Today, as we open up bargaining, the Company and the Union recognize it is in the best interest of both parties and employees, as well as the public for all dealings between us to continue with mutual responsibility and respect. Responsibility and Respect are words everyone at the table know well but are also words that appear to define a different era in AT&T’s relationship with its employees. Words to which it seems, through the last two rounds of bargaining, this Company has begun to drift away from. The Union, through its membership, has a vital role in the overall success of the Company’s operations, and the bargaining team I stand with today, recognizes this vital role and has come in the spirit of good faith, to reclaim our member’s rightful part of that great success. CWA stands before you today as a unified voice, the voice of thousands of Union members, the voice of thousands of retirees, all of them speaking in unison loud and clear with a singular message, “It is our turn”.

Earlier this year AT&T was recognized as the most admired telecommunications company in the world. When acknowledging this recognition CEO Randall Stephensons was quoted as saying, “Being recognized by FORTUNE as the number one telecom company is a testament to our 240,000 employees working hard every day to help customers.” The 2015 bargaining session is an opportunity for Mr. Stephenson to show the employees, our members, how much they are valued and deserve to share in this recognition. This award would not have been possible without the thousands of CWA members, working hard on a daily basis to build this company.

AT&T’s most valuable asset is its employees, CWA members. We come before you today to demand that they be treated with respect in the workplace. On a daily basis they are subjected to unreasonable objectives and goals. They are continuously harassed while simply trying to do their jobs; whether it’s through unjust performance plans or through the misguided administration of those plans. They are faced with mandated roadblocks, with company plans and processes. One day they are on top and are told what a great job they have done and the next day, after a tough dispatch or a long call taking care of a customer, they are pulled into an office and threatened with entries being put into their records over poor performance. Even through all of this, our
Members are still dedicated to our customers. They work hard and should be treated with the same respect that they show our customers. Our members also deserve appropriate wage increases. Since the signing of the last contract in 2012, they are routinely given more work and responsibilities. Even though their workload has increased, they are still held to the same rigid standards and performance levels that were in place before they were given this extra work. The company has expectations and so does CWA. Our members work hard every day and we demand that they be compensated to the level they deserve. Our members in District 3 deserve no less than their peers in other Districts. AT&T wants things to be uniform; this is a good place to start.

Our Members are highly skilled and eager to take on the challenges brought before them through the technologies and jobs of the future. In order to take on these challenges, they must be given a chance to access training and afforded the opportunity to use that training. AT&T has the workforce needed to carry the company into the future and your leadership need not look beyond its own workforce of CWA Members, to achieve the goals of the future. Our members are the ones that have carried this company to where it is today and they are the ones that will carry it into the future.

Benefits. Many of our members started their careers with this company because of the benefits offered to them. These benefits are what made this company stand apart from all of the other companies. Our members felt like they worked for a company that valued their hard work, a company that would take care of them, and with the partnership of CWA, this happened for many years. The benefits that once defined AT&T as a top employer have slowly faded away. As this company’s profits continue to rise, our members’ benefits continue to fall. AT&T is not struggling to survive and our members are; the people who are the face of this company. You can talk about all of the changes in technology, competition, or any of the other changes in the telecommunications industry, but at the end of the day, the members that we are bargaining for, are AT&T. They are the ones who interact with customers, whether it is at work or in their communities. They have made this company what it is today. They have a right to quality benefits without continued cost shifting. Enough is enough.

This company’s complete disregard for retirees is another issue that must be addressed in these negotiations. AT&T seems to look at the people who built this company as a burden, and have forgotten the years of service, and
sacrifice, that they made to shape this company into what it is today. Without them and the hard work that they contributed to this company, I would dare say that none of us would be sitting here together today. You cannot forget them and brush them off as a liability. In fact, they are still asked to help the company today as representatives at various political and community activities. CWA will never forget them and AT&T doesn’t need to either. The same is true for future retirees. Our members have dedicated years of their lives to this company, sacrificing themselves and their families. They are not just asking for a retirement, they are working tirelessly for it.

In closing, I would like to mention a quote of Mr. Randall Stephenson’s from a comment that he made in regards to the integrity of AT&T employees. “We excel at so many things — from developing innovative technology to building strong customer relationships. But true, lasting success is not about what we accomplish, but how we accomplish it.” The “how” is why we are sitting here today. This is the time to continue the ground work that has been laid by the generations before us, and let’s do the right thing to achieve lasting success. AT&T, take care of your retirees and take care of our members. Treat them with the respect that they deserve, and make sure that they are compensated for the work that they do, through wages and benefits. Whether it’s their current job, or jobs of the future. We are AT&T, proud CWA members!

Richard Honeycutt
District 3 Vice-President