



ON THE MOVE

COMING TOGETHER AGAIN

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Diversity, solidarity are keys to AFSCME's success

Union efforts make a difference at State Capitol



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

GRASSROOTS LOBBYING IS CRITICAL

The Illinois General Assembly has wrapped up its spring session—a strange amalgam of in-person debates and votes at the Capitol and testimony on bills in committee provided remotely, with reporters and lobbyists largely barred from the premises.

Under the circumstances, it's amazing that anything got done at all. But it was actually a very productive session with some good outcomes for AFSCME members.

The FY 22 state budget adopted in the final days of the session essentially reflected the plan Governor Pritzker put forward back in February. Rejecting Republican calls for state employee furlough days or pay freezes, it maintains current staff levels (adding staff in IDES and DCFS), funds employee pay raises, and projects no layoffs.

The budget includes the full employer contribution to the state's pension funds, repayment of a loan from the federal government, additional funding for education at all levels and maintenance of the state's funding to local governments.

Moreover, thanks to AFSCME's grassroots lobbying campaign, it includes funding for a raise of at least \$1.50 an hour for low-wage frontline caregivers in nonprofit community disability agencies funded by the state.

In other words, it is a fair and balanced budget—one that will demonstrate to the bond rating agencies that Illinois is getting back on track.

There was progress on a number of other fronts as well, both in passing bills that will benefit AFSCME members and in defeating those that would have caused harm.

Most notable in the latter category was the total blockade we erected against a bevy of Republican-backed bills to slash or even eliminate public-em-

ployee pensions. Working with others in the labor movement, AFSCME lobbyists made sure that none of those saw the light of day.

And in a major feat, we convinced sponsors of a sweeping criminal justice reform bill to remove a provision that would have taken collective bargaining rights away from police officers. We made the case that such an assault on basic workplace rights for one group of workers could lay the basis for other workers being stripped of their rights going forward.

Our union was also successful in blocking action on a measure that would have undermined qualified immunity for public employees, reversing a longtime legal precedent that severely restricts civil lawsuits against individual employees for actions taken in the line of duty.

And there's more. We helped stop bills that would have restricted voting rights, privatized work in the Illinois Department of Human Services and required monitoring of certain employees in the Illinois Department of Corrections.

We were able to accomplish all this and more because we are a statewide union with occupational and geographic diversity unlike any other in Illinois. There are AFSCME members in every corner of the state. And we come from a wide range of backgrounds and occupations—librarians, nursing home workers, sanitation workers, correctional officers, lawyers, park rangers, maintenance workers, clerical workers and so many more.

Diversity is our great


strength. That wide range of locations and vocations means we can reach out to legislators across the state and be heard. When there's an issue affecting members in one part of the state, AFSCME can go to legislators in other parts of the state for help, even when voters in their district are not directly impacted. And if there's an issue only affecting AFSCME members in one type of work, our union can engage even those legislators for whom the issue itself may not be important.

And we don't have to go it alone. AFSCME's lobbying acumen and commitment to solidarity across the labor movement means we can help forge strong labor coalitions—as we have done to defend pension benefits and fight for tax fairness—and we can count on the backing of the Illinois AFL-CIO when the going gets tough.

That's why grassroots member lobbying is so critical. Phone calls, emails and witness slips make clear that the Council 31 legislative team at the State Capitol has an army on the ground in legislators' districts.

And that's why our PEOPLE program is so important. Building a strong political action fund helps to make our union a potent force for a better life, not just for our own members, but for all working families in Illinois.

Of course, we don't win every legislative battle. But we're in every fight that matters to our members. Sometimes it's a matter of months, sometimes it can take years, but we don't back down and we don't give up if there's even the slimmest chance of prevailing.

So prevail we very often do. And we will continue to do so if we continue to build the strongest possible union on every single front. The pandemic may have slowed things down for a time, but we're coming back now and ready for all the challenges yet to come. 



ON THE MOVE

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RETIREE CHAPTER 31 REPRESENTATIVE

Larry Brown



A majority of frontline CGH Medical Center employees filed a petition to form a union with the Illinois Labor Relations Board on December 5, 2019. Their bargaining unit was officially certified this April.

CGH Medical Center workers win union recognition at last

Blowing the whistle on employer's intimidation and threats

Nurses and other hospital employees at CGH Medical Center in Sterling won a two-year campaign against anti-union intimidation by management when the Illinois Labor Relations Board formally certified them as members of AFSCME Council 31 on April 26.

These 850 new members of the AFSCME family are the largest newly unionized group of workers in Illinois this year, in both the public and private sectors. Represented employees include registered nurses, certified nurse assistants, licensed practical nurses, phlebotomists, medical assistants and other health care workers.

"We're thrilled to finally have our union certified with AFSCME Council 31," said bargaining committee member Jodi Thompson. "As frontline health care employees, it's more important now than ever to have a real voice to advocate for our communities, our patients and our co-workers."

Labor, community support

CGH workers share their victory with the community at large. It signals greater stability for the north-central Illinois town, an area that's seen its economy decline due to outsourcing and plant

closures in union-dense industries.

"Sterling and Rock Falls used to be a very prosperous area. Then the steel mills closed down and the union jobs went away," said Fidencio Hooper-Campos, a member of the Whiteside County Board and a former steelworkers union president. "That's why I supported CGH workers trying to organize from the beginning, and when I found out their union was certified, I choked up. I congratulate the CGH hospital union workers and I hope this will be the first of many union victories for our community."

Fellow AFSCME members and retirees in the region stood by CGH workers as they fought for their right to form a union over the last two years. They came out to hospital board meetings to support the employees and spoke out against management's anti-union campaign. When the pandemic hit, management didn't provide adequate PPE but still continued to waste resources on expensive

legal delays against the union.

With CGH workers risking their lives to protect their community, hundreds of supporters signed a petition calling on hospital CEO Paul Steinke and the board of directors to ensure the safety and well-being of every employee and patient. AFSCME made lawn signs that read, "We love CGH Heroes!" that popped up across the area.

"I'm so proud to have been part of this fight," said state employee and AFSCME Local 2615 Executive Board member Loretta Soresie. "CGH Medical Center employees are heroes who risk themselves and their families daily for the sake of others in our community. We stand in solidarity with our newest members."

Fighting for a voice

For employees, certification was a triumph over a harshly anti-union employer that relied on familiar "union avoidance" tactics. When CGH workers started organizing their union in mid-2019, they faced harassment from management that included captive-audience meetings, pressure from supervisors and even firing union activists.

After the workers filed majority-interest petitions at the labor board in December that year, the harassment

continued, with management using specious objections to deny the will of the workers.

The pandemic further delayed certification of the CGH union as the ILRB offices were temporarily closed in 2020. And late that year



New AFSCME members at CGH voted for bargaining committee members as they prepare to negotiate their first contract with CGH Medical Center.

registered nurses and other frontline medical staff had to vote in what's called a "preference poll" to determine if they would form one or two separate bargaining units.

While they awaited the results of that poll, an administrative law judge at the labor board in January dismissed CGH's baseless allegations,


clearing the way for the union to finally be certified.

More good news came in April when the labor board finally counted the ballots in the preference poll. CGH employees had voted to form one bargaining unit rather than separate units, showing they knew the power of solidarity.

"The determination of CGH employees to form their union is an inspiration," AFSCME Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said. "By standing together despite the challenges, they won a voice to improve their working lives, the patient care they provide and the community they love. We're happy to welcome CGH workers to our always-growing union family."

The next step for the new local union is electing a bargaining committee and negotiating their first-ever union contract. It won't be easy, but CGH employees have stood trial by fire and are ready to keep pushing ahead.

"We look forward to sitting down with management in good faith and bargaining real improvements that will benefit us all," Thompson said.

"Our voices have never truly been heard," said bargaining committee member Tammy Vinson. "My hope for this union is that our voices are heard and changes are made to benefit CGH employees and patients. Together we can make this happen." 

EIU employees fight for fair pay

Campus comes together for union's contract battle

The members of AFSCME Local 981 at Eastern Illinois University clean and maintain the school's buildings and grounds, prepare nutritious meals for students and staff, and do the clerical and technical work that keep university departments and administration functioning.

