The middle class of this country is on the move. The problem is that it’s moving in the wrong direction. Instead of going up, it’s going down.

U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders
Treat TPP Like a Treaty

For many years, trade agreements have been treated like legislation, which requires a majority vote of both houses of Congress. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is a treaty, which according to the dictionary is a “formal agreement between two or more states in reference to commerce or other international relations.”

Our Constitution requires that only the Senate can ratify treaties, with a two-thirds majority vote. The House has no role. If you oppose the TPP, please write to Sen. Harry Reid, the Senate minority leader, and ask him to raise a point of order and call for a two-thirds majority vote.

Robert Holdenvenzon, San Diego

God Bless the Unions

My dad, born in 1898, got a job in the coal mines when he was a teenager. There was no union at that time, and he was forced to work in unsafe conditions. If you complained, you were fired. The boss would say, “If you don’t like it, you can quit.” If you were injured on the job, you weren’t compensated, you were fired.

I am a retiree from Rockwell International. I had a heart attack, and Rockwell forced me to retire. The company cancelled my insurance when I needed it the most. Companies like this suffer from a disease called greed, for which there is no cure.

In the early days, unions didn’t get much, but it was a start. Can you imagine what America would be like today without unions?

Andrew Shaffer, Canonsburg, Pa.

Union Busting

I do not work in a union shop, but I like to support unions if I can because I believe that our nation’s workers are losing the power and upward mobility that unions have given us historically, and I know that I have indirectly benefited from the actions of unions all through America’s history.

It’s maddening to see many states trying to pass right-to-work-for-less laws that pit workers against each other in a fight to the bottom. Sold to the taxpayers as a way to get people to compete for jobs, it is really little more than a union-busting proposal that only shifts more power and money to the “haves” from the workers. Thank you all, and keep up the good work.

Chris Graf, Willington, Conn.

Support Your Retirees

In the 1950s when I worked for the American Co. in St. Paul, Minn., I was a member of the United Steelworkers. I have been a member of a union, or a union supporter, ever since.

My husband is a pensioner from the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, and their latest contract retains all benefits for pensioners.

Keep up your struggle, and continue to support your retirees!

Amy Frazee, Colville, Wash.

Thanks to Rapid Response

I am ecstatic that our local union is accepting the USW Rapid Response program. Personally, my involvement in the program has done wonders for my courage and ability to stand up and speak in front of our union body. I have asked members to participate in future action alerts, and most have agreed that they will.

This program has lit a fire under some of our other members as well, and they are pleased to have us here, letting them know what our representatives are doing on Capitol Hill. We have formed a Facebook group and already have more than 30 members. Other leaders in our local have been speaking to members and getting results, all thanks to Rapid Response.

Chris Hunter, USW Local 13-1965 Morrilton, Ark.
For members of Local 1693 at the Louisville Slugger factory in Kentucky, every day is baseball season.

The 60 USW members there work for Hillerich & Bradsby (H&B), the family-owned company that has run the Slugger factory for 131 years. The H&B workers produce the iconic wooden bats prized by the most famous hitters in the history of the national pastime.

“We work hard, and we take pride in our bats,” USW member Terribo Kohn said as he applied brown stain to the barrels of a batch of souvenirs.

The factory, a block from the Ohio River in downtown Louisville, produces 4,000 unique types of wooden bats – from ash, maple and birch – for professional baseball games, as well as souvenir giveaways and retail sales. The workers produce, on average, 3,200 bats each day for souvenirs and retail sale and about 300 bats per day for MLB players.

**History of heavy hitters**

Rhonda Kaninberg, who has worked at the factory for 12 years, said that while H&B has about 40 competitors in the bat-making business, Slugger products stand apart from the rest.

“There are other baseball bat companies of course, but not like this, not with this history,” Kaninberg said.

From Honus Wagner and Babe Ruth to Hank Aaron and Barry Bonds, the biggest hitters in baseball history have wielded Slugger bats.

In addition to being the “official” bat of Major League Baseball (MLB), Louisville Slugger has contracts with individual major league players, including All-Stars such as Hanley Ramirez, Evan Longoria, Buster Posey, Joey Votto and Derek Jeter. The company creates bats that meet each player’s specific needs and, in return, is able to use that player’s signature on souvenir products.

**Baseball is king**

While college basketball is the most popular sport for residents of the Louisville area, baseball is king for the workers at the Slugger factory.

Kaninberg said she is a fan of the Reds in nearby Cincinnati but still feels “elated” when a player from any team scores a big hit using a Louisville Slugger.

“Working here makes you a baseball fan,” Kohn said.

On a recent April morning, just as the MLB season was getting under way, Local 1693 members were hard at work creating bats for Baltimore Orioles outfielder Adam Jones.

Brittany Ray has worked at the Slugger factory for two years. One of
her jobs is to create brands for custom bats by hand, using block letters to spell out the player and team names and bat model numbers and then to burn labels onto each bat, either directly onto the wood in the case of ash bats or with foil labels for maple and birch products.

A self-described “huge fan” of the now-retired Jeter, Ray said she took special delight in helping to produce bats for the former Yankees superstar to use in his final games.

**Brand sold to Wilson**

Slugger’s iconic status hasn’t protected H&B from financial worries. Brian Hillerich, the company’s pro bat production manager, said declining sales and quality-control issues with non-wood products (made elsewhere) led H&B to sell the Slugger brand this spring to Wilson Sporting Goods Co.

While Wilson will own the brand, H&B will continue to run the factory and will become Wilson’s exclusive supplier of wooden bats. The company also will continue to operate the adjacent museum and conduct tours of the factory, which receives 300,000 visitors each year.

One of those visitors last fall included International President Leo W. Gerard, who toured the factory and met with workers during an October trip through Kentucky.

“It hurts to say it,” Hillerich said, “but for the brand, the sale is probably the best thing that could have happened.”

USW Unit President Glen Seabolt, who has worked at the Slugger factory since 2006, said he doesn’t expect the sale to bring changes to the work environment in Louisville, where he said the local maintains an excellent relationship with management.

“The family has been good to us. We provide them with what they need,” Seabolt said. “It is going to stay that way. We’ve got to step up, but we’re going to make it.”

Gordon Nichols, president of the amalgamated USW local, said H&B announced the sale in March after about a year of rumors.

Nichols said that because Wilson is well known for its strong support of American manufacturing, he expects
the sale to ultimately be good news for workers. “Nothing has changed for USW members,” Nichols said.
Kaninberg said having the USW at her workplace has made her feel safer, especially after the sale.
“Wilson is a union company, too,” she said. “I don’t see them taking it anywhere. We feel secure.”

From hands-on to automated
The sale has been far from the only change at the H&B factory over the years.
As he inspected and placed black painted bats in plastic sleeves to prepare them for shipping, USW member George Green said a buyout offer in 2006 led to a wave of retirements that made the H&B work force significantly younger.
Still, Green said, the staff remains a good mix of newer and more experienced workers.
Over the years, the bat-making process has changed as well. For 100 years, workers made Sluggers one at a time using hand-operated lathes, and each bat took 20 to 30 minutes to complete. Now, automatic lathes perform the same functions in about 30 seconds.
The shift to automatic lathes happened gradually over a period of about four years, from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, said Danny Luckett, a 45-year employee who is the last worker remaining with the skills to make a bat by hand. Known to his co-workers as “The Legend,” Luckett said the move to a more automated system has reduced the stress on workers’ hands.
“I couldn’t do it all day anymore,” said Luckett, who joined the work force at the age of 22 and is planning to retire in June.

From forests to ball fields
Some parts of the bat-making process, though, are much the same as they were in the late 19th century.
Wood from timberlands in New York and Pennsylvania arrives at the 30,000 square-foot facility in bundles
of “billets,” or large, rounded pieces of wood. The highest-quality billets are set aside for major league bats.

The billets are fed into automatic lathes with precise settings to produce exactly the right size and shape. From there, the nubs are cut off each end, and the bats are smoothed and sanded, stained or painted, branded and then buffed to a shine before they are bagged and shipped.

Through each step of the process, a USW member handles each bat to ensure quality control.

“We still make the same thing, we just make it differently,” Luckett says. “We’re more efficient than we’ve ever been.”

Part of that efficiency is recycling the wood that is shaved off of billets during bat production. That sawdust travels out of the factory through an elaborate piping system and is eventually trucked to an Indiana farm for use as bedding in turkey coops.

“You’re Thanksgiving dinner probably slept on wood chips that came from a Louisville Slugger,” Hillerich joked.

Getting ready for the season
The factory’s busiest time is November through January, as players and fans get ready for spring training and the start of baseball season. Business spikes again in September, as pro players prepare for the playoffs or for fall and winter developmental leagues.

While about half of all MLB players still use Slugger products and remain fiercely loyal to the brand, they can be very picky about their individual bats.

“They handle them all day, every day,” said Hillerich. “If something is off by one-thousandth of an inch, they can tell.”

That attention to detail is part of what makes the dedicated USW workforce in Louisville such an essential part of the success of the Slugger brand, Seabolt said.

“We are the stewards of this brand, and we are proud of that,” he said.
More than 1,600 union members and management guests spent a week sharing stories, hearing speeches, participating in workshops and planning strategies to accomplish one of the USW’s most important missions: making sure workers are healthy and safe on the job.

“Nothing is as important as making sure our work is safe,” International President Leo W. Gerard said in his opening remarks to the 2015 Health, Safety and Environment Conference, sponsored by the USW and the Communications Workers of America (CWA).

The conference, held in Pittsburgh, is the largest union health and safety meeting in North America. The first day, March 9, was open only to USW and CWA members. Joint labor-management sessions were held the rest of the week.

Jim Walker Jr., a Local 1138 safety committee member at the Allegheny Technologies Inc. steel plants in Bagdad and Vandergrift, Pa., described the week as an excellent learning experience.

“It’s great to be here with all these union guys. We learn from each other. We share best practices. It’s just a good thing,” he said. “And it’s a good investment on the company’s end because we bring back a lot of information to the plant – the lessons we learned from each other.”

Noting that the work they do often goes unrecognized, Gerard thanked the union members who devote time and energy to the ongoing fight for better conditions where they work. He also praised management members who care enough about safety and health to attend the conference and its workshops.

