Cool heads, quick response combine to save lineman’s life

By Eric Wolfe

It was not the sort of weather you associate with trees falling down: clear skies, brilliant sun, just a whisper of wind.

But with the surrounding soil saturated by fierce El Niño storms, that delicate breeze was enough to uproot a 120-foot pine tree and send it crashing into the utility pole being worked on that day by PG&E linemen Steve Wilson, Mike Degner and Glenn Crane.

The crew, working on a 60kv transmission line, had tied in two conductors and were securing the third when the pine tree fell into the conductors, broke off the insulators, and pulled the line down on the crew.

After a terrific lurch knocked him several feet down the pole, Crane heard guys yelling on the ground. Then he heard the voice of Steve Wilson, near him on the pole:

"I'm hurting, Glenn."

See PAGE TEN

Union prevails in effort to safeguard transmission system

Local 1245 has prevailed in its year-long quest to insure effective third party oversight of transmission maintenance practices.

Transmission maintenance standards are a critical element in the electric markets now being created in California. Without adequate and reliable transmission capability, market exchanges cannot be conducted in an efficient manner and overall system reliability is jeopardized, raising the spectre of blackouts.

Due in large part to lobbying efforts by Local 1245 and other IBEW local unions, transmission maintenance standards were mandated by Assembly Bill 1890, the massive electric restructuring bill enacted in 1996. That law provided for the creation of the Independent System Operator (ISO) to insure continued system reliability as California moves into an era of competitive electric markets.

In early 1997, the trustee of the ISO appointed an advisory committee to develop the transmission maintenance standards called for by the legislature. Participating on that committee were representatives from the state's investor-owned and municipal utilities, and representatives from IBEW Locals 1245, 47, and 18.

Developing such standards is no easy task, and the parties met twice weekly through March of 1997, and then weekly through June, to fashion a mutually-agreeable proposal. In July, the outlines of an agreement began to emerge.

The unions agreed there could be marginal differences between maintenance practices of the major Investor-Owned Utilities, but insisted that the ISO must have absolute authority to
Workers here and abroad

**Rolling the union on...**

**Ex-Piercers Organize:** A quartet of body piercers at San Francisco’s Gauntlet piercing boutique voted for Food and Commercial Workers Local 101 representation in January, California Labor News reported. The piercers were apparently anxious about production expectations that created an “assembly line” atmosphere. The company had demanded that they sign a one-sided contract, so they approached the UFCW.

**Quality Declining:** An SEIU survey of healthcare professionals reports that a large majority feel that the quality of patient care in their facilities is good, but going downhill. Thirty-eight percent of these feel that their facility is understaffed. Those interviewed said that several trends have hurt health care, including hospital closures, managed care expansion, the growth of national hospital chains, subcontracting, and privatization.

**Martyrs Immortalized:** The National Park Service has designated the Haymarket Martyrs’ Monument as a National Historic Landmark, Labor Notes reported. The monument is in Forest Home Cemetery in Forest Park, Ill. It commemorates the activists in the 1886 fight for an eight-hour day who were arrested and subsequently executed after an unknown person threw a bomb at police. The police were trying to disperse a rally called to protest previous police misconduct.

**UFW Rally:** The United Farm Workers are visiting 15 major cities to rally public support for the campaign to organize California strawberry pickers. A major rally is scheduled in San Francisco for March 29.

**Janitors March:** Twenty-five janitors, representing 1200 who want to form a union in Sacramento, marched 150 miles through fierce rainstorms from Sacramento to Cupertino, Calif., to ask stockholders at Hewlett Packard to support their efforts to unionize at Somers Building Maintenance. HP contracts Somers to clean its buildings in California, Oregon and Colorado. “We may be poor, but we don’t deserve to be treated this way,” said Marta Villalobos, a Someres employee who earns $6 an hour and has no health benefits. Somers has been fined eight times for health and safety violations, ordered to repay $14,000 in “dues” illegally collected from workers for a company union, and ordered by the courts to stop intimidating union supporters.

**Electrical unions pursue international solidarity**

Leaders of US and United Kingdom unions that represent 350,000 electric utility workers pledged mutual solidarity, especially regarding their common employers. The IBEW, Utility Workers, and Mine Workers have been bought by US-based multinational companies.

