

# USW@Work

A Publication of the United Steelworkers

A Powerful Voice for Workers

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**"AS WE LOOK ACROSS THE UNION, WE SEE WE ARE IN A TRANSITION. YOU SHOULD BE AMBITIOUS. YOU SHOULD WORK AT LEARNING SKILLS AND MASTERING THOSE TOOLS BECAUSE THIS UNION IS PREPARING TO TURN IT OVER, AND WE INTEND TO TURN IT OVER TO YOU."**

INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT THOMAS M. CONWAY AT NEXT GENERATION CONFERENCE, NOV. 18, 2019.

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## Your Union, Your Voice

I attended the USW's "Your Union, Your Voice" town hall meeting this January in Midland, Mich., and I really enjoyed it.

I was able to learn more about what the USW's core issues are and how that affects which candidates the union endorses, and how the USW influences politics, policies and bills.

I am glad that hearing our voices and what matters to us is important enough to the USW that the union created this forum for us to take notes and send them to the International headquarters.

I also appreciate how many different people the USW represents. I work in an auto industry-related field. The woman who was next to me works in health care. Other people there were from foundries or from Dow. There were both active members and retirees.

For members who have a chance to attend one of the upcoming town hall meetings, I highly recommend that you go. The union's facilitators did an amazing job. They taught, they listened, they kept us on track, speaking on the issues.

I feel like I am a more informed voter now.

*Echo Carson, Local 690L  
Auburn Hills, Mich.*

## Fighting Workplace Violence

As a nurse and member of Local 7600 in Fontana, Calif., it was an experience of a lifetime to travel to Washington, D.C., and watch the U.S. House of Representatives vote on and pass the Workplace Violence Prevention Act.

Being able to witness firsthand how our democracy works was a blessing. Seeing the fruits of our labor come to fruition while watching the vote from the gallery was an experience I will never forget.

Each year, some 2 million Americans report having been a victim of workplace violence. The vote was a win for all of us who selflessly work in the health care industry and serve as caretakers across this nation. To every legislator who listened to our stories and who took the time to vote in solidarity with us, thank you.

Although we came through with a victory, it was disheartening to witness opposition to our bill from a few legislators whose reservations didn't pertain to the bill itself, but were more a matter of party partisanship.

I look forward to the day when bipartisan support on bills will be the new normal, as it should be. How powerful we will become when we all rise together.

*DeJonae Shaw, Local 7600  
Fontana, Calif.*

## Union Strong

I was glad to read the latest edition of the USW magazine. It seems to me that the strength of unions is increasing and the movement is spreading.

Keep up the good work.

*Sam Alessi  
Jamestown, N.Y.*

## Educating Next Generation

The Next Gen conference (held in Pittsburgh last November) was so many things: powerful, touching and extremely educational. To say I left the conference feeling hungry for more is an understatement.

The idea that our union puts such great effort toward educating its membership is amazing! Providing over 900 Steelworkers with the knowledge needed to build a better union environment will result in lasting impact. I'm proud that our union is educating the next generation of leaders, while at the same time addressing today's issues that will affect us all tomorrow.

*Eric Gaskins, Local 1014  
Gary, Ind.*

## A Great Event

The first International Next Gen conference was a great event. Meeting members from all over North America and sharing stories with them was very inspiring. Some of our members are doing amazing things at their locals and I was glad to learn from them. Our group came back energized and ready to get to work at our local.

*Rick Pietrick, Local 979  
Cleveland, Ohio*

## The Union's Future

As the Next Gen coordinator for District 1, I could not be more proud of how the first International conference turned out! Next Gen is the future of our union. It is our job as current leaders to mentor and prepare the younger generation to fight for workers' rights, good contracts, sustainability of our great union and the labor movement. These young activists showed promise, dedication and determination during this historic week!

*Tiffany McKee, Local 200L  
Delphos, Ohio*

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USW active, retired members and their families are invited to "speak out." Letters should be short and to the point. We reserve the right to edit for length.

# PUTTING



# FIRST

## USW PUBLIC WORKERS THRIVE DESPITE CHALLENGES

When Joe Plagenza travels the streets of Boston, the reception he gets resembles a family holiday or a high school reunion. Seemingly on every block in the city of 700,000, a resident has a smile and a kind word for him.

For the Local 9158 treasurer and 30-year city employee, it's just another day at the office. That's because, for him, the office is synonymous with his hometown.

Plagenza has spent most of his career responding to residents' concerns on behalf of the Boston parks department. He also is one of the more than 25,000 public workers across North America who are members of the USW.

"As public employees, you carry a great burden on your shoulders," said Roberson

Castor, a Local 9158 member and construction project manager. "You're working not just for yourself. You're working for everyone."

For the USW's public workers in Boston and around the country, that community-first spirit permeates their workplaces and their union halls. Nearly two years after the Supreme Court gave public employees the right to reap the benefits of union representation without paying dues, USW public employee locals are strong and growing thanks to a renewed focus on organizing, both inside and outside of USW workplaces.

In June 2018, the right-wing court majority overturned decades of precedent by ruling, in the case of Janus vs. AFSCME, that public workers no longer had to pay dues or even smaller "fair share" fees to cover the cost of bargaining, arbitration and other union business.

"The Janus ruling was an attack on working people, but it also was a call to action,"



Greg Mosman, Local 9158  
Photos by Steve Dietz



**“THE STEELWORKERS DO  
A GREAT JOB OF KEEPING  
CHECKS AND  
BALANCES.”**

MICHELLE ALCARAZ, LOCAL 8599



Roberson Castor, Local 9158



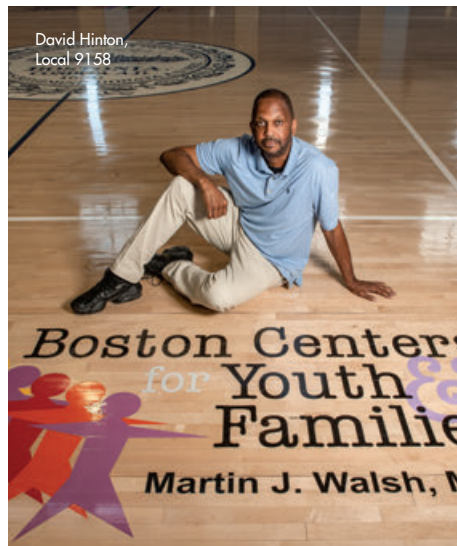
Stefanie Seskin,  
Local 9158



Anthony Hennessy Sr.,  
Local 9158



Steven McHugh,  
Local 9158



David Hinton,  
Local 9158

said International Vice President Fred Redmond, who oversees bargaining for the union's public workers.

"That's why we must keep fighting every day to organize new workplaces and demand that our elected officials make it easier for people in both the private and the public sectors to join unions."

## Changing the game

The Janus case was part of a decades-long, systematic effort by corporate America to starve unions financially and, thus, subjugate and silence workers. However, for USW members, so far the ruling has had the opposite effect.

"We recognized that Janus was going to change the game," said Jim Williams, president of Local 8599, which represents school employees in Fontana, Calif.

"That's why we focused on organizing from day one. We don't have our heads in the sand."

Williams decided to put his strongest organizer in charge of welcoming new workers and encouraging them to get involved in the union. That approach has paid big dividends, with only eight of the local's 1,900 members choosing not to pay dues.

"I take it personally," he said. "I am personally offended when somebody opts out."

That devotion to building strength and solidarity is an attitude shared by the USW's public workers, from Boston and Pittsburgh to California and New Mexico. And the approach has been a success, not just for Steelworkers but for the families and communities they serve.

"I take a lot of pride in the work that we do," said Boston arborist and Local 9158 member Greg Mosman, who helps to care for the city's 38,000 trees across 2,800 acres. "We make Boston a more beautiful city."

Mosman's USW brother and colleague Anthony Hennessy is the city's superintendent of horticulture. He oversees roughly 40,000 plants and flowers each year in more than 100 locations. He said the work that he and his fellow city employees perform helps to give residents and visitors a more positive outlook on life.

"Urban beautification is important work," he said. "People love their city."

## Maintaining quality of life

The work that other public employees do, whether they drive school buses, serve in law enforcement, prepare food, maintain roads or perform other vital tasks, is also critical to the quality of life for residents.

"Public employees always show up. Whenever something happens, we are there," said Steven McHugh, deputy superintendent for Boston's emergency medical service



Josh Garcia, Local 9424



Leticia Guzman, Local 9424



Filiberto Aguirre Jr., Local 9424



Jerry De La Torre,  
Local 9424



Santiago Goytia, Local 9424

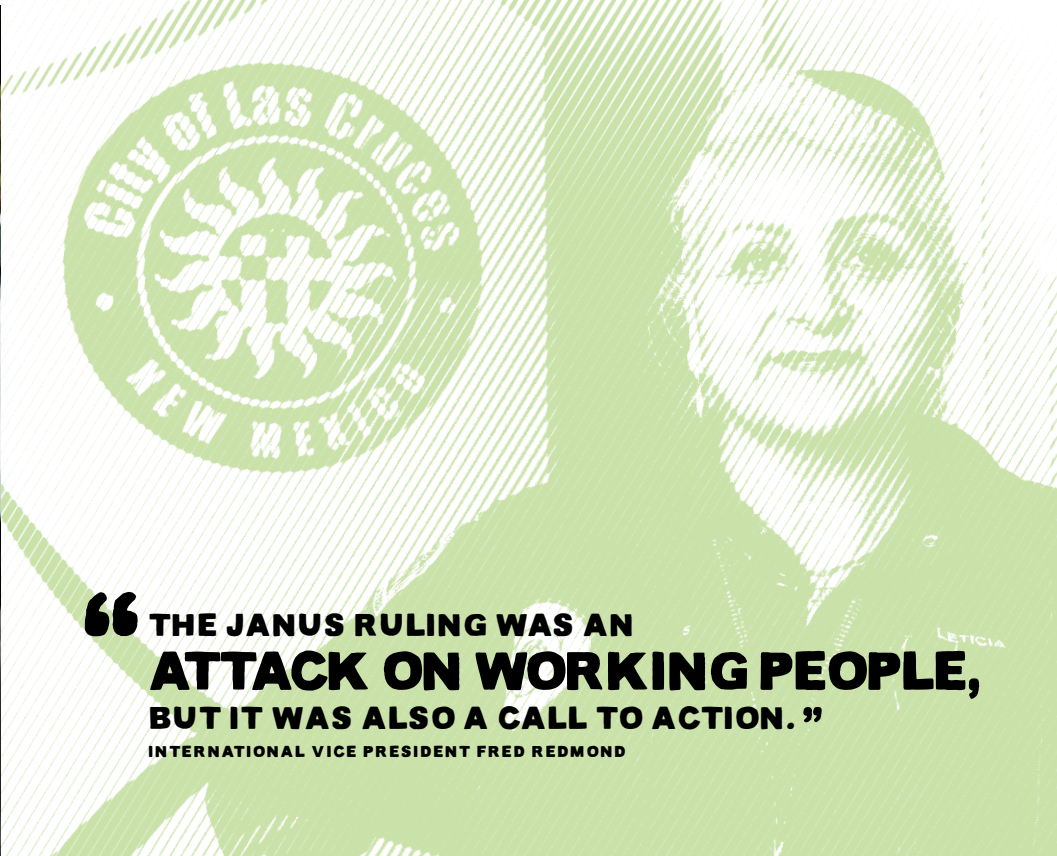
and a USW member. “Emergencies happen anytime, anywhere – nights, holidays, weekends.” That 24/7 need for services means that life can be difficult and unpredictable for public workers.

“You learn to work around it,” McHugh said. “Sometimes, Christmas has to be on the 23rd or the 27th.”