“When you make sure safety equipment is actually in working order, the people who come after you won’t know that you did that, but they will go home safely,” Gerard said. “You should be proud of the work that you do. It is tremendously important and it makes a difference.”

Mourning those who died

The most solemn moment of the conference occurred on the second day. The audience watched in silence, heads bowed, as video screens displayed the names of workers killed on the job at USW and CWA-represented work sites since the last conference 18 months earlier. The list included 51 USW and three CWA fatalities.

Health, Safety and Environment Director Mike Wright said those who died were heroes, not because they lost their lives, but because they went to work every day to a job that was difficult, dangerous and ultimately deadly.

“That kind of heroism is so common, so ordinary that we don’t even recognize it until a workplace tragedy occurs and a life is lost,” Wright said.

“What price do we put on a death?” Wright asked, noting the different responses one might get from a family member, a religious leader, an attorney or an economist.

“But I suggest for us, as union members and managers, as people who care about life and death in the workplace, as people committed to safety and health, there is a more relevant measure. The value we put on a life is measured by what we are willing to do collectively to protect that life,” Wright said to sustained applause.

Oil strike issues

Gerard spent much of his keynote speech on the health and safety aspects of the USW’s national oil strike, which was underway during the conference. A tentative agreement with Shell, the industry’s lead bargainer, was announced a few days later on March 12.

It was important, he said, that the union prevail in its demand for safer conditions in the domestic refinery industry, where a recordable fire is reported, on average, once every eight days, and workers are frequently directed to work “until the point of exhaustion.”

“We need to win it for all of those people who go through refinery gates every day, and we need to win it for all the people who care about health and safety in all of our workplaces,” he said.

CWA International President Larry Cohen brought attendees to their feet when he told of CWA member Randy Rodriguez and his wife, Katherine, who joined USW members on oil picket lines in Houston, Texas.
While picketing, Katherine held a photo of her father, Ray Gonzalez, who died from burns sustained in an accident at the former British Petroleum refinery in Texas City.

“We will stand with you until we make sure no more dads die in refineries,” Cohen said.

**Trans-Pacific Partnership**

Gerard and Cohen urged the conference to oppose a pending trade agreement called the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) that would bind the United States and 11 other countries to new commitments across a wide range of contentious trade issues.

At Cohen’s urging, union members in the hall used their smart phones to call members of Congress and express opposition to Fast Track legislation that would speed the TPP through Congress with little debate and no amendment.

“If we kill Fast Track, just like if we win the struggle for health and safety, it will send a message across the world that Americans are tired of being the world’s patsies when it comes to protecting our jobs and creating good jobs,” Gerard said.

Cohen said workers on all sides of the border were victims of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and similar deals that killed jobs and depressed wages.

“We need to see Fast Track as the fight that can unite us all, whether we are immigrants or native born, whether we are in manufacturing or the service sector, whether we are environmentalists or labor,” Cohen said.

**Labor under attack**

AFL-CIO Occupational Safety and Health Director Margaret Seminario said the labor movement is under attack by right-wing ideologues who don’t believe in government, don’t think workers have rights and don’t want unions to exist.

Those right-wing forces converged in West Virginia this year to roll back legislative protections for coal miners enacted after the tragic explosion that killed 29 miners at Massey Energy’s Upper Big Branch coal mine on April 5, 2010.

“This is the kind of environment we’re now facing as we do this work,” Seminario told the conference.

At the top of the AFL-CIO’s list of projects is pressing the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to move forward on a new standard to protect workers exposed to silica dust, she said. The current rule, enacted in 1971, is outdated and ineffective.

“Under the current standard, hundreds of workers die each year and thousands are disabled, so it’s a very important issue for unions like the Steelworkers representing people in foundries and in glass where you have lots of exposure,” she said. “It’s a huge issue for millions of workers in this country.”

David Michaels, the assistant secretary of labor for OSHA, told the conference he is committed to finally updating the agency’s standard on silicosis.

“We know people are getting silicosis and are getting lung cancer at exposures that are legal under our old standard, so we are working very hard to issue a new standard. Once it goes into effect, it will save hundreds of lives.”

Michaels expressed concern about falling prices and profits in the oil refinery and steel industries, saying safety is one of the first things cut in industries where profits are depressed.

“We’re seeing layoffs across those industries. What we don’t want to see is safety going into the back seat,” he said. “We can’t let that happen just because prices and profits are down. People can’t sacrifice their lives for those issues,” he said to applause.

Michaels was introduced as plenary speaker by International Vice President Fred Redmond, who recalled his awakening to the importance of health and safety when two millwrights died on the job when he was president of a local union in Chicago.

“It really changed my perception about priorities and what is really important,” Redmond said. “I came to the conclusion that our number one priority is the safety and health of our members and co-workers. We are all our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers.”
Looking for Trouble, the USW’s new comprehensive health and safety program, is ready for rollout at local unions across the United States and Canada.

The program was unveiled at the 2015 Health, Safety and Environment Conference, held in Pittsburgh in March. There it was endorsed by Assistant Secretary of Labor David Michaels, who leads the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

“The Steelworker program, ‘Looking for Trouble,’ is a great example of how to make a safety and health management system involving management commitment and worker involvement really work,” Michaels told the conference. “I’ve read it. I’ve seen it work.”

Local unions can access summary materials and a slide show on the program by going to the USW website and searching for “Looking for Trouble.”

Looking for Trouble was chosen as the slogan over an early working title, Comprehensive Management Safety Program, because it expresses what the program is really about: finding and fixing workplace hazards that can kill, injure or sicken workers.

“We look for trouble because if we don’t, trouble will come looking for us, and somebody is going to suffer as a result,” said Mike Wright, director of the Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) Department.

The most obvious goal is to cooperate with management, when possible, to create safer and healthier workplaces by finding and fixing hazards before they lead to injury or death. That could mean mitigating risks such as unguarded machinery and improperly stored toxic chemicals or controlling explosive dust, vapors and other potential hazards.

“It’s also based on the idea that we want to go after hazards and not blame the worker,” said Wright, referring to wrong-headed, corporate-run, behavior-based safety programs that fault workers for injuries on the job.

Those behavior-based programs simply don’t work and give employers cover to hide injury and accident numbers, OSHA’s Michaels said in his remarks. He noted there is a relationship between recording injuries and preventing them.

“If you are hurt, that means there is a hazard. And if there is a hazard, it needs to be addressed,” Michaels said. “Anything that discourages a worker from reporting that hazard increases the danger to other workers.”

Because all accidents and near misses should be investigated, the USW opposes corporate programs and policies that punish workers for reporting incidents or reward workers for concealing them.

The reward-for-concealing approach is “incredibly problematic because it keeps us from finding hazards in the workplace,” said Jim Frederick, assistant director of the HSE department. “It’s difficult to correct the hazards that we know about, but it’s impossible to correct the hazards that we don’t know about.”

OSHA also is campaigning against behavior-based safety programs. “These programs don’t encourage safe work,” Michaels said. “What they do is they discourage injured workers from reporting injuries.”

Many employers purchase safety programs from vendors. Some have good elements, and some are harmful. None recognizes the legitimate role of the union in accident prevention and safety.

The USW’s program is designed to be comprehensive, flexible and practical while recognizing and respecting the knowledge, skill and dedication of USW members and union health and safety activists.

The USW is hoping that employers will see value in the program and work with local unions to implement its key elements. Nevertheless, the program is designed for all workplaces, whether or not management chooses to participate.

“Even though it is meant to be a cooperative union-management program, we believe in its principles as a union,” Wright said. “So, even in places where we do not have management’s cooperation, we intend to push to get as much into that workplace as possible.

“We would rather do it cooperatively, but we think this way of addressing safety and health is important, so we are going to do it by any means necessary.”

The USW is committed to establishing in every workplace a union health and safety committee, some or all of whose members also serve on a union-management safety committee.

Union safety committees are a requirement of the USW constitution, and joint union-management committees are becoming more common in collective bargaining agreements.

Safety and health in the workplace is typically managed by government standards issued and enforced by OSHA and the Mine Health and Safety Administration (MSHA) in the United States and the Ministry of Labour in Canada.

But not all hazards are in the rule books. Take molten metal and water, for example. Mix the two and there is a
powerful explosion as water flashes into steam and jetisons splashes of molten metal.

OSHA has no standard requiring employers to keep surfaces dry where a molten metal spill might occur even though workers have died from hot metal and water explosions in steel mills, foundries, aluminum and copper smelters and many other workplaces.

Several years ago, the HSE department reviewed a randomly selected set of fatality reports from its files and found that in almost half of the cases, one or more of the root causes did not violate any OSHA, MSHA or Canadian standards applicable to that workplace.

Yet standards work, and compliance with them is critical. When OSHA established standards for confined spaces, grain dust explosions and locking out equipment during maintenance, the death rate from those hazards dropped dramatically.

Some employers also base their safety programs around a set of simple “cardinal rules” and think they have done enough to protect a work force.

Too often, those employers become so fixed on enforcing rules and punishing violators that they overlook the hazards that the rules don’t cover, as well as impediments to following the rules.

The Looking for Trouble program is based on the ideas that rules are important and compliance with standards is critical, but they are not enough by themselves to keep workplaces safe.

“You can’t manage safety and health by just reading the rule book, by just reading the standards,” Wright said. “You’ve got to actively go out and look for problems the rule book doesn’t cover, and you’ll find plenty.”

Trouble comes in many forms, from machinery that can crush a limb, to dusts that can ignite, to awkward repetitive tasks that can cripple over time, to chemicals that can poison today or cause death from cancer later.

Staffing and workload also are safety issues, said HSE specialist Steve Sallman, who frequently hears from union members that they are required to do more with less and wear multiple hats on the job.

“We have investigated fatalities where on a paper machine, people went from a five-man crew, down to a three-man crew and those things can be just as dangerous as any other traditional hazard,” Sallman said.

Many locals may already have some of the elements of Looking for Trouble in place and can improve existing programs by negotiating or implementing the parts they do not currently include.

Health and safety activists will also recognize the influence of the USW’s successful “Triangle of Prevention” programs, which exist in refineries, chemical plants and other workplaces.

“There are no shortcuts, no gimmicks,” Wright said. “The only way to do this is with hard disciplined work.”

Three A.Q. Evans awards for outstanding accomplishments in occupational safety and health and two other safety awards were presented at the 2015 Health, Safety and Environment Conference.

