



# Local 1277

# News

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## President's report



### *Notes from the Front Line*

By Art Aguilar - President, Local 1277

### **President Biden's Task Force on Worker Organizing and Empowerment**

Continuing his very welcome and much-needed support of unions and working people, President Joe Biden announced the formation of a high-level *Task Force on Worker Organizing and Empowerment*. Created by his Executive Order and spearheaded by Vice President Kamala Harris and Secretary of Labor (an ex-Boston union leader) Martin Walsh, the task force will seek to formulate federal policies and programs to help working men and women organize and collectively bargain.

I am pleased to report that this effort, along with his strong support for the vital PRO Act (please see the May newspaper), proves once again President Biden's rock-solid commitment to working people and families.

International President John Costa praised this achievement, saying, "*President Biden's Executive Order creating this task force is a historic step for workers to exercise their freedom to join together to have a voice on the job. For far too long, the deck has been stacked against working people as corporations have sought to trample on the rights of workers to improve their working conditions.*"

I welcome the fact that the ATU will work closely with this task force so that more working men, women, and families will have the chance to realize their "American Dream" through good, better-paying union jobs.

### **Transitioning to Clean-Energy Mass Transit**

As our nation rightfully (and finally!) begins the transition to clean-energy, zero-emission mass-transit vehicles, it is very important to remember that ATU members must be *thoroughly trained to maintain, repair and operate these new electric-battery coaches.*

Right now, only about 3% of our ATU brothers and sisters have received such training. There simply is no getting around the fact that our Maintenance and Repair specialists, as well as our Operators, must learn this new, emerging technology.

Clean-energy mass transit is obviously needed as we continue to fight the perils of global warming and climate change. The job possibilities from this new technology are very promising and exciting—and needed. *However, while creating these new jobs, we cannot afford to lose jobs.* In responding to this challenge, the ATU is conducting educational/training sessions and also calling for a *national training center* for clean-energy technology, which will provide both theoretical and hands-on training for these new, exciting jobs of the future.

### **ATU's Worker Memorial Day**

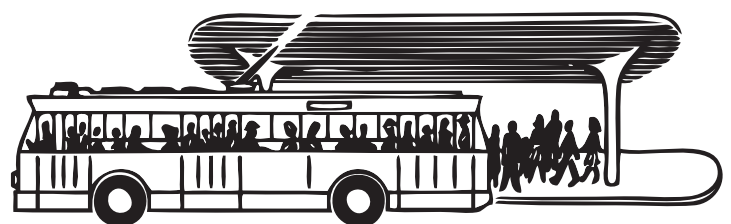
The ATU's most somber and respectful *Worker Memorial Day* honored the 152 (and, unfortunately, still counting) brothers and sisters we have lost to the global Covid pandemic. This is a tragedy that our Union shares with people and families everywhere—in union and nonunion homes and jobsites, across our country and Canada, and around the world.

International President John Costa spoke for us all when he said, "*On our Worker Memorial Day, we mourn and salute our fellow brothers and sisters who risked their lives on the frontlines of this deadly pandemic. We must keep each other safe and healthy on the job during the pandemic and beyond. Every single worker deserves the right to go home to their families at the end of the day. We will never give up our fight and we will never forget.*"

Amen.

### **Hopeful Signs, But Mass Transit Systems Still Have a Long Way to Go**

A snapshot of some of the country's major mass-transit systems at the end of May: *Rail* ridership in Los Angeles is at about 43% of pre-pandemic levels. In New York City, it is roughly at 40%. Other major city rail systems report even lower ridership now: Both Boston and Chicago rail systems are running at about 25% pre-pandemic capacity, and in the San Francisco Bay area, that number falls to a disturbing 15%.



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While *bus* ridership is also down in many American cities, there are some hopeful signs: S.F. Muni expects to be back to 85% of pre-pandemic ridership by the end of the year. Kansas City, the first major urban mass-transit system to offer free travel, has seen ridership rise to about 80% of the pre-pandemic level. More cities are thinking about or already trying out free travel in an effort to bring riders back to their mass-transit systems.

