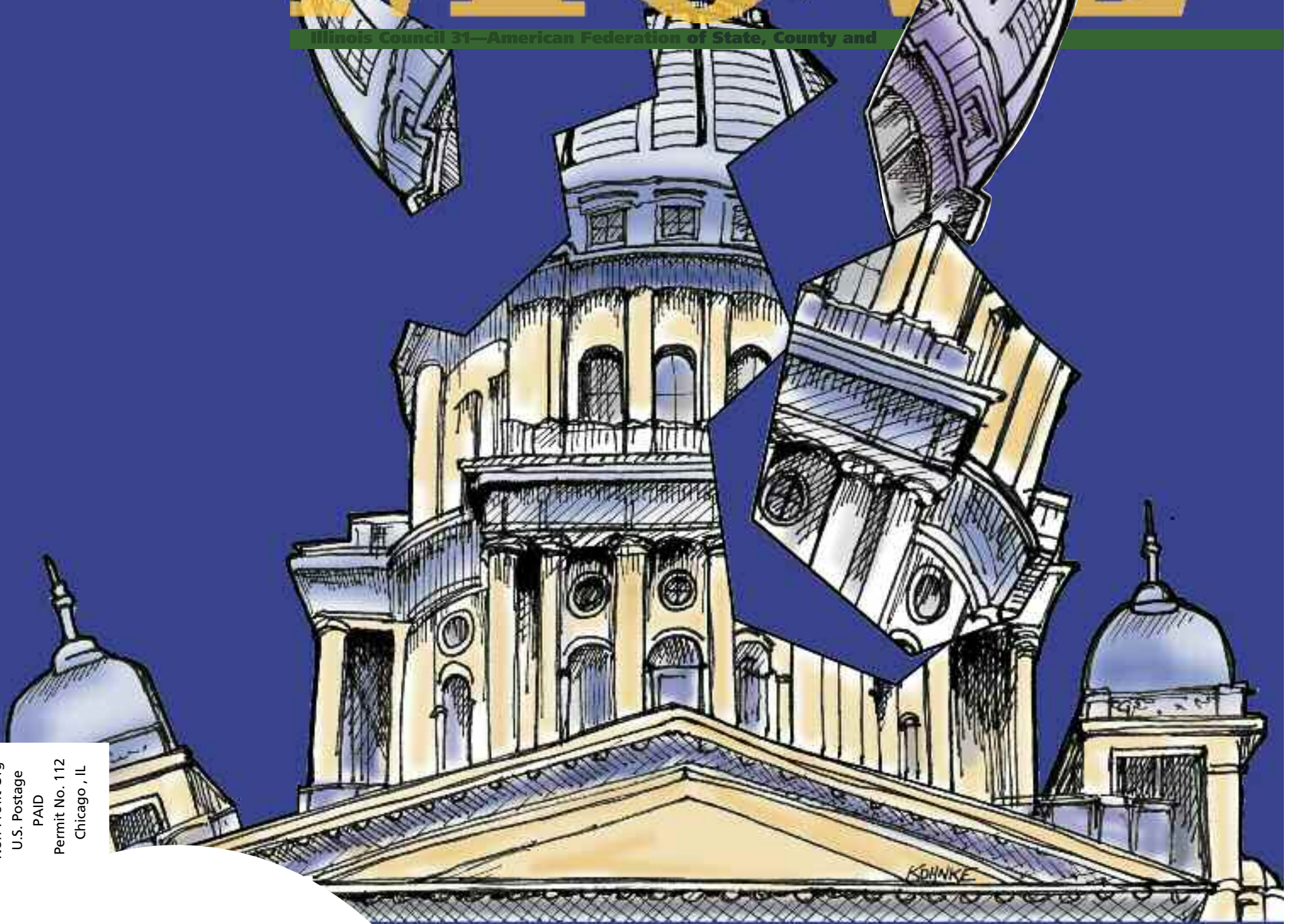




# MOVE

Illinois Council 31—American Federation of State, County and



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## Broken budget shatters services



**On the Move**

AFSCME Illinois On the Move is published 8 times annually by Illinois Public Employees Council 31 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO. Send correspondence to: lcohen@afscmeillinois.org or: AFSCME, On the Move, 205 N. Michigan Ave., 21st Floor, Chicago, IL 60601

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**DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

**Abysmal state finances harm every AFSCME member**

*We have to march in lock step to push for new revenues*



BY HENRY BAYER

**EVERY MEMBER WHO'S BEEN HIT BY THIS BUDGET CALAMITY NEEDS TO CALL, WRITE, AND BE WILLING TO VISIT THEIR REPRESENTATIVE.**

Cover illustration by Jennifer M. Kohnke

**T**he fiscal crisis deepens. Everyone's affected in ways large and small.

A RETIREE WRITES TO LET THE UNION KNOW THAT HIS DENTIST NOW DEMANDS UP-FRONT PAYMENT from him because the state hasn't paid in months. A caseworker emails that she's owed more than \$1,000 for travel expenses and could sure use the money to purchase Christmas gifts for her kids.

The press reports that Vermilion County may shut down its public health department because its state funding has dried up. And the Associated Press uncovers a secret program where the Department of Corrections has been releasing inmates, many incarcerated for violent crimes, after only a few days in prison. Another impact of the budget fiasco.

The "good time" granted may be good for the inmates who didn't earn it, but it's trouble to communities when perpetrators return to the scene of their crimes.

Glenn Poshard, the president of Southern Illinois University, worries about having the money even to meet his payroll, and two other university presidents are considering canceling their entire spring semesters for lack of funds. So much for the value of higher education.

Despite the looming catastrophe, most state legislators are still in denial, blindly hoping that the fiscal storm will pass. NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER FROM REALITY.

This month Illinois' bond rating was lowered once again, sinking it to a depth exceeded only by the state of California, whose inability to raise taxes has forced it to issue IOUs to vendors and burden state employees with three unpaid furlough days each and every month.

Gov. Quinn's plan to borrow \$500 million is being held up by the comptroller, who claims that Illinois would be borrowing money just to pay off previous loans, not to pay the mountain of bills piling up.

The Land of Lincoln is without a Lincoln penny as lawmakers continue to enjoy the holiday season, and those with primary opposition prepare their February primary campaign. How long can this go on?

Only as long as bondholders are willing to lend money even as the risk increases. Only as long as vendors continue to provide goods and services while waiting months for payment. Some have already stopped: The company that supplies coal to the Jacksonville Developmental Center is demanding a \$300,000 payment before making its next delivery.

Past state budgets have been called deficient for leaving folks out in the cold. But no one meant it literally, until now! We've seen tough times, but nothing that approaches what we confront today.

There are plenty of politicians willing to make AFSCME members pay more for fewer benefits. They are perfectly comfortable cutting funding to universities and local governments, at the cost of layoffs, furloughs and public services. But they won't pay for these services in the only fair and equitable way – by raising taxes.

After a rigorous review, the union is endorsing fewer candidates than at any time in our history because, of those facing opposition in the primary, so few will stand up for public services and the workers who provide them.

A lot of AFSCME members who are disgusted with the whole political scene might think it's a good thing to only support a few candidates. It's not. It's tragic that there are such a small number willing to stand against furloughs, layoffs, and pay and benefit cuts.

That number has to grow quickly to avert the looming disaster. We can grow it by demonstrating on Feb. 2 that politicians can stand with us, be for a tax increase and still get elected.

I know well the problems AFSCME members are facing. I know about the problems of short-staffing in state agencies and late payments to universities and direct-care agencies. I know that you're waiting for expense reimbursements and are being dunned by your doctors for payment.

Every member who's been hit by this budget calamity needs to call, write, and be willing to visit your representative. They need to hear directly from you. They are the ones who get to vote on a tax increase. They are the ones whose responsibility is to fix this mess.

At the PEOPLE Conference on Dec. 12 we asked attendees to state why they felt we needed a tax increase, what harm had come to them and their families, and why we can't wait for a responsible budget.

Senate President John Cullerton, who has already produced 36 votes to pass a tax bill in the Senate, gave this reason: "Illinois can't wait for a responsible budget because it's our job." Well said, senator.

Now it's our job to remind our representatives why they are elected and what might put them out of work. Every AFSCME member knows what he has to do to keep his job. We need to educate legislators on what it will take to keep theirs.

# Tax increase only way to cope with staggering deficit

The call is getting louder for Illinois politicians to step up and pass a tax increase that will get the state out of its deepening budget crisis.

CORRECTIONAL AND HUMAN SERVICES FACILITIES FACE CLOSURE. PRIVATE-SECTOR NON-profit agencies that care for the state's most vulnerable citizens are on the edge of bankruptcy. Local governments, such as county health departments, are losing the state grants essential to their operations. Medical providers are refusing to provide care to people insured by the state, because they are being paid months after the services are dispensed. Thousands of state employees are threatened with layoffs. Crucial payments owed state pension systems are being skipped.

These cuts have done lit-

tle to stanch the red ink. In response, some 150 organizations, including AFSCME, have joined the Responsible Budget Coalition. They are demanding passage of HB 174 — a bill that would increase the income tax and expand the sales tax base, while doubling the property tax credit. Newspapers around Illinois are editorializing about the state's deadbeat ways, and the need to raise taxes as the only way forward.

"To simply pay its bills and maintain current service levels into next year, Illinois must find \$13 billion in new revenue," said Ralph Martire, director of the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, in an op-ed column run by the Springfield Journal-Register. "That's not an opinion or ideological viewpoint, that's math."

Those who argue that the state can cut its way out of this problem aren't doing the math. For example, the state's entire payroll for a year is about \$4 billion, so laying off everyone who works for the state — police, correctional



"To simply pay its bills and maintain current service levels into next year, Illinois must find \$13 billion in new revenue," said Ralph Martire, director of the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, a leading voice for reforming Illinois' tax system. Reform would help eliminate the structural deficit that has plagued the state for many years, causing an escalating deficit, shortchanging of employee pension systems and eroding state services. Martire spoke at Council 31's PEOPLE conference on December 12 in Springfield.

officers, revenue collectors, child welfare workers, park rangers, those who care for the disabled, and many more — wouldn't even get us half way there.

Martire argues that "because 86 percent of the budget goes to essentials like education, health and human services," no politician will come up with a realistic plan to cut their way out of the problem.

"In the end, I think we have to face up to the fact that Illinois has to have higher taxes," said University of Illinois economist Daniel McMillen, co-author of a new study from the university's Institute of Government and Public Affairs. "Budget cuts can't close a gap

this wide and worsening. It's just not possible with major expenses like pension and Medicaid obligations that you simply can't reduce."

The report says that the best solution is a two-pronged plan that raises the state income tax and expands sales-tax receipts through a new tax on services such as haircuts, plumbing repairs and health clubs — exactly what HB 174

would do.

Doing nothing isn't an option. "All told, the price tag for being a deadbeat state this year will be an estimated \$60 million that won't be spent on anything other than borrowing or penalties," said the Bloomington Pantagraph in an article about the high cost of delaying payments to vendors who are waiting months to get what the state owes them.

"If the state continues to fail to make payments to the university, SIU's budget for payroll will be more than \$7 million in the hole by Dec. 18," the Edwardsville campus student newspaper Web site reported. "The state of Illinois has not made a payment to the University since July 1. ... This comes on the heels of a projected 7 percent decrease in state appropriations to the SIU system."

It isn't just state and university employees whose jobs are on the line if lawmakers don't pass a tax increase. School districts, local governments and state-funded private-sector human-services agencies all are feeling the pinch.