**Grill joins Local 1245 staff**

Mike Grill has been hired as a Business Representative for Local 1245, assuming the duties of representing those Local 1245 members formerly represented by Business Rep. Chuck Davis.

Grill’s assignment will include the following areas:

- PG&E-Fresno/Kern Division
- PG&E-Gas System Maintenance & Operations (Hinkley, Hollister, Kettleman, Topock, Milpitas, San Jose, Walnut Creek)
- Lindmore Irrigation District
- Asplund Tree
Union will defend members’ interests in PG&E’s General Rate Case

Jack McNally, IBEW 1245 Business Manager

The upcoming PG&E General Rate Case is an important milestone for our members and the customers we serve.

The California Public Utilities Commission is scheduled to make a decision on PG&E rates by December, with the rates to be effective in 1999. That is also the year that our labor agreement with PG&E is up for bargaining.

In many respects the financial condition of PG&E has a direct bearing on the outcome of general bargaining. We have a big stake in this case and we must be involved. There is no alternative.

As a public utility, PG&E’s revenues from gas and electric rates are set by the CPUC. Those rates, called tariffs, are set every three years.

The last GRC took effect in 1996. As those rates were being hammered out in 1995, we were actively opposing PG&E downsizing. Our protests, winter storms, and public concern over service and safety issues forced the cancellation of 800 planned layoffs, and PG&E had to hire new additional employees. Not all of these positions were funded by the rates set for 1996.

PG&E says it has not been able to recover the costs of a substantial number of employees who have been working to restore system reliability and improve emergency response. The company will present evidence of this to the Commission.

These costs are a big part of the requested one billion dollar increase.

As most members at PG&E know, our union is no stranger to this process. We have had to defend our wages and benefits in these GRCs for the last 15 years. This time around, there are three areas of concern for us.

1. Our wages and benefits will again be under close scrutiny. We will vigorously defend our wages and benefits.

2. The commission will probably try to force restructuring concepts in the case, which we have already hammered out in other forums. We have to be on guard. With our Coalition of Utility Employee organization, we will be prepared to defend our turf in the restructuring issues.

3. This case is in large part about jobs. Safe and reliable electric and gas service is made possible by the work that we do. We won’t be shy about making the connection between jobs and service.

There is going to be sizable opposition to this case. We are preparing strategies to participate in the case and to gather support. We have a story to tell and we’re going to tell it.

Customers expect and deserve safe, reliable, and responsive service. But they need to understand that it takes people to provide that service. There is good evidence of this in the efforts by our members to restore power in the recent El Nino storms. There is good evidence in the improvement our members have made in the infrastructure that delivers the gas and electricity.

It takes a skilled, qualified workforce to accomplish these things. That’s what our members do.

A part of our overall strategy is to inform the public. We will be contacting other local unions, labor councils, the state federation of labor, as well as members of the California state legislature, to explain the importance of this case to us and ask for letters of support.

We need you, our PG&E members, to be informed about the GRC so that you can explain to your friends, your neighbors, your customers, and your communities, why this case is important to them.

It takes revenue to keep a workforce strong and service reliable. In the wake of the El Nino storms, we have a message for the regulators, and for the people in the communities we serve: We’re the ones who keep the gas flowing and the lights on.
The real aim of a June ballot initiative primarily supported by out-of-state right-wing extremists is to get unions out of politics.

This anti-worker initiative—Proposition 226—contains a provision that would require unions to annually sign up members who want to donate money to political activities.

This mandate would present unions with a huge task that would require shifting resources from such important activities as organizing, winning fair contracts and leadership development to solicit signatures and political donations.

Currently, unions sign up members once. If members later decide to defer political donations they have the right by law to request the deferral in a brief letter to their union.

For union members, the anti-worker initiative is particularly devastating because it all but eliminates unions from politics and influence over issues such as the prevailing wage, daily overtime, privatization and health and safety protection.

If passed in June, the initiative would require the notoriously slow Fair Political Practices Commission to develop a form for workers to sign authorizing deduction of dues for political purposes. Then unions would have to sign up members and collect donations before contributing monies to candidates for governor or the Legislature, a task that would require the deferral in a brief letter to their union.

