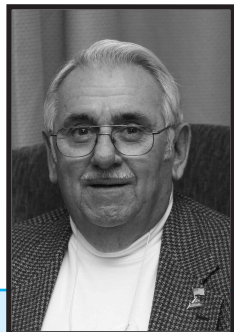


BELLTEL RETIREE

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.

Fall 2017

Volume 83



President's Message

By John "Jack" Brennan

Trouble Ahead? How About Now!

I wish I could report to you that the future looks starry and bright for all Verizon retirees. It would be nice to tell you that the company has shown itself to always be concerned about protecting our future and looking out for the well-being of its entire retiree family.

Unfortunately, we know that is not true. Not because we automatically take a dim view of today's senior company officers. In fact, many members served in management and craft alike, while building memorable careers and forming great relationships.

No, it is because we have learned through harsh experience that the bean counters and modern senior executives who have been running the company for some time now are laser focused on dumping their corporate responsibilities and leaving all of us out in the cold.

They don't see themselves as protectors of the workforce that built the company; rather, they are eager and proud to fatten their own bottom line no matter who pays the price.

Make no mistake: There is trouble ahead for America's retirees. We know this by looking at recent history, especially at our own former employer. Verizon has never stopped searching for new ways to

cut costs and enrich the top brass at the expense of retirees and workers.

Whether it was selling out 41,000 loyal retirees by transferring their pensions to Prudential and stripping them of critical federal protections, or bundling up a whole group of retiree pensions and turning them into a toxic asset to be spun off and abandoned, Verizon has been dutiful at shirking its duty to retirees.

Starting in 2019, many retiree pensions are going to become even more expensive to this company, which has shown again and again that it responds to increased expenses by selling us out.

In two years, the rate that Verizon must pay to the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC) goes up to \$80 per pension, nearly double what it was in 2012, when the company reacted to an increase by transferring 41,000 pensions to Prudential.

Might Verizon "de-risk" even more retirees when those fees go up again? Isn't past behavior usually a good predictor of future actions? As more people retire and the costs of bearing those pensions go up, how can we expect Verizon to act any differently than it has in the past? By shedding its obligations to us and trying to kick us out into the wilderness.

So how do we protect ourselves, up against a corporate behemoth whose only goal is cutting costs and boosting profits?

(Continued to page 2)

Red Alert: Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation Facing Insolvency In 8 Years

The Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC) has declared that it is expected to run out of money by the end of 2025, based upon fiscal year 2016 projections for multi-employer pension plans.



The PBGC guarantees a certain amount of pension benefits for individual retirees even if the pension plans from their former employer becomes insolvent or fails.

According to PBGC estimates, the fiscal year 2016 deficit of \$59 billion will increase to about \$80 billion by fiscal year 2026 for the multi-employer program.

(Continued to page 5)



SLOWING THE PENSION FREE FALL

SPECIAL SECTION PAGE 5-8



Trouble Ahead? How About Now!

(Continued from page 1)

We do it by standing together and drawing strength from numbers. The Association of BellTel Retirees was formed because the company was ignoring retirees as individuals.

The Association can fight for our interests in a way you could never do on your own. How many individuals out there would have the means and the ability to take on the company through the federal court system all the way up to the U.S. Supreme Court, like we did this year and last year? Or place proxies on the annual shareholder ballot and force the nation's largest communications company to change its corporate bylaws to be fairer to retirees and all shareowners, as we have done 11 times in the past.

Our ability to communicate our message has gotten our Association favorable coverage in high-profile publications like *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, both of which recently profiled our efforts to advocate for retirees. Believe me, Verizon noticed that!

By pooling our talents and resources, we can fight and win battles that we never even would have been able to enter on our own, as lone individuals. This kind of strength and success does not happen by accident. We have board members volunteering some 10,000 hours annually and we hire lawyers and experts to fight in court, on the shareholder ballot, in the media, on our behalf.

And although we accomplish all of this at an incredible bargain considering the corporate callousness that we are up against, it does not come free of cost. Our members' contributions are essential to enabling us to win protections for you that the company is trying so hard – and using all of its legal and corporate firepower – to take away.

Those contributions have a tremendous multiplier effect: Each member's support, pooled together, allows for the sum to be far greater than its parts. Verizon's attempts to leave retirees vulnerable and unprotected will only intensify. We need to band together and harness the power of our numbers now more than ever.

The Power of United Voices

By Jim Casey

President of ProtectSeniors.Org

Our sister legislative advocacy organization, ProtectSeniors.Org, has been working tirelessly by lobbying for legislation on the federal and state levels to protect your earned retirement benefits and pensions from the harmful effects of pension de-risking, also known as pension stripping.

This year, ProtectSeniors.Org has worked significantly with a bipartisan group in Congress led by Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-NY) to introduce federal legislation that would favorably amend the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 and the National Labor Relations Act to protect the health benefits of retirees.

