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On the Move

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DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Bruce Rauner's big lie

Don't believe the GOP frontrunner's folksy image – he's out to take away pensions and destroy public employee unions in Illinois



BY HENRY BAYER

THE REGULAR GUY RAUNER PLAYS ON TV COULDN'T BE MORE DIVORCED FROM WHO HE REALLY IS.

Cover illustration by Joe VanDerBos

When the Illinois legislature audaciously looted the retirement savings of the state's public employees, many lawmakers dissented because the bill was clearly unconstitutional and immoral.

BUT A SMALLER GROUP VOTED "NO" BECAUSE THEY FELT THE CUTS WEREN'T DEEP ENOUGH. They were taking their cues from the leading Republican candidate for governor, Bruce Rauner, who wants to eliminate defined benefit pension plans and force public employees into 401 (k)-style plans, left to the vagaries of the stock market.

How did someone who was a political unknown until recently gain such influence? It's easy if you've got millions of your own money to spend promoting yourself. Rauner has been "introducing" himself to voters in phony, folksy TV ads seeking to disguise his status as a venture capitalist who made a good part of his immense fortune feeding off of those very public pension funds he purports to despise. Rauner says he's an "outsider" to public service, but he's spent decades soliciting public pension fund dollars for his hedge funds to invest for a handsome fee. A few years ago, he received millions in Pennsylvania pension dollars to invest – after a \$300,000 campaign contribution to that state's Democratic governor.

Here in Illinois, a company owned by Rauner paid a member of the Teachers' Retirement System Board more than \$25,000 a month. Not coincidentally, his firm was selected to handle TRS pension dollars. The TRS member, Stuart Levine, is now doing time in federal prison for public malfeasance.

Despite, or perhaps because of, his sordid record of "paying to play," Rauner is attempting to pedal a large load of hooey about "union bosses" being in "control" in Springfield.

One only has to look at the passage of pension-slashing SB 1, which legislators enacted in violation of the state's constitution and over the vocal opposition of thousands of union members, to know who's really calling the shots in Springfield. AFSCME and other public sector unions are important lobbying forces at the state capitol, but our influence (and financial contributions) can't begin to compare to that of the corporate elite Bruce Rauner represents.

Of course, Rauner's real target isn't a handful of union leaders, but the hundreds of thousands of union members whose pay, pensions and workplace rights he wants to diminish. He's out to wipe out unions in the public sector because in his view they've raised the salaries of public workers too high. It's more than ironic that a man who reported \$52 million in income in 2012 claims employees who earn their relatively modest salaries through hard work are overly compensated.

His claim that AFSCME's contracts with the state are the result of campaign contributions to the governors with whom we negotiated is a flat-out falsehood. Yes, we've negotiated contracts with the past five governors of Illinois that improved the standard of living of union members. But in most of those cases the union did not even endorse

them in their runs for office. And, even when we did, the agreements often were only won after intensive member mobilizations all across the state.

In Rauner's world, the truth doesn't matter – but money most certainly does. His campaign is about whether the big money can sell the big lie.

The regular guy Rauner plays on TV couldn't be more divorced from who he really is. He doesn't want voters to know he owns nine homes and has claimed tax breaks on three, even though he's entitled to just one such exemption. He doesn't want them to know that while he lives in a fancy suburb, he falsely claimed residency in the City of Chicago, placed a call to a top schools official, and got his daughter 'clouted in' to a highly-regarded public high school.

Rubbing elbows and scratching backs is what Rauner has done to amass his fortune. He's done it not only with Republicans, but also with Democrats like Rahm Emanuel, who benefit from Rauner's largesse and are quick to return the favor.

Bruce Rauner wants to be governor to wipe out labor unions and destroy what little remains of the middle class in our state – all while steering more money to him and his friends. He's trying to prey on the resentments of those who've already lost jobs and income – turning their anger away from the Wall Street wolves who robbed them and onto struggling public employees.

We can't let Rauner make us the punching bag of this election season. There's little more than 60 days left until the primary, and we are not about to spend them hanging from the ceiling in the gym. Let's step into the ring and start fighting back before it's too late.

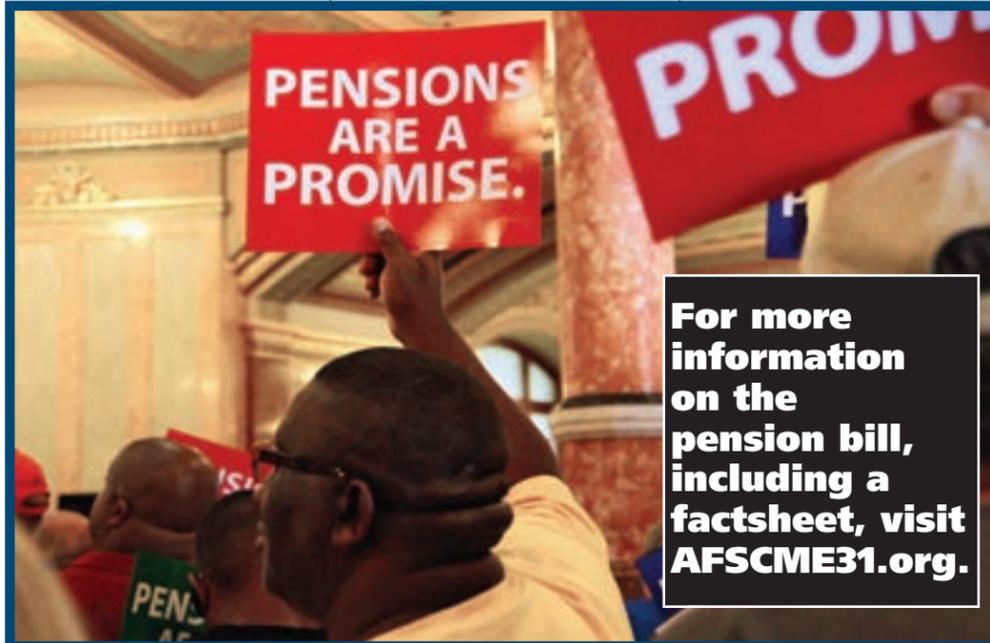
Pension battle heads to court

The fate of retirement security for public service workers in Illinois will now be decided in court.

THE WE ARE ONE ILLINOIS UNION COALITION – OF WHICH AFSCME IS A LEADING PARTNER – is already working on a lawsuit to challenge SB 1, the pension-gutting law the General Assembly passed with almost no time for review, scrutiny or lobbying by those it will affect most.

The legislation covers active and retired participants in the State Employees Retirement System (SERS), the State Universities Retirement System (SURS), the Teachers Retirement System (TRS) and the General Assembly Retirement System (GARS).

The coalition's action comes after one of the most disappointing days in Springfield in recent memory – Dec. 3, when, nearly simultaneously, the House and Senate both voted to rob nurses, correctional officers, teachers, case-workers, caregivers and other public service workers of their hard-earned pension benefits.



For more information on the pension bill, including a factsheet, visit AFSCME31.org.

Following the legislature's action, the bill was quickly signed into law by Gov. Pat Quinn.

"Governor Quinn has given hundreds of thousands of working and retired teachers, nurses, police, caregivers, first responders, and others no alternative but to seek justice for retirement security through the judicial system," the coalition announced in a statement. "We will challenge SB 1 as violating the constitution and ask for a stay of the legislation's implementation pending a ruling on its consti-

tutionality."

The lawsuit is based on the new law's violation of the state's pension protection clause, which clearly states that the benefits of any public employee pension program cannot be "diminished or impaired."

Wasting taxpayer money

ADDING INSULT TO INJURY, after passing SB 1 the Senate also voted to lavish a tax break on agri-business giant Archer Daniels Midland, which had a

\$2 billion profit in 2012 and had already admitted that it faced no state tax liability in some years.

"Many members of the House and Senate – Democrats and Republicans alike – showed their true colors in these votes," Council 31 Executive Director Henry Bayer said. "By gutting pensions and moving to open yet another corporate tax loophole, they showed their loyalties lie with the corporate elite. Not taxpayers, not their constituents, and certainly not the public service workers who provide

Illinois with vital services."

Yet the biggest waste of money may come from SB 1 itself. Its shaky constitutional footing means it may do little to make state bonds appealing to investors and, if it is struck down, the pension funding crisis will not only remain unresolved, but also have become much worse over time.

"It didn't have to be this way," the coalition noted after Quinn signed the bill. "Bipartisan majorities in both chambers could have passed a much fairer, legal, negotiated solution – with real, substantial savings."

That plan, SB 2404, was supported by the We Are One Illinois coalition and had already passed the Senate with a large, bipartisan majority. But in the House, Speaker Michael Madigan refused to let the bill come to a vote.

Dire consequences

AS SIGNED INTO LAW, SB 1 would make potentially devastating cuts to pensions for active and retired public employees.

It slashes cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) and imposes COLA freezes of up to five years. Combined, these two COLA cuts erode the value of a person's pension by nearly one-third after 20 years in retirement – and deprive retirees of thousands of dollars of income in the first five years alone.

