The first Labor Day — held in 1882 — was the idea of the Central Labor Union of New York, which proposed a celebration honoring the American worker. Street parades and other celebrations were a way for the public to show its appreciation for the work of the trade and labor organizations. It became a federal holiday in 1894, when 30 states officially celebrated Labor. Today, on the first Monday of September each year, Labor Day is a statutory holiday in all U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. territories, which continue the parade tradition (Pittsburgh’s parade is considered one of the largest). NABET-CWA locals in Detroit, Buffalo, Chicago, and Burbank shared their experiences of this year’s holiday.

Detroit

“Rise Up Unions: Fight for Your Rights”
Forty members of the Detroit Media Council/CWA joined the Detroit Labor Day March, whose theme was “Rise Up Unions: Fight for Your Rights.” NABET-CWA Local 43 President Dorethea Brown-Maxey and member Jack Ballomo marched with the group on the streets of downtown Detroit. They joined thousands of fellow union members, politicians and elected officials. Liz Shuler, AFL-CIO Secretary/Treasurer, also participated in this event.

Buffalo

“Labor Unions Make America Great!”
Local 25 President/RVP Roy Schrodt and Local 25 Vice President Bob Hellwitz marched along with fellow CWA locals and many other unions from Western New York in the Buffalo Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO Labor Day Parade in South Buffalo, NY. The parade’s theme this year was “Labor Unions Make America Great.” The large parade is followed by a picnic sponsored by all of the participating unions. The picnic includes food, live music, and entertainment for kids. This year’s parade, which took marchers along a 1¼ mile route, included 5,000 marchers, 2,500 spectators, and 2,000 picnickers, Schrodt reported.

Chicago

The Labor Day holiday in Chicago is rooted in the city’s Southside history. Congress created Labor Day following the deadly 1894 Pullman Strike in Pullman, Chicago. The city’s Labor community celebrated that history on the Saturday before Labor Day during the Southeast Side Labor Day Parade. NABET-CWA Local 41 members, wearing their red NABET-CWA shirts, marched with fellow union members and attended a Friends of Labor Festival that took place afterward at Steelworkers Park.

Burbank

“Union Proud—Union Strong”
NABET-CWA Local 53 Vice President Joe Ayala and Local 53 Treasurer Louis Gabrielle participated in the Los Angeles/Long Beach Harbor Labor Coalition 38th Annual Labor Day Parade. The parade — with the theme “Union Proud—Union Strong” — brought together thousands of union members and their families, as well as state and local officials, for the march down Avalon Boulevard in Wilmington, CA.
**President’s Perspective**

The attacks on our industry and livelihood must stop

Throughout the presidential campaign, Donald Trump made the “MSM” (Main Stream Media) his punching bag. His attacks have only increased after the election, starting with his questioning of reported inaugural crowd size (backed up by photos), and more recently, calling journalists “truly dishonest people” when his public remarks over the deadly white nationalist protest in Charlottesville, VA, were met with near-universal disgust. By labeling unflattering stories “fake news” and launching attacks on individual journalists, the President of the United States of America is undermining one of the key institutions of our democracy and putting journalists at personal and professional risk.

“I mean CNN is really bad, but ABC this morning,” Trump said at a “Unite the Right” rally in Phoenix, AZ on Aug. 22. “I don’t watch it much but I’m watching in the morning and they have little George Stephanopoulos talking to Nikki Haley.”

Trump then called out the “failing New York Times” and “pathetic” CNN, and called The Washington Post a “lobbying tool for Amazon.” He called journalists “liars” and “sick people” who are “trying to take away our history and our heritage.” He told the crowd, “I really think they don’t like our country.”

A Trump re-election campaign ad unveiled the day after the Charlottesville rally showed the faces of a dozen members of the news media, calling them “the enemy.”

While covering Hurricane Harvey and the president’s first visit to Houston, CNN reporter Nick Valencia (@CNNValencia) tweeted: “I just walked on the tarmac to cover @realDonaldTrump visit to Corpus and was heckled by a crowd shouting derogatory things. Unbelievable.”

Valencia and NABET-CWA members are DOING THEIR JOBS.

In the case of Valencia and others covering the hurricane, they are doing their jobs while also performing a public service by telling people how to get help, encouraging donations and, at times, rescuing people from dangerous situations.