Our federal legislation, the Employee Benefits Protection Act, HR 2578, would amend the ERISA law to protect benefits "available under the plan during retirement of the employee are fully vested and cannot be modified or terminated for the life of the employee or, if longer, the life of the employee's spouse." Such protections would also apply to benefits earned by any employee with 20 years of service.

In addition to trying to amend ERISA, we are working to attach HR



2578 to any comprehensive healthcare law passed by Congress to replace the Affordable Care Act.

To further support our bill, ProtectSeniors.Org has worked with Rep. Slaughter and a bi-partisan coalition to convince Congressional

leadership and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to take steps to investigate how corporate restructuring affects retirement security and healthcare coverage. This GAO study, which is scheduled to be completed in the fall, will help support our cause with facts and figures.

Our team on Capitol Hill has continually met with House and Senate members requesting that they co-sponsor HR 2578 and we have succeeded in adding seven new co-sponsors this year.

Then on the state level, ProtectSeniors.Org has two bills to protect retirees, one in Pennsylvania, House Bill 324, which would prevent creditors from ever garnishing retirees' annuity payments that were previously protected as corporate pensions under ERISA.

In Massachusetts, ProtectSeniors.Org lobbied for House Bill 476, which would provide creditor protections, limitations on subsequent transfers, and financial disclosures for annuities that had been converted from pensions.

There are current efforts being made in New York, Connecticut, New Jersey and Virginia to enact similar protections from the harmful effects of pension de-risking.

Thus far in 2017, ProtectSeniors.Org has kept up its presence and the pressure as articles about our efforts have been published across 15 states.

We need your help to get our message out. If you are not part of ProtectSeniors.Org, we kindly ask you to join today. Can you also reach out to your fellow retirees and ask them to join ProtectSeniors.Org?

Retirees need to realize the power of their united voices. Retirees were once the nation's largest voting bloc. However, that is no longer the case.

According to the Pew Research Center, Millennials (age 18-35) and Generation Xers (36-51) cast more votes than Baby Boomers in the 2016 presidential election.

Let's not allow ourselves to be overlooked and ignored. Retirees may no longer be the largest voter bloc but with your participation we can still be the loudest. We can make our voices heard in unison.

Support the advocacy of ProtectSeniors.Org to work in tandem fighting for retiree rights. To learn more about ProtectSeniors.Org, call 1-800-398-3044.

Pension Fee Increase = More De-Risking

By Jack Cohen

The word “Pension” is rapidly vanishing from our vocabulary. In another 20 years, children will most likely have to look the word up on Google to find the definition. In 2011, only 18 percent of full-time private sector workers had a Defined Pension Benefit – down from 35 percent just 21 years ago.

Why is this happening and why is the government allowing it to happen?

“Companies want to get away from pensions totally,” said Steve Pavlick, a worker benefit specialist at the law firm McDermott Will & Emory. He said that four years ago in an article in Yahoo Finance.

The federal government dodged a bullet in 2008 when General Motors (G.M.) was rescued. Had G.M. gone under, with hundreds of thousands of pension obligations, many other major corporations would have followed. The Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC) could never have come to the rescue without Congress authorizing a major bailout.

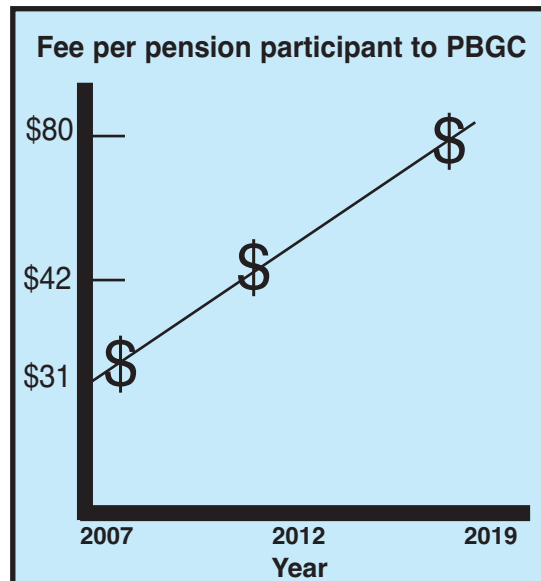
Those elected officials must have considered the inevitability that someday this could happen once again and if pensions went away, then the problem would also evaporate. My theory is that pensions are not going away fast enough to satisfy either corporations or those they have in their corner in Congress.

On July 6, 2012, as part of a federal Transportation Bill (H.R. 4348) a package was included having to do with pensions. There was much included in that legislation, but it accommodated major corporations whims.

Corporations with major pension plans were being hurt by reduced interest rates. Those reduced rates caused a reduction in the projections for funding of pensions. Employers were required to make contributions to increase the plan assets if the fund faced a shortfall.

