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MOVE



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ON THE MOVE

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Taking aim at us

Anti-union forces seek to divide and conquer



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

PENSIONS ARE TARGETED AGAIN

At every step of Bruce Rauner's all-out crusade to wipe out labor unions—especially public sector unions—in our state, he found a ready ally in the Illinois Policy Institute (IPI).

The dark-money group infamously staffed his administration, acted as his proxies when he tried to impose his contract demands on state employees and recruited plaintiffs for the lawsuit he filed claiming that it was unconstitutional to require represented employees who chose not to join the union to instead pay a fair-share fee.

Roundly defeated in his run for reelection in 2018, Rauner decamped to Florida. He was embarrassed at the ballot box, but hoped that his anti-labor legacy would live on through that lawsuit—*Janus vs. AFSCME Council 31*—which prevailed at the U.S. Supreme Court. With employees no longer required to pay union dues or fees in any form, Rauner predicted they would leave their unions in droves.

That mass exodus never happened. Instead, union members doubled down to defend the rights and benefits we'd won by standing together for many decades, pledging to remain "AFSCME Strong" in the years to come.

It wasn't for lack of trying by the IPI. They deluged public service union members with mailers claiming they'd be better off on their own rather than coming together in a union to improve their wages, benefits and working conditions.

Fortunately, AFSCME members weren't buying. They found creative ways to dispose of IPI "trash," many sharing entertaining images on social media.

Why is the IPI so committed to weakening public employee unions? In large part because they want to abolish public employee pensions, and they know that strong unions are the chief force standing in their way.

If they could weaken us, their odds of ending pensions would go way up.

New kid on the block: Freedom Foundation

Unfortunately, the forces that want to silence workers' voices and rob our retirement security aren't going away. In fact, there's a new kid on the anti-union block in Illinois: The Freedom Foundation. Based on the West Coast, it's spent years pushing workers to "opt out" using mailers, phone calls, videos, emails and even home visits, all with the sole goal of getting members to quit their union.

Now the Freedom Foundation has announced that it's going national and AFSCME members in Illinois have begun to report its materials turning up in their mailboxes. Its message is pretty much the same as the IPI, but it's a little slicker and more persistent. Its website shows little interest in anything else in the world except taking down public employee unions.

Both groups get lots of money from unknown sources who share an obsession with destroying the only source of organized power for workers in our country, their unions. Like Rauner, they want to further consolidate power at the top and make sure that the rest of us don't have a fighting chance to have our voices heard and our concerns addressed.

They want to convince us that if we disagree with something our union does, instead of recognizing that we're not all going to agree on everything all the time, we should just quit, undermining the solidarity that's so essential to all the progress

our union has made on so many fronts.

In effect, every revocation of union membership is a victory for the Freedom Foundation, the IPI, and of course, for Bruce Rauner, down there in sunny Florida.

New assault on pensions

The IPI and Rauner have something else to cheer for now: Republicans in the state legislature, as well as some Republican gubernatorial candidates, are renewing their attacks on public employee pensions.

At a recent news conference, Illinois House Minority Leader Jim Durkin attacked Governor Pritzker for refusing to back "any kind of reduction in the growth of [pension] benefits."

Vowing to wipe out the state's constitutional pension protection clause that led to previous cuts being overturned, Durkin said, "I would change the constitution and I would be the one who sponsored it, absolutely."

Rep. Darren Bailey went even further. Boasting that he has already sponsored such a measure, the Republican candidate for governor praised a plan that would immediately freeze all pensions at what's earned to date and dump employees into a 401(k)-style plan. Pension cost-of-living increases, or COLAs, would be given only to those earning less than \$50,000 annually and, even then, limited to just 1% per year.

Taken together, we likely have two tough fights on our hands: Against those who want to weaken our union with their "opt out" campaigns and those who want to take away our retirement security with their pension reduction schemes. The stakes are nothing less than the balance of power in our state: Will working people keep a voice and some dignity in retirement for ourselves? Or will the anti-worker forces of wealth and greed take every last scrap of influence? As we look ahead to 2022, let's make sure we're ready to do battle on both fronts.

Chicago reinvests in public mental health clinics

New funding, staffing result of a decade of advocacy by AFSCME and allies



AFSCME has advocated for reinvestment in public mental health clinics since six were closed in 2011. In 2019, our union helped to pass a resolution creating a mental health task force, paving the way for this year's new investment.

A FSCME Council 31 helped secure \$6.3 million in the Chicago budget for 29 new positions in the city's own public mental health clinics. This 73% increase in staffing is the biggest investment in the clinics since former Mayor Rahm Emmanuel shuttered half of them in 2011.

Ever since those devastating closures, AFSCME members and community allies tirelessly advocated to rebuild the city's public mental health service network while the city shifted its support to the private sector. In fact, the proposed 2021 budget for the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) initially included a significant investment in expanded mental health services, with all the new revenue going to private service providers.

AFSCME Council 31 lobbyists sprang into action, reaching out to concerned aldermen and winning backing for directing some of those dollars to public programs.

At her press conference announcing the passage of the budget, a reporter asked Mayor Lori Lightfoot why she invested new dollars into the public mental health clinics.

"The additional resources that we put into the clinics is because of AFSCME, and their ask," she said. "We sat down and negotiated in good faith and came to an agreement.

AFSCME is the one who should get the credit for that. It was our partnership and thoughtfulness on the part of AFSCME."

Opposing more privatization

Before the budget passed, CDPH head Allison Arwady opposed investment in public clinics and urged aldermen to reject the proposal supported by AFSCME and sponsored by Ald. Rosanna Rodriguez-Sanchez.

"Our union represents many of the employees that work in the city's public mental health clinics and we have a long-standing commitment to ensuring access to health care—including mental health treatment—for all," AFSCME's Director of Intergovernmental Affairs Adrienne Alexander said during testimony to the council on the proposed amendment.

"Along with a dedicated group of community partners, [AFSCME] has fought every

year since [the closures we opposed] to regain the ground that was lost."

The new funding, she said, would provide for "increasing the communities served and increasing outreach so we are better able to connect individuals to public services. Moreover, the necessary staff will be added to ensure that these goals can be met. Without question, many more people will receive quality, trauma-informed care, without limits or wait lists."

"We have a crisis of mental health in this city, and the public mental health clinics

Budget distributes federal funds

Lightfoot called the \$16.7 billion budget passed on October 27 the "most progressive and forward-looking budget in our city's history."

"With the passage of this budget," she said, "we're serving notice that our future as a great city lies in *all* our neighborhoods and we will leave no one behind."


New spending on public health, affordable housing, violence prevention, and help for

averts layoffs of city employees, and increases investment in the city's four pension funds.

More civilian jobs in CPD

AFSCME members in the Chicago Police Department (CPD) and the recently formed Public Safety Administration are standing up to ensure the safety of Chicagoans while also spending resources wisely. The union has long advocated for increased civilian hiring in public safety administrative positions to accomplish these goals.

Driven by AFSCME's lobbying efforts, a majority of City Council members signed on to a resolution that calls on CPD to provide increased transparency in the use of police officers who perform duties that could be performed by civilians. Using sworn officers to fill administrative positions can be an inefficient use of resources that reduces the numbers of public safety personnel involved in directly fighting crime.

"If there's a reason why a sworn officer needs to be in a specific position, [CPD] should be able to defend that," sponsoring Ald. Jason Ervin said. "We just need to get some clarity on the rationale behind why individuals that could very well be in neighborhoods helping [fight crime] are behind the desk doing some function that very well could be done by [a civilian]." 

"We have a longstanding commitment to ensuring access to mental health treatment for all."

are a fundamental piece of making sure we are providing treatment," Rodriguez-Sanchez said.

She argued that privately-run providers are more difficult to track and regulate, pay employees less and have higher rates of turnover which is detrimental to clients.

"It's a lifeline," Rodriguez-Sanchez said of the public clinic network. "People need these services, and we can't cut corners."

at-risk youth, low-income families, and unhoused residents will be covered by \$1.9 billion in federal COVID-relief funds, along with a small property tax hike on homes worth more than \$250,000.

In the largest test of a universal basic income in this country, the budget provides \$31.5 million in direct cash assistance to 5,000 low-income households. The plan also closes budget gaps and funding shortfalls caused by the pandemic,

AFSCME grows ranks in pandemic

Challenges bring workers together to generate change

The past year and a half has been a time of unprecedented isolation, as the COVID-19 pandemic has kept many workers apart. But in some instances, it's actually served to bring us together: Seeking the union difference, more than 1,500 workers have organized with AFSCME Council 31 since March 2020.

They've had to get creative to do the work needed to form a union. Since face-to-face discussions have always been the best way to build unity, AFSCME organizing committees pivoted to use Zoom, texting and other technology to speak with one another.

