These senseless deaths have to stop. And of course we know it’s not just mine workers that need protection. It’s housekeepers, carwash workers, meatpackers, construction workers, farm workers and janitors. In other words, it’s all workers.

Labor Secretary Hilda Solis
In remarks made while asking for a moment of silence to honor 29 coal miners who died in a West Virginia coal mine explosion.

TRADE VICTORY
American pipe-workers furloughed by the thousands because of unfairly priced and illegally subsidized imports from China are getting relief from a big trade case championed by the USW.

REFINERY SAFETY
Near-misses and deadly tragedies still occur in the petroleum refining industry five years after 15 workers were killed and 180 were injured in an explosion at the BP refinery in Texas City, Texas.

SOAR
The Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR) celebrates 25 years of activism on behalf of retirees and workers. Join and get active.

HEALTH CARE REFORM
The historic health care legislation signed by President Obama will help most Americans gain access to health care coverage. The USW is working hard to figure out what it means for you.

Education Matters
While good jobs, working conditions and health care are indeed the basic demands of all workers, I would like to add education (especially higher education) to the list. Because of terrible budget situations, most states are cutting contributions to state universities and community colleges. In order to make up shortfalls, schools are raising tuitions, thus limiting access. Low-cost higher education has traditionally allowed children of workers to train for jobs in the new economy and to expand the intellectual horizons of all, no matter their occupation. Access to higher education, for those who want it, should be a fundamental right for all, not a privilege for the wealthy.

Judith Wisnich, Associate Member
Retired, Local 2190, AFT
Setauket, N.Y.

Right to Organize
I joined the USW as an associate member in 2004 because I strongly support the right to organize and am concerned that this is being frittered away without anyone really speaking out. I believe that there are people like myself who have never had the chance to join a union, but could and should be organized to support unions – like with an active, meaningful associate membership program.

Marge Boyle, Associate Member
Saint Paul, Minn.

Doris Tanner, WWII Aviator
The Women of Steel of Local 878L in Union City, Tenn., hosted an appreciation ceremony on March 19 in honor of Doris Tanner for receiving a congressional gold medal for her service as a Women Air Service Pilot (WASP) during WWII.

Mrs. Tanner spent a lifetime teaching history in high school and college. I believe she was so passionate because she didn’t just watch history being made; she made history herself.

There were only 1,000 WASPs and their jobs were to fly planes from their factories to military bases in order to free up male pilots for the war effort. The WASPs disbanded in late 1944.

Mrs. Tanner was asked if she would do it all over again. “In the blink of an eye,” she said. “I’ve got ice water in my veins.”

The Steelworkers and a grateful nation are proud of her historic efforts.

Johnny Dyer, Recording Secretary
Local 878L
Union City, Tenn.

USW Saved My Job
I started work at the US Magnesium plant in July 1977. In October 2008, I was terminated. My local union stood by me and my case went to arbitration. I received nearly $35,000 in back pay and got my job back. The Steelworkers improved my wages and benefits and saved my job.

Frank DeHerrera, Local 8319
Tooele, Utah

Manufacturing in America
The biggest problem with manufacturing in America is that the USW has made it in the bottom line for the shareholders. Until we get CEOs to commit to American workers, we are in a losing battle.

A.J. Jeffery, Retired, Local 2730
Homerville, Ohio

Hope in Unethical Times
Your seasonal magazine is excellent, both informative (for news not otherwise available) and inspirational, a mood changer as well as a hope giver that these lousy unethical times will not endure. Thank you and more power to you!

Helen Hilt, Associate Member
Monona, Wis.

Corporate Lack of Respect
My mom, Elizabeth M. Larrabee, was a member of the USW and passed away July 8, 2008. Mom had a wonderful career at the Scott Paper Mill in Winslow, Maine, before it was sold in 1993 to Kimberly-Clark and finally closed in 1995.

It was a terrible blow to the local workers and to the local economy and another sign of the lack of respect that corporations have for past and present employees and the communities where they reside.

I support all of your efforts to better the working lives of your members. I am a former IBM employee whose 20-year career ended in 15 minutes on a terrible day in June 2002. Once an example of what employers should be like, IBM, under the guidance of Louis V. Gerstner, was transformed into “just another” company.

Since then, IBM employees have lost their retirement medical coverage, and their defined benefit pension plans have been replaced by a 401(k) program that bears all of the risk of the stock market and its fluctuations over time.

Thank you for your efforts.

Robert Larrabee
Winoski, VT

Mail to: USW@Work
Five Gateway Center, Pittsburgh PA 15222
or e-mail: editor@usw.org

USW active and retired members and their families are invited to ‘peak out’ on these pages. Letters should be short and to the point. We reserve the right to edit for length.

Mail to: USW@Work
Five Gateway Center, Pittsburgh PA 15222
or e-mail: editor@usw.org
The United States is hemorrhaging millions of jobs as a result of growing trade deficits, largely with China. Since China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, 2.4 million jobs have been lost or displaced in the United States as a result of the burgeoning trade deficit with that nation, concluded a report from the Washington-based Economic Policy Institute.

Growing trade deficits cost jobs in every state and congressional district, including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Contrary to conventional wisdom, high-tech industries are losing jobs faster than any other sector of the economy. The computer, telecommunications equipment and parts industries experienced the largest growth in trade deficits with China, resulting in 628,000 job losses — 26 percent of all jobs displaced by trade between 2001 and 2008. The hardest-hit congressional districts were located in California, Texas and Northeastern states, which are hit in a variety of manufacturing industries. New York, Illinois and other populous states also had major job losses.

“China’s cheating is causing America to lose more than just the capacity to make widgets in the one-sided trade arrangements with China,” said Scott Paul, AAM’s executive director, said. “Sophisticated electronics and high-tech products that once were made in the United States are increasingly being made in China instead. We are losing more and more of our high-tech jobs.”

The report cites China’s currency manipulation as a major cause of the growing U.S. trade deficit with that nation. China has pegged its currency to the dollar at a rate that encourages a large bilateral surplus with the United States.

Other causes include massive industrial subsidies in China, tax lax and environmental law enforcement, intellectual property theft, and Chinese policies that block market access to U.S. firms.
25 years of activism

This year, SOAR celebrates 25 years of activism with an appreciation of its rich history and the knowledge that the struggle for the rights to a secure retirement continues in both the United States and Canada.

“We’ve worked an awful lot to save health care, and we’ve been in Washington, D.C. lobbying to make sure our Social Security is not messed with,” Prasjner said in discussing his chapter’s activities. “This is our work. This is what we are dedicated to do.”

SOAR, created in 1985 during a steel industry crisis with the direction and support of retired International President Lynn Williams, has over 230 chapters with 70,000 members. The initial idea was to provide a forum for retirees who wanted to continue to be engaged in the union and its fight for worker and retiree rights.

“Lynn’s vision was the union should be there to help people – not just when they are at work, but when they are out of work and retired too,” said International President Leo W. Gerard.

In both the United States and Canada, the union must continue to defend pension plans that have been undermined by the greedy antics and corruption of Wall Street. Canada’s single-payer health care system is also under attack and the fight for a fair system in the United States is far from over.

“There is every reason to stay connected to the union and continue the struggle, and find a place to play an active role,” Gerard said. “It is incumbent on our generation to take care of the generation that came before us and to prepare the next generation to replace us. And if we can keep that continuity going, it will keep our union strong.”

Since its inception, SOAR has been a major part of the USW’s ongoing fight for a better deal for workers and retirees. It has long fought for the preservation of Social Security, Medicare, and for better health care protection.

SOAR members stand with the union on other issues, notably election campaigns and the fight for fair trade laws that encourage, not discourage, the rebirth of U.S. manufacturing.

“SOAR members are in the forefront of all our legislative fights. They are foot soldiers for our battles,” said SOAR Director Jim Cotton. “Workers’ issues are retiree issues. They are joined at the hip.”

Retirees often have the flexibility to be politically active at times when working members are tied up with their jobs and families, said current SOAR President Connie Entrekin, a retired director of District 9.

That can mean taking a long bus trip to lobby in Washington, D.C., filling in when needed on an organizing campaign or on a picket line, and packing a town hall meeting.

“SOAR has been active from the day of its birth until now in the fight for the rights of retirees to save their Social Security, and to establish a fair and reasonable health care system,” Entrekin said.

Along the way, as the USW grew through mergers, so did SOAR. USW retirees opened SOAR to retirees from the former United Rubber Workers, the American Brick and Glass Workers, American Flint Glass Workers and PACE and other merger partners.