This was very risky to their working capital since that money had to come from operating funds.

The federal legislation passed in 2012 covered two bases for both government and corporations: It allowed the funding calculations to extend averaging over 25-years and extended an illusion of funding adequacy so that sponsored pensions would not need additional funding donations. Such donations, remember, are tax-deductible.



Look at your Verizon Annual Funding Notice if you're still getting a pension. Notice page #1, the bottom of the second paragraph. Then turn to page 3, where the real table is shown. How many people ever get past the cover letter?

Government also wins because fewer tax deductions mean more revenue. The loser in all this is us, the pensioners. Oh yes, part of this law was that the flat-rate premium to the federally guaranteed Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation for single-employer plans increased from \$35 per participant to \$42 in 2013, \$49 in 2014, and will be indexed for inflation in subsequent years. (Note: in 2019 it will go to \$80 per retiree annually). The law was extended to 2017, and will inevitably

be extended again, possibly made permanent. That growing out of pocket cost is a great incentive for a corporation to go in the direction of de-risking their retiree pensions.

This provided enough incentive in 2012 for Verizon to move 41,000 retirees into Prudential Group Annuities before it had to pay the increase from \$35 to \$42, in 2013. The prospect of such increases has caused many similar moves, including G.M., WestRock Paper, and so many others.

How much greater will the incentive be in 2019, when it goes to \$80? How many more corporations will de-risk pensions to avoid the increase?

So the urgent incentive for more corporations to walk away from their pensions is clear. The migration to group annuities circumvents the protective umbrella of ERISA, rendering that 1974 law null and void. Without pensions to worry about, the problem is pushed off to the individual states, with the result that Congress will no longer need to fear a major bailout for the PBGC.

Fighting against and arguing against de-risking is critical whether we like it or not. America's retirees need to bring the fight to the states, which have had exclusive jurisdiction over insurance companies since 1945. The fight will be long, going state-by-state. It will be expensive, frustrating and absolutely necessary unless we want to just stick our heads in the ground and pretend we are all ostriches.

Your Association of BellTel Retirees cannot do this alone. We need your support in two prominent ways. We need you to get your state elected leaders educated on this crisis, especially if they sit on a state insurance committee. In addition, we need your financial support for both the Association and ProtectSeniors.Org, which is our “muscle” doing the fighting state-by-state.

We're not giving up...are you?

Hudson Valley, NY Retirees Meet With The Association Leadership

Responding to a request from retirees in and around the Lower Hudson Valley in New York, BellTel board members organized a meeting for those unable to attend the regular annual member meeting this past May.

Nearly 40 retirees came out, with amazingly another 1,000 participating online via Facebook Live. This was a very successful use of our live social media engagement, showing clearly that people who are too far away to travel can still participate, interact and ask questions at these meetings.

Although we encourage your physical attendance at our meetings, we believe doing more to interact with you is an advantage.

Chairman Jack Cohen, and Board Members John Hyland and Tom Steed worked with local retirees to offer this meeting at the Brewster, NY Elk's Lodge to discuss important issues impacting all of our retirees.

During the session, Mr. Cohen expressed his expectation that Verizon may be looking to de-risk its pensions. Recently, *Pension and Investments Magazine* ranked Verizon at a low of 86 out of 100 companies that fund their pensions. Shortly thereafter, Verizon borrowed \$3.4 billion to add into the pension fund.

He further explained that, for every pension holder in Verizon's plan, the company must pay the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC) an annual fee. In 2007, Verizon had to pay the PBGC \$31 per pension. That amount has gone up significantly with more drastic increases scheduled. In

2012, the fee rose to \$42 and it helped spur Verizon to transfer the plans of 41,000 retirees to Prudential, saving itself \$1.7 billion.

In 2019, that rate will go all the way up to \$80 per pension, almost double the level that prompted the 2012 spin-off. Mr. Cohen predicted that sadly no pension plan under Verizon is safe.

Once a pension is spun off into an insurance annuity, creditors can go after the asset because it loses federal ERISA protection.

"You can't lie down," he said. "We have to fight," urging people to strongly support the Association of BellTel Retirees and ProtectSeniors.Org.

The Association's sister organization has been fighting in the states to have these protections restored.

"We are trying to get ourselves heard," he said. "Older Americans are 1/3 of the voting population. The one thing politicians count on is that seniors vote, retirees vote. So we have more power than we give ourselves credit for and we need to exercise that power."

Board member Tom Steed, a former CWA union organizer, related the story of how the Association's founder, Bill Jones, filed a shareholder proxy to get Prudential's attention after retirees were ignored.

"To create a dialogue you have to put a fire under them and they will act," he said.