Just days later, during a second trip to Houston, Trump praised the Coast Guard for saving 11,000 people, while also using the vast press coverage to get in another dig at the press. “Think of it, almost 11,000 people by going into winds that the media would not go into,” Trump said, smiling. “They will not go into those winds, unless it’s a really good story.”

Not only do the president’s provocative comments help to diminish the news media to the public, sowing doubt about whether to believe what is being reported, they also put journalists at personal risk. When a person with as large a megaphone as the president, whose views are covered around the world, launches these types of attacks, it creates an extremely dangerous atmosphere for journalists. I encourage our members to make their safety a priority, and to report any threats or dangerous situations they encounter while doing their jobs.

Press freedom is a core democratic value that is written into the U.S. constitution; it is our guaranteed right to search out and report the truth. We must remain vigilant, however, as these protections are challenged and mocked by the person who has been elected to preserve and protect these rights.

**U.S. Press Freedom Tracker**

On August 2, the Freedom of the Press Foundation and more than 20 press freedom organizations launched the U.S. Press Freedom Tracker – a website dedicated to documenting press freedom abuses across the United States. It currently shows that 19 journalists have been arrested in the course of their work in 2017 and that at least 10 reporters are facing charges.

In 2017, at least four journalists have been stopped at the border and 11 have faced physical attacks.

**NABET-CWA Welcomes New Staff Representative**

NABET-CWA announced the hiring of Local 25 Steward Ronald Gabalski as the union’s new Staff Representative. Gabalski, a NABET-CWA member for 26 years, fills the vacancy left by Lou Fallot’s retirement in September.

“I am pleased that we had seven deeply passionate and dedicated applicants for this job vacancy,” said Sector President Charlie Braico.

“While I wish we could have hired all seven of these fine people, NABET-CWA will be extremely well-served by Ron Gabalski for many years to come.”


Gabalski was first elected as Steward at WICU-TV in 1994. After moving to Buffalo, he became the Chief Steward at WIVB-TV in 2000. Over the past 17 years, he has participated in six contract negotiations at WIVB, including the historic lockout of half the bargaining unit in 1999 and, in 2005, when the union negotiated a five-year agreement. Currently, he is a member of the bargaining committee that is in contract talks with WIVB’s new owner, Nexstar Media, which he explained, “has exposed me to situations that required the use of seemingly every tool in the labor movement’s tool box.”

In addition to formal CWA and AFL-CIO training, Gabalski gained first-hand experience when he shadowed NABET-CWA Staff Representative Eric Seggi during bargaining with WJET-TV in Erie and accompanied Seggi and Staff Representative Bill Murray during an organizing effort in Rochester, NY.

In his new job, Gabalski said he hopes “to use my years of ground-level experience and relevant specialized training as an activist and union leader in NABET-CWA to be an effective, full-time voice for our members and help guide those members on how to use their collective power.”
The Regional Advisory Board for Regions 2 and 6 held its annual meeting on August 5-6 in Pittsburgh. The RAB consists of one person from each local in Regions 2 and 6, many of whom also attended the CWA Convention. Attendees discussed union business, listened to speakers and took part in breakout training sessions.

Judy Graves, CWA District 6 Organizing Director, led the “CWA Strong” workshop, which calls for CWA locals at or below 80 percent organized to increase membership by 10 percentage points this year; for all locals to have active and effective organizing, legislative-political, and human rights committees and participate in boot camps and other trainings, and to build and strengthen the workplace mobilization structure, among other actions.

Attendees were taught how to build the union through inside organizing in order to help their unrepresented co-workers gain representation. Once members have talked to co-workers about joining the union, they should identify key workplace issues and create an organizing committee. CWA can then help them build majority support.

NABET-CWA Staff Representative Eric Seggi and Local 25 Steward Ron Gabalski led a Shop Stewards training class, which included legal advice and answers from Attorney Chuck DeGross.

NABET-CWA General Counsel Judi Chartier presented updates on grievances and arbitrations, identifying key wins and losses, and Cornell University’s Paul Frank conducted a seminar about organizing.

During a Social Media training session, NABET-CWA Social Media Coordinator Toni Buoy gave attendees tips on broadening their reach with Twitter and Facebook. In addition, all locals with websites learned how to link to a news and information package offered by the AFL-CIO.

