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SMUD News briefs
bargaining proposals are due by the April unit meetings.

Union membership, after several years of decline, increased in 2005 by 213,000, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported. Pay for union members also increased to an average of \$801 weekly, nearly 30% more than the \$622 weekly pay received by non-union workers.

US workers real wages have fallen in 18 of the last 20 months, according to the Economic Policy Institute, which said the decline resulted both from faster inflation over the course of 2005 and slower nominal wage growth in recent years.

Corporate wealth has become more concentrated in the hands of the highest-income Americans, the New York Times reported. In 2003 the top 1% of households owned 57.5% of corporate wealth, up from 53.4% the year before. In 1991 its share was 38.7%.

Tax policy appears to be a big factor in the growing concentration of wealth as the government sticks wage earners with a growing share of the tax burden. Long-term capital gains, where the wealthy dominate the playing field, were taxed at 28% until 1997, and at 20% until 2003, when rates were cut to 15%.

The minimum wage in Vietnam was increased by nearly 40% after more than 40,000 workers in plants in Ho Chi Minh City went on strike through December and January, Labor Notes reported.

SIERRA PACIFIC HIRES UNION-BUSTING CONSULTANT

Company pushes for massive givebacks at bargaining table —see page 3

Utility Reporter

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UNITY IS STRENGTH

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ADVISORY COUNCIL CONFRONTS RANGE OF ISSUES

Neutrality agreement paves way for new organizing at PG&E

A neutrality agreement negotiated with Pacific Gas & Electric paves the way for Local 1245 to organize hundreds of previously unrepresented employees at the utility, Senior Assistant Business Manager Tom Dalzell reported to the Advisory Council last month.

Scattered around the PG&E system, as many as 3700 unrepresented employees are eligible for membership in Local 1245 or in PG&E's other union, Engineers and Scientists of California. The



Assistant Business Manager Bob Choate discusses organizing opportunities at PG&E.

neutrality agreement provides for union recognition when a majority of the employees in any designated bargaining group sign cards authorizing the union to represent them.

Known as "card check recognition," this system of organizing avoids the protracted and sometimes contentious process of National Labor Relations Board elections.

"In coming weeks we will seek Advisory Council and Executive Board assistance in identifying and recruiting eligi-

continued on page 5



Grover Day, representing PG&E Stockton Division, weighs in on the journeyman wage hike during last month's Advisory Council meeting.

Bargaining over 'Transformation' to begin March 1

Local 1245 and Pacific Gas & Electric will begin negotiations March 1 over the contractual implications of the company's Transformation plan.

Negotiations will initially focus on three broad areas of proposed change: Materials Distribution Optimization, Outage Response procedures, and Resource Management Centers. The company formally unveiled its Business Transformation bargaining proposals to the union on Feb. 13.

PG&E has been working on major changes to its organizational structure for 18 months. In November, the company began a period of consultation

with its two unions—IBEW and ESC—to solicit employee input into the Transformation process, including feedback on ideas put forward by PG&E's Transformation consultant.

continued on page 7



Senior Assistant Business Manager Tom Dalzell discusses concerns over PG&E's Transformation initiative with the Local 1245 Advisory Council on Feb. 4.



Before asking for the union's support in her bid to become the next Lt. Governor of California, State Senator Jackie Speier relates a horrifying account of being shot in Guyana, South America while investigating the Jonestown cult with her boss, Congressman Leo Ryan. Ryan was murdered in the attack. More on Page 5.

Merced-area retirees plan new chapter

Retirees in the Merced area will meet on April 5 to discuss forming a new chapter of the Local 1245 Retirees Club.

The meeting, to be held at Caro's Restaurant, 720 Motel Dr. in Merced, is open to all former members of IBEW Local 1245 and their spouses. The meeting will begin at 10 a.m.

Retiree medical premiums and pension benefits are two issues that are causing deep concern among Local 1245 retirees. "Retirees are being squeezed," said Local 1245 retiree Gordon Borges of Los Banos, who first suggested the Merced-area meeting. "Medical costs keep going up but our pensions do not. With many of us there's a high level of urgency to do something ASAP because of age."

Merced would be the fifth area to establish a chapter of the Retirees Club. Chapters were organized late last year in Santa Rosa and in Vacaville. Chapters have been meeting for over a decade in the East Bay and in San Jose.

Although chapters meet for the purpose of defending the interests of retirees, they also provide an opportunity to make new friends and reconnect with former co-workers. If you are interested in attending the April 5 meeting, you're welcome to just show up. But it would be great if you let us know you're coming! Call Tonya at 707-452-2718.

Learn more about the Local 1245 Retirees Club at www.ibew1245.com/Retirees.html.



Perry Zimmerman
BUSINESS MANAGER

Want things to work better? Try asking your employees!

I would like first to thank all of our members who expressed concern for my health in December. I am back to full health after a rough couple of weeks with a nasty combination of viruses. It is ironic that I got sick shortly after writing my year-end column extolling the importance of our health and safety. There was obviously nothing I could have done to avoid catching whatever it was that I caught, but it sure brought home to me on the most personal level how unimportant everything else is compared to your health and the health of your family.

Local 1245 is in the midst of challenging and in some cases difficult negotiations with a number of employers, including PG&E's contract proposals arising from Business Transformation and general negotiations with Sierra Pacific. In the next few months, we will begin negotiations with NECA for our members in Outside Line construction and with SMUD. Mt. Wheeler, Truckee-Donner PUD, Healdsburg, Alameda, and Truckee Meadows Water Authority are all in bargaining.

With the repeal of Public Utility Holding Company Act (PUHCA), investor-owned utilities are scrambling to make changes that they think will insulate them from take-over attempts. Especially worrisome to us is the widespread use of outside consultants by the utilities. At best, it seems to us that they charge millions of dollars to tell utility management that the utility's ideas for contract changes make sense. At worst, they import an anti-union attitude that is antithetical to the mutually cooperative, sophisticated relationship that we have carefully developed with most of our employers over the years.

I am not singling out any one utility with these remarks or even any one consulting firm. I am, however, making a general appeal to our employers: if you want to make things work better, come to us and come to your employees. You'd be surprised at how many good ideas they have if you'd only ask them.

Even with these many important negotiations taking place, we can all too easily be jarred back into understanding what is really important. Last spring, I traveled to Portland to meet with several dozen long-time Local 1245 members who were losing their jobs. Their company had been acquired by a large pipeline concern, and the work that our members had done on a small scale in Portland was already being done on a large scale at the company's headquarters.

After that meeting, I wrote in this column of the grace and optimism of this group of employees who were facing job loss in the near future. One by one, they spoke of their gratitude for all that the union had done for them over the years. Nobody's comments touched me more than those of Lisa Weihe, a long-term union member. She personally thanked me for the union's work, and said that the severance and pension that she would receive would let her retire in comfort and dignity.

In early February, we learned that Lisa had not gotten the long retirement that she deserved and wanted. In a freak accident, she slipped off a sidewalk and was killed by a passing truck. Lisa's death was profoundly sad, and is an eloquent reminder that safety matters every second of the day, not just on the job. Her passing, however, does nothing to diminish her support of Local 1245 over the years and her personal appreciation of what workers stand to gain when they band together in a union and act collectively to exercise control over their working lives.

Transformation Impact LOA

Have you seen the PG&E Letter Agreement to mitigate the impact of Transformation? Read it on-line at www.ibew1245.com/newsarchive-docs/La05-66.pdf.

Bob Dean, Pat Waite join Local 1245 staff

There are two new faces on the Local 1245 staff: Bob Dean and Pat Waite.

Pat Waite, a 28-year IBEW member, has been hired to fill the Nevada assignment formerly held by Santiago Salazar. Waite most recently has worked as a Substation Lineman Splicer at the Truckee Donner Public Utility District, where he served on the union's negotiating committee and also on the labor relations committee. Waite has been a union steward at Truckee Donner PUD and also at southern California Edison, where he worked from 1978 to 1991.

Bob Dean, a 14-year IBEW member, has been hired to fill the Bakersfield-area assignment formerly held by Ed Dwyer. Dean was working as an Operator at Rock Creek Power House for PG&E when he was recruited to the union staff. Dean has served as a union steward and also has served on the System Operator committee.

Local 1245 welcomes Waite and Dean to the staff, and also extends the union's gratitude to Salazar and Dwyer for their service.

Local 1245 welcomes Waite and Dean to the staff, and also extends the union's gratitude to Salazar and Dwyer for their service.

Illinois, not Ohio

On page 5 of the January-February 2006 edition of Utility Reporter, Rod Blagojevich was mistakenly referred to as governor of Ohio. He is governor of Illinois. Our apologies.



Bob Dean



Pat Waite

APPOINTMENTS

PACIFIC GAS AND ELECTRIC

Materials Labor Management
Steve Mayfield

SACRAMENTO REGIONAL TRANSIT

Training Committee
Robert Bonsack

FAMILY TREE

Bargaining Committee
Carl Lamers

CONFERENCES & CONVENTIONS

California Labor Federation
Pre-Primary Convention
Dave Scott
Mike Davis
Jim Findley
John Mendoza

PG&E Clerical Retesting LOA

Local 1245 and Pacific Gas & Electric have agreed to remove the existing limit on the number of attempts an employee may have on an entry-level aptitude test as outlined in Exhibit A of the Clerical Agreement and Letter Agreement 90-8. Read Letter Agreement 06-03 on-line at www.ibew1245.com/newsarchive-docs/LA06-03.pdf.