Mr. Steed also addressed the issue of Sickness / Death Benefits for surviving spouses. He encouraged everyone to call Verizon's benefits office and ask for a letter saying how much would be available for a surviving spouse and hold onto it so that their



Retirees in the lower Hudson Valley gathered in Brewster, NY for a retiree briefing.

surviving spouse would have that information.

Verizon does not advertise these benefits and a surviving spouse has only one year to claim them before they revert back to the company.

"All retirees have to row in the same direction, whether or not you are union or management. If we don't row in the same direction, the boat sinks. We are all fighting for the same benefits," Mr. Cohen said.

One member had questions about the mystery involved in pension de-risking and the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation. Simply put, the system is meant to be complicated. This is why the Association of BellTel Retirees and ProtectSeniors.Org are a great force in addressing these issues.

These types of meetings are a source of information for retirees.

To watch this meeting, go to the Association's Facebook page.

If you have a group that is interested in hosting a regional meeting and can provide a location, like a VFW, union hall, or church hall, please contact us so we can start a dialogue to arrange a meeting.



Board Member Tom Steed addresses retirees.



Red Alert: Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation Facing Insolvency In 8 Years

(Continued from page 1)

The multi-employer plan alone covers 10 million people in about 1,400 pension plans.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, “71 plans are in default and receiving the agency’s assistance. Those plans cover roughly 100,000 participants.”

“There are no serious consequences to employers or trustees for failure to put enough money in the plan to pay the benefits promised,” said PBGC Director W. Thomas Reeder.

Under the Multiemployer Pension Reform Act of 2014, multiemployer plans that project insolvency must notify participants that their plan is running out of money.

There are over 1.2 million retirees now in critical and declining plans, according to the PBGC.

If the PBGC runs out of money, the retirees who rely on their pension income will be forced to survive on less than \$2,000 a year - perhaps much less.

President Trump’s Fiscal Year 2018 Budget contains a proposal to raise \$16 billion in additional funds for the PBGC in a 10 year period.

The PBGC’s single employer program has a \$21 billion deficit but it projects that it will have a surplus by fiscal year 2022. The agency is raising rates per an act of Congress. However, the PBGC has warned that there is a wide range of possible outcomes. Single employer plans cover 29 million people.

Your Association of BellTel Retirees and our sister organization ProtectSeniors.Org has been warning federal officials and fellow retirees about this possibility for years. In February 2016, our leaders met with Mr. Reeder of the PBGC and his senior staff about retiree concerns over pension de-risking.

Several years earlier, before this crisis was evident, we also provided them a briefing, warning much of the same, related to the upward trend of companies with healthier pension plans who decided to de-risk.

It is rare to be able to meet privately with such key federal regulators but our two retiree groups have led the way with pinpoint research, advocacy and legal action.

Under the federal ERISA law of 1974, retirees’ pensions are guaranteed by the

PBGC but if it continues on the path towards insolvency, companies are more likely to de-risk pensions into group insurance annuities that are only lightly sheltered under varying individual state insurance regulations.

Insurers who assume oversight of de-risked pensions have zero responsibility or obligation to inform retirement group annuity holders if their pension assets are safely invested.

There is no oversight to protect the interests of retirees whose assets were transferred.

“The Association has foreseen that there would be issues with PBGC funding and concerns over the underfunded state insurance guaranty associations, which is why we have been proactive in going to bat for our fellow retirees,” said Jack Brennan, Association president. “PBGC leaders were initially shocked when we presented them with warning signs about the coming instability of their funding. I ask all of my fellow retirees to please continue to help support this critical advocacy work, which will only be more important in the years ahead.”

More U.S. Retirees Lose Pensions

In recent months, more companies have decided to dump their pension plans. The Hartford, General Mills, Accenture and UPS are the latest to strip away pensions from their loyal retirees.

The Hartford

The Hartford, a Fortune 500 company, which is a leader in property and casualty insurance, group benefits and mutual funds, has de-risked its pension obligations to Prudential Financial.

It transferred \$1.6 billion, or 29%, of its \$5.6 billion in U.S. qualified pension plan liabilities.

The agreement transferred responsibility for current and future pension benefits for about 16,000 former employees, or about 38 percent of The Hartford’s U.S. pension plan participants, to Prudential in June.

Those participants who are being transferred to Prudential will receive

more detailed information from Prudential in mid-October. According to the company, all transferred plan participants will continue to receive their benefits from The Hartford’s pension plan until November 1, 2017, at which time payment and administration will transition to Prudential. All other plan participants will remain in The Hartford’s plan.

Prudential says that each year it makes more than \$10 billion in pension payments to more than 1 million retirees and their beneficiaries. Other companies that have shed their pension obligations to Prudential include Verizon, General Motors, Motorola, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Kimberly-Clark and JCPenney.

Accenture

Accenture, a global professional service company, has purchased group annuity

contracts from American International Group (AIG) and Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance to settle \$1 billion in U.S. defined benefit plan obligations.