CWA delegates came together for the “CWA Strong/Union Strong” Convention, held August 7-8 at the David Lawrence Convention Center in Pittsburgh, PA. Dozens of delegates from most NABET-CWA locals attended the biennial event, where CWA delegates gathered to discuss union business, give reports, present resolutions, and make amendments to the union’s constitution.

CWA President Chris Shelton recognized CWA members and activists who walked picket lines and stood with striking workers at AT&T, Verizon, AT&T Mobility, and Momentive. NABET-CWA members in Chicago, Pennsylvania and New York walked the picket line in support of AT&T workers in May.

NABET-CWA Sector President Charlie Braico spoke to the convention delegates about the continuing battle to win justice for workers at CNN.

Three NABET-CWA delegates were selected for CWA Convention committees: Local 24 President Dianne Chase served on the Constitution Committee; Local 31 President Rich McDermott served on the Credentials Committee; and Local 53 Secretary Cheryl Hacon was on the Resolutions and Rules Committee, which approved seven resolutions, including one on workers’ rights and human rights that calls for building and supporting active Human Rights, Women’s, and Civil Rights and Equity Committees in every local.
On August 5, NABET-CWA celebrated three retirees who had given their long service to the union: Louis Fallot, a Staff Representative of Local 11; Fred Saburro, a 63-year member and long-time Union’s legal representative for over 46 years.

The celebration took place in conjunction with the CWA Convention meeting for Regions 2 and 6 in Pittsburgh. Several dozen gathered for a dinner to honor three men who all retired within the past year.

In addition to the dinner, a first-time award was presented in September: the Fred Saburro Award of Excellence – to Local 17 President Andy Halpin. Each year, the award is given to a member who has gone “above and beyond” in their service to the union. The CWA Retiree Coordinator chooses the award winner each year.

Sturm was “shocked” by the award and moved by the honor. “I am so honored,” she said of retirement. “It was so nice seeing all of those people I know and love dearly.”

Two resolutions were passed in honor of Fallot and Saburro. The first called for the Fred Saburro Scholarship. The scholarship awards $5,000 to an outstanding student in Region 2.

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The party and the RAB in Pittsburgh really brought to my attention the fact that I will miss these people. I wish whoever takes over much luck. It’s been a humbling experience to be able to represent our members from around the country,” Fallot said of retirement.

Fellot’s future plans include a lot of volunteer work, especially for members who need it. These are some of the people who need it the most.”

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The Steve Sturm Award for Excellence was presented to three retirees who have retired this year: Steve Sturm, John Green, and Fred Saburro.

Steve Sturm, a dedicated retiree, has worked with the union for 35 years and has been involved in various capacities, including as a local representative for 12 years and past president of RVP of Region 2; and, Steve Sturm, the Steve Sturm Award for Excellence – the Steve Sturm Award for Excellence – is among the honors given to retirees who have made valuable contributions during their service to the union and their communities.

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NABET-CWA awarded scholarships this year to five high school scholars who are the daughters or sons of active NABET-CWA members. They each will receive $750 annually for four years – a total of $3,000 – toward their college educations. In honor of their academic and community leadership, these students won merit-based scholarships named in memory of past NABET-CWA International Presidents and/or employees:

Jaclyn Barrea
Jaclyn Barrea is the daughter of Local 11 member Lawrence Barrea. Jaclyn received a “Regents Diploma with Advance Designation” from Miller Place High School in Miller Place, NY. While there, she was on the Varsity Cross Country and Track teams and received awards for Scholar Athlete, General Academic Excellence, AP Scholar, and English 10 Honors Excellence. Jaclyn was a member of the National Honor Society and on the High Honor Roll during her four years in high school. Her volunteer experience includes being a camp counselor and serving at a local soup kitchen. Jaclyn won the George Smith Scholarship Award and attends the State University of New York Geneseo.

Nadine Ciardulli
Nadine Ciardulli, the daughter of Local 11 member Don Ciardulli, won the Edward M. Lynch Scholarship Award. A graduate of Plaindeigh High School in North Massapequa, NY, Nadine was a member of the National, Science, English and Tri-M (music) Honor Societies. She participated in Varsity tennis, track and field and bowling, and played violin in her school’s Chamber Orchestra. As an intern, Nadine helped to organize clothing and food drives for those in need. She volunteered twice a week for a dog shelter and for the American Cancer Society throughout her high school years. She attends the State University of New York Plattsburgh.

