BELLTEL RETIREE

BELLTEL
Association of BellTel Retirees Inc.

The Official Newsletter for all Union & Management Retirees and Employees of the successor companies and subsidiaries of the Bell System. Your newsletter is paid for by your contributions.

Spring 2022 Volume 101

BellTel Achieves Latest Governance Reform at Verizon

BellTel leaders have quietly and successfully achieved another important reform at Verizon and its corporate governance policies, the 12th change won through shareholder activism by the retiree organization, that aims to bring about greater workforce equity and inclusion practices.

PROXY 2022

The change, which Verizon's Board has since adopted in response to one of our three 2022 retiree shareholder proposals, expands the roll of the Board's Human Resources Committee from its narrow focus on executive compensation to include the responsibility to oversee broader workforce equity issues, including: "employee diversity, equity and inclusion, talent acquisition, retention and development, employee engagement, pay equity and corporate culture."

In November 2021, BellTel co-founder Robert Rehm filed a shareholder resolution asking Verizon to give the board direct responsibility for workforce equity issues. "Verizon should have done this a long time ago, and it shouldn't have taken a shareholder resolution to get them to act," said Mr. Rehm.

He continued, "For too long the Human Resources Committee focused solely on how much to pay top company executives without taking responsibility for seeing that management is

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AT&T Reduces Insurance for Its Retirees

It comes as no surprise that major corporations are continuing to walk back and turn away from their commitments to their loyal retirees. This is something that all our members can clearly understand.

AT&T retirees recently saw life insurance that was long guaranteed to them drastically cut back on Dec. 31, 2021.

In early 2021, AT&T announced a plan to cut management retirees' life insurance benefits at the start of 2022 to just $15,000 and cap the death benefit at $25,000, effective at the start of this year. Retirees were initially promised benefits dependent on their final year's compensation.

Retired AT&T union members, who had life insurance also based on their pay, will now be capped at $25,000 for their life insurance and death benefit, respectively.

This change affects an astonishing 220,000 AT&T retirees enrolled within life insurance and death benefits program.

In a December 26 *Wall Street Journal* article, the details of this harmful action to retirees were laid out. The article addresses the harsh life insurance reduction retirees' families would be dealt in the new year.

Your Association of BellTel Retirees board leaders and Retirees for Justice conducted multiple news briefings for the Wall Street Journal's telecom reporters, helping give them greater context and insights about how harmful the switch was.

Much like the case of Verizon suddenly announcing the transfer of 41,000 pensions in 2012, retirees and their families are cast aside even as senior executives reap outsized rewards. It's notable and ironic that their benefits still include significant company subsidized life insurance, all at the final expense of those who gave decades of devotion and sacrifice to the company.

Despite months of protest from fellow retirees, AT&T refused to change course and opted into what it calls "challenging" decisions to purportedly balance the needs of its business.

Meanwhile, those "challenging" decisions AT&T made are clearly contradicted by the life insurance benefits that will be received upon retirement,

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Thomas Steed Elected BellTel Chairman

The board of the Association of BellTel Retirees has elected Thomas Steed, a board member since 2012, as the national non-profit advocacy organization's Chairman. Mr. Steed, a resident of Orange County, NY, began his career with the New York Telephone Company, then a part of AT&T, in 1971 as a cable splicer working in Bronx construction.

Mr. Steed will be succeeding Lionel Brandon, who served in the role on an interim basis to fill out the term of the late Association Chairman Jack Cohen, who passed away on September 29, 2021.

"The entire board wants to thank Lionel Brandon for his poise, leadership, and volunteer service to our retiree community," said Mr. Steed.

"Retirees across the nation have so much in jeopardy. In most cases, top corporate executives look at their loyal retirees as sitting ducks to pick off. We need to change that perception, push back, fight back, and defend our economic security. If we don't protect ourselves, who will?" he asked.

Throughout his career, Mr. Steed was a member of the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and worked on a multitude of major construction and recovery projects across New York City and the Hudson Valley, including the February 1975 Telephone Company Fire, which knocked out both local and long-distance service that routed through New York. The recovery from that single incident – a five-alarm fire – took months of work and was a national priority for the corporation.

In an April 2020 video, Mr. Steed told of his experiences at that major incident and the recovery work necessary.

Later in his career, Mr. Steed would be selected to serve as a part-time organ-

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Chairman's Report

By Thomas Steed

It is an honor to write this report to you, my fellow retirees.

I have been an active member of this great retiree advocacy association five years before I retired. 2022 marks my tenth year of service on the BellTel board.

Why did I get involved so early?

Simply put I could see the writing on the wall. Senior corporate leadership at companies everywhere were more focused on rewarding and praising themselves than honoring the loyal workforce and retirees who built our companies to greatness. And now as plainly seen, 2021 was not a kind year to retirees throughout America.

