



CWA confident it will thrive, despite AT&T/BellSouth merger

By Pat Ray
Shop Steward

As if Cingular Bothell employees had not scratched their heads enough already following the AT&T Wireless-Cingular merger in 2005, the long talked about AT&T-BellSouth merger, which included AT&T's acquisition of Atlanta-based Cingular, was finally approved by the Federal Communications Commission on December 29, 2006.

The FCC approved the merger by a 4-0 vote (Republican Robert McDowell recused himself from the vote because of a possible conflict of interest) after AT&T accepted several concessions, long lobbied for by the board's two Democratic commissioners Jonathon S. Adelstein and Michael Copps. The acquisition included conditions AT&T agreed to such as not discriminating against web companies in pricing or access to lines, offering a stand-alone internet service of \$19.99 for the first 30 months following the merger, agreeing to give up some wireless licenses so other companies who offer high-speed service can compete, freezing rates for "special access" lines for large businesses and moving 3,000 BellSouth jobs to the United States from overseas.

The Communications Workers of America has taken a decidedly positive stance on the merger, saying the union worked hard to protect existing jobs within the BellSouth area and create incentives for worker and consumer-friendly provisions to be included in the terms of the acquisition. According to the CWA's District 7

Bill offers incentives for businesses to create thousands of new jobs

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The CWA is supporting a bill in the Washington State legislature that would offer tax credits to businesses that create call center jobs in Washington assuming the company remains neutral on unions, offers health care benefits to all employees and pays a wage at least 120 percent above the state minimum wage.

House Bill 2155 would create a \$1,000 tax credit per year for each employment position created assuming that "qualified employees" have graduated from an institution of higher education somewhere in Washington and the company meets the other conditions. It was presented in front of the House Finance Committee on February 27.

"I have watched a relationship between management and the workforce at AT&T grow over the past year and feel this is a direct result of worker representation under the CWA," testified Les French, Cingular Collective Bargaining Unit Vice President. "Because of this improvement in working conditions and pay, I am in favor of this legislation and believe the standards at the new AT&T should be the norm throughout the call center and the entire call center industry in the State of Washington, not

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Vice President, Annie Hill, the current labor agreements will be honored by AT&T and remain in effect until the next bargaining cycle when things are sure to change in some ways.

"I think that (the merger) can give us more power," Hill said. "That's how we get our position – with a larger group you have more power. It gives us a bigger base. It clearly gives us a more well-defined footprint for Cingular especially."

However, the CWA's District 7 Vice President said there is concern that AT&T may try to union-bust at some point.

"I think there's always that concern," said Annie Hill, the CWA's District 7 Vice President. "For a lot of us who were around when the divestiture took place (the break up of the old AT&T), the union took an active position against the divestiture. Now it looks like it's slowly being put back together again. In the meantime, not only have a lot of our members been impacted, but a lot of customers were impacted."

"Where we're probably having the biggest visual problems right now is with Verizon. They have been notoriously anti-union with Verizon Wireless, which can impact Cingular because we want to make sure there are more members represented in the wireless industry."

AT&T says the merger will create a premier global communications company committed to driving convergence, continued innovation and competition in the communications and entertainment market.

"AT&T will be an engine for innovation, competition and growth for our customers at home and abroad," AT&T Chairman and CEO Edward E. Whitacre, Jr. said in a statement on the company's website. "In the Southeast, we will build on BellSouth's excellent record of serving customers and communities. And we are ready to lead the way in a new era of integrated wireless services nationwide."



WashTech President Marcus Courtney testifying in front of the House Finance Committee on Feb. 27 in Olympia about House Bill 2155.

Stewards' Corner:

"Give and it will come back to you!"

By Pat Ray
Shop Steward



Since I hired-in at Cingular in July 2006 in Business End User Care and became a Shop Steward in October, it has become clear to me that members' involvement with the CWA will determine our future here.

In BEUC where I work, there is a great deal of apathy and misinformation present regarding the union, its purpose and functions. For many folks, this is their first union job. They rely on past experience at non-union workplaces and know how authoritative and unquestionable a company's policies, compensation and business philosophy can be.

With a union employer though, things are different. Unions are democratic in the sense that employees have a voice to management to address their concerns regarding workplace rules and policies via the contract. The other side of the union as a democratic organization is that it works best when folks are involved in running the functions of the local by working as stewards, organizers, CATs, etc.

