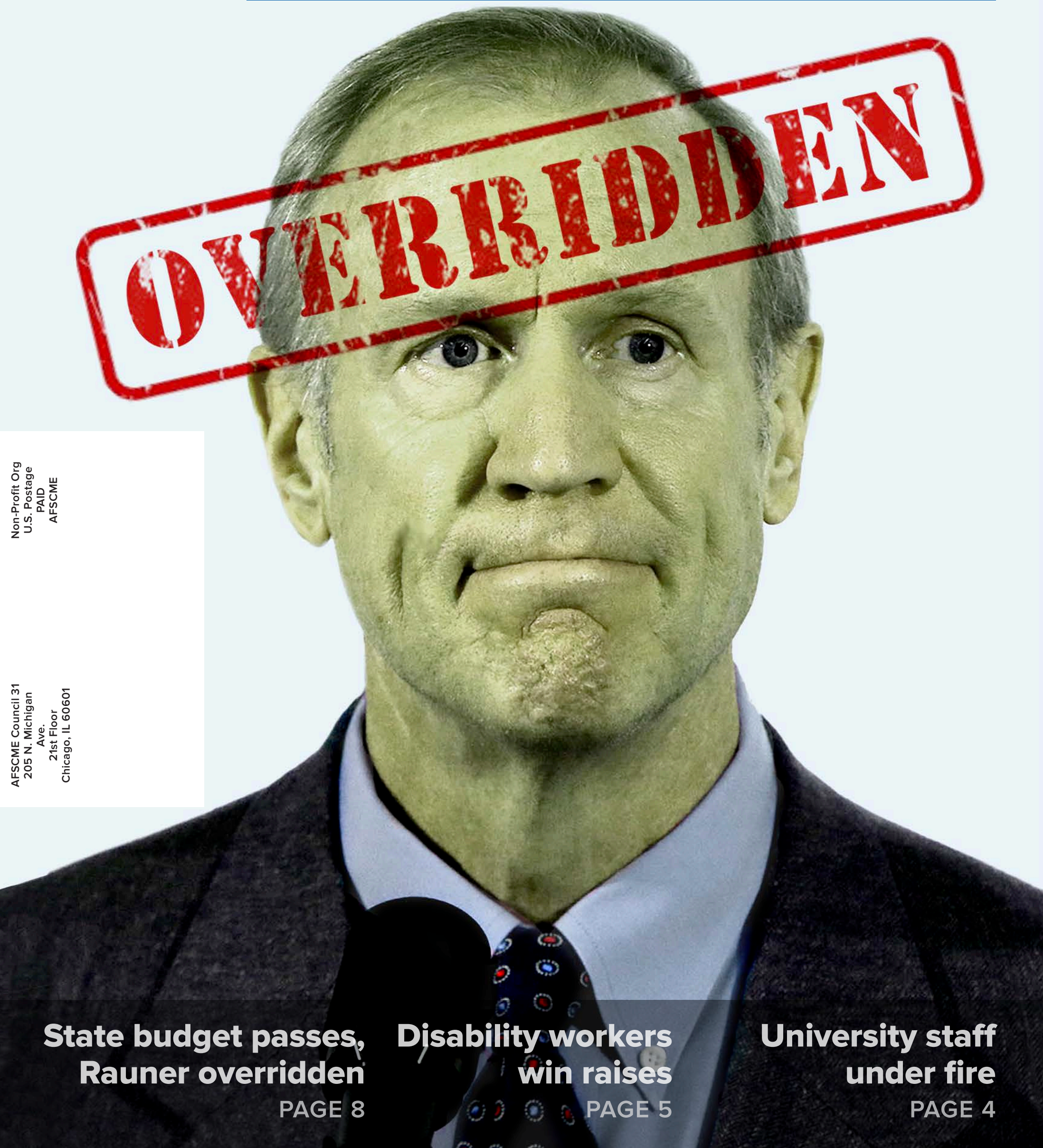


ON THE

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MOVE

Illinois Council 31—American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees—AFL-CIO



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Rauner overridden**

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Rauner's down but not out—yet

He'll fight for governor's office with everything he's got

Are you tired of reading about Bruce Rauner? I know I'm tired of writing about him. In fact, I'm totally tired of HIM. Increasingly, it seems like we are all so ready to be rid of Rauner. We want him gone before his destructive policies take down our entire state.



BY
ROBERTA LYNCH

IF WE WANT TO DEFEAT RAUNER, WE HAVE TO STAND AGAINST THE POLITICS OF RESENTMENT AND DIVISION

AND, AT THE MOMENT, IT SURE SEEMS LIKE IT SHOULDN'T BE TOO HARD TO GET RID OF HIM. Polls show that he's among the least popular governors in the country. And in just a little more than a year, we'll have the opportunity to vote him right out of office.

Unfortunately, as we know from so many events in our lives, what shouldn't be difficult, very often is.

In this case, we're talking about someone who's utterly ruthless and incredibly wealthy. That perilous combination means we can almost certainly count on three things happening over the coming months.

First is the return of Bogus Bruce. Unlike the Real Rauner who has nine lavish homes (and one very vile temper), Bogus Bruce is warm and folksy, a regular guy who hangs out in what appears to be a garage full of DIY home repair tools. While the Real Rauner wants to drive down your family income and strip your rights on the job, Bogus Bruce is ready to come right over and fix your leaky faucet.

It may be difficult to believe that anyone will fall for Bogus Bruce after we've seen so much of the Real Rauner threatening legislators, belittling public service workers, forcing human service agencies to close and pushing Illinois off a fiscal cliff. But with the nonstop TV, radio and social media saturation that his millions will buy, some people almost certainly will be taken in.

Rauner will also fill the airwaves with negative attacks on his opponent and House Speaker Michael Madigan. That's because Rauner almost

certainly knows deep down that too many Illinois voters won't be fooled by his own extreme makeover. So instead he'll focus the bulk of his efforts on trying to smear his opponents with more mud than you'll find on Illinois' biggest hog farm.

Secondly, we can expect that before long there will be an army of paid canvassers out knocking on doors for Bruce Rauner. He'll undoubtedly look to programs in other states run by groups like Americans for Prosperity, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Koch Brothers, which relied on paid canvassers to swing key political races and elect Republican officeholders who moved swiftly to suppress labor unions in their states.

The third piece of Rauner's game plan is probably the most time-tested and pernicious: Divide and conquer. He's already spent a lot of time and money trying to stir up workers in the private sector against public employees like us—attacking our wages and benefits as excessive and undeserved. He's tried to make it about taxpayers vs public employees—never mind that public employees pay taxes too!

Right now he's working night and day to pit Downstate against Chicago, jeopardizing school funding reform legislation that would improve educational opportunities for kids from one end of the state to the other. And, sadly, despite all the warnings that history gives us about how those in power foment such divisions to keep the rest of us from gaining some of that power, there are folks who continue to fall prey to it.

So, yeah, it seems like a guy who's done so much harm and

next to no good should already be on his way out the door. But, in fact, Rauner's going to hang on to the governor's office with everything he's got.

If we want him gone, we're going to have to be willing to use everything we've got too.

The thing is we've actually got a lot—a lot of people, a lot of determination, and a lot of know-how. Yes, he'll saturate the airwaves, but research shows that more persuasive than any ad is the viewpoint of a trusted friend, neighbor or family member. We can make a big difference by systematically reaching out to others and sharing the truth about the Real Rauner who held Illinois hostage, drove our debt up and our credit rating down, hurting Illinois residents and refusing to do his job.

To drive that message home, AFSCME will be working with other unions through the Illinois AFL-CIO to build the biggest volunteer voter outreach effort ever assembled in our state. Take some time now to think about your plans for the coming year—and factor in ample time to do your part.

Finally, if we want to defeat Bruce Rauner, we have to stand strong against the politics of resentment and division that he seeks to foster.

As union members, experience has taught us that nothing is more important than standing together and refusing to be divided.

We can lead the rest of Illinois by example, demonstrating that no progress has ever been made by fighting each other over crumbs rather than coming together to work for a better state for all.

