

STEEL VOICE



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For the Health of the Nation: Ensure a Public Option

Just days ago, America celebrated her birthday with fireworks, spontaneous renditions of the Star Spangled Banner and chants of, "We're Number One!"

In a crucial area, health care, the chant is untrue. Many of us love the individual doctors who may have saved our lives or the lives of loved ones. But the health care system in this country is not top-ranked. It's not even close to number two. Its poor quality and excessive expense are sucking the life out of America. For the health of the nation, both physically and economically, we need a system with a public option - that means a government-sponsored and managed alternative. And we need it now.

First, the issue of ranking. In the year 2000, the last time the World Health Organization stacked up countries'



USW International President Leo Gerard.

health systems, the United States came in 37th, behind the likes of Chile, Morocco, Cyprus, even drug war-torn Colombia, to which the U.S. donates hundreds of millions in foreign aid. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention pointed out late last year that the U.S. ranked 29th in the world for infant mortality in 2004, a statistic that steadily worsened since 1960, when the U.S. ranked 12th. Twenty-two countries' rates were

below 5 deaths per 1,000 live births. The U.S. rate was 6.78 deaths.

Similarly, the U.S. ranks 42nd for life expectancy, down from 11th two decades ago. Contributing to that decline is the parallel drop in Americans covered by health insurance, researchers said. While 46 million Americans lack insurance, Canadians and residents of European Union countries ben-

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My View

Bruce Reed, Local Union Representative



Brothers and Sisters:

Summer is here and our vacations have started “FINALLY”. We all look forward to getting away from work and spending more time with our families. As we spend our summer at Little League, Lassie League, Family Outings and the many other outdoor activities we are blessed to be able to participate in this Country we need to be aware of the importance of our work life and the jobs situation in America.

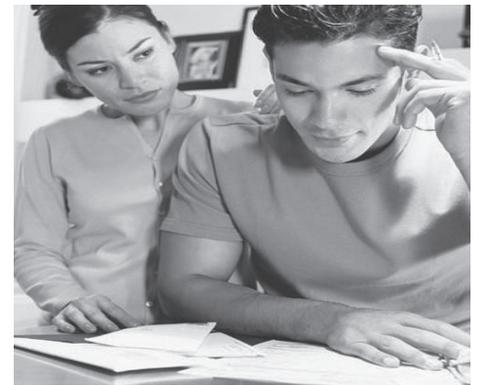
As we have discussed the Employee Free Choice Act is very important legislation for all of us in working class America, or what is left of the working class. If the employees at any work site determine they want to become Union, the Act will give the employees the choice of a secret ballot or recognition by signature. We need to be very aware of this Act and write, call and if possible meet with our Senators and Representatives and tell them how important this Act is to us as work-

ing families.

None of the Indiana Republican House Representatives have signed the EFCA nor has Senator Lugar, while I am not surprised, it boggles my mind why they would have an issue with working men and women having a choice of how they express themselves in an election as important as becoming Union or not. There are three Democrats that have not signed, Senator Bayh, House Representatives Brad Elsworth and Barren Hill, all three of them campaigned on the back of working families and now are reluctant to stand up for us when we need their support. Please call and write them and express your displeasure with their actions in not signing on to the legislation. They should be held accountable for what they said they believed in when they were looking for our votes to get elected.

Health Care Reform is the hot topic in Washington now; it has been the hot topic for us in the working class for many years. President Obama's election has put it on the front burner and we may see some relief. I don't believe any of us know the best or only way to reform health care, but doing absolutely nothing like we have experienced the last 8 years cannot be the answer. There are too many American families at risk because they do not have affordable health care, in many cases families cannot get health care due to existing health condition, it is not a question of affordability but refusal of coverage at any price or a cost so high it is impossible to pay. Please pay attention to the actions in Washington in relationship to reform, again our support for the politicians that support our issues is critical for our well being.

Lastly congratulations to Senator Al Franken the Democrat from Minnesota on finally being seated after a long battle and several vote recounts. Senator Franken signed on the EFCA bill within the first day of his being seated and his help on Health Care Reform will be a boost. Senator Franken has said his intention is to follow in the footsteps of Paul Wellstone and Walter Mondale, two Minnesota Democrats that were champions for the Labor Movement, we look forward to the Senator taking up the working man's issues in the future. □



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Public Option From Page 1.

efit from universal health care.