AIG and MassMutual started making payments in August 2017. There were 9,200 retirees that were de-risked. Accenture also eliminated another \$600 million in pension liabilities by giving lump-sum payments to about 7,000 active and former U.S. employees.

By de-risking and offering lump sum buyouts to its retirees, Accenture has developed a new defined benefit plan for its current 550 active U.S. employees. There is \$200 million in the plan.

UPS

Pension de-risking is not the only problem retirees are facing. Companies have also decided to freeze pension plans.

(Continued on page 7)



SLOWING THE PENSION FREE FALL



IF WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER, WHY DO ONLY THE COMPANY'S BIG WIGS GET GOLDEN PARACHUTES AND A SECURE LANDING IN RETIREMENT? SUPPORT THE CONTINUATION OF THE ASSOCIATION OF BELLTEL RETIREES PROTECTING YOUR RETIREMENT SECURITY.

Remarkable Accomplishments: Give BellTel Your Declaration of Confidence

Dear fellow retirees,

Can you name another group besides the Association that has such a high “batting average” in terms of its achievements?

Let me remind you of just a few.

The Association pushed Verizon to give lump sum pension COLA payments of \$2,000 - \$20,000 for pre-1995 retirees that was a big win.

The Association convinced Verizon to give retirees surviving on minimum pensions a COLA in not one, but rather three consecutive years... another huge win for many retirees.

The Association, together with ProjectSeniors.Org, helped draft federal legislation to protect our earned benefits. The legislation, the Employee Retiree Benefits Act, HR 2578, has been introduced in Congress.

Leaders of our Association have been so out front and vocal on federal pension and healthcare protection issues that the U.S. Department of Labor invited us to testify before its leadership.

Add to that, Association leaders, shoulder to shoulder with a group of highly respected academics, testified before the Congressional Labor Committee on the protection of earned healthcare benefits.

And then our team at the Association, together with ProtectSeniors.Org gets a one-on-one meeting with the top leaders of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation to address the threats faced from de-risking.

These are but a few of the very remarkable accomplishments for our group, its leadership, and fellow



retirees, dedicating
much of their retirement
for our cause.

Its success hardly ends there. The Association has fought Verizon all the way up to the United States Supreme Court, not once but twice about the legality of spinning

off retiree pensions.

They did that on behalf of 41,000 impacted retirees. Could your pension be next to go?

BellTel has beaten Verizon outright on the proxy ballot three times and forced additional changes to corporate policy eight other times as well.

It is exceptionally clear to me that we need and benefit from the Association of BellTel Retirees.

Hey, I know money is not something we exactly want to throw around in retirement, but writing a small check of \$30, \$50, \$100 (and reminder its tax deductible) – helps to guarantee we keep some level of protection against attacks on our earned benefits.

Won't you stand with me and co-sign this "declaration of confidence" in this remarkable group I am proud to call my Association of BellTel Retirees!

I'm going to write a check today.
Please consider doing the same.

Sincerely,

Lionel R.E. Brandon,
past President of the Nova Five
Chapter of the Telephone
Pioneers of America.

More Pensions Lost

General Mills

General Mills announced it is freezing its pension plans at the end of 2027. Pension plans will be closed to newly hired, non-union production employees as of January 1, 2018.

General Mills cut off pension plan enrollment to newly hired salaried employees in June 2013.

The Association will continue to work closely with our sister organization ProtectSeniors.Org on state and federal legislation that would protect retirees from the harmful effects of pension derisking.

Please be supportive of both organizations' efforts. Please reach out to your elected officials – state and federal - and tell them how this practice of pension stripping negatively affects you.

If you need help or greater insights on these issues, please contact ProtectSeniors.Org at 1-800-398-3044 or via email at info@protectseniors.org.

(Continued from page 5)

UPS has frozen its defined benefit pension plan for approximately 70,000 non-union employees, and is moving them into the company's defined contribution plan, according to SEC filings.

UPS' defined benefit pension plans will cease accruals of additional benefits for future service and compensation for non-union participants effective in 2023.

Those who are affected by the pension freeze will keep the benefits earned in their defined benefit plan through Jan. 1, 2023.

Teamsters union drivers and delivery workers are not affected since they have their own defined benefit plan, via the union.

UPS is among other companies such as AIG, DuPont, U.S. Steel, L.L. Bean, and the Boston Red Sox, which have frozen their pension funds, according to the Pension Rights Center.



Metlife Spins-Off Brighthouse Financial To Oversee Pension Business

Met Life announced that it will spin off its life insurance and annuity business, calling the new entity Brighthouse Financial.

According to analysts interviewed by the *Wall Street Journal*, "Brighthouse is expected to be one of the nation's biggest life insurers, with 1.3 million life insurance policyholders and 1.5 million annuity owners."