Emily Collier
Emily Collier is the daughter of Local 47 member Patty Collier (WKBN-TV) and Local 47 member Bob Collier (WJW-TV). At Lakeview High School, Emily graduated in the top one percent of her 2017 class. As an honor student, four-year letter winner in golf and state champion, Emily participated in several school organizations, including National Honor Society, Madrigal Choir, French Club, and Bulldog Buddies tutoring, and served as a classroom aide for intervention students at her high school. She also worked at a local market and served a one-year term on the Ohio Attorney General’s Teen Ambassador Board. Emily won the Lawrence Dworkin Scholarship Award and attends the Xavier University in Cincinnati, OH, double majoring in Business and History. Emily also received the James Harris Scholarship Award, which provides a one-time scholarship of $600.

Model UN, and the president of the French Club. His hobbies include maintaining the pop culture blog ChannelTim.com and playing guitar. Timothy volunteered for Meals on Wheels, as a tutor and for the Eastchester Public Library. Timothy won the Doris C. Wilson Scholarship Award and attends Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, CA.

Liz Yount
Liz Yount of Tazanana, CA, is the daughter of Local 53 member David Yount. Liz, who graduated from Harvard-Westlake High School, won the James P. Nolan Scholarship Award. In her senior year, Liz represented the United States in worldwide debate competitions as Team Captain of the country’s top high school debate team – USA Debate team. As an editor, reporter, and photographer for her school’s newspaper, Liz won international and national awards for her journalism work. Liz’s critiques of the presidential debates last year were professionally published eight times, appearing in The Hollywood Reporter and The Guardian. In her spare time, she volunteers for Operation Gratitude. Liz is currently attending George Washington University’s Elliott School of International Affairs as a Presidential Scholar.

The following students received a one-time NABET-CWA Scholarship of $1,000:

Richard Heath
Richard Heath, the son of Local 18 member Glenn Heath, graduated from Weymouth High School in Weymouth, MA. Richard was a member of the National Honor Society and completed numerous community service hours, including taking part in efforts to clean up underdeveloped and struggling areas in Detroit. He played baseball and guitar, which he plans to continue in college. Richard won the Region Two James P. Nolan Memorial Award. He attends the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where is a student in the college of Social and Behavioral Sciences and plans to major in Political Science.

Emily Collier
Emily Collier is the daughter of Local 47 member Patty Collier (WKBN-TV) and Local 47 member Bob Collier (WJW-TV). At Lakeview High School, Emily graduated in the top one percent of her 2017 class. As an honor student, four-year letter winner in golf and state champion, Emily participated in several school organizations, including National Honor Society, Madrigal Choir, French Club, and Bulldog Buddies tutoring, and served as a classroom aide for intervention students at her high school. She also worked at a local market and served a one-year term on the Ohio Attorney General’s Teen Ambassador Board. Emily won the Lawrence Dworkin Scholarship Award and attends the Xavier University in Cincinnati, OH, double majoring in Business and History. Emily also received the James Harris Scholarship Award, which provides a one-time scholarship of $600.

Timothy McManus
Timothy McManus, the son of Local 11 member Mike McManus, received an Advanced Regents Diploma from Eastchester High School in Eastchester, NY. Among the top 10% of his graduating class, Timothy also was a member of the National Honor Society, the

Alayna Seggi
Alayna Seggi, the daughter of NABET-CWA Staff Representative Eric Seggi, won the Region Two James P. Nolan Memorial Award. Alayna graduated summa cum laude from Fort LeBoeuf High School in Waterford, PA, where she was a member of the National Honor Society, Student Council, and Editor of the yearbook. Alayna was a scholar athlete and a four-year letter winner in track, basketball and volleyball, where she was a two-time All-Region and All-District 10 selection. Alayna plans to continue her education and athletic career at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford, where she plans to major in forensic psychology and participate in Women’s Volleyball for the Panthers.

Hunter Skorczewski
Hunter Skorczewski is the son of Local 46 member Mark Skorczewski. Hunter graduated from All Saints Central High School in Bay City, MI, where he was named to the Highest Honors list every semester and received the President’s Award for Academic Excellence. He participated in baseball, football and basketball, where he was named to the Academic All-State Team and won “BCAM’s BEST” Boys Basketball All-State Honorable Mention. He also was a member of the Robotics team and recognized on the NBC 25 News “Path to Greatness” series. Hunter volunteered for the United Way and the MidMichigan Medical Center, among others, and was a regular blood donor. Hunter won the Thomas F. Kennedy Scholarship Award and attends the Northwood University in Midland, MI.

