

# Labor News Digest

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## UAW Backs OSHA's Call for an Ergonomic Standard

This is the article that should have been included with the August 2000 issue on how Ergo Standard Would Work.

"Sharp pains would go up my wrist, and the pain kept getting worse and worse," UAW Local 1700 member Faye Smith says. Her suffering was caused by the torquing motion of the wrenches she used at the DaimlerChrysler Sterling Heights Assembly Plant just north of Detroit.

Eventually she underwent surgery on one hand, was off work for three months, came back with work restrictions, and was sent home again. She is back on the assembly line.

Repetitive motion injuries--like those suffering by Faye Smith--and other ergonomic traumas are the nation's most common type of occupational safety and health injury. In 1997 alone more than 620,000 workers suffered musculoskeletal injuries in the workplace.

After over a decade of studying the problem, last November the federal government's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued a proposed standard which would cover employees who work in manufacturing or manual handling.

Hearings are now underway across the country. In March and early April, UAW health and safety experts and workers from several UAW-represented workplaces testified in Washington, D.C. and Chicago.

Susan Ruhala, a UAW joint ergonomic technician at Local 651, told the OSHA panel that 46 percent of the total recordable injuries in the Delphi plant in Flint, Mich., were ergonomic-related due to repetitive work, awkward postures, and forceful exertions.

Victor Henderson, UAW ergonomic technician at the GM parts operation in Pontiac, Mich., said workers often avoid reporting early symptoms to medical "because they are afraid of being harassed by management or being viewed as a wimp by their peers."

"The UAW and GM have recognized the need for intervention in addressing problems which can cause cumulative trauma disorders (CTDs)," said Pat McGee, UAW Local 2209 member from the GM truck plant in Roanoke, Ind.

At the Chicago hearing Sandy Alston, chair of the safety committee for UAW Local 997 at Maytag in Newton, Iowa, discussed many ergonomic improvements that have been made in her facility based on suggestions from a joint union-management Workplace Design team.

Stephen Mitchell, UAW Local 974 at Caterpillar in Peoria, Ill., explained how management and the union safety representative found a company that could build a special tool to torque the cylinders on a large diesel engine that was causing repeated injuries.

Beside these and other UAW members, UAW staff members also testified.

Dr. Frank Mirer, director of the union's well-respected Health and Safety Department, said the UAW strongly supports the proposed standard as a modest but critical first step.

"Only the direction of an OSHA ergonomic standard will provide employers with definitions of what they need to do and workers with a means to spur their employers to do it--and might give professionals the excuse to do the right things," Mirer said.

Mirer also spelled out areas where the proposed standard could be improved. He said that employers should be required to analyze jobs whenever they have knowledge that a hazard exists rather than waiting for an injury to occur. And he said the medical provisions of the standard are not protective enough.

Mirer presented evidence that the musculoskeletal injury rate in auto and parts plants has declined by 28 percent since 1994--in large part because of UAW-negotiated ergonomic programs with General Motors, Ford, DaimlerChrysler, and other employers.

The UAW has been working for a long time to protect workers from musculoskeletal injuries--both at the bargaining table and in the political arena.

In July 1991 the UAW and other labor unions asked the administration of President George Bush to issue an emergency ergonomic standard.

The Bush administration refused but directed OSHA to develop and issue a standard through the

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## Teamwork Makes It Work!

Here's a job description that probably needs an overhaul. When a hungry student with flu symptoms came into Health Services at Chaffey College, he left with medicine and a referral to a food bank. A homeless student was able to find shelter and eventually permanent housing with help from Health Services. And on a rainy day last winter, more than 55 people inundated the eight staff members who work in Health Services.

Sadie Llauger, administrative assistant for Health Services, made sure all those people got the help they needed. Her story is much the same as that of many classified employees throughout California. Llauger says she likes the work, but most people outside of education don't know why she does it.

"They say I could make so much more money in the private sector," Llauger said. "I do it for the love of the students, and because I love helping people."

This divorced mother of three works harder than she should to help students and staff succeed. But as Llauger said, staff throughout the college campus go out of their way to help students. "That's kind of our philosophy here at Chaffey," she said. "We're all professionals, and we take a lot of pride in our work."