In one example, a state caseworker, age 49, who

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Pension attacks not limited to Illinois

The passage of SB 1 isn't the only attack on public employee pensions happening today in America.

IN FACT, THAT BILL'S PASSAGE IS PART OF A COORDINATED ATTACK BY AN ALLIANCE OF RIGHT-WING LAWMAKERS, a corporate elite unwilling to pay its fair share, and "pro-business" Democrats who have lost touch with the needs of the middle class.

The most outrageous example of pension theft may be in Detroit, where an unelected emergency financial manager, Kevyn Orr, has steered the

city into bankruptcy, a process that could result in pensions for city workers being eviscerated.

Orr was appointed by Republican Gov. Rick Snyder – the same governor who signed the state's "right-to-work" law written by right-wing think tanks designed to weaken unions.

In granting Orr's request to put the city into bankruptcy, a federal judge found that the Michigan state constitution's pension protection language did not apply to a federal bankruptcy proceeding, setting a dangerous precedent that other cities eager to cut benefits could exploit.

The average pension of Detroit retirees is just \$19,000. Experts estimate that the bank-

ruptcy proceedings could reduce it by as much as 50 percent.

"Those who play by the rules every single day, who struggle every day to put bread on their tables and pay their mortgages, should not be punished for problems they did not create," AFSCME International President Lee Saunders said after the Detroit ruling. "They cannot restructure their debt as Wall Street banks and corporations can. It's unfair and immoral to attack these retirees and workers."

While the pension crisis in Detroit has received national media attention, less sensational attacks on the retirement security of public service workers are taking place across the country.

In Florida, Americans for Prosperity – the conservative political organization funded by Charles and David Koch, patrons of the infamous Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker – is airing ads against three state senators who voted against a plan pushed by the Republican House Speaker that would have completely eliminated pensions for incoming state employees, replacing them with 401(k)-style plans.

In Oklahoma, Republican Gov. Mary Fallin and her allies in the legislature are also pushing to put some public employees into 401(k)-style plans. A major proponent of making such a change in Oklahoma and other places is the John & Laura Arnold Foundation – a

conservative foundation run by a former executive at Enron, the poster child of corporate fraud.

Dozens of other states in recent years have enacted pension cuts, often at the urging of right-wing, corporate-backed groups. These laws will often slash cost-of-living adjustments, raise the retirement age, or make other changes that all have the same result – weakening the retirement security of public service workers.

According to the National Association of State Retirement Administrators, in 2013 alone, Kentucky, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oregon, Tennessee and Texas joined Illinois in passing laws that weaken public employee pensions.

Strike brings home fair contract for Will County employees

For 16 days, nearly 1,000 Will County employees braved freezing cold temperatures on the picket line and stubborn politicians at the bargaining table – as they stood steadfast in their strike to win a fair contract.

THEIR TIME ON STRIKE WOULD BE REWARDED: MORE THAN TWO WEEKS AFTER WALKING OFF THE job, the county and Local 1028 came to an agreement that gives employees what they wanted – fairness.

“Will County employees stood up and won fairness, justice and respect on the job,” Council 31 Executive Director Henry Bayer said. “The unity and determination of AFSCME Local 1028 members to fight for what’s right, no matter the odds, sets an example for us all.”

The new contract – ratified by an overwhelming margin – runs for four years and provides a 4.5 percent cost-of-living increase over its life. It also adjusts wages upward by eliminating the bottom two steps on the county’s pay plan, in effect adjusting the wage scale upward a further 5 percent while ensuring that employees will continue to receive step increases.

Equally important, the



agreement ensures that increased costs for health care are shared equitably based on employees’ ability to pay.

Those terms are dramatically different from what the county’s negotiators repeatedly offered during 15 months of talks. The county’s final offer before the strike would have left many employees with significantly higher health care costs which, coupled with small wage increases, would have meant a pay cut for employees who had already gone four years without a cost-of-living increase.

“We didn’t want to see our wages lose ground when the

cost of living goes up, and we weren’t going to accept a health plan where the lowest-paid employees were asked to do more than the highest-paid,” Local 1028 President Dave Delrose said. “By standing together we reached a fair settlement that achieves those goals.”

Time to take a stand

FOUR YEARS AGO, WITH THE ECONOMY in freefall and local governments facing difficult choices, members of Local 1028 stepped up, agreeing to a contract that lacked standard cost-of-living increases.

“We put our wages on freeze,” said Barb Guerrero, who works in the circuit clerk’s office and served as a strike captain. “We gave up all of that to help the county, to help the people. That’s what we do – we serve the public.”

Unfortunately, that sacrifice wasn’t recognized by the county when talks over the next contract kicked off in mid-2012. They offered a contract with only a paltry cost-of-living increase that would have been completely overwhelmed by a dramatic increase in health care costs.

With over 40 percent of county employees making less than \$30,000 a year, that was unacceptable.

“My son had brain surgery two years ago and we still have follow-up expenses from that. I’m the main breadwinner in my family and I can’t do it with what the county’s offering,” said Eve Smolik, a nurse with the county health department. “We need to be able to take care of ourselves so we can take care of people in the community.”

Little changed in the months between the start of negotiations and the decision to strike – little, that is, aside from Local 1028’s resolve to win a fair contract, which only grew as time went on. In August, a march and rally among the membership drew the largest turnout in the local’s history. In October, 90 percent of those eligible to strike voted to authorize a walk-out.

Then, after a last-ditch negotiation session held at the request of a federal mediator

than 20 worksites, the largest in front of Sunny Hill Nursing Home and the county courthouse.

“This is about togetherness,” said Eddie Bradley, who works in the nursing home’s accounts payable department. “Being on the picket line with my fellow union members is something that brings us together.”

The strike was a monumental effort, requiring hard work not just from Will County employees, but also other AFSCME locals, members of other unions, friends and family members, and supportive citizens.

That support took many forms, ranging from cups of coffee to financial donations.

“It is amazing. All the union people, all our brothers and sisters have helped so much these first weeks – giving us food, leaning on each other,” said Keith Dick, a maintenance and grounds worker at the county’s adult detention center.

That support kept spirits high, even when temperatures dropped and even when the county tried to ignore what was happening.

“To everyone who hung a sign or joined our picket lines, donated to our cause or just honked and waved, we couldn’t have done it without you,” Delrose said. “Now we’re glad to be back at work, serving you, our neighbors and the countless friends across the county that we never knew we had.”

saw the county refuse to budge, employees began to strike at 7 a.m. on Nov. 18.

One day longer, one day stronger

ANYONE WHO doubted county employees lacked the strength to stage a meaningful walkout was quickly proven wrong – picket lines were set up at more



Nursing home employees, community fight privatization

In October, some Rock Island County officials thought they could quietly push through a plan to privatize the county's nursing home.

BUT INSTEAD WHAT THEY GOT WAS PUSHBACK – FROM NURSING HOME EMPLOYEES, FROM THE FAMILIES OF THE HOME'S RESIDENTS AND FROM ORDINARY CITIZENS, ALL OPPOSED TO SEEING THE CARE OF THE COUNTY'S FRAIL ELDERLY PUT INTO THE HANDS OF A FOR-PROFIT COMPANY.

The fight to save Hope Creek Nursing Home from outsourcing is still ongoing, but so far the dominant story has been one of employees and families reaching out and engaging the community in the effort to preserve a vital public service and ensure that care comes before profits.

"About 75 or 80 percent of our residents are Medicaid-funded," said Shelley Close, president of AFSCME Local 2371. "They shouldn't have to worry about whether they'll have a home or not. County officials can tell us a private home won't get rid of those residents but we worry they'd ship them out."

The crusade to save the nursing home began when the union caught wind of a plan by county board Chairman Phillip Banaszek to hold a vote on selling or leasing the home. Within a matter of days, employees helped generate a strong turnout of people who support keeping the nursing home in public hands.

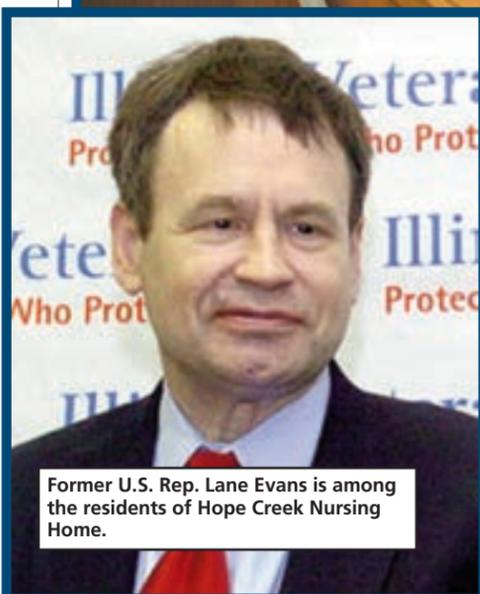
Reaching out

"WE PACKED THE BOARD meeting in October with at least 200 people and got enough board members to vote that idea down," Council 31 staff representative Dino Leone said. "The local union leaders were able to call board members and explain the situation to them, educate them about what harm this could do."