After the spin-off MetLife will focus on the international network of life-insurance businesses as well as group life insurance and other benefits sold to employers, and other products.

Brighthouse Life Insurance Company will be headquartered in Delaware. At the end of March 2017, it had more than 2 million policies and annuity contracts and more than \$220 billion in assets.

Prudential, which manages the pension-annuity plans for Verizon retirees, had a total of \$797.4 billion in assets as of March 31, 2017.

Eric Steigerwalt, previously MetLife's executive vice president, will become president and CEO of Brighthouse Financial.



Brighthouse
FINANCIAL

Established by **MetLife**

The Association, along with its sister organization, ProtectSeniors.Org, have been concerned and speaking out about the possibility that pension annuities spun off from the Verizon pension plan might be subsequently transferred to other companies. This appears to be exactly what MetLife is now doing.



MetLife

Right now there is no law that prevents a company from transferring pension obligations to any financially unstable, fly-by-night company.

According to analysts, MetLife has better growth prospects than the spunoff Brighthouse.

MetLife's recent announcement is just the beginning of retirees' concerns coming to pass. What if other companies follow this trend? What is to stop

other insurance companies or other financial industry players from creating similar spin-offs that are not well funded?

The Association has a long history of serving as a watchdog, sounding alarms to help protect retirees from possible problems before they have risen. This is a call to action for all retirees.

We have been saying for years that a subsequent transfer of assets from an insurance company could happen. ProtectSeniors.Org has a multi-state legislative advocacy campaign in place working to protect against the harmful effects of subsequent transfers, such as requiring financial disclosures of the companies managing our retirement assets and preventing subsequent transfers to financially unhealthy companies. We need your help in this effort.

It is important for all retirees to see that banding together to fight to protect your earned pension and healthcare benefits is necessary because companies are finding new tactics every day to attack retirees. We cannot let them find more.

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 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.

Silence Sends the Wrong Message

By John Kolimaga

All of us have heard someone ask us "you don't call, you don't write," and it's usually directed at us by a relative/friend whom we haven't seen or spoken to recently. There might be a little barb or cynical tone but the intention is clear: The person wants to know how you're doing, what's new and interesting in your life, and is anxious to return the same type of information to you.

Another portion of the conversation usually involves something the person can do for you with the hope that you'll stay in touch, schedule a visit, etc. I also believe there are other individuals that fit into a version of that scenario, that is your elected officials.

Their questions and good wishes certainly don't carry the same weight as that of a friend or relative.

Your elected officials want to hear praise and assurances that you agree with their positions. They also interpret your lack of questions, comments, or criticism of what they are doing as evidence they're doing a great job and acting in your best interest. Your silence with your elected officials conveys that



message, it's a tacit endorsement of their agenda.

Writing letters or emails to your representatives might seem intimidating, awkward and time consuming, but a phone call is easier and very effective. It's quick and doesn't take a lot of time or preparation.

Federal and state representatives have local district offices in addition to those in the capitals if you don't have free long distance service. Calling to express an opinion and ask questions gets attention.

If you want to see some real attention, make an appointment with your representative's office and calmly explain your concerns. It can be useful and enlightening. You'll be treated with respect and might be offered coffee, water, or a soft drink, which is appropriate because your taxes are probably paying for it anyway. You are also more likely to receive a personal verbal/written reply and not just a form letter or recorded phone message.

Think about our many troubling retiree needs such as pension de-risking protection and the need to maintain our earned health benefits, now the need and connection is clearer. If you need help contacting your elected official, the Association and our sister organization, ProtectSeniors.Org, would be glad to offer assistance.

The alternative is doing nothing and having your fate decided by the well-meaning elected official who has not

heard from you or know what you are asking for. I encourage retirees to counter the oversized impact of corporations or individuals whose large donations and persistence gain them legislative access. Together we are stronger, but only when you do your part too.

The last item is important and a fact of life, but you have a low cost way of participating via a small donation to the Association of BellTel Retirees and our national lobbying arm, ProtectSeniors.Org.

As senior citizens or if you are getting close to that point, we should make a strong effort to stay in touch with family and friends and not have to hear old clichés about not calling, writing, or visiting and their 21st century spin-offs: texting, skyping, emailing, etc.

You should be using all these tools and more to stay in touch and share your opinions with your elected representatives. Otherwise those who do get their attention may have very different thoughts and objectives regarding the state and federal protections that protect your interests.

Your two retiree associations work hard to protect and enhance your earned benefits but they need your help to see that your federal and state representatives get the message from you.

John Kolimaga is a resident of Pennsylvania and a board member of the Association of BellTel Retirees. He started his career with Bell of Pennsylvania and retired from Verizon.

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.



ProtectSeniors.Org

www.protectseniors.org

We are fighting to keep our earned retirement benefits secure:
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HELP US BY:

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We appreciate your financial and grassroots support.