“You’ve got to stand up for your own rights. You’ve got to belong to an organization that believes in saving what you negotiated, what you worked for all of your life,” Entrekin said. “It could all be gone with the stroke of a pen in Washington or Canada. You’ve got to be active.”

Retiree power in politics

Steve Skvara, a retired steelworker and SOAR member from Indiana, is a vivid example of the power retirees can exert in a political debate.

The retired LTV steelworker became the voice of middle-class frustration in 2007 when he confronted Democratic presidential candidates at an AFL-CIO forum in Chicago about health care and said he could not afford to purchase coverage for his wife.

“What’s wrong with America?” Skvara tearfully asked candidates attending the televised debate. “And what will you do to change it?”

Like all of LTV’s workers, Skvara lost much of his health care insurance when the Cleveland-based company tumbled into bankruptcy in 2000 for the last time and went out of business by the start of 2002.

“When the company filed for bankruptcy protection, I saw how SOAR stood up for retirees and made sure we were taken care of as best we could under the circumstances of bankruptcy,” Skvara said. “It gave us some place to turn.”

“Usually, when companies filed for bankruptcy protection, (other) unions said there was nothing we can do and walked away,” Skvara said.

“The Steelworkers aren’t like that. They were the first to fight for retirees and their rights and to try and reclaim benefits that they could. That’s the truth,” he added.

“It shows you how Steelworkers are so different from any other union. They are like Navy Seals and the Marines. They leave no one behind.”

Rallying cry

LTV’s first bankruptcy, in 1986, and its decision to unilaterally terminate retiree health care benefits proved to be a rallying point for the newly-formed SOAR.

Pensioners picketed to protest the termination and active workers refused to cross the line. The wildcat became a sanctioned strike and retiree health care was restored, until the next time LTV went into bankruptcy protection.
The next year, in 1987, the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corp. terminated four LTJ pension plans, including two that covered hourly employees and two that covered salaried workers. Both hourly plans were restored after LTJ emerged from bankruptcy protection in 1993.

"We marshaled the troops, sent them to D.C., sent them to New York to the bankruptcy court," Centner recalled. "It demonstrated that the union cared for retirees, that we were there for them, and would be there for them in the future.

In the LTJ protests were the beginning of the political and community activism that has been SOAR's hallmark ever since.

And these people work," Gerard said. "It's not unusual during the election process to see SOAR volunteers stuffing envelopes, some knocking on doors, some driving people to the polls. Almost every chore you can imagine in an election campaign, our retirees volunteer to take part in it."

George Edwards, a charter member and longtime volunteer from U.S. Steel's Clairton, Ohio, Works, takes pride in the fact that SOAR has made a name for itself by organizing for political activism and strike support.

"I've seen SOAR evolve from a retirees' organization where people sat around and talked about the old days in the mill to an organization that is dealing with current events," said Edwards, now 93 and still active. "It has become more and more a part of the union."

Bob Jurasko, vice president of the USW chapter in Aliquippa, clearly remembers that first fight over retiree benefits. Aliquippa was home to a major LTJV mill that is now closed.

"We were all losing," said Jurasko. "Everybody came to the meetings because they wanted to know what the next step would be. Were we going to get our health care back? Were we going to get our pensions back? It became a rallying point."

Making problems visible

Before SOAR there was no strong advocate in the union to focus attention on the special problems and needs faced by USW pensioners and their spouses. SOAR made those problems visible and helped to fashion the USW's policies.

Throughout very difficult times in our basic industries, the USW has fought for retirees in many venues including at the bargaining table and in the courts.

Court fights included trying to prevent the federal Pension Benefit Guaranty Corp. from stripping retirees of benefits. One result was the establishment of VEBAs, or Voluntary Employee Beneficiary Associations, or trust funds that are used to help restore lost benefits.

Gerard said he is "extremely proud" of the role that SOAR has played in shaping the USW's vision of responsibility towards retirees.

"Obviously, keeping the union's attention on retirees and the obligation to the people who built this union and made the institution it is now proud to be … is an important ongoing accomplishment," he said. "It never stops."

When SOAR was founded in 1985 a devastating business slump had eviscerated the steel industry, causing plant shutdowns and widespread unemployment.

It was a "frightful time" for the union, its members and retirees, recalled retired International President Lynn Williams, who led the USW during that stormy period and pushed for SOAR's creation.

"If you can imagine an old mattress out in the junkyard with the springs popping up, I was like a guy lying on the springs trying to hold them all down," Williams said. "And I didn't have enough body parts to put a hand on this one, a hand on that and a knee on another one. I didn't have enough body parts to hold them all down."

In the years between 1981 and 1985, the basic steel industry lost some 350,000 jobs in the United States. The crisis created a huge wave of early retirements and, in many cases, threatened their health care and pensions.

USW retirees actively supported food banks and other support services that were established to aid displaced steelworkers and their families.

Organizing for strength

But Williams thought it was important to find a more organized way to keep retirees active in the union, where they could collectively help him hold down at least two of those wayward springs – the pensions and the benefits they had earned through decades of work.

The initial response to SOAR after its establishment was more favorable than had been expected. The applications and dues—set at $1 a month—rolled in to Pittsburgh headquarters.

"We didn't feel we were an integral part of the Steelworkers until they put us in the constitution," Montgomery said. "That happened in 2000, when delegates to the 50th International Convention voted unanimously to amend the USW constitution to recognize SOAR as an affiliate union."

The amendment also encouraged the formation of SOAR chapters, established direct support for retirees in the local unions and local chapters and gave SOAR chapter leaders input into contract negotiations on SOAR issues.

At that convention, Becker for the first time seated the SOAR executive board and SOAR officers as full-voting delegates to the constitutional convention. Williams, as SOAR president, was among those receiving a badge.

"This is a first for the union. Let's welcome them," Becker said as the convention delegates rose in standing ovation.

Today's challenges

Today, the biggest challenge SOAR faces is maintaining and growing its membership, broadening the base with new retirees who have many options to take up their newly-found free time.

SOAR chapters can be effective, no matter their size.

"In some locations the SOAR chapter is 150 or 200 people who are active all the time. In other places, it's just a handful of retirees," Gerard said. "But bring them together and you've got a movement."
Infrastructure spending

T

o save jobs and industrial ca-
pacity, the United States must
dramatically change course, get
tough with China on trade and
adopt an aggressive manufactur-
ing policy with strong domestic content
rules for all infrastructure projects.
That’s the message International
Vice President Thomas Conway deliv-
ered to the Congressional Steel Caucus,
a bipartisan group of 100 members of
Congress concerned about the health of
the U.S. steel industry.
“The American people and USW
members are angry and frustrated with
business as usual in Washington, and
Congress are concerned about the health of
the steel industry’s international competitiveness.
USW members produce industrial
products including steel, tires, glass and
paper. We refine oil, mine copper and
produce uranium. We build ships and
make pipe for the oil industry.
“In short, USW members are the
backbone of the nation’s industrial
base,” Conway said. “They have always
answered the call to make the best
products in the world – our products can
beat the competition anywhere so long
as the competition is fair and others play
by the rules.”

Supporting green energy technolo-
gies and investing in critical long-term
infrastructure needs would propel our
economy forward and help to save the
world’s climate, Conway testified.
“For far too long we have been rely-
ning on infrastructure that is too old and
outdated while the world has caught up
and is eating our lunch,” he said. “When
Shanghai and Paris have truly state-of-
the-art high speed rail but we can’t even
fix old rails, that’s a serious problem.”

Currency manipulation

U.S. Rep Tim Murphy, the caucus
vice chairman, said last year’s $226.8
billion trade deficit with China is due
in part to its currency, the yuan, being
undervalued by about 40 percent against
the dollar.

If the yuan and other Asian cur-
rencies were allowed to rise to proper
levels, Murphy said that would trim
the trade deficit by about $100 billion
to $150 billion annually, and create as
many as 1.2 million jobs in the United
States.

“We cannot sit idly by as China
continues to break the rules by illegally
subsidizing its exports and controlling
its currency’s exchange rate,” he said.
More than 2.2 million manufactur-
ing jobs in the United States have been
wiped out since the great recession
began in December 2007, Conway told
the caucus.

But the bleeding has gone on for
much longer than that. More than 5.5
million manufacturing jobs have disap-
peared since October 2000. By October
2009 there were more people officially
unemployed in manufacturing (11.1 mil-
lion) than those working (11.1 mil-
lion manufacturing hard. The mill had never
been completely cold since it was built
in the late 1800’s. Partial production was
resumed in mid-June 2009.