Outsourcing supporters didn't relent, however, and



Members of AFSCME Local 2371 and community supporters of Hope Creek Nursing home packed meetings of the Rock Island County Board.



Former U.S. Rep. Lane Evans is among the residents of Hope Creek Nursing Home.

"County officials can tell us a private home won't get rid of those residents but we worry they'd ship them out."
—Shelley Close

we know how that goes," Leone said.

With time to prepare, nursing home employees reached out into the community, working with the families and friends of Hope Creek residents and other concerned citizens. The effort eventually spawned KISS (Keep It Supported for Seniors), a group dedicat-

ed to preventing the nursing home from being privatized. "The KISS committee will educate the community and let them know why the nursing home is needed," Close said. "This community has always supported the nursing home. It's just some county board members who don't think we should be in the nursing home business."

The union's work and its outreach have already proven their worth: At another packed meeting in November, the county board rejected a request to put out bids for the nursing home.

Vocal supporters

SPEAKING OUT against the plan was Mike Malmstrom, a former staff member of retired U.S. Rep. Lane Evans, who is among the home's residents.

"I've been in many homes, including veterans' homes and private nursing homes, and Hope Creek is one of the best," said Malmstrom, the former congressman's legal guardian. "Lane has Parkinson's disease and Lewy body dementia – conditions that affect his muscles, his ability to control his movements and his memory – and whatever he needs, the staff provides. They have done a fantastic job."

Christine Baker, whose father lives at the home, said the facility beat out other, for-profit homes.

"We visited several nursing homes, but Hope Creek has been an absolute godsend," she said. "The staff members have become our extended family. My mom, siblings and I visit every day, and the care and attention the staff gives, it's like my mom and dad were their own parents. I don't know what we'd do without them."

Even though privatization proponents have lost two votes before the county board, they haven't given up and will be urging rejection of a referendum in November 2014 that will ask voters to approve a tax hike to put the nursing home on solid financial footing.

Winning passage of that referendum will be the focus of Local 2371 and the KISS committee for the next year.

"We've had three referenda in the past that have passed with flying colors so our hope is that will happen again," Close said.

Union presses to restore probation staff in Cook County

After years of budget cuts, layoffs and attrition, AFSCME locals representing adult and juvenile probation officers in Cook County are hopeful they've turned the tide and will soon see positions restored.

THE NEW COUNTY BUDGET PROVIDES FOR THE HIRING OF 23 PROBATION OFFICERS FOR ADULT OFFENDERS AND 20 OFFICERS FOR JUVENILES.

The improved staffing resulted from direct action by employees who have seen

their caseloads skyrocket and their quality of life suffer due to added stress.

"This by no means brings us back to where we were, but it's a stopgap measure to reduce the bleeding and hopefully give officers with caseloads way over standards some relief," Local 3486 President Jim Dunaway said.

The adult probation office had lost 100 officers since 2010 – 40 due to a 2010 layoff, with 60 more lost through resignation or retirement. The situation created what Dunaway called a "death spiral" – fewer officers meant more stress on those left behind, and those officers became more likely to leave for that exact reason.

Losses among juvenile probation officers have been even more dramatic, with

staff dropping from 500 to 300. That not only makes work more difficult for those still there, but it also increases the risk that juvenile offenders won't get the services they need to avoid an adulthood of crime.

"It's had a devastating impact," Local 3477 Vice President Jason Smith said. "We provide services like drug counseling, alternative schooling, electronic monitoring and GED programs. We need staff to conduct those programs."

Making a case, face-to-face

THE SHORT-STAFFING IN BOTH departments reached a point where employees knew the exodus of probation officers had to be stopped. When

Cook County began drawing up its fiscal 2014 budget, an opportunity presented itself.

Both locals sought out in-person meetings with key county commissioners.

"We give them examples – this crime happened in your district to one of your constituents," Dunaway said.

"Many of them were very receptive to the message we delivered to them," Smith said.

Commissioner Larry Sutfredin took the lead in pressing for inclusion of the probation staff in the budget. "He played a key role in moving this issue forward," said Council 31 staff representative Maggie Lorenc.

Still, more work lies ahead. Getting each department back to a full complement of probation officers will take several budget cycles, and

even getting the positions authorized in the new budget filled will require continued pressure on county officials.

As for adult probation officers, those who were part of the 2010 layoff still have recall rights thanks to an agreement negotiated by Council 31. Letters to those eligible for recall had just been sent as On the Move went to press. But even then, Dunaway said, the union will have to ensure people who are brought back are assigned where they're most needed.

"You're not helping us if you're not using the recalls to put people in the most critical areas," he said. "As long as our department and our management team listens to the union about where the needs are that need to be met, services will improve."

Presence home health employees ratify first contract

For 11 years, the employees at Presence Home Care, which is part of the Presence Health system, never gave up in their determination to gain union representation.

THE RNS, SOCIAL WORKERS AND OTHERS WHO PROVIDE HOME HEALTH SERVICES BEGAN ORGANIZING when they were part of the Resurrection Health Care system. Employees at several hospitals in the system were also seeking union representation with AFSCME.

The roadblocks were many as RHC management waged an aggressive campaign to thwart efforts to form a union. But the employees on the union organizing committee were steadfast. With AFSCME's backing, they filed a complaint with the Department of Labor over wage and hour law violations – and pursued it for years. They struggled through all the changes

involved as Resurrection Health Care merged into a larger system and employees became part of Presence Health. At the same time, they continued to build support among their coworkers strong enough to resist management pressure.

In August 2012, Presence Home Care employees voted overwhelmingly to form a union with AFSCME.

Now, after all those years – and another 11 months at the bargaining table – Presence employees have what they wanted: a contract that will guarantee them fairness at the workplace and a real voice in patient care.

"I think our perseverance and stamina – and people who stood up and weren't afraid – made this happen," said Vicki Affinito, treasurer of Local 2342. "The rug can't be pulled out from under us now. We have a voice."

The fight for a voice began over a decade ago, when Presence was still Resurrection. Employees were dedicated to serving patients – mostly senior citizens on Medicare – but had little voice



in patient care, scheduling or staffing levels.

The employer seemed to be putting a priority on quantity over quality, with a focus on the number of patient visits that meant many were not getting the care they needed.

The new, three-year contract marks a big step in resolving these issues. It establishes a professional practices committee split evenly between labor and management that "may make recommendations to management on patient care, patient handling, case loads, case management, travel time, employer-employee relations" and

other key issues.

The agreement also puts into a place a defined procedure for patient scheduling that will take into account the needs of the patient, employee workloads and travel time, among other factors.

Salaries for Presence employees – mostly registered nurses and therapists – will also improve, and Local 2342 members will receive contract signing bonuses as well.

Affinito, however, said the contract's language on productivity and staffing might represent the most important change.

"One of the things that was big for me and my colleagues wasn't about money, it was about staffing and having a good nurse to patient ratio," she said. "We got it in writing that our productivity – how many patients we see per day – is at a set number now. Only in rare circumstances could they say you have to see more."

Employees fought hard for such a provision after seeing management slowly increase the number of patients employees were expected to see each day – resulting in each patient getting less and less one-on-one care.

"We're going to be able to give better patient care if we know what our set number is per day and we'll have more time to spend with the patient now," Affinito said.

"The negotiations were up and down, but it was nice they had to sit across from us and make decisions with us instead of for us," she added. "If we didn't have a union and weren't able to negotiate, we'd have way less than what we have now."

Privatization looms large in City of Chicago bargaining

Despite being in bargaining for over a year, AFSCME local unions representing City of Chicago employees and the Emanuel administration are still far apart on the terms of a new contract.

A LARGE REASON FOR THAT IS THE ADMINISTRATION'S CONTINUED INSISTENCE ON THE UNRESTRICTED right to privatize city jobs and services, a practice that has seen good jobs replaced with low-paying ones and greatly reduced accountability.

"We're clearly moving at a snail's pace," said Susan Littlefield, president of Local 2912. "I don't think management wants this over with. As long as we're at the table, they can keep bringing in these private companies."

Littlefield and other members of the AFSCME bargaining team for city employees think one way to speed up talks – and rein in Emanuel's privatization push – is for the



city council to pass the Privatization Transparency and Accountability Ordinance.

That proposal would ensure every privatization scheme receives a public hearing and would require the city to demonstrate that outsourcing would still result in jobs with fair wages and benefits while offering meaningful cost savings.

Unfortunately, the proposal has been bottled up in the council's Rules Committee – traditionally a graveyard

for legislation opposed by the mayor.

The AFSCME bargaining team has been fighting for strong anti-privatization language in a new contract. Passage of the ordinance would allow several issues related to privatization to be taken off the bargaining table.