That's why Council 31 is building a "Count Me In" drive to mobilize members from every corner of the state in an all-out grassroots lobbying campaign to call, write and visit legislators and get them on board to vote for raising new revenues.

# AFSCME prods Cook County to get moving on contract talks

Facing an AFSCME-initiated unfair-labor-practice charge that it is not bargaining in good faith, Cook County management may finally be showing signs that it is willing to move forward with contract negotiations.

THE COUNTY HAD MADE AN INITIAL WAGE OFFER TO AFSCME LOCALS IN MAY, BUT IT WAS CONTINGENT ON Board President Todd Stroger's ability to stop a rollback of last year's sales-tax increase. Now half the tax increase has been repealed and a Stroger veto was overridden. The loss will mean a \$200 million a year hit to the county budget, starting in July when the rollback takes affect.

"This was an irresponsible action by county commissioners, who were

thinking only about keeping their own jobs in the next election," said Council 31 Associate Director Mike Newman, who leads the county bargaining team. "It will result in service cuts, especially for health care, and the county's citizens at the bottom of the economic ladder will be the first to suffer."

Five commissioners took the responsible stand to uphold Stroger's veto: Murphy, Sims, Moreno, Beavers and Butler.

## Wages lag behind cost of living

WORKING ON A CONTRACT extension, with no wage increase for 18 months, county employees feel they have the right to plan for the future, with wages that keep up with the cost of living and health insurance that remains affordable.

At an early-December bargaining session with the 15 locals that bargain jointly for AFSCME's universal contract, which covers common issues like wages and benefits, management withdrew its contingency stipulation and left its wage offer on the table.

"It's a place to start," Newman said. "The county is offering too little in wages and asking for too much in cost shifting of health-care costs to employees. But we are hopeful that we can get things moving in the right direction. Our committee is

determined to protect the gains AFSCME members have made in improving their working conditions and standard of living over the past two decades."

## Labor board hits county foot-dragging

THE MANY MONTHS WHEN MANAGEMENT came to the table unprepared to discuss much of anything — economic terms or even contract language — led Council 31 to file an unfair labor practice charge. The state labor board investigated the charge, issued a complaint against the county, and will schedule a hearing on its merits. That in itself puts pressure on the county to get things moving, which union leaders believe may have contributed to the new attitude at the table.

The fact that the sales tax issue is settled for now also removes some uncertainty from

the bargaining, though its negative effect on the budget doesn't bode well for county employees or the services they provide.

Once the full impact of the repeal is felt, revenues will plummet. And the extra federal and state aid the county's health system is getting this year can't be counted on going forward.

The Health Systems Board is warning that repeal of the tax increase could result in further layoffs at the county's public hospitals and clinics.

At the same time, a federal judge is ordering greatly increased hiring at the jail. And the county's juvenile detention center continues to be under heavy legal scrutiny, requiring additional revenue.

"We don't intend to go backwards or back down," Newman said. "We're going to get the fair contract we deserve."

# As battle to save jobs escalates, grievance make a difference

*Enforcing state contract could lower layoff total*

**H**undreds of jobs now being done by outside contractors could be made available to state employees as a direct result of an arbitration decision handed down in November.

MANY MORE POSITIONS MAY BE GAINED INDIRECTLY AS THE RULINGS IN THIS CASE AND THREE OTHERS DECIDED IN THE PAST YEAR ARE APPLIED IN SIMILAR CASES — MOST NOTABLY TO THE HUNDREDS OF WORKERS IN STATE OFFICES WHO ARE BEING PAID THROUGH TEMP AGENCIES.

One of those cases has led to DHS Rehabilitation Services posting 187 bargaining unit jobs for professional counselors and clerical positions. The postings went up in mid-December, and state employees in AFSCME-represented titles now have the opportunity to fill positions that had been filled by employees of outside private companies.

With the Quinn administration planning to lay off as many as 2,600 state employees and only a preliminary injunction temporarily holding it back, the union's long fight to protect AFSCME members' work is looming larger.

The state has used three basic methods of getting bargaining-unit work done by outsiders:

- Personal service contracts, or PSCs, are with individuals who are hired directly by the state, supposedly as temps, and usually work in state offices or facilities, often right alongside state employees;
- PSCs through vendor contracts, where workers are hired by an outside firm but, like PSCs, work under state supervision; and
- Subcontracting, where an outside firm agrees to do a job or project (often off site), directs its own employees and uses its own resources to get the work done.

The state is limited by the union contract in how it can use any of these methods.

## Distinctions are crucial

BEFORE TURNING WORK OVER TO a true subcontractor, the state is obligated to notify Council 31 of its intent to do so and

## What to do if there are contractual employees at your worksite

**U**nion members who work for the state can help enforce the contract by supplying information to union representatives when they know about personal service or temporary agency contract employees at their work site. Write down as much of the following information as you can and give it to your local union representative.

- Where is the work being performed?
- How many workers are doing the work?
- Who is giving direction to the workers?
- What are they doing?
- Do we know who their employer is?
- How long has this work been performed by someone other than a bargaining unit member?

give the union an opportunity to propose alternatives.

The master contract between AFSCME and the state says: "The employer will avoid, insofar as is practicable, the subcontracting of work performed by employees" represented by the union. Ultimately, however, the state can proceed with subcontracting "because of greater efficiency or economy," if it follows the agreed-upon procedures.

AFSCME has been able to negotiate sharp limits on how the state can use PSCs and outside agencies that send in workers who function as PSCs. But the state often tries to hide its use of PSCs through vendors by falsely claiming that the arrangement is a true subcontract. The master contract and the Personal Service Contract memorandum provide that such PSC workers can only be hired under the following conditions:

- An emergency situation;
- Temporary or seasonal work, or when there is no eligible list of candidates, for a maximum of 6 months in any 12-month period;
- Time-limited projects that last no longer than one year, with a one-year extension possible, to meet certain state agency mandates;
- Jobs that require specialized professional or technical expertise that could not reasonably be provided by state employees.

## Grievance procedure is enforcement vehicle

EMPLOYING WORKERS NOT COVERED by these exceptions puts management in violation of the union's master contract with the state. If the state wants the work to continue to

be performed, the union can then compel the agency to have the work performed by AFSCME-represented employees, which may require the hiring of additional employees. But these provisions must be enforced.

That's where the grievance procedure comes in—and the diligence of individual union members in enforcing these provisions. The grievance that led to the arbitration decision referred to above was filed because a significant number of IT workers employed through IBM are basically involved in day-to-day state

operations. They do work that is routinely performed by AFSCME members, sometimes working side-by-side. They have state IDs and state e-mail addresses. Many have been in the same positions for several years.

The state argued that these are subcontractors. The union said they were working under vendor contracts that the state was using to get

around the PSC contract restrictions. The arbitrator agreed with the union.

Other arbitrators ruling on similar issues have said that the state may owe back wages to the union workers if temps are employed when union members are laid off.

## A basis for holding back layoffs

THE UNION'S ABILITY TO WIN injunctions against layoffs has been tied to the fact that the state shouldn't lay off anyone until it is in compliance with the contract in this regard because of the huge liability that could be incurred for violating the contract. The union argued that if the layoffs go forward and the state incurs large back-pay liabilities as a result, it won't be able to pay up, because of the current budget crisis.

"The state has been using these vendor contracts for a long time, even when it's more expensive than hiring state employees to do the work," said collective bargaining administrator Erin Gorman, who is taking the lead for Council 31 in enforcing the state contracting language. "Part of that has been

**We need our members to be our eyes and ears in this battle over jobs.**

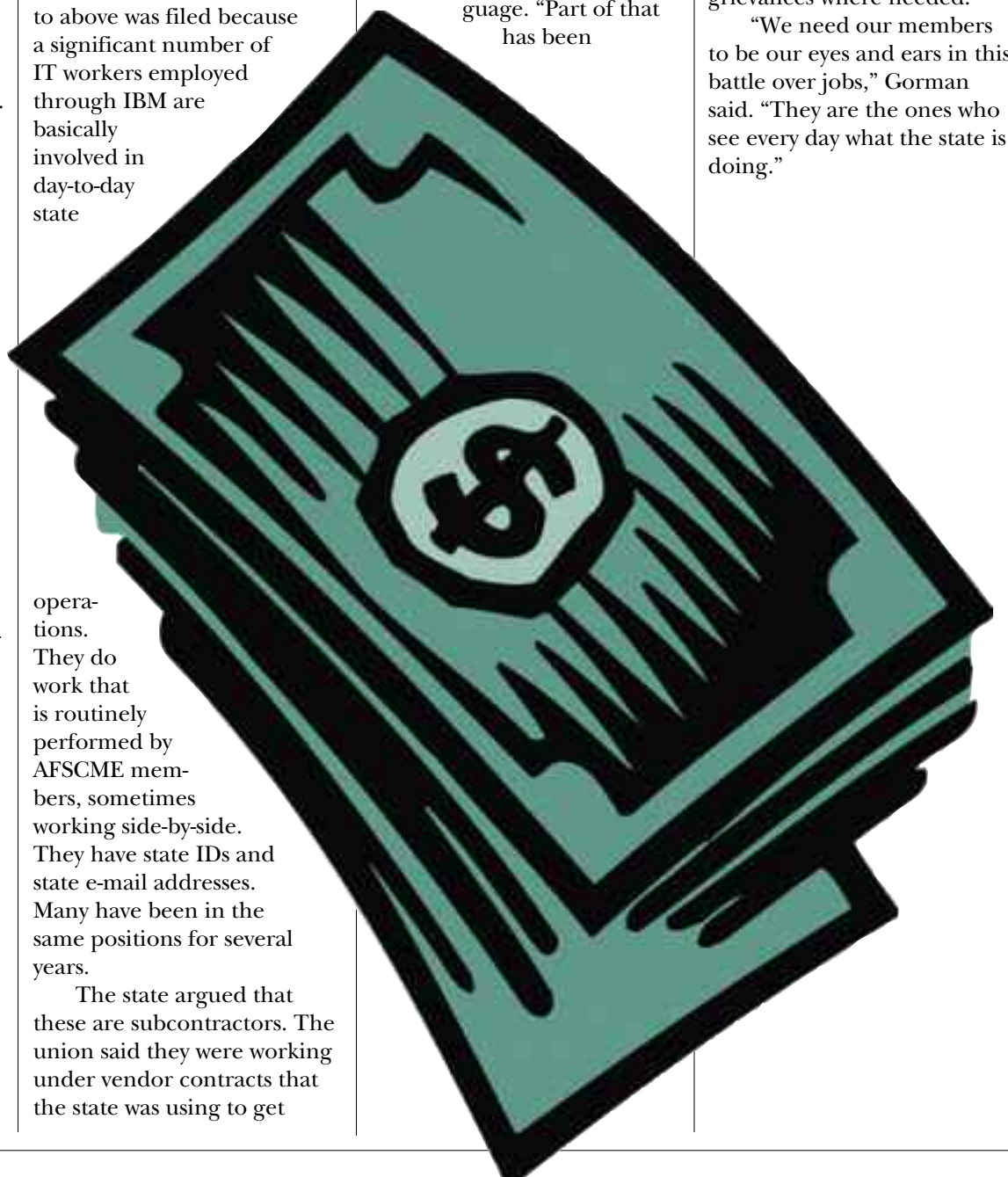
due to previous administrations wanting to cut the number of state employees for political reasons. And they also were squeezing campaign contributions out of contractors, so they wanted to have a lot of them."