For union members, the anti-worker initiative is particularly devastating because it all but eliminates unions from politics and influence over issues such as the prevailing wage, daily overtime, privatization and health and safety protection.

For union members, the anti-worker initiative is particularly devastating because it all but eliminates unions from politics and influence over issues such as the prevailing wage, daily overtime, privatization and health and safety protection.

Indeed, one of the backers of the proposition is the Indiana-based J. Patrick Rooney, an insurance magnate and major Republican donor on par with giants such as Philip Morris and RJR Nabisco. Rooney’s company, Golden Rule Insurance, is infamous for cherry picking, or slimming off the healthiest consumers from the health care pool.

Rooney and his company have fought legislative measures in states such as Vermont, Colorado and Kentucky that would prevent cherry picking by insurance companies.

Both Rooney and another major backer, Grover Norquist, a Washington, DC-based lobbyist, rabidly support right-wing causes, including privatization of government services such as public education, Medicare and Social Security.

Gov. Pete Wilson enthusiastically agreed to serve as honorary chair of the anti-worker initiative campaign. California is just one of 10 states the right wing has targeted for measures that would cripple union political participation. Others include Alaska, Michigan, Nevada, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Arizona.

California, however, is a key site because of its size and popular wisdom that the state’s voters forecast national trends.

Union observers believe the California measure satisfies the Republican vow made after the 1996 election to curb workers’ influence over politics. At a recent meeting of the Republican Governors Association, for example, supporters of the initiative boasted that it would either cause unions to lose political funding or force them to spend millions of dollars defeating it.
Corporate vs. union spending on politics

There's too much money in politics---but it's not union money

The political balance of power is already tilted heavily in favor of corporations.

In the 1996 election cycle, corporate interests spent more than $677 million on political contributions—11 times more than unions spent. So while unions contributed less than 4 percent of the $1.6 billion raised by candidates and parties in 1996, corporations contributed more than 40 percent.

The Big Biz Chorus

The disparity between corporate and union spending is growing.

Since 1992 (when the ratio was 9-to-1), corporate political contributions have increased by $229.8 million, while union contributions rose by only $12.1 million.

In "soft money" contributions, the gap is even wider.

While both corporations and unions have increased their unrestricted, so-called "soft money" contributions since 1992, corporate spending grew twice as fast. In 1996, corporations spent more than $176 million—19 times more than unions did.

Corporate special interests are pushing initiatives that would skew the balance even further.

By backing special restrictions on unions while imposing no such limits on themselves, big corporations are trying to remove working families and their unions from the political playing field.

Corporations, right-wing foundations and anti-union lobbying groups are raising hundreds of millions of dollars to "de-fund" unions.

At a recent meeting of the Republican Governors Association, proponents of the initiatives noted that the de-funding ploy has two strategic benefits: If it works, unions will lose funding. Even if it doesn't, unions will be forced to spend millions of dollars in the fight.

Total Contributions

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<th>Unions</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
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Soft Money Contributions

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Hard Money Contributions

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<td>$428,202,210</td>
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<td>$381,252,744</td>
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Join the Fight Against Prop. 226!

Tell Your Friends & Co-Workers to Vote No.

Register to Vote (Call the Union at 510-933-6060 to Find Out How)

Vote "NO" on June 2nd
SAN BERNARDINO SERVICE AWARDS

Union members honored at service award dinner in San Bernardino, Ca.

July 18, 1997

45 Years
45-year member Jack Martin, right, is congratulated by Business Manager Jack McNally.

50 Years
Bernard Guzenske (at right with guest) accepts award from Business Manager Jack McNally (above).

Providing entertainment with a karaoke version of Bugle Boys from Company "B" are Mrs. Dudley, Johnstone and Murray.

Micky Walsh and wife.

Bobby Dutton
Jerry Dillow and wife.

40 Years

Former Executive Board member Tube Dudley (left) receives award from Business Manager Jack McNally.

20 Years

Jerry Dillow and wife.

