



Local 1277

News

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President's report

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"We're in a war!"

It's Open Season on Transit Drivers!

*By Jeff Shaffer
President, Local 1277*

Boston, Massachusetts. Las Vegas, Nevada. Right here in Los Angeles. It never seems to end—the violent, senseless, unprovoked attacks on our brothers and sisters who operate the mass-transit systems that—literally—move our country. This has gone *far* beyond disgraceful and shocking. It is terribly dangerous and *life-threatening!*

In Boston, a member of Boston Carmen's Local 589 was recently attacked with a pellet air gun. A plastic protective shield was the only thing between the deranged attacker and the Operator. "It's basically every single day, our Operators being violently or verbally attacked," said Local 589 President Jim Evers. The union is calling for police to be given the tools to hold attackers responsible for their outrages. They propose prison sentences of two-and-half years and a \$5,000 fine for attacking transit workers.

In Las Vegas, ATU Local 1637 member Tamisha Davis tells it like it is: "*We're in a war and we're drivers, and we shouldn't be.*" In late April, a man stabbed a Bus Supervisor in the chest! "I get cursed at. I get called all kinds of names," said Sister Sandra Adams, Local 1637 Vice President. All this for the "crime" of showing up to work, doing important work well and diligently! At a large rally, members demanded better safety for transit workers and the creation of a transit police department.

And here in Los Angeles, most of us already know this sickening story. In late May, a *17-year-old* hoodlum stabbed a 61-year-old L.A. Metro Driver, causing "beyond life-threatening injuries." Even worse, this outrageous, senseless attack is just one of way too many against Bus Operators.

During February and March alone, 23 Metro Bus Drivers were assaulted on the job. *23!* What the hell is wrong with people? Why are hard-working drivers stabbed, spit on, punched, and verbally harassed? *Again, what the hell is wrong with people?* Throughout 2022, L.A. Metro 158 Bus Operators were assaulted on the job. *158!*

L.A. Metro is testing various see-through floor-to-ceiling plastic walls that will fully enclose the driver. Metro's

2024 budget calls for adding 40 additional transit security officers. These are reasonable first steps, but until people come to their senses, our fellow transit drivers are still sitting ducks, even as they provide their much-needed service to the public.

ATU, UTU, Carmen's Union, TWU, any organization of mass-transit drivers deserves our support and praise. The cost of serving the public must—never—be their safety, sanity, or lives!

And now, in later news that makes things even worse, another L.A. Metro Driver was stabbed near Venice Beach. The 29-year-old brother was stabbed—completely without cause or reason—while he was working at the front of the bus. The suspect was caught, and the driver, thankfully, did not suffer life-threatening wounds. But this madness must stop!

The Supreme Court Is A Supreme *Disappointment!*

The United States Supreme Court, supposedly the guardian of individual freedoms and "equality for all under the law," is shaping up as *the most anti-union, anti-working people and families institution in a hell of a long time!*

This is more than just an abandonment of legal common sense and respect for working people. The Court, heavily loaded down with *three* ultra-hard-rightwing appointees from former *Republican* President Trump is, for the time being at least, pretty much locked into a 6-3 majority against almost all of the progressive agenda the country needs in general, and organized labor in particular.

Since back in 2005, when Chief Justice John Roberts (appointed by another *Republican* President) took office, the Supreme Court has, among other things:

- **Made it *harder* for workers to bring lawsuits against unfair employers**
- *Limited* the power of workers to hold employers responsible for discrimination on the job
- **Ended the ability of public-sector unions to require dues from nonmembers who benefit from collective bargaining**
- *Struck down* a California law that allowed unions to recruit workers on the property of agricultural employers

What it simply boils down to is this: ***In any case involving a conflict between labor and management, it is—unfortunately— a safe bet that the Court will almost always side with the employers.***

Continued to page 2...

We just saw this depressing show again. Just recently, the Court ruled against Teamsters Local 174 in a Washington State case. In 2017, employees at a concrete manufacturer exercised their *right* to strike over various jobsite issues. Management sued the Teamsters over what it claimed was lost revenue because some concrete was wrecked. The Teamsters, rightly, cited their absolute right to strike, further noting that the damaged concrete was a result of routine spoilage, for which unions generally have *not* been held liable.

The Washington State Supreme Court dismissed management's lawsuit on the grounds that the dispute was "pre-empted by the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA)," the landmark legislation that codified many workers' rights and a mechanism to enforce them, The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB).

The apparent win by organized labor was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. The Court ultimately ruled that unions are, under federal law, liable for damages during strikes when they take deliberate steps to endanger/damage an employer's property instead of taking precautions to lessen that risk.

