

Letters to the Editor

Reminiscing

Having been a member of Local 3 for over 50 years I remember a time having been fortunate to have known and worked under the outstanding leadership of the late Harry Van Arsdale Jr., an icon in labor's history. I remember attending a special apprenticeship meeting about a small nonunion job being done at Prospect Park in Brooklyn and Harry was calling for mass demonstrations. He said in his wisdom that if it was allowed to be completed, the profits from that job would be applied to a larger nonunion job till eventually they would all be doing new construction nonunion.

Somewhere along the line membership became complacent and dropped the ball, and so it came to pass today that the nonunion poses a huge threat. If we fail to learn from our mistakes we are doomed to repeat them. Stop the small jobs before these nonunion contractors become large enough to do the bigger jobs.

*Patrick J. Simoniello
Local 3 retiree, New York*

A Dedicated Member

There was never a prouder member of the IBEW than George O. Wein (Amarillo, Texas, Local 602 and now-defunct Amarillo Local 460). After 60 years as a member, business manager for several terms, and officer, our beloved husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather died on Feb. 2, 2009, at the age of 82. George walked the walk and refused to shop at stores that he remembered 30 or 40 years earlier had gone nonunion for their electrical work.

His greatest contribution to the industry was not only the education and training of younger electricians, but also the teaching of the necessity to take care of your responsibilities in life.

*The Family of George Wein
Local 602 member, Amarillo, Texas*

Road to Recovery?

Last month's Journal article "The Road to Recovery" (Winter 2009) was seriously deficient in its coverage of the health care crisis and its implications for our country's economic recovery. It concluded with a quote from President Hill, "When we have a plan we can agree on, we'll need a lot of membership participation to get it passed." We do have a plan we can agree on, President Hill, and that is Rep. John Conyers' HR 676, Expanded Medicare for All. It's the only plan with broad based, rank and file, grassroots support. At this writing, 481 union organizations in 49 states, including 120 central labor councils and 39 state AFL-CIOs have enthusiastically endorsed this bill.

There is no support for any of the other bills except that of the insurance and pharmaceutical industry lobbyists that drafted the legislation for their puppet legislators. Just last month the Missouri state IBEW conference endorsed HR 676; that's all 21 locals in the state, 21,000 members!

The fact that 78 percent of the AFL-CIO has endorsed this (at the state level) and the national AFL-CIO has yet to take a stand worries me. Does anyone in D.C. listen to what their union brothers and sisters back home are saying? We want HR 676 passed and we expect our national union leaders to represent us. As important as EFCA is for organized labor, universal single-payer health care is for our country and we in organized labor need to devote time, money and manpower to its passage.

*Ray Kenny
Local 48 member, Portland, Ore.*

Wage Inequality

If wages for workers increased at the same rate as CEO pay did over the last 20 years, the minimum wage would not only be a livable wage but a more comfortable one. The gap between the top executives and workers rose over 500 percent in the 1990s and currently is around 419 to 1. In the '80s that gap was 42 to 1. It would seem then on the executive scale, workers making \$29,000 a year, ought to be making \$110,000. Doesn't that sound great? Just remember how CEO's finance their enormous compensation: by keeping the workers' wages down.

*Terry Smolik
Local 176 member, Joliet, Ill.*

Who We Are

If you have a story to tell about your IBEW experience, please send it to media@ibew.org.

Alaska Organizer Brings Labor's Voice to the State House

In his more than five years as lead organizer for Anchorage, Alaska, Local 1547, Chris Tuck honed his skills at connecting with people and talking union with working Alaskans from different walks of life. Now he's brought those skills, along with his lifelong commitment to working families, to the state house in Juneau.

Tuck, a Democrat, was elected to the state legislature last November, prevailing in a district of Anchorage that has a more than 2 to 1 GOP advantage by a razor-thin majority of less than 300 votes.

"My vision for Alaska is one that many people support, where Alaska is a place for meaningful jobs and opportunities for families," Tuck said about his open seat challenge.

Tuck started his IBEW career at an electrical supply house more than 20 years ago. Because of the bad economy in Alaska at the time, he had to wait more than eight years before he was sponsored into an apprenticeship. But he knew that an IBEW membership card was worth waiting for.

His mother, a former hairdresser and single parent who moved to Alaska from California when Tuck was five, got a job as a secretary with the state government and the decent salary and health benefits provided by her union kept her and her son out of poverty.

"The union put us in the middle class," he said.

Tuck was always interested in politics, and in 2004 he made his first run for public office, taking on a long-entrenched incumbent state representative, Ralph Samuels, in the district he now represents. "Even though I knew I would lose, I talked with voters about issues that hadn't been discussed before," he said. "The state was slashing health care for kids and financial support for seniors and I couldn't sit and take it anymore. We educated the public and brought people together to find solutions."

No one gave Tuck a chance but in the end, his cash-starved grassroots campaign netted him nearly 40 percent of the vote.

While falling short, Tuck got both his



Rep. Chris Tuck, left, with legislative aides Aurah Landau and retired Anchorage, Alaska, Local 1547 member Gene White.

name and his issues out there. He was appointed by then-Anchorage mayor, now U.S. Sen. Mark Begich to the city's Education Workforce Advisory Council, helping to oversee Anchorage's school budget and its adult job training program.

Tuck had been active in school affairs ever since the birth of his son, who started the 11th grade last fall. "I knew someday he would be going to Anchorage schools so it was important to be involved."

In 2007 he made another run for office, this time for the Anchorage School Board. With some help from his IBEW brothers and sisters, Tuck pulled in 67 percent of the vote, gaining him a seat on the board that oversees more than 50,000 students.

He planned to serve for at least three terms, but developments in his home district changed his plans. Samuels, the legislator in his district, was getting ready to retire.

Seeing an opportunity to pick up an open seat, the state Democratic Party convinced Tuck to get into the race.

Tuck has found that his union experience has served him well in the realm of elected politics.

"We focus on pocketbook issues of our constituents and we're always held accountable for our actions," he said.

He is the second IBEW member serving in the state legislature. Sen. Bill Wielechowski, associate general counsel for Local 1547, was elected to the state senate in 2006.

Tuck says his priorities are creating decent paying jobs for Alaskans, opening up more educational opportunities and finding low-cost solutions to the energy crisis.

"Everything organized labor has won, we've had to fight for," he said. "People elected me to continue to fight for the things that help working families." ■