

LOCAL 2-21

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21 NEWS

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WWW.USW2-21.COM

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21 News is a periodic publication of USW (United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial and Service Workers International Union) Local 2-21, 1201 Sheridan Road, Escanaba, Michigan 49829. The views and opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily that of the International Union, the Local 2-21 membership, or the officers of these bodies. The editor reserves the right to refuse any article that is detrimental to the Local Union or the USW. Article accuracy and content is the responsibility of the author.

Important Information & Events

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
(www.guidanceresources.com)
1-800-428-4650

Retiree "Get Together"

First Wed. of each Month 10 am at the Union Hall

Union Meeting: June 10th, 7pm - Dinner at 6pm

Next Generation Meeting: June 10th, 5pm at the Union Hall

Steward's Meeting: June 24th-3:00pm at the Union Hall

Welfare Club Meeting: Monday, June 1st 7:00pm at the Mead Rod and Gun Club

Total Benefit Solutions will be at the Union hall Wednesday, June 10th from 10:00am to 4:00pm for Union Benefit questions and to help "soon to be retirees" investigate the insurance market place and answer questions about the union insurance. Call 1-877-265-2212 to schedule an appointment.

Strike for Hunger: June 5-7, Elmer's County Market

Mill/Union Picnic: Save the date. The mill picnic will be held Saturday, June 20th at the UP State Fairgrounds. Camping available. Picnic Noon to 7:00 PM. See enclosed flyer.

Committee Members

	Home	Work	Cell
President Steve Benoit	233-7126	233-2366	399-4195
1st Vice Chuck Way.....		233-2705	280-1698
2nd Vice Joe Curran		233-2511	420-3918
3rd Vice Jeff Skorupski.....		233-2556	399-5472
Insurance Gerald Kell.....		233-3062	869-7943
Comp Ross Strand.....		233-2549	280-1494
Secretary Brandon Stromberg.....		233-2714	284-1604
Treasurer Guy Trudell.....		233-2922	399-9143

Next Gen/Rapid Response..	Brandon Stromberg....	233-2714	284-1604
Rapid Response.....	Gerald Kell.....	233-3062	869-7943
Hall Rentals	Steve Kennedy		789-1933



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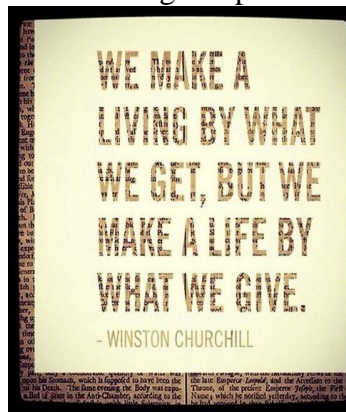


<http://pacelocal21.proboards.com/>

Giving

Steve Benoit, *President* †

Where should I start? Let's highlight the good: our Local continues to be generous to the community by giving. This past year's Christmas Party generated a ton of gifts, food, toiletries, and money to help those in need during the holiday season. We are now once again sponsoring the Strike for Hunger



event to collect can goods, toiletries, monetary donations, etc. for those in need in the surrounding communities. These initiatives demonstrate our support for the community as gratitude for their continual support.

Thank you to everyone

for stepping up this weekend and special thanks to our very own Brandon Stromberg, for being at the forefront of the organizing of this wonderful event.

KEA (Key Element Assessment)

Steve Benoit, *President* †

During the Week of June 8th there will be a group of people spanning throughout the mill to do an audit on safety called the Key Element Assessment (KEA). The KEA is an assessment of the programs, systems and behaviors keeping us safe. This audit will be gauging how effective the key elements of safety are working for us here at the Escanaba Mill. The group will be out in the mill and in control rooms speaking to employees, asking questions about things like training/education, policies/procedures/record keeping and maintenance/reliability. These questions will be directed at our members and we ask that you answer

these questions honestly so that the people doing the audit can get a good idea of what it is like here in Escanaba. I encourage you to answer their questions without concern; we have been guaranteed that there will be no discipline involved in answering honestly (guaranteed only by word of

If I went to work in a factory the first thing I'd do is join a union.