We are 37th - Yea! We are 29th - and falling! We are 42nd — and dying! These are not the chants of proud Americans. These are not the chants of vibrant Americans. In fact, these are not the chants of Americans who could continue financially supporting this sick system even if they wanted to. And they don't.

The cost of the American system, with its private health insurance industry in the business of profiting off of illness by limiting care, cutting corners and denying access to those with "pre-existing conditions," is suffocating the U.S. economy. In this one unenviable area - spending — the U.S. is number one. Health care expenditures are a shocking 16 percent of U.S. gross domestic product (the value of all goods and services produced in a nation in a year), far ahead of the closest competitor. That would be France, where it's only 11 percent. That's followed by Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, Canada and Austria, where it ranges from 10.8 down to 10.1 percent. These are all countries that provide national health care.

Looking at it another way, the average expenditure per individual, America remains in the undesirable position of most profligate spender. The average for an American was \$7,290 in 2007, the latest year for which comparable statistics were available. But the average for the 30 countries in the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development was a mere \$2,964, with the closest to the U.S. being Norway at \$4,763.

Those costs marginalize U.S. manu-

facturers as they attempt to do right by their American workers while scrambling to compete in international markets. Here's how Dr. Atul Gawande put it in his June article, "The Cost Conundrum," in "The New Yorker:" "Spending on doctors, hospitals, drugs, and the like now consumes more than one of every six dollars we earn. The financial burden has damaged the global competitiveness of American businesses and bankrupted millions of families, even those with insurance . . . By a wide margin, the biggest threat to our nation's balance sheet is the skyrocketing cost of health care. It's not even close."



President Obama warned the American Medical Association, which opposes national health care, about exactly the same thing in June when he said this: "If we do not fix our health care system, America may go the way of G.M." Would those wealthy physicians bail out the government then?

Clearly these costs don't contribute to quality since U.S. rates of infant mortality and life expectancy are so relatively poor. And they factor large in personal bankruptcies and delay of care as individuals are unable to keep up with medical care's morbidly obese costs.

A Kaiser Family Foundation poll in

February found that 53 percent of Americans cut health care because of cost in the previous year. A quarter reported putting off health care they needed such as doctor's visits and surgery, and twenty percent said they have not filled a prescription. Another part of the poll explains this: "13 percent say they have used up all or most of their savings trying to pay off high medical bills in the past 12 months, and just as many say their medical debt means they have difficulty paying other bills. A similar proportion (12%) say they have been contacted by a collection agency, while a smaller share (7%) report being unable to pay for basic necessities like food, heat or housing."

We are Number One? This is cruel. This is wrong. This must stop.

I know that many Americans view my native land, Canada, not as a country, but as an unofficial 51st state. But the difference between Canada and the 50 states is that Canada has national health care, thanks to Tommy Douglas, the former premier of Saskatchewan, and a party leader. One huge difference between the American system and Canada's national health care is the extreme cost of administering private insurance in the U.S. A study published in 2003 in the New England Journal of Medicine showed that administrative costs were \$1,059 per person in the U.S. but only \$307 per person in Canada. That excessive \$752 in administration costs paid in the U.S. for each insured person has only grown larger in the ensuing years. The study concluded: "A large sum might be saved in the United States if administrative costs could be trimmed by implementing a Canadian-style health care system."

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OSHA Warns Refineries About Safety; Steelworkers Say Standard Lacks Teeth

By Mark Gruenberg, PAI Staff Writer

WASHINGTON (PAI)--Disturbed by yet another accident at an oil refinery, in Delaware, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration warned the nation's oil companies they must recheck and follow "process safety management" (PSM) procedures -- safety rules that cover a refinery's entire system from beginning to end.

The Steelworkers, who represent the Delaware workers, applaud OSHA's move, but note the process safety manual the federal agency wants refiners to check and follow has little in the way of enforcement against refiners who flout it.

OSHA's announcement came after it cited the Valero refinery in Newark, Del., in late June for four repeat violations and nine serious violations of OSHA process safety rules. OSHA also proposed a fine.

OSHA issued its "process safety" manual in 2007 after a blast at BP's Texas City, Texas, refinery in 2005 killed 15 workers and injured more

than 170 and after the agency was criticized for doing little or nothing. Texas City had never had a "process safety" OSHA inspection. Nor have most other refineries, federal investigators found.

