



Association of BellTel Retirees Inc.

The Official Newsletter for Union and Management Retirees and Employees of Bell Atlantic, GTE, Idearc/SuperMedia/DexMedia, NYNEX, MCI, Verizon and its Subsidiaries. Paid for by contributions from Verizon and Idearc/SuperMedia/DexMedia retirees.

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## They're Messing With Your (Retirement) Pay Check!

By John Kolimaga

Over the past 20 years, legislators on the state and federal levels have passed various consumer protection laws applicable to a myriad of financial issues, but none to retiree benefits. At the same time, corporations have been reducing and eliminating the benefits we earned over our working lifetimes.

What types of purchases have you “financed” in your lifetime? Car and houses quickly come to mind, and if you think about it a little longer the list may include a life insurance policy or perhaps a college education.

You made periodic payments ranging from a few years to decades and eventually satisfied the debt. You had some help during the last 20 years when state and federal governments made improvements to these contracts to include clearer terms that explained financing, interest, penalties, right to cancel, etc.

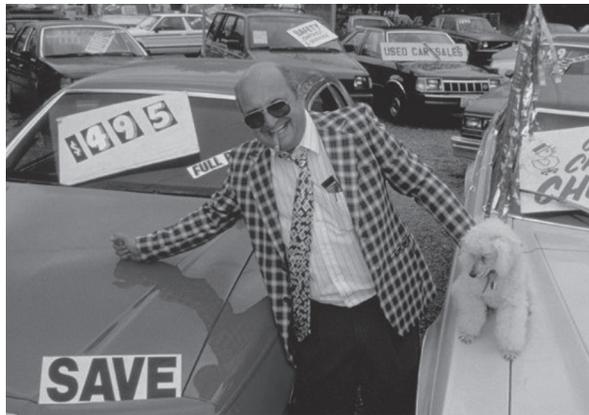
These regulations benefitted all of us and we likely now know better who we're paying, the amount, over what period of time, interest charges, etc. An important element is that neither party can randomly cancel or modify the terms while keeping the amount already paid.

Unfortunately too many employees financed a very valuable service over



their working years only to have the other party change or cancel the promised service close to when or even after the terms took effect. That service is retiree health care and pensions. Just because there was no amount shown on your pay stub or you didn't receive a yearly Social Security Administration type statement, doesn't mean it wasn't something you already paid for in full.

Employers often cited specific



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amounts put aside for that specific purpose, and it was included in the “loaded labor rate.”

The loaded labor rate was the total employee cost, which included current salary and benefits along with future pension and retiree health care. When corporations faced contract negotiations, wanted to raise prices, or were pursuing merger talks, quoting the loaded labor rate could be useful to their position.

If you were able to understand complicated financial reports, you may have

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## Resolving Serious Retiree Problems

By Jack Cohen

When retirees have significant problems and face difficult bureaucracy where can they turn for help? Our office staff has heard many of these problems. Sometimes resolution is just a matter of giving the proper direction.

There was a man named Joe who worked for a company called NYNEX, starting in 1970 until April of 1996. He decided that after 27 years he would retire with a “6 and 6” package. Still young enough to continue working, he eventually took a job in 2002 with XO Communications, where all went well until February of 2017, when XO Communications was absorbed into the Verizon family and Joe found himself once again, unintentionally, an active employee of Verizon.

Verizon immediately had “integration” meetings with XO employees advising them of their new options and benefits. Nothing was ever mentioned relative to what would happen if one of these people were a retiree from Verizon caught in the middle of this takeover.

So that Joe would not feel too nostalgic, he found himself in a typical Verizon Force Reduction and in early April found himself RIFF'd along with other personnel, all of whom were given a severance package and left the payroll.

To add insult to injury, during this period he received notification from United Healthcare that his coverage was terminated with Verizon as of April 1, 2017. When he called he was told that he was considered a “new hire” and therefore not eligible for UHC coverage as a retiree.

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## President's Message

By John "Jack" Brennan

Another year is coming to the end. 2017 was the Association of BellTel Retirees' 21<sup>st</sup> year in action.

When OUR - and I repeat OUR - retiree association was formed in 1996 by NYNEX retirees Bill Jones and Bob Rehm, as well as our other founders, little did any of them think that the need for ardent and steady advocacy to protect what was rightfully OURS and EARNED retirement compensation, would be needed so many years into the future.

We all need to offer a tip of the hat to those pioneers for their foresight and continuing strength and dedication to build this volunteer organization to the national impact player it has become.

To that I would be remiss if I did not mention the massive volunteerism by our Verizon retiree peers. Over the 21 years the board members of this organization have donated a collective 210,000 hours, or 8,750 complete days! That is just remarkable.

I think it is very safe to assume that members of your association's volunteer leadership over those many years did not endlessly dream about, during their lunch hours, spending retirement this way. It is sort of like when we were younger and had kids growing up, there were always certain people putting themselves out there to volunteer with Girl Scouts, the PTA or coaching little league.

We need the energy, the enthusiasm and support of the collective retirement community to succeed and continue to produce effective results. Get involved!

If high-profile third-party observers' recognition of our effort is worth anything, let me offer some for you to consider.