Recipients

50 Years
Bernard Guzenske

45 Years
Jack Martin

40 Years
Andrew "Tube" Dudley
Bobby Dutton Sr.
Dale Parrott
Alan Wade
Michael Walsh
Jerry Dillow

35 Years
Carl Winner
Richard Edwards
Larry Kidney
Carl Bichel

30 Years
David Alschbach
Donald Dillon
James Henderson
Carl Gardner
Larry Paul

25 Years
Hugo Torres
Larry Skoglund
Lon Peterson

20 Years
Larry Cournoyer
Jim D’Avanzo
Ray Obregon
Gregory Krogh
Boycotts
Endorsed by
the AFL-CIO

BUILDING MATERIALS & TOOLS

BROWN & SHARPE MFG. CO.
Measuring, cutting and machine tools and pumps
International Association of Machinists & Aerospace Workers

ROME CABLE CORPORATION
Cables used in mining and construction industry
International Association of Machinists & Aerospace Workers

SOUTHWIRE CO.
Commercial and industrial wire and cable; Do-it-yourself brand Homewire
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers

CLOTHING

MASTER APPAREL
Men's and boy's pants. Labels include Botany 500, Hinds and Archer, and Blair
Electronic Workers

FOOD & BEVERAGES

CALIFORNIA TABLE GRAPES
Table grapes that do not bear the UFW union label on the carton or crate
United Farm Workers of America

DIAMOND WALNUT CO.
Diamond brand canned and bagged walnuts and walnut pieces
International Brotherhood of Teamsters

FARMLAND DAIRY
Milk sold under the Farmland Dairy label in stores in Connecticut, New Jersey and New York.
International Brotherhood of Teamsters

TYSON/HOLLY FARMS CHICKEN
Chickens and processed poultry products
International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Warehousemen & Helpers of America

FURNITURE

TELESCOPE CASUAL FURNITURE CO.
Lawn, patio, other casual furniture. Brand name: Telescope.
Electronic Workers

TRANSPORTATION & TRAVEL

ALITALIA AIRLINES
Air transport for passengers and freight
International Association of Machinists

BEST WESTERN-GROSVENOR RESORT
Hotel in Lake Buena Vista, Fla.; located at Disney World, but separately owned and operated
Steelworkers

CROWN CENTRAL PETROLEUM
Gasoline sold at Crown, Fast Fare and Zippy Mart stations and convenience stores.
Oil Chemical & Atomic Workers

FOUR POINTS BY SHERATON
Hotel in Waterbury, Conn.
Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees

KAUAI RESORT
Hotel in Kapaa, Hawaii
Longshore & Warehouse Union

MICHELIN
Michelin brand tires
Rubber Workers

NEW OTANI HOTEL & GARDEN
Hotel in downtown Los Angeles
Hotel Employees & Restaurant Employees

OBLEBAY PARK
Wheeling, W. Va., park/resort/recreation complex
Hotel Employees & Restaurant Employees

BLACK ENTERTAINMENT TELEVISION
BET cable television, Action pay-per-view, Bet on Jazz
Electronic Workers (BEW)

R.J. REYNOLDS TOBACCO CO.
Cigarettes: Camel, Winston, Salem, Doral, Vantage, More, Newport, Bright, Century, Sterling, YSL, Ritz;
Smoking Tobaccos: Prince Albert, George Washington, Catier Hall, Apple, Madeira Mixture,
Royal Comfort, Top, Our Advertiser; Little Cigars: Winchester
Bakery, Confectionery & Tobacco Workers International Union
Union safeguards transmission

From PAGE ONE

reject or modify the maintenance practices submitted by the utilities.

"In our view, the ISO had to have this authority in order for any standard to be meaningful," said Local 1245 Business Manager Jack McNally.

By August, the unions were relatively satisfied with the agreement they had worked out with the utilities.

"It contained the three elements we were interested in," said Business Rep. Landis Marttila, who represented Local 1245 on the advisory committee. "The agreement provided that qualified workers would perform the inspections, and that there would be an auditable documentation of that inspection, including the inspector's timeline on when work should be performed. And third, it provided the ISO with the authority to unilaterally make changes if any particular utility's maintenance practice appeared deficient."

The advisory committee continued to meet periodically in September and October to fine tune some statistical measures for performance. But in late autumn there was some attempt to diminish the ISO's authority to reject or modify particular maintenance practices at the utilities.