But these dedicated workers are struggling to make ends meet. A survey done by the local union found that one-third of them work second jobs to provide for themselves and their families. And more than 80% of the employees have had to delay paying a bill because they didn't have enough money to cover it.

The Board of Trustees has prioritized only those at the top—the administration. EIU President David Glassman is paid almost 10 times as much as the average frontline EIU employee. Last January, he got a 10% raise to \$325,412 a year. EIU administrators are paid an average of \$103,670, three times the typical frontline employee, and have received a

26% pay raise over the last five years.

In contrast, because of stagnant pay and increased health insurance premiums, the university's frontline workers are taking home only an average \$35 more each month than they did five years ago.

Students have their backs

The EIU student body is standing up for the employees who help make their educational experience a positive one.

They rallied with the union at a picket on March 30, calling on the administration to support its dedicated employees by providing fair



EIU students joined university employees at a picket on March 30, calling on the administration to provide fair wages and guarantee not to outsource jobs to a private contractor.

wages and guaranteeing not to outsource their jobs to a private contractor.

The student-run Daily Eastern News printed a strong editorial in support of the workers in advance of the action to urge students to join in the fight.

"Members of AFSCME have a part to play in everyone's life on campus," the editorial stated. "Throughout

the pandemic especially, [they] have been the backbone of this university. They make it possible for any of us to be on campus safely and make our lives easier in the process. We ask that those who are able to stand with them and show they support those whose work has kept this university afloat."

The students saw how these same university

employees stepped up during the state budget crisis under then-governor Bruce Rauner. Because of layoffs and cuts, the staff had to take on more work than ever without any additional compensation.


"Union members ... have been completely dedicated to this university. They have worked tirelessly to take care of the students and employees of Eastern," the editorial concluded. "Now, it is time to thank them ... by standing by them after they have stood by our campus. Fight for them to be treated fairly."

Building pressure

The call to action worked and the local union has held several successful actions this spring.

"It's past time for EIU to do the right thing," said Council 31 Staff Representative Natalie Nagel. "That's why Local 981 placed a full-page ad in the university's school newspaper in advance of a board of trustees meeting in April. Union members held up the posters and other signs as board members walked into their meeting."

As *On the Move* went to press, the local was still negotiating with the university for a fair contract. Despite quickly addressing a back-pay issue for three employees to avoid more negative publicity on campus, management hasn't made significant movement at the bargaining table.

"There is still quite a fight ahead," Nagel emphasized. "The administration hasn't moved enough to adequately address our concerns about fair pay, and we aren't going to quit pushing for what's right." 



"We are the front line of this institution. Since 2015 we have seen 200-plus of our co-workers laid off due to the budget. We pulled together and did the extra work to save our beloved EIU. Even through the pandemic, we kept our departments running. We helped save this institution—and now we are asking for the compensation we deserve."

LESLIE ASHLEY-MCLEAN, OFFICE MANAGER

"We have continued to do more with less, and the pandemic has added even more to our jobs. We have worked every day cleaning and disinfecting the campus, providing food, and helping students when they need assistance. Fair pay for me is allowing my family to keep up with the rising cost of living and being able to afford the necessities of life. The minimum wage is increasing and our pay isn't keeping up. We just want to continue providing services to the most important people of the university: the students."

DEREK LIGHT, BUILDING SERVICE WORKER



"When I needed money for college, I had to join the Army. I ended up spending 15 months in Iraq. Now I'm working at EIU for the benefit of my son getting a discount on his college tuition, so that he doesn't have to go to war to pay for it. But EIU is indicating they want to outsource my job. If they do that, people like me will lose the tuition benefit."

JERICA LINDEMANN, CULINARY WORKER

Union responds to IDOC restructuring plan

Safety, pace and programming are key concerns

Early in May the Illinois Department of Corrections notified AFSCME Council 31 of a far-reaching restructuring plan that will significantly impact operations at every prison across the state. AFSCME is working to ensure the change process prioritizes safety and incorporates feedback from local unions.

In its initial stages, the state's plan will focus on facilities that have aging buildings in need of repair or that will prepare offenders for community reentry.

The department gives four reasons for the plan: Pressure from legislators to reduce capacity and staff given the decrease in the prison population, anticipated continued decline in population due to changes in sentencing guidelines, the number of buildings at various correctional centers that need repairs, and a heightened focus on offender rehabilitation.

While certain buildings will be closed and some number of offenders moved out of several of the targeted facilities, no IDOC facility is slated to be closed entirely. And, department leaders say, no employees will be laid off or required to transfer to another facility to keep their jobs.

Addressing concerns

Ensuring that employees won't lose their jobs or be forced to move is AFSCME's top priority. But even with the department's commitments on that score, our union has a number of concerns about the plan.

On May 20, Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch and Regional Director Eddie Caumiant led a labor-management meeting where all IDOC local union presidents met with IDOC Director Rob Jeffreys and his entire leadership team. Though many issues remain unresolved, progress was made in addressing several of the union's concerns.

Pace of implementation: AFSCME strongly pressed for a pause in implementation of the new plan to allow for labor-management meetings and/or impact bargaining

opportunities for offenders. Management said that programming (including education and training) is being extensively revised with a strong focus on successful reentry.

Corrective action: AFSCME pointed out that there has already been a decline in ensuring consequences for offender infractions. IDOC insisted that there is no intent to further limit use of accountability measures, but rather to expand incentives for good behavior.

Despite a positive view of the restructuring plan for Vandalia Correctional Center—where the inmate

department welcomed such a collaborative effort.

Staff safety: The union argued that the department needs a much stronger focus on employee safety going forward and pointed out that nowhere in the restructuring plan is there any mention of measures to improve workplace safety.

Maximum-security changes: The union identified numerous issues arising from the plan to transition Stateville Correctional Center to a "multi-level" facility with a strong focus on community reentry.

Local 1866 President

going to make this situation different than years past?"

Other facilities and vendors: AFSCME is pressing for the work camps to be reopened as quickly as possible, Corrections Industries to be maintained, and Wexford Health Services and educational vendors assured that they will continue to play a role in department operations.

Union voices at the table

The labor-management meetings at the facility levels are now underway with participation from Council 31 staff and

with the relevant local union at the affected facilities. IDOC agreed that such facility-level input would be valuable and pledged to cooperate in getting meetings set up.

Reclassification: The union



is concerned that offenders will be reclassified inappropriately based on pressures to reduce population. The department said that there are no quotas for reclassifications, but only an effort to reduce a large backlog of reviews that were needed to determine where reclassification would be appropriate.

"The union will be closely monitoring the movement of offenders and we've requested a copy of the current guidance used for reclassifications," Caumiant said.

Programming: AFSCME stressed the current lack of educational and vocational staff and the related lack of

population will be reduced and three dorms converted to health care, mental health care and a commissary—Local 993 President Tim Worker is very concerned about changes in corrective action.

"They're handing out 'good time' to some inmates that don't deserve it," Worker said. "They are letting inmates out that should not be outside. All we're doing is turning them out, but we're not rehabilitating them."


Inadequate staffing: IDOC said they are facing a major problem in recruiting job candidates. The union proposed a joint labor-management committee on hiring. The

Ralph Portwood, who has worked in DOC for nearly three decades, is concerned about protecting members at Stateville and ensuring they get proper training and the tools they need to convert from a maximum-security prison to a reentry program. He's also concerned about the future of the facility and the people who work there.

"The things they want to do are things we've had in the past, like colleges, trainings, reentry programs, but they cut the funding to them," he said. "When there are more cuts, and they will come, the first thing they're going to do is cut programs. And if Stateville is program-driven, what's

IDOC central office staff. It's too soon to say whether the concerns of union members will be adequately addressed through this process, but those concerns are most definitely being put on the table.

"AFSCME is determined to do everything possible to ensure that this sweeping IDOC reorganization is implemented in a manner that protects jobs, salary levels, working conditions, and employee safety," Lynch said.

"If what they do isn't in the best interest of employees, and they don't give us the tools we need to do our jobs," Portwood said, "we'll be right back in their faces at the bargaining table." 