The misconception that public workers have overly comfortable schedules or are a drain on taxpayers is a deliberate distortion created by the same anti-union forces who supported the Janus case and who have been fighting against workers for decades, Williams said.

Although unionized public workers have better retirement plans and more on-the-job protections than their non-union counterparts, they often make sacrifices in other areas to secure those benefits, said Joe Smith, president of Boston’s USW Local 9158, known as SENA (Salaried Employees of North America).

“Nobody is getting rich doing this kind of work,” said Williams. “It has to be a labor of love, doesn’t it?”



**“THE JANUS RULING WAS AN ATTACK ON WORKING PEOPLE, BUT IT WAS ALSO A CALL TO ACTION.”**

INTERNATIONAL VICE PRESIDENT FRED REDMOND

## Good contracts critical

Still, with union membership comes a degree of certainty. Public workers' contracts ensure that they receive good pay, quality benefits, fair scheduling, a secure retirement and respect on the job.

These are benefits, won through years of labor activism, that some non-union workers simply take for granted, said Local 9424 President Filiberto Aguirre, who works as a water and sewer line locator in the city of Las Cruces in southern New Mexico.

But union workers have an added benefit. "I don't have to worry about repercussions for using my voice and doing what is right," Aguirre explained.

Ensuring that bosses treat workers fairly is one of the most important aspects of union membership, said Michelle Alcaraz, a Local 8599 member who works in tech support for Southern California's Fontana Unified School District.

That guarantee helps to ensure that women and men are treated equally in a profession that is often dominated by men, she said.

"The Steelworkers do a great job of keeping checks and balances," Alcaraz said.

In the wake of the Janus ruling, that promise of justice and fairness can be one of the strongest selling points union leaders can use when organizing new members, Williams said. Another, he said, is the strength that comes from being Steelworkers.

"We're strong locally and nationally," said Williams, whose local represents employees of the Fontana school district who are not classroom teachers or administrators. The local includes library aides, technical support and food service workers, custodians and security officers. "We are part of a strong manufacturing union."

"Sometimes people ask me what products we make," he said. "And we do make something – we make people. They're on a long, 13-year conveyor belt, and when they leave our factory, they're wearing that cap, if we do our jobs right. We are all educators."

## Fighting stereotypes

Williams said he understands the anti-public-worker trope is repeated so often by corporate and anti-union media that many have come to accept it as fact. But he knows it is not.



Yulette Rogers, Local 8599

"There are financial pressures in so many communities, and they want to blame somebody," he said. "The first things they look at are the pensions, the health care."

Public workers can fight back against negative stereotypes by giving back to their communities and by being good stewards of the public trust, Williams said.

"All we have to do is continue to do a good job," he said.

Maintaining public trust is part of the job for USW member David Hinton, who manages a community center in inner-city Boston. His facility runs on a combination of support from city funds, grants, private donations and nonprofit organizations.

"It's a good partnership, and it gives the community a sense of ownership," Hinton said.



Richard Romo, Local 8599



Jenifer Overy-Brown, Local 8599



## Value of public work

Making sure that the public, and by extension elected officials, understand and buy into the value of their work is an essential part of being a public employee, said Boston's Stephanie Seskin, a SENA Local 9158 member who plans and creates bicycle paths throughout the city.

Her work cuts down on traffic, reduces the need for road repairs, helps combat pollution and climate change, makes travel safer and provides a fitness opportunity for residents, she said.

"Working for the public is a heavy weight," Seskin said. "But all of these things contribute to the public good."

Local 8599 member Richard Romo,

a senior custodian in Fontana, said he knows that schoolchildren and other staff members appreciate his efforts to maintain a healthy environment for them.

During a recent shift cleaning up after a lunch period, a student approached him and placed a sticker on his shirt thanking him for his hard work.

"Little things like that make it worth coming in every day," Romo said.

For the USW's public workers, knowing that the people and communities they serve appreciate and support their work can be the difference between staying in a job for decades and finding employment elsewhere. That, in turn, keeps the USW's public sector strong.

For Aguirre, making a difference, not just for the 400-plus members of Local 9424, but for the 100,000 residents of his city, is what keeps him coming back each day.

If he makes a mistake on the job, it could result in water getting cut off from homes, businesses, schools or hospitals.

"Even something like fire safety could be affected," Aguirre said. "It gives me pride to know that because of us, the water is going to keep running, our parks are going to be clean, our facilities are going to keep running. We're keeping Las Cruces beautiful and safe."



**“ WE DO MAKE SOMETHING - WE MAKE PEOPLE. THEY’RE ON A LONG, 13-YEAR CONVEYOR BELT, AND WHEN THEY LEAVE OUR FACTORY, THEY’RE WEARING THAT [GRADUATION] CAP. ”**

LOCAL 8599 PRESIDENT JIM WILLIAMS

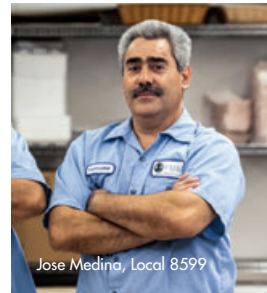
Michelle Alcaraz, Local 8599



Dawn Dooley, Local 8599



Jose Medina, Local 8599



Rosemarie Tibbels, Local 8599



Judy Nordlund, Local 8599



# NEW STANDARDS

## USW MEMBERS RATIFY WESTROCK CONTRACT

USW members voted overwhelmingly to ratify a new four-year master agreement with packaging giant WestRock that sets standards for wages, benefits and working conditions for more than 9,400 members of 71 local unions.

The new contract, approved last December, contains wage increases totaling about 10 percent over the term of the agreement, along with other significant improvements, particularly in health and safety. The agreement maintains the existing high-quality, affordable health care plan with no changes and makes improvements to the pension and 401(k) plans.

“Thousands of USW members across the country stood together to demand a fair contract with WestRock,” International President Thomas M. Conway said. “With the strength and solidarity of the membership behind them, our local leaders joined together at one bargaining table and won a fair agreement. This victory is a credit to the entire membership.”

The contract covers workers at 62 WestRock facilities across 26 U.S. states. While wage increases at each facility won’t go into effect until each local ratifies its individual agreement,

improvements to the retirement plans and sick and accident benefits took effect on Jan. 1.

WestRock is the second-largest packaging company in the United States and one of the world’s largest paper and packaging companies, operating in more than 30 countries and generating annual revenue of nearly \$20 billion.

In September 2018, the USW, through IndustriALL and the UNI Global Union, worked with other labor organizations around the world to create the Global WestRock Trade Union Alliance to combat the effects of increasing globalization and consolidation. International Vice President Leeann Foster, who oversees bargaining in the union’s paper sector, serves as a co-chair of that council of unions.

### No concessions accepted

Initially, the company approached the 160-member USW bargaining team with demands for concessions, including cuts to health care and a two-tier wage system, but the membership stood strong throughout the negotiations.

“The USW’s bargaining committee, consisting of local union leaders from every location and international leaders, entered these negotiations knowing that we were facing a number of challenges,” said Foster. “These challenges included the company’s proposals, but also overcapacity in the paperboard market, a shaky economic outlook, especially in manufacturing, and related falling box demand. All of these factors combined to create uncertainty.”

Workers responded to the challenges head-on by standing together. They held

THIS CONTRACT  
**66** SETS A  
STANDARD  
FOR THE INDUSTRY

INT’L VP LEEANN FOSTER

# RD SET

## ROCK CONTRACT

a series of solidarity action days at WestRock locations, which bolstered the bargaining committee's positions. In addition, the union's global alliance helped to deliver a strong message of unity to the company, making it clear that USW members would not take steps backward.

"Through the strength and solidarity of the members in a year-long campaign involving all locations, we achieved a package with no concessions, no givebacks, only gains," Foster said. "In short, we achieved security for our members."

In addition to ensuring financial gains for members, the agreement guarantees regular safety courses and meetings at USW-represented facilities, establishes an annual company safety conference and commits the two parties to creating a labor-management study on the effects of excessive overtime.

The contract, which runs through 2023, covers workers at WestRock paper mills and converting and merchandising display facilities in Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin.

"This contract sets a standard for the industry," Foster said. "It positions the company to succeed and invest in our facilities while making sure that workers, families and communities continue to share in that success."

## LOCALS RATIFY — AT — CLEARWATER PAPER

Members of USW Locals 608 and 712 ratified a new agreement with Clearwater Paper in Lewiston, Idaho, on Jan. 8 after negotiations stalled over health care coverage and other contract items.

"It was a long and tedious 2 ½ years, but it was only by sticking together that we got the agreement we got today," Local 712 President Mark Rhodes said after the votes were counted.

The two USW locals and Local 73 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers together represent more than 870 workers at the Lewiston facility. Their new contracts run through August 2025.

The union members turned down the company's last, best and final offer last summer by an overwhelming margin.

Rhodes gave credit to the local's Communications Action Team for maintaining solidarity.

"We had a great action team. We distributed car window flyers saying, 'Fair Contract Now,' and our membership did not hold back voicing their unhappiness to their supervisors."



# Winning

# COMBINATION

## NEW USW MEMBERS BUILD BATTERY-POWERED BUSES

**G**ood, family-sustaining union jobs can be green. The USW's newest members include more than 60 production workers who build zero-emission, battery-powered electric buses in California for Proterra, an emerging U.S. vehicle and energy storage company.

International President Thomas M. Conway congratulated the new members of Local 675 after Proterra recognized the union last November at its factory in the city of Industry, some 30 miles east of Los Angeles. Local 675 is a large amalgamated local that represents thousands of oil refinery workers.

"In Proterra, we have a dedicated, highly skilled, productive work force, an American company committed to manufacturing in the United States and

management that respects employees," Conway said. "This is a winning combination not only for this company and these workers, but for our country as a whole as we look at the kind of jobs we want to have in the future."

Headquartered in Burlingame, Calif., Proterra manufactures battery-powered transit buses up to 40 feet in length, as well as electric charging stations that are located in maintenance facilities and at bus route terminals.

The USW hopes Proterra will grow manufacturing in California. The company currently employs some 126 workers in LA County, including the factory and the Burlingame headquarters. Proterra also has an assembly operation in Greenville, S.C., to serve the East Coast.

CEO Ryan Popple, a former finance

manager with Tesla, the electric car company, voluntarily recognized the USW as the bargaining agent on Nov. 12, 2019, after an overwhelming majority of its California factory workers signed authorization cards.

Proterra is also working with a nonprofit organization, Jobs to Move America (JMA), toward a community benefits agreement that could commit the company to hire and train workers from disadvantaged backgrounds.

"This is what happens when a company remains neutral and allows the employees to choose. The employees choose union wholeheartedly," organizing Director Maria Somma said. "Within 24 hours, a majority of workers signed cards in support of forming their union."

Commuter buses are expected to be

the fastest growing segment of electric, heavy-duty vehicles as public transit authorities around the world move away from diesel-fueled fleets to cleaner alternatives.

It is imperative that emerging clean technologies foster good jobs and healthier communities, Conway said. That means materials and components must be made in the United States and those workers who produce them should earn fair wages and good benefits.

“U.S. manufacturing and manufacturing workers are vital to the innovation and economic future of this country,” Conway said. “It’s important that we capitalize on the technological advancements and strengths of American companies to seize the tremendous momentum happening in the domestic electric vehicle sector and promote American leadership in this next transportation revolution.”

The USW is partners with JMA, a national nonprofit organization with offices in Chicago, New York, Birmingham, Ala., and Los Angeles. JMA builds community coalitions and lobbies for public transit agencies to create local jobs when spending money on buses, trains and other manufactured equipment.

“This is a first-of-a-kind in achieving collective bargaining rights for us because we did it with the support of a coalition of different organizations aligned with Jobs to Move America,” Somma said. “It’s a real recognition that collective bargaining is a benefit to the communities where our members live.”

