

April 2016

## March MiARA Biannual Meeting and Election Draw a Huge Crowd

On Thursday, March 31, 2016, over 100 Michigan Alliance for Retired Americans members attended the MiARA Biannual Convention.

Michigan Alliance President Richard Long welcomed the members with remarks about the important work being done at both the state and national level. Dick introduced Executive Vice-President Henry Lykes who led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance.



Secretary McInerney conducted the roll call of officers. Present were Dick Long, Henry Lykes, Judy Foster, Richard McInerney, Charlie Robinson, and Jack Schneider.

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved as was the Treasurer's report presented by Charlie Robinson.

The Convention Rules Committee members, Rita Yancy and Rita Rivera, presented the rules for the Convention, which the body adopted unanimously.

The guest speaker list included Ron Bieber, President, Michigan AFL-CIO; Joe Peters, Financial Secretary, National Alliance for Retired Americans; and Steve Cook, President, Michigan Education Association.

Bieber reminded delegates that we are strongest when we have each other's backs. He went on to say that we must fight for legislation for working people because currently so much is for the rich. This is an election year and we must work together to hold politicians accountable. We must bring everyone back together.



Michigan AFL-CIO President Ron Bieber addresses the March 2016 MiARA Biannual Convention.

Joe Peters remarked that the goals of the Alliance are to strengthen Social Security and Medicare. He said that we must elect candidates who support our cause. Alliance

members must work to register new voters and get them out to vote on Election Day.

MEA President Steve Cook discussed Flint’s needs. He said Flint does not need any more bottled water, but the need is for empty jugs. He further remarked on the Detroit School situation. He said, “The Michigan legislature appropriated thirty-eight million dollars for Detroit schools so they would not be shut down in April.

Cook stated Governor John Engler appointed an Emergency Manager for Detroit and, at that time, Detroit was \$93 million dollars in the black. Detroit is now millions of dollars in debt. Cook pointed out that AFT-Michigan President David Hecker has diligently worked to get Detroit on course, but the legislature needs to find long-term solutions to insure a great education for Detroit students. Steve warned the MiARA audience that what is happening in Detroit is eventually going to happen to all of Michigan public schools.

Cook ended with a challenge to the delegates saying, “We must work very hard to elect officials who will support Public Education.

*Following the Speeches, the Convention held its election of officers.*

Tim Foley, ARA Regional Board Member, presided over the election of officers. The credentials Committee included James Blaine and Rick Lyons. A slate of the current officers was presented and, since there

were no other nominations, the slate was adopted by acclamation.



Shown are the elected MiARA Officers. **Front Row:** Judy Foster, Secretary (MEA), **Back Row, Left to Right:** Henry Lykes, Executive Vice-President, (AFSCME); Richard McInerney, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President (USW); Richard Long, President, (UAW); Charlie Robinson, Treasurer, (AFT-MICHIGAN).

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## **Mackinac Straits Line 5 Pipeline Poses a Threat to Michigan’s Great Lakes**

*The following article was written by Hans Voss, and first appeared in the April 16, 2016, issue of the Traverse City Business News. Mr. Voss is the Executive Director of the Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities.*

It’s hard to fathom that the people of Flint were poisoned by lead-tainted water for seventeen months while government officials ignored evidence and downplayed the problem.

Unfortunately, the culture of denial and inaction brought to light by the Flint disaster has been around for a long time in our state government. You only have to look at the Line 5 oil pipeline in the Mackinac Straits – which, until Flint, was the top water issue in Michigan – to see the

same unwillingness to act in the face of urgent risk.

Rather than concede to calls for his resignation, Gov. Rick Snyder said he intends to stay in office to solve the problem in Flint, help the people who have suffered, make sure other Michigan cities aren't also at risk and, as he vowed during a three-hour Congressional hearing, make "comprehensive change in state government."

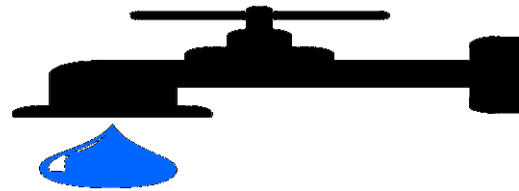
In addition to fixing Flint, one action he can take immediately to demonstrate that he is serious about changing the culture in Lansing is shutting down the flow of oil in Line 5 to insure the Great Lakes are protected.