"At one point it looked like the ISO might not retain sufficient authority to modify or reject utility practices," said Marttila.

The union found this prospect unacceptable.

"Even if the ISO found something wrong, its ability to take corrective action would have been impeded," said McNally, who is a member of the ISO governing board.

"The intent of AB 1890 was to insure that the state's transmission system be well maintained," said McNally, noting that unions were the ones primarily responsible for getting maintenance language included in that law. "Putting some teeth into the law in terms of maintenance was our achievement—on behalf of consumers and on behalf of our members. We didn't want to see it eroded."

Working in concert with the other IBEW locals in the Coalition of California Utility Employees, and with CUE attorney Marc Joseph, Local 1245 was successful in preserving the regulatory authority of the ISO.

The utilities must comply with the standard, and if there's something they don't like, the burden is on the utility to appeal," said McNally.

Under the agreement, utilities must annually submit to the ISO all their inspection records for major facilities.

"In the long run this is in everybody's best interests—the consumers, the utilities, and our members," said McNally. "It would be a disaster for the utilities as well as the consumers if the system experienced significant failures due to inadequate maintenance of the transmission system. The union has made sure there are solid protections in place to preserve the integrity of electric transmission in the competitive era," said McNally.

Help build the labor movement

All members living in Contra Costa County who want to help themselves by helping others, please fill out and clip the Rapid Response Team volunteer form and mail to Business Rep. Frank Saxsenmeier at the address below. Remember, we are only as strong as our weakest link!

Frank Saxsenmeier
IBEW Local 1245
PO Box 4790
Walnut Creek, CA 94596

Think before you switch

The bell that will open the competitive era in electric service is set to ring on March 30. Many Energy Service Providers have already ramped up their phone and mail solicitations in an effort to get consumers to switch providers.

Before you switch, think about what's involved.

Your current provider (PG&E, SMUD, Sierra Pacific Power, etc.) has a labor agreement with Local 1245, and its employees therefore enjoy the benefits of union representation.

Currently there are no known union Energy Service Providers entering the market. What's worse, some of the new Energy Service Providers are playing fast and loose with the truth, such as claiming they can provide you a 10% cut in your electric rate.

The truth is that a 10% reduction was mandated by the California Legislature with the passage of AB 1890, and you have been enjoying that 10% reduction since the beginning of January.

There are many changes ahead in the electric industry. One new Energy Service Provider is already under investigation by the California Public Utilities Commission for allegedly operating a pyramid scheme.

Look before you leap. Think before you switch.

Contra Costa Labor Council Rapid Response Team

Yes, I want to help and be part of building a strong labor movement in Contra Costa County. You can count on me to support five activities in a year to help another working person's struggle to have a better future.

Name ___________________________ Union & Local # ____________

Street Address _____________________ City, Zip ____________

Home Phone: ______________________ Work Phone: ____________

I Will: ____________________________

☐ Attend pickets and rallies

☐ Help with phone banks & precinct walks

☐ Attend a legislative visit

Special Notice: Those participating in five actions in a year will receive special recognition at the yearly Labor Council Dinner.

March 1998 Utility Reporter 9
Send in accident reports

The Local 1245 Safety Committee would like to ask all shop stewards and employees to please send in all accident reports regardless of the severity, so we can document and investigate them.

Insecticides & lubricants

When using aerosol lubricants or insecticides inside vaults or panels that have energized equipment in them, be aware that some of these products may be flammable.

Some of these "environmentally safe" aerosol sprays may have a flammable propellant. They can be ignited due to a spark while working in these enclosures.

The reports are essential for this committee to monitor potential unsafe work practices and/or unsafe working conditions.

Your participation will be greatly appreciated.

Remember: Safety First!

Emergency plan checklist

For your own protection, Rodale Press’ “Safety Check” poses the following questions. Do you know?

• Emergency escape procedures and escape route assignments?
• Procedures to be followed if you operate critical equipment?
• Where to report after an evacuation?
• How to report fires and other emergencies?
• Where hazardous materials are handled and stored?
• Where fire protection equipment is located?

Cool heads, quick response...

