

Report on the IFPTE's 58th Convention Held July 27-July 30, 2015

GESTA sent two Executive Council members, Treasurer Edwin Fung and Area Vice President Alvin Boutte as delegates representing GESTA, Local 29 of IFPTE to IFPTE's 58th Convention. The convention was held at Bally's in Las Vegas, Nevada, from July 27 through July 30, 2015. The costs for the convention were covered by GESTA.

IFPTE holds conventions every three years. GESTA did not send any delegates in the previous one, the 57th in 2012, but 4 delegates went to the 56th Convention in 2009, also held in Las Vegas.

The main purpose of the convention is to consider a series of amendments (to the IFPTE Constitution) and resolutions, to be approved by the attending delegates along with valid proxies from those IFPTE members that were not able to attend. Another purpose for the convention is to elect IFPTE leaders for three-year terms.

There were two amendments to the IFPTE Constitution. The first one was to allow the Executive Council to authorize reductions of dues for those locals who experience severe financial difficulties. The sections of the Constitution that would be amended are Articles 13.5 and 13.6. The second amendment was for allocation of the Per Capita Tax for the next three years. The proposed rates are \$8.27 starting March 2016, \$8.47 starting March 2017, and \$8.72 for March 2018. The pertinent section for the change is in Article 13, Section 13.6(a). Both amendments passed unanimously.

There were 26 resolutions proposed and passed during the convention. Ten of these were proposed before the convention began, then an additional 16 were proposed during the convention, and all of those resolutions passed. Most of these resolutions are causes dear to the Labor Movement, such as supporting the Voting Rights Amendment (this is necessary because the U.S. Supreme Court overturned a key section of the 1965 Voting Rights Act in June 2013), the re-enabling of the United States Postal Service to offer financial services (the USPS offered financial services from 1911 to 1967); promote provincial/state-federal public ownership of public service assets; the re-authorization of the Export-Import Bank (authorization for the bank was left to expired by the Republican Congress), the support of the Equal Pay/Paycheck Act; the reinstatement of the Glass-Steagall Act whose repeal in 1998 was viewed by many as the planted seed which resulted in the near-collapse of the world's financial system in 2008, etc.

Some resolutions were for support of some recent headline issues, such as Black Lives Matter (the IFPTE supports) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact (the IFPTE rejects). Some resolutions were to support our trade union brothers and sisters, such as the Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers, the Crown Holdings Workers, the Black Trade Unionists, etc. All resolutions passed. With the exception of Resolution #10, the GESTA delegates voted for all resolutions. Resolution #10 was to support "Responsible Investment in Nuclear Energy". Pre-convention, the GESTA EC discussed this resolution and decided to cast an abstain vote. Resolution #24 is also noteworthy, because it was a resolution about where IFPTE will hold its next (59th) convention in 2018, which also happens to be IFPTE's 100th anniversary – the union was first chartered in 1918 by the AFL as the "International Federation of Draftsmen's Unions",

or IPDU, and was expanded in 1919 to become the “International Federation of Technical Engineers, Architects and Draftsman’s Union”. The original resolution was to name Atlantic City, New Jersey, to be the site in order to attract the maximum number of delegates and guests, as well as the city’s union-friendly hotels, cost effectiveness, family friendly atmosphere and ease of travel. However, there was a counter-proposal to name the site to be Norfolk, Virginia, because that was the location of the shipyards where many of the engineers and draftsmen worked when the IPDU was first formed. After discussion, the resolution was changed to name Atlantic City, New Jersey *or similar location*, delegating the final authority of the decision to the Executive Council. You can access the final versions of the amendments at <http://www.ifpte.org/downloads/news/manager/547d.pdf>, and the final version of the resolutions at <http://www.ifpte.org/downloads/news/manager/547c.pdf>.

The nominations of officers were held on July 29, 2015, and the slate of officers were voted on the last day of the convention, July 30, 2015. Greg Junemann and Paul Shearon were re-elected as President and Secretary-Treasurer, respectively. All of the previous Area Vice Presidents were also re-elected to three-year terms. This includes Gay Henson, who is the Area Vice President of the Eastern Federal region, the region in which GESTA belongs. There is one new Area Vice President for SPEEA (Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace), Mr. Ryan Rule, who is the President of Local 2001.

Those items were the “official business” for IFPTE. Besides these, there were many invited speakers, including Liz Shuler, Secretary-Treasurer of the AFL-CIO, Allison Beck, Director of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, Lee Saunders, President of AFSCME, Dr. Elaine Bernard, Executive Director of the Labor & Worklife Program of the Harvard Law School, Sid Ryan of the Ontario Federation of Labour and Matt Kellway of Canada’s New Democratic Party, a Member of the Canadian Parliament. Many of these are great speeches, and they are available on the IFPTE website, <http://www.ifpte.org/>. A film titled *Koch Brothers Exposed* was shown on the last day of the Convention and that film is also available at IFPTE’s website. However, to access these videos, one must have the IFPTE Member Number in order to log on to IFPTE’s Members Only portion of the website. If you would like to know what your IFPTE Member Number, please contact Stephen Leete, GESTA Secretary, stephen.leete@nasa.gov, 301-286-9093 or Edwin Fung, GESTA Treasurer, edwin.h.fung@nasa.gov, 301-283-7347.

