



MOVE

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



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On the Move

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DIRECTOR'S REPORT

**Ho Ho Ho!
 The Senate played
 Santa to the nation's
 wealthiest**

The holidays brought a bonanza of tax breaks to the non-needy



**BY
 HENRY BAYER**

**THE RICH AND POWERFUL
 ON WALL STREET
 CELEBRATED A HOLIDAY
 WITH THEIR STOCKINGS
 BRIMMING AND NO SPACE
 LEFT UNDER THE TREE FOR
 ANY MORE GIFTS.**

The post-election drama that played out in Congress at year's end made for a holiday story that warms your heart, if you're a millionaire.

IN CASE YOU HADN'T HEARD, THE RECESSION'S OFFICIALLY OVER.

Maybe you didn't know that if you were among the tens of millions of Americans worried about finding or retaining a job as the year was drawing to a close, or those scraping together a few dollars to buy Christmas gifts for the kids.

But the moguls in the New York financial district knew well that corporate profits had hit record levels in the third quarter of 2010.

Their biggest concern was exactly when to open up their wallets to themselves – their version of holiday spirit. Should they grab their super-size bonuses before or after the first of January?

You see, just like you and me, they have concerns. No, they didn't have to worry about losing their jobs or paying their bills as the holidays approached, but they nevertheless faced grave uncertainty.

The Bush tax cuts were about to expire. The Democrats were pushing to extend them to all families making less than \$250,000 annually.

To their great dismay the financial crowd faced the very real possibility of having to pay a higher tax rate on their bonuses, which are traditionally handed out after Jan. 1 and were projected to be north of \$150 billion (that's "b").

Their dilemma: break with tradition and give themselves bonuses before the new calendars are placed on their desks, or maintain the old order and face the frightening prospect of paying taxes at Clinton era rates (when unemployment hovered

around 3 percent).

The threat was very real. President Obama had pledged to extend the tax cuts only for those families making less than \$250,000, and the House of Representatives, that unruly body where a mere majority can pass legislation, had voted to extend the tax cuts only to the first \$250,000 of income.

This bill wouldn't have meant empty Christmas stockings on Wall Street, it just would have meant that theirs might not be made of pure silk.

They might have had to strain a little more to pay for the upkeep of a fancy townhome on New York's tony East Side, or maintaining a beach home in Waikiki or a ski chalet in Colorado. They might have had to stiff the limousine drivers or the doormen on their tips.. They might not have been able to buy that \$1,000 bottle of champagne or that \$500 box of cigars.

When you're in that kind of trouble, it's nice to have friends in high places. It makes for a happy ending, like every Christmas movie. And the richer you are, the happier you'll be.

In this case, the role of Santa was played by the U.S. Senate, where a minority of members have the ability to thwart the will of the majority. If 41 of 100 senators say you can't vote on a piece of legislation, you don't.

Like their brethren in the lower chamber, who had all voted against limiting the tax cut to the first \$250,000 of income, the 42 Senate Republicans stood should-to-shoulder to protect their beleaguered friends from Wall St.

Not only did Senate Republicans block a vote on targeting the tax cuts to low and middle income families who could actually put the money to good use, but they blocked a vote on legislation extending unemployment benefits, money for folks who desperately needed it just to put food on the table.

Eventually, the Republicans did relent and allow a vote on legislation to extend the tax cuts to the middle class and benefits to the unemployed. But they exacted a high price: maintaining income tax breaks for the wealthy, and an even bigger bonanza for the super-wealthy whose family estates exceed two million dollars.

So rather than a lump of coal, the unemployed had a little something for their stockings when they woke up on Christmas morning.

And those of us fortunate enough to still have a job were able to enjoy what was for us a normal holiday, though one clouded by what lies ahead in an uncertain future.

But the rich and powerful on Wall Street celebrated a holiday with their stockings brimming and no space left under the tree for any more gifts.

As they pushed away from their holiday tables, sated from the bountiful plates, they were secure in the knowledge that the government would not capture a greater share of their January bonuses. Nor need they fear that, should they succumb to the effects of their gluttony, the IRS would visit their heirs.

Such is the state of our nation as we begin 2011.

There's something terribly wrong with this picture, and if working families don't quickly wake up to this fact, the erosion of the American middle class, which built an economic engine that was the envy of the world, will continue unabated.

State must deal with budget crisis now

Illinois is in trouble. And nothing short of a massive infusion of new revenues will get it out.

BY THE BEGINNING OF THE CURRENT FISCAL YEAR THE STATE OWED AROUND \$6 BILLION IN overdue unpaid bills, another \$4.6 billion in debt coming due and a \$3.5 billion payment to the state's five pension systems.

Measured as a percentage of its annual general fund budget, the state's deficit is by far the largest in the country at 47 percent. Arizona is a distant second at 9.7 percent.

As we have catalogued in many previous On the Move articles, the numbers don't tell the whole story. State employees and retirees are finding it harder and harder to get medical services due to the state's slowness in paying

health insurance bills. People who rely on Medicaid are being turned away by an increasing number of health-care providers. Universities are laying off employees, freezing wages and raising tuition and fees.

State buildings, parks and historic sites are falling into disrepair. Demands for cutting public-employee pension benefits are getting louder.

Prisons are overcrowded while a brand new facility goes unopened. Local governments are facing big delays in getting money they're owed by the state and they're getting less when they do.

As a result, they're laying off employees and cutting services.

Nonprofit agencies that provide human services are scraping by and borrowing for operations, leaving their employees to go without wage increases. Of the 282 human service organizations that responded to a recent survey, half have laid off staff due to late state payments. Those

282 providers had laid off 1,167 employees and were serving 118,000 fewer clients as a result. And that's just a fraction of the total human service agencies that rely on state funding. One estimate puts the layoffs statewide at 26,000 and the number of clients losing services in the multiple hundreds of thousands.

These and other problems haven't escaped the notice of the rest of the country. A New York Times article headlined "Mounting Debts by States Stoke Fears of Crisis" leads with tales of Illinois' budget woes.

"The finances of some state and local governments are so distressed that some analysts say they are reminded of the run-up to the sub-prime mortgage meltdown or of the debt crisis hitting nations in Europe," the Times story warned. "Large states like Illinois and California are increasingly at risk."

Illinois is not alone, of course. The Times noted that

"New York balanced its budget this year by shortchanging its pension fund. And in New Jersey, Gov. Chris Christie deferred paying the \$3.1 billion that was due to the pension funds this year."

Could Illinois actually face bankruptcy?

Probably not, but if it does, all bets are off. A bankruptcy judge could void contracts, like the one between AFSCME and the state. There could even be an attempt to void state-employee pension rights under the guise of bankruptcy law. And the no-layoff agreement recently ratified by members could also be nullified.

Bankruptcy could become a much bigger threat if Republicans in Congress have their way. They're planning to push for passage of federal legislation to make it easier for states to declare bankruptcy.

Still, every state, even Illinois, is seen by the rating service Moody's as a better credit risk than a vast majority of

American non-financial companies.

The key, it would be hard to repeat often enough, is new revenues. Rumors that a tax increase is on the table in Springfield's inner circles could be just rumors. And a tax increase, if it does advance, could be linked to bitter pills for AFSCME members to swallow — like cuts in Workers' Compensation benefits, an onerous Medicaid "reform" package and even pension benefit cuts.

"These are not good times," Council 31 Deputy Director Roberta Lynch said. "But AFSCME members have been through bad times before. Our members continue to work hard to provide the critical services that Illinois residents want and need. We've been called on to make sacrifices, and we've made them. Now we must look to our elected officials to do the right thing, and make sure we support those who do, in what is sure to be a major battle."

No-layoff agreement ratified

State employees voted in a resounding 79 percent majority to approve a new agreement that will bar layoffs and facility closures through June 30, 2012.

THE AGREEMENT WILL SAVE THE STATE SOMEWHERE BETWEEN \$50 MILLION AND \$100 MILLION. State employees submitted dozens of ideas that can bring about greater efficiencies in operations, will continue to take voluntary furlough days, and will defer for seven months half of a contractually scheduled 4 percent wage increase. (An exception to this deferral was made for employees giving notice by May 1, 2011, of intent to retire by Dec. 31, 2011. They will get the full 4 percent on

July 1, 2011.)

"Our country is in the worst recession of modern times, which has led to a big drop in tax revenues to state government as well as a greater public resistance to taxes," Council 31 Director Henry Bayer said. "Like public employees everywhere, we are the targets of a highly-orchestrated, well-funded attack by big business and right-wing elements who hate government. They are trying to paint us as overpaid bureaucrats with big fat pensions and other cushy benefits at a time when many Americans have lost their jobs or taken big pay cuts. At the same time, this state has the worst budget shortfalls in the entire country.

"In the midst of all this, we have forged a ground-breaking agreement that offers protec-



Staff at Sheridan Correctional Center, who had gone through a facility closure and a long battle to get the prison reopened, voted overwhelmingly for the no-layoff, no-closure agreement.

- Expanding salvage and recycling programs at correctional facilities;
- Improving operations in Corrections Industries;
- Making energy-efficiency modifications at correctional facilities; and
- Reorganizing parole agent

tion against layoffs and job loss for AFSCME members in state government."

The union and management agreed that some \$20 million in savings could be achieved by adopting some of the operational efficiencies submitted by employees, including:

- Contracting in work now being done by outside vendors;
- Implementing a statewide document-management program to reduce paper utilization;

travel.

Other suggestions are still being evaluated, in hopes of approaching the \$100 million savings goal.

Though the details have not been worked out, discussions on the furlough program extension have touched on provisions that would allow employees to use earned paid days off at any time, operations permitting, rather than on specified dates. Other possibilities

include allowing for furloughs in two-hour increments and allowing participation by RC-9 and RC-6 bargaining unit members.

Bayer praised state employees for making "tough but wise choices" in difficult situations.

"We will need to draw on our unity and solidarity yet again in the days ahead," he warned. "Our state still faces a \$13 billion budget deficit that will undoubtedly continue to place great strains on the delivery of state services. We still face a fierce attack on our pension benefits with the state's corporate elite leading the charge to cut the benefits of current employees. And later next year we will be getting down to work on a new collective bargaining agreement in what is likely to be the worst economic climate in which our negotiations have ever taken place."

"Layoffs are the very real consequences of a perilous political-economic climate," Bayer said. "The overwhelming majority of members who voted in favor of this agreement are painfully aware that states and other units of government (cities, counties and even school districts) all across the country have already laid off tens of thousands of employees — with thousands more in the works. For now, thanks to this agreement, we have dodged that bullet."

