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(Minneapolis & St. Paul)

Message From the CWA Minnesota State Council The Voice of CWA

By President Tim Lovaasen

This is the first issue of **The Voice**, published by the Communications Workers of America Minnesota State Council. We will be sending two issues this year to our membership to talk about the Council and the importance of this year's election to our Union.

The CWA Minnesota Council is made up of nineteen locals in Minnesota with participation from North Dakota Locals 7303 and 7304. Minnesota workers in the industries of - telephone, television, bus manufacturing, newspaper publishing, credit union banking, printing, general manufacturing workers, sales and social work are represented by CWA, CWA-Nabet, CWA-TNG along with IUE-CWA. These are the employees of AT&T, Qwest, Frontier, Garden Valley and Paul Bunyan telephone companies. These are also the employees of the Minneapolis Star Tribune, St. Paul Pioneer Press, WCCO-TV, TPT-TV Public Television, New Flyer Bus Company, Dex Yellow Pages, Crisis Connection, Topline Credit Union, TORO, many other smaller telephone companies, print shops and smaller manufacturing companies in Minnesota.

CWA is a Union that not only represents workers from many different industries, but also many different racial, religious, ethnic and cultural walks of life. Therefore, some of our members believe CWA should stay out of politics. The leadership of CWA nationally as well as the state and local level know we need to be aware and involved in politics whether we like it or not.

The CEO's of the companies our members work for are definitely involved in politics. They understand politicians make the laws industries must operate under. Laws that govern unemployment compensation, workers' compensation, workplace safety and taxation of corporations affect the bottom line of the corporations but they also affect the bottom line of workers and their families.

CWA's involvement in politics revolves around issues affecting the rights of workers and the quality of life for their families. CWA knows that politicians can pass laws that take away the gains we have fought to obtain through collective bargaining and the legislative process. CWA knows politicians can set the rules to make it very hard or almost impossible to organize more workers into the CWA union family. If there is a continued decline in union membership in the United States and in Minnesota this will put the rights, wages and benefits of CWA members and other union members under unrelenting attack by corporate America.

The CWA Minnesota State Council will not tell you who to vote for. The Council will recommend candidates based on their support to improve workers rights to organize, to collectively bargain and to protect the gains made through this process. Also, the endorsed candidates must support protecting and improving workers compensation, unemployment compensation and work place safety. Our recommendations will be based on a candidate's commitment and support of our issues such as - quality education, affordable health care, pension protection, fair and equitable taxation. They must earn the right to be a Labor endorsed candidate. The final decision on who you vote for is, of course, yours!

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CWA Members

– Who Cares About the Presidential Elections?

By Dawn Schnickels-Johnson – Local 7200

That nagging question about why should I care about who wins the Presidential Election and why is our union actively asking us to vote, is rising to the surface at a rapid pace this year. The discussions around this are even more prevalent in states considered 'Battleground States' such as Minnesota where the vote appears to be very close.

We, as Workers, are in the mist of a revolution started by the present administration. This may sound extreme, but think about these facts and issues.

Do you know what one of the first actions **Clinton** took when he came into office? Enacting the Family and Medical Leave Act – even though it is unpaid, unlike other countries, it was a positive for workers and protected their jobs if they needed to care for their families. On this issue **Bush** wants to narrow the availability of Family and Medical Leave, if not eliminate it. In 2003, the administration rolled back a rule that had allowed states to use unemployment funds to replace lost wages when a state employee took time off to care for a new baby.

Do you know what **Bush's** first things he did for workers when he took office? He revoked the Ergonomics Rule that recognized that Repetitive Motion resulted in medical problems such as Carpel Tunnel and therefore, employees could no longer claim this as an on-the-job injury! This saved employers over **\$9 billion dollars!**

John Kerry recognizes that ergonomics injuries are the nation's biggest job safety problem, affecting more than 1.8 million American workers each year. **Kerry** supports mandatory ergonomics safeguards to improve workplace safety and has opposed legislative and Bush administration efforts to block these safeguards.