## Members urged to get involved

UNDER THE CURRENT ADMINISTRATION, some agencies have been better," she said. "If we can show savings over subcontracting, they'll look at it."

But getting the right information is part of the union's challenge. Though the state is obligated to notify the union when it hires temps and subcontractors, that often doesn't happen. And very few agencies are reporting PSC-through-vendor contracts. So the union must find where these workers are and file grievances where needed.

"We need our members to be our eyes and ears in this battle over jobs," Gorman said. "They are the ones who see every day what the state is doing."



# DOC downsizing raises risks for public, staff and inmates

Though it seems to have no overall plan for how it will continue to protect the public, the Quinn administration has embarked on a major downsizing in the Department of Corrections.

WITH THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF A POTENTIAL SALE OF THOMSON CC TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, the plans to close the Kankakee Minimum Security Unit and the Jessie "Ma" Houston Adult Transition Center, the threat of another attempt to close Stateville Correctional Center, and the ongoing premature release of hundreds of inmates, the state is gambling with the safety of its citizens while it tries to fill an ocean-sized budget deficit with an eyedropper.

"State government has a responsibility to keep dangerous felons off our streets, and to maintain safety, security and order in our prisons," Council 31 Director Henry Bayer said.

"These moves raise serious questions about the ability of the Illinois Department of Corrections to achieve its mission."

## Not enough room

IF THE STATE DOES ATTEMPT TO close Stateville, with some 1,500 maximum-security inmates, and Thomson gets sold off, the prison system, already at 135 percent of capacity, would be even more dangerously overcrowded. And that overcrowding would have a ripple effect throughout the penal system, with the most acute problems arising in facilities that hold the most dangerous prisoners.

"A statement from the governor's office says the federal Bureau of Prisons is considering the Thomson purchase because federal prisons are overcrowded," Bayer said in a news release. "Apparently Gov. Quinn is not aware of the fact that his own prison system right here in Illinois is severely overcrowded — and turning Thomson over to the federal government will actually make that overcrowding even worse."

Supposedly Stateville's



maximum-security inmates would be moved to Lawrence CC, a medium-security prison which is already at capacity. In turn, Lawrence's current inmates would be moved to other medium-security prisons, which are themselves either at or above capacity.

## Comprehensive plan needed

"BEFORE ANY CONSIDERATION OF turning Thomson over to the federal government, the governor should present a comprehensive plan detailing both the projected number of state prison inmates over the next five years, along with the projected capacity and security level of each facility it operates," Bayer argued.

"The governor also has a responsibility to the staff hired to work at Thomson. These employees have been through eight years of fits and starts — being transferred to other prisons, recalled to Thomson and then transferred again — never sure whether they'll have a job or where they'll be living."

Before going ahead with any sale, Bayer said, "The governor should secure a commitment from the Obama administration that any employees working at Thomson now, as well as those hired to work there and transferred elsewhere, will be offered a position at the new federally operated facility.

## Hostage crisis one more example of understaffing dangers

An inmate with a record of violent behavior took a librarian at Pinckneyville Correctional Center hostage on Dec. 15 and was shot several hours later when Department of Corrections officials determined the situation was deteriorating and the librarian was in immediate danger.

The inmate had been convicted of aggravated criminal sexual assault with a weapon; aggravated kidnapping; armed, aggravated criminal sexual abuse; and unlawful restraint. Yet he was allowed into the library in the absence of any security staff.

"The local union had warned management about not having security staff in the library," Council 31 staff representative Steve Joiner said. "But the warnings fell on deaf ears. It was just the kind of situation the local has been talking about."

Staff at the facility are faced with the same twin crises felt at prisons across the state: understaffing and overcrowding.

Joiner said that the prison's single-celled disciplinary unit has been converted to double-celled general population use, which compounds the overcrowding while taking away from staff the ability to put an inmate in segregation — a tool that helps with control.

During the hostage taking, the union maintained a "safe area" just outside the facility's grounds. Council 31 staff and a Personal Support Program counselor were there to help.

The union made sure provisions were made to feed staff and tried to get inmates fed to avoid more turmoil. AFSCME also helped by getting food to staff who were not able to move about the facility, getting State Police to help ensure that prison staff who had been released to go home were not accosted by news media, supplying information for off-duty staff at the safe area, and providing support for the hostage's family.

And he should pledge that all Thomson employees who don't want to accept positions in the federal prison system will be offered positions at nearby IDOC facilities."

A hearing of the General Assembly's Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability, in accordance with the State Facilities Closure Act, was scheduled for

The governor has a responsibility to the staff hired to work at Thomson.

Dec. 22 to take testimony on the Thomson sale.

## Facilities that lower recidivism targeted for closure

THOUGH DOC AND THE QUINN administration say they want to focus on keeping the prison population down, their announced plans to shutter the women's minimum security unit in Kankakee and the Jessie "Ma" Houston Adult Transitional Facility could well achieve the opposite result.

"Both closures are clearly driven by budget problems, not sound policy rationales," Council 31 regional director Ken Potocki told legislators at a COGFA hearing on the two closures. "Right now we have facilities over capacity, understaffed and without sufficient counseling, education and other programming. The result is a high rate of recidivism."

Yet both facilities being closed have proven records of lowering recidivism — that is, the rate at which those being released return to prison for new crimes.

"When you eliminate ATC beds, which prepare inmates for their release and get them ready for community living, that will mean greater reentry problems, not improvements," Potocki said. "When you close a facility that houses women in a healing environment, where their family is free to visit frequently and where most are getting treatment for their addictions, you'll create rather than solve problems."

The union argued that the Kankakee facility should stay open and that the ATC should be relocated to another site, given the run-down condition of the current Dixon location.

"These are the kinds of investments the department has talked about making in inmate rehabilitation," Potocki said. "We want to see it in action."

# Local governments, nonprofit agencies, universities all taking hits from state's revenue shortfall

**A** FSCME members in Illinois provide public services, all of them at least partially dependent on state funding. And the state has the most crushing budget deficit it has faced in many decades.

NOT ONLY IS THE DIRECT FUNDING FROM THE STATE DRYING UP, BUT IN INDIRECT WAYS THE BURDEN IS STEADILY BEING SHIFTED TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS. COUNTY JAILS, FOR EXAMPLE, ARE FEELING THE PRESSURE AS STATE PRISONS SEEK TO DOWNSIZE AND THE number of slots dwindle for proper housing of the mentally ill and developmentally disabled.

But help could be on the way in the form of HB 174, a tax reform measure that is Council 31's No. 1 legislative priority in the coming General Assembly session.

"State and local governments across the nation are feeling the effects of this economic crisis," Council 31 Executive Henry Bayer said in his speech at the union's recent PEOPLE conference. "And Illinois is not immune. We have to focus our attention laser-like on the effort to pass meaningful tax reform. Billions of dollars are needed to keep the Illinois ship afloat. If we don't, the consequences will be catastrophic for our members and the devastation for those who need those services will be widespread."

## Towns, cities and villages battle falling revenues

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS all get state funding – through grants for specific programs and through the Local Government Distributive Fund, where 10 percent of net state income tax receipts are returned to local governments based on population.

The economic crisis has pushed personal and corporate incomes down, reducing the state's income-tax revenues, which in turn reduces local governments' take from the distributive fund.

Villages, towns and cities are already cutting back, with escalating layoffs, and requests for furlough days and pay freezes.

Right in the state capital, for example, the city of Springfield is laying off AFSCME members who provide critical services.

HB 174 would increase income tax rates, raising the amount the state collects and thereby raising the amount distributed to local governments. If it passes, local governments would get close to \$25 per resident in new funding in the first year, and about \$45 per resident in succeeding years.

That would bolster municipal government budgets and help keep AFSCME members on the job, doing the work citizens want and need.

In addition, cities with local sales taxes would benefit from the bill's provision that broadens the base, by making some personal services taxable.

## Universities face funding cuts, late payments

UNIVERSITIES HAVE had their state allocations drastically reduced. Layoffs have occurred at some state schools, though in relatively low numbers so far. But the situation is deteriorating.

At Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, the state was five months behind

by November in providing appropriated funds, and management was warning that it may not be able to meet payroll in December.

At the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, "Management keeps bringing furloughs up," Local 3700 President Dorinda Miller said. "And if we don't agree to furloughs, they are threatening layoffs."

She said management is considering shutting down the university for several days during the spring break – in effect laying everyone off for those days.

In the first week of December, "The U. of I. has billed the state for about \$400 million and received just \$20 million in payments," according to the News-Gazette in Champaign.

Other state universities are facing the same problems, and resistance to tuition increases during the recession complicates the budget picture. Without HB 174, higher education could face crippling cutbacks.

## Community non-profits struggling to stay afloat

SEVERAL THOUSAND AFSCME members work at community agencies that provide developmental disability services. These non-profit organizations depend on the state for nearly all of their funding.

In addition to not getting a raise in the last two state budgets, many of these agencies have been pushed to the brink of bankruptcy by the state's huge lag in reimbursing them for services provided. As the state gets farther behind, the non-profits are being forced to increase borrowing of funds just to meet payroll and pay their bills. That means interest costs are eating away money they need for operations.

And the amount they need for operations is growing faster than the state's appropriations. In the last five years Illinois' minimum wage has gone up 55 percent, for example. But the state's reimbursement rates to providers of services for the developmentally disabled have only gone up 9.5 percent. These providers are feeling the squeeze in every direction.

"Providing direct support is physically and emotionally demanding, while the pay is often lower than much easier jobs," Council 31 political action director Jason Kay said. "This results in a turnover rate of 43 percent. And the agencies struggle to find people to fill those vacancies. It erodes quality of care."



# UMP students feeling heat as state lags on tuition payments

**T**he state's deadbeat ways are rippling out in all directions, with impacts few could have predicted – the latest being a problem for state employees who receive tuition payment through the union-negotiated Upward Mobility Program. Because the state is months behind in paying what it owes to almost everyone, an entire semester or quarter can go by, and the tuition payment won't yet be made. Then the next term comes up, and the student isn't even paid up for the previous one.

UMP counselors recommend state colleges and universities and community colleges – for those who need college credits to qualify for their targeted promotions. But some choose private schools because of course availability or geographical proximity. The problem is worse there.

At some private schools, where the state's portion of a student's tuition for the previous term remains unpaid, registration officials are asking students to put the amount on their credit card as a backup until the state pays what it owes. A few students have been threatened with being turned over to a collection agency.

Continued on facing page



# Public employee pension threat grows

*Panels take aim at city of Chicago and state-employee benefit levels*

**L**ed by The Civic Federation, an organization that speaks for Chicago's wealthiest and most powerful business interests, employer representatives on a state task force are calling for cuts in benefits for both current and future state employees.

THE NATION'S ECONOMIC CRISIS, THE STATE'S EVER-GROWING STRUCTURAL BUDGET DEFICIT and the business community's relentless campaign to end retirement security for everyone but the very wealthy have converged to spawn a perfect storm that is boosting its chances for success. The storm is spreading ill toward public employee pensions across Illinois' economic landscape.

With little chance it will blow over anytime soon, AFSCME members are facing a new round of assaults on their pensions. And the influential Chicago Tribune, which caters to the state's most powerful corporate bosses, is leading the media charge.

Politicians of every stripe seem only too willing to bend to the pressure. Witness Mayor Daley's Commission to Strengthen Chicago's Pension Funds and the General Assembly's Pension Modernization Task Force. Both were designed with benefit cuts in mind – for future employees at the very least.

While AFSCME was represented on both, and has so far been able to head off the most

burdensome proposals, the battle of pension funding and benefits is not going away.

