

# OUR TURN

2005

A Newsletter dedicated to  
Qwest Non-Bargained  
Employees  
[www.cwa7777.org](http://www.cwa7777.org)  
email: [organize@cwa7777.org](mailto:organize@cwa7777.org)

## The Process

By Kevin Hilton, former CWA Organizer

What is the process of forming a union? How do we get started? What should we expect?

Let us briefly begin with the concept of a union. A union is workers, caring for one another, and understanding that collectively we can build power to benefit our interests. As far back as 1935 the Supreme Court, in its ruling to uphold the right for workers to form and join a union, made it clear that in the scope of major industry, an individual did not have the necessary ability to obtain livable wages and benefits. Looking at today's telecommunications industry it is more evident that the same holds true—workers must come together to ensure our worth and the stability necessary to provide for ourselves and our families.

Collectively, you can have your voice, concerns and ideas heard when you form a union. When we look at all the provisions that craft employees enjoy, imagine what little we would have if we had never negotiated with, Mountain Bell, U S West, or Qwest. We have seen the full spectrum of the instability of the telecom industry. However, those of us with the benefit of a union contract have benefitted from the security of contract language that lessens the impact on workers. Collectively, we are better able to ensure our interests and make sure when the industry is low, and times are tough, we are heard.

The structured process of forming a union places the decision into the employees' hands. It is totally up to the workers if they want a union. In the case of Qwest managers, the company will let the employees decide without any interference, or reprisal. They have agreed to remain completely neutral. So, Qwest managers don't have to be fearful, or doubt whether they can have a union—you can.

We must start by finding out who is interested, and willing to talk with there coworkers. This group of leaders becomes what is called a "committee". The committee works to identify other coworkers that support a union, and educate their peers on the issues of concern, the vision and process of forming a union. This takes a commitment of a little extra time, a willingness to talk to others, and excitement of making positive change where you work.

Once a committee comes together, we will then begin to circulate a petition for workers to sign. This petition is used to show that a majority of the employees in your workgroup desire a union. It is also used as what is called a "show of interest" for the National Labor Relations Board

## Overtime Alert

House Leaders Ignore  
Workers' Plea to Save  
Overtime

The Bush attack on overtime pay and the U.S. Labor Departments outrageous misuse of your tax dollars to cut paychecks for millions of workers must stop now.

Just how cynical and anti-worker is the Bush administration attack on overtime pay? Bush's Labor Department has published a "summary" of the overtime pay cut rules giving employers clear suggestions on how they can avoid paying overtime to low-wage workers, according to the AP report.

The Bush Labor Department's options for ducking overtime pay include cutting workers' hourly wages to make regular and overtime pay equal to the original salary. Such a "payroll adjustment," the summary says, would result "in virtually no, or only a minimal increase in, labor costs." The summary also suggests employers could raise the salaries of workers just enough to make them ineligible for overtime under the new

(NLRB). The when the NLRB receives a petition signed by a majority of workers in a work group, they will go through the process of setting up for an election. This election will be held in your workplace, and all your coworkers will have an opportunity to vote. The vote is done in private, and supervised by an NLRB agent. If a majority of the employees voting vote “yes” for a union, you now have the legal right to negotiate with your employer. It doesn’t make you an official union member yet. That comes later. However, you will have the support of CWA and our resources to gain a contract.

Negotiations will be based on a proposal that all your coworkers come up with. After a series of meetings and surveys, the workers will elect a bargaining committee and develop a proposal concerning wages, benefits and working conditions. This proposal will be negotiated back and forth between the union (the bargaining committee and a CWA representative) and the company. After a series of negotiations a final offer will be presented for the employees to vote on (ratify).

After a final proposal is offered, everyone will have the opportunity to read over the provisions. You will be able to examine the contract—wages, benefits, working conditions. When one looks over the proposed agreement they should weight it up against a couple of things. First, does the agreement address your concerns, such as retirement, or job security. Second, is it worth what you might pay in union dues (2.25 hrs of pay per month). The benefits of a contract should far outweigh what you would pay in dues. If you and your coworkers are not happy with the proposed contract, vote it down. By not accepting it, you can go back to continue negotiations, or if it is apparent that your concerns cannot be addressed through negotiations, you can discontinue and remain non-union, where you are currently. However, not gaining a contract that is acceptable is rare.

After a contract is ratified, you and your coworkers will become official members of CWA. So, as the process unfolds, one can see that the workers have control over it from beginning to end.

---

## Contract Language Managers Can Have A Union

There has been new contract language negotiated to ensure the right to belong to CWA. This language states that Qwest will not resist if workers wish to become union, by stating as follows:

**Section 1.4** The Company agrees to remain neutral during any organizing campaign of employees eligible for union representation under the NLRA. This means that the Company will not hold any captive audience meetings, and when responding to inquires, will only advise employees that it is an individual employees’s choice to support or not support the Union’s organizing efforts and/or join the Union. The Company, including its supervisors, will not take any action or make any statements that will state or imply any opposition by the Company to the selection by such employees of a collective bargaining agent.

This language gives “management” titles, that do not direct others, the right to become part of CWA with the benefit and protections of a contract, and keep their current title. Employees that desire to begin this simple process need not worry about the opinion of directors or supervisors. This language will provide for these titles to make this choice on the basis of what they feel is right for themselves and their families.

In other parts of the Company, and other states, Qwest has done well to uphold this agreement. Employees have begun to exercise this right without interference or resistance.

## Unions Help Workers Win

### What is a union?

A union is a group of workers who form an organization to win:

- **Respect on the job**
- **Better wages**
- **Overtime pay**
- **Better pensions**
- **Stable healthcare costs**
- **Layoff protection**
- **A voice in the workplace**

### Does the law protect workers joining unions?

Yes. Under the law, which protects the freedom of association, employers are not allowed to discriminate against or fire workers for choosing to join a union.

### How do unions help working families today?

Union workers earn 28 percent more than non-union workers and are more likely to receive health care and pension benefits than those without a union.



## Health Care Costs

Can You Afford Them?

While most Americans with health insurance rely on their employers for access to quality care, employers are increasingly shifting its rising cost to workers who struggle to pay higher premiums, deductibles and co-payments. As workers with coverage find themselves in a rapidly changing health care market where managed care is now a given. Health maintenance organizations are increasingly converting to for-profit status, and workers may find themselves denied care while profiteers work to prevent governments from protecting their rights as patients.

**What's wrong with our system, and can we fix it?** *Some of the problems facing health care.*

- Too many Americans have no health insurance
- Employers refuse to pay their fair share
- Rising drug prices— profits

**How to improve access to affordable, quality care.** *Some solutions that may move us in the right direction.*

- Support the use of public programs to supplement private health care dollars
- State based bulk drug purchasing, for lower costs.
- Quality measurements and assurance
- Negotiate for health care at work
- Compel employers to pay their fair share
- Adopt a Patients' Bill of Rights

**For more information, contact:  
Joe Juarez  
303.781.8700 x40**