The partnership first approached Proterra a few years ago when it announced it was considering a factory location in California, which offers tax credits and other help to companies that establish permanent facilities and hire locally.

The factory was funded in part by a \$3 million grant from the California Energy Commission, which spends \$100 million a year to spur green innovation in a transportation system responsible for much of the state’s greenhouse gas emissions.

In 2017, the LA Metro committed to full bus electrification by 2030 and is actively seeking funding to buy battery-powered buses and make system changes to accommodate them.



Proterra electric bus



Proterra photo

" THIS IS A WINNING COMBINATION NOT ONLY FOR THIS COMPANY AND THESE WORKERS, BUT FOR OUR COUNTRY AS A WHOLE AS WE LOOK AT THE KIND OF JOBS WE WANT TO HAVE IN THE FUTURE. "

INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT  
THOMAS M. CONWAY



New USW members at Proterra



Proterra electric school bus

“Over the last two to three years, transit agencies across the country have committed to purchasing more battery-powered electric buses,” said Hector Huezo, senior workforce equity coordinator for JMA in Los Angeles.

“This is an opportunity to move to cleaner technologies that are better for our environment. It’s also an opportunity to ensure early on in a relatively new industry that workers building electric buses can have quality employment, good working conditions and a voice on the job,” he said.

The local’s chief of staff, Xochitl Cobarruvias, said the union can help promote the company while it seeks new bus orders from public transit agencies. “All of us, the workers, the union and the community, can work together. Everybody wins,” she said.

Employees were invited in late October to meet representatives of Local 675, known for representing oil refinery workers. The local convinced Proterra employees that they understood the issues related to climate change and were committed to helping existing members survive an eventual transition to a more carbon-neutral economy.

“This is not about one or the other,” said staff rep Moises Hernandez, who worked on the campaign. “We need workers in both sectors. They will all have wages, benefits and a voice at their jobs.”

Two weeks later, the Proterra workers chose the USW through card check.

“This is my first time being in a union, and I’m actually excited about it,” Blanchard Pinto, a supervisor on the assembly line, told the *Los Angeles Times*. “It was a no-brainer for me that it was something we could use for job stability.”

Popple, the CEO, said the cooperation with the USW is an unprecedented opportunity to solve some of the greatest challenges of the day while creating and preserving quality American manufacturing jobs.

“Proterra and the United Steelworkers share a common vision to support American workers while building a healthier and more resilient future for all, and we look forward to a strong partnership,” Popple said.

USW

# GLASSMAKERS

KEEPING THE  
ART ALIVE

John Kanosky  
Photos by Steve Dietz

Shades, globes and other light fixtures sold throughout America are hand-crafted by USW members at a West Virginia factory that's surviving stiff competition from foreign imports.

At Davis-Lynch Glass Co. in Star City, a small town of 2,500 residents near Morgantown, about 45 members of Local 1-09 keep two dying arts alive: They hand-blow glass pieces and hand-decorate them.

The finished products—including globes for commercial lighting fixtures, elegant tops for torchieres and ornately painted shades for table lamps—are shipped out in boxes with a red stamp that says:

“Hand Made Glass by Skilled Craftsmen.”

Only a few companies can make that claim. Davis-Lynch is one of the last hand-blown glass factories in America,

a distinction that USW members take pride in and labor to maintain.

“It’s a dying art, but it’s hard,” said Mark Morris, a glass blower for 19 years, noting the job requires strong lungs and the stamina to wield blowpipes holding as much as 30 pounds of glass.

Bob Lynch, co-owner of Davis-Lynch, said the top-quality craftsmanship keeps customers—including home stores, distributors and contractors—coming back.

“You look at some of the homes being built, and you’ll see some of our glass and fixtures,” he said, adding he’s proud of the company’s strong relationship with the USW.



## Turning sand to glass

The glassmaking begins in a room lit by fires fueled with natural gas in open-faced tanks. Each afternoon, workers add sand and chemicals to the tanks. The raw materials meld together, producing a fresh batch of molten glass to use the next day.

Several workers operate as a team or shop. The gatherer works molten glass onto the end of a blowpipe, then blows and shapes it into a small ball. "You breathe life into the glass, really," explained Mike Radwell, a gatherer who's worked at Davis-Lynch for about two years.

Next, a ball boy takes the pipe and blows into it, enlarging the glass orb. A blocker takes the pipe back to the tank, adds more molten glass onto the existing ball to make it bigger, and smooths and rounds it.

Maneuvering in close quarters with hot glass, the workers must anticipate each other's movements to avoid injury and keep production moving.

Finally, the blower, standing on a raised platform, takes over. Beneath him, steam rises from a hot mold that's just been hosed down to remove impurities from the last use. It's one of hundreds of molds in the factory, some used exclusively to produce special items for select clients.


Depending on the size and shape of the product being made, the blower further enlarges the glass ball or swings the pipe to elongate the glass. Then he puts the glass into the mold. He blows until the glass fills out the mold while simultaneously turning the pipe to prevent the mold from leaving marks.

When done, his co-workers open the mold and remove a perfectly formed shade, globe or other product that is then annealed, or toughened, while slowly running through alehr oven, or long kiln, to other parts of the plant.

After that, the products may be decorated or trimmed so that they fit onto a lamp or another fixture. Then they're packed and shipped.

## Founded in 1943

Davis-Lynch has been producing glass this way since the company's founding in 1943 by Mert Davis and R. Emmett Lynch, both of whom worked at other glassmakers before striking out on their own. Today, the company is run by Lynch's sons, Bob and John. Bob's sons, Rob and Scott, also work there.

A photograph of a glassblower in a workshop. The worker is in the foreground, focused on his work, holding a long metal rod. In the background, another worker is visible, and a furnace with glowing glass is on the right. The scene is lit with warm, orange light from the furnace.

At its peak, in the 1970s, the company employed about 330, including 60 to 70 decorators. It had as many as 16 shops running during a single shift. It operated its own fleet of trucks.

Back then, the company did a lot of business with New York lamp manufacturers, who, in turn, sold to major department store chains. But consolidation in the retail industry and overseas competition – first from Mexico, now China and Europe – eroded that market for Davis-Lynch’s goods.

“When you can import lamps at cheap prices, it hurts,” Lynch said.

Now, only a couple of shops operate at a time. Davis-Lynch survives by forging new niches. For example, it sells fixtures for office buildings looking to do away with fluorescent lights. It markets to buyers—including Schoolhouse and Rejuvenation, a branch of Williams-Sonoma Inc.—that specialize in custom and high-end home goods.

Rejuvenation buys opal and crystal shades from Davis-Lynch and uses them in fixtures it manufactures in Portland, Ore. On its webpage, Rejuvenation promotes the “gentle, graceful curves, the flawless structure, artisanal hand-painted touches, and the undeniable character” of Davis-Lynch’s work.

Cody Benninghoff

“IT’S A DYING ART.”  
MARK MORRIS

### Each piece unique

Davis-Lynch is revamping its own website to better showcase USW members’ workmanship—the company’s chief selling point in an age of mass-produced goods.

“We’d like for people to get more interested in what we do,” said decorator Kathleen Rowe. No two pieces of hand-blown glass are exactly the same, she said, and the uniqueness makes them special.

Rowe, who’s worked at Davis-Lynch for 25 years, praised the

company’s efforts to find new customers for those lost to foreign trade. But she worries about the long-term prospects for the special skills she and her co-workers have.

“It’s just going to be lost,” she said.

Rowe contributes to the exceptional appearance of Davis-Lynch products. She hand-paints lines, floral patterns and other designs on shades and other products after they cool. They’re so lovely that some people mistake

them for decals.

Rowe wears no apron, uses nothing to steady her hand and proudly declares: “I don’t slop paint.”

She’s looked at imported lighting fixtures in stores and wondered why anyone would buy them. Some of them, she said, look like they’ve been decorated with house paint instead of the special kind she uses.

Davis-Lynch is part of a rich glass-making tradition in West Virginia,





Donnie Cost



Shane Stephens



Leanna Brown



Rodney Jaggie



Annette Justus



and some of its products are featured in the Museum of American Glass in Weston, W.Va.

Over the years, workers said, they've recognized the company's products on television shows and in hotels, restaurants and Disney parks. There's no mistaking them, said Mike King, a blocker for 13 years. "Just seeing them, you can tell."



Kathleen Rowe



# BATTLING OVER THE BALLOT BOX

UNION ACTIVISTS ATTEND POLITICAL BOOT CAMP TO HONOR MEMORY OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

**E**lection Day 2020, when Americans will head to the polls to make their voices heard, is around the corner. Yet the freedom to vote remains under attack 55 years after passage of the Voting Rights Act.

That's why nearly 400 union activists from across the United States hustled through a weekend of political bootcamp at the annual AFL-CIO Martin Luther King Jr. Civil and Human Rights Conference in Washington, D.C.

"Dr. King's fight, our fight, was for goals both big and basic," AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said in his opening speech on Jan. 17. "It was also about the insidious and inane injustices that protected the powerful."

Members from multiple unions, including a large delegation of Steelworkers, gathered at the nation's capital for three days of reflection and action in honor of the slain civil and labor rights hero. Dynamic panels and workshops at the event focused on protecting and strengthening voters' and workers' rights, to which Dr. King devoted his life.

The first day of the conference included conversations about attacks on the ballot box, as legislatures across the country pass laws that weaken the ability of citizens to vote.

Gerrymandering, draconian voter purges as seen in states like Wisconsin and Georgia, squashing access to voting on college campuses and restrictive ID laws are all systematically undermining

the basic tenet of democracy. To reverse this, workers and activists must reclaim their collective power, Trumka said.

"We're not going to shy away from this fight because we're the ones who make America great," Trumka said.

## Grassroots action

AFL-CIO Vice President Tefere Gebre also touched on the need for grassroots action in the fight for economic and racial justice.

"Real change happens on the ground," said Gebre, who came to the United States as a refugee from Ethiopia in the 1980s.

The activists turned from talking about making change to creating it by volunteering with several organizations in the D.C. area on the second day of the conference. USW members, including Sarah Werth of Local 12775 in northern Indiana, spent the morning delivering groceries to home-bound residents, while others painted walls at a local veterans' center and helped serve breakfast at a nursing home.

Werth, an equipment operator at gas and electric company NIPSCO, came to the conference with the hope of learning how to better protect her members from discrimination. As vice president of her county's AFL-CIO labor council, she found a workshop on union ballot initiatives valuable.

"It's hard to get labor issues on the ballot here in Indiana," said Werth. "We have right-to-work now in our state and

it's something we need to fight back on."

## Running for office

Marcia Cannon, a biochemistry laboratory technician for Merck Pharmaceuticals in Pennsylvania and a member of Local 10-00086, was inspired by a workshop on the importance of women running for office at all levels.

"It was really empowering," said Cannon, who has been considering running for a position on her local's executive board. After hearing the workshop facilitator's call to move beyond merely talking to walking, Cannon said, "I think I just may take her advice."

Everything union activists do must be done in solidarity and for the cause of the common good, Cannon said.

"It's about humanity and about us all working together," she said. "When we work together in our community, we make a difference to our country."

The weekend's closing reception echoed Cannon's sentiment as International Vice President Fred Redmond reminded attendees to take what they learned at the conference and use it to bolster the labor movement back home.

"You must leave here committed to do the work of changing our country," said Redmond, who is co-chair of the AFL-CIO Civil and Human Rights Committee. "This is our opportunity to build a better future for our children and our grandchildren, and the stakes are too high for us not to do the work."

# HOUSE PASSES PRO ACT

## EMPLOYERS VIOLATE FEDERAL LAW IN 41.5% OF ALL UNION ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

The USW called on the U.S. Senate to quickly pass a comprehensive labor reform bill, the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, after it was approved by a bipartisan vote of the U.S. House of Representatives.

