

## President's report

### Look Beyond All the Hot Air: The Economic Numbers Don't Lie

By Jeff Shaffer  
President, Local 1277

*"The war on inflation is over."* Those aren't my words, brothers and sisters (I am *no* kind of economist!). This is a very recent quote from Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman.

O.K., fine. That's certainly good news for all working people and families who have struggled these past few years with rising inflation—the "thief" that robs all of us of financial security, spending power, and confidence in our economic system. Make no mistake about it: runaway inflation can destroy families, jobs, and dreams as surely as diseases, unemployment, or natural or man-made catastrophes.

So, what do Krugman's words mean, how do they affect the all-important Presidential race this year, and why even bring them up for discussion?

Here's why (and this is extremely important): ***The Republican Party and the Trump fanatics (sadly now pretty much one and the same) want you to believe that the U.S. economy is crashing under Democratic President Joe Biden. They want you to believe that runaway inflation is here to stay under the Democrats, that the unemployment rate is at an all-time high, the national economic is shrinking, and that there are no jobs for people who want them. Oh, and only the Republicans know how to fix the economy—the Democrats can't do it.***

Guess what, brothers and sisters? That's a serious, lying load of *you-know-what* (rhymes with *hit*). Here's what recent statistics say about the *current* state of the economy:

- Inflation has unquestionably slowed down, now hovering between a controllable 3-4%.
- The national economy *grew* at an annual rate of 3.3% in 2023, far better than those of economic powerhouses like Germany, England, China, and Japan.
- The U.S. unemployment rate stands at a near-historic low of 3.4%, marking the longest stretch of time (two years) that the national rate has been below 4%.
- Consumer confidence (how do we feel about spending, economic security, and the overall economy) is at its **highest** since December 2021 (**the Biden years**).
- During the **Biden Administration**, over **800,000** manufacturing jobs have been created, many of which have been filled by *unionized* working men and women.

Let's consider the last item: Job creation.

Recent statistics show that during 2022, the U.S. recovered *all* the jobs lost during the pandemic. This burst of job creation helped lower the wage-inequality gap that has plagued so many working families. Lowering that gap has led to increased wealth among Black and Latino families. Recent statistics point out that Black family wealth has grown by a whopping 61% during the Biden years, Latino family wealth has increased by a strong 47% during that same time. White family wealth rose by 31%. The rising economic tide surely has lifted all boats!

But there's more. President Biden got a very balky and divided Congress to pass and send to him for his signature at three major positive economic bills:

- The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.
- The Inflation Reduction Act.
- The CHIPS and Science Act.

All three historic pieces of legislation committed our country—and our economy—to an extensive construction program, a lot of it in so-called "depressed areas" and a lot of it aimed to be environmentally sound. CHIPS is designed to help free us from Chinese domination of the vital computer-chip market—lessening our dependence on a foreign supplier while proving good jobs here in the U.S.

All this is very good news, and it should make anyone who carefully considers important economic indicators enthusiastic about Biden's re-election. The only cloud on the horizon (other than an endless barrage of Republican misstatements about the economy and other issues) is this: ***Good economic news—and this is good news—can often take up to six months to become visible to most voters.***

What I mean is this: The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), for example, provides over a *trillion* dollars—long range—to rebuild and expand our decaying roads, highways, ports, airports, railways, bridges, schools, neighborhoods, and a lot of other badly needed projects, all of which will bring tens of thousands of jobs to people and areas that so desperately need them.

Put another way, many voters may not believe in the economic stimulus provided by the IIJA until they see ground being broken for these new projects and workers actively building what is needed. Seeing is believing, so to speak, *but those jobs are here, the construction has begun or is beginning around the country.* Hopefully, by Election Day, November 5, enough voters will have seen enough building to realize how successful the Biden economic recovery has been—and *why he must be re-elected.*

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Our economy has unquestionably strengthened and grown during his term in the White House! Don't believe anyone who tells you otherwise.