CALENDAR

March 6: Deadline to Apply for Sandoval Competitive Scholarship

March 7: Retirees Club, Santa Rosa, CA

March 8: Retirees Club, Vacaville, CA

March 9: Retirees Club, Antioch, CA

March 11: Stewards Conference, San Jose, CA

March 11: Service Awards, San Jose, CA

March 18: Stewards Conference, San Luis Obispo, CA

March 18: Service Awards, San Luis Obispo, CA

April 3: Deadline to Apply for Trade School Grant

April 8: Tree Trimmer Stewards Conference, Vacaville

April 21: Service Awards, Bakersfield, CA

April 22: Stewards Conference, Bakersfield, CA

May 6: Advisory Council, Vacaville, CA



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Sierra Pacific Power refuses to budge during negotiations

Editor's note: The following letter was sent to IBEW Local 1245 members at Sierra Pacific Power on March 1 by the Local 1245 Bargaining Committee. Throughout five months of bargaining, the company has insisted on gutting benefits for current and retired employees.

Members of IBEW Local 1245 take warning: Your retirement is in jeopardy.

After five months of collective bargaining, Sierra Pacific Power has refused to budge from extreme take-aways that they know are unacceptable to you and your Union. Company managers have retained one consulting firm to help them reorganize (Bain) and another consultant (Strom Engineering) to help recruit replacement workers from out of state to do your job.

Let's be clear: the company we have known through the years is in danger of being hijacked. Traditional values of customer service and fair treatment for employees are being replaced by a narrow focus on profits, without regard for the people who do the work and make those profits possible.

When this company was in financial

crisis, it was *our* work that allowed Sierra to return to profitability. It is *our* work that has put this company back on track to achieve investment-grade status. When the Company set STIP goals of 3.5%, we achieved 4.09%—117% of the goal. *That's* performance.

The company recognizes the contribution of top management with generous packages. Total compensation for the top five managers in 2004 was over \$4.7 million (enough money to give every bargaining unit employee at Sierra Pacific Power a 10.15% raise). While managers reward themselves, here is what they propose for us:

The members of IBEW Local 1245 want this company to succeed. Our performance is proof of that. We deserve better than to have union-busting consultants hovering over our negotiations.

- Shift a huge burden of medical costs onto employees and retirees.
- Reduce medical benefits for current and future retirees.
- Eliminate the union-negotiated employee discount on utility service—the service *we* provide.



WAITING FOR MANAGEMENT. Despite rising productivity and improved finances, Sierra Pacific Power has proposed a massive shift in health care costs onto the backs of employees and retirees, the contracting out of jobs, and the elimination of workrules. The Local 1245 Bargaining Committee is still waiting for management to bring proposals to the table that acknowledge the employees' contribution to the company's success.

- Threaten job security through contracting out our jobs.
- Chain employees to their jobs by reducing time off earned while on-call.

The members of IBEW Local 1245 want this company to succeed. Our performance is proof of that. We deserve better than to have union-busting consultants hovering over our negotiations.

Chairman Walt Higgins says that employees are the company's "most valuable asset." He says that he wants Sierra to be in the "top quartile of western utilities in terms of employee satisfaction." But employee satisfaction isn't something that can be dictated by out-of-state consultants who specialize in busting unions. Employee satisfaction is something a utility company *earns*. It is something earned with

deeds, not slogans.

This is no ordinary bargaining alert because this is not ordinary bargaining. The company has proposed taking our benefits and tearing them to shreds. For five months, the union bargaining committee has made a good-faith effort to preserve the traditional values that have made this company great: commitment to customers, fairness for employees, and respect for the collective bargaining process.

Collective bargaining at Sierra Pacific Power has assured the peaceable resolution of labor-management differences for over six decades. Now the company is apparently ready to turn its back on this proud history of accomplishment. But we are not. The time has come to tell management: do not kill the goose that lays the golden egg. Respect your employees. Bargain in good faith. **BACK OFF!**



Retirees slip into financial desperation

Editor's note: This letter is excerpted from a letter sent to PG&E President Tom King. It is reprinted here with the writer's permission.

I was employed by PG&E for 38 years and retired as a Gas Service Rep. in 2000.

Throughout my PG&E career I prided myself as an employee and would go to great lengths to protect and defend the image of the company. Since the year 1992 the company has almost completely disregarded the needs of their retirees. The rising cost of our health care premiums has become unbearable. The medical cap that went into effect in the year 2000 was disastrous.

Retirees have been called upon in the past by the company to help with phone banks, information pickets, and canvassing of neighborhoods regarding rate cases, annexation of service areas and various issues. At the present time the company has requested the help of retirees regarding SMUD's takeover on the west side of Sacramento. Retirees are very concerned but feel justified in not helping PG&E in the future due to the manner in which they have been represented.

The RPOA medical account was a step in the right direction that came at the expense of employees who were currently on the active payroll. The 2002 COLA for retirees affected less than 100 retired employees. For many retirees, medical premiums will exceed their monthly pension, if not already, and they will be billed by PG&E for the remainder amount.

Currently I am enrolled with Health-net. When I retired, my portion of medical cost was zero. As of Jan. 1, 2006 my medical cost portion will be \$400 a month, minus \$200 a month from my RPOA account. In less than two years, my RPOA account will be depleted and I will be at Medicare age where again the company portion of my medical plan will be reduced by \$300 a month.

Company executive within the last three years have received an unconscionable amount of over \$100 million in perks and bonuses, while retirees are slipping into financial desperation. The retired employees who sacrificed their health and welfare that help make PG&E the company it once was are being treated like second class citizens and will possibly qualify for government assistance in the future.

During negotiations for the contract that expired in 2005, the IBEW negotiating committee was told by PG&E management they would consider discussing financial help for retirees during the wage opener negotiations, but then declined.

In the very near future PG&E management and IBEW must sit down and address the financial situation of the retired employees and future retirees.

Various possibilities would be:

- Larger RPOA account
- Percentage cap on retirees portion of medical premiums
- Larger portion to be paid by the company towards a medical supplement when reaching Medicare age
- Future employees pay larger portion of their medical insurance

*Ed Lenoir, Member
Local 1245 Retirees Club
Sacramento, Ca.*

Thanks for voting on PG&E contract

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

I just received the results of the voting on the (PG&E) Contract Settlement Offer of Oct. 14, 2005. To you who voted, thanks for voting on the proposal; to you who did not vote, you should be ashamed of yourselves—it costs you nothing to vote and express your desires.

The results of the election seem to show that many members are not interested in their benefits. These members who did not vote should remember George Bush and Arnold Schwarzenegger were elected because of those people who did not vote, and everybody is paying the consequences because of people not willing to vote.

Let's hope the next negotiating team will not be hampered by the low voter turnout last year. I'm glad the IBEW retirees are mobilizing to fight the company (PG&E) for our benefits, and carry those working members who did not think it is important to vote.

*Tom D.S. Young, Member
Local 1245 Retirees Club
Reno, Nev.*

On the road to becoming union

In an age when wages for working people are stagnant, when health benefits are under attack, when pension plans are being abandoned, becoming union—and staying union—is more important than ever.

By Eric Wolfe

When you hire on at Pacific Gas & Electric you're not just becoming part of a company. You're becoming union. It's a difference that truly makes a difference.

Damien Padilla knows. Before coming to PG&E the 24-year-old had been working at Home Depot. "My pay doubled now that I'm at PG&E," he said.

Padilla was one of 30 or so new employees attending a company and union orientation session last November in San Ramon, one of many such meetings held during the year as PG&E brings new blood into the organization. From PG&E these new employees learned what the company expects of them. From the union, they learned what they should expect of the company.

Daniel Partridge already had it figured pretty close: "Great benefits, great retirement." Over 50 years of contract bargaining has made a PG&E job one of the best deals available for a young person entering the labor market today.

But it's not just money. Becoming union is about gaining a voice in the workplace.

Fred Sanderson, who hired into General Construction Electric in Petaluma on Oct. 10, got a sense of what it means to be union when he worked for nine months in 2005 as a Hiring Hall Meter Reader in Santa Rosa, where he attended the Santa Rosa unit meeting.

"It's nice to be able to have a little input into issues like AMI (Automated Metering Infrastructure), wage negotiations. It's nice to be heard," Sanderson said.

Even as probationary employees, new recruits enjoy union-scale wages. If you make it six months you achieve permanent status. That means health care for you and your family. It means you start earning toward a company-paid pension benefit, vacation leave, sick leave. It means dental and vision plans, paid holidays, and promotion rights based on your service, not favoritism.

Jeremy Clark, who hired into General Construction Gas in Petaluma on Oct.

10, has no previous union experience, but he knows the union is about more than just money, that a union steward will file a grievance if something isn't right. "Representation is the big thing about it," says

Clark, 25. "It's nice to have somebody care about you besides yourself."

"We're going to represent you," explained Local 1245 Business Rep. Joe Osterlund to the newcomers at San Ramon. "We're not Johnny Cochran, but if there's a problem and you guys bring a good case, we're going to help you out."

"Representation is the big thing about it. It's nice to have somebody care about you besides yourself."
Jeremy Clark, 25

But there's a flip side. For the union to be effective, it needs the support of its members. Not just the old guard, the baby boomers who will be walking out the door over the next few years. The union needs the new guys on the block, the Linemen and Fitters and Customer Representatives of the future.

The union needs *you*.

Winning wages, benefits and rights on the job is only part of it. Hanging onto them is just as important. As good as PG&E is to work for, management's job is to shell out as little money as possible. The union's job is to make sure you get as much as possible for the skills, experience and dedication you bring to your job.

The union is as close as the nearest unit meeting, as close as the union steward at your jobsite. For Lauren Cunningham, a utility clerk in Fresno who attended the November orientation, the union's even closer than that—her desk is nearly adjacent to that of Chris Habecker, Recording Secretary for Local 1245 and chair of the Fresno unit.

Jahmar Johnson, 20, understood the importance of becoming union before the union reps even started flapping their lips about it: "One person can stand alone, but when you have a group of people, it's better," said Johnson.

The orientation included employees

who come from union families, and some who do not. It included employees who've worked union before, and some who have not. It included a few who've reached their 30th birthday, and many who have not.

But among all of them there was a strong current of self-confidence and determination, qualities they will need to get through probation. Daniel Partridge, for one, wasn't at all shy about his prospects: "Oh yeah, I'll make it—no problem. I'll be here for a long time."