“Workers have the right to join together to improve their lives on the job, and the PRO Act will make sure that fundamental right is protected,” International President Thomas M. Conway said after the Feb. 6 House vote. “Too often, companies bully and intimidate workers to keep unions out and face little to no punishment, even in cases when they break the law.”

The 224-to-194 House vote was an important election-year gain for labor even though the measure, opposed by corporations and anti-union lawmakers, faces an uphill fight in the Senate and a promised presidential veto.

It’s an opportunity, a litmus test, to see who stands with workers.

“So many politicians in Washington, including President Trump and members of the Senate, got elected by promising to stand up for workers. Now, we will find out if that’s all just talk,” Conway said.

“The Senate should pass the PRO Act, and the president should sign it. It’s time to take some of the power out of the hands of corporate America and Wall Street and give it back to working Americans.”

The PRO Act would make it easier for workers to certify unions, restrict some of the most damaging tactics employers use to oppose organizing, and impose meaningful penalties when

employers violate the law.

“For too long, we’ve seen workers’ wages stagnating and benefits being cut while productivity, corporate profits and CEO pay keep increasing,” said Eduardo Placencio, a USW member who attended the House vote and whose local (937) is engaged in an unfair labor practice strike

avoidance industry got its start after the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) was enacted in 1935. Before then, employers had the legal liberty to spy upon, question, punish, blacklist and fire union members.

Attempts to thwart organizing are widespread. The report estimated that

three-quarters of all employers engaged in union elections with 50 or more voters hired union avoidance consultants.

“The main goal of union avoidance consulting firms is to prevent a union election from taking place—and if that fails, to ensure that workers vote against the union,” the report said.

Using information gathered through Freedom

of Information Act requests and from government reports, EPI found that employers in 2016 and 2017 were charged with violating federal law in 41.5 percent of all union campaigns conducted under National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) oversight.

Employers were charged with illegally coercing, threatening or retaliating against workers for supporting a union in nearly a third (29.2 percent) of cases.

They were accused of illegally disciplining workers for union support at about the same rate.

That type of activity should stop. “Under the PRO Act, companies will face real consequences for their behavior, and workers will be able to choose for themselves – without interference – whether they want to join a union,” Conway said.



Photo by Steve Dietz  
From left to right: Johnny Archuleta, Richard Perez, Director of Rapid Response Amber Miller, Michael Sanchez, John Saavedra and Eduardo Placencio

against ASARCO, the mining company. “The PRO Act will reverse those trends and help rebuild the American middle class.”

### Employers break the law

Employers routinely engage in a wide range of tactics – both legal and illegal – without fear of reprisal to frustrate workers’ rights to form unions and collectively bargain, according to a study supporting the PRO Act by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), a nonprofit think tank.

Employers’ bad behavior includes making illegal threats, engaging in surveillance, harassing workers and spending \$340 million annually on legal “union avoidance” consultants to stave off representation elections.

Employer interference is not new. Union busting dates to the Industrial Revolution, and the modern union



International President Thomas M. Conway



Assistant to the President Kim Miller



USW member James Sheridan addresses a general session.



Delegates lock arms in solidarity.



UNITED STEELWORKERS  
*Rapid Response*  
Legislative and Policy CONFERENCE

U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.) meets with District 2 delegates.



Delegates lobby their members of Congress.

# USW ACTIVISTS LOBBY for Workers' Rights

USW members took the fight for workers' rights to the halls of the U.S. Capitol and the streets of Washington, D.C., during the union's three-day Rapid Response and Legislative Policy Conference.

The climax of the annual event, held last October, came on the final day when more than 700 activists, divided into small groups, visited the offices of hundreds of members of Congress to push for legislation to ensure safer workplaces, protect union organizing rights, preserve endangered pension funds, and secure stronger protections in the new United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA).

The conference included detailed presentations addressing each of those four legislative priorities.

"All of these principles are the ties that bind us and the values that

unite us," International Vice President Roxanne Brown said in her opening remarks to members of the Rapid Response program, the USW's nonpartisan, grassroots effort to educate and mobilize members on issues important to working families.

In the two days before the legislative meetings, union members engaged in dozens of training sessions and panel discussions designed to prepare them for sometimes difficult conversations with elected officials.

International President Thomas M. Conway said the strength of the 25-year-old Rapid Response program is the main reason why the USW "punches way above its weight" in influencing legislators on Capitol Hill and in statehouses around the country.

"The labor movement is the only voice that stands up for workers,"

Conway said, urging the members in attendance to take what they learned in Washington back to their locals and expand the union's base of activism.

"That's how we build strength, and that's how we build unity," he said.

## Undercutting workers' rights

The conference occurred against the backdrop of a series of National Labor Relations Board and Labor Department decisions undercutting workers' rights. But Conway warned: "This union's not going to go away. We're going to continue to confront them on the issues affecting us in the workplace."

Brown noted that advocacy, especially related to pensions and workplace safety, is enshrined in the USW's founding principles. And retired Secretary-Treasurer Stan Johnson, who was involved in the Rapid Response

program from its earliest days and who oversaw its growth in his role as an International officer, explained that the program is needed to counter corporate America's army of lobbyists.

"Corporate America is always at the table," Johnson said. "This makes sure our voices are heard, too."

Amber Miller, who became director of the Rapid Response program in 2019, said that workers must demand that lawmakers listen to them, or their priorities will be pushed aside.

District 1 Director Donnie Blatt, a Rapid Response activist since its founding, said the program works because it is a member-driven initiative.

"You are the reason this program is a success," Blatt told the delegates, who were urged to help recruit the next generation of activists from among the USW's younger members.

## Achievements made

Blatt, Secretary-Treasurer John Shinn and other speakers offered a series of examples of the program's national- and state-level achievements over the years, from lobbying for trade enforcement actions in the mid-1990s to save a Dayton, Ohio, citric acid plant to calling for an extension of unemployment benefits to hasten the end of a lockout at National Grid in Massachusetts in 2018.

"We fight for every job," said International Vice President David McCall. "That's why this work is so important."

Through Rapid Response, the USW was instrumental in gathering 300,000 signatures to force a referendum on a so-called "right-to-work" bill passed by Missouri's legislature in 2017. In 2018, 67.5 percent of voters voted against the law, rolling it back.

"We won big," Bob Ryan, District 11 Rapid Response coordinator, told the delegates.

David Beard, a member of Local 752L at Cooper Tire in Arkansas, said the work that members do in Washington is only a small part of the equation when it comes to the need for activism in the labor movement.

"This isn't about who is living in the White House," Beard said. "This is about who is living in our house, and in our plants."

That nonpartisan, issue-based approach is one of the hallmarks of the program and one of the keys to its success.

On Oct. 29, USW members held a rally outside the U.S. Department of Labor calling for support for HR 1309, the Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act. About a dozen lawmakers and several USW members spoke in support of the legislation, which would require health care employers to implement violence-prevention plans to protect their workers.

Stephanie Adams, a nursing assistant and member of Local 9230 in Minnesota, said that violence is a more common occurrence in the health care field than most people realize.

"Sometimes it feels like management doesn't care about violence in our workplace but, thankfully, we have a union that does care," Adams said.

The next day, Steelworkers marched to Capitol Hill armed with more than 80,000 postcards signed by USW members demanding that Congress pass the law.

Vernon Beck, president of Local 12775, asked an aide to Rep. Larry Bucshon of Indiana to get the congressman — a cardiothoracic surgeon before coming to Congress — to sign on as a co-sponsor.

"It's not a major ask. It's not a heavy lift," Beck told the aide in a hallway outside the congressman's office as about 15 other USW members looked on.

## Health care violence

U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney of Connecticut, lead sponsor of the workplace violence prevention bill, said the level of violence in health care was "horrific" and that the rate of increase in recent years was particularly alarming.

In recognition of his efforts on behalf of workers, the USW presented Courtney with a 2019 USW Paul Wellstone Award, an annual tribute named in honor of the late Minnesota senator and champion of labor who died in a plane crash in 2002.

The union also presented a 2019 Wellstone Award to U.S. Rep. Bobby Scott of Virginia, who in 2019 introduced the Protecting the Right to

Organize (PRO) Act, a bill that would strengthen workers' rights to organize and penalize employers who illegally obstruct those efforts. The House passed the bill on Feb. 6.

District 10 Rapid Response Coordinator George Piasecki said the PRO Act gets to the heart of everything that the union is about.

"Every right we have in the workplace is connected to a piece of legislation," he said.

In lobbying for the PRO Act, the Workplace Violence Prevention Act and the Butch Lewis Act, Jackson Suter, a maintenance technician at U.S. Steel's Edgar Thomson Works in Braddock, Pa., found a friendly ear in U.S. Rep. Mike Doyle, whose father was a member of Suter's union, Local 1219.

Doyle thanked the USW members for their support and said any new trade agreements must include strong protections for workers and communities.

## Changing minds

Suter said that while Doyle supports all of the USW's priorities, Braddock residents may be more difficult to convince. Attending the Rapid Response conference gave him the information and the confidence he needs "to change some minds," he said.

Changing minds one at a time is exactly what the Rapid Response program was designed to do, said retired Secretary-Treasurer Johnson.

"One-on-one conversations are at the core of this program," Johnson said. "Rapid Response has fundamentally changed who we are as a union."

In addition to Johnson, retired International President Leo W. Gerard also made an appearance, closing out the conference by presenting the union's inaugural Leo W. Gerard Visionary Award to Local 13-1 President Lee Medley.

Following an introduction by U.S. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, Gerard praised Medley for his leadership and urged the attendees to continue to build the union through relentless organizing.

"The labor movement didn't get born; the labor movement got built," Gerard said. "This is a great union, and it's because we built it."

# USW MEMBERS RALLY

*for Safe Health Care Jobs*

UNITED STEELWORKERS  
**Rapid  
Response**  
Legislative and Policy  
CONFERENCE



International Vice President  
Roxanne Brown



District 11 Director Emil Ramirez (Center)  
carries a banner with Assistant Director  
Cathy Drummond and members including  
Deanna Hughes.

**H**undreds of USW members rallied outside the U.S. Department of Labor to demand protections for health care workers who are often kicked, punched, groped and threatened on the job.

The protestors, which included health care workers wearing hospital scrubs, urged passage of the Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act (H.R. 1309/S. 851).

The bill would compel the U.S. Labor Department to issue a workplace violence prevention standard requiring health care and social service employers to implement violence prevention plans tailored to each workplace. Possible safeguards range from enclosed reception areas at doctor's offices to panic buttons enabling workers to summon help when they're in danger.

The legislation passed the House in November after the union's rally on Oct. 28. By the time *USW@Work* went to press, the bill had not been brought to a vote in the Senate.

"We put up with a lot at work. We shouldn't get punched in the face," International President Thomas M. Conway said before the rally, which was held in conjunction with the USW's Rapid Response Legislative and Policy Conference in Washington, D.C.

Passage of the violence prevention bill is one of the USW's priorities.

Police blocked off streets as USW members marched from the conference hotel to the Labor Department a mile away. The chanting was so loud that officials of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) mentioned it when a delegation of members went inside to meet with them about the bill.

"We heard you coming," one official said.

International Vice President at Large Roxanne Brown opened the rally by demanding action on workplace violence, a problem that's only gotten worse in the last few years.

## Violence reports increase

From 2008 to 2017, workplace violence in the health care and social service industries increased 69 percent. Health care and social workers are five times more likely to suffer workplace violence than workers in other fields.

Other speakers at the rally included U.S. Sens. Sherrod Brown of Ohio and Bob Casey of Pennsylvania and Reps. Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut, Marcy Kaptur of Ohio, Joe Morelle of New York, and Conor Lamb and Susan Wild of Pennsylvania.

