Solidarity Wins

Voters Reject Rauner’s Anti-Union Agenda

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT

Rauner’s loss is workers’ win

A 15-point trouncing is a rejection of his anti-union agenda

When an incumbent governor loses by 15 points—something that hasn’t happened in Illinois since 1948—voters are doing more than picking a candidate. They are choosing sides. That’s why Bruce Rauner’s 54-39 trouncing means more than the loss of an election. Paired with the rout of his hand-picked candidates and legislative enablers, the results were an emphatic rejection of Rauner’s anti-union agenda and his four years of attacks on working people.
Governor Bruce Rauner’s S4-39 re-election loss to challenger JB Pritzker rightfully took up the headlines, ending Rauner’s one-term tenure with a resounding defeat. But just as importantly, pro-worker candidates swept the other statewide offices and expanded their legislative majorities.

“Illinois voters did more on Election Day than defeat Bruce Rauner and end his four years of conflict and failure,” AFSCME Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said. “Voters across the state came together to support working people and to repudiate not just Rauner personally but his mean-spirited, anti-worker, anti-union agenda up and down the ballot.”

“This victory is overwhelming. I’m so excited and proud,” said Don Wunac, president of AFSCME Local 945 at Pinekneyville Correctional Center and one of AFSCME’s most dedicated volunteers.

“We had this humongous struggle, but every time it looked bleak, we stood up. We’ve endured the fight of our lifetime. Rauner wasn’t able to do to us what Scott Walker did to workers in Wisconsin. We need to recognize the power we have as a union. We’ve got so much to look forward to.”

AFSCME-recommended candidates Kwame Raoul (Attorney General), Susana Mendoza (Comptroller), Jesse White (Secretary of State) and many more statewide. Nine AFSCME members and retirees ran for local and state offices. Jay Ferrari (retiree), Beth Masser (Local 3323), Carlos Acosta (Local 2653), Michele Hansen (Local 3693), Danny Williams (Local 29) and Charlene Eads (Local 51) won for county-level positions. Amy Davis (retiree), Carolyn Blodgett (Local 29) and Gregg Johnson (retiree) won a bid for seats in the General Assembly. Aosta won his race. While the others fell short of election, their efforts put working-family issues on the agenda.

“Voters opted for leaders who want progress to benefit everyone.”

Raoul comfortably overcame Rauner’s hand-picked candidate, Erica Harold, in the Illinois Senate, winning candidates supported by AFSCME included incumbents Andy Manar and Tom Cullerton, along with newcomers Christpher Belt, Rachelle Aud Crowe, Ann Gillespie and Suzanne Gla- wiszak. As On the Move went to press, Laura Ellman was leading. In the state House, AFSCME-backed incumbents Randy Casto and Katie Stuart held their seats, as did appointee Monica Bristow. Newcomers Lanes Yednock, Karina Villa, Mark Waller, Terra Costa Howard, Joyce Mason, Jennifer Gong-Gershowitz, Diane Pappas, Bob Morgan, Daniel Dide and Anna Stava-Murray also prevailed. Mary Edly-Allen’s and Maggie Trevor’s races were too close to call at printing.

At the county level, AFSCME-endorsed candidate Kevin B. Morrison pulled off a remarkable upset in Cook. He knocked out Tim Schneider, chairman of Bruce Rauner’s state Republican Party. Several union-backed candidates won in Champaign, Lake (flipped to Democratic control for the first time), Will and DuPage counties, and many more statewide.

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Randy Haltgren, who voted to take health care away from millions of Americans and to give a trillion-dollar tax cut to wealthy people and big corpora-
tions, paid for by cutting Social Security and Medicare. Brendan Kelly and Betsy Lendergan also mounted strong challenges.

“Voters rejected candidates willing to do Rauner’s and Trump’s bidding and to divide our state and country,” Lynch said. “They opted instead for leaders who want progress to benefit everyone, not just the wealthy few.”

Union shoe leather
AFSCME members played a key role throughout the election cycle, endorsing dozens of candidates, making sure members were informed and encouraging them to get out and vote. AFSCME volunteers were an important part of the Illinois AFL-CIO’s Labor 2018 effort, making calls and knocking on doors on behalf of union-recommended candidates in the weeks leading up to Election Day.

On Nov 6 itself, more than 500 active and retired AFSCME members across Illinois took part in the labor coalition’s get-out-the-vote efforts.

“I found it imperative to get the message across to voters that their vote is important and needed in order to create change at all levels of government,” said Robert Dybas, a Local 2854 member who volunteered every weekend in the Chicago area. “I am very happy with the voter turnout and the election results.”

“We look forward to working with JB Pritzker, Juliana Stratton, Kwame Raoul, Susana Mendoza and every other new officeholder and returning incumbent to put Illinois back on track,” AFSCME Council 31 Director Lynch said.

“We won’t agree on everything, but these leaders have expressed an understanding that everyone who works for a living deserves family-sustaining wages, affordable health care, retirement with dignity and a strong union voice on the job.”
Jackson County employees refuse to back down

Threat of strike forced county to provide fair wages, health care

After unanimously authorizing a strike, Jackson County employees won a new union contract with fair pay and affordable health care.

In September, union members were shocked when county administrators walked away from negotiations and declared impasse. “We were making progress at the table,” AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Jeremy Noelle said. “so we felt completely caught off-guard, especially since the county’s last, best and final offer was worse for employees than the proposals already under discussion.” The county’s demands would have substantially raised the cost of health care for employees, doubling premiums and increasing co-pays and out-of-pocket expenses.