And speaking of people “who tell you otherwise,” brothers and sisters, please do *not* be sucked in by Republican and other right-wing crazies' smears against President Biden and his achievements in office. Sure, the President is no youngster—but *either is Trump*. And Biden does *not* face 91 criminal indictments and the real possibility of spending a lot of campaign time going from courthouse to courthouse as he tries to avoid possible jail time.

Trial lawyers like to say that if you can't win a case with the facts, then dazzle them with B.S. That's the Republican game plan for this Presidential election: The national economy has rebounded and is stronger, so we can't argue the facts and reality. *We will just have to throw up a smoke screen of lies and misdirection and hope the voters won't see through it.*

*But we will.* The national AFL-CIO sees through it. Our International Union sees through it. Our State and County Federations of Labor see through it. Your Executive Board sees through it, and I am confident that ATU Local 1277's brothers and sisters see through it, too.

**A final note:** Under our Presidential-election system, with the Electoral College actually deciding the next President, it is safe to say that California—because of its varied and generally liberal population—will go Democratic in November. That's fine, *but the election may well be decided by six or seven “battleground states”—Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.*

*If you have friends, family members, and ATU brothers and sisters living and voting in those states, please—PLEASE—reach out to them and tell them why it is so important that they vote for Joe Biden, for the economic reasons described above and for the actual survival of our Constitution, government, and society that I wrote about in your February newspaper. It really is that important!*

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## Adam Schiff for U.S. Senate

As you know, there are three Democrats running for the U.S. Senate seat in the March 5 primary. After careful consideration, and a thorough weighing of their records, our Local Union and our legislative arm, the California Conference Board, have endorsed **Congressman Adam Schiff** for the senate seat. Congressman Schiff has long been a supporter of unions and the rights and goals of working people and families. He has been a strong voice for protecting our Constitution and our country's core values during these recent years of attacks on our cherished institutions and laws. ***We need Adam Schiff in the U.S. Senate!***

Because of an unusual electoral “quirk”, you will have to vote *twice* for Congressman Schiff. Once for him to complete the term of Dianne Feinstein (up until January 2, 2025), and a second time for him to serve a full term in the Senate (until January 3, 2031). ***Thank you!***

## Training, Mentoring, Apprenticeships Combine to Make the ATU Stronger

*By Mauro Varela  
Treasurer, Local 1277*

Training, mentorship, and apprenticeships are the building blocks of ATU Local 1277 and our International Union. They form the foundation of today's strong union, as well as providing our members with important leadership and organizing tools for current and future workplaces. Two recent events, sponsored by our International, show how important these building blocks are to our efforts.

The first event was the annual meeting of *California Transit Works (CTW)*. This year's theme was “Mentors in Motion.” Local 1277 officers in attendance were Brothers Jeff Shaffer, John DiRito, Victor Rodriguez, IVP James Lindsay (former Local 1277 President), and me.

The goal of the meeting was to promote apprenticeships and workforce development for our members in every ATU local union across the United States and Canada. Certainly, a better trained and more skilled workforce is the key for the safe, efficient, and economical operation of the transit agencies we work at and the mass transit-dependent public we serve.

For years, the ATU has set the standards for apprenticeship opportunities and training in the U.S. and Canadian transit agencies. And it is through these kind of meetings and everyday working closely with these agencies that labor, management, and the riding public benefit.

## RAMP-22 Program Was a Big Hit

I am pleased to report that Local 1277's forward-looking RAMP-22 was well received at the CTW meeting. Our Union's team laid out what we have accomplished so far at Riverside Transit and exactly what we want to do through this program in the future. We explained how we promoted apprenticeships at our Riverside property, and then how we got those apprentices up and running through our successful mentoring program.

Our Union's successful RAMP-22 program was proudly represented by Sisters Josephine Garcia and Michelle Santa Cruz, and Brother Christopher Vore.

You may recall that in our January paper I described the mentoring program and the aim of our RAMP-22 project. We set out to train mentors—who are experienced and knowledgeable teachers—so that they, in turn, can apply that training to provide guidance, the accumulated wisdom of their own working experience, and encouragement to newly hired members at RTA, both in Operations and Maintenance. The mentors are a “support system” for our new hires.