*"If I can help someone succeed in life, than I'm a success."*

Llauger brought that same enthusiasm to her role as the staff advisor to One Over One,

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## UAW Backs OSHA's Call for an Ergonomic Standard

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normal regulatory process. And in January 1993 the Clinton administration made creation of an ergonomic standard a regulatory priority. So our hopes were high.

However, in 1995 the new Republican Congress passed legislation to prevent OSHA from issuing a standard. A year later they again blocked OSHA from issuing a standard but allowed data collection to continue.

In October 1998 the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) told Congress that the workplace causes many repetitive motion injuries. Other studies by the National Institute on Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and the Bureau of Labor Statistics have reached similar conclusions.

Despite the strong scientific evidence, in late 1998 the GOP leadership ordered a second NAS study for \$890,000, and then in February 1999 the House voted to prohibit OSHA from issuing a standard until the second NAS study was completed in 2001.

Behind the strong Republican opposition are powerful elements of the corporate and small business community. Because the GOP today controls both houses of Congress, OSHA's rule-making could run into further roadblocks.

Cass Ballenger, R-N.C., and a key Republican opponent of an ergonomics standard, says bluntly: "The fact that OSHA has worked on ergonomics for over a decade is irrelevant since Congress decided the issue needed further study."

Rep. Bill Goodling, R-Pa., pleads that Congress just needs "to get the scientific evidence first."

But some of his colleagues don't mince their words. "I hope we get a hurricane and just push OSHA out to sea," says Rep. Sam Johnson, R-Texas.

To all this, Rep. David Obey, D-Wis., retorts: "The only repetitive motion injuries that members of Congress are likely to get are knee injuries from continuous genuflecting to big business special interests who want us to put their profit margins ahead of worker health."

"This standard is long overdue," says UAW President Stephen P. Yokich, who notes that while the UAW has been able to negotiate extensive ergonomics programs with many companies, "the lack of an enforceable standard and competition from irresponsible corporate citizens limits what we can achieve through negotiations."

### How Ergo Standard Would Work

#### What jobs are covered?

Manufacturing.  
Manual, material, or patient handling.  
Other jobs when a musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) is reported.

Evaluate programs.  
Correct deficiencies.  
Keep records.

#### What must these employers do?

Assign responsibility for ergonomics.  
Set up a way to report MSDs.  
Inform employees.

#### How must an employer treat a worker reporting an MSD?

Provide access to a health care provider.  
Maintain workers' income for up to six months if restricted.

#### What must an employer do when an MSD is reported?

Analyze the problem job.  
Abate the risk factors.  
Evaluate the modified job.  
Consult with employees.  
Provide training to employees.

#### Can employers omit the full program if an MSD is reported?

Only if they find a quick fix to a problem job and no further MSDs are reported.

#### Common Disorders

Common musculoskeletal disorders include: carpal tunnel syndrome, rotator cuff syndrome, De Quervain's disease, trigger finger, tarsal tunnel syndrome, sciatica, epicondylitis, tendonitis, Raynaud's phenomenon, carpet layers' knee, herniated spinal disc, low back pain.

#### Symptoms

Symptoms of musculoskeletal disorders include: numbness, burning, pain, tingling, cramping, stiffness.

## We Must Vote for Our Friends

It has been said that bad officials are elected by good citizens who do not vote. Remember, if you don't vote, it counts as a vote for the candidate you don't want.

On November 7 there will be a national election in the United States, and it is erratically important that we all vote. We have an opportunity to put another friend in the White House and take control of Congress from the anti-union and anti-worker conservatives if we all vote. This means all of our members and our union families.

Of course, not all Republicans are our enemies, just as not all Democrats are our friends. But it is a fact that the Democratic Party has been a far strong supporter of labor's issues than has the Republican Party. Whether you vote Republican, Democrat, or Independent, it is the duty and obligation of every voter in the U.S. to go to the polls on Election Day.

On November 7, our voices and our votes, joined together with those of other labor unions around the country, can make all the difference in helping elect a President and a Congress that care about working people and their families. And now is the time to say to every union member you must register so you can vote on Election Day to protect our rights, our friends, and our families.

As I have said many times in the past, whatever gains we make at the bargaining table can easily be legislated away. And that is why we must elect friendly political candidates to office at the national and local level who support a fair policy for organized labor.

When we have a Democratic President in the White House, you can be sure he will appoint a worker friendly cabinet. And he will appoint worker friendly judges and members of the National Labor Relations Board who protect workers' rights.