“We knew that the county’s offer meant that some of our people would be going home with less money than they had now,” said Robin Crabtree, a member of the bargaining team. “And we didn’t want to take that.”

Ready to strike

Employees covered by this contract are members of AFSCME Local 2464. They do critically important work for the county, including handling tax collections, property tax exemptions, elections and more.

“The county was trying to fix their budget problems on our back, but without us they have nobody to do these jobs,” said Tammy Ehlers, another bargaining team member. “We felt enough was enough. We were nervous about the possibility of a strike, but we couldn’t afford not to do it.”

Crabtree and Ehlers joined with their fellow bargaining team members Jill Stokes and Samantha Shepherd to get the county to offer their fellow members. The membership voted unanimously to reject the offer and authorize a strike for the first time in the local’s history.

The day after the union’s vote, the county agreed to come back to the table and voted to override its impasse decision. The parties resumed negotiations with the help of a federal mediator and a tentative agreement was reached. Union members ratified the agreement soon after, but the county continued to drag its feet, leaving the contract off the agenda of its next county board meeting.

“The process could have dragged out another month, but we made it clear that if they didn’t get this thing finalized, we’ll be out on the streets,” Noelle said.

The union set a strike date, demanding that the board call a special meeting to vote or they would walk off the job. The threat of a strike was timed perfectly to have the biggest impact, Crabtree said. “This time of year is election time, tax-bill time, appeal time. This is when they depend on us the most.”

The county board arranged a special meeting and—with a strike date looming—approved the agreement unanimously.

Winning together

The new four-year contract includes three-percent annual pay increases each year and a modest rise in health insurance premiums that is implemented gradually through the life of the agreement.

Throughout the contract fight, the members of Local 2464 stuck together. They wore green union shirts and bracelets every day. They put green placards on their cars. They made calls to county board members and enlisted friends and family to do the same. And their fellow members stood with them every step of the way.

“The county thought they were in the driver’s seat, but the bargaining team was able to flip the script,” said Local 2464 President, J.B. Pittzker, an EMSS worker for the county. “Through hard work and courage they mobilized to put enormous pressure on their elected officials.”

Despite being ready to do whatever it takes, the membership had a collective sigh of relief when the contract was finalized.

“Nobody wants to strike,” Crabtree said, “and after a long fight, it made us feel appreciated when they saw how important we are.”

“This experience showed us that we have power,” Ehlers agreed. “We pushed harder than ever before and we were 100% united.”

“If we weren’t in a union, we would have gone home with less pay, higher health insurance premiums and decreased coverage. But we stuck together and fought to ensure we had decent pay and fair health care coverage. We accomplished that together.”

Union turns to arbitration to address violence in DOC, DJJ

AFSCME members across the state are working together to help reduce violence between inmates and against staff in Illinois adult and juvenile correctional facilities.

With data showing that assaults on staff have risen dramatically over the past three years, Council 31 has filed a mass health and safety arbitration case—similar to a class action grievance—covering a host of incidents and issues long raised by local unions. Many locals are involved in the case, with member witnesses providing testimony on assaults and facility conditions.

“AFSCME members are at risk of being beaten, of losing their lives, because of severe understaffing, poor facility conditions and lack of staff involvement in policymaking,” said Eddie Caumiant, AFSCME Regional Director and liaison to the departments of Corrections and Juvenile Justice. “We want to force the state to establish and maintain safe working conditions by working with us.”

The union has long sought this objective using every tool at its disposal, including labor-management meetings, grievances and ongoing discussions at the facility level, and pushing the agencies to participate in a Joint Safety and Security Committee process statewide. Now AFSCME members are trying a new ambitious approach based on the health and safety provision in the state contract.

Caumiant says union members should be at the table where policy decisions are made because they are an integral part of putting those policies into practice. “The state is woefully unprepared to deal with our modern correctional system. Instead of reaching out to staff to help solve problems, they are ignoring them,” said Caumiant. “The union should be more directly involved in policymaking and implementation and we hope the arbitrator will give us a clear path to do that.”

As On the Move went to press, the state was putting forth its case, with the union’s rebuttal set for December. A decision won’t likely come until after January, when new Governor JB Pritzker will take over.

“We hope to be able to sit down with the new administration, armed with the results of this arbitration, and be able to work together to address the entire range of problems AFSCME members face in these agencies,” Caumiant said.
Building power through unity

AFSCME members stand strong in face of attacks

When a June 27 US Supreme Court ruling banned fair-share fees, AFSCME was ready. Local union activists had already been organizing and reaching out to members and non-members alike. Now, six months after Janus v. AFSCME brought “right to work” to the public sector nationwide, AFSCME Strong—the union’s power-building program—continues to build strength throughout the union.

AFSCME activists’ goal is to talk to every employee represented by their local unions, explaining the benefits of union membership and stressing the importance of solidarity for strength at the bargaining table, in the workplace and beyond.

“One-on-one talks are the best way to reach people,” Local 401 President Sara Holtgrave said. “When you take the time to have those conversations and listen to concerns, employees get all their questions answered and really understand why we have to stay together as a union.”

Holtgrave works as a mental health technician at the state’s Warren G. Murray Developmental Center that was threatened by closure in 2012. Holtgrave said it was solidarity—of the membership, aligned with the parents and broader community—that made the state back off its plan and keep the facility open.

