

# Association of Ameritech /SBC Retirees <sup>SM</sup>, Inc

*Proudly working on behalf of retirees of the AT&T Midwest Region, SBC Midwest Region, Ameritech, and predecessor/successor Bell Companies of the New AT&T, located throughout the United States*



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## **Third Quarter Newsletter September, 2008**

### **FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK, SEPTEMBER, 2008**

My fellow retirees,

We have just seen what General Motors (GM) has announced to all of their management retirees age 65 and over. These retirees, as of January 1, 2009 will no longer have medical, prescription, dental, vision, hearing aid and extended health care. Instead GM has stated that they will send \$300.00 per month for each of the affected retirees. We all know that \$300.00 does not go very far for health care these days. We all must do all that we can to support these retirees' struggle and to work so that this does not happen to us. Do not kid yourselves, AT&T, and all large corporations would like nothing more than to dramatically reduce retiree healthcare expense. The December, 2007 EEOC ruling that allows companies to eliminate healthcare for retirees over 65 on Medicare makes a very unpleasant option a viable alternative. Medicare is good, but there are big holes in its coverage. Medicare D for prescriptions is good for seniors with no prescription coverage but AT&T's coverage through CVS Caremark is far superior to Medicare D. Please take the time to let your congressman and senators know how you feel about this EEOC ruling and that you expect them to sponsor legislation to trump this unfair treatment of seniors. You can go to [www.nrln.org](http://www.nrln.org) and click on Take Action. You provide your nine digit zip code and the preformed letter is addressed to your congressman and senators. Just customize the letter and send it right from there.



We are still working with AT&T HR on various benefit issues. For some unknown reason, retirees often are not heard or believed until AASBCR<sup>SM</sup> gets AT&T HR involved. AT&T has corrected many problems after AASBCR<sup>SM</sup> worked the issue with their HR people. Be sure that you are getting what you worked for. If the answers that you get sound incorrect or unfair, keep names and dates, request a supervisor, then, if it still doesn't seem right to you, ask AASBCR<sup>SM</sup> to get involved.

#### **AASBCR<sup>SM</sup> State Representatives**

<b>Florida</b>	<b>Pat Reichard</b>	<b>Ohio</b>	<b>Tom Burkhardt</b>
<b>Illinois</b>	<b>Phil Schelinski</b>	<b>Ohio</b>	<b>Kathy Vihtelic</b>
<b>Michigan</b>	<b>Ron Rhodes</b>	<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>Bob Ledvina</b>
		<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>Corey Parolina</b>

**Office / Fax Number (312) 962-2770**

## Third Quarter Newsletter September, 2008

On another note, our fellow retiree groups of the AT&T Retiree Coalition have been asked by some of their retiree members about starting a letter writing campaign to AT&T CEO Randall Stephenson and the AT&T board of directors requesting an across the board pension increase. Many of you have not had a pension increase in many years. If you wish to make your opinion about pension increases known, mail your letters to:

Randall Stephenson  
CEO  
208 S. Akard St.  
Suite 3700  
Dallas, TX 75205

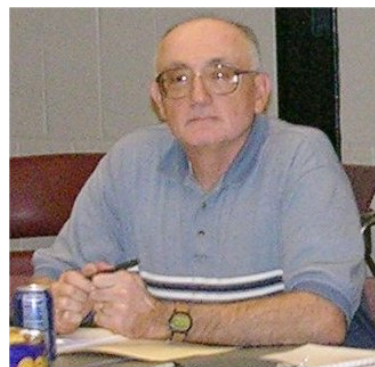
Ann Meuleman  
Senior VP and Secretary  
175 E. Houston Street  
Room 1140  
San Antonio, TX 78205

AASBCR<sub>SM</sub> is in need of volunteer time and effort. There are many projects that AASBCR<sub>SM</sub> is being stretched to handle. The AASBCR<sub>SM</sub> board volunteers, as well as the AASBCR<sub>SM</sub> state representatives, are unselfishly contributing their time and talents to benefit all AASBCR<sub>SM</sub> members but more help is required to do well, all that needs to be done. Additional assistance with communications and resolution of benefit issues is at the top of the list. Additional volunteers to serve as state representatives are needed. I have attended several Life Member Pioneer functions across northeastern Ohio. Many of our fellow retirees do not know of AASBCR<sub>SM</sub> and all that we do. As soon as they become aware of what AASBCR<sub>SM</sub> does, they are eager to join us. We need to tell the AASBCR<sub>SM</sub> story to all retirees. Please consider joining our team and assisting your fellow retirees. It is a very rewarding task.