"If this ordinance can pass, the chances of resolving the outstanding privatization language will be greatly improved and we will be able to move on to other issues,"

said Local 1215 President John Rayburn. "Until then we have to continue to stand firm."

The case against rampant privatization has only grown stronger in recent months, thanks to the botched rollout of the new Ventra fare payment system for CTA trains and buses.

Ventra, run by Cubic Transportation Systems, a private California firm, has become a running joke among Chicago commuters.

Complaints have included an enormously complex transition from the old system and being overcharged for trips. Some people, after signing up to receive a Ventra card, have had their mailboxes inundated with literally hundreds of plastic fare cards.

The Ventra transition went so poorly that the CTA delayed for several weeks its plan to phase out the fare cards used under the old system, which was administered in-house by public employees.

"The citizens of Chicago are only getting half the truth when it comes to the mayor and privatization," Littlefield said. "They're not getting full disclosure of the costs or the downside of what happens when things don't go right. The public's not being fully educated on the costs.

There's no accountability for these private firms."

Fighting for retroactive pay

ANOTHER MAJOR STICKING POINT in talks with the city has been the Emanuel administration's refusal to consider a contract that awards wage increases retroactive to when the last

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One year in, slow going in Cook County talks

When the 15 AFSCME locals representing Cook County employees began talks on a new contract a year ago, members of the bargaining team complained that county negotiators were stalling and seemed unprepared.

ONE YEAR LATER, NOT MUCH HAS CHANGED.

The issues expected to be sticking points when talks began – health care, a cost-of-

living adjustment, classification issues and parental leave – remain the biggest sources of contention.

Many members of the AFSCME bargaining team believe the process has been further hampered by the County's lax attitude toward the negotiations.

"The progress has been very slow and it just seems like this administration, even though it says it's trying to move negotiations along, isn't serious," said Carmin Willis-Goodloe, president of Local 1111.

"There's not a sense of urgency from the county," said Presita West, president of Local 3315. "I think there's a lack of direction."

The county wants a con-

tract with a pay freeze in the first year, followed by a 1 percent increase in the second year. At the same time, the county has demanded employees pay much more for health care.

"Right now we have a good contract with good insurance and benefits – we want to preserve what we have and we need a fair wage increase," Willis-Goodloe said.

15 locals united

COOK COUNTY NEGOTIATIONS are always somewhat complex due to the 15 locals that are included in the master contract – locals whose members serve in a wide variety of positions. Bargaining talks include "local negotiations" for 14

"We want to preserve what we have and we need a fair wage increase."

—Carmin Willis-Goodloe

separate contracts, along with a "universal table" that works on common issues including wage increases and insurance issues.

Still, the 15 locals have managed to stay focused on a common purpose.

"I think the bargaining team presents a unified front," West said, "even though there's a variety of issues each local faces. There are some employers who give a particular local difficulty but

it's our job to support each other in this struggle. We want to go out and show our solidarity."

Showing solidarity is crucial to bringing the negotiations to a successful conclusion, according to Mike Newman, AFSCME's chief negotiator.

"For these many months, all of the locals on the Cook County bargaining team have stuck together and stood firm against management's efforts to reduce the standard of living of County employees," Newman said. "Now we're going to have to intensify our efforts at the grassroots level – everyone working together – to make sure the county knows that we are determined to get a fair contract."

VOICES FROM THE STRIKE LINE



Will County employees - members of AFSCME Local 1028 - were on strike for 16 days in late November. Their jobs include working in the county courthouse, caring for the elderly in Sunny Hill Nursing Home, maintaining highways and more. Though they came from different jobs and walks of life, they stood united in their fight for a fair contract and emerged stronger than before. Some of these members spoke to On the Move about why they were on the picket line.





Keith Dick
Adult Detention Center

We have four kids. Everything just gets more expensive. When you don't get wage increases, it gets tougher and tougher. We're on the picket lines almost every day – sometimes twice a day, sometimes with the kids too. We just have to show everyone that if we can do this, we can set an example to the people who think they can't.



Kacey Scofield
State's Attorney's office

We're a single-income family. It's hard to get the bills paid and make sure everything's on the table for the kids. I have a second job and have been able to make ends meet, but I'm still staying in my folks' house. I can't afford a mortgage or rent by myself. The support on the line, the support from the public, has been awesome. We've got the police department coming in, wearing our stickers into the office. Our attorneys are wearing green in court. Strangers have dropped off coffee and bagels. Restaurants have delivered food. You walk through Joliet and see someone wearing green or holding a sign and you've got a new friend.



Jason Taylor
Health Department

They're acting like our families don't deserve fair health coverage and that's what we're really fighting for. We don't want to strike – we're forced to strike. We want a fair contract and to have a happy home for our families. It's really about the family and the community. If we don't get fair coverage for our families and can't serve the people, then there's a problem.



Gabby Reyes
Environmental Health

After 20 years of service I only make \$30,000 a year. We've had to cut back on anything that we can. I became a citizen seven or eight years ago. I became an American so I could have a voice and have rights. By being out there on the picket line, I'm teaching my kids something.



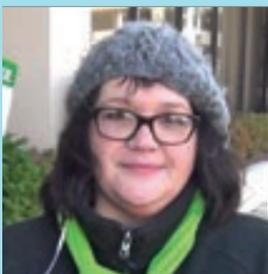
Jim Rinke
County Courthouse

The county has frozen raises for the last four years. We were in negotiations for 15 months and they tried to double our insurance premiums and give us absolutely no cost-of-living raise. Both sides need to give and we stepped up and put off raises and they offered nothing. This country was built on unions. This is why we have vacation days and sick days. We have the pay we have because of unions. If we stay strong and stay together, we'll come through.



Karry Dotson
Sunny Hill Nursing Home

We're dependable. We show up every day and do what we're supposed to do, and they're unfair with us. Why not give us a reasonable raise? We've got to feed our sons and daughters just like they've got to feed theirs.



Brooke Brewer
Recorder's office

This is something that's been coming for a long time. When we negotiated the last contract, we sacrificed COLAs because of the poor economy. It's about time the county gave something back to us. We deserve so much more. We are strong employees. We are vital to the operations of this county and we deserve fair pay and good health insurance. We need to show the county how strong we are and we need to show the public how important we are to the county.



Cheryl Hajewski
County Courthouse

I have two kids at home. My husband works, too. One thing I've always wanted is to have my own house – make my own garden, cut my own grass. Looking at my future, I can see that what the county wants to do is not going to benefit me and allow us to get that house we want for our kids. When the labor movement rose up years ago, they did it to create fair work practices and fair wages. To stand out here and be part of that, and carry on what history started means a lot to me. I have to do it.

New task force tackles DOC safety and security concerns

After years of complaints regarding inmate overcrowding and understaffing, Council 31 and the Department of Corrections have established a joint labor-management task force aimed at addressing the most serious problems confronting the state's prisons.

THE TASK FORCE IS CHARGED WITH SYSTEMATICALLY REVIEWING EACH CORRECTIONAL FACILITY IN the state, in conjunction with local unions and facility administration, to make recommendations regarding improvements in operations

that enhance safety and strengthen security.

"The task force is going to have the chance to address some long-neglected issues," said Ralph Portwood, a member of the committee and president of Local 1866, Stateville Correctional Center. "We hope that this effort is going to boost morale at the workplace seeing that these issues are being addressed."

The task force, which includes three AFSCME representatives and three IDOC management representatives, recently conducted its first site review at Vandalia Correctional Center.

Facility visits are going to continue through next summer. After each visit, both sides will follow up with each other to go over top concerns, ranging from problems that can be fixed immediately to more long-term issues.

Each site visit includes discussions with local union lead-

ership, administrators and employees.

"The members seemed happy to see us and were very engaged in the process and glad someone was paying attention," Council 31 regional director Eddie Caumiant said of the visit to Vandalia CC. "It's going to be a very long-term project. It's a heavy commitment."

While the panel has only one site under its belt so far, initial results appear promising. At Vandalia, administrators are already working to fill key openings – a move that's desperately needed, said task force member, Randy Hellmann, president of Local 943, Pinckneyville Correctional Center.

"One thing we saw immediately at Vandalia was the lack of staff and guidance," he said. "You would have one officer supervising 88 inmates for seven-and-a-half hours. There's no zone coverage or supervisors to provide security and make sure that staff member's safe.

That's one of the things we immediately jumped on."

Facility improvements are also on the way at Vandalia, including repairs to lighting around the perimeter fence and lockboxes for correctional officers to store belongings while on duty.

"Many staff didn't even have a place to put their coats," Hellmann said. "Inmates would steal their belongings."

A broader focus

WHILE MAKING FACILITY-BY-FACILITY changes can make a big difference at the ground level, the task force is also taking a broader look at how the state's prisons are run. Only a few months removed from the closures of Tamms CC and Dwight CC, overcrowding – and the security risk it creates – remains a primary concern.

A related problem is a gradual reduction in staff – a lack of new hires has meant

fewer correctional officers are responsible for a larger number of inmates.