Local 1245 wishes all new hires best of luck on the road to becoming union.

Who, what, when, where and why? Learn more about IBEW Local 1245 on-line at www.ibew1245.com.



From right: Jennifer Isaac (A&T employee), Jeremy Clark and Tim Gillaspie.



Damien Padilla



Jahmar Johnson



Lauren Cunningham



Business Rep. Joe Osterlund answers questions from new members.



Fred Sanderson



Earl Hampton



Daniel Partridge



Business Rep. Bill Brill explains protections offered by union contract.



Tom Cornell discusses bargaining difficulties at Sierra Pacific Power.



Sacramento Regional Transit Representative William Gilliam.



John Felts representing members at Trans-Canada, formerly Pacific Gas Transmission.



Recording Secretary Chris Habecker.



Assistant Business Manager Sam Tamimi reports on Review Committee.

AD COUNCIL, continued from page 1.

ible employees,” Dalzell said. Coordinating the organizing effort will be Assistant Business Manager Bob Choate, assisted by Assistant Business Manager Dorothy Fortier, and Office Manager Tonya Alston-Maxwell.

Journeyman Raises

Advisory Council members engaged in a lively discussion over a letter agreement with PG&E to raise wage rates by 1% for journey classifications, with some Council members wondering why that money wasn’t on the table during general wage negotiations last fall.

Dalzell said growing concerns over “attraction and retention” of employees, coupled with a wave of retirements on the horizon, had brought about additional movement in the company’s position since negotiations were concluded in October.

“It is our practice to take the money that’s on the table,” said Dalzell, noting that the union had seized opportunities over the past three years to negotiate increases for the Transmission Department, for Electric System Operators, for Gas System Operators, and for rubber gloving.

“I’d like to compliment you guys on the fact you did get the 1%,” said Council member John Harper. “By keeping that journey level wage up there it’s good for the whole union” because it tends to “pull up” other classifications over time, he said.

Other Issues

Advisory Council members were also

brought up to speed on:

- Extremely rough bargaining climate for current negotiations with Sierra Pacific Power.
- Status of SMUD’s attempt to annex PG&E service territory in Yolo County: current SMUD customers will vote on the proposal.
- An important arbitration case involving a SMUD employee in which the back-pay award included pay for lost overtime opportunities.
- PG&E Letter Agreement 05-66, signed Dec. 13, which seeks to maximize employment opportunities of employees directly impacted by future PG&E Transformation initiatives.
- PG&E Letter Agreement 05-55, signed Jan. 20, which adapts contractual provisions to the company’s new software, SAP, for Payroll and Human Resources data.

Dramatic History

California State Senator Jackie Speier, attending as special guest, appealed to Council members to support her candidacy for Lt. Governor, saying California needed “diversity at the top of the ticket.”

Speier, whose father was a Teamster, has a 96% lifetime voting record in support of labor issues, but it was her dramatic personal history that really caught the attention of Council members.

In 1978, Speier was seriously wounded in the same attack that took the life of Congressman Leo Ryan, whom Spei-

er had accompanied to Guyana in South America to investigate complaints about “The People’s Temple,” a cult led by the Rev. James Jones, formerly of San Francisco. Jones and his cult gained infamy both for the attack on Ryan’s delegation and for an astonishing mass suicide in which 913 cult members died shortly after Ryan’s murder.

“While I laid on that airstrip (where she was shot) for 22 hours without medical attention I had a lot of time to think,” said Speier. She vowed she would “never take another day for granted.”

Later, as the mother of a five-year-old and with another child on the way, Speier lost her husband in an automobile accident. “I know what it’s like to be a single mom—to have the rug pulled out from under you,” she said.

Among other pro-worker and pro-family legislation, Speier co-authored SB2, requiring employers with over 50 employees to provide health insurance. She also championed a law to strengthen personal privacy, noting that “every single bank was selling your financial information and you had no say over it.”



State Senator Jackie Speier, who has a 96% voting record in support of working people, is running for Lt. Governor of California.



Bryan Carroll, attending as an alternate representative for General Construction, jumps right into the thick of things.



The journeyman wage hike drew responses from Todd Wooten, representing PG&E Colgate Division, and Mark Taylor, representing employees at Diablo Canyon Power Plant.



Assistant Business Manager Dorothy Fortier discusses PG&E Letter Agreement concerning implementation of new SAP software.

Dan Mayo, left, representing San Joaquin Division of PG&E, and John Harper, representing Shasta Division of PG&E.

Get up and go

Who do you turn to when your vehicle's got no get-up-and-go? If you work on a PG&E gas or electric crew, your best bet is to turn to your fellow Local 1245 members working in the garage. In San Rafael, where the Utility Reporter visited one morning last October, that would be Equipment Mechanics Chris Chapman and Ronald Giori, and Parts Clerk John Janisen. (Dayshift sub-foreman Dave Maffei was out.) At night you'll find night shift Equipment Mechanics Paul Repin and Rod Levey, all under the

supervision of former Local 1245 member Ed Landman.

It doesn't matter much what it is, if it breaks down it's going to end up here. Chapman rattles off the possibilities: passenger cars, aerial lifts, big rigs, motorcycles, construction equipment. "I replaced an engine in an airboat a while back," he recalls. "It's not like being a transmission man at a Ford dealership where you work on transmission day after day."

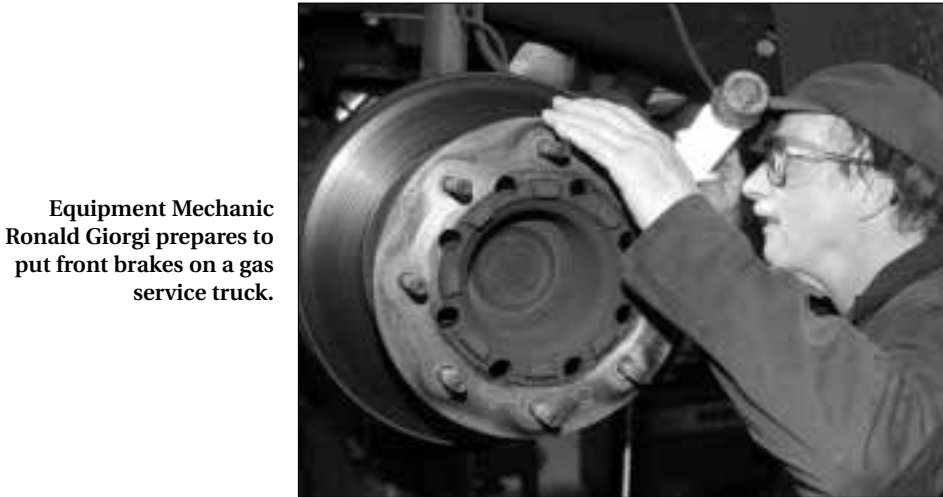
That keeps it interesting for the garage guys. And it keeps the rest of PG&E up and going when they need to be.



Equipment Mechanic Chris Chapman inspects brakes.



Parts Clerk John Janisen is the go-to guy for parts.



Equipment Mechanic Ronald Giorgi prepares to put front brakes on a gas service truck.



Equipment Mechanic Chris Chapman fixes a leaky control valve on a T-truck aerial lift.

Photos by Eric Wolfe



Eureka, CA November 18, 2005



Assistant Business Manager Bob Choate, right, and Ron Nelson, middle, receive their awards from Business Rep. Rich Cowart.



THE HONOREES

40 Years

Bob Choate
Ronald Nelson

Gerald McKinnon
John Miller
William Nolan

Wesley Dedrick
Donald Freeman
Robert Hubbard
Benjamin Lewis
Kenneth Mahouski
Karen Miller
Stanley Miller
Carol Musson
Thomas "Dan" Savage

35 Years

D Craig Butler
Harold "Tom" Gill
Ben Lapena
Nick Martin

30 Years
Steve Hutchings
Howard Macrum

25 Years

Charles Damon

Outside Construction

In the Construction market we are starting to see work picking up for some of our utilities. Since last month's report, we've had 54 calls for Journeyman Lineman; 6 calls for Equipment Specialist; 25 calls for Groundman; 7 calls for Cable Splicers; 9 calls for UG Techs; and 9 calls for Apprentices, for a total of 113 calls.



Dave Crawford

The books, as of February 4:
Journey Lineman,
Book 1: 14

Journey Lineman, Book 2: 4
Lineman, Book 3: 1
Lineman, Book 4: 31
Equipment Specialist, Book 1: 0

Equipment Specialist, Book 2: 4
Equipment Specialist, Book 3: 5
Groundman, Book 1: 4
Groundman, Book 2: 6
Groundman, Book 3: 33
Groundman, Book 4: 104
Cable Splicer, Book 1: 0
Cable Splicer, Book 2: 0
Cable Splicer, Book 3: 0

Total crews working on
Outside Agreement: 50
U.G. Agreement: 17 crews
Pole and Test Agreement: 10 crews
Teledata Agreement: 10 crews
Total crews working: 87

Currently we have 301 apprentices: 4 are traveling working in our jurisdiction, 55 are working out of Local 1245; 229 are working out of Local 47; 11 are working out of Local 396 and 11 are laid off due to various reasons. We graduated a total of 71 apprentices to journeyman Lineman in 2005.

OTHER NEWS

First Aid & CPR is the third Saturday of every month in Sacramento.

David Crawford, Senior Outside Line Business Representative

In Memoriam: Earl Verbeck

Local 1245 member Arthur "Earl" Verbeck died Jan. 23 when a portable crane he was loading onto a trailer fell and trapped him beneath it. Verbeck, a heavy-duty equipment operator, had worked at the Sacramento Municipal Utility District for 20 years.

His son, Joseph Valdez Jr. is a SMUD meter reader, and his daughter-in-law Erica Valdez is a SMUD account representative. Verbeck is survived by his wife, Ramona Tripp-Verbeck and seven other children. The following remembrance of Earl was written by his wife Ramona.