Franklin Roosevelt

mouth not in writing, the company has chosen not to put this in writing, so use your

own discretion with your answers). I believe that involvement in this assessment can only show what the situation is like here at this mill if we share the things that we experience everyday with the folks taking the survey. Thank you for your participation.

Kaizen

Steve Benoit, *President †*

Mill management has asked the union to take part in Kaizen events. We fully understand that some of our members have already stepped up and it's great to see that willingness to take part. I would just like to ask everyone to be sure that you are aware of what these events entail and what you may be working toward. The committee is still researching some of the finer details of Kaizen events and management's intentions when utilizing the information collected (including the information the membership provides).



The committee has not yet committed to a stance on this topic, but we will have more information this week at the union meeting Wednesday night. As always, I encourage all interested parties to attend.

Third Steps

Steve Benoit, *President †*

On April 20th, the union committee met with management in regards to 3rd step grievances. All of the grievances were denied by the company. They were unwilling to work with us on any one of them. Since then, some of the grievances were reverted back to first step and withdrawn while others will possibly move on to the next step.

Please continue to file grievances when contract violations occur. Locate a steward and utilize them to defend our contract language to send the message that we will not allow our contract, for which we fervently fought, to be violated. We shall not be broken so long as we stand strong.

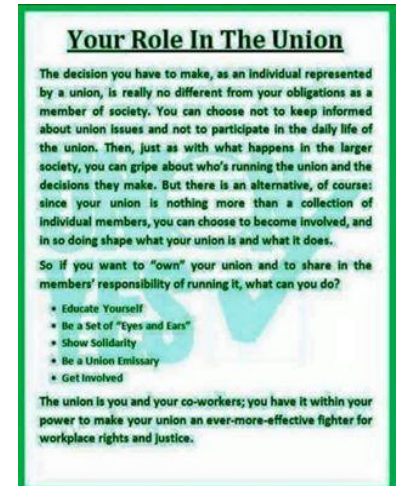
Solidarity

Steve Benoit, *President †*

Some concerned members recently brought to my attention the distribution of work load in a production area to be placed within another department. I want to encourage all of our members to be fully aware of

what they are actually inciting when they start giving your work away. First of all, you may be encouraging the company to eliminate a job in your area (if they give enough work away). Secondly, you may be creating animosity

among union brothers and sisters. Finally, it could be unintentionally creating an unsafe working environment for fellow employees due to a lack of understanding about the job. If you feel you have a work overload speak with a union steward in the area about the proper avenues that may be taken and be sure to take the time to do your job safely. We have a challenge ahead of us and we need to come together and remain united. Solidarity can take us through anything.



Get Involved

Brandon Stromberg, *Secretary/Next Gen/Rapid Response*

As I write this article, the Strike for Hunger is less than a week away. I'm confident it will be a success because every one of our members is committed to doing great things. When we support our community, they will support us.

We should take pride in the ambitious nature our members show for this event. Just to demonstrate this dedication I want to point out some of the individual efforts of several volunteers. One of our retired members wants to volunteer from 12am-3am, and it's not going to be easy, but she could sleep in. Another one of our members is going to

be very busy with one of the many shutdowns throughout the mill, but is volunteering from 3am-5am, before his dayshift starts. Why? He's doing it



because he cares. A new committee member is going on vacation at the end of our event, but is making time for him and his wife to offer a couple hours of help because they feel it's worth it. Another one of our members stepped up for a 3am-9am shift, because she just wants

to help out. A former committee member is volunteering his time because it just feels right. I applaud all of our members, active and retired, who are able to give their precious time to this event.

As I reflect on the past involvement with this event, I realize we are truly blessed to have such an amazing group of people at our mill and in our community. THANK YOU!

We have many new challenges ahead of us, but I'm confident we can get through them together. Our union committee is strong, passionate, and dedicated. Don't take my word for it; educate yourself, be a set of eyes and ears, show solidarity, be a union emissary, and by all means GET INVOLVED!!!

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E1 Shutdown

Joe Curran, *First Vice President*

Obviously you should all be aware of the shutdown in E1 due to low pulp on hand and short orders. This outage is going well with work being done to the frame, dryer cans, and forming board among other things. I realize that there are some rumors floating around and all I can say is there is a lot of work being done to fix the quality of paper coming off of E-1 thus far during the outage. Crews are doing a great job with the lockouts and working safely.