On the Move

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Larry Brown

Cook County layoffs halted

Battle over revenue measure continues

For Cook County employees, good news came on Friday, July 28 when a judge lifted the temporary restraining order blocking the new penny-per-ounce tax on sweetened beverages, allowing the county to collect revenues beginning August 2.

ON JUNE 30, A COOK COUNTY JUDGE HAD GRANTED A REQUEST FROM THE ILLINOIS Retail Merchants Association (IRMA) to block implementation of the tax, the revenue from which would address Cook County's gaping budget hole.

Unable to collect revenue, the county looked immediately to cut personnel costs.

AFSCME members in the offices of the Chief Judge, the Public Defender, the State's Attorney, and the Health and Hospital System suddenly found themselves faced with the threat of layoffs.

They quickly took action. "We did a lot of grassroots outreach to the Cook County Board of Commissioners—emails, calls and meetings—and we've established good relationships for the future," AFSCME Local 3315 President Kevin Ochalla said.

No-layoffs demand

DAYS LATER, THE AFSCME bargaining committee met with the county for negotiations. The first and only demand from the union members was that all scheduled layoffs be rescinded. With the lifting of the restraining order, the county had reduced its projected shortfall to \$17 million, an amount that can be addressed through non-personnel-related cuts.

Ochalla's local represents public defenders, and stood to lose the highest number of employees in the layoff plan.

"I really give credit to all the Cook County locals," Ochalla said. "Our office was looking at 63 layoffs out of our 430 members—the next highest number was the state's attorney support staff local at 22. Some locals were facing

powerful."

"We were unwilling to go on with 'business as usual' while well over 100 AFSCME members were facing the prospect of losing their ability to provide for their families," AFSCME Council 31 Regional Director Helen Thornton said.

A week after negotiations, the county informed Council 31 that every layoff notice sent to AFSCME members because of the delay in implementing the beverage tax would be rescinded.

just a handful.

"When our entire bargaining team got together, I really felt the solidarity in the room," Ochalla said. "Everybody is in this together. Even the locals that weren't facing layoffs are very supportive. That was very

Health benefits

UNFORTUNATELY, IRMA HAS filed an emergency appeal, asking the court to issue a new order blocking the tax. The motion to reinstate the temporary restraining order and stop tax collection was denied, but the court case is still pending.

Over-consumption of sugar is a major contributor to obesity, diabetes and tooth decay—all of which drive up health care costs. Drinks are a major source of sugar in

Americans' diets. On average, a single can of a sugary drink contains the equivalent of 10 teaspoons of table sugar.

Public health organizations support taxes on sweetened beverages as a way to curb diabetes and obesity, especially among children and adolescents. An analysis by the Harvard University School of Public Health projected that such taxes would save more in future health care costs than they cost to implement by preventing cases of childhood and adult obesity, preventing new cases of diabetes, and increasing healthy life years.

The Cook County sweetened beverage tax is one cent per ounce. It's paid by consumers who buy bottled sweetened beverages and by manufacturers and distributors of the syrups and powders used for fountain drinks. That's why IRMA is the major opponent of the tax.

All for one

WITHOUT THE REVENUE FROM the pop tax, hundreds of AFSCME members could face layoffs.

"AFSCME will continue fighting layoffs until the threat no longer exists."

As *On the Move* went to press, the tax's future was uncertain. Another court decision was expected in the coming weeks. But one thing is sure: Severe staff layoffs would only hurt the residents of Cook County.

"The union's no-layoff demand will remain Number One if the county is again ordered to stop collecting the new tax," Thornton said. "AFSCME will continue fighting layoffs until the threat no longer exists because our communities need essential, high-quality public services more than ever."

"Everybody is in this together."



NEIU facing layoffs despite budget's passage

In the midst of the state budget impasse, Northeastern Illinois University President Richard Helldobler told the media that his threat to lay off 170 employees would be averted if a budget was enacted.

beat down.”

NEIU has a student body of about 10,000, many of whom are people of color and first-generation college students. Retention is difficult when students are juggling jobs and raising families while they earn their degree.

Larrimore said the employees on the chopping block are critical to providing high-quality student services. They help at-risk students navigate their college education, which can be

“We know it’s always better to stand up and fight. So that’s what we will continue to do.”

BUT NOW NEIU IS STILL SET TO LAY OFF EMPLOYEES DESPITE RECEIVING MILLIONS IN long-awaited state funding.

“President Helldobler said one thing during the impasse and now he’s saying the opposite,” AFSCME Local 1989 President Ellen Larrimore said. “It seems to us like NEIU is using the budget impasse to allow them to shrink our workforce.”

Throughout the impasse, the university filled its budget hole with layoffs and furloughs, a painful process that left the community shaken.

“We’ve lost a lot of colleagues, people we’ve known for many years,” Larrimore said. “We are not ready to lay down and let them do whatever

they want, but at the same time people are feeling pretty



the very thing keeping those students enrolled and on track to graduate.

Local 1989 members organized multiple protests against

the proposed layoffs, calling into question the president’s logic and educating union members, students and staff about the fact that additional layoffs will only hurt students even more.

On August 9, 100 protesters marched through campus to take their message to the president. They played a somber game of musical chairs to symbolize the loss of colleagues and floated huge balloons in front of Helldobler’s office with messages like, “Student Success = Adequate Staff” and “Reverse the Layoffs – Bring Staff Back!”

AFSCME members won’t quit pushing back against the layoffs.

“We know it’s always better to stand up and fight,” Larrimore said. “So that’s what we will continue to do.”

NIU employees demand fair treatment

AFSCME Local 1890 has had a long battle for its first union contract with Northern Illinois University.

ALMOST TWO YEARS AGO, MORE THAN 600 CLERICAL, TECHNICAL, PARAPROFESSIONAL AND administrative workers organized their union at NIU. These AFSCME members support professors, students, academic departments and university administration, but most are paid less than \$15 an hour.

The bargaining committee has been working toward an initial agreement since February 2016, but NIU has not demonstrated the same commitment.

On July 10, dozens of

Local 1890 members joined their bargaining team in a show of support at the union’s first bargaining session since a federal mediator was appointed in March. Earlier that day AFSCME had filed an Unfair Labor Practices charge against the university for failing to bargain in good faith.

“I’m both excited and nervous,” said Christian Lash, a library catalogue assistant at NIU for five years. “I’m excited to see so much support in this room, but I’m nervous because negotiations have been going



on so long. They don’t seem to care about our union, about us or about the work that we do.”

Earlier this summer, the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board found that NIU violated state labor law when it unilaterally increased parking permit fees for employees

without negotiating with their union. But instead of respecting that ruling, the university immediately appealed it.

“Appealing that ruling on the parking shows that they don’t respect us,” said Katja Marjetic, who works with Lash in the library. “We are not

happy. We are frustrated. And that’s exactly why we formed a union in the first place.”

Although the university hasn’t budged on its economic proposals since 2016, the new AFSCME local is standing strong. Members say they’re in this fight for the long haul.

Disability workers win wage increase in state budget

AFSCME members say they won't stop now

Community disability agency employees finally had a real breakthrough in the Illinois General Assembly. The long-awaited state budget includes funding for an average 75 cents-per-hour increase in compensation for direct service personnel (DSPs) and other frontline staff.

“EVERYBODY IS LIKE, ‘WOW!’—BUT WE AREN’T GOING TO STOP NOW,” SAID TIMOTHY OLAOSEBIKAN, president of AFSCME Local 3492 and a DSP at Ray Graham Association. “It’s a huge pick-up for us. It’s not everything we wanted, but they remembered us. That means a lot.”

The legislators definitely remembered DSPs—because AFSCME members didn’t let them forget. For the past two years, DSPs across the state visited legislators in their district offices, tracked them down in the Capitol on Lobby Days and delivered thousands of postcards to Gov. Rauner.

A dedicated, coordinated coalition of union members, agency administrators and client families ensured that the story of the disability services workforce crisis was told in the newspaper, online, and on TV. The campaign focused on how poverty wages were driving dangerously high turnover and staff vacancies, making it difficult for caregivers to provide for their own families and leaving people with disabilities without adequate help.

