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Campaign Underway to Block Verizon Sale in Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire

CWA and the IBEW, with the support of state and local AFL-CIOs, are engaged in a massive campaign to block Verizon's plan to sell 1.6 million local access lines in Vermont, Maine and New Hampshire. Prevent Rural Telecom Redlining, Protect the New England Economy, Defend 3,000 Good Union Jobs - this is the message that union members are taking to the public throughout the three states.

The sale would adversely affect some 2,700 IBEW members who work as technicians, clerks, operators and service reps and 350 CWA members employed as service reps throughout the three states. Estimated by the Wall Street Journal to be worth as much as \$3 billion, the sale would shrink the Maine-to-Virginia area where Verizon now provides landline telephone service and reduce the unions' bargaining power.

For customers, it's also bad news, said Cheryl Ahern, president of Local 1400. "Verizon would abandon its telephone customers in these rural states to smaller companies that do not have the assets to maintain the network or provide the same level of service - just dump them and stick with the more densely populated and more profitable states. Some of these customers would never get the same level of service again."

Every American deserves access to quality, high speed internet, and that's why the Communication Workers of America have launched a website dedicated to making this goal a reality. Visit SpeedMatters.org for more information and to test your own connection speed against countries around the world.

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About 75 union leaders met to put together the campaign shortly after learning of Verizon's plans in mid-May. "As in the 2004 New York 'Stop the Sale' campaign, our goal is to pursue every available legal, political and contractual avenue to protect our members affected by the dismembering of Verizon in New England," said District 1 Vice President Chris Shelton.

Members of the two unions marched in July 4 parades in all three states to call attention to the proposed sale, Ahern said. Local 1400 Treasurer Sarah Rotcovich and Vice President Karen Cusson coordinated a phone bank in New Hampshire, alerting members of other unions. CWA and IBEW activists held a town hall meeting in Hooksett, N.H., where members spoke their concerns to former Democratic Senate Leader Tom Daschle and New Hampshire State House Leader Jim Craig.

Along with IBEW and other union activists, CWA Local 1400 District Vice Presidents Mike O'Day in Vermont and Ann Mussenden in Maine met with governors, lawmakers and legislative staffers, asking them to contact Verizon CEO Ivan Seidenberg and express their concerns about the planned sale. Several of these public officials have already done so, including Maine Gov. John Baldacci and Reps. Tom Allen and Michael Michaud, as well as Vermont U.S. Sens. Patrick Leahy and James Jeffords and Rep. Bernie Sanders. "It has been explained to me that this offer for sale represents abandonment from Verizon's commitment to provide reliable service to rural areas such as those in Maine. Such an action would not square with the responsibilities reasonably expected of a provider of telephone service," Baldacci wrote. "Any sale would be reviewed by the Maine Public Utilities Commission and other regulatory bodies at the state and federal level," Allen wrote. "Verizon management should organize a meeting with representatives of IBEW and CWA on the potential impact on wages, benefits and working conditions of the hundreds of employees that would be involved," he said.

Plans to ramp up the campaign include Jobs with Justice Workers' Rights Board hearings in all three states, meetings with the state public service commissions, continuing workplace education and mobilization, and letter-writing by concerned union members.

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Send your own message to Ivan Seidenberg, Chief Executive Officer, Verizon Communications at 140 West Street, New York, NY. 10036.

Attachment	Size
VZCampaign.doc	22 KB

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