In District 4, Burrows Paper Council locals 956, 1300 and 1438 in Little Falls and Lyonsdale, N.Y., won an A.Q. Evans award for their role in negotiating a settlement between Burrows and OSHA following a series of inspections prompted by high injury rates.

The settlement went beyond compliance and includes USW-provided safety and health training, full-time safety and health representatives and other improvements. As a result, USW members have a safer work environment and know the union is fighting for them.

Another Evans award was presented to locals 13173 and 8562 in District 6 at the Cameco uranium processing plant in Port Hope, Ontario. Working with the employer, the locals established an effective safety and health program that engages the membership in finding and fixing hazards. It includes education and accident investigation programs and a strong union safety committee.

Local 1114 in District 2, Milwaukee, won an Evans Award for adopting a sophisticated approach to finding and fixing hazards at a mining equipment firm, including widespread member involvement and a series of union-based health and safety training programs.

Local 9477, representing members at the U.S. Department of Energy Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in Carlsbad, N.M., won the Falkowski/Seguin award for outstanding work in environmental protection.

After an underground fire broke out on Feb. 5, 2014, local members safely evacuated co-workers, some of whom suffered smoke inhalation. The fire was followed by a radiation release that is under investigation.

The local has fought to be part of the investigation and to make sure it results in a comprehensive understanding of the accident and what must be done to protect workers, the public and the environment.

The Karen Silkwood award for union building and solidarity through health, safety and the environment was presented to Local 16506, District 6. The local has provided safety and health education to more than 13,000 high school students over the past five years.
Jason Coleman was concerned about silica dust and nickel exposure in the glass factory where he works, so he headed for a workshop on industrial air control at the 2015 Health, Safety and Environment Conference.

A union safety coordinator at the Adage glass container plant in Ruston, La., Coleman went home with valuable information on controlling worker exposure to airborne toxins and a newfound respect for the union’s health, safety and environment program.

“I learned that you truly do not have to work in fear,” he said during a break between workshops. “You can work in a healthy environment. It is possible.”

The conference was Coleman’s first. He said he is proud of his local union for negotiating attendance for two safety coordinators in their contract. “It’s an amazing experience,” he added.

Workshops are an integral part of the conference. There were 226 sessions this year, including 54 held on the union-only first day and 172 that were open to union members and management on the final four days.

The workshop catalog was geared for new and veteran safety activists with a mix of courses on broad topics including effective labor-management safety and health committees, accident investigations, accident prevention and environmental laws, among others.

Participants could take advantage of topics more specific to their individual work sites. Offerings included training on machine guarding, ergonomics, asbestos, public sector safety, gas boilers and piping, and chemical and lead exposure.

Sharing lessons learned

When not in classes, members shared experiences and the lessons they learned with other union safety representatives, often in the same industries.

“The contacts I’ve made have been priceless,” Coleman said. “There are issues and concerns that we share throughout our trade and now, where there are opportunities to improve, I can take those back and say ‘this is what we can do.’”

As far as his concern with silica dust exposure, Coleman learned that industrial ventilation – moving bad air out and good air in – is the best way to control exposure to air contaminants. He also learned that the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) performs workplace evaluations at no cost.

“It really did educate me, and there are pamphlets that I can take back to read and share,” he said.

Marshall Lake, president of Local 2603 at the Republic Steel plant in Lackawanna, N.Y., took a week’s worth of notes home to share with his local union and the plant’s management.

“Definitely, the workshops helped me a lot,” he said. “Everybody is going to get something out of this meeting.”

Specifically, Lake took home tips on conducting hazard and accident investigations along with plans to improve air quality for those who work with and around welding rods. He is also interested in the idea of using teams of members to participate in reviewing their own workplaces for hazard elimination and accident prevention.

“If they have ownership, if they are involved and come up with ideas that are functional, I can see that working in our plant and throughout the corporation,” he said.

Identify, evaluate hazards

Learning to identify and evaluate hazards was important to Jesse Pinkston, a safety committee member for Local 11228 at AGCO Corp., an agricultural equipment maker in Hesston, Kan.

Pinkston particularly enjoyed sessions on accident investigations and hazard mapping, a technique where workers combine their knowledge and skills to identify and map potential hazards.

On a personal note, the convention exposed him to the diversity of the union in the United States and Canada and the many different environments where the union represents workers.

He met union members who work outside in the elements, in foundries where the heat is intense and in other manufacturing operations that seem far more dangerous than his shop.

“It really opened my eyes,” he said.

Carl Pudlewski, a member of Local 135L at the Goodyear Dunlop facility in Tonawanda, N.Y., took classes on machine guarding and ergonomics. He also met with members from other rubber locals and exchanged information...
We’re in the tire industry, so you want to use things that work in other tire plants,” he said. “There were a lot of good fixes in the plants, things we can use in other facilities. We exchange information and ideas and steal shamelessly from each other.”

Andrea Godbolt, a member of Local 959 at the Goodyear plant in Fayetteville, N.C., said the accident investigation training will help her better perform her job as a safety committee member.

“That especially is going to benefit me,” she said. “It helped you learn how to question people, how to look for the right answer, not just the easy answer. There’s a big difference.”

Frank Cameron, another safety representative from Local 959 at Goodyear, found the class on assessing and addressing asbestos to be helpful. He was particularly impressed with the experience and knowledge of the presenters.

“These are fellow brothers and sisters in the union who want to give us the best information to keep our people safe and protected as much as possible,” he said.

Cameron was also excited that conference organizers accepted some of his suggestions from previous years, particularly with regards to material for rubber workers.

“I was very impressed that they are moving forward instead of staying stale or moving backwards,” he said. “This was a wonderful conference.”

When Diana Mejia first came to the United States from Colombia, she worked as a day laborer and in a factory polishing silver until her right hand was caught and mangled by a machine.

Mejia filed a complaint with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) over her injury, and after the agency inspected the factory, she was fired.

That experience, mixed with the exasperation of trying to assimilate in a new country, led her to cofound the Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center in New Jersey.

Today, with assistance from OSHA and the USW Tony Mazzocchi Center for Health, Safety and Environmental Education (USW-TMC), her center offers 10-hour OSHA safety training courses in Spanish for immigrants who work as day laborers. The partnership, supported by a grant from the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences, trained 1,000 workers last year.

Mejia said the training and OSHA certification has created job opportunities for immigrants she serves and has helped to make them feel more comfortable in a country where they may not understand the language and customs.

“It’s like opening a window of hope,” she said. “We are all workers. Safety and health is a collective effort. We all have to respect each other. We all have to work together.”

Helping day laborers

The USW invited representatives of dozens of worker centers that it similarly helps to the 2015 Health, Safety and Environment Conference. This educational exchange was important since Latino immigrants are at greater risk of work-related fatalities than any other group, according to the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Participants included Wind of the Spirit and the National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON), an umbrella organization of 44 worker centers.

Make the Road New York, one of the nation’s largest worker centers serving Latino and working-class communities, attended, as did the Interfaith Worker Justice, a Chicago-based nonprofit religious organization and network of worker centers.

Arturo Archila, a senior OSHA trainer for Make the Road, said the training offered through the USW-TMC partnership is a valuable tool for workers who cannot afford the normal tuition of $400 and up.

“We are filling a need,” he said. “We are breaking barriers and we are giving tools to the immigrant community to market themselves as aware, empowered and safe workers.”
In a letter to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), USW staffer Steve Sallman asked about the unequally applied rights of union and non-union workers to assistance on safety and health inspections.

USW Health and Safety Representative Sallman was seeking an OSHA rule on whether workers without a collective bargaining agreement could authorize a person who is affiliated with a union or community organization to act as their representative under the federal Occupational Safety and Health Act. This would include “representing the employee(s) as a personal representative” and “accompanying the employee on an OSHA inspection in a non-unionized workplace,” Sallman wrote.

Sallman also asked whether an individual who was filing an OSHA complaint on behalf of a non-union employee could act as a “walk-around representative” during an OSHA inspection.

OSHA replies

OSHA said yes. Richard Fairfax, a now-retired deputy assistant secretary of labor for OSHA, replied that union representatives are welcome, even at work sites where unions have no official standing or representative role.

OSHA allows workers at establishments without collective bargaining agreements to designate who will act on their behalf during inspections.

But the rule was not consistently applied, and Sallman wrote the letter to OSHA in frustration after being denied access on several occasions when his help had been requested.

During the USW’s 2015 Health, Safety and Environment Conference, Margaret Seminario, the AFL-CIO’s director of Occupational Safety and Health, noted the importance of Sallman’s question and OSHA’s reply.

“And so now, because of Steve Sallman, and the work of many unions pushing forward on this, unorganized workers, unrepresented workers, can ask you to act on their behalf,” Seminario told union activists.
Every April 1, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services receives a flood of applications for H-1B visas from employers seeking to bring skilled “guest workers” into the country.

To mark the opening of the always oversubscribed visa lottery this year, the AFL-CIO released a report documenting abuse of the H-1B program by Walmart, the nation’s largest retailer. The report is titled “After Decimating U.S. Manufacturing, Walmart Takes Aim at the Information Technology Sector.” It claims Walmart is applying the same cost-cutting and outsourcing strategies that crippled U.S. manufacturing to the information technology sector, a source of good, middle-class jobs.

The AFL-CIO said its report contains strong evidence that Walmart and its contractors rely on the H-1B work visa program to meet the company’s routine needs for information technology (IT) labor, potentially displacing U.S. workers.

The report reveals how Walmart has quietly backed corporate lobbying groups pushing to expand the program and triple the number of available H-1B visas.

“At a time when we face unprecedented levels of inequality and decades of wage stagnation, it is irresponsible to expand access to employment-based temporary work programs that will continue to hold down wages, increase worker vulnerability and reduce social mobility for deserving workers,” AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said.

**American workers first**

The H-1B program allows U.S. companies to bring skilled “guest workers” to the United States for up to 6 years. However, the requirement for companies to search for American workers before turning to foreign labor is not effectively enforced.

Current law limits to 65,000 the number of foreign nationals who may be issued a visa or otherwise provided H-1B status each year, a cap that is quickly hit after the lottery opens.