“We work so hard so we can take care of our families,” Olaosebikan said. “But to make ends meet we have to work 50 to 70 hours a week. It’s crazy.”

Coalition campaign prevails

With the governor opposed to fair wages for DSPs and refusing to sign a budget, AFSCME members knew the fight for an increase was an uphill battle.

Last year Rauner vetoed a bill to provide livable wages to disability workers. And after more than two years of

political games, it was unclear whether the state would even have a budget by summer’s end.

“We put so much effort in the last time and Rauner vetoed our bill. And with the budget crisis, we weren’t banking on it,” Olaosebikan said.

“This victory is a huge motivation.”

“For them to actually put in 75 cents per hour more for us, it means that they listened to our campaign.”

The latest DSP wage enhancement bill, Senate Bill 955, passed the Senate but never made it out of the House before the legislative session concluded at the end of May. The 75-cent raise was included in the new state budget, instead of in a separate bill.

No stopping us now

DSPs are very happy and bolstered by the progress, Olaosebikan said, but they aren’t satisfied.

“It’s very, very encouraging,” he said. “But that doesn’t mean that we are going to sit back. It just means that we are going to continue where we stepped off.”

“We came this far by sticking together and we will continue our campaign in the next legislative session to pass our bill to require a base salary



of \$15 per hour for DSPs,” said AFSCME Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch. “Huge credit goes to every DSP who made a phone call, sent a postcard or came to Springfield to tell their story of caring and hardship.”

Olaosebikan said that AFSCME members are very aware of how Gov. Rauner actively worked to prevent a wage increase for DSPs. And they are ready to knock on doors to ensure that a new governor is elected in November

2018.

“Everybody is ready to go out and vote in the election and volunteer,” he said. “This victory is a huge motivation. We are powerful.”

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Two critical bills on Rauner’s desk

DESPITE ALL THE POLITICAL theatrics of the spring legislative session, lawmakers determined to tackle two critical problems passed legislation to address them both.

First up was the urgent need to ensure that all those who work in Illinois earn a living wage. That’s what Senate Bill 81 would accomplish by increasing the state minimum wage from its current \$8.25 per hour to \$15 per hour over five years. (It’s been seven years since Illinois’ minimum wage got a bump from \$8 to

\$8.25.)

If signed by the governor, the law would go into effect January 1, 2018. Minimum wage workers would then make \$9 per hour with the promise of annual raises. Small businesses would get tax credits to help offset increased labor costs as they adjust to the new wage law.

Legislators also took up the challenge of strengthening accountability when state government considers subcontracting vital public services. House Bill 3216 aims

to prevent privatization of services currently performed by state employees without first meeting rigorous standards to assure high-quality and cost-effective outcomes. Sen. Andy Manar and Rep. Letitia Wallace skillfully guided this measure through both chambers.

It should be no surprise that Gov. Rauner has pledged to veto both of these bills and has until August 26 to act. If he vetoes the measures, legislators will have the opportunity to override him when they return in the fall.

Righting wrongs—the strength of a union contact

Three stories of winning grievances

Corrections employees stand up for better pay



TWO AFSCME MEMBERS WORKING AS CORRECTIONS IDENTIFICATION TECHNICIANS at different correctional facilities won their temporary assignment grievances and

are now getting the pay they deserve.

Charles “Chuck” Tabor of Dixon Correctional Center and Ryan Rivera of East Moline Correctional Center both

worked alone in their facility’s Bureau of Identification, without any supervisor.

Tabor and Rivera had put in for temporary assignment pay for doing the work of a supervisor on top of their tech duties, but management denied them.

Local 817 and Local 46 filed grievances on their behalf, which were combined when Council 31 brought the issue before an independent arbitrator.

Ensuring justice

Bureaus of Identification in state correctional facilities

do critical work conducting and recording DNA tests via buccal (saliva) swabs and fingerprinting inmates.

A technical process that requires meticulous documentation, tech work can have a dramatic impact on the justice system.

A former employee at Dixon CC, AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Lorie Aurand recalled a particularly sad case of a little girl murdered 40 years ago in Florida.

Her family never gave up trying to find her killer. They got a new investigator involved who put a suspect’s DNA into the system and there was a match at Dixon.

“We had a man doing time for the same offense, and he was the murderer,” Aurand said. “Our members’ work helped give that Florida family some peace. Helping solve cold cases is just one of the critically important things bureau techs do.”

Taking a stand

Tabor and Rivera were able to prove that they were essentially running their respective Bureau of Investigation units with only general supervision, but not being fairly compensated for that work.

The arbitrator ordered temporary assignment pay for both grievants, pointing to the union contract, which says an employee will qualify for temporary assignment pay if they perform duties of a higher classification or are held accountable for responsibilities outside their normal position classification.

“This job carries enormous responsibility,” Aurand said. “You could destroy somebody’s life if you make a mistake—or you could ensure that justice is being served by doing your job right.”

“I’m so glad Tabor and Rivera stood up for what is right.”

The retirement she deserves

AMANDA CRABB HAD WORKED SEVEN YEARS AS A SPEECH PATHOLOGIST WITHIN THE education department of the Illinois Youth Center in Harrisburg as a member of AFSCME Local 779. She enjoyed working with the youth and making a difference in their lives.

Two years ago in April she got a letter in the mail.

“It said the state retirement system had discovered a coding error regarding my retirement contributions. They said they were taking too much money out of my checks for the last six years,” Crabb recalls, “and that I would receive a refund of \$25,283.28.”

Crabb was shocked—and at first not altogether displeased. After taxes, the check she received was for more than \$15,000.

But a nagging suspicion compelled Crabb to make a phone call to the state.

She was told that she should have received a letter explaining that her job description did not qualify for the cor-



Amanda Crabb, AFSCME Local 779

rections alternative retirement formula that she was enrolled in and had been paying into.

“I knew being in the regular formula meant that I would need to work four additional

years and my pension checks would be lower,” Crabb said.

Crabb felt strongly that her job met the necessary criteria for the alternative formula. She had the same certification and schooling as educators, and also worked in the DJJ school district.

Crabb’s local union filed a grievance to redress this

“I had to work hard. But it was well worth it.”

wrong.

AFSCME Council 31 attorney Sue Osthus handled the case when it eventually went to an independent arbitrator for resolution.

“Sue was a bulldog,” Crabb said. “Her research was amazing. She had really done her legwork and because of that I won my case.”

Osthus found that Crabb had been removed from the alternative formula pension system not by SERS, the administrator of state employee pensions, but by the Depart-

ment of Juvenile Justice.

“The department took it upon itself to review the eligibility of employees who had historically been members of the alternative formula system,” Osthus said, “and it was their determination which resulted in Crabb’s transfer to the regular system.”

Illinois law requires that a person working in a school district, such as the one in IYC Harrisburg, hold a professional educator license. Amanda Crabb does hold this license and Osthus argued she must be treated in the same manner as the educators at the facility.

The arbitrator agreed, finding that Crabb had been improperly removed from the alternative retirement formula and should be returned to that coverage and made whole.

Crabb will have to repay the money the state has not been collecting the last two years. But she knows in the long-run it will greatly benefit her to be in a pension system that provides better benefits and an earlier retirement.

“I had to work hard,” Crabb said of her self-advocacy. “But it was well worth it. Now I will have hundreds more on my pension check and be able to retire four years earlier.”

Privatizing benefits administration violates contract

EARLY IN HIS TERM OF OFFICE, GOV. BRUCE RAUNER RUSHED TO PRIVATIZE STATE EMPLOYEE and retiree health benefits administration, violating the union contract and creating a stew of problems.

For reasons never made clear, in the fall of 2015 the Rauner Administration entered into a contract with Morneau Shepell—a foreign company whose US operations are based in Georgia—to administer state employee and retiree health care benefits.

Problems abound

Health benefit administration had previously been work done entirely by state employees. There were very few complaints or problems in the way the work was done.

Since the private contractor took over, “it’s been a big mess,” said Martha Merrill, AFSCME Council 31 Director of Research and Employee Benefits.

Even though the vendor would perform work previously done by AFSCME members, the Rauner Administration failed to meet with AFSCME.