The case for pension benefit cuts – and why it's wrong

Despite well-informed views from a variety of authoritative voices, Chicago's corporate elite and its mouthpiece, the Chicago Tribune, continue to press for cuts in public-employee pension benefits.

CUTS FOR ANY EMPLOYEES HIRED AS OF JANUARY 1 HAVE ALREADY BEEN ENACTED. AND VIRTUALLY unanimous agreement exists that cuts in benefits that all other current employees have already earned are out of bounds. So the debate centers on benefits those employees will earn from now until

they retire.

The language

THE ILLINOIS CONSTITUTION'S Pension Protection Clause provides: "Membership in any pension retirement system of the State, any unit of local government or school district, or any agency or instrumentality thereof, shall be an enforceable contractual relationship, the benefits of which shall not be diminished or impaired." (Article XIII, Section 5)

How this language is interpreted will determine the outcome of the debate.

On the one side, are a number of legal authorities who hold that the language and the case law are clear: The terms that determine your pension when you retire cannot yield a pension that is less than what the terms when

you started would have yielded.

The debate

ON THE OTHER SIDE, LED BY THE Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago, speaking for the city's most influential business interests, is the argument that the contract established in the constitution can be changed "for consideration." That is, if you take something away, you have to give something back.

That may be true. State employees have over the years agreed through their union to pay more for their pension benefit in exchange for improved benefits.

But the committee, in a long memo, argues that the consideration can be determined by the state government alone. Thus, goes their argument, if the state says

that it is reducing the pension benefits that state employees earn in the future because it will lay off employees if it doesn't carry out the reduction, that is "consideration."

But a contract is arrived at by mutual agreement. If the state has the right to dictate the terms of the "contractual relationship" free of negotiations with the other parties, then the contract has no meaning.

The evidence

"THE CCC AND ITS SUPPORTING memorandum are clearly wrong and they have erroneously interpreted the Illinois Constitution," says Gil Feldman, an attorney with extensive experience in representing AFSCME and other public sector unions, referring to the Civic Committee. "In a series of cases, the Illinois Supreme Court held that the purpose of this provision in the 1970 Constitution was to protect pension benefits."

Feldman cites not only case law from the Supreme Court, but historical evidence from the records of the 1970 Constitutional Convention. During debate on the Pension Protection Clause, a delegate explained its meaning thusly:

"...Benefits not being diminished really refers to this situation: If a police officer accepted employment under a provision where he was entitled to retire at two-thirds of his salary after twenty years of service, that could not subsequently be changed to say he was entitled to only one-third of his salary after thirty years of service, or perhaps entitled to nothing. That is the thrust of the word 'diminished.' It was not intended to require 100 percent funding or 50 percent or 30 percent funding or get into any of those problems, aside from the very slim area where a court might judicially determine that imminent bankruptcy would really be important."

The conclusion

"CLEARLY, THIS IS A MATTER OF settled law," Feldman said. "A public employee is constitutionally entitled at the time of retirement to pension benefits as provided by the actual terms of their pension plan as it existed at the time the employee became a member of the pension system. A unilateral change related to future services would be unconstitutional."

Municipal elections heating up

Towns, cities and villages across Illinois will be holding elections for mayor and city council in the early part of this year.

AND AFSCME LOCALS WILL PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THOSE ELECTION CAMPAIGNS, ENDORSING candidates and working to get their members to the polls.

The first round of voting in Chicago is on Feb. 22, and AFSCME, in conjunction with the Chicago Federation of Labor, is taking a hard look at all of the contenders in the race to replace retiring mayor Richard Daley. In addition, Chicago-based locals are screening candidates in many of the city's 50 aldermanic contests.

The union will make endorsement decisions for the City Council positions based on candidate viability,



The Chicago region PEOPLE Committee interviews candidates for alderman.



incumbent voting records, questionnaire responses and, in some cases, face-to-face interviews.

The main issues the Chicago locals will use to judge candidates include:

- Support for full funding of the city's pension funds and opposition to any attempts to reduce pension benefits of current employees;
- Active support for workers

who want to form a union on the job;

- Support for higher taxes and fees if needed to raise adequate revenues for the city budget;
- Support for a city budget with staffing levels that maintain or improve service deliv-



erics to assist them. So we want to do as much as we can to ensure that the candi-

date is someone who will return that support if they win the office."

- Support for an ordinance to ensure that privatization would result in quantifiable savings that are not based upon paying lower wages or benefits, and that privatization would not be used to undermine unionization, and would not result in a diminution of services;
- Oppose further privatization of public assets like city water.

"If we endorse a candidate, in Chicago or in any municipality in the state, we'll go all out to support them," Council 31 political action director Jason Kay said. "That means contributing to their campaign fund and mobilizing our members in their dis-

tricts to assist them. So we want to do as much as we can to ensure that the candi-

date is someone who will return that support if they win the office."

AFSCME locals will likely be involved in local electoral contests in Springfield, Rockford, Rock Island, Silvis and other communities. They will be using similar criteria for judging candidates.

In Springfield the partisan primary is Feb. 22, but the only primary races come in the race for mayor and AFSCME locals have not decided whether they will back anyone until the general election. In many other towns the first round isn't until April, so the candidates are still in the filing-for-candidacy stage.

Overcrowding ramps up tensions in Illinois prisons

Many Illinois prisons are bursting at the seams, creating conditions that translate into safety concerns for corrections staff.

“WE’RE PACKING INMATES INTO ALL OF OUR BUILDINGS,” SAID RICKY RUTHART, PRESIDENT OF Local 817 at Dixon Correctional Center. “They’re on top of each other.”

For example, one unit that was at full capacity with about 110 beds now has 180.

“We were already at our max,” he said. “Hostility is increasing. When they get to the point of erupting, it will affect staff.”

The potential for increased violence isn’t the only burden on staff, he said. Security officers are working long hours and mandatory overtime is on the rise again.

On a day in early December, for example, 18 staff were held over from the day shift to the evening shift.

Council 31 and CMS have a signed agreement aimed at ending forced overtime, which both sides agree is an expensive and dangerous practice. The agreement includes a provision that says: “In the event there is an expansion of beds operated by a Department, the parties shall meet to discuss its impact on this agreement and determine whether additional staff is needed to meet its goals.”

Union: focus on safe operations

IN RESPONSE TO SIGNIFICANT growth in the number of beds, that impact bargaining has taken place at 12 facilities: Vandalia, Big Muddy River, Lawrence, Logan, Pinckneyville, Southwestern, East Moline, Vienna, Sheridan and Dixon Correctional Centers and Decatur and Peoria Adult Transition Centers.

In all, those bargaining sessions have resulted in agreements to add 142 staff.

“We made progress at the table,” Ruthart said, “but getting them to implement has been hard. We’re fighting with them to do what they said.”

The union has also expressed concern about an



overemphasis on getting American Correctional Association accreditation for each facility.

“The department says it’s crucial because it sends a message to the public that the prisons are being well run,” Council 31 regional director Ed Caumiant said.

“We agree to some extent. But we have to point out that they are violating some basic requirements for accreditation, like the amount of square footage per inmate. We are telling them that when they are deciding how to use scarce resources, safe operations should be taking precedent over getting a piece of paper that says they are operating safely.”

Everyday problems magnified

AT VANDALIA CC, THE DEPARTMENT has packed in 300 more inmates than are usually housed there.

Bunks are going into places like a basement that isn’t set up for housing.

‘There have been more inmate-on-inmate assaults than we’ve ever had. We need more responders when there are problems.’
—Steve Slocum

putting undue pressure on the visiting room, mail room, dietary and the health-care unit, he said. “There are long lines for everything. It can take six months to get a dental appointment.”

The prison has stopped sending inmate work crews to the nearby state park and to do other work around the community, because there isn’t enough security staff to oversee them.

“Supplies are hard to get,” Stunkel said. “Money is short, so we go without cleaning supplies. There are more inmates and fewer programs.”

There have been some staff added, he said, “But they are trying to play catch-up. We’re supposed to be getting more in three months. Maybe

“We put inmates in those bunks, literally before the paint dried down there,” Local 993 President Russ Stunkel said. “There’s still too much mandatory overtime – sometimes back-to-back.”

In addition to security concerns, the extra population is

then we’ll see daylight.”

‘Fights in the yard’

AT EAST MOLINE CC, IMPACT bargaining resulted in an agreement to add staff, and some of that has happened. But a promise of bringing in new correctional lieutenants hadn’t materialized yet, Local 46 President Steve Slocum said.

“We’ve had fights in the yard and in the housing units,” he said. “There have been more inmate-on-inmate assaults than we’ve ever had. We need more responders when there are problems.”

He said there are six correctional officer trainees slated to come in, but that won’t even keep up with attrition.

Overtime down at Sheridan

WHEN THE INMATE POPULATION shot up at Sheridan CC, to 1,650 from 1,300, mandatory overtime shot up, too.

But impact bargaining sessions in June and again in November brought commitments to add staff, and the department has indeed added COs – 46 earlier, with 12 more slated to arrive soon.

“They’ve come through with more COs,” Local 472 President Rob Fanti said. “And overtime is way down. It helped a lot.

“But we need lieutenants and sergeants, and we are a couple dozen down in dietary and clerical. They need to post these jobs, fill them, then backfill the vacancies” created by people who take the posted jobs.

“The people in dietary and the clerical staff are busting their butts and working a lot of overtime,” he said. “Management agrees with us that the positions are needed. But there’s a lot of bureaucracy that goes into posting and filling vacancies. They need to just get it done.”

The political factor

THE SURGE IN DOC’S POPULATION is mostly political, it seems. The administration got some bad publicity during the recent gubernatorial election when the media revealed a controversial DOC program to give inmates extra good-time credit.

That resulted in a sharp slowdown of inmates getting early release for “meritorious good time.”

“They went from one extreme to the other,” Stunkel said. “They were letting people out too fast. Now it’s too slow.”

He said a balanced program of good time credit is needed. “I hope it doesn’t take something drastic to make it happen.”

November election shows voter frustration and confusion

Despite the claims of politicians and pundits who pretend they know what November's election meant, voters really provided little concrete guidance for lawmakers as to how to solve the huge problems faced at every level of government.

BLAME IT ON THE MEDIA. BLAME IT ON THE POLITICIANS. BLAME IT ON THE VOTERS. WHOEVER deserves the blame, there is strong evidence that the voting public is not well informed on the issues that their representatives will be tackling in the coming months and years.