"We have to go back and look at the rosters from 2009," Hellmann said. "Back then we entered into a memorandum of understanding with DOC and there was supposed to be no reduction in posts. But due to attrition, the department may be in violation of that."

Members of the task force emphasize that their work has only begun and judging the success or failure of the project could take months. But right now, there is a strong sense of optimism.

"These things that we can bring forth ought to hopefully provide some necessary relief to problems that are outstanding without putting pressure on the locals," Hellmann said. "I think it has the potential of really moving us down a path that addresses issues thoroughly."

AFSCME report sheds light on inequality at University of Illinois

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign may depict itself as an enlightened institution of higher learning – but that's contradicted by the growing wage gap between top university administrators and its lowest-paid employees.

A REPORT RELEASED BY COUNCIL 31 FOUND THAT "CLERICAL AND TECHNICAL WORKERS ACROSS campus have seen their pay stagnate and workload increase." Meanwhile, the university "has managed to find the resources to dramatically increase the compensation for its top administrators and highest-paid staff."

As a result, many universi-

ty employees who ensure basic operations and work for key programs are struggling to provide for their families. Some of the report's most dramatic findings are:

- Total salaries paid to the top 1 percent of earners at UIUC in 2013 nearly equaled salaries paid to the bottom 10 percent of earners.
- The value of raises paid to the top 1 percent over the last three years could have provided a \$3,128 pay increase to each employee in the lowest 10 percent wage tier – a raise that would lift many out of poverty.
- The highest paid 50 employees at the university saw their salaries increase by an average of 25 percent between 2010 and 2013.
- In the same time span, the lowest paid 50 employees saw their average salary increase just 3.86 percent – to \$20,348.

The report's findings aren't news to the many UIUC employees who have been fighting for fair wages and benefits, including



Veterinary technicians at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign have held demonstrations to demand a fair contract.

clerical workers and veterinary technicians who in recent years have fought for the right to organize and win contracts.

Belva Blakely, a community worker for the UIUC Extension program, has worked for the university for nearly 10 years. Her job involves going out into the community to teach children healthy eating habits. But despite the important service she provides and the years she's put in, she only makes \$14.39 an hour.

"Gas costs too much and food is too expensive and you can't keep up," she said. "There's no trips to the movies, no eating out."

She called the university's practice of lavishing top administrators with raises "a low blow."

"They might value the work we do, but they don't want to pay us any more to do it," she said. "They want all the money to go to the higher-ups. That's plain to see every time they give someone

a \$90,000 raise. I feel terrible because it wouldn't take that much to satisfy me, but it takes a whole lot to satisfy them."

Employees like Blakely, as the report indicates, are the lifeblood of the university – and the administrators getting big raises wouldn't be able to run the university without the clerical and technical workers who have seen their wages stay flat.

"UIUC depends on the skills and experience of thousands of employees whose work is often invisible and undervalued," the report notes. "The university's budget has increasingly reflected its goal of attracting and retaining big-name administrators and academic superstars. Their decisions ignore the fact that no administrator (big name or not) and no highly-paid academic superstar can be successful without the quality clerical and technical workers that support everything that is done on campus."

Maximus settlement will end wasteful outsourcing

In a victory for Illinois taxpayers, Medicaid recipients and AFSCME members, the union and the state have come to an agreement to end the state's use of Maximus, a private firm, for Medicaid eligibility redeterminations.

AN INDEPENDENT ARBITRATOR'S order issued Dec. 17 sets in motion the termination of state

government's wasteful \$77 million contract with Maximus that has been duplicating Medicaid eligibility redetermination work performed by state employees.

Under the terms of the order, the state will use currently appropriated funds to hire a sufficient number of caseworkers to return the work to employees in the departments of Human Services and Health-care and Family Services no later than April 30, 2014. Maximus will continue to provide data-matching software and some support services until June 2015.

"The arbitrator's order is a win for Illinois taxpayers," AFSCME Council 31 Executive Director Henry Bayer said. "Wasteful spending on a private

contract will be eliminated, trained professional caseworkers will replace unqualified call centers, and state government will ensure that Medicaid is available to those who need it, and cut off from those who don't qualify."

The state had appealed to circuit court seeking to overturn an initial arbitrator's ruling requiring termination of the contract by the end of 2013. However, even after the appeal, the state and AFSCME continued talks aimed at ending the use of Maximus employees to perform bargaining unit work – a clear contract violation.

The decision to outsource redetermination work has already cost taxpayers millions more than if the state had sim-

ply hired sufficient staff. During the arbitration hearing, AFSCME presented evidence – not disputed by the state – showing that keeping the work in-house would save more than \$18.1 million annually.

Because of Maximus' spotty performance record, the state had to hire additional staff to double-check the company's work, adding to already substantial costs. To date, its recommendations to change existing Medicaid coverage were found in error and overturned in 47 percent of cases, its cancellations reversed in 31 percent of cases, and its findings deemed inaccurate in 15 percent of cases where the company said recipients should continue receiving benefits.

Despite those numbers, a vocal minority of legislators and conservative lobbyists are claiming that Maximus' track record is actually a "stunning success," demonstrating the lengths to which pro-privatization forces will go to weaken public services in order to help for-profit corporations.

The protests also signal that while the settlement regarding Maximus is a victory, the forces pushing greater privatization aren't planning on scaling back their agenda in response.

"It's time to end this failed experiment with outsourcing a critical public watchdog role to a private, for-profit corporation," AFSCME director Bayer said.

SHORT REPORTS

Fight for back wages continues in Springfield

WHEN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY wrapped up its business for the year, it failed to allocate money to pay wages owed to some 20,000 state employees – even after it responded quickly when lawmakers' own pay was threatened.

State employees in five agencies – DHS, DJJ, DOC, DNR and DPH – have been waiting more than two years for the back wages owed to them after Gov. Pat Quinn withheld their negotiated pay increase. Although many employees have received partial payment for wages owed in fiscal 2011 and 2012, there is still some \$112 million in outstanding debt to state employees.

In the closing days of the fall Veto Session, AFSCME held a Back Pay Action Day at the State Capitol to urge key legislators to speak out more strongly for action on a supplemental appropriation by the General Assembly. Twenty-five teams of AFSCME local leaders from across the state travelled to Springfield to present "Collection Notices" to their legislators and press them to stand up for state



AFSCME members delivered "Collection Notices" to members of the General Assembly, including Democratic Rep. Jay Hoffman (left).

employees.

Despite this grassroots lobbying and broad support for the supplemental appropriation in both houses, Speaker Michael Madigan has not allowed it to be called for a vote.

Some legislators have made the argument that the state's many "unpaid bills" need to take priority over paying employees the wages they're owed – an argument AFSCME has strongly rejected.

"How is this not another unpaid bill?" Council 31 Executive Director Henry Bayer said. "These are not bonuses people are waiting on. These are regular wages that have already been earned. It should be the

General Assembly's first priority when they return to Springfield."

As union members continue to lobby the legislature to appropriate money for the back wages, Council 31 continues to oppose Attorney General Lisa Madigan's appeal of the circuit court's finding that the money owed is an obligation of the state and must be paid.

U.S. Supreme Court case could cripple public employee unions

A CASE SET TO BE ARGUED before the U.S. Supreme Court in January – one being pushed by a number of anti-union organizations –

could have enormous implications for the future of public employee unions.

On Jan. 21, the court will hear arguments in *Harris v. Quinn*, a case that originated in Illinois when the state declared that personal care assistants (also known as home health care aides) paid from state Medicaid dollars would be treated as state employees for collective bargaining purposes.

One of these personal care assistants, Pamela Harris, agreed to become a plaintiff in a suit filed by the anti-union National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation which sought to undermine the right of these employees to form a union. Even though both an Illinois circuit court and the appellate court ruled against National Right to Work's argument, the U.S. Supreme Court recently agreed to hear the appeal of the case over the objections of the Obama administration.

The suit contends that it is unconstitutional for unions in the public sector to charge a "fair-share fee" to employees in a bargaining unit who choose not to be union members.

It goes even further, not only seeking to prevent a

union from negotiating on behalf of everyone in a bargaining unit, but also seeking to severely limit the issues that can be negotiated.

Given the propensity of the current Republican-dominated Supreme Court to issue rulings that strongly favor corporate interests, there is a very real danger that National Right to Work could prevail in this case.

A range of rulings are possible, including a very narrow one that would only affect home health care workers. However, the case has turned into a rallying point for right-wing, anti-union organizations – along with National Right to Work, the Illinois Policy Institute and the Cato Institute have all become involved. Briefs filed by those groups urge the court to issue a ruling that would severely cripple all public employee unions, including AFSCME.

If the court rules that fair share fees in the public sector are unconstitutional, then public employee unions would be forced to devote resources toward representing employees who

Continued on page 15

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

Slow start, good finish for Fulton County employees

DESPITE SOME INITIAL RELUCTANCE by management to take bargaining seriously, members of Local 1372 in Fulton County are happy with a new four-year agreement that includes wage increases and several language improvements.