While the use of H-1B work visas is commonplace at technology companies and universities, the AFL-CIO said Walmart was the only brick and mortar retailer to use a substantial number of H-1B work visas to hire IT workers.

The report accused Walmart of driving down standards in the U.S. tech industry by using H-1Bs visas and contractors excessively and violating the spirit, if not the letter, of the visa program. This keeps corporate costs low and allows for IT guest workers to be paid less.

The number of H-1B applications for IT workers in Bentonville, Ark., where Walmart’s headquarters and technology center are located, continues to grow, the report found, suggesting that recent U.S. science, technology, math and engineering (STEM) graduates lose out on IT jobs.

Walmart filed 1,800 petitions for H-1B visas in IT-related occupations between 2007 and 2014, the years of the study. H-1B visa holders work for Walmart in areas such as software development, data management and system maintenance.

Over the same seven years, IT contractors filed almost 15,000 petitions for H-1B visas for work in Bentonville. The AFL-CIO said it verified that Walmart uses controversial outsourcing contractors including Infosys, Cognizant and Wipro that operate globally.

The AFL-CIO said many of the IT guest workers participating in the six-year program are denied a path to citizenship, a finding that undermines arguments advanced by the corporate lobbyists who are pushing to expand the program.

Walmart and its contractors rarely apply for green cards for H-1B visa workers. In some years, they submit no green card applications at all, said the AFL-CIO.

In arguing for reform, Trumka said at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing that the current H-1B visa program “allows employers to stifle wages, create a captive work force and make previously full-time jobs insecure and temporary.”
USW oil workers seeking safer workplaces for themselves and their neighbors stood up to one of the world’s richest and most powerful industries with the largest refinery work stoppage in 35 years.

The unfair labor practice strike began Feb. 1 at nine refineries and related facilities in California, Kentucky, Texas and Washington, and expanded twice before a tentative four-year agreement was reached March 12 with Royal Dutch Shell, the lead bargainer for the industry.

“We salute the solidarity exhibited by our membership,” International President Leo W. Gerard said. “There was no way we could have won vast improvements in safety and staffing without it.”

The agreement accomplished major goals as directed by the USW’s oil conference last October, including notable new language on safety and health, wage gains, health care cost sharing maintenance and no retrogression on previously negotiated contracts. It was approved by the union’s lead negotiators and the National Oil Bargaining Policy (NOBP) Committee.

At its peak, the unfair labor practice strike involved nearly 7,000 USW-represented workers at 12 refineries and three related facilities that account for about one fifth of domestic refining capacity.

The strikers put themselves on the line for a national pattern contract that, once fully ratified and implemented, will cover 30,000 represented workers at over 230 facilities, including 65 U.S. refineries and dozens of oil terminals, pipelines and petrochemical plants.

The agreement with Shell set a national pattern on wages, benefits and working conditions, but did not immediately end all of the work stoppages.

Each local union, whether on strike or not, was required to bargain a contract with their employer that incorporates the terms of the national agreement and resolves local issues specific to their plant.

By April 1, most of the refinery workers who struck had ratified new agreements that fit the pattern and were back at work or preparing to return to work.

Employers who still refuse to present fair agreements included LyondellBasell Industries NV’s Houston, Texas, refinery, BP Plc’s Toledo, Ohio, refinery, and Marathon Petroleum’s Galveston Bay refinery in Texas City, Texas, and a refinery in Catlettsburg, Ky.
Safety issues were central to the negotiations given the clear-cut potential for danger in refineries, where crude oil is processed into gasoline, diesel fuel, heating oil, kerosene and other flammable products. It’s a working atmosphere of high temperatures, high pressures, toxic chemicals and gases.

The union argued that many locations are critically understaffed and accused the industry of demanding excessive overtime that leaves workers fatigued and prone to accidents instead of scheduling more workers for fewer hours.

The settlement called for the immediate review of staffing and workloads with USW safety personnel involved at every facility. Daily maintenance and repair work was another critical issue that was addressed.

“The new agreement calls for joint review on the local level of future craft worker staffing needs,” said International Vice President Tom Conway. “Included are hiring plans to be developed in conjunction with recruitment and training programs.”

The tentative agreement called for yearly wage increases as well as for maintaining the current cost-sharing ratio for health care insurance coverage.

“Preserving no-retrogression clauses in our agreements was also an objective established by our policy conference and we accomplished that, too,” said International Vice President Gary Beevers, who oversees the union’s oil sector.

Shell initially refused but later agreed to continue no-retrogression language that binds companies to accept previous agreements with the industry without sliding backwards.

“There was no way we could turn our backs to the accomplishments of prior contract negotiations,” Beevers added. “We refused to relinquish 50 years of progress in NOBP bargaining.”

In addition to contract issues, the strike was called over unfair labor practices that included bad faith bargaining and the refusal to bargain over mandatory subjects, undue delays in providing information to the union, impeded bargaining, and threats issued to workers if they joined the ULP strike.

The strike began after Shell refused to continue bargaining beyond the midnight Feb. 1 deadline even though the union was prepared to continue talking.

“We told Shell that we were willing to continue bargaining for a fair agreement that would benefit the workers and the industry, but they just refused to return to the table,” Beevers recalled.

The initial targets of the strike included a Shell refinery and laboratory in Deer Park, Texas; two Marathon refineries and a co-generation power plant in Texas City, Texas, and Cattlesburg, Ky.; Tesoro refineries in Anacortes, Wash., Martinez, Calif., and Carson, Calif., and a LyondellBasell refinery in Houston, Texas.

After a week of little progress at the bargaining table, the strike was expanded to about 1,000 members of Local 7-1 at the BP refinery in Whiting, Ind., and some 340 members of Local 346-3 at the BP-Husky joint venture refinery in Oregon, Ohio, near Toledo.

In its fourth week, the strike expanded again to include the Motiva Enterprises refinery in Port Arthur, Texas, and a Shell chemical plant and three refineries owned and operated by Motiva Enterprises, a joint venture between Shell and Saudi Refining Inc., a subsidiary of Saudi Aramco.

Leading up to the negotiations, local unions underwent mobilization training and prepared for bargaining by conducting member surveys, gathering home email addresses and showing videos about the bargaining process and safety problems in the industry.

At the NOBP conference last October, delegates from each oil unit reviewed contract priorities suggested by members in the surveys and developed contract proposals in the union’s company councils.

After debate, discussion and compromise, delegates voted on the national oil bargaining policy that was presented to Shell at the start of bargaining this year.

The Strategic Campaigns department helped to engage members in the bargaining process and get Communications and Action Teams and other local member-to-member distribution networks up and running.
More than 3,100 USW members remain on strike over unfair labor practices (ULP) at four refineries and one co-generation plant.

As USW@Work went to press, several local unions continued to struggle with employers that refused to resolve local issues or accept the National Oil Bargaining (NOB) pattern agreement that the USW reached with Shell Oil Co. on March 12.

The USW and the locals have filed numerous unfair labor practice charges against these companies with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB).

Marathon Galveston Bay Refinery

The 1,100 members of Local 13-1 who work at this refinery remain on strike as Marathon insists on eliminating health and safety measures instituted after a 2005 explosion killed 15 workers and injured more than 170.

After Marathon bought the refinery from BP two years ago, the corporation killed the USW’s Triangle of Prevention (TOP) program and a labor-management partnership instituted in 1996. Now Marathon is trying to cut union health and safety representatives.

Marathon gave Local 13-1 its “last, best, and final” offer on April 8, but no vote was taken and the parties continued to meet at press time.

Members of Local 13-1 walked out on Feb. 1, the first day of the strike.

Marathon Houston Green Co-generation Facility

As USW@Work went to press, a tentative agreement had been reached covering 42 members of Local 13-1 who work at Marathon’s South Houston Green Power co-generation facility.

LyondellBasell Houston Refining

The 500 members of USW Local 13-227 who walked out at LyondellBasell on Feb. 1 charged the company with additional unfair labor practices in April.

The local filed its 12th ULP charge on April 20, accusing the company of failing to bargain in good faith. The local charged that the company prematurely declared an impasse, refused to bargain over mandatory subjects and illegally changed the terms and conditions of employment unilaterally.

Members rejected LyondellBasell’s “last, best and final” offer, but submitted new proposals that made significant movement to resolve disputes. Despite that, the company asserted there was a bargaining impasse and implemented the rejected offer.

The company’s demand to eliminate premium pay is a major point of contention. The local has rejected the company’s proposal because premium pay provides a disincentive for the company to schedule onerous and dangerous overtime.

BP Whiting

As USW@Work went to press, a tentative agreement had been reached covering about 1,100 members of Local 7-1 who work at BP’s Whiting, Ind., refinery.

BP Husky Toledo

The 340 members of USW Local 1-346, who took to picket lines on Feb. 7, are battling an attempt by BP Husky Toledo to eliminate arbitrations compiled since 2001, including one that could set an industry precedent on filling craft vacancies.

The company also has tried to eliminate some of the local union’s bargaining rights and has refused to accept the NOB pattern.

ExxonMobil Beaumont

The ExxonMobil Beaumont, Texas, refinery is operating under a rolling, 24-hour extension of the existing contract, but the company refuses to accept the NOB pattern agreement.
The American steel industry is again in deep crisis, shedding jobs by the thousands as China and other foreign producers flood the United States with excess steel, crushing prices and grabbing market share.

Faced with a wave of layoffs in steel communities across the nation, the USW is calling on Congress to stop the dumping of illegally subsidized foreign steel and reject any future trade deals that will further hasten the domestic industry’s demise.

“America’s steel sector and its workers are being systematically targeted by our trading partners that use the U.S. market as their dumping ground,” International Vice President Tom Conway told the bipartisan Congressional Steel Industry Caucus on March 26.

Washington is doing little to help and is only making matters worse by preparing to sign the massive new Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade pact with 12 countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

The proposed TPP will increase the industry’s problems. “Not only does it fail to address the key issues of currency manipulation and global overcapacity, but it will increase the incentives to outsource production and diminish the incentives to produce here,” Conway said.

Conway urged lawmakers to rewrite U.S. trade laws to truly protect American workers, their employers and communities. He specifically called for Congress to review the injury standard used by the International Trade Commission (ITC) to determine if trade relief is necessary.

Proof requires injury
Before American workers can get relief, they must prove to the ITC that they were injured by bad trade. That means jobs must be lost and communities ruined before trade officials can act.