Riley Yusko
Riley Yusko, of Hinckley, OH, is the daughter of Local 42 member John Yusko. Riley won the James Harris Scholarship Award. In high school, Riley was on the yearbook staff at Brunswick High School for two years and participated in Professionals of Tomorrow, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, and HUDDLE, where she acted as a role model and presented alternatives to alcohol and other drug use for elementary students. Riley is pursuing a Bachelor of Nursing degree at the University of Toledo in Toledo, OH. She hopes to become a Nurse Anesthetist.

The following students received a one-time NABET-CWA Scholarship of $600:

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WTIC-TV/FOX CT – Hartford, CT (Local 17)
The new NABET-CWA unit at WTIC ratified their first contract on July 20. The two-year deal included two 2% wage increases for those not under a PSC and outlined job descriptions, minimum hourly rates, work rules, minimum hours of pay for work on days off, vacation, and holidays. The contract also included 26 weeks’ severance, just cause, and expedited arbitration. The 95-member unit of anchors, reporters, meteorologists, news photographers, editors and assignment desk editors voted to join NABET-CWA in 2015. The bargaining committee, led by NABET-CWA Staff Representative Bill Murray, included Reporter Jeevan Vittal, Photographer Ryan Bernat, and Local 17 President Andy Halpin.

WTNH-TV – New Haven, CT (Local 14)
The Directors unit ratified a contract on July 12. Negotiations for a successor agreement for the Technicians/Photographers continued in July, August and September. According to NABET-CWA Staff Representative Lou Fallot, a deal is within reach with Nexstar, which “came to the table willing to negotiate.” Another round of talks is possible in October. The bargaining committee includes Local 14 President Joe D’Addese, Vice President John Coleman, Sec-Treasurer Jim Bagley, and Lou Fallot.

KTCA-TV – Minneapolis, MN (Local 411)
An agreement was ratified with Twin Cities Public Television in August. The new agreement will run from Jan. 1, 2017, through Aug. 31, 2020. Wage increases of 2.5% are retroactive to Jan 1, 2017, followed by increases of 2%, 2% per year and 1.5% for the last 8 months of the agreement. The main sticking point was jurisdiction and use of non-unit employees for broadcast work. The Union was able to negotiate job protections, opportunities for new work on digital platforms and exclusive jurisdiction over several new cameras. The bargaining committee included Local 411 President Joe Kaczynski, Mike Phillips, Terry Grey, Clayton Henderson, and NABET-CWA Staff Representative Eric Seggi.

Hockey Western NY (Buffalo Sabres) – Buffalo, NY (Local 23)
Negotiations took place in June and July, coming to terms on a number of items. The Union is waiting for the Company’s response on jurisdiction and management rights and hopes to reach a final agreement soon.

WIVB-TV – Buffalo, NY (Local 23)
The two sides met in July and August and made minor progress on a new contract for the 50-member unit of photogs/editors, production employees, technicians, and maintenance. The Company continues to have a significant number of proposals on the table, including jurisdiction, definition of employees, grievance/arbitration, job descriptions, etc. More talks are scheduled for early October. The previous contract expired on March 26. The bargaining committee includes Ron Gabalski, Rich Ersing, Jim Diavastes, and NABET-CWA Staff Representative Eric Seggi.

WJLA-TV – Washington, D.C. (Local 31)
The Union’s negotiating committee presented a new comprehensive package to the Company prior to talks that were held in August. Bargaining has been ongoing since October 2015. The Union had prepared a comprehensive package, but the Company would not come to the table to exchange proposals. The Company wanted to have the ability to cut full-time employees’ minimum 40-hour guaranteed work per week. We are working under an extension agreement with a 14-day cancellation clause.

WDIV-TV – Detroit, MI (Local 49)
The Company presented a comprehensive proposal to the Union during talks that were held on June 22. The Union provided the Company a response in late August but no agreement has been reached. Bargaining dates have been scheduled for early October.