Certainly history tells us that the Democratic Party is the party that is and always has been more supportive of organized labor. There can be little argument about that. After all, it was the Democrats who introduced and worked for most of the progressive legislation that has enabled organized labor to survive and prosper throughout the 20th century; issues like the National Labor Relations Act, which gave labor the right to organize, Social Security, Medicare, prevailing wages on public construction, workplace safety, and health care.

The AFL-CIO has an initiative underway called 2000 In 2000. This is a program that seeks to strengthen our voice in government by recruiting 2,000 union members to run for office this year at the local, state, and national levels. It shouldn't be too hard to reach that 2,000 mark if we all get out and vote on Election Day 2000.

Going to the polls now is the only way we can protect the rights we have and it's the only possible way we'll be able to stop anti-worker legislation or get pro-worker legislation passed in the future. As President of this great union, I know you don't need me to tell you that you have to vote; you need only information from your union and encouragement to vote. It is my opinion that the labor movement can and must play a major role in determining who will be our next President. And I am convinced that if every worker goes to the polls on Election Day, we will elect labor's friends to the Congress and Al Gore, who has been a loyal friend of workers and who was overwhelmingly endorsed by labor, for President.

Jake West, General President, *International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Worker*, writing in *The Ironworker*, 1750 New York Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20006.

## Eating Blueberries

An experiment conducted at the U.S. Agriculture Department Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University in Boston reveals that eating blueberries could improve balance, coordination, and short-term memory.

According to a report in the *Journal of Neuroscience*, rats whose age would be equivalent to that of humans 65 to 75 years of age, were fed blueberry extract equal to a daily half-cup of blueberries. After eight weeks, the rats could run faster, and walk longer on a narrow rod, thus demonstrating improved motor skills. They could go through mazes quickly and find an underwater platform in murky water, indicating improved short-term memory.

Scientists believe that antioxidants help slow the aging process by destroying the free radicals produced by human metabolic activity. Blueberries have the strongest antioxidant source of 40 fruits and vegetables tested at the Tufts neuroscience lab; however, more scientific study needs to be done to determine whether blueberries help humans the way they do rats.

Source: AARP

## Teamwork Makes It Work!

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the college's non-denominational Christian club. As club advisor, she facilitates discussions of religious values, prayers with the students, and helps club members with letters of recommendation for college applications and scholarships.

Llauger is also active in her community, organizing blood drives and an annual relay fund-raiser for the American Cancer Society. She urges people to get involved, and has the most success recruiting classified employees.

"I think classified employees volunteer because it's a chance to improve our own community" Llauger said.

As if all Llauger does is not enough, she never misses a meeting of CSEA Chaffey College Chapter 431 contributing toward CSEA's mission to increase respect for classified staff.

Llauger helps organize Classified School Employee Week events with the college's classified senate. She also served as a facilitator/trainer at a staff development retreat for classified staff.

"If I can help someone succeed in life, then I'm a success," Llauger said. "That's my calling, and I think that's why most classified employees do the type of work we do."

*The California School Employee Association (CSEA), P.O. Box 640, San Jose, CA 95106.*

## Hempstead Administrators Surrender

When administrators from Hempstead, N. Y., forget their own laws defining part-time and seasonal work, organizers from the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA)/AFSCME Local 1000 quickly reminded them.

Showing its muscle, CSEA organized 500 part-time workers and got the town's administrators to recognize them as full-timers. They are now members of Local 880 and are eligible for the same wages and benefits as other full-time workers.

Phoebe Mackey, CSEA supervising organizer, first rallied the support of Local 880's shop stewards and officers. Mackey and her organizing team--Denise Lawyer, Doug Card, and Dean Shultis--met with the group and advised them of the importance of adding the part-time workers to the bargaining unit. The group then held a meeting with the part-timers to notify them that activists would be visiting them at their worksites to discuss the strategy.

Talking to the workers one on one, the organizing committee learned that most of them wanted to be in the bargaining unit. After the part-timers signed membership cards, Mackey says, "we sent a letter to the town demanding that these workers be placed in the bargaining unit." Town officials quickly agreed.