“The simple truth is, when we win a case, we simply stabilize the market. We rarely get back to where we were,” Conway testified. “We are ratcheting down our industrial sectors into oblivion.”

To protect jobs, the USW files trade cases year after year to fend off subsidized and dumped products from a broad range of countries. But the system is broken.

“Our competitors know how easy it is to grab market share, how terribly long it takes our system to respond, and that the only way we can win – because of the way the ITC views the concept of ‘injury’ – is to let them flood our market and steal our jobs,” Conway said.

Trade cases currently move along two parallel tracks.

The ITC, an autonomous federal agency, determines whether an industry is facing harm, looking at company profit as an indicator. The U.S. Department of Commerce, meanwhile, decides whether dumping has occurred and if foreign competitors were subsidized. Both agencies must rule affirmatively before duties can be imposed.

Conway called for a discussion on what injury means in the context of trade rules. When the USW files a trade complaint, it can take as long as 18 months for a decision, and, if the union wins, victory can be hollow.

“Our communities have been wiped out. Our jobs have been lost, and the investments the companies made are not realized,” Conway said.

Bad trade the culprit
At the hearing, steel company executives and trade associations all fingered bad trade as the cause of the job cuts. Foreign firms, particularly those operating in non-capitalist countries, are violating international trade regulations.

The main culprit is China, whose massive steel industry produces as much steel as the rest of the world combined and more than four times what America produced at its peak in the 1970s.
As economic growth slows in China, its excess metal supply is washing up overseas, and not just in the United States. The European Union, Korea, Australia, and even labor-cheap India are investigating whether China is dumping steel in their countries illegally.

Conway said leaders in Washington, the current and previous administrations included, have done nothing except talk. Despite global overcapacity of steel production, China is in its 12th five-year plan calling for expansion of its steel sector. Conway noted that the 13th five-year plan, now in development, is expected to do the same.

"For us to continue to walk past that overcapacity is just killing us here, and we are getting hammered by South Korea, by Turkey, by Brazil, by all these other nations, and we don’t seem to have a comprehensive approach,” he said.

While illegal imports have spiked, the idled production capacity at U.S. mills has grown to the highest rate since the 1990s, another period of crisis when much of the domestic industry was lost. Bloomberg, citing company sources, reported 32 percent of domestic capacity is offline.

“The last time we were at these levels, nearly half of American steel companies disappeared,” U.S. Steel President and CEO Mario Longhi said. “Today, across the country, once again, mills are idled. Plants continue to be shut down. American workers are laid off.”

Speakers expressed concern about the effect on national security if America can’t make its own steel for guns and tanks. It is worth remembering, Longhi said, that in World War II, U.S. Steel produced, among other things, 90 percent of the steel used to make over 21 million helmets.

“We do not build a steel plant in an emergency,” such as war, he told lawmakers. Instead, he said, “we rely on it” to already exist and quickly fulfill national needs.

Here’s how John Ferriola, chief executive of Nucor, a non-union steel company based in Charlotte, N.C., explained what is happening to the industry:

“Blatant foreign government support of their steel industries has resulted in a glut of global steel production. A brazen disregard for international trade rules has led to the dumping of steel products in our market. As a result, one in three tons of steel sold in the U.S. today is produced abroad by less efficient, less safe, and less environmentally friendly countries. Our government must take a much tougher line with countries that break the law.”

U.S. Steel job cuts

The caucus heard testimony on the crisis just a few days after U.S. Steel announced that it would temporarily idle its entire Granite City Works in Illinois at a cost of 2,080 middle-class jobs.

By March, at U.S. Steel alone, Conway said, about 5,500 steelworkers had received federal WARN layoff notices, were working reduced workweeks or were laid off in Alabama, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Ohio and Pennsylvania. Other companies, including ArcelorMittal, have also announced job cuts.

A week after the hearing, U.S. Steel announced it will dramatically slow production at its Minntac facility in Mountain Iron, Minn., starting June 1. The decision will idle some 700 Steelworkers, nearly half of the 1,500 people who work at the taconite mine and processing center.

“Global influences in the market, including a high level of imports, unfairly traded products and reduced steel prices, continue to have an impact,” the company said in a statement.

That problem is exacerbated by lower demand for steel in the U.S. energy sector. Lower oil prices reduced exploration and drilling, and, as a result, cut the demand for pipe and related steel products.

USW members have lost good manufacturing jobs and market share in rebar, in pipe used in the oil and gas industry, in stainless, wire rod, electrical steel and in other commodities such as copper, tires and paper.

“And this keeps rippling up week after week after week,” Conway said. “Every one of those layoffs can link itself, tie itself back to trade problems and this surge of imports on us right now.”
The United States is challenging China before the World Trade Organization (WTO) on illegal subsidies it grants to a broad range of export industries.

The WTO challenge stems from a trade complaint filed by the USW in 2012 and accuses China of supporting seven key export industries with almost $1 billion in illegal subsidies over three years.

This support from the government makes Chinese-produced goods artificially cheap, which kills American manufacturing and jobs.

International President Leo W. Gerard called the challenge, initiated by U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Michael Froman, “an important step” in the effort to combat China’s illegal trade practices.

“The Obama administration has worked hard to get China to play by the rules. The Chinese catalog of barriers is voluminous and taking action is a slow, grueling process,” Gerard said. “But this broad-based effort will help dismantle a web of mechanisms designed to game the system and help establish a more level playing field for hard-working Americans.”

Industries targeted by China for export subsidies include textiles, agriculture, apparel and footwear, specialty chemicals, medical products, hardware and building materials, light industry and advanced materials and metals including specialty steel, titanium and aluminum.

“The USW has members in a number of these industries whose jobs have been lost or are at risk because of China’s practices,” Gerard added. “It appears that China will stop at nothing to continue to grow its economy at our expense.”

Consultations sought

In February, Ambassador Froman announced the government was seeking consultation with China over the subsidy program, which, he said, has potential ramifications for important American industries from coast to coast.

Consultations are a first step toward bringing a formal case against China. The USTR said it will try to reach a settlement with China in those discussions at the WTO. If that fails, the United States can ask the WTO to rule on the dispute.

“In our view, this program violates the commitment China made when it joined the WTO not to provide certain export subsidies,” Froman said. “In doing so, it injures American workers, farmers, ranchers, and businesses – really anyone who plays by the rules and wants to compete fairly, on the merits of their hard work and the quality of their products.”

China, the world’s second largest economy after the United States, joined the WTO in 2001 with promises to open its markets to foreign imports and restrict subsidies and other government-provided advantages to exported goods, the USTR said in a statement.

The subsidies case, one of a number of trade disputes the United States has with China, underscores the economic tensions between the world’s two largest economies.

The U.S. trade deficit with China set another record in 2014, rising 23.9 percent to $342.6 billion. The trade gap with China has been America’s biggest deficit since 2000 when China surpassed Japan in that category.

Free, discounted services

The complaint accuses China of providing free and discounted services like information technology, product design and worker training to industries that aim their products at the export market.

WTO rules ban virtually all export subsidies as a way of discouraging member nations from trying to buy market share for their companies in other countries.

Froman said China designates certain companies in the targeted sectors as “demonstration bases,” contingent on them exporting their products.

Once designated, the companies are eligible for subsidized
services. A designated textile company, for example, might receive subsidized information technology (IT) services, product design services and worker training.

“All of these services, provided for free or at a discount, undermine fair competition,” Froman said.

The effort was triggered by a complaint filed by the USW in 2012 over Chinese export subsidies in the auto parts sector, another area where the union represents members.

“Three years ago, the USW outlined a case to address Chinese export subsidies in the auto parts sector, which put China on the path to export $100 billion in auto parts to the United States. This caused massive disruption and pain among thousands of USW members employed in this sector,” Gerard said.

**Subsidy program enlarged**

After requesting consultations with China on auto and auto parts subsidies, the USTR’s office became concerned that China was funding a subsidy program that included many other industries.

“The Obama administration called China on the carpet about their subsidies at the time of the USW’s filing, and China appeared to scale back in that sector,” Gerard said. “China now, however, appears to have broadened the program.”

The complaint came as the Obama administration was pressing Congress to grant it Fast Track, also called Trade Promotion Authority, a set of rules that ensure trade agreements can speed through Congress with little debate, no amendment and no real chance for the public to have a say.

Fast Track would presumably pave the way for a proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement being negotiated among the United States and 11 countries in the Asia-Pacific region including Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam.

With Fast Track, only a handful of people have the power to make decisions about trade deals that involve such things as food safety regulations, human and worker rights, and the protection of family-supporting domestic jobs.

So far, trade deals like the TPP and North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) before it have fueled historic trade deficits and left America’s trading partners with “bags of U.S. dollars and millions of American jobs,” Gerard said. “More of the same will yield only more outsourced and off-shored jobs and shattered dreams.”

To secure and expand U.S. tire building jobs, USW officers obtained a commitment from Goodyear Tire & Rubber to invest in U.S. plants an amount comparable to what it will spend to construct a new tire plant in Mexico.

When Goodyear announced last year that it would build a new plant in “the Americas,” the USW knew that it wouldn’t be in the United States. So the union immediately began work to safeguard good, family-supporting, tire-building jobs in the United States.

“We secured significant and specific capital improvements and expansion commitments from the company to ensure that existing USW plants continue to be a vital and expanding part of the company’s manufacturing footprint,” said International Vice President Tom Conway, who leads the union’s Goodyear bargaining team.

What the USW won from Goodyear is in addition to the $700 million that the current labor agreement requires the corporation to spend on U.S. facilities.

USW officials expressed disappointment when Goodyear formally announced in April that it would construct the new plant in Mexico, particularly because USW members at Goodyear have worked tirelessly for the company’s profitability. “Together we worked hard to help turn the company around,” said International President Leo Gerard.

The USW led the successful trade fight in 2009 to stop a devastating flood of illegally subsidized tires imported from China. And the USW now has renewed that struggle as China, freed from the time-limited trade sanctions imposed in the 2009 case, resumed dumping tires in the U.S. market, again threatening U.S. tire companies.

