

# The Debs Foundation Newsletter

P.O. BOX 843, TERRE HAUTE, INDIANA 47808-0843



FALL 2001

## CHESSER TO RECEIVE 2001 DEBS AWARD

As befits a railroader, Al H. Chesser has always been moving on (up). The recipient of the 2001 Debs Award began his work life in 1935, in Kansas, first as a Kroger grocery clerk, then manager, but because he could not tolerate labor-management relations at Kroger at that time, he hired on in 1941 as a Brakeman on the Sante Fe line in Amarillo, Texas, and joined the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen. In 1945, he was elected Secretary-Treasurer and Legislative Representative of the 800 member local, offices which he held until 1956, when he was elected State Legislative Director and moved to Austin, Texas. During these Texas years Chesser benefited from the tutelage of the Texas Democratic Party Chairman, Charlie Gibson, who lived in Amarillo. Gibson introduced Chesser to then congressman Lyndon Johnson, with whom he became friends.

In 1961, Chesser began what he considers one of the most productive phases of his life, this when he assumed the duties of National Legislative Director, in Washington, for the Trainmen (which merged during this period to form the United Transportation Union, or UTU). He represented his members in the U.S. House and Senate and at hearings before the Interstate Commerce Commission. Chesser moved on to serve as International President of UTU from 1971 to 1980, stepping down voluntarily in 1980 to be given emeritus status. He also was a Vice President of the AFL-CIO Executive Council and Chairman of the executive council's Constitution Committee.

Among Chesser's proudest accomplishments while in leadership



AL H. CHESSER  
*Debs Award Recipient, 2001*

positions in his union are improvements in the safety laws protecting rail workers, and his role in creating Conrail. Steward McClure, a Secretary of the U.S. Senate, wrote of Chesser:

"Chesser was a master of any situation, able to fight rail management on turf that had long belonged to them, but also able to work with them on matters involving the best interests of his union members. Long hours, seven day weeks, preparation, hard work and contacts were all key ingredients to success in Washington that Chesser was sure to include in his own work regime... Chesser was able to establish himself as a formidable lobbyist."

Al Chesser is now President Emeritus of UTU, but he continues to be deeply involved in union activities. His expertise in workplace safety as well as in the techniques of legislative representation are highly respected and regularly sought after. Though retired, he is still moving, still serving his union and the interests of working people. We hope you can join us in this event honoring Brother Chesser with the coveted Eugene V. Debs Award.

## KEYNOTE SPEAKER



BYRON A. BOYD, JR.  
*Keynote Speaker*

Byron A. Boyd, Jr. is International President of the 135,000-member United Transportation Union, which represents employees in the railroad, bus, airline and other transportation industries in the U.S. and Canada.

A native of Seattle, Washington, Boyd began his railroad career in 1964 as a brakeman for the Union Pacific Railroad. He was transferred to engine service in 1968 and promoted to locomotive engineer in 1971. Boyd was twice elected Assistant UTU President, in 1995 and 1999, and in February, 2001, he was elevated to President of the UTU International following the retirement of Charles L. Little.

The challenges which face the unions in rail transportation today compared to Debs' time may be different in scope, but are the same issues of safety, job security and decent pay. The very existence of the UTU -- formed as it was out of a merger of craft unions -- is a tribute to union leaders who carried on the tradition of Debs when he in 1893 formed the American Railroad Union, and merger talks are going on as this is written which will be another progression toward the great industrial union which Debs envisioned.

Byron Boyd holds Al Chesser in high regard, and is delighted to have this opportunity to participate in the program honoring such a legendary figure.

## **Debs Foundation Spring Business Meeting April 28, 2001**

The meeting was called to order at 1:05 p.m., Noel Beasley presiding. Announcements were made regarding the annual award banquet for 2001, including the date of November 3, and the anticipated award recipient.

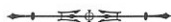
Woody Creason, Treasurer, reported on the foundation's financial activities, and reminded us that the annual financial statement for year 2000 was in the *Spring Newsletter*. He mentioned that the Endowment Fund is not faring badly in the current period of stock market "adjustments."

Charles King, Secretary, reported on activities related to maintenance of the Debs Home and grounds. Some landscaping work is needed to maintain the appearance of the property.