CSEA has precedent on its side. Nearly 10 years ago, the association filed charges with the state's Public Employee Relations Board. The result: an agreement that added to the bargaining unit part-time counterparts. Through attrition of full-timers in Hempstead, however, the part-time population began to creep back up. Before CSEA stepped in recently, some part-timers were working for the town for four or five years and "making a lot less money and receiving no benefits," Mackey says. "They were working 40 hours a week and, in many cases, overtime."

CSEA organizers are currently running a similar campaign in Western New York state to secure bargaining rights for some 300 workers. Mackey says the officers there "are all on board, and they're going to do a house-calling blitz." After that, they will set their sights on 1,500 workers in the Rochester-Buffalo area.

*AFSCME Leader*, 1625 L St., NW, Washington, DC 20036.

## Chatroom

**Henry E. Simmons, M.D.**, President of the National Coalition on Health Care - **The Problem with Health Care Services** - Preventing medical errors is extremely important to improving the quality of health care. We need to address the total problem of the overuse, underuse, and misuse of health care services and to change the way medicine is practiced in this country.

**Kenneth E. Thorpe**, Tulane University Medical Center Institute for Health Services Research - **Health Care Crisis Hits Middle America Hardest** - The health care cost crisis is not over. After a two-year hiatus, the projected growth in health care costs is on the rise...Middle income families--those earning between \$20,000 and \$60,000 per year--will be hardest hit by this resurgence.

**Former President Jimmy Carter**, who also serves as Honorary Co-Chairman "Universal Coverage--A Call for Action" - **Uninsured Face Higher Death Rate** - The devastating effect of someone who goes to the hospital uninsured has multiple results. The primary result is that four times as many patients who go to the hospital without insurance die as a patient who has insurance. It is not the insurance that saves them, necessarily; it is the social economic circumstances from which they come when they arrive in the hospital. They already may be malnourished, or they haven't had adequate preliminary care, or basic instructions on what to do about their own health. These circumstances are embarrassing to my country. Because, so far, we haven't made much progress in correcting them.

**M. Edith Rasell, M.D., Ph.D.**, Director, Economic Analysis and Research Network Economic Policy Institute - **Unionization: Cure for Health Care Crisis** - Health care facilities are merging at record rates to gain a level playing field with big insurance companies. Research shows the best way health care workers can have a voice on the job, win better staffing levels, and help control rising health care costs is to unionize.

**"Reality Check: The Public's Changing Views of Health Care System"**--A National Coalition on Health Care report - **Americans Fear Losing Health Care Coverage** - The public has serious doubts about the structure and operations of our health care system. These concerns reflect worries about the cost, coverage, and quality of health care as well as loss of trust in the health care system. The 22 polls clearly reflect that consumers are experiencing difficulty--or are concerned about--obtaining affordable, appropriate, quality health care for their families and that the economic well-being and health of these individuals and families are at stake.

*United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW)*, 1775 K St., NW, Washington, DC 20006.

## Words of Wisdom

"There can be no democracy unless it is a dynamic democracy. When...people cease to participate...then all of us will wither in the darkness of decadence." -- *Saul Alinsky*

## Progressive Discipline Rights Detailed

Progressive discipline works in concept but can get muddled in application. Concepts don't consider personalities or motives. The idea of progressive discipline is that good management takes an interest in success of the employee. Each step of the progressive discipline process should provide the information and tools to help an employee succeed. It is not intended to "keep book" for future actions.

That's the way it's supposed to work. Enter the unenlightened manager. Here is where the process can become complicated with personality conflicts, mixed motives, poor management styles, inadequate training for supervisors and a myriad of other problems that come with being individuals.

### What Are Your Rights?

**1. Informal Counseling** (your employer may call it an oral warning) is the first step of the progressive discipline process. It is an informational meeting with your supervisor to counsel you regarding performance issues. If you believe that any disciplinary action could eventually be taken against you when you are called into a meeting, you have the right to have a representative present.

Ask what the meeting is about and could the meeting result in disciplinary action being taken against you. If the answer is yes, say "I would like to have my representative with me in this meeting."

**2. Corrective or Counseling Memo**--if you are given a written counseling memo, you have a right to representation regarding the content of the memo. A corrective memo usually doesn't go into your personnel file, but you will need to ask when the memo is given whether it is management's intent to put it into your file and which file. (This would be a good time to review your personnel file to see just what it contains.) You can request a meeting with your supervisor to (a) request the memo be withdrawn; (b) request the memo be amended; (c) attach a written response; (d) launch the grievance process to have it removed. Most contracts have such material removed after one year.