But, as you all know, mass-transit systems are suffering everywhere. More people are working from home, service cutbacks brought on by the pandemic have negatively affected long-time users, who have gone back to their cars, and there still are lingering fears about riding with others in enclosed spaces, even with mask mandates and sharply increased vaccinations. Some of the ridership numbers are encouraging, but overall U.S. mass transit still has a long way to go.

## **A Useless, Expensive Republican Power Grab!**

The anti-Democracy, commonsense-deprived *Republican* crowd just won't leave the rest of us in peace. They're at it again: Promoting a naked power grab to overturn a legitimate election and trying to negate the votes of millions of Californians. This misguided effort is *beyond* mere stupidity. It is an enormous waste of time, effort, and millions of dollars. It is unnecessary, dangerous, and it undermines our democratic-election process.

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## **Education remains the key**

### **Updates Concerning the Important Joint Apprenticeship Committee Program**

*By Mauro Varela - Treasurer, Local 1277*

Brothers and sisters, recently, I have been receiving lots of phone calls concerning the Joint Apprenticeship Committee (JAC) programs. I understand your rightful concerns, so let me give you an update. Fingers crossed, hopefully by the time you are reading this, we will have the rest of these important, career-enhancing classes underway.

However, as I write this now—in mid-May—the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) *has pretty much put the brakes on the Signals and Track Inspector JAC programs*. This is an unwelcome and disturbing situation.

I am, of course, referring to the effort by an unholy alliance of radical right-wing fat cats, ambitious, deluded *Republican* politicians, and outside-of-California special interests to recall legally elected, pro-union and working family *Democratic* Governor Gavin Newsom. This is a man, fairly elected in 2018, who has been a strong friend of organized, *especially the 13,000 ATU members in California, who received N-95 masks early on **and** were jumped to the head of the vaccination line when Newsom made all public-transit workers priority recipients*.

But, no: The anti-union, regressive crowd has targeted Newsom for his “sins” of caring for working people and getting California vaccinated ahead of schedule. These democracy deniers are raising and spending millions of dollars in a hopeless attempt to torpedo the votes cast in 2018. *No way* Newsom is going to lose whenever this recall nonsense reaches the ballot (probably in late 2021)! *No way* the ATU and organized labor are going to turn our backs on someone who has helped us so much!

Brothers and sisters, this is an important fight for *political decency and common sense*. I will keep you informed about this silly, wasteful recall effort in the months to come.

Our Union has proactively been trying to get these programs started. We were hopeful that all the classes would start at the same time. However, as of now, only the Maintenance Specialist classes have started at both MTA and Los Angeles Trade Technical College. MTA has been dragging its feet, and it doesn't seem that the Authority is interested in speeding up the process. As such, we cannot complete the process, since we still don't have all the final details on those two programs.

We have vetted a series of candidates for these programs, and we are ready to move forward once MTA stops wasting its—and our—time. Because we don't have the final details, we have not been able to notify anyone yet. *However, please be aware that all eligible brothers and sisters will be notified as soon as we know the details*. Those candidates who did not make the class will also be notified.

Rest assured, brothers and sisters, you will be notified one way or another. The JAC Program and the excellent educational opportunities it offers are way too important for us to overlook!

## Twenty-Three Local 1277 Members Retire from Careers at MTA

*Twenty-Three Local 1277 members have retired from MTA after long and productive careers. They all were hardworking employees and loyal members of our Union.*

