

COUNCIL 31 DEPUTY DIRECTOR MIKE NEWMAN

Excerpts from remarks to the 22nd Biennial Convention, October 16, 2021

I just came across an old fundraising piece from an anti-union group called the Freedom Foundation. They predicted that millions of workers nationwide would jump at the chance to quit our union when the Janus decision came down. And they boasted they would drive a stake through the hearts of public employee unions. But union members are a lot smarter than those anti-union forces gave them credit for. Our members stuck with their union because our members understand the importance of standing together.

Still, we have many challenges ahead. There is a new generation of workers, most of whom have not been part of the hard-fought battles we've been through. And many are not aware that their pay, benefits, and working conditions exist only because of all the hard work and sacrifice so many have made. We need to teach these new members about what the union has done and, with their support, can continue to accomplish. That, along with the continued organizing of unorganized workers, is the best prescription for building and maintaining the power of working people.

A decision of the state Supreme Court was key to saving public employee pensions in Illinois, and next year's election will include several Supreme Court seats. We know there will be more money spent on those races than ever before. We can't possibly match the other side's campaign money, but we can outdo the other side with boots on the ground, with going door to door.

The workers' rights constitutional amendment will also be on the ballot next year, and we have the opportunity to put a stop to attempts to strip us of our collective bargaining rights for good. While passing the workers' rights amendment would be a great and truly historic victory, it is going to require a lot of hard work.

We've seen attempts to divide us by geography, by occupation, by political party, or by race, religion, or gender. We know we have to be ever vigilant—because those who want to take away our voice—and our power—have unlimited amounts of money to devote to trying to divide us.

A famous labor leader once said there is one word that is the most important word in the English language for working people. That word was—and is today—solidarity.

As we continue to fight for higher wages, better benefits, and improved working conditions, we must never quit working to build unity—to build solidarity.

So, in closing, let me say it again, AFSCME never quits—we never quit fighting for our members, we never quit fighting against division, and we never quit fighting to build power through unity—through solidarity!