*Carole Lovell*

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### From the Desk of Ray Sternot, VP-Legislation



Given that this is an election year, there hasn't been any significant retiree legislation created in Congress. Over the last 3 months there has been a lot of posturing and reelection campaigning by both sides of the aisle. Only critical laws (e.g. war funding, etc.) are being considered while most important efforts will wait until the new administration is sworn in. And, now Congress is attempting to develop a critical plan to address the near meltdown of our financial system.

There have been several developments/successes in the legislative arena since our last newsletter. One had to do with the NRLN grassroots effort to stop a

## **Third Quarter Newsletter September, 2008**

congressional finance committee from allowing capped and inactive private company pension funds to be privatized (taken over) by financial companies under the guise that it would be beneficial to the pension plan and the retirees covered by the plan. (That was just before the Wall Street meltdown). The NRLN was successful in stopping that legislative change for the moment with our help and that of the members who are part of the CapWiz system. NRLN and AASBCR<sub>sm</sub> members contacted members of the Finance Committee and suddenly that provision was dropped! Another and more recent success occurred on Thursday, September 25, 2008, when Bill Kaderiet, the NRLN President, had the opportunity to address the full House Education and Labor committee in a hearing titled, "How to Safeguard Retiree Health Benefits. Bill provided comments on some of the issues faced by retirees and the potential impact of the recent EEOC ruling has on retirees over 65. That ruling allows companies to push their retirees totally onto Medicare and eliminate their promised healthcare benefits. You can view Bill's full testimony on the NRLN site at: [www.nrln.org](http://www.nrln.org) as well as an accompanying white paper that was presented to the committee.

While we've made some headway and have had some success in bringing to light retiree pension and healthcare issues on Capital Hill, it is and continues to be a constant struggle requiring constant vigilance. If you've seen or played the carnival/arcade game where you hit one gopher and score some points, then two more gophers pop up, you will understand why I say this. As I began writing this article for the newsletter, we were informed that literally just after the September 25<sup>th</sup> meeting on healthcare, one of the committee members from NJ actually proposed putting capped pensions back on the table for financial firms to "take care of". Unbelievable, but given the lobbying efforts of financial firms, not unexpected. Perhaps the Congressman in question thought it would help address the Wall Street Financial issue by sinking pension funds into the market mix. The point is that we cannot take our eye off members of congress just as we cannot take our eyes off the new AT&T. We must "trust but verify" that they have retiree's best interests in mind. It is for just this type of oversight as to why the Association of Ameritech/SBC Retirees (AASBCR<sub>sm</sub>) and the NRLN exist.

In closing, I encourage all of you to contact your legislators when a pension or healthcare bill comes up for a vote/discussion. That will happen once again and soon because our message of needed Healthcare and Pension reform is being heard. We will make you aware, via CapWiz, when your action is required. I also encourage you to let AASBCR<sub>sm</sub> know of any issues you are having with AT&T and its vendors such as Hewitt; United Healthcare; or Caremark that you are having difficulty handling on your own. Only through good communication and collective

**Third Quarter Newsletter  
September, 2008**

action can we address issues that may affect us all. And, only through monitoring the legislative process in Congress can we protect our benefits from eroding further.