In early March the *Wall Street Journal* did a major feature story about the future of pension de-risking, in the lead-up to our second return to the United States Supreme Court with the BellTel sponsored, *Pundt -vs- Verizon* litigation. At the center of that major news story was the advocacy of your Association pitted against Corporate America and the entire U.S. insurance industry, which was anxiously waiting to take a bigger bite of the pension funding apple. There was NO OTHER group that the *Wall Street Journal* editors even identified!

At the end of March, the front page of the *Sunday New York Times Business Section* did a close-up of investors putting their proxy vote to valuable and strategic use. Your Association's 2017 Verizon proxy campaign and its past proxy success were the center of attention. The Times' lead economics columnist analyzed different policy changes shareholder activists were putting forth, including our own 2017 Executive Compensation Clawback Provision (eventually gaining 33.7% votes) and noted that BellTel's accuracy and winning percentage was 80% on the proxy issues for which we have agitated. No other group can match that outcome!

In September *U.S. News & World Report* magazine did a major feature story on America's most impactful shareholder activists. The article opened: "*The words 'shareholder activism' can send gale-force willies through publicly traded companies to make a tornado look like a weakly thrown tomato.*" They then name the most impactful shareholder activists:

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Vanguard, Blackrock, leverage buyout investors Nelson Peltz, Dan Loeb, Bill Ackman, Carl Icahn and then once again, the Association of BellTel Retirees. That is pretty impressive company to be keeping.

The article states: "*Verizon constantly find itself in the crosshairs of activist efforts from the Association of BellTel Retirees. Don't let the image of docile switchboard operators turned doting grandparents enter your thoughts for a second. The BellTel posse, 134,000 strong, has turned out to be one of the most successful activist groups over the last 20 years.*"

So that's what the world of top-tier American business and news media are saying about YOUR Association. I think we should all be very proud of that impact. We have established the type of reputation that any bully who intends to push our retirees around better be prepared for a major brawl.

We need you all to play a larger, more significant role. Please help recruit fellow retirees. Be willing to volunteer yourself and please support financial appeals we make to keep this ship sailing in the troubled retiree waters.

I thank you and wish all of your families a wonderful holiday season.

## OUR MISSION:

The Association of BellTel Retirees Inc. is dedicated to promoting the protection and enhancement of the pensions and benefits for all retirees and beneficiaries of the companies and subsidiaries that make up the Verizon and Idearc/SuperMedia/Dex Media Corporations.

The Association will convince the company to properly care for its thousands of dedicated former union and management employees.

The Association will conduct activities designed to educate elected federal, state and local representatives and promote the passage of legislation which will protect and guarantee, rather than invade our hard-earned pension and benefits fund.

# They're Messing With Your (Retirement) Pay Check!

(Continued from page 1)

noticed the large dollar amounts set aside specifically for retiree pensions, health care, etc. Those funds were placed in appropriate investments and managed by experts. Many retirees as recently as the 1990s can remember being told that these funds were so well funded and managed that the interest alone was more than enough to cover the expenses.

Things changed in the late 1990s and early 2000s when corporations found that laws, regulations, and accounting practices allowed them to use retiree pension and healthcare funds for other purposes.

Employees very close to or in retirement found that their coverage was suddenly changing. It may not have been illegal but it certainly seemed wrong at the very least and perhaps unethical or immoral.

Unfortunately the legislators who created the rules and protections relative to financial transactions and contracts didn't address the protection of senior citizens whose lifetime of labor were supposed to finance their retirement health

care coverage. The employer escape clause, called "Reservation of Rights," is what allows employers to modify or even cancel your retiree health care coverage.

You certainly weren't aware of it when you were first hired or during your time as an active employee. You were too busy doing your job and it obviously

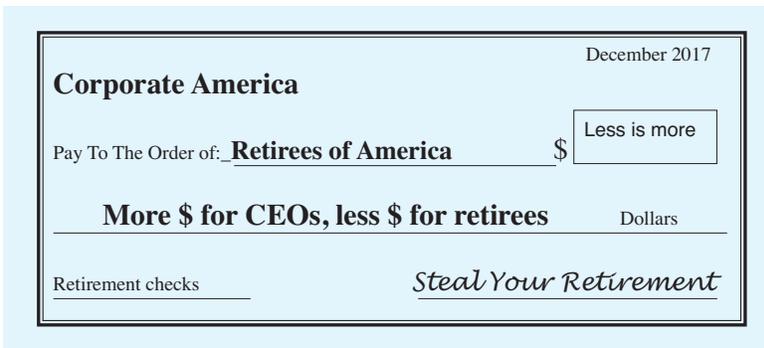
constituents. Talk and sympathy evolved into legislation and The Employee Benefit Protection Act (HR 2578) resulted, from the diligence, hard work and legislative advocacy of ProtectSeniors.Org.

It's going to take time. The organized effort to correct this injustice, is being led by your advocates, the Association of BellTel Retirees and it's lobbying arm, ProtectSeniors.Org.

Verizon/Bell system retirees have historically supported one another, either by the nature of their jobs or the culture that was in effect when they were first hired. Many of your friends and coworkers who preceded you

into retirement have been negatively affected by rising health care costs that they never anticipated. You may not be or know any of those persons today but you're likely to in the near future, particularly if we don't all fight to protect the benefits we paid for.