Brown noted that the Labor Department building is named for pioneer labor activist Frances Perkins, who redoubled her fight for workplace safety after 146 workers, most of them young women, died in the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City.

The senator said it sickens him to know that corporate attorneys climb the steps of that building and go inside to oppose worker safety regulations.

Instead of improving workplace safety, Wild said, the Trump administration has rolled back worker protections and left OSHA inspection positions vacant.

"It's signaled to workers across the country that (corporations) won't be held accountable if they fail to maintain a safe workplace," Wild said.

## Kicked in the face

Health care workers are groped by patients with dementia and assaulted by patients with mental health problems, brain injuries and drug addictions. Yet many employers look the other way when health care workers are injured or claim that the risk of violence comes with the job.

"They don't do anything," said Joel Maya, an EKG technician and member of Local 7600 in Fontana, Calif. Maya expressed frustration with employers' lack of concern for worker safety.

One patient threatened to kill Maya. Another threw a tray at him. A third patient, unhappy with a co-payment he had to make, threw his checkbook and wallet at him.

Tuan Vu, a behavioral health technician and member of the Essentia Red Book unit of Local 9460 in Duluth, Minn., said one of his co-workers was kicked in the face while staff members tried to calm an out-of-control patient. Another co-worker was injured during a fight involving three youths.

"I've been bitten, scratched, hit, several times this year," Vu said, noting many of his patients have problems with impulse control.

Some health care workers said they manage too many patients alone and hope the workplace violence bill forces employers to maintain adequate staffing levels.

Marketa Anderson, president of Local 9349 in Chisholm, Minn., sometimes works alone with 10 patients at a center for people with developmental disabilities. Over 19 years on the job, she's been hit, kicked, head-butted, slammed against a wall and had a chair thrown at her.

"If somebody goes off, you hope you can get to the phone and call 911 because there's nobody there to help you," she said.

# TAKE ACTION!

**CONTACT YOUR SENATORS AND ASK THEM TO SUPPORT THESE EFFORTS TO PROTECT WORKERS:**

### **Butch Lewis Act (S. 2254)**

The U.S. House passed this bill in July to protect endangered pensions and ensure workers get the secure retirement they earned. Urge your senators to support the bill.

### **Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act (S. 1306)**

Urge your senators to support the PRO Act, which would remove barriers to union organizing and establish stronger penalties for companies that illegally block those efforts.

### **The Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act (S.851)**

Urge your senators to support the workplace violence prevention bill, which would require health care and social service employers to implement violence-prevention plans.

*Contact your U.S. senators by visiting [Senate.gov](https://www.senate.gov) and clicking "Find Your Senators." Or call the U.S. Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121.*

# NAFTA REPLACEMENT

## USW: WORK AHEAD TO ENSURE USMCA IMPROVEMENTS

**T**he USW joined the AFL-CIO in endorsing a reworked replacement for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that includes stronger protections for workers in all three countries.

The new revised U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) was announced in December 2019 by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, passed by the Senate on Jan. 16, 2020, and signed by the president on Jan. 29.

“Thanks to the improvements that we fought for and won, this USMCA is significantly better than the original, and the USW supports it,” International President Thomas M. Conway said. “It’s far from perfect, but leaving the original NAFTA in place was not an option.”

“There is a great deal of work to do to ensure that corporations stop exploiting workers in their quest for larger and larger profits,” Conway said. “For all who supported this agreement, the work is just beginning to ensure it lives up to all its promises,” he said.

Mexico must honor its commitment to improving labor conditions and enforcing its labor laws, while the United States and Canada need to be vigilant in ensuring that workers’ rights are a top priority.

“The U.S. government must further support other policies that will combat rampant economic inequality and level the playing field for working people,” Conway said. “This includes a commitment to affordable health care, retirement security, infrastructure investment, a healthy environment and stronger labor protections in the United States.”

The White House initially reached agreement with Canada and Mexico on updating NAFTA in late 2018, but labor and environmental leaders balked at its weak language and sought improvements, particularly stronger labor law enforcement from Mexico.

### Pressure paid off

Months of pressure from USW members and other activists paid off when Pelosi announced the improved deal,

saying it is “infinitely better than what was initially proposed by the administration.”

The USW opposed the original NAFTA, which took effect in 1994 and was disastrous for American manufacturing and American workers. Lax labor and environmental standards in Mexico led U.S. companies to close more than 50,000 factories and offshore nearly 1 million manufacturing jobs. That deal also more than tripled the U.S. trade deficit with Mexico and Canada over 25 years.

### Improvements to the new USMCA include:

- An increase, from 62.5 percent to 75 percent, in the percentage of a vehicle’s parts that must be made in one of the three participating nations in order for the product to avoid tariffs. Workers who make auto parts also must earn at least \$16 an hour.
- Stronger enforcement of labor laws. Democrats demanded that the agreement included the creation of a committee that will monitor Mexico’s labor law enforcement.
- Updates to reflect changing technology. NAFTA was written prior to the internet era, so the new proposal includes legal protections concerning digital trade.
- Protections for drug prices. Democrats negotiated the removal of controversial pharmaceutical protections that they hope will make medicines more affordable for consumers.

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, Conway and others said that the improvements to the USMCA would not have been possible without the activism of union members.

“The trade rules in America will now be fairer because of our hard work and perseverance,” Trumka said. “President Trump may have opened this deal. But working people closed it. And for that, we should be very proud.”



# FIGHTING FOR RETIREES

## USW Sues Alcoa over Benefit Termination

The USW filed a lawsuit against Alcoa over the aluminum maker's decision, announced late last year, to terminate life insurance benefits for approximately 8,900 union-represented retirees.

International President Thomas M. Conway said the union-negotiated benefits are a critical part of the USW's collective bargaining agreements with Alcoa.

"The company agreed to provide these benefits," Conway said. "Abruptly cutting off this coverage is not only immoral, it's unlawful."

The federal suit was filed in the Southern District of Indiana on Dec. 19, 2019, some two weeks after Alcoa announced the benefit terminations and other actions it had taken to "reduce liabilities and volatility risk from pensions and other postemployment benefits."

Alcoa informed retirees by letter on Dec. 4 that it would eliminate life insurance coverage effective Dec. 31, 2019. The company included with the letter a check equal to about 20 percent of the face value of the life insurance coverage and a federal 1099 tax form, since the payment would be taxable. The coverage amounts range from \$4,500 to \$7,500.

Local 104 at Alcoa's Warrick operations near Evansville, Ind., reminded retirees in a notice dated Dec. 11 that the company proposed multiple retiree cutbacks during contract negotiations in 2019 that were rejected by the union.

### Standing strong

The USW negotiating committees refused to bring the contract to a vote until all of the negative retiree demands were removed from the table. Contractual life insurance was one of those items.



"The membership stood strong against the company's demands during negotiations, and we would ask that you continue to make your voices heard in the plant that an injury to any one of our retirees is an injury to all," Local 104 Business Agent Tim Underhill and President Chris Horn said in the notice.

The lawsuit was filed as a class action, and three Alcoa retirees joined the complaint as proposed class representatives. The Wenatchee Aluminum Trades Council, a coalition of unions representing workers at an Alcoa facility in Washington state, is also a plaintiff.

"It was a surprise to me when I got the letter," said Charles Wyatt, who retired from Alcoa's Warrick operations in 2013 after more than 40 years of service.

Wyatt, one of the retirees named as a plaintiff, told the *Evansville Courier & Press* that the company's offer of \$1,500 in exchange for a death benefit of \$7,500 was shocking. "Cutting costs – that's all this is about," he said.

District 7 Director Mike Millsap, chairman of the USW's Alcoa bargaining committee, criticized the action.

"Families rely on the contractual death benefit to assist with funeral and other expenses," Millsap said. "It is deeply disturbing that Alcoa would show so little respect for its retirees, many of whom devoted decades of work helping the company grow and thrive."

The union is also studying other announcements that the company made regarding health care benefits for certain Medicare-eligible retirees effective in 2021.



Members of Local 9700 from the ABI aluminum smelter in Quebec, Canada, protest outside Alcoa's annual shareholders meeting in Pittsburgh on May 8, 2019. ABI, a joint venture between Alcoa and Rio Tinto, locked out some 1,031 USW members on Jan. 11, 2018. The dispute was settled with a new contract after 18 months.



# NLRB UNDER TRUMP ATTACKS WORKERS' RIGHTS



**W**orkers lost the right to use work email to discuss unions, collective bargaining and other workplace matters in a flurry of year-end National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) decisions favoring employers.

The NLRB's actions in December 2019 followed a pattern of uniformly pro-employer decisions issued since 2017 when Republican members appointed by President Trump gained a majority on the board.

In what turned out to be a very busy December, the NLRB also restored an employer's right to end dues check-off once a contract expires and ended speedy union election procedures championed by the Obama administration.

It also set a new standard saying it is lawful for employers to require confidentiality in workplace investigations, and approved a controversial settlement that had scuttled the agency's nationwide, joint employer case against McDonald's and its restaurant franchises. The board also proposed a rule change that would strip collective bargaining rights from 81,000 graduate students.

Using a business-friendly Chamber of Commerce wish list as a playbook,

the NLRB in 2019 advanced an anti-worker, anti-union corporate agenda using as tools a combination of decisions in labor cases, new rulemaking aimed at overturning existing protections and policies initiated by board General Counsel Peter Robb. Labor attorneys expect 2020 to be another year of similar anti-worker rulings on issues like joint employment, protected concerted activities and private property rights.

"Every decision up and down the line has been directed towards weakening the ability of unions to organize, to represent workers, and to achieve adequate remedies," USW General Counsel David Jury said. "It has all been to the disadvantage of unions and workers. The NLRB majority since 2017 hasn't changed any doctrine to the advantage of workers or unions."

### Three run the board

The board normally has five members, with three required for a quorum. Currently, the board is operating with three Trump appointees, Chairman John Ring and members Marvin Kaplan and William Emanuel. The term of the only remaining Democrat, Lauren McFerran, expired last Dec. 16, and the term

of Democrat Mark Pierce, a one-time union-side labor lawyer from Buffalo, expired in 2018.

Responsible for conducting workplace elections and investigating unfair practice allegations, the NLRB under Trump has elevated corporate interests above those of working people whose rights to bargain are protected by the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) of 1935. Upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1937, the act allowed millions of Americans to form unions.

After its passage, the United States experienced decades of faster and fairer economic growth that persisted until the 1970s, when declining unionization led to rising income inequality and stalled economic progress for the middle class.

Under Trump, the Republican majority has overturned precedent in more than a dozen cases, according to a study of the NLRB's actions released in late 2019 by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), a nonprofit think tank.

The EPI report found that the NLRB initiated action on 10 out of 10 policy items requested by the Chamber, and went beyond those requests in undermining workers' rights.



CHAIRMAN JOHN RING

WILLIAM EMANUEL

MARVIN KAPLAN

GENERAL COUNSEL PETER ROBB

## USW case overturned

In one instance, the board made it more difficult for workers to join unions by overturning a standard for determining an appropriate bargaining unit that was set in a landmark 2011 case involving the USW.

In the case, known as Specialty Healthcare, the USW successfully argued that unions should be permitted to more freely choose the types of bargaining units they wish to organize. That decision allowed the USW to organize a certified nursing assistants-only unit at a nursing home.

Many other unions took advantage of that decision to organize workers in numerous sectors, causing employers to denounce it. The NLRB overturned the standard in 2017, making it easier for employers to manipulate bargaining unit descriptions and making it harder for workers to win.

Another board ruling gave employers more power to prevent workers and union organizers from entering and protesting on the employer's property, even when employers let other groups on their property to solicit.

The NLRB is also working to narrow the definition of "joint employer" to make it harder for temporary and contract workers to bargain with the firms that actually control their wages and working conditions. In addition, tens of thousands of student workers and Uber drivers have been stripped of their right to organize under the NLRA by a decision of the NLRB's general counsel.