Holtgrave shares that story with new employees to demonstrate the importance of unity. “We formed a lot of bonds during the closure process,” she said. “We realized that we all have each other’s backs.”

Today, the local is stronger than ever. When they face difficulties with management, members know from experience that they can’t afford to be divided.

From fair share to activists

AFSCME members are focusing their efforts on bringing former fair share fee-payers into the union. Now that paying a fair-share fee is not an option, non-members are joining the union because they don’t feel it’s right to pay nothing while benefiting from union accomplishments made possible through the dues willingly paid by co-workers.

Others realized that the forces behind the Janus case—including outgoing governor Bruce Rauner and the Illinois Policy Institute—don’t care about working people; indeed, these activists had already been organizing and building power through unity. “We formed a lot of bonds during the closure process,” she said. “We realized that we all have each other’s backs.”

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Moving forward together

AFSCME members are feeling positive in spite of the Janus ruling. The key is educating members about what the union is really about and showing solidarity to new employees, said Jim Smyser, president of Local 3821 and a wastewater treatment plant operator at the city of Mattoon.

“We’re not a real big local but we’re all headstrong in the union way,” Smyser said. “We have good conversations amongst ourselves. We let new people know if you pay your dues, if you’re here for your union, we’re there for you. You’ve got protection.”

Many local unions also utilize a variety of other tools to keep their members informed and engaged with union activity. Holtgrave said to ensure consistent communication with members working in three different shifts, she and a network of officers and stewards use Facebook and a text-message app called Mobile Text to quickly share information. These technologies can’t replace that regular one-on-one conversation, but they can supplement it.

Every new hire receives a one-hour new-member orientation and the local is developing a committee to ensure continued communication over time.

All their hard work has paid off. Of the 432 employees represented by AFSCME Local 401, 431 are members.

That’s indicative of a state-wide trend. Working people are rejecting the deceptive rhetoric from anti-worker forces who want to persuade union members to drop out. Instead of division, iron-club unity is flourishing in unions across Illinois and across the country.
Cook County AFSCME members ratify new contract
County workers showed unity despite revenue crisis

AFSCME members in Cook County government won a new union contract that ensures economic progress for 5,000 county employees and maintains their affordable health insurance plan.

The 90-person bargaining team representing 14 local unions (1111, 1178, 1276, 1767, 2060, 2226, 3315, 3477, 3486, 3692, 3835, 3958, and 3969) reached a tentative agreement on September 5. Union members ratified it in a county-wide vote on September 12.

"Cook County faces severe revenue problems, especially after the loss of the sweetened-beverage tax revenue," AFSCME Council 31 Regional Director Helen Thornton said. "The administration came to the table

"We were determined to hold the line on health care costs."

AFSCME members who work for Cook County benefited long-term. Their contract, plus a lump-sum bonus for the first year, guaranteed the gains they worked over time and made further progress," Thornton said. "Protecting our step increases was huge," Marshall said. "People coming up to the top were determined to hold the line on health care costs."

AFSCME stands up for fairness

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two AFSCME members were doing the work of a higher job classification without getting the recognition—or wages—they deserved.

Through the union, they advocated for themselves and won restitution.

Both Aurora Rodriguez and Amos Tatekey are AFSCME Local 3696 members at the Cook County Public Defender’s Office. With the help of local stewards Monique Hodges, Dugar and Valenicia Ross, Tatekey, an administrative assistant, filed his grievance for reclassification in October 2016 and Rodriguez in February 2017.

Rodriguez had been working for years in her division as a stenographer. She gladly took on extra work and stepped up when her co-workers were out of the office. Over time her job responsibilities significantly increased. But when she found out that other divisions had administrative assistants doing the same work at a higher classification and for better pay, Rodriguez decided to do something about it.

"I consider myself a team player, but it was so frustrating to find out that I had been here for years doing the work and not getting any credit for it," Rodriguez said. "And I could have kept doing that and nobody would have said anything. So I took it to the union."

Rodriguez and Tatekey won their grievances at Step 1. But the fight wasn’t quite over. Months after the grievances had been granted, the county refused to honor the grievance resolutions and tried to delay or prevent both employees’ reclassifications by demanding an audit be done first.

"The local knew these cases were important to take on. We argued that the employer must respect the grievance process and cannot go back on their word," said Maggie Lorenc, AFSCME legal counsel on the case.

"The fact that the different representatives of the employer could not agree on how to move forward in honoring the grievance resolution was not the fault of Rodriguez and Tatekey and should not have impeded their reclassification," AFSCME to that argument to arbitration and the arbitrator agreed. Both union members were granted reclassification and back pay to the date they originally filed their grievances.

For Rodriguez, that meant a year and five months of pay and a priceless sense of stability. She had been in the process of applying for another position that would have increased her commute and time away from her family. Instead she was able to stay in the office she preferred doing work she enjoys.

"The bottom line in this office is helping the clients," Rodriguez said. "I’ve always liked working with people that need help."
AFSCME members reach agreement with City of Chicago

City employees building stronger union

After more than a year of difficult negotiations, AFSCME members who work for the city of Chicago ratified a new union contract on October 3.

Comprised of four bargaining units, the membership encompasses more than 3,500 employees in administrative and clerical, human services, inspection, animal control, professional and library positions. Led by Council 31 Deputy Director Mike Newman and including representatives from each of six AFSCME local unions (505, 654, 1215, 1669, 2912 and 2946), the bargaining committee never wavered.