“CMS had the company rush going live with taking over the benefits administration and because of that, as well as the complicated nature of the state system, there were a large number of highly problematic mistakes,” Merrill said.

Some of the issues reported by participants include incorrect payroll deductions from voluntary flex-spending accounts, trouble accessing flex-spending accounts and submitting claim reimbursements, and incorrect premium deductions for dental and life insurance.

“Those errors didn’t happen when state employees did that work,” Merrill said. “And so far the burden has been on participants to identify the

mistakes and bring them to the attention of someone who can fix them.”

That requires going to the vendor’s notoriously clumsy website or calling a customer service number in Atlanta.

“You’ve lost that go-to state employee right in Springfield who can give you guidance or fix problems,” Merrill said.

Aaron Runge, a correctional officer at Menard prison and member of AFSCME Local 1175, came up against this situation first-hand. He visited the web portal and added his family’s new baby as a dependent. But he didn’t realize his application was incomplete.

“By the time he learned, Morneau Shepell said the baby’s \$2,000 in medical bills couldn’t be covered retroactively,” the Associated Press reported. Runge had to file a union grievance to get the health care coverage to which he was entitled.

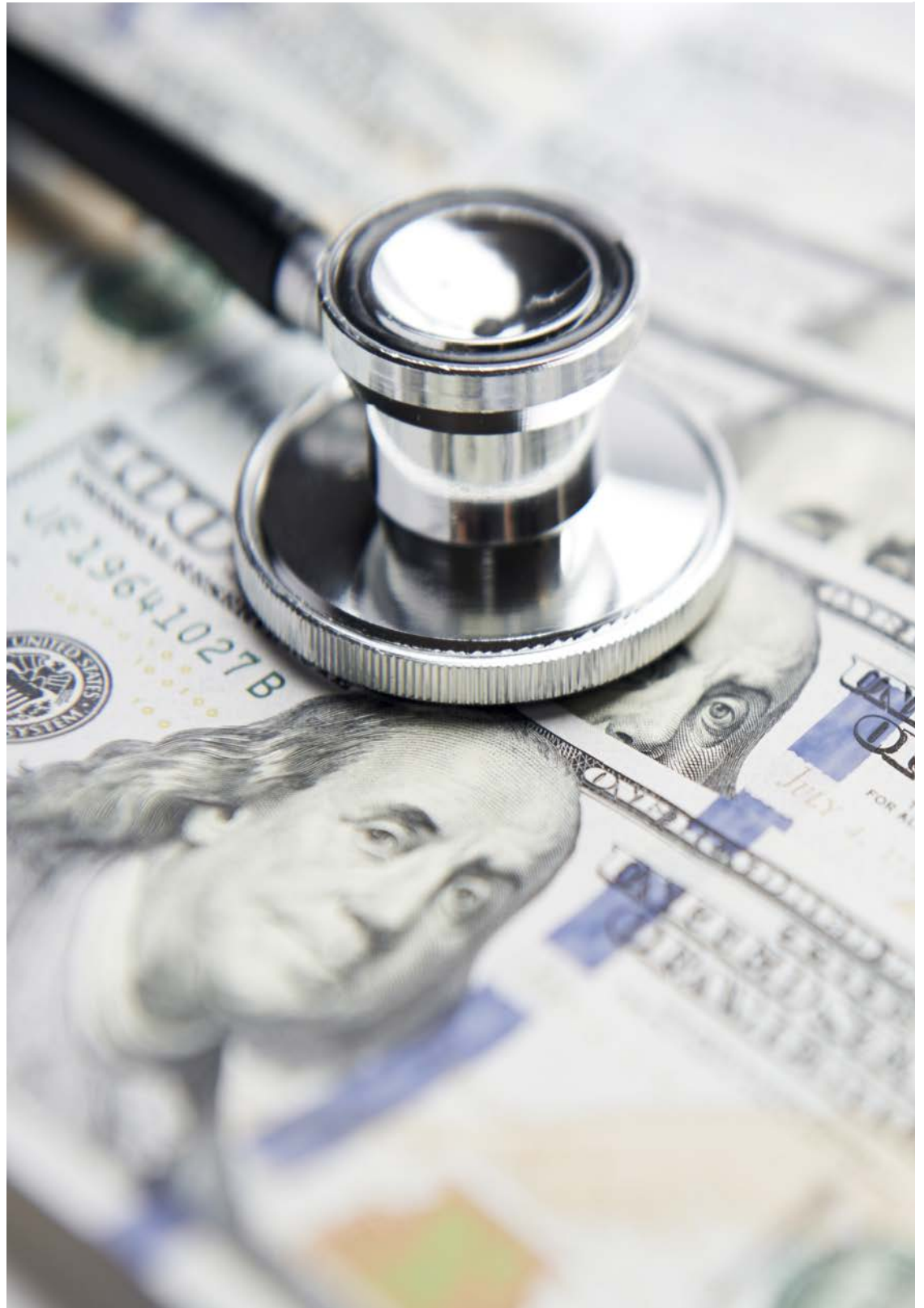
“With the old system, you didn’t have to deal with a company out of Atlanta, Georgia,” Runge said. “They couldn’t care less. You lose the personal touch and knowing that your situation is covered.”

One of the biggest glitches with the new vendor has been the termination of newly retired employees from health care coverage.

Previously, enrollment in retiree benefits was an automatic process. But when Morneau Shepell took over, rather than simply continuing the health insurance of employees who retire, the company terminated their coverage without even telling them. New retirees have suddenly found themselves at risk of serious illness without any health insurance.

Contract violation

AFSCME Council 31 filed two grievances with the state



“It’s been a big mess.”

over the botched transition.

The union said the state never bargained over the new benefits enrollment processes—a clear change in working conditions. This case is going to arbitration.

In the second grievance, the union argued that benefits enrollment is bargaining-unit work. AFSCME members processed health insurance, maintained computer systems

and servers, and helped participants make changes to their coverage and navigate paperwork. This work should not have been outsourced without notification and negotiation with the union.

That grievance went to an arbitrator, who ruled that by signing a contract with Morneau Shepell the state violated the union contract. He ordered the state to take steps

to return bargaining-unit work to AFSCME members within seven days of the decision. But as *On the Move* went to press, the state had not yet complied with the award.

In the meantime, Merrill urged employees and retirees to closely monitor their coverage.

“Go online to the MyBenefits portal and check to make sure everything is what it should be,” Merrill advised. “Keep track of your paychecks and make sure your deductions are correct. If you see any errors, contact Morneau Shepell and AFSCME Council 31 immediately.”



RAUNER'S BUDGET BLOCKADE IS

OVER

After two years in which Bruce Rauner held the state hostage to his own political agenda, Illinois finally has a budget. Lawmakers of both parties voted to override the governor's veto.

The people of Illinois faced crises on every front. Road work and infrastructure projects were halted. Human services agencies were shutting their doors. State universities were losing students and faculty. A \$15 billion mountain of unpaid bills had accumulated. And the threat of becoming the first-ever "junk bond" state loomed.

But when legislators sent Rauner a budget and revenue plan that cut spending more than his own proposal and set the income tax at

the rate Rauner himself said was necessary, he vetoed it anyway.

Realizing there would be no compromise with the governor, the General Assembly voted to override Rauner's veto. Even 10 Republican legislators in the House of Representatives broke ranks with Rauner to ensure the budget would pass.

REVENUE NEEDED

The revenue plan raised the individual income tax from 3.75 to 4.95 percent and the corporate income tax rate from 5.25 to 7 percent. The new individual income tax rate is less than Illinois residents paid three years ago, and less than the top rate of our neighboring states.

After two years without a budget, Illinois' financial rating was teetering on junk bond status. The state's credit rating allows it to borrow money for improvements, to refinance debt and more. A junk

New Illinois budget: Mostly good, but problems remain

The bipartisan balanced budget plan that legislators passed—overriding Gov. Bruce Rauner’s reckless veto—has some good news for working families as well as causes for concern.