All of the precedent-changing rulings favored employers and none followed the long-standing practice of seeking public input, according to the EPI report.

Former NLRB Chair Wilma Liebman, an EPI board member, said every policy choice made by the Trump board and its general counsel has created obstacles for unions.

"Viewed together, these decisions – issued at breakneck speed, without public input, and often without any party seeking to upset long-settled precedent – reveal intent to defy the law, its values and its goals," Liebman said.

*Following are brief summaries of key changes outlined by the EPI.*

## Organizing, protesting

In a trio of decisions, the Trump board overturned long-settled law and announced new rules making it far more difficult for union organizers to talk with employees where they work about forming a union.

The board upended long-standing rules that permitted union organizers limited access to public areas of an employer's property, such as a cafeteria, to talk with workers about unionization.

The changes bolstered the advantage bosses have in communicating with workers. Employers are permitted to freely discuss anti-union views over the company email system, shutting out pro-union workers from doing the same, in one-on-one meetings, and in mandatory captive audience meetings.

CASES: BEXAR, KROGER LIMITED, UPMC

## Undermining bargaining

For 70 years, employers had been prohibited from making unilateral changes to wages, hours, or working conditions during a contract term unless it could prove that the union had "clearly and unmistakably waived" its right to bargain.

To the advantage of employers, the Trump board adopted a new and weakened rule allowing them to make unilateral changes to collective bargaining agreements if there is a reference in the contract to management authority over the subject.

In addition, in a case involving a

USW unit in District 7, the board empowered employers to make unilateral changes after the expiration of a contract without bargaining if the employer has a past practice of making similar changes.

CASES: MV TRANSPORTATION, RAYTHEON, CARE ONE

## Bargaining relationships

Under a new rule which disturbs stable bargaining relationships, employers may withdraw union recognition at the conclusion of the contract when presented with evidence that the union lacks majority support. If the union wants to get its status back, it must file a petition for a new election in a mere 45 days and prevail in that election.

CASE: JOHNSON CONTROLS

## Defining joint employer

The Trump board has made known its intention to overturn the 2015 Browning-Ferris decision that loosened the test for determining whether businesses like franchisors and franchisees are joint employers under the NLRA.

The business community fiercely opposed the Browning-Ferris decision because, where joint employer status is found, both employers have an obligation to bargain in good faith with workers and can be held liable for violating workers' rights.

In December 2017, the NLRB's Republican majority overturned Browning-Ferris. That ruling was later reversed because one board member should have recused himself due to a conflict of interest. The Browning-Ferris rule was then reinstated.

Unable to overturn Browning-Ferris through adjudication, the Trump board has proposed to do so through rule-making. If successful, this new rule would make it more difficult for workers to protect their rights in a changing work environment.

CASE: HY-BRAND



Although the weather in Pittsburgh had turned wintry cold, the atmosphere at the USW's first-ever International Next Generation Conference was hot and on fire.

# ACTIVISTS *Fired Up*

YOUNG LEADERS PREPARE FOR UNION'S FUTURE

Nearly 900 union activists participated in the energetic four-day event held last Nov. 18 to 22. The agenda was packed with a dynamic lineup of speakers and presentations about the past, present, and future of the union and of the labor movement.

Everything about the conference epitomized the purpose of the USW's Next Gen program, which was developed to inspire, educate and empower young and newer members of the United Steelworkers in all industries and occupations.

"The future of our union depends on our ability to identify the leaders who will step up when experienced activists are done," International President Thomas M. Conway said.

"It's our responsibility to ensure those activists have the knowledge and skills they need to continue the hard work and progress we've already made, which will help build a stronger movement for generations to come."

AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Liz Shuler moderated an opening night panel with top USW leaders including Conway, International Secretary-Treasurer John Shinn, and International Vice Presidents David McCall, Fred Redmond, Leeann

Foster and Roxanne Brown. All addressed the need for the labor movement to adapt to the younger generation and the importance of those workers stepping out and up.

"As we look across the union, we see we are in a transition," Conway said. "You should be ambitious. You should work at learning skills and mastering those tools because this union is preparing to turn it over, and we intend to turn it over to you."

## Helping where needed

Redmond believes unions can bring this next generation into the fold by expanding organizing efforts and showing up where help is needed.

"We have to be inclusive if we're going to attract new members and grow this movement," Redmond said. "We need to be responsive to the needs of the communities where we live and work."

The first morning plenary continued this conversation with guest speaker Desmond Meade, a voting rights activist who Redmond said is the perfect example of how one person can make a monumental difference.

Recently named one of Time magazine's 100 Most Influential People in the World, Meade successfully led the campaign to pass Amendment 4 in Florida, which restored voting rights to 1.4 million Floridians with felony convictions who completed the terms of their



Photos by Steve Dietz  
From Left to Right: 1. Michael Bibbel, 2. Delee Nikal, 3. Charles Best, 4. Bernie Wood, 5. Elysha Daya, 6. Solidarity collage, 7. Parvinder Kaur, 8. Marienka Bishop-Kovac, 9. Vicki Ni, 10. Mike Campney, 11. Carlos Arocho Vazquez, 12. Mayra Rivera, 13. Al Vega, 14. Wilson Rairigh, 15. Lindsey Disler, 16. Amanda Zakhour, 17. Emily Bombich, 18. Alex Perkins



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sentence, including parole or probation. The amendment did not apply to murder or sexual offenses.

Meade, executive director of the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition, once struggled with homelessness and drug abuse and spent time in prison before he committed himself to improving other people's lives.

"I didn't know back then that I would be standing here. All I knew was that I needed to be of service for someone else," Meade said. "When you fight for others, when you commit to improve the lives of others, that's when you will experience the quality of life that you desire."

The conference featured many other panels and guest speakers, including Will Attig, combat infantry veteran and executive director of the AFL-CIO Union Veterans Council. After returning to civilian life, Attig struggled until he was given an opportunity to attend a welding program and join the labor movement in 2010.

### Building power with purpose

Attig now uses his position to build power with purpose, and he believes the next generation is a perfect fit for the work.

"The idea is to use our programs to move and change America," Attig said. "Our young workers are primed for this."

Servicing others is a core part of the Next Gen program and was a main focus of the conference. Attendees were given several opportunities to further that cause by giving back to the community.

Members were encouraged to bring unopened, full-sized toiletries and children's non-perishable snacks to donate to the multiple sites where they performed service projects on the fourth and final day of the event.

Myron Bynum, of Local 945 in Verona, Pa., volunteered at a local school where he and other Steelworkers helped to repair basketball hoops. The hoops ended up being beyond repair, and the group chipped in to buy new ones.

"I loved it," Bynum said.

Throughout the week, attendees were also presented with a hearty buffet of workshops and seminars conducted by USW members and staff, as well as coalition and community members from around the globe. Topics ranged from labor

history, immigration, mass incarceration, the power of strong contracts and the crisis facing workers in Puerto Rico.

"We wanted to give everyone the chance to get a taste of everything in one place," said E.J. Jenkins, a Next Gen leader from District 7 who helped to organize the event.

### Finding a path

The conference was the first labor event of any kind for Jamie Martinez, who works at the Bridgestone tire plant in Morrison, Tenn. Living in a small Southern town can come with challenges for LGBTQ+ people like Martinez.

The four-year member of Local 1155L came into the week hoping to find a way to make a difference. After attending a workshop conducted by members of the recently formed LGBTQ+ Advisory Committee, she thinks she just may have found her path.

"I wanted to do something for my community that mattered, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it until I came here," she said.

Martinez understands the importance and impact of community service and the labor movement. Encouraged by her grandfather, she joined the USW at Bridgestone, and the local has already helped her navigate a few workplace predicaments.

"It makes a difference," Martinez said. "I think of it as an investment."

The final night of the conference honored two recently retired USW officers, former International President Leo W. Gerard and International Vice President at Large Carol Landry.

Landry, who played a vital role in building the Women of Steel leadership program, spoke to young workers about the pride she takes in the changes they are making to the movement.

"I've seen more Steelworker activists in our community since you all became active than I have in years, and that itself made us realize that this is a new Steelworker union," she said.

Gerard echoed Landry's gratitude for younger members' activism and reminded the attendees that the ball is in their court.

"The reality is that we've got a really great activist union, and you've got to start thinking about your role in it," Gerard said. "This is your union."

See more photos at [www.flickr.com/photos/unionsteelworkers/albums](http://www.flickr.com/photos/unionsteelworkers/albums)



# Nuclear Waste CLEANUP

## *Atomic Council Members Question DOE Officials*

A parade of current and former U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) officials answered questions from USW members at the Atomic Energy Workers Council (AEWC) biannual meeting.

About 30 local leaders representing members at DOE sites and nuclear facilities attended the two-day session last fall at the USW's legislative office in Washington, D.C.

"This is the first time we have had multiple representatives from DOE over the last three years, so this is progress," said International Vice President Roxanne Brown, who last summer took over for retired International Vice President Carol Landry as chair of the union's atomic council.

Brown opened the meeting by addressing leadership changes both within the USW and at the DOE, where former Deputy Dan Brouillette recently replaced Rick Perry as U.S. secretary of energy. Brown, who oversees the union's political, legislative and policy work, told the group that the atomic sector would be her only bargaining responsibility.

It was Brown's first meeting as AEWC chair after many years of work with the sector. She said she has learned in her time in Washington that the atomic sector has support from across the political spectrum.

"It doesn't always matter who is in power in the government as long as there is a person willing to listen," she said.

### **Educate DOE**

Brown encouraged council members to educate DOE officials about their locations and offer suggestions for im-

provement. "This gives you a voice you may not have at your site," she said.

The AEWC meeting gave members a chance to use that voice.

Pete Gomez of Local 12-369 at the Hanford Nuclear Site in Richland, Wash., asked William (Ike) White, senior advisor for environmental management at the DOE, about outstanding contracts in the department's environmental management (EM) program.

White said the department was in the final stages of selecting contractors and said the agency in the future wants indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity contracts for fixed periods of time with companies that have high-quality management teams.

Shortly after the meeting, Local 12-369 approved a one-year contract extension at Hanford that was negotiated by the Hanford Atomic Metal Trades Council, an umbrella group including Local 12-369, to prepare for potential changes.

Local unions will enter full contract negotiations in September after the DOE awards cleanup contracts for the former nuclear weapons production site.

John Knauff, president of Local 1-689 at the former Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant in Piketon, Ohio, suggested that White work closely with locals to ensure contractors are doing their jobs properly.

Contractors at Portsmouth are performing open-air demolition of buildings containing contaminated, radioactive equipment without decontaminating them first, he said.

Knauff and AEWC President Jim

Key told White about instances in which contractors have denied worker requests for respirators and employees getting injured as a result.

### **Experience ignored**

Bill Collins, a Local 12-369 member at Hanford, said the contractor taking down the Plutonium Finishing Plant hired people off the street instead of workers with decades of experience.

Brown asked that White restart quarterly meetings with the DOE, the USW and contractors to "cut through the issues." White said he would "commit personally" to meeting with union workers at DOE sites.

