

ON THE

taxpayers file electronically. It is easy and you will get you

MOVE

Foreign Nation, if not United States (do not abbreviate)
Filing status: Single Married filing jointly Married filing separately Widowed
C Check if someone can claim you, or your spouse if filing jointly, as a dependent. See instructions.
D Check the box if this applies to you during 2019: Nonresident - Attach Sch. NR Part-year resident

Step 2: Income

1 Federal adjusted gross income from your federal Form 1040 or 1040-SR, Line 8b.
2 Federally tax-exempt interest and dividends from your federal Form 1040 or 1040-SR, Schedule 1, Ln. 1.
3 Other additions. Attach Schedule M.
4 Total income. Add Lines 1 through 3.



Tax time!

Ballot measure gives us a break

5 Federal gross income from your federal Form 1040 or 1040-SR, Line 8b.
6 Federally tax-exempt interest, dividends, and income from your federal Form 1040 or 1040-SR, Schedule 1, Ln. 1.
7 Other additions. Attach Schedule M.
8 Total income. Add Lines 5 through 7.

Step 3: Base Income

9 Social Security benefits and certain retirement plan income received if included in Line 1. Attach Page 1 of federal return.
10 Illinois Income Tax overpayment included in federal Form 1040 or 1040-SR, Schedule 1, Ln. 1.
11 Other subtractions. Attach Schedule M.
12 If Line 7 includes any amount from Schedule 1299-C.
13 Total subtractions. Add Lines 9, 10, and 11. This is the total of your subtractions.
14 Base income. Subtract Line 13 from Line 8.

Options

15 The exemption amount for yourself and your spouse. See instructions.
16 You + Spouse # of checkboxes X \$1,000 =
17 You + Spouse # of checkboxes X \$1,000 =
18 For dependents, enter the amount from Schedule IL-E/EIC, Step 2, Line 1.
19 Add Lines a through d.

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On the MOVE

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The Union Difference is our nation's hope

Building stronger unions helps lift us all up



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

WE CANNOT BE COMPLACENT

Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot recently sponsored a Summit on Poverty aimed at developing a strategy to lift all of the city's residents out of poverty. It's a more than worthy goal and the mayor deserves credit for putting the issue front and center.

For too long, residents of communities across our state have been struggling to get by, living from paycheck to paycheck or struggling even to find jobs, especially jobs that pay a living wage.

In fact, despite the nation's steadily declining unemployment rate, good jobs in our country are still all too hard to find.

By good job, I mean a family-supporting job. One that doesn't require you to hold a second job, that provides benefits like affordable health insurance and a retirement plan. In other words, for the most part, I mean a union job.

Fifty years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King said the most effective anti-poverty program in America is a good union. Especially for women and people of color, that remains truer than ever today. Last year, union members earned 23% more than nonunion workers.

Among women, the union difference in wages was even greater at 29%. For African-Americans, wages were 27% higher, and for Hispanics, 39%.

So having a strong union is one of the best predictors of whether a job will pay a family-sustaining wage. A union contract that ensures equal pay for equal work is the best bulwark against gender inequity and racial bias. And union membership is the most likely indicator of access to affordable health care and the promise of dignity in retirement.

But rather than expanding union membership to help boost more Americans into the middle class, the rich and powerful have embarked on a fierce and unrelenting offensive against labor unions. It is no coincidence that over the same 40-year period of political attacks and policy

choices that have eroded union membership nationwide, middle-class income has stagnated and the gap between the rich and the rest of us has grown ever wider.

The decline in union membership is no accident of fate or economic fortunes. It's a purposeful strategy designed to shift more of our country's wealth to the already-wealthy.

The tactics used to diminish or demolish unions are varied and not always visible. We tend to think that union density declined with the decline of the manufacturing sector in our country. But those good jobs didn't just wander off overseas. They were deliberately moved to countries that lacked unions and had an abundance of desperately poor people willing to work for vastly lower wages.

In the ensuing years, the assault on the labor movement has been waged in the courts, media, state and federal legislatures, and of course in the political arena.

Few examples have been more dramatic than the near-obliteration of public sector unions in Wisconsin after Republican governor Scott Walker joined with a Republican-controlled legislature to enact laws that made it virtually impossible for public employees in that state to engage in collective bargaining. Whenever Republicans gained control in other states—Iowa and Missouri, for instance—similar union-destruction laws followed there as well.