Then there is the overall issue of Safety in the Workplace. **Bush** has killed dozens of OSHA worker protection measures, including rules on cancer-causing substances, reactive chemicals and infectious diseases. He favors voluntary protection programs instead of enforcement action, letting employers make their own rules. **Bush** has excluded unions from representation in development of the voluntary guidelines.

In his 20-year career as a U.S. Senator, **John Kerry** has a 100 percent voting record in favor of workers' interests on all workplace safety and health legislation. He has voted for stronger OSHA penalties against employers who willfully allow workers to be exposed to workplace safety and health hazards that result in injury or death.

What other attacks have we seen from this Bush Administration you ask? We are currently in a battle for

overtime rights. This administration rewrote the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act to take away overtime pay and the right to a 40-hour week, potentially affecting millions of workers. They claim that they have lowered the threshold for those who will qualify for overtime. They also assert that if you have a union contract that you will not be impacted.

Let's dispel some of those statements. First, when does someone who works in the fast-food industry, department stores, restaurants, etc. get scheduled more than 30 hours per week? That would mean benefits would have to be paid. And even if they did reach over 40 hours, what is the amount of overtime at time and a half on \$5-\$8 an hour. So did they really lower the bar on who will qualify?

Secondly, what would prevent those fine, upstanding employers from raising someone's hourly wage to reach the level where overtime is no longer required? We have some technicians who are within fifty cents of that threshold! It's good we have a contract, but what will these employers be suggesting at the bargaining tables?

John Kerry strongly **opposes** any changes in Department of Labor rules that would take overtime pay away from any worker now eligible. We need this position to protect our rights!

Kerry supports **increasing** the minimum wage and recently sponsoring a bill to bring from its present rate of \$5.10 an hour to \$7.00 an hour. At the current minimum wage of \$5.10 an hour this equals \$204 a week or \$816 a month before taxes. Could you live on this? **Bush** **opposes** raising the minimum wage and wants to allow states to opt out of any increase. He also proposed that welfare recipients in work experience programs be exempt from minimum wage laws.

This list is just a small picture of what is happening to workers across this country. Your union leadership looks at this and finds that there is no question about who will work on our behalf. We cannot afford another four years of an administration that supports taking away workers' rights and protections; while padding the bankrolls and profits of the major corporations and their upper echelon.

John Kerry and John Edwards have proven records on their support for workers, their families and safe workplaces. We need to put aside one-issue politics and look at the big picture. We need to have an administration that works to keep our jobs here, our workplaces safe, our pensions secure, our pay for overtime and will not fear taking a stand on our behalf, lest they lose their financial contributions from us. If we do not have this support, we could be in for many more

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Election Timetable

- **Tues Aug 24 2004** Pre-registration closes for Primary Election
- **Tues Sept 14 2004** Primary Election
- **Fri Oct 1 2004** Absentee Ballots available for General Election
- **Tues Oct 12 2004** Pre-registration closes for General Election
- **Sat Oct 30 2004** Counties & Designated municipalities must be open from 10 am – 3pm
- **Mon Nov 1 2004** Counties & Designated municipalities must be open for absentee voting until 5pm
- **Tues Nov 2 2004** Vote & Same Day General Election Voter Registration

John Kerry's Health Care Plan Works for Working Families

Basic health care is unaffordable for too many people in this nation. The United States spends more on health care than any other country in the world, yet nearly 44 million Americans lack medical coverage. Too many employers refuse to offer affordable health insurance coverage to workers. And even when they do, employers increasingly are shifting costs to workers, requiring them to pay higher premiums, deductibles and co-payments. Meanwhile, rising drug prices and drug company profits are driving up health care costs.

But so far, President George W. Bush's policies have been bad medicine for the nation's health care crisis. The Medicare prescription drug bill Bush signed into law last year encourages companies to drop retiree health coverage and doesn't allow the U.S. government to negotiate price reductions with pharmaceutical companies. Bush supports a weak Patients' Bill of Rights that would allow HMOs and accountants to make medical decisions. His plan would only expand health care coverage to 2 million people by offering risky and expensive individual health accounts.