Kraft Mill Outage Signup

Joe Curran, *First Vice President*

An agreement was reached with the company for the Kraft Mill shutdown to allow employees with prior Kraft Mill department seniority to sign-up and work parts of the outage based on seniority and qualifications. The entire department was given the option to work maximum amount of hours via the contract before this was exhausted and we felt this was the best way to go about it for us to keep the work in house and still have safety observers looking out for everyone involved in the outage. I am also working on getting the yard involved in bark hauling on the backend of this agreement but the details are still being worked out.

Special Assignment Guidelines

Joe Curran, *First Vice President*

Article language states: ***Employees who are on special assignment shall not be utilized to perform bargaining unit work (beyond the nature of the work involved in the special assignment) unless mutually agreed to by the union and the company.***

This language is to supersede the transfer and flexibility language in the contract and protect the integrity of the special assignments by preventing utilization of the people on these jobs for vacancies in the mill. We do have a standing agreement with the company however, that these people can work vacancies at step 7 as long as the hours **DO NOT** interfere with their normally scheduled shift. In conjunction with the Kraft Mill outage agreement we also agreed to allow a special assignment person to work extra help on the outage. This however will not be a standing agreement and is considered a one-time deal as it stands now.

Be Careful

Ross Strand, *Workers Comp Advocate*

First, I want to thank everyone for the kind words and warm welcome to my new role as Workers' Comp Advocate. Now, I want to let everyone know to BE careful out there so you don't discover how little they don't care about you the hard way. Workman's Comp seems to be a difficult struggle with most cases. If you get hurt, take notes on everything, you would not believe some of the cases they're denying. So if you get hurt, take notes, and call me. Thanks again.

Excise Tax?

Gerald Kell, *Insurance Advocate/Rapid Response*

The Affordable Care Act...wait, Obamacare, or do I mean that weird healthcare system thingy that Canada has? Regardless of what you know or how you feel about the ACA (or whatever you choose to call it), you should know that it is very extensive and difficult to follow but with most directives aimed at mitigating healthcare costs while simultaneously expanding coverage to millions of Americans; it will and does likely affect many people in your life.



This article will not be an opinion piece that tries to convince you of its merits or its downfalls, let's just agree it has its share of both. Nevertheless, there is one area of the legislation that has yet to take effect and has lurked in the shadows of public spotlight due to the

heated battle over the individual and employer mandates: the Excise Tax. No, not an exercise tax, the IRS will not be charging you per dumbbell or for any distance run over 5K, they'll be taxing what they've deemed excessive healthcare coverage. I don't claim to be clairvoyant, but I can assure you that the term Excise Tax will (and should!) become a more common term in our vernacular by the 2017 collective bargaining process.

The Excise Tax is an unprecedented 40% tax on employer sponsored health care plans that exceed \$10,200 for individuals and \$27,500 for families. It will take effect in 2018 if our legislators do not act. Plans that meet or exceed these costs are sometimes referred to as Cadillac Plans, but I implore you to eliminate this from your vocabulary as it is a misnomer used to imply that individuals with good healthcare plans utilize them recklessly and abuse them. The Excise Tax was agreed upon to generate revenue to fund and potentially lower healthcare costs. However, since World War II brought about wage controls, businesses had been allowed to offer tax free healthcare benefits as a way to compensate employees outside of



wages; this incentive led to benefit packages becoming near commonplace throughout US industry. The Excise Tax will diminish this incentive.

You're probably aware that our contract is negotiated every few years and addresses a broad expanse of prospective issues including, but not limited to wages and healthcare coverage. Healthcare plans are often difficult to assess and predicting their costs is a daunting task to say the least. Regardless, it is paramount to our well-being that we keep healthcare at the forefront because of the implications it has on so many of our members. To allow taxing of a supposedly excessive healthcare plan undermines decades of negotiations that led to better plans often in lieu of higher wages.

There are many questions you may be asking yourself right now in regards to your specific plan. Quite frankly, I cannot answer them all because some changes are still being worked on. However, there are some common questions that can be answered—at least by the measures of the tax as it currently stands.

Who pays the Excise Tax?