Loss of Life Insurance & Death Benefits:

Our brethren from AT&T were decimated with the loss of "guaranteed" life and death benefits that they worked decades to earn. How is it fair for them to get the rug pulled out from under them, long after they already traded their labor for such assurances?

Our brethren that retired from DuPont in 2021 also had their earned and guaranteed pension and retirement plan offloaded to a new and undernourished agricultural company named Corteva.

Soon afterward, Corteva engaged in a "study" of the life insurance benefits of DuPont retirees. It determined these earned benefits were too generous, so they cancelled them, unscrupulously adding nearly $1 billion to its balance sheet—on the backs of retirees.

DuPont and AT&T retirees both lost these benefits on January 1, 2022.

Proxy 2022:

Within the first few weeks of become Association Chair, a fellow retiree exclaimed frustration with why we engage in annual shareowner proxy efforts. Wasn't it pointless?

The answer is: Absolutely not. In January 2022 your Association was victorious with its 12th proxy win since 2003. There is not another group, even professionally on Wall Street, with such a record of success.

Why does it matter? The executives making decisions about the future of retiree benefits – such as those at AT&T, DuPont and Corteva - all report to their Boards of Directors. Each year when we arrive at Verizon's annual shareholder meeting, with our record of success, we are warmly greeted by the board and senior executive leadership.

They know who we are. They understand our concerns. They recognize we are the voice of retiree-shareowners and know how to win. They also recognize that while we are challenging concerning policy issues, we want the company to thrive. They also respect that we know how to turn out national media attention to our cause.

Register & Protect Yourself:

I want to remind the many of you that there is still time to register for the federal health and compensation program if you were affected by the 9/11 attacks. Did you work there for a few days in the following nine months or so? Did you do a walk-through, visit, or inspect damage to 140 West Street after the towers collapsed? If you did, as did countless employees and consultants to Verizon and AT&T, take action.

I was recently briefed that more than 650 of our BellTel Retirees have registered for the 9/11 Compensation and Health Fund, but I would venture thousands more were within the toxic containment zone below Canal Street in Lower Manhattan from 9/11/2001 to 5-31-2002, when the clean-up operation was concluded. Don't wait.

Pioneers:

The Board is anticipating that our partnership with the Pioneers will grow in 2022. In many ways, this great organization, founded in 1911, is in the same boat as us. Their members are aging, and younger folks are proving to be less inclined to join. Like theirs, your Association runs on people power, and an organization is only as good and as deep as the players ready and willing to get out there and give it their all. If we do not stick up for each other, then realistically who will?

If you are looking for something dynamic in 2022, consider giving back to either the Association of BellTel Retirees or the Pioneers.

BELLTEL
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Call It Pension Stripping, De-Risking or Pension Risk Transfer. Anyway, Retirees Lose!

In 2020 the lobbying organization Retirees for Justice was formed to advocate for a solution to the largest threat to retirement security today: when corporations transfer their pension responsibilities to insurance companies and simply walk away.

The corporate HR Reservation of Rights Clause, means any pensions, including for union members can be de-risked, as was done to the United Auto Workers at General Motors. Nobody is safe from this happening.

RETIREES FOR JUSTICE

To combat this threat YOUR Association of BellTel Retirees has given its support to the Retirees for Justice organization, led by long time retiree advocate, attorney Edward Stone.

Here is the reality: Since 2012, well over $200 billion in retiree pensions have been off-loaded to insurers, with over $25 billion in 2020 and possibly exceeding $35 billion in 2021. When this happens, each of those retirees lose ALL federal ERISA law protections.

Thus, there is a critical need for retirees to petition their individual state legislatures to seek laws restoring full legal protections for our pension assets, protecting those benefits from creditors or possible future third-party pension asset transfers.

Given that our Association has restrictions on the amount of lobbying activity we can conduct, the Association Board encourages members to be become involved in Retirees for Justice. The organization is a non-profit, tax-exempt, 501(c)(4) organization. There is no charge to join Retirees for Justice, but donations are graciously accepted.

Principal Financial Group Takes Over Pension Fulfillment from Wells Fargo
— *Impacts Union Retirees* —

At our news deadline, we received mountains of calls and emails from members after many reported receiving notification from Verizon that Wells Fargo Institutional Retirement & Trust (IR&T) that it has been purchased by The Principal Financial Group (Principal). Pension payments previously distributed through Wells Fargo would now be serviced by Principal.

According to letters sent by the Verizon Benefits Center, the changeover starts April 1, 2022. At that point, Principal will pay retirees' pension benefits on behalf of the Verizon pension plan trust.

The letter clarifies that this change will have no impact on any retirees current pension benefit payment amount. It advises that retirees should continue to receive their payment either in the mail or through direct deposit, depending on their previously selected preference.