Arthur Verbeck

Editor's note: Contributions to the family can be made out to Ramona Verbeck, account # 18650, and mailed to 6341 Folsom Blvd., Sacramento, CA 95819.

Earl was a one-of-a-kind guy. He was a super husband, father, brother and friend. He didn't have an enemy anywhere in the world. He would help anyone anytime, especially his children and grandchildren.

He loved his job with a passion. He always said he had the best of both worlds. He worked in God's country and got to play with big-boy toys—and got paid to boot. He was never afraid of anything. He loved the guys he worked with and loved to tease them. They were all his extended family and he would go to bat for them, too.

It didn't matter what was asked of him, he did it with a smile or a joke. Nothing ever got him down, even when there was a time when we were so broke we couldn't pay attention. He would laugh and tell us things could get worse, and sure enough they did, but he always saw the light at the end of the tunnel. Even when I wanted to give up on our kids, he wouldn't let me. He stood behind me in anything I wanted to do and gave me support, love and help.

He loved going hunting and fishing with his brothers, sons and friends. He loved his new sport of bow hunting and going to the shooting range. He truly looked forward to his retirement in April so we could spend our time hunting and fishing and even do some gold panning (since he had also been a miner, too). He also looked forward to spending more time with his friends and family.

Earl will truly be missed by all who knew him and I hope they know how much he loved all of them—as much as we love him.

Transformation, continued from page 1

"PG&E has decided to move ahead on some of its Transformation initiatives," said Senior Assistant Business Manager Tom Dalzell. "Because many of these proposed initiatives bump up against language in the labor agreement, negotiations are required before PG&E can proceed. We look forward to serious discussions on how the company's plan will affect our members."

The union shares the company's hope for improved customer service, but is especially concerned about company proposals that could lead to displacements in the bargaining unit, Dalzell said. The bargaining committees will consist of Local 1245 members from the affected areas, under the direction of union staff.

Negotiations over Materials Distribution Optimization will be headed by

Senior Business Rep. Larry Pierce. A major issue in these negotiations will be a company proposal to convert warehouses in Marysville and Fresno into "satellite" facilities.

Negotiations over outage response procedures, which could impact contractual language concerning overtime, will be headed by Assistant Business Manager Howard Stiefer.

Negotiations over Resource Management Centers will fall into two broad categories: Assistant Business Manager Dorothy Fortier will lead the bargaining over company proposals to create a single clerical line of progression, while Assistant Business Manager Sam Tamimi will lead the bargaining over company proposals to consolidate dispatch operations to a minimum of two centers. Currently there are five 24-hour centers and six satellite centers.

Wage improvements at Mt. Wheeler

Local 1245 has negotiated wage improvements in a new agreement with Mt. Wheeler Power, an electric co-op based in Ely, Nev.

Members in Physical classifications will receive a wage increase of 5% retroactive to Jan. 1, 2006, and additional 5% increases at the beginning of 2007 and 2008. Members in Clerical classifications will receive a wage increase of 3.5% retroactive to Jan. 1, 2006, 3.25% in 2007, and 3% in 2008.

The agreement was ratified Feb. 15.

Numerous other improvements were negotiated including:

- \$300 climbing boot reimbursement for Physical classifications effective immediately and every 3 years subsequently.
- Additional half-hour at applicable overtime rate payment to meal in-lieu language for meals missed.
- Personal Leave Time buy-back will now be at 100% (formerly 80%).
- Instead of cashing out excess PLT, employees may elect to put any PLT into their 401(k) accounts at 100% of the dollar value.
- Increased cap on PLT

savings bank.

- Joint safety committee will be required to meet at least quarterly.
- Evergreen language added to contract.

Under the terms of the agreement, members will see their contribution to medical premiums rise over the term of the agreement to a maximum of \$40 a month for employee-only plans and a maximum of \$80 for family plans.

Negotiating for the union were Senior Business Rep. Ray Thomas; Michael Venturino, Line Foreman in Ely, Nev.; Chad Bliss, Line Foreman in Eureka, Nev.; and Jennifer Ashby, General Office Clerk in Ely, Nev.

Mt. Wheeler Power was incorporated in 1963 and began operations in 1971. The cooperative now provides power to more than 4,400 member-owner accounts over a 16,000 square mile territory in four Nevada counties and three Utah counties.



From left, Senior Business Rep. Ray Thomas, Michael Venturino, Chad Bliss, and Jennifer Ashby.

Generation bargaining unit

Wage hikes bargained at NCPA

Local 1245 members in the generation bargaining unit at Northern California Power Agency approved a new three-year agreement.

Under the terms of the agreement, wages will increase 3.25% in each of the first two years and 3.5% in the third year.

The agreement also reduces what members pay toward their PERS retirement benefit, reducing their payment to zero by the second year, according to

Business Rep. Rich Cowart.

Serving on the bargaining committee for the union, in addition to Cowart, were Hersehl Allen, Paul House, Chuck Barnes, Kevin Ricks, and Assistant Business Manager Dennis Seyfer.



Rich Cowart

Calmness And

SMUD DISTRIBUTION SERVICE



DSO William Abdullah consults the map.



DSO Greg Baird is third generation SMUD. His father Jim Baird, now in supervision, worked as Lineman and Foreman; grandfather Charlie Baird retired as Foreman in 1988.



John Callahan: "It's the heartbeat, baby."



DSO Jennifer Nobley checks the map as she speaks on the phone with an employee in the field.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ERIC WOLFE

When your power goes out, you'll never see these guys. But without them, your power's not going back on anytime soon.

"It's the heartbeat, baby," declares John Callahan, a Distribution Service Operator II for the Sacramento Municipal Utility District and a 15-year member of IBEW Local 1245. "This is a 24-7 operation. We are control."

That's not just the caffeine talking. If you have an electric distribution system, you'll find DSOs at the heart of it.

A tree that took down a line? An SUV that decided to wrestle with a power pole? A set of capacitor banks that crossphase in a substation? DSOs are the people who figure out how to reroute power to minimize the extent of the outage and to restore power as quickly as possible.

They giveth power—and sometimes they taketh it away. If lines need to be de-energized to make it safe for an electric crew to work on it, the DSO writes the prescription.

"There are times we have to open breakers (de-energize a line) if we feel there is a danger to life or property," says Frank Misiewicz, a DSO II and 20-year Local 1245 member. These decisions often are made in consultation with the workers in the field. In the case of newer employees, Misiewicz says, "We want them to get us involved."

Experience is a quality you want in a DSO. A DSO's knowledge of the system has to be broad, says Stephen Guzman, "because there's so much of it." A

*It's a state of mind as much as a skill.
Striking the right balance between
is the challenge.*



Stephen Guzman, standing, mentors William Abdullah, a former PG&E System Operator who recently came over to SMUD.



midst Chaos

E OPERATORS ARE IN CONTROL



Owen Yuen Jr., Electrician and IBEW steward, by the back-up generator distribution board. Electricians play a key role in maintaining and testing the power system.

DSO must “have a knowledge of all the voltages” and be able “to relate that to Troubleshooters and line crews” in the field.

Guzman himself was a Lineman and Troubleshooter prior to becoming a DSO. Another Lineman-turned-DSO is Greg Baird. He says he likes being a DSO because it keeps him close to line work, but with a difference.

“As a temporary foreman, I never wrote up the orders. Now I’m writing the orders,” Baird says. “If there’s a car-pole somewhere then you have to come up to the wall map, figure out how you’re going to isolate the problem and get the people you can back to power.”

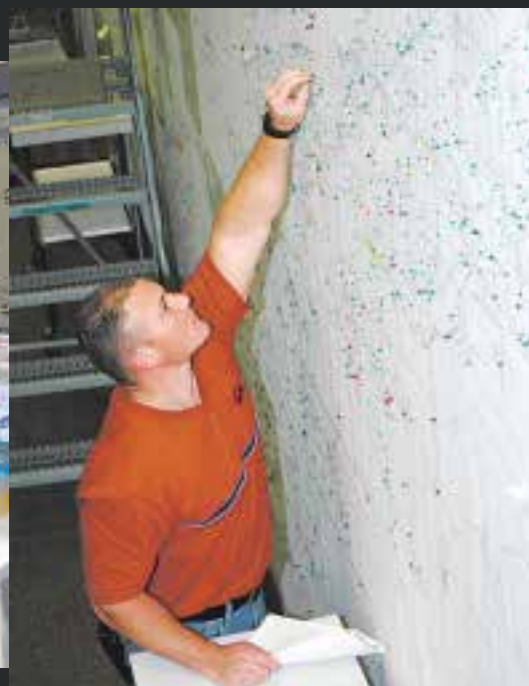
*much as a set of skills.
between calmness and urgency
of being a DSO.*



A 24-7 operation.



DSO Jennifer Nobley writes an order.



DSO Greg Baird at the map.

In an age when virtually everyone depends on electricity, DSOs have a lot of responsibility on their shoulders—and they know it. Misiewicz describes the atmosphere in the operations room as “chaotic but controllable,” where getting the job done right requires “a lot of dedication from employees.”