One item of new business was the election of Kathleen Culver to the foundation's board as a Director. Kathleen, along with her late husband, Pete Culver, were jointly awarded the foundation's distinguished service award in 1995. Several helpful suggestions were directed at getting the press more active in reporting foundation news, and possibly incorporating in the newsletter labor news on issues which Debs had supported in his day. Mention was made that next year will be the appropriate year for special observation of the foundation's 40th anniversary.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Charles King  
Secretary



## **Of Cowboys, Politicians and Cockleburs**

As a boy growing up in West Texas I heard a lot of country and western tunes. Just the other day while driving I heard an old Conway Twitty song with words which really caught my attention. The refrain said: "Don't call him a cowboy, until you've seen him ride." The message was directed to cowboy singers in fancy garb who may not be much good in the saddle, but my thoughts ran quickly to how true this is about persons in every walk of life. Don't call him a cowboy until you've seen him ride. Almost instantly my thoughts went, surprise, to politician cowboys. And to our current President who tries to be something of a Texas cowboy: straight talking, square shooting, a bit rough but committed to the basics, and western boots and hat too. And he is trying to turn back the clock twenty years to emulate the policies and style of a former California movie star-cowboy president. I've seen President Bush ride now and he definitely is not my type of cowboy.

A fabulous trick to play on a cowboy was to slip cockleburs under his horse's saddle. A cocklebur is a mean thing, hard to get loose from. I'd about as soon tangle with a rattlesnake as with a bunch of cockleburs stuck to my pants or caught in the tail of the cow I was milking. One thing for sure, play this trick on a guy and you'd soon find out just what kind of cowboy he was, he definitely wasn't in for a comfortable ride.

### **DEBS FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER**

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**Website: [www.eugenevdebs.com](http://www.eugenevdebs.com)**

Foundation Officers:

Jack Sheinkman, *President*

Noel Beasley, *Executive Vice President*

Charles King, *Secretary*

Woodrow Creason, *Treasurer*

The *Debs Foundation Newsletter* is published twice yearly for distribution to members and friends of the Foundation. The Eugene V. Debs Foundation is a non-profit, private organization which maintains the home of Eugene and Kate Debs as a museum and shrine to labor, and carries on educational and informational programs which aim to honor and promote the goals for which Debs struggled: industrial unionism, social justice, and peace. For those wishing to become members, an application form is provided elsewhere in this issue.

In a manner of speaking, when we try to hold our political leaders accountable, we are slipping burs under their saddles, make them ride a good ride, preventing them from getting too comfortable in the saddle, too cozy with the interests of money and power.

There are plenty of issues to be used as saddle burs on politicians at all levels of government and in both parties. The more informed you are of what goes on in Washington and your state house, the more burs you have at your disposal. And the bur under the saddle blanket trick is not deserved only by members of one political party. Far too many of both sides of the aisle are much too comfortable in the saddle.

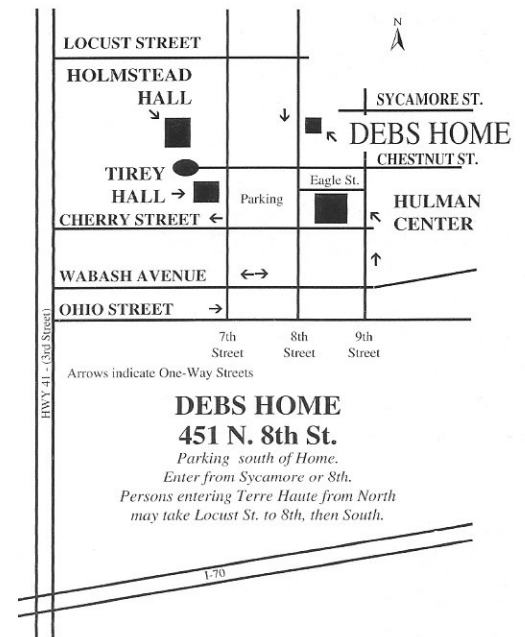
A prime example: the disappearance of the federal budget surplus. Blame Bush and his tax cut. Where really did the surplus go? At least \$20 million was spent in postage to inform us that our tax rebates were on their way. This wasn't just a Bush tax cut, and the mailing was free advertising for all in congress. Knowing that we all love a tax break, this was \$20 million in sure fire advertising paid for by the tax payers of America. You can do the figures. Assuming average per household federal tax payments of \$10,000, it will take the total federal tax payments from 2,000 households just to pay for that mailing. And it will take another mailing, late this month, for me to receive my rebate.

But that \$20 million or so is nothing compared to the hundreds of millions Congress spent last fall near the end of their legislative session. While we were diverted by that pitiful presidential election campaign, Republicans and Democrats alike were rushing thru pork barrel legislation to benefit their home states and districts. Knowing it could only aid their own re-elections -- how many citizens complain about spending tax dollars when they themselves benefit -- they passed legislation which drew down the budget surplus in shameless acts of provincialism and self interest.