Following our successful presentation, we met with SunLine Transit managers, who were in attendance, and who

realized the benefits of this labor-management cooperative effort. Local 1277 Brothers Francisco Ojeda and Esteban Huizar, along with Sister Norma Hernandez, will speak with SunLine management about the benefits of our mentoring program.

We have scheduled meetings in order to discuss the benefits of our mentorship program. While Metrolink and the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority were not represented at this year's CTW meeting, we are working with both agencies to start apprenticeship/mentoring programs at their properties.

## Training the Trainers

Another recent event—hosted by International Union President John Costa and his staff—focused on “training the trainers.” This new and innovative program aims to teach ATU organizers “new skills and techniques to better engage and mobilize our local members.” The goal is to help ATU local unions recruit and train their own members to be *activists*—leading organizing drives, contract campaigns, and community/political involvement, among other necessary union efforts.

At the close of the Training the Trainers conference, International President Costa, referring to local officers, Shop Stewards, and organizers in attendance, summed up its purpose: *“Thank you for the important role you play in helping fight for the rights of our members. Now you can take what you’ve learned here on the road to engage more of our members for the fights and challenges our locals face.”*

You, brothers and sisters, are the lifeblood of Local 1277, and your ATU family across the U.S. and Canada is the strength of the ATU. And it is by creating the solid foundation of training, mentoring, and apprenticeship that we keep the ATU strong for our members, influential in politics and our communities, and a force to be reckoned with today—and tomorrow.



PLEASE  
VOTE FOR  
UNION-ENDORSED  
CANDIDATES



## International President Costa Kicks Off New Innovative “Train the Trainer” Program for ATU Organizers

This week, our ATU International Organizers attended a new innovative “Train the Trainer” program developed under the leadership of International President John Costa to help better prepare our Locals and their members for the fights they face. Conducted by the Director of the ATU Campaigns Department Justin Panos and other ATU International staff, the training focused on teaching our Organizers new skills and techniques to better engage and mobilize our Local members through role-playing scenarios, interactive discussions, and other exercises. “This has been a great training to give you strategies and tools to help our Locals recruit and train their own members to be activists in their Locals for contract campaigns, organizing drives, and other actions,” said Costa, who attended the training.

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Sisters Michelle Santa Cruz (left) and Josephine Garcia (RAMP-22 Coordinator, right).

# 2023 Legislative Roundup And a Win for California Workers

By Errol Frazier  
Vice President, Local 1277

As I do every year, I summarize the significant legislation that affects working people and families. As you know, the bills that are proposed, and either passed or rejected, are very important to our careers, families, and future. Our Union, through its legislative watchdog, the California Conference Board, keeps a sharp eye on the proceedings in the State Assembly and Senate in Sacramento.

**SB 848:** Provides five days of protected leave after what is designated as a “reproductive loss event”. The following circumstances fall within this heartbreaking designation:

- Failed adoption.
- Failed Surrogacy.
- Miscarriage.
- Stillbirth.
- Unsuccessful In Vitro Fertilization.

The bill further mandates that employers may *not* ask for documentation pertaining to any of the above unfortunate situations. The employer must provide complete confidentiality concerning any details of the leave and the reasons for it. This leave must be used within three months after the reproductive loss event.

The five-day leave is unpaid unless the employer has a prior policy in place concerning this situation. However, an employee may use sick or vacation days, as well as other paid time off to cover the five-day period.

This is a vital new law because it is estimated that between 10-20% of all pregnancies result in miscarriages, for whatever reason. Governor Gavin Newsom signed SB 848 into law on October 10, 2023, and it took effect on January 1, 2024.

**SB 616** was signed by Gov. Newsom on Oct 4, 2023, and became effective Jan. 1, 2024. The bill made changes to Healthy Workplace, Healthy Families Act of 2014, a.k.a., California sick leave law.