“We have new state-of-the art coke
capacity, around the clock.” Conway called for immediate action
proposing a $500 billion transportation plan
introduced by U.S. Rep. James Oberstar
(D-Minn.) to increase investments in high-speed rail, highway construction
and green technology development.
“Some of the money we take from
the $500 billion transportation plan
would trim the trade deficit by about $100 billion
of the country is in decline; and that’s where
America is headed,” Conway testified.

Conway called for immediate action
on a $500 billion transportation plan
introduced by U.S. Rep. James Oberstar
(D-Minn.) to increase investments in high-speed rail, highway construction
and green technology development.
“We cannot hope to compete suc-
sessfully in the global economy and
maintain our standard of living as a nation unless we make a
serious commitment to repairing and
expanding roads, bridges, ports, the
electrical grid, public transit, high-speed
rail, schools and water infrastructure,”
Conway said.

“We will make business more cost-
efficient and our goods more competi-
tive; it will put people to work here and
will create the biggest bang for taxpayer
dollars in terms of stimulating demand
for goods and services produced here.”

Nearly 1,900 union members,
including 100 new hires, are
glad to be back on the job
after as much as a year on
layoff from US Steel’s Granite City, Ill.,
works.

The plant was idled in December
2008, when the recession hit U.S.
manufacturing hard. The mill had never
been completely cold since it was built
in the late 1800’s. Partial production was
resumed in mid-June 2009.

“I remember talking calls from our
members asking when we were coming back and when our insurance would run out,”
recalls Dan Simmons, president of
Local 1999 on the steelmaking side
of the plant.

“We are running at full
capacity, around the clock.”

Conway pushes Congress
for long-term solutions

Conway Pushes Congress
for Long-Term Solutions

Granite City
Steelmaking at Full Capacity
and Providing its Own Power

In addition to coke batteries and blast
furnaces, the plant includes a two-vessel
BOF shop, two continuous casters, a
hot strip mill, pickles lines, a cold roll
mill and a galvanize line.

With the addition of a heat recovery
coke manufacturing facility built in
a partnership with SunCoke Energy Inc.,
the facility is close to being self-suffi-
cient with its coke supply.

“We have new state-of-the art coke
batteries,” Chism said. “And the old
batteries have been improved to meet
all environmental standards. Our future
looks bright.”

USW members are the
backbone of the nation’s
industrial base.”
In its annual survey of chief executive compensation, the AFL-CIO took aim at the big banks that triggered catastrophic financial meltdown, and yet continued to stuff their own wallets and resist tougher financial regulations.

The AFL-CIO’s annual Executive PayWatch this year exposed the egregious compensation and lobbying efforts against reform from the “Big Six” Wall Street banks: Bank of America, Wells Fargo, JP Morgan Chase, Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley and Citigroup.

These big banks helped cause the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression by trading financial derivatives that went sour when the real estate market declined.

As the financial system started to recover, they went back to their old ways.

Together, the big banks paid out $145 billion in total 2009 executive compensation. They spent millions of dollars lobbying against meaningful financial reform and have cut back on lending to consumers and small businesses.

Lobbying expenses up

The banking industry spent a total of $50.4 million to lobby in 2009, a 5.4 percent increase from the previous year, according to the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics, with nearly half coming from the six largest banks.

At the same time, millions of workers lost their jobs, their homes and their retirement savings in the financial crisis.

“For those at the top, it is business as usual and worse,” said Richard Trumka, president of the 11.5 million-member labor federation, the nation’s largest.

Instead of lending in their communities, banks have choked off much-needed credit. And instead of working with Congress to develop good, common sense regulations to prevent another financial meltdown, big banks are spending millions of dollars lobbying to protect their own narrow interests.

No more inaction

“People are angry and won’t stand for inaction on financial reform,” said Karen Nussbaum, the executive director of Working America, the AFL-CIO’s community affiliate.

Working America recently started a virtual protest website — “I Am Not Your ATM” — where people can take photos of themselves outside of bank storefronts, holding handmade signs expressing their frustration with the industry.

The AFL-CIO’s website features case studies of the major banks, highlighting compensation and the amount of money spent on lobbying Congress to fight financial regulatory overhaul.

The most highly compensated bank executive last year was John G. Stumpf of Wells Fargo. He was paid $21.3 million, or 665 times the average worker pay last year of $32,048.

Wells Fargo repaid its $25 billion from the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) in part by issuing more than $10 billion in new shares, ending government oversight of its executive compensation.

Wells Fargo boosted its lobbying expenses to $2.9 million in 2009, a 27 percent increase. The bank lobbied on regulatory reform issues that include consumer protection standards for mortgages, pay for performance, bank risk assessments, a proposed bankruptcy law amendment to allow judges to modify mortgages, derivatives market transparency and legislation on overdraft protection, credit cards and debit card fees.

Bank of America
Kenneth Lewis, the former chief executive of Bank of America, the nation’s largest bank, took a salary hit, receiving just $4.2 million last year. But he is set to receive $83 million in retirement benefits, the AFL-CIO noted.

Like Wells Fargo, Bank of America repaid its $45 billion in TARP funds, escaping government oversight of its executive compensation.

The bank spent $3.7 million to lobby Congress on issues including the creation of a consumer protection agency for financial products, over-the-counter derivatives and credit default swaps, TARP oversight and executive compensation.
Deadly month for industry

This April, there were 40 deaths and injuries in the petroleum industry. Many drew little attention. On April 14, three workers were injured in a fire at ExxonMobil’s Baton Rouge, La., refinery. On April 19, the day before the oil rig explosion in the Gulf of Mexico, a contractor died in a crane accident at a Motiva Enterprises refinery in Port Arthur, Texas. On April 29, two workers and a supervisor were injured in a fire at Valero Energy Corp.’s Memphis refinery.

Deadly explosion in Texas City

Five years ago in March explosions rocked the BP refinery in Texas City, Texas, as workers re-started equipment used to boost the octane level of gasoline. Explosions and fire killed 15 workers and injured another 180 that day. It was the deadliest refinery disaster in a decade and the worst U.S. industrial accident in 15 years.

Investigators uncovered “organizational and safety deficiencies at all levels,” stemming from years of corporate focus on profits without adequate consideration of safety. “The combination of cost-cutting, production pressures and failure to invest caused a progressive deterioration of safety at the refinery,” said Carolyn W. Merritt, who chaired the U.S. Chemical Safety Board when it released findings of a two-year probe.

“Safety and ill health rates are misleading and do not give the full picture of health and safety within the refining sector,” Gerard said. “There’s a difference between a sprained ankle and an explosion that kills people.”

Industry refuses to learn lessons from BP disaster

Investigators who studied the BP disaster five years earlier pointed to significant downsizing in operations and training following budget cuts of 25 percent in both 1999 and 2003. On that tragic day, abnormal pressure built up in a distillation tower during an equipment restart. Relief valves opened allowing highly volatile gasoline components to escape to a “blowdown” drum. So much fuel flooded into the drum that its capacity was exceeded, causing liquid and vapor to shoot up a 113-foot vent stack like a geyser into the open air.

In no time, some 7,600 gallons of flammable liquid hydrocarbons were released onto the grounds of the refinery. An idling pickup truck ignited the liquid and vapor to shoot up a 113-foot vent stack like a geyser into the open air. Operators were unaware of the unfolding danger. Alarms and gauges that should have warned them of overfilling equipment failed to operate. The glass on one external gauge was too blackened to see through.

Investigators later cited a lack of basic process indicators that could have provided operators with a better picture of what was happening.

After Texas City, OSHA launched a two-year inspection and emphasis program for petroleum refineries. At the end of the first year, inspections of 20 refineries led to 456 total citations issued to refinery employers. The average number of citations per inspection was 23.

Most inspected refineries had good safety programs on paper, but implementation in the facility was lacking. OSHA Enforcement Director Richard Fairfax told a 2009 safety conference, “We were pretty shocked and dismayed by what we found.”

“The state of process management is frankly quite horrific.”

Process safety can be defined as an engineering and management focus to prevent catastrophic incidents such as explosions and toxic releases. It also refers to an OSHA standard governing refineries and management systems put into place to address hazards.

The USW conducted an industry-wide survey on health and safety issues in the oil refining industry after BP. A full 90 percent of responding local unions reported at least one of the highly hazardous conditions that led to the Texas City disaster existed in their facility.