*Ray Sternot*

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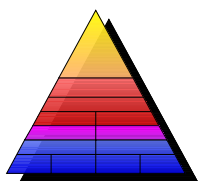
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## Third Quarter Newsletter September, 2008

### ON THE PIONEER SCENE:



The Illinois Pioneers Life Member Council held its second annual Town Hall meeting - at the Oak Brook Drury Lane banquet facility. Phil Schelinski, Joel Brown, and Art Comings again represented the AASBCR<sub>sm</sub> with a table display and by talking with retirees about the organization.

Almost 500 Retirees showed up (484 before the final count) in an elegant ballroom setting, with tables in the center of the room and "exhibitors" around the edges. We didn't get to see many other exhibitors' wares - we were too busy talking with fellow retirees about AASBCR<sub>sm</sub> and why they should be members. AT&T was there showing off U-Verse and other innovations, as were Travel Organizations, Banks, Brokerage Houses, etc. - all geared to Senior needs and wants.



Pioneer Life Member  
President Jackie  
Steffgen at the podium

Working in cooperation with the Pioneers, we forwarded our Pioneer invitation to our Northwestern Illinois members to this Town Hall Luncheon. More than a few of our members introduced themselves to us. We passed out well over 100 1-page flyers extolling some of our latest victories. We also passed out over 50 membership applications and signed up one new member (check and all!) on the spot.

The principal speaker was AT&T Executive Vice President Cathy Coughlin, who discussed the direction and future of AT&T. She was excited, even passionate, about her message for the future. But much of her audience was much more interested in knowing about pension increases, what is happening with healthcare, and, if they had a computer, when they will get high speed internet. This was a great event. Kudos to Jackie and all the workers who made this event possible. We are looking forward to next year.

# Third Quarter Newsletter September, 2008



A good meal with old friends in an elegant setting. A great way to spend the day.



Phil, Joel, Art - "Would you buy a used car from these guys?" Phil selling the AASBCRsm. Note Joel's display board!

## **FROM THE Editor's Desk:**

## Third Quarter Newsletter September, 2008

That old Chinese curse seems to have come to fruition: We certainly are living in "interesting times"! The Middle East Wars. Iran and North Korea threatening to join the Nuclear Powers. The Stock Market tanking and taking much of the economy with it. And the Presidential campaigns heating up as we approach the finish line of a process that has turned from a middle-distance race to a Marathon!



Which brings me to the subject of this editorial: The Elections. I have my opinions and you probably have yours.

That's what it is all about. There are things I admire about both candidates and things that worry me. My duty, as I see it, is to study the issues and the expressed positions of both candidates so I can make an informed "intelligent" decision. While the Presidential race is making most of the noise, there are 435 Representatives and 34 Senators to elect. These 469 winners-to-be will collectively have more to say in the conduct of the Federal Government for the next 2 years than the winner of the Presidential race. And many State, County, and Local races are also being run. (It ain't easy being an informed, responsible citizen!)

A short while ago I received an e-mail about the struggles, including jail and mistreatment-to-torture, of 1914 Suffragettes while picketing the White House to win the vote for women. I forwarded this to several people, including my cousin's husband. Half English and Half Welsh, he came to Florida for an education, married my cousin, and chose to become a US citizen because he believes in this country. Based on the article I sent him, he wrote the following for his column in the weekly Havana (Florida) Herald:

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### ***WE OUGHT TO BE ASHAMED OF THE LAST ELECTION***

*Our most recent election was a disgrace. When all was said and done, very few of us turned out to cast a ballot. In my home precinct, the Coonbottom Firehouse, I was #70 when I cast my ballot at noon.*

*The results show the effects of small turnouts; razor-thin margins that don't tell us anything about the wishes of the people of this county. Forgive incoming commissioners Taylor and Morgan if they are not quite sure of what it is you wanted. Wins of 30+ and 70+ are hardly overwhelming endorsements, more like a disinterested shrug, the electoral equivalent of the current "whatever." For the*

### Third Quarter Newsletter September, 2008

*defeated Commissioners Dixon and Price, it's hardly a repudiation of their positions either; more an electoral fluke.*