But no such laws could be enacted in any state that still had Democratic leadership in at least one branch of the government. In Illinois, where Bruce Rauner rode into office boasting


that he would take down public employee unions—and held up a state budget for two years trying to force that annihilation—Democratic state legislators held firm in defending workers' rights to collective bargaining.

As a last resort, the enemies of labor turned to the courts, where Donald Trump's recent appointments to the US Supreme Court cemented a judicial brigade all too ready to further weaken unions in our country. The result was the infamous Janus ruling in 2018 that allowed union-represented employees to refuse to pay union dues.

But we regrouped and fought even harder.

Public employees did not drop out of their unions in the wake of the Janus ruling—in fact, many former feepayers signed up as full dues-paying members. As workers in all sectors realized the forces aligned against them, many became even bolder. Teachers staged statewide walkouts in West Virginia, Arizona and Oklahoma. Thousands of autoworkers went out on strike. Workers in high-tech firms like Amazon and Google organized pickets and other direct actions. As Republicans solidified their all-out war on unions, Democrats became even stronger advocates for workers' rights.

We still have a very long journey on the road to ending poverty and ensuring that all workers have a decent standard of living. Those of us who have made it some part of the way because we have strong union representation cannot be complacent. If the powers-that-be succeed in "defanging" the labor movement as one right-wing organization described its goal, then we too will be left disarmed and powerless.

It's essential that we recognize that in helping other workers to form unions, expanding our ranks, supporting legislation that raises the minimum wage and bringing everyone along with us, we are helping ourselves as well. And in the process, we are building the best possible force for ending poverty in our time. 

Reducing violence in DOC, DJJ facilities

In wake of class action grievance win, AFSCME pushes for big changes

In response to the growing incidence of violent assaults against staff in the Department of Corrections and Department of Juvenile Justice, AFSCME filed and won a class-action grievance regarding unsafe working conditions in both departments. The arbitration award directed the parties to negotiate a plan of action to improve safety at every facility.

Built systematically with dozens of grievances at facilities across the state involving issues from staff assaults to inadequate equipment, training and support, AFSCME made a strong case that the employers' responses to health and safety concerns have failed to meet the stan-

union's liaison to the two departments. "That's why we brought this class-action grievance, to demonstrate the breadth and depth of the problem.

"We have until April under the arbitrator's jurisdiction and we're using that deadline to get the state to

"That's why we brought this class-action grievance, to demonstrate the breadth and depth of the problem."

dards set by the union contract and state law.

Over eight days of hearings in 2018, AFSCME members provided powerful testimony bolstering the union's argument that management had ignored steadily worsening conditions in facilities across the state.

On March 25, 2019 arbitrator Terry Bethel issued a ruling that essentially affirmed AFSCME's claims, granting the union's grievance.

Bethel said that both DOC and DJJ failed to meet the state's responsibility to "provide a safe environment in its corrections facilities and youth centers" and "that the departments have not acted to the extent feasible to prevent injury to their security staffs."

Plan of action

The arbitrator remanded the case to the parties to shape a remedy that improves safety in DOC and DJJ facilities. He retained jurisdiction over the case to ensure that a satisfactory plan of action is developed.

"There isn't a good, quick answer to emergent safety concerns at DOC and DJJ facilities," said AFSCME Council 31 Regional Director Eddie Caumiant, who is the

accelerate the planning process," Caumiant said.

As directed, the union has developed a platform of meaningful, tangible remedies that can be implemented and enforced around the state. Each proposal was crystallized from issues identified and brought forward in testimony from AFSCME members.

The next step is for DOC and DJJ to provide feedback and then begin to implement the plan. The union's action plan includes:

1. Training

The employer shall provide meaningful, up-to-the-minute training in all areas impacting staff safety.

A staff trainer will be established at every facility to address ongoing deficiencies, challenges and needs of staff at the facilities.

2. Chief Safety Officer

To meaningfully protect staff and inmate safety on the ground, a Chief Safety Officer will be appointed to identify dangers and advocate for improvements. The officer will have the authority



AFSCME members in the Departments of Corrections and Juvenile Justice are working to improve facility safety.

to stop unsound activities in the moment and to require management to immediately review and address issues.

