

June, 2006

President's Column

LOCAL UNION WEB SITE UNVEILED

Our Local Union website has been officially up for about a month and we have experienced over a thousand hits. It will be a great communication tool for our membership. The Executive Board came up with the parameters and Bill Brennell ran the information to member Randy Dailing, who will serve as our Web Master. A long time goal became a reality. Thanks to all that made it happen. If you missed the address in the last Newsletter it is "www.ironworkerslocal396.org". Give it a try, it is a cool site.

MEDICARE PART D

Last November I did a piece on Medicare Part D, the new drug coverage part of Medicare that started in January. I thought a review after six months would be helpful. Our seniors in the Local have had a hard time making sense of it, but age has nothing to do with it. Everyone has struggled to understand it. Only a federal bureaucracy could come up with such a jumble of a program. The projected cost of this endeavor is \$724 billion over the next 10 years (if that's their projection, you must know it will be more). The bigger down side is not only that it is expensive, the program provides more benefits to insurance companies than to enrollees.

Let's take a look how:

- The massive cost easily outweighs the benefit structure. The cost to the enrollee is \$32 monthly, has a \$250 deductible, and 25% of drug costs up to \$2250. When that threshold is met they must pay 100% of drug costs up to \$5100 out-of-pocket, then 5% of costs over \$5100. To make matters worse, the new drug plan may undermine one important source of prescription drugs for hundreds of thousands of people without health insurance: the pharmaceutical companies' patient assistance programs for the indigent. Some companies have made policy that anyone who signs up for Medicare Part D will become ineligible for such programs. Some companies have determined that anyone who is even eligible for the new benefit will be out of luck.

- Because of the Right-Wing Conservatives in Congress, less bargaining leverage is available because they have banned the government from negotiating directly with drug companies. One side of their mouths says free markets will deliver the lower costs, while out of the other side comes the fact that our federal government already negotiates directly with drug makers and receives deep discounts for medicine purchased by the Dept. of Defense and the Veterans Administration (VA). The price of the top 10 drugs under Medicare D is 80% higher than the negotiated price the VA pays for those same drugs.
- Enrollees who missed the May 15th sign up deadline will incur a 1% penalty per month for every month they are late, with no limitation. Once enrolled a person cannot change plans for a year. Insurance companies however are free to drop drugs from their coverage lists, at any time, as long as they cover two drugs within the same group class. Another catch is that the insurance carrier can disregard a doctor's recommendation under the appeals process.
- Conservatives have been trying to privatize Medicare for years and succeeded in that effort with Part D. Instead of being handled directly through Medicare the prescription drug benefit will be delivered by private insurance companies through so called competing Prescription Drug Plans. Congress is saying that companies will cut government inefficiency and lower prices. The fact is Medicare runs on overhead of less than 4% with a high level of beneficiary satisfaction. Part D poses another huge problem in the fact that in many regions enrollees are looking at over 40 different insurance plans with different benefits and cost structures. The whole program has been overwhelming for everyone.

In reality, private markets for individual health insurance do not work well. For corporations it is and has been a very enriching experience. Leaving the fox to guard the hen house is not a smart thing and relying on corporations to deliver health care will only further impoverish and destabilize our health care system. Thank God the Iron Workers do better for their seniors than the U.S. Congress.

A reminder: Safety is #1; Productivity is #2. Have a safe month.

- Chuck Decker

Business Manager's Column

Work has slowed down considerably over the past month. We dispatched only 6 men to 6 jobs. We worked a total of 161,885 hours for the month, which is over 20,000 hours less than last month. It is very frustrating to come to the hall every day and not have any jobs called out, but we have got to remain optimistic because we have so many good-sized jobs coming up. Most of the locals in our District Council are just like us, waiting for their to open up. There is work in our other locals that we are sending members. We have been sending men to Milwaukee and Madison, Wisconsin, Indianapolis, Las Vegas and New York. If anyone is interested, contact the hall and we will try to set something up. It is very important to keep your insurance going. In most locals, the "money follows the man", which means the hours you work out of town will be transferred back to your home local. You need 440 hours in 2 consecutive quarters to be eligible. Remember, when going out of town, you are not only representing yourself as an ironworker, but also Local 396. We've always had a great reputation as being one of the most respected locals in the International and we want to keep that status.

ON-GOING PROJECTS

- Pinnacle Casino on the Landing - McCarthy Brothers.
- Ameristar Casino Hotel & Garage - Jacobsmeyer Mauldin; Rebar Specialist - Rods; Weaver Steel - Pre cast & miscellaneous steel.
- Fizer Pharmaceutical - K. Bates - rebar.

Also just announced, Clayco has been awarded the St. Louis University Basketball Arena. The project should break ground in September.

POLITICS

The second year of the four-year term of our Republican administration has come to an end as of May 12. The Right To Work Bill, the Senate and House version of the Anti P.L.A. and Anti-Job Targeting Bills both failed. We want to give special thanks to Senator Tim Green and State Representative Vic Callahan of Kansas City, and our own member, Rod Gladney, for keeping up the fight for labor in Jefferson City.

Work safe.

- Tom McNeil