If that decision wasn't bad enough by itself, two of the Court's hardline conservative justices suggested that they should reconsider (in other words, look for a way to *overturn*) a 1959 decision that mandated that employers must first receive a favorable NLRB ruling if they want to sue a union over its right to strike. Overturning this legal precedent would, the words of the *New York Times*, "**bring labor law much closer to pre-NLRA status quo, when conservative judges treated union actions as little more than criminal conspiracies to harm employers.**"

The lone voice of reason in this matter, the lone voice of working people, came from the *Democratic* President Joe Biden's recent appointee, Ketanji Brown. The Court's ruling, she wrote, "**Erodes the right to strike and undermines the oversight of workplace law by the NLRB. Workers are not indentured servants, bound to continue laboring until any planned work stoppage would be as painless as possible for their masters. They are employees whose collective and peaceful decision to withhold their labor is protected by the NLRA even if economic injury results.**"

Amen, sister! While the Supreme Court, over the years, has enforced and expanded the *civil and political* rights of the American people, it has all-too-often *not* been a friend to workers' rights to organize and act in their best interests. The Court values property over people. Strict management control over employees' rights and safety. **Bottom line: The American Constitution and political system was not designed with the best and rightful interests of working people in mind.**

Our best bet with respect to the Supreme Court and the mighty power it exerts is, as always, **to elect a President and Senate who will nominate and confirm the kind of pro-union, pro-working families we must have to protect our careers, lives, and futures.** And, guess what? Those politicians are almost always going to be Democrats!



Election financing, Backing our friends

What are PACs and COPE, And What do They Mean for Me?

*By Mauro Varela
Treasurer, Local 1277*

Let's clear this up right off the bat, brothers and sisters: *Political elections are a) damn important to our careers and lives, and b) they cost an obscene amount of money.* You can argue if those absolutes are good or bad, but you sure can't deny them!

If money is the "mother's milk of politics," as proclaimed by California's legendary Assembly Speaker Jesse Unruh many years ago, then PACs and COPE are the pipelines from which it flows.

So, what is a **PAC**? *It is a Political Action Committee, an organization whose purpose is to raise and distribute campaign funds to candidates seeking political office, or supporting or opposing a ballot initiative.* PACs were created in 1944 and were used to re-elect then-President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Since then, there have been changes to the definition and uses of PACs. They came about as part of the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) of 1971 and then as amendments added in 1974. The FECA Law was established to reduce the influence of money in campaigns by setting strict limits on the amount a particular corporation, union, or private individual could give to a candidate.

The law certainly meant well, but it has generally failed to limit the tsunami-flow of money into campaigns. The Supreme Court has essentially completely opened the pipeline for campaign money by ruling that corporate America can pretty much pour in as much money as it wants to back its candidates and causes.

In theory, PAC money can only be used for political and ballot-initiative campaigns in specific ways. There is a very strict accounting of all PAC contributions. PAC and general-campaign account ledgers can never be co-mingled. It is illegal and violations can bring about stiff penalties from election-oversight bodies, at all levels of campaigning—local, state, and federal. A campaign may use general-fund (non-PAC contribution) money for various political uses, but it may not combine PAC money for its political efforts.

The ATU COPE Fund

The ATU-Committee on Political Education, ATU-COPE, (or more often referred to as just COPE), is our International Union's PAC fund. It supports or opposes candidates and ballot initiatives in local, state, and federal campaigns. *As public-transit workers, our jobs, wages, and working conditions are directly linked to politics, politicians, and*

the legislation they propose. As the largest transit-worker PAC in the United States, ATU-COPE is our voice in campaigns at all levels of government. COPE funds are used to help elect pro-labor, pro-transit candidates (or defeat them, if need be). Once elected with our help, we keep a sharp eye on them to ensure that they stay loyal and accountable to our best interests.

So, what does this mean to you and me? Well, for one, everyone knows the saying, “Money talks.” And that’s the truth. Contributing to COPE helps fill our collective coffers so we can “talk” with and get behind those brave souls who run for elected office.

Who do We Back?

Who are these candidates and why do we give to them? Well, like I stated before, we give to those candidates whose ideologies align with our agenda. This is the essential rule for organized labor: *“Support our friends, fight our foes.”*

On a local level, we support candidates who currently or previously have sat on one of our agency’s board of directors. Why is this important? Well, sometimes we need help to ask questions of agency heads on the properties we represent. Just because you are an agency CEO doesn’t mean you don’t have to answer to someone. The CEOs directly answer to their boards. These boards are also the ones that approve or reject our contracts, so direct access to them, with clear lines of communication, is crucial to our day-to-day careers.