3. Health and safety reviews

A joint Health and Safety Committee made up of union members and DOC/DJJ administration appointees will work together to review facilities on a regular basis and put remedies in writing to be addressed within 60 days of the review.

4. OSHA logbook

Bringing occupational safety (OSHA) standards to corrections facilities for the first time, a logbook at each facility will create a verifiable record that

captures data on a daily, ongoing basis. The book will gather information about required improvements and track subsequent handling of those issues.

5. Reporting

Quarterly, DOC and DJJ management will report on findings from the logbook to AFSCME to ensure ongoing attention and compliance in identified critical areas and to determine the upcoming schedule of facility reviews.

6. Ongoing jurisdiction


Instead of awaiting remedy through normal means outlined in the collective bargaining agreement, the arbitrator will retain jurisdiction for

in-the-moment decisions that can't be resolved jointly by the parties.

7. Safety validation

After years of turmoil and upheaval, DOC and DJJ will seek regular, ongoing accreditation from agencies that regulate and certify best practices industry-wide.

8. Staff support

Working in correctional facilities places extreme demands on staff—physically, psychologically and emotionally. A subcommittee will coordinate and centralize a reliable continuum of supportive services for employees with needs in these areas. 

AFSCME members fight privatization at Hope Creek

Rock Island County board threatens to sell nursing home

A FSCME Local 2371 members have waged a years-long battle to save Hope Creek Care Center in Rock Island County. After an intense public education and grassroots lobbying campaign, the board put off the sale. But the reprieve may only be temporary.

As *On the Move* went to print, the board was set to vote on a potential sale at its Feb. 25 meeting.

Just months ago, the board was ready to sell the home for far less than it's worth. Aperion Care, a for-profit company with a track record of poor care, offered just \$6 million—a fraction of the \$19 million price tag the county placed on it.

"That's practically giving this facility away," Council 31 Staff Representative Audie Schmidt said, "considering the county paid \$25 million to construct the facility in 2007."

Board members seemed only too willing to overlook Aperion's record of public health violations.

"This company's focus is clearly not on what's best for Hope Creek residents, the seniors and people with disabilities who depend on the dedicated employees and excellent care they receive there," Schmidt said.

Residents agree. They have also urged the board not to

sell the place they call home to an irresponsible company and remove it from public oversight.

Resident James Nelson came to the Jan. 21 board meeting in his wheelchair with his oxygen tank.

"The quality of care I receive at Hope Creek is outstanding," Nelson said. "Not only is the care good, but the residents and employees are one big family. It would be a tragedy to see Aperion take this over... Please think about their past history and don't forget us."

Buyer calls union contract "deal killer"

In addition to a low-ball offer, Aperion demanded that Hope Creek workers be stripped of their union rights, along with the benefits and protections they've won in their union contract.

In an email sent on Jan. 23 from Aperion boss Michael Rosen to the county's real estate agent, Rosen wrote, "Nice



Determined to save Hope Creek: AFSCME Local 2271 members Adrienne Walker, Brenda Coppage, Cheryl Campbell and Amanda Haskins (left to right).

conversation today regarding moving forward with the contract but I want to make it clear that successor liability of the union contract will be a deal killer."

"This company's focus is on stripping the rights, silencing the voices, and doing away with the benefits and job security of Hope Creek employees when it should be focused on resident care," Schmidt said. "They have to be stopped."

County board member Ed Langdon says after hearing all the facts, he doesn't want to sell the home to Aperion.

"The residents ... get quality care and I'm afraid if we [privatize] Hope Creek nursing home, the loving care these patients are receiving now will

deteriorate," Langdon said.

Others on the board may be coming around to the same conclusion. They pushed off voting on the sale more than once. But the outcome of the Feb. 25 vote is uncertain.

"Privatization of public nursing homes puts the well-being of residents and employees at risk," Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said. "That's why it's so important for AFSCME members to stand against it and fight for the people they serve every day."


Walnut Acres also at risk

The public nursing home in Freeport now known as

Walnut Acres is also at risk of privatization.

A vocal faction of the Stephenson County Board is pushing for the body to sell the home and held a Town Hall on Feb. 19 specifically about the home's future.

Community supporters and AFSCME Local 2399 members packed the room, braving the frigid cold to speak out against privatization and in support of the home remaining in county hands. They are standing up to make sure the board is considering the human side of caring for residents and the importance of keeping dedicated employees in place.