The contract raises wages by 2 percent in each of the first two years, and by 2.5 percent in each of the final two years.

Initial negotiations focused only on the county board and nursing home, but got off to such a slow start that eventually all county employees represented by AFSCME were involved.

"They wouldn't work with us on anything initially," Council 31 staff representative Randy Lynch said. "But then when they did finally sit down, we got it all resolved pretty quickly."

The agreement also provides for extra vacation days for employees who have been with the county more than 20 years. Its length is also significant – outgoing President Sam Swickard said he wanted to ensure a large number of expected retirees could step down with a contract in place.

At the other end of the seniority scale, the contract contains language to help draw in and retain new employees by reducing to six months a probationary period that had lasted up to five years, depending on the position.

"One of the women in the office had to wait five years and the truck drivers had to wait three for full pay," Swickard said. "I don't like that two-tiered system."

Swickard said that change will also help the county in the long-run.

"All low wages do is drive away people with high skills," he said. "It doesn't save the county money because they don't get the caliber of career employees they need."

The bargaining team was led by Lynch and included Swickard, Larry Lindsay and Tanya Holmes.

Bloomington employees block privatization expansion

CONTRACTS COVERING PUBLIC works and library employees in the City of Bloomington will provide modest wage increases, but the real victory for Local 699 may be in keeping out language that could have opened the door to increased privatiza-

tion of city services.

Both contracts run for two years. Public works employees will receive a 2 percent wage increase in the second year of their agreement, along with a \$500 bonus, while library employees will receive 2 percent bumps in both years.

The city was hoping to use the contracts to set a precedent for others by putting in language allowing "managed competition" – usually a euphemism for privatization.

"They wanted to implement some managed competition language to target the garbage pick-up workers," Council 31 staff representative Renee Nestler said. "We ended up not having to take that. We did some things on the ground, putting together a report on why managed competition was not a good idea."

The city tried to add similar language to the contract for library employees, even though it largely wouldn't apply to them. But employees saw that for what it was – an attempt to establish a precedent for other contracts – and stood against it. "We weren't going to sign off on something like that because it could have hurt other employees in the city," executive board member Bonnie Becker said.

The bargaining committee included Nestler, local President Lyle Oliver, Becker, Rob Oliver, Aaron Barlow, Kent Sigler, Wendy Klessig, Honor Coleman, Steve Connor, John Wheatley, Tim Kerns, Mary Crusier and Rondalea Fish.

NIU health service employees fight off takeaways

SIGNIFICANT INCREASES WERE HARD to come by in the new contract for members of Local 963, but the five-year agreement still contains some hard-won gains for health service employees at Northern Illinois University.

The contract includes 1 percent wage increases in each of its final three years. It also establishes benchmarks for starting salaries, including new positions.

"We did the best we could facing some dire circumstances," Council 31 staff representative Ken Anderson said. "NIU is a school facing declining enrollment and a trimmed budget. That makes life more difficult."

"We didn't get all we wanted but we got a lot more than what they were offering, which was basically nothing," Local

963 President Carol Sibley said. "They wanted no raises."

Negotiating the agreement took over a year, but Sibley said the time was worth it.

"There was an awful lot of delaying in the bargaining but we persisted and bargained what we thought were the important issues," she said.

The bargaining team, led by Anderson, included Sibley, Becky Jarman, Karyn Dixson and Andy Peccarelli.

Making the case against outsourcing in Wilmington

CITY OF WILMINGTON EMPLOYEES knew it would be hard to make major gains in their new contract, but they also weren't going to let an opportunity go to waste – especially when the threat of outsourcing loomed.

When it came time to negotiate, Local 1909 members made the case against outsourcing to city officials.

"Outsourcing has been such a constant drumbeat," Council 31 staff representative Jeff Dexter said. "The employer has always come to us during bargaining and threatened us with outsourcing and layoffs."

Fighting outsourcing is nothing new for the local, Dexter said.

"Part of what they've done, even prior to this contract, is when the city wants to outsource, the local has looked at what the proposed bids are, and showed they can do it cheaper than what the city was going to pay," Dexter said.

The four year contract holds off outsourcing and also includes wage increases of 1.5 percent in each of its last three years. Employees were also able to hold off management's attempt to increase health care costs.

"We were able to keep our health insurance costs down to a minimum which was our goal in the first place," Local 1909 President Pat Nugent said.

The bargaining team included Dexter, Nugent, Ryan Foster and Ken Ewenson.

Wages, family leave provisions improve for Madison County employees

A GROUP OF CONTRACTS COVERING Madison County employees will keep wages rising, while also giving greater assistance to workers whose children are facing health issues.

The agreements cover employees of the county board,

the circuit clerk and the chief judge. All the contracts run for four years, with wages increasing 7 percent over the final three years.

While the first year technically calls for a pay freeze, the local was able to negotiate a one-time, \$450 signing bonus for all members – a significant amount, particularly for the lowest-paid employees.

"It's a good agreement overall. We had a good foundation to work with. The local's really involved with good leadership," Council 31 staff representative Steve Joiner said.

The most significant gain for county employees may be an expanded family leave provision that allows employees time off to care for adult children, not just minors.

"Whether your kid is 8, 18 or 38, if there's something physically or mentally wrong with your child and they need care, you shouldn't be limited," the local's president, Chris Milton said. "It made a lot of people angry to be told that they shouldn't be able to take care of their children."

The negotiating team included Joiner, Milton, Cathi Gitchoff, Greg Faulkner, Paul Kacera, Joli Sabatino, Theresa Hale, Lexy Schlemmer, Bill VanBuskirk, Denise Marler, Darryl Seaman and Todd Brooke.

No attorney means no problems for Peoria County employees

HEADING INTO A NEW ROUND OF bargaining, Peoria County employees were expecting the worst: drawn out, frustrating negotiations and the possibility of little improvement in wages and benefits.

"At the previous negotiation we had a tough time," Local 3586 President Kevin Kennedy said. "They wanted to have shortened work weeks and furloughs."

But before talks began, the local asked management whether it would be willing to skip having an attorney handle negotiations and instead allow the two sides to talk directly.

"They agreed to do that and we secured a fair agreement after five or six meetings," Council 31 staff representative Tim Lavelle said.

The three-year agreement will raise wages by 7.5 percent over its life. Otherwise, the contract is basically a continuance of an agreement that has served employees well in the past.

"There's no givebacks and decent wage increases," Lavelle said.

Joining Kennedy and Lavelle in bargaining were Kim Schilling, Michele Arbogast and Felicia Whitelaw.

Wages improve in pair of Peoria contracts

TWO UNITS OF LOCAL 3464 IN Peoria recently ratified con-

tracts that will see wages increase – with one also providing some protection from outsourcing.

The first agreement covers a handful of ticket-sellers at the Peoria Civic Center. That three-year contract includes 2 percent wage increases in each year. The eventual goal is to combine the contract with a larger agreement covering other civic center workers.

The other agreement is a four-year contract for library employees, who will see their wages rise 7.35 percent over that time, along with lump-sum bonuses in 2014 and 2015 and improved longevity bonuses.

The contract also guarantees that employees will be given more time for training – a critical need for library workers.

"With librarians being such a technical position, training has to be the biggest component for them," said Local 3464 President Sherry Carter-Allen. "Employers always want to raise the bar, but they also have to educate our members and make sure they're trained appropriately."

Carter-Allen said the agreement also strengthens the bidding power of library employees, improving their ability to fight off attempts at privatization.

"With privatization being Enemy No. 1 to union life, we have to make sure our contracts have language that's as tight as possible and allows us to fight," she said.

The library contract also guarantees each employee will have one Saturday and Sunday off per month.

The negotiating team for both contracts included Lavelle and Carter-Allen, with Barbara Bradley-Carruth, Diane Whitaker, Dave Underwood, Sandy Smith and Vickie King working on the contract for civic center employees, and Chris Farris, Joe Fitzanko, Vicky Gouliard, Tiana Helms, Tom McFall and Max Smith serving on the team for library employees.

"Really smooth" talks for Rock Island Board of Education employees

A QUICK ROUND OF BARGAINING resulted in a three-year agreement for Rock Island Board of Education employees that will see wages rise by 6 percent overall.

Negotiations went well thanks to a good relationship with management, Local 822 President Carl Durham said.

"Both sides work together a lot so it makes things really smooth," Durham said. Our insurance not changing was the biggest victory."

The bargaining team included Durham, Council 31 staff representative Dino Leone, Corey Colvin, Joanne France-Silas, Debby Swanson, Stephanie Anson, Lupe Hatch, Tina Imes and Joel Padilla.

Packed agenda awaits PEOPLE legislative and endorsement conference

With the General Assembly's 2014 session and March primary elections on the horizon, Council 31's biennial PEOPLE Legislative and Endorsement Conference will have plenty to discuss.