And, if the deck weren’t already stacked against us when it came to campaign financing, the super conservative U.S. Supreme Court (*with six appointees by Republican Presidents*) has handed down far-reaching (and far-right wing) decisions! The biggest culprit, with respect to this article, is *Citizens United v. FEC*, which allows the expansion of Super PACs and re-defines what and who are individuals and how much they can contribute to campaigns. *Now a multi-billion-dollar corporation like anti-union Walmart is seen as an “individual” and has almost no limits to the amount they can “donate” to a campaign.* The only way we as members of an International Union can even come close to competing with those dollars is to pool our money together in the form of a strong, active PAC. Hence, the ATU-COPE fund.

Every little bit helps when we contribute to the COPE fund. I personally contribute \$500 a year to COPE. I know not all of us can contribute the same amount, but let me assure you, even \$1 a month can help in fighting for and advancing workers’ rights. Skipping just one \$5 cup of coffee in a month and donating to the ATU-COPE fund may well pay off in the long run, when it comes to our futures, careers, benefits, and working conditions. To get started, to help level the political financing playing field between labor and big business, please reach out to the our Local’s office or to one of your officers.

Heading into next year’s crucial national and state elections, I thank you in advance for your contributions to ATU-COPE.

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Don’t base your lifestyle on it!

Overtime Pay is All Well and Good, But it is *Not* Guaranteed

By Errol Frazier
Vice President, Local 1277

Brothers and sisters, recently I have seen and heard some things that led me to sit down and write this article. Having extra money is a nice plus in everyone’s budget. Being able to take the family out to enjoy a nice meal or a big event, maybe even an extravagant vacation, is why we may put in some extra hours beyond our regular shifts. Being able to deposit a little extra into your savings, or into your rainy-day account “hiding spot” is always an added benefit.

But please beware! Do not take overtime pay for granted. Do not allow yourself to become accustomed to all this extra income, and do not re-work and plan your lifestyle by counting on a constant flow of overtime pay!

We all work long and hard at our important jobs for simply one reason: The wages we earn. We all want and need to make and have money for ourselves, our families, and our security. *This is a basic fact of life in today’s world and there’s nothing to be ashamed about it!* As our seniority builds, so does our earning power. *Another basic fact.* The more time we spend as members in our Union and working at the properties we represent, the more you earn—and rightly so.

Now, as that happens, we may well start to make small adjustments in our lifestyles. You may take that big step and purchase your first home, or perhaps invest in the home you already own through an extensive remodeling project. In better financial days, with lower interest rates, you may have sold your old house and upgraded to a nicer, bigger one in a better neighborhood. All of this is possible if you handle your money correctly as your seniority builds.

Living within your means should be priority one--for both our new members and our more seasoned brothers and sisters. Yes, it may be hard, as a new member and employee, while you start your career. At some point, and hopefully it will not take too long, you find your financial footing. This means being able to have a real savings account, or the ability to invest in a 401 or 457 account to supplement your years of retirement, which—surprise!—you’ll discover isn’t all that far off.

Never forget, we are people who put on a uniform every day in order to perform a critical service to the mass-transit-dependent public. We are not movie or recording stars or professional athletes who have access to almost unimaginable amounts of money. Most of us will not be able to afford to live in areas like Belmont Heights, Hancock Park, Mission Grove, Pacific Palisades, or San Marino. *But we surely are proud hard working union members who can—and deserve—to enjoy a comfortable life, and perhaps in time afford to live in very enjoyable neighborhood on our regular salaries.*

Continued to page 4...

Counting on overtime to fund your lifestyle is a recipe for disaster. If you do, you most likely can start to count on more stress, lying, unhappiness, and broken relationships—simply because of missing time with your growing family. Perhaps the biggest—and worst—problem connected with the relentless drive for overtime pay is the change in your essential character, going from being a contented career-maker to a slave to that overtime paycheck.

I have seen too many good ATU Local 1277 members turn to stealing and cheating their union brothers and sisters (and themselves and their families!) simply because they were “hooked” on overtime pay, and when that “fix” dried up, they had to do something—*anything*—they could in order to try to maintain that “rockstar” lifestyle they have gotten sucked into and used to.

Living within your means and *not* beyond your steady income will help maintain health, attitude, and wellbeing. It will keep you sane, focused, and in stable relationships. It will help you to be a good union member and a loyal friend to your brothers and sisters. Handling your money with common sense and not becoming “addicted” to overtime pay will be a huge benefit in achieving a long, rewarding career in public transportation.

Nothing is more important than good health!

Taking Better Care of Ourselves

*By Victor Rodriguez
Executive Board Member-at-Large*

Nothing—absolutely nothing—is more important than staying healthy! Good health—both mental and physical—will most surely have a positive effect on almost every aspect of our lives, personal and professional.

Taking better care of ourselves is easier said than done. With our busy shifts, long work hours, long commute, stress, we often find less time for ourselves. Fast life, fast food, and less rest are unhealthy, and we risk our careers, families, and lives when we put our health concerns on the backburner.