OSHA's letters went to "the management of more than 100 oil refineries, providing them with data on compliance issues found under OSHA's refinery National Emphasis Program (NEP), and urging the refiners to comply with their obligations under the process safety management standard," the agency said.

"The standard requires employers to develop and incorporate comprehensive, site-specific safety management systems to reduce the risks of fatal or catastrophic incidents," the agency added.

Acting OSHA Administrator Jordan Barab, a former safety and health specialist for AFSCME and an expert in the field, said: "We initiated this NEP to ensure refineries de-

velop and fully implement a safety management system that protects workers from serious incidents. Our inspection teams were repeatedly seeing the same problems at refineries. We found it necessary to remind employers of the importance of compliance with OSHA standards that are designed to save workers' lives."

But the letters to the refiners reminding them to check their procedures against the manual aren't enough, says Kim Nibarger, USW's safety and health specialist for refineries. USW represents tens of thousands of refinery workers, former members of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers.

One problem, he explained, is the manual lacks enforcement teeth. Another is that refinery owners could enter the Bush-pushed Voluntary Protection Program. That program has OSHA advise and instruct companies on proper safety procedures -- which they are supposed to follow -- in return for having no OSHA inspections. The owner of the Delaware refinery joined VPP for 10 of its other refineries, though not the one in Delaware. The firm even got a VPP quality award under Bush.

And part of the problem is in data OSHA uses to target refineries for inspection, Nibarger said. It only counts the number of deaths in individual accidents per 200,000 man-hours at each refinery. That does

See Safety Page 6.



To Have or Not to Have - Single-Payer Health Care

Chuck Jones, President

" I suffer no illusions that this will be an easy process. It will be hard. But I also know that nearly a century after Teddy Roosevelt first called for reform, the cost of our health care has weighed down our economy and the conscience of our nation long enough. So let there be no doubt : health care reform cannot wait , it must not wait, and it will not wait another year."

President Barack Obama, February 24, 2009

The President has vowed that the health care reform process will be different in his administration. He has said that it will be an open, inclusive, and transparent process where Congress, doctors, hospitals, businesses and unions will all work together to find a solution to the health care crisis. This administration believes that comprehensive health care reform should:

- Reduce long-term growth of health care costs for businesses and government
- Protect families from bankruptcy or debt because of health care



costs

Guarantee choice of doctors and health plans

- Invest in prevention and wellness
- Improve safety and quality of care
- Assure affordable, quality health coverage for all Americans
- Maintain coverage when you change or lose your job
- End barriers of coverage for people with pre-existing medical conditions

These are principles that Organized Labor have been trying to implement for decades. Health care is the biggest issue, anytime we start negotiating a contract. The cost of health care has become such a bur-

den on businesses, that they are in turn are passing these cost on to the employees, which results in higher premiums and larger deductibles and in some cases less coverage.

Single-payer health care is a term used to describe the payment to doctors, hospitals and other health care providers. The single-payer system pays from a single fund. The United States, Canada, and Australia have single-payer health insurance programs, these programs are called Medicare. However Australia and Canada's programs provide universal health care. The United States is the only wealthy, industrialized nation that does not ensure universal health care coverage. Universal health care remains a highly debated political topic, and depending upon which side of the aisle your on, your views differ dramatically. There are a variety of universal health care programs all around the world. Which one would be best for the United States is something that we must find the answer to. I guess our main question is still yet to be answered, Do Americans have a fundamental right to have health care provided to them by their government? □

Health From Page 3.

In 2004, the Canadian Broadcasting Company conducted a poll to determine the country's greatest citizen. People everywhere could vote, for anyone they wanted, so an actor, like Tommy Douglas' grandson, Kiefer Sutherland, could have won, or a famous singer like Celine Dion or Shania Twain. But Canadians chose

a politician — Tommy Douglas, the father of national health care. That's how we feel about the national health care system in Canada.

Don't let the Republican Party-of-No stop this. Don't let big vested interests like the pharmaceutical, insurance, and for-profit hospital corporations keep America down. In poll after poll, Americans have made it

clear they want a public option. They want care as good as Canadians get. They're paying more than twice the price for it. To ensure that America is Number One, Congress better deliver it before the end of August.

By Leo Gerard □

Democrats Drop Key Part of Bill to Assist Unions

By STEVEN GREENHOUSE

A half-dozen senators friendly to labor have decided to drop a central provision of a bill that would have made it easier to organize workers.