"The pandemic really got everybody on the same page to work together to unionize."

New unions were certified for employees in the following workplaces this year: Franklin-Williamson Bi-County Health Department, College of DuPage (custodians), Pathways (DSPs), Spring Creek Nursing Home, Lake County Probation, LaSalle County Health Department, CGH Medical Center and Niles-Maine District Library.

And employees in the following workplaces have majority support or petitions for representation pending: Art Institute of Chicago and School of the Art Institute, St. Charles Library, Oak Lawn Library, Waukegan Library and Whiteside County Health Department.

Growth is one of AFSCME Council 31's most vital missions. It means bringing the rights and dignity that an AFSCME contract provides to as many workers as possible, giving them a voice in their workplace and strengthening our power at the bargaining table and in other critical battles.

Yet despite the strong public support for unions in our country today, the obstacles facing workers who want to form unions in the United States are enormous. The law is too often on the side of employers, who are determined to hold on to their power by keeping their workplaces union-free.

These new and aspiring AFSCME members not only stood up to threats, harassment, and intimidation to form their union, they pushed through the isolation of the pandemic to fight for a voice at work. Together they're improving the lives of their co-workers and enhancing the quality of services they provide.



Nicole Dornes
CGH MEDICAL CENTER

precautions in place earlier, like masking and PPE. We had each other's backs so we could get what we needed, [which] CGH should have been thinking about in the first place."

"COVID hindered our efforts in some ways, like slowing down our petition at the labor board, but because we were so persistent and the employees really wanted this union, we were able to overcome the obstacles and get it done. With COVID going on, AFSCME helped us get safety

"We realized that unionizing might be our only shot at protecting our staff, protecting the services we offer the public. We're stronger than ever. Everyone is working together—the community, the library and the union. We never could have done it without everyone. We saved our jobs. And now we have the power to negotiate for ourselves and advocate for ourselves and each other."



Donna Block
NILES-MAINE DISTRICT LIBRARY



Kim Spasari
LAKE COUNTY PROBATION

impact, we decided we needed to protect ourselves and have a say in what was going to happen to us. We had zero say in our job,

"We've had a lot of mistreatment from management over the years but I would say the pandemic really got us thinking because our county board started discussing layoffs as a way to save money. Once people caught wind that we'd be catching the brunt of the financial

no safety or security, and there was a lot of favoritism. The pandemic really got everybody on the same page to work together to unionize so we could do something about how we've been treated. It was harder and took us longer because of the pandemic but now everybody is definitely in it for the long haul."



David Norris
SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE


it's time we invest in a precision tool that saves us time, saves us energy, helps to right wrongs, and ensures that we're heard. Our union will do this for us."

"I know it would be safer for my career to simply keep my head down and ignore the inequity around me, but when I think about how the institution treats its staff, how they treat my colleagues, I can't just stare at the ground. SAIC's tools for working on inequity are dull, and

"I'm choosing our union to bring about genuine change. We have little to no say in the circumstances impacting our lives or jobs. In January, I was among those furloughed by administration for three months. We were told we were not essential to the



Kevin Whiteneir
ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

functioning of the museum, only to be told in April that we suddenly were essential and were needed onsite before vaccines had even become available. Staff had no role in deciding the conditions of our return even though we would deal with the brunt of the impact of visitors, of operations, and of serving the Art Institute's audience. Those of us on the organizing committee of the Art Institute of Chicago Workers United were certain then that this is our best chance at creating a better Art Institute for ourselves today, and for those of us to come tomorrow." 

State employee promotional opportunities expand

Union advances timely, fair process

Government employers are prohibited from taking political factors into consideration when making employment decisions as a result of the Shakman Decrees, a series of federal court orders dating to the 1970s and '80s. To comply, the state of Illinois must have approved procedures for filling vacancies.

During negotiations over the current collective bargaining agreement that was signed in August 2019, the State informed the AFSCME Bargaining Committee that the

developing the revised procedures. That MOU did not fix the broken system for filling vacant positions, but it did require the state to involve the union in reviewing any

“This revised MOU is going to allow us to fill vacant positions much more quickly.”

federal court-appointed monitor overseeing Shakman compliance was requiring major changes to the hiring process. Those changes were likely to make the current cumbersome procedure for filling vacancies even more difficult to navigate.

AFSCME responded by insisting that fairness for union members in that process must be part of the contract settlement. The result was a new memorandum of understanding (MOU) giving the union a voice in

changes prior to their implementation and prohibited the state from making any unilateral changes that would conflict with the union contract.

Faster and better

When the Department of Central Management Services (CMS) contacted the union to propose changes to the process a year after the contract was signed, AFSCME assembled a “Shakman Committee” of local union leaders from



various agencies and Council 31 staff members. Led by Deputy Director Mike Newman, the committee included Arnold Black (DCFS), Cheryl Graham (DHS), Elizabeth Hutson (TAB), Keith Kracht (DOC), David Morris (DCFS), Charlene Raikett (DCEO) and Tim Worker (DOC), as well as Council 31 staff members Ron Hudson and Chuck Stout.

The Shakman committee met with CMS representatives for more than a year to reach an agreement on a groundbreaking addendum to the MOU, which was signed on Oct. 29 of this year.

“The committee was so good,” said Stout, a Council 31 labor relations specialist.

“They worked for more than 16 months to get these changes in place. They were not bashful. They expressed the frustration they were feeling with the slow pace of the process and that really helped move it forward.”

For the 17 titles covered by the addendum, employees will no longer need to fill out the exhaustive CMS 100 or 100B forms. Instead, there will be a simple “yes/no” electronic questionnaire to demonstrate that an employee meets the qualifications for the position. There are new time limits on application assessments and grading to ensure more timely hiring based on seniority and

qualifications.

Employees can now apply for open positions during working hours. If they aren't allowed time during their work day, they can remain at work to complete the application, getting overtime pay if appropriate.

“This revised MOU is good for our members and the state of Illinois because it's going to allow us to fill vacant positions much more quickly than we've ever seen,” Stout said. “And by speeding up the process for filling vacancies, it will reduce the instances of so-called temporary assignments becoming semi-permanent because the vacancy isn't filled in a timely manner.”

UPWARD MOBILITY PROGRAM OPENS UP ACCESS

The Upward Mobility Program (UMP) is a joint program of AFSCME Council 31 and the state of Illinois, with key elements established in the AFSCME master agreement for state employees. Over the course of some three decades, tens of thousands of state employees have found a pathway to better jobs through the program's combination of counseling, education funding, and specialized testing.

After weathering former governor Bruce Rauner's attempt to shut it down several years ago and then the slowdown necessitated by the coronavirus pandemic, UMP is now

gearing up to be back in full swing.

Participation remains at an historically high level in 2021. Nearly 6,000 AFSCME members are currently active within the Upward Mobility Program and that number is climbing. In the past year, the number of employees taking promotional tests through the program has increased by more than 50% statewide.

Now, opportunities to participate will be even greater as the program is operating its Online Registration System on an open and continuous basis—24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year—rather than having a

time-limited registration period.

With open and continuous registration, members can register when they are ready to take advantage of the program's benefits, not because of trying to beat a registration deadline. And they don't have to worry about missing a promotional opportunity because registration has been closed.

You can learn more about the Upward Mobility Program by contacting AFSCME coordinator Chris Goodman at 217.788.2800 or cgoodman@afscme31.org.

LaSalle County health department employees join AFSCME ranks

Some 28 employees at the LaSalle County Public Health Department—including nurses, environmental health inspectors, family case managers, and others—have joined AFSCME and won their first union contract.

Lisa Dahl and Eric Pyszka had been friends for a long time. They both worked for LaSalle County, Dahl as an administrative clerk and Pyszka as a health inspector. Lisa had a union—AFSCME Local 978—and Eric didn't. They ran into each other by coincidence in October 2020 in the holiday aisle at Target.

"I had just been voted in as vice president of my local and Eric was saying it was getting rough at the health department after eight months of a pandemic, and people were miserable," Dahl said.

"We had to step up because we're there for public health and public safety and we have to do our jobs," said Pyszka, who worked for the county for nine years. "But we didn't know exactly what COVID would require of us, and boy, was it a strain. As time went on, we started feeling used and abused. Burnout was coming quickly because we were working seven days a week and missing our families."

Pyszka and his co-workers weren't getting overtime pay while working mandated overtime; instead, they got comp time. But with the demands of their job, no one was able to take that time off.

"We were accumulating hundreds of hours in flex time and weren't able to use it," Pyszka said. "We were losing thousands of dollars per employee. That's not right. When people work, they should be paid for their time and effort; it's as simple as that."

Dahl said it was like seeing the union difference side by side.