The survey also revealed that the industry’s response to calls for improvement since Texas City has been anemic. Generally speaking, refineries are required to maintain proper records, keep machinery and pipes in top condition, provide employees with adequate training, and to reduce employee fatigue, which can be a factor in safe operations.

OSHA’s process safety rules “are the bare minimum of what refineries are required to follow,” said Kim Nibarger, a USW health and safety specialist who investigates refinery accidents. “It wouldn’t hurt them to go above and beyond.”
Felt like an earthquake
Lisa Wooding, who lives a mile away, told reporters that her windows rattled and her whole house shook like it was in an earthquake.

“I looked over at the refineries, and you could see big flames coming out,” she said. “There was black smoke and what appeared to be like red embers in the sky.”

It was the worst refinery accident in terms of lives lost since the March 23, 2005 explosion at the BP refinery in Texas City, Texas, killed 15 contract workers and injured 170 others.

The three operators killed immediately in the Tesoro blast and fire were Matthew C. Bowen, 31; Darrin J. Hoines, 43, and Daniel J. Aldridge, 50. Operators Todd T. Cauble, Powell, and Earl E. Drumel, 36, were the fourth and fifth victims to die.

Lew Janz, 41, a supervisor who had been a long-time member of the union, died on April 13 while hospitalized. Matt Gumbel, 34, died April 24 after a skin graft operation.

Investigations are being conducted by the USW, the U.S. Chemical Safety Board (CSB) and other agencies.

ERT on the scene
Nibarger was on the scene from the start. The USW’s Emergency Response Team (ERT) was alerted that morning to the explosion and immediately killed three USW-represented workers and injured four other workers.

Within three weeks, all seven would be dead from their injuries. The explosion shook houses for miles around and sent flames darting into the sky. Some people thought it sounded like a jet engine; others described a boom and loud wind.
International President Leo W. Gerard told talk show host Ed Schultz that this dangerous way of doing business must be stopped—and one way to do that is criminally charge CEOs after workplace deaths. “If you’ve got to reform OSHA, one of the things I think has to happen is that you get this kind of blatant neglect or ignoring of the rules. We’ve got to have the ability to not just fine them but to charge the CEO with criminal negligence,” Gerard told Schultz.

As in the past, these deaths may result in safety legislation. Already they’ve prompted new considerations of a proposal to update OSHA, a bill called Protecting America’s Workers Act (PAWA). One congressional committee conducted hearings just after the Upper Big Branch and Tesoro blasts and more are planned. President Obama has pledged that these workers will not have died in vain. At a memorial service for the Tesoro workers, a statement from Obama was read, including:

“As a lasting tribute we pledge our renewed vigilance to ensure that workplace conditions are safe and secure so every American can return home at the end of each workday.”

MSHA promises action At the first Congressional hearing, Joseph A. Main, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health, reinforced that sentiment, saying of the workers killed at Upper Big Branch, “We owe them accountability.”

Main promised that the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) would act and said the agency would begin exercising its authority to temporarily close mines for serious violations.

The Obama administration, OSHA, MSHA and Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis have all given support passage of PAWA. The first substantive update of OSHA in 40 years, it would significantly increase OSHA penalties and enforcement powers. For a willful violation, fines would rise from the current $70,000 to $250,000. PAWA would also improve whistleblower protections, extend OSHA to cover public sector workers, expand the rights of workers and victims’ families and strengthen criminal penalty provisions.

This year’s report on workplace fatalities by the AFL-CIO, called “Death on the Job: The Toll of Neglect,” discusses the inadequacy of OSHA at length. In a country where 14 workers are killed every day on the job, OSHA penalties are outdated, the report says. The largest fine OSHA can impose for a violation is $7,000, a figure not increased in 20 years. “OSHA penalties are too low to deter violations,” the AFL-CIO report says. “Even in the cases of worker fatalities, penalties are incredibly weak. For [fiscal year] 2009, the median initial total penalty in fatality cases investigated by federal OSHA was $6,750.”

Current criminal penalties under OSHA are paltry as well, the report says. They are misdemeanors and are limited to cases where a willful violation results in a worker death. The issue of OSHA’s anemic enforcement powers was raised during hearings conducted by the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee just after the explosions in April at Upper Big Branch and Tesoro.

Union President John Sibert, a Democrat who chairs the committee, said of the hearings, “We will be looking at weaknesses in our laws that provide incentives for employers to skimp and cut back on health and safety measures.”

OSHA Administrator David Michaels testified that OSHA is among those laws that are too weak. He noted, for example, that under OSHA’s penalties cannot force employers to mediate workplace hazards while the employer is contesting the violation. Mining companies like Massey Energy, which owns the Upper Big Branch mine, have prevented enforcement measures like mine closures by appealing numerous citations.

For OSHA to accomplish its mission of protecting working people, Michaels told Harkin’s committee at the hearing, “fundamental change must be made. Now, he said, employers too often compare the benefits of not complying with safety laws to the cost of complying. If companies weigh penalties “they ‘opt to gamble with their workers’ lives.”

Michaels, the assistant secretary of labor of occupational safety and health, testified at Harkin’s hearing about refinery violations. “We think they are extremely dangerous. We are extremely concerned about oil refineries,” he told the committee.

He said no one is keeping track of the safety records of companies that operate refineries in multiple states. Under questioning by Sen. Patty Murray, a Democrat from Washington state, where the Tesoro explosion occurred, Michaels said, “It is a weakness in the law.”

Industry fails to learn The Tesoro explosion occurred almost exactly five years after the catastrophic blast at the BP refinery in Texas City, Texas, that killed 15 workers and injured 170. “It is obvious that this industry still has not learned from other refinery disasters and near-misses,” said International Vice President Gary Bevers. The House Education and Labor Committee also is expected to conduct hearings on workplace safety.

While the PAWA legislation moves through Congress, Labor Secretary Hilda Solis launched new enforcement actions on her own. The Labor Department increased civil penalties and began a new Severe Violator Enforcement Program.

For many employers, investing in job safety happens only when they have to. This year’s report on workplace fatalities by the AFL-CIO, called “Death on the Job: The Toll of Neglect,” discusses the inadequacy of OSHA at length. In a country where 14 workers are killed every day on the job, OSHA penalties are outdated, the report says. The largest fine OSHA can impose for a violation is $7,000, a figure not increased in 20 years. “OSHA penalties are too low to deter violations,” the AFL-CIO report says. “Even in the cases of worker fatalities, penalties are incredibly weak. For [fiscal year] 2009, the median initial total penalty in fatality cases investigated by federal OSHA was $6,750.”

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Source: COMBINED

Date  Type  Company  Location  Date  Type  Company  Location  Date  Type  Company  Location  Date  Type  Company  Location  Date  Type  Company  Location
1/9/10  F  ConocoPhillips  Artesia, N.M. 1/7/10  F  Citgo  Lemont, Ill. 2/9/10  F  Tesoro  Anacortes, Wash.
1/10/10  F  ConocoPhillips  Artesia, N.M. 1/17/10  F-1 inj.  Holly Corp., Hinesville, Ga. 2/9/10  F-3 inj.  Valero  Memphis, Tenn.
1/10/10  F  Murphy Oil  Missouri City, Texas 1/19/10  F  ConocoPhillips  Artesia, N.M. 3/2/10  F-7 dead  Tesoro  Anacortes, Wash.
1/10/10  F  ConocoPhillips  Artesia, N.M. 1/20/10  F  Holly Corp., Hinesville, Ga. 3/3/10  F  Motiva  Port Arthur, Texas
1/20/10  F  ConocoPhillips  Artesia, N.M. 1/20/10  F  Holly Corp., Hinesville, Ga. 3/3/10  F  Motiva  Port Arthur, Texas
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1/20/10  F  ConocoPhillips  Artesia, N.M. 1/20/10  F  Holly Corp., Hinesville, Ga. 3/3/10  F  Motiva  Port Arthur, Texas
1/20/10  F  ConocoPhillips  Artesia, N.M. 1/20/10  F  Holly Corp., Hinesville, Ga. 3/3/10  F  Motiva  Port Arthur, Texas

A two-day emergency meeting of USW leaders in the oil industry will be held in Pittsburgh starting June 15 to discuss and develop an action plan to improve industry safety conditions. The recent series of catastrophic fires, explosions and accidents in the energy industry prove the need for USW elements to get involved in pushing for reform.

Elements of the campaign could include lobbying for updated laws to protect all workers, pressing for strong enforcement of existing safety regulations as well as increasing individual attention to safety on the job.

USW members are encouraged to report health and safety problems they see at their work sites. He also plans to reach out to the industry.