As responsible and informed citizens, we must go beyond self interest. Don't fall for the blame game, and don't be diverted by half-a-loaf gestures. We may like how Bush rides when he talks of education. "Leave no child behind." What does he propose, beyond a lot of testing, and privatization under so-called free market competition. Wouldn't it be great for him to say and make concrete proposals to leave no worker behind.

— Continued on page 4

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| <b>ANNUAL AWARDS BANQUET</b><br><b>TERRE HAUTE</b><br><b>November 3</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>2001</b></span><br><b>Honoring</b><br><b>AL CHESSER</b>   |  |
| <b>SCHEDULE OF EVENTS</b><br><b>Afternoon</b><br>1:00 to<br>4:30 p.m.: Debs Home Open<br>3:30 p.m.: Ceremony at Debs Grave Site<br><br><b>Evening</b><br>6:00 p.m.: Social Hour and Reception (cash bar), Heritage Ballroom, Tirey Hall, ISU<br>7:00 p.m.: Banquet Honoring Al Chesser |  |
| The fall business meeting will be Sunday, November 4<br>at 9:00 a.m. at the Debs Home  |  |



*Parking is free in lot shared by Hulman Center and Tirey Hall.*

## Individual Greetings

You have the opportunity to participate in sending greetings in either of two forms. For a listing of your name (one or two persons), send \$20. For a listing which includes your personal greeting not to exceed 20 words, send \$30. Indicate if not attending the banquet in order that a copy of the souvenir program can be mailed. This order must be received by October 15. Use space at bottom of this page to provide name, \$20 or \$30 listing (include message) and if attending the banquet.

## Dinner Ticket Order

(\$25 per ticket)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ X \$25 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 number of                      amount  
 tickets                              enclosed

### NOTE

We offer a choice of entrees. Please **indicate your choice when you order tickets and again at the door.**

Chicken Dijonnaise \_\_\_\_\_  
Number

Baked Trout \_\_\_\_\_  
Number

Tickets must be paid in advance, checks payable to The Debs Foundation, P.O. Box 843, Terre Haute, IN 47808  
 Please check one of the following options.

☐ Hold tickets at the door, in the name of \_\_\_\_\_  
 (actually the preferred way)

☐ Mail my tickets to the following address:  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Inquiries may be directed to Charles King, 812-237-3443.

Assure everyone access to a job at a livable wage and under safe working conditions. And by the way, that's where true family values begin, with a family unit which is economically viable. Still, it takes more than a livable wage for a healthy family. Family values should include circumstances where every child is a wanted child. That requires family planning. Emulating Ronald Reagan, the first executive act of President Bush was to stop U.S. funding for a number of overseas agencies providing family planning and reproductive health assistance in developing countries. In doing so he cut funds which went, not for abortions, but to families in poor countries needing educational and technical assistance for family planning services. His action made a lot of religious fundamentalists happy, but what kind of family values are those? A dollar spent on family planning does more good, especially at the level of the family, than a dollar spent on economic development.

The bur of tax cuts needs to be used at the state level also. In state houses across the land, legislators and governors are playing the blame game, just waiting for the other party to take the politically dangerous step toward fiscal and social responsibility by advocating tax increases. We have schools to fund, roads and bridges to fix, health and unemployment programs to be funded, and the politically safe increases in "sin taxes" on alcohol and tobacco won't bring in enough money. It will take a great many burs under saddles before state legislators begin educating the public to the necessity of tax increases.

Were Debs alive today he would have just as many burs to slip under saddles as he found in his day. As responsible advocates of human rights, social justice and world peace, we can find bushes full of burs which ought to be picked and readied at every opportunity to be slipped under the saddles of too comfortable politicians!

**Recycle your  
Newsletter by  
sharing it  
with a friend.**

The form at right is for year 2001 dues or for new members. Year 2002 dues statements will be mailed later in the fall.

**Membership Dues: The Eugene V. Debs Foundation**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
STREET \_\_\_\_\_  
CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ \$ 5.00 Student Member      \_\_\_\_\_ \$100.00 Sustaining Member  
\_\_\_\_\_ \$10.00 Regular Member      \_\_\_\_\_ \$250.00 Life Members  
\_\_\_\_\_ \$25.00 Supporting Member      \_\_\_\_\_ Other

Enclose remittance. Make checks payable to the Debs Foundation.

The Debs Foundation  
P.O. Box 843  
Terre Haute, IN 47808-0843

Your dues and contributions are tax deductible. The Foundation owns and maintains the Debs Home and offers several educational and cultural programs. We are a voluntary organization with no paid staff.

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