"Management was forcing people to do work outside their job description, there was unfair treatment, a hostile work environment," Dahl said. "They desperately needed representation and a seat at the table. By December we had already had our first informational meeting. And surprise: They wanted to unionize."

"We got the fire started," Pyszka said. "We started talking to other people and realized we had almost 90%

who were going to vote yes. I was really proud of everyone for taking the leap."

"They desperately needed representation and a seat at the table."

The newly formed bargaining unit filed its petition with the labor board in February 2021 and settled their first union contract in October. The




AFSCME Local 978 welcomes new members from LaSalle County health department.

bargaining team won better pay and put fair policies into place to protect employees.

"Moving from a salaried employee to an hourly employee who can earn

overtime at time-and-a-half with equitable distribution of those hours is a real game-changer for these employees," Dahl said. But more than the money, Dahl said the backing

of solidarity and a real voice on the job were the biggest wins. "Union representation alone took a huge weight off their shoulders. And they deserve that." 

Public Service Loan Forgiveness program expands

The Biden administration announced a major overhaul of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program on October 6. The policy changes include a dramatic expansion of those eligible for the program and reviews of previously rejected PSLF applications.

When the loan forgiveness program started in 2007, its goal was simple: Encourage workers to pursue careers in public service and reward them for that service. After 10 years of public service work, applicants—teachers, nurses, first responders, child welfare workers, librarians, mental health professionals, law enforcement officers and many other professionals in the public and non-profit sectors—would have the balance of their student loans forgiven, provided they'd made on-time

payments of their loans.

However, only about 5% of participants were ultimately given that relief because the task of applying for loan forgiveness was onerous, confusing, and misleading. Some borrowers believed they were enrolled in the program and making qualifying payments, only to find out that the type of payment they were making didn't meet requirements of the program. Many others were wrongly disqualified from the program from the start and should have had their

loans forgiven after 10 years of payments and public service.


Finally, the barriers and errors will be addressed. Forbes.com published this list of key changes to be made:

- Count prior student loan payments toward student loan forgiveness;
- Make FFELP and Perkins Loans eligible for student loan cancellation;
- Give credit for student loan forgiveness even if you used the wrong student loan repayment plan;
- Give credit for student loan forgiveness for student loan payments made prior to student loan consolidation;
- Count student loan payments for members of the military who were on active duty, even if their student loans were in forbearance or on deferment;
- Make more student loan borrowers eligible for student loan forgiveness by

expanding the definition of "public service";

- Give credit for student loan forgiveness even if student loan borrowers made late payments or paid in installments; and
- Create an appeals process allowing borrowers who are rejected to correct any errors and get approved.

"Relief is here for our everyday heroes who have dedicated their lives to strengthening our communities," said AFSCME President Lee Saunders. "For too long, public service workers, many of whom could have earned more working in the private sector, encountered a maze of changing rules, unreliable loan servicers and zero accountability or assistance when seeking debt forgiveness."

AFSCME has always been committed to this fight, Saunders said. "After years of pushing for Congress and past administrations to fix this program, AFSCME is elated that the courageous workers who keep our communities running every day will get the help they deserve." 

For more information, visit www.studentaid.gov/pslf and use the PSLF Help Tool. Some measures expire in October 2022.

“We did it!”

AFSCME members at Chicago nursing home reach vaccination goal

Every active employee at Smith Village nursing home in Chicago is fully vaccinated due to the diligent efforts of AFSCME Local 919. In three short months, the vaccination rate of staff went from just over half of employees being immunized to 100%.

Local President Sheila Jenkins said it was a team effort of the vaccinated and unvaccinated union members and management. “We knew our vaccination rate was low and that a mandate was coming. So we all came together and said, ‘Let’s do this’. The first thing we did was start educating people.”

The local union set up informational roundtables for employees who were hesitant to get the vaccine to provide the facts on the science and hear from fellow union members who got the shots.

“We gave our experience from the vaccine and allowed them to ask their questions and share their concerns about it,”

Jenkins said. “A lot of people had misinformation, especially from social media. We got them the right literature and resources and shared our stories of only having a slight fever or a sore arm after the shot and nothing more. That helped a lot.”

Jenkins said allowing people to become comfortable with the vaccine at their own pace was key to the successful campaign. Workers were encouraged to go to their own doctor or pharmacist if they were more comfortable. And management even allowed co-workers to accompany each other to the appointments for comfort and hand-holding, on

company time; employees also received up to two days off for side effects.

“We emphasized protecting our residents and remembering the battle we went through with COVID early on,” Jenkins said. “We lost residents from COVID and even some employees caught it. Now we have something here that can save us. We have to face our fears.”

Jenkins said a lot of union members talked to the nursing home residents, all of whom are fully vaccinated, about their experience with pandemics and vaccines. “A lot of them lived through other public health crises,” she said. “They can teach us a lot about how they got through it.”

Three days before the employer was prepared to impose a vaccine mandate, Jenkins received an email from Human Resources letting her know that 100% of 220 active employees were fully vaccinated.

“We did it!” Jenkins exclaimed. “Working together really worked.”



AFSCME Local 919 members at Smith Village nursing home in Chicago worked together to get every active employee voluntarily vaccinated before the employer’s deadline.

Union seeks fair vaccination policies

Since vaccinations against COVID-19 became available, AFSCME has been working to educate union members and encourage everyone to get immunized. It’s the best tool available to combat the spread of this deadly virus.

At the same time, the union supports a testing option for those who are uneasy about vaccinations at this time, and opposes rigid employer vaccine mandates that would result in employees who don’t get vaccinated being fired.

The U.S. Labor Department’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has issued a regulation requiring all employers of 100 or more employees to have their workforce fully vaccinated by Jan. 4 or require masking and weekly testing of those who are not vaccinated.

A stricter federal vaccine mandate is in place for

Medicare- and Medicaid-participating hospitals and health care settings that does not include a testing option.

Many large employers had already issued their own mandates before these new rules were announced this fall.

In Illinois, Gov. JB Pritzker issued a vaccination mandate—without a testing option—for state employees who work in congregate settings like prisons and veterans’ homes. He subsequently issued a mandate for all teachers and staff at all schools that does allow for a testing option. The City of Chicago, Cook County and other local governments and nonprofits

across the state have begun implementing their own vaccination mandates.

While employers have been found to have the legal right to establish such policies, labor law in our state also requires that they bargain with unions over the impact on employees.

State congregate facilities

At the state, from the outset, the Pritzker Administration recognized its duty to bargain with affected unions before implementing the policy established for employees in 24/7 congregate facilities. AFSCME immediately made a demand to bargain.

The union bargaining team’s core goals in those negotiations were to provide a testing option for employees who did not choose to be vaccinated and to prevent employees from being fired if they chose not to be vaccinated in the affected agencies (DOC, DJJ,

DHS and DVA). But the federal government’s “vaccinate only” mandate for health care facilities meant a testing option was not viable at the DHS and DVA workplaces.

After more than two months at the bargaining table, AFSCME came to an agreement for employees in the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Human Services. Under the terms of this agreement, while employees who choose not to be vaccinated will still face discipline, no employee will be discharged. Instead, they will have the option of taking a leave of absence or being subject to a modified layoff process for up to a year. Employees can apply for an exemption from the mandate based on medical contraindications or religious objections. The agreement also includes significant paid-time off provisions when employees or their family members are sick with COVID or under quarantine.

“This is by far the best agreement that any union representing state employees has reached,” said Executive Director Roberta Lynch in a message to members. “You can be very proud of your AFSCME bargaining team that worked tirelessly to this end.”

Because the federal

“vaccination only” mandate did not apply to DOC and DJJ, AFSCME continued to press for a testing option in those agencies. However, management would not agree, declared impasse and imposed its “last, best and final offer”—which included the same terms as those in the DHS and DVA MOU—on non-security employees in DOC and DJJ. AFSCME filed an Unfair Labor Practice charge in response.

Security employees in DOC and DJJ have the right to interest arbitration and AFSCME is now pursuing that course, which halts any vaccine mandate for the affected employees until the arbitration is complete.

“From the earliest days of the coronavirus pandemic, our union has done everything possible to foster safe working conditions,” Lynch said, “protecting against the spread of COVID, pressing for adequate staffing levels, providing support for those working under undue stress, securing hazard pay during the worst days of COVID, providing education about vaccinations, and upholding members’ rights on the job. We’ll continue to fight together to save lives, to preserve jobs and to build our union ever stronger.”



BETTER TOGETHER: AFSCME COUNCIL 31 CONVENES

Held in Springfield from October 14 to 16, AFSCME Council 31's 22nd biennial convention was a resounding success, despite the challenges posed by COVID-19. Every precaution was taken to ensure the safety of the more than 600 attendees, including masking and a vaccine or negative test requirement upon registration.