**3. Letter of Reprimand**--a letter of reprimand goes into your permanent file. You can schedule a meeting to (a) have the letter withdrawn; (b) have the letter amended; (c) have the reprimand reduced to a corrective memo; (d) attach a written response; (e) remove it after one year. Contact your representative about such a letter.

**4. Disciplinary/Adverse Action**--due process rights are guaranteed by law. Disciplinary actions vary, but may involve some economic loss (suspension with pay, denial of salary increase, demotion, or termination). Again, you need to contact your representative.

There are good supervisors. However, all you need is one bad supervisor in your career, and it can end or damage your working reputation. You have rights of representation. Use them.

*The Montana Public Employees Association, P.O. Box 5600, Helena, MT 59604.*

## Raised Union

My mother told me to always wear clean underwear, to always say please and thank you, and to never, ever cross a picket line. Growing up with union folks has taught me to play well with others and collaborate with coworkers for a better bargaining position.

I know that when some corporate big shot tells me that we're all one big happy family, it's not going to get me and my fellow workers a raise or an invitation to his home. The corporate big shot sees me as just a face; but what I know and he doesn't, is that I'm part of a sea of faces, all riding the wave together. I know that when I win, others will win; and if I lose, I'll never be alone. My mother also taught me that what you leave behind passes onto others.

What I left behind was a plain white poster with a red stop sign shape in the center with black lettering that spelled out STOP WORKER ABUSE. This poster was the last remnant of *Let the Lady Speak*--a one-woman play about a union organizer--a play I had written and performed as part of my thesis for graduation.

I finished the show and received my grade, and it seemed as if the play had completely disappeared; the set had been dismantled, lights and props put away, all except that one poster. It continued to hang in plain view in the scene shop long after the play had closed.

I doubt that the play or performance made a profound impact on any one person who sat through it, but the poster remained. I smiled every time I saw that poster hanging there, not because I had a part in putting it there, but that the message of the play remained. I'd like to think that poster still hangs there, and perhaps the shadow of its message burns into the mind of some passerby--some new freshman, some jaded senior, or some despairing adjunct faculty member.

Without the careful vigilance of my mother to make sure that I knew about the labor movement, I doubt I would have ever written the play. Through all the union rallies and marches I had been dragged off to since I was a small child, I learned the bodies on a picket line are real people with families, pets, and homes. I wanted to tell their story and make their struggle real for others.

Without the solidarity shown to me by all the men and women I've met in the labor movement, I might not have had the courage to add my voice to the cause. No doubt I didn't change the minds of a conservative college, nor did I blaze a path to Broadway, but I left something behind--that single poster. Maybe, someone got the message.

In the end, it's only with the wide-eyed child upon our knee that we become the tellers of our tale and pass it on. Don't worry; they won't forget your story. Undoubtedly, they'll pass it on. Maybe they too will leave something behind, like I did.

Teresa Nelson-Romero is the daughter of PACE Communications Department staffer Joanne Powers. She teaches reading to adults in Durham, N.C. in, P.O. Box 1475, Nashville, TN 37202.

## Thieves Get Rich Quick by Stealing Your Identity

When Barbara Mickelberry dropped her credit card and ID card after renting a video, she didn't notice it was missing until she got a phone call from a local jewelry store. The clerk had taken a credit application that he was suspicious about, so he looked her name up in the phone book.

Her number in the phone book did not match the applicant's. His phone call confirmed his suspicions. The 20-something female in his store was not 80-year-old Barbara Mickelberry. He withheld the card and called the police.

It was lucky for Barbara that the clerk had good instincts. The jewelry company's main office had already approved a credit line of \$5,000.

Barbara came very close to becoming a victim of one of the newest and fastest growing forms of crime: identity theft.

Identity thieves do not steal from you directly. They pretend to be you, get your credit cards in your name, and run up bills that can ruin your credit.

Identity theft claims more than 500,000 victims a year. In most cases, the thieves steal your Social Security Number (SSN) first. With that, they have access to all your financial and credit records.

Thieves can get your SSN by stealing your wallet, taking mail from your box, going through trash for discarded receipts and bills, or conning you into giving it to them over the phone. A thief can buy batches of SSNs from accomplices working for companies that have

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## Architectural Metal, Rose Plant Companies Share 2000 Labor-Management Award

Management of two companies--one with a seven-decades relationship with its employees' union, the other with just over five years as a union employer--shared the Union Label & Service Trades Departments Labor-Management Award for the year 2000.

