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Union Pressures AT&T To Bring Jobs Home

[By David Saleh Rauf](#) - Express-News

AT&T says it has completed a more than two-year process of repatriating 5,000 high-tech jobs that had previously been outsourced to contract vendors overseas.

The company's largest union, however, says that's not good enough.

The Communications Workers of America is pressuring the telecommunications giant to bring back to the United States more than 20,000 outsourced call center jobs at a time when domestic unemployment is steadily inching toward 10 percent.

"It's not a union issue," said Ralph Cortez, president of CWA local 6143 in San Antonio. "It's an American issue."

The CWA estimates a total of 22,000 AT&T jobs are held by contractors outside the U.S. Most of the jobs, about 16,000, are in the Philippines, according to the CWA. But thousands more have been outsourced to India, Argentina and, in some cases, as far away as Uzbekistan, the CWA says.

"They're sending these jobs to foreign countries, yet we're the people that made it happen for AT&T," said Cortez, adding that AT&T was required to bring those 5,000 workers back to the U.S. under the terms of a CWA collective bargaining agreement.

"This certainly is a threat to America."

The ramped-up union discussion comes as the CWA and AT&T continue to negotiate new contracts for tens of thousands of wireline workers across the country, including 2,500 in San Antonio.

AT&T officials say the company is committed to creating jobs in the United States and remains one of the country's largest employers. AT&T spokesman Walt Sharp brushed off CWA suggestions that the company is not creating enough jobs for Americans as "ridiculous"

"We prefer to have work done in-house," Sharp said. "However, in the competitive environment we are in, we need to have competitive contracts to do that work."

Sharp said the 5,000 jobs brought back to the payrolls of its U.S. operating companies were done under "competitive contracts," and that there is nothing in the works to repatriate more outsourced jobs.

Communications Workers of America Local 4250
3055 Glenwood-Dyer Road, Lynwood, Illinois 60411
Steve G. Tisza, President (708) 757-4065(Office)
stevetisza@sbcglobal.net (E-Mail)
<http://www.cwalocal4250.org> (Website)

“I know of no such plans at this point,” he said.

In July, local union leaders staged a rally outside AT&T's building at Broadway and Hildebrand to raise awareness of the outsourcing issue. They also hoisted onto the side of the local CWA building two 4-by-8-foot yellow signs that say: “AT&T stop sending our work to foreign countries.” The signs are still up.

Cortez says the union has ordered another set of signs that will read: “Demand to speak to a worker in the USA.”

In a separate move, AT&T officials announced last week the creation of 200 new high-tech jobs in San Antonio at a new U-verse technical support call center. Union leaders responded by saying that “giving us 200 jobs doesn't make up for the thousands that are being outsourced.”

Just days later, AT&T said it was slashing 100 San Antonio-based directory-assistance operator jobs, a move that drops the total number of AT&T workers in the city to about 5,400.

Those laid-off workers, says AT&T spokesman Mike Barger, can transfer to Houston to do the same work, “take another job with AT&T” or accept a severance package.

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