



PRESSRELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
JUNE 2, 2015

United Electrical Workers Begins Contract Negotiations with GE

NEW YORK, NY

National contract negotiations began today in New York City between General Electric and the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE). UE's national contract with GE covers workers in 10 local unions at nine GE locations around the country, including Erie, PA, Fort Edward, NY. In addition, representatives of the pre-majority union in Grove City, PA are participating in the negotiations.

In his opening statement, UE President Bruce Klipple said the union intends to correct GE's "overreach" in the previous round of contract negotiations in 2011. The union's national president said the company's "overreach" had resulted in a health insurance plan that is "broken" and which has increased workers' health costs by 18 percent while reducing GE's costs by the same 18 percent. Klipple also blasted GE for eliminating pensions for new hires in 2011.

The union's bargaining goals, outlined by Klipple, include "health care improvements... that roll back the massive cost shift" that GE imposed; restoring pension coverage to all employees and improved pension benefits; substantial wage increases; and improved job security. GE can afford the union's proposals, Klipple said, given that its profits from manufacturing increased by 24.5 percent from 2010 to 2014. The profits of GE Transportation, operating in Erie and Grove City, more than doubled in that period, from 9.3 percent to 20 percent. "I want to remind you that our members and the generations that came before them built this company," Klipple told GE.

In the company's opening statement, GE representative Mike Luvisi attempted to defend GE's health insurance cuts, argued for so-called "competitive wage rates" even though GE has little if any competition in most of its businesses, and defended GE's recent elimination of health and life insurance for post-65 retirees from its non-union salary workforce. UE and the other unions believe GE will try to impose those same cuts on hourly union workers. Klipple told the company, "GE's attack on post-65 health care benefits is simply unacceptable and unjustified."

The current UE-GE contract expires June 21, and the parties have scheduled three weeks of intense bargaining leading up to that date. UE negotiates with GE as part of a coalition of 11 unions representing 17,000 GE workers nationwide. UE has had a collective bargaining relationship with GE since 1938.

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