Here in Illinois a poll of registered voters taken a month before the election by the Paul Simon Institute at Southern Illinois University showed a weak grasp of the state budget crisis and the possible solutions.

"These results show that the current campaigns for governor and other state offices have completely failed to educate the Illinois public about the size of the deficit and what steps are realistic to address a problem of this magnitude," said John Jackson, a visiting professor at the Institute and one of the designers of the poll. "People seem to want simple and easy solutions to a problem which has been growing for years and a deficit which is of such

a size that no easy solutions are left."

A healthy majority of those polled said they opposed cuts in basic state services: education, public safety, human services, aid to low-income residents, natural resources. Even opposition to pension benefit cuts was a surprisingly high 47 percent.

On the other hand, a substantial majority opposed raising new revenues, with 57 percent saying the state has plenty of money and just needs to cut waste and fraud.

But confusion wasn't limited to Illinois voters.

Some two-thirds of likely voters nationwide said they believed that, "under Obama and the Democrats, middle-class taxes have gone up, the economy has shrunk, and the billions lent to banks under the Troubled Asset Relief Program are gone, never to be recovered,"

New Yorker editor Hendrik Hertzberg said, reporting on a Bloomberg poll taken the week before the election.

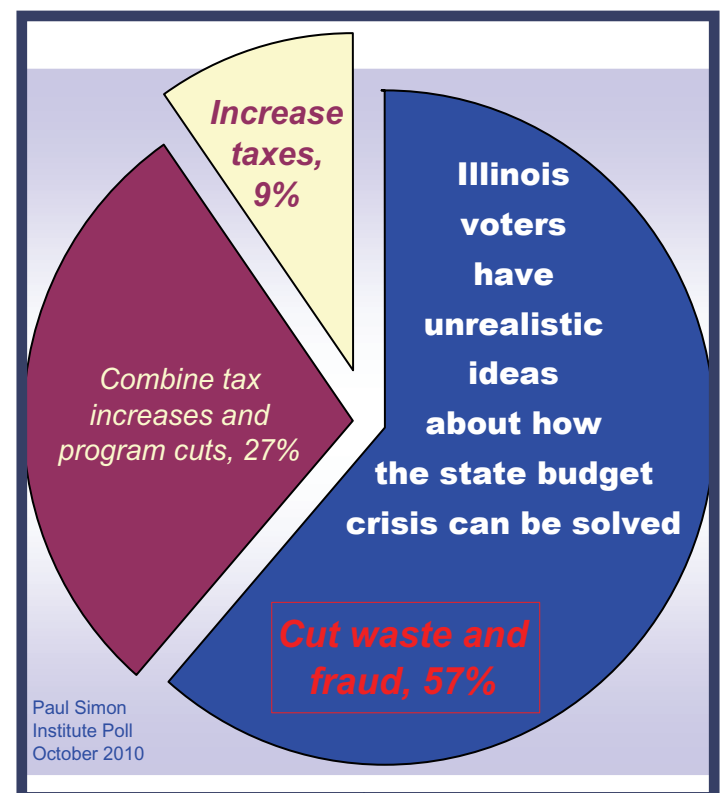
But, he noted, "Reality tells a different story. For 95 per cent of us, taxes are actually lower, cut by around four hundred dollars a year for individuals and twice that for families. The economy has been growing, however feebly, for five straight quarters. Most of the TARP loans have been repaid and the rest soon will be, plus a modest profit for the Treasury."

Further, he added, many people believe that illegal immigration is skyrocketing and that the health-care law will drive the deficit higher.

The facts, Hertzberg said: "the number of illegal immigrants fell by close to a million last year, thanks in part to more energetic border enforcement." And "the health-care law, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office says, will bring the deficit down."

Despite the breadth of misinformation, there are definitely problems to be solved in Illinois. Budget shortfalls are leading to layoffs of teachers, police officers, fire-fighters and other public employees. The Sun-Times report-

Republican policies that favor tax breaks for the wealthy and lower wages for average workers have led to an ever-widening income gap.



ed that 15 suburban Chicago police departments have downsized since the recession began. At least 300 officers have been laid off statewide. And Rockford is threatening to lay off 24 on its police force.

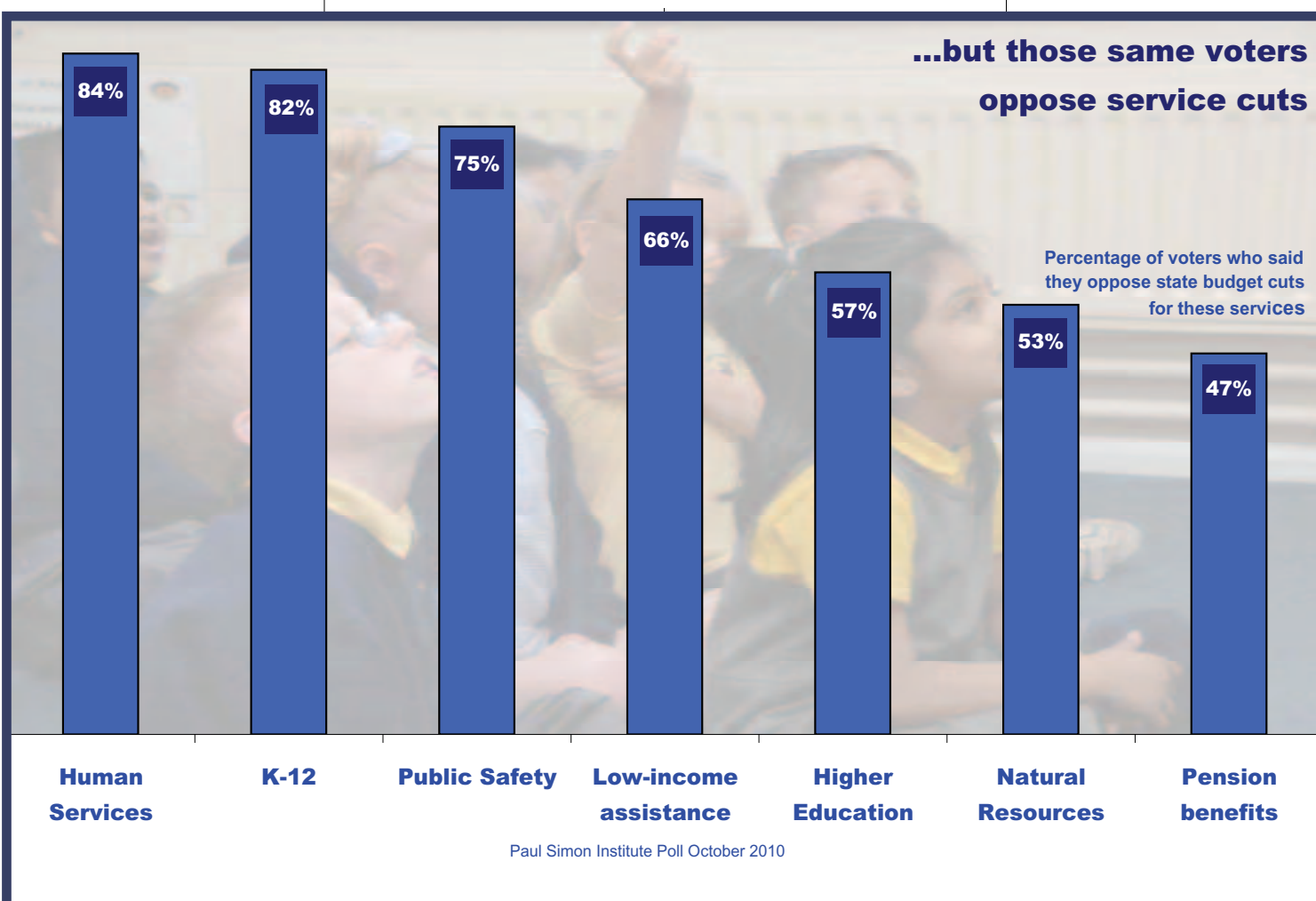
At the state level the budget crisis is only getting worse, as legislators continue to resist tax reform to raise new revenues.

Too many of these elected officials reinforce voter confusion, pretending that essential services can be preserved without new revenues, when in reality there will be devastating cuts if politicians don't act to raise taxes.

Nationally, the country seems to be caught between the rock of an angry army of unemployed and the hard place of a Republican Party which sees prolonged high jobless rates as a ticket to regaining the White House in 2012. Republican policies that favor tax breaks for the wealthy and lower wages for average workers have led to an ever-widening income gap between those at the top and everybody else. Ironically, those hardest hit by the recession are too often the very folks who cast their votes for Republicans who want to cut off unemployment benefits, wipe out unions and drive down wages. Increasingly, the middle class seems determined to vote itself out of existence.

"The mass media, especially cable news shows, provide so much misinformation that many Americans can no longer tell fact from fiction," Council 31 Deputy Director Roberta Lynch said.

"We do the best we can to make sure our members have the facts they need to make informed decisions when they go into the voting booth," she said. "And in general AFSCME members, even the ones who don't necessarily agree with the union's positions, have a much better grasp of the major issues. But a majority of voters don't have a union to help them sort through the misinformation and disinformation that gets thrown at them. Growing the labor movement may be our best chance at restoring the balance that has been lost as income inequality grows in our society."



Paul Simon Institute Poll October 2010

Union wins on privacy for public employees

Council 31 scored a victory for all public employees when union lobbyists were able to gain the votes needed in both legislative chambers to override the governor's veto of HB 5154.

THE LEGISLATION, WHICH NOW GOES INTO EFFECT, AMENDS THE STATE'S FREEDOM OF INFORMATION Act to protect public employees' performance evaluations.

The action came during the General Assembly's fall veto session.

It was a happy ending to a story that began in 2009, with passage of an "ethics reform" package. That new law gave any member of the public or the press the ability to request the job evaluation of any public employee — whether they work for the state, a state university or a unit of local government. AFSCME and other public employee unions worked to defeat that measure but couldn't swim against the reformers' tide.

Council 31 countered in the 2010 spring session with a bill that amended the law by removing the provision that opened up employee personnel files. It passed, but then the governor vetoed it. Council 31 lobbyists went to work once again, finally garnering the super-majority of votes needed to override that veto.