As the Association continues to monitor the situation and field questions from members about this change, every single person contacting us is a retired CWA member.

News of this transfer was previously reported by the Wall Street Journal in April 2019. At the time, news reports were that Wells Fargo would be selling off its retirement and trust business to Principal for $1.2 billion.

The transferred business includes Wells Fargo's retirement plan recordkeeping and administrative services, executive deferred compensation, institutional trust and custody, and institutional asset advisory businesses.

As this is a developing issue, we intend to look into it further and continue to gather information. We are also in the process of reaching out to Verizon, Wells Fargo, and Principal Financial Group for additional details.

Some may recall last year's announcement by Prudential of it taking similar action in turning over such pension payment and administration tasks to Empower. Leaders of the Association conducted a meeting with Prudential to gain greater insights.

You have questions about Principal and rightfully so, and we believe you deserve answers. We are committed to learning the intricacies of this switch and how else it affects all of us.

AT&T Reduces Insurance for Its Retirees

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including about $1.5 million alone for CEO John Stankey.

Decades ago, AT&T prided itself on its quality retirement and benefits so much, that executives used this to defend the company's lower wages compared to competitor's packages, citing that sticking with AT&T meant a more substantial retirement for all.

That "cradle-to-grave" way of thinking meant something very significant to workers and their families, with certain expectations they would always be well taken care of in the future.

By winter 2021, AT&T forgot this ethos and made its choice to harm its loyal retirees who built the company.

Many are questioning how can anyone continue to trust AT&T leadership, especially while executives are the beneficiaries of a double standard and getting VIP treatment? Simply put, retirees and the workforce already traded our labor and cannot go back in time to make different arrangements for the future.

Ultimately, retirees are now at the mercy of AT&T's top executives. It illustrates why we need to stick together now to protect the pensions and benefits we earned over 20, 30, 40 years of work, and are fully entitled to!

Thomas Steed Elected BellTel Chairman

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izer for his union, Local 1120, based in Poughkeepsie, NY, where he worked on national recruitment and organizing matters, including the recruitment of the International Business Machines (IBM) workforce into the union.

"My request to my fellow retirees is that they double down on their focus and worries of our issues – the protection of our earned benefits and pensions – before it is too late and they might, through some technical sleight of hand, be lost."

Under his role with the CWA, Mr. Steed went from being a technician working on major construction jobs to earning an Associate of Applied Science from Dutchess Community College 1999, Bachelor of Arts from the National Labor College 2000, Master of Science from the University of Baltimore 2003, and a Financial Planning Graduate Certificate from Mount Saint Mary College 2005.

His interactions included working with then CWA International Union President Morton Bahr and his successor President Larry Cohen.

"As a trained organizer, when I joined the BellTel Retirees five years before my retirement, I said 'This organization is really going someplace,' said Mr. Steed, citing the nonprofit's impact bringing its litigations to protect pensions to the U.S. Supreme Court and it's12-shareowner proxy campaign wins versus Verizon, along with its advocacy in successfully interacting with company officers on behalf of retirees.

"This is a very sophisticated organizing drive here, where everyone who once had a career in the company from management and craft, can be together under one umbrella."

OUR MISSION:

The Association of BellTel Retirees is dedicated to promoting the protection and enhancement of the pensions and benefits for all retirees and for the current and future beneficiaries of the companies derived and evolving from the original Bell System.

Since 1996, the Association has worked to convince the companies to protect and guarantee, rather than raid or erode, the hard-earned retirement security for hundreds of thousands of dedicated current and former union and management personnel and their families.

2022 Proxy Campaign

We're fresh into 2022, and your Association is already deep into planning and ramping up its preparations for this year's Verizon Annual Meeting and shareholder proxy season.

In January, we secured a substantial win for one of our proxies regarding the Verizon board's human resource committee.

Previously the board HR committee was primarily focused on setting pay and benefits for the company's top tier of executives. It's time to turn the page. Now this mandate and committee charter has expanded to also include significant matters concerning employee equity, diversity, and inclusion. More details can be found in this newsletter.

This year we are putting forth two other proxy proposals.

We are revisiting our previous "Golden Parachutes" proposal. This would require shareholder approval of new and renewed compensation packages for senior executives, specifically packages that include severance or termination payments valued at more than 2.99 times the sum of the base salary plus target short-term bonus.

In 2021, this proposal received 38.1% of the vote.

The bottom line is that unnecessarily large compensation packages are costly to the shareholders, including the tens of thousands of current retiree shareholders, and "would be much less prevalent if a shareholder approval process were put in place," said BellTel co-founder Robert Rehm, sponsor of this proxy.

Each year, the massive disparity between upper management and rank-and-file employees related to compensation only grows. These increases are meant to be based on company performance, but substantial pay inequities suggest that top ranking executives are simply rewarding themselves regardless.