By now, the Flint story has been well told. The switch from the Detroit water system to the Flint River in April 2014, without implementing the proper corrosion controls, leached lead from old pipes. Flint residents began complaining about the water, and as brown water flowed from the taps and tests confirmed unsafe lead levels over the following year, government officials quietly tried to figure out what to do.

Just how badly things were handled came to light, at least in part, after the governor's office released nearly 300 internal emails earlier this year. A number of them pertain to an eight-page memo, written in June 2015, calling for urgent action by Miguel Del Toral, a mid-level Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulator. Michigan

Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) and EPA officials didn't react with urgency, so Del Toro gave a copy of the memo to Lee Anne Walters, a Flint mother whose children were suffering from lead poisoning. She gave the report to the media, and the Flint Water Crisis became front-page news.

When questioned by reporters, an MDEQ spokesperson, who later resigned, said the water was safe, told people to "relax," and called Del Toral a "rogue employee." Despite mounting evidence and media pressure, it wasn't until October 2015 that regulators finally issued a warning to Flint residents not to drink the water.



The Line 5 debate in Michigan has dragged out on a similar timeline. It was 2012 when the first report outlined the risk of the 63-year-old oil pipeline and the shocking lack of oversight. University of Michigan scientists have since developed a computer simulation that shows a pipeline leak would contaminate more than 722 miles of coastline from Petoskey to Alpena, and shut down drinking water on Mackinac Island.

Gov. Snyder formed a task force and an advisory board to study the issue. But just as the water kept flowing in Flint while regulators considered alternatives, each day that goes by the pipeline continues to carry

23 million gallons through five miles of open water in the Great Lakes.

Independent scientists have raised serious concerns about zebra mussels corroding the pipeline. Divers have documented broken pipeline supports. And everyone, including the Coast Guard, has pointed out that it's impossible to clean up a spill in winter when the straits are typically covered with four feet of ice.

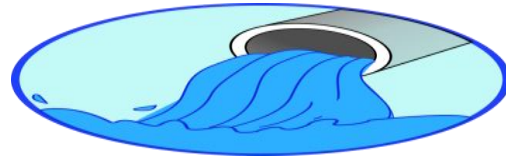
Public outcry is growing, too. More than two dozen local governments – from Traverse City to Alpena Township – and four Native American tribes have passed formal resolutions, more than 100 businesses have signed on, citizens have filed petitions, and state legislation has been introduced, all calling on the governor to exercise his authority to protect the Great Lakes from a catastrophic spill.

Of course, the difference between Line 5 and Flint is that the Line 5 pipeline tragic event has not happened yet. However, that's just it. To rebuild public confidence, state officials need to take proactive action to prevent harm before it happens.

The bottom line is that at some point in the lifespan of a pipeline a leak will happen. There are dozens of documented leaks throughout the same Midwest pipeline network that prove it, including the 2010 disaster that spilled nearly a million gallons into the Kalamazoo River.

If there is one thing that unites Michiganders, it's a love for the Great

Lakes. We understand that our recreational tourism economy is based on clean water. And what's particularly important in the Line 5 debate is Michigan's economy can thrive without Line 5. The majority of its oil passes right through Michigan for processing in Canada before being



shipped to markets in the Northeast U. S. and overseas – and Michigan can get the oil it needs from other, less risky pipelines.

In addition to aiding the people of Flint and solving one of the most tragic drinking water cases in modern American history, Gov. Snyder should look across Michigan and take action to prevent another disaster and restore public trust in state government. Shutting down Line 5 and protecting the Great Lakes would be a good start.

MiARA Executive Board

Dick Long, President (UAW)

Henry Lykes, Executive Vice-President (AFSCME)

Richard McInerney, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President (USW)

Charlie Robinson, Treasurer (AFT-MICHIGAN)

Judy Foster, Secretary (MEA)

Board Members from State Sustaining Organizations

Warren Danford, (UAW)

Arthur Kroll, (USW)

Jack Schneider, (MEA)

Editors: Jack and Merylene Schneider

## **Paid Sick Time is Needed For Michigan Workers**

Imagine choosing between going to work sick, knowing you will make others sick, or risking your paycheck and even your job by staying home. The choice must be even harder for working parents who must decide between sending a sick child to school or daycare as opposed to staying home and risk missing necessary income.

