting you know right now I am not reading his speech, but mine, so you can't blame him for anything I say.

I'm going to talk about bargaining the Legacy T contract. Many of you know, before I came on staff I was the Local President in NYC for almost 20 years. I was an elected member of the bargaining team since 1992. As a Local President I opposed a lot of contract ratifications, but I would NOT have opposed this one, and I'm not just saying that because I have to.

The Company said from the beginning they wanted us to pay 24% of their health care costs instead of the 8% we had been paying.

From February to April all we heard from them was take backs. You've heard a lot of them too. Our monitoring language, absence, the double time build, on-call, FMLA, JOG, and of course health care – you name it, they went after it.

Like every company in America they wanted to solve the health care crisis on the backs of workers instead of being part of the solution. We all know this is not an issue that can be fixed solely at the bargaining table. Like VP Brooks Sunkett just said, a real, universal health care plan MUST be passed this year.

Like every company in America, they used the terrible economy, millions of unemployed and the foreclosures as a weapon against us.

AT&T told us there would be absolutely no discussion of our issues until we addressed their issue – health care costs.

Our issue from day one was job security. In 1998 when we bargained, we had 44,000 in Legacy T. In 2005 – 11,000. This year, 2009 – 7000. So we told them the same thing: There would be no discussion of their issue until the Company dealt with ours – job security.

You all know the expiration date came and went with all the take-backs still on the table. It took us another four months. Finally by mid-August we had finally gotten back just about everything they tried to take away. We got improvements in several articles. Agreements had been reached in two Districts shifting health care costs,

not to 24% but to over 17% with Health Care Reimbursement Accounts to help with a good part of the increase. We knew at that time we could do no better on health care.

The decision our bargaining team had to make – (and I want to stop at this point and say that Roy Hegenbart, President of 3250, who was on our team, did District 3 proud. He made a huge contribution to the bargaining.) The decision our team had to make was this – what did our members need the most? What would make a decent trade for the additional costs of health care?

What we needed was job security.

With no jobs – there are no wages.

With no jobs – there is no health care.

With no jobs – there is no Union.

The Company made all kinds of offers and each time we said it was not enough. We had a bottom line and would not move until they agreed to it.

Finally the Company offered:

- No layoffs at all until April 2010.
- A limited layoff clause protecting 80% of our members from involuntary layoff.
- A watermark of employment which protects this bargaining unit even against voluntary offers and transfers to other Contracts.
- 

Plus we had improved our JOG language and had the new National Transfer Plan.

Our team fought and agonized. They had been away from home for over six months and most only went home twice during the whole time. They weren't staying at a Hyatt in downtown DC like I did when I started bargaining in 1992. They lived in damp, often smelly \$59 a night Extended Stay out in Virginia. Some rooms had an inch of water in the hall outside the room for a few days. But they would have stayed longer if they believed they had left one thing on the table. Push came to shove, we all had to decide, and we all believed this was the absolute most we could get from AT&T at that time, and it was time to put it out to our members for a vote – and they ratified it 2 to 1.

Are we happy? No. We hate AT&T for the awful bargaining. We hate what they demanded. We hate the way they bargained – that they controlled everything from Dallas and didn't really let us bargain with the people sitting across the table from us. Often we had to wait days for answers to our questions or responses to our demands.

We know if this health care crisis is not fixed we will be facing the same fight in just 2 ½ years. We need to spend the next 2 ½ years figuring out how, as a Union, we can do this better. That is up to all of us to figure out because AT&T is not getting any better, so we have to.

I know you are still in bargaining with AT&T South, and we will do whatever we can to support you. The enemy is AT&T, and I hope, when your bargaining team decides that they have gotten the best contract they can get, based on the conditions that exist right now, that you give them the support our members gave us; but shame on us if we as a Union don't find a way to use the lessons of 2009 to make us stronger in 2012 – for our current members, our retirees, our future members, and the future of our Union.