From PAGE ONE

dreads. It's also the moment that Crane and every other IBEW lineman has been trained to anticipate.

"Wait until they can get to you," Crane replied.

Although stunned by his own drop down the pole, Crane quickly moved to Wilson's side. Wilson's arm, dangling at his side, had been nearly severed by the falling conductor and insulator. Crane noted the steady flow of blood from Wilson's jacket sleeve. As members of four crews working in the area scrambled to mount a rescue, Crane got his hand under Wilson's arm.

The doctors who later treated Wilson credited Crane's quick response with saving Wilson's life.

But Crane knows the rescue was a group effort.

"If it wasn't for the guys on the ground we would have been screwed," he said in a recent interview.

Wilson wasn't the only injured man on the pole. Below him, Mike Degner had been working at the distribution level. Crane could see that Degner was now hanging upside down, his leg wedged between a crossarm and the pole. Crane called down to him, but got no response.

Furious Pace

Meanwhile, Todd Walker's crew was flying into action. They knew they needed to get a bucket to the injured men as quickly as possible. But the bucket truck's path to the pole was blocked by the downed tree. So they cut through the tree with a chain saw, working at a furious pace.

"They said that tree was 42 inches in diameter," Crane recalled.

While the crews below struggled to get help to the men on the pole, Crane sought to comfort Wilson, who was slipping in and out of consciousness.

"I told him we'd get him down and everything'd be all right," Crane recalled.

Degner, meanwhile, had regained consciousness but

When you have trouble seeing at night...

If you have trouble seeing at night, “Safety Check” recommends the following:

First, see your physician to rule out any eye problems related to other disorders. If your thyroid isn't working properly, for example, you may suffer from increasing nightblindness.

Also, visit your eye doctor if you haven't already. If there is no discernible cause for your difficult seeing at night, your optometrist may recommend putting on antireflective coating on a pair of glasses to help you.

Antireflective coatings on glasses are usually recommended for cosmetic purposes—they reduce the Coke-bottle look of strong prescriptions. But the reduced reflection also gives you sharper vision, especially at night, by eliminating halos and glare, according to James Sheedy, a clinical professor at UC Berkeley.

O.S.H.A. O.S.H.A. "REFORM"

"What do you mean you're from OSHA? I thought you were one of our temps!"

"I was talking to him, telling him he was going to have to hang there for a while," said Crane.

About 10 minutes after the tree toppled onto the line, the crew below managed to get the bucket up to Wilson and brought him down, being careful to support the badly-injured arm.

Then Walker came up the pole to assist in Degner's rescue. While Walker hung the hand line from above, Crane got under Degner.

"I put his back under my shoulder and kept inching up. Then we put his left gaff in the pole and as he put weight on it we could free up his right foot," said Crane.

The men got the hand line tied around Degner and lowered him down. Neither Degner nor Crane suffered serious injury.

Wilson's injury was serious indeed, but the quick rescue effort gave doctors at the Stanford University Medical Center a chance to save Wilson's arm with microsurgery. Crane, who has stayed in close touch with his injured buddy, said Wilson was already anticipating his return to work.

"He's in real high spirits. He's real optimistic about his recovery," said Crane.

"He hopes to return to work as soon as he can," said Crane, a hiring hall employee since March of 1996, who was initiated into Local 57 in Salt Lake City in 1979. He participated in last year's Gas & Electrical Rodeo at Rancho Seco, where one of the events—the "Hurt Man Rescue"—tests linemen's skills in helping get injured workers off a pole.

Among PG&E teams competing at the rodeo, Crane's team took second place and went on to compete in the national rodeo in Kansas City.

Crane believes the emphasis on safety at PG&E makes a difference.

"The classes we've had while I've been here, I think it's great," he said. "The First Aid classes, the First Aid reviews, the CPR—the more you practice it, the easier it is to use it when someone's in need."