“We were committed to securing a contract that continues to provide access to high-quality, affordable health care and builds on the economic gains and workplace rights achieved in previous contracts,” Newman said. “That’s exactly what we did.”

“I’m very proud of the contract we got in these trying times,” said Susan Littlefield, president of Local 2912 and a member of the bargaining committee. “Everybody worked hard and diligently to keep what we have and add some important perks.”

In addition to proposing an unacceptable economic package, management sought other concessions. The bargaining committee successfully rejected provisions that would have allowed changing work schedules and detailing employees without notice by declaring an emergency, restricting the use of earned holiday time, refusing professional standards course reimbursement, and cutting weekend overtime pay.

The committee also won several other important changes to benefit members. Bargaining team member John Rayburn, president of Local 1215, said he’s most proud of this win.

“Without question, our unity and strength was a powerful force that helped to achieve this contract.”

Employees had to take the days consecutively and immediately, including the day of the funeral service.

Library pages will continue to be paid the living-wage or minimum-wage rate that applies to city contractors and concessionaires, whichever is higher. These rates would not apply to city employees but for the union contract.

The city will make matching contributions on a dollar-for-dollar basis up to $250 each year to an employee 401(a) plan starting in 2020. The maximum will grow to $500 by the end of the contract. Employees will be able to use these funds toward health insurance after retirement.

While employee health insurance premiums will gradually increase by 1.5 percent of salary, this will be the first increase in premiums as a percentage of salary in 12 years. Overall wage increases of 11 percent compounded through the life of the contract more than make up for that modest bump.

Building a stronger union

Throughout negotiations, the union was able to build its strength through the AFSCME Strong program.

“We took the opportunity to bring in new members while giving bargaining updates,” said Littlefield. “We started with more than 300 fee-payers in my local and at the end of negotiations we were down to just 12.”

When Janus hit, the payroll department mistakenly refunded every member’s union dues. But instead of losing members, local leaders were bombarded by phone calls and emails from members and former fair share fee-payers wanting to pay dues.

“Without question, our unity and strength was a powerful force that helped to achieve this contract,” Newman said.

Now AFSCME members are determined to build an even stronger union in the city of Chicago. The new contract includes improvements in policies around new member orientations with that goal in mind.
Time and again throughout his term in office, Bruce Rauner took illegal actions that AFSCME went to court to overturn. It happened when he issued an executive order blocking fair-share fees, with his unilateral freeze on step increases and when he unilaterally declared “impasse” in state contract negotiations and tried to impose his demands.

In each of these cases, the Rauner administration used taxpayer funds to hire outside counsel—a private law firm—to represent him, instead of the Attorney General’s office.

According to state records obtained by AFSCME under the Freedom of Information Act, Rauner wasted $6 million on legal bills to just one management-side law firm. Given that he has continued to fight myriad losing battles since, including the steps and impasse cases, it’s a safe bet that the figure will end up even higher.

Instead of handing it over to high-priced lawyers, Rauner should’ve put every penny of that $6 million towards repaying state workers for the wages he unlawfully denied.

More stalling on step increases

Since an appellate court ruled last fall that Rauner acted illegally in freezing state employee step increases, his administration has done everything possible to evade its responsibility to pay employees what they are owed. The appellate court remanded the case back to the Illinois Labor Relations Board to put forth a remedy. In July the board issued a clear statement that employees should be placed on the proper steps and made whole for wages lost.

Rauner immediately offered up reasons why the money couldn’t be paid. The labor board then directed its compliance officer to provide more specific guidance as to how the administration should meet its obligations to employees. The compliance officer set Oct. 1 as a deadline to end the
illegal step freeze and place all employees on their proper steps.

Once again the administration defied this legal directive and instead sent an 18-page letter to the compliance officer, claiming that it would take months to calculate step placement and how much employees are owed. It was all too clear that the administration would continue to evade responsibility so AFSCME filed a motion to compel the labor board to seek a direct court order enforcing compliance. The Rauner-appointed board had yet to consider the union’s motion when On the Move went to print.

**Appellate court rejects Rauner’s impasse claim**

Rauner made an array of extreme demands of state employees in bargaining, including no pay increase for four years, a 100 percent hike in employee costs for health care that would cost the average worker thousands of dollars a year, and a free hand to privatize public services without oversight.

Then on Jan. 8, 2016, he walked away from negotiations, declaring that the parties were at impasse and asking his labor board to give him the power to unilaterally impose the terms of his final offer.

AFSCME strongly disputed that the parties were at impasse and repeatedly sought to restart good-faith negotiations, but the labor board complied with Rauner’s request. AFSCME went to court and won an order blocking implementation while the union appealed the board’s decision.

In October, a unanimous three-judge panel of the Fourth District Appellate Court ruled in AFSCME’s favor, finding that the Illinois State Labor Relations Board was “clearly erroneous” and that the parties were not at impasse.

Not surprisingly, the court also found that the Rauner administration had engaged in bad-faith bargaining in violation of labor law.

**What’s next?**

Governor-elect JB Pritzker has said he is prepared to restart negotiations for a new state contract. AFSCME will make it a top priority to undo the wrongs that Rauner has done to state employees over the past four years—and especially to press for swift restoration of step increases.
With a desire to improve their lives and ensure consistency for a vulnerable client population, nearly 100 employees of Willowglen Academy in Freeport voted October 17 to form a union with AFSCME Council 31.