**Minh Hoa Nguyen**, Maintenance Specialist, Red Line, 16 years, October 18, 2020;

**Juan Amaya**, Sheet Metal Worker, CMF, 12 years, November 1; **Rohana Kandamby**, Mechanic A, Division 18, 24 years, November 12; **Diana Valdez**, Electronic Communications Technician, Facility Maintenance, 33 years, November 24; **Ronald Garcia**, Mechanic A, Division 2, 33 years, November 30; **Eric Anderson**, Laborer A, Facility Maintenance, 39 years, December 14; **Franklin Hernandez**, Traction Power Inspector, Traction Department, 23 years, December 16; **Alan Hester**, Service Attendant, Green Line, 15 years, December 25; **Roger Milan**, Maintenance Specialist, Red Line, 31 years, December 27; **Richard Quevedo**, Electronic Communications Technician, Facility Maintenance, 19 years, January 1, 2021; **Edwin Formoso**, Service Attendant, Division 15, 24 years, January 4; **Chester Clark, Jr.**, Mechanic A, Division 7, 38 years, January 5; **Kenny Prapha-Phatanak**, Facility System Technician, Facility Maintenance, 24 years, January 5; **Brian Nishie**, Mechanic A, Division 9, 30 years, January 6; **Gary Breaux**, Mechanic A, Division 2, 24 years, January 14; **Ron Jongeling**, Maintenance Specialist, Blue Line, 24 years, January 23; **John Edwards, Jr.**, Facility Systems Technician, Facility Maintenance, 30 years, January 25; **Francisco Carlos**, Rail Body & Paint Repairer, Red Line, 31 years, February 1; **Gary Vu**, Electronic Communications Technician, Revenue Collections, 35 years, February 6; **Jose Luis Soto**, Mechanic A, Division 13, 24 years, February 8; **Haidook Arakelian**, Mechanic A, Division 8, 19 years, February 13; **Chhoy Yam**, Digital Systems Technician, ITS Operations, 31 years, February 19; **Anselmo Sanchez**, Service Attendant, Division 1, 34 years, February 28, and **Jorge Quevedo**, Facilities Painter, RRC, 18 years, February 28.

*Local 1277's Executive Board and members wish these brothers and sisters long, enjoyable and healthy retirements. They will be missed!*

## Ten More Local 1277 Members Contribute to Vital ATU COPE Fund

*Ten members of our Union have generously contributed to the important ATU COPE Fund. As you know, our International Union amasses this war chest in order to support our political friends and causes, and fight the enemies of working people and families. We are proud to present Union pins and jackets to those members who have realized how vital the ATU COPE Fund is for expanding labor's influence in Congress and advancing our agenda.*

**Christine Carter; Tiffany Jouwsma; Sally Rodriguez; Joseph Acuna; Sakonchai Kongchan; Juan Valdivia; Jose Dignadice; Jose Salcedo Luna; Aaron Velasquez, and Philis Sogers.**

*To earn a jacket, one must contribute \$12.50/month, for a total of \$150.00/year. Congratulations to those members for their public-spirited and timely action. The ATU COPE Fund is very important. Please contribute whatever you can to it! Thank you.*

## A Presidential Priority!

### **Biden Urges All Americans —Union Members or Not— To “Buy American”**

*By Errol Frazier - Vice President, Local 1277*

On April 28, President Joe Biden gave a stirring, heartfelt speech to Congress and the American people. For more than an hour, he outlined his plans to rebuild and expand our aging infrastructure (roads, bridges, airports and other mass-transit facilities, ports, schools, and other public buildings—creating tens of thousands of *union* jobs). He stressed environmental concerns (green energy, 500,000 charging stations for electric-powered vehicles, off-shore wind farms—*more union jobs*).

*And, brothers and sisters, on a number of occasions in his excellent speech, President Biden (perhaps the strongest pro-union, pro-working family leader we have ever had!) called on all of us to “Buy American.”*

That’s right: Support American businesses—large and small—by buying products made in our country. Support *union* workers and families by looking for both the union label and the “Made in USA” tag. *We bolster and expand our economy—helping us all—by buying American, not by buying foreign products that are too-often made by cheap labor working in conditions you and I would never tolerate!*

As he was so right on so many things in his speech, President Biden is absolutely right about this: ***Buying American is good for America!***

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## Why it is so Important to “Buy American”

This is a long-running conversation: “*Why buy American?*” Why is that important? Why should “Made in the USA” mean all that much more than “Made in China” or “Made in Japan” or, for that matter, “Made anywhere outside our country”?

***It does matter, brothers and sisters, and for three significant reasons: Political, economic, and moral.*** Let me outline my thinking, and maybe this will come to guide your own purchasing.

### Political

It’s long been a staple of American political campaigns: The rise and potential dominance of the Chinese economy. Some economic experts warn that China will replace the U.S. as the world’s greatest production engine—if it hasn’t already done so.

