



Local 1277

News

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President's report

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Sadly, More ATU Brothers and Sisters Pay the Ultimate Price During this Crisis

By Art Aguilar - President, Local 1277

As the coronavirus pandemic continues unchecked—despite what people in Washington, D.C. seem to think—I must again report the terrible news of the passing of 22 more ATU brothers and sisters due to this crisis, bringing the dreadful total to 43 of our fine co-workers now gone far too early.

- **John Dunston Jr.**, Local 1056, Flushing, N.Y., Retired Bus Operator, over 25 years of service
- **Steven Wiggins**, Local 1056, Flushing, N.Y., Retired Bus Operator, over 30 years of service
- **Mohammed Rahman**, Local 1056, Flushing, N.Y., Bus Operator, 11 years of service
- **Samina Hameed**, Local 587, Seattle, WA, Bus Operator, 2 years of service
- **Kendel Nelson**, Local 825, Oradell, N.J., Bus Operator, 28 years of service
- **Kevin Rossiter**, Local 726, Staten Island, N.Y., Bus Operator, 28 years of service
- **Henry Castro**, Local 1056, Flushing, N.Y., Bus Operator, 24 years of service
- **Lucien Cedeau**, Local 819, Newark, N.J., Bus Operator, 20 years of service
- **LaLonee Gibbs**, Local 1700, Richmond, VA, Bus Operator, 16 years of service
- **Klyoto "Breeze" Williams**, Local 726, Staten Island, N.Y. Bus Operator, 23 years of service
- **Luis Marulanda**, Local 820, Union, N.J., Bus Operator, 14 years of service
- **Shanda Stokes**, Local 822, Paterson, N.J., Depot Master, 20 years of service
- **Oscar Morales**, Local 825, Oradell, N.J., Bus Operator, 21 years of service
- **William Shackelford**, Local 1056, Flushing, N.Y., Car Cleaner, 15 years of service
- **Michael Borland**, Local 1056, Flushing, N.Y., Bus Operator, 19 years of service
- **Hubert Belgrave**, Local 1056, Flushing, N.Y., Bus Operator, 18 years of service
- **Mitchell Rosenwasser**, Local 1056, Flushing, N.Y., Bus Operator, 28 years of service

- **Robert Irwin**, Local 1548, Plymouth, MA, retiree, former Financial Secretary-Treasurer, 28 years of service
- **Eugene Jones Jr.**, Local 1700, Chicago, IL, Bus Operator, 4 years of service
- **Anthony J. Brown**, Local 1764, Washington, D.C., Mechanic, 10 years of service
- **Martin Bond**, Local 1179, New York, New York, Operator, 21 years
- **Howard Rogers**, Local 281, New Haven, CT., Maintenance, 20 Years of Service

Rest in Peace!

When Will the Madness End?

Once, again, I must report that a "perfect storm" of incredible thoughtlessness and plain stupidity has endangered the life of a brave, hard-working *front-line* Bus Operator. On April 19, **Miakeya Rolle**, a driver for the Miami-Dade County (Florida) public-transit system, was *spit on* by a homeless woman, a passenger on her vehicle. The rider was *not* wearing a mask, and was coughing on people. Ms. Rolle asked her to put on a mask, and this completely unhinged woman responded by spitting on her.

What is wrong with some people? Wearing a face mask is not only mandatory on public-transit systems, it is simply a matter of good health and common sense, as we continue to deal with this unprecedented—and still uncontrolled—global pandemic!

Fortunately, Ms. Rolle reacted quickly and properly. She immediately cleaned herself off with a Clorox hand-wipe and hand sanitizer. *However, because of the trauma she suffered during this senseless assault, and even though she fortunately tested negative for the virus, Ms. Rolle has not returned to work. "As of right now, I just can't do it," she said. Who can blame her?*

The Grim Figure

As of this writing, more than 135 dedicated transit professionals from both the ATU and TWU (Transit Workers Union) have died from the virus while serving the public. One of the reasons for this terrible toll is that vehicle operators lack adequate health/safety protection. Our people need more *high-quality masks*, a stricter enforcement of the requirement that *masks must be worn while riding on public transit* (and, indeed, anywhere when you are outdoors), and a stronger effort to prevent overcrowding on buses and light rail.

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ATU International President John Costa has pointed out that *fewer than half* of ATU locals across the United States and Canada have adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) as member risk everything to keep serving the transit-dependent public. He also correctly noted that bus drivers directly face their passengers; few have any physical barrier to protect them. The international president of the TWU recently made this grim statement: “*I wake up every morning and if I don’t have a report of a fatality, it’s like a good morning.*”

Imagine that truly grim—but realistic—outlook, brothers and sisters!