Willowglen Academy is a private facility that provides care to children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

“I really love working with the kids. It’s powerful because you’re really making a difference in people’s lives,” said Chelsea Kruger, who’s been a para-educator and direct support personnel (DSP) at Willowglen for 11 years. “We’re able to get [our clients] to experience and learn new things and have fun doing it. It’s awesome.”

Change needed

While the staff is dedicated to the people they serve, they feel they aren’t valued by management. That neglect has a negative impact on both the clients and the workers’ own families and lives.

“We needed a union because we need consistency and fairness in the workplace,” said Rosetta Knox, a DSP who works the night shift. She helps clients with their medication, nutrition and hygiene needs. Knox, who has a disabled adult son, said compassion and respect motivates her to do this work. She wants to be focused on solutions that will improve care at Willowglen.

“We haven’t had a raise in eight years, so people are working 24 to 80 hours of overtime a pay period just to make ends meet,” Knox said. “This has led to a very high turnover rate, which isn’t good for the people we serve.”

Kruger agreed. “These kids need consistency,” she said. “When you’re short-staffed and people are drained, they aren’t going to do their best. They aren’t going to stay. We banded together so we can make things better.”

Organizing together

The organizing committee spent time talking to fellow employees about changes they wanted and how they felt about getting a union. They worked hard to make sure as many people participated in the union election as possible because they wanted a united front.

The workers were so ready for a voice on the job that the organizing process went quickly. In just two months the employees were ready to vote. On election day, the close-knit group came out in force, and a vast majority voted to join AFSCME.

“The union staff let us know our rights and told us what the union could help us achieve,” Knox said. “It was scary, worrying that the administration would retaliate against us, but I’m proud that in the end we were able to come together so quickly, and that the majority decided that we needed to be heard. We advocated for ourselves.”

“I knew that most people would be on board because so many changes need to happen, but to be there when they counted all those ballots felt phenomenal,” Kruger said. “It sent a message: We’re here, listen to us. It was a huge victory and it felt really good.”

“Staff morale has already started to go up” since the election, Knox said, and she believes that once members elect representatives to the bargaining committee and determine their priorities for contract nego-

“Our clients need this change as much as we do. A union will be a game-changer for them.”

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Willowglen DSP Chelsea Kruger said, “We banded together so we can make things better.”
Anti-worker forces tighten grip on Supreme Court

With the confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh to replace retiring Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, President Donald Trump and Republicans have stacked the bench.

A far-right, anti-worker majority is poised to reinterpret U.S. law to benefit wealthy people and big corporations for decades to come.

The Kavanaugh appointment was made far more meaningful because it followed last year’s elevation of Neil Gorsuch to the high court. Gorsuch wound up in the seat as a result of a brazenly political hijacking of the appointment process by Republican senators who, after the unexpected death of Justice Antonin Scalia in 2016, refused to consider President Barack Obama’s nomination of Merrick Garland.

What difference can one seat make? Consider that while Scalia’s seat stood empty, the court deadlocked on Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association, a case that would have banned fair share fees in the public sector, a long-sought objective of well-funded anti-worker forces.

But after Trump was elected, Gorsuch solidified the 5-4 conservative majority that in June sided with the super-rich and against workers in Janus v. AFSCME Council 31. Kavanaugh’s nomination was rocked by a slew of accusations of sexual assault and misconduct, as well as serious questions about his character and suitability for the position. The nation watched as Dr. Christine Blasey Ford described specific and credible assault allegations against Kavanaugh, who denied them. The Republican majority quickly approved the nomination and Kavanaugh was sworn in on October 6.

In addition to concerns about his personal character, Kavanaugh has a track record of holding corporate interests above the rights and safety of working people, according to the AFL-CIO. Specifically, he has put working people at risk by defending corporations with dangerous and unsafe working conditions.

In a case against SeaWorld where a trainer was killed by an orca whale with a record of aggression toward humans, Kavanaugh said the worker took that risk and that requiring employers to protect workers from on-the-job dangers was too “paternalistic.”

Kavanaugh argued that the Secretary of Defense should be allowed to abolish collective bargaining at the federal level in his majority ruling in a case involving members of the American Federation of Government Employees at the Department of Defense.

“Kavanaugh has consistently sided with corporate interests” and will “find any interpretation of the law that helps corporations avoid their obligations to working people,” said Sen. Patty Murray of Washington, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.

The senator pointed out a dissenting opinion where Kavanaugh argued “that corporations should be allowed to create sham, spin-off companies in order to skirt their responsibility to negotiate with workers and their unions for better wages, working conditions, and benefits.”

Kavanaugh will fit right in on a Supreme Court now skewed to favor corporate interests.

Aggressively and strategically pursued by the radical right, lawsuits seeking to overturn long-standing precedents and strip workers and their unions of workplace rights will be that much more difficult to stop for years to come.

AFSCME grievance clears employee records

AFSCME Local 2226, which represents lieutenants at the Cook County Jail, took a series of grievances for five employees to hearing and won the whole group.

Local president Chuck Luna and chief steward Kieran Mundt drove the process, with AFSCME Council 31 attorney Scott Miller serving as legal counsel in the expedited hearing. Each case concerned a lieutenant with a perfect record.

Kavanaugh’s denial was based on the unwritten and general order that employees had to pursue it as a matter of principle.

“Management was issuing discipline with a super heavy hand and the environment is very oppressive,” Kieran said.