WJRT-TV – Flint, MI (Local 46)
With the help of a federal mediator, an agreement was reached on Sept. 18 for the 15-member unit, which had been working under a contract extension. The two-year contract includes a wage increase of 2% in the first year and 2.25% in the second year. A ratification vote is scheduled for Oct. 1. If ratified, the agreement will run through Sept. 30, 2019. The bargaining committee includes Local 46 President Sheldon Neely, Mike Adams, Brandon Millbrot, Local 46 Secretary Jerry Look and NABET-CWA Staff Representative Eric Seggi.

WJMI-TV – Youngstown, OH (Local 47)
The Union met with the Company for two days in August on a contract for the 25-member News unit: reporters, anchors and MMJ employees. Some progress was made during the talks, but the two sides are still apart on economics and MMJ duties, including live shots. Further talks are scheduled in September. The agreement, which was set to expire on Aug. 24, has been extended. The bargaining committee includes Matt Stone, Kate Keller, Danielle Cotterman and NABET-CWA Staff Representative Eric Seggi.

WTRF-TV – Wheeling, WV (Local 212)
One bargaining session was held in July. The Union and the Company are still apart on seniority, dues check-off, and grievance arbitration. With the sudden passing of Local 212 President John Green, who was on the bargaining committee, no new dates are scheduled at this time.

WJVM-TV/Fox 8 – Cleveland, OH (Local 42)
The bargaining committee sent a reopener letter and is preparing for bargaining with potential new station owner, Sinclair Broadcast Group. WIW, which has had eight different owners since 1985, is one of 43 Tribune Broadcasting stations being sold to the expanding media company.

Contract ratified at KSBY-TV
A new three-year contract was reached and ratified during the first week of September for the 25-member NABET-CWA Local 51 unit at KSBY-TV in San Luis Obispo, CA. The agreement for the station’s Content Producers, Photographers, Production Control Technicians, Master Control Technicians, Maintenance Engineers, Graphics, Creative Services Producers and Directors includes wage increases of 2.5% in each year of the contract, providing a 7.5% wage increase over the contract term. The wages are retroactive to June 8, 2017.

“This bargaining was primarily about money. KSBY is Number 1 in their market, but was resistant to compensate employees fairly for the work they provide,” said Local 51 President Kevin Wilson. “The 7.5 percent wage increase we negotiated over the term of the three-year contract does not come close to covering the cost of living in the very expensive area of the Central Coast.”

“Nevertheless,” Wilson added, “We didn’t give up anything and negotiated improvements such as an increase in severance pay to a maximum of 16 weeks; an increase in carryover days of paid sick leave; and, an increase of job protection for employees who are disabled or who are involved in an on-the-job injury.”

The Union’s bargaining committee consisted of Kenny Nichols and Local 51’s President Kevin Wilson.
The Marginalization of Retirees

In this column of “After the Show,” I want to speak to you about the attempt in this country to marginalize retirees. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition of “marginalize” is “to relegate to an unimportant position.”

We can begin with our elected officials, who continually refer to Social Security and Medicare as “entitlements.” There are powerful forces in this country that make these programs sound like handouts and they are not. These programs are benefits we have earned over a lifetime of working and to which we contributed our hard-earned money.

It is our job as retirees to correct our elected officials, and anyone else, when they use the term entitlement to describe Social Security and Medicare. We must speak up — politely, if possible, or not so politely, if necessary.

The real “entitlements” in this country are paid to the CEO’s of major corporations. Those entitlements are known as SERPs (Supplemental Executive Retirement Plans). These SERPs are given to those I refer to as the “kings and queens” of these corporations. I will be writing more about SERPs in an upcoming NABET News. The pension payments for former GE CEO Jack Welch are rumored to be $800,000 a month, the majority of which is a SERP. Outgoing GE CEO Jeff Immelt will receive a SERP of more than five million dollars a year, and during his tenure as CEO, the stock price and the dividend have dropped. Somehow, the GE Board of Directors has decided to reward failure. Talk about “entitlements.”

Then, we have our former employers, like AT&T, GE, and now NBCUniversal, which don’t give a second thought to breaking long-standing promises to retirees by terminating or radically reducing retiree medical benefits under the guise of giving retirees more choice.

Disappointingly, I must add CWA to this list. I am mindful that most retirees no longer pay dues, or vote in local union elections. What we do, however, is contribute to CWA-PAF, formerly known as COPE. We knock on doors, staff phone banks for labor-friendly candidates for public office, and support active employees during labor disputes. And, of course, we must continue to engage in all of those activities to support our active brothers and sisters.