“This virus changed my life”

A year after getting COVID, AFSCME member returns to work

A FSCME Local 1563 President Steve Doris contracted COVID-19 at work in May 2020. He came down with flu-like symptoms while working at his job as a certified nurse assistant at Manteno Veterans’ Home. The day after he tested positive, he was taken to the hospital from his home by ambulance.

Doris felt so terrible, he thought he was going to die. He didn’t. He was released from the hospital after several days and sent home. But the struggles were just beginning. He was on oxygen 24 hours a day for three months.

“I would cough so hard I would throw up,” Doris recalled. “I had to sleep sitting up. I would get out of breath walking down my hallway to go to the bathroom.”

Doris’ doctor told him that his heart had been severely damaged and permanently weakened from COVID-19. Although he’s just 44 years old, Doris didn’t think he’d ever be able to work again. He said the news “broke my heart a little bit.”

At death’s door

In November, he went back to the hospital. He hadn’t eaten in two weeks and his kidneys

were failing. Doris said that as the technician was trying to reposition him for an x-ray, the hospital room went dark and he saw images of his life flash by him in a dark tunnel.

“I was seeing a video of my life: the last time me and my dad were together, my wedding, the birth of my daughter, things that happened to me as a child,” he recalled. “Then I heard ‘We’re going to lose him,’ and I took a breath. I almost died that night. That changed how I view life now.”

After that terrifying episode, Doris’ wife would drive him to the cardiologist every other month. “On our drives home from the appointments, we were talking about arrangements for my untimely death. I told her, we have to have this talk. I wasn’t afraid to die, but I didn’t want to lose my family.”

But in March, the doctor came into his exam room after



AFSCME Local 1563 Vice President and Chief Steward Steve Doris.

yet another test with completely unexpected news. Doris recalled he said: “Your heart is healed. You can go on to do what you normally do.”

It’s unclear if Doris’ heart recovered because of medicine, extended rest or both. But Doris and his wife were elated. “I felt like I was in a dream,” Doris said.

Taking his shot

Cleared to come back to work, Doris started back at the veterans’ home on June 2, welcomed by his friends and fellow AFSCME members. After making the difficult decision to resign as president back in February, Doris looks forward to his new role as the

local’s second vice president and chief steward.

“This virus changed my life,” Doris said. “It almost took everything away from me. To this day I still have coughing fits in the morning because my lungs are scarred from the blood clots I had,

“I don’t want anyone going through what I had to go through.”

and I never smoked a day in my life.”

That’s why Doris said he’s committed to educating others about the importance of the COVID vaccine.

“I don’t want anyone going through what I had to go through. Making arrangements for your death with your spouse, thinking about telling your 19-year-old kid that you might not make it. I understand being scared of vaccinations, but COVID is no joke. I believe in the vaccine and I’ll do anything to encourage people to take it.”



THE WAY BACK TO NORMAL: SAFE, EFFECTIVE COVID VACCINES

Illinois is in the final stages of reopening but to really get back to normal, we all need to be vaccinated against COVID. Vaccination is the surest path to safe workplaces, safe communities and a safe country.

Everyone 12 years of age and older is currently eligible for one of the safe, effective COVID vaccines. More than 140 million people in the U.S. have been fully vaccinated. Adverse reactions have been extremely rare; most people report minor symptoms such as arm soreness or mild flu-like effects that last a day or two.

The vaccines ramp protection way up! Studies have proven that the vaccines are more than 90% effective at preventing you from getting COVID-19, and nearly 100% effective at preventing severe cases.

Fully vaccinated people can begin to return to life as normal, according to the CDC. Fully vaccinated people no longer need to wear a mask in most instances or practice social distancing.

For more information and answers to common questions, visit: AFSCME31.org/Vax

Cook County employees say no to takeaways

A FSCME's Cook County bargaining committee, which represents some 4,000 AFSCME members in Cook County government, has been negotiating with management for a new contract since October.

The union is seeking an agreement that recognizes the sacrifices county employees have made and the hardships they've endured throughout the pandemic, when AFSCME members kept the county running—often by working large amounts of overtime. While some employees made the adjustment to working from home to stop the spread of the virus, others continued reporting to their worksites, putting themselves and their families at risk of contracting COVID-19.

But management is demanding employee givebacks.

"The county is offering small raises that would be unacceptable under any circumstances, let alone after the pandemic clearly showed the critical contributions of AFSCME members," Council 31 Deputy Director Mike

Newman said.

Those small proposed raises would be virtually wiped out by almost doubled health insurance costs for employees that the county is

"The pandemic clearly showed the critical contributions of AFSCME members."

also demanding. The county also proposed cutting overtime pay.

At three simultaneous informational pickets on June 10, hundreds of AFSCME members showed up to say no to takeaways and




AFSCME members in Cook County government held three simultaneous informational pickets on June 10, telling the county they're ready to do whatever it takes to win a fair contract.

send a clear message to the county that they're ready to do whatever it takes to win a fair contract.

"These proposed

takeaways come on the heels of the influx of funding from the American Rescue Plan to replace lost revenue due to the pandemic," Newman

said. "AFSCME members are not giving up the fight. We'll keep pushing for real contract improvements at the bargaining table." 

Stephenson Co. nursing home under threat

The Stephenson County Board voted May 20 to put the county's nursing home, Walnut Acres, up for sale.

AFSCME Local 2399 is joining with community members and resident families in a fight to save the nursing home for the residents and the employees who care for them.

After years of threatening to sell the facility—and despite widespread community outcry against the scheme—the county board voted 15-7 to hire a company that will put the public nursing home in Freeport up for sale for the asking price of \$5 million.

"Instead of focusing on improving staffing or building resources, selling the home would just allow a private company to extract a

profit from it," said Council 31 Staff Representative Sara Dorner.

"Every year they attempt to privatize the home, but every year the community rallies together to stop them," she said. "In April, there were 52 public comments against the sale of the nursing home and zero comments in favor of selling. The board is flat-out ignoring the will of the people."

Putting care first

AFSCME Local 2399 members have worked tirelessly to keep the vulnerable nursing home residents safe during the coronavirus pandemic. They transferred more than half the residents to other nursing homes or back to families' care after a bad COVID-19 outbreak. By

"We need to think about the well-being of our elderly."

making that hard decision they were able to save lives.

"It's important to stop the sale because we take more Medicaid patients than anyone in



AFSCME Local 2399 member and CNA Melissa Piggues helped distribute yard signs in Stephenson County, part of the community's fight to save their public nursing home.

the area," said Melissa Piggues, a longtime AFSCME member and Walnut Acres certified nurse assistant. "A lot of people can't afford the private home costs. Where are they going to go? We need to think about the well-being of our elderly."

Piggues is proud of the care she and her co-workers provide to residents. "When everybody got displaced because of COVID, the residents got homesick for this place. A lot of people came back to life when they came

back to Walnut Acres."


She said AFSCME members are wondering about what will happen with their jobs but they are most worried about what will happen to the residents at Walnut Acres. She's disappointed in the board and the mayor of Freeport for not standing up for what's right.

"They're clearly not listening to the citizens of Freeport because we all want it to stay," Piggues said.

Next steps

"Seven board members agree with us," Dorner said. "So over the next six months, we have to convince more to oppose the sale as well."

As *On the Move* went to press, Walnut Acres employees and other AFSCME members in the Stephenson County area were planning a strategy session on June 9.

They're determined to convince the county board that selling Walnut Acres would be bad for the community, wrong for residents and wrong for employees. 

PROGRESS ON THE LEGISLATIVE FRONT!

The spring legislative session has concluded. AFSCME Council 31 succeeded in passing of a number of bills of importance to union members—and blocking passage of a number that would be harmful.