PEOPLE (PUBLIC EMPLOYEES ORGANIZED TO PROMOTE LEGISLATIVE EQUALITY) IS COUNCIL 31's political action program. The conference – one of two that will be held in 2014 – is open to every AFSCME local union in the state. Locals are represented by their presidents and PEOPLE chairpersons. Each retiree subchapter can also send a representative.

If any item tops the agenda when the conference begins on Feb. 1 in Springfield, it may be the campaign to change the state's income tax so that it's fairer to the middle class and small businesses.

The conference will come in the midst of a campaign by AFSCME and over 100 other organizations to place on the November ballot a proposed constitutional amendment that would allow Illinois to institute higher income tax rates for higher incomes and lower tax rates for lower incomes.

The amendment is urgently needed to address the state's chronic budget shortfall without resorting to massive cutbacks in public sector jobs and services.

The campaign – A Better Illinois – is already working to gather signatures from people across the state who support the plan. However, only the General Assembly can place the proposed amendment on the ballot – a task that must be accomplished by May.

"Our locals and members are going to play a key role in persuading lawmakers to put tax fairness on the ballot," said John Cameron, Council 31's director of political and community relations. "The PEOPLE conference will give us a chance to inform every local of where the campaign stands and agree on a common strategy."

Other issues important to the union will also be on the agenda, including the Care



Delegates to Council 31's 2012 PEOPLE Legislative and Endorsement Conference listen to a speaker.

Campaign – an effort to increase funding to community agencies serving individuals with developmental disabilities so direct support workers can earn wages sufficient to lift them out of poverty.

Another priority will be a renewed legislative effort to make whole some 20,000 state employees who still have not received all of the back wages they are owed from wage increases that were withheld in fiscal 2011 and 2012.

Primary endorsements

ON THE POLITICAL FRONT, THE conference will consider endorsements for congressional and statewide primary contests looking toward the election on March 18, when Illinois voters will select party nominees for seats in the General Assembly, the U.S. House and statewide offices.

Endorsements in state legislative primaries are made by the PEOPLE Executive Committee based on recommendations from regional PEOPLE committees, made up of delegates from each local in the region.

Regional meetings are already underway to interview candidates in districts where contested primaries are expected to occur in order to identify candidates – Democrat or Republican – who support the union's goals.

"Endorsements are based on the voting records of incumbent legislators," Cameron said. "We identify every vote of importance to AFSCME members that a legislator took, weight their importance, and then grade each legislator."

Every non-incumbent candidate is asked to complete a comprehensive ques-

tionnaire and, in most cases, to attend a regional meeting where local union delegates have an opportunity to directly interview him or her.

"While the fight to protect pension benefits has now shifted to the courts, it is certain to have an effect on the way conference delegates assess which candidates to support, as well as the strategy

for being successful on other issues," Cameron noted.

"The pension fight showed why we can't expect members of one party to support or oppose us," Cameron said. "We need to be active and engage with as many lawmakers as we can. The PEOPLE program is what allows us to do that effectively."

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RETIREE NOTES



Remembering Virginia Yates (1930-2013)

VIRGINIA YATES, A LONGTIME UNION ACTIVIST AND IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT OF AFSCME RETIREES Chapter 31, died Nov. 17 following a long illness. She was 82.

“Virginia was deeply committed to AFSCME,” Council 31 Executive Director Henry Bayer said. “She served as a local president for many years and then went on to lead the Chapter 31 retiree organization for six years. She worked tirelessly to advance the cause of dignity and respect for workers, both active and retired. Whatever the fight, you could always count on Virginia to answer the call.”

Yates retired as a Mental Health Tech 4 from Murray Developmental Center in Centralia, where she was president of AFSCME Local 401 for 18 years. She was a trustee for the Illinois State Employee Retirement System, a member of the AFSCME Council 31 executive board and president of AFSCME Retiree Sub-Chapter 85.

Virginia lived in Sandoval and passed away at St. Mary’s Hospital in Centralia. She was born on December 15, 1930, in Akron, Ohio. She was predeceased by her husband and is survived by two sons, a daughter, four grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Yates was a veteran of the U.S. Air Force, serving two years during the Korean Conflict. She was a life-long St. Louis Cardinal’s baseball fan who, in addition to her extensive involvement in union and retiree activities, found time for shopping, reading, traveling and basking in the Florida sun.

“Virginia was diligent and dedicated in her advocacy for retirees,” said AFSCME Legislative Director, Joanna Webb-Gauvin. “She was a wonderful person who was always ready to give of herself to help others.”

Chapter 31 retirees rally against pension theft

ON DEC. 2, THE DAY BEFORE the Illinois General Assembly reconvened to consider massive cuts to public sector pension benefits, AFSCME Chapter 31 retirees joined active employees and allies from other unions in the We Are One Illinois coalition to demand that their legislators vote NO on Senate Bill 1.

In forty different actions across the state, from Rockford to Chicago to Bloomington to Marion, AFSCME retirees and their allies held rallies and pickets directed at the offices of state legislators.

A group of approximately 50 retirees and working members, led by sub-chapter 93 President Al Latoza, delivered to local legislators the message that Senate Bill 1 was unconstitutional. “We gathered at Rep. John Bradley’s office in Marion to let him know that he can’t throw

our retirees under the bus and we will not stand for the theft of the benefits we worked for and earned over the course of our career,” Latoza said.

In areas with multiple, tightly-packed districts, such as Chicago and the Cook County suburbs, retirees boarded buses and traveled to as many as five different lawmakers’ offices in one day.

Mary Jones, secretary-treasurer for Chapter 31, joined fellow retirees on a five-stop tour to state legislators in the Chicago area. “We rode the bus to state legislators all around the city to demand that they stop stealing our hard-earned benefits,” she said. “I’m a City of Chicago retiree, so this particular bill doesn’t affect me, but all retirees no matter where they live or who they worked for have to stick together. We are all

greater – more than \$270,000 over 25 years.

“These are not small tweaks,” said Council 31 legislative director Joanna Webb-Gauvin. “For public employ-

Pension battle

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retires at normal retirement age with a pension of \$40,000, would lose more than \$12,000 over the first five years of retirement. In the longer term, the loss would be much

under fire and if they steal from state and university workers it makes it easier to come for me next.”

Dependent audit deadline extended

THE DEADLINE FOR SUBMITTING documentation to verify dependents for retirees of the state’s Group Health Plan has been extended to January 31, 2014.

CMS has contracted with an out-of-state company, HMS Solutions, to conduct an audit of all SERS and SURS retirees who carry dependents on their health insurance. Affected retirees have already received a letter from HMS Solutions asking for documents to verify that dependents are still eligible to be carried on the state insurance plan.

Many retirees were initially having trouble accessing the required documents, specifically the Federal Income Tax transcript necessary to establish spouse eligibility, due to the federal government shutdown in October. Still more retirees were having problems contacting HMS with questions about the process, often finding that HMS’s customer service line was down.

The new deadline should help retirees who are experiencing difficulties complying with the audit.

Polling data shows widespread support for government workers, pensions

DURING THE PENSION DEBATE, politicians would often use rhetoric indicating that they were acting in “the people’s best interest.”

But when anti-pension advocates working for Wall Street billionaires commissioned polling data to support their attacks on worker’s retirement benefits, they got much

more than they asked for.

Several groups dedicated to eliminating pensions for government workers, led by former Enron trader John Arnold, hired a bipartisan polling team to conduct a survey of American voters’ views on public worker pensions. Far from getting the results they wanted, the polling actually found that there is broad majority support for public employee pensions, and that most Americans rightly blame their state governments and the economy for pension problems, not workers or their unions.

The poll, conducted by the Democratic-aligned Mellman Group and the Republican-aligned Public Opinion Strategies, found that:

- Voters, regardless of political party, have favorable views of public employees.
- 55 percent of poll respondents believe public pension benefits are currently about the right amount, or too small.
- 58 percent of respondents said state governors and legislators, as well as the economic downturn, were to blame for pension shortfalls.

When offered a choice of retirement plans, respondents overwhelmingly favored defined-benefit pension plans similar to those that public employees in Illinois have. The least favored were defined contribution plans such as 401(k)-style plans. Defined benefits plans have also been actuarially shown to be more cost efficient for state governments and a more stable form of retirement benefit for workers, according to a separate study conducted by the National Institute on Retirement Security.

Despite the data indicating that most voters view government workers favorably and believe they deserve the benefits they earned, politicians show no signs of stopping their attacks on workers’ retirement security.

ees, most of whom aren’t eligible for Social Security, this is a drastic, cold-hearted cut to their retirement savings.”

The law also contains a “funding guarantee” that can be easily breached, increases to the retirement age – with no consideration for employees in physically demanding jobs – and a cap on pensionable salary.

The bill’s passage increases the likelihood that other under-

funded pension systems – particularly the City of Chicago – will seek to make cuts similar to those in SB 1.

“If this law stands, it would obviously be a disaster for public employees and retirees who made their contributions and held up their end of the bargain,” Bayer said. “But it would also be a disaster for the rule of law in our state. That’s why it needs to be struck down.”

