



MEMBER RESPONSES

In January, the USW launched a multi-part initiative, Your Union Your Voice, to provide more transparency around the union's candidate endorsement process, share information on our core issues, and solicit feedback from members. A special January edition of *USW@Work* shared the questions we ask of federal candidates. In roughly 170 town hall meetings held across the nation, we had a conversation and heard what was on your mind. A survey of our members and retirees provided additional feedback. This effort was unlike anything we've taken on in our union.

For the next part of this effort, we want to share what we've learned about your priorities.

CORE ISSUE: **HEALTH CARE** YOU TOLD US...

Affordable health care and prescription drugs got the highest rating in our survey with 87 percent of respondents rating it as “very important.” When asked to rank the top three issues out of a list of 13 USW priorities, two out of every three people chose it, making it the most selected issue. During nearly all of the town hall meetings, attendees raised health care as a key concern. Frequently, town hall attendees commented on the need to control rising costs and employers’ attempts to push more costs our way. Regular comments included those like, “costs go up while benefits go down” or “we’re paying more, but getting less.” Others expressed worry for un- or under-insured family members and friends who are shouldering devastating costs incurred from illness or injury. And, some attendees shared personal stories of how having benefits helped them through the worst moments of their lives without financial ruin.

CORE ISSUE: **RETIREMENT SECURITY** YOU TOLD US...

Retirement security that includes Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid was the second highest rated issue in the survey, with 86 percent of respondents giving it a “very important” rating. Over half of those taking the survey selected it in their top three issues, making it the second highest issue. At town hall meetings, both active and retired members shared thoughts on retirement security. Many discussed protecting what we’ve got, whether that’s Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, retiree health care benefits or pensions. Others noted how 401ks have shifted risk to individuals. Some noted concern over the future solvency of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation if the multiemployer pension system is allowed to collapse. And, still others raised the need for all workers – no matter their age – to think ahead to their own retirement and what it might look like.

CORE ISSUE: **WORKERS RIGHTS** YOU TOLD US...

The issue of labor laws that support our ability to form unions and negotiate strong contracts was rated third highest in terms of importance, with 81 percent of respondents saying it’s “very important.” This was the third most frequently chosen issue when ranking the top three priorities, with just under half of respondents selecting it. Repeatedly during the town halls, participants expressed frustration with the direction of the current, pro-business National Labor Relations Board and their rapid and systematic unraveling of the protections we’ve won. These not-in-the-headlines actions were a surprise to some and provided an explanation for the increased difficulty in many of our relationships with our employers. Many town hall attendees noted concern for the generally weakened state of labor laws in recent decades, including the increasing number of states that have adopted right to work laws. Some pointed to examples in their own workplaces where their gains are being rolled back because employers have increasing power.

WHAT ELSE DID PEOPLE HAVE TO SAY?

While we’ve reported out in detail on the top three issues, the next highest-ranked tier of issues included trade agreements and laws that protect U.S. workers, increased worker wages, and strong workplace safety and health protections. Survey respondents left thousands of individual comments that spanned a wide range of concerns. Some of those comments reinforced or expanded on the provided responses, while others brought new issues to the table. Likewise, the full range of comments reported from the town hall meetings attests to the broad diversity and interests of our union.

WHO TOOK THE SURVEY?

Thousands of you.

Nearly 77 percent were active members and another 19 percent were retired. The remainder selecting “other” mostly identified themselves as former/laid off members, people who noted they were officers, and associate members. The states with the most participants loosely mirrored our union’s overall density, with Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Ohio being the top three states. However, Steelworkers in 49 states and the U.S. Virgin Islands all participated. The top three industries participants identified themselves as being from were steel, manufacturing, and pulp and paper. Like with the geographic diversity in the survey, there was also sector diversity, with participants’ workplaces ranging from health care to oil to retail to public services.

Of those who answered the optional questions, about 21 percent reported being female and 78 percent male. The most commonly reported age range was 50-64 followed by 35-49. Twenty percent of respondents reported being people of color. Twenty-one percent reported being veterans.