I urge you to help lead this fight forward by strongly supporting and endorsing the work of the Association of BellTel Retirees today. Please support this great group and organization.



wasn't something corporate executives thought to bring to your attention. General Electric, IBM and Time Warner are just a few examples of companies that decided to "save" money on the backs of retirees, while Verizon decided to freeze its coverage amount at the 2007 level and wait for retirees to shop elsewhere, die or otherwise disappear.

Congress members, who want to be reelected, have become aware of this issue through contact with their senior

### ASSOCIATION OF BELLTEL RETIREES INC. P.O. Box 61, Glen Head, NY 11545-0061

Yes, I want to support the Association of BellTel Retirees Inc. in our fight to protect the pensions and benefits of all retirees and active employees. Enclosed is my tax-deductible donation:

Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_  \$100  \$75  \$50  \$36.50  \$30 We appreciate any amount you can donate \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Or use your credit card. Visa Discover Amex MasterCard Credit Card

Acct.# \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration Date \_\_\_\_\_ Security code on card: \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone # \_\_\_\_\_

I am a: Management retiree \_\_\_\_\_ Union retiree \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_ Company Retired from: \_\_\_\_\_

You can also donate online by going to our web-site [www.belltelretirees.org](http://www.belltelretirees.org) and click on the DONATE NOW button. Consider a recurring donation—which is an easy and safe way to budget your contribution.

**I am interested in learning more about Planned Giving. Please contact me.**

The Association of BellTel Retirees Inc. is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization representing retirees and active employees of Verizon, its subsidiaries and retirees who were transferred to Idearc/SuperMedia/DexMedia.

# Retirement State of Affairs in Washington, D.C.

By James Casey

The future of healthcare still seems up in the air and it is vital that retirees stay engaged and active so that we can effectively advocate for the rights of older Americans on Capitol Hill.



President Trump has declared that "Obamacare is dead" but, as of newsletter press time, the law has not been overturned and it is not clear what comes next for the Affordable Care Act. Regardless of the politics, the threat to our earned benefits remains real and we must be vigilant.

The President signed an executive order in October 2017 to eliminate subsidies to health insurance companies that help pay out of pocket costs for lower income healthcare customers and also enables the sale of cheaper policies with fewer benefits and protections.

President Trump has also signaled that he is in favor of repealing the individual mandate provision in the Affordable Care Act (ACA).

The individual mandate requires, with some exceptions, that those without insurance pay a fine to the IRS, essentially a tax.

If the mandate is repealed, it would discourage younger and healthier individuals to sign up for insurance plans, according to industry insiders who spoke to The Hill.

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) and the staff of the Joint Committee on Taxation (JCT) project that the federal government will collect \$38 billion in penalty payments from uninsured people from now to 2026.

However, the CBO and JCT also estimate that repealing the individual mandate would reduce federal budget deficits by \$416 billion between 2018 and 2026. Both offices conclude that the loss of revenue from uninsured people would be offset by reduced spending on federal subsidies for coverage.

Retirees would be right to be concerned about how repealing the mandate would affect them, particularly if cuts to

healthcare subsidies will affect Medicare funding.

Retirees worked decades in exchange for healthcare in retirement. They invested in the benefits they earned laboring for private sector corporations.

Companies have been walking away from their fiduciary responsibilities for years and Congress has simply done nothing to stop them. The first debate over ACA earlier this year was an opportunity to add crucial protections for private sector retirees so that millions of older Americans don't see their benefits slashed. That opportunity was missed.

The fight is far from over. Congress may well revisit the issue, in whole or in part.

ProtectSeniors.Org continues to champion legislation that would amend ERISA to make it more difficult for companies to reduce or eliminate the pension and earned healthcare benefits that were guaranteed to retirees in their working years. We are on Capitol Hill daily to cajole, implore, educate and twist arms to counter the massive army of corporate lobbyists.

The legislative solutions we seek, would not only protect those who have earned these benefits, but would save taxpayers by not shifting more of the cost of retiree benefits into the public sector. These promises were made to retirees during their working years and companies should not be allowed to simply abandon their commitments.



We urge you all to join or redouble your involvement with ProtectSeniors.Org by participating in its multi-state and federal level campaigns because it will help put a face to a name regarding our retirement concerns and it will educate elected officials on retirees' plight. Some of our elected leaders in Washington and in state capitals need to understand exactly how we earned our healthcare over decades of work and what is happening to our retirement security as a result of pension de-risking.

Quite simply, ProtectSeniors.Org and the Association of BellTel Retirees are the only organization out there that is working tirelessly on Capitol Hill and in state capitals to address the viability of retirees' earned pensions and healthcare benefits.

Take action today. Join our group, call us to help you set up a meeting with your elected official. You do not need to be an Association of BellTel Retirees member to join.

Contact ProtectSeniors.Org at 1-800-398-3044 or write to me at jimcasey01@gmail.com.