This budget accomplishes a lot:

- ✓ **No changes to collective bargaining.** Despite two years of intense pressure on legislators, including threatening members of his own party, Gov. Rauner wasn’t able to push through any of his schemes to weaken the bargaining rights of public employees.
- ✓ **Universities can begin renewal effort.** Few entities were more damaged by Bruce Rauner’s two-year budget blockade than Illinois’ state universities. Most saw their bond ratings drastically downgraded, enrollment decline and faculty begin to exit. Now universities will once more have a stable revenue stream from state government and can start to get their operations back on track.
- ✓ **MAP grants fully funded.** MAP grants are critical to enabling students from moderate-income families to attend college—and many of those students choose to attend public universities in Illinois, keeping student enrollment robust.
- ✓ **Funding for 911 systems.** Legislators overrode Rauner’s veto of legislation to help local governments maintain effective 911 emergency systems.
- ✓ **Public health programs preserved.** After struggling for two years to cope with a lack of state funds, the budget increases funding for city and county public health programs.
- ✓ **Shores up City of Chicago pension funds.** The budget allows the City of Chicago to increase contributions to its struggling pension funds.
- ✓ **Stabilizes Local Government Distributive Fund.** This important source of state revenues for cities and counties will now continue to flow again.
- ✓ **No government shutdown.** State government has stayed open and employees have been paid for the past two years only because of a court order AFSCME won. But that order was being challenged in court, and if the union didn’t prevail, critical public services would have halted.
- ✓ **No cuts to employee health insurance.** Legislators resisted Rauner’s demand that the budget drastically slash funding for the group health insurance plan for state government and state university employees—and bar union contracts that didn’t shift the costs to employees.
- ✓ **No cuts to pensions of current employees.** Rauner pushed hard for pension changes that would require participants to choose between a reduced COLA or a freeze in the salary base on which their pension would be calculated. But the pension bill that passed as part of the budget compromise did not include this change.
- ✓ **Funds for state agencies.** Cuts to most state agency budgets are relatively modest (2-8%). Legislators made clear that they expected agencies to be able to absorb these cuts without any layoffs.

But there are trouble spots in the plan:

- ▶ **Funding for state universities was cut by 10% across the board.** While most universities should be able to absorb a cut of this magnitude without laying off employees, there may still be significant revenue problems for some schools that had to borrow heavily to make it through the past two years.
- ▶ **The funds appropriated to pay FY 17 back bills aren’t backed up with revenue—**so any monies still owed to state universities, local governments or medical providers in the group health plan may still go unpaid or be severely delayed.
- ▶ **No funds included for back pay.** The budget does not appropriate funds for the state’s oldest debt—back wages owed to state employees.
- ▶ **Pension contributions would be "smoothed"—or phased in—over five years** instead of being paid in full right away, potentially reducing what the state sets aside.
- ▶ **The Local Government Distributive Fund allotment is reduced by 10% in FY 18.** The state has also added a new fee to help cover the cost of taxes it collects for local governments.
- ▶ **There are a few state agencies that took inexplicably larger hits,** e.g. DNR, CMS, DoIT. It’s not clear yet what those cuts will mean.
- ▶ **The budget appropriates funds to some agencies as a “lump sum,”** rather than by line item, giving the Rauner Administration greater discretion over how the appropriation is allocated.



THE BIG BUDGET BATTLE IS OVER, BUT THE BATTLE OVER ILLINOIS’ FUTURE CONTINUES.

rating would have put interest rates through the roof.

But Rauner refused to budge. His “unrelenting political brinkmanship”—in the words of S&P Global Ratings—was threatening the future of the whole state.

Raising revenue was absolutely necessary and long overdue.

THE FUTURE OF ILLINOIS

The big budget fight has effectively ended, but the real battle isn’t over yet. That’s the battle over what kind of a state Illinois will be.

Rauner is now running full-tilt for re-election. He’s dumped more than \$50 million into his own campaign fund.

The governor’s cronies at the Illinois Policy Institute (IPI)—an organization that has frequently attacked public employees as overpaid and underworked—led the charge against the new budget and revenue plan.

So it should be no surprise that Rauner has now hired the IPI president as his chief of staff and brought others from the organization into his administration in a massive staff shake-up.

“As he said since before he was elected, Rauner sees Wisconsin as his model,” said AFSCME Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch. “He wants Illinois to be a state where public employees have been entirely stripped of their union rights, where employee health care costs have soared, wages are stagnant, and workplace protections are almost nil.”

AFSCME has a different vision for Illinois, Lynch said, one in which working people have the freedom to form strong unions, helping to foster prosperity that’s shared by all; public employees are able to continue to provide the vital services that our communities rely on; and the tax system is truly reformed to ensure that the wealthy pay their share.

SHORT REPORTS

Race for governor underway

NOVEMBER 2018 SOUNDS FAR-OFF TO MOST VOTERS. BUT GOV. BRUCE RAUNER IS already sinking millions into misleading TV ads that try to shift blame for the mess he's created in his two-plus years in office.

After all, if you want to get re-elected after doing nothing except sinking the state deeper into debt and chaos, you have to get a very early start. It takes time to rewrite history effectively enough to convince voters to give you another four years.

Unwilling to let Rauner monopolize the media, several Democratic candidates have emerged in what promises to be the most expensive gubernatorial election in US history.

Democratic hopefuls include state senator Daniel Biss, Chris Kennedy, Chicago alderman Ameya Pawar and J.B. Pritzker.

Rauner has amassed \$67.7 million in his campaign war chest. Most of that is from his

“Our union can build a grassroots army of volunteers to reach out to every community in the state of Illinois.”

own wallet, but his super-rich friends have helped out, like financier Ken Griffin who gave \$20 million.

AFSCME Council 31 has not yet made an endorsement in the Democratic primary. That decision will be made by rank-and-file leaders of local unions from across the state once there has been a greater opportunity for union members to learn about the candidates.

However, one decision that was made by the Council 31 Executive Board is clear and straightforward: Since Bruce Rauner has already launched his campaign for re-election in 2018, AFSCME is joining with other unions to launch our own campaign to beat him in 2018.

“We don't have his millions

to saturate the airwaves,” said Council 31 Political Director Jason Kay, “but we do have our determination to stand up for working families—the families that Bruce Rauner is so doggedly trying to take down.

“If AFSCME members start early and work hard, our union can build a grassroots army of volunteers to reach out to every community in the state of Illinois.”

“We won't quit fighting hard for what's right.”



AFSCME Local 3982 members picketed the SHA board meeting for fair pay.

Springfield Housing Authority employees fight for decent wages

EMPLOYEES OF THE SPRINGFIELD HOUSING AUTHORITY (SHA) ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR providing low-income housing to eligible city residents, yet most employees are paid so little that they qualify for the very same programs.

Even so, after seven months of contract negotiations with members of AFSCME Local 3982, SHA management has refused to offer more than a two-percent pay increase.

On July 24, dozens of AFSCME members and their allies picketed outside the SHA board meeting, urging the board to quit dragging its feet in union contract negotiations and increase wages to a level more comparable to other county housing authorities.

“The SHA claims to be ‘changing lives one key at a time,’ yet they are paying poverty wages,” AFSCME Council



The biennial AFSCME Council 31 Convention will be held in Springfield, October 19-21.

31 Staff Representative Jessica Jay said. “That’s not how other housing authorities treat their employees and that’s why some SHA employees are leaving for better jobs elsewhere.”

Despite refusing to pay its frontline staff decent wages, SHA management gave themselves bonuses and raises this year. Adding insult to injury, these salary bumps seemed to have resulted from a high-performer grant that AFSCME members did the qualifying work to win.

“The local will continue to negotiate in good faith for better wages,” Jay said. “We won’t quit fighting hard for what’s right.”

20th Biennial AFSCME Council 31 Convention set

DELEGATES FROM AFSCME LOCAL UNIONS ACROSS ILLINOIS WILL GATHER IN SPRINGFIELD this October for Council 31’s 20th Biennial Convention. Local union elections for convention delegates are held

during August and September.

“We’re very proud of all that our union has accomplished over the past 40 years,” said Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch. “But in times like these, we’re also keenly aware of the challenges that yet remain before us.”

Some 500 local union delegates will vote on resolutions that will set policy and guide strategy for the coming two years. Along with alternates and guests, they will attend plenary sessions with guest speakers, including International President Lee Saunders, and participate in workshops aimed at strengthening skills to deal with the critical issues confronting us.

