

Health Care, Pensions, Job Security, sound familiar?

By Joseph Venegas, President

It should, these are some of the subjects of debate that are being discussed by the Presidential candidates in their bid for the White House in 2008. Why are these issues so important? Well, that goes without saying, however, what is important to point out is that these are all subject matters that labor unions have been talking about for decades.

Many Americans across the United States do not enjoy the benefits and protections that CWA has brought to you and your family today, such as affordable health care, a secured pension and job security clauses. Also, many working Americans across the United States are not part of a labor union.

America has a health care crisis. Forty-seven million Americans have no health insurance. Most of the working class in America lives without affordable health care and/or with inadequate coverage. To add insult to injury, Bush recently vetoed a bill, the State Children Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) that would have provided health care coverage to an additional 3.8 million uninsured children.

After a lifetime of work, retirees deserve a basic level of security. But employer provided pensions are disappearing and Social Security is under threat. Most employers now are only providing a 401k plan, leaving workers without a secured retirement. Only half of all workers participate in any workplace retirement plan at all. In 1983, the vast majority (88%) of these workers were covered by defined benefit pensions. By 2004, only a minority (37%) had traditional pensions, as employers shifted responsibility for retirement saving to workers through 401(k) plans. This leaves Social Security as the only guaranteed source of retirement income for most workers (Munnell and Sundén 2006.)

America's workforce is under pressure, facing stagnant wages, rapidly rising health care costs, disappearing retirement benefits and an overall lack of job security. It's taken ten years for America's minimum wage workers to get a raise, and families are still struggling to get by on what they earn.

This is the reality that the American workforce is facing; this is the reality of working without a Union. Without your Union you would be at the mercy of the employer, the state and federal governments to provide you with the coverage and protections that being a Union member provides you today. To reiterate, it took the federal government ten years to raise the minimum wage.

With CWA you have affordable health care coverage, you have a defined pension for your retirement and you have job security clauses in your contract, something that most of the working class in America goes without and is now just talking about. While it is peace of mind knowing that you and your family have these protections today, there is no guarantee that we will have them in our next contract.

If we are to have a contract that is fair, if we are to have a contract that is strong and will expand on the rights and benefits that we have today, than we must be united in our cause. The strength

of our Union comes from its members. Each and every one of you make the difference in what we have and in what we can have. In 2008, we must stand ready and stand strong as we continue to heighten attention and awareness to what is important to union members. The expiration of our next contract is just around the corner and we have our livelihood at stake.

On a separate note I would like to wish you and your family a Merry Christmas and Happy Hanaka. Thanks for a great 2007 and look forward to an even stronger 2008.

In Unity,
Joseph Venegas