With the theme of Better Together, the convention focused on all that has been achieved through solidarity over the last two years and the importance of staying united to overcome the challenges ahead.

Delegates from 136 local unions voted to pass more than a dozen resolutions that will guide the union's priorities over the next two years, including bolstering the AFSCME Strong program, meeting the challenges of the pandemic,

fighting privatization, standing up for racial and social justice, and winning higher wages in underpaid sectors.

In-person and remote guest speakers—including International President Lee Saunders and U.S. Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh—applauded the dedication of AFSCME Council 31 members during this dark chapter. Delegates also nominated and elected Council 31 executive board members, including reelecting Roberta Lynch as Executive Director; the new board was sworn in by Associate Director Claudia Roberson.

"This year's convention was like no other. It was emotional and powerful to come together after being apart through so many obstacles and so much trauma," Executive Director Roberta Lynch said. Delegates commemorated the lives lost since the 2019 convention with a special memorial for members whose lives were taken over the last two years, largely due to the pandemic and its ripple effects.

"We took the time to remember their names," Lynch said, "while pledging to honor their lives by working together for a better, brighter, safer future."

You can read resolutions, see photos and watch the videos screened at convention at AFSCME31.org/bettertogether.

Lee Saunders addresses convention delegates

AFSCME International President Lee Saunders travelled to Springfield to speak directly to AFSCME Council 31 members.

"I wanted to be here to look you in the eye, to thank you and celebrate you. Because it doesn't matter how steep the challenge is—Council 31 attacks it with courage and tenacity, with a warrior mentality that represents the very best of our union.

"When we say AFSCME never quits, that's more than a catchphrase. It means that when things are at their absolute worst, we find the strength and stamina to push through. It means that when our communities need us most, we continue to serve with fearlessness and resolve. It means we stand on the front lines to protect our neighbors even if we have to expose ourselves and our families to danger.

"At Council 31, you know how to break through the noise and bring people together. You know how to instill pride in our union, how to give members a greater sense of ownership in our union. You know how to fortify the pillars of AFSCME Strong: growing the union through internal and external organizing; building power in the workplace, in the legislature and at the voting booth; and driving new innovations to better communicate with members and potential members.

"As one of AFSCME's strongest and most strategic affiliates, I'm counting on you to light the path and show the way. I'm counting on you to show that Council 31 power. I'm counting on you to help our entire union rise to meet this challenge."



AFSCME members going the extra mile

Convention delegates bestowed three biennial awards on AFSCME members who have gone above and beyond over the last two years, embodying what it means to be a union activist dedicated to public service.

STEWARD OF THE YEAR

AFSCME Local 416 Vice President Angela Kuter

Angela Kuter, a juvenile justice specialist at Illinois Youth Center-Saint Charles, is an exceptional example of the critical role of union steward.

As vice president, she helps keep her local running smoothly. “She’s the back bone of this local: our responsible, motivated, detail-oriented, go-to person,” Local President Ashley Landrus said. “But her most important role is defending and enforcing the contract—and she does it like no other.”

Kuter helps educate new and existing members on their rights, sharing her extensive knowledge so they can be advocates for themselves. A person of great integrity, Kuter is trusted by her coworkers, who feel comfortable bringing their ideas and concerns to her. She’s honest, yet extremely compassionate.

“Angela Kuter works to build solidarity among the membership,” Landrus said. “She’s a fighter. She doesn’t back down because she’s not afraid to stand up for what’s right. She’s passionate about fairness.”

PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD

AFSCME Local 472 members Karle Eccles, Stephen Fanti, Nate Roberts, and Matt Roth

This year’s Public Service Award winners are a group of AFSCME members at Sheridan Correctional Center who didn’t hesitate to jump in and help passengers who were involved in a devastating car accident last June.

These officers acted as first responders when they came across a vehicle on the highway that had rolled several times in front of them. While ensuring the inmate they were transporting was secure and safe, they provided comfort and care to the three injured passengers in their time of need, helping save the life of the young woman who was most severely hurt.

Their bravery, compassion and exemplary dedication helps foster a positive image of public service employees and the work they do.

JANE FITZGERALD – GLORIA ARSENEAU AWARD

AFSCME Local 2081 President Stephen Mittons

This award is given in honor of two AFSCME local union leaders who dedicated their lives to fostering dignity and justice for workers, Jane Fitzgerald and Gloria Arseneau. Both died of cancer. A DCFS child protection specialist, AFSCME Local 2081 President Stephen Mittons is continuing Jane and Gloria’s legacies by advancing the work of this union with tenacity and dedication.

“President Mittons has been a part of the labor movement for more than 20 years. He has been our fearless leader representing Local 2081 for the past 10 years; always fighting the good fight; never backing down and always keeping union members’ best interests at heart,” Local 2081 Vice President Jennifer Howard said.

Mittons serves on the AFSCME Council 31 executive board. He works hard to build union power and lift the voices of his membership and help meet the goals of our union.

Community supporters lift up workers’ voices

A new award inaugurated at October’s convention recognizes the critical role played by community supporters in public campaigns to win better wages, save jobs and improve public services.

AFSCME members can’t do it alone. They need the support of individuals and organizations in the community. Delegates paid special tribute to such allies from three campaigns over the last two years.

FOR TIRELESS SUPPORT OF CGH WORKERS

Fidencio Hooper-Campos

When workers first began organizing a union at CGH Medical Center in Sterling, they kept the activity very quiet. It was clearly going to be a tough fight and the organizing committee wanted to build strength at the worksite before taking the campaign public.

But there was one person they knew would stand with them from the very beginning: Fidencio Hooper-Campos. A steelworker from Sterling, longtime member of the United Steelworkers Union, and an elected official on the Whiteside County Board, Fidencio understands the true nature of solidarity.

From Day One he stood up with CGH workers. When the employer launched a harsh and punitive anti-union campaign—which continues to this day—it means so much to the workers to have a community leader like Fidencio standing by their side.

FOR INSPIRING ADVOCACY FOR UCAN WORKERS

Rev. John H. Thomas

Three years ago, nearly 200 employees at UCAN, a youth services agency in Chicago, joined the AFSCME family. They fought for a better future for their co-workers, themselves and the youth they serve everyday—and they won. Today, UCAN is represented by AFSCME Local 3096.

Community support was critical to the workers’ ability to fight off anti-union aggression by management. In particular, an invaluable friend, Rev. John H. Thomas, helped boost these workers’ spirits and pressure the UCAN board to move forward.


Rev. Thomas is a retired ordained minister of the United Church of Christ and currently serves on the Board of Directors of ARISE Chicago. He never stopped working to amplify the voices of UCAN workers, bringing them the support of church leaders to help settle a fair contract.

FOR COVERAGE OF LOCAL 981’S CONTRACT FIGHT

Corryn Brock, Luke Taylor, and The Daily Eastern News

During the Rauner years, AFSCME Local 981 members at Eastern Illinois University went through budget cuts and layoffs. Then the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, and things got even tougher.

In contract negotiations, management fought these workers every step of the way, even trying to replace them by outsourcing their jobs to a private contractor. The workers held informational pickets, attended board meetings and more to protest management’s proposals at the bargaining table.

Their actions were made all the more powerful by support from the student body at EIU. And that support was sparked and sustained by the thoughtful, fair-minded, worker-centered and highly visible coverage of the workers’ struggle by student journalists and editors like Corryn Brock and Luke Taylor at the student-run Daily Eastern News. 

Solidarity blocks privatization in Rock Island

A yearlong fight to save Rock Island's public water service ended in victory for the public works employees of AFSCME Local 988 when the city in September announced it would drop plans to privatize.

An important lesson from the struggle: It takes a whole community of supporters to win. But fortunately, solidarity and mutual aid is what the union movement is all about.

The first alarm rang in November 2020, when rumors spread that American Water—a private company that's grown into a billion-dollar multinational corporation by buying up and profiting from public water systems—was pushing to purchase Rock Island's water infrastructure.

Local 988 members swung into action, immediately working with Council 31 to plan and execute a news conference that got their message into the media. Workers warned that privatization schemes take public services out of public hands, making the operations less transparent and less

accountable to local residents.

What's more, AFSCME members pointed out, corporate owners often drive up costs to residents while cutting corners on quality in pursuit of private profit. A recent report found toxic chemicals in drinking water provided by American Water in neighboring Davenport, and the company was seeking a 9% rate hike in the fees it charged to residents.

Springtime brought municipal elections. AFSCME made every politician's position on privatization a focus of its endorsement recommendations.

That's when the local union launched its most important tactic: Walking door to door, talking to local residents about the privatization threat and the harm it posed. Canvassers asked voters to call



Members of AFSCME Local 988 protest the sale of the public water service in Rock Island.

their city council members and urge them to oppose any sale.