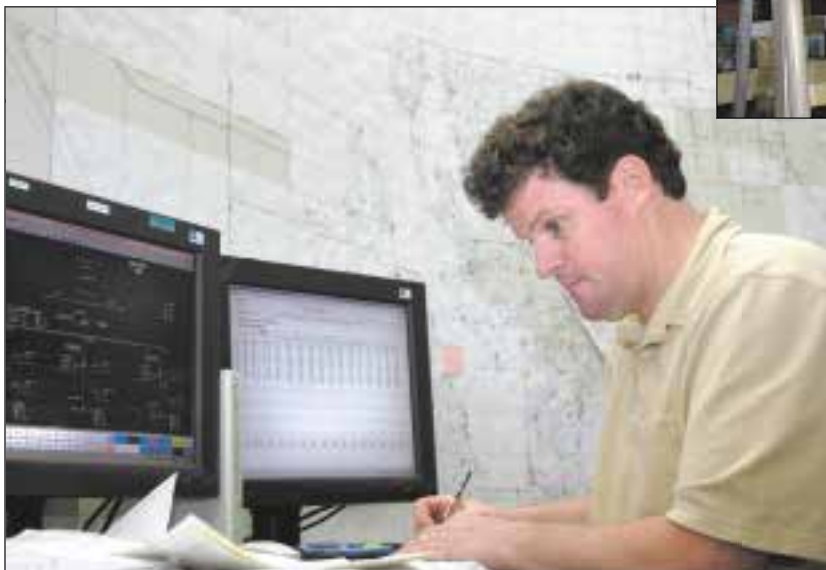
“You have to weigh a lot, you can’t get tunnel vision,” says Misiewicz. “You have to multitask, but you have to maintain calmness.”

It’s a state of mind as much as a set of skills. Striking that balance between calmness and urgency—when power is out and customers are frantic and the stakes get higher with each passing hour—that’s the challenge of being a DSO.

When your power comes back on, you realize they’re worth every penny.



Consulting the map can be its own exercise routine. Climbing the ladder above is DSO II Frank Misiewicz.



DSO Joe Forbes, left, monitors system activity.

By the Numbers:

What workers, parents, taxpayers and seniors should know about the new Bush Budget

The budget proposed by President Bush for Fiscal Year 2007 would reduce spending on education, health care services, veterans benefits and other program. The Bush budget would provide further tax breaks for the wealthy, further increasing the federal deficit. The numbers tell the story. Draw your own conclusions:

THE DEFICIT

Increase in the federal deficit over the next five years, not including Bush's new budget proposals: **\$760 billion**

Increase in the federal deficit over the next five years including Bush's new budget proposals: **\$952 billion**

Amount of budget *surplus* in 2000, as percentage of Gross Domestic Product: **2.4**

Amount of budget *deficit* in 2005, as percent of Gross Domestic Product: **2.6**

Change from budget surplus to budget deficit, as percent of Gross Domestic Product, under Bush: **5**

Percentage of this change from surplus to deficit that is attributable to drop in revenues (tax cuts): **66%**

TAXES

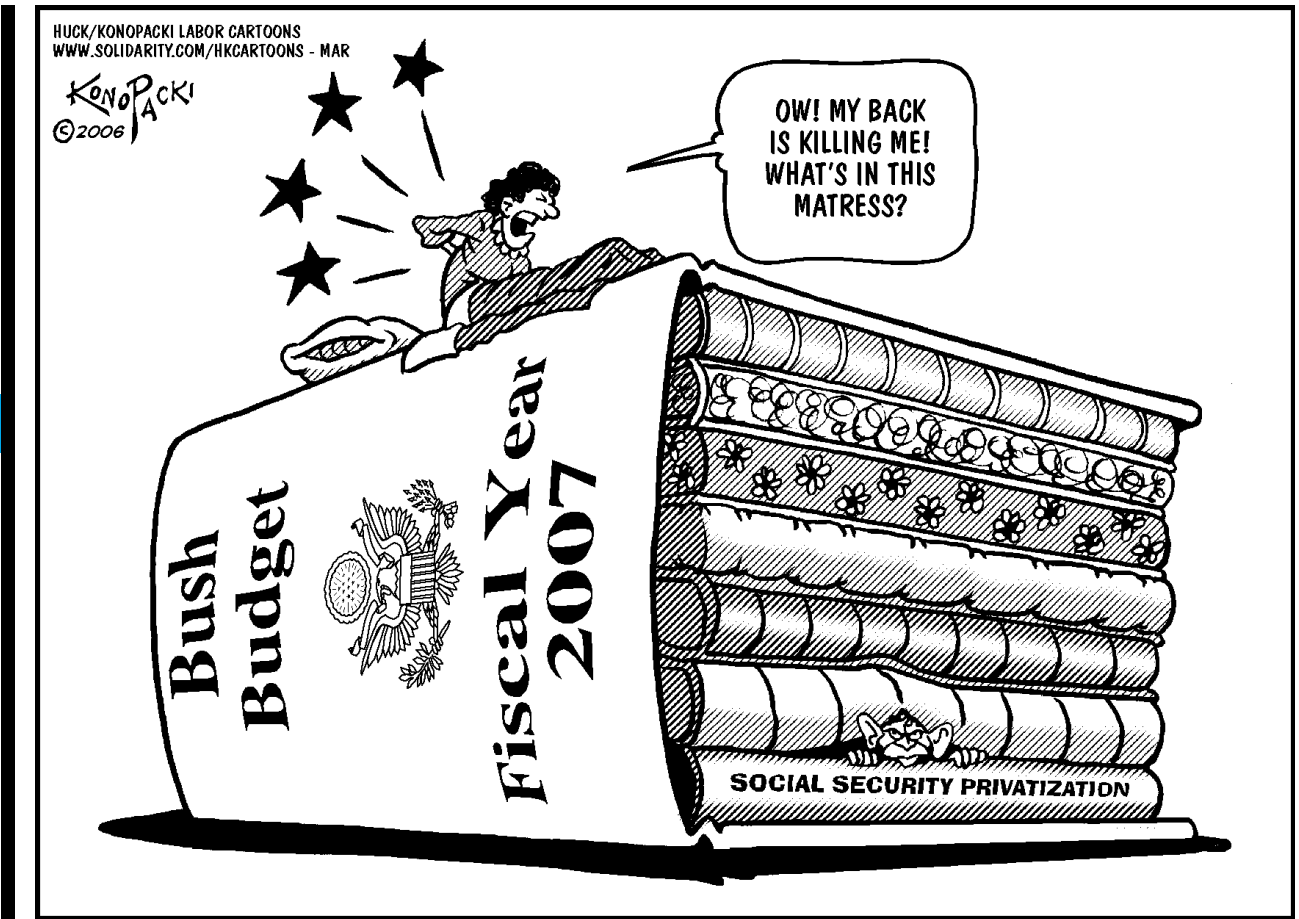
Amount of tax cuts over the next five years: **\$285 billion**

Amount of tax cuts over the next ten years: **\$1.7 trillion**

Amount of those tax cuts that would go to the top 1% of households: **\$900 billion**

Average tax cut for people who make over \$1 million per year: **\$136,000**

Average tax cut for middle-income taxpayers (middle fifth of earners): **\$650**



PROGRAM CUTS

Reduction in overall spending on non-defense programs over the next five years: **\$187 billion**

JOB SAFETY CUTS

Amount that consumer and occupational health and safety programs would be cut over the next five years: **\$1.6 billion**

HEALTH CARE CUTS

Amount that health care services would be cut over the next five years: **\$7.1 billion**

Amount that health care research and training would be cut over the next five years: **\$15.5 billion**

Amount that hospital and medical care for veterans would be cut over the next five years: **\$9.3 billion**

EDUCATION CUTS

Amount that K-12 and Vocational Education

programs would be cut over the next five years: **13%**

Amount that Higher Education programs would be cut over the next five years: **20%**

CUTS TO COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Amount that Community-Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program would be cut in 2007: **79%**