The marginalization of retirees by CWA is conducted in a subtler manner. Let me share some history to illustrate. In January 2014, the CWA Executive Board passed a motion creating the GE Retiree Growth Fund. This appropriation was for approximately $471,500, and not one member of the Retired Members Council Board was asked for any input. How in the world can you create an almost half a million dollar fund for retirees without involving CWA’s retiree leaders?

Afterwards, Annie Hill, then CWA’s Secretary/Treasurer, described our omission from the process as a mistake. It was no mistake; RMC retiree leaders were deliberately bypassed and ignored.

In 2007, the RMC Board reached an agreement with the CWA Executive Board to have two joint meetings a year, one each at the Legislative and Political Conference and the Convention. That joint meeting has now been reduced to a meeting between the full RMC Board and just the CWA President and Secretary-Treasurer.

The RMC Board agreed to that change only because of the obvious lack of interest by many of the members of the CWA Executive Board. Some Vice Presidents came late, some left early, some didn’t come at all, and others appeared not to have any interest in our discussions.

The RMC’s key purposes are to organize all CWA retirees and keep them informed and engaged in the issues that affect their lives. It is my opinion that visibility is an important aspect of accomplishing that goal. When I became a member of the RMC Board in 2005, the RMC had an exclusive newsletter, Journeys. It was discontinued for a number of reasons, including the cost of mailing.

Some years after Journeys was discontinued, I received the NABET News wrapped around the CWA News. It occurred to me that it couldn’t cost much to wrap an RMC newsletter around the CWA News.

That is where my challenge began and continues. I introduced my idea of having a separate RMC print newsletter at our RMC Board meetings and presented it to the RMC’s liaisons – Helen Gibson, Melinda Gibson, Laura Reynolds – as well as Larry Cohen, Annie Hill, Chris Shelton, and Ron Collins. Thanks to Laura Reynolds, we did make some progress. We used some of the money from the RMC Growth Fund to create a masthead and an online newsletter entitled Grey Matters. Unfortunately an online-only newsletter is not enough: it does not reach the many retirees that are not computer literate or who do not have access to a computer. More importantly, an online newsletter does not provide the visibility that I believe the RMC needs to grow.

In attempt to eliminate any additional cost to CWA, I then proposed to Chris Shelton that Grey Matters be given the back page of the CWA News. That could provide the kind of visibility RMC needs to grow. Even though we have a new administration, it seems to me my idea is still greeted with the same indifference that I received by the previous administration. At one point, I was able to convince some NewsGuild retirees to participate with the editing of Grey Matters. So much time has passed, I am not sure that capability is still available.

Retirees in this country are one of the fastest growing demographic groups. We can have a profound impact on our elected officials and corporate executives if we were united and organized, but sadly, we are not. We are divided by political philosophy, religion, and to me the most meaningless difference of all: whether a retiree worked in management or a union job. We need to put these and other differences aside if we are to flex our collective retiree muscle.

In closing, my question is: When will we ever learn?

By 2030, 20 percent of U.S. residents are projected to be aged 65 and over, compared with 16.8 percent in 2020, 13.7 percent in 2012, and 9.8 percent in 1970. —U.S. Census Bureau, “An Aging Nation: The Older Population in the United States”

News media gives 2017 solar eclipse star treatment

The coast-to-coast Great American Eclipse captivated the country on August 21. News media were staged along the path of totality in 14 states and elsewhere, providing coverage of the first solar eclipse across the entire U.S. — from Oregon to South Carolina — since 1918. Major networks — ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, Fox News Channel, Telemundo, PBS, MTV, The Science Channel and The Weather Channel broadcast live television specials, allowing viewers who weren’t in full totality the opportunity to see what it was like. Correspondents and photographers covered viewing parties, broadcast activities at observatories, and explained the science behind the event. NASA, which used cameras both above and on the ground said, “never before was a celestial event be viewed by so many and explored from so many vantage points — from space, from the air, and from the ground.” It was also the first total solar eclipse in the smartphone and social media era in the U.S. NABET-CWA members across the country were proud to be involved in the historic eclipse coverage.

We must speak up — politely, if possible, or not so politely, if necessary.