

IBEW / AT&T 2012 Contract Negotiations

May 15, 2012

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Chairman Opening Statement

As we open bargaining today with AT&T, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers understands that both the union and the company must resolve many difficult issues before our current agreement expires at 11:59 PM on Saturday, June 23, 2012. The new contract, once ratified, must provide wages, working conditions, and a benefits package that rewards our members and their families.

Out of these negotiations, IBEW members expect their key issues to be met, including stronger job security language than they have today. Our members look forward to new work opportunities brought on by AT&T's investment in new technology, and we will be seeking an equal investment in security and training.

Hard working IBEW women and men, your employees, are recognized as the finest workers in the entire communications industry. They are committed to keep AT&T at the top of this industry. As highly skilled workers, they will continue to lead the industry as they have for decades. These seven thousand plus IBEW members, located in New England, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, California, Illinois, Indiana and the Northwest all expect to be treated with respect and dignity throughout these negotiations.

These employees are a diverse and loyal group of workers. Some are original AT&T employees who remained working for the company after it was forced to divest of its regional Bell Telephone units due to federal anti-trust enforcement in 1984.

Our membership includes the workers that install and maintain components, oversee the backbone and foundational AT&T network, delivering some of the newest technologies AT&T offers today. This makes up the IBEW System Council T-3 which consists of inside and outside technical workers, clerical, marketing sales and more.

The goal for our bargaining team and yours should be to reach agreement on a new collective bargaining agreement for the thousands of IBEW members in our union, on time, an agreement that rewards hard work and provides good jobs for our members and is also fair for AT&T. Although it will be a challenge, I am confident because the IBEW has a long history with AT&T, and though we've faced tough years together we look forward to even more decades of growth, prosperity, and shared vision. IBEW International President Edwin D. Hill said during the last round of negotiations that "Our members are a big part of the company's success, and we expect that their value will be recognized and rewarded as a result of these talks." The same applies today.

We realize the difficulty of hard economic times, and we are keenly aware that many companies today, small and large, will cite poor economic conditions as a reason to justify their demands for give-backs, concessions, and take a ways. Hear me as I say these will surely be difficult negotiations should those kinds of arguments arise! AT&T is a highly successful and profitable company. Even in these times, AT&T is structured and positioned well to succeed. We all know that. These are the facts AT&T's corporate executives share at each and every investor briefing, write into every transcript, answer in every question, and these are the facts AT&T cites in their corporate financial filings, website presentations, and media releases.

AT&T is not a bankrupt airline or automobile company of the past decade. AT&T is not budget-strapped like state and local governments. AT&T is a corporation that has plenty of money. It has gained billions and billions of dollars in profits just the last few years.

The IBEW is disappointed the company has proposed major labor concessions in talks with the Communication Workers of America. We are aware some company proposals could take thousands of dollars out of workers' pockets. We don't wear blinders. To help companies survive and to keep members working, when needed, the IBEW and other blue collar unions have occasionally accepted concessions without a fight.

However, there will be no harmony in the work places of AT&T should the company make those kinds of unreasonable demands, demands that would potentially wipe out fifty years of gains from those who fought those fights before use. This is not the future we see or want. This is not the AT&T America sees or wants.

The IBEW has always partnered with AT&T to work through these union management relation phases. We are willing to hear your concerns, and we will work with AT&T as needed. But, we must find solutions that work for both sides. I am confident that together we can stop the downward pressures placed on our members' living standards since the recession began nearly four years ago.

This contract is an opportunity to reach yet another important milestone in the history of AT&T and the IBEW because it will determine in what direction our future lies. We believe AT&T should be a leader in helping to turn the economy around and provide good paying jobs with improvements in health care, job security, and secure retirement. We are ready to work through the difficulties of the times. We are also prepared to help build solutions that will enable the company and its employees to move forward together.

These goals are contingent on the joint involvement of the parties and the demonstrated good faith of the company and the IBEW. We look forward to these efforts, in the spirit of mutual gains, to keep the company forerunners in the industry, and our members among the best trained and best compensated workers in our industry. At this time, the security of our workers is foremost in our minds. We maintain a healthy skepticism to that end.