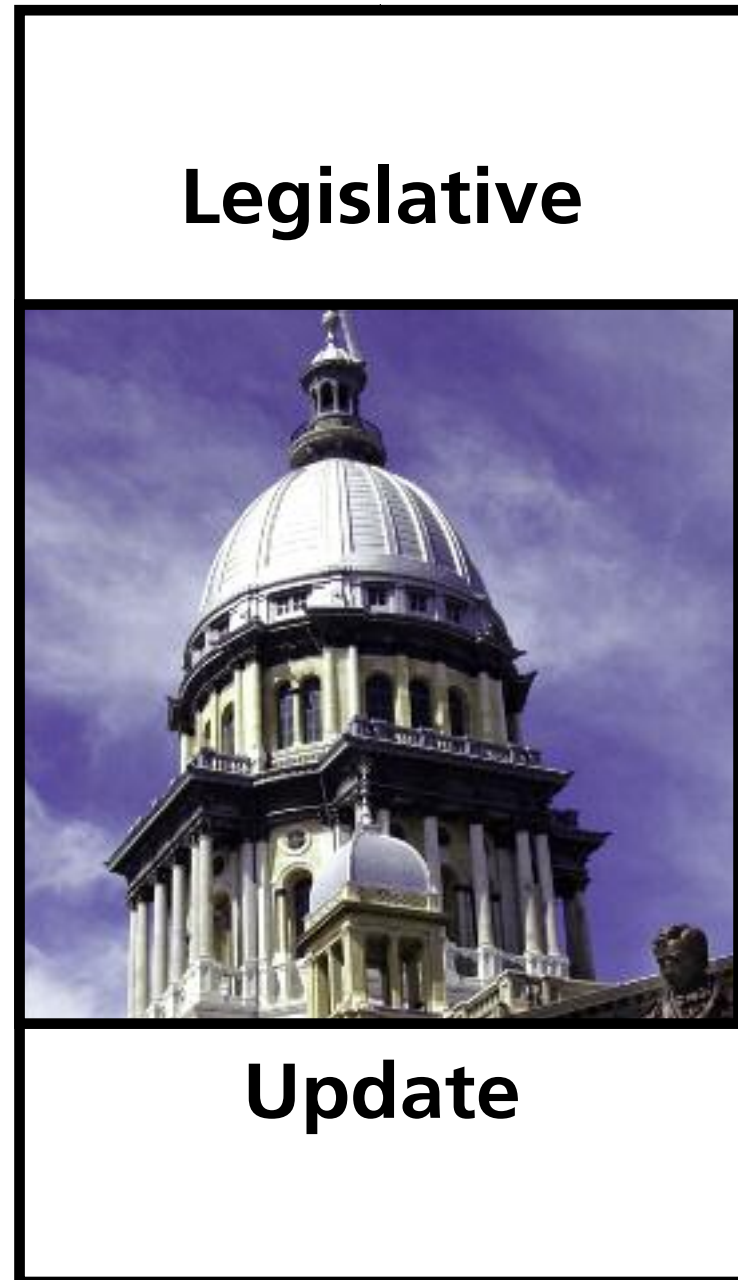
As a result, employee personnel records are now confidential once again.

Worries for injured workers remain

For years Republicans in the statehouse have pushed for what they call "reform" of the Workers' Compensation system. By that they mean reducing benefits for workers injured on the job.

"It's not surprising that they came back to Springfield still singing that same song," Council 31 legislative director Joanna Webb-Gauvin said. "But what is surprising is that the Democratic majority in both houses appears to be joining in on the chorus."

Last month both Senate President John Cullerton and House Speaker Michael Madi-



Legislative

Update

gan created special committees that are holding a series of hearings on workers' compensation.

"Every employee in the state of Illinois, whether they work in the public or the private sector, is dependent on the Workers' Compensation system if they are injured on the job," Webb-Gauvin said. "Big Business lobbyists are going into high gear on this one. They see an opportunity to cut costs by cutting benefits for injured workers, and they want to seize it."

At this point, no related legislation has been introduced, and the specific changes business groups are pushing for haven't been made public. But media reports have hinted at a couple of their priorities: changing the standards for determining medical claims, restricting doctor choice, and limiting benefits based on assigning fault. All would be bad news for injured workers.

Labor movement uniting in opposition

THE ILLINOIS AFL-CIO IS

coordinating the labor movement's efforts to oppose any legislation that might reduce workers' rights or benefits. State Federation President Mike Carrigan testified before a Senate committee in early December and strongly urged that any such legislation be subject to the "agreed bill process."

This process has been the normal means of developing legislation on workers compensation and unemployment insurance issues in the General Assembly. It requires that both business and labor agree before any bill can move forward.

Pension cuts hit police and firefighters

THE ASSAULT ON PUBLIC PENSIONS continued in the veto session. Both chambers passed legislation that imposes on police officers and firefighters cuts similar to those enacted in 2009 for all other newly hired public employees.

This bill will also only affect new hires, but the cries are already going up that it doesn't go far enough — and the pressure to cut the pen-

sion benefits of all current public employees will undoubtedly intensify in the coming legislative session.

"AFSCME members should prepare to take up that fight once again," Webb-Gauvin said.

Pension bonding stalled

GOV. QUINN HAS BEEN SEEKING legislative authorization to borrow money to make the pension contributions that are required by state law for the State Employees, State University and Teachers Retirement systems.

AFSCME's position is that while borrowing is bad, it's not as bad as failing to make pension payments. So Council 31 has been helping to lobby for the borrowing plan.

"Unfortunately, there is strong resistance in the ranks of legislators, largely Republicans, but even some Democrats," Webb-Gauvin said. "Few of them are budging at this point."

The veto session ended with no action taken to make sure that pension obligations are met.

The elephant in the room

UNDERLYING VIRTUALLY EVERY issue now before state legislators, including pension funding, is the state's enormous budget deficit, which is \$13 billion and growing.

AFSCME and the rest of the Responsible Budget Coalition have built a broad-based group that supports raising the tax revenues needed to close that budget gap now. During the veto session more than 150 leaders of civic, health care and human services groups traveled to Springfield to lobby for HB 174, legislation that embodies revenue-raising measures on the scale that is needed to close the deficit.

"When the General Assembly reconvenes in January, passage of HB 174 or a similar measure must move to the top of the legislative agenda," Webb-Gauvin said, "or Illinois will be facing a budget disaster of unprecedented scale."

Attacks on teachers could affect all education workers

A SHADY BUT WELL-HEELED Oregon-based group that

spent record amounts of money on Illinois state legislative races in November is now pushing legislation that would limit teachers' right to strike.

The group, Stand for Children, has now hired some high-powered lobbyists, according to the Capitol Fax newsletter, and is also backing legislation that would make it easier to fire tenured teachers, make it tougher to get tenure and link tenure awards to performance.

In addition to Illinois, Stand for Children has state groups in Arizona, Colorado, Massachusetts, Oregon, Tennessee, and Washington.

The current draft of the bill limiting the right to strike would also affect AFSCME members who work for school districts, as well as those in state universities.

"We will be working with the teachers' unions to defeat this legislation," Webb-Gauvin said.



PEOPLE conference will adopt legislative agenda

Council 31's legislative agenda will be the main business for delegates to the PEOPLE conference set for Jan. 29 in Springfield.

Each local union is authorized to send two delegates — the local union president and the chair of the local's PEOPLE committee. Locals are also encouraged to bring along other members, who can listen to the proceedings and participate in educational workshops.

"This could be one of the most difficult legislative sessions we've ever faced as a union," Council 31 legislative director Joanna Webb-Gauvin said. "Public employees are under fire from many directions. The state budget crisis is getting even worse. And attacks on pensions will escalate."

Disability workers saying 'NO' to 'no'



These days, nearly every employer comes to the bargaining

Any union member who has served on a local's negotiating committee finds that refrain all too familiar.

And nonprofit agencies that provide services to developmentally disabled individuals have as strong a case to make as any employer about the validity of this claim. After all, they are virtually wholly reliant on state funding for their operations, and it's been more than three years since the General Assembly appropriated a cost-of-living increase for their employees.

That means many of the front-line workers at the disability agencies, whose wages and benefits are already far too low, haven't had a raise in three years. But in the last year those workers have had enough, and their local unions are stiffening their resolve not to walk away from the negotiating table empty-handed.

When the employer says no to their proposals, they are saying "No! We can't live like this any more." And their message is getting through.

Little City workers take case to board

"We were not willing to take nothing and we let it be known," Council 31 staff representative Flo Estes said about the most recent round of negotiations between Local 4008 and Little City Foundation. "When it came to talking about money, they talked about a \$200 bonus. We said this is not an acceptable answer. You'll have to find a way of doing better."

The local pushed for a meeting with the agency's board of directors and got it. They brought written statements from members, talking about what it was like to live on their salaries. There were even spreadsheets that showed several families' expenses and income.

"It showed they were in the red every month," Estes said. "The board was looking at caring for disabled individuals, but they weren't paying enough attention to the people who provide the care. We forced them to think more carefully about what they were doing."

The eventual settlement brought in up to \$700 bonuses, depend-

ing on years of service.

"We showed we know what we're talking about," Estes said. "They are starting to look at union members as a good source of information on how to run a more efficient operation."

'We stood our ground'

As Local 3237 went into bargaining with United Cerebral Palsy in Will County, management took the expected tack.

"They told us they were barely able to meet payroll," said Yurvette Simmons, the local's president. "We said, 'We're not accepting it.' We were determined that we weren't giving up. In our last negotiations the insurance went up, but we got no raise. We had done our part."

Local union members wore "Contract Now" buttons, green clothing on bargaining days and signed a petition.

Management had offered 2 percent raises in the second and third years of the contract.

"We said no," Simmons recalled. "We stood our ground."

Their persistence paid off. The final settlement included a \$250 bonus in 2009 and a \$400 bonus in 2010, plus 2.5 percent increases in the second and third years.

Raises and limits on overtime

Local 3784 was born of struggle, conducting an 18-week strike in 1994 to win its first contract after six years of battling a fiercely anti-union administration at Beverly Farm Foundation in Alton.

Relations between union and management have improved a lot since then, but that didn't make it easy to get a good contract in these tough times.

In 2010, local union members still had to take to the streets to get a settlement they could live with, staging an informational picket on par-



Beverly Farm employees in Alton went out on strike in 1994, but they didn't have to go to that extreme this year, though they did have to battle for a fair contract.

Bargaining table bemoaning how broke they are.

ents' weekend and another demonstration during the foundation's board meeting.

But "we focused more on the bargaining table this time," said Mark Lott, the local's president. The local had two main issues, he said, forced overtime and wages.

It took months of negotiations, but in the end, they made gains on both, getting a wage increase that averaged 6 percent in the first year of the contract, and limits on the agency's ability to schedule overtime.

Contract campaign works at Hope Institute

Local 2481 knew their upcoming negotiations would be tough.