WHAT WE WON

FY22 STATE BUDGET

- **Averts layoffs in state agencies and funds scheduled pay increases.**
- **Maintains state funding to local governments at current levels.**
- **Provides funding for at least a \$1.50/hour wage increase for frontline workers in community disability agencies.**
- **Closes unfair corporate tax loopholes, allowing more funds for important programs.**

SB525

IMPROVES LABOR RIGHTS IN STATE GOVERNMENT

Corrects some unfair exclusions of employees from coverage under the Illinois Public Labor Relations Act. Fixes legislative provision that would have barred implementation of scheduled employee step increases. **Passed both houses and awaiting action by the governor.**

SB1681

LINE OF DUTY COMPENSATION—PROBATION OFFICER

Amends the Line of Duty Compensation Act. Includes probation officers within the scope of the Act. **Passed both houses and awaiting action by the governor.**

SB2249

DOC EMPLOYEES CAN'T BE FIRED FOR SEEKING MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT

Provides that the Department of Corrections shall not make possession of a Firearm Owner's Identification Card a condition of continued employment as a correctional officer or a parole officer if the employee's FOID card is revoked because the employ-

ee has been a patient of a mental health facility. Provides an expedited procedure to regain FOID card. **Passed both houses and awaiting action by the governor.**

HB 2643

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE—SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY EMPLOYEES

Omnibus unemployment insurance legislation that provides for unemployment benefits for the 2021 summer for noninstructional school and university employees who are effectively laid off over the summer months. HB 2643 also allows repayment requirements for non-fraudulent overpayment of benefits be waived. **This measure has passed the Senate and is on the order of concurrence in the House. The House is expected to act on HB 2643 in June.**

HB2521

STRENGTHENS WORKERS' RIGHTS

Provides that the showing of interest in support of a petition filed for the purpose of selecting a labor organization as the representative of the employees in a bargaining unit may be evidenced by the electronic signature of the employees. Provides that it shall be an unfair labor practice for an employer to threaten, or take any action because of an employee's specified participation in a strike. **Passed both houses and awaiting action by the governor.**

SC11

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT ON WORKERS' RIGHTS

Proposes to amend the Bill of Rights Article of the Illinois Constitution. Provides that employees shall have the fundamental right to organize and to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing for the purpose of negotiating wages, hours, and working conditions, and to protect their economic welfare and safety at work. Provides that no law shall be passed that interferes with, negates, or diminishes the right of employees

to organize and bargain collectively over their wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment, including any law or ordinance that prohibits the execution or application of agreements between employers and labor organizations in the private sector requiring membership in that organization as a condition of employment. **Adopted by both chambers. Will be placed on November 2022 General Election ballot.**

SB1771/HB3798

AIDS CNA'S IN IDOC IN MAINTAINING CERTIFICATION

Amends the Health Care Worker Background Check Act. Makes it easier for CNA's employed by an outside vendor, such as Wexford Health Services, in the Illinois Department of Corrections to maintain their certification. **SB 1771 and HB 3798 passed both houses and awaiting action by the governor.**

HB12

FAMILY LEAVE ELIGIBILITY

Amends various Acts relating to the governance of public schools, public universities, and public community colleges in Illinois. Provides that an employee of a school district, public university, or community college district who has been employed for at least 12 months and who has worked at least 1,000 hours in the previous 12-month period shall be eligible for family and medical leave under the same terms and conditions as leave provided to eligible employees under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993. **Passed both houses and awaiting action by the governor.**

HB3474

EMPLOYEE REP ON IMRF BOARD

Amends the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund (IMRF) Article of the Illinois Pension Code. Provides that a person who meets the criteria to be an executive trustee may not serve as an employee trustee. Effective immediately. **Passed both houses and awaiting action by the governor.**

A “virtual” legislative session

Insights from Joanna Webb-Gauvin, AFSCME Council 31’s Director of Political and Legislative Affairs

A session like no other

“There were a lot of challenges for this new General Assembly. We had a new Speaker of the House in Emanuel ‘Chris’ Welch and a relatively new Senate President in Don Harmon. It was also the first time the General Assembly was completely virtual.

“Usually, legislators are in session, holding committee meetings, three days out of the week. But this year they were running committees five days a week. And because they had a limited number of virtual rooms that they could use, committees were always backed up and running behind.

“On top of that, lawmakers had far more legislation to consider than in a typical session. Last year was abbreviated because of COVID, so there were two years’ worth of ideas that people had made into proposed legislation. There were a ton of bills that had to be dealt with; more than 600. And since they

were doing all the committee work over Zoom, it took a lot longer to get things done.”

Working outside the Capitol

“In a normal session, lobbyists like me have a sense of what’s going on because we’re all in one physical space, the State Capitol building. You can see who’s talking to who and know what work is being done. You’re also able to react to information quickly by asking to testify or providing lawmakers with information pretty much on the spot.

“But in the virtual world you needed to know 24 hours in advance if you wanted to talk or testify. That doesn’t leave room for last minute maneuvering. Since we couldn’t see the players, we had to rely a lot on texting. It was almost as if you were lobbying blindly.”

Making the connection

“Working remotely made it a lot harder for lawmakers to connect with their constituents and for lobbyists like our team to connect with lawmakers. But despite all the challenges, AFSCME members stepped up and made phone calls to legislators and set up Zoom meetings to share their concerns. Our Council 31 lobbying team worked day and night on behalf of union members across the state. We met many goals and made progress on other fronts. Together, we accomplished an incredible amount in an unprecedented situation.”

WHAT WE BEAT BACK

All bills seeking to reduce or eliminate public employee pension benefits did not pass! These bills were either amended to address our concerns or were not called for a vote in their chamber of origin.

HB1727

ELIMINATES QUALIFIED IMMUNITY FOR POLICE OFFICERS

Eliminates long-established qualified immunity protection which restricts the ability of any person to file a civil lawsuit against a

peace officer for actions taken while performing his or her job. Allows attorney’s fees and costs to be awarded to the plaintiff. Would have set dangerous precedent, undermining qualified immunity for all public employees. **Never called for a vote in the House.**

HB2445

VOTER PHOTO ID

In an attempt to restrict voting rights, this measure would have amended the Election Code to require Voters Identification Cards for those who do not have an acceptable photo ID. Provides that any person desiring to vote shall present to the judges of election for verification of the person’s identity

a government-issued photo identification card or his or her Voter Identification Card. **Never called for a vote.**

HB3408

MEDICAID/SNAP ELIGIBILITY CHECK

Would have privatized work in IDHS by requiring the Department of Human Services to contract with a third-party vendor to conduct quarterly checks on the eligibility of persons receiving benefits under the State’s Medical Assistance Program or under the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). **Never called for a vote.**

KEEP ON FIGHTING!

Some bills AFSCME supported didn’t make it through the General Assembly in this session, but we’re not giving up. We’ll be back in the next session.

HB3977

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH—FIRST RESPONDER

Creates the First Responders Behavioral Healthcare Bill of Rights Act. Provides that first responders have certain specified statutory rights in seeking behavioral health services and treatment. Provides that the

rights guaranteed to first responders in these provisions are judicially enforceable. Provides that an aggrieved employee may, under the Civil Practice Law, bring an action for damages, attorney’s fee, or injunctive relief against an employer for violating these rights. Defines various terms. **Never called for a vote.**

Continued on next page.

Frontline disability workers win higher wages

After an intensive grassroots lobbying campaign by AFSCME members during an unprecedented remote legislative session, lawmakers provided funding for an hourly wage increase of \$1.50 in the state budget for frontline workers at state-funded community disability agencies.

Governor JB Pritzker’s original budget proposal included a 50-cent hourly increase. AFSCME immediately went into action to press for more.

Fair pay for heroes

As the pandemic raged over the past 15 months, Direct Service Personnel (DSPs) who care for individuals with severe developmental disabilities made enormous sacrifices to protect the vulnerable population they support. Yet they’re paid just \$12 an hour on average, leading to a catastrophic 50% turnover rate that’s extremely disruptive and harmful for the individuals they serve.

Meanwhile the agencies that employ DSPs are reimbursed by the state at \$14.50 an hour for employee wages. The \$2.50 discrepancy exists

because community agencies don’t always pass allocated wage increases through to workers.

“This is demanding work, yet the starting pay at many agencies is barely above minimum wage,” Council 31 Executive Vice-President and Local 3237 President Yurvette Simmons explained to the Illinois House Appropriations Human Services Committee on May 28.

Testimony like hers and that of relatives of people who participate in these programs convinced legislators of the dire need to continue to raise wages and ensure those raises go to frontline employees.