The so-called card-check provision -- which senators decided to scrap to help secure a filibuster-proof 60 votes -- would have required employers to recognize a union as soon as a majority of workers signed cards saying they wanted a union. Currently, employers can insist on a secret-ballot election, a higher hurdle for unions.

The abandonment of card check was another example of the power of moderate Democrats to constrain their party's more liberal legislative efforts. Though the Democrats have a 60-40 vote advantage in the Senate, and President Obama supports the measure, several moderate Democrats opposed the card-check provision as undemocratic.

In its place, several Senate and labor

officials said, the revised bill would require shorter unionization campaigns and faster elections.

While disappointed with the failure of card check, union leaders argued this would still be an important victory because it would give companies less time to press workers to vote against unionizing.

Some business leaders hailed the dropping of card check, while others called the move a partial triumph because the bill still contained provisions they oppose.

The card-check provision was so central to the legislation that it was known as "the card-check bill." Labor had called the bill its No. 1 objective, and both labor and business deployed their largest, most expensive lobbying campaigns ever in the battle over it.

"This is a very emotional issue," said Senator Arlen Specter of Penn-

sylvania, the Republican turned Democrat who had been lobbied heavily by both sides. "I cannot remember an issue this emotional in all my years in the Senate."

Several moderate Democrats, including Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas, have voiced opposition to card check, convinced that elections were a fairer way for workers to unionize. They were swayed partly by business's vigorous campaign, arguing that card check would remove confidentiality from unionization drives and enable union organizers to bully workers into signing union cards.

Though some details remain to be worked out, under the expected revisions, union elections would have to be held within five or 10 days after 30 percent of workers signed cards favoring having a union. Currently, the campaigns often run two months.

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not take account of PSM violations -- or the injuries or the deaths and illnesses in surrounding communities.

To fix the problems found at refineries, he said "workers need to be more vested in" oil company plans to monitor their processes and ensure their safety. "And then the workers need to stand together to see that it's done" he said of company PSM plans.

OSHA said during its first year --

under the Bush government -- "NEP inspectors issued nearly 350 PSM citations to 14 refineries." In some cases, the refinery's owner "failed to address their own process safety findings and recommendations, and failed to establish maintenance procedures for equipment such as pressure vessels and emergency shutdown systems." An explosion in a pressure vessel caused Texas City.

The OSHA manual that Barab cited shows the problem is worse. "Since the PSM standard was promulgated by OSHA in 1992, no other industry sector had as many fatal or

catastrophic incidents related to the release of high-hazard chemicals (HHC) as the petroleum refining industry," its introduction says.

OSHA's own industrial accident database shows that "since May 1992, 36 fatality/catastrophe incidents related to HHC releases in the refining industry have occurred. These incidents included 52 employee deaths and 250 employee injuries; 98 of these injuries required hospitalization. The number of refinery incidents surpasses the combined total of the next three highest industries over the same period," it adds. □

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Democrats From Page 6.

To further address labor's concerns that the election process is tilted in favor of employers, key senators are considering several measures. One would require employers to give union organizers access to company property. Another would bar employers from requiring workers to attend anti-union sessions that labor supporters deride as "captive audience meetings."

Labor unions have pushed aggressively to enact the bill -- formally, the Employee Free Choice Act. They view it as essential to reverse labor's long decline. Just 7.6 percent of private-sector workers belong to unions, one-fifth the rate of a half-century ago.

Several union leaders interviewed took the senators' move in stride. One top union official, who insisted on anonymity because lawmakers and labor leaders have agreed not to discuss the status of the bill, said, "Even if card check is jettisoned to political realities, I don't think people should be despondent over that because labor law reform can take different shapes."

While voicing confidence they have the 60 votes to pass the revised bill, labor leaders acknowledged an additional hurdle: two powerful Democrats, Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts and Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, are seriously ill.

"This bill will bring about dramatic changes, even if card check has fallen away," said an A.F.L.-C.I.O. official who insisted on anonymity. The official said the revised bill achieves the three things organized labor has been seeking.

"Our goals," the official said, "have always been letting employees have a real choice, having real penalties against employers who break the law in fighting unions, and having some form of binding arbitration to prevent employers from dragging their feet forever to prevent reaching a contract."

Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa, a senior member of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, has led a group of six Democrats who have worked closely with labor to revamp the bill. The other senators are Sherrod Brown of Ohio, Thomas R. Carper of Delaware, Mark Pryor of Arkansas, Charles E. Schumer of New York, and Mr. Specter.

Labor leaders voiced confidence that if Mr. Pryor backed the compromise, Ms. Lincoln and other moderates would do likewise.

Union leaders argue that under current law, unionization elections are often unfair because, they say, employers have a huge opportunity to intimidate and pressure workers during the lengthy campaigns that precede the unionization vote.

Business leaders say the current system is fair, asserting that unions lose so many elections because workers oppose paying union dues and do not feel they need unions to represent them.

Corporate lobbyists have indicated they would oppose fast elections, arguing that such a provision would deny employers ample opportunity to educate employees about the downside of unionizing, such as strikes and union dues.

Labor leaders counter that employ-

ers will have plenty of opportunity to fight unionization, noting that many companies begin plying employees with anti-union information the day they are hired.

Business also opposes the bill's provisions to have binding arbitration if an employer fails to reach a contract with a new union. Companies argue it would be wrong for government-designated arbitrators to dictate what a company's wages and benefits should be.

"Binding arbitration is an absolute nonstarter for us," said Mark McKinnon, a spokesman for the Workforce Fairness Institute, a business group opposing the bill. "We see it as a hostile act to have arbitrators telling businesses what they have to do."

Several union officials said that once the senators' revisions became public, some union presidents who are card-check enthusiasts might attack the changes, call for scrapping the revisions and demand an up-or-down Senate vote on a bill with card check.

Kate Cyrul, a spokeswoman for Mr. Harkin, declined to discuss details of the bill. "Nothing is agreed to until everything is agreed to," she said.

Union officials have urged the White House and Senate leaders to schedule a vote this month. But Senate leaders have told labor that the Senate is so preoccupied with health care legislation that September would be the earliest time to take up the pro-union legislation. □

Machinists Lead Fight For F-22 Fighters, Opposing Obama

UPPER MARLBORO, Md. (PAI)-- After months of agreement on virtually everything, organized labor and the Democratic Obama administration finally have a divergence, over

the 187 F-22s the Air Force already plans to buy are enough.

But the company and the union offer two reasons for continuing produc-

workers in Missouri, Georgia and elsewhere -- would harm the U.S. defense industrial base. And it would cost jobs.



seven jet fighter planes.

That's how many F-22 Raptors that the Machinists -- along with Lockheed-Martin, their builder -- got senators to insert into this year's defense bill, at a cost of \$1.75 billion. But Obama Defense Secretary Robert Gates doesn't want them. Neither does the president. An amendment is pending to the measure to strip the planes out.

The president's Office of Management and Budget even went so far as to say "senior advisors will recommend a veto" if the planes are in the Pentagon measure. Gates says

tion of the fighter plane: National security and jobs. National security would be aided, according to a group of retired and active-duty generals Lockheed-Martin marshaled, because buying too few planes would pose "a moderate risk" to security. And the Air National Guard's chief says the Guard needs the F-22's "unique capability" to protect the continental U.S. from "asymmetric threats," notably seaborne cruise missiles.

The Machinists, continuing a long-time theme, say shutting the F-22 production line -- IAM represents a large share of Lockheed-Martin

"If the F-22 program is cut, tens of thousands of good paying U.S. jobs will be lost, including thousands of IAM jobs at Lockheed Martin, Boeing and Pratt and Whitney," IAM said in urging members to call their senators and have them vote for the planes -- and against Obama and Gates.

"Maintaining funding of the F-22 will support 25,000 high-skill, high-wage jobs in 44 states, including thousands of IAM members who make the air frame and engines for the fighter. An estimated 70,000 indirect jobs are also impacted by the program," the union fact sheet added.

"In this time of crisis we must not shortchange our national security because of short-term budgetary considerations," IAM President Thomas Buffenbarger wrote to all senators. "We must continue to make investments in our industrial base and workforce. Maintaining production of the F-22 will allow America to accomplish these critical goals." □

Promising Transparency, Fighting For Middle Class, And Listening To Grass Roots, Trumka Announces Candidacy

By Mark Gruenberg, PAI Staff Writer

WASHINGTON (PAI)--Promising transparency in AFL-CIO affairs, pledging to fight to restore the middle class and vowing to listen to and heed grass-roots unionists, AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Richard L. Trumka formally announced his candidacy for the labor federation's presidency, on July 9. If elected, he would succeed 14-year incumbent John J. Sweeney, who is retiring and who endorsed him.