The ATU, TWU and national AFL-CIO have demanded that the Federal Transportation Administration make it a *national* requirement that all passengers on public transit must wear masks. States, counties and cities have by and large mandated this, but it seems that—once again—the federal government is *way behind* the curve when it comes to dealing adequately with this pandemic. Even worse, the Secretary of Transportation could *order* masks to be worn on mass transit—but *hasn’t so far*.

Notes from the Front Lines

Across the country, our International Union *continues* to be a strong leader in dealing with this coronavirus crisis.

- The ATU lent its strong and vocal support to a rare, but welcome, *bi-partisan* effort to secure adequate funding for the *intercity* motor coach industry. More than 90 Democratic and Republican members of the House of Representatives joined forces to call for more funding in future stimulus bills that would help the beleaguered transit systems that serve suburban and rural American communities.

- In a companion move, your California Conference Board (CCB) has joined with county Democratic Party leaders to ask House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-San Francisco) to include badly needed funding for intercity coach transit in the next stimulus package.

- Our Buffalo ATU sister union has called for a limit on how many passengers can safely ride on a coach at one time. Social distancing must be maintained, and with that in mind, Milwaukee’s public-transit systems allows only 10 riders at one time on their coaches.

- ATU Local 241 in Chicago won two big victories: Passenger limits on buses and coach boarding only from the rear.

- ATU Local 268 in Cleveland got critical protection for bus operators—strong vinyl barriers to separate drivers from passengers on 350 city buses.

- On April 28—Workers’ Memorial Day—the ATU International released a moving video honoring our brothers and sisters who have died from the coronavirus.

To no one’s surprise, NBC News has reported that public-transit workers are among the most dangerous professions when it comes to exposure to the coronavirus. The President of ATU Local 26 in Detroit—himself a survivor of the virus—pointed out that his members take many *other* frontline workers (like retail clerks, Post Office and restaurant employees) to work.

Most reluctantly, I must report than our annual, fun-filled Old Timers Day—set for Saturday, June 27—has been cancelled, due to the coronavirus pandemic. I know that our retirees will be as disappointed as I am, but we just do not have a choice here.

It continues to be risky out there, brothers and sisters, even as we continue to do our jobs and serve the public. It still may get worse before it gets better, so **please continue to do your outstanding work, but remember that safety comes first!**

A political “wish list”

Biden for President And a Democratic Senate

By Errol Frazier - Vice President, Local 1277

Even as the Coronavirus (still incurable, still unchecked) continues to dominate our lives, brothers and sisters, I very much believe it is time to call our attention to the *other* tremendously significant event of this year: ***Our national election, still set for Tuesday, November 3.***

Oh, yes, friends, let’s not for a moment forget that on Election Day, we will be choosing our next President, *one third* of the U.S. Senate, and the *entire* House of Representatives, not to mention many state governors and countless local officials.

This is the Super Bowl of national electoral politics, brothers and sisters, and—virus and all—we better be damn sure about what’s at stake in November, and who best can deal with not only overcoming the effects of this virus, but also with the numerous, major problems facing our country here and abroad.

Here at home: Getting America back to work; infrastructure revitalization; overcoming the scourge of income inequality; preservation and expansion of union rights and influence; adequate and affordable healthcare coverage; quality education; increased role and funding for mass transit; social and economic equality; impartial, honest justice for all; preservation of the human rights and dignity for *all* Americans; a *real* fight against global warming, and a return to civility and honesty in government.

Overseas: Restoring American leadership and prestige; rejoining the vital, international treaties that seek to control climate change; working for peace in the world’s hot spots like the Middle East and North Korea; working with other major powers like China, instead of feuding *with* them; once again *supporting*, not alienating our allies around the world; being a global force for *good*, not fear, and remembering that all of us—friends and foes alike—have to share the only planet we have.

Fine, there are the major challenges, both home and abroad that we face (and I'm sure I haven't listed all of them!). Now the question is *who is best suited to lead our country towards starting to resolve these tremendous problems?*

Biden for President

No big surprise here. Without even dwelling on the shockingly long list of failures, poor decision making, out-and-out disregard for integrity and the truth, daily chaos, subpar (and even worse!) appointments to the courts and agencies that so affect our lives, and the embarrassment that our country has become in the eyes of both the international and domestic communities, *we simply have to have a change at the top of our federal government! For our sake, our families' and children's sake, and for the sake of our country and even the world—things must change!*

So, what do we know about former Democratic U.S. Senator and former Vice President Joe Biden?

