

Testimony for New York State Public Hearings**On Spending Needs for New York State 2008-09 Budget****Tuesday, November 27, 6-9 p.m., SUNY IT, Marcy****By Gerald Eldridge, Retiree Chapter, United Auto Workers Local 2367**

I am here to offer testimony today as a member of Retiree Chapter of UAW Local 2367 at Revere Copper and Brass, and one of the many retirees of the 32 affiliated union locals of the AFL-CIO Central New York Labor Council.

Not unlike our sisters and brothers who are still working, the retired members of our community fall lower and lower down the economic scale. With the cost of everything on the rise except for the value of our homes, it has become a common phenomenon, and is now referred to without much thought or shock, as "the loss of our middle class." But above all else stands the drastic increase in the cost of health care and the significant decrease in coverage: health care for children, health care for workers, and health care for seniors. At the bargaining tables, workers fight to keep coverage for their families with this being the single most important issue in labor- relations unrest. In Washington, we fight to guarantee our children the right to health care coverage. And in the maze of Medicare coverage, part A and B, and now D, supplemental insurance and long term health care, seniors try to find their way through a system designed to test the most market-savvy amongst us, and attempt to save their homes the stalwart symbol of the middle class and a responsible work ethic. As an example, I would like to share what retirees of my local have faced over the past few years. One person, under age 65, premium increase from 2001 to 2007, is \$248.72 per month to \$542.32 per month respectively, or 120%. Two person coverage, from 2001 to 2007 is \$497.55 to \$1,355.80 respectively, or 170%. Over age 65, for one person with Medicare, the premium increase from 2001 to 2007 is \$169.04 to \$205.93 or 22%. For two person coverage, the premium increase is \$338.08 to \$470.50 or 33%. 22 or 33% sounds even reasonable nowadays. But this does not take into account the cost of Medicare and its significant increases. As you might imagine, enrollment in our company-sponsored plan is in significant decline because of cost. But the market place eats up much more than the \$75 payment per month paid by the company, for not participating, and offers less coverage.

I fully appreciate that the purpose of this hearing today is to address the New York State budget and, specifically, its impact on seniors. I understand that what I have presented is a national issue in that health care coverage for every man, woman and child must be addressed at every level of our government. We can no longer turn a blind eye to the problem and point to the market place as the solution. But in this most difficult of times, our state budget needs to reflect its support for the aging network and the state's responsibility as a partner in addressing the health care needs of its senior citizenry. These and other senior needs are priorities for our state supported senior network, including local services.

For sure, the health care system needs an overhaul! Not a tweak here or there, not a

reorganization, not more managing of my personal health care services, but a compete look and analysis of how we, the most prosperous nation in the world, addresses the right to affordable health care coverage for every man, woman and child. It is a moral issue.

When the accumulated wealth of our richest fifth of our population has never reached such heights, and the disparity between the haves and have-nots has ever been so great, I urge you to increase funding for the aging network and its vital services to the seniors of our state.

Retiree Chapter United Auto Workers Local 2367,

Chairman Rodger Kent

AFL-CIO Central New York Labor Council

President Pat Costello