It was a community effort, with public works employees themselves getting help from other AFSCME locals (including Local 2025 Rock Island County Employees, Local 1132 City of Moline Employees and Local 1234 East Moline-Silvis-QComm Employees) and retirees.


Meanwhile at the State Capitol, Council 31 was working with the Citizens Utility Board in support of legislation to require a local referendum before any

private company could acquire a public water system. The bill didn't pass but it drew even more attention to the issue.

By the summer, American Water still wasn't dissuaded. In July the corporation planned a presentation to the city council, but Local 988 and its allies were there to greet them with an informational picket.

And they kept knocking on doors. It got results. "As a direct result of the door-knocking we did, people were calling," Council 31 staff representative

Audie Schmidt said. "Elected officials were hearing from them, which is what we wanted."

The final victory came Sept. 10. "The city of Rock Island will not sell its water and sewer system," the Quad-City Times reported. "The decision followed months of pressure from public works employees, residents and union members who marched in protest, circulated petitions and spoke out regularly at city council meetings in opposition to a proposed sale." 

Steady progress on DSP wage increase

This October, after many months of effort, the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) issued guidance requiring state-funded community disability agencies to pass through the full \$1.50 wage increase appropriated by the General Assembly to direct service personnel (DSPs) and other low-wage, frontline workers.

The fight started in the spring, as AFSCME members from more than two dozen agencies made hundreds of calls to lawmakers, met with them in-person and via Zoom, and testified in committee hearings to urge support for a frontline worker pay raise. Meanwhile the AFSCME legislative team worked around the clock until session closed on May 31.

Local 3237 President Yurvette Simmons, a member of the Council 31 executive board

and a DSP at United Cerebral Palsy of Will County testified before the Illinois House Appropriations Committee on May 27.

"Many of our members contracted COVID-19 in the course of their work and some have died," she said. "In most of the agencies, DSPs have volunteered to leave their own families for up to a month at a time to live 24 hours a day in CILA settings to protect the individuals they serve.

"Most of the workforce in community agencies are women and people of color," she added. "When we are paid poverty wages, it hurts our families and communities. This work is a labor of love for us, but we still deserve the respect of a fair wage. This should not be minimum-wage work."

Campaign didn't stop

The successful grassroots lobbying campaign resulted in an FY 22 state budget that included a \$1.50 per hour increase, along with language in the budget implementation bill that provided strong justification for the full amount going to workers' wages.

Yet, the fight wasn't over. Employers opposed the wage pass-through and urged DHS to allow them to keep some of the funding for other operating costs. But by educating lawmakers and state officials, AFSCME helped craft a final rule that can help to ensure the state funding ends up where it was intended—the pockets of frontline disability workers.

For years AFSCME members have pressed lawmakers to invest the significant resources needed to retain staff and foster




AFSCME Local 3492 members at Ray Graham Association at the bargaining table to ensure pass-through of the full appropriated wage increase.

the best quality of care for the state's most vulnerable residents. Their efforts are bearing fruit: In the last five years, the union has spearheaded campaigns that have increased hourly wages by nearly \$5.00 in community disability agencies.

Once the funding is approved and the rules are in place, AFSCME local unions take their fight to the bargaining table. As *On the Move* went to print, bargaining teams have secured memorandums of agreement to increase wages as directed at several agencies, including Horizon House, Trinity, Glenkirk, Arrowleaf and Pinnacle.

"Our pay does not reflect

the responsibility that we have to do our job," AFSCME Local 2690 Secretary-Treasurer Veronica Lee said on the floor of the Council 31 convention in October. "We can't afford the basic necessities and have to work unhealthy amounts of overtime just to bring home decent pay. That's why we need AFSCME members to stay strong and keep fighting to win this fight for fair pay."

The increase is still awaiting federal approval. It will be effective in January 2022 for most workers, but where employers have already implemented increases (since July 1, 2021), those increases will be counted toward the total. 

AFSCME members win round in fight to save Walnut Acres

County-run nursing home to stay in public hands—for now

A FSCME members in the Freeport area in northern Illinois won the latest battle in their “Save Walnut Acres” campaign. On Oct. 14 the Stephenson County Board voted 19-2 to reject the latest bid by a private company to buy the county home.

Employees and their allies—including residents, their families, community activists and AFSCME members and retirees in the area—are fighting to keep the 150-year-old county-run nursing home in public hands.

Rumors of a possible takeover by a private, for-profit corporation started in early 2020. Local 2399 members and supporters have been regularly attending county board meetings and organizing in the community ever since.

They’ve been in high gear since May, when the board officially put the nursing home up for sale. The campaign has included door-knocking, phone-calling, meetings with county board members, a petition, yard signs, direct mail, digital ads and local news coverage that have put the issue front and center for thousands of Stephenson County voters.

Perils of privatization

Employees know that privatization could jeopardize Walnut Acres’ role as a safety net for the community. The only nursing home in Stephenson County with an Alzheimer’s Special Care Unit, it’s one of just two facilities where every bed is Medicaid-certified for low-income seniors and where Medicaid is accepted at the time of admission. There’s no guarantee that a corporation would sustain these services when motivated by private profit instead of the public good.

In other Illinois counties, privatization has led to loss of services and jobs, poor-quality care and even closure:

- When Vermilion County sold its nursing home to a for-profit private equity firm, 39 of 115 employees were terminated the next day.
- Ford County had four different private management groups before its final for-profit owner closed it.
- The for-profit purchaser of the Champaign County home

had below-average staffing at 80% of its facilities.

- The company that bought the Rock Island county home was sharply criticized in the media for its one-star (worst) quality rating.

Workers, families unite

“Walnut Acres is so valuable to our community. It’s an affordable place where residents can be close to family,” said Penny Kennedy, a certified nursing assistant and Local 2399 member.

That’s why residents’ loved ones have spoken out, too.

“I’m scared that if a private owner took it over, where would he go?” Beth Nagel asks about her stepdad, Arnie. “Private places are really expensive. He was in another place before Walnut Acres and when his insurance ran out, they said, ‘That’s it, you have to go.’”

Latest threat

Under the latest threat, the county board received an offer from Saba Healthcare to purchase Walnut Acres for just \$1.6 million. But the




AFSCME Local 2399 members like Colleen Stilson (left) and Penny Kennedy helped educate and mobilize the community to stop the sale of the public nursing home.

“Walnut Acres is so valuable to our community. It’s an affordable place where residents can be close to family.”

fine print stated that another unnamed entity would own the home and a third

unnamed entity would operate it. In other words, no one knew who was really trying to

take over the home, and why or what they’re hiding.

It’s encouraging that the board overwhelmingly voted down that offer, but the same shadowy group has already made another lowball offer. AFSCME members and the Save Walnut Acres coalition are gearing up once again to keep their home in public hands. 

Protecting probation jobs

When the Illinois Supreme Court announced a plan to restructure pretrial services earlier this fall, AFSCME Council 31’s legal and legislative teams sprang into action.

Their goal was to protect the rights and benefits of AFSCME members employed in probation services in counties across Illinois, preserve jobs and keep services local.

As originally drafted,

the plan developed by the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC) required that the state Supreme Court directly employ all pretrial officers. Such a change would have forced employees who


currently work in county pre-trial programs to shift employers—potentially impacting wages, benefits, and pensions. In addition, it could have triggered a layoff process, causing dislocations in county probation departments throughout the state.

Restructuring on this scale would require legislative action, so the union reached out to state lawmakers and stakeholders in the criminal justice system and led the charge against hasty adoption of such sweeping changes.

In the end, the AOIC agreed to modify its legislation so that the new initiative would be restricted to counties that do not currently have a pretrial services program. The legislation’s Senate sponsor stated for the

record on the Senate floor that the bill would have no impact on current pretrial employees or employees of specialty courts. Nor would it alter the AOIC’s current reimbursement structure to counties for pretrial services.

The AOIC legislation passed the Senate but was not called for a vote in the House during last week’s fall legislative session, so it will be heard again in January.

“AFSCME will be leading the charge over the coming year to ensure that any pre-trial services reforms protect employees and are aimed at true service improvements, not disruptive and unnecessary reorganizations,” Council 31 Regional Director Anne Irving said. 

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL



AFSCME Local 981 members rally for a fair contract on the EIU campus with the support of students and faculty.

EIU workers win contract battle

AFSCME LOCAL 981 MEMBERS at Eastern Illinois University fought long and hard to win a new union contract that protects their jobs and increases their wages. Solidarity, determination and support from the campus community were critical components of their successful campaign.