“Our efforts have significantly contributed to the return to prosperity for the company’s North American operations,” said Secretary-Treasurer Stan Johnson, who heads the union’s rubber and plastics sector. “That makes Goodyear’s decision to build a new plant in Mexico particularly troubling. Unfortunately, in today’s world of manufacturing and finance, that’s increasingly the decision corporations make. Our misguided trade policies drive our companies to produce outside the United States with Wall Street reaping the benefits.”

The USW has reached out to its counterpart in Mexico and is working to ensure Goodyear recognizes the rights of workers there to join a union of their choice without interference from managers.
More than 600 USW activists representing local unions across the country converged in Washington, D.C., at the end of the cherry blossom season in mid-April for the USW’s 2015 Rapid Response and Legislative Conference.

Many participants were attending the conference for the first time, like Doug Spencer from Local 6787 at ArcelorMittal Burns Harbor, who was eager to learn as much as possible to educate, empower and engage his brothers and sisters back at home.

“I find it exciting to learn more effective ways to get myself involved and get others involved,” he said. “Our Next Generation and Women of Steel committees partner together for many events, and I plan to share my experience with them.”

Others have been active in Rapid Response for years and have specific tasks to accomplish, like Local 1899 Rapid Response Committee Chairman Terry Biggs, a third-generation Steelworker from U.S. Steel Granite City Works.

“My company issued us a 60-day notice of its intent to idle my plant due to bad trade policies,” Biggs said, “so we’re here to deliver 1,500 letters from Granite City Works employees to Congressman Mike Bost asking for his help opposing Fast Track.”

“We can’t afford another free trade deal that doesn’t put American workers first.”

20 years of activism

This year, the USW Rapid Response program marks 20 years of building strong communication networks that educate, empower and engage union members on important political, legislative and other issues.

In his opening comments to the conference, International Secretary-Treasurer Stan Johnson, who has been involved with Rapid Response since it began, reflected on two decades of activists writing letters, placing telephone calls and visiting congressional offices, staging rallies, and most importantly, fighting for union members, their families and communities.

“In the early years, we fought bad trade deals, took on a crisis in our steel industry and worked hard to defeat Fast
Johnson said, acknowledging the obvious déjà vu moment. “Sound familiar?”

In addition to the near-constant need to lobby Congress over trade issues, Rapid Response defends overtime, seeks safer workplaces and fights cuts to Social Security and Medicare. It also defends the right to organize and bargain collectively.

“We start off strong by reflecting on the positive difference we make every single day,” Johnson said. “Even when we only prevent the bad legislation from taking hold, we’re holding the line for workers everywhere.”

**Wellstone Award for Sanders**

International President Leo W. Gerard then took the podium to present U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) a Wellstone Award for his lifelong commitment to improving the lives of workers and rebuilding the middle class in America.

In his address to the conference, Sanders explained the problems caused by sustained high levels of real unemployment and the decline of median family income. He noted that this is an era when corporate profits and worker productivity are at all-time highs—an era when a handful of the top hedge fund managers earn as much as 400,000 public school teachers combined.

“The middle class of this country is on the move,” he said. “The problem is that it’s moving in the wrong direction. Instead of going up, it’s going down.”

Finally, and fittingly, Sanders recounted the country’s long and gruesome history of failed trade policy and free trade agreements. These agreements have resulted in massive trade deficits, 60,000 factories closed and a million jobs lost in the past ten years alone.

He challenged the audience to deliver a loud and clear message to Congress and the administration during lobby visits.

“Do not pass Fast Track and do not pass the disastrous Trans-Pacific Partnership! Enough!”

**Unfair trade hurts communities**

Many of the conference participants were already uncomfortably familiar with the consequences of unfair and often illegal foreign trade, even before receiving briefings to inform their legislative visits.

Local 4708 President Spencer Terrel and others have seen the ugly side of globalization since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed 21 years ago by Canada, Mexico and the United States.

“I’m from Logan, Ohio, and we used to have two Goodyear plants,” he said. “They are both shut down, and my facility recently announced that they were sending half our jobs to Mexico.”

Terrel came to the conference with an appointment at the office of U.S. Rep. Steve Stivers (R-Ohio) to see if the congressman would be willing to help prevent the job losses at his plant.

“I come from an area of upstate New York that has lost three large paper mills that were good, community-supporting jobs, and now the mills are completely gone,” said Local 956 President Jack Vander Baan from Burrows Paper Company in Lyons Falls. “We definitely need to send a strong message that Fast Track and TPP will just kill more jobs.”

Charleeka Thompson from Local 13-434, attending her first Rapid Response and Legislative Conference, has seen the population of her hometown of El Dorado, Ark., drop from 30,000 in 1986 to 18,000 in 2011.

“Unfair trade has changed my community in the worst possible way,” she said. “Plants like Cooper Tire and Pilgrim’s Pride closed, so we have declined instead of prospered.”

**Opportunities to learn**

Workshops provided specific tools for each conference participant to work on skills, depending on the needs of their local. Topics ranged from “Rapid Response Basics,” to “Running for Office,” all aimed at improving the union’s ability to mobilize on every level.

George Walsh, a member of Local 10-00086 at Merck in West Point, Pa., came to the conference interested in improving his knowledge and skills to communicate the union’s message more effectively.

“I’m always looking for ways to connect the dots for my membership and show how bad trade deals affect our future,” he said. “The statistics on job losses are always amazing to me and always make a huge impression.”
In all, about 600 Steelworkers attended workshops and received information and materials to make lobbying against Fast Track as effective as possible. Some of the discussions included strategies for reaching out to allies in the community as well as other USW groups, including SOAR, Next Generation and Women of Steel.

Bob Adkins, a member of SOAR from District 8, believes that the fight against unfair trade can unite communities like his hometown of Huntington, W.Va., which has seen a decline in population and an increase in poverty.

“We can win this war by getting everyone involved,” Adkins said. “Instead of dividing by gender, age and race, we must find our common ground and be a powerful force against trade agreements that accelerate the race to the bottom.”

Local 959 Rapid Response Committeeman Joe Smith from Goodyear in Fayetteville, N.C., shared some advice for new Rapid Response activists.

“On one of my first experiences, I was told to not let a congressman or senator intimidate me,” he said. “I was told to walk the halls on the hill like we owned the place, because we do; our tax dollars built all of the buildings on Capitol Hill.”

Lobby and rally day

After two days of preparation, 600 USW delegates made their way to Capitol Hill.

Local 608 President John Duggar from Clearwater Paper in Lewiston, Idaho, has been active in Rapid Response for about eight years and knows that his congressman and senators are unlikely to vote against Fast Track. Nevertheless, he wanted to talk to them armed with facts about the negative effects of previous trade agreements on the middle class.

“There’s less work for everyone, and it will get worse if Fast Track is passed,” Duggar told them. “More jobs will be sent overseas.”

“I’m from Arkansas, so my group spoke to Senators Tom Cotton and John Boozman and Congressman Bruce Westerman. I have never met them before; most of them are new to Capitol Hill,” reported Charleeka Thompson after her first day lobbying. “For the most part, they were undecided on the issue we presented to them, but they definitely know where we stand.”

The highlight of the week for many Steelworkers at the conference was a massive call to action rally at Upper Senate Park with more than a dozen members of the U.S. House of Representatives, four members of the U.S. Senate and labor and environmental allies.

“Tell your representatives to let the past guide them on Fast Track,” Gerard said. “Every previous trade deal has resulted in a net job loss in this country.”

Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.) received a Wellstone Award at the rally, where every speaker gave strong testimony about why they oppose Fast Track.

“The voices of workers echoed through the halls of Congress and at our rally to declare U.S. trade deals have been nothing more than broken promises, lost jobs and closed factories that are wiping out middle-class American families,” Gerard said.

“When I get home, I will tell everyone how more than 1,200 people from different unions came together to fight Fast Track and rally,” Vander Baan said. “We had a very informative week, learned a ton of information and had excellent speakers.”

“I think it’s very important that we make sure our congressional representatives know where we stand on issues that affect us,” he said.

George Walsh from Local 10-00086 said the timing of the conference and rally were perfect.

“The timing of this conference could be a key factor to defeating Fast Track,” he said. “When like-minded activists get together at the Rapid Response conferences, we can accomplish our goals.”

Bringing it home

The battle against Fast Track, with thousands of jobs at stake, is too important to fight in Washington, D.C., alone. Before the conference even ended, the union put out an action call for anti-Fast Track events to take place across the country on and around an April 18 national day of action.

“I’ve learned so much from this conference and plan to get my local engaged and more active in talking with their senators and congressmen,” Thompson said. “Most people don’t understand how much influence they have when we put pressure on these representatives.”

“I wish I could have shared the experience with my 12-year-old son,” she said. “He is bright, and I want to keep him informed. It starts at home.”

Local 1241 President Chris Ormes from American Fuji Seal in Bardstown, Ky., knows that if the USW hopes to stop the loss of thousands of family supporting, community sustaining jobs to future bad trade agreements, Rapid Response must lead the fight.

“I’ve always believed that Rapid Response is the biggest tool we have as a union to protect our rights while preserving the quality of life we enjoy as union members,” Ormes said. “It also teaches those who want to get involved the basic skills and knowledge they need to become leaders in our movement.”
A populist movement has grown up around the country to build opposition to the “fast tracking” through Congress of the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the largest trade agreement in history.

The AFL-CIO and the Steelworkers have teamed up with like-minded groups to defeat Fast Track, also called Trade Promotion Authority.

In March and April alone, hundreds of organizations sponsored rallies, press events, phone banks, door-knocking and other activities culminating with a national day of action on April 18. City councils in Seattle, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and elsewhere passed resolutions calling on Congress to reject the Fast Track proposal.

Over 86,000 calls were made to members of Congress, according to the AFL-CIO, while over 40,000 people signed a national petition to stop Fast Track. Around the country more than 400 events were organized in congressional districts.

“The AFL-CIO doesn’t just oppose fast track, we’re fighting to kill it. And we’re fighting to win,” AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said.

The TPP is a massive, controversial free trade agreement pushed by big corporations and negotiated behind closed doors by officials from the United States and 11 other countries – Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam.

The TPP would expand the disastrous North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) model that has spurred massive U.S. trade deficits and job loss and put downward pressure on wages while creating unprecedented levels of inequality.

It would replicate NAFTA’s special protections for companies that offshore U.S. jobs. TPP negotiators have used the 2011 South Korean free trade agreement, under which jobs have been lost and trade deficits have surged, as the template for the TPP.