Fight continues

AFSCME members made hundreds of calls to legislators and met with lawmakers in person and via Zoom to share their stories and concerns. AFSCME Council 31’s lobbying team



“AFSCME members will now move their campaign from the Capitol to the bargaining table.”

worked until the midnight deadline on May 31 to secure the strongest possible guarantee that employees will receive the raise.

The successful campaign resulted in not only a

\$1.50-an-hour increase in the budget, but also language in the budget implementation bill that provides strong justification for the full amount going into the pockets of frontline workers.

“As is always the case, AFSCME members will now move their campaign from the Capitol to the bargaining table to ensure they receive the raise provided in the budget,” said Council 31 Regional Director Doug Woodson.

“But we’re first awaiting guidance issued by Illinois Department of Human Services, hoping that it includes strong and clear language directing agencies to pass the \$1.50 to all workers as an across-the-board increase.”

Progress on the Legislative Front

Continued from previous page.

HB3135/SB 2073

SERS-ALTERNATE ANNUITY

Corrects error made in eliminating SERS “alternative formula” participation for Security Therapy Aides in the Illinois Department of Human Services forensic facilities and units. **Never called for a vote.**

HB2531

CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS-FIREARMS

Defines “retired law enforcement officer qualified under federal law” for purposes of permit for carrying of a concealed weapon. Permits currently employed and qualified retired state correctional officers and county correctional officers to carry their own firearms off-duty without being in violation

of the unlawful use of weapons and aggravated unlawful use of a weapon statutes if they meet certain training requirements. **Never called for a vote.**

SB2128

IDOC-EDUCATORS

Appropriates funds to the Department of Corrections to hire additional educators and vocational instructors. **Never called for a vote.**

SB2334

GAMING BOARD- INVESTIGATIONS

Amends provisions of the Illinois Gambling Act by removing the Illinois Gaming Board’s authority to contract with the Illinois State Police for the use of State Police Officers to perform specified duties. **Never called for a vote.**

HB3898

HEALTHY WORKPLACE ACT

Creates the Healthy Workplace Act and amends the State Finance Act. Requires employers to provide specified paid sick days to employees. Sets forth the purposes for and manner in which the sick days may be used. **Never called for a vote.**

HB737/SB164

UTILITY-WATER/SEWER REFERENDUM

Restricts efforts to privatize local government water or sewer functions. In provisions concerning procedures for a large public utility to acquire a water or sewer utility, provides that if the water or sewer utility being acquired is owned by the State or a political subdivision of the State, a referendum will be required to approve the acquisition of the water or sewer utility by the large public utility **Never called for a vote.**

SHORT REPORTS

State employees see pay jump

State of Illinois employees will see their pay go up 3.95% on July 1, pursuant to the union contract negotiated two years ago between AFSCME and the Pritzker administration after four years of conflict with former governor Bruce Rauner.

Negotiated pay rates in the state collective bargaining agreement are now among the highest in the country because the union was determined to redress the losses that state employees suffered during Rauner's tenure when he froze pay for four years and illegally blocked progression through the pay plan.

Among other provisions, the four-year contract with the Pritzker Administration strengthened protections against forced overtime, expanded maternity and paternity leave, created a new labor-management body to reduce the threat of violence in the workplace and improve worker safety, preserved accountability standards for privatization proposals and created new protections to safeguard employees' private information.

The agreement was ratified by some 99% of union members voting.

America's union support on the rise

AMERICAN WORKERS SEE THE union difference and they have a president willing to fight for their right to form one.

With a 65% approval rating in the latest Gallup poll, organized labor is enjoying its highest level of support in nearly a decade. In fact, more than half of Americans say they'd vote for a union in their workplace. So why is it that only 11% of Americans belong to a union? Because U.S. labor laws are stacked against workers and in favor of employers.

President Joe Biden is trying to change that. He's been the most vocal pro-union president since Franklin Roosevelt, taking unprecedented steps to strengthen workers' rights, including creating a task force on unions chaired



U.S. Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh meets with workers who participated in the 1968 AFSCME sanitation workers' strike in Memphis where Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated.

"Every worker deserves a free and fair choice to join a union."

by Vice President Kamala Harris. He's also been an outspoken champion of the PRO Act, which passed the House in March and awaits Senate approval. If passed, it will serve to rebalance power in America so that workers have their fair share.

Right now, Americans feel more positively about unions—and more negatively about big business—than they ever have before. Since the American National Election Studies began collecting data in 1964, public feelings toward labor unions and big business ran parallel, experiencing highs and lows together. But since 2016 those sentiments have split.

In fact, all political and age cohorts hold record or near-record highs in their positive views of labor over management. Americans born after 1975 have particularly strong positive feelings toward unions over big business; even a record number of Republicans, who historically lean pro-business rather than pro-worker, have positive feelings for unions over big

business.

The change in pro-union sentiment could be tied to increasingly public campaigns to raise wages for all workers and seeing more workers attempting to organize unions while opposed by big-money employers.

Americans know that union members enjoy higher wages, more affordable health care and a more secure retirement. And the COVID-19 pandemic clearly showed the power of collective bargaining: Because union members worked in safer conditions than those without an organized voice on the job, the risk posed by the virus increased interest in unionization and collective action among non-union workers.

The widening difference between the share of workers who want a union and those who actually have one clearly shows how biased current labor laws are against workers. Penalties for violating workers' rights and union-busting are so negligible that corporations continue violating these laws without fear.

But with a pro-worker, pro-union president, America could finally turn the page and right this wrong.

"I believe every worker deserves a free and fair choice to join a union—and the PRO Act will bring us closer to that reality," President Biden said. "I urge Congress to send it to my desk so we can summon a new wave of worker power and create an economy that works for everyone."

Labor Secretary visits sanitation strikers

U.S. Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh met with living figures from history when he visited AFSCME Local 1733 on May 6, delving deep into the role of the Memphis sanitation strike in the civil rights movement. Martin Luther King was in Memphis to support the sanitation workers when he was struck down by an assassin's bullet.

After meeting privately with workers who participated in the 1968 strike, Walsh addressed a larger crowd of AFSCME members and retirees. He spoke about the challenges and opportunities

facing the labor movement today.

"It's the older generation that fought for the pension, for health care, for time off, sick leave, worker protection, job rights," he said. "And it's incumbent upon us, as the next generation, standing on the shoulders of the people who built these unions, that we continue to move down the road and do better."

Library workers build connections

AFSCME COUNCIL 31 HOSTED a May 7 webinar, "Growing the Library Workers' Movement," that brought together union-represented library workers and employees at libraries that are not yet union to discuss how to effectively build worker power.

The panel of library worker activists included AFSCME Local 1215 President John Rayburn, a Supervising Clerk of Circulation at the Chicago Public Library, Mimi Davis, an Adult Service Librarian at Bloomington Library and leader of AFSCME Local 699, and Kelly Hopkins, an Administrative Assistant at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Library.

Panelists shared union victories at their libraries, stressing the value of a union contract when it comes to protecting library workers' jobs and livelihoods, and the power of collective action.

"I think the time is now, if forming a union at your library is something you have been thinking about," Davis said to the non-union workers on the Zoom. "Everyone knows that budgets are tight, especially coming out of a pandemic, and we all know that our most beloved cultural institutions, including libraries, are the first places municipalities look at for budget cuts."

AFSCME represents more than 3,000 library workers in communities throughout Illinois, more than any other union. Nationwide, AFSCME represents more than 25,000 library workers. AFSCME also represents thousands of workers at universities and other cultural institutions. Together with library workers, these workers make up Cultural Workers United. Learn more at CulturalWorkersUnited.org.



ON THE LOCAL LEVEL



AFSCME Local 1970 President Viraj Dhebar and fellow bargaining team member Verna Preisel, vice president and chief steward.

Glenbard school employees leap forward

AFSCME LOCAL 1970 MEMBERS are a bargaining unit of nearly 200 support staff at Glenbard Township High School District 87. Underpaid for too long, the local fought hard for a fair contract and won an outstanding 25% wage increase for members over their five-year collective bargaining agreement.