The local represents some 220 employees in clerical and technical roles, building services and dining services. They were up against an administration that was trying to cut costs on the backs of its employees after years of budget cuts and layoffs. Negotiations went on for more than a year with management fighting them every step of the way.

The union organized actions at board of trustees meetings, held campus-wide pickets, published op-eds and newspaper ads and got support on social media. The student body came together to support their campaign, covering their struggle in the campus newspaper (see page 9 for more), and faculty and other staff joined them in protest.

The biggest fight was protecting building and food services employees. Management wanted the option of outsourcing those jobs to a private contractor.

"They wanted to replace all of us," Local President Renee Kerz said. "We've taken care of the campus, the students, everything that needed to be done."

Removing the outsourcing clause was one of the last things the union team got done before finalizing the contract—and the biggest victory.

"We were really proud that we got them to take it out. Our campus actions had a lot to do with it," Local 981 Recording Secretary Kim Turner said. "The campus and the Charleston community were horrified that EIU would do something that would put their own employees out of a job."

Management had also attempted to tie wage increases to student enrollment.

"A lot of members in our bargaining unit are the lowest-paid people on campus and they don't have anything to do with enrollment or recruitment," Turner said. "It wouldn't be fair. We got that clause removed and won across-the-board raises and a signing bonus."

AFSCME members at EIU fought like never before. "We had been through so much with the budget crisis, so many employees were laid off, some came back to lower-paid positions, and everyone is taking on more work since then," Turner said. "We've all been struggling with COVID and we felt like it was time for management to step up. We kept fighting until we got everybody what they deserved."

The bargaining team was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Natalie Nagel, and included Kerz, Turner, Leslie Ashley-McLean, Melissa Crouch-Carr, Michelle Burnside, Dusty Strader, Kenny Keyser, Tony Willenborge and Dino Cohoon.

Pushing back in Freeport

AFSCME LOCAL 3367 AT THE City of Freeport represents all city workers, including library employees, 911 operators, and employees in public works, the street department, water and sewer department, animal control, and forestry.

"When COVID hit, they labeled us essential employees and we agreed to work with the city to do a one-year contract to get COVID behind us," Local 3367 President Pat Ingram said. "But when it came time to negotiate, they came out and offered us zero in terms of wage increases. It was a huge slap in the face after working through the pandemic and after we showed good faith the year before."

The local took action. Members in every department wore stickers with "0%" and t-shirts that said, "Once Essential... Now Forgotten."

"Everybody banded together and our actions showed our solidarity," Ingram said.

In a big win, the bargaining team worked together to hold the line on health insurance, keeping premiums the same for the next four years. They also secured annual raises of more than 6% over the life of the agreement. They raised standby pay and increased second and third shift differentials.

"Everybody felt good about it," Ingram said. "The executive board and our bargaining committee worked really hard and having our members



AFSCME Local 39 bargaining team (left to right): Jason Goff, Natalie Klopmeier, Tammy Kujawa, Brian Hoffman and Keith Washausen. Not pictured: Cole Moore.



Members of the AFSCME Local 3367 bargaining committee (left to right): President Pat Ingram, Recording Secretary Tina Dirksen and Vice President Andy Leverton. Not pictured: Treasurer Dawn Fernandez.

supporting us was huge."

The bargaining team was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Lori Laidlaw and included Ingram, Vice President Andy Leverton, and executive board members Dawn Fernandez and Tina Dirksen.

Lobbying elected officials helps local make gains

AFSCME LOCAL 39 MEMBERS at the city of Waterloo took their case to city council members to force the city to return to the bargaining table after management had declared impasse.

"The union was strong the whole way," said Local President Jason Goff, a gas and water operator at the underground utility department for more than 20 years. "We set

our limits and we weren't going to back down."

Negotiations had gone back and forth until there was a standstill on both sides. Management had made an offer that the local refused. The city said it was their last, best and final offer.

"We needed an open line of communication so we could get to a resolution," Goff said. "So we took it to the aldermen. We're hometown people and we've known a lot of them for years outside of work. We asked them to really look at the issues and explained the problems."

As a result, the city rescinded its offer and the parties went back to the table with one of the aldermen joining to observe. The local ended up winning an average of 4% in annual raises plus a signing bonus, which had never happened before. They also added Martin Luther King Day as a paid holiday.

“We have a strong union body when it comes to sticking together for what’s fair,” Goff said.

Negotiations were led by Council 31 Staff Representative Patricia Rensing. The bargaining team included Goff, Cole Moore, Keith Washausen, Natalie Klopmeier and Brian Hoffman.

Wage gains at SIU School of Medicine

THE MORE THAN 650 MEMBERS of AFSCME Local 370 at Southern Illinois University’s School of Medicine in Springfield won the highest wage increases members ever received in their recent contract negotiations. Some employees will see their wages rise by as much as 44%.

“We started out talking about the major wage compression that was happening at the school,” said Local President Lisa Linehan. “People hired off the street were making more than people who had been here for years. We had major turnover and we had to stop that.”

The local represents clerical workers, nurses, medical assistants and others at the school.

“We’ve had a really rough time since the pandemic happened,” Linehan said. “At the beginning there wasn’t enough



Standing up for fairness, AFSCME Local 3323 picket the Shelby County board meeting.

PPE at the medical clinics. People exposed to COVID were standing next to people who weren’t.”

Management was making medical clinic staff work extra hours with no breaks since they were exempt from overtime, Linehan said. The new contract ensures these workers get their lunch hour and sets a limit on the number of hours required of them.

“We did a lot of talking in bargaining and got them to realize they can’t work them to death,” Linehan said. “The turnover rate was ridiculous. People were coming in and going right out. The members

are a lot happier now.”

The wins secured at the bargaining table will make a real difference in the lives of the union members. “And we’re going to make sure to let everyone know about what we accomplished in this agreement,” Linehan said.

New board member and bargaining team member Regina Darden agrees. She said she’s especially excited about getting union orientation integrated into the hiring process for all new employees. “We’ll be able to have time to talk to them; we won’t get pushed to the side. We’re officially a part of orientation and that makes

me proud.”

Darden said her mission now is to continue encouraging coworkers to join the union.

“When they ask me, ‘Why should I be a member if I’m getting the benefits?’ I say, ‘If everyone drops out, we won’t have a union and we’ll be back to what it was before, not accomplishing anything. It will be take it or leave it, walking on egg shells, dreading your job and not wanting to be here. Is that what you want to go back to?’ Then I say, ‘Join us and make us stronger,’ and I send a link for them to sign up.”

Led by Council 31 Staff Representative Jessica Derhake, the bargaining team included Linehan, Darden, Susan McLaughlin, Eileen DiBartolomeo, ShaRhonda Bond, Ashley Jones, Julie Sutton, Stacy Miller and Amanda French.

Fresh start for Shelby County employees

WITH THE HELP OF A change in leadership, AFSCME Local 3323 members at Shelby County won the best contract they’ve negotiated in years.

Local President Lisa Swenny is an election administrator in the county clerk’s office. She said the last two rounds of contract negotiations were difficult after the county brought in an outside attorney.

But this year, the new state’s attorney represented

the county at the table. “From the beginning there was a different atmosphere,” Swenny said. “They were open to discussions, to finding out our reasoning for different issues.”

To raise the visibility of their work and their need for better pay, union members held informational pickets at the July and August county board meetings and spoke during public comment periods.

“Many county board members didn’t even realize we were in negotiations,” Swenny said, “and that opened their eyes a bit.” The membership ratified the contract Sept. 7 and the county board approved it Sept. 9.

In an exciting win, the bargaining team negotiated an average of 5% in wage increases each year for the three-year agreement and lower health insurance premiums. They protected longevity, reinstating a bump for employees with more than 20 years of service. They secured an extra step of vacation time for all employees and a much-needed clothing allowance for highway laborers.

Negotiations were led by Council 31 Staff Representative Natalie Nagel. The bargaining team included Lisa Swenny, Chris Hewing, Mary Jo Curry, Carmen Foster, John Agney, Henry Vail and Savannah Arnold.

“We have more than 240 years of experience among our 20 members,” Swenny said. “We all do a great job, we really stick together and try to help each other out. We couldn’t ask for better.”



Some of the AFSCME Local 370 bargaining team members (left to right): ShaRhonda Bond, Regina Darden, Amanda French, Susan McLaughlin, Stacy Miller and Lisa Linehan.

SHORT REPORTS



U.S. Supreme Court won't take up cases aimed at weakening unions

THE U.S. SUPREME COURT has refused to consider four cases aimed at expanding the scope of its 2018 ruling in *Janus v. AFSCME Council 31*. That decision holds that fair-share fees in the public sector violate the First Amendment of the Constitution, a boon for anti-union corporate interests.

Originally filed by billionaire Republican Gov. Bruce Rauner, the case was taken up by frontman Mark Janus and backed by the National Right to Work Foundation.