“The progressive movement could not be more united, more focused, more committed to holding our leaders accountable for the actions they take in Washington than we are right now in the fight against Fast Track Authority for the TPP,” said Neil Sroka, a spokesman for Democracy for America, a national political action committee.
The USW stood up against Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker’s latest attack on workers, filing a lawsuit immediately after the Republican signed the state’s right-to-work-for-less law in March.

“Having a voice at work and the ability to bargain collectively is a basic right,” District 2 Director Michael Bolton said. “Allowing some workers to benefit from representation without contributing is fundamentally wrong. Everyone should pay their fair share.”

That argument for fairness is the basis for the lawsuit the USW filed along with allies from the AFL-CIO and the International Association of Machinists District 10. The lawsuit alleges that right-to-work-for-less laws violate a provision in the Wisconsin constitution that states that “the property of no person shall be taken for public use without just compensation.”

Because right-to-work-for-less laws allow freeloaders to benefit from the union’s collective bargaining agreements without paying their share of dues or fees, such laws violate that provision, the lawsuit says.

“Our ‘property’ is the service that we provide for our members, which is paid for in the form of dues by those members,” Bolton said.

Bolton says the USW has a strong case, but cautioned that Walker’s anti-union allies control the Wisconsin Supreme Court, which is likely to decide the case. The USW has challenged right to work for less on similar grounds in Indiana and Michigan.

Business owners and anti-union politicians push right-to-work-for-less laws by saying that they give workers “freedom,” when their true aim is to cripple the political and bargaining power of unions and, in turn, erode wages, benefits and working conditions. In the end, the laws take money and power away from workers and put it in the hands of business owners and politicians.

“Real freedom is about working people having the ability to speak with a strong voice,” Stephanie Bloomingdale, secretary treasurer of the Wisconsin AFL-CIO, said. "Workers in right-to-work-for-less states earn nearly $6,000 less per year than workers who do similar jobs in other states, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

In addition, workers in these states are less likely to have employer-sponsored health insurance and pensions, and are 54 percent more likely to be injured or killed on the job.

“Right to work will lower wages, weaken safety standards and hurt families,” said Phil Neuenfeldt, president of the Wisconsin AFL-CIO.

In fact, right-to-work-for-less laws do more than just harm unions – they reduce the standard of living for everyone. U.S. Census data show that poverty rates and infant mortality rates are significantly higher in right-to-work-for-less states.

The passage of right to work for less is just the latest in a series of attacks the Wisconsin governor has waged on the workers of his state. Four years ago, Walker, who has hinted at a 2016 presidential campaign, began his first term by seeking to limit the rights of public-sector unions. That move gained national attention and sparked protests by tens of thousands of people at the state capitol.

This time, Bolton said the USW is ready to fight back even harder, regardless of whether the union’s lawsuit is successful.

“I am not afraid of right to work,” Bolton said. “I don’t like it and I think it’s wrong, but I know it won’t kill our union. We can not only survive right to work, but continue to grow despite it.”

President Obama vetoed a Republican attempt to block implementation of new National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) rules that modernize and speed up the union certification process.

The attempt to derail the April 14 launch of rules streamlining the union election process is just one aspect of a startling upsurge in Republican attacks this year on workers’ rights.

The new NLRB rules are intended to rein in those employers who use a drawn-out union election process to threaten and intimidate workers into voting “no.”

The rules shorten the period between a union petition and an election to as little as 14 days and require employers to share employee names, home addresses, phone numbers and email addresses with unions.

Big business has gone all out to misrepresent the modest and common-sense changes as giving unions a big advantage over employers during organizing campaigns.

Employers, however, still have an arsenal of tactics at their disposal to try and prevent the millions of Americans
who want union representation from getting it.

Corporations will continue to use expensive union busting consultants and force attendance at captive audience meetings where management disparages unions. And they will continue to face weak penalties for illegal actions, including firing union sympathizers.

**Anti-worker agenda**

Attacks on unions and workers are underway at the federal and state levels by conservative politicians who are influenced by anti-union organizations.

State-Republican lawmakers have promoted right-to-work-for-less bills, which weaken unions and increase inequality. Republicans have also attacked prevailing wage laws and eliminated or severely limited collective bargaining for public-sector workers.

Wisconsin became the nation’s 25th right-to-work-for-less state in March. That same week, Nevada and West Virginia significantly weakened prevailing wage laws. Republicans in Michigan, Indiana and Wisconsin are also attempting to weaken or repeal prevailing wage statutes.

At the federal level, newly elected Republican majorities in the U.S. House and Senate are aggressively pushing an agenda that would roll back decades of progress on regulations designed to protect the rights and the well-being of workers and their families.

**Cutting regulations for profit**

One of the first bills the House passed was aimed at cutting federal regulations to the bone. Known as the Regulatory Accountability Act (RAA), the bill would gut current mechanisms for ensuring fair wages, safe workplaces, clean air and water, safe food and consumer goods, and stable economic institutions and financial markets.

The RAA was aimed at what Republican leaders often decry as the “red tape” that they claim impedes commerce. While the Republican Congress claims the bill is a “job creator,” the true intent is to make businesses more profitable for owners and other members of the wealthiest 1 percent.

“The RAA would further tilt the regulatory process in favor of business groups and others who want to stop regulations and make it much more difficult for the government to protect workers and the public,” William Samuel, government affairs director for the AFL-CIO, said in a letter to Congress before the vote.

Despite claims by business leaders and GOP legislators that regulations such as those enforced through the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and other federal agencies “kill jobs,” data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that very few layoffs (less than one half of one percent) can be blamed on regulations.

“Some right-wing politicians, regulations are the enemy,” International President Leo W. Gerard said. “The fact is these rules save us far more than they cost us. They save the lives of countless workers every year; they ensure that the food we eat and the water we drink is safe, and they make our highways, airliners and cars less dangerous.”

The House passed the RAA in January by a mostly party-line vote of 250-175. For now, President Obama and his veto pen are standing in the way of final adoption of the bill.

The RAA “would make the regulatory process more expensive, less flexible, and more burdensome,” the White House said in a statement.
USW members across the United States rallied with fast food and retail workers, fellow unionists, clergy members, students, adjunct professors and community activists on April 15, a national day of action calling for an increase in the federal minimum wage.

“Too many full-time workers are living paycheck to paycheck, barely able to pay their bills,” said International President Leo W. Gerard. “At the same time, corporate profits have never been higher. It’s time for all workers – union and nonunion – to stand up and demand better treatment. Nobody who works full time should be living in poverty.”

The actions this April came on the heels of announcements from retailers including Walmart and Target, as well as fast-food giant McDonald’s, that they would gradually raise their lowest wages. Walmart and Target will pay $9 an hour; McDonald’s will give 10 percent of its workers a raise of $1 an hour above the local minimum.

The current federal minimum wage is $7.25 per hour, but 29 states and the District of Columbia set higher minimum wages for their residents, and half of those link future increases to inflation. The highest minimum currently is $9.50 in Washington, D.C.

A full-time worker paid the federal minimum wage would earn $15,000 per year, a figure below the federal poverty line for a family of two.

Workers welcomed the raise announcements from McDonald’s and Walmart, two of the three largest employers in the United States. The companies likely were motivated not by concern for workers but instead by concerns about public relations. For years, activists have targeted the poverty wages paid by the highly profitable pair as evidence of the need for higher wages and broader worker protections.

Over the past few months, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) has filed complaints against both companies alleging that they violated workers’ rights, including threatening retaliation against those who participated in strikes.

“McDonald’s didn’t wake up one day and just decide to raise wages for its workers,” said AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka. “This decision – just like Walmart, Target and the momentum of major retailers that preceded it – is the direct result of a powerful, collective movement.”

That movement, which began more than two years ago with demonstrations by fast food workers in New York City, had perhaps its biggest day yet on April 15, when more than 200,000 people in 200 cities participated in strikes, rallies and marches calling for a $15 minimum wage and the freedom to unionize.

While the goal of more than doubling the current minimum wage may seem unrealistic, such action would have a ripple effect that would raise wages for workers across the board and boost the quality of life for millions, economists say.

According to a report from the Brookings Institution, increasing the minimum wage would result in raises for 35 million American workers, and the effect on unemployment would be negligible due to the economic growth resulting from increased spending. In addition, mandating raises would reduce impoverished workers’ need for food stamps and welfare, cutting government costs by more than $3 billion.

“This is a movement to create a lasting economy that works for everyone,” Trumka said.
Linden Hall has a long history, but it’s best known to Steelworkers as the USW’s Walter J. Burke Labor Education Center, where members and staff receive training in leadership and other skills.

“Linden Hall is a place of great empowerment, a facility that gathers union activists and builds them up through education, history and working together,” said Marly Sandoval, a USW representative at St. Mary Medical Center in Apple Valley, Calif. “The education is priceless, and for that I am forever grateful to everyone who makes this facility one of a kind. They taught me to be a stronger leader.”

The USW Education and Membership Development Department, under the direction of Lisa Jordan, creates and conducts the training programs at Linden Hall.

Training is the key to almost everything the union does for its members, from collective bargaining, arbitration and grievances, to organizing, engaging politicians, and improving safety and health.

“These are the most extensive training and education programs the USW has to offer, which gives us the ability to grow as a union and continue to be sustainable for the future,” said Roger McGinnis of District 8 in Kentucky.

The objective of the USW’s training programs at Linden Hall is to empower union members through education, which in turn builds a foundation for the power and strength of the USW to advocate on behalf of workers.

Located in rural Pennsylvania, the site includes conference halls, lodging, gardens and access to a hiking trail. The centerpiece of the property is a 35-room stone building that was constructed between 1909 and 1911 as a home for Sarah B. Cochran, the widow of a coal and coke baron.

Because it was built with profits earned off the backs of miners and coke workers, it seems appropriate that the facility is used today to train local union activists to fight for workers’ rights.

Designated a national historic site by the National Park Service, Linden Hall had fallen into disrepair by the time the USW purchased it in 1976 for use as a training and education center.

Linden Hall today is a busy place, particularly from spring to late fall, with leadership training, district and regional conferences, seminars and summer institutes.

The site hosts community and recreational activities and includes a public golf course, all of which generate funds to support the USW’s training and education programs for members. Steelworkers qualify for certain discounts.