The most vulnerable workers in Michigan, who are already living from paycheck to paycheck, stand the greatest risk of losing their jobs simply because they fall ill.

Workers without access to paid sick leave are more likely to go to work sick and more likely to delay needed medical care, leading to prolonged illness and costly emergency room visits.

In September 2015, a group of activists started a statewide ballot initiative aimed at enacting a law that would require Michigan employees to offer all workers one hour of paid sick time for every 30 hours worked. The law would allow workers to take time off for personal or family health needs, matters related to domestic violence or sexual assault, and school meetings related to a child's ailment or disability.

If enough signatures (252,523) are gathered by the June 1st deadline, the issue will be voted on in November 2016.

*Information was obtained from the February 2016 MEA Petition Insider.*

## **Version Workers Strike For a Better Future**

Nearly 40,000 brave working people from Massachusetts to Virginia went on strike to protect good jobs and ensure quality service at Verizon. It is the largest national strike in recent years.

Despite record profits of 39 billion dollars over the last three years, Verizon executives have been pushing to offshore jobs to the Philippines, Mexico and other locations, to outsource work to low-wage contractors, and to transfer workers away from their families for months at a time.

Isaac Collazo, a technician and Communication Worker of America (CWA) member from Brooklyn, New York, who has worked for Verizon for 19 years said, "Through our hard work, Verizon is making record profits while our families are left with threats to our jobs and our customers aren't getting the service they need. Striking is a hardship for our families, but we need to remind Verizon executives that the people who build their profits are a critical reason for the company's success."

Verizon workers, represented by the CWA and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), have been working without a contract since August 1, 2015, while Verizon executives, who have brought home hundreds of millions of dollars in the last few years, have been insisting on: (continued on page 6)

**Offshoring Good Jobs** – Verizon has already contracted out work to more than 5,000 employees in the Philippines, Mexico, the Dominican Republic and other overseas locations. These offshore workers handle customer service calls originating in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeastern states. Verizon wants to increase the number of calls – and jobs – that are transferred overseas.

**Outsourcing Work to Low-Wage Contractors** – Verizon is pushing to dramatically expand its outsourcing of work to low-wage, non-union contractors. The company wants to sharply expand the amount of contracting out of outside line work, particularly vital work installing and maintaining telephone poles.

**Hanging Up on Wireless Workers** – Verizon is also refusing to negotiate a fair first contract for Verizon Wireless retail workers who formed a union in 2014. Verizon says Wireless retail workers make the company huge profits, but it's refusing to give them any improvements – even though they're some of the lowest paid people at Verizon. In addition, Verizon is failing to negotiate a fair contract for the 100 wireless technicians who maintain the network in downstate New York.

**Call-Center Closings** – Despite the huge demand for customer service, hundreds of Verizon workers are at risk of losing their jobs or being forced to commute as much as three hours or more each day because of

the company's plan to close and consolidate call centers. Working moms like Betsy Derr, a customer service representative in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, worry that their families and communities would be devastated by the move.

**Out of State Assignments** – Verizon executives want wireline technicians to work away from home as long as two months at a time, anywhere from Massachusetts to Virginia, without seeing their families. Working parents like Isaac Collazo, a cable splicer from New York, fear they will be forced to choose between caring for their kids and keeping their jobs.

As the workers have intensified their campaign to protect good jobs in America, public support for a fair contract has grown. Twenty United States Senators sent a letter to Verizon CEO Lowell McAdam calling on him to “act as a responsible corporate citizen and negotiate a fair contract with the employees who make your company's success possible.” Thanks to the CWA for information in this article.

## **SOLIDARITY FOREVER!**

When jobs leave America, it hurts retired workers. Loss of jobs means less money to fund social security and private pensions. When jobs are lost or when workers earn little pay, they purchase less. This means fewer dollars for taxes and pensions. As retired union members, we need to stand in solidarity with all our brothers and sisters in the labor movement – The Editors.