- He spent 36 years in the senate and *eight* as vice president under Barack Obama, piling up a *lifetime* of legislative and executive experience.
- Contrast that with the “experience” that our current President has: reality television and a history of fraud, failure and unfair labor practices as a “genius real-estate tycoon”.
- Biden has a personal, first-name relationship with most of the leaders of the world, from Europe, through Asia, Africa and the Middle East. He knows them, they know him and, best, they *trust* him.
- Contrast that with a President who can't find many of the world's dangerous hot spots on a map, and delights in insulting allies and cozying up to dictators.
- Biden has been on the right side of just about every social, economic and human-rights battle in the past 45 years. His essential honesty and decency is acknowledged and respected across the political spectrum. *It is real, it is who the man is.*
- Contrast that with a President who belittles his opponents (and often his allies!) at every opportunity. A man who treats women, immigrants and anyone who doesn't acknowledge his “genius” with vulgarity and hostility.
- Under pro-working families, Democratic President Obama, Biden was given the responsibility for leading administration efforts on a number of key domestic and foreign issues, including women and minority rights, enforcement of environmental and union rights, Middle East peace proposals, and the drive to halt the spread of nuclear weapons.
- Contrast that with a President who sees no reason to protect the environment, working families and national health, or lessen the spread of dictatorship and nuclear blackmail.

More specifically, let's focus in on an area that is so important to us, our careers, our families and our future: Labor relations and rights, and the importance and influence of unions.

Joe Biden's agenda for organized labor and the essential rights of working men, women and families goes far beyond his early, strong support for a national \$15.00/hour minimum wage.

Biden clearly sees how the current administration has gutted union organizing rights, job-site safety and health regulations. He has watched—as we have—with horror as the National Labor Relation Board (the NLRB, organized labor's watchdog) and OSHA have been staffed with life-long, anti-union businessmen whose goal is destroying unions and reducing working people to 19th-Century serfdom!

Biden knows—as we do all too well—that while it is illegal for corporations to fire employees for trying to organize a union, the penalties for doing so under this administration are toothless! They hardly rise to the level of the proverbial “slap on the wrist”.

Biden proposes—and will act on—making those anti-union penalties harsh and truly felt at the corporate “bottom line”. He plans to hold cheating corporate executives personally responsible for these gross and totally unfair efforts to crush union representation.

He would follow the strong lead of California (last year's AB 5) by cracking down on companies like Uber and Lyft that wrongly classify full-time workers as independent contractors so they can duck paying healthcare, pension and other well-earned benefits.

Biden pledges to extend federal labor protections to farmworkers and domestic workers, huge groups of hard-working men and women who desperately need such coverage.

Few Presidential candidates—and that includes Democratic ones—have offered such a firm platform of well-thought out labor standards and union protections. And, boy, are they sorely needed, brothers and sisters! *Simply put, Joe Biden fully understands and applauds the absolute importance of worker and union agendas and influence!* He can—and most likely will—carry the key battleground, heavily working class states (like Michigan and Pennsylvania) that we lost in 2016, and which led to the mess we now find ourselves in.

Contrast Biden's experience and instincts and humanity with what we have now. Oh, don't even try; it'll just make you ill!

A Democratic Senate

Fine, you might be saying to yourself at this point: I get it about the President and the stark difference between the candidates. *I see why one has to go, and why he must be replaced by a truly experienced, caring and pro-union leader.* But the U.S. Senate? Why should I care? They argue along party lines, insult each other, get damn little done, and always have their hands out for more money.

Far too often, that's true. But, still, we cannot overlook the far-reaching importance of the U.S. Senate when it chooses to get off its collective duff and do the job it was created to do under our Constitution. For example, the senate:

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- Confirms (approves) all federal judicial nominations. The current senate, controlled by the *Republicans*, has rushed through dozens and dozens confirmations of hard-right wing federal judges—strictly along party lines. The result: These anti-union, anti-working family judges, many of them quite young, will handing down decisions that run *against* our interests for years—even decades—to come.

- **Confirms the major appointments to the federal agencies that so greatly affect organized labor and our careers and future. Agencies like the NLRB and OSHA, and others that deal with health, equality in employment, and the environment. Again, the current Republican-controlled senate has confirmed pro-corporate, anti-science people to fill these vital slots.**

- *Confirms* all federal cabinet and sub-cabinet positions. Over the past three and a half years, you have seen a parade of dangerously incompetent men and women approved for important positions, and then you've seen many of them forced out of office for criminal or professional failings.