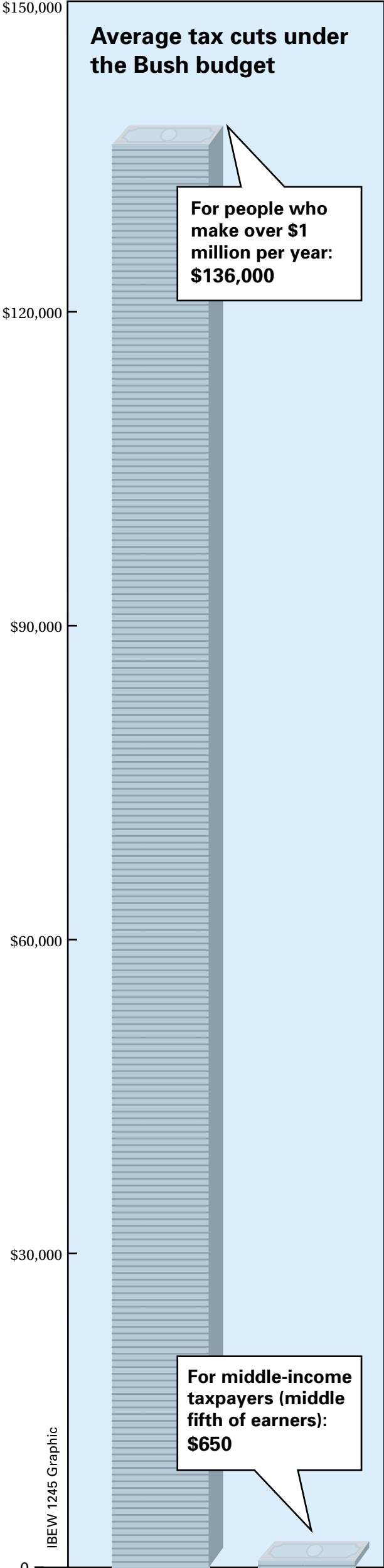
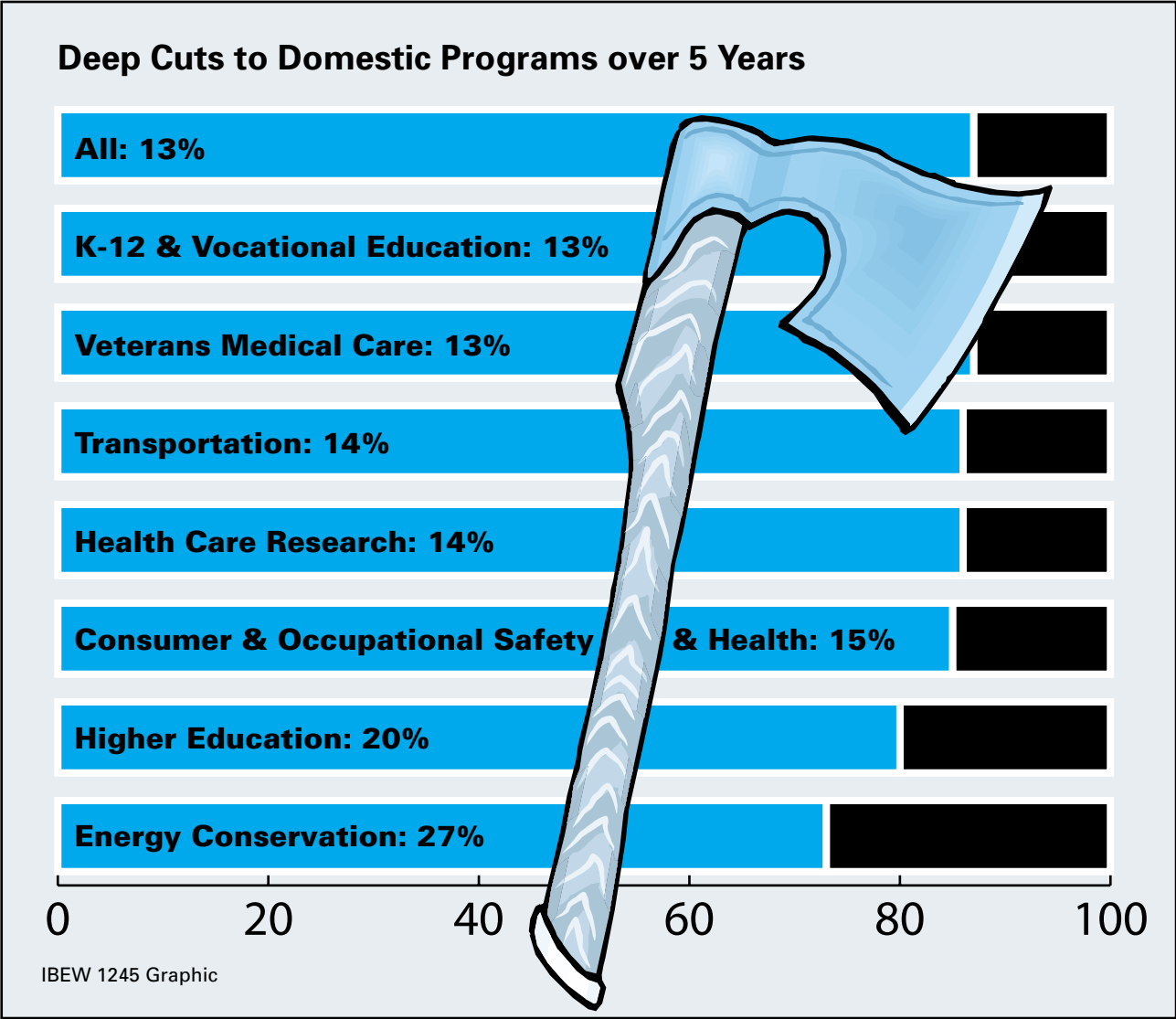
Amount that Community Development Block Grant formula grant program would be cut in 2007: **30%**

Amount of cuts in discretionary child care funding for children from low- and moderate-income families over next five years: **\$1 billion**

Change in the number of children receiving child care assistance in 2011, compared to 2005: **-400,000**

Amount allocated to Preventative Care Block Grant, operated by the Centers for

Sources: Los Angeles Times, 1/17/06; *The Hidden Cuts in Domestic Appropriations: OMB Data Reveal Deep Funding Cuts After 2007*, Center on Budget & Policy Priorities, 2/9/06
National Public Radio, *The Financial Cost of War*, 1/12/06



Disease Control and Prevention to provide grants to states for preventative health services: **\$0** (program eliminated)

CUTS TO PROGRAMS FOR THE ELDERLY

Amount the Bush budget would divert from Social Security Trust Fund into private accounts: **\$712 billion**

Amount the Bush budget would cut Medicare over 10 years: **\$105 billion**

Amount that housing for the low-income elderly would be cut: **26%**

Amount of current Social Security lump sum death benefit to surviving spouses or children in the event of death of beneficiary: **\$255**

Amount of Social Security lump sum death benefit in Bush budget: **\$0** (program eliminated)

Amount the Bush budget cuts in benefits for children of deceased, disabled or retired workers; public sector workers; and disabled persons: **\$6.3 billion**

Amount allocated to Commodity Supplemental Food program, which provides nutritional food packages to more than 400,000 low-income elderly people: **\$0** (program eliminated)

Amount allocated to the Community Services Block Grant, which provides funding for a range of social services and other types of assistance to low-income families and elderly and disabled individuals: **\$0** (program eliminated)

THE BUDGET AND THE WAR

Current annual cost of US operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to the former director of the Congressional Budget Office: **\$72-84 billion**

Amount in the Bush budget for funding US operations in Iraq and Afghanistan after 2007: **\$0**

Amount the Iraq war will actually cost by 2010, including health costs for wounded soldiers, according to Nobel Prize winning economist Joseph E. Stiglitz: **\$1-2 trillion**

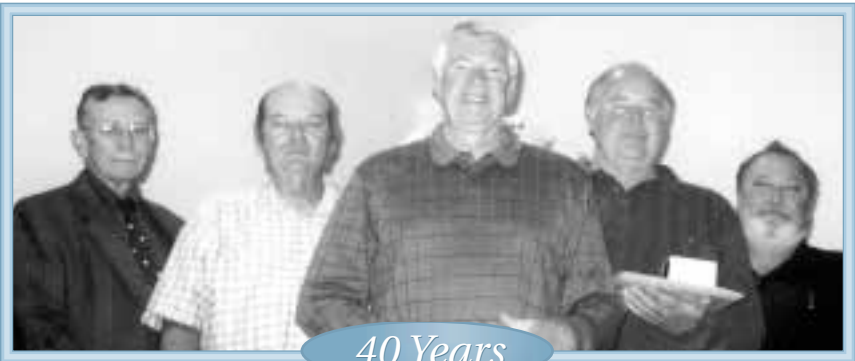


Stockton, CA

October 29, 2005



William Peitz, center, is honored for 55 years of service. Presenting the award is Assistant Business Manager Roger Stalcup, left, along with Business Rep. Gary Hughes.



THE HONOREES

55 Years

Peitz, William

40 Years

Andrews, Charles
Davis, Lyle
Guerra, Jack
Luchsinger, Jay
Robertson, Ronald

35 Years

Alicea, Robert
Barkley, Betty
Beaudrow, Glade
Bethel, Henry
Boyle, Daniel
Christian, Paula
Dalman, Charles
Dennis, Daniel
Foley, Harold
Gomez, Paul
Halfmoon, Melvin
Harris, C
Hushour, Roger
Luyster, Glen
Martinez, Fred
Metrovich, Patricia
Monson, Thomas
Moore, Roy
Patricio, Ramon
Smatsky, Jr, Albert
Smith, Ronald
Stewart, David
Vulich, Richard
Wells, Wayne

30 Years

Banda, Arthur
Boitano, Brian
Clary, Robert
Fernandez, Linda
Freeman, Dennis

Gonzalez, Salvador
Guzman, Betty
Imperial, Emmahilda
Jaich, Robert
Lemos, Kathleen
Lyter, Jon
Neyens, Victoria
Ohearn, Jack
Olson, Larry
San Julian, Paul
Smallfield, Douglas
Stiles, Walter
Torres, Pedro
Webb, William
Zakel, Paul
Zimny, Julia

25 Years

Allec, Greg
Areola, John
Baker, Ronald
Bayless- Martinez, Anna
Bell, Timothy
Brown, Jim
Casey, Paulette
Castillo, Steven
Dangerfield, Christina
Davis, Ernest
De Herrera, Hannah
Devencenzi, Rocco
Dolan, Kathleen
Finegan, Paul
Flores, Ralph
Flowers, Greg
Fong, Alan
Fong (Toy-Shiba), Christine
Fort, Mark
Frantz, Harvey
Furukawa, David
Garibaldi, Richard
Gaultney, Kenneth
Gines, Angelo

Haver, Cynde
Hobbick, Kathleen
Jackson, A Jeanine
Jackson, Kevin
Jones, Daniel
Kane, Mike
Kennard, Christine
Laughlin, Susan
Leatherman, Donna
Lerma, Salvador
Changaris, Lorrie
Lowe, Darcy
Lynch, Richard
Magorian, Glen
Martin, Emma
Matthews, Donald
Merritt, Robert
Mouw, Forrest
Orozco, Margaret
Orrick, Tom
Patterson, Jimmy
Perez, Eduardo
Perez, Daniel
Peters, Irene
Petersohn, Rhuea
Powell, Jerry
Riley, Dennis
Rios, Larry
Robertson, Dale
Roots, Duane
Rowe, David
Sheppard, Curtis
Silva, Henry
Spencer, Annette
Stuart, Robert
Thomas, Tony
Tinaza, George
Vezaldenos, Gus
Watson, John
Willemssen, Curtis
Williams, Nedra
Woodham, Stephanie
Woodman, David





Bush Budget Hits Women

Women will be particularly hard hit by the Fiscal Year 2007 budget cuts proposed by President Bush. The Bush budget would:

- Cut child care assistance by 300,000 children by FY 2010.
- Eliminate Women's Educational Equity Act programs, which fund activities promoting educational equity for girls and women.
- Eliminate vocational education, destroying innovative career and technical education programs. This would result in huge cuts in funding currently available to states to provide programs that train women and girls for jobs in careers from which they have traditionally been excluded, among other things.