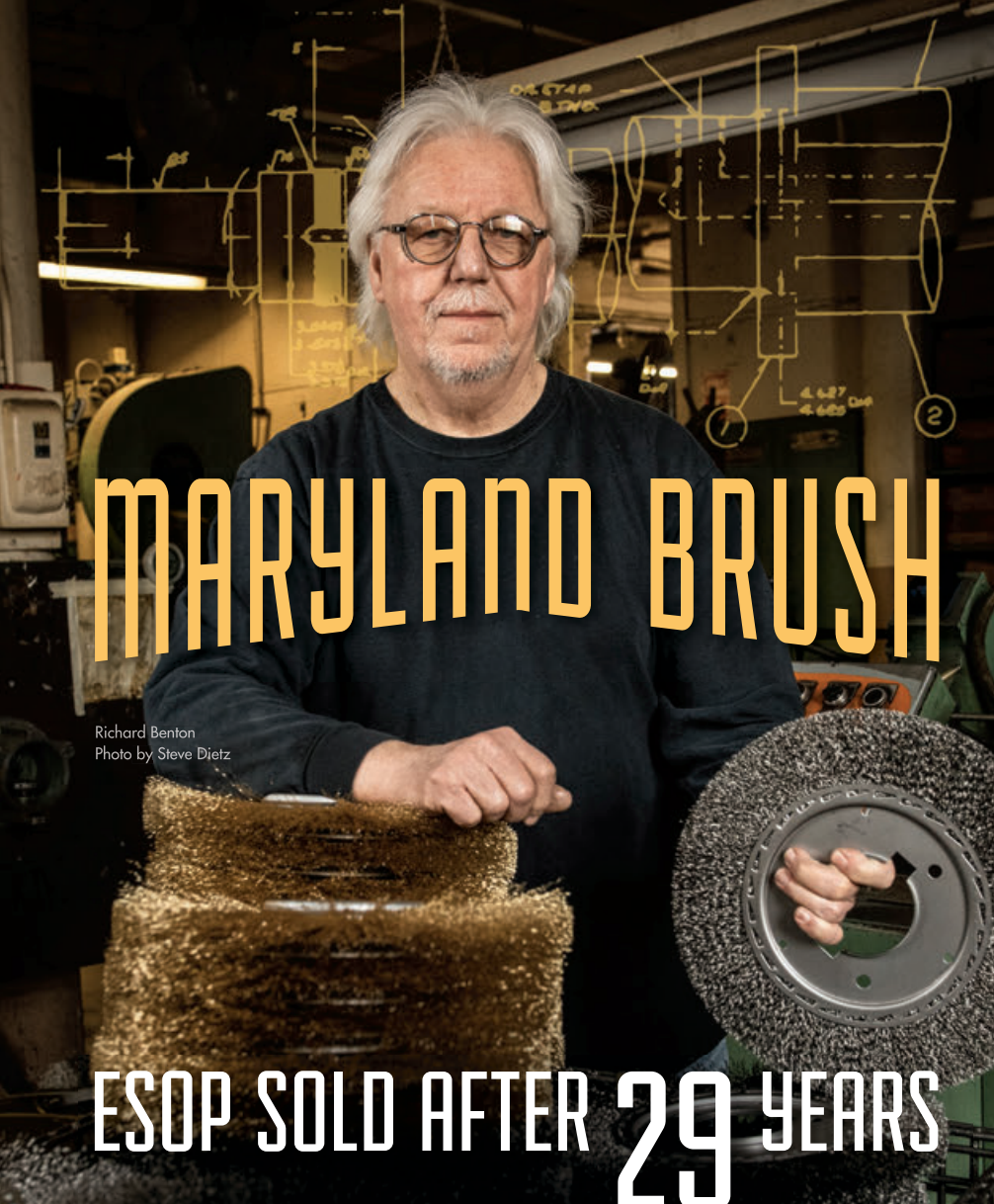
"Your management team will tell you what you want to hear," Key told White. "I will tell you the truth."

Kevin Dressman, director of DOE's office of enforcement, spoke about the agency's efforts to improve safety at cleanup sites.

Because the DOE is a self-regulating agency, OSHA does not perform inspections. DOE provides incentives for contractors to address problems, Dressman said.

While the office of enforcement does not inspect sites, it will post investigation notices and outcomes on its website.

Dressman said his office emphasizes higher controls for health and safety than personal protective equipment (PPE). Elimination of hazards is evaluated first, then engineering and administrative controls, with PPE used last. Not blaming workers for health and safety incidents is also integral to good safety, as well as robust sharing of lessons learned, he said.



Richard Benton  
Photo by Steve Dietz

**T**he USW-represented workers at Maryland Brush Co. in Baltimore owned and operated the business for nearly 30 years, likely making it the longest-lasting unionized worker-owned company in the United States.

Sadly, the experiment in worker ownership ended at a shareholders' meeting late last year when the members of Local 12978 voted to sell the business and equipment to a private firm in Canada, where national health care will lower costs.

"It's what we had to do as shareholders," CEO Steve Mullen said.

The company and its worker-owners should be remembered as a positive example of employee ownership, said Deborah Groban Olson, an attorney and former chair of the National Center for Employee Ownership.

The company stood out among Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs) for its embrace of democracy, she said. USW employees had one vote per person on shareholder issues and regularly participated in company decisions. Its board showed a willingness to seek out and experiment with new products when old products lost market share.

"The closing is not a unique story," Groban Olson said. "The 29 previous years is the unique story."

### **Industrial brush supplier**

Renamed MBC Ventures, the company was a leading manufacturer and supplier of industrial brushes. A subsidiary of PPG Industries from 1901 to 1989, it was incorporated as an ESOP in 1990 with the assistance of the USW.

Maryland Brush was featured in the

spring 2018 issue of *USW@Work* when it supported 19 worker-owners, managers and sales staff. At the time of the sale, the active work force had dwindled to about 10.

MBC's city property will likely be sold at auction, Mullen said. At the end, the brush factory used a small portion of a 72,000-square-foot building located on a 2.5-acre site of a former brewery.

In 2007, after paying off its acquisition debt, the company elected Subchapter S status. As a 100 percent ESOP, it became exempt from paying federal corporate income tax, which enabled it to invest in a new product.

### **Seeking new products**

After 2008, the maturing market for industrial brushes caused MBC to seek new products. In 2010, the company invested in a startup called SkyLouver, a combination skylight and solar thermal collector designed to fit on the flat roofs of retail stores and reduce utility costs. But the project, which involved purchasing a patent, failed in 2015.

"If we had deeper pockets, maybe we could have made it work," Mullen said.

No one pointed fingers of blame. "That's not our style," Local 12978 President Rich Benton said in 2018.

"We made the decision to invest in the venture together. Failure hurts, but our focus was on moving forward, not casting blame."

Over the years, MBC reduced its product line and work force to stay competitive. In its final years, the company focused on manufacturing power-driven brushes and related products used in industry.

Len Shindel, a retired Bethlehem Steel USW member who served as a neutral member of the board, said MBC did not recover from losing its most profitable customer, a tiremaker that used its brushes for retreading.

Shindel, who was part of an effort to retain steel mill brush customers in 2017, remained impressed with the cooperation and atmosphere of trust that prevailed during the ESOP.

"Observing how managers and union members delicately honed their relationship for their mutual benefit has been one of the most humbling experiences of my life," he said.



## USW MOURNS ROBERT LAVENTURE

Robert LaVenture, who started his working life in a Wisconsin foundry and later led the USW's District 12, died on Nov. 13, 2019, at age 68.

"Bob was a tireless union activist who always fought on the side of working people, first in his home state of Wisconsin and later on behalf of our members in District 12," said Interna-

tional President Thomas M. Conway. "He will be sorely missed."

District 12 is geographically large, encompassing the states of Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Utah and Washington.

LaVenture was appointed by retired International President Leo W. Gerard as director of District 12 in 2009 to succeed Terry Bonds, who retired. He was elected to full four-year terms in 2013 and 2017.

As director, LaVenture was a strong advocate of American industry and jobs. He led opposition to the use of Chinese-made steel in the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge reconstruction, and stood up for USW-represented refinery workers whose jobs were jeopardized by state policymakers.

LaVenture chaired contract negotiations with EVRAZ Rocky Mountain Steel, Kaiser Aluminum, ASARCO, and Kennecott Utah Copper. He also led the USW Cement Council.

He was profoundly dedicated to cross-border solidarity, working closely with Los Mineros, the USW's partner in Mexico.

After high school, the Wisconsin native joined Local 3740 in 1970 at the International Harvester foundry in Waukesha, Wis. He served the local as a trustee, steward and vice president before being elected local president, a position he held for five terms.

While local president, LaVenture was involved in developing the Navistar Education Center, the first employee education center in Wisconsin. The center was later replicated across the state.



## TIRE INDUSTRY VETERAN RON HOOVER DIES

Retired International Executive Vice President Ron Hoover, a veteran union negotiator who led the USW's Rubber/Plastics Industry Conference (R/PIC), died on Oct. 29, 2019, in Wilmington, N.C. He was 78.

Hoover, of Wabash, Ind., was born on April 12, 1941, in Kansas, where he was a farmer and a tire worker. He joined the United Rubber Workers (URW) Local 307

in 1964 at Goodyear in Topeka after working for the Santa Fe Railroad.

He was a union activist at Local 307, serving as division chairman and two-term president before his appointment to the URW staff in 1989.

After the URW merged with the USW in 1995, Hoover served as an assistant to John Sellers, who then led R/PIC. He was coordinator of the Goodyear bargaining committee for 12 years before taking over R/PIC when Sellers retired in 2005.



## PRESCOTT NAMED D12 DIRECTOR

The International Executive Board on Dec. 10 appointed Gaylan Prescott District 12 Director to replace Robert LaVenture, who died suddenly last November.

A longtime union activist and leader, Prescott, 57, had served as LaVenture's assis-

tant since January 2018 in District 12.

After graduating from high school in his hometown of Kelso, Wash., Prescott earned an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) certification and spent several years working alongside migrant farmers.

Following in his father's footsteps, Prescott then worked at the former Reynolds Metals Co. aluminum reduction plant in Longview, Wash., where he spent nearly 20 years as a casting machine operator and a pot tender.

Prescott began his career as a union activist in 1986 when he became a shop steward. In 1990, he was elected to his first of three terms as president of the Longview Federated Aluminum Council, which represented about 700 workers from multiple unions at the facility.

The USW named Prescott a staff representative in 1999, when he assisted 2,900 members who were locked out at Kaiser Aluminum plants in Washington, Ohio and Louisiana. It was one of the union's longest and most contentious work stoppages. Prescott was named a sub-director in 2012.

Jim Kilborn was appointed to serve as an assistant to the director. Kilborn joined the union in 1988 as a laborer at ATI's Wah Chang plant in Albany, Ore. He has been on staff since 2013.

"Ron was a great addition to the USW when we merged with the United Rubber Workers, and he led our union's tire and rubber sector through many difficult negotiations," said International President Thomas M. Conway.

"He was a dedicated and serious leader for so many years within our union, and he stayed in touch with so many of our Rubber and Plastics Industry Council locals. We miss his friendship and solidarity, and his wife Linda and their entire family are in our thoughts and prayers."

Hoover fought to keep domestic companies producing tires and rubber products in the United States, and he defended union members and retirees from industry attempts to cut costs on their backs.

As R/PIC chairman, Hoover led a three-month work stoppage against Goodyear in 2006 that secured \$1 billion in investment to protect retiree medical and prescription drug benefits.



## NLRB Investigates ASARCO for Unfair Labor Practices

The National Labor Relations Board is investigating unfair labor practice (ULP) charges accusing ASARCO of bad faith bargaining, unilaterally implementing a last-best offer when there was no impasse, threatening to hire and hiring permanent replacements for nearly 2,000 striking copper miners.

The charges were filed in January by the USW over the company's ongoing unfair labor practices. They are retroactive to the start of the strike and the date the company implemented its proposal.

Other ULP allegations made against ASARCO include failure to bargain in good faith over mandatory subjects, dilatory bargaining tactics, surveillance, failure to provide relevant and necessary bargaining information, implementing a discriminatory copper price bonus and soliciting employees to resign their union memberships.

A coalition of eight labor unions led by the USW struck the copper producer last October at five locations in Arizona and Texas over its serious ULPs and the membership's refusal to accept a concessionary offer.

No new bargaining sessions were scheduled as *USW@Work* went to press.