## City of Chicago faces massive debt

CHICAGO'S COMMISSION IS expected to issue a report soon. Some business representatives there propose a conversion from the current defined-benefit plans to 401(k)s. Doing so decreases benefits, even as it transfers investment risks from employers onto the backs of individual employees, putting future retirees at the mercy of the markets. The recent collapse has shown how devastating this can be, with millions of workers compelled to defer their retirement dates. And since city employees are not covered by Social Security, which does provide a defined benefit, the risk to them is compounded.

Because the city's pension system is so heavily underfunded, there have also been calls to cut benefits for current employees and substantially increase employee contributions, and create a

second tier of lower benefits for new hires. The Municipal Fund, in which AFSCME-represented city workers participate, is only at a scary 45 percent of full funding. To be considered operationally sound, pension systems should have a funding ratio of at least 90 percent, or a plausible, multi-year plan to get there.

The report may or may not recommend a specific course of action, instead laying out possible options, any of which will require a massive infusion of money to make up for the huge unfunded liability.

"Ultimately, the debate will boil down to developing a revenue stream, arguing about how much should be the responsibility of the city itself versus its employees, and whether benefits should be cut," said Council 31 Director Henry Bayer, who serves on the commission. "The reality is that a big boost in revenue will be required because of the unfunded liability, not because of benefit levels."

## New revenues, not a second tier

THE STATE TASK FORCE COULD not reach a consensus on recommendations for how to get out of the current deficit. Business interests and some state legislators wanted to include proposals on creating a second tier that lowers benefits and requires more years to earn a full pension. Union representatives and others on

the task force were able to block this recommendation, but could not get one that called for raising revenues as the only real solution.

Consequently the report produced by the task force did not receive a majority vote, but it nonetheless reiterated some of the grim facts.

Current state law requires that the state's pension systems be 90 percent funded by 2045, but the combined funding level for the five systems is now less than 50 percent. Unfunded liabilities (money that the systems owe to current and future retirees) are currently at \$75.4 billion, and are expected to get as high as \$138.9 billion before starting to come down – that is if the state keeps up annual contributions at the level required by law, something that hasn't been done for at least the past decade. What's more, creating a second tier for new hires would not decrease the unfunded liabilities, since those are created by what's owed to current employees.

These numbers threaten to overwhelm a state budget that is already in crisis. On that point nearly everyone agrees. The dispute lies in what actions should be taken to avert such a bankruptcy.

## State employees' benefits are reasonable

EMPLOYER REPRESENTATIVES ON the state task force argue that the Illinois Constitution's

Pension Protection Clause, which says benefits "shall not be diminished or impaired," only applies to benefits already earned. Thus, they argue, benefits could be cut not just for future public employees, but for current employees on all benefits earned after the reduction.

"We believe this is a misinterpretation of the constitution's language," said Council 31 benefits director Hank Scheff, who served on the state task force. "But there are legal opinions on both sides of the question. It's very clear that corporate interests in this state want to take away pension benefits from all public employees, present and future. If we want to protect those benefits, we'll have a fight on our hands."

AFSCME and other public-employee unions argue that the state should pay what it owes, and pay it quickly. That means raising revenues, including a substantial tax increase. The longer state government waits, the higher the interest costs and the deeper the debt.

The union also points out that state and university employees get average benefits, compared to 85 public-employee retirement systems nationwide and that the cost to taxpayers of state-funded pension benefits is less than both the average private-sector employer and less than neighboring states.

### Continued from facing page

At state universities or community colleges, most of which have a longstanding relationship with UMP, as long as participants have the proper paperwork filed, there hasn't been any problem.

That paperwork includes a Participation Verification Agreement, essentially a voucher, which guarantees state payment.

"You must have a PVA from your counselor in order to attend classes and have UMP pay for the classes," Council 31's UMP coordinator Chris Goodman said. "This PVA must be signed and given to the school in order for the school to bill UMP for the classes listed on it. You should request one 30 days before the first day of class. Also a copy of your grades must be sent to UMP after each term.

Without these grades UMP will not pay for additional classes."

AFSCME created the highly regarded Upward Mobility Program in the 1989 master-contract negotiations. Since then thousands of state employees who participated have gained promotions and earned college degrees. In all there have been more than 5,336 promotions through UMP, with 4,000 employees currently enrolled.

The program designates target titles, agreed upon in bargaining between the union and the state. Then program administrators establish what an employee must do to become eligible for a promotion to that title. The AFSCME contract removes barriers between departments and bargaining units for UMP participants, giving them a wider range of opportunities.

Employees qualify for certificate titles simply by passing a test. Credential titles require specific educational programs. There are also dual titles, requiring either a test or a degree. Once an employee qualifies, he or she goes on an eligibility list. When a position opens up, it goes to the senior qualified employee on that list who has indicated a preference for a vacancy in that county, in accordance with Article XV, section 4, of the master contract.

"If state employees have any questions regarding UMP, they are welcome to give me a call," Goodman said. His number is 217-788-2800, ext. 3348.

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# 'Laser-like' focus on new revenues at PEOPLE conference

*Endorsements, legislative agenda adopted with HB 174 in mind*

The shopworn analogy about an elephant in the room taking up all the space and all the air fit perfectly as AFSCME local union presidents and PEOPLE committees chairs from around the state met Dec. 12 in Springfield to consider endorsements in the upcoming Feb. 2 primary election and adopt the union's legislative agenda.

THE ELEPHANT, OF COURSE, IS THE \$13 BILLION BUDGET DEFICIT THE STATE MUST GET out from under if it is to fulfill its duty to promote the common good and ensure the safety of its citizens.

A tax increase is the only solution that doesn't involve massive cuts in vital state services. But getting an adequate revenue-raising measure through the legislature, especially the state House of Representatives, is proving to be even harder than herding elephants.

"The Republicans are not providing any votes," Council 31 Director Henry Bayer said in his address to the confer-

ence. "And too many Democrats are unwilling to support the kind of meaningful tax reform that will generate the billions of dollars needed to keep the Illinois ship afloat."

Bayer said the union needs to maintain "laser-like focus" on the tax-reform issue. The PEOPLE conference was a good example, with no one getting an endorsement for statewide office or the state legislature who isn't firmly on record in support of a tax increase, and with passage of tax reform the No. 1 priority on the union's legislative agenda.

To drive home the message, the two outside speakers

at the conference stayed right on point.

"Illinois must raise revenue to balance its budget," says Ralph Martire, director of the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, a relentless advocate for tax reform.

In his speech at the conference, Martire refuted the idea that states can't raise taxes during a recession.

"If the state were to close its budget deficit by cutting spending, it could cause the state's economy to lose 125,875 jobs," he says, "thereby worsening the recession and the state's unemployment rate. If state government desires to create jobs and counter the deepening recession, its best option for eliminating the deficit is to raise taxes."

Senate President John Cullerton was the other speaker at the conference. He has led Senate Democrats beyond the anti-tax hysteria, passing HB 174 with no Republican votes. HB 174 is AFSCME's preferred revenue-raising measure because it is fair, and raises more revenues than any



Senate President John Cullerton

other plan under consideration.

"I did negotiate and sponsor the only true balanced budget solution in Illinois," he said. "It is a tax increase because Illinois is a dead-beat state and we need the money!"

Cullerton argued that, "We need a realistic, responsible approach to funding government. And politicians need to stop attacking public professionals and criticizing them for the difficult jobs they do. I think we're severely short staffed. I think we need

MORE state workers, MORE public professionals. I don't think it's responsible to short-staff agencies that are charged with keeping our drinking water safe. It's irresponsible to ask families to send their fathers and mothers to their job at the prison to do the work of two or three people. Lawmakers have an obligation to make government work for the public. I don't want inefficiency. I don't want waste, fraud and abuse. Smart budgeting means getting serious about the obligations we have."

## Legislative agenda starts with raising new revenues

The following items comprise Council 31's legislative priorities, adopted at the Dec. 12 PEOPLE conference in Springfield by the delegates in attendance — local union presidents and PEOPLE committee chairs.

### Address revenue shortfalls in state and local governments

ILLINOIS STATE GOVERNMENT has a structural deficit that creates chronic budget shortfalls. The state's ongoing fiscal problems have a negative fiscal impact on local governments, state-funded private agencies and public universities, all of which rely on state funding.

#### Council 31 will:

- Make its top priority enactment of legislation that can raise desperately needed state revenues through a compre-

hensive reform plan that would expand the sales tax base, increase the income tax, and expand local property tax credits;

- Support legislation that would expand the taxing authority of local governments;
- Support measures that would make the Illinois tax system more progressive, including the enactment of a constitutional amendment that would make it possible to ensure that the wealthy pay their fair share of taxes; and
- Support efforts to close corporate tax loopholes.

### Protect public employee pensions and retiree health care benefits

WHETHER AFSCME MEMBERS work for (or are retired from) the state, a local government or a public university, their pensions are set and regulated by the General Assembly.

#### Council 31 will:

- Oppose all legislation that seeks to shift Illinois public employee retirement plans from defined-benefit plans to defined-contribution plans;
- Vigorously oppose efforts to reduce or eliminate health-care coverage for retirees;
- Continue to press for full funding of Illinois pension obligations; and
- Oppose any effort to create a two-tier pension system by reducing benefits for newly hired employees.

### Provide adequate staffing levels for state agencies

#### Council 31 will:

- Oppose all efforts to further reduce headcount in any state agency; and
- Expand its grassroots mobilization and public outreach campaign to build support among legislators of both parties for adding staff in the FY 11 budget for those agencies in which understaffing most severely impacts working conditions and service delivery.

### Oppose facility or site closures or downsizing

#### Council 31 will oppose any attempts to:

- Close or downsize state facilities, such as prisons or mental health/developmental centers; and
- Weaken or repeal the State

Facilities Closure Act.

### Pass a COLA for direct-care workers in community agencies

Council 31 will join with other concerned organizations to lobby for sufficient funding to avert cutbacks in community disability agencies and to provide for an increase in pay for frontline workers.

### Adequate funding for state universities

STATE UNIVERSITIES ARE ANTICIPATING that the state's current fiscal woes will require severe budget cutbacks, which could lead to layoffs and furlough days, and make contract negotiations more difficult. Council 31 will continue to work in coalition with other unions,

Continued on the facing page

# Support for revenues key test in February primary endorsements

A democratic process that starts in 11 regions around the state and ends at the Council 31 PEOPLE conference has resulted in a list of candidates union members are urged to consider when they enter the polling places for the Feb. 2 primary election.

LOCAL UNION PRESIDENTS AND PEOPLE CHAIRS ATTEND THE REGIONAL AND STATEWIDE MEETINGS to vote on which candidates the union will support.

"We aren't trying to tell our members how to vote when we endorse candidates," Council 31 political action director Jason Kay said. "We do it to give them the information they need to be able to make the best choices."



Local union delegates took the time at regional PEOPLE meetings to review the records and candidate questionnaires for state legislative and county offices. In some cases candidates were invited to question and answer sessions at the meetings.

"We feel that when we pool our knowledge and make decisions as a group, we do better. And if we vote together, we build our unity and we build power for our union."

Sticking to the theme of raising new revenues to balance

the state budget, those who got the nod either voted for a tax increase or, if they are not incumbents, have committed to do so.

The union also decided not to endorse a candidate in either party for governor. On the

Republican side, every candidate opposes new revenue measures and supports pension benefit cuts. On the Democratic side, neither Gov. Pat Quinn nor his main challenger, Dan Hynes, drew strong support from the delegates. They were

turned off by Quinn's proposal to cut pensions and his efforts to layoff state employees. And Hynes, though he has stood up for protecting pension benefits, is not supporting the union's plan to act swiftly on raising new revenues.