As *On the Move* went to press, the board was still discussing the issue. 

Lobby Day set: Raise wages for frontline caregivers

A FSCME-represented employees at community-based nonprofit agencies serving youth and people with disabilities are gearing up to continue their push for fair pay at the state legislature.

Armed with a court consent decree ordering the state to assure fair wages to its essentially outsourced labor force, AFSCME members at disability services agencies have successfully lobbied for wage increases in each of the last three legislative sessions.

Last year, these frontline direct service personnel (DSPs) teamed up with AFSCME members at youth care agencies like

UCAN and Hope School, which are also funded with state dollars. Together they helped secure a 3.5% rate increase for disability services agencies and a 5% increase for youth care agencies.

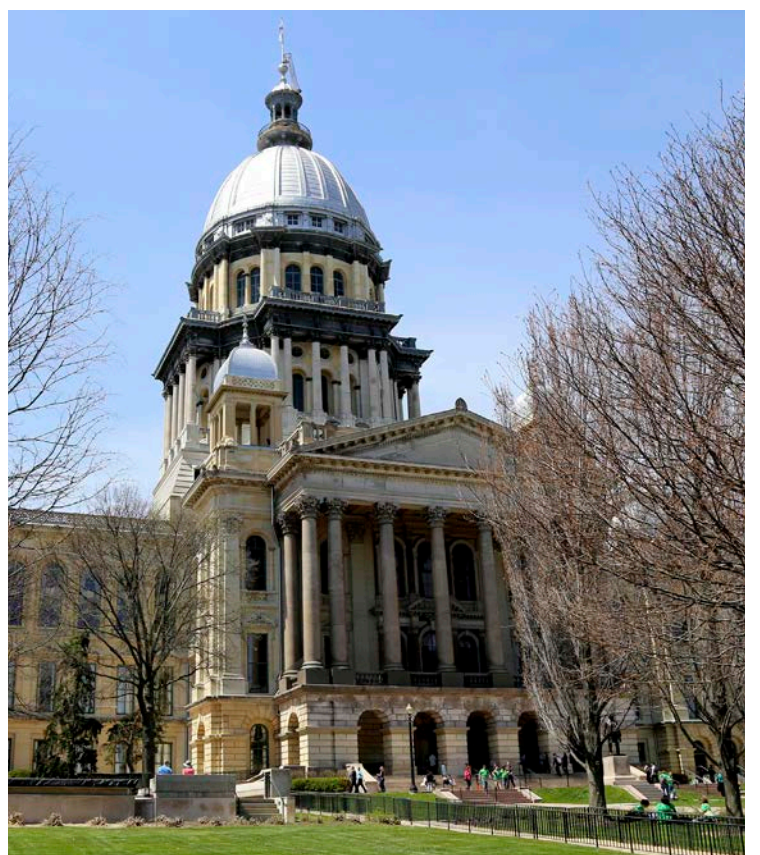
The General Assembly indicated that all or a portion of those increases are to be used for wage increases to address the hiring and retention crisis that is hurting the

people who need these critical services.


"Some employers are doing the right thing, but unfortunately many others are pushing back at the bargaining table and attempting to reserve those funds for other purposes," Council 31 Regional Director Doug Woodson said.

Rather than fight with employers over a too-small pie, AFSCME's Care Campaign is gearing up for another intensive lobbying effort to convince legislators to appropriate the funding needed to keep raising wages.

Members from local unions across the state will gather in Springfield for a lobby day on



Wednesday, April 1. They will meet with legislators and the governor's office to remind them that investing in frontline

employees is critical to ensuring consistent, high-quality services for the state's most vulnerable. 

A broken tax system

Illinois voters can fix it

The tax burden in Illinois falls more heavily on working people than the wealthy. That's because, unlike the federal government and 35 other states, Illinois doesn't tax the wealthy at a higher rate.

That unfair way of taxing income leaves the state without enough revenue to pay its bills and adequately fund public education and services.

This November, Illinois voters could change all that.

Last spring the Illinois General Assembly approved a ballot measure that will let voters decide whether to amend the Illinois Constitution to allow for a fairer income tax structure.

