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USW National Oil Bargaining Conference Delegates Prepare for 2009 Talks

Denver—Delegates to the United Steelworkers (USW) national oil bargaining conference came together in Denver Nov. 4-7 to celebrate the birthplace of their pattern bargaining, join together in solidarity and prepare for negotiations with the industry in 2009.

“The membership is firmly behind this union leadership, and the members are fully committed to engage this industry in 2009,” said USW International Vice President Gary Beevers. “There will be no contract extension; we need to bargain.”

The last time the union and the industry engaged in full-fledged bargaining where every issue was on the table was in 2002. The current contract expires Feb. 1, 2009 at midnight.

“The locals are preparing their members for a tough set of negotiations,” Beevers said. “They are beginning to educate their members on the issues and are planning to have collective actions. The oil companies are ready for us; we have to be ready for them.”

Health care and health and safety will be the main issues in the 2009 talks, according to members.

“This industry failed to partner with us on health care to solve the crisis in this country, so we intend to do it alone. In the meantime, it will be the number one item at the bargaining table,” Beevers said.

The oil bargaining conference drew the largest number of delegates ever to attend this event—340 delegates. They unanimously passed motions on how to do contract extensions in the future, how to elect national oil bargaining policy committee members and on oil company divestiture in Burma. They also passed a resolution on a strike assessment that will be brought to the 2008 USW convention from the conference.

“There was a spirit of solidarity that had not been seen in some time, and there was a spirit of determination for one goal. It is truly a new day, a new time, a new union,” Beevers said.

The USW is the largest industrial union in North America and represents over 1.2 million workers and retirees. In the oil sector, the USW represents 30,000 workers in the U.S., Canada and Aruba.

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