Our second 2022 proposal is our Senior Executive Clawback Proxy, which stipulates that if a senior executive engages in activities that look good at first, but in fact turn out to harm the company in the end, the executive needs to return any awards or benefits they received.

A comparable example of this is when Wells Fargo was caught fraudulently signing up customers to bank or credit accounts they never authorized. In response to backlash, the directors at Wells Fargo used a similar clawback policy to recoup $180 million in incentive pay from the CEO and other top executives.

More recently, McDonald's clawed back $105 million from its ex-CEO after he failed to disclose intimate relationships with several employees and attempted to cover it up. The Golden Arches recouped funds from the CEO's initial exit package following the revelations. After more facts were revealed, McDonald's sought and clawed back more money for what he would have normally been paid had he been fired "for cause".

The Association believes Verizon's current policy is outdated and would not allow for an effective clawback.

"While we hope no one at Verizon would ever commit any act to warrant a clawback, these other examples illustrate how generous incentive pay can lead to hundreds of millions of shareholder dollars being lost if a company does not have a strong clawback policy," said BellTel Chairman Thomas Steed, the proxy measure's sponsor.

BellTel will be on the shareholder ballot in 2022. Although the proxy statement will not be released by Verizon until late March-early April, your Association asks shareholder members to vote YES for the Golden Parachute and Clawback proposals.

Our Association's ability to directly impact change at the top of Verizon is a reason why we have long championed our proxy fights. We now have achieved 12 governance policy changes at Verizon via our annual proxy campaigns.

This is unequivocally the strongest track record of any shareholder advocate in the U.S.A. Our ability to impact an outcome, both corporate and policy, is always looming over management of the corporation.

BellTel Achieves Latest Governance Reform at Verizon

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doing all it can to promote workplace equity on a range of issues, especially following events in recent years that have focused public attention on the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace."

Prior to the Association filing this proposal, the Verizon board's Human Resources Committee operated under a charter that focused solely on the compensation, retention, and succession of Verizon executives. Retirees believed this was a glaring blind spot as to the board's oversight of human capital management practices.

In response to the Association proposal, less than a month later, Verizon's board of directors responded by amending the Committee's charter to make the Human Resources Committee responsible for overseeing Verizon's *"strategies, initiatives and programs related to human capital management, including with respect to employee diversity, equity and inclusion, talent acquisition, retention and development, employee engagement, pay equity and corporate culture."*

The company revealed this change in a filing with the Securities & Exchange Commission and advising that the Association proposal would now be moot.

"Verizon's board may have been late to recognize the importance of these issues, but better late than never," said Mr. Rehm. "We look forward to see what steps the board will take to implement this new policy."

BellTel Retiree Chairman Thomas Steed, who is proposing another 2022 Verizon proxy added, "Human capital drives the corporation's success, not vice versa, and the work output of its employees is the most valuable asset any corporation can possess and benefit from. For the company to finally consider all its employees under the Board's HR oversight function, and not just the elite few in the senior executive compensation pool, is not only equitable but is the morally right conclusion. This is now the 12th time BellTel Retirees have achieved enhancements to Verizon's corporate governance and executive compensation policies."

Top executives, analysts, and traders on Wall Street are receiving astronomical bonuses, as reported in multiple news outlets. Bloomberg News says these bonuses aren't just six figures, not even seven figures, these are EIGHT figure bonuses ranging up to $30 million for the upper echelon of Wall Street.

BellTel's Proxy Victories

The Association of BellTel Retirees has a long and successful history of promoting changes to the corporate bylaws at Verizon. The Association has an unsurpassed record of success as retiree activists in successful corporate governance campaigns with an astounding 12 victories dating back to 2003. The impact we've had requires the company to focus more on our issues.

Even in years when our proxy measures don't result in a win the national stage provides us with the opportunity to reach larger audiences in the investor community and news media. Publications like The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg, Associated Press, Barron's, Business Week, Time Magazine, Fortune, AARP, Kiplinger's, and more, keep our retiree issues front and center.

Here is a list of the Association's proxy wins, from our most recent to our first:

- **2022 –** ***Human Resources Committee –*** Our most recent win, which you can read more about on page 1. In short, the change expands the role of the Board's Human Resources Committee from its narrow focus on executive compensation to include the responsibility to oversee broader workforce equity issues.
- **2013 –** ***Shareholder Proxy Access proposal –*** Won by a majority vote to allow shareholders to nominate a candidate for Verizon's board, as long as the shareholders have owned 3% of Verizon common stock for 3 years or more.
- **2013 –** ***Performance Stock Unit Payout (PSU) proposal –*** Was partially adopted, tightening standards for awarding PSUs to senior executives when Verizon's performance is below the median compared to its Dow Jones peer index.
- **2009 –** Association proposal separating the roles of Chairman and CEO led to Verizon changing its governance guidelines, adopting an empowered independent Presiding Director, elected annually to provide independent leadership and oversight ensuring an employee-Chairman is fully accountable to the independent directors.
- **2007 –** ***"Say on Pay" Advisory Vote on Executive Compensation –*** Before the issue of executive pay received attention from Congress, the Association introduced a proxy proposal to allow shareholders to have a say in executive pay. Retirees won with 50.18% of the vote. Verizon implemented the proposal in 2009.
- **2007 –** ***Corporate Governance Guidelines –*** Verizon agreed to partially adopt a retiree proxy limiting the number of boards on which a Verizon director can serve. A director who is an executive officer of a public company is limited to three public company boards; other directors are limited to six company boards.
- **2006 –** ***Performance Based Equity Compensation –*** Retiree proxy asked that at least 75% of future senior executive equity compensation be performance based. Verizon agreed to change its compensation policy.
- **2005 –** ***Supplemental Executive Retirement Plan (SERP) –*** The Verizon board agreed to rein in senior executive SERP. Previous SERP contributions were 32% of combined salary plus bonus for every dollar above $210,000 of salary. The old SERP was frozen and the new contribution level reduced from 32% down to the rank-and-file level of 4% to 7%.
- **2005 –** ***Board Composition –*** Revised guidelines to reduce the Verizon board head count from 21 to 12 or fewer members. Over time Verizon agreed to align the board to meet the Association's proxy definition of an "independent" board. The Verizon board originally consisted of six executive officers, two CEOs with company officers sitting on their board, and most had business relationships with the company.
- **2004 –** ***Binding Executive Severance –*** Following the board's failure to implement the 2003 proxy mandated by shareowners, the Association proposed a new binding proxy causing the Verizon board to agree to adopt the requirement of a shareholder vote to approve large new severance packages.
- **2003 –** ***Exclude Pension Credits (Phantom Earnings) from Calculation of Executive Compensation –*** Verizon's board agreed to stop using shadow profits to enhance senior executive bonuses after retirees receive over 40% of the vote in previous year balloting.
- **2003 –** ***Executive Severance –*** Retirees receive 59% yes vote. The change limits overly generous golden parachutes and requires shareholder approval for packages over the limit. It is the first time an outsider proxy opposed by the company board wins at a Bell System/former Bell company.

The Association continues its proxy proposal advocacy. Please remember to vote this proxy season.

Mega Wall Street Bonus Time is Here

These executives would claim that these bonuses were a long time coming. They'll say that it is necessary on Wall Street for top talent to receive bonuses of this magnitude in order to reflect their value.

According to Bloomberg, while Goldman Sachs did spend about 23% more per employee in 2021, they also invested about 50% more into their top "dealmakers."

Federal regulators have been for years attempting to rein in the massive bonuses on Wall Street as laid out in the 2010 Dodd-Frank Act.

Twelve years later there has been no change and these lavish bonuses have rained down on bankers before and even after federal bailouts.

Sarah Bloom Raskin, an attorney and regulator who previously served as US Deputy Secretary of the Treasury, is the current White House Nominee for the Federal Reserve's Vice Chairmanship. She says there needs to be a crackdown on these lavish multi-million-dollar bonuses as written into the Dodd-Frank Act.

During a time when so many retirees and workers are struggling to make ends meet, these Wall Street titans have seemingly brought back the Gilded Age of the 19th century robber barons.

We should keep in mind that these same Wall Street leaders are very often the advisors and facilitators for the companies that once employed us. These bankers are influencers over corporate America and its leadership.

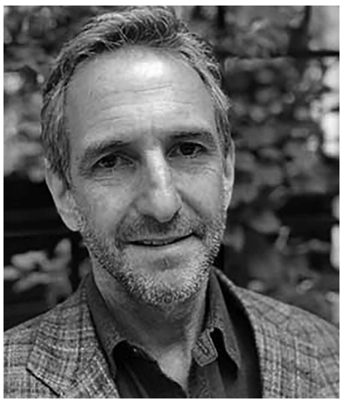
While the average employee at Verizon makes about $50,000 annually, according to human resource company Indeed.com, in 2020 the CEO made $19.1 million between salary, benefits, and bonus.

All of this is another reminder as to why our retiree Proxy campaigns are so instrumental. By pursuing change via the Proxy, we can hold corporate leadership accountable.

Fellow retirees, if we don't look out for ourselves no one else will. Your Association always stays on top of news and developments like this to keep a close eye on the issues and trends and make sure that we are not forgotten.

The Fight to Protect Earned Benefits

By Edward Stone



Last year the Association of BellTel Retirees formed a strategic alliance with Retirees for Justice to continue the Association's leadership role in fighting to protect earned benefits for retirees and their families. As we move forward into 2022 and beyond, we see many challenges and opportunities ahead.