## ProtectSeniors.Org

[www.protectseniors.org](http://www.protectseniors.org)

We are fighting to keep our earned retirement benefits secure:  
**HEALTHCARE PENSIONS SOCIAL SECURITY MEDICARE**

### HELP US BY:

- ◆ Sign on and contribute at [www.protectseniors.org](http://www.protectseniors.org)
- ◆ Receive timely updates

- ◆ Become a Grassroots Leader
- ◆ Respond to "write to Congress" requests.
- ◆ Take part in our surveys

Call: 800-398-3044 /email: [info@protectseniors.org](mailto:info@protectseniors.org)

Donate Today to:

**ProtectSeniors.Org, P.O. Box 476, Cold Spring Harbor, NY 11724**

We appreciate your financial and grassroots support.

ProtectSeniors.Org is a 501(c)4 organization. Contributions are NOT tax deductible.  
Paid for by ProtectSeniors.Org

# Save the Date: June 6, 2018 Annual Member Meeting in Atlantic City

The Association of BellTel Retirees will host its 22<sup>nd</sup> annual membership meeting in Atlantic City, New Jersey on **Wednesday, June 6, 2018** at the beautiful Golden Nugget Casino Hotel and Marina at 600 Huron Avenue and Brigantine Boulevard. The meeting begins at 9 a.m., with a continental breakfast beforehand.

You can get to the meeting by car, Amtrak, the Jitney bus or Greyhound bus.

The Association hosted its annual meeting in Atlantic City last year, and we encourage those of you who attended to come again and tell your former Bell System colleagues, so they can come too.

The beautiful Golden Nugget is right by the marina and features several restaurants, a spa, and casinos.

While in Atlantic City, you can stroll the boardwalk, find bargains at the Tanger outlet premium mall, visit attractions such as the Atlantic City Art Center, Atlantic City Historical Museum, Ripley's Believe It or Not, along with multiple golf courses and fishing options in the nearby area.

Reservations are required to attend the meeting. To reserve a seat, please complete and send the RSVP reservation form below. Be sure to include the names of those attending and return it with your \$5 per person registration fee to Ms. Stef Baker, c/o the Association of BellTel Retirees, P.O. Box 33, Cold Spring Harbor, NY 11724.

Please make all checks payable to the Association of BellTel Retirees.

Entrance tickets and directions will be mailed to you closer to the event.

Please note that hotel and event reservations are separate and a reservation to one does not mean a reservation to the other.

Discount codes for room reservations and prices will be available and announced in the lead up to the event and posted on the BellTel Retirees' website and in the Spring 2018 Newsletter.



Stroll the Atlantic City Boardwalk.

Courtesy of the Atlantic City Convention & Visitors Bureau.



Tanger Premium shopping outlets in Atlantic City, hosts 109 different stores just steps from the board walk.

## Early Bird RSVP for Association of BellTel Retirees Annual Meeting

Wednesday, June 6, 2018 at \_\_\_\_\_ Atlantic City, NJ

A Ticket Is Required To Attend

I will attend the meeting in Atlantic City, NJ - # in party \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Enclosed is a Check for \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (\$5.00 per person)

Please list your guest's names and addresses: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

(You can list invitees names on a separate piece of paper if more than 2 are attending)

A ticket will be mailed to each member and guest for admission. Please return this registration form and fee ASAP to:

Association of BellTel Retirees Inc. c/o Stef Baker P.O. Box 33, Cold Spring Harbor, NY 11724

## The State of Pensions in U.S.A.: Bad News

“The last three to four decades have seen a sharp decline in defined benefit pensions in the private sector. In 1983, 88% of workers were covered by defined benefit plans, including 26% who also had access to defined contribution plans, according to the Los Angeles Times. In 2016, 17% were covered by defined benefit plans and an additional 10% had both plans,” the paper wrote. More and more retirees have also seen their benefit plans cut or de-risked.

Companies selling off their retirees’ pensions like a garage sale include:

The New York Times, International Paper, Sears, the Ball company, CBS and ABX Air all have recently announced that they were de-risking their retirees’ pensions.

CBS purchased a group annuity

# Many More Retiree Pension Plans Sold Off

contract from an undisclosed insurance company to transfer about \$800 million in U.S. pension plan liabilities.

CBS did not disclose how many retirees are being transferred or when the insurance company would begin making benefit payments.

Last year CBS offered lump sum payments to its former employees totaling \$518 millions.

In October, the New York Times obtained a group annuity contract from Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance company to transfer a total of \$225 million in its staff and retiree pension assets. There will be 3,800 retirees

impacted. Retirees who are affected are under the New York Times Co. Pension plan and retirement annuity plan for craft employees from its U.S. defined benefit plans.

MassMutual begins taking over the payments on January 1, 2018.

The newspaper said the pensions were de-risked because “part of the company’s continued effort to manage the overall size and volatility of its pension plan obligations, and the administrative costs therein.”

International Paper Company, a fiber-based packaging, paper producer, based in Memphis, Tennessee, announced it would transfer \$1.3 billion in pension obligations to Prudential. The

**The  
New York  
Times**

**CBS**

**SEARS**

## And Now For The Public Pension Crisis

Funding levels for public pensions have declined to 71.1% in 2016, according to Reuters. Many states have been having trouble funding their pensions.

Here are some examples.