“Our bargaining team was great and we didn’t back down,” said Local 1970 President Viraj Dhebar, a former special education aide and career resource coordinator who’s now a school secretary. “We’re underpaid and we brought attention to that fact, as well as the fact that there is budget available for raises.”

In addition to those realities, Dhebar said the employees’ hard work and dedication are a big part of why the district finally agreed to start paying fair wages.

“The district knows the support staff is awesome,” she said. “You give us anything and we’ll get it done. We stepped up during the pandemic especially and worked harder than ever before.”

Dhebar was joined on the bargaining team by Verna Preisel, Kimberly Thomas, Lisa Cooper, Janet Berger, Wendy Rosario, Sheila Kasproicz, Mary Clinkert, Danielle Nickel, Marianne Jourdan and Stephen Uhl. AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Carla Williams led negotiations, which were largely held via Zoom.

“We stepped up during the pandemic and worked harder than ever before.”

“Overall we negotiated a minimum of a 25% increase for the contract, with the largest increase coming in the first year,” Williams said. “We extended the layoff notice, increased the starting rate to \$15.00 per hour in the first year and negotiated a \$900 stipend for special education aides who work with students that need feeding, transporting or toileting help.”

Dhebar said the bargaining team wanted to hear and incorporate every member’s perspective.

“Negotiations were a fair balance of representation of the different positions—secretaries, instructional supervisors, specialists and

building technical support,” she said. “All of them had a voice.”

The bargaining team also wants to make sure that management understands how the jobs of support staff have evolved over the years to be more demanding and complex.

“Our support staff are highly qualified, bringing skills to the job that didn’t used to be needed,” she said. “Every job is different than it used to be; we are doing so much more, management is expecting more and technology is more advanced. This wage increase was long overdue. Our jobs have changed, and we wanted equity.”

Pathway members win first AFSCME contract

NEW AFSCME LOCAL 38 MEMBERS at Pathway Services Unlimited, Inc. in Springfield won their first AFSCME contract after a long road to organize their union and meet the needs of their clients during the COVID-19 pandemic. The group not only had to negotiate their first AFSCME contract, they also had to bargain with management to receive their fair share of state funding earmarked for wage increases.

The bargaining team included chief steward Jessica Shaw, chief steward Angelica Muffick, Robin Fromme, Connie Haverfield, Yazamine Ball and local president Shelly Hoots. It was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Ingbert Schmidt. It wasn’t the unit’s first time bargaining a union contract—these 130 frontline disability workers (DSPs) had previously belonged to another union—but it was the first time the group felt their voices were truly being heard.

“I’ve worked at Pathway for 10 years and only had one raise that whole time,” Shaw said. “Everybody was very proud and happy to see raises finally coming in and our wages finally going up.”

Thanks in large part to lobbying done by AFSCME members and legislative staff, state funding for DSP wages had gone up by nearly \$2 an hour since January 2020—both to keep up with the increasing state minimum wage and to address the workforce crisis in disability services caused by grossly low wages.

The new local’s bargaining team was able to win the entire \$1.82 increase with back pay, plus an additional \$1.40 increase, a boost to the starting wage floor and longevity pay for part-time employees. They also secured additional paid leave for senior employees in the three-year agreement.

Shaw said being part of a larger effort to win long overdue wage increases for DSPs feels good, because “we have people to back us up. It’s not just Pathway, it’s all DSPs throughout the region. There’s a group of us all doing it together. That’s all new to us.”

The group isn’t close to stopping now that they’ve made some progress. “We’ve all agreed that in the next bargaining session we’re going to push further and keep trying to hopefully get all the things we need for our staff. Pathway knows now, with us as AFSCME members, we are not backing down. We’re going to keep pushing.”

“As AFSCME members, we are not backing down.”



New Local 38 members at Pathway in Springfield celebrate their first union contract with AFSCME.

Big step forward for Board of Ed employees

CLERICAL AND SUPPORT staff at the Illinois State Board of Education won major changes to a decade-old wage progression or step scale in a new three-year agreement.

The AFSCME Local 2811 bargaining team successfully made their case for significant raises using an employer-funded wage study that found they were underpaid by 20-30% to relative average salaries. They were also able to

management-level salary study had been conducted which resulted in a huge boost in salaries for upper-level management. The professional and support level studies came after that and also showed glaring disparities.

“We had salary freezes in 2008 and have been behind ever since. The study clearly showed that most of our members were not paid market value,” Clay said. “It showed that people at the top of our scale were OK, but the bottom wasn’t.”

Armed with that information, the local union knew their unit was long overdue for



The AFSCME Local 2811 bargaining team is proud of the gains they made together in their recent collective bargaining agreement with the Illinois State Board of Education.

“We’ll push for even more in our next contract.”

negotiate more vacation time, improvements to longevity pay and an annual service bonus to reward dedication.

Local 2811 President Leslie Clay has worked at ISBE for 28 years. She said management had to come to terms with shifts in responsibility and skill-level of support staff and pay accordingly, especially if they want to be able to attract good new recruits.

“We have about 50 support staff today and 20 years ago there were 200 of us,” Clay said. “Nobody just copies and files anymore. Now you need to do a lot more technology work and need more skills. The state board has the highest number of grants of any state agency and a lot more administrative work that needs to be done. There’s a lot more to the job now. The work has changed.”

In recent years a

an increase and the bargaining team had “high hopes” when they started planning negotiations in late 2019. “But then the pandemic hit. Right off the bat at our first meeting in May 2020 they let us know: Don’t expect much,” Clay recalled.

But the union wasn’t backing down. Members took a strike authorization vote and planned to disrupt a state board meeting to make their case to a broader, more public audience. Management relented and the union prevailed. The bargaining team won significant raises and was also able to move up the vacation scale so union members can earn vacation faster and carry more of that earned time over to the next year.

“We’re one year into our contract already,” Clay said, “so in about a year and a half we’ll push for even more in our next contract.”

She was joined on the bargaining team by Vice President Shelly Hamlin, Recording Secretary Wanda Schoneweis, Treasurer Jacki Ruenzi and at-large executive board member Mary Long. They were led at the table by Council 31 Staff Representative Joe Jay.

Coming Together Again

As more and more people take their shot and become fully vaccinated, AFSCME members are finally able to come back together in person. Getting through the pandemic together showed the power of solidarity. Now AFSCME members are taking every opportunity to reconnect by commemorating important moments, agitating for what’s right, and celebrating getting back to normal as vaccinations allow us to reconnect in person. Let’s Spring Forward Together!



AFSCME Local 699 members at Miller Park Zoo in Bloomington held a community event on May 22 urging management to put two wrongly terminated zookeepers back to work.

ABOVE PHOTO & COVER PHOTO: MIKE MATEJKA



McLean County employees of AFSCME Local 537 gathered May 5 to dedicate a road sign to fellow member Scott Bundy who died on the job in August 2019.



Members of AFSCME Local 2767 joined with members of the Illinois Nurses Association in April to protest unsafe working conditions at McFarland Mental Health Center.

Congratulations Larry Marquardt Scholarship winners!



Noah Muñoz and Mark Pellegrini awarded AFSCME Council 31's 2021 Larry Marquardt Scholarship.

A FSCME members and their families can benefit from annual scholarship opportunities to pursue their education goals, including Council 31's Larry Marquardt Scholarship. The \$2,000 scholarships honor the first executive director of Council 31, who was a tireless union organizer.

Children of AFSCME members or retirees who are high school seniors or college students under the age of 25—as well as members in good standing who plan to attend school full-time—are eligible to apply. Recipients are chosen by the Marquardt Scholarship Committee, composed of Linc Cohen, retired Editor of *On the Move*; Letitia Taylor, retired

AFSCME International Union Area Director; and Rosetta Daylie, retired Council 31 Associate Director. This year's two scholarship winners are sons of AFSCME members.

Noah Muñoz

Son of AFSCME Local 2081 member David Muñoz, an office associate with the state of Illinois's Department of Children and Family Services, Noah Muñoz is headed to the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign in August. He plans to major in business—an interest informed by his knowledge of the role of unions in maintaining a balanced economy.