To provide all workers with health and safety protections, Beevers urges USW members to lobby for passage of the Protecting America’s Workers Act (H.R. 2067, S.1580).

Increase employer penalties

The bill would increase civil and criminal penalties imposed by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to address safety problems and the changes necessary to improve the situation, Beevers said.

We must also push to give employers the right to refuse unsafe work. That right is needed with the Department of Labor and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to address safety problems and the changes necessary to improve the situation, Beevers said.

On Wednesday, April 28, 2010, the United Steelworkers remembered the men and women who lost their lives while on the job in the past year as part of the union’s annual observance of Workers’ Memorial Day. About 100 Steelworkers gathered at USW headquarters in Pittsburgh to honor the 34 USW members who died on the job in the year since last April 28. Their names follow:

Rick Crawston, 55 - Olympic Forest Products
Gary Godfrey, 60 - DTE/EEJ Coke Battery, LLC
Charlie Knopp, 60 - Loren Cook Co.
John Larmand, 59 - Lemore Lake Logging
Burrell Oughton, 59 - Brick Wall Corp.
Stanley Jones, 45 - Even’s Dedicated Transportation Co.
Herbert(Herb) Derese, 58 - Huntman Petrochemical
Otis Collier, 41 - Moad/Washaco
Mike Karkowski, 49 - Commercial Vehicle Group
Angela Smith, 37 - Arcelor Mittal
Cason Hosch, 29 - Mueller Copper Tube
Peter Uson, 23 - Mid-Atlantic Packaging Co., Inc.
Walter Lowe, 26 - Quincy Joyst
Robert Stewart, 39 - Asarco
Dennis Woods, 50 - Material Sciences
Peter Lesmeister, 59 - Illinois Cement Co.
Brian “Paw” E. Hair, 50 - Robinson Industry
Will Spaulding, 51 - International Paper
Chris Stansbury, 39 - Infra Source
Danny Butler, 59 (died 1/25/10) - BF Goodrich
Jerry Evans, 39 - International Paper
Vance Dickson, 60 (died 2/15/10) - Severstal
Dominic Shorter, 46 - Seaport
Leroy Baker, 61 - Galland Manning Napak
Elidon Perry, 56 - Iron Ox Co.
Don Marcusco, 55 - Goodyear
Matthew C. Bowen, 31 - Tesoro Refinery
Darrin J. Haines, 43 - Tesoro Refinery
Daniel J. Aldridge, 50 - Tesoro Refinery
Kathleen “K.D.” Powell, 59 - Tesoro Refinery
Donna Van Dreumel, 36 - Tesoro Refinery
Matt Gumbel, 34 (died 2/24/10) - Tesoro Refinery
John Paget, 57 - Wheat City Metals
Bridgette Geist, 37 (died 4/15/10) - Victaulic Co.
WORKING TOGETHER
USW, SCA Tissue Partnership Continues Despite Economic Downturn

"We’re always looking for the win-win." — Denny Lauer

"If we all do better, then we know that the pot of gold gets bigger." — Keith Itzler

The financial incentive for workers to participate comes in a profit-sharing, or gain-sharing program called EquiShare that can boost take-home pay. “If the company makes money, we make money. It’s an actual equitable division of it,” said Allen Hyde, vice president of Local 9-1535 at Barton. “And the bonus checks have been quite nice as far as I know throughout the country.”

Hyde worked as a USW member at Reynolds Metals Co. before joining SCA and sees a positive difference. “SCA has laid their cards on the table. You go in knowing where the company actually stands financially and everything from the get-go,” he said. “I go back years with Reynolds where we fought high performance work systems and fought team-based work systems,” he said. “Now, being in it and seeing what’s a lot, I think this is the way we as Steelworkers are going in the future.”

Helping each other
Tony Tomasovic, of Local 1478 at South Glens Falls, N.Y., said he sees a lot more cooperation on the shop floor. In the paper mill where he works, a crew from one machine used to not help a crew from another. That has changed. “The guys watch out for each other. They work with each other, back and forth on the machines. It’s like, hey, we’re on one big team here,” he said. “We back each other up.”

The pursuit of quality and cost savings can sometimes mean standing up to a salaried employee, engaging in some back and forth talk and suggesting better alternatives to a proposed move.”

“With this EquiShare, it’s big,” Tomasovic said. “If a salaried employee is trying to make a decision that’s not cost effective, we’ll not let him do it just to satisfy him.”

Local 1478 President Keith Baker agreed that EquiShare drives a lot of the improved cooperation and other changes he has seen at work. “If we all do better, then we know that the pot of gold gets bigger. One hand washes the other. You help me. I’ll help you.”

Baker said. “It’s a process that never stops. It’s like anything else. You can always improve.”

The president of SCA Tissue North America was speaking frankly about the company, its profitability, marketing strategies and capital spending plans to an audience, not of shareholders or Wall Street analysts but Steelworkers.

“We really value the relationship with the USW. It’s important to us,” Don Lewis said in opening a unique partnership with the USW. It’s important to us,” Lauer added. “It’s a very difficult thing to do at times.”

During recent negotiations over a master contract and local issues, a desire to protect wages and benefits in a struggling economy led the parties to look at other options to moderate costs. “Instead of looking at the low road, going after our wages and benefits, we took the high road, looking at different ways to work in the manufacturing setting, changing how we work,” Lauer added.

“When you find that win-win, it’s good for the company and it’s also good for the union.”

SCA Tissue, a subsidiary of Swedish papermaker Svenska Cellulosa Aktiebolaget, had little presence in the United States before 2001 when it acquired Georgia-Pacific Tissue, making it the third largest tissue production company in North America.

In the years since, SCA has established itself as a leading producer of paper towels, napkins, and bath and facial tissues principally for the commercial away-from-home market. SCA has seven U.S. production facilities in Alabama, Arizona, New York and Wisconsin. All but one is unionized by the USW.

Neutrality agreement
One of the first initiatives of the partnership was the adoption in 2003 of a neutrality agreement between SCA and the USW. The agreement allowed workers in Barton, Ala., to freely choose to organize through majority sign-up.

Since the Barton plant opened and unionized, wages have increased from roughly $12 an hour on average to about $20 an hour before bonus programs, local union officers said. Bryan Dyar helped to organize the Alabama plant as a PACE member, and is now involved in the partnership as a regional HR manager for SCA at Barton.

“It’s unbelievable to be in a business where you have the union so involved,” Dyar said during a break in the Philadelpha meeting. “To me, it’s a dream come true. But the bottom line is it creates a better business result.”

The union typically sits in on monthly business update meetings. A joint advisory committee of union and management employees meets quarterly to review progress and tackle problems.

Employees are expected to make decisions, work with minimal direction, control the flow of work and work as a team to solve problems and devise better ways of working.

The idea is to build a work force that will, for example, fix a problem with production machinery at first notice rather than letting it build into a long and expensive breakdown.

Engaged work force
"We have an engaged work force and we’re kind of betting on the come,” said James Carmichael, SCA’s vice president of human resources, using a poker term. “We’re going down the line of negotiating fair contracts, operating fairly and we believe that the productivity that comes from the work force will more than overcompensate.”
Hundreds of Rapid Response activists celebrated 15 years of success and readied for important work ahead at their annual conference, held this May in Washington, D.C.

The USW’s best activists from around the nation heard during the conference that Rapid Response is needed now more than ever.

“We’ve shown time and again that Rapid Response works — whether it’s fighting against unfair trade deals, fighting for health care for all or fighting for our jobs,” said Tim Waters, the USW’s Rapid Response director.

Over 15 years, you’ve helped thousands of families, seniors and other Americans who so desperately need it,” Gerard said. “We dare them to take away the ‘donut hole’ that forces retirees to choose between medicine over food or to take away health care for adult kids who want to go to college.”

“This is a defining moment for Rapid Response, not just for Steelworkers, but Rapid Response now has to be embraced by every American,” Schultz said.

“We have to move because this is a war,” Schultz said, reminding delegates about the attack from greedy corporations and others who are against working families. “We’re in a war for the truth.”

This is a multifaceted issue, Schultz said, whether it’s fighting for health care reform and stood up to big insurance companies.

“We thank these members for their courage and we dare anyone to run a campaign to repeal health care for working families, seniors and other Americans who so desperately need it,” Gerard said. “We dare them to take away the ‘donut hole’ that forces retirees to choose medicine over food or to take away health care for adult kids who want to go to college.”

“We thank them for supporting us, and we want them to know it’s payback time. You supported us, now it’s our turn,” Trumka said. “We will work harder than ever. We will work smarter than ever. And we will win in November.”

