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In pilot project, AFL-CIO organizes Minnesota jobless workers

By Kelsey Eide



No person expects job hunting to be simple, but for many unemployed Minnesotans it can begin to seem hopeless.

The AFL-CIO, in a pilot project in the Twin Cities and in six other areas, is trying to bring some hope back - along with practical help.

That's why it's launched the Minnesota Wants To Work Coalition. If the effort succeeds, the labor federation plans to expand it nationwide.

The coalition is designed to help people like Shawn Singleton. He's a former sales representative for Pre-Paid Legal who has been job searching since becoming unemployed two years ago. His efforts have ranged from newspapers to websites, from job fairs to WorkForce Centers, but to no avail.

Singleton is not alone. The struggle to find and keep jobs has left many people unemployed.

The Minnesota Wants To Work coalition is part of a pilot program designed to give a voice to unemployed workers. The coalition seeks to organize unemployed and underemployed workers into a group powerful enough to make their collective voices heard by decision-makers.

A secondary goal of Minnesota Wants To Work is to provide unemployed workers with useful resources to aid in their job search and to help with financial hardships.

Minnesota Wants To Work is Minnesota's contribution to a larger program, America Wants To Work, which is in turn an expansion of Working America, the AFL-CIO's community affiliate. Working America succeeded in organizing large groups of people quickly, and the America Wants To Work expansion of this program makes it possible to include the broader community of unemployed workers, organizers say.

America Wants To Work has been launched in seven states, and its success in Minnesota will help determine whether or not the program will

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continue.

Minnesota Wants To Work is led by the Minneapolis and St. Paul regional labor federations,

The unemployed are not the only people who the group hopes to recruit, however.

the Minnesota AFL-CIO, Working America and the Minnesota Dislocated Worker program, with the aid of interns in the AFL-CIO's Union Summer program.

To date, Minnesota Wants To Work has focused on serving the unemployed and finding out from people first-hand what they want to see from the program.

At a recent Minnesota Wants To Work service fair, unemployed workers met with representatives from partnering programs, including Bridge to Benefits, Fare for All, Portico Healthnet, the United Way, Community Action Partnerships of Ramsey and Washington Counties and the Neighborhood Development Alliance.

Meanwhile, Minnesota Wants To Work team members have been researching and brainstorming ways to creatively and effectively organize the unemployed. By looking at our nation's past and present unemployment programs, the coalition began to build a strong foundation for future action.

"The unemployed worker is becoming the silent majority, which will eventually become the boisterous majority," said Bobby Kasper, president of the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation. "We need to pay attention to the unemployed

union worker."

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One of the challenges leaders of the program foresee is retention of members. There is a possibility that, as unemployed workers are hired, the movement for job creation may lose momentum.

For this reason, it is essential that the Minnesota Wants To Work coalition's member base includes active and passionate people from all walks of life, whether unemployed, underemployed or working full-time. Pushing for job creation rather than job elimination is something that will benefit all Minnesotans, and more support means more power.

Shawn Singleton, though he has been unemployed for two years, remains optimistic about every job he applies for. Organizers at Minnesota Wants To Work hope to see Singleton and his fellow unemployed workers remain hopeful and succeed in their quest for jobs. Through organization and cooperation, the Minnesota Wants To Work program can work for unemployed and underemployed workers.



Kelsey Eide is an AFL-CIO Union Summer intern.

Will Obama get on the bus for federal action to create jobs?

By PW Editorial Board

President Obama began a 3-state bus tour to promote his rural jobs initiative. At his first stop he spoke of the great struggle ahead.

It will take a monumental fight back to put the country back on track.

The president's trip coincides with the beginning of such a movement. The U.S. House of Representatives Progressive Caucus and Black Caucus are holding public hearings across the country to demand federal action on jobs.

Rep. Jan Schakowsky introduced the Emergency Jobs to Restore the American Dream Act, that would put 2 million people to work.

The New York Times has called on the president to join these efforts by presenting to Congress his own jobs plan. "It is past time for Mr. Obama to send a jobs plan to Congress that has popular appeal, one that he can use to try to shame Republicans."

As compared to these proposals, initiatives from the White House to extend unemployment benefits, seek patent reform and payroll tax cuts while important do not nearly go far enough.

At the very least, the White House is in midst of debate. Grassroots pressure in support of the Schakowsky's new bill from union halls, churches, mayors and other public officials will help bring the necessary pressure to convince the president as John Conyers said recently "to get off his butt" and speak forcefully for jobs. "He's the best speaker in the world" said Conyers.

According to Democratic strategist Donna Brazile, Obama can do more than speak on the subject. Given the GOP's legislative intransigence she says, "sometimes the president needs to take matters into his own hands." This includes executive action: "President Obama needs to develop an economic action plan with his Cabinet that he can implement strictly through the exercise of executive power."

Executive action must be matched by peoples action. If the jobs fight - which certainly will extend beyond next year's election - is to be successful, every pressure must be brought to break the GOP roadblock and get the country moving again.

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Rally tells Sen. Feinstein: Fight for Social Security

By Marilyn Bechtel

They came from all over northern California - by bus, by train, by carpool - to deliver a powerful message to Senator Dianne Feinstein: Stand up and be a champion for Social Security!

As hundreds of demonstrators stood just feet from the senator's downtown San Francisco office Aug. 17, California Alliance of Retired Americans (CARA) President Nan Brasmer told the crowd, "We're here today to ask Sen. Feinstein to tell us, her constituents, that she will support and champion Social Security, and fight against cuts and proposals to privatize the program by Congress, the super committee and even by the president, who keeps tossing it out on the table."

The senator has "often said she supports Social Security," Brasmer said, "but most of us are tired of the lip service, we want some real action from her. That means no means testing, no raising the retirement age, no downsizing of the program in any way."