"Instead of requiring the state to tax income at a single rate, the amendment allows higher rates on wealthy people and lower rates for working people," Council 31 Director of Political & Community Relations John Cameron said.

The old way of taxing people results in recurring budget deficits at every level of government (state, counties, cities, universities, school districts),

only on income over \$250,000. By making the wealthy pay their share, Illinois will bring in more than \$3 billion a year in new revenue to reduce debt and invest in public services.

It's only fair

From 1979 to 2015, the top 10% of income earners saw their income go up by 108% while the bottom 90% saw their income go down by 8%.

Not only are the rich wealthier than ever, they pay less in taxes than working people.

Working people in Illinois now pay almost double what wealthy people pay in taxes as a share of their income.

"Something has to give," Cameron said. "The people who can least afford it are paying the most in taxes, while those who can best afford it are pay-

**Vote YES
for a Fair Tax!**

**Learn more:
AFSCME31.org/FairTax
VoteYesforFairness.com
YesforFairTax.org**

hurting our communities and threatening public employee pensions. It's also pushing localities to hike property taxes to pay for public education and infrastructure improvements and forcing harmful cuts to public services and jobs.


Amending the Illinois constitution to repeal the ban on taxing wealthy individuals at a higher rate will pave the way for immediate enactment of Governor Pritzker's fair tax plan, under which 97% of Illinois taxpayers will pay the same or less in income taxes.

Only the top 3% of earners will see their taxes go up—and

ing the least. That's wrong and that's what we need to fix."

How do we win?

"Illinois can have a fair tax system if we vote yes on the constitutional amendment on our ballots at the statewide general election in November 2020," Cameron said. "AFSCME members will work to get out the vote all across the state."

To win the fair tax, a 'yes' vote of more than 50% of those voting in the election or more than 60% of those voting on the ballot question is required. 



Tiffany Euler

Local 997 Department of Revenue

The Fair Tax is a means by which the share of responsibility will be more equitably distributed among taxpayers. This ensures the funding of vital programs that many people in Illinois depend on. Currently, many of these programs are operating in the red. The Fair Tax is a step in the right direction for Illinois.

Byron Clemons, Sr.

Local 124 Alton Mental Health Center

To pass the Fair Tax will be historic for all that now reside within the Prairie State and future generations to come. How can one be against a tax code that would be fairer to all Illinoisans and provide tax relief for most, all while accelerating job creation from Chicago to Alton?

We don't fault the rich for being rich, but we have a chance to hold them accountable to contributing their part. Let's make history and vote YES to the Illinois Fair Tax Amendment.



John Day

Local 1048 Southern Illinois State Employees

The fair tax creates an opportunity for Illinois to address income inequality by allowing the tax base to be shifted to the folks who have benefited the most from living and doing business in the state. A fair tax would make it possible for the state to fully fund itself and meet its obligations without placing an additional burden on lower- and middle-income working families.

Taxing wealthier households would allow us to put more money to K-12 education and lower local tax levies. This is so important in rural and downstate areas because education is funded by property taxes on homes with lower values. So those districts struggle to meet the needs of students and offer good wages to teachers. Living in a rural community shouldn't mean you have less resources for public education. We need a fair tax so all our kids have the same chance at a better future.

The Illinois Tax System is Far from Fair

Current Average State and Local Tax Rate Paid in Illinois (by Income)



Source: ITEP, "Who Pays"

PEOPLE power

AFSCME members endorse in primary, prepare for upcoming elections

With critical elections and the vitally important Fair Tax coming up on the November ballot, more than 500 delegates to Council 31’s PEOPLE conference in Springfield on Feb. 1 made endorsements for the March primary, prepared for the campaign to pass a Fair Tax in Illinois, and set the union’s 2020 legislative agenda.

Executive Director Roberta Lynch opened the conference with a rousing speech on the union difference in the lives of our nation’s economic wellbeing.

“Union membership is the difference between hanging on by your fingernails and having a measure of economic security that you know you can count on,” Lynch said.

“Why are tremendous resources used to try to destroy unions?” she asked the crowd. “Because unions are pulling back the curtains and telling the truth about our economy. We are willing to stand up and say wealth inequality is crushing the American dream.”

Ready for a fair tax code

Special guest speaker Ralph Martire, Executive Director of the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, educated the entire conference on the current regressive tax system in Illinois, which disproportionately burdens the middle class.