Even allowing for heated—and sometimes wildly inaccurate—political posturing, it is undeniably true that China’s overall economy clearly is the second largest in the world. And there is no doubt that they are actively and relentlessly (by hook or by crook) aiming to dislodge us from the top spot. Even with a recent economic slowdown due to spiraling costs and an aging population, the Chinese are on the “economic attack.” And, yes, Japan is the world’s third-largest economy but, as opposed to the Chinese, they are not fundamentally hostile to our interests.

Economic data often puts most of us to sleep, but here’s why it is so important: ***The Chinese, like any non-unionized nation that puts economic growth ahead of human rights and working families, can produce products faster and more cheaply than societies like ours that still try to value workers’ rights, jobsite safety, and some sort (but not enough yet!) of income equality.***

American politicians howl about Chinese economy growth and its threat to our society and economy. *But few of them come right out and say the obvious: Buy American! Combat the “Chinese Economic Invasion” by buying American-made products whenever and wherever you can.* This is one sure way to stop that “invasion”—*don’t buy their products!*

By greatly undercutting our wages and throwing workers’ rights and safety to the winds, the Chinese can underprice American firms, so much so that far too many of our home-based and home-grown companies simply have stopped making products they used to turn out by the millions. And even beyond the matters of wages, safety, and respect, there looms this important consideration: ***Quality control. Fast, cheap labor hardly adds up to quality, durable products.***

### Economic

Up until the mid-to-late 1970s, America was still a manufacturing powerhouse. Our nation proudly, reliably, and successfully supplied much of the world with a lot of its goods. Our economy was thriving, jobs were plentiful and well-paying, and the *union-created* middle class was strong and growing.

That’s changed over the past 40 years. Now we are a *consumer* nation, more and more buying products made in *other* countries, boosting *their* economies, not ours. Further, we continue to consume a lot more than we export overseas. ***Over the past 20 years, we have lost somewhere more than \$2 trillion(!) in overall trade deficit to China. To a country that most certainly does not wish us well!***

That \$2 trillion-plus of forfeited production could have generated hundreds of millions of dollars of American revenue and created millions of jobs in *this* country!

Job creation, of course, is the key. Having more American manufacturing jobs cuts down the unemployment rate, but that also expand our tax base so we can pay for vital human-rights programs like Obamacare, Social Security, badly needed infrastructure improvement, housing, education, environmental protection, and medical research, just to name some. It is not only desirable that manufacturing leads the U.S. economy to new strength and heights, it is *necessary*.

Too many American jobs are service-oriented, like computer work, wealth management and customer servicing. They’re important, to be sure, but most of them don’t produce products, things we can buy and sell and hold in our hands.

Bottom economic line: To maintain its economic recovery and growth, America needs a ***consumer-led commitment to buying American-made products, thereby supporting our national manufacturing base, and creating and maintaining good jobs, family security and the working middle class.***

### Moral

Brothers and sisters, buying American is simply the *right thing to do*. By doing so, you support millions of unionized and even non-unionized families that rely on their jobs to keep afloat economically, provide for their children, come out of the hole that the Covid pandemic has put many into, and build a secure financial platform for their retirement.

It has been estimated that for every *single* manufacturing job, there are a number of *other* jobs created—jobs like truck driver, accountant, research & development, and clerical. Further, buying American-made products helps assure a stable working middle class, promotes jobsite safety (imagine the working conditions in Chinese or even cheaper third-world factories), and helps preserve our environment (our air, water and ground standards are miles stricter than those in many other countries). *Beyond that, buying American stops the flood of jobs leaving for overseas sweatshops.*

Finally, and very importantly, ***if the outflow of American manufacturing jobs is significantly cut down, if the demand for cheap foreign products of dubious quality is slashed, then China and other “sweatshop” countries may well be forced to change their economic model into one that stresses and produces quality, high-end products. This would, by necessity, force those countries to pay their more-skilled workforce a better wage, and could even lead to the formation of independent unions. And we know that the trade-union movement is the creator and backbone of a strong middle class—the absolute rock upon which all stable democracies rest.***

So there you have it, brothers and sisters. When you shop—be it for expensive, high-end goods or everyday hardware and drug-store items—*please think American and buy American!* Don’t think, well, one foreign-made item here or there doesn’t matter, if I can save a buck or two. It *does* matter, it really *does!* If tens of millions of Americans heed President Biden’s strong call, and think and buy American, that can—and will—make a difference.