Pointing out that Social Security, funded by workers who have paid into it all their lives, does not contribute to the deficit, Brasmer said, "Let them solve those problems with the money they're squandering on the wars!"

The rally celebrating Social Security's 76th birthday brought together participants from many unions and community organizations, across generations. Organizers said it and a companion rally in Los Angeles drew over a thousand people.

Said one college student, "The cuts being made on our parents and grandparents are being waged against us. The cuts to education and child care are cheating young people out of our dreams and our futures. Let's fight together to protect those rights and futures."

Maria Luz Torre of Parent Voices spoke of being in the "sandwich generation" - living with her



mother, who receives Social Security, and raising children about to go to college. "I'm really worried," she said. "Wall Street wants more money to play with, and they're looking at Social Security." Pointing out that those who would be most affected by cuts would be people of color, young children, single parents and women, she urged Feinstein to "be our hero!"

Fellow retiree Kokoye Sande added, "Social Security is not why we're in our present economic situation. We shouldn't be penalized."

Meanwhile, a delegation had gone to meet with the senator, but returned empty-handed.

"We had worked for months to get a meeting with her," said Michael Lyon of San Francisco Gray Panthers. "And it was arranged we would finally be able to meet with her and urge her to make a statement."

But, said Lyon, when they approached the office, the group was told there was no meeting, and that perhaps someone would come downstairs to pick up the 2,000 cards collected in recent weeks.

"So this fight is going to go on throughout next year," he said. "Social Security is our right, we are not going to give up this fight!"

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Detroit demands action on jobs

By Joe Sims

Over 5,000 jobseekers showed up at the Wayne County Community College in Detroit for a jobs fair and town hall meeting yesterday. More than 7,000 attended last week's event in Cleveland, the second stop on the Congressional Black Caucus's "For the People" tour.

Over 1,000 positions were offered at the fair.

President Obama announced he would give a major speech on jobs and the economy after Labor Day.

According to the Associated Press, "The president's plan is likely to contain tax cuts, jobs-boosting infrastructure ideas and steps that would specifically help the long-term unemployed."

The New York Times again pressed the Obama administration to offer bold new jobs creation proposals, the second time in as many days. President Obama, says the Times, "needs to come up with policies big enough to match his new found anger - and big enough to get the economy growing again."

In recent speeches, the president has sharply criticized the Republicans for putting politics over country.

Detroit residents at the town hall meeting, however, facing 50 percent unemployment rates, felt the president and Congress could do more. According to Thegrio.com, "During the sometimes heated town hall, people's frustration over their economic conditions overwhelmed decorum and order."

Rep. Maxine Waters, called on the audience to "unleash us" to address the president on the jobs issue.

The Oakland event too had a militant character. "The session, organized by the Congressional Progressive Caucus, was at times raucous, with some heckling or angrily chanting that it is time to 'tax the rich.'"

"Estamos con los trabajadores de Verizon; su lucha es nuestra"

Por Joelle Fishman

Ya entienden de la dura experiencia los trabajadores de AT&T en Connecticut que la solidaridad es clave para la victoria de cualquier huelga, y en especial para los 45.000 trabajadores de Verizon que están luchando en estados cercanos para salvar sus trabajos y beneficios en la mesa de negociaciones.

A diferencia a los demás estados de la Costa Este, en Connecticut no hay negocios de teléfono alambrado de Verizon. Sin embargo, el Local 1298 de los Trabajadores de Comunicaciones de América (la CWA, por sus siglas en inglés) no desconoce a las luchas duras para contratos. Resistían ellos durante un año entero más que los demás locales alrededor del país rechazando recortes de beneficios propuestos por AT&T, y ya se alistan para nuevas negociaciones para el año que viene.

Así es que la CWA en Connecticut y sus aliados ya están en pie de lucha en solidaridad con sus hermanas y hermanos de Verizon. Viajan a Boston y a Nueva York para participar en las líneas de piquete. Están piqueteando frente de las tiendas no sindicalizadas de Verizon Wireless en Connecticut, con el primer piqueteo programado para este jueves. Se están negando a hacer negocio con ningún gerente de Verizon en el trabajo. Y están haciendo contribuciones monetarias al fondo de huelga.

"Los sindicatos somos los últimos que bloquean el camino a los grandes ladrones corporativos que surgían con el turno del último siglo.

Tiene todo que ver con la avaricia. Estaremos con los trabajadores de Verizon porque en este abril que viene su lucha será la nuestra," declara Bill Henderson, presidente del Local 1298 de la CWA. Representa su local a más de 5.000 trabajadores de AT&T, AT&T Mobility y otros lugares de trabajo en Connecticut y por toda Nueva Inglaterra.

"En la mesa hay más de 100 cuestiones de recortes sobre los cuales Verizon se niega a mover, que representan una reducción de pago de \$20.000 para el trabajador ordinario," enfatiza Henderson. Entre estos recortes son la eliminación de las pensiones, de compartir gastos para el cuidado de salud, y el traslado de trabajos hacia el exterior.

Al igual que AT&T, busca Verizon aumentar sus ganancias aun más transformando a decenas de miles de trabajos seguros con beneficios adecuados en unos pocos trabajos mal pagados. Están rabiosos los trabajadores con esta compañía adinerada cuyas ganancias en el primer semestre de 2011 son de \$6,9 mil millones, de los cuales \$85.000 por semana van a pagar a su Ejecutivo en Jefe.

En Connecticut, el Partido de las Familias Trabajadoras, del cual la CWA es un integrante, está llamando a todos sus partidarios que pidan a la gerencia de Verizon a negociar en buena fe.

Dicen partidarios que con su huelga los trabajadores de Verizon están defendiendo a todos los trabajadores.

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