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Member Mailbag



To the Association,

Back in the Spring 2017 issue of the BellTel Retiree newsletter you had an article "Does Your FiOS Service Need a New Battery" (p 10). I took the article out and put it by my FiOS power supply for future use. Shortly after that my battery started beeping and was dying and I needed to replace it.



I visited various Verizon stores and they didn't carry it and finally out of frustration I decided to see what would happen if I just unplugged the battery. To my surprise my service worked fine, no problems. The battery cost would have been \$39.99 plus tax and S&H and would have taken approximately a week to receive via mail but I couldn't wait because the beeping was frightening my dog. I continued to use the service without a battery and figured in a case of an emergency I would use my cell phone especially since the battery would only last approximately 24 hours, pretty expensive for only 24 hours of backup.

Today I had a Verizon technician come at my request to fix a drooping Verizon line on a street close to my home. The technician asked me since he was at my home would I let him replace my power supply box because Verizon was trying to upgrade them all.

I said yes and he replaced my box with a smaller one that has no battery and it took only about 15 minutes total to replace the unit and test my service. He said Verizon is trying to get out of the battery business. He then offered to mail me a separate battery back-up unit that I can plug in or just keep it until I need it. This unit runs on "D" batteries and the batteries will last for 4 hours of talking.

I am glad I didn't buy the special expensive battery only to find out a free cheaper alternative was available to me.

Claire D Reisert

Dear Association,

I salute you, each and every one of you, for all the work you have done for us all. It is hard to believe folks like you still exist. But I am so glad you do.

I worked for NY Tel from 1952-1985. I started as a Steno-typist and ended up as secretary to a division head. I loved my job, enjoyed working for my boss and was very proud of the benefits that would follow me into retirement. What a joke. One benefit after another is disappearing and now it's the dental insurance (if you are in Florida) but I believe it will reach everyone. I hope all false promises come to bite them but will probably not happen in my lifetime. But I can hope.

Enclosed is my small contribution but it comes from my heart with thanks and good luck and further success with your wonderful work for each and every one of us.

As for Verizon, I am embarrassed to tell people I worked there.

So thank you to all of you. I appreciate all you have done and continue to do for us.

Sincerely,
KS

Thank you for all the good work that you do.

I wish I could give you more but I am on a very fixed income. Without my Bell pension I don't know what I would do. God bless you so much.

GG

To all of you working at the Association,

Thank you for your efforts on our behalf. Your newsletter keeps us up to date. Thank you – I really appreciate all you do.

GWG

Thank you very much for working so hard on my behalf. You are doing wonderful things and I appreciate it.

Sincerely,
SB

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Watch Us On Youtube... New Videos

The Association of BellTel Retirees video channel on YouTube.com helps us distribute news content to a wide audience. The Association's Facebook platform expands that reach even further.

Not all members can attend in-person functions but we want to get news and events delivered to you. Our team has regularly broadcast our events in real-time online via Facebook live. The filmed events are also later made available to watch on the Association's Facebook page.

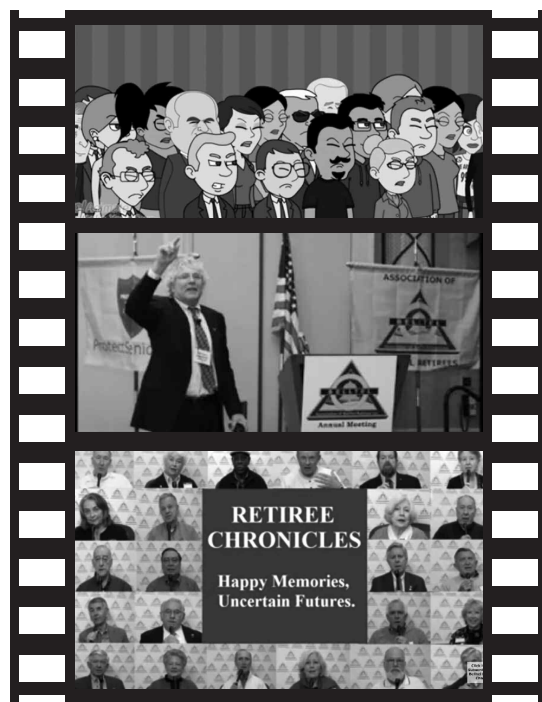
Afterwards, the Association will publish key talks in an abbreviated version for your convenience.

We urge those of you who have not yet checked out our recent live online events and other retiree videos series to do so. You may just see the faces of people you spent your Bell System career with or have one of your own questions or concerns answered.

"Subscribe" to the YouTube channel – it's free - so you can be notified when a new video is uploaded. "Like" the videos and "Share" them with others on social media to help spread the word.

Help us get to 1,000 subscribers.