Steelworkers were among the more than 3,000 people who attended the Good Jobs, Green Jobs national conference in Washington, D.C., in early May. Labor and environmental leaders, top politicians, business executives and others called for increased investment, innovation and action for good American jobs and also help our environment and curtail climate change.

International President Leo W. Gerard was among the featured speakers at the conference hosted by the Blue Green Alliance, a partnership of the Steelworkers, the Sierra Club and eight other labor unions.

Gerard said recent work-related accidents like those at the USW-represented Tesoro refinery in Anacortes, Wash., and the oil rig explosion and spill off the coast of Louisiana shows that labor and environmental issues are connected in many ways and that it’s everyone’s responsibility to work for progress on both fronts.

“Our generation has a responsibility to the next,” Gerard said. “Our generation is going to be the one to leave the worst mess in history, or our generation is going to be the one to leave the most opportunity in history. I want to be the second one.”

The Blue Green Alliance has built a movement representing more than 8 million workers and environmentalists that must seize the momentum and continue pushing for legislative action for the jobs of the future, particularly manufacturing the parts needed in clean energy and other green industries. There are many green jobs opportunities in all of USW’s sectors, including pulp, paper and forestry. For example, current certification standards for sustainability ensure that there is a net positive replacement for harvested timber. Every new tree planted captures more carbon, acting as a carbon sink. When more trees are planted than harvested there is a positive impact on carbon reduction — unlike the use of fossil fuels that simply release carbon.

Spokeswoman Nancy Pelosi echoed Gerard’s statements and lauded him as one of the nation’s leaders in pushing for good, green jobs.

“In Congress, we have stood strong in the drive for good, green jobs,” she said. “We’ve said all along that clean energy is about four things: jobs, jobs, jobs.”

“We are just six months away from an election that is going to make history one way or the other,” Durbin said. “Let’s keep moving forward. We need your help in November. Let’s win it.”

Trumka and Gerard said it took courage for lawmakers to stand with working families on health reform instead of big insurance companies that spent hundreds of millions of dollars to try to defeat the bill.

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Setting the Record Straight: What You Need to Know About Health Insurance Reform

President Obama on March 23, 2010, signed historic health insurance reform legislation. While making big progress, reform will be gradual and change will occur over time. It will help most Americans gain access to health care coverage and it secures quality health care for those lucky enough to already have it.

During this complex and important time of transition, the USW is working hard to disseminate every word of the legislation to determine what the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act means for you and your families. For the most part, it will be months or even years before you notice any change at all. But here’s what we can tell you today:

What this means right now for union-negotiated plans:

- You will NOT lose your union-negotiated private health insurance plans because of reform.
- Nothing in this bill changes our right to collectively bargain health plans and employers cannot drop existing plans because of reform.
- Current collectively-bargained plans are grandfathered, meaning much of the new law does not apply to those plans until after they expire.
- NO high-cost benefits will be taxed until at least 2018, and the impact of the tax on insurers was significantly lessened through a variety of changes and exemptions pushed by our union and other unions.

Keeping in mind the grandfathering of collectively-bargained plans, here’s how reform will eventually help you and your family:

- Children with pre-existing conditions can no longer be denied health insurance coverage. In the coming years, pre-existing condition discrimination will become a thing of the past for everyone.
- Health care plans will allow young people to remain on their parents’ insurance policy until their 26th birthday.
- Insurers will be banned from dropping people when they get sick.

Here’s how reform will help our retirees:

- Effective January 1, 2011, co-pays for preventive screenings will be eliminated to help older Americans more quickly and affordably identify and treat diseases such as cancer and diabetes.
- The bill will provide help for early retirees by creating a temporary re-insurance program to help VEBAs and employers offset the costs of providing health care benefits for early retirees age 55 to 64.
- The bill will reduce costs associated with the Medicare Part D “donut hole” that occurs over time. It will help most Americans gain access to health care coverage and it secures quality health care for those lucky enough to already have it.

What this means right now for union-negotiated plans:

- Itty health care for those lucky enough to already access to health care coverage and it secures quality health care for those lucky enough to already have it.

President Obama says that once new competitive insurance markets open for business, in 2014, individuals buying coverage comparable to what they have today will pay 14 to 20 percent less. Family coverage costs about $13,400 a year, so that could be real savings.

This is a first step in reforming a very broken system run by inefficient insurance companies. And as the AP points out, the U.S. population aging and medical science is constantly evolving. Premiums for some people will likely be lower than they would have been without the bill. One thing we know for sure is that the path we were on was unsustainable. Even a slowing of the pace of projected premium increases is better than what we would have been stuck with. Had we not done anything, premiums were projected to go up nearly 9 percent a year. By 2019, the average health insurance premium for a family was expected to hit $30,903 a year, according to the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation.

Let’s put reform in perspective: In 2007, the United States spent $2.2 trillion on health care, which represents $7,421 per person or 16 percent of our entire economy, or 15 percent of GDP. Last year, health care expenditures were about 18 percent of GDP. Without reform, by 2030 health care costs would balloon to 28 percent of GDP. By 2040, 34 percent. We had to do something.

President Obama has put the nation on a slippery slope toward socialism.

Government’s role in health care has been steadily growing since Medicare and Medicaid were established 45 years ago. Even if Republicans were to take control of Washington and repeal this bill, government would still be on track to pick up more than half the nation’s health care tab by 2012, according to a report this spring from Medicare.

MYTH: The bill will lead to government health care rationing.

The legislation sets up a research center to compare the effectiveness of medical treatments. The legislation specifies that the research findings cannot be used to impose mandates, guidelines or recommendations for payment, coverage, or treatment — or used to deny coverage.

Putting Cost in Perspective (in $ billions)

- Total U.S. health care spending: $2.4 trillion
- Total cost of health care reform: $832 billion over 10 years
- Total cost of reform in 2014: $13,400 a year
- Total cost to an individual family: $33,300 a year
- Total cost of reform in 2019: $17,100 a year
- Total cost to an individual family: $49,700 a year
- Total cost of reform in 2022: $20,100 a year
- Total cost to an individual family: $60,200 a year
- Total cost of reform in 2030: $24,500 a year
- Total cost to an individual family: $73,200 a year

What's next?

The impact of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act on future contract negotiations will depend upon the terms of your labor agreement and the current design of your health care plan.

Because USW negotiated contracts and health care benefits vary from one local union to another, it is difficult to anticipate the specific impact the law will have on your contract. The USW is training staff representatives on the details of the act and how to address the act in negotiations.

Right to bargain remains

The act does not take away the union’s right to bargain over health care, so health care will continue to be a significant issue at the bargaining table.

USW staff has been given guidance on how to deal with reform in current bargaining. If you’re in bargaining or about to bargain, you should discuss this with your local officers or staff representatives.

Common Health Insurance Myths Debunked

You can be certain that the heated debate around health insurance reform will continue as this fall’s midterm elections approach. It is important that USW members and retirees judge the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act for what it actually says and does and not what they see and hear on cable news talk shows.

Here’s a look at some of the myths and realities according to a March 23, 2010, Associated Press Fact Check:

MYTH: The health care overhaul is going to cost you more.

President Obama says that once new competitive insurance markets open for business, in 2014, individuals buying coverage comparable to what they have today will pay 14 to 20 percent less. Family coverage costs about $13,400 a year, so that could be real savings.

This is a first step in reforming a very broken system run by inefficient insurance companies. And as the AP points out, the U.S. population aging and medical science is constantly evolving. Premiums for some people will likely be lower than they would have been without the bill. One thing we know for sure is that the path we were on was unsustainable. Even a slowing of the pace of projected premium increases is better than what we would have been stuck with. Had we not done anything, premiums were projected to go up nearly 9 percent a year. By 2019, the average health insurance premium for a family was expected to hit $30,903 a year, according to the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation.

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MYTH: You will be forced to pay for other people’s abortions.

This is simply not true. Americans will be able to decide if they want to join a plan that covers abortions or not. If you do, the costs of paying for abortions would be spread over all the enrollees in the plan — no differently from how other medical procedures are handled. Except a policy holder would have to write a separate check for it.

People who don’t want to pay for abortion could simply pick a plan that doesn’t offer it.

MYTH: The bill will lead to government health care rationing.