As at past conventions, this gathering will honor members who demonstrate outstanding public service on and off the job. Any AFSCME member can nominate a fellow member for an award. Visit AFSCME31.org/Award to submit a nomination.

Follow @AFSCME31 on Twitter for coverage of the biennial convention.

AFSCME member saves a life on the job

Sergeant Mark Wolfe brings an inmate back from death

In more than 20 years working for the Sheriff's Department at the Cook County Jail, Sergeant Mark Wolfe of AFSCME Local 3692 had only ever performed CPR in training classes. But on the afternoon of May 15, his years of training paid off. Sgt. Wolfe saved a man's life.

THREE INMATES HAD GOTTEN AHOLD OF A SYNTHETIC OPIOID CALLED FENTANYL, WHICH THE Drug Enforcement Administration says is 25 to 50 times more potent than heroin.

A call came over the radio for Sgt. Anthony Luppino.

"A man had flatlined," said Sgt. Wolfe. "But the paramedic that came to the scene administered [an anti-overdose drug called] narcan and reversed the effects of the fentanyl, saving his life. But right after that another inmate passed out from the same drug."

After calling 911, Luppino called for backup and Wolfe arrived on the scene. He saw two nurses giving the second man CPR.

"He was gone," said Wolfe. "The only thing that could have saved him was the narcan, but they ran out because they had given it all to the first guy."

Holding out hope

But the staff didn't quit. One of the nurses ran to get more narcan and left the other nurse to continue performing CPR.

"She was worn out," Wolfe recalled. "At the same time there was blood everywhere because she was trying to put an IV in his vein."

"I told her, move over, I'll give him CPR and you close that vein and open another IV."

Wolfe was pumping the lifeless man's chest so hard that he was covered in sweat.

"When you do CPR, you have to pump hard enough to move the bones—the breastplate—so that they are pumping the heart, but you have to try not to break the sternum."

"The scariest part was looking at this dead man's face. His face and lips were discolored, his eyes were rolled back in his head. You see that in your sleep."

For all Wolfe's pumping, the man was seemingly lost. He had no pulse.

Back to life

"The scariest part was looking at this dead man's face," Wolfe remembered. "His face and lips were discolored, his eyes were rolled back in his head. The pumping was starting to make him regurgitate the food he had eaten earlier that day. You see that in your sleep."

After what seemed like an eternity to Sgt. Wolfe, the nurse finally returned with the narcan. Within seconds of receiving the drug, the man's pulse returned.

Incredibly, his eyes opened and he started talking.

"He looked at us and asked, 'Why are you all around me?'"

"It was like a movie. You wouldn't believe it unless you saw it," Wolfe said.



Above and beyond

Sgt. Wolfe's humble nature is very clear as he recalls that dramatic day in May.

Everyone on duty—Sgts. Wolfe and Luppino, the nurses and the EMTs—worked

together to save three men.

But Wolfe doesn't want to take any credit. He felt he was just doing the work he was trained to do.

The inmate he saved will always be grateful.

When he came back from the hospital, he saw Sgt. Wolfe and wanted to hug him—

which Wolfe did not allow.

As the other inmates clapped and cheered, he said, "Thank you, man. Thank you, thank you, thank you."

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

Nursing home employees fight for patient care

CAREGIVERS, NURSES AND aides at Winchester House nursing home in Libertyville won raises, increased shift differentials and new work rules that they hope will improve patient care and reduce turnover.

AFSCME Local 2452 President Soosie Palamalayil said the six months of negotiations focused on addressing understaffing at the long-term care facility. Largely made up of Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs), the 90-member bargaining unit was extremely concerned with low staff-to-resident ratios.

The nursing home used to be owned and operated by Lake County, but was privatized in 2015. Already two different management companies have been at the helm.

"Staffing is a huge problem," said AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Colin Theis. "It's been hard for the members and the residents. Management closed two entire floors, reducing patient care floors from four to two, and made three rounds of layoffs."

Palamalayil works with res-

"In negotiations we had to fight for patient care."

idents who suffer from dementia and Alzheimer's disease, a population that she has dedicated her career as a CNA to helping. She said it's very difficult to be short-handed with residents whose afflictions can be extremely volatile and need constant attention.

"In negotiations we had to fight for patient care," she said. "We've had a staff shortage for a long time. We are supposed to work with five CNAs but often we are only staffed with two or three. It's really hard."

Palamalayil does a lot of comforting when she's on the clock, working the night shift.



AFSCME Local 2452 members won raises and work rule changes they hope will improve patient care at Winchester House nursing home.

Patients with dementia and Alzheimer's can suffer from terrifying nightmares and a false sense of reality.

"One patient is 102 years old. She told me, 'My mother is coming to pick me up. She is up in the sky and I am on my way to her.' When that kind of thing happens, we go and hold their hands, say their name," Palamalayil said.

The bargaining team of Theis, Palamalayil, Beata Stefan and Matt Meillor was able to increase shift differentials in an attempt to reduce turnover. They also created a new differential, which pays an extra dollar an hour to any AFSCME-represented employee who volunteers to work an extra shift on top of their regularly scheduled shifts.

The two-year contract is retroactive to December 1, 2016 and includes two percent cost-of-living raises each year. In contrast, nonunion staff at the facility have had fewer raises since the facility was privatized, their PTO was reduced and their insurance rates have gone up.

Thornton Township school employees win retirement benefit

AFTER SEVERAL BARGAINING sessions, the AFSCME Local 3335 bargaining team was at a standstill with their employer, Thornton Township High School District 205.

Union members won a wage increase as well as an important change to their retirement benefits—but the gains did not come easy.

"It's always the same, isn't it?" local president Donna Crabtree said. "They say, 'No, no, no, you can't have that. We only have a set amount of money to work with.'"

But the bargaining team didn't give up.

"We stood strong and stood our ground," said Crabtree, who comes from a union family and says she "always had the gift of arguing."

"Our team took every negative comment from management with a grain of salt and stayed respectful. We finally got the retirement benefit that we had been seeking for years."

The district agreed to pay

50 percent of an employee's single coverage health insurance premiums for the first five years of their retirement. This new benefit allows AFSCME members to retire at age 62 instead of waiting until they reach 67, the required age for Medicare coverage.

"A lot of people can't retire when they want to because private health insurance is just

"We stood strong and stood our ground."

too costly," Crabtree said. "This way we can keep our district health insurance and we can afford to retire sooner."

The bargaining team also won 2.25% raises for each of the four years of the contract.

The local was concerned with both ends of the work-life spectrum, as a large segment of the local is near retirement age and another large segment is just beginning their careers.

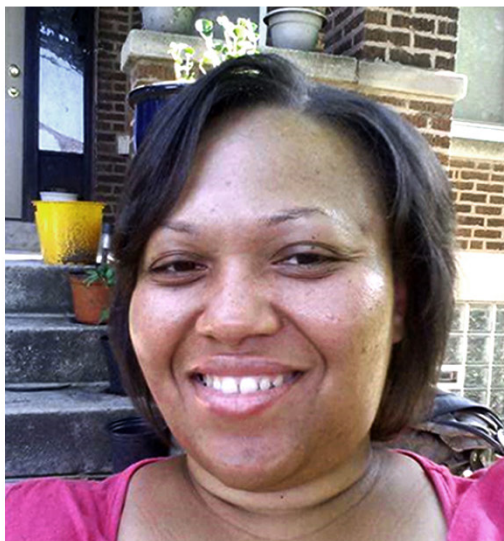
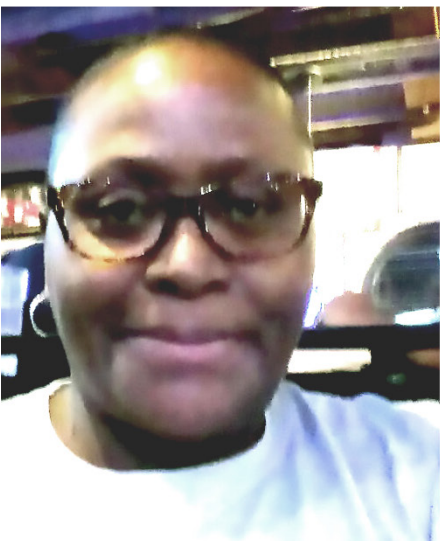
"It's a struggle. We need to help those who are close to retirement while the younger set isn't thinking long-term as much," Crabtree said. "You have to see all perspectives."