Others seem distrustful of the union, dissatisfied with our current bargained pay scale, which admittedly is not up to par with where it should be – not quite comparable with union jobs in other sectors.

The silver lining lies in knowing that it doesn't have to be that way.

We can negotiate a better contract by building our Cingular Action Team and having the infrastructure in place to lead our members in proactive worksite actions. By expanding the number of talented stewards we have, providing better coverage in BEUC and educating our co-workers as to the many benefits the union provides (i.e. great health benefits, a no-offshoring clause in the labor agreement and collective bargaining every four years for a stronger contract), we can increase awareness around the Bothell campus.

We can negotiate a better wage scale so that compensation is comparable with other wireless and telecommunications companies out there. We can successfully put the needed pressure on the company to fight for better wages and a better quality of living for our families, but we can't do it without increased participation.

So basically, it's up to you. What are you going to do to brighten our future?

If we're going to reach our goal of recruiting 20 new Stewards and 50 new CAT members this year, we have to step up to the plate and become leaders in our workplace.

Getting active in the union isn't as much about volunteering your time, but getting something back that is so much greater than what you put in. You will learn new skills, meet co-workers who share your values, develop promising opportunities and push for positive change together working as a team.

Beyond what one can gain personally from this experience, we all have a stake to claim in relying on each other to improve our conditions here, as the mantra of a chorus they sing at my neighbor's community church rings true: "Give and it will come back to you."

Your Union Representation

See these folks on your front lines at Cingular, now the New AT&T, as the first step to getting any questions answered in regards to your Union or if you need representation.

Want to do more for your peers and see your name on this list as well? Do not hesitate to contact any of the individuals below!

Shop Stewards are designated in bold, while CATs (Cingular Action Team) members are non-bolded.

Bothell 1

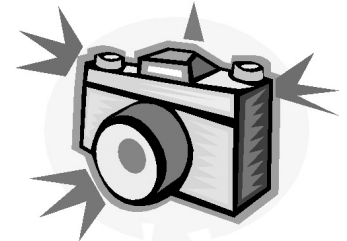
Jim Burdick (NBS)
Mitch McMurry (NBS)
Donna DePuy (NBS)
Kale Nostrand (NBS)
Gary McGahey (ETS)

Bothell 2

Rich Atherton (BEUC)
Les French (BEUC)
Kevin King (ETS)
Patrick Ray (BEUC)
Sharon Kent (BEUC)
Jake Larsen (BEUC)
Jim McHale (BEUC)
Doug Mount (BEUC)

Bothell 5

Scott Ellestad (ANS)
Mindi Hart (ANS)
Bill Montgomery (ANS)
Tony Patterson (ETS)
Ben Schlechty (ANS)
Jolene Thomas (NBS)
Nancy Wright (ANS)
David Hildebrand (ANS)
James Ho (ANS)



Freelance Photographer Needed

We've stepped up our written content, re-named our newsletter and found a talented designer to layout our product.

Now, we're looking for another member to help take our newsletter to the next level.

If you care about the future direction of your union, have photography experience and a few hours a month to go on assignment – contact Local President Marcus Courtney at (206)271-6272 or courtney@washtech.org.

Bill... from Side 1

the exception. This bill will not only help boost employment in an important area of the state's economy but also ensure that AT&T is competing on a level playing field."

Telecommunications companies like AT&T, Comcast and Qwest have taken a neutral stance on the bill. Comcast lobbyist Rhonda Weaver spoke at the hearing, saying the company employs over 3,000 people in the state of Washington and has taken a neutral stance on the bill, since it cannot fully reap the benefits the bill offers.

"As currently drafted, Comcast would not be able to participate in the tax credit program," Weaver said. "We've already made the investment to be here. The credit we'd receive for incrementing additional employees would not offset the cost of reporting necessary to receive the benefit. Having said all that, we look forward to working with the sponsor of this bill during the rest of this session and in the interim as well."

Local President Marcus Courtney also testified in favor of HB 2155 at the February 27 hearing.

Having been introduced in-committee, the bill will be brought back for further arguments and then sent to the Legislative Floor for debate and eventually a vote. HB 2155 is not expected to make it to the floor this session.