On Nov. 1, the Supreme Court declined to take up challenges that sought to expand the *Janus* ruling to prohibit state laws requiring that a single union represent all of the workers in a bargaining unit. Every federal appeals court that has considered the issue also denied the cases.

The highest court's rejection "exposed these frivolous cases for what they are: a cynical attempt by well-funded, anti-union radicals to flood the zone with countless post-*Janus* lawsuits to drain unions of resources," said American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten.

The Supreme Court also declined to hear a case seeking to establish that union members should be able to

drop out of paying dues on demand instead of in a designated annual period. The court's November action follows an earlier decline to hear six cases attempting to retroactively reimburse non-members for previously paid fair share fees.

Unions increase wages for all, close racial wealth gaps

WORKERS WHO BELONG TO unions make more money than their nonunion counterparts. They have better health care insurance and retirement plans, more job security and safer working conditions. They're happier. That's the union difference.

A new Center for American Progress (CAP) report analyzing data from the Federal Reserve found that not only do unions increase wealth for all households, regardless of race or ethnicity, they help to close the longstanding income gap for Black and Hispanic households.

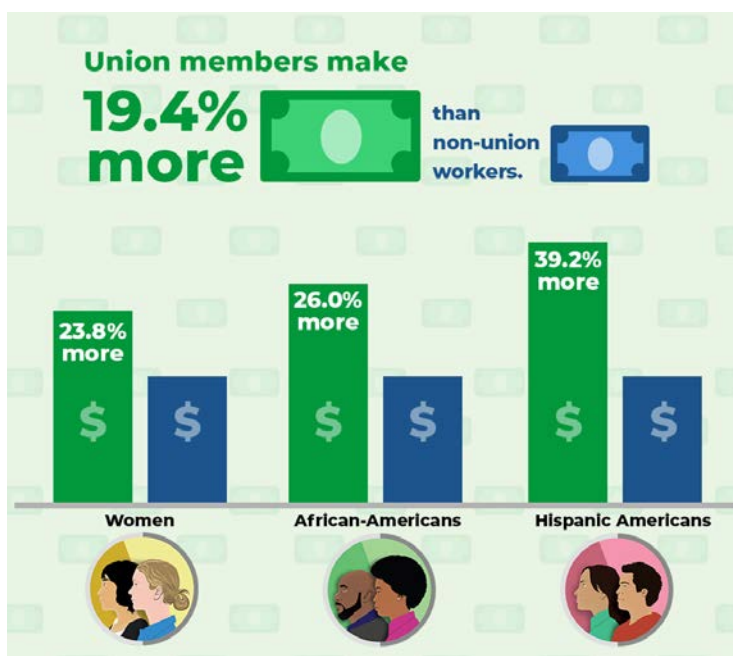
According to CAP:

- For Black households with a union member, the median wealth is more than three times that of non-union Black households.
- For Hispanic households with a union member, the median wealth is more than five times that of nonunion Hispanic counterparts.
- For White households with a

union member, the median wealth is nearly two times that of nonunion White households.

By narrowing this gap, unions help decrease inequality and benefit the larger economy, especially important during times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

William Orange, who works in the nutrition department at Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami, told USA Today that being part of a strong union has made a huge difference in his and his fami-



ly's life. A member of AFSCME Local 1363, Orange used to work in warehouses with no union representation. Now he has a guaranteed 40-hour work week and paid sick leave.

"It allows me to make a decent salary, and ... if I get sick, I can get paid and it doesn't impact my financial

situation with my family," he said. "Being in the union gives you a sense of security."

Workers flexing their muscle

IT'S BEEN DUBBED "THE Great Resignation"—the phenomenon of a record number of workers leaving their jobs during the pandemic. Employers are finding it more difficult to replace workers, especially in the lower-wage service industry. The scales are tipped, with workers holding the power to demand change.

One signal of that tipped scale is the large number of strikes occurring across the country this fall. The Bureau of Labor Statistics has documented 12 strikes of more than 1,000 workers so far in 2021—and Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations has tracked strikes against 178 employers.

Strikes at John Deere, Kellogg, Nabisco and El Milagro in Chicago—plus strike authorization votes by large units like the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees and Kaiser Permanente in California—are getting national news coverage. Workers are protesting harsh conditions, understaffing and lower wages for new hires.

"The strikes are sending a

New rules encourage federal workers to join unions

THE BIDEN-HARRIS ADMINISTRATION issued new guidelines to encourage collective bargaining and guarantee that federal employees are educated on their rights.


The guidelines were announced during a roundtable talk on Oct. 20 by Vice President Kamala Harris and Labor Secretary Marty Walsh. Harris spoke with a panel of federal workers alongside Walsh, making a powerful case not only for the importance of the jobs that federal workers do, but also why they must have a voice on the job.

"This is what it means to have a truly pro-worker administration."

To that end, two new rules will take hold for federal workers, thousands of whom are AFSCME members.

First, federal workers will be educated about their rights to join a union when hired. Unions will also be able to participate in new-hire sessions. Second, currently eligible federal workers will be reminded of their right to join a union.

"This is what it means to have a truly pro-worker administration—one that believes it is the responsibility of government to empower working people and encourage collective bargaining," AFSCME President Lee Saunders said in a statement. "Federal employees serve the country with pride every day, and they deserve a voice on the job."

This action from the White House is a stark counterpoint to the previous administration, which, during its four years, made many attempts to diminish workers' rights. In 2018, a federal judge ruled that President Donald Trump exceeded his authority by attempting to weaken the collective bargaining rights of federal employees. 

RETIREE NOTES

Chapter 31 convention goes virtual

AFSCME RETIREES CHAPTER 31 held its 18th Biennial Convention via Zoom on Oct. 13.

"While some of us are not very comfortable with technology, many more of us are concerned with the impact of COVID and the breakthrough cases," said Carol Hadsell, a Chapter 31 Executive Board member and president of Peoria area's sub-chapter 78. "That's why the Board voted to hold the convention virtually. I was very impressed with both the content and organization."

Sub-chapter delegates elected the chapter's statewide officers and passed resolutions guiding the organization for the next two years. Priorities reflected in those resolutions include defending retirement security, supporting compounding COLAs, opposing the social security offsets, protecting Medicare and Social Security, and containing prescription drug costs.

Delegates heard remarks from AFSCME President Lee Saunders, State Senator Doris Turner (D-Springfield), AFSCME Retirees Director Ann Widger and Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch.

"Quite a few of our members weren't going to attend before it went virtual," said Don Todd, an Executive Board member and President of Springfield area's Sub-chapter 86. "We were thrilled with the great speakers, and the ability to take care of business in a safe and accessible way."

Hall of Fame honorees

THE AFSCME CHAPTER 31 Retiree Hall of Fame honors those who have dedicated their time and effort to building the organization, fending off attacks on earned benefits and strengthening retirement security for all. At the convention, Chapter 31 delegates inducted the following individuals into the Hall of Fame.

Charlie Hogan

Charlie was a member of Northern Cook County Sub-chapter 161. Prior to



Charlie Hogan



Jeannette Hosey



Ruth Holmes



Rosemary Rouse

retiring, he worked for the city of Evanston for 20 years as an air conditioning technician and was an active member of AFSCME Local 1891. After Charlie retired in 2007, he worked with Chapter 31 to build a new retiree sub-chapter, becoming president of Sub-chapter 161, which today has nearly 1,000 members. A stalwart activist, Charlie was always either at a picket line, phone-bank or an action, or mobilizing others to join in. A dedicated and patient leader who spent long hours building the organization, Charlie passed away in March 2020.

Ruth Holmes

Ruth joined AFSCME Retirees Sub-chapter 60 in January 2012, immediately after retiring from John Stroger Cook County Hospital's Department of Medical Records

after 30 years as an assistant supervisor. Elected to the executive board and in 2016 as secretary, she serves as the event planner for most activities. Competent, reliable and trustworthy, Ruth has dedicated many hours to serving the members of Sub-chapter 60.

Jeannette Hosey

Jeanette began her career as a state employee in 1976. She worked in several facilities including Joliet Correctional Center and Stateville Correctional Center. In 2008, Jeanette retired but didn't slow down. She joined Retirees Sub-chapter 73 in the Joliet area, where she now serves as treasurer. Thorough and always timely, she regularly works beyond her own duties and responsibilities to ensure the sub-chapter runs

smoothly. Jeanette's resilience, tireless dedication and commitment to the organization have been invaluable.