“We warned members going in that it was an uphill battle, but they wanted to take the fight all the way and they knew the union had their back.”

“We made a good argument and the burden of proof fell on the sheriff and his team,” Luna said. “We prevailed in all five cases.”

Luna has been a lieutenant at the county since 2002, before the workers organized a union with AFSCME in 2006. He knows how important it is to have the resources and ability to pursue cases like these.

“Before the union, I was disciplined, and going through that was aggravating and stressful,” Luna recalls. “Now we have the right to fight these kinds of things and we don’t have to do it alone. We can fight together as a union.”

AFSCME Local 2226 chief steward Kieran Mundt and president Chuck Luna pursued justice.
ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

Pay, sick time gains in Schaumburg

Village of Schaumburg employees’ fight for a fair contract has ended with a big win for the members of AFSCME Local 1919. The union bargaining committee tentatively agreed to terms for a new four-year contract in late August, and the unit of 150 employees unanimously ratified it on Sept. 12.

The agreement came after members of the local mobilized over the summer to pack a Village Board meeting and mount an email campaign targeting village leaders. Under the new contract, AFSCME members achieved one of their top priorities: gaining the right to use accrued sick time to care for their immediate family. The matter was dramatically illustrated in testimony before the Village Board by 23-year employee Norma Higgins, who despite having earned hundreds of hours of sick time, I was told I couldn’t use one day of that accumulated time to care for my spouse.”

Going forward, sick time can be used to care for parents, spouses and children. What’s more, every employee is due to receive retroactive pay increases dating back nearly a year and a half to May 2017 when the previous contract was slated to expire. Union members won another family-friendly provision with the added right to take one or two days of vacation with only a day’s notice. Previously two weeks’ notice was required to take even a single day off.

“After 15 long months of negotiations, we’re very happy with the gains we made in this contract,” said Debbie Diamond, an animal control officer and the president of AFSCME Local 1919.

AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Matthew Lange led negotiations with Diamond and bargaining team members Tom Todd, Norma Higgins and Sandy Golliher.

City of Rockford employees reach deal

More than 200 members of AFSCME Local 1058 and 1058B decided they would have more power at the table if their two bargaining teams joined together for negotiations. As a result, they won a three-year contract with gains in wages and paid time off. Negotiations took place over several months. Led by retired AFSCME staff representative Jay Ferraro, staff representative Chris Hooser and local president Christina Loudermilk, the bargaining team included Tony Garcia, AJ Indovina, Lisa Kingsavanh, Tracy Pauley, Laura Anderson, Steve Mangraen, Sue Whitley, Julie Michalsen, Ron Reimagle, Bob Reever, Stephanie Buzzo, Darius Morrow and Amy Sommerfield.

The city and community development units gained power at the table by joining forces instead of negotiating separately, Ferraro said. Much of the work done at the table was improving contract language, especially around paid time off.

Employees at the 911 call center are now able to use comp time in one-hour increments, will have 12-hour holiday pay (equal to one full shift) instead of eight, and can’t be forced to work overtime the day preceding a vacation. Another important gain for the 911 workers is a period of guaranteed rest between shifts. “These employees have a stressful job and work a number of days in a row,” Loudermilk said. “We thought it was important that they have at least 12 full hours of rest between shifts to prevent burnout.”

Public works employees who clear ice and snow in the winter months often work on-call for 12 hours at a time and must be available to come to work immediately if required, receiving two hours of pay per “standby” shift.

“But we bargained so that now we can use those two hours as paid time off to spend with our families,” Loudermilk said. “This is especially important around the holidays when employees may have to miss family gatherings when they’re on-call.”

All employees will now have a full holiday on Christmas Eve (formerly a half day), Loudermilk said, and can use sick leave to care for anyone in their family unit, not just a spouse or child.
The union did agree to a city-limit residency requirement for future hires, a policy that the administration is implementing city-wide. Every employee received a two percent cost-of-living raise retroactive to Jan. 1, with no increase in health insurance costs. The contract will be reopened in 2019 and 2020 for wages and one additional issue designated by each party.

NIU local building power

A new contract with Northern Illinois University didn’t come without a fight for the nearly 300 building service, housing and dining employees of AFSCME Local 963. The workers clean and maintain classrooms, buildings and residential halls, and cook and serve the food in the cafeterias.

“After a year of bargaining, they led us to believe we were close to getting a contract,” AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Sara Dorner said. “We came to the table expecting to wrap it up and instead they suddenly demanded a massive concession to get rid of the step plan.”

After a federal mediator was called in, the union thwarted management’s attempt to freeze everyone’s wages, winning a five-year contract with three-percent raises in each of the first three years of the contract and a wage reopener for the final two years. The members ratified it overwhelmingly.

The bargaining team also secured wage adjustments for the most underpaid job classifications—some as much as a three-dollars-an-hour increase—by showing how their low pay compared to other universities.

“We fought long and hard to provide a better income for those of us who are struggling and still have to work two jobs to make ends meet,” said Manny Diaz, a member of the bargaining committee and building service chapter chair. “It was a long process but we achieved what we set out to do.”

Diaz and his co-workers feel a constant threat of outsourcing and don’t feel valued or respected for the work they do to contribute to the institution, he said.

“We are looked down on by management yet we are the people that keep the university running,” Diaz said. “We work hard to get the job done well but they’d rather just get somebody else in here and pay them less.”