Richard Trumka, AFL-CIO
Secretary Treasurer

And if the crowd of unions represented by officials sitting on the sun-splashed stage at the outdoor rally at the University of the District of Columbia was any indication, Trumka and his ticket-mates -- incumbent Executive Vice President Arlene Holt Baker, who seeks re-election, and IBEW official Liz Shuler, who seeks Trumka's job -- should coast to victory at the federation convention in Pittsburgh, Sept. 14-17.

As of now, only Shuler, 39, executive assistant to IBEW President Ed Hill and a member of Portland, Ore., Local 125, faces competition, from IFPTE President Gregory Junemann. Voting will be weighted, according to a member union's size.

Trumka, who will turn 60 on July 24, is a former miner, son and grandson of coal miners and a former Mine Workers President. He hit several themes in his sometimes-fiery address, opening his formal campaign to head the 10-million-member group:

- An increased emphasis on organizing. Preparing for congressional enactment of the Employee Free Choice Act -- labor's top legislative priority and still up in the air -- "The AFL-CIO I plan to lead is going to have a strike force of 1,000 union organizers that we'll collectively unleash any time any union has a strategic organizing drive as well as any time any union is being raided."

They'll be "professional organizers with one goal: To see that every worker that wants a union contract gets a union contract. And we will leave no industry behind when it comes to organizing," he promised.

- More listening to the grass-roots. In an interview afterwards, Trumka elaborated on that theme he raised in his speech. He said the labor movement needs to reach out to younger workers -- a task Shuler says she'll take on if

elected -- and that he'll travel the country in the election campaign before the Pittsburgh convention and afterwards, holding sessions and town hall meetings to hear what's on workers' minds.

"You told me you want an AFL-CIO that's more transparent and more responsive to your needs. Well, that's the type of AFL-CIO you're going to have," he stated.

- Restoring the middle class. Trumka said election of Democratic President Barack Obama and a more pro-worker Congress presented labor with "the moment...to build the movement to create the America we want -- and that every worker deserves."

That's "an America where every job is a portal into the middle class, where the kind of health insurance you have doesn't dictate the quality of health care you receive, where no man and no woman ever retires into poverty, where students can try to get into colleges like this without being buried under a mountain of debt, and an America where workers are the masters of the economy, not the victims."

"A union contract is the best way to transform dead-end work into good-paying careers," he added. "Even though it wasn't organized labor that created the God-awful mess the country's in, we are the people who can lead America out of it."

See Trumka Page 11.

Unit 00 Rexnord

As of the time of the writing of this information regarding Rexnord business is still slow. We have around 72 people on layoff and an additional 14 where their seniority call back rights have ran out. The Company laid off the whole plant July 1 thru July 12, they did call back some the 2nd week of that layoff.

There is some ray of hope at our plant with the Company deciding to bring Downers Grove bearing production to our facility. That is the 2nd non Union facility that has been phased out. That says a lot about our people and should help offset some of the business issues we are currently facing.

In Solidarity,
Brian Bousum
Unit 00 President

Unit 09 Quemetco

Things are still going well here at Quemetco. Work has been steady despite the economy.

We had an emergency furnace rebuild last month due to a wash out. This created a lot of overtime being available for everyone for a couple of weeks.

Grievances have slowed down for the most part. We do have a few awaiting arbitration. In June the arbitration hearing for a Holiday scheduling grievance was held. We hope to have the arbitrators decision by September.

I would like to remind everyone to keep making food donations to the Local's food pantry for those who are still on lay off.

In Solidarity,
Kelly Ray Hugunin
Unit 09 President

Unit 17 Mid America Extrusion

Business is improving here at Mid America Extrusions. For the month of May we shipped 596,000 pounds of aluminum, compared to the month of June we shipped 786,000 pounds.

The Company called back the third shift on July 7th. We currently have no one on lay off.

Our contract is up in October, so we are currently working on proposals for the new contract.

In Solidarity,
Howard W. Davis
Unit 17 President

Trumka From Page 10.

In an interview afterwards, Trumka also said enacting a second stimulus package, after the \$787 billion measure labor helped Obama push through Congress early this year, is absolutely necessary. "We warned, when the first one came out, that it wasn't big enough" to deal with the current recession, "and we were right," he said.