The legislation sets up a research center to compare the effectiveness of medical treatments. The legislation specifies that the research findings cannot be used to impose mandates, guidelines or recommendations for payment, coverage, or treatment — or used to deny coverage.
A national Vice President Tom Conway.

them are in another country, said Inter-

guarantees if the jobs to be created by

should not bear the burden of loan

by Congress in 2005, are seen as essen-

2010 budget proposal.

dent Obama is seeking to triple that

$18.5 billion to offer in loan guarantees

overseas.

plants, the USW is fighting to ensure

Gerard alerted the Nuclear Regulatory

plates for reactors as part of its ambi-

mills in Japan and South Korea.

However, some of the central compo-

jobs and about 800 permanent jobs.

Pa., in 1979 halted new orders.

would be the first constructed in the

Georgia loan approval

So far, the government has ap-

8.3 billion loan guarantee to utility giant Southern Company for the construction of two reactors in

If those reactors move forward, they

would be the first constructed in the United States since the Three Mile Is-

land nuclear accident near Harrisburg, Pa., in 1979 halted new orders.

The project in Georgia would create thousands of temporary construction jobs and about 800 permanent jobs.

However, some of the central compo-

nents, including the reactor vessel and

elements of heat exchangers, can only be obtained from certified steel

mills in Japan and South Korea.

China, The New York Times re-

port has also constructed a factory to

produce large steel containment vessel

plates for reactors as part of its ambi-

tious energy development plans.

International President Leo W.

Gerard alerted the Nuclear Regulatory

Commission (NRC) of our concern that

reactor parts could come from over-

seas, jeopardizing safety and jobs in the

United States.

Gerard asked the NRC, which over-

sees the safety of nuclear reactors, to

make public all of the components that

would be used in the Southern

Company’s new reactors.

“Sourcing key components for

nuclear facilities from foreign nations

- China most specifically – can put in

jeopardy our citizens’ safety and

undermine efforts to promote economic
growth and job creation,” said NRC

Chairman Gregory B. Jaczko.

It makes no sense to manufac-

ture components overseas, where our

regulators have less ability to ensure

safety. In particular, it makes no sense
to source parts from China, which has a

speckling regulatory record on produc-

tion that is questionable at best.

In his letter to the NRC’s Jaczko,

Gerard cited unsafe and hazardous

products that have been exported by

China including drug ingredients, ve-

hicle tires, highway bridge components

with weak welds and children’s toys

with dangerous levels of lead.

Acknowledging that nuclear energy

will continue to be a major source of

electric power around the world, more plans

for future development in the United States

depends on having the full support of

the American people.

“The loan guarantees are intended to

accelerate development of nuclear power.

And, at a time of high unem-

ployment and a continuing economic

crisis, we need to utilize every policy
tool available to create jobs and pro-

mote economic growth,” Gerard said.

Safe, clean nuclear plants

In his State of the Union address,

President Obama portrayed the deci-

dion to grant the loan guarantees as part of a broader strategy to increase

employment and generate clean energy.

The Georgia project, using reactor

designs by Westinghouse, a U.S.-based

company owned by Japan’s Toshiba

Corp., calls for 11 thick steel strips

13 feet wide and 130 feet long to be

stacked on top of one another.

American mills are not equipped
to manufacture the 13-foot strips.

Westinghouse claims, adding that it

is considering redesigning so American

mills can compete for the project. One

possibility is to use steel strips 11 feet

wide, stacked 13 high.

Actual construction in Georgia is

still years away. The Southern Compa-

ny applied for a license to build and op-

erate the reactors more than two years
ago. The application, one of many

under consideration, is not expected to

be approved until 2011 or 2012.

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS ARE RAISING THE ROOF AT THE FIRESTONE AGRICULTURAL TIRE PLANT IN DES MOINES, IOWA.

In its first year of operation, the tires

will now provide employment for the

USW-represented jobs at the 65-year-old

project that will increase the number of

USW-represented jobs at the 65-year-old

plant in LaVergne, Tenn., get first prefer-

ance, told the union it was consider-

ing redesigning so American

makers.”

Firestone brand

The plant has been owned by Bridge-

stone since 1988. The products made in

Des Moines are sold under the Firestone

brand name in North America.

Bridgeston said the expansion will

allow the company to meet the farm
equipment industry’s growing demand

for high capacity radial farm tires in

North America and globally.

The project is already underway. The

investments are being made in core

manufacturing areas of tire building, cur-

ing and related support equipment.

“The goal is to build tires that are

strong enough to carry huge farm

equipment yet gentle enough to minimize

soil compaction that can cause spring

floods and environmentally damaging

fertilizer runoff.

Farms are getting larger and more

diverse. In Iowa, for example, farms

are twice the size they were 50 years ago

and they produce between four and five

times more corn and soybeans.

Farm equipment is also much larger

today. Tractors now run up to 60,000

pounds, some ten times the weight of

machines used five decades ago. Corn

bines used to harvest wheat and other
cereals can be 40,000 pounds and capable

of carrying bins holding 360 bushels, or

about the same amount of people as the

past. An acre or con can hold about 32,000

Iowa has both farms and farm equip-

ment makers. John Deere operates a

plant near Des Moines that employs

about the same amount of people as the

Firesotre factory.

Bridgeston said the investment will

allow Firestone to maintain its market

position to continue to develop advanced

solutions and supply improved tire tech-

nology to the agricultural industry.

“We make good quality tires here. It

is good security for the members,” added

USW-BF’s Contract Coordinator Randy

Boulton. “It shows confidence in our

technology to the agricultural industry.

It’s not in regular production yet but

they have kicked some tires off and they

are pretty nice tires,” Skinner said.

Cranes were used to raise part of the

roof of the factory. “With the econom-

y the way it is, we had a tougher time

because of the automobile industry crisis,”

Skinner said.

USW Warns:

Don’t Source Nuclear Reactor Parts Overseas
Charles Jones was 20 in 1950 when he started working at Reznor, a maker of heating and air conditioning systems now known as Thomas & Betts Corp. He stayed 60 years before he put down his tools.

Jones, 80, officially retired in April from the plant in Mercer, Pa., with his six decades of service interrupted only by a tour of duty with the U.S. Marines Corps. “Sixty years at one plant is unbelievable,” said Tom Katlis, the president of USW Local 5306, which represents about 260 employees.

The plant and employees celebrated “Charlie Jones Day” on April 24, the 60th anniversary of his hiring, with special blue T-shirts marking the event.

When Jones started, the plant was operated by the Reznor family that had founded the business in 1888. The facility went through several owners in its tenure and was sold to Memphis-based Thomas & Betts in 1993.

No stranger to work
Jones enjoys what he’s doing, or he wouldn’t have been here this long. And the best part is I get paid for it,” he said ten years ago on his 50th anniversary. One thing is certain. Jones was no stranger to work. He was one of six children born on a rural Pennsylvania dairy farm. His father both worked the farm and mined coal.

At 14, Jones was using a horse-drawn wagon to help neighboring farmers load their silos with corn. In high school, he worked for a local sawmill cutting logs with a two-man crosscut.

He worked for a time at a rail car manufacturing company repairing hopper chutes for coal cars before joining Reznor on April 24, 1950, starting in the shops. In those days, he would milk cows before going to work.

By 1951, he was a U.S. Marine stationed for two years in North Carolina.

Once out of the service, he returned to his hometown of Stoneboro, Pa., and his job.

Jones has been married to Eva “Louise” Anderson for 55 years. The way he tells the story, he asked her out in high school and she refused. Later, on leave from the Marines, he met up with Louise again and asked if she was seeing anyone. She said no and he said, “How about Saturday night?”

“It went from there,” he said. “We just clicked right off the bat.”

Specialty parts his specialty
Jones has spent the last dozen or so years making specialty items, including replacements for parts damaged on the line and parts for products that are no longer manufactured.

“It was strictly hand-forming, laying out the piece and making it from scratch,” he said. “It kept me in shape. It was physical work.”

Since he had spent so much of his life at work, Jones resolved a long time ago to take pride in what he was doing and to try to see something good in everything.

His advice to those starting out in the work force: “Look at the positive in everything, and get out of work what you can, and realize that things are not maybe going to go the way you want every day, and do whatever you can to push things in the right direction.”

His wife’s health was a factor in his decision to retire. They had three children, and enjoy time with grandchildren and great-grandchildren, a few of whom live at home.

“Our family is what we really care about,” Jones said. “We enjoy them. I won’t be bored. I’m going to have to do that I’ve got to do.”

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ecently, in a room packed with hundreds of the United Steelworkers’ best activists, MSNBC’s Ed Schultz made a passionate case for why it’s so important for workers to have a trusted source in the media.