Diaz said he and his co-workers aren’t done fighting. The union is still holding the employer to task in enforcing the new contract.

“NIU has continually cancelled labor-management meetings and is dragging their feet on paying all wage increases,” Dorner said. “We’ve filed a class action unfair labor practices charge to get that remedied and have a labor board hearing scheduled for November.”

In the meantime the union continues to build strength. Part of the contract includes two paid union meetings per month, where members can meet to discuss union business 15 minutes before their shift ends. The members are ready to use this new tool to make their union even stronger.

“We will keep moving forward and making further progress,” Diaz said. “We’re still fighting and we know we’re not alone. We have each other’s backs.”

The bargaining team included Dorner and Diaz plus Local 963 President Tim Gray, Vice President Patrick Sheridan, Shelly Ruby, Andy Pecarelli, Recording Secretary Adam Harper, Jason Hutchison and Larry Fay.

McHenry Clerk’s Office wins first contract

Employees at the McHenry County Clerk’s Office ratified their first union contract in September, making gains in wages, benefits and workplace protections, all enforceable through a grievance process.

Led by AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Colin Theis, the bargaining committee included Meghan Honca, Cheryl Zito and Melissa Massey. These new union leaders learned what can be accomplished at a bargaining table.

“We are very happy about it. We feel much more secure,” Massey said.

Indeed, job security is a big reason why she and her co-workers decided to form a union. With the clerk’s seat open in the November general election, employees in the office who handle taxes, records, deeds, licenses, elections and more wanted to have a contract they could depend on no matter who was in office. Their unit is now a chapter of the newly formed AFSCME members who will be coming on, and we have a wide range of ages, issues and experiences,” Massey said. “We made sure the contract was broad enough to encompass an expanding family and address all those different to their base pay.

For health insurance, members can now switch to the plan of their choosing instead of being forced into a high-deductible plan. The union also got strong language restricting outsourcing.

The contract was ratified in the old county jail, which is now a local restaurant. In 1885, legendary labor leader Eugene V. Debs served a federal prison sentence there following the historic Pullman labor strike.

Now the employees of the McHenry County Clerk’s office are part of labor history, too.

“It’s a whole new world,” Massey said. “We are very excited and very reassured. And that’s what the union has given us. It’s a unanimous feeling.”

Local 963 members, including Manny Diaz, presented a petition to NIU President Dr. Lisa C. Freeman demanding a fair contract.
Chicago hotel workers win strike for health care

A September strike by UNITE HERE Local 1 members who work in 26 downtown Chicago hotels was the largest action of its kind in the city’s history. It ended in wins for workers and their union, including on the strike’s central issue, access to health care coverage for hotel employees who are laid off during the slow winter season.

After voting overwhelmingly to authorize a strike when their contracts expired, thousands of hotel housekeepers, door staff and restaurant workers fighting for fair treatment walked off the job on Sept. 7.

Over the years their union has won gains in wages and benefits, but hotels have increasingly been cutting staff and overloading workers. At the same time, Chicago hotels raked in more than $2 billion last year. The workers knew they had to stand up to the megacorporations like Uber and Lyft have increased the cut they take out of drivers’ earnings while the city continues to charge struggling cab drivers the same high fees and taxes.

Workers kept to the picket lines for weeks until hotel management began settling contracts, one by one or in small clusters. Workers remained on strike at only one hotel—the Cambria Chicago Magnificent Mile—as On the Move went to press.

Ride share, taxi drivers join forces

Chicago taxi drivers and rideshare drivers are uniting to call on the City of Chicago to level the playing field and ensure a living wage for all drivers. On Oct. 31, the two groups rallied together for the first time at City Hall to urge common-sense reforms like those adopted by New York last August, including putting a moratorium on new for-hire vehicle licenses.

Over the past three years the number of licensed rideshare vehicles in Chicago has quadrupled to more than 117,000, making it nearly impossible for either ride-sharing or taxi drivers to earn a living. Rideshare companies like Uber and Lyft have increased the cut they take out of drivers’ earnings while the city continues to charge struggling cab drivers the same high fees and taxes.

Nnamdi Uwazie is a veteran taxi driver and leader of Cab Drivers United, Chicago’s taxi union, which organized with the help of AFSCME Council 31. “Taxi drivers and rideshare drivers alike strive to provide quality transportation to Chicago residents and visitors and feed our families,” he said, “but Chicago’s regulations are broken and all drivers are suffering.” Although the city’s regulatory double-standards have pitted drivers against each other in the past, members of Cab Drivers United and the newly formed Chicago Rideshare Advocates are working together for stronger and more even-handed regulations.

“One thing the city of Chicago has to do is step in and bring some long overdue regulations,” said Lenny Sanchez of Chicago Rideshare Advocates.

“We need a fair, safe, transparent system that works for everyone, not just wealthy investors in Uber and Lyft.”

“Who Pays”? Not the rich

Most state and local bodies tax the rich at much lower rates than households with low to middle incomes. That’s according to Who Pays, a new analysis of tax systems nationwide by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP).

In Illinois, the lower your income, the more you’re taxed. Those with incomes in the lowest 20 percent pay an average of 14 percent of their income in state and local taxes while those in the top 1 percent of incomes only pay 7 percent in taxes.

That’s why AFSCME has consistently advocated for fair tax reform, including a constitutional amendment to allow for graduated tax rates that require the wealthy to pay their fair share.