The New Jersey public pension system faces a \$253 billion crisis. NJ state officials claim that pensions are underfunded but WNYC in New York analyzed data under rules from the Government Accounting Standards Board and found that pensions are underfunded by \$168 billion and there is a shortfall for medical benefits of \$85 billion. There are 760,000 current and retired public workers in NJ.

However, due to a recent pension lottery bill signed by Governor Chris Christie, money from the lottery proceeds is considered an asset for pensions.

The state of Connecticut is not faring much better. The state has \$50 billion in unfunded pension liabilities.

The State of New York has \$100.6 billion in unfunded retiree healthcare and has \$17.75 billion in unfunded

pensions. The Kentucky public pension system is \$40 billion short. Kentucky Governor Matt Bevin says the money will run out in 3-5 years.

In October he proposed legislation to keep the pension system afloat. Thousands of Kentuckians rallied in opposition.

One part of the proposal transfers these public employees from pension plans to 401(K)-type plans. It also cuts the benefits of current teachers and state workers.

“Bevin’s plan breaks the promise made to state employees, lowers their wages and devalues their public service,” said Kelly Smith, a member of the Madison County chapter of Kentuckians for the Commonwealth. “A pension is a promise.”

The pension bill would allow current teachers to stay under their plans until they reach 27 years of service. At that time, they would switch to the 401(K)-style plans.

Teachers of 27 years or more would now have three years before they would

have to switch to the 401(K) plans, while all new hires would be in that plan.

A survey by Boston College’s Center for Retirement Research found that 401(K) plans are destined to fail millions of Americans because their balances are not enough to provide for a decent retirement.

Jason Bailey, executive director of the Kentucky Center for Economic Policy, said the bill “raises new questions and concerns.”

Mr. Bailey said under the proposed legislation 3% of their salary would go into retiree healthcare plans but they would not benefit from that program “because it will be offset by a 3% lower employer contribution to retiree healthcare.”

As of press time of this newsletter, the plan has not been voted on and Governor Bevin has not called a special legislative session to consider pension reforms.

Many other states are assessing their fiscal exposure to municipal obligations and projected retiree healthcare costs.

transaction affects 45,000 former employees.

According to Reuters, International Paper expected to take a pretax non-cash pension settlement charge of about \$400 million in the fourth quarter 2017.

Sears Holdings Corp. purchased two group annuity contracts from MetLife. The first transferred about \$515 million U.S. defined benefit liabilities for about 51,000 retirees and another transferred about \$512 million in U.S. defined benefit plan liabilities. The second contract affects 20,000 retirees.



Sears stated that it had “an immaterial impact on the funded status of (its) total pension obligations, but will serve to further reduce the size of the company’s combined

pension plan, reduce future cost volatility and reduce future plan administrative expenses.”

The Ball Corp., based in Colorado, a recycling metal and beverage and food containers company, purchased a group annuity contract from Prudential to transfer about \$220 million in U.S. pension plan liabilities.

The purchase affects about 11,000 U.S. retirees from both Ball Corp. and its subsidiary, Rexam PLC.

ABX Air Inc., of Ohio, purchased a group annuity contract from Mutual of America Life Insurance Co. to transfer about \$105 million in pension liabilities. At press time, it was not disclosed how many retirees were affected.

Insurers are increasingly competing to persuade corporate America to sell them their pensions. It means that what was once trickle of pension spinoffs is now the equivalent of a dam breaking after the Supreme Court declined our *Pundt v. Verizon* Supreme Court case earlier this year.

According to LIMRA, a worldwide research firm, pension transfers of \$13.7 billion were finalized in 2016.

## Status of Multi-Employer Pensions: On Thin Ice

The Multi-Employer Pension Reform Act (MPRA) of 2014 allows trustees of troubled pensions to cut payments to retirees if it would improve the health of the fund. Prior to the law, only benefits for current workers could be cut. Reductions for retirees were only possible after a fund became insolvent.

To date, 15 multiemployer pension funds have applied for MPRA benefit reductions.

The Alaska Ironworkers pensioners have 1,573 participants and are projected to be insolvent in 15 years. The International Brotherhood of Teamsters pension and retirement fund in New York, with 2,065 participants, and Southwest Ohio Regional Council of Carpenters Pension intend to resubmit their applications since they are projected to be insolvent in 6 years and the carpenters have more than twice as much in liabilities as assets.

The Iron Workers Local 17 was the first pension fund for which the U.S. Treasury Department approved cuts. The Teamsters Central State Pension Fund was the first to apply but their application was rejected because the cuts would not save the fund.

## The U.S. Treasury Department Calls For Annuity Assessment Experts

When companies de-risk pensions, retirees lose the protections of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation and ERISA. Our sister organization, ProtectSeniors.Org has been lobbying for stronger protections of pension-annuities, including from bankruptcy and creditor claims. We have also been seeking financial disclosures from insurance companies that provide annuity payments so that we can see the health of the institutions that own our pension assets.

A report by the U.S. Treasury Department, “A Financial System That Creates Economic Opportunities,” discusses annuities.