Summer brings DJ parties on Friday nights, a concert series and an annual July 4 celebration with fireworks that usually attracts 2,000 to 3,000 guests. The July 4 celebration offers USW members an opportunity to celebrate the holiday with fellow union members and supporters.

“It’s basically a bring-your-own lawn chair thing,” manager Tim Hall said. “We do everything from hamburgers to ribs outside, and then we have four bands playing all day long.”

For more information, visit www.lindenhallpa.com.
Crown Workers Find Support

Local 9176 members in Toronto, Canada, on strike for 19 months at Crown, Cork & Seal, have been traveling regularly to picket in front of Crown Headquarters in Northeast Philadelphia.

District 10 Director Bobby “Mac” McAuliffe along with District 10 Assistant Director Lew Dopson have attended events and encouraged District 10 locals to show solidarity.

In April, that continued solidarity brought a show of support from Philadelphia’s City Council. Local 9176 members Rob DePippo, Cheryle Dollimore, Bob Lapcuk and Dave Elines accompanied Local 404 President Lindsay Patterson to a meeting at which the council unanimously passed a resolution condemning Crown for its union-busting tactics, calling on the company to negotiate a fair contract and return all employees to work.

In addition, dozens of allies in Great Britain held a protest in April outside the headquarters of the Carnival cruise line in Southampton, England, calling for support to end the strike from Carnival CEO Arnold Donald, who serves as a Crown director.

USW Joins Day of Action on Right to Strike

The USW joined workers around the world for an international day of action in February in defense of workers’ right to strike.

“The right to withhold our labor in support of our just demands is a fundamental right of workers that has historically been recognized by the International Labor Organization (ILO) as part of Convention 87 on Freedom of Association,” said International President Leo W. Gerard. “Without the right to strike, our members would have no way to effectively enforce their demand for safe workplaces and safe communities.”

Member Celebrates 90th Birthday

Sidney Richardson turned 90 years old in February. But instead of retirement, he is still working hard as a USW member.

Richardson works full-time at Goodyear Tire and Rubber in Gadsen, Ala., and has the most seniority at Local 12L. He started working at age 17 when the United Rubber Workers (URW) represented the workers at that plant.

Richardson said he thought about retiring after 40 years on the job but then reconsidered, thinking he would get bored.

Richardson, who served in the U.S. Army from 1944 to 1947, is the longest-serving Goodyear employee.

When he was asked what advice he could give to young workers, Richardson said, “Put forth a lot of effort. Put one foot in front of the other, and you can get through anything.”

Report: Unions Key to Fighting Inequality

Unions play a crucial role in fighting income inequality around the world, according to a report released in March by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The IMF, a coalition of 188 nations that works to improve the global economy and foster cooperation among its members, said declining rates of union membership have resulted in an increase in income inequality, and expanding bargaining rights is the key to addressing the problem.

According to the report, “the decline in unionization is strongly associated with the rise of income shares at the top.”

At a time when the wealthiest 1 percent of the population controls 48 percent of the world’s net wealth, workers’ wages remain relatively stagnant. About half the income share gains made by the world’s richest people are due to the decline in unionization, the IMF said.
New Contract Ends Honeywell Lockout

The 150 members of Local 7-669 at Honeywell in Metropolis, Ill., ratified a new three-year contract on March 30, ending an eight-month lockout at the uranium reprocessing plant. It was the facility’s second lockout in the past five years.

“Once again, our brothers and sisters in Metropolis have proven that we are all stronger when we stand together,” said International President Leo W. Gerard. “Their solidarity has been an inspiration and an example to Steelworkers across the country whose employers engage in similar union-busting tactics.”

District 7 Director Michael Millsap also praised the members of Local 7-669 for their solidarity in fighting for a fair contract after previously enduring a 14-month lockout that began in 2010.

“For the second contract in a row, Honeywell’s employees were forced onto picket lines despite our union’s best efforts to reach a fair agreement,” he said. “By now, they most certainly have earned the respect of Honeywell management and the entire labor movement.”

Local Pressures Sherwin Alumina

Members of Local 235A at Sherwin Alumina in Gregory, Texas, locked out of their jobs since Oct. 11, continue to build public support in their fight for a fair contract.

In February, the local held a press conference to unveil a USW report that showed that the company’s safety record has substantially worsened since the lockout began.

Later that month, Local 235A members welcomed an international delegation of labor leaders from Australia, Great Britain and South Africa. The guests joined members and their families on the picket line in Gregory, and at a rally at the Houston offices of Glencore, Sherwin’s corporate owner.

There, the group presented Glencore with a silver medal in recognition of the company’s second-place finish in the Public Eye “Worst Company in the World” online contest.

Charlotte Upton, a member of Unite the Union and an electrician at Tata Steel in Scunthorpe, England, said she was proud to stand with members of Local 235A.

“It’s important that we recognize that we have the same struggles. We need to stand together,” Upton said.

Save the Date:

2015 Civil & Human Rights Conference

Local activists should mark their calendars for Oct. 20 to 23 for the 2015 USW Civil & Human Rights Conference. This year’s event will be held in Birmingham, Ala., and will focus on helping union members make a difference in the fight for economic, political and social justice.
USW Local Wins ULP Charge

Local 8287 at the Kalkaska County Road Commission in Kalkaska, Mich., prevailed in its case before the Michigan Employment Relations Commission (MERC).

MERC ruled that the road commission unlawfully implemented terms and conditions of employment. It ordered the employer to bargain in good faith and return to the status quo until bargaining is complete. MERC also ordered restitution with interest for all affected employees.

The 16-member local has been in a three-year battle with the employer.

Union Marks Explosion

The USW International Executive Board in February marked the ninth anniversary of a tragic explosion at Grupo Mexico’s Pasta de Conchos mine in Mexico.

Sixty-five workers needlessly lost their lives in the explosion, and investigators found that “the government of Mexico did not do all that was reasonably expected of it to avoid or minimize the effects of the accident.”

The bodies of 63 miners still remain entombed in the mine. Families still have not received just compensation for their loss, and no one responsible for the deaths has faced criminal prosecution.

“The U.S. and Canadian governments must insist that Mexico make real improvements in mine safety in order to access enhanced trade benefits under the Trans-Pacific Partnership,” the Executive Board said in a statement.

USW Lauds Alcoa Expansion Loan

The USW announced its support for a U.S. Department of Energy loan to Alcoa to help expand a Tennessee factory to produce lightweight aluminum for use in the automotive industry.

The $259 million loan is part of the federal Advanced Technology Vehicles Manufacturing (ATVM) program, which encourages use of new technology to create fuel-efficient and alternatively fueled vehicle production.

“This loan is yet another example of the Obama administration’s commitment to job creation, as well as its commitment to new technology and environmental protection,” said International President Leo W. Gerard. “This will help to create good, family supporting jobs, which will bring more innovation and efficiency to the U.S. auto industry.”

Alcoa has said that the Tennessee factory expansion will cost $275 million and create 200 permanent jobs once completed in mid-2015.

Steelworker Participates in Career Day

Wil Lynn, unit chairman at Local 10-74 at BASF in Monaca, Pa., spoke to 6th grade students at Hopewell Memorial Junior High School in February for a “Career Day” presentation. Lynn explained what the USW is and what the union does. He talked about contracts, health and safety and the importance of having a union.

AFL-CIO Creates Commission on Racial, Economic Justice

The AFL-CIO Executive Council voted unanimously to create a new Labor Commission on Racial and Economic Justice to explore racial issues within the labor movement.

“The labor movement has an opportunity to be on the right side of history by standing up for racial and economic justice at a time when these issues are at the front of the public consciousness,” said AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka. “When we have embraced our better selves, we have always emerged stronger in every sense.”

Trumka named USW International Vice President Fred Redmond a co-chair of the commission, along with United Food and Commercial Workers President Marc Perrone.
Adjuncts Continue Organizing Push

The Adjunct Faculty Association of the USW (AFA-USW) continues to grow. In March, adjunct instructors at Robert Morris University in suburban Pittsburgh became the third group of instructors in the region to join the USW.

The 342 Robert Morris instructors join AFA-USW members at Pittsburgh’s Duquesne University, who voted to unionize in 2013, and Point Park University, where instructors joined the AFA-USW last summer.

Dr. Robert Trosky, an adjunct instructor who helped lead the organizing campaign at Robert Morris, said the union would benefit both the faculty and the students at the university.

“The provost has stated that we are all one faculty, but we didn’t really feel that way until now,” Trosky said. “This will attract better professors and will make things more transparent.”

International President Leo W. Gerard congratulated the instructors on their victory, noting that they contribute to the diverse membership that makes the USW a stronger union.

“Academic workers deserve to be treated with fairness and respect. Getting paid a decent wage is part of that for all workers, no matter what sector they are employed in,” Gerard said. “The Steelworkers are pleased to have them as members.”

USW Calls for Equal Pay

The USW marked International Women’s Day on March 8 by renewing its call for laws guaranteeing that women who do the same work as men receive equal pay.

On average, women in the United States earn 78 cents for every dollar earned by men, a discrepancy that has remained largely unchanged for a decade. Even after adjustments are made to account for experience, hours worked, qualifications and other variables, female workers come up short.

The gap is even worse for women of color, with black women making 64 cents and Latina women making 54 cents to every dollar a white man makes.

Republicans in Congress have blocked passage of the Paycheck Fairness Act, which would provide for greater transparency and enable women to more easily recognize and remedy sex-based pay discrimination.

“Women are an essential part of our workforce, and they deserve fair wages. It is long past time for every woman in this country to be guaranteed equal pay for equal work,” said International President Leo W. Gerard.

USW Joins Organizers Workshop

Twenty-three USW members attended the National Organizers Workshop on March 6 and 7 in Washington, D.C.

More than 700 organizers from unions and community groups attended the conference, which was also a celebration of the 25-year anniversary of the AFL-CIO’s Organizing Institute. The event featured plenary sessions, hands-on workshops, and high-spirited training on new models of organizing, strategically engaging the NLRB, working with community organizations and revitalizing the labor movement, particularly in the American South.
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@Work
USW Membership Department,
3340 Perimeter Hill Drive, Nashville, TN 37211

Name ________________________________
New Address ________________________________
City ________________________________
State ___________________________ Zip __________

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