“From the availability of the Internet to the growth of convenience in the service industry, everything seems to be moving a little bit faster every year,” Noah observed in his application essay. “Unfortunately, the price for such rapid comfort and availability often falls onto the back of the workers. From Amazon warehouse workers to fast food employees, corporations across the United States have shown that their workers are often not valued as much as their profits.”

He points out the fact that “Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos' wealth has grown an estimated

90 billion dollars during the pandemic” yet the “workers have not seen better wages or optimal work conditions” during this same harrowing time. The disparity between huge profits and CEO pay and frontline workers' wages can be narrowed with greater prevalence of unions.

“Unions are necessary because the workers of America need a voice for themselves,” Noah stated. “When the rich corporate employers just keep getting richer, it is essential that the workers creating their profits are able to negotiate and fight for better working conditions and livable wages. This pandemic will decline but the need for unions to ensure equality for their workers remains ever prevalent.”

Mark Pellegrini

AFSCME Local 1028 member Carol Pellegrini's son Mark is headed back to Columbia College in Chicago this August for his junior year. Mark was raised in a union family. His mom works as a secretary at Will County's Supervisor of Assessments' office, and he grew up hearing stories about his great-grandfather who was active in the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).

“Grandpa Tony organized strikes that enhanced the members' retirement and death benefits. Thanks to that work, those benefits were passed on to the widowers and widows,” he shared in his application essay.

“These stories taught me about how thousands of people came together to fight against horrible working conditions, and a lack of health care and retirement plans for all employees. Learning about all the work they did gave me a higher respect for the rights my great-grandfather's generation strived and fought for.”

Knowing that history has nurtured Mark's conviction of the importance of strong, member-supported unions today.

“Without employees supporting their union, the very rights my great-grandfather fought for will be taken away. My generation must support unions to give them strength of numbers to ensure the right to negotiate for better wages and benefits for generations to come.”

MORE SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

AFSCME Free College

The AFSCME Free College benefit offers free associate's and bachelor's degree programs for AFSCME members, retirees and family members of union members, including children, spouses, siblings and others. The programs are conducted exclusively online, making it readily accessible for those who work full time. More than 20,000 AFSCME members and their families have already taken advantage of this benefit, pursuing education in areas ranging from social work to accounting to criminal justice and more. Visit freecollege.afscme.org or call 888-590-9009 for more information.

AFSCME Family Scholarship

Each year the AFSCME Family Scholarship Program sponsored by the International Union provides 10 \$2,000 scholarships to graduating high school seniors, renewable for four years.

Union Plus Scholarship

The Union Plus Scholarship program sponsored by the Union Plus Education Foundation has awarded more than \$4.5 million to deserving union members and their families since 1991.

Gerald W. McEntee Scholarship

In honor of former AFSCME International Pres. Jerry McEntee, this one-time \$5,000 scholarship is awarded annually to an AFSCME member for use towards higher education.

William A. Lee Memorial Scholarship

Each year, the Chicago Federation of Labor awards 10 William A. Lee Memorial Scholarships to high school seniors, five to the winners of the Academic Competition and five to the winners of the Random Drawing. The \$2,000 scholarships may be used at any accredited college or university in the United States.

To learn more about scholarship opportunities for AFSCME members, retirees and their children, visit AFSCME31.org/union-scholarships.

Applications for the Larry Marquardt scholarship are due the third Friday in April each year.

RETIREE NOTES



AFSCME retirees Terra Fairburn and her spouse Nance Kinley joined forces with fellow AFSCME retiree Kae Carroll to help seniors navigate the system and sign up to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

Retirees work to expand vaccine access

ROCK ISLAND SUB-CHAPTER 74 retiree Terra Fairburn and her spouse Nance Kinley were having a hard time getting themselves signed up for the COVID vaccine. Every time they tried to get an appointment online, the slots were taken.

others to do so.”

Fairburn, Kinley and their friend Kae Carroll quickly found themselves immersed for months in the efforts to help their community get vaccinated.

“We knew other people who were struggling,” Fairburn said. “Most retirees couldn’t stay up till midnight, and there were a great number who didn’t have computers or the Internet. As former employees

Carroll said.

On April 27 their local church provided more than 400 vaccines to the community. And as word got out, people started asking who these ladies worked for—finally dubbing them “the COVID Angels.” Together they have signed up more than 100 people and they’re still going, adding transportation for those who can’t drive themselves.

“We are all in this together,” Carroll said. “It is important that all of us get vaccinated and that all of us have the same access to the vaccine.”

If you haven’t yet had your vaccination, you can call the IL COVID Vaccine hotline at 833-621-1284.

American Rescue Plan benefits retirees

THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN Act of 2021 signed by President Joe Biden includes significant direct benefits for retirees and support for services and programs that are important to them.

Many seniors received the \$1,400 stimulus checks that the legislation authorized, and there are a number of

other ways that retirees benefited from the bill as well.

The Rescue Plan expands vaccine administration and purchases to increase access for nursing home residents and staff. It pays for the creation of nursing home “strike teams” in each state, to provide rapid response if a COVID outbreak occurs. And it funds testing and tracing so that outbreaks can be quickly identified and stopped, including frequent testing of nursing home residents and staff.

The law also expands financial benefits for working caregivers and gives money to states for services that support people in their homes and communities through state Medicaid programs including:

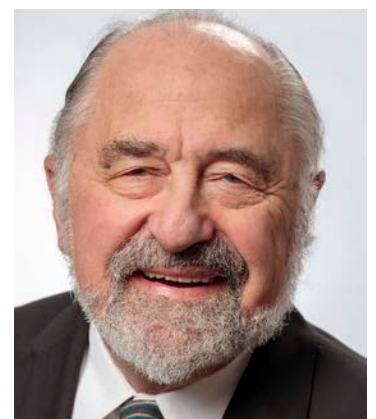
- An increase in the 2021 tax credit that can help with senior care expenses, to \$4,000 for one dependent from the usual \$1,050, and an increase in the share of expenses that can be applied to the credit to 50% from the usual 35.
- An increase in the 2021 amount a worker can contribute to a tax-free dependent care flexible spending account that can be used to pay for senior expenses from \$5,000 to \$10,500.
- Money for states to improve opportunities for Medicaid beneficiaries to receive services in their own home or community, instead of moving to a nursing home.

Retirees who are not yet Medicare-eligible and do not have health insurance coverage after retirement can get extra help when buying individual health insurance coverage through the Affordable Care Act in 2021 and 2022. Retirees who lost a job also are eligible for no-premium plans with very low out-of-pocket costs in 2021 if they receive unemployment benefits during any week. Retirees who lost coverage when they lost a job also may be eligible for no-premium coverage under their former employer’s plan from April 1 through Sept. 30.

Some other ways in which retirees can benefit from the American Rescue Plan include help paying housing costs, more support for senior programs in your community, more funding to fight elder abuse, and pension protections for certain private

pension plans.

For more information, visit [AFSCME.org/Victory](https://www.afscme.org/Victory).



John Tilden (top) and Mitch Vogel (bottom)

AFSCME-backed candidates win pension elections

Two annuitant candidates supported by AFSCME Retiree Chapter 31 have won seats on the State Employees’ Retirement System and State University Retirement System pension boards.

AFSCME retiree John Tilden was re-elected to the SERS board. He is an experienced SERS trustee with more than 50 years of public service, having served the State of Illinois for four decades as a counselor and psychologist.

Mitch Vogel, a retired professor at Northeastern Illinois University, was re-elected to the SERS board. Vogel is a former president of the University Professionals of Illinois Local 4100 of the American Federation of Teachers and former vice president of the Illinois Federation of Teachers.

“Both races were tight,” said AFSCME Chapter 31 Retiree Coordinator Maria Britton-Sipe. “AFSCME retiree voters made the difference. By participating in the election, they helped protect a secure retirement for tens of thousands of retirees by ensuring we have a union voice on both the SERS and SURS pension boards.”

“It is important that all of us get vaccinated. We’re all in this together.”