The award was made in Milwaukee just before the opening of this year's AFL-CIO Union-Industries Show. First made in 1988, the award recognizes employers who have demonstrated their commitment to collective bargaining and to producing quality, competitive, union-made products and services in the U.S.

This year's award recipients are:

- The A. Zahner Company of Kansas City, Mo., a world renowned producer of architectural sheet metal. The company was nominated by the Sheet Metal Works International Association (SMWIA) and SMWIA Local 2, which has represented Zahner employees for 70 years; and,
- The Bear Creek Production Company facility in Kern County, Calif., one of the world's largest producers of rose plants. It was nominated by the United Farm Workers (UFW), which has had a contract for Bear Creek's Kern County employees since 1995.

The awards were accepted by the president of the Kansas City firm, L. William Zahner, and by the vice president of Bear Creek's California operations, Carl Lindgren, Sr.

The SMWIA's union label appears on Zahner projects the length and breadth of the U.S., and abroad in places like Hong Kong and elsewhere in China.

Zahner often relates that a Chinese inspector, impressed with the high quality of the company's products, once asked him if the SMWIA label was "the symbol of your company?" "I thought for a moment," Zahner says, "and answered, 'yes.'"

By contrast, the UFW and Bear Creek Kern County, which employs some 1,500 members of the union, have had a contract only since 1995, but that relationship, too, has been exemplary, the UFW notes, pointing out that it took just three months to negotiate the first contract and that during negotiations the company listened to UFW worker-leaders and removed more than 40 nonproductive managers.

Bear Creek's widely respected "Jackson & Perkins" brand rose plants, available by mail order and from nurseries and garden centers, all have the UFW eagle union label on their packaging.

Nine other companies also were nominated for this year's award, by seven other unions. Each of the nine received a "certificate of honor...in appreciation for continuing commitment to collective bargaining and to producing quality, competitive union-made products..."

*Union Label & Service Trades Department, 815 16th St., Washington, DC 20006.*

## October Conference to Focus on Workplace Rights

Cornell University's Institute for Workplace Studies is convening a conference on workplace rights, October 20-21, in Rye Brook, NY. Participants will include representatives from American labor and business, along with academics, members of the media, and representatives from non-governmental organizations.

The State Department's Special Representative for International Labor Affairs, Sandra Polaski, is also slated to appear, along with Francis Maupain of the ILO. The conference, *Human Rights in the American Workplace: a Reassessment of U.S. Labor Law and Policy*, will be organized into five panels:

1. Workers' Rights as Human Rights.
2. A Commitment to International Human Rights Principals: Implications for U.S. Labor Law and Policy.
3. U.S. Labor Law and Policy in an International Context.
4. Agents of Change: Non-Governmental Organizations and Workers' Rights.
5. What Needs to be Done: Workers' Rights in the 21st Century.

For details about the conference and a registration form, go to [www.ilr.cornell.edu/iws/rights.html](http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/iws/rights.html), call 212-340-2896, or send e-mail to [iswconferences@cornell.edu](mailto:iswconferences@cornell.edu).

*International Labor Organization (ILO), 1828 L Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036.*

## RX Express

Frustrated by the lack of government help with prescription drugs and angered by the high cost of prescription drugs in the U.S., bus loads of senior citizens are heading across the border to Canada.

Rep. Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., who is running for the U.S. Senate from Michigan, led a group of Michigan seniors to Windsor, Ontario.

On average the seniors on Stabenow's trip saved 52 percent. One senior saved \$445.67 filling four prescriptions. Her biggest savings came from purchasing two bottles of Glucophage, which would have cost \$323 in the U.S. but only cost her \$50 in Windsor.

"In our country, with the most advanced prescription health care system in the world, senior citizens should not have to go to Canada for affordable prescription medications," says Stabenow, who is challenging incumbent Senator Spencer Abraham, R-Mich., a close ally of Michigan's governor, John Engler.

Other groups of seniors have been making the trip to Canada, too. George McKinney, a UAW retiree from Wisconsin, recently went on a bus trip organized by Wisconsin Citizen Action. McKinney, who saved 66 percent of the cost of his three prescriptions, says: "It's simply a crime that seniors are being forced to do this."