Kerry's Plan Would Ensure Health Care Coverage for All

In contrast, Sen. John Kerry would extend health care coverage to 96 percent of all people living in the United States by creating incentives for employers to offer job-based coverage, expanding public child health insurance programs and making it easier for small employers to provide workers with health coverage through a new insurance plan modeled after the health plan for members of Congress. Kerry supports a strong Patients' Bill of Rights—one that allows doctors to make medical decisions and patients to have access to the specialists they need. He pledges to overhaul Bush's misguided Medicare prescription drug law and replace it with policies that discourage employers from dropping retiree coverage and allow the United States to negotiate lower drug prices. Funding for Kerry's plan will come from rolling back Bush's tax cuts for wealthy people earning more than \$200,000 a year.

"With these reforms, we will make real savings in the cost of health care," says Kerry. "We'll save lives, we'll save jobs, we'll save paychecks and we'll save businesses. We'll build healthier households, more prosperous communities and a stronger America."

"We need a comprehensive plan to address the nation's health care crisis. John Kerry's strategic vision and common-sense approach will go a long way toward repairing our broken health care system and bringing the United States up to par with other industrialized nations whose citizens have access to quality, affordable health care."

-Tim Lovaasen – CWA MN State Council President

Visit www.johnkerry.com to read the full Kerry plan for the nation's health care crisis.

...continued from page 2

take backs on a political level and at the bargaining tables!

The information in this article hopefully will give you a reason to get involved. I hope that it enforces what we have on the line and that you see why it is critical for us to **vote**. We have a lot to lose with indifference and a lot to gain with participation. The Question is Clear when it comes to – Who Cares About the Presidential Election! We must as

CWA members and workers care! If we don't, who will?

Encourage your family members to make sure they are registered to vote and to support the union endorsed candidates! We do not take these endorsements lightly! This is the most important election to date and our future is not in their hands, but in ours at the VOTING BOOTH on November 2, 2004!

What You Should Know About John Kerry

CWA Minnesota State Council wants you to know more about Senator John Kerry and why CWA believes John Kerry should be the next president of the United States. No one can tell you how to vote, but please learn about the issues and the candidates' positions on the important issues that affect your job.

Since he was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1984, Kerry has earned a 91 percent lifetime AFL-CIO voting record on important working family issues. Just in 2003, Kerry voted to:

- Protect workers' right to overtime pay from the Bush administration's assault on the Fair Labor Standards Act that could cut paychecks for 8 million workers;
- Extend and expand federal unemployment insurance benefits for long-term jobless workers;
- Protect millions of retirees from the loss of their employer-provided prescription drug coverage threatened by the recently passed Medicare prescription drug law.

Kerry has an economic plan to reverse the incredible job loss of the Bush administration years: more than 2.9 million jobs gone.

On March 26, 2004, Kerry unveiled a detailed plan to create 10 million jobs in the United States in four years. The plan centers on tax reform and credits to encourage job creation in the United States, a new emphasis on education and training and restoration of fiscal discipline to reduce the



makes no sense. And if I am president, it will end," Kerry says.

Although Kerry supported the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and trade with China, he now acknowledges their problems and says he will address every unfairness and fix them. Kerry also says he will insist on strong worker protections in new trade agreements.

On health care, Kerry's proposes a comprehensive health care plan, including ways to restrain health care costs, provide health insurance for every child in the country and make it possible for all Americans to receive the same health care as any member of Congress. His plan includes help for employers to provide quality health care coverage for their workers.

Kerry will fight to roll back Bush's tax cut for the wealthy while expanding middle-class tax breaks to help cover health care and college tuition costs.

Workers fighting for a voice at work will find an ally in Kerry, who has a long record of supporting workers' freedom to form unions. Kerry supports card-check and employer neutrality, in which employers recognize workers' choice if a sign authorization cards asking for union representation. Kerry has co-sponsored the Employee Free Choice Act (S. 1925) and supports measures to restore the bargaining rights of hundreds of thousands of workers in the federal Defense and Homeland Security Departments that are under attack by the Bush administration.

How you vote is a personal decision, but after carefully examining the candidates' records, *CWA has endorsed Sen. John Kerry for president of the United States*. For more information on John Kerry and where he stands on other important working family issues, visit www.aflcio.org/issuespolitics/politics/candidates_kerry.cfm.

record \$543 billion deficit the Bush administration has run up since inheriting a \$5.7 trillion surplus from the Clinton administration.