The local covers three separate high schools in three different towns, as well as the district office building, a unique organizing challenge. Like members at different stages of their working life, employees at different worksites have diverse experiences and goals.

To address these different standpoints, the bargaining team was representative of the entire local.

"I couldn't have picked a better group of ladies to work with," said Crabtree. "We had people with decades of seniority and also those with a fresh perspective. As a result, the membership overwhelmingly approved the contract we negotiated."

The bargaining team included Crabtree, Pamela Horton and Kathy Stockwell (both now retired), Tina Stott, Denise Johnson, Jen Brower, Laura Vaughn and Anita Jones. The team was led by AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Kevin Watson.



AFSCME Local 1216 bargaining committee members won raises and strengthened their voice on the job at Loretto Hospital in Chicago.

Nurses make gains at Loretto Hospital

THREE YEARS AFTER ORGANIZING a union with AFSCME, nurses at Loretto Hospital in Chicago are making gains in wages and strengthening their voice on the job.

"We care about the patients and we want the best for them," said AFSCME Local 1216 Chief Steward Evangeline Jackson. "We are trying to improve the quality of care here through our union."

The bargaining committee, which was led by AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative David Dover, included President Caryl Jackson, Evangeline Jackson, Sandra Weeks, Harold Grubbs, Cecelia March and Vivian Bright. Together they negotiated a three-year agreement with two percent annual cost-of-living raises retroactive to March 1.

The team worked to increase "flex nurse" pay for part-time employees and increased the entry-level wage for new hires by two dollars per hour. AFSCME members who

are topped out of step increases will receive a \$500 annual bonus.

Hospital management agreed readily to raise pay for new hires, but it was more of a struggle to get them to agree to upgrade pay for the rest of the nursing staff.

"Management was not acknowledging those of us who have been here for years," said Jackson, "so I was proud to get some improvements on our pay. But in another three years we will accomplish more and be even more powerful together."

Loretto Hospital is a community institution and Jackson said she's proud to hear that their reputation for care is improving.

"Last Sunday at church, the pastor told a story about seeing a lot of positive changes at Loretto," she said. "We're not perfect but we are trying to impact the community and I was so proud to hear that people are noticing."

Jackson said the union has had a lot to do with their recent successes.

"The union gave us a voice. If you're willing to use it, you can speak up and be heard. We have

the opportunity to make this a two-way street with management. We can right the wrongs."

Fulton County Sheriff's Office gets set for 2018

NEARLY 30 MEMBERS OF AFSCME Local 3433 at the Fulton County Sheriff's Office won a cumulative seven percent raise in a two-year agreement that is retroactive to December 1, 2016.

The correctional officers, deputies, secretary and communications specialist agreed to changes in their insurance benefits so that they would align with all other county employees, but the raises negotiated more than paid for these concessions.

"We made them pay for their demand," said Randy Lynch, the AFSCME Council 31 staff representative who led negotiations. "The members also received a \$200 signing bonus and will receive retroactive pay."

The Sheriff's Office is one of four bargaining units in Local 3433, which also includes the court house, the circuit clerk

and the nursing home. These units went on strike in 2005, and as a result the county had staggered the contracts so that

Williams said. "The bargaining committee had some very difficult decisions to make. But they kept in mind the good of the whole and truly realized what a tough job that can be."

Bargaining committee members Ryan Maricle, Preston Harris, Trever Kelley, Keith Wojtkiewicz and Tiffany Williams helped bring home the contract, setting their whole local up for negotiations later next year.

Knox County employees win raises

MULTIPLE UNITS OF AFSCME Local 3217 at Knox County—the sheriff's department, court house and state's attorney's office—won raises and improved benefits for nearly 70 members in two four-year union contracts that are retroactive to 2016.

The sheriff's department employees won 9.5 percent in raises over the life of the agreement, which was resolved through interest arbitration. The members will now receive time-and-a-half for core holidays and comp time for secondary holidays.

The court house and state's attorney units agreed to 6.5 percent raises over the four years

"The union gave us a voice. If you're willing to use it, you can speak up and be heard. We can right the wrongs."

negotiations wouldn't occur simultaneously. But that's about to change in 2018 as all four contracts will be renewed.

"That's where the power is," Local 3433 President Trudy Williams said. "We will all be together in 2018. We're all the same local and we all care about each other. What we negotiate in one unit affects the others."

She said the Sheriff's Office negotiations were tougher than they have been in years. A federal mediator was required to help settle the agreement.

"It's been a long time since a mediator was brought in," Wil-

plus a new longevity step, which will provide an average three percent wage increase each year. The team also negotiated a substantial one-year anniversary wage bump.

AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Randy Lynch led negotiations for both units. The bargaining teams included: Roger Underwood, Dennis Decker, Kendall Britton, Randy Schauer, Tracey Bailey, Mary Christie, Pamela Coon, Melody Lair, Shari Larson and Shiela Parkin.

The two contracts expire in 2019.

RETIREE NOTES

Budget fully funds Community Care Program

THE COMMUNITY CARE PROGRAM that provides home health care for seniors is fully funded in the FY17 and FY18 state budgets.

AFSCME retirees worked as part of the Illinois Alliance of Retired Americans (IARA) to beat back a harmful 31% cut pushed by the Rauner Administration.

The IARA held actions across Illinois, with AFSCME retirees attending and speaking about the importance of home health care. Due to the hard work of advocacy groups, the Community Care Program will continue to provide seniors with the care they need.

Privatized benefit administration doesn't work for retirees

THE RAUNER ADMINISTRATION'S zeal to privatize the administration of group health benefits via a hastily-implemented contract with a Canadian firm—Morneau Shepell—has resulted in a multitude of mistakes in the administration of the state's health insurance program. Many of those errors have created major problems for SERS and SURS retirees (see

page 7 for more on this story.)

The CMS Benefit Choice period for non-Medicare retirees concluded on May 31. Given all the problems that have arisen as a result of Morneau Shepell's errors, AFSCME is recommending that all non-Medicare eligible retirees who participate in the CMS Group Health plan carefully review your benefit information and monitor your pension check deductions regularly to ensure there are no errors.

If you experience any problems or have any questions, contact the MyBenefits Marketplace Service Center at 844-251-1777 and AFSCME Council 31 Director of Research and Employee Benefits Martha Merrill at 312-641-6060.



Ruth Meyer: A woman of distinction

THE YWCA OF ALTON HONORED AFSCME retiree Ruth Meyer, a Sub-Chapter 59 trustee, with this year's Women of



Members of AFSCME Retirees Sub-Chapter 67 (Kane County) at their regular meeting.



Sen. Andy Manar joined members of AFSCME Retirees Sub-Chapter 87 (Decatur) at their regular meeting.

Distinction Award. Honorees were selected based on their boundless commitment to community through their service to others and their compassionate leadership to help improve the quality of life for everyone in their communities.

Meyer has excelled in advocacy both in and out of the workforce. She dedicated 18 years of public service to the Department of Children and Family Services as a child welfare specialist, while also serving as steward for AFSCME Local 1805.

After retiring, Meyer was a Peace Corps volunteer during the civil war in Nicaragua, volunteered with the Red Cross during the Oklahoma City bombings, and worked as a street medic during the Ferguson protests.

"I was born a social worker and I will die a social worker," Meyer said. "I represent and stand up for people because it is the proper thing to do."

Health care victory

AMERICANS HELD STRONG AND beat back Republican efforts to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act (ACA), an assault that posed a particular threat to millions of America's senior citizens.

GOP Senators voted on a motion to proceed, which is a procedural step to continue to aggressively repeal and replace the ACA. This vote passed narrowly, 50-51, with Vice President Pence casting the deciding vote to continue to debate the repeal legislation.