The theme of the 58th IFPTE Convention is “Every Member is a Leader”; and the theme is a common thread in many of the speeches of the invited speakers. In addition, there were many workshops/lectures/brain-storming sessions which proved to be very informative, again based on the theme of “Every Member is a Leader”, focusing on creating space and capacity for new leaders to emerge. There were sessions that explore how to attract young workers to join the unions as well as to enable them to be leaders; revitalizing local union leadership; effective, communications, recruitment and outreach, etc. One of the workshop was on the topic of “Members Only” unions which I found to be worthy of some discussion. When workers want to organize and form a union, it requires an election by all of the workers as to whether they want to form a union or not. Often, employers try to delay the election so that they can use the time to dissuade or intimidate workers so they would vote no to forming a union. In any case, more than 50% of the employees in the

organization is required for a union to be formed. In southern states (and some Midwest states), where “right-to-work” laws prohibit union agreements between unions and employers that require employee’s membership and payment of dues, this 50% requirement is simply a bar set too high for unions to overcome. The concept of “Members Only” unions takes an incremental approach, in which a union can be formed for only a minority of all employees, who elect to join the “Members Only” union. The union then bargains with the employer for only those employees who are union members, and it cannot represent those employees who elect not to join. This is a way for unions to get a foot in the door for states that are hostile to unions. And hopefully other non-member employees will “see the light” if they can see there are benefits for joining a union. According to a 2004 book titled “The Blue Eagle at Work” by Charles J. Morris, this type of union is permissible under the 1935 National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). However, his thesis has not been tested in any ruling by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), which was created by the NLRA, as a body to enforce the NLRA. The United Steelworkers was attempting to test this in a right-to-work state, filing a ULP (Unfair Labor Practice) with the NLRB in 2006. However, they withdrew the ULP after the George W. Bush Administration appointed labor-unfriendly board members.

On each day of the convention there was a federal training session for federal workers during the lunch break. During those sessions some of the other locals talked about their experiences in dealing with management. There was a session on pending laws in Congress which would take away some of the retirement and health care benefits that federal workers currently have. The proposed legislations will total \$194 billion of cuts to federal employees’ benefits, according to some estimates. Some of these pending legislation includes HR 1230: *Government Employee Pension Reform Act*; HR 417: *Federal Workforce Reduction Through Attrition Act*; HR 1658: *Federal Employee Accountability Act of 2015*; and HR 1563: *Federal Employee Tax Accountability Act*. There was also training for contract negotiations, as well as the 4 types of official time – “official time” are time that union officers can charge for their work involving various labor or union issues, such as contract negotiation, representation of bargaining unit employees, or PDI (Pre-Decisional Involvement). Without official time, union officers will have to either use their leave or go without pay when working on behalf of bargaining unit employees, who may or may not be dues-paying members. However, official time cannot be granted for internal union business. Official time was first authorized in the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, but over the last several years there have been multiple bills introduced in Congress which would eliminate it. The aforementioned HR 1658, *Federal Employee Accountability Act of 2015*, is expressly crafted to eliminate official time. While HR 1658 has not been passed, opponents of official time also put forth amendments to appropriations bill, such as HR 2029, which is the FY16 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs funding bill, as well as HR 2822, the FY16 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies appropriations bill. Needless to say, IFPTE oppose all such attempts to eliminate official time. The following are IFPTE letters to Congress opposing amendments designed to eliminate official time to HR 2029 and HR 2822:

<http://www.ifpte.org/downloads/news/manager/517c.pdf> (April 30, 2015); and

<http://www.ifpte.org/downloads/news/manager/538c.pdf> (July 8, 2015).

Another thing of note is that some convention time was devoted to the LEAP Year 2016 PAC Campaign. LEAP stands for Legislature Education Action Program, and PAC is Political Action Committee. Lobbying is an important part of IFPTE's activities. IFPTE has a presence on Capitol Hill and has developed mature relationships with Congressional staffs. None of the LEAP budget is funded by members' dues – the LEAP PAC has a separate account with funds coming from contributions from members, families of members, staff and retired members of IFPTE. In the session on the LEAP PAC, it was emphasized that in order to have any impact on legislations being put forth and deliberated upon, the LEAP PAC must be able to help those members of Congress friendly to Labor's cause in a financial way. There have to be some counterbalance to the huge financial resources of the business community such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. While this is not ideal, it is a necessary evil to counteract those who do not have labor's best interests in mind. For more information on the IFPTE LEAP PAC, please go to <http://www.ifpte.org/members/leap-pac/>.

Overall it was a positive experience to attend the IFPTE convention as a delegate. We not only learned a lot but it was also good for networking, exchange of ideas and sharing of information which can help all of our unions to do our jobs better. We also have some first-hand accounts of what worked and what did not work in both the private and public sectors. Finally, there is nothing like face-to-face interactions, as opposed to communications by phone or e-mail. It is also encouraging when you meet with folks who also share your beliefs and goals, and it gives one a feeling that we are not alone; there are sisters and brothers who are also working very hard to advance the same goals as ours in the overarching interest of improving the quality of life and working conditions for our bargaining unit employees.