"If a company is torn between creating jobs here or overseas, we now have a tax code that has American taxpayers paying to ship jobs overseas. That



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The Future of Social Security

By Bob Horvath – CWA Local 7270

The Social Security Act of 1935 is one of the most important pieces of legislation in our history. By 1935, after bank failures and a stock market crash had wiped out the savings of millions of Americans, over half of America's elderly lacked sufficient income to be self-supporting. Social Security not only provides a retirement income, it also provides survivor and disability benefits to people who qualify under the plan.

In 1974, the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) was passed. ERISA sets minimum standards for pension plans in private industry. The law was passed because of the failure of some very large pension plans that were mismanaged and underfunded. Again, many workers were left without adequate retirement income. Because ERISA now mandates that pension plans are adequately funded, employers are reluctant to tie up all that cash and have been trying to reduce or eliminate pension plans altogether. Since 1985, the number of companies with pension plans has dropped from 114,000 to 32,500. Today, less than half of all workers are covered under an employer-sponsored pension.

Because of the bleak outlook for employer pension plans and the historical uncertainty of the stock market, Social Security is more critical than ever. To old and young, Social Security should be viewed as a foundation of any retirement plan. We should never abandon the guarantee that Social Security offers in favor of privatization that offers no guarantee. Ask investors of ENRON, WorldCom, Global Crossing and TYCO about the risks of the stock market. From 1959 to 1997, Social Security has reduced the elderly poverty rate from 35% to 11%. With private retirement accounts, the larger the potential in earnings, the greater the risk. In order to get the lowest amount of risk, you would be getting returns that are no better than

Social Security currently offers. You would still have to pay all the associated fees that come with stock market accounts.

Is Social Security on the verge of collapse? Will there be anything for workers currently in their 20s and 30s when they retire? The Social Security Board of Trustees estimated in a recent report that Social Security would be fully funded until 2042. The Congressional Budget Office later estimated that Social Security would be fully funded until 2052. Both reports indicate that by 2018-2019, the Social Security surplus will end. That means more Social Security benefits will be paid out than FICA taxes coming in. Payments will then have to be made by dipping into the Social Security trust.

Even though Social Security is not on the verge of collapse, some changes will be needed to assure its future for all. One trend that can't be overlooked is this – America will go from 5.1 workers per Social Security beneficiary in 1960 to 2.1 workers per beneficiary in 2033 – less coming in, more going out. Some changes could include increasing FICA taxes, benefit adjustment, transferring from general revenue. Some things that will not help are deficit spending, low-income employment, a shrinking middle class (the two Americas), and huge corporate tax breaks. The longer we wait, the bigger the problem will be, and the impact will be just as critical for the younger workers.

Senator John Kerry has stated that he will not privatize Social Security. He has also pledged to protect the Social Security Trust Fund by taking it 'off-budget' or putting it in a lock-box. This removes Social Security surpluses from being transferred to the general fund or being used for other purposes. It is important to the retirement future of all workers to save Social Security.



Hello India!

Jim Meyer – CWA MN Political Coordinator

Have you ever called about your computer, credit card, or phone bill and reached someone with either a very different accent or had trouble understanding them at all? Like most Americans, you are discovering this new, appalling, corporate business strategy of “Offshoring” American customer service jobs to countries such as India, the Philippines, Vietnam, and other third world countries.

Why are American corporations doing this? Because they can take advantage of countries whose workforce are willing to work for almost nothing. For instance, an AT&T Customer Care Service rep who does billing and ordering makes \$47,000 a year with full benefits but in India they are paying people to do the same job \$3,000 – \$5,000 per year with no benefits. But the difference doesn’t end with pay. The quality of service and work also drops dramatically. Customers dealing with service reps overseas find themselves frustrated because they either cannot understand these people or are unhappy with the quality of service they receive. Obviously, these jobs are “offshored” only to fatten up the bottom line of corporations with customer service falling a far second place as a priority to these companies.