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- Finally, the *Republican*-controlled senate has been the depressingly consistent *roadblock* to the progressive legislation working people—and our country—so desperately needs. Good legislation concerning, among other things, healthcare, education, workers' and union rights, mass-transit expansion, climate change, sound international agreements, and human rights.

The *Democratic*-controlled House of Representatives has done its job—crafting and passing solid, much-needed legislation on these and other important issues. But almost all of the House bills have died in a senate controlled by conservative, pro-corporate legislators and the special interests that own them.

The good news: ***The Democrats have a realistic chance to seize control of the U.S. senate in November. If Biden becomes President, they just have to "flip" three or four seats that are now Republican in order to have a majority! It really could happen. There are at least six seats now held by the Republicans that could well go Democratic this Fall. We can change the senate and start to confirm the kind of people who care about our interests!***

So there it is, brothers and sisters. The no-nonsense political landscape of today, and the way we can change it for the better in November! *All of us, as union members, working families and concerned citizens, must get our act together and be sure to vote for Biden for President!*

And, since there is no U.S. Senate race this year in California, please do not hesitate to contact friends (if you have them there) in key senate-race states like Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, Maine, Montana, and North Carolina, and urge them to vote for their Democratic U.S. Senate candidate. Please believe me—it's that important!

Risking your health and lives!

**Thank You, Front-Line Workers,
For Your Service and Dedication**

By Jeff Shaffer - Financial-Recording Secretary

In normal times, your Executive Board fully knows that, day in and day out, you come to work, do your jobs with great dedication and professionalism, and richly earn your wages and benefits.

Of course, brothers and sisters, these past few months have been about as far *away* from normal times as you can get. ***So, on behalf of your Executive Board, I want to offer a heart-felt, ringing thank you to all of you essential workers who risk health and life to get the job done! We gratefully salute ATU Local 1277's Maintenance, Operations, Utility, Service Attendants, ITS, ECT, and all the rest of the 56 classifications represented by your Union at the rail and bus properties we are so proud to serve.***

Your valiant, selfless efforts are *critical* to keeping society functioning and making sure that people throughout Southern California have access to mass transit. And across this country and Canada, it is almost 200,000 ATU brothers and sisters who keep working and providing important and welcome service to the public.

Congratulations! But even as I acknowledge your contributions, I must—sadly—note that your hard work is coming at a tragic cost. Across both the U.S. and Canada, 43 loyal, hard-working ATU brothers and sisters have paid the ultimate price for their service. They have died while on the job, in service to the public.

Last month's paper somberly listed the names and local ATU union affiliations of those outstanding working people. And, unfortunately, that number continues to grow, as shown in this month's paper. And, most unfortunately, that horrible number will continue to grow until we have licked this damn virus once and for all.

On The Front Lines

You all, of course, read last month about the tragic and senseless death of Brother **Jason Hargrove**, a veteran, well-respected Coach Operator in Detroit (ATU Local 26), who contracted the Coronavirus and died from it because a thoughtless passenger kept coughing while *refusing to cover her mouth*.

As bad as that was (and, really what could be worse?), Brother Hargrove's story is not the only example of the health and life threats our members face on the job during this terrible time. Here in Southern California, in New York City (especially hard hit by the virus pandemic), and in many cities across the United States and Canada, our Coach Operators continue to work in the shadow of the virus, perhaps only a few coughs from an unthinking rider away from Brother Hargrove's fate.

But, when you think about it, *many* ATU Local 1277 members share the same risk on the job. Our Maintenance workers repair buses and trains that probably have been ridden by people who may be virus-positive. Every day, our Service Attendants clean and disinfect those coaches and rail cars. Many of our Utility workers come in contact with vehicles that have been out on the open road, exposed to people who may not even know they are carrying Coronavirus.

Again, congratulations on your dedication and professionalism. And I'd be at fault if I didn't mention the tens of thousands of *other* brave front-line men and women who continue to defy the virus and serve the public, including: *Retail Clerks; Doctors, Nurses and EMTs; Police and Fire; Utility and Postal Workers, and Municipal, County, State and Federal employees.*

Once again, on behalf of your Executive Board, thank you, ATU Local 1277 members, all ATU brothers and sisters everywhere, and all front-line responders for everything you've done and continue to do! You're the best!

Due to the Coronavirus, all Local 1277 unit meetings have been postponed until the time when it will be safe to hold them. All members will receive credit for these meetings.