"They came to the table saying they had no money," said Yolanda Sims, the local union president. "But we knew they had something because they have alternative sources of funding. We wanted to let management know that all our members knew we were at the table, were watching and were in support of the union."

Members wore black on every day that bargaining meetings were held. There were regular bargaining updates, sticker days and other demonstrations of solidarity.

In one of the local's actions, workers on their lunch breaks and those with the day off massed in the hallway by the room where a bargaining session was about to begin. They carried signs saying, "Make me a priority."

"That demonstration turned the tide," Sims said. "Within a couple of sessions, we had an agreement that will put some money in our members' pockets."

Raises in the first year of the contract averaged 2.35 percent.

Cuts don't fly at Clearbrook

Management was seeking a wage reduction when bargaining

between Local 2871 and Clearbrook came down to economic items.

"At first they didn't want to give us anything," said Tina Anderson, the local union president. "Then they offered to give us a raise, if we'd give back all 12 of our sick days. We told them no. We weren't going to pay for our own raises."

Management went so far as to send union members a letter, saying they would terminate the contract. The bargaining team held a union meeting to make sure the members were behind them. They circulated a petition, showing strong support.

"We stood by what we wanted," Anderson said. "The members all came together and said they weren't giving up any sick days and they were willing to fight."

The contract settlement included a 3 percent wage increase for the first year and a \$200 bonus. The union agreed to give up three personal days which they were rarely able to utilize, but kept all 12 sick days.

Fighting and winning

The locals in the above stories are not the only ones that have refused to take no for an answer. For example, AFSCME locals at Aspire and St. Coletta's fought back and won bonuses, despite the agencies' funding problems.

"We knew that something had to be done at these agencies," Council 31 regional director Joe Bella said. "These are hard-working, dedicated staff who are grievously underpaid. The long hours they work to keep their families afloat leave gaping holes in the fabric of their home lives."

"AFSCME has been making the fight in Springfield to get additional state funding for pay increases for direct-care workers," he said. "But in recent years, the enormous state budget shortfall has halted the progress that was being made. These ground-level struggles for better contract settlements are crucial stop-gap measures. But we have to fix the state's fiscal woes in order to keep moving forward."

Red Cross workers looking at the big picture



Newly organized Red Cross workers in Peoria are building solidarity with other Red Cross of America groups around the country.

Workers who run blood drives for the Peoria-based Heart of America region of the American Red Cross are working to build solidarity with others who are facing the organization's strident anti-union policies.

THE PEORIA WORKERS ARE HAVING THEIR METTLE TESTED ONCE AGAIN BY MANAGEMENT'S REFUSAL to sit down and bargain. They waited three years to have their votes counted, while management used stalling tactics through the broken unionization process overseen by the National Labor Relations Board.

When the votes were counted, it was clear that the workers had chosen AFSCME as their representative, and

the NLRB has certified that result. But it has also become clear that the Red Cross has no intention of bargaining until it has exhausted every conceivable legal delay and is forced to do so. The agency continues its legal machinations.

In the meantime the Peoria-region workers have begun to reach out to Red Cross employees nationwide. They gathered to send a show of support to a group in

Wilmington, N.C., who were engaged in a similar battle with Red Cross over their right to form a union.

"There are a lot of Red Cross employees trying to do the same thing we are," said Keith Steele, a union supporter in Peoria. "The more of us that stand together, the better chance we have of getting the company to bargain."

He appeared with other Red Cross workers at a news conference held by Interfaith Worker Justice, a national group of religious leaders who, according to their mission statement, work on "issues and campaigns that will improve wages, benefits, and conditions for workers, and give voice to workers, especially workers in low-wage jobs."

The group was announcing a guide for congregations that host or support Red Cross Blood drives.

Churches urged to monitor safety

EVERY YEAR THE RED CROSS holds 200,000 blood drives across the country, many of them at churches.

"As an organization dedicated to a humanitarian mission, we believe that the American Red Cross must do more to ensure it meets its obligations to blood donors and its employees," said Rabbi Jonathan Klein, executive director at Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice. "If we host a blood drive, we want to know if it is properly staffed, whether there is a licensed nurse on-hand and whether workers assigned to the blood drive are treated fairly."

The interfaith group's executive director Kim Bobo said it was not trying to stop churches from hosting blood

drives, but was trying to hold the Red Cross accountable "for the safety of the blood supply and the treatment of their workers."

Safety problems and labor law violations

A NUMBER OF UNIONS REPRESENTING Red Cross workers around the country have also formed the Workers' Committee for Blood Safety. They argue that there is a strong link between the high number of unfair labor practice charges filed against the Red Cross and the increasing number of problems in keeping donors and the blood supply safe.

In 2010 alone the Red Cross was fined \$16 million by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for blood safety compliance problems. The FDA has fined Red Cross \$37 million since 2003 for blood safety violations due to recurring non-compliance with safety procedures, including donor screening, testing and handling of blood products, component preparations and quality control.

At about the same time, between 1996 and 2007, the Red Cross was charged with 212 unfair labor practice violations by the NLRB.

The Coalition of Red Cross Unions has

signed a Solidarity Statement. The unions plan to coordinate bargaining, increase communication and joint action and press for improved blood safety practices.

'We're not going away'

"FROM THE DEGRADING OF requirements that medically trained personnel be present at blood drives, to the extraordinarily long workdays with minimal breaks demanded of many workers, to attacks on workers' collective bargaining rights, management's (behavior) risks imperiling the safety of donors, the integrity of the blood supply, and the well-being of employees," argued a report commissioned by the National Workers' Rights Board and Jobs with Justice.

In Peoria, the new AFSCME group was planning an informational picket.


"It's still a long, hard battle," Steele said. "We want to get the public informed and we want to let Red Cross know we want to work together, but we're not going away."

The new AFSCME members in Peoria prepare for an informational picket after having faced more than two years of stalling by the American Red Cross, which refuses to bargain in good faith.



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Putting the brakes on state contracts

The number of AFSCME-represented state employees, which has been decreasing for most of the last 10 years due to shrinkage of the state workforce, is beginning to turn upwards.

A GROWING NUMBER OF JOBS WILL BE FILLED BY FULL-TIME, AFSCME-REPRESENTED STATE EMPLOYEES THROUGH COUNCIL 31'S EFFORTS TO:

- Gain adequate staffing in state agencies;
- Identify savings for state government to prevent layoffs;
- End forced overtime; and
- Ensure that contractual employees are not performing work that state workers should be doing.

"Agencies often let a contract without doing a cost analysis, so they don't know if they are realizing savings or not," Council 31 collective bargaining administrator Erin Gorman said.

AFSCME has been engaged in a systematic effort to review all of the hundreds of state contracts to determine which of them involve work that could more appropriately be performed by state employees.

"It has been challenging," Gorman said, "but we are starting to see agencies asking the right questions: 'Are we getting our money's worth?' and 'Can we do it more cheaply or better in house?'"

Multi-pronged approach against contracting out

THE STATE HAS THREE MAIN methods of out-sourcing jobs: hiring a contractor whose company manages and performs a specified body of work; letting a "personal service" contract to an individual who performs work under state management; and using a vendor to recruit and hire temporary employees who end up functioning like personal service contractors.

The union has filed hundreds of grievances to enforce a series of negotiated union contract provisions aimed at protecting union jobs and the wages and benefits that go with them.

This has resulted in a number of arbitration awards and negotiated settlements that have committed the state to bringing these outsourced jobs back in house.

Other roads have led in

the same direction. The union has long argued that out-sourcing doesn't really save the state money, even though wages and benefits of those performing the work are lower. Council 31 staff got the chance to prove that when the state took up the union's offer to discuss ways of saving money as an alternative to layoffs.

Once the books were opened on many contracts, it was easy to show that state employees, even at union compensation levels, could do the job for less than the contractors.

The union has been meeting with every agency and reviewing contracts to determine which ones could be converted to state jobs.

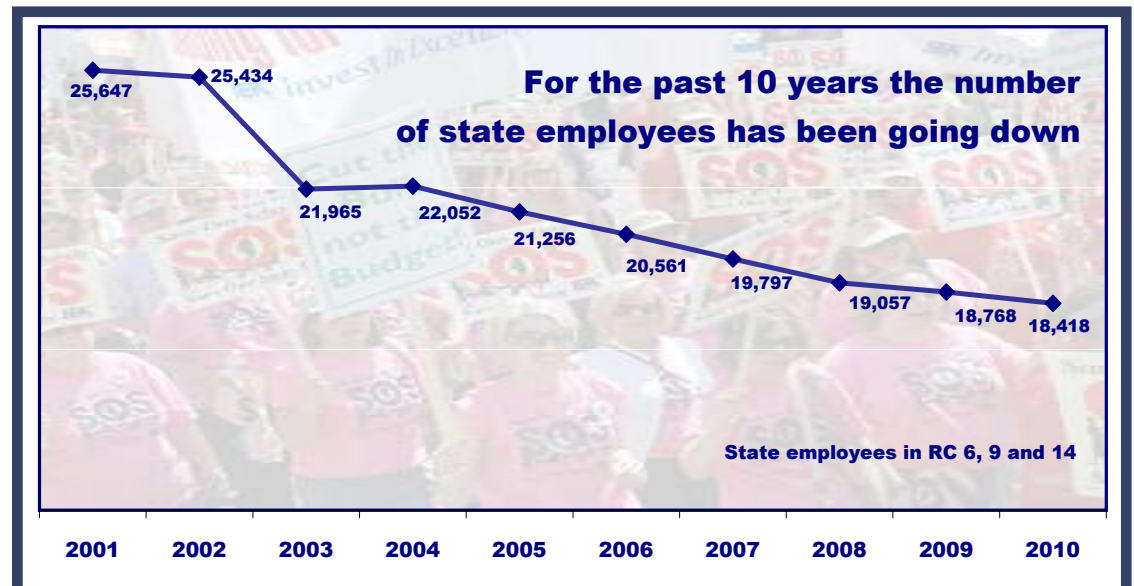
"We are looking at hundreds and hundreds of contracts," said Emily Johnson, also a Council 31 collective bargaining administrator. "It's a slow, tedious process."

State employees replacing contractors

BUT IT'S A PROCESS THAT'S LED to a steady reduction in personal-service contractors and temporary-agency employees. Many have been replaced by newly hired state employees. With an impartial arbitrator overseeing the process, the state was working toward a Dec. 31 deadline for completely eliminating personal-service contract employees and those that function in the same manner.

