

AFSCME COUNCIL 31 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ROBERTA LYNCH

Excerpts from Remarks to the 22nd Biennial Convention, October 15, 2021

It seems hard to believe on many days, but it was just two years ago when we gathered for our last convention. We were here at this same hotel together in the highest of spirits. We had succeeded in ousting Bruce Rauner, the maniacal governor who wasted four years of our state's scant resources in an unrelenting assault on public employees and especially on our union.

We had concluded bargaining with JB Pritzker, the new governor, and won back all that Rauner had tried to steal from state employees: Step increases restored, tens of thousands of dollars in back pay, a \$2500 bonus in hand, pay increases locked in for four years.

We were one full year out from the US Supreme Court ruling in the Janus case that banned union Fair Share fees. And to the great frustration of our enemies, our ranks were not decimated, our spirits were not diminished, in the wake of that decision.

Of course, there were many problems and challenges still before us, but we felt more than ready to take them on.

That was in October 2019, just two years ago.

Then in just a matter of a few months our world, in fact the whole world, was turned upside down with the arrival of the coronavirus.

Here in our country, we never imagined such a thing could happen to us. We felt secure, protected from the kind of dangers we saw elsewhere in the world.

Then suddenly all around us—and in our own ranks—people were getting sick—very sick. People were dying. And, in essence, all of us became a danger to each other.

Social distancing—stay apart! become our country's watchwords. Our children had to be kept home from school, many of our workplaces shut down, and we had to learn to work remotely. And for the tens of millions who had to remain at their worksites to keep our economy and our essential public services on track, we had to learn, and learn very quickly, how to protect ourselves.

You could say it knocked us off our feet—this out-of-nowhere virus.

But you know what? When we get knocked down, we get right back up—because we're AFSCME

We're an army of public service workers doing our jobs with grit and determination.

And, sisters and brothers, for us safety is job one. So, we got to work. In a matter of months, sometimes even in a matter of weeks, we compelled employers to provide the necessary personal protective equipment and to put appropriate safety protocols in place.

And we haven't stopped fighting for even a day. Through all these many months and all of the struggles we've faced, we have held fast to what binds us.

Solidarity is foundational and it must always be rock solid!

We may have our differences—but we are always striving to overcome them.

So yes, we have to deal with the challenges of our time and the crises of the moment, but we have to always remember we inherited this union and so much of what we have was won due to the sacrifices and struggle of those who came before us. We stand on their shoulders. We must be sure that those who come after us can stand proudly on ours.