Continued from the facing page education advocates and student organizations to ensure adequate funding for our state universities.

### Fight privatization of public services and assets

Council 31 will:

- Oppose all legislation that would open the door to privatizing any service currently provided by public employees; and
- Support legislation to make state employees those who work for contractors such as correctional medical vendors.

### Improve health care quality and access

Council 31 will continue to press for legislation requiring nurse staffing ratios in Illinois hospitals and to provide for nurse input into staffing plans.

### Bring greater equity to the Unemployment Insurance program

Council 31 will continue its efforts to enact legislation that would allow school district and university employees to qualify for unemployment benefits when they are laid off over the summer months.

## AFSCME recommendations in 2010 Illinois Primaries



Alexi Giannoulias

### U.S. Senate

Alexi Giannoulias (D)

### Congressional Districts

- 1st Bobby Rush (D)
- 3rd Dan Lipinski (D)
- 7th Danny Davis (D)
- 10th Julie Hamos (D)



David Miller

### Comptroller

David Miller (D)  
Judy Baar Topinka (R)



Robin Kelly

### Treasurer

Robin Kelly (D)



Judy Baar Topinka



James Epstein

### Judicial

First Judicial District/  
McNulty Vacancy  
James Epstein (D)

### State Senate

- 1st Tony Muñoz (D)
- 7th Heather Steans (D)

### State House of Representatives

- 2nd Edward Acevedo (D)
- 4th Cynthia Soto (D)
- 5th Ken Dunkin (D)
- 18th Patrick Keenan-Devlin (D)
- 23rd Daniel Burke (D)
- 29th Thaddeus Jones (D)
- 32nd Andre Thapedi (D)
- 60th Eddie Washington (D)
- 71st Jerry Lack (D)
- 114th Eddie Lee Jackson (D)

### Rock Island County

County Clerk – Larry Toppert  
15th District County Board –  
James Davies, Nick Camlin

### Kane County

#### Board Districts

- 1st Myrna Molina
- 3rd Juan Reyna
- 7th Lorena Cundari

### Cook County

Assessor  
Joe Berrios

#### Commissioner Districts

- 3rd Jerry Butler
- 4th Elgie Sims
- 5th Deborah Sims
- 6th Joan Murphy
- 7th Jesus Garcia

Note: AFSCME did not make any endorsements in uncontested primaries.

# Communities suffer as state budget woes trickle down

*Madison County loses state grant*

The entire criminal justice system in Madison County has been weakened as probation officers struggle to keep up with unmanageable caseloads that doubled when state grants were cut.

THOUGH SOME ARE NOW BACK TO WORK, 34 OF THE COUNTY'S 55 OFFICERS WERE LAID OFF when the state's Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts cut funding to Madison County's probation budget by 58 percent.

Eleven officers were called back after the governor, under pressure from AFSCME and from Madison County elected officials, used some of the discretionary funding given him by the General Assembly to restore partial funding.

Still, probation officers say, because caseloads are so heavy, their jobs have been reduced to pushing paper, leaving the social work part of the work undone and offenders, essentially unsupervised, facing few consequences for violating the terms of their probation.

## 'Just a cattle call'

"DRUG TESTING IS NOT GETTING done," said Bill Van Buskirk. "Home visits are not getting done, so we aren't verifying that the address the offenders give us is really where they are living. They did away with the mental health court, where there was a professional therapist."

The school-based program where an officer assigned to alternative schools had daily contact with troubled youths is completely gone, he said.

Offenders get assigned to community service to shorten or eliminate jail time. But no one has time to keep up reports, putting the convict in jeopardy of serving jail time, even though the community service has been done.

"We used to be able to assign community service as a disciplinary measure," said Dave Ezell, a probation officer who was laid off and has now been called back to the juvenile detention home, the bot-

tom job on the seniority ladder. Now they've lost that tool. "Everything we've been taught in training, the officers don't have time to do. If you have a half hour to talk to someone, you can find out a lot. You can do motivational training, try to get them to think before they act."

And maybe help the offender avoid more trouble. But now there's only a few minutes with each offender, Ezell said: "It's just a cattle call."

High-risk offenders, like those convicted of sex crimes, are supposed to get random visits to their homes twice a month and are also supposed to get random curfew checks.

"It's not being done," Van Buskirk said. "It was hard enough with 80 cases. Now we have 150."

## State government shifts the burden

THERE USED TO BE A PROBATION officer doing pre-trial reports, which help a judge determine whether an accused person should go free until his or her trial, or be forced to wait in jail. That job is gone too, leaving judges with little option but to have more of the accused incarcerated – at increased cost to taxpayers.

Local 799, which represents the probation officers, points out that a properly supervised offender on probation will cost the taxpayers \$4,000 per year to supervise versus \$40,000 per offender in prison. It's another example of how, step by painful step, local governments are bearing the costs of the state's budget deficit.

Aware of the connection, Local 799 has taken to the streets on behalf of AFSCME's campaign for state tax reform. On Labor Day the local worked the parade crowd, gathering 5,000 signatures on a petition directed at legislators, urging them to pass HB 174 or another similar measure.

## Local works to soften layoff blow

BESIDES THE COST TO THE COMMUNITY, individual workers who have been laid off are paying heavily for the state's irresponsible budget choices. With jobs hard to find, laid-off workers struggle to make ends meet. Car and mortgage payments, utility bills and health insurance premiums weigh



Bill Van Buskirk



Dave Ezell

down most families even with two or more paychecks.

"Once the probation cuts were in the pipeline, there wasn't a lot we could do to stop them," said Gary Groeteka, the local union

president. "So we worked with the county to minimize the pain."

First, the local worked out an agreement providing for members to take voluntary layoffs, for a minimum of four

months. That has helped four less-senior officers stay on the job longer, giving them time to plan ahead a little and a few extra months where they don't have to use up their unemployment benefits.

Second, the union was able to help families pay for their health insurance. Employers are required to allow laid-off employees to remain in their group-health plans if the employee pays the full premium. The federal recovery bill passed this year to help get the economy going again increases unemployment benefits by paying for 65 percent of these "COBRA" costs.

The union was able to get most of the rest of that paid by tapping into the Dependent Health Care Fund. The fund was created after AFSCME had waged a month-long strike several years ago, mostly over the health-care issue.

Members agreed to take a one-year wage freeze, and the county agreed to put the 3 percent that would have gone to a raise into the fund each year. Over the years, the fund has covered the costs it was designed to meet, and built up something of a surplus. The local and the county agreed to tap that surplus to help laid off workers meet their COBRA payments.

"They're getting \$300 a month in these supplementary unemployment benefits," Groeteka said. "It was something we could do, and it helps a little."

# Labor leader stresses aid to states in jobs plan

AFL-CIO President Rich Trumka made it clear in the run up to President Barack Obama's early-December job summit that help is urgently needed for state and local governments to maintain vital public services and prevent layoffs of public employees. "Without additional funding, our public safety, our health needs and our children's educations will suffer," Trumka said. "The right thing and the

smart thing is to take action to save services, save jobs and stop the hemorrhaging from choking off economic recovery."

At the White House meeting, Trumka continued to push the AFL-CIO's five-point plan to aid the jobless and put America back to work:

- Extend the lifeline for unemployed workers. Unless Congress acts, supplemental unemployment benefits, additional food assistance and expansion of COBRA health-care benefits

were set to expire at the end of 2009. Extending them for another 12 months will help keep working families from bankruptcy, home foreclosure and loss of health care. It will also boost personal spending and create jobs throughout the economy.

- Rebuild America's schools, roads and energy systems. America still has at least \$3 trillion in unmet infrastructure needs. Fixing the nation's broken-down school buildings and

Continued on the facing page

# Union fights to safeguard Howe residents

*Poor transition planning leaves many in dire straits*

**I**n the rush to close Howe Developmental Center, the Department of Human Services is leaving too many residents to face inadequate care in group homes ill-equipped to serve their needs, leading to incarceration, psychiatric hospitalizations, inappropriate nursing home placements, and even death.

ACCOUNTS OF THE FATE OF THOSE WHO HAVE LEFT HOWE AS THE STATE IMPLEMENTS ITS CLOSURE plan show that there are few options available for those with the most severe disabilities.

"Our intent today is not to debate the closure of Howe," Council 31 public policy director Anne Irving told state legislators at a House Disability Services committee hearing. "It is to ensure that everything possible is being done to protect the well-being of Howe's residents past and future as IDHS forces them to move from their home at Howe."

Irving and a delegation of Howe employees told the stories of residents who have been pushed out of Howe, not on the basis of finding the "most integrated setting in which they can be reasonably accommodated," as the law requires, but because the state is seeking to shut down their home. The legislators present at the hearing included Sens. Maggie Crotty and Toi Hutchison, and Reps. Al Riley, Marlow Colvin and Will Davis.

Psychologist Donna Smith told the story of Sam, whose

father lives in Central Illinois. Sam went to a group home in Litchfield, where behavioral problems landed him briefly in jail. Then he moved to a home in Vandalia. He ended up in jail three times.

"One of the biggest threats to individuals with developmental disabilities who have significant behavior issues when they leave state centers is incarceration," Smith told the committee. "Behavior issues are a lot more difficult to handle well in a small home with limited staff, and the police may be called by community agency staff or by neighbors."

## Some 'heart-wrenching' stories

SHE TALKED ABOUT GEORGE, WHO "was doing well" when he left Howe but is now in a psychiatric hospital where he "is being overmedicated."