Some examples:

- The Department of Children and Family Services reports filling seven clerical positions that have been converted to state jobs. Another 114 temporary workers are scheduled to be moved out, which will lead to additional postings for state positions.
- The Departments of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and Human Services have posted information technology positions, as has DCFS. The Department of Central Management Services has said it plans to do a comprehensive review of all IT jobs that are now being done by non-



union workers on contract.

- In DHS's Division of Rehabilitation Services more than 150 counselor and case coordinator positions have been converted to state positions.
- In DOC, a cost-saving move led to the elimination of an accounting firm, yielding 14 state jobs and still saving nearly \$1.2 million.

Legislative action leverages staffing increases

A LOBBYING PUSH BY COUNCIL 31 in 2009 to enact a law banning forced overtime led to negotiations with the state that yielded a memorandum of understanding on mandatory overtime.

The MOU included specific numbers for staffing increases, because the state acknowledged that cutting

overtime by adding staff would actually save money.

But the state was not hitting the hiring targets, so the union filed a grievance, which was recently submitted to arbitration.

The arbitrator agreed with the union's contention that the state was not moving quickly enough to hire staff and set deadlines for the four affected departments – Corrections, Juvenile Justice, Human Services and Veterans Affairs – to meet the net hiring targets, with additional hiring required to compensate for attrition. Specifically:

- DOC is required to start classes for a minimum of 140 cadets each on Jan. 10, Feb. 28 and April 18;
- DJJ is to hire a minimum of 30 Juvenile Justice Interns on or before Apr. 15;
- DHS, an additional 375

direct-care staff by Feb. 28; and;

- DVA, 120 additional direct-care staff by Feb. 28.

The arbitrator has also said he would adjust the DOC numbers upwards after he has looked at figures detailing the number of beds that have been added to state prisons in recent months.

"We have fought against contracting out, for adequate staffing and against forced overtime," Council 31 Associate Director Mike Newman said "The added good news is that the progress we have made in all of those areas has led to significant cost savings for the state. It's a win for union members, a win for the state, a win for people who are looking for a good job, a win for taxpayers and a win for people who need state services."

Renewed push on for Cook County contract

Presidents of 11 Cook County locals delivered nearly 3,500 postcards, signed by AFSCME members in their locals, urging newly elected County Board President Toni Preckwinkle to "respect the employees on the frontlines of County government," and "direct your management team to come back to the bargaining table with a firm commitment to reaching a fair contract settlement in an expeditious manner."

The 11 locals are renewing their efforts to conclude bargaining for a contract, after working for two years on an extension. The four locals representing sheriff's employees had their contract settled by an arbitrator. Those locals, because they are barred by law from striking, have the option of going to arbitration.

Preckwinkle sat down with the AFSCME group and agreed that it was outrageous for the bargaining to have dragged on for so long. She said she believes negotiations should be concluded quickly. And although there are serious budget problems, she indicated that AFSCME members are not the cause of the problem, and that it would not be appropriate to balance the budget on their backs.



SHORT REPORTS

AFSCME-backed candidates win IMRF trustee slots

AFSCME-BACKED CANDIDATES Marvin Shoop, John Piechocinski and Sharon Thompson to the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund Board of Trustees. Shoop and Piechocinski were elected by active participants in the pension system, while Sharon Thompson was overwhelmingly elected by retirees.

The union supported these candidates because they give union members who participate in IMRF, the retirement system for local governments outside of Cook County, a voice on the board.

All three pledged to fight for:

- Maintaining the 100 percent funding requirement for the IMRF, a legal protection for IMRF participants that has made IMRF the strongest and best-funded public pension system in Illinois;
- Counteracting the growing anxiety in Illinois about the affordability of public pension systems;

- Protecting the economic integrity of the fund; and
- Preserving board independence.



Christian County employees celebrate win.

Public support helps local win no-layoff pact

CHRISTIAN COUNTY WAS SEEKING concessions from Local 3776. Management started out demanding five furlough days, with a 90-day no-layoff guarantee. The local wouldn't go along.

Then the county sent a layoff notice to the local, with eight jobs on the line.

The local decided to fight back. Members jammed into a finance committee meeting and the County Board agreed to bargain.

Then the local went out

on a Saturday, hitting four of the larger towns in the county and within only two hours collected 1,000 signatures on petitions opposing layoffs and service cuts.

The petitions were presented at the next County Board meeting.

The board decided to hold off on passing its budget until the bargaining had been concluded.

The local was able to get an agreement that bars layoffs and furlough days during the term of the current contract, which runs until Nov. 30, 2011. The union agreed to defer a 2 percent wage increase until that date, but if other county employees get an increase, the union members will also get it.

"This was a great settlement in that it saved not just jobs, but vital public services," said Mary Rhodes, the local union president. "Had the layoffs taken place, public safety and assistance of many kinds would have been impacted."

The local credited the strong show of support from county residents for the success.



AFSCME joined with the FOP in protesting cuts to Naperville's police force.

Naperville employees choose AFSCME

LOOKING FOR A VOICE AT WORK, basic fairness and the right to be treated with respect, employees of the city of Naperville's Utilities Department have chosen AFSCME representation.

"Our voices need to be heard," said Carol Stigler, an administrative assistant in the Electric Department. "Management has a voice, the City Council has a voice, and other employees who are unionized have a voice. We need to be heard to express what is important to us in serving the citizens of Naperville. Being part of AFSCME seems like the best way to do that."

Once the union is certified, the group will begin preparations to bargain with the city for a first contract, but the administration is throwing up barriers, using the State Labor Relations

Board process to slow things down.

In the meantime the new AFSCME group has been meeting with a coalition of unions that represent other city employees.

"It's a great opportunity for us to learn from their experiences," Stigler said. "We all know we won't get anywhere if we don't support one another."

The police union got that support when they held an informational picket in late November to protest short-staffing.

Eventually the stalling will end and the bargaining will start for the utilities workers.

"We haven't had a raise in two years," Stigler said. "Everyone else has, but we've been forgotten. We feel we've been left out. And we wanted a union to protect ourselves from pay cuts and insurance hikes. As non-union employees, we have taken the brunt of that."



City of Champaign workers fight layoffs, furloughs

WHEN LOCAL 1960 WOULDN'T GIVE BACK ITS SCHEDULED 3.25 PERCENT wage increase, the city, which had neglected to account for the raise in the current-year budget, retaliated. Management announced a plan to impose five furlough days and cut 10 employees by layoffs and attrition.

The plan would cut public safety services. For example a 24-hour haven for parents and children in crisis situations would be cut. The police station would be closed to the public for eight hours nightly. The cuts would affect workers who relay up-to-date information on criminal activity and criminal suspects to police officers in the field, and track the city's sex-offender residents.

The local is fighting this plan. Members lined the path to council chambers before the Nov. 23 meeting, distributing fliers that said "Tell Champaign City you value public safety and efficient public services!"

"We wanted to say, 'We're here, we're willing to talk,'" said Broc Summers, the local's president.

But at press time no dates for bargaining had been set.

Local pushes for equity at NIU

WITH THE REST OF NORTHERN ILLINOIS University faculty and staff slated for 2.5 percent wage increases on Jan. 1, building and health service workers are battling for the same treatment as management drags out contract negotiations with their local union.

After five months of bargaining with no progress, AFSCME members moved to raise the stakes, staging a demonstration at the university president's office.

They had circulated a petition around campus and outside the school's Homecoming Day football game, collecting signatures from hundreds of staff, students, parents and alumni. Then they took them to the president, who happened to be in his office when they arrived with some 25 members and the poster-sized petitions.

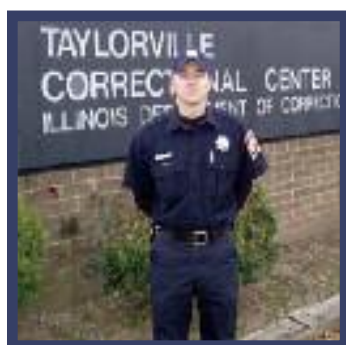
"It was a good experience," said Darlene Seilheimer, Local 963 president. "We took our concerns to the president and he came out to address us."

She said the local also appeared at the university's board of trustees meeting, asking them to "facilitate better relations between AFSCME and the university."

As On the Move went to press, the local had a bargaining session scheduled.

"We're hoping we've got their attention now," Seilheimer said. "We're frontline service employees and up to now they aren't recognizing what we do for the university."





Taylorville CO saves a life

A GROUP OF FRIENDS WERE PLAYING basketball at the Taylorville Christian Church gym when Adam Vincent, a correctional officer at Taylorville Correctional Center and executive board member of Local 3653, noticed that one of the players was lying on the floor on the sidelines.

Vincent went over to see if anything was wrong and realized John Crist, who volunteers in the prison chapel, was having trouble breathing. Using the emergency response training he learned in the Department of Corrections, Vincent responded. He told someone to call 911 and began to check Crist's vital signs.

By this time he had stopped breathing and had no pulse. Vincent began chest compressions, reviving the stricken man three times until the ambulance arrived with medical personnel who restored Crist's heart rhythm with a defibrillator.

Vincent was named the prison's November 2010 Employee of the Month.

Council 31's Marquardt Scholarship applications due April 17

COUNCIL 31 HONORS ITS FOUNDING executive director, Larry Marquardt, and emphasizes its commitment to education by choosing three members of Council 31 or their children for a \$2,000 scholarship.

Marquardt, a tireless union organizer and leader, dedicated his own life to improving the lives of working people. He was the first executive director of Council 31, serving in that job until his death in 1980.

In choosing winners the scholarship committee considers:

- Financial need;

- High school or college grades and class ranking; and
- Vocational goals as expressed in the application, including interest in the goals of the labor movement.

The applicant must be a member of Council 31 or a child living in the household of a member. Membership of one year in good standing is required. Members of any age, or a child who is a high school senior or college student under 25 years old, must be working toward an undergraduate degree or diploma in an accredited college or vocational school. Awardees must plan to be full-time students.

Members can write for applications to AFSCME Council 31, 205 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60601, attention Minnie Perez, or send an email including name and address to mperez@afscme31.org. Completed applications must be received by April 15.

Apply for Chicago Labor Federation scholarships by March 1

TEN COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS, each of \$2,000, will be awarded through the William A. Lee Memorial Scholarship program of the Chicago Federation of Labor to students who graduate from a Chicago-area high school in 2006. Eligibility is restricted to members in good standing or children of such members in local unions affiliated with the CFL.

Selections for five of the awards will be based on high school grades and college entrance exam test scores. The other five awards will be given out to any eligible student on the basis of a random drawing.