## Local 8888 Reaches 10,000 Members

Local 8888 in Virginia began 2020 by signing its 10,000th member, a milestone that came after nearly 1,500 new members joined the shipyard workers' union in 2019 in the right-to-work state.

The new members reversed a downward trend and strengthened the union's leverage for contract negotiations coming up with Huntington Ingalls Newport News Shipbuilding in 2021.

Justin Bates, a painter, was the 10,000th member of the USW's largest local.

Local President Charles Spivey made organizing and training the next generation of Steelworker activists a top priority after his election in 2018. He attributes the growth to organizers who helped to sign new members and a revamped approach to orientation for new hires and apprentices.

"Local 8888 is back in the game. We're keeping the union spirit alive with new energy," Spivey said. "Most of all, we have sent a powerful message to the company: At contract time, we won't be coming for crumbs. We're 10,000 strong now."



L-R: Organizing Chair Kenneth "Chan" Lewis, Justin Bates and Local 8888 Pres. Charles Spivey.

## Health Care Workers Look Forward

The USW's Health Care Workers Council strategized for the future of the union and the evolving industry, preparing several action plans at a two-day session in Pittsburgh last December.

Activists reported on work at the district level, including pushing legislators to pass the Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act. They also discussed coming automation and its impact on work.

"Technology absolutely is a great tool to use, but it should not replace bodies and real workers," said District 12 Health Care Council Coordinator Alma Garzon, who attended a conference on the topic sponsored by Unite the Union.

International Vice President Fred Redmond, who oversees the council, reminded attendees that their work is vital to the union's future.

"This is a growth sector. How we grow this council and get engaged is going to be crucial in strengthening our ability to represent health care workers," he said.



## Mendoza Named Paper Sector Chair

International President Thomas M. Conway appointed Luis Mendoza as chair of the USW's paper sector, effective Jan. 1.

Mendoza joined the labor movement in 1988 as a member of Local 12882, manufac-

turing explosives for Hercules Inc. Mendoza has served as a health and safety chair, a grievance committee member and unit president. He was appointed to the International staff in 2006 and has been working in the paper sector since 2007, building bargaining experience.

## Lucky Friday Mine Back to Work

Members of Local 5114 in January ratified an agreement with Hecla Mining to resolve a 2 ½ year strike at the Lucky Friday mine in northern Idaho's Silver Valley.

The three-year pact ended an unfair labor practice strike that began on March 13, 2017. It was approved in a secret ballot vote counted on Jan. 6 after a tentative agreement was reached in December.

District 12 Director Gaylan Prescott praised local union members for standing together to demand a fair contract at the silver, lead and zinc mine, located near Mullan, Idaho, in the Coeur d'Alene Mountains.

"For nearly three years, our solidarity has been tested," Prescott said. "We are proud of their unity and resolve, which will serve as an example for all of organized labor."

The new contract includes several improvements over the "last, best and final offer" that led to the strike. They include a signing bonus, wages, hours of work, vacations and holidays, leaves of absence, seniority and bidding.

# NEWS BRIEFS

## USW, European Unions Work Together

As aluminum producers Novelis and Aleris moved closer to a merger, USW members began working closely with their European counterparts to ensure that jobs and workers' rights are protected on both continents.

Members of Local 9443-01 from the Aleris plant in Lewisport, Ky., held two days of meetings with union leaders visiting from Aleris facilities in Germany and Belgium and signed a joint declaration promising further cooperation in the future.

The declaration called on new ownership to provide detailed information to workers about its plans for the company, and to ensure that the collective bargaining agreements and working conditions are protected.

"I can't express enough how valuable this visit was," said Local 9443-01 President Chris Geary, whose members make automotive products. "Being able to reach out across countries and work together is extremely powerful."



## Oklahoma Local Votes to Stay Union

Members of Local 13-1141 in Pryor, Okla., showed solidarity and voted overwhelmingly to remain Steelworkers in a decertification election despite employer National Gypsum's long-term efforts to undermine organized labor.

The company has a long history of encouraging decertification at its U.S. facilities. The vote for the union by Local 13-141 in Pryor followed a rash of decertification votes in at least eight National Gypsum sites nationwide since 2014 when a local in Kansas decertified the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers.

National Gypsum is a gypsum board producer headquartered in Charlotte, N.C., with operations in both the United States and Canada. It currently operates 17 gypsum board factories, three paper mills, four cement board plants, and eight mines and quarries, including the world's largest in Halifax, Nova Scotia.



## USW Sues to Save Chemical Disaster Rule

The USW filed a legal challenge to the federal government's decision to gut the Chemical Disaster rule, a suite of Obama-era regulations intended to prevent chemical disasters and save lives.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) capitulated to industry demands when it rescinded crucial provisions of its risk management regulations, including requirements that companies take commonsense actions to prevent foreseeable catastrophic incidents.

"Eliminating these requirements will allow a profit-hungry industry to police itself while putting workers, first responders and the public at risk," International President Thomas M. Conway said.

"The USW spent years advocating for the Chemical Disaster Rule. Thousands of our members signed petitions imploring the EPA not to gut it. Now, we're going to court to protect our members and our communities."

The lawsuit, filed on Jan. 9, asks the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit to implement the Chemical Disaster Rule as the EPA originally wrote it before the current administration took office.

## Persad Center Workers Vote USW

Workers at Persad Center, a human service organization that serves the LGBTQ+ and HIV/AIDS communities of the Pittsburgh area, voted to join the USW.

The unit of 24 workers, ranging from therapists and program coordinators to case managers and administrative staff, announced its campaign as the Persad Staff Union last November and voted for the USW on Dec. 5.

"We strongly believe this work and our connections to our clients will only improve now that we are represented by a union," said Johanna Smith, Persad's development, communications and events associate.

## Steelworker Daughter Aces Ranger School

U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Chelsey Hibsich, stepdaughter of a retired Steelworker, is the first female airman to graduate from the Army's Ranger School at Fort Benning, Ga.

The Army Ranger Course is one of the Army's toughest leadership courses. It seeks to develop proficiency in leading squad and platoon dismount operations in around-the-clock, all-terrain and terrain challenges.

Hibsich is the stepdaughter of Gary Guralny, retired president of Local 6992 of Tonawanda, N.Y., and past chair of the USW DuPont Council.





## USW Launches New Podcast

The USW has launched a new podcast, Solidarity Works, which will focus on starting conversations about the labor movement, its past, present and future.

The debut episode featured an interview with Rapid Response Director Amber Miller, who discussed legislation USW activists have been campaigning for and what lies ahead. She touched on the need for stronger protections for unions in order to bargain good contracts and passing laws to uplift workers.

Listen to the podcast on your favorite streaming service, such as Spotify, iTunes, and Stitcher, or visit [usw.to/podcast](http://usw.to/podcast).

## Celebrating Gains for College Athletes

The USW held a fundraiser and celebration in December for the National College Players Association, which has played a pivotal role in fighting for and gaining basic rights and protections for college athletes.

The event included a tribute to retired International President Leo W. Gerard, who was the driving force behind the USW's long-running support for the NCPA.

In recent years, the NCPA helped to develop antitrust lawsuits that were the impetus for easing economic restrictions against student athletes and expansion of student athlete health care.



## ATI Bargaining Under Way

The USW's ATI bargaining committee held meetings with company representatives in Pittsburgh throughout January and February as bargaining began on a new contract.

Local union leaders, representing more than 2,000 members of 11 USW units across six states, also met face-to-face with their management counterparts to discuss plant-specific issues.

The USW's committee, led by International Vice President David McCall, proposed wage increases, pension improvements and provisions to protect affordable health care and other benefits.

Management opened discussions seeking below-standard wages and other concessions, including health care costs. The committee made progress on these issues as bargaining continued, but challenges remained as *USW@Work* went to press.

## NOTICE TO ALL EMPLOYEES COVERED BY A UNION SECURITY CLAUSE

All USW represented employees covered by a union security clause have the right, under *NLRB v. General Motors*, 373 U.S. 734 (1963), to be and remain a nonmember subject only to the duty to pay the equivalent of union initiation fees and periodic dues. Further, only such non-member employees have the right, under *Communications Workers v. Beck*, 487 U.S. 735 (1988), to limit payment of union-security dues and initiation fees to certain moneys spent on activities germane to a union's role as collective bargaining representative. This latter statutory right is embodied in the USW's Nonmember Objection Procedure.

The Procedure is available to any USW represented employee who is subject to a union security clause but who is a non-member and who objects to his or her union security fees being expended on nonrepresentational activities. Paragraph 1 of the Procedure states:

"1. Any individual, who is not a member of the United Steelworkers

and who is required as a condition of employment to pay dues to the United Steelworkers pursuant to a union security arrangement but objects to supporting ... political or ideological expenditures by the United Steelworkers which are not necessarily or reasonably incurred for the purpose of performing the duties of an exclusive collective bargaining representative shall have the right upon perfecting a notice of objection to obtain an advance reduction of a portion of such individual's dues obligation commensurate with expenditures unrelated to collective bargaining as required by law."

An eligible employee who objects to the USW expending monies for nonrepresentational activities such as charitable or political activities may choose to perfect a notice of objection under Paragraph 2 of the Procedure, which states:

"2. To perfect a notice of objection, the individual must send an individually signed notice to the International Secretary-Treasurer during the first thirty days following either the individual's initial date of hire into the USW represented unit or an anniversary date of such hiring; provided, however, that if the individual lacked knowledge of this Procedure, the

individual shall have a 30 day period commencing on the date the individual became aware of the Procedure to perfect a notice of objection; and, provided, further, that a member who resigns membership shall have the opportunity to object within the 30 day period following resignation.<sup>1</sup>

Objectors are not USW members and have no right to vote in union elections or to be a candidate, no right to participate in union meetings or activities, and no right to vote on contract ratification.

Upon perfecting properly a notice of objection, the objector is entitled to an advance reduction of a portion of his or her union security obligation commensurate with expenditures unrelated to collective bargaining, as required by law. International Secretary-Treasurer John E. Shinn has determined, based upon expenditures for the calendar year 2018 that the reduction percentage under the Procedure is 12.55% (20.64% if organizing expenditures were to be included).

There are court decisions holding that organizing activities are non-representational activities. The USW does not agree with those rulings. However, without intending to waive its position that its organizing expenditures are not subject to

objection and without intending to waive its right to assert its position if there is a challenge to the reduction percentage, the USW has deemed it expedient to apply the 20.64% figure to most current and future objectors. Therefore, an objector will be charged 79.36% of the regular dues amount. Each objector will be given a detailed breakdown between representational and non-representational activities with a report by an independent auditor.

The Procedure contains an appeals system under which challenges to the reduction percentage determination must be filed within 30 days of the Notice of Determination and are to be decided by an impartial arbitrator appointed by the American Arbitration Association. Disputed amounts are escrowed pending appeal.

While a notice must be individually signed and timely mailed, there is no form for a notice. Processing is faster, however, when the notice contains the objector's name, address, local union number, and employer.

<sup>1</sup> Any right of a resignee to pay a reduced amount under this Procedure may or may not be superseded by the resignee's check-off authorization."

## Have You Moved?

Notify your local union financial secretary, or clip out this form with your old address label and send your new address to:

USW Membership Department,  
60 Blvd. of the Allies, Pittsburgh, PA 15222

Name \_\_\_\_\_

New Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

You may also email the information to [membership@usw.org](mailto:membership@usw.org).

# STEELWORKERS KEEP ALIVE THE ART OF GLASS BLOWING

SEE PAGE 14



John Kanosky, Local 1-09  
Photos by Steve Dietz



**THERE IS STILL TIME.  
TAKE OUR MEMBERSHIP  
SURVEY AT [USWVOICES.ORG](http://USWVOICES.ORG)**



**YOUR UNION  
YOUR VOICE**