In January of 2022, AT&T retirees had their life insurance benefits slashed. The same thing happened with the former DuPont retirees who had their pension and retirement plan off-loaded by DowDuPont, to a new agricultural company called Corteva.

Soon after Corteva took over the DuPont pension plan they allegedly did a "study" of companies of comparable size and determined that the life insurance benefits they were providing to the old DuPont Retirees were too rich!

So, they got rid of all of the life insurance benefits that had been promised to DuPont retirees decades ago. At the same time, Corteva offers highly subsidized life insurance benefits to its current employees. AT&T Retiree friends, does this sound familiar? Ironically, the DuPont retirees lost their life insurance benefits on the same exact day as the AT&T folks.

It seems more and more that targeting retiree earned benefits is the best way to improve stock performance. In fact, Corteva improved their financial statements by kicking retirees to the curb to the tune of close to a cool billion dollars. Corporate executives were handsomely rewarded for their shrewd maneuvering.

But what about the retirees? What happens when they lose life insurance benefits when they can least afford or qualify for replacement coverage?

This issue was brought to the attention of the Department of Labor (DOL) and an investigation into the practice was undertaken by the Employee Benefits Security Administration (EBSA) with significant input from Retirees for Justice. Unfortunately, the DOL concluded that under existing law they lacked the authority to prevent a plan sponsor from exercising its "business judgment" and terminating what is known as a "welfare benefit" for economic reasons.

Welfare benefits include both health insurance and life insurance, and these benefits can be reduced or eliminated without violating ERISA as they are not considered "vested" benefits like a pension. Even though DuPont in its heyday was more than triple the size of Corteva, Corteva management succeeded in convincing EBSA that the cost of maintaining life insurance was not economically viable.

Investigations are underway into whether or not the spin-offs were done with the specific intent of offloading retiree liabilities in violation of ERISA.

The Association of BellTel Retirees and Retirees for Justice believe that taking away life insurance benefits from retirees and their families is unconscionable and has to be addressed. Currently, Retirees for Justice is looking to introduce an amendment to ERISA to prevent plan sponsors from discriminating against retirees by cutting life insurance benefits and requiring that those benefits be reclassified under ERISA as vested benefits.

This is no small task as the cost of maintaining insurance coverage for retirees is substantial and companies like Corteva have 5 times more retirees than employees. Still, cutting life insurance coverage should not be an easy way for corporate executives to line their pockets at the expense of the greatest generation.

Our proposed ERISA Amendment contains other retiree friendly provisions that we plan to share in the weeks ahead. Stay tuned as we push this initiative forward in 2022.

Retirees for Justice is expanding its scope and bringing in members from other groups around the country who have come face to face with the onslaught of cuts and benefit reductions that have become all too commonplace these days.

We most recently brought in a number of GE retirees, and we are in the process of integrating the General Electric Retiree Benefit Solutions folks into the Retirees for Justice family. Similar efforts are underway with other groups as we believe that there is strength in numbers, and we are all better together.

GE retirees already had their life insurance benefits reduced and their pensions off-loaded to an insurance company known as Athene – which is now owned by a private equity firm known as Apollo – once run by the now disgraced Leon Black. More and more private equity firms are getting into the insurance business and this poses unique risks for those whose pensions have been de-risked into an insurance annuity.

Unlike healthcare and life insurance, ERISA still protects pensions from reduction in retirement because they are considered vested benefits. However, since 2012 more than $200 billion in pension liabilities has been offloaded to insurance companies in pension de-risking transactions, which allow a Plan Sponsor to amend its Defined Benefit Plans to kick out retirees without giving them a choice.

It happened with Verizon in 2012 and the Association of BellTel Retirees has been a tireless advocate in favor of transparency and accountability in de-risking transactions. Through its affiliation with Retirees for Justice the Association is making a big push to change state laws to replace protections that are lost in pension de-risking transactions with reasonably equivalent protections under state law.

New BellTel Chairman Thomas Steed is pushing for a 2022 hearing before the New York State Insurance Committees – beginning with the Assembly Committee chaired by Kevin Cahill. Retirees for Justice is coordinating this effort and will be submitting memoranda of support to both the Assembly Committee and the Senate Committee.

New York Senate Bill Number S2885 sponsored by Senator Andrew Gounardes and Assembly Bill Number A6099 sponsored by Assemblyman Peter Abbate are both in their respective insurance committees. These two Bills are designed to replace the uniform protections intended by Congress under ERISA with reasonably equivalent protections under New York State Law.

Retirees for Justice is actively looking for support from New York constituents. Please reach out to me directly at estone@retireesforjustice.org if you are a New York resident and would like to write a letter or email of support.

As we move into the 2022 state legislative sessions, we need your support more than ever to stop the assault on retirees and their families.