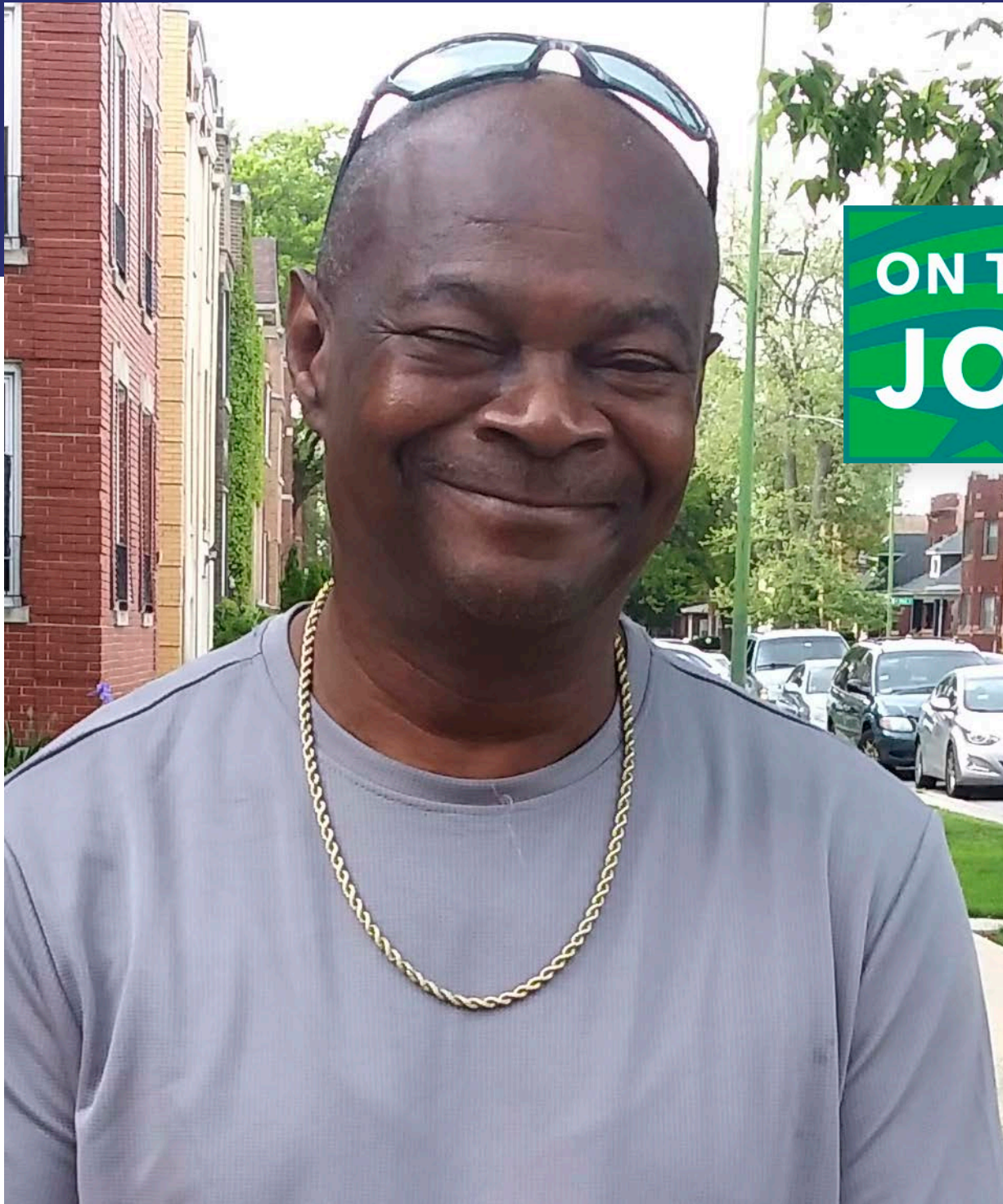
They soon figured out that the new slots were added at midnight and were taken within minutes of being posted. They then tried to sign up across the border in Iowa, but people in Iowa were also having problems and didn’t want to compete with Illinoisans. Finally, they were able to get appointments in Peoria County, 90 miles away.

“During the pandemic, many of us felt so vulnerable,” Fairburn said, “so when vaccines became available, we raced to sign up. Unfortunately, what we found was a maze that was difficult to navigate. Once we figured it out, we knew we wanted to help

of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, we naturally fell into the role of assisting others, and we learned the tricks to get people signed up quickly.”

It was Carroll who told the couple that communities of color were having serious issues getting access. She joined them in the effort to get people vaccinated, and also reached out to her church and Congresswoman Cheri Bustos’s office.

“I was able to communicate the need for local distribution and transportation, as not everyone can get to the large vaccinations centers. Bustos’s office responded,”



Earl Miller

President of AFSCME Local 1038

STOREKEEPER AT ILLINOIS CENTER FOR REHABILITATION AND EDUCATION (RETIRED)

Reflecting on a career in public service...

In order to do a good job, you have to like what you're doing. I was on my job for more than 30 years. I loved my job. I can't say what part was my favorite because I liked what I was doing. ICRE-Roosevelt helps disabled children up to 22 years old and ICRE-Woods supports blind adults.

I was the storekeeper at Roosevelt. When I first started, I was serving three locations all over the city. There was not enough time in the day to do all of that all by myself. Our union got my job audited and saw I was doing storekeeper III work, but being paid as a storekeeper I. Management was asking for more than one person could do. So after that I only served Roosevelt. Without a union, I would have still been doing all three jobs or been fired.

I tried to lead by example. You got to step up. You can't do the bare minimum. I don't want anybody to ever say I half-do anything. I want to know in my heart that I gave it my best. If you're making a career out of a job, you put something extra into it.

I retired December 31 but now I'm training the next person to do my job.

On the union difference...

I'm still Local 1038 president until my term is up in November when I'll pass it on to someone else. You get a chance to reflect when you retire, and I've been so blessed to have a union.

I worked at the post office, Coca-Cola, a plastic company. This is the best job I ever had and it's because of AFSCME. I have enough money to survive on in my retirement and that's due to the union. We have our pension, we have our benefits. We get vacation time, sick days, parental leave for the daddy and the mama. We care for our wounded. We have benefits for people who are going through stuff, we have [the Personal Support Program,] PSP.

If I didn't have my union benefits, I wouldn't be able to provide for my family. I have four girls and two boys; my youngest is 26 now. I have a daughter that's blind and deaf. She had a seizure at four years old, and completely lost her eyesight and hearing by the time she was 15. She's 41 now. Because I had union benefits, I was able to take her back and forth to the doctor and get her the help she needed. I could provide her with hearing aids and new glasses.

We need to stop and look around and remember how valuable our union is to us. I am so happy

to be part of AFSCME. I wear my AFSCME stuff proudly every day. We would not have what we have if it weren't for us having AFSCME.

On being active in your union...

Our union is much stronger than we can even imagine. We help each other. My union has been there for me and I've seen a lot of people that have been helped by our union. If the union can affect you this much, how can you not be a part of it?

We don't realize how much the union has provided for us because certain things we take for granted, like the air we breathe. And that's what happens with the union; we take it for granted instead of saying, Hey, let me do my part and see what I can do to help improve things.

I've been at this job since 1990 and I was local union president for 25 years. I've been able to negotiate a lot of good things for my people. As much as I can, I'm still going to be around to help as a retiree.

On leadership...

I have to take off my hat to Roberta Lynch. She's been amazing. Look at how strong that lady is. Roberta has done an outstanding job. She's kept the union together. You're only as good as your leadership and we've got good leaders. That's our success, what's made the union a powerful entity.

Even though the governor and the legislature have changed, we still find a way to accomplish what we need to. When they were trying to take away our pensions, AFSCME held fast and wouldn't let them. We got the back pay for the raises that the governor [Pat Quinn] promised to us but then didn't want to give us. And when Rauner was trying to knock off the unions, AFSCME stopped it.

“Our power is in the numbers. We're a show of force.”

Folks have been trying to union-bust a long time. They came close with that no-fair-share [US Supreme Court ruling in the Janus case]. But we're surviving, we're moving forward. I hope we never stop.

On building our union...

At my local we have 60 members and right when they walk in the door, we get them signed up. You get them to understand we're all a family here. And you need to stay in contact because otherwise you'll grow apart.

Our power is in numbers. We're a show of force. We have to use our money to defend what we have. That's why our dues are so important.

I'm pro-union, 100%. 