- Cut Violence Against Women programs by \$19 million, or 5%, below this year's enacted level.
- Provide only half of the funding promised to after-school programs, meaning that 1.7 million children who were promised these services will not get them, further handicapping women trying to remain in the job market.
- Cut Medicaid by \$45 billion (net), which would have a particularly devastating impact on women because women account for over 70% of adult Medicaid beneficiaries.
- Raise health care costs for 2.2 million veterans, many of whom are women. Over five years, the budget for veterans' health care is \$15 billion below

the amount needed to maintain services at current levels.

- Eliminate funding for dropout prevention; 10% of young women drop out of high school, badly limiting their opportunities for independence and success.
- Completely eliminate funding for

Perkins Loans and provide inadequate funding for Pell Grants, closing the door on a college education at a time when only 19% of women finish their bachelor's degree.

- Completely eliminate a \$24 million Justice Department program that assists victims of human trafficking.

In memoriam: Dora Carone

IBEW Local 1245 mourns the passing on Jan. 16 of Dora Carone, a long time union activist and 28-year union member.

Carone served for many years as a Local 1245 Shop Steward. She was a regular participant in Local 1245 conferences and served on many committees.

Carone commitment to Nevada's working people went beyond her participation in Local 1245. She served as Secretary for the North Eastern Nevada Labor Council and was active in the Democratic Party.

Though she had been on long-term disability for a number of years, Carone continued to participate in the union she loved, often attending Advisory Council meetings as a guest of Executive Board member Kathy Tindall.

Local 1245 offers its condolences to Dora's friends, family and union brothers and sisters.



Dora Carone



Bush mine official rejects stronger safety rules

A total of 18 miners were killed in US mines in the first few weeks of 2006, but the Bush administration's latest choice to run Mine Safety and Health Administration, Richard Stickler, declined to endorse a strengthening of federal mine safety laws.

A former mining company executive at a subsidiary of Massey Energy in West Virginia, Stickler told a US Senate confir-

mation hearing Jan. 31 that he believes the nation's mine safety laws are adequate. The Massey Aracoma Coal's Alma Mine was the site of a Jan. 19 mine fire that killed two mine workers.

Among the stronger safety measures Stickler declined to endorse are West Virginia's newly passed laws that require all miners to be equipped with tracking devices to give rescuers a better chance of finding missing miners and that mandate additional supplies of oxygen in mines.

Meanwhile, federal MSHA called for a national "Stand Down for Safety" Feb. 6. The stand down didn't require thorough safety inspections in the mines, but instead offered a pre-shift safety talk by mine operators. Who knows, perhaps mine owners called in Stickler to give a pep talk on safety.

At mines represented by the United Mine Workers of America, bargaining agreements give union safety committees a wide range of rights to help ensure miners' health and safety. Seventeen of the 18 deaths in US mines this year have occurred at nonunion operations.

"In the bite"

Art Torres

"In the bite" is a term difficult to explain to someone who has never stood there, yet for those of us who have had the experience of being there, we will never forget it.

No, it does not mean that some ferocious beast set on inflicting great bodily harm is biting you. "In the bite" is when a person's body is located in such a manner that if the stored energy of the situation were to be suddenly released serious injury could occur.

For example: a large tree limb has fallen on a span of wire. The wire is still attached at both ends yet it has sagged and stretched beneath the weight of the limb. As you are cutting away the limb you are lightening the load on the wire. When the tension of the wire overcomes the weight of the limb, the wire will suddenly and with great force try to straighten out. Being "in the bite" means that your body is in the path of that wire as it straightens out.

An IBEW brother recently had both arms broken, and suffered serious head injuries, when a chunk of tree was removed from a wire under tension. He was "in the bite" because he was in the path of the wire as it straightened itself out.

Those of us who pull wire or cable are exposed to another dangerous "in the bite" situation. Have you ever used a pulling rig, a rigging wheel, and a cable dolly? In this situation the pull is not a straight line. We have formed a triangle. Inside of this triangle is the area known as "in the bite." If the pulley we

are using fails, the force being exerted on the cable will attempt to straighten out the cable. When the cable attempts to straighten out between the puller and the dolly, anyone standing in the triangle, could be seriously injured.

At our last union meeting we were discussing the topic of "in the bite." Brother Mark Flanders gave me the following: "Avoid situating your body between two or more objects which may change position without warning, which could result in injury or death."

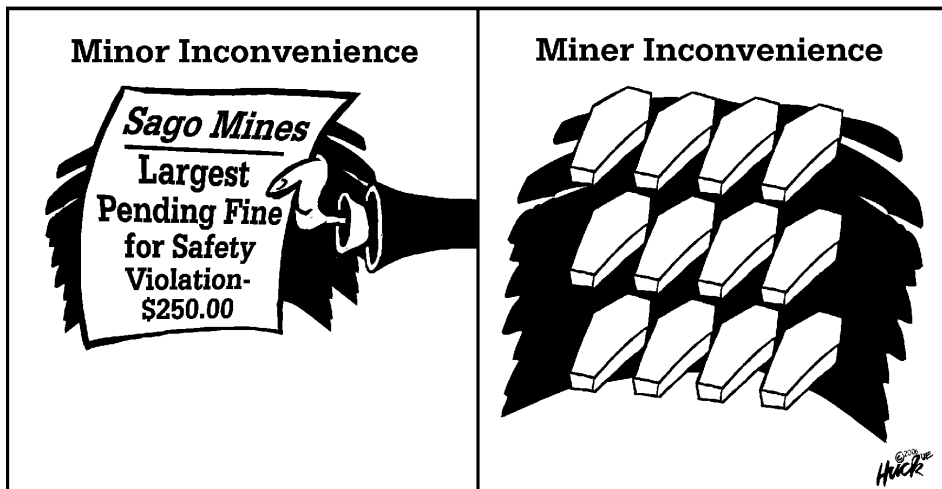
There are probably other examples of being "in the bite," so if anyone out there has questions or comments on how to stay safe please bring them up with your crew members. Get your questions answered. Remember, the only dumb question is the question not asked.

Be safe.

Art Torres is a member of the IBEW Local 1245 Safety Committee.

Local 1245 Safety Committee

Current members of the Local 1245 Safety Committee are Keith Hopp, Pacific Gas & Electric; Al White, Pacific Gas & Electric; David Vipond, Citizens Communications; Kurt Celli, Modesto Irrigation District; Art Torres, Sacramento Municipal Utility District; Bob Burkle, City of Santa Clara; James Gorman, Davey Tree; and Assistant Business Manager Howard Stiefer.





Retirees will meet April 5 in Merced

Retired members of Local 1245 will gather in Merced on April 5 to lay the foundation for a new chapter of the Retirees Club. The meeting will be held at Caro's Restaurant, 720 Motel Dr. in Merced, beginning at 10 a.m. Let's get together and see what we can do about the rising cost of health care and the declining value of our pensions!

For more information about the meeting, call Local 1245 Office Manager Tonya Alston-Maxwell at 707-452-2718.

Other Chapter Meetings

East Bay Chapter: 2nd Thursday each month, 10 a.m., IBEW Local 595, 6250 Village Parkway, Dublin, CA.

San Jose Chapter: 1st Thursday each month, 10 a.m., at IBEW Local 332, 2125 Canoas Garden, San Jose, CA.

Vacaville/Sacramento Chapter: 2nd Wednesday each month, 10 a.m., at IBEW Local 1245, 30 Orange Tree Circle, Vacaville, CA.

Santa Rosa Chapter: 1st Tuesday each month, 10 a.m., at IBEW Local 551, 2525 Cleveland Ave., Suite B, Santa Rosa.

SAP implementation at PG&E

PG&E Letter Agreement 05-55 modifies numerous wage, premium, and in-lieu payment rules to be compatible with new SAP software. Read the agreement on-line at www.ibew1245.com/newsarchive-docs/LA05-55.pdf.

Court allows suit over nursing care levels

Elderly and disabled people whose nursing care is halted because of state budget cuts can sue their states under a federal law requiring care for the needy, the Ninth US Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco ruled on Feb. 8.

The court reinstated a suit by seven Oregonians whose government-funded nursing services in group homes and their own residences were cut off in 2003 when the state narrowed eligibility

An RX for curing the Medicare drug benefit

The Medicare Part D prescription drug program has been one of the biggest federal policy disasters in decades.

First, there were the well-publicized problems with the roll-out of the program in January: many elderly and disabled people were turned away or overcharged for their prescriptions. Computer glitches, overloaded telephone lines and poorly trained pharmacists suggested that the federal government was about as prepared for the roll-out of Medicare D as it was for the rolling in of Hurricane Katrina.

As many as 6.4 million low-income seniors, who until Dec. 31 received their medications free, suddenly found themselves navigating an insurance maze of large deductibles, co-payments and outright denial of coverage. At last count, 31 states had stepped in to pay for the prescription drugs that people had been receiving prior to Dec. 31 with no problem.

But the real disaster runs deeper than the bungled roll-out. The Medicare prescription benefit is an expensive boondoggle which costs too much, benefits too few, and serves mainly to line the pockets of pharmaceutical companies and insurance companies. America's seniors deserve better.

Inadequate Coverage

For starters, coverage is woefully inadequate. You pay a \$250 deductible and then a 25% co-pay on the first \$2,250 of drug benefits each year, plus roughly another \$450 a year in premiums. Do the math: if your prescriptions cost \$2,250 a year, or about \$190 a month, you pay \$1,200 a year all told and the plan pays just \$1050.

Then coverage simply disappears, until you have spent nearly \$3,100 out of pocket—the so-called “donut hole.” Coverage resumes only after a total of

\$5,100 in prescription costs.

Many seniors will receive no help because they won't sign up for this “bargain.” Others will sign up, but then find themselves unable to pay the out of pocket expenses before qualifying for the benefits. And the cost of these threadbare benefits? The program is

But the real disaster runs deeper than the bungled roll-out. The Medicare prescription benefit is an expensive boondoggle which costs too much, benefits too few, and serves mainly to line the pockets of pharmaceutical companies and insurance companies. America's seniors deserve better.

expected to add over half a trillion to the federal budget over the next decade.