Trumka also had some sharp words for fair-weather politicians and labor's foes in the business commu-

nity. Harkening back to his days as UMWA president, Trumka claimed he built the coal industry's first labor-management partnerships -- though within the movement he's more noted for leading the successful 1989 Pittston coal strike.

The partnerships show he can work with management, Trumka said. "But I'll stop demonizing business just as soon as they put their country ahead of their profits and just as soon as they put their workers ahead of their greed," he added.

As for the politicians, Trumka made it clear that "fair-weather friends who can't seem to decide which side they're on" would not get labor's aid in the future. "You know who I mean," he said, without naming names either in his speech or in answering reporters' questions afterwards. But one such key stand-out is his own home-state senator: Pennsylvanian Republican-turned-Democrat Arlen Specter.

If elected to the federation's #2 job, Shuler envisions herself as a bridge to a new generation of workers. A legislative rep and grass-roots organizer for IBEW Local 125 in Portland, Ore., Shuler urged unionists to get with new media, such as Facebook and Twitter. "We will encourage members to build a 'virtual' union hall," Shuler said.

After her speech, Shuler said she had no set ideas yet on how to close the AFL-CIO's multi-million-dollar budget deficit. She managed large pieces of IBEW's \$100 million budget. "We have a challenge before us. We want to bring together all the affiliates and put together a plan" to solve the fed's red ink problem, she added. □

Lawmakers Propose Widening, Toughening Plant Closing Law

By Mark Gruenberg, PAI Staff Writer

WASHINGTON (PAI)--Saying the nation's 21-year-old plant closing law needs to be widened and toughened to account for changes in today's economy, a bipartisan group of lawmakers introduced legislation in late June to do so.

The "Forewarn Act," by Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, House Education and Labor Committee Chairman George Miller, D-Calif., Rep. John McHugh, R-N.Y., and others, would extend the present plant closing law to cover mass layoffs or shutdowns affecting 25 workers or more, not 50. The present law covers only 24% of companies.

Their new bill also would require firms to give workers three months' notice of a closing, not two. And the company would have to inform the state governor and the congressional delegations whose constituents would feel the impact.

Their proposal would also order double back pay for workers for each day the company violates the law and fails to tell them of the shutdown in advance. And it would give the Labor Department more enforcement power against companies that break the law -- and a recent government report said two-thirds do.

The plant closing law, officially known as the WARN Act, was pushed through Congress by unions after a slew of sudden shutdowns during the Reagan era. AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Richard L. Trumka has long argued it should be updated.

In 2008, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported a record 7,818 mass layoffs, each affecting at least 50 workers. More than half the layoffs were in the Midwest, with four states -- California, Illinois, Michigan and Ohio -- dominating the data. "Associated worker separations were at its highest level since 2001, at 1,383,553," BLS said.

"Four major industry sectors reported program highs in terms of events and separations in 2008 -- construction, finance and insurance, educational services, and accommodation and food services, with annual data available back to 1996," BLS said. But while those four industries saw record highs in mass layoffs, they were dwarfed by more mass layoffs (though not sector records) in factories, especially autos, BLS added.

The mass layoffs are not just numbers. They also do enormous damage to workers, families and communities, Brown, Miller and McHugh said.

"Workers deserve more than just a pink slip when they lose their job because of our nation's economic difficulties. Current protections for workers being laid off are both confusing and rarely enforced. While an early warning may not save their job, a meaningful early notice will help them prepare to find a new job or upgrade their skills for new employment," Miller said.

"Across our country, communities and families have been devastated by mass layoffs. We have seen this acutely in Northern and Central New

York and know all too well the lasting and fundamental impacts mass layoffs and plant closures have on individuals, families, and communities. In the two decades since the WARN Act was enacted, our nation's economy has changed markedly," added McHugh, a Republican whom Democratic President Barack Obama nominated to be Secretary of the Army.

"Mass layoffs send shockwaves through individual households and entire communities," said Brown, whose state has been hard-hit by the shutdowns. "This bill is about protecting workers and helping communities respond to mass layoffs.

"The WARN Act was supposed to give employees time to find a new job. Unfortunately, fair notice has become the exception, not the rule. This bill will modernize the WARN Act by closing loopholes and strengthening its enforcement. Workers and communities should be armed with best arsenal of protective measures during these challenging economic times."