Please join Retirees for Justice by going to www.RetireesForJustice.org and click on "Join Now." Membership is free! This small step of support will greatly assist the Association of BellTel Retirees in fighting the good fight to protect earned benefits for retirees and their families.

— 2022 Membership Appeal —

Dear Valued Member,

Your board of directors at the Association of BellTel Retirees is ready, willing and able to fight harder than ever in 2022 to fulfill our eternal core commitment to YOU: Protect and enhance YOUR pension and benefits.

As we all know, your healthcare, life insurance, and pension are **earned benefits** – not handouts. Most retirees agree that they traded higher salaries for a more comprehensive benefit package. Yet your earned benefits are under constant attack. The following details highlight just a few current matters that address our shared concerns.

During mid-2021 your Association invested in AT&T stock to ensure our eligibility to participate in future proxy campaigns. Our foresight proved fortuitous and here is just one reason why YOUR Association is MAD as HELL and why you should be TOO.

As of January 1, 2022, AT&T **union retirees** had their EARNED life insurance benefits CUT to $25,000, and AT&T **management retirees** to $15,000. It does not surprise us that NO similar reduction impacts AT&T executives. Further, the sickness and death benefit will be capped at $25,000 for eligible union and management retirees.

We are rightfully concerned that Verizon is likely considering the same despicable action. We must take a strong position to ensure that **YOUR voice is heard** throughout the corporate offices at both AT&T and Verizon.

I now shift your focus to share a very recent VICTORY in our ongoing proxy efforts to "help" Verizon behave ethically. YOUR BellTel legal team uncovered a glaring deficiency in Verizon Board of Director's so-called "Human Resources Committee". Until recently, this committee focused solely on compensation for Verizon executives.

In November 2021 your Association filed a shareholder proxy to mandate Verizon make the board directly responsible for **workforce equity** issues. In response, Verizon amended their HR Committee's charter to take responsibility and to oversee Verizon's, "…strategies, initiatives and programs related to human capital management, including with respect to employee diversity, equity and inclusion, talent acquisition, retention and development, employee engagement, pay equity and corporate culture."

Yes, indeed. Your Association's advocacy continues to "help" Verizon by shining a glaring light on their deficiencies in caring for their **retirees AND current employees**. Be assured, we will also assist AT&T, and others from our extended telephone and communications family, to identify and correct similar deficiencies in ethical and legal behavior.

Your Association is committed to continued partnership with like-minded organizations in 2022. This includes Retirees for Justice, Pension Rights Center, Pioneers, and many others. Strength in numbers gives us a LOUDER voice to protect the earned benefits for ALL retirees and workers. All retirees, retiree social and networking groups and associations need to work in unison.

Today, I call on YOU to join our Call to Action! Your past generosity has been incredible and we are grateful for all that you contribute to YOUR Association. Please continue to support yourself, your family and your fellow retirees. We stand tall as we proudly walk shoulder to shoulder with YOU.

You can send a check, make an online credit card donation and you can even set up automatic donations that recur monthly, quarterly or annually. There are other donation options such as a Qualified Charitable Distribution or you may consider including the Association of BellTel Retirees in your estate planning. We are a 501c(3) organization and your contributions are tax deductible. Feel free to call our office for more information

We enter 2022 wishing eternal peace to all your dearly departed. The Association of BellTel Retirees sends a special acknowledgement to our own Jack Cohen and Jack Brennan.

We Stand Strong Together,

— Una Kelly, Treasurer

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

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

❏ **$100** ❏ **$50** ❏ **$40** ❏ **OTHER** _____________ **We appreciate any amount you can donate**

Or use your credit card: VISA MASTERCARD DISC AMEX

Acct.#__________/__________/__________/________ Expiration Date_____ Zip Code: _________

Please consider adding $1.00 or more to help offset costly transaction fees and ensuring your donation will fund the work we do on your behalf.

Name____

Address______________________________________ City/State/Zip Code________________________

E-mail_______________________________________ Telephone #_______________________________

I am a: Management retiree _____ Union retiree ______ Other _____ Company Retired from:______ Year Retired: ________

You can also donate online by going to www.belltelretirees.org and click on the DONATE NOW button.
Consider a recurring donation – an easy and safe way to budget your contribution.
The Association of BellTel Retirees Inc is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization.

Spring 2022

AT&T Spins off WarnerMedia to Create Warner Bros. Discovery

Telecom giants continue to attempt to step into the streaming media ring to challenge known and established content farms like Netflix and Disney.

As recently reported, AT&T has made the decision to combine two of their supposed crown jewel content creation assets, WarnerMedia and Discovery, to create Warner Bros. Discovery.

WarnerMedia overseas assets including HBO, CNN, TNT, and TBS television networks, while Discovery is home to the more reality TV based channels like HGTV and the Food Network.