Who is this affecting? In the telecom industry, this practice has infested the whole industry. Customer service and technical jobs are being “offshored” by companies such as AT&T,

Qwest, Verizon, SBC, with AT&T being one of the most blatant abusers. If your job consists of sitting behind a computer all day or taking customer calls, your job is very vulnerable to be sent overseas. Companies such as AT&T go to great lengths to conceal that these service reps are overseas. The actually have these reps go thru linguistic training to sound more like us and even school them in American culture so you think you are just talking to an American with an accent. But when you dare to ask where this person is located, they will tell you that for “security purposes”, they are not allowed to disclose where they are located. What a bunch of bull! If you asked an AT&T service rep represented by CWA, they would proudly tell you where they are located.

So what can be done to stop this? If you are not aware, President Bush thinks “offshoring” jobs is good for the US economy. It might fatten up the bottom line for corporations, but do you think it is good for the American worker who is loosing it’s good paying job with benefits? On the other hand, Senator John Kerry is very much against “offshoring” these jobs. In 2003, Senator Kerry introduced the “Consumer Right to Know” bill (S.1873) that forces overseas customer service reps to disclose their location when asked by consumers. If elected, he plans to change tax laws that punish those who send jobs overseas and reward those who create jobs in the US. It’s obvious, if we want to keep good paying jobs in America, we need to support John Kerry for President!

CWA Media Workers Face Unique Challenges

By Richard Bowring – President NABET-CWA Local 57411

As we see the end of another year come rapidly to a close and the election season coming into full swing those of us in the media field are grabbing and scratching to hold on to many things that we have fought so hard for in the past.

The role of the media has changed in the last 10 years. With the advent of many 24 hour news channels and instant internet access to up to date news it makes it even harder for those of us who make fair quality television, radio, and print, to be fair and accurate. In this day of “wanting it now” and “let’s be first” attitudes of many news directors the pressure for many NABET-CWA members are challenged.

Hubbing which is the operating and

maintaining of several stations being run by one station, is one of the biggest challenges that we face as union members in the television media. Where there used to be 15-20 union employees doing the work it is now just a handful doing the same functions. Many of our members are being asked to do more jobs, in less time, with fewer resources. This hurts moral, brings up a series of safety concerns and cuts union employment.

Politically those of us in the media have great challenges. As we are asked as union members to “endorse” and help handbill for candidate it becomes very challenging for those of us who are journalists. We must remain neutral as to never show our bias in our stories. If we openly endorse a candidate or help

on a campaign of any candidate it may be perceived that our bias for those candidates will show up in the work of our journalism.

The future of the union employee in the media field is challenging. We face tremendous competition, workload issues, and declining enrollments.

As a union president and a member of the media I am proud of what I do with both of the jobs that I hold. I know others join me in feeling that we have a positive and healthy outlook for not only our jobs but for our unions as well.

Remember – even though as journalists we must remain neutral when doing our job, we still have the right to VOTE!

Cope Activities In Northern Minnesota

By Casey Cusick – VP CWA Local 7214, Duluth

On Wednesday May 26th, Jim Meyer (CWA MN Political Coordinator), Darwin Chester (QWEST retiree), Judy Chesney, and Casey Cusick (both Local 7214 officers) had the honor of speaking with Congressman James Oberstar for 2 hours.

This meeting took place so that Jim Meyer could present Congressman Oberstar with a campaign donation from our COPE fund.

During our time together, we discussed pending legislation regarding over-time pay, further FMLA rule changes, the upcoming election, and the outsourcing of telecommunication jobs.

The outsourcing of telecommunication jobs has already begun. We made sure that Congressman Oberstar understood the ramifications this practice has on us. He talked about the weakening of the middle class and how it affects us. He is aware of our plight and said he will do

everything possible to stop this practice.

We were only able to pass along our concerns to the Congressman because of our ability to make a political donation from our COPE fund. COPE does open the doors and ears of some very influential people on issues that concern all working families. All CWA members should contribute to COPE because it helps our voices be heard. It really works!

Congressman Oberstar also provided us with some very good points that we can use in discussing the abortion and gun issues with our members. Basically he said that no one issue should be black and white, Republican or Democratic issue. You can be for gun rights and still be a Democrat; they are not mutually exclusive ideals.

Without your COPE contributions, our concerns would not have been heard!