Rosemary Rouse

Rosemary was in management at the end of her career but knew the importance of the union and joined AFSCME Retiree Sub-chapter 92 in the Vienna area shortly after she retired from the Illinois correctional system. Since then, she has proven herself an energetic and reliable officer who often fills in for others when needed. When the coronavirus pandemic hit and the sub-chapter had to hold meetings by Zoom, Rosemary made sure that members were supplied with the necessary information to join the online meetings. She has been the glue that holds the organization together.

COVID breakthroughs underscore importance of vaccines, booster

"THE DOCTORS SAID I WAS incredibly lucky. If I hadn't been vaccinated, I would have died."

Those are the words of AFSCME Illinois Retiree Chapter 31 President Larry Brown, who was hospitalized for 16


"We all have a responsibility to care for the more vulnerable members of our community."

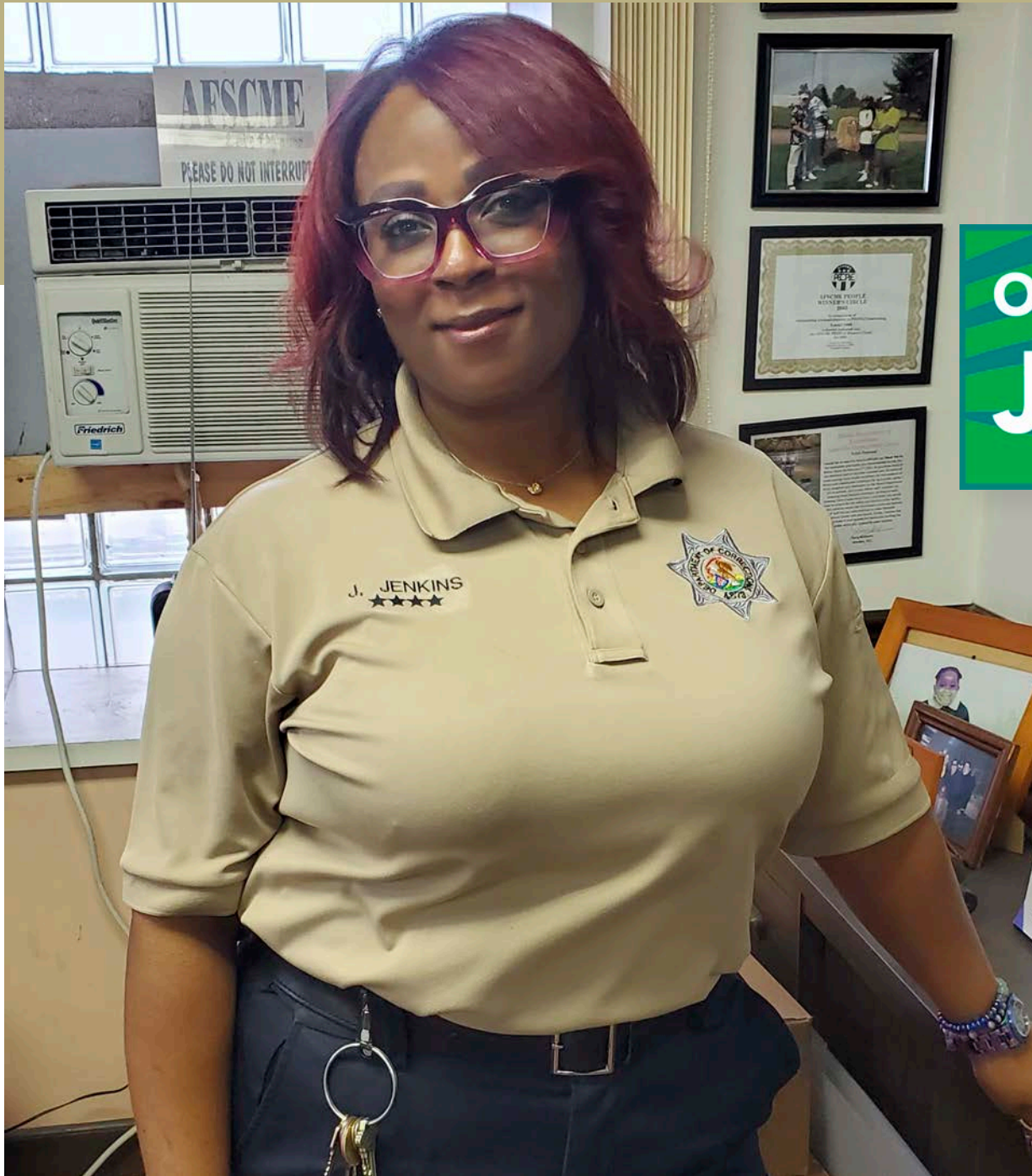
days in September after being diagnosed with COVID-19. "Unless you go through it, you just can't imagine how difficult it is," Brown said.

Throughout the pandemic, research has clearly demonstrated that older adults have been more likely to suffer from COVID complications. Experts say the same reasons that made them more susceptible from the get-go, including a less robust immune system and higher likelihood of chronic health issues, could be causing them to bear the burden of severe breakthrough cases.

"Everyone I know has lost someone to COVID, yet many people still act like it doesn't exist," Brown said. "We all have a responsibility to care for the more vulnerable members of our community, which means wearing a mask and getting vaccinated to reduce exposure, illness and death. To do otherwise is unacceptable and irresponsible."

Vaccines are critically important to reducing the likelihood of COVID infection, severe illness and death. Unvaccinated individuals are 10 times more likely to be hospitalized and die from the disease than vaccinated people.

To increase their protection, the CDC recommends that everyone age 65 and older who receive the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine more than six months ago should get a booster shot now, as should anyone age 50-64 with underlying medical conditions. 



mentally disabled adults. But I came here to help. To help individuals in custody and help my coworkers.

So many of the individuals in custody come from different walks of life. You never know what battle someone is facing. I try to be a beacon. They can reach out to me. I talk with them. If I'm helpful or fair, or I brighten their day, hopefully they carry that mentality back to the unit instead of going back aggressive and acting out.

I also try to teach them on the job. Something as minor as how to sweep and mop, those skills can help them. I've had individuals in custody come up and say thank you so much for treating me like a human being. I try to go the extra mile with them.

What's your inspiration to go to work every day?

It starts with my upbringing. I was raised in a positive environment. I was always taught to see the good even in a bad situation. What keeps me going every day is the fact that I'm grateful. I don't take this job for granted. I'm so thankful I have a job and I can be there for my coworkers.

I came up with an idea to start the Coffee Café. I saw the need for members who are experiencing hard times. Once we're in the facility we're in for the day, so I thought it would be nice for us to get together, have a cup of coffee, some fruit and a donut. That might make the difference in someone's day. It was originally for the frontline security staff, but now others like the nurses and dentists come by to the lunchroom to partake.

When I see my coworkers drink that cup of coffee that does my heart good. Making a difference in someone's day is very rewarding.

Why is solidarity important?

We are the union. We can make the change. We can point out all the wrongs. Having a union has helped us in so many ways. I try to make sure our members have a full understanding of their rights and benefits, so they know their options.

We were fortunate to get paid time off for COVID because our union fought for that. My daughter is a TSA agent and when she got COVID her time was her own sick time. Even pre-COVID, establishing and fighting for benefits to ensure we're properly taken care of, to protect ourselves against management. Having a union contract and each other—that should not be taken for granted.

Solidarity means sticking together, supporting each other, fighting for each other, standing for each other. We're a unit and in this line of work you need strength and unity. 🦅

Jacqueline Jenkins

AFSCME Local 1866

CORRECTIONAL OFFICER

Tell us about your job at Stateville Correctional Center.

I've worked here at Stateville for 22 years as a correctional officer. I think I've worked every assignment—every cell house, every tower, the catwalks. Before COVID, I was a court writ officer, taking 10 to 35 individuals in custody to the courthouse in Chicago every day.

“Solidarity means sticking together, supporting each other, fighting for each other.”

I'm currently assigned as a second armory officer. I make sure all the equipment—radios, keys, cell phones—is accounted for. And when I'm not doing that, I'm the safety and sanitation officer, ensuring that the institution is clean. I escort four to eight minimum-security workers

around, supervise sweeping, mopping, cleaning bathrooms, sanitizing the dining hall. It's our institution and I'm thankful for it so I want to take care of it.

Are you active in your local union?

I've been a union steward with Local 1866 for 10 years. Five years ago, I became a level three grievance officer. I've been the election committee chairperson even longer. When I came to Stateville I had quite a few family members who worked here, and they were active in the union. I learned more about the union through my family.

I knew I wanted to be active, I didn't want to just sit around. I want to be part of it. I believe in the union so strongly that whatever needs to be done I'm willing to do it. I try to go to every rally and encourage other members to come. I try to be a facilitator to get more members educated and active.

How does your job provide a valuable public service?

My family always encouraged me to come work here. I thought I didn't want to work at a prison. I had a background of working with physically and