“Why would anyone have designed such an insane program?” asks Robert Kuttner, writing in The American Prospect.

Because the political purpose was never to deliver a good benefit. The Bush game plan was to take care of supporters in the private insurance industry, whose bloated bureaucracy already absorbs tens of billions of our health care dollars. Instead of a clear, easily administered program—using Medicare itself as the model—the Bush administration tossed seniors into the swamp, where they must evaluate innumerable competing private plans, each with subtle differences in costs and benefits. This approach raises total costs because each of these private plans tacks on a profit.

Even worse, the Bush administration

decided to fatten the drug industry at the expense of everyone else by explicitly prohibiting the government from negotiating bulk price discounts from drug companies. The Veterans hospitals negotiate such discounts, and their drug costs are about 48% less on average than those expected to be charged to people enrolled in the Medicare drug program.

Medicare Part D doesn't need to have the bugs ironed out. It needs to be tossed out. The path to a cheaper, more effective program is clear:

- Bring the “Medicare” drug program back into public Medicare; ditch the costly crazy-quilt of private programs.
- Allow Medicare to negotiate bulk discounts the way the VA does.
- Get rid of the donut hole, and design a simplified benefit structure with modest co-pays and then 100% coverage after a set annual cap on out-of-pocket costs.

If the savings from the bulk price discounts are not quite sufficient to cover costs of filling in the donut hole, put a hold on the upcoming round of new tax cuts for the nation's richest one percent.



Congratulations newly-retired members

The Local 1245 Retirees Club congratulates these recently-retired members of the union. We invite you to participate in a Retiree Club chapter in the East Bay, San Jose, Sacramento/Vacaville, or Santa Rosa. If you don't have a chapter nearby, call the union at 707-452-2718 and find out how you can help start one!

James Addiego
28 years
Pleasanton, CA

Larry Burdick
36 years
Chico, CA

Bud Burgess
26 years
Kingsburg, CA

Charles Edmonson Jr
32 years
Modesto, CA

Earl Flick
33 years
Newcastle, CA

Kenneth Hensley
36 years
Woodland, CA

Joseph Kayser
2 years
Sheridan, WY

Robert Kneppel
49 years
Sacramento, CA

Rudolph Long
16 years
Thorton, CA

Antonio Lozano
35 years
San Jose, CA

Harold Meyer
32 years
Antioch, CA

Carol Musson
25 years
Fortuna, CA

Russell Newland
30 years
Elk Grove, CA

Larry Paglia
21 years
Fresno, CA

Geraldine Scaife
35 years
Oakland, CA

John Torgersen
12 years
San Rafael, CA

Rex Vaughn
17 years
Anderson, CA

Robert Villa
21 years
Red Bluff, CA



Ron Weakley at 91

A Conversation with Our Founder

When workers at Pacific Gas & Electric finally stopped fighting with one another and joined together in the early 1950s to create a single union for the entire workforce, there was only one logical choice for the new union's leader. Since 1941, Ron Weakley had worked to unite PG&E employees, first as an organizer for the Utility Workers, then under the banner of the IBEW. In 1951, Weakley became the first Business Manager of a newly-launched IBEW Local 1245, a position he held until 1971.

Weakley's legacy is still visible in every wage increase negotiated by the union and in the democratic union structures that were put in place, at his insistence, to ensure that members controlled the union. Thirty-four years after he left office, Weakley remains keenly interested in current affairs. On the occasion of his 91st birthday, Jan. 25, Weakley shared some political reflections and personal reminiscences with the Utility Reporter.

When it comes to the state of affairs in today's labor movement, Ron Weakley doesn't mince words.

"My main concern lately is the almost dissolution of the American labor movement. It's really gone to hell."

Wal-Mart, in particular, gets under his skin. The notoriously anti-union company has faced massive lawsuits alleging that it discriminates against women, denies meal breaks to its employees, and pressures employees to work without pay after they are "off the clock."

"I think Wal-Mart is the worst thing that ever happened to the country as far as labor relations are concerned. It's just terrible," Weakley says.

The threat to workers doesn't come only from anti-union companies like Wal-Mart. Pensions, for example, have become very vulnerable even at unionized companies.

"It's a disaster these days—the gutting of people's pensions," says Weakley. "Look at the industries with big strong unions like the UAW, what's happening to them. And the Steelworkers are practically gone."

Weakley believes Local 1245 employers will also take aim at pension and health benefits. For PG&E employees and retirees, the "only hope is the union."

"There's a concerted effort to destroy the labor movement, there's no question in my mind. There always has been, but it's more concentrated now," says Weakley. He thinks for a moment about how this sounds, then adds: "I guess I'm sort of a gloom merchant."

By Far the Worst of Them

As Weakley sees it, many of the problems faced by working people today can be traced back to the current resident of the White House. "I've been around since Woodrow Wilson was president, and this by far is the worst of any of them," he says.

Weakley's voice is calm and measured, but his message is not reassuring:

"It's one thing after another. Lying to the people. Power grabbing. Basically (Bush) says he can do whatever he wants as long as he ties it to national security. The guy is becoming a dictator."

The Bush presidency has been particular bad for the economy, in Weakley's view.

"The war has ruined the economy. This guy Bush has squandered more money and built up more debt than all the presidents before him. We are in such bad

shape that China and Japan are practically our owners—all the billions we've borrowed from them."

In the long run, this reckless fiscal policy will be devastating for those who come after us, Weakley says.

"The interest we owe Japan and China is fantastic. It's going to cost each individual a bunch of money their whole lives."

"In the midst of all this economic wreckage," he adds, "Bush is cutting taxes for the rich and getting away with it."

On President Bush:
"Basically he says he can do whatever he wants as long as he ties it to national security. The guy is becoming a dictator."

Positive Force

Bush's performance irritates Weakley, in part, because he knows from personal experience that government can be a positive force in the lives of ordinary Americans. Some 75 years ago Weakley enrolled in the federally-sponsored Smith-Hughes program for vocational education. "You did half a day of shop, manual arts, and half a day of regular education," he remembers.

When he could no longer travel the long distances required to remain in that program, Weakley switched to business courses, graduating from Oakland's Castlemont High School in 1931. Although he passed the entrance exam to attend St. Mary's College in Moraga, Ca., "I just didn't have any money and my folks were in dire straits."

Instead of college, he worked on farms and ranches. He spent four years in the Navy. During the San Francisco World' Fair in 1939-40 he worked for the Key system, the forerunner of today's AC Transit. And, in 1940, he began work as a laborer for PG&E at 50 cents an hour.

Here, too, the federal government had a positive role to play. Passage of the National Labor Relations Act in 1935 strengthened the hand of workers as they tried to organize unions, and throughout the 1940s Weakley led the struggle to organize a union at PG&E. When that drive succeeded, he became Local 1245 Business Manager, serving from 1951 through 1971.

"After that, I finished up with the federal government," recalls Weakley, who was tapped by Uncle Sam to run the troubled United Mine Workers union for six months in 1972 while union elections were being organized.

On Unions: *"There's a concerted effort to destroy the labor movement, there's no question in my mind. There always has been, but it's more concentrated now."*



A Shield for Working People

But you only have to talk with Weakley a few minutes to realize that, for all his life experiences, his heart is still with Local 1245. He believes that unions will continue to be a shield for working people in general and utility workers in particular.

He takes pride that he insisted on "successor clauses" in some of the union's early contracts, and predicts that successor clauses will become even more important as the industry continues to be buffeted by deregulation and the newly-emerging threat of utility mergers and acquisitions.

Weakley freely acknowledges that his intense commitment to union work took a big toll on his personal life. "My first marriage was a failure because of my activity. I paid more attention to the union than my own personal situation," he says. That changed with his second marriage, to Ethel. They will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary later this year in their adopted home state of Hawaii.

As a young man, Weakley dared to go for the big prize. He didn't seek personal wealth but tried to build an institution that would promote the financial well-being of future generations of working people. At 91, he seems comfortable with the choices he made: "I look back and it's been quite a ride," he says.

We say, "Happy Birthday, Ron."

Learn more about Ron Weakley and the historic campaign to organize a union at PG&E by visiting www.ibew1245.com and selecting "IBEW 1245 History" among the file folders on the right-hand side of the page.



City of Gridley Linemen Give Rubber Gloves a Try

Brian McClure tests his rubber gloves for leaks. This is an essential safety measure since a hole in the glove could lead to an electrical contact.

Safe work practices are crucial

PHOTOS BY ERIC WOLFE

City of Gridley linemen practiced rubber gloving on energized lines while performing an insulator change on a pole next to the Gridley-Colusa Highway in February. City certification of the rubber gloving procedure is pending, and Local 1245 members know that proper procedures are essential for safety. Rubber gloves are the first layer of protection. Linemen test them for leaks before every use. Rubber blankets and “snakes” are wrapped around conductors the crew might come into contact with in the course of the job. Although these precautions are time-consuming, rubber gloving is usually quicker than the traditional hot sticks, at least on some jobs, and the City clearly hopes that rubber gloving will lead to improved efficiency. The Local 1245 members will start receiving a rubber gloving premium of 6% when the practice is certified, perhaps as early as March.



James Smith cleans the rubber blankets, but it's not just being tidy. Dirt, being a conductor, is an unwanted companion on the job.



In the bucket are, left, Apprentice Lineman Brian McClure and Senior Lineman Gary Andes. On the ground are, left, Apprentice Lineman James Smith and Lineman Daryl Dye.



RIGHT James Smith delivers tools via rope to the crew working in the bucket.

City of Gridley electric crew rubber gloves an insulator change on a pole next to the Gridley-Colusa Highway.



The just-installed epoxy bell insulator is the only exposed hardware. Gary Andes begins removing the protective rubber insulation.



Brian McClure, right, hands a clamp to Gary Andes.



Daryl Dye observes the job from the ground.



Lineman Tom Wiles stopped by at the end of the training to say hello and goodbye—he retires next month.