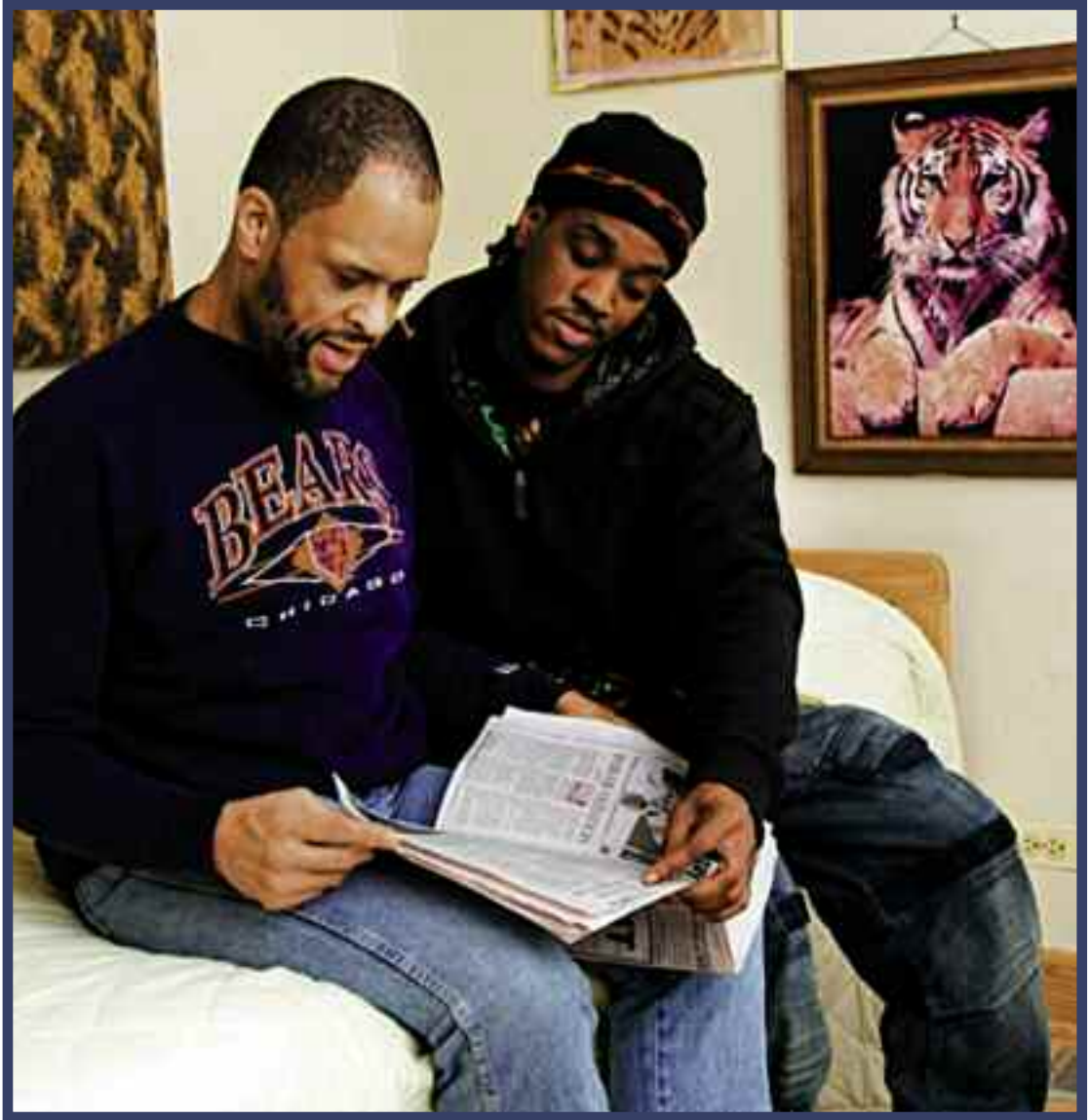
Dorothea Dillard, a Habilitation Service Coordinator, told the story of Susan, who was placed in a group home and then returned to Howe with "pneumonia and scratches on her neck. Howe staff had

competitive wages and should target distressed communities.

- Put TARP funds to work for Main Street. The bank bailout helped Wall Street, not Main Street. The government should put some of the billions of dollars in leftover Troubled Asset Relief Program funds to work creating jobs by enabling community banks to lend money to small- and medium-size businesses. If small businesses can get credit, they will create jobs.

America's jobs situation would be even more dire without the economic stimulus program President Obama and Congress enacted, which has saved or created 1 million jobs.

"The depth of this crisis demands that we do more," Trumka said, "and that we do it now, before more people lose their jobs, their homes, their health care and their hope."



explained that this non-verbal individual who was prone to pneumonia would signal its onset by scratching her neck, but apparently the home had not noted this sign."

And she talked about Carol, who was discharged from Howe in August 2008. Within a week she was moved into three separate group homes, something Dillard called "heartless-Carol's story doesn't have a happy ending, Dillard said: "Staff on her former unit have heard Carol is now blind. They do not know the cause, but know that Carol had no eye problems when she was at Howe."

Habilitation Program Coordinator Steve Stephens called what is happening to Howe families "heart-wrenching."

"I have individuals on my unit whose family members are calling me, crying, asking me what to do," he said. "They have been offered a spot in another state center, but they are worried it's too far. There are no offers of overnight visits to see how it works for their loved ones. The families are being told it's the last spot left and they have to take it now or lose it. Or they are offered a community placement and told if they don't take it their loved one might end up in a state center much farther away. The

department is using the hard sell on families, they are twisting people's arms to make quick decisions, and this isn't right."

Social worker Sandra Calhoun told the committee that "the pace at which this is moving is frightening. Our families and their loved ones deserve to make planful and thoughtful choices. A poorly planned and executed transition will result in poor outcomes for our individuals."

## Staff taken out of placement process

HOWE STAFF WHO ROUTINELY plan for community placements of residents have now "been taken out of the process," she said. "But we are the ones who get the heartbreaking calls from families struggling with a decision they don't want to make."

Since 2007, when DHS began speeding up the transition of Howe residents to other placements, seven of those who left have died. "The transition process is very different now, in many ways," social worker Shirley Hubert Thompson said. "The more complicated logistics of the new transition planning, and the focus on speed, can lead to mistakes."

She told the story of a Howe resident in his 40s, who "was a friendly, people-oriented person."

He was placed in a group home. But he had existing medical problems that required surgery and was sent to a nursing home to recover. There he contracted pneumonia and passed away.

In light of this testimony, Irving asked the committee to advocate for:

- Requiring DHS to thoroughly investigate the conditions under which each of the residents described in the day's testimony is living and report back to this committee regarding their health and safety.

- Requiring DHS to be more open with the Closure Committee, on which Irving sits, in providing specific redacted information about outcomes for each resident who is transitioned out of Howe.

- Pushing for improvements in the transition process, including more person-based post-discharge monitoring and more state center options to allow greater choices for families.
- Extending the closure date if it takes more time to do a good transition than the five months that are left.

"This should be about good outcomes for individuals," Irving said, "not a time clock."

*The names of the residents in this story have been changed to protect confidentiality.*

**Continued from the facing page** investing in transportation, green technology and energy efficiency will put people back to work.

- Increase aid to state and local governments to maintain vital services. State and local governments and school districts have a \$178 billion budget shortfall in fiscal 2010 alone — while the recession creates greater need for their services. States and communities must get help to maintain critical frontline services, prevent massive job cuts and avoid deep damage to education just when children need it most.

- Fund jobs that build communities. People should be put to work restoring the environment, providing child care and tutoring, cleaning up abandoned houses and more. These are not replacements for existing public jobs. They must pay

# SHORT REPORTS

## AFSCME members running for judicial seats

THOUGH AFSCME IS NOT MAKING endorsements for judges in circuit court races, a number of AFSCME members are running for those judicial positions. As a courtesy to those members, we provide a list below.

The following judicial candidates work in the Cook County Public Defender's office and are members of Local 3315:

- **Mark Levitt** – is running for the 4th Subcircuit or the 19th Judicial Circuit, in Lake County.
- **Daniel J. Gallagher** is running for the countywide vacancy of Pearce McCarthy in the Cook County Circuit Court.
- **Melanie Rose Nuby** is running for the countywide **James O'Malley** vacancy.
- **Ann Finley Collins** and **Pamela M. Leeming** are running for the 11th Subcircuit.
- Steven Bernstein** works at the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority and is a member of Local 2258. He is running for the 9th Subcircuit in Cook County.

## Chicago budget leaves mental health clinics understaffed

AFSCME AND ITS ALLIES IN THE community and on the Chicago City Council fell short in their efforts to restore laid-off staff at the city's mental health clinics.

The clinics have had to cut the level of services since early last year when the layoffs took place. Former Public Health Commissioner Terry Mason tried to close several of the clinics down, but AFSCME, mental health advocates and community organizations fought back and blocked the closures.

Mason has now been replaced, and clinic advocates hope the new commissioner, Dr. Bechara Choucair, will be more responsive. If he is, he'll have to be willing to challenge the culture of the Daley administration.

"Chicago is the nation's leader in municipal privatization efforts," said Wall Street Journal columnist Thomas Frank. "It may not fit the myth, but that's the real Chicago way. Sell off public property without public scrutiny. Prohibit public input on an essential public service. Rationalize the whole thing, as Mr. Daley's administration has done, by insisting that government can't run such things as well as the private sector can."

The Skyway, the parking meters, downtown parking garages, Midway airport and now, perhaps, the water works?

## Daley flirts with water privatization

EVEN AFTER PRIVATIZATION OF Chicago's parking meters produced widespread citizen outrage, Mayor Richard Daley is

said to be looking at another sell-off of city operations.

Daley's response to questions about possible water system privatization has been, "Everything is on the table."

"There's no doubt who would be filling their bellies if this scheme goes through," Council 31 Associate Director Claudia Roberson said, "business interests out to make a profit without regard for the public welfare."

The New York Times recently revealed that the company that took over privatization of the city's parking operations is already raking in a handsome profit from the huge fee increases. And Chicago's citizens are paying the price. Had the city kept control of the meters and raised prices, the money flowing into the firm's coffers would be available now and in the future to fund vital city services.

Privatization of water systems has created havoc in many cities where it's been tried. Atlanta, Georgia, and Fort Wayne, Indiana, are currently trying to wrest control of their systems back from privatizers who've made a mess of the operations.

Chicago residents would likely find their water bills soaring, while assurances of water purity would be weakened.

AFSCME is not alone in its strong opposition to this latest privatization scheme. Aldermen and community organizations are already speaking out against any attempt to turn water operations over to a private company.

## U.S. lags in legal mandates for paid leaves

"OF THE WORLD'S 15 MOST competitive nations, 14 mandate paid sick leave, 13 guarantee paid maternal leave and 12 provide paid paternal leave by law," according to Reuters news service, reporting on a recently released study from Harvard and McGill universities. "Eleven provide paid leave to care for children's health and eight provide paid leave for adult family care."

The United States, on the other hand, legally guarantees none of these policies to workers. The findings are published in a new book, "Raising the Global Floor: Dismantling the Myth that We Can't Afford Good Working Conditions for Everyone."

The issue of paid employee leave in the United States

has heated up. Paid leave would allow sick workers to stay home without financial hardship and help prevent workers from spreading such diseases as the H1N1 flu.

Opponents argue that mandating such leave policies would cost jobs and be a financial burden on businesses. But the study shows that nearly every strong economy has such policies, so it would not hurt U.S. companies who must compete globally.

"What we found is that none of these policies in any way impede being highly competitive or having low unemployment," one of the authors said.

In the United States, a proposed Healthy Families Act, which has the support of the Obama administration, would require businesses with 15 or more employees to provide up to seven days of paid sick leave per year. Passage of a bill would take away a competitive advantage non-union employers have over unionized employers, where sick leave is more common.

## Chicago Federation of Labor offers 10 scholarships

THE CHICAGO FEDERATION OF Labor will once again offer the William A. Lee Memorial Scholarship Awards to ten graduating high school students in the Chicago area who are members, or whose parents are members, of a local union affiliated with the CFL.

The CFL will offer five academic-based scholarships and five random-drawing scholarships, each in the amount of \$2,000. Students may only submit applications for one of the two categories. The period for submitting applications begins Jan. 1 and ends March 1. Please see the application for more complete rules. Applications are available now at [www.chicago-labor.org](http://www.chicago-labor.org).

## U. of I. grad assistants win strike

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS GRADUATE instructors reached an agreement with the Campaign-Urbana campus administration on a new three-year agreement, which explicitly guarantees the continuation of tuition waivers.

The waivers, which allow some graduate and teaching assistants to attend the school at reduced or no cost, were the

Continued on the facing page

## PSA IIs: New member helps build the union

ONCE THE LONG WAIT WAS OVER FOR WORD THAT HER JOB CLASSIFICATION – PSA II – had won AFSCME representation, it didn't take Kelly Kruger any time to take the next step.

There was a group of co-workers in her classification that had been keeping in touch with each other about their efforts to become part of AFSCME.

"When we finally got into the union, I said, 'They've been working hard for us, now we need to support them,'" Kruger said. "Everybody was really responsive."

Her efforts yielded 13 membership cards and one PEOPLE MVP card, all of which she handed to Local 2224 President Gary Kroeschel.

"I've been a union supporter," Kruger said. "As merit compensation employees we've been getting the benefits of the union's hard work for years. Now it's time for us to step up and be part of it."