Technically, the employer pays the 40% of what is considered excess. So, if the yearly cost of an individual is \$11,500, they will pay 40% on the \$1,300 that is above the \$10,200 threshold. However, as we know the employer is not just going to eat this cost and it will be a significant topic at negotiations.

How is the cost determined?

Total value of a plan is determined by adding the employer and employee premium contributions, any funds set aside for a Health Savings Account, Flex Spending Account, or Health Reimbursement Account, and potentially any supplemental coverage.

Will the Excise Tax threshold change each year?

The law is currently written to adjust the threshold with inflation; however, they're using the inflation rate of the overall consumer market as opposed to the healthcare market which is typically much higher.

What can I do to stop the Excise Tax?

Contact your local and national representatives to let them know that the taxing of healthcare benefits cannot be allowed.

There is a wealth of information on this topic if you seek it out. I could continue this article for several more pages and have unavoidably had to leave out many of the details due to the constraints of a newsletter. My intention is to hopefully prompt you the reader, the union member, the healthcare beneficiary to seek further knowledge on this topic. If anyone would like follow-up information or have specific questions about the Excise Tax, I'll do my best to answer them.

We Fight for All Labor

Gerald Kell, *Insurance Advocate/Rapid Response*

It is said that our understanding is correlative to our perception. If so true, it's easy to see why we have so many misunderstandings between individuals—perception is a subjective viewpoint. I find this apropos in the ongoing rhetoric over the significance of unions and their viability in our future.

While we should be open to many interpretations and opinions when it comes to common discourse, I noticed that there is a repeating narrative that we must contest relentlessly. The perception I'm referring to is that unions are somehow detrimental to the prosperity of workers regardless of the immense evidence suggesting otherwise. I often share quips and anecdotal stories to negate these claims that seem to be uttered ad nauseam on certain news programs, social media, and even old timey normal conversation between actual people. I recently found another story to add to my file of firepower and felt compelled to share it with the membership.

At a USW conference in April, Ken Bower and I befriended a firefighter from Alabama who was in Washington to lobby for support of his local emergency agencies. It's worth noting that



Alabama has been a right to work (for less) state since the 1950s along with many other Southern states. His quest for support from legislators piqued my interest and led

to a discussion about compensation in our respective fields. The firefighter who we'll call "Shrek"—because it was his nickname, not because I found similarities with a certain swamp-dwelling animated ogre—was about the same age as myself (33) and had a wife and child at home. He was well spoken and demonstrated a deep passion for his job which he'd been doing for over 10 years. Although typically I consider my wages and benefits taboo for general conversation, it seemed natural to discuss them with him considering we were all there to hopefully protect them through legislative action.


After an exchange and comparisons between wages, insurance, and retirement packages we each shared a similar disgust. It was clear that decades of neglect to worker's rights had rendered his occupation to a wholly undercompensated state.

Remember, this gentleman not only risks his life to save burning homes and businesses, but much of his job involves Search & Rescues in a grueling climate over land and water. I expressed our concern and offered up the question, "Are you guys union?" My question was pretty much rhetorical as I was pretty sure what the answer would be, but what I wasn't expecting was the reaction associated with the headshake. Shrek not only said they were not, but he actually found the idea of being union as something derogatory. It was clear his intentions weren't to insult us, but it was simply the perception he was raised to believe; indoctrinated in an environment that saw little to no value in worker's rights. Often at this point is when too many discussions become heated and then fail to produce anything remotely constructive. Fortunately, it did not go in that direction. Shrek shared his recent problems with his insurance and its lack of coverage for his wife and young child (although they were technically on his policy). In 2014 he had to pay over \$9,000 out of pocket without having had any outrageous health issues. Now, that might have been egregious enough to initiate a poignant response, but when you factor in the fact that after over a decade of dedicated service, he had only just recently reached a \$30,000 salary, that perception becomes all too heartbreaking.

Shrek and I exchanged contact information and I reached out to him to get permission to share the above information and he was pleased to allow it. I was thankful to see that after a few more discussions and a prosperous back and forth, he began to see the value that an organized workforce could bring and I further saw what the lack of one can do—a change in perception, if you will.

Thinking about your retirement plans?
Or rethinking your current plan?

Let's talk.



Les Cseter, CTFA
SVP—Trust Manager

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