He stressed that the Fair Tax constitutional amendment is the surest path to a fairer tax system.

“We’re funding public schools unfairly and starving local governments all because our constitution prohibits higher taxes on the wealthy,” Martire pointed out.

“The top 1% in our state pay a lower effective tax rate than the bottom 90%, making inequality worse. With a Fair Tax, only the wealthiest 3% will pay more (97% of taxpayers will pay the same or less), which alone will raise \$3.6 billion a year for public services.”

Delegates broke up into workshops by region and strategized how best to educate their co-workers and neighbors about the Fair Tax. They returned to their local unions better armed to help win passage of the ballot measure in November.

(See more information on the Fair Tax on page 5.)

Legislative agenda set

The conference delegates approved the AFSCME Council 31’s 2020 legislative agenda, setting priorities for the current legislative session which began in January and is set to adjourn on May 31.

With thousands of bills introduced in every session of



Local 2615 member Loretta Soresie votes at the Feb. 2 PEOPLE conference.

the Illinois General Assembly, the AFSCME Council 31 lobbying team at the State Capitol is on the job every day working to defeat measures that would harm AFSCME members and to build support for bills that improve job conditions and fairness for working families.

“With a new governor that understands and respects


the valuable contributions of AFSCME members, we will be able to identify areas to improve and create pro-worker policies that make sense for our members and all working people,” Legislative Director Joanna Webb-Gauvin said. “That’s why it’s so important to have AFSCME members set our union’s priorities.”

2020 endorsements

AFSCME Council 31 endorsements are based on candidates’ records on issues of importance to union members.

The union’s endorsements are determined by rank-and-file delegates at regional meetings that were held across the state in recent months (local government endorsements, recommendations for state legislative seats); at the PEOPLE Executive Committee meeting on Jan. 31 (state legislative seats, recommendations for congressional and statewide races); and at the Feb. 1 PEOPLE conference (congressional and statewide endorsements).

Every AFSCME local in Illinois, along with every Chapter 31 Retirees sub-chapter, is eligible to send delegates to the conference.

The full list of Council 31 endorsements for the March 17 primary election is on the facing page. PEOPLE delegates will meet again in August to consider endorsements for the November general election. 

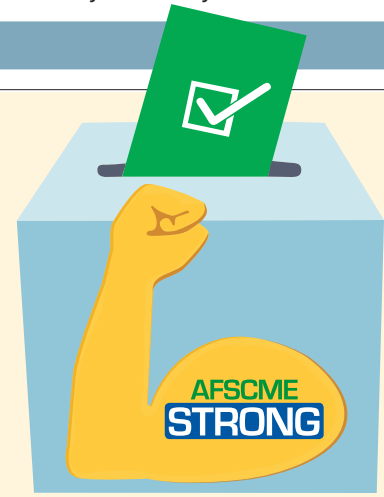
2020 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

- ✓ Support a responsible budget and adequate revenues for state and local governments
- ✓ Protect and expand workers’ rights
- ✓ Support adequate funding for state universities
- ✓ Fight privatization of public services and assets
- ✓ Fight to improve wage levels in community disability agencies and other AFSCME-represented nonprofit agencies
- ✓ Stabilize pension funds and oppose cuts to retirement benefits
- ✓ Fight for affordable prescription drugs

See the entire legislative agenda at AFSCME31.org/LegislativeAgenda2020

AFSCME Endorsements 2020 March Primary

The Illinois Primary Election in March will provide an opportunity to choose candidates who will stand up for workers' rights. Make your voice heard and VOTE!



The following candidates have been endorsed by AFSCME Illinois PEOPLE*

NATIONAL

Cong. District 1: **Bobby L. Rush (D)**
 Cong. District 2: **Robin Kelly (D)**
 Cong. District 3: **Daniel William Lipinski (D)**
 Cong. District 5: **Mike Quigley (D)**
 Cong. District 7: **Danny K. Davis (D)**
 Cong. District 8: **Raja Krishamoorthi (D)**
 Cong. District 11: **Bill Foster (D)**
 Cong. District 13: **Betsy Dirksen Londrigan (D)**

STATE LEGISLATURE

Illinois Senate

Senate District 1: **Antonio "Tony" Muñoz (D)**
 Senate District 10: **Robert Martwick (D)**
 Senate District 10: **