Students who want applications should write to the Chicago Federation of Labor, William A. Lee Memorial Scholarship Committee, 130 E. Randolph St., Suite 2600, Chicago, IL 60601. An online application is available for download at www.chicagolabor.org.

In requesting an application by mail, the applicant should provide his or her name, address, and union affiliation on a note card and say which selection method they are opting for. Completed applications must be postmarked no later than March 1.

RNs put squeeze on General Assembly

NURSE ACTIVISTS CONTINUED THEIR PUSH FOR A BILL THAT WOULD set statewide standards for safe staffing levels in hospitals with a unique twist, setting up a blood-pressure-screening table in the state Capitol lobby.

Nurses from Resurrection Health Care who are seeking union representation with AFSCME were among those who used a "wellness table" to distribute literature and talk to people about SB224 and HB485 – the RN safe-staffing bill.



Energized by recent research documenting the benefits for patient care that resulted from the nurse staffing ratios established by law in California, nurses in Illinois are building support for similar legislation to be introduced in the new legislative session that gets underway in January.

The premise is simple: having enough nurses at the bedside is essential for safe, high-quality patient care.

And the evidence is persuasive: An analysis of 13 studies from the journal Nursing Economics revealed that hospitals with higher registered-nurse-to-patient ratios had fewer deaths. Virtually all the studies demonstrated that more nurses at the bedside decreased costs and produced safer, shorter patient stays.

Cook County local hoops for toys

A BASKETBALL TEAM SPONSORED BY LOCAL 3692, COOK COUNTY Sheriff's correctional sergeants, defeated the correctional officers in a game the sheriff's staff put together as a fundraiser for the Toys for Tots Christmas drive.

As the price of admission some 200 fans brought a toy. The local also kicked in \$250.

"This will benefit a lot of children that otherwise might not see a Christmas," said Robert Rodriguez, the local's president. "Right now, we're on a winning path. Our contract was a win, we've won every grievance we've taken to arbitration and we are undefeated on the basketball court."



Lombard residents get to 'Touch a Truck'

UNIONS FOR FIREFIGHTERS, POLICE OFFICERS AND PUBLIC works employees in the village of Lombard joined during Fire Prevention Week in October to bring the public in to see what the city does and what all that equipment is for.

AFSCME Local 89 members brought a front end loader, a back hoe, dump truck, skid-steer, snow plow, and street sweeper to the "Touch a Truck" day and let kids and parents climb on board.

"Public employees are under fire everywhere, and Lombard is no different," said Shaun Stillwell, the local union president. "This was a chance to show we're here for the public. People get to recognize what we do. Usually we only get to see people when something is going wrong, so it's nice to meet with citizens when they have a smile on their faces."

The unions also used the event to raise money for charities – Lombard's "TLC Camp" for children with cancer, and the firefighters union "Camp I Am Me" for children with severe burn injuries.



RETIREE NOTES

Sharon Thompson re-elected

IMRF RETIREES HAVE re-elected Sharon Thompson, a member of Dixon Sub-chapter 72, as the retiree trustee on the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund Board.

"I want to thank all the members of AFSCME for your support and endorsement of my campaign for reelection to the IMRF Board as the Annuitant Trustee," Thompson said. "Your support was very important to my victory. I will strive to continue to support legislation to stabilize the supplemental '13th' check and to increase the IMRF death benefit from \$3,000 to \$5,000. We will fight to maintain the 100% funding requirement for the IMRF. IMRF is the strongest and best-funded public pension system in Illinois, and I am proud to be part of it."

Deficit commission report could hurt retirees

THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, a "blue-ribbon" panel of 18, was created eight months ago by President Obama to come up with recommendations for reducing the deficit. Though its final report contained some provisions that would have cut into retirees' standard of living, it did not secure the required 14 votes to make it an official recommendation by a Dec. 3 deadline.

Unfortunately, that does-



n't mean the proposals are dead.

"We fear that certain provisions in the report by the Fiscal Commission may be incorporated into future legislation that will have a negative impact on retirement security," Chapter 31 President Virginia Yates said.

The report aims to reduce the deficit by nearly \$4 trillion by 2020, in large part by slashing domestic spending, including Social Security. Future retirees would face higher Medicare premiums and a retirement age of 69 in 2075.

The proposal would also cut Social Security's annual cost of living adjustment and cut benefits overall for middle-income earners by 17 percent to 36 percent. The early retirement age would also rise, to 64 from 62.

"Many seem to forget that time is not as friendly to those whose jobs are psychically taxing or stressful," Yates said. "Yet waitresses, teachers, corrections officers and others in such jobs would not be able to

access their benefits until 68 or 69."

While the report did not get enough votes to win an official recommendation, some of the proposals could come up in the next session, when there will be a divided Congress.

U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky has authored a proposal that offers an alternative plan to lift the burden from people of modest means. As a member of the commission, Schakowsky released her own deficit-reduction plan after rejecting the proposal of the commission's co-chairs.

Schakowsky would keep Social Security benefits intact, while making deep reductions in defense spending by cutting what many consider unnecessary weapons systems and reducing troop levels.

She calls for a rise in corporate taxes on companies that outsource jobs or grant excessive pay to chief executives. Half of the proposed budget cut — \$430 billion annually in 2015 — would be achieved by eliminating various corporate tax breaks, ending the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy, and creating a new energy tax through the cap-and-trade system.

While some may argue that U.S. companies should not face higher taxes because of their need to compete globally, the Commerce Department released a report that noted that American businesses earned profits at an annual rate of \$1.659 trillion in the third quarter, the highest figure (not adjusting for inflation) recorded since the government began keeping track more than 60 years ago.

Schakowsky's deficit reduction proposal also included an additional \$200 billion economic stimulus, which would create jobs and combat unemployment. Her plan calls for "sustained, long-term economic growth by ending the trend of concentrating more and more wealth in the hands of the rich and less and less in the hands of the middle class."

Yates said Schakowsky has the right idea: "The deficit must be addressed, but in a way that does not leave the bulk of the sacrifice to work-

ing Americans."

Retiree PEOPLE program

THE AFSCME PEOPLE PROGRAM experienced some changes last year, but that will not impact Chapter 31's ability to raise PEOPLE dollars. Illinois Chapter 31 remains one of the highest contributing AFSCME affiliates — compared not only to other retiree chapters across the country, but also to councils representing active members.

PEOPLE is the way that public-sector retirees support candidates for office who will fight to protect their interests, including pensions, Social Security, Medicare and other retirement benefits. Retiree activism enables AFSCME to be strong politically.

PEOPLE allows members to put money into a fund voluntarily, to help elect public officials who have shown they support public employees and retirees.

"Lawmakers have a profound influence on the quality of retirees' lives," AFSCME Chapter 31 Retiree Coordinator Maria Britton said. "We must hold them accountable for their votes."

AFSCME Retirees can contribute at two levels: Those at the "All Star" level contribute \$2 per month and receive a special PEOPLE contributor's lapel pin; at the MVP level a member contributes \$8 per month and receives a custom-designed, lightweight MVP jacket with a gold embroidered logo.

MVP contributors will also be enrolled in MVP Rewards, a new Internet-based incentive program. It replaces the former MVP and VIP incentive programs, allowing contributors to choose from a variety of union-made merchandise in an online store, based on the amount of reward points accumulated.

An MVP can earn a point for every dollar contributed and those points can be accessed by registering for a personal, password-protected rewards account. Members can register at peoplerewards.afscme.org.

Veto session does not address pensions

THE LEGISLATURE LEFT UNANSWERED the question of a funding source for Illinois' pension systems when the fall veto ses-

sion ended without a resolution to the problem.

The fiscal year 2010 budget included a provision giving the comptroller authority to delay the state's payments to the pension systems, and the legislature is using it to once again dodge its responsibility.

"I have been overwhelmed with questions from retirees who are seriously concerned about the status of the pension systems here in Illinois," said Viki Olsen, president of Ottawa Area Sub-chapter 75. "They want to know why the legislature has not funded the pensions this year as required by the law."

The state's pension systems are only 54 percent funded, ranking them among the most underfunded in the country with a current estimated liability of \$61 billion. But the underfunding is not a result of overly generous benefits.

According to the comptroller's office, Illinois ranks in the bottom one-fifth of all states for retirement benefits paid to the average state worker. State retirees have an average standard pension of \$22,000 per year.

Instead, the underfunding is a result of the state ignoring its pension obligations over the years. While public-sector employees are required to regularly make their pension contributions, the state frequently reduced the employer contribution. In some years no payment was made.

Last spring, with the state facing an estimated \$13 billion deficit, the legislature considered two options to fund the \$3.7 billion pension contribution: Borrow the money, which would have cost an additional \$1 billion in interest, or cut \$3.7 billion from other budget items. Though a borrowing measure passed the House last spring, it so far has not been approved by the Senate. Thus a third option is now on the table: skip the payment once again.

In the meantime, the retirement systems have been forced to sell assets to pay benefits. The resulting firestorm left many retirees frustrated that they have been made targets for the state's irresponsibility.

"Retirees worked and set their money aside for retirement, often sacrificing pay increases to insure the stability of their retirement benefits, while the state did not honor its obligations," Olsen said. "It's time for the legislature to correct its mistakes by funding the pensions appropriately."



ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

Raises for East Side Health District workers

A THREE-YEAR CONTRACT PROVIDES members of Local 3565 with a 50-cents-an-hour wage increase in the first year.

The East Side Health District employees will bargain separately for wages in the other two years. There will be no change in the terms of the health insurance package. The employer is now required to give 15 days' notice for layoffs. Recall rights will extend for two years.

"We started out being offered nothing," said Jaunita Jefferson, the local union president. "But it got more friendly toward the end."

Staff representative Carla Gillespie, who led the local's bargaining team said, "It didn't take them long to figure out that we were organized and we wouldn't take nothing."

The local put some pressure on management by

going to health district board meetings.

"Last year we had layoffs and we went to the board," Jefferson said. "We got the last ones recalled that way. That had a lot to do with getting a good contract. The director knows we won't back down. And she knows we had gone out on strike before."

Mechelle Jones and Kourtney Hicks served on the bargaining committee with Gillespie and Jefferson.

New Cook County group gains security

SUPERVISORS IN THE COOK County State's Attorney's office have their first contract, after a majority chose AFSCME representation last year. They now have seniority, compensatory time and a grievance procedure.

Being slotted into the AFSCME pay plan for county employees gave the supervi-

sors raises from 5 percent to 13 percent, and they will get any additional raises bargained by all 15 Cook County locals in the "universal contract".