## Unfairly fired — grievance yields big back-pay award

AN ARBITRATOR SIDED WITH LOCAL 1058 IN PUTTING TONIA Vrolyk back to work with all the money she lost — \$52,581.15 — when the city of Rockford fired her without just cause.

"She transferred into a new department and when she ran into some problems with the new job, she asked for training," explained Gary Cacciapaglia, the local union president. "But they didn't give her any. They didn't tell her that her job was in jeopardy. They didn't give her any evaluations. They just gave up on her."

She was fired without cause, supposedly because she had not passed her probationary period. But she was already an employee, so she was not on probation. The local filed a grievance that eventually went to an independent arbitrator for a final decision.

"She was vindicated thoroughly," Cacciapaglia said.



Continued from the facing page

main issue leading to a two-day strike, which led to the cancellation of several hundred classes.

The Graduate Employees' Organization, an affiliate of the Illinois Federation of Teachers, represents 2,600 graduate student instructors, who teach about 23 percent of undergraduate credit hours.

Grad students will continue to have their tuition waived or reduced as long as they hold "qualifying assistantships, are in good academic standing, and are making proper progress toward graduation in the program in which they began," according to a university news release.

The two sides also agreed to increase the minimum wage by the third year of a new contract to \$14,820, up from \$13,430, for a nine-month salary at 20 hours a week.

### AFSCME has an alternative for spring break

COLLEGE SENIORS AND GRADUATES who are considering a career in union organizing can get some valuable experience by spending their spring break helping out on an organizing drive.

Those accepted travel to an active union organizing campaign for five days of intensive training and organizing. There will be basics of union organizing in the classroom and hands-on experience while talking with workers in their homes. A typical day might include learning about local labor history, talking with workers about improving their working conditions, and participating in campaign strategy sessions. All participants will learn the AFSCME organizing model, which links grassroots organizing with a rigorous analysis of the power relationships that influence workers' lives.

Program participants will be provided with lodging and transportation during the week as well as a \$125 stipend for food.

Candidates who successfully complete the program will be given priority consideration for AFSCME's year-long Organizer-in-Training positions.

Application deadline for the spring break program is Feb. 22.

## ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

### Aurora locals sustain long fight against concessions

AURORA, ILLINOIS' SECOND largest city, was struggling under a mounting deficit, recently pegged at \$6 million, as city locals tried to hammer out a contract. Negotiations that began in August 2008 ended with a tentative agreement in September 2009 that raises wages 8 percent over four years for Local 1514, with no increase in 2010. Local 3298 settled for a three-year contract that raises wages 5 percent, also with a 2010 wage freeze.

"They wanted obscene concessions," Local 3298 President Christa Heinke said. "We were willing to do things based on the economic times, but we weren't going to give up the farm. There were some basic fundamentals in our contract that they wanted to take away."

The two locals worked together on a "Play Fair" campaign that included attending City Council meetings wearing solidarity stickers and a petition directed at the mayor.

"Our actions kept fuel on the fire," Local 1514 President Kevin Didier said. "We let the city know we were there. It made a difference when we were at the table. Considering everything going on around us, we did well."

The city wanted its right to impose furlough days put into the contract. The locals refused. But they did agree to 12 days of unpaid time off, in exchange for a no-layoff agreement lasting through 2010. Four layoffs of Local 1514 members were also rescinded as part of the agreement.

"Saving jobs was important," Heinke said. "If we had layoffs, there would have been that many fewer voices, making it harder for us to be heard."

Didier said keeping people working was Job 1 for the union. "The economic downturn took its toll on the whole process," he said. "It was not a good time to be in negotiations. There wasn't much sympathy from the taxpaying public."

A major issue, not surprisingly, was health insurance. Employees were paying 2.75 percent of their wages toward the premiums. The city wanted to change that to a percent of the premium, which meant the costs would fall more heavily on the lowest-wage members. The union wouldn't agree. Then the city wanted to raise the contribution to 4.5 percent of wages.

The final agreement installed a tiered system, where members with no dependents who opted for the HMO will pay the least, and those with several dependents who opt for the PPO plan will pay the most, at 3.75 percent.

"We fought them at every turn, and the city ended up coming around as our members continued to stick together," Heinke said.

Staff representative Flo Estes led the bargaining committees for both locals. Committee members for Local 1514 were Didier, Joel Salz, Tony Miller, Dan Piscoran, Ruben Delgado, Jerry DeMario, Brett Bennett, Chuck Gillette, Ken Christoffel and Chris Olson. For Local 3298 they were Heinke, Dora Soto, Ben Torrance, Diane LaFan, Kelley Gruca and Rose Matlock.

### SAVE local makes small gains in hard times

LIKE MANY OF THE NON-PROFIT community agencies that serve developmentally disabled individuals, St. Clair Associated Vocation Enterprises said money for raises was hard to come by when Local 1831 sat down with management to negotiate a new contract.

The state hasn't appropriated any cost-of-living increase for the agencies in nearly three years, so workers have gone without raises and agency budgets are tight.

"It's been a lot harder to talk about what union members deserve and need because of the economy," said Cindy Rehg, the local union president. "Management is saying they wish they could help, but they just don't have

it, since most of their money comes from the state."

The one-year agreement froze wages for the first six months, with wage negotiations to be reopened after the first of the year. Employees got a \$75 ratification bonus, and the employer agreed to pay the second \$500 of a \$1,000 deductible on the new health insurance plan. Employees pay 20 percent of the premium.

"The bonus also went to people not in the union," Rehg said. "They get the same thing we get and some of them thank us for going in and fighting for wages."

Staff representative Barb Brumfield led the union bargaining team, with Rehg, Ron Geasley, Fran McManus, Rita Gain and Gary Thies.

### Wages edge up for ARC of Rock Island workers

ANOTHER HARD-PRESSED NON-profit community agency that serves the developmentally disabled, the Association for Retarded Citizens of Rock Island County is struggling with its budget.

But Local 3538 "wanted to walk away with something" in contract negotiations, said staff representative Dino Leone, who led the local's bargaining team. "They've done their share of hard work and the employer recognized that and was willing to dig deep."

The four-year contract included a 1.2 percent bonus at the end of 2009, plus 10 cents added to the 10-year longevity step. At the end of 2010 there will be another 1.2 percent bonus. At the end of 2011, there's a 1 percent wage increase and another 1 percent in 2012, along with a 1.2 percent bonus. In addition, any state-budget increases in reimbursement rates or cost-of-living allowances will be passed through to employees. The employer agreed to increase its contribution for health insurance premiums by a small amount.

"The agency was telling us they had no money," said Alicia Popp, the local union president. "When things go up and our wages don't, it's hard to hear them say that. At least we got something and we didn't have to concede anything."

Sue Liggett, Karen Leaf, Jim Hanne, Rob Tolmie and Katrina Day served on the negotiating team with Popp and Leone.

### Macon County local wins raises, avoids takeaways

WAGES GO UP 11 PERCENT across the board over the term of a four-year contract between Local 612 and Macon County. No one will get a longevity increase during that time.

"The money was good, especially considering the economic times," said Debbie Nihiser, the local union president. "They started out wanting furlough days and lower salaries."

But the local resisted and management backed off the concession demands.

The bargaining committee was led by staff representative Victor Osuna, with Nihiser, Craig Culp, Julie Magana, Monica Probus, Paulette Smith, Luis Perez and Kim Fowler.

### Bonus tides Egyptian Health members over for a year

AMIDST CUTS IN STATE GRANTS for health departments, union members at Egyptian Health Department in Southern Illinois decided on a one-year contract, with a \$750 bonus.

"It was a good decision," said staff representative Ty Petersen, who led the union bargaining team. "Next year could be much better."

He explained that the agency has secured a federal grant for the coming year that will substantially improve its finances.

In the meantime the base pay for the lowest-paid positions were raised to \$15,000 from \$14,000 to satisfy federal standards. The contract also extended family leave and funeral-leave coverage to step parents, and liberalized the attendance policy. Anyone laid off will have two years recall rights, up from 18 months.

"We are fortunate that there have been no layoffs," Local 3780 President Troy Milligan said. "That's what we're looking for, to keep jobs. With economic times the way they are, we felt this was a good deal."

Sherry Chrisman, Nickie Evans, Randall Robinson, Randy Stiles, Elaina Ledbetter and Dorothy Smith served on the bargaining committee with Petersen and Milligan.



There were lots of kids and plenty of surprise packages at the Local 473 (Winnebago County) Christmas party.

# RETIREES NOTES

## Retirees face threats on health care

WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO for health care?" asked Edna Glass, who retired from the University of Illinois-Champaign after 23 years. "I am 91 years old and recovering from cancer surgery that I had this year and now I'm being threatened."

Glass recently received a letter from her medical provider, the University of North Carolina Health Care System, saying they will not be able to continue to serve her because the state of Illinois is not paying its bills. She is currently stuck with bills from her surgery in March and from her husband's health procedures prior to his death in August.

Glass has already communicated to her provider that if they wait for the payment, they will receive a late fee, but like other providers across the nation, they are tired of holding the bag.

"I need Quality Care because I live outside of Illinois, and yet I am being told that my health care is in jeopardy because Illinois legislators will not pass a budget that will pay their bills on time," Glass said. "The solution is clear to many of us who see that Illinois has one of the lowest income tax levels in the country."

Glass will most likely have to begin the search for a new provider that may take her many miles outside of her home town.

She's not alone.

Robert Boon of Shawneetown has been contacted by his medical provider to pay bills that are several months delinquent and like Glass, he is frustrated with the state's irresponsible behavior.

"Lawmakers met in Springfield, played political games and real people are being harmed by it," he said. "After working 24 years for the Department of Corrections, I understand that there are negative consequences when an individual doesn't take responsibility for his actions, and in this case the politicians are not feeling the consequences, retirees are." Thousands of retirees are in similar predicaments and need the state to pass a tax increase that would bring in sufficient revenue to pay its bills so they can have stable health care.

Retirees should contact

## Thousands of retirees need the state to pass a tax increase that would bring in sufficient revenue so they can have stable health care.

their legislators asking them to support HB 174, which will raise new revenues to help state government close its gaping budget hole.

## Union to appeal decision on retiree dental contributions

AFSCME'S ATTORNEYS BELIEVE that a recent arbitration decision concerning the state's unilateral imposition of an \$11-per-month retiree contribution for dental insurance is seriously flawed. They have reviewed both the decision itself and other legal precedents, and believe that the union has the basis for a lawsuit and will soon file one in circuit court.

AFSCME filed a grievance after the state announced this unprecedented change in retiree benefits, and took the case to arbitration. In finding in favor of the state, the arbitrator ignored a long history of the parties bargaining over retiree health insurance, and of arbitrators enforcing the agreed-upon contractual provisions. Instead he focused on the question of whether the collective bargaining agreement's grievance procedure allowed the union to process grievances on behalf of retirees.

The union presented evidence that the parties had bargained over retiree health and dental insurance since 1985, and had included language concerning retirees in successive collective bargaining agreements. Prior arbitration decisions have supported the union's right to enforce provisions related to retirees through the grievance procedure and, ultimately, through arbitration.

In spite of what the union's attorneys believe is clear language

allowing the union to enforce the contract through arbitration on behalf of retirees, the arbitrator ruled that, because retirees are not employees and therefore not members of a bargaining unit, "the grievance arbitration process is foreclosed to them and instead retirees and their survivors must consider other appropriate venues if they wish to challenge the Employer's actions in regard to their negotiated benefits contained in the Collective Bargaining Agreement."