The problem that seniors face is growing. Families USA, a grass roots organization that lobbies for health care reform, recently reported that in 1999 the prices of the prescription drugs most commonly used by seniors increased at almost double the rate of inflation.

The report also found the seniors with chronic illnesses are often forced to spend well over 10 percent of their income on prescription drugs. Most UAW retirees enjoy prescription drug benefits won through collective bargaining with the Big Three and other employers, but many other UAW members have no drug coverage once they retire.

Thelma Buell, who worked for three decades at the Howell Motor plant in Howell, Mich., retired in 1981 shortly after Howell went into bankruptcy. After the bankruptcy, she and other retirees lost the health insurance and prescription drug coverage they expected--and have been forced to rely entirely on Medicare, which has no prescription drug coverage.

Currently President Bill Clinton wants to offer Medicare beneficiaries the option of buying drug coverage for half their prescription drug costs (up to \$2,000) for an additional \$26 a month premium.

By 2009 that would increase to \$5,000 annually with a \$51 premium. Under Clinton's plan, the lowest income seniors would pay no premiums or cost-sharing.

Though there are no explicit price caps in Clinton's plan, the big pharmaceutical companies fear that if the government becomes a big buyer, it will be able to bargain for lower prices at greater volume.

Through a front called Citizens for Better Medicare, the pharmaceutical industry has been running television ads attacking Clinton's approach. But the drug companies are swimming against public opinion.

Americans are strongly behind a bigger government role in providing drugs to seniors. A Louis Harris poll conducted in October 1999 reported that 86 percent of adults supported a prescription drug benefit, and 71 percent preferred that associated costs be paid through general taxation.

In reaction to Clinton's moves on his popular issue, House Republicans finally countered with a plan to help the poorest senior citizens.

However, AFL-CIO President John Sweeney criticized the Republican plan for failing to help retirees with modest incomes. The National Council of Senior Citizens likewise graded the GOP plan an "F" because it fails to cover all Medicare recipients.

"There are millions of seniors who are not at the poverty level but still don't have enough money to pay for their prescription drugs, and their rent, and their food, and their other costs," says House Democratic Leader Richard A. Gephardt, D-Mo. Already some states have begun to take action.

The Maine legislature has become the first in the nation to approve a bill that sets up an 11-member pricing board that would begin with a schedule of recommended lower prices. If prices fail to go down by October 2001, the board would mandate that all drugs sold in Maine cost more than they do in Canada.

The bill has yet to be signed into law. With an election coming up and politicians feeling the heat on this issue, President Clinton feels we have an unprecedented opportunity to get things done this year. Some Republican leaders see that opportunity, also. So UAW members have a chance to help shape a prescription drug benefit for Medicare beneficiaries.

George McKinney, who took the trip to Canada, says that federal and state legislation--not pilgrimages to Canada--are the answer. "We are currently enjoying plentiful budgetary surpluses at both the state and federal level; if we can't get a prescription drug benefit in this atmosphere, we never will," he says.

## Thieves Get Rich Quick by Stealing Your Identity

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access to them, and they've even been sold over the Internet at \$20 each.

Once a thief has your SSN, he or she can apply for a credit card in your name. Months later, when a debt collection agency is hired to collect the payment, they track you down. You don't have to pay the debt, but you must clean up your credit record, which means trying to get a police report and copy of the fraudulent contract, then using them to clear the fraud from your credit report.

That isn't easy to do. And a bad credit record is not the worst of it. Some victims have been denied jobs, had their drivers' licenses suspended, or even been jailed for offenses committed by an identity thief.

You can minimize your risk of identity theft in many ways:

1. Never carry your SSN in your wallet or have it printed on checks.

2. Guard you SSN closely, giving it out only to official authorities or businesses you trust.

3. Shred documents so all numbers are unrecognizable.

4. Demand that credit bureaus stop selling your credit information. Call the credit bureau's special toll-free line: (888) 567-8688.

5. Don't post personal information on the Internet--for example, on genealogical or college reunion sites.

6. Check your credit report annually.

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## When Working Women Rise, Everyone Gains

The times, they are a-changing--and they've been changing even faster in the last 25 years. Rosie the Riveter is no longer a short-timer; indeed, she's no longer confined to being a riveter.