"We wanted a fair wage and job protection," said Chuck Duerr, one of the new Local 2060 members who served on the negotiating committee. "We decided AFSCME was the best choice for us. Job protection was our No. 1 goal."

The negotiating committee was led by staff representative John DiNicola, with Duerr, Colleen Mitchell, Sandra Prude and Christine Kote.

Forced overtime a 'thorn in our side'

A THREE-YEAR CONTRACT between Local 3784 and Beverly Farm Foundation raised wages an average of 6 percent in the first year. Wage reopener negotiations will determine the other two years' wages.

The employees' portion of health-care premiums go down by \$7 to \$16 per month. Limits were imposed on the employer's right to schedule mandatory overtime.

"The most important issue was mandatory overtime," said Mark Lott, the local union president. "It has been a thorn in our side for 10 years. At one point they were scheduling four extra shifts per week. Now they have to share with us why they're doing it and they have to meet with us on it."

The contract gains didn't come easily, but they didn't seem that hard to a local that had withstood a long strike in 1994 to get its first contract.

"We focused more on the bargaining table," Lott said. "But we did do an informational picket during parents weekend and we attended the foundation meeting. A lot of parents were there, too."

Staff representative Nick Christen led the bargaining team, with staff representative Ed LaPorte, Lott, Jimmie Jordan, Mary Fillback, Lucienna Cole and Cathy Devening.

U. of I. local chooses one-year extension

WAGES WILL BE FROZEN FOR A one-year contract extension

between Local 698 and the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana.

The local was concerned that opening the contract would bring on employer demands for concessions, so it proposed the extension.

Still, small gains were made for library employees, who will now get a shift differential, and holiday pay will go to 12 hours for firefighters, from eight hours. All members of the bargaining unit got a \$150 bonus on the last paycheck of 2010.

"In economic times like these and with the state budget where it is, we wanted to make sure we didn't go backwards," said Jim McGuire, the local's president. "That was important to our members."

He said the local is hoping that next year the bargaining climate will be better. The local is also taking steps to strengthen its position, by signing up non-members and meeting with other unions.

"We're working with all the unions on campus to organize for next year," he said. "Wages have been frozen for a couple of years and we'll need to be organized to make some progress."

Staff representative Tara McCauley led the union negotiating committee, with McGuire, Margaret Lewis and Greg Homerding.

New push to reduce federal deficit on backs of middle class

The increasing drumbeat to reduce the federal deficit may have been muffled a bit when the president's fiscal commission failed to reach consensus on a budget-balancing plan.

THAT'S GOOD NEWS FOR THE MIDDLE CLASS BECAUSE WHEN YOU TRANSLATE "REDUCING THE federal deficit" it's beginning to sound a lot like "lowering the standard of living for working families."

The plan floated by Erskine Bowles and Alan Simpson, the bipartisan co-chairs of the National Commission of Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, certainly hewed to that equation.

It "focused more on protecting lavish tax cuts for corporations and millionaires than on protecting jobs, public services and the retirement security of working Americans," AFSCME International President Gerald McEntee

said.

U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-Evanston, a member of the commission, was so dissatisfied with the co-chairs' plan that she issued her own alternative.

"Lower- and middle-class Americans did not cause the deficit," she said. The Bowles-Simpson plan would have serious consequences for them, "and that is why I cannot support it."

From the 18 commission members, 14 votes were needed to trigger a provision that Congress consider the plan in its entirety. Fortunately there were only 11 supporters, though one of them was Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill.

Social Security hit hard

THE PLAN WOULD:

- Cut Social Security benefits of middle-class families. Young people entering the workforce today would lose 17 percent to 36 percent of their benefits, depending on their income.
- Focus on benefit cuts to close Social Security's long-range funding gap.
- Fail to close the gap by requiring those employees (and their employers) who make more than \$107,000 a year to pay Social Security taxes on all their wages, as do those who earn less.
- Raise the retirement age to 69 — a 13 percent benefit cut — and raise the early retirement age to 64.
- Reduce the annual cost of living adjustment for Social Security beneficiaries, starting in 2012.

But the damage isn't limited to Social Security. The plan would also force

deep cuts in Medicare and other social programs. And taxing employer contributions to health insurance would also be on the table.

Asking the rich to contribute more

INCOME INEQUALITY HAS increased sharply in the past 10 years, at the same time that the federal deficit has skyrocketed. The wealthiest Americans have gained income and wealth, while workers' economic fortunes have been stuck in place. While many in the political punditry praised the Bowles-Simpson plan as courageous, AFL-CIO President Rich Trumka saw something else.

"True political courage would take on the powerful and the wealthy," he said, "and ask them to pay their fair share to bring our fiscal situation back into balance — not cut the top tax rate for the wealthy and for corporations."

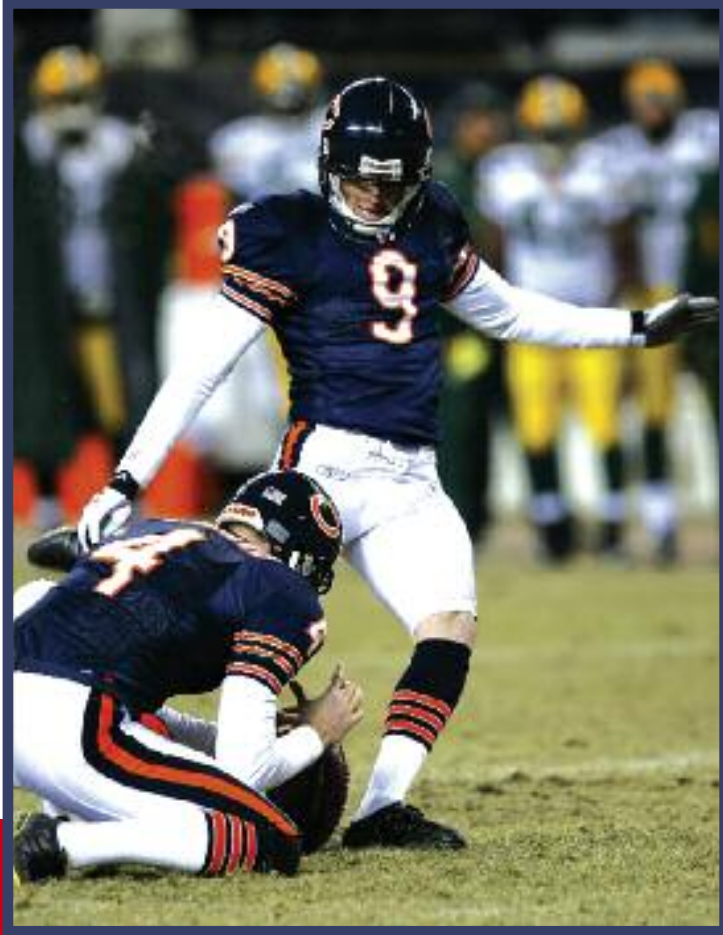
One alternative plan that

follows Trumka's formula was laid out in a report done jointly by Demos, the Economic Policy Institute and The Century Foundation — "Investing in America's Economy."

It says: "We strongly oppose the idea that America's fiscal challenges should be solved by cutting long-standing social insurance programs that have brought security and prosperity to millions of Americans. Throughout the 'Great Recession' and its painful aftermath, those programs have proven to be effective mechanisms for limiting widespread catastrophic hardship."

The report lays out a detailed plan for eliminating the annual deficit by 2018. It focuses on stimulating job growth, cutting defense spending, controlling health care costs and "rebalancing the tax code and increasing tax revenue from those most able to pay."

Star Bears placekicker Robbie Gould is the teams representative on the NFL Players Association board.



Many Downstate Council 31 members cross the state line and root for the Rams.

ILLINOIS UNIONS VOICE SUPPORT FOR NFL PLAYERS

A lockout looks all too likely when the National Football League Players Association contract with the NFL expires at the end of the current season.

Everybody knows what a labor strike means — employees withhold their labor in the hope of pressuring their employer to come to fair contract terms.

But fewer people understand what a lockout means in terms of labor relations. In a lockout, the employer prevents employees from working (and collecting their salaries) in order to pressure them to accept a less-than-fair contract.

Normally, employers don't like lockouts much more than they like strikes because in both cases, they can take big losses if vital services are not provided and major revenues are lost.

However, because of a unique set of circumstances, the nation's football team owners are actually eager to lock out professional football players.

The team owners are demanding an 18 percent cut in the share of league revenue set aside for player salaries, which would take \$1 billion out of the players' pockets. The current split is roughly 50-50. But owners get a \$1 billion credit for operating and investment expenses off the top of the revenue pool before the remainder of the money is divided with players.

At the same time as they try to reduce salaries, the owners are seeking to increase the number of games played each season, thereby increasing each player's risk of injury.

The players union points out that the NFL has threatened to discontinue active-player health care in a lockout. That health care doesn't come easily: The average NFL career is only 3.6 years, but it takes three accredited years to get just five years of post-career health-care coverage. And given the ferociousness of the game, it is not unusual for NFL players to incur severe injuries that continue to plague them for years after they've stopped playing.

The lockout seems certain to occur because the owners are holding a big trump card: They've negotiated deals that guarantee them television revenues even if games are not played in the 2011 season.

The real money in football is not at the gate, but on the screen. That

means the owners can effectively lock out players—leaving them without income or health coverage for an entire season — without suffering any real consequences themselves.

But even if the owners don't lose, lots of others, will. For instance, the city of Chicago stands to lose \$140 million in revenues and jobs if next season's games aren't played.

"It is incredibly disheartening to know that the passion of Chicago Bears' fans and the state funds that have benefited the team in the form of land grants and other tax subsidies are apparently taken for granted by NFL owners like Mr. McCaskey," said Illinois AFL-CIO President Mike Carrigan in a letter to Mayor Richard Daley, seeking his intervention with Bears ownership.

"We will soon ask public officials like you to review the state tax and other benefits enjoyed by the Chicago Bears and, if necessary, request a public accounting and audit of the NFL and its member teams," Carrigan wrote.

He noted the "hundreds of thousands of stadium workers, hotel and restaurant workers and other working people in Chicago who not only support the Bears as fans but rely upon this business to support their families."

The players association is demanding that the teams open up their books to demonstrate whether they really need economic concessions. So far the owners are refusing to do so.

"This seems to be but one more example of the kind of ruthless tactics that too many employers are using to shift income to the wealthy, drive down wages and break unions," Council 31 Director Henry Bayer said. "It's a sign of the times in which we live that even popular public figures like pro football players can be subjected to this kind of assault."