Direct support workers take their case to Quinn – via mail

The General Assembly may be out of session, but that doesn't mean the campaign to lift direct support workers out of poverty is taking a break.

IN DECEMBER, AFSCME LOCALS REPRESENTING DIRECT SUPPORT WORKERS WHO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE to individuals with developmental disabilities in community settings began signing postcards to Gov. Pat Quinn, urging him to include funding to increase their wages in his upcoming budget.

Direct support workers in Illinois now earn an average of \$9.35 an hour, placing them below the poverty line for a family of four, despite stressful work that often requires long hours. The nonprofit agencies where they work provide services to more than 20,000 individuals under contracts with the state of Illinois.

"We hope Gov. Quinn will use the platform offered by his annual budget to make the case that these workers – who help some of the most vulnerable citizens of our state – deserve a wage in line with the work they do," Council 31 public policy director Anne

Irving said. "This postcard campaign is a way to show him how much support this idea has."

The postcards are the latest initiative of the Care Campaign, a coalition which AFSCME played a key role in initiating that includes advocacy groups, agency management, and the families of people with developmental disabilities.

AFSCME locals representing direct support employees in nonprofit agencies have embraced the postcard campaign, including Local 2871, which represents employees at Clearbrook, a Chicago area agency.

"People really wanted to jump on this and say enough's enough," said John Demmert, the local's president. "With all of us getting these cards signed, people are saying to the governor 'Look at what we're doing here and what we're getting paid.'"



Supporters of the Care Campaign are signing postcards to Gov. Quinn urging him to include funding in his next budget that will allow direct support agencies to increase wages.

Raise wages for direct-support workers!

State funding lags

WAGES FOR DIRECT SUPPORT workers are low because their employers are almost entirely funded by state grants that have been frozen at 2007 levels. As a result, agency employees have seen their wages unable to keep up with rising costs.

While wages for direct support staff represented by

AFSCME have fared better than at non-union agencies, they are still not at a level that can provide financial security for employees. Many are forced to work multiple overtime shifts, get second jobs or make other sacrifices in order to take care of their families.

The added stress also can be detrimental to the level of care direct support staff members are able to provide.

"The pay we get is so low and some of these workers are single parents trying to take care of kids, driving from Chicago to the suburbs every day," Demmert said. "Their check goes to gas and food and they can't even take their kids out to McDonald's. They have double shift after double shift and don't get to see their family or friends."

Agency management has generally been enthusiastic about the postcard campaign, encouraging employees to participate and enlisting the support of outsiders.

"It will help reduce turnover, increase morale and help them retain employees," said Council 31 staff representative Kathy Steichen. "These jobs are important and they need to be paid better. Having well-paid staff will provide continuity of service. It's in management's interest to get this passed as well."

But postcards will be coming in from others, too, Demmert noted. "Families, friends, everyone – they're supportive because they know the kind of work we've done," he said.

SHORT REPORTS

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contribute no dues or fees.

"The Supreme Court's willingness to take up this case despite the fact that two lower courts very forcefully rejected the arguments being made is a cause for grave concern," said Council 31 Deputy Director Roberta Lynch. "Obviously, the labor movement in the public sector would be profoundly damaged if it is required to represent employees who are not required to contribute anything toward that representation."

Fate of Murray Center may be settled in court

AS ON THE MOVE WENT TO press, a court hearing that could decide the fate of Murray Developmental Cen-

ter in Centralia was set to begin on Jan. 6.

The hearing is the result of a lawsuit brought by the Murray Parents Association, which is strongly supported by Council 31. The lawsuit argues that the state's plan for closing the facility and moving residents into community-based care is inadequate.

The problems with the state's plan was recently underscored when one community-based care organization, Community Alternatives Illinois, was heavily criticized by the guardian for state wards for hiring abusive workers and failing to provide therapies and services at the same level as those seen at Murray Center.

"The state hasn't met its burden of demonstrating

they can close Murray without an adverse impact upon access to care," Council 31 public policy director Anne Irving said.

At an Oct. 9 hearing of the Health Facilities and Services Review Board, Council 31 argued in favor of stopping the closure, noting that strong demand from Murray Center families and a lack of significant cost savings eliminate any justification for closing the facility. While the board has the power to stop the closure, it has decided to put off a decision until the state reschedules a closing date.

The state canceled its plans to close Murray Center on Nov. 30 after a U.S. District Court judge ruled the lawsuit by the Murray Parents Association could move forward.

Chicago bargaining

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contract expired in June 2012. Without a retroactive increase, the new contract's first year would effectively be a pay freeze.

Rayburn said the city's position penalizes employees for standing strong and seeking a fair agreement.

"You can't always get everything you want, but we definitely deserve retroactive pay," Rayburn said. "They're saying we shouldn't get anything because we've been in

bargaining, which is unfair. We definitely need to stand strong on that."

Standing strong will be especially important in a bargaining process that appears likely to stretch on well into 2014.

"We're in this for the long haul and our members are getting more riled up the more they hear," Littlefield said. "They are becoming more active and engaged every day."

ROBINSON CC MEMBERS RALLY BEHIND ONE OF THEIR OWN



At Robinson Correctional Center in southeast Illinois, employees are banding together – and reaching out – to protect one of their own against IDOC management’s scapegoating tactics.

The members of AFSCME Local 3649 are speaking out – at disciplinary hearings, on Facebook and in the community – to help Mark Lowrance, a correctional officer management has sought to blame for the escape of an inmate on Aug. 30.

“He wasn’t to blame,” Local 3649 President Bryon Steadman said. “We feel very strongly that management should take responsibility for its actions.”

The inmate – Jared Carter – escaped after he was assigned to outdoor work. He and four other inmates were put under the supervision of Mark Lowrance, a maintenance craftsman with nearly 25 years of experience and a spotless disciplinary record.

“There wasn’t anything done different that day than any other day,” Lowrance said. “There was a total of five inmates. I sent three out to mow. A few minutes after I sent them out, one of the guys didn’t do what I told him to do so I went out to look for him.”

That inmate, Carter, was gone. Lowrance immediately began following the procedures required for an escaped inmate.

“It was up the chain of command within 25 minutes,” Lowrance said.

Initially, Lowrance won praise for a quick response that stuck to protocol and ensured Carter couldn’t get far. In fact, he was found five days later, only seven miles away, without incident.

Yet despite the fast response and relatively swift capture, officials at Robinson soon turned their sights onto Lowrance and began disciplinary action.

“On the day this happened, I was getting pats on the back,” he said. “Two months later, they’re running me through the mill with discipline hearings.”

ALL FOR ONE

Management’s about-face on Lowrance didn’t go unnoticed. Once he was targeted for blame, Local 3649 members rallied behind his cause.

“Mark has been following protocol for 23 years. They’re saying that he didn’t do his job adequately and they’re calling him negligent,” Steadman said. “The union has fired back. We’ve gotten the real facts out to the press and we did a rally during Mark’s hearing.” That hearing, as it turned out, would reveal some crucial information: Carter’s criminal record, including a burglary charge, should have barred him from an outdoor work detail.

“He shouldn’t have had outside clearance. It was a lack of information from management that let this guy out there,” Steadman said. The hearing also shed more light on an issue plaguing Robinson and many other DOC facilities: chronic understaffing. In this case, Carter took direct advantage of knowledge that one of the guard towers at Robinson was only manned a few hours of each day.

Union members were incensed when an IDOC spokesman claimed that short-staffing was a “myth” and not a factor in Carter’s escape. “The reason Jared Carter managed to ‘walk away’ is because the administrators of the Department of Corrections have cut our staffing and closed our posts to accommodate a mass attrition of staff over the years,” Timothy Frapp, a correctional lieutenant, said in a letter published in the Robinson Daily News.

A COMMUNITY CAUSE

The fight to clear Lowrance’s name has spread beyond the prison gates. Signs announcing “We support Mark Lowrance” have sprung up throughout Robinson. Local businesses have used their marquees to declare their backing as well. A Facebook page started by Lowrance supporters has become a hub of activity and organization.

“I think they woke a sleeping giant by going after an innocent guy who followed the procedures,” Council 31 staff representative Jeremy Noelle said. “People who normally don’t talk socially and cross paths are now talking and planning on what to do for Mark.”

“There were at least 75 co-workers in the freezing cold with picket signs at the discipline hearing and two or three trucks had big signs in the back saying ‘We’ve got your back,’” he added. “People realized that if they do it to a 23 year veteran with a spotless history, they can do it to them, too.”

Lowrance and his supporters are now waiting to hear whether he will receive any discipline.

In the meantime, Local 3649 members continue to show their support for Lowrance in other ways. Recently, administrators took the routine step of surveying employees to help determine Robinson’s employee of the month.

All 196 nominations were for Lowrance.

“It’s really kind of overwhelming,” Lowrance said. “I’m glad they’re all there to back me up because after I heard of this being handed down, I thought I was on a limb by myself. It’s a good feeling to have the union and the community behind me.”