You can find the videos at <http://www.youtube.com/user/BellTelRetirees>



We Need you to Keep Defending Retirees

In our summer newsletter you'll recall we provided a review of 2016 financial activity. As you read this we are fast approaching year end and preparing our strategic plans for 2018. Here is a brief recap of events that have taken place since our last update.

2017 Mid Year Financial Update

Through the first seven months of this year we have recorded approximately \$460,000 in member contributions representing more than 13,000 individual contributions!! Thank you so much! But we are far from where we need to be.

On the expense side the absence of any significant new legal expense continues to help the bottom line. Total expense through July is approximately \$436,000 or 8% under target largely as a result of professional fees. We do not want to get complacent and let our guard down. As history with Verizon has taught us, we never know what the senior executives have up their sleeves. Support our ability to always be in a state of readiness.

At summer's end we were busy working on the individual state registration

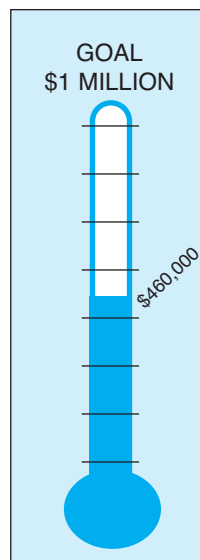
process. Each state in which our members reside requires that we register with that state, comply with various filings and pay associated fees. Your contributions help satisfy the costs of completing this process.

Please remember to contribute as generously as you can. We are working hard to be successful with the initiatives we are pursuing on your behalf, but we cannot defend retirees properly without you!

External Review of 2016 Financials Update

As noted in the last newsletter, BDO conducted an on-premise review of our 2016 financial statements in July, 2017. The final report was then presented to and approved by the Association's Board of Directors at our August 2nd meeting.

BDO's responsibility was to conduct the financial review in accordance with Statements on Standards for Accounting and Review Services promulgated by the Accounting and Review Services Committee of the



American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA). Those standards required BDO to perform procedures to obtain limited assurance as a basis for reporting whether they are aware of any material modifications that should be made to the 2016 financial statements for them to be in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America. BDO states that they believe that the results of the procedures provide a reasonable basis for their conclusion.

BDO's conclusion states: "Based on our review, we are not aware of any material modifications that should be made to the accompanying financial statements in order for them to be in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America."

Thank you,

*Eileen Lawrence, EVP &
Bob Gaglione, Treasurer*

VERIZON BUSINESS NEWS

It's Official...Verizon owns Yahoo!

Shareholders at Yahoo! have approved the sale of the company to Verizon for \$4.48 billion.

In February 2017, Yahoo! and Verizon agreed to a reduced price for the company, from \$4.8 billion, because Yahoo! had suffered from security and privacy breaches that it did not disclose earlier.

After talks of the deal were made public, it was disclosed that Yahoo! had suffered a security breach in 2014 that affected at least 500 million customer accounts. Then, Yahoo! disclosed that in December 2013, hackers stole information including users' email addresses, passwords and dates of birth.

According to *Bloomberg News*, Verizon seeks to use Yahoo's web audience to connect their customers to new content. Verizon will merge Yahoo! with AOL, calling it OATH. AOL CEO Tim Armstrong will be OATH's CEO.

In 2000, Yahoo was valued at \$125 billion.

"The entire company is centering around brand building for mobile and building our content brands," Mr. Armstrong told Bloomberg.

After the sale, the remains of Yahoo! will be renamed Altaba and be led by

Yahoo's current director Thomas McInerney.

Yahoo's CEO Marissa Mayer received a severance package of \$23 million in addition to stock compensation of about \$187 million.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Verizon will lay off 2,100 workers from Yahoo! and AOL. Both Yahoo! and AOL have been steadily laying off employees knowing the Yahoo-Verizon deal was in the works.

About 500 employees were let go from AOL at the end of last year. As of the end of 2016, Yahoo! had about 8,100 employees; it had 14,000 employees in 2010.

The Verizon-Yahoo deal officially closed in June.

Problems with unlimited data service

To compete with other wireless service providers, Verizon has reintroduced unlimited data plans to its wireless service, adding 614,000 subscribers in the second quarter of 2017.

However, according to a report from Open Signal in *PC Magazine*, the demand for these plans resulted in Verizon's network slowing down due to increased traffic and congestion.

According to the report, Verizon's 4G speeds dropped by 2Mbps, while speeds for AT&T, which added 127,000 mobile customers after offering the plans, dropped 1Mbps.

The *PC Magazine* report said Verizon argued that the data does not tell the whole story.

"Results can be impacted by a large range of factors, including pricing plans, location, rural and urban distribution of users, and quality control, [like] how the app interacts with different devices," Verizon said.

Open Signal crowdsources data on carrier signal quality from users who have its consumer mobile application installed.




UNITED, TO PROTECT OUR FUTURE

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