An Open Letter to President Bush

June 24, 2004

Subject: "Off Shoring of jobs"

Dear President Bush,

Recently a news release on national T.V. stated that you have said that the "off shoring" of jobs is good for the business economy. I fail to see how the "off shoring" of family supporting jobs is good for the economy of "our" country. To my understanding, the foreign countries that those jobs are sent to, do not pay taxes in our country. I believe that the leadership of my country "The United States" has forgotten how this country was built and how it is sustained by the workers of this country.

I maintain that it is just as immoral to "off shore" our jobs as it is to cheat on your spouse. The reason I say that is, to go to some other person for any service or work than the people who put you in office is akin to cheating on those who were "good enough" at one time but now deemed more expensive than a foreign country.

I look forward to hearing from you or your office.

Sincerely,

Doug Ardoff
CWA Local 7205



*The CWA Proudly Supports
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- Good Jobs at **Home**
- Affordable Healthcare
- Investing in Education
- Protecting workers rights



What is COPE?

By Jim Meyer – CWA MN State Political Coordinator

Over the past 5 months, my job has been to go from local to local and member to member soliciting COPE money. 90% of the time when I tell members I am raising COPE money, they give me a strange look because they have no clue what COPE is.

COPE stands for the Committee On Political Education. It's CWA's program that allows our members voices to be heard in the political arena. The money goes toward educating our members about political issues and candidates that effect working families. The money supports such activities as informational mailings and workplace flyers, voter registration drives, member-to-member door knocks, phone banks, and support pro-worker candidates and issues at the local, state, and federal level.

Why do you need to give to CWA's COPE Program? Your money is needed to help support pro-worker friendly candidates who will help CWA fight such issues as Overtime Pay Elimination, Offshoring of American Jobs, changes in the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), Affordable Health Care, and many other issues that effect your job and your family. Without your support, we are unable to keep our message alive compared to large corporations such as Qwest, AT&T, Citizens, and other telecom & manufacturing corporations

who seem to have deep pockets.

Some people have asked, Why should I give to COPE? I already pay dues. The reason we need to give to COPE is we are not allowed to use dues money for political activities such as supporting pro-worker candidates. In 2002, Congress passed the McCain-Feingold Campaign Reform Bill, which seriously hinders unions. The Law basically put an end to "Soft Money", which is money that is taken out of the general treasury, your dues, to help candidates. We are now forced to ask for "Hard Money", which is money voluntarily given by our members for the political cause.

This is why we are asking our members to join COPE. For as little as \$1 per week (the cost of a bottle of soda), you can make a

major difference in helping keep Federal & State laws that support working families. If you decide to join or up your contribution, you can receive the following awards. For \$1 a week, you have a choice of a T-Shirt, cap or thermos; \$2 a week, a golf or folding umbrella or lunch box-sized thermos; \$5 a week, a polo shirt or 26-quart cooler; \$7 a week, a jacket; \$10 a week, a CWA watch and membership in the Presidential Club. If you don't already belong to CWA COPE or would like to up your weekly donation, please fill out the card below and turn it into your local officer or steward.

We need your help! Please sign up for CWA COPE and help us elect pro-worker candidates and John Kerry for President!

Payroll Number (If Required)	Social Security Number	Print Employee Name
Payroll Authorization Card	CWA-COPE Political Contributions Committee	
	I hereby authorize my employer to deduct from my wages the sum of \$ _____ each pay period and to remit such amount to the Communications Workers of America Committee on Political Education Political Contributions Committee. ("CWA-COPE PCC")	
This authorization is voluntarily made based on my specific understanding that:		
The signing of this authorization card and the making of contributions to CWA-COPE PCC are not conditions of membership in the union nor of employment with the Company, and that I may refuse to do so without fear of reprisal. (Continued on back)		
Check one: <input type="checkbox"/> New Enrollment <input type="checkbox"/> Change of Amount		
Employee Signature	Date	Local Number
E-Mail Address	Street Address	
City	State	Zip
Name of Employer	Occupation	

Authorized by the Communications Workers of America and the AFL-CIO on behalf of a joint fund-raising effort by CWA-COPE PCC and AFL-CIO COPE PCC.

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