According to Pension and Investments, the Department of Labor (DOL) issued a safe harbor rule in 2008 with respect to annuities, saying that employers who “appropriately” consider “sufficient” information as to whether the annuity provider will be able to make payments under the annuity contract will be protected from legal liability in case the insurer becomes insolvent. According to the Treasury Department, these terms are not clearly defined—and the safe harbor still requires employers to

consider whether the provider will be solvent decades into the future.

“Many employers and their professional advisers are not comfortable relying on the safe harbor,” according to the Treasury Report.

The Treasury Department recommends that it and the DOL “develop proposals on how to establish or certify one or more expert, independent fiduciary entities, to assess the long-term financial strength of annuity providers. These assessments, which could be in the form of ratings or other specific metrics, could assist ERISA-governed plan sponsors in complying with their fiduciary duty obligations in selecting annuity providers for plans.”

Please reach out to your elected officials at the state and federal levels and tell them how an annuity plan assessor would benefit the health of your pension-annuity and about the harmful effects that were caused by de-risking.

If you need help or more information on these issues, please contact our sister organization, ProtectSeniors.org, at 1-800-394-3044 or via email at [info@protectseniors.org](mailto:info@protectseniors.org).

## Retirees Hold Regional Meeting In Yonkers, NY

In late October, the Association of BellTel Retirees members gathered in Yonkers, NY for an update on benefit concerns and to learn ways they can continue to help.

Board members at the Yonkers meeting discussed important issues impacting all of our retirees, such as pensions, the sickness/ death benefits and how it related to surviving spouses and the retirees' beneficiaries, health benefits related to the United Healthcare Medicare Advantage plan and more. There were nearly 40 retirees in attendance.

Among the topics for discussion were whether certain hospitals accepted the United Healthcare Medicare Advantage Plan. Some hospitals in that region, such as White Plains Hospital and Montefiore Hospital have converted from an "in-network" to "out-of-network" status.

This means any costs borne by UHC will be considered out-of-network.

When you speak to any provider of medical care very often a member may be



advised that a specific doctor or hospital is not within the network of our plan. It is important to recognize that this does not mean that the provider will not treat you.

If the provider accepts Medicare, the key question a retiree should ask when advised that the provider is not part of the network should be: "Will you still treat me and file a claim?" According to the benefit reps of admissions for UHC, generally, the response will be "yes," if they accept Medicare. It is still recommended that any extensive elective procedure be

checked with UHC concerning what out-of-pocket costs may be incurred.

"It is beneficial to the members when we can devote a significant amount of time answering questions that affect retirees in a specific region," said Mr. Cohen.

"These types of regional member mini-meetings are a source of information for retirees which provide our members with a more one-on-one conversation. It gives a better chance to interact with the volunteer Association leaders."

The Association is planning upcoming mini-meetings in New York City, Long Island, Syracuse, NY and New Jersey. Please check our Facebook page and our email communications for details.

If you are a member of a group that is interested in hosting one of these regional meetings and can provide a location, like a VFW, union hall, or church hall, please contact us so we can start a dialogue to begin putting event plans in place. Please call us at 1-800-261-9222.

## Verizon Workers Exposed to Toxic Dust after 9/11 Attacks Eligible for Healthcare, Compensation

The Verizon community was significantly impacted by the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York City and played a crucial role in the recovery efforts by restoring communications for all of Lower Manhattan as well as getting the Verizon Building at 140 West Street back online.

If you were working south of Canal Street on September 11, 2001 or at some point during the 8 months that followed, you are eligible for federal health screenings, healthcare and compensation, but you must apply. 68 cancers and many respiratory illnesses have been linked to World Trade Center toxins. The federal government also has earmarked \$7.3 billion for compensation to individuals with negative health effects.

We can help! Barasch McGarry PC has advocated for more than 10,000 individuals impacted and secured over \$1 billion for those who turned to us.



See a 4 minute informational video: <http://tinyurl.com/y8geb4wq> or call us  
[www.wtclawyers.com](http://www.wtclawyers.com) **BARASCH MCGARRY P.C.** 212-385-8000

# 2017: YEAR IN REVIEW

Your Association of BellTel Retirees has been quite active in 2017.

Our Association leaders continue to collectively donate thousands of hours of their time to protect the pensions and benefits of Verizon retirees living in the towns and cities where we worked and also those now scattered all across the 50 states.

As this is our end of the year newsletter, we thought this was an opportune time to look back on our year in retiree advocacy.

The Association continued taking retirees issues and concerns before the board at the annual Verizon shareowners meeting, as we have for nearly two decades.

Our record: 11 wins, three by outright shareholder vote and eight changes the company agreed to after our votes began getting close to the 50 percent mark with a likelihood of success the following year. Not too shabby!

In 2017, our tenacious proxy fight was chronicled by the New York Times Business section in a March 26, 2017 article that major paper spotlights your Association: "Want Change: Shareholders have a tool." Later in the year, U.S. News and World Report looked at some of the biggest and boldest proxy strategists and campaigns. They included the Darden Group, efforts championed by Vanguard, long dominant Wall Street players such as Carl Icahn and your Association. It said Verizon "constantly finds itself in the crosshairs of activist efforts from the Association of BellTel Retirees."

This past spring, our proposal to clawback compensation from executives who violated a company policy, regulation or law, won 33.7% in support.