In 2021 AT&T announced that they would be unwinding their $85 billion purchase of Time Warner – a purchase made in 2018 – to focus on their broadband capabilities and to further develop 5G. However, the $43 billion deal to merge WarnerMedia with Discovery tells another story.

Just last year Verizon sold off both AOL and Yahoo for a total of $5 billion after having purchased the assets in 2015 and 2017, respectively, for a combined cost of $8.9 billion, in an attempt to create their own original content. The move to shed these assets signaled that Verizon was going to refocus on their telecom business and move on from the idea of becoming a major content creating agency.

AT&T's attempt to be the Cecil B. DeMille of modern broadcasting comes at a significant time. When the pandemic hit, the division's bottom line took a nosedive when theaters began to close due to quarantines. Now they are scrambling to recoup their losses.

When Verizon originally bought Yahoo, they became the owners of a niche social media platform called Tumblr which was procured by Yahoo for $1.1 billion in 2013 and then sold by Verizon for only $3 million long before Verizon decided to sell Yahoo as a whole.

With Verizon's purchase of AOL came the Huffington Post – which AOL bought for $315 million in 2011 – but Verizon subsequently sold Huffington Post in 2020 which resulted in a $119 million loss for Verizon according to Variety.

These non-core investments clearly never panned out. It is frustrating to see how executives are making poor decisions time and time again while losing money for shareholders. These resources could have instead been better spent on wage and retiree COLA increases at both companies.

Pension Rights Center Has Lost a Champion

The Pension Rights Center (PRC) in Washington, D.C. has for years worked in close coordination with our Association.

The PRC was originally founded by Karen Ferguson in 1976 as a legal advocacy group to protect retirees' rights.

Your Association has learned the sad news that in late December of 2021 Karen passed away, at the age of 80, from colon cancer.

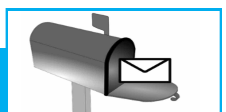
As a young lawyer, Ms. Ferguson was drawn to pension law and fought tirelessly to preserve pension and benefit rights. She kept up the mission until the very end.

We are reminded of the many times that Ms. Ferguson and her team stood alongside our Association leaders as we testified collaboratively on Capitol Hill on our joint mission to fight for retirees.

Ms. Ferguson was significantly instrumental in drafting legislation and helping to pass laws to support the needs of those planning for a well-earned retirement. One law she helped champion was the Retirement Equity Act of 1984, signed into law by President Ronald Reagan.

This law expanded pension rights by lowering the minimum age requirement for pension plan participation. It prevented pension plans from mislabeling maternity and paternity leave as a break from employment service and further expanded the definition of accrued benefits.

MEMBER MAILBAG



Long time member, but just never got around to writing. I want to thank each and every one, who has donated their time and energy to the success and accomplishments of the BellTel Association. Thanks to the last newsletter and the Thomas Steed video, I learned about the Death and Disability benefit. I had no clue to its existence, only of the group insurance policy, and am sure did many other fellow members.

I did apply and received a response, hence: happy wife. I wish you all a healthy and happy New Year.

P.S. Kudos to whomever arranged Amazon Smile, excellent!

Robert Lima, Hudson, FL

* * *

Just a quick note to say thank you for your work protecting our pensions and benefits.

A special thanks to Mr. Tommy Steed for the information he provided regarding the Life Insurance and Disability Benefit, and the Sickness and Death Benefit. I contacted the Verizon Benefit Committee was successful in getting a commitment for the letters Mr. Steed suggested we get.

Thank you again.

Dan Palermo

I have had several occasions lately to contact the AETNA insurance plan for Verizon retirees. I am delighted with the service, and just thought I'd let y'all know!

Their phones are quickly answered, even in the days of COVID. Their people are courteous, knowledgeable, and often go to great lengths to assist me.

I have, of course, been known to write letters of complaint on a few occasions, but I have no complaint about these folks. I just got a copy of the rules for next year, and they continue to be outstanding.

Thank you for your continued good work.

Bob Legato

* * *

Thank you for the great work and effort for the retirees to keep our pension and medical!

Marilyn Daly, Riverhead, NY

* * *

In memory of Jack Cohen. An awesome, amazing man!

Diann Crossman, Venice, FL

* * *

The latest newsletter was really great.

Richard Burney, Massapequa Park, NY

Thank you for all you do for us retirees.

Paul Talaska, New Milford, CT

* * *

Thank you for all your hard work and time.

Robert Kersbergen, Ronkonkoma, NY

* * *

Thanks for your dedication in preserving the rights of every retiree, who so much strived to make the Bell System the jolly green giant we know today!

Ralph De Jesus

* * *

Thanks for all you do. Keep up the good work.

Bill Burnett, Mechanicsburg, PA

* * *

Happy 25th anniversary. Proud to be a member all these years.

Lloyd Wurst Jr.