Crew members assisting Crane and Walker in the rescue effort were: Joseph Adamo, Mike Saner, Russ Martin, Michael Amaro Jr., Daren Arnold, Dixie McDaniel, John Frazier, Juan Barron Jr., Jesus Diaz, Bob Gibbs, Mitch Green, Mark Maire, Craig Gilbert, Kris Ratfield, John Kinard, Jim Lehnertz, Kevin O'Connor, and Dave Stickel.
Social Security must be preserved for all

By Orv Owen

President Clinton announced in his State of the Union speech that this year there will be meetings in town hall settings covering the Social Security program for improving the stability of Social Security for all present and future recipients. It is extremely important for all of us to participate in discussions and keep informed on the proceedings and developments. For over 60 years Social Security has been the most successful and broadly supported Federal government activity. Without Social Security, millions of older persons would be poor, families of disabled workers would be destitute and the status of low income families would be in crisis.

It has secure funding for full benefits well into the next century. Over the past 60 years, Social Security was modified often to meet the changing needs of American citizens as family structures and economic conditions have changed. These changes included disability benefits, age 62 benefits and the introduction of the COLA.

The political intent of the Congress was to extend and secure benefits for American workers and families. As a result, Social Security is not just the most popular and economic government program, it is also the most successful national program. For many of us, it is the single most important program binding the American people together as a national community.

Keep the faith!

Social Security is not just the most popular social and economic governmental program, it is also the most successful

Health care is at risk with Proposition 226

A lot is at stake in this June’s election for Californians concerned with preserving quality health care and work environments.

The main threat is Proposition 226, a ballot measure that would require annual authorization to use membership dues for candidates who fight for working families. The anti-worker initiative is funded by wealthy out-of-state special interests, whose agenda is to severely weaken the ability of health care employees to participate in the political process.

If Prop 226 should pass, the balance of power over HMO reform would almost entirely belong to the big corporations, leaving health care workers and consumers without a significant voice.

These corporations already have Gov. Pete Wilson on their side, fighting against any positive reform. For example, the Patient Bill of Rights would protect health professionals from termination without cause. It would also protect those who speak out about unsafe conditions.

But without union representation defending quality health care, the legislative votes to override a Wilson veto on important components of the Patient Bill of Rights simply are not there. Also in jeopardy are improved hospital staffing-patient ratios and certain elements of Title 22.

Also at risk are vital health and safety standards that protect patients and staff. Health care workers are frequently subjected to extreme dangers, such as airborne diseases and unsafe waste disposal, that can be properly controlled only by a strong regulatory agency. That’s why union influence must be maintained, to ensure that Cal-Osha remains in place to enforce existing standards and to promote a safer working environment.

Furthermore, because of the rate of work-related impairment in the health care industry (such as back injury and needle sticks), union representation is imperative to assure adequate workers compensation coverage.

Mental Health Coverage

Mental health is particularly vulnerable to reforms that favor the corporate HMOs and physicians in this field could see drastic changes in patient treatment.

While a recent UCLA study found that offering broad mental health benefits would not add significantly to insurers’ costs if a managed care approach is used, insurance companies reacted with their usual cost-benefit defense.

“Anything that adds cost, no matter how seemingly small,” argued the health care policy manager for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, “is of concern to us.”

At a time when many states, including California, are considering legislation to mandate some form of parity between mental health and other medical coverage, the opposition is mobilizing, too.

In a service industry like health care, issues that affect workers—like the eight-hour work-day affect consumers, too. And those issues must be fought for on a day-to-day basis.

That’s why nurses, physical therapists, medical technicians, hospital pharmacists, medical social workers, drug rehabilitation counselors and health care consumers rely on unions to counter the negative influence of the corporate health care industry.

Proposition 226 would silence unions and the health care employees they represent, putting us at the mercy of unhealthy corporate executives.

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The next time someone blames global competition for driving down America's wages, speak up—and share the facts:

"Global competition" has been a great excuse for driving down wages and workers' rights. Ever notice that some of the companies using the "global competition" excuse do all their business right here in the U.S.? Mining companies, for example, and construction and retail companies—even government.

Where global competition is real, we could have won! Instead of using American ingenuity to expand their markets and make better products more efficiently, when global competition heated up in the 1970s, U.S. businesses took the low road. First they slashed wages and benefits here, then packed up the jobs and sent them to the lowest-wage countries they could find.

The bottom line: Corporate America has no business crying about global competition. It's an excuse for multiplying its profits without sharing the wealth.