The Association was also chronicled on the pages of The Wall Street Journal, on one of our top concerns: pension de-risking. The article also features one of our members and our de-risking survey and discussed the additional risks retirees take on with pension transferred annuities.

Also in 2017, and for the second consecutive year, the Association's federal court cases *Pundt/Lee v. Verizon* and *Murphy v. Verizon*, returned all the way up to the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court for review, and were widely

promoted in legal publications.

While we did not come away with a victory, we fought Verizon and all of its white shoe law firms to the very end, forcing a legal battle they never could have pictured being so massive.

Our annual meeting, where we honored co-founders C. William Jones and Robert Rehm was well attended.

It was broadcast live via Facebook, attracting 1,350 views. If you did not get a chance to attend our 2017 meeting, we encourage you to watch the meeting online. It is our way of bringing the meeting to you if you could not attend.

The Association of BellTel Retirees has expanded its online presence with more than 9,000 views this year.

The board also hosted mini meetings in Brewster, NY and Yonkers, NY for those who could not travel to Atlantic City for the annual meeting (for more details about the Association's mini meetings see page 11).

We plan to continue forward with this momentum in 2018. If you wish to join us and assist with our advocacy

efforts or with ProtectSeniors.Org's legislative efforts, please contact us at 1-800-261-9222.

As always, we are grateful for your continued support – and more than that for your loyalty and generosity. We have said it many times before: the economic protection of our retirees' future is vital – and it is our only goal. You have made this possible with your contributions. Your board also contributes financially, and in their efforts to use our money wisely we give over 11,000 hours of volunteer time per year. We seek your opinion through our online surveys, and we use that information in policy decisions. We are always open to your calls and letters, and we respond to each.

You are the people who keep us going, without your support, we simply could not go on.

Please contribute what you can and spread the word to others. There are many thousands of retirees that we are not even reaching who you can help us connect with. When you speak with former colleagues, please ask if they are aware of the threats they face to their earned benefits and the Association's efforts to protect them. Please offer to contact our office with their names and email addresses. We will take it from there!

Enclosed is a donation card, which lists your last donation date next to your name. If you have already contributed this year we thank you very much for being a true team member. If you haven't gotten around to it yet please consider enrolling in our recurring program and arrange for a small amount to be contributed directly every month, quarterly or annually. It is very convenient. You can enroll by using our on-line system at [www.belltelretirees.org](http://www.belltelretirees.org) and click on the DONATE NOW button.

Thank you once again for your financial and moral support.



# Resolving Serious Retiree Problems

(Continued from page 1)

What followed was two months of agonizing exchanges with various employees of Xerox (the call center that Verizon has outsourced to do its HR work) and discussions of “research” in order to explore what could be done for Joe and his wife. The result was Joe was given “active coverage” under Anthem,

Aetna and Xpress Scripts and told to contact Verizon to select a “retiree plan” now costing him over \$600 a month. Under his original retiree plan from 1996, he was paying no more than \$78 a month.

At this point he was almost resigned to his fate, decided to attend an Association of BellTel Retirees “Mini Meeting” in Yonkers, hosted by three members of

the Board of Directors. This was on October 23rd. Joe lives in Tarrytown.

At the end of the meeting he told his story to Tommy Steed and myself.

On November 1, Joe was informed that he is being restored to his original plan. This was an unusual problem. What happened between October 23rd and November 1, was simply Verizon recognizing that restoration to the original plan was just the right thing to do.



Association of BellTel Retirees Inc.

UNITED, TO PROTECT OUR FUTURE

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**HAVE A QUESTION?**

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Email: association@belltelretirees.org

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## Retiree News and Notes



On September 9, leaders and members of the Association of BellTel Retirees attended St. Patrick's Cathedral's labor mass in New York City. (L-R) Tim McManus, Nick DeVito, Bill Miller, John Hyland, and Jack Cohen. Also in attendance, were Lionel and Dee Brandon.



On November 14 and December 12, 2017, Board Member David Simmonds spoke before the Staten Island (NY) Telco Retirees to discuss some of the recent activities of the Association and to address retirees' concerns.

## Hey Amazon Shoppers: How You Can Benefit The Association of BellTel Retirees

**D**o you have an Amazon.com online shopping account? Hundreds of millions of products are purchased this way each year. If so you can help the Association when you shop at zero cost to you.

At Smile.amazon.com, for every dollar you spend, .5% is donated by Amazon to a non-profit or charity of your choice.

This costs you nothing and is helpful to the Association, which pays no fee. It's a straight charitable donation from Amazon.

Thus far, since this program was launched by the mega e-commerce company Amazon has donated \$22 to the Association through this service. For everyone who has used this service, Thank you. Every little bit helps.

If you are a regular Amazon shopper, why not make it benefit the Association of BellTel Retirees?

It's very simple to do. If you're an Amazon user, instead of the normal web address for Amazon, use the link established for the Association.

<https://smile.amazon.com/ch/11-3311185>. It will link to your Amazon account. Save the address in your favorites. From that point on, click on <https://smile.amazon.com/ch/11-3311185> every time you shop.



The site also provides a running total of the donations made on your behalf. This helps the Association with some extra economic support.