There’s the hundreds of conservative, corporate-funded, right-wing television and radio talk shows that flood America’s airwaves with mistruths and myths, he pointed out. There’s the corporate-funded, right-wing television and radio talk shows that flood American airwaves with mistruths and myths, he pointed out. There’s the hundreds of conservative, corporate-funded, right-wing television and radio talk shows that flood America’s airwaves with mistruths and myths, he pointed out. There’s the recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling that will allow virtually unlimited corporate spending in elections, giving multinational corporations and their political allies an unprecedented platform, Schultz said.

And then there’s this fact, according to Schultz: “They lie. The cameras are on – the Republicans lie.”

The 500 activists attending the Rapid Response conference where Schultz was speaking stood, cheered and clapped in agreement.

“I believe in who you are and what you stand for,” Schultz said. “I believe that at every level we have to be Americans and take care of each other.”

International President Leo W. Gerard, who’s appeared on Schultz’ radio and TV show multiple times to discuss workers’ rights, describes the veteran host as a devoted family man. He and his wife Wendy have six children.

Employees celebrate Charlie Jones Day.

A Working Life

Photos courtesy of Thomas & Betts Corp.

With TV, Radio Shows
Schultz Gives Voice
Spotlight to Workers

On the Radio: “The Ed Schultz Show” airs live weekdays from noon to 3 p.m. ET with a weekly audience of more than 3 million listeners on 100 stations across the country. For more info: http://wegoted.com/

On the TV: “The Ed Show” airs weekdays from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. ET on MSNBC. For more info: http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/30031533/
Workers Lose Their Shirts

Ohio Democrats have posted an Internet campaign ad in response to a Republican ad depicting a bare-chested Lt. Gov. Lee Fisher, a Democratic candidate for the U.S. Senate.

In the Internet video, the members complain that Ohio voters “lost their shirt” under policies promoted by Republican Senate nominee Rob Portman when he was a budget director and trade advisor for former President George W. Bush. To see the video, go to www.ohiodems.org or www.portmantooktheshirtoffmyback.com.

The Ohio Democratic Senate Party also invited viewers to “send a shirt to Rob Portman” or to direct that the party send one to the Republican to “let him know how many people refuse to go back to the failed policies of the Bush era.”

CPR Training Saves a Life

USW member Erv Meyer is grateful for the CPR instruction he received at a work-site training course negotiated by the USW with United States Steel Corp., his employer.

The Met lab employee of U.S. Steel’s Fairless Works near Philadelphia saved the life of his 85-year-old father, also named Erv, on April 16 after he had slumped over while watching a Philadelphia Phillies game on TV.

Meyer quickly started chest compressions and mouth to mouth breathing on his father, who had been unresponsive. “In less than two minutes, I’m breathing in his mouth and he woke up,” said Meyer, who took the training in January. “Within three minutes, the ambulance arrived and the police were here.”

Local 4889 President William Coe said the company had initially delayed implementing the CPR and AED training program, saying it was unnecessary.

“What we negotiated. It’s in the contract,” Coe said. “Erv Meyer took his training home and used it in a good way to save his father.”

USW, APRI Team Up for Green Jobs

The Pittsburgh chapter of the A. Philip Randolph Institute has teamed up with the Pittsburgh chapter of the A. Philip Randolph Institute has teamed up with the USW to train workers for the new generation of green jobs.

The A. Philip Randolph Adult Learning Center, located in the housing authority’s Bedford Hope Center in Pittsburgh, opened last summer. There, USW trainers as well as leaders from APRI help residents take advantage of new educational and job opportunities.

The goal of the collaboration is to encourage self-sufficiency among housing authority residents, said Housing Authority Executive Director A. Fulton Meachem Jr. educational, and economic development opportunities.

“Erv Meyer took his training home and used it in a good way to save his father.”
Courthouse Monument Honors Local 665

Union memorials are a rare sight on courthouse lawns. But there is an impressive one that honors USW Local 665 in a place of honor outside of the Graves County courthouse in Mayfield, Ky.

Dubbed the “rock of labor,” the 3,000-pound, rough-hewn brown boulder commemorates Local 665, which represented workers at the now defunct Continental Tire factory in Mayfield. The factory closed in 2007.

Workers voted to join the union shortly after General Tire and Rubber opened the plant in 1960 to manufacture car and truck tires. Local 665 was part of the United Rubber Workers until it merged into the USW. General Tire sold the plant to Continental.

The boulder was donated by the Western Kentucky AFL-CIO Area Council at the request of Wayne Chambers, Local 665’s last vice president and a current trustee. Chambers was the driving force behind the project.

Former Labor Secretary William Wirtz Dies

Former Secretary of Labor William Willard Wirtz, who helped the USW establish and enforce the rules that govern the union’s International Elections, died on April 24 at the age of 98.

Wirtz, a lawyer and labor arbitrator was the first chair of the USW’s Campaign Conduct Administrative Committee and led the committee as it established and enforced the USW’s election rules.

During his tenure, the USW’s prohibition on the use of funds from nonmembers in International Elections was challenged in the courts and went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ruled 5-4 in favor of the union.

Wirtz left a Chicago law firm to join the Kennedy administration as undersecretary of labor in 1961. President John F. Kennedy promoted him to the top job in 1962 after naming Labor Secretary Arthur J. Goldberg to the Supreme Court. He stayed in the post after President Johnson succeeded Kennedy in 1963.

In step with the social and economic goals of Johnson’s Great Society initiatives, Wirtz directed numerous training and education programs aimed at furthering opportunities for workers. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 spurred the department to pursue an equal-opportunity agenda, including nondiscriminatory practices by contractors and equal pay for women.

USW Endorses Onorato for Pa. Governor

International President Leo W. Gerard and District 10 Director John DeFazio both delivered endorsements to current Allegheny County Executive Dan Onorato to be the next governor of Pennsylvania.

Onorato said he is proud of his labor background and will work to create jobs in Pennsylvania. His highest priority if elected governor to succeed Democrat Ed Rendell, who is completing a second term in office.

ABG’s John J. Murphy, Sr. Dies

John J. Murphy Sr., a retired special assistant to the USW’s international president, died on March 18 at age 75.

Murphy was elected director of the division in 1996 after being appointed to merge the Aluminum Brick and Glass Workers Union with the United Steelworkers of America. He also served on the executive council of the AFL-CIO Union Leadership Department.

Prior to the merger, Murphy had been executive administrative assistant to the ABG president, administering affairs and the union’s national and leadership negotiations in the aluminum, brick and glass industries.

A member of Local 440 at Reynolds Metals Co. in Richmond, Va., Murphy joined the union in 1974 and joined the ABG as a district court when the Aluminum Workers International Union, which later formed the United Brick & Clay Workers and the United Glass and Ceramic Workers. He was a resident of St. Peters, Mo.

Alcoa Negotiations Start

The USW and Alcoa Inc. have negotiated openings in Cincinnati over a master contract that would cover about 4,000 employees at 10 plants in the United States. The current labor contract expires on May 31. District 7 Director Jim Robinson is the lead negotiator for the union.

Pa. AFL-CIO Leader Bill George Retires

After 20 years as the top union leader in Pennsylvania, USW President William “Bill” George is retiring at the end of May as president of the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO.

A union member for 50 years, George started his career with J&L Steel as a member of USW Local 121 in Aliquippa, Pa. He became president of the state federation in 1990.

Rick Bloomgindle, the federation’s secretary-treasurer since 1994, was elected in April to succeed George as president. Frank Slay, a former USW organizer, succeeds Bloomgindle as secretary-treasurer.

Taxes at Truman Levels

According to analysis by the newspaper USA Today, the average American this year paid their lowest level in taxes since Harry Truman’s presidency in 1950 as a percentage of all personal income.

On average, taxes paid in 2009 – including state, local, federal, income, property, sales and other taxes – amounted to 25.2 percent of all personal income, according to data compiled by the Internal Revenue Service.

Around 9.2 percent of all personal income, the lowest rate since 1950, according to analysis by the newspaper USA Today.

On average, taxes paid in 2009 – including state, local, federal, income, property, sales and other taxes – amounted to 25.2 percent of all personal income, according to data compiled by the Internal Revenue Service.

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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 __________

Everyone deserves a safe workplace.

The USW is pressing for safer workplaces in the petroleum industry following a deadly series of accidents in April that killed or injured 40 people, including an oil rig explosion (above) in the Gulf of Mexico that swept 11 workers overboard and an explosion at a refinery in Anacortes, Wash., where seven workers perished. See pages 14 to 21.