AFSCME leaders assured retirees that the battle is not over and that the legal fight will proceed.

## Six retirees inducted into the Hall of Fame

THE CHAPTER 31 HALL OF FAME, reserved for those retirees that have shown an outstanding commitment to AFSCME retirees, above and beyond the call of duty, has six new inductees: Ron Bradley, Virginia DeBerry, John Henson, Joyce King, Ann Lawrence, and Dorothy Livingston.

The Hall currently has 82 inductees, who have their name prominently displayed on a plaque in Council 31's Springfield office. Though the honor usually goes to five retirees every two years, a tie in voting meant six were added this year:

### Ron Bradley of Harrisburg Sub-chapter 55

stepped down this year after serving as its president for 17 years. He became involved with AFSCME when state employees began organizing a union at Bowen



Ron Bradley

Developmental Center in 1967 and was elected to serve on the Council 34 executive board in 1970. When Council 34 merged into Council 31, Bradley helped negotiate the first AFSCME master contract and every one after until 1989. After his retirement from state service in 1991, he was immediately elected as sub-chapter president, a position that he continued to serve in until this year. His dedication and service to AFSCME has spanned 42 years.



Virginia DeBerry

Virginia DeBerry has dependably served Chicago Sub-chapter 60, responding to every call to action.

Known for her determination to fight for those less able to speak up for themselves, she believes fervently in doing whatever it takes to preserve the retirement that retirees worked so long for. That means that if there is a rally, a meeting, a seminar, a phone bank or a march to participate in, she will be there. In addition to being an executive board member for the sub-chapter, DeBerry belongs to many other community organizations.



John Henson

John Henson has worked tirelessly to increase the membership and outreach of

### Bloomington Sub-chapter 79.

Since his retirement from Illinois State University, where he actively labored to protect workers' rights, he has used many community contacts to increase the visibility of the sub-chapter. His willingness to help in whatever capacity is necessary has made him an invaluable member of the organization.



Joyce King

Joyce King of Peoria Sub-chapter 78 brought her skill for organizing, educating, and working hard with her when she retired from the Department of Children and Family Services in 1994.

Since then she has served as secretary of her sub-chapter and executive board member of the chapter. She attends each meeting armed with information that is valuable to all AFSCME members, but especially retirees. In 1996 King was elected to the State Retirement System Board, a position she still holds. She is known there for strongly representing retiree interests. Her intelligence, dedication, and common sense have proved an outstanding asset to AFSCME.

Ann Lawrence, of Sub-chapter 59, has been a life-long advocate for the rights of working people and has continued that commitment into retirement years.

She has been an active member of her sub-chapter until health issues recently slowed her down. Lawrence could always be counted

Continued on the facing page

# Hospital 'report cards' now available online

Group forms to advocate for safe patient care

**A** FSCME-backed legislation to help people become better-informed consumers of medical services and hold medical providers accountable for their performance is finally yielding results.

ILLINOIS' FIRST HOSPITAL REPORT CARD AND CONSUMER GUIDE IS NOW POSTED AT [www.healthcarereportcard.illinois.gov](http://www.healthcarereportcard.illinois.gov).

Data on each hospital in the state is available for:

- Volume and cost of services;
- Quality and safety data; and
- Patient satisfaction surveys.

The site also has summaries and links to Illinois laws that further consumer protection.

But the Web site in its current form is not enough, say those who believe more must be done to prevent med-

ical errors and improve patient safety. In response Citizen Action/Illinois, the Campaign County Health Care Consumers, Health and Medicine Policy Research Group, the RN2RN Network, Women Employed and Council 31 have launched the Campaign for Safe Patient Care.

Medical errors and hospital-acquired infections kill tens of thousands of patients every year – raising health care costs by an estimated 30 percent. That amounts to hundreds of billions of dollars each year.

In its literature, the campaign notes that making good information available can change outcomes. It cites the case of New York, where the Department of Health began to publish data on deaths following coronary artery bypass grafts. The number of people who died following bypass surgeries soon fell by 41 percent.

Another element of improved patient care is adequate staffing. When registered nurses have more than

## AFSCME sounds cautionary note on sale of Resurrection hospitals

Resurrection Health Care has announced its intent to sell West Suburban Medical Center and Westlake Hospital to Vanguard Health Systems – a for-profit national hospital chain.

The sale must be reviewed by the Illinois attorney general and by the state Health Facilities and Services Review Board.

Council 31 Director Henry Bayer said that there should be a comprehensive analysis of the potential sale's impact on area patients, employees and the hospital industry.

"West Suburban and Westlake are nonprofit hospitals that serve thousands of low-income patients," he said. "Will a for-profit operation maintain or improve services to patients? What will happen to the dedicated and experienced employees who have contributed so much to these hospitals? These and other important questions should be answered before any sale moves forward."

Also raising questions about the sale was the Oak Park/Austin Health Alliance, a coalition created to press for quality and access improvements at West Suburban Medical Center.

"We urge state leaders to aggressively review this proposal and assess its impact on access to health care, especially for the uninsured," said Bill Barclay of the alliance. "We are concerned that when a hospital converts to a for-profit business, the problems of access, transparency and accountability grow. Only a handful of Chicago area hospitals are for-profit. The consequences of this sale should be considered very carefully."

four patients to care for, the likelihood of bad outcomes begins to increase. Yet in some Illinois hospitals, RNs care for up to 10 patients at a time.

The campaign will work with nurses to advance AFSCME-initiated legislation

that would increase the number of nurses at the bedside by setting minimum nurse-to-patient ratios for each hospital unit.

Finally the campaign is planning to provide educational materials for patients and health care consumers on

how to find and use data about the quality of patient care in Illinois hospitals. This will help them make informed decisions before checking into a hospital as well as put pressure on hospitals to improve their performance.

Continued from the facing page on to serve on committees, staff a phone bank, lobby legislators via letters, calls, and e-mails, and participate in lobby day marches and rallies in Springfield.



Dorothy Livingston

Dorothy Livingston jumped into retirement with both feet in 2001.

Her willingness to take action has helped her get elected as the Galesburg Sub-chapter 77 secretary-treasurer for nine years and to the chapter executive board, where she is currently beginning her second term of office. Dorothy is always willing to participate in any event, whether it requires travel to Washington or Springfield, and her technological expertise provides great benefits to the organization.

### Chester Sub-chapter 56 gives back

CHESTER SUB-CHAPTER 56 joined Menard Correctional Center Local 1175 to hold a drive that netted 700 food items to benefit local food banks. To encour-

age donations the sub-chapter began in March giving every member who brought a canned good to a monthly meeting a chance in a lottery for an AFSCME polo shirt.

In November, two local food pantries were selected to receive the items. The sub-chapter has already voted to collect food items next year, but to increase the total they donate.

"I am very grateful to my membership," said Larry Brown, the sub-chapter president. "I would like to thank all of the great members for making this community project a wonderful success. Our members are thankful for what they have and would like to challenge all retirees to give back to their communities."



Delores Wasmund

### Longtime member and advocate passes

DELORES WASMUND, PRESIDENT of Chicago Sub-chapter 60 and treasurer of Chapter 31, passed away Nov. 16.

"Delores Wasmund was a force to be reckoned with and will be missed," said Virginia Yates, president of Chapter 31 Retirees.

Nicknamed the "Energizer Bunny" for the massive amounts of energy that allowed her to participate in many organizations and continuously travel for them across the country, Wasmund was a stalwart of Illinois Retirees since 1993. She became involved with

AFSCME during her 35 years working at the Chicago Police Department and helped with the initial organizing effort of Local 654, where she served a term as president.

After her retirement, Wasmund worked with AFSCME, CBTU, CLUW and AARP and fought diligently to protect retirees and their benefits.

"Delores fought endlessly for a higher standard of living for hard-working men and women while she was employed and also into her retirement," Council 31 Director Henry Bayer said. "Her strength and perseverance have taught many people and left a strong legacy behind."



Chester Sub-chapter 56



Men who did heroic work below at time bodies were being taken from Cherry mine.



Relatives viewing remains of Davis at the morgue. He had worked in the mine only two days at time of disaster. His body was taken overland to Peoria.



Scene at mine disaster, Nov. 13, 1909, Cherry, Illinois.

# CHERRY MINE DISASTER

*A tragic moment in Illinois labor history remembered*



Illinois Labor History Society president Larry Spivack at the dedication of a new Cherry mine disaster monument.

**T**he electrical system that lit the St. Paul Coal Mine in the tiny town of Cherry, Illinois, was not functioning on Nov. 13, 1909.

But the miners couldn't earn their bare-bones living unless they went down. So kerosene torches were used to light the way, a practice that was common before electricity came along.

A narrative on the Illinois Labor History Society Web site tells what happened as a result: "Around lunch time several bales of hay were dropped down the hoist to feed the mules. Forty mules were stabled underground. Their job was to pull the little cars, which had been loaded with coal by the miners through the tunnels to the elevator hoist.

"Now, 15-year old Matt Francesco and another miner pushed one of the cars piled with the hay over to the stable area. They gave it a final shove down the track, and then went on their way. Unfortunately, the car came to rest under one of the open torches. Soon the hay caught fire. Efforts to move the car out of danger only spread the fire. The heat and smoke became overpowering, as the fire began to spread."

Of the 481 men and boys who went into the mine that day, only 222 made it out alive. The ILHS narrative continues:

"A hastily assembled team of people from the town went down in the cage six

times, each time dragging more miners to safety. From the seventh trip into the hell below, however, none returned alive."

Add the deaths of those 12 heroes to the 259 miners who perished, and you have one of the largest mine disasters in U.S. history.

"There were tales of unbelievable suffering and endurance. One group of miners, 500 feet underground, had built a wall of mud, rocks, and timbers to block off the poisonous gasses. They were in total darkness with only a pool of water leaking from a coal seam to drink.

"After eight days of confinement, they could bear it no longer. They tore down the barricade and began crawling through the tunnels. Finally, they heard the sounds of a search party. Twenty-one men still alive from this group were rescued."

The suffering of the miners, their families who waited above for news of their loved ones, and the community of Cherry, near LaSalle, has not been forgotten, even 100 years later. There are songs, a museum, monuments and a rich trove of photos and documents.

But the Cherry mine disaster is also remembered for what came in its wake:

"The shock and outcry over Cherry led to political action and calls for mine safety legislation," wrote Mike Matejka, vice-president of ILHS. "As public donations came

into the community, a review board was established, modeled after the recently passed British Workers' Compensation law, to hear claims from the bereaved families and survivors. The United Mine Workers helped serve on that committee.

"The next year, Illinois passed its first Workers Compensation Act. Thus workers would no longer have to simply rely on charity after an industrial accident."

In 1910 the Illinois legislature also established stronger fire and safety regulations governing mines.

"I think the story of Cherry will be told for as long as the slag heaps and the monuments rise above the prairie, the soybeans and corn," ILHS President Larry Spivack said on Nov. 14 of this year, as a new monument was dedicated at Cherry's Village Hall. "As long as this story is told, opportunities to make the future brighter will be on the horizon. When we remember that the Cherry miners were people like ourselves, with families and friends, with stories of wanting and yearning, with lives full of tragedy, but also joy, we see ourselves and think about doing what is right."

For more about the Cherry mine disaster, see <http://guitarjourney.tripod.com/cherrycoalminedisaster/index.html> and [www.kentlaw.edu/ilhs/cherrymi.htm](http://www.kentlaw.edu/ilhs/cherrymi.htm).