*Americans are a lazy lot when it comes to democracy. Oh, Americans will blather on about freedom, wrap themselves up in red-white & blue, pledge allegiance to the flag, yap about their rights,(they've never read the Constitution) but they're too darned lazy to vote. They are too disinterested to learn about the issues that confront their community, state or nation. In short, we can't be bothered. We let somebody else do it. Then the most exasperating aspect of all this; then these same lazy clods whine about the government, whimper about taxes, complain about the candidates and dismiss them all as crooks. As a result we get exactly the government we deserve.*

*A scant ninety years ago a group of women were arrested in front of the White House for the crime of obstructing sidewalk traffic. Of course they were carrying signs at the time, demanding the vote for women. For the heinous crime of obstructing the sidewalk, forty prison guards beat and tortured these women in the Occoquan Workhouse in northern Virginia. One woman, Lucy Burns was chained to her cell bars and left hanging for the night. Dora Lewis was slammed against an iron bedstead and knocked unconscious. Her cellmate Alice Cosu suffered a hear attack. Alice Paul was force fed through a funnel shoved down her throat. Because they wanted to vote.*

*I was already in the news business when the case now called "Mississippi Burning" happened. Goodman, Cheney and Schwerner gave their lives so that people could vote. And they are just three of many. Our history is full of brave men and women who dared exercise their ballot and were brutally treated for wishing to do so.*

*And yet we stay home. We are too busy. We can't be bothered to pay attention to the issues.*

*This year there is no excuse. We have two incredible men running as Democrats, an orator of surpassing power and inspiration, a man of mixed parentage who rose to his position in a very short time. Demonstrably brilliant, he's the age of my eldest son. His running mate a boot-strap success story, a working guy who made it to the US Senate at age 29. On the GOP side a war hero who suffered for principle—he could have gone home—he didn't, a political non-conformist who flirted seriously with changing parties and his running-mate, a one time beauty-queen, sportscaster, turned governor whose family includes an unmarried, pregnant daughter and whose husband is a card-carrying union*

## Third Quarter Newsletter September, 2008

*man. How much more human can you get? How much more like us as we are, or us as we'd like to be? If there's not a life story there to inspire you, to engage you, to get you interested and wanting to be a part of it all, I would suggest you move. Not far, just a few miles south. In Cuba you don't have to think, that's done for you. You don't have to vote, that's done for you. You don't have to care, because what you think doesn't matter.*

*Get involved—it's the American thing to do.*

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### **QUARTERLY CORRESPONDENCE:**

During the past quarter we have sent the following correspondence via e-mail.

*(E-mail recipients please click on the following links to the AASBCR<sup>SM</sup> web site.)*

- [AASBCR<sup>SM</sup> BLUE BULLETIN VOL.3 NO.6 7/26/08 - POSTED 7/27/08](#)  
Your AT&T Health Care Benefits
- [AASBCR<sup>SM</sup> BLUE BULLETIN VOL.3 NO.5 - POSTED 7/25/08](#)  
The Good and Bad News
- [AASBCR<sup>SM</sup> BLUE BULLETIN VOL.3 NO.4 - 7/9/08 POSTED 7/10/08](#)  
Caremark Escalation; Get Benefit Assistance
- [9/12/08 NEWS REGISTER - POSTED 9/13/08 - AASBCR Intervened So UHC Paid Member's Health Expenses](#)
- [8/9/08 NEWS REGISTER - POSTED 8/13/08 - Progress of the Out-of-Area Telephone Concession Lawsuit](#)
- [7/3/09 NEWS REGISTER - POSTED 7/3/08 - Update on the Linda Call vs AT&T Pension Benefit Plan, previously the Ameritech Management Pension Plan lawsuit.](#)

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### **COMMENTS AS MEMBERS RENEW THEIR DUES:**

Thank You so much for you and all of the staff members' efforts and hard work on behalf of us former Bell System employees! There is no doubt in my mind if it wasn't for the AASBCR we would be in dire straits today.

-Michael K.

Thank you all for the work you are doing on our behalf. We appreciate the information we receive and the contact with other groups working for similar causes.

-Bonnie and Darrell D