“While state and local taxes can’t eliminate income inequality, well-designed systems can help lessen the problem,” said Meg Wiehe, ITEP’s deputy director. “Meanwhile, it’s clear that steeply regressive systems only make it worse.”

Amending the Illinois Constitution requires a supermajority of the state Senate and House to approve a resolution putting the question on the ballot, then approval by 60 percent of voters at the next statewide election. In the 2018 legislative session, Republican lawmakers blocked passage of the needed resolution, but with big changes in the composition of both legislative bodies coming out of the November election, advocates point to new opportunities to move forward on this vital issue.
Retiree activism contributes to big election wins

Retirees from all corners of the state worked diligently to help labor-friendly candidates in the November general election.

“Chapter 31 members wrote letters, addressed envelopes, walked in parades, knocked on doors, made phone calls and worked on Election Day,” Sub-chapter 55 President John Weir said. “We worked hard for what we have, but retirees and working families were being attacked for just living our lives. That’s why we phone-banked all the way up until the election.”

“Retirees could not afford to sit out this election. Everything that we worked for as state employees was threatened,” Sub-chapter 163 President Clyde Wilson agreed. “As retirees in Illinois, we were at the mercy of a government that doesn’t care about us. We had to make a change.”

And change was made. JB Pritzker and Juliana Stratton will take office on January 14.

“We are keeping the union strong so that retirees and workers can continue to live quality lives with dignity,” Todd said. “I couldn’t be happier that we ran out Rauner’s clock.”

The AFSCME Advantage benefits program includes access to the National Hearing Aid Discount Benefit Plan. Working and retiree AFSCME members and extended family who may need help with hearing loss can register for free annual hearing screenings at a nationwide network of locations.

Did you know?

To be an AFSCME Retiree Chapter 31 member, you must sign an AFSCME Chapter 31 membership card after you retire!

Retiree dues are only $3.00 a month and will be deducted directly from your pension check upon your authorization.

By joining AFSCME Retiree Chapter 31, you’ll be taking a stand for retiree rights and improved benefits. You’ve earned your retirement benefits; now join the fight to protect them. Become a member of AFSCME Illinois Retiree Chapter 31 today—it’s the best investment a retiree can make!

For more information or to request a membership card, please contact Kate Morthland, AFSCME Council 31 Retiree Coordinator, at 217.788.2800
Tell us about your job at SAVE.

I’m a direct care-giver at St. Clair Associated Vocational Enterprises (SAVE), a [state-funded] not-for-profit organization that provides employment opportunities for adults with disabilities. My job is to teach our clients in the vocational programs how to complete tasks involved in the contracts we receive from employers to help them learn the skills they need to work.

I’ve also been working a lot of overtime lately in our housing program. We go into clients’ homes and help them cook and clean, take them to places they need to go like the store, the bank or the beauty shop. We make grocery lists with them and help come up with new, simple meal ideas that they can cook safely.

What’s your inspiration to go to work every day?

Our clients motivate me. I’ve been working here for more than 22 years and they are always so happy to see me. I go to work for them. They are positive about everything, as if they don’t have a worry in the world.

Teaching them skills and building trust make my work very meaningful. Their work instills a feeling of their self-worth. They don’t care how big their paycheck is, they are just so happy to get one.

I love seeing their excitement.

What have you learned from your career at SAVE?

Working here makes you feel like you don’t want to take anything for granted. Some of our clients were in car wrecks or suffered from injuries that changed their life forever. And some have had challenges since birth.

There are little things all the time that make me stop and appreciate what I have. I took a client to a clothing store. She grabbed some clothes and was ready to leave and I said, ‘Don’t you want to try those on?’ I helped her into a fitting room.

On the way back, we were both singing along to a song in the car. After the song ended she turned to me and said, ‘Thank you, Paula, I’ve never done that before.’ I said, ‘But you have shopped for clothes before.’ And she said, ‘Yeah, but I’ve never gotten to try them on first!’ She was so thankful.

There are a lot of little stories like that. They appreciate the little stuff and now I do too.

How does your job provide a valuable public service?

Our clients have built motors for furnaces, worked on the state license stickers, rolled up silverware sets for a catering company, compiled screw kits for furniture sets and more.

Our clients’ work is benefitting companies in the community because we can help them with their work. And our clients benefit from those jobs. It’s a place for them to go every day. It gives them a feeling that they belong somewhere. That they are part of it all—they like having to get up and go to work too.

How does your union improve your work?

If we didn’t have a union, one person might be able to get by with stuff that someone else couldn’t. If they didn’t like you, you might not be there anymore. With a union, there is fairness.

Having a union also gives us the ability to really advocate for our clients. We can go to management if something isn’t fair or isn’t right for them. If I ever did something else, it would be to become a full-time advocate for people with disabilities. There’s so much more we should be doing.

How has your job affected your family?

I’ve worked here since my oldest son was just a baby. Our clients know my husband, they know my kids, and they love having them here. Throughout the year—and especially during the holidays—we have parties, banquets and dances. Our kids grew up coming to the parties and dances. It’s had a huge impact on their lives.

My son is a sports fanatic—he’s what you would call a jock. There was a kid at his school who was disabled and he was being teased by other jocks. My son stood up for him. He told his friends to leave him alone, that that’s not cool. Being part of SAVE, my son learned that every life is important.

Paula Johnson
AFSCME Local 1831
ST. CLAIR ASSOCIATED VOCATIONAL ENTERPRISES (SAVE)