One quick step on the track back to health—or *keeping* you in good health—is an easy and small step: Drinking more water. That’s right. Drinking more clean, plain old water. Too many people drink little to no water—or not enough of it—to support our bodies, which, after all, are mostly made up of fluids. Another way to better health is *exercise*. It can be as simple as taking the time for long walks, or as demanding as running, jogging, or workouts at gyms or clubs. Hey, if I can do it, so can you! Spending a little time each day exercising can help us all become healthier and avoid problems like obesity.

Losing weight helps you live longer or, looking at it another way, *gaining* weight can lead to all sorts of health problems and even early death. This is why most people work

out or watch their diets. A study I recently reviewed suggested that moderate alcohol consumption, coupled with a common-sense diet and some exercise could well extend your life by as much as 14 years.

And, if at all possible, don’t even think about smoking!

Another reason to drop some weight and work out is to feel better as we age. Regular exercise releases hormones in the brain which provide happiness and a sense of contentment. And another reason for good health: Living a healthier lifestyle can significantly lower health-care costs fewer doctor visits mean fewer co-pays, and likely fewer costly prescriptions.

You also can save money on insurance policies. Some policies lower are less expensive if you are not overweight, eat and drink reasonably, exercise, and *don’t smoke*. Stress is another potential health hazard. We live and work in stressful conditions in a stressful world. This is simply a fact of 21st century life in our region, brothers and sisters. Healthy living can, and most likely *will*, lower stress and the anxiety that comes with it.

Finally, better self-esteem is also a byproduct of a healthy lifestyle. You look and feel better, you may look younger, your clothes will fit better, and your outlook, both at home and on the job, will improve. *Your friends and families will certainly approve!*

Just as important, you will set a good example—at home and at work—for the people around you who may need just that little nudge in the direction of better health. Let’s try to set some time apart for ourselves and make the changes we need to live healthier, less stressful lives as we all grow older together. Older and *healthier!*

**Seventeen Local 1277 Members
Retire From Careers at LACMTA**

George Moncrease, Mechanic, Division 5, 24 years, March 25, 2022; **Reynaldo Sacapano**, Body Repairer A, CMF, 10 years, December 20; **Vinh Trang**, Maintenance Specialist, Division 24, January 5, 2023; **Farouk Fanous**, Traction Power Inspector, Track Department, 23 years, January 15; **Scott Lafarrel**, Mechanic A, Division, 23 years, January 31; **Nof Orfano**, Maintenance Specialist, Red Line, 11 years, February 1; **Dwayne Jordan**, Service Attendant, CMF, 30 years, February 28; **Jesus Rivera**, Maintenance Specialist, Division 24, 30 years, March 9; **Kiet Tran**, Maintenance Specialist, Red Line, 32 years, March 10; **Boguslaw Twardowski**, Mechanic A, Division 4, 24 years, March 31; **Tony Mundy**, Mechanic A, Division 9, 33 years, April 1; **Eric Darby**, Warranty Equipment Mechanic, Warranty Department, 31 years, April 3; **Cesar Solano**, Mechanic A, Division 7, 33 years, April 3; **Andre Thomas**, Maintenance Specialist, Blue Line, 23 years, April 4; **Ted Caballero**, Mechanic A, Division 9, 36 years, April 30; **Darlo Franco**, Mechanic A, Division 18, 24 years, May 1, and **Leopoldo Gomez, Jr.**, Laborer A, Stops & Zones, 26 years, May 24.

Here are the upcoming Local 1277 membership meetings for August. Please make every attempt to attend the meeting for your unit. It's your Union, and we need your participation at our meetings! All members will receive credit for the meetings.	
Tuesday, August 1:	Los Angeles area members: L.A. Building Trades Council, 1626 Beverly Blvd., Los Angeles. Morning Session 10:00 a.m. Evening Session 5:00 p.m.
Wednesday, Aug. 2:	MetroLink Unit members: Local 1277 Office, 1744 North Main Street. Morning Session 8:30 a.m. Evening Session 5:00 p.m.
Wednesday, Aug. 2:	Riverside area members: IELC Building, 1074 E. La Cadena Dr., Riverside Morning Session 10:00 a.m. Afternoon Session 3:00 p.m.
Thursday, Aug. 3:	SunLine area members: Hilton Palm Springs, 400 East Tahquitz Canyon Way, Palm Springs Morning Session 10:00 a.m. Afternoon Session 4:00 p.m.
Thursday, Aug. 3:	Long Beach area members: LBFA Local 372, 2201 Cherry Avenue, Signal Hill CA 90755 Morning: 10:00 a.m. Afternoon: 3:00 p.m. Evening: 6:00 p.m.