All of us wish we could donate more to worthwhile charities and causes and now Smile-Amazon provides the means to do it.

It's an opportunity to supplement your much-needed donation using someone else's money. Any questions can be directed to our office staff who are happy to provide you guidance and answers in short order.

Thank you in advance for your generosity.

## Social Security COLA Increases By 2% in 2018

**T**he Social Security Administration will give beneficiaries a 2% cost of living increase for 2018, the largest in six years.

More than 61 million Social Security beneficiaries will receive increased payments in January 2018, and more than 8 million will see the increase beginning December 29, 2017.

The COLA is expected to result in monthly increases averaging \$27.38. This is the largest percentage increase since 2012. There was a small .3% increase in 2017 and nothing in 2016.

Unfortunately, beneficiaries might not see much of a net difference due to Medicare Part B premiums.

A "hold harmless" provision in federal law prohibits Medicare from raising a person's Part B premiums if it reduces their Social Security benefits. For the past two years, most Medicare beneficiaries have been held harmless because, without a significant COLA, increasing their premiums would have resulted in lower Social Security benefits.

As of press time, Part B premiums have yet to be announced for 2018.

In its 2017 annual report, Social Security trustees again warned that without changes, the Social Security trust fund would be depleted by 2034.



Dear Association:

As a member for the past 20 plus years, I do appreciate your hard work, but am disheartened by our current Congress and don't expect much worthwhile legislation to be enacted.

I am, however an optimist and hope the enclosed check will help the cause. With God's help!

Thanks Again,  
E.O.

\*\*\*

Dear Association,

Can't begin to tell you how much I appreciate all that you are doing.

Sincerely,  
M.D.

\*\*\*

Dear Association,

I just wanted to say thank you for the wonderful job you are doing. May God bless our Association.

-J.P.R.

\*\*\*

Dear Association,

Prayers and blessings for all you have done and continue to do to protect our pension and health benefits. I will continue to support you.

Sincerely,

M.B.B – Verizon Management 1986

**Connect with BellTel and share your photos and memories via social media**



Twitter.com/belltelretirees



Facebook.com/associationofbelltelretirees



youtube.com/user/BellTelRetirees

On the Web:  
[www.BellTelRetirees.org](http://www.BellTelRetirees.org)

# VERIZON BUSINESS NEWS

## Verizon disconnects rural customers

Verizon Wireless plans to drop 8,500 rural customers across 13 different states, due to the roaming charges they rack up.

“These customers live outside of areas where Verizon operates our own network,” Verizon said. “Many of the affected consumer lines use a substantial amount of data while roaming on other providers’ networks and the roaming costs generated by these lines exceed what these consumers pay us each month.”

Verizon claims it has “sent these notices in advance so customers have plenty of time to choose another wireless provider.”

The customers live across 13 states, including Alaska, Idaho, Iowa, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Utah and Wisconsin.

## Charter Communications to launch wireless plans in 2018 on the Verizon network

In the Spring 2017 newsletter we reported that the Wall Street Journal believed there was a possible deal between Verizon and Charter Communications, yet neither

company offered to comment.

In October 2017, Charter CEO Tom Rutledge announced that Charter is on track to launch wireless service in the first half of 2018. The service will use Verizon’s cell network and Charter’s network of Wi-Fi hotspots. The plans will be handled by Charter.

“The wireless component of Charter’s network is transitioning from a nomadic Wi-Fi network to one that supports full mobility by incorporating Wi-Fi with multiple 4G and 5G access technologies to deliver a seamless connectivity experience,” Charter said in the filing.

It has not been announced whether plan prices will be comparable.

Charter Communications is a cable company with 17 million cable customers and 21 million broadband customers.

## Verizon third quarter results

Verizon added 603,000 landline and cell phone subscribers, which includes 486,000 smart phone users, during the quarter, up 36% from the 442,000 new connections it added in Q3 2016.

The company reported revenues of



\$31.72 billion, up 2.5 percent from third-quarter 2016 and 89 cents earnings per share.

Net income was \$3.7 billion in third-quarter

2017.

## Verizon wants the FCC to block states from imposing broadband privacy protections

Verizon does not want individual states to have a say in managing consumers’ privacy protections.

In March, the U.S. House of Representatives voted 215 to 205 to kill proposed privacy rules that would have required Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to be transparent about the private data it collects and sells about customers to third parties.

Verizon was among several large ISPs that successfully lobbied Congress against the rules. If the ISP’s get their way, states will have less control over their residents’ online privacy.

“Allowing every State and locality to chart its own course for regulating broadband is a recipe for disaster,” said Verizon. “It would impose localized and likely inconsistent burdens on an inherently interstate service, would drive up costs, and would frustrate federal efforts to encourage investment and deployment by restoring the free market that long characterized Internet access service.”

According to Fortune Magazine, this has occurred after nearly 30 states considered imposing privacy rules on Internet service providers. Verizon said it supports “the open Internet” but that any rules must be “national in scope” rather than vary from state to state.

“Internet services are inherently and necessarily interstate,” Will Johnson, Verizon senior vice president, said in a statement. “Saddling these services with a patchwork of state and local regulation would result in a huge mess likely to disrupt how services are offered and would harm consumers.”

## Morgan Stanley



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