The layoffs have forced some workers to take their former employers to court, the three lawmakers note. Over the past several months, laid-off employees sued the stockbrokerage Lehman Brothers, the Wal-Mart subsidiary Sam's Club and the electronics chain Goody's -- among others -- for breaking the present plant-closing law by failing to tell workers of shutdowns 60 days in advance. □

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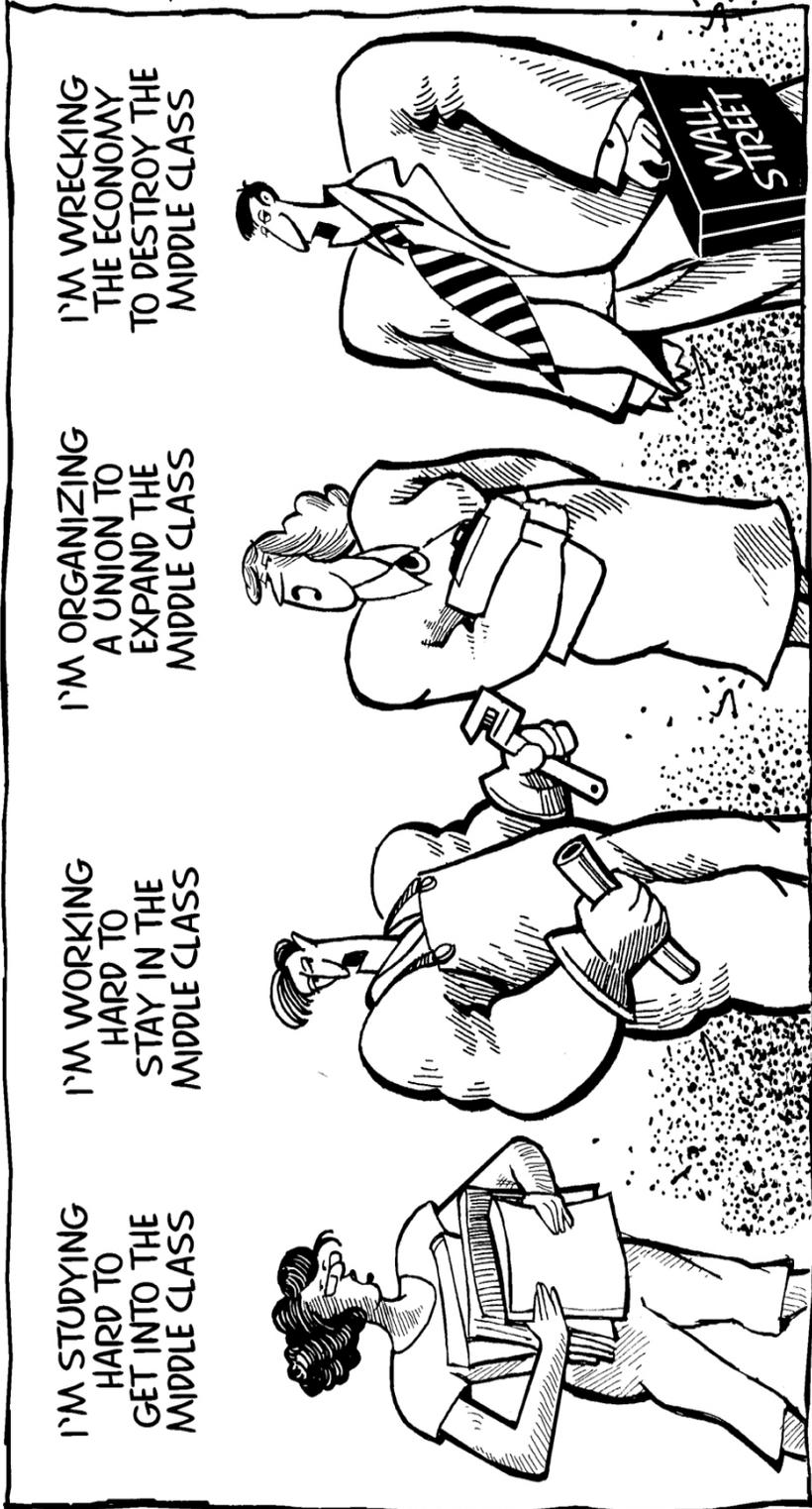
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