- Ends “No Fault Attendance Policies- After January 1, 2024 an employee may no longer be charged an attendance “points” or “occurrence” for using a paid sick day.
- Only arguable exception is railroad employers, whom are not covered by the Healthy Workplace, Healthy Families Act per Labor Code Section 245.5(b)(2). However, given the wording used in Labor Code Section 246.5(d), the protections for the use of sick leave do appear to cover railroad employees in California.
- The California Department of Labor Standards Enforcement (DLSE) has confirmed this understanding of the law, stating: Under the terms of the paid sick leave law (and Labor Code section 233 and 234) if an employee has accrued and available sick leave, and is using his or her accrued paid sick leave for the purpose as specified in the law, it is not permissible for the employer to give the employee an “occurrence” for the absence under such an attendance policy because this would constitute a

form of discipline against an employee for using his or her paid sick leave as allowed under the paid sick leave law.

- SB616 ends any restriction on holiday or other pay due to the use of sick days. Some collective bargain agreements state that employees do not receive holiday pay if they use a sick day the day before or after the holiday. Such provision are no longer enforceable after SB616, as they discriminate against employees who use accrued sick days.
- SB616 ends “Doctor’s Notes” requirements for the use of paid sick days. The law prohibits an employer from demanding a doctor’s note or other documentation in order to utilize an accrued sick day.
- Section 246.5’s terms cannot be altered via agreements. As a result, any sick leave policy or contractual provisions in conflict with SB616 are void and unlawful.

## Federal Court of Appeals Rules for California Workers

On Monday, February 12, as reported in the San Francisco *Chronicle*, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals gave working Californians a big victory. The court ruled that employees may use a unique state law—known as PAGA—to sue their employers for violations of labor laws.

PAGA, the *Private Attorneys General Act*, enacted in 2004, allows employees to sue their employers in the name of the state for violating such fundamental pro-worker laws concerning regulation of minimum wages, overtime, meal and rest breaks, and sick pay. If their lawsuit succeeds, employees collect 25% of the penalties provided by a particular labor law, with the rest going to the State of California.

PAGA lawsuits have strengthened labor laws here due to California’s lack of resources to fully enforce these laws on its own.

In June 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court, with three Trump-appointed justices, ruled that PAGA violated the rights of employers, whose contracts required workers to *take disputes to individual arbitration rather than going to court*. This was a big win for corporations because arbitrators’ decisions are almost never appealable and most often come down in management’s favor.

However, the *California Supreme Court*, the ultimate authority on *state* law, unanimously ruled that while employees were bound by their agreements to arbitrate individual claims, *they could still join their coworkers and sue collectively in the name of the state (California)*. The State Supreme Court ruled that **“A state court has the authority to correct a misinterpretation of that state’s law by a federal court, including the U.S. Supreme Court.”**

While this is surely a big win for working people, the fight is not over. California voters will be asked to decide if PAGA should survive. Big business has qualified an initiative for the November ballot that would repeal PAGA and alter the payout system from any successful lawsuits. I will keep you informed about this upcoming important political fight.

Here are the upcoming Local 1277 membership meetings for March & April. 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, Mar. 5:	Los Angeles area members:	
Tuesday, Apr. 2:	L.A. Building Trades Council, 1626 Beverly Blvd., Los Angeles.	Morning Session 10:00 a.m. Evening Session 5:00 p.m.
Wednesday, Mar. 6:	Metrolink Unit members:	
Wednesday, Apr. 3:	Local 1277 Office, 1744 North Main Street.	Morning Session 8:30 a.m. Evening Session 5:00 p.m.
Wednesday, Mar. 6:	Riverside area members:	
Wednesday, Apr. 3:	IELC Building, 1074 E. La Cadena Dr., Riverside	Morning Session 10:00 a.m. Afternoon Session 3:00 p.m.
Thursday, Mar. 7:	SunLine area members:	
Thursday, Apr. 4:	IBEW Local 40 Electrical Resource Center 39615 Washington Street - Suite G Palm Desert, CA 92211	Morning Session 10:00a.m. Afternoon Session 4:00p.m.
Thursday, Mar. 7:	Long Beach area members:	
Thursday, Apr. 4:	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.