Following the motion to proceed, GOP senators attempted, and failed, to pass an amendment on July 25, which included repealing the ACA without a replacement.

Other amendments that failed to get enough votes to pass included a "skinny" repeal, which would have eliminated the employer mandate to offer

health care to employees in addition to any individual mandate. Repealing the ACA and making cuts to Medicaid would have harmed 9 million seniors that rely on the ACA for health care. Some 874,000 Illinoisans faced losing their health insurance if the repeal legislation became law.

"This effort failed because thousands and thousands of Americans—including AFSCME members who are on the front lines of our health care system—made themselves heard loud and clear," said AFSCME President Lee Saunders.

"With phone calls, emails, rallies and more over the last several months, they demanded that their elected officials in Washington represent their views. And they will continue to raise their voices until Congress abandons any effort to destroy the nation's health care system."

Retirees: Update Your Information Today!

Knowledge is a powerful arsenal as we prepare for upcoming battles. Communication fosters solidarity. Make sure you are up to date on crucial information effecting changes and threats to your retirement security.

If your personal information has changed, please fill out the information below and mail it to:

AFSCME Retirees Chapter 31
615 South Second
P.O. Box 2328
Springfield, IL 62705

Contact Information Change Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Cell Phone* _____

Home Phone: _____

*I want to receive text alerts from AFSCME Council 31.
Standard message and data rates apply.

Rockford school employees gain contracts

Three AFSCME locals reach settlements after strike

After a long struggle for fairness that climaxed in a three-day strike, nearly 1,000 AFSCME members at Rockford Public Schools successfully blocked the district's privatization attempts, improved their wages and protected their health insurance.

TAKING A PAGE FROM BRUCE RAUNER'S PLAYBOOK, THE SCHOOL BOARD HAD REFUSED to negotiate for months on end and eventually imposed its "last, best and final offer" in January, arguing that negotiations were at impasse.

AFSCME filed an Unfair Labor Practice charge challenging the impasse claim, since the bargaining teams of AFSCME Locals 692, 1275 and 3210 had made clear their willingness to negotiate.

Finally the paraprofessionals, bus drivers and nutrition services workers were forced to go on a three-day strike in March. They took their case to the public, urging the board to get back to the bargaining table.

Building power together

TIKISHA ELLIS HAS WORKED IN nutrition services for four years. She's the new president of Local 3210, taking the reins from longtime leader Madeleine Sherod who played a pivotal role in the strike and helped inspire Ellis to become an activist in her union.

"Madeleine told me to know my role and get involved," Ellis said. "She told me the importance of the union, of standing up for people."

During the strike, elected officials, parents and community leaders called on the board to negotiate with the staff who help teach, transport, care for and feed the city's students—and who are also parents of RPS students.

Ellis said her local was encouraged by the support and resources they got from fellow AFSCME members, other unions and the community

during a tough and emotional fight. Looking to the future, she wants to make a plan for building stronger and more broad-based community support.

Winning a better future is not an overnight job, Ellis said.

Privatization blocked

DESPITE SUPERINTENDENT Ehren Jarrett's assurances to parents during the strike that the district would bargain in good faith, the district refused to negotiate with employees when they returned to work. Instead, the board tried to quickly privatize bus operations and food services.

When the board voted to contract with a third party vendor, bus drivers had to make a decision: Give in, allowing the district to privatize bus services, or save their union and live to fight another day.

A strong majority voted to accept the contract, which included both raises and increased health insurance costs. The school board ratified the deal on June 1.

That left two of the three locals—paraprofessionals and nutrition services workers—without an agreement. In July, both locals finalized negotiations and overwhelmingly ratified their new union contracts; on August 8 the school board did the same.

"This was a tough fight," said Ashley Smith, bus driver and president of Local 1275. "Now we need to focus on making our union stronger so we can build our power—for our own local and for each other."

Planning for the future

THE THREE AFSCME LOCALS are more unified than ever. Just like they never quit on Rockford's schoolchildren, AFSCME members won't stop fighting for the wages and benefits they need to build a better future for themselves and their families.

"We feel accomplished and secure in our jobs as we head back to school," Ellis said. "The strike was a movement. It was a movement throughout our union and the city of Rockford. Our voice was heard."

Smith worked two jobs over the summer. She's looking forward to a new route for a new year while she's busy getting



Members of AFSCME Locals 692, 1275 and 3210 at Rockford Public Schools announced their three-day strike.

"You have to stay positive and focused, no matter what's thrown at you. You have to be persistent, press forward, know your worth and stand your ground."

"Getting this three-year contract with annual raises was hard work," Ellis said. "There were a lot of challenges but you have to stay positive and focused, no matter what's thrown at you. You have to be persistent, press forward, know your worth and stand your ground."

her daughter ready to go back to school.

Ellis has a young daughter too. She feels her union activism is teaching her daughter invaluable lessons.

"I'm raising a strong leader," Ellis said. "I'm teaching her to ask questions. I tell her, 'I don't care how scared you are. Don't back down.'"



Laura Riggins, Zookeeper

Animal Handler at the Niabi Zoo, Steward, AFSCME Local 2025, Rock Island County Employees

Every day as a zookeeper is different.

But there is a routine. My day starts with health checks, visiting every single animal to make sure everyone is moving, bright-eyed and exhibiting normal behavior. I usually feed the animals in my care and clean their enclosures.

Then I provide enrichment—activity that stimulates the animals, keeping them active, interested and moving. Most are going through some kind of training, learning how to go into crates or get on scales.

In the afternoons, I usually do some maintenance, weeding, mowing, and preparing things for new animals to arrive. And at the end of day I do final health checks and feedings and close things up safely for the night.

There are a lot of things I love about being a zookeeper.

I get to do a lot of different work, things nobody else gets to do. I get to be up close with the animals. I get to train them. Seeing an animal have a breakthrough, when they do what you asked, it's like a lightbulb went on. Building that bond with the animals is really fantastic.

I also love seeing the social bonds between the animals themselves. Our seven colobus monkeys each have a distinct personality. Observing how they interact and get along as a group is really fun.

As a zookeeper you have to think on your feet.

Things are always changing and the animals have strong personalities. Sometimes they

don't do what you need them to do. If we have a thunder storm and an animal doesn't want to come inside, it's stressful. I worry about their safety. But you can't always make them do what you want them to do.

We are very involved with conservation.

We want to make sure our animals are well taken care of, but we also want to make sure wild animals have a safe natural environment and when possible, animals get to be reintroduced to those environments.

We raise a lot of money that goes directly toward programs helping animals in the wild through our Quarters for Conservation program. Guests get to pick which program their quarter goes to. The Snow Leopard Trust is very popular.

One of my favorite moments

I was working with the buffed-cheeked gibbons. We have a mesh inside and I train them to put their shoulder against the mesh. Because of that training, when we do their annual exam, I'm able to give their injection right there so they will go to sleep, we can crate them and take them to the hospital and do their exam.

Gibbons are high-stress animals and we never want our animals to be stressed out. They trust me to do something that doesn't feel good—it hurts. Because I've worked with them so much they know nothing bad is going to happen to them. Earning that trust and having them let me do that for them was one of my favorite moments.

To the Quad Cities community, we are very special.

We are the only zoo within a two-hour drive. We have animals that people would otherwise never get to see or have the opportunity to learn about.

We are located right on the Mississippi River. As one of many Midwest farming communities along the Mississippi, runoff from the fields goes straight to the river and the Gulf of Mexico. It creates a dead zone in the ocean. Our new oceans exhibit teaches our community that we have an effect on somewhere as far as the Gulf of Mexico and how we can help.

AFSCME is important to us.

I decided to become a union steward because it's a way to help people. To make sure everything is done fairly. To ensure the communication remains open between our management and our employees.

We've had a lot transitions here, and during those we've had a lot of support from our union to make sure everything stays status quo for us.

We are lucky because we share a local with the county employees. We get to have collective bargaining with more AFSCME members than just us and we all benefit from that.

As zookeepers we have excellent benefits compared to other zoos across the country. We are very thankful to our union for that. We're really lucky that we can focus on what we need to do here at the zoo, make sure the animals are healthy and safe. Through our conservation efforts we make the world a better place.