Today, women are an essential part of the American workforce--and the American labor movement. And everybody--that means men as well--stands to benefit from changes that began speeding up a quarter-century ago, and are just now beginning to move on to center stage.

The road that working women have trod over the past 25 years has been a rough one. When women started entering the workforce in record numbers in the mid-1970s, their arrival coincided with a major shift from a manufacturing to a service-based economy. The result? Significant inequities in pay, health benefits, and retirement.

These inequities were, and still are, in part caused by the misconception that "women's work" is not as valuable as "men's work" and that women enter the workforce for only short periods of time. These misconceptions persisted because society viewed women as second-class citizens who contributed little to the workplace. In fact, some people still hold this view and even believe women should not be in the workplace at all.

But now the gap between the change in conditions and the change in consciousness is closing. Women are no longer entering the workforce temporarily; in reality, very often we are the major, and in some cases, the only breadwinners for our families. As our numbers in the workplace have grown, we have also learned to fight for recognition. The increased awareness of what we can accomplish together, and the fact that more women are entering the workforce give us an opportunity to help shape the future of the American Labor movement.

That women are becoming powerful new players in the labor movement became apparent to me when I had the privilege of attending and participating in the AFL-CIO's Working Women Conference 2000 held in Chicago. It was an exciting and informative weekend for the 5,000 in attendance, mainly union women, but also a few unrepresented women and concerned men. Banners of different unions were waved; signs which read "Working Families for Gore" abounded; and thousands of voices rose in support of women's issues.

Labor leaders from a wide variety of organizations conducted 80 different workshops on such issues of importance to working families as the rights of contingent workers, how to combat apathy, organizing, getting out the vote, sexual harassment, and violence against women. I was honored to participate in a round table discussion with six other labor women in which we answered questions from women in the audience about our own experiences in organizing and mobilizing members of our unions.

AFL-CIO President John Sweeney and Executive Vice President Linda Chavez-Thompson spoke at the conference, and they urged working women to transform their anger and outrage over workplace inequities into political action. Vice President Al Gore, the Democratic Party presidential nominee, told the participants he intended to put the concerns of working women at the top of the national agenda.

The concerns the vice president was referring to were the four issues of critical importance to working women, as identified by the AFL-CIO-sponsored study *Working Women Say*: equal pay; quality, affordable health care; expansion of family leave policies; and pensions, Social Security, and retirement.

As noted in the June 1999 *Postal Record* article, although some of these problems do not affect us directly as members of the NALC, these inequities in the workplace do hit others in our families. Another result of the study shows how stressful it is to juggle family and work responsibilities and, although men were not mentioned in the Working Women study, a separate and unrelated study shows that this is true for them as well.

So though one may think the issues address at a "Working Women's Conference" would be of interest only to women, that is simply not the case. These are issues of critical importance to working families. And it is due to the increasing numbers of women in unions that these issues are being examined, for both in the workplace and in politics, numbers count.

The bottom line is that today active union women are helping to build strong unions and ensure that this nation's elected officials act to secure the future of America's working families.

Rosie the Riveter would be proud.

National Association of Letter Carriers, 100 Indiana Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20001.

## Thieves Get Rich Quick by Stealing Your Identity

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7. Check bank and credit statements.

If you should become a victim of identity theft, here are some ways to protect yourself from further harm.

1. Get a copy of the fraudulent contract or application.

2. Contact the credit bureaus that hold your credit report and ask them to log the theft and remove the bad accounts from your report.

3. Have a "fraud alert" put on your credit report.

4. Keep meticulous dated records of your attempts to clean the record.

5. Never agree to pay any portion of the debt just to get debt collectors off your back. (Once you begin paying, the debt is your responsibility. The balance can stay on your record and creditors can even collect from your estate.)

To report identity theft and get help on how to restore your credit, contact the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), Consumer Response Center, 600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20580, or call toll free, 1-877-382-4357. Contact FTC online at [www.consumer.gov/idtheft](http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft).

To get your credit record (free from fraud victims) and to have it corrected, contact all the following:

1. TransUnion, P.O. Box 6790, Fullerton, CA 92834; 1-800-680-7289.

2. Equifax, P.O. Box 740241, Atlanta, GA 30374; 1-800-525-6285.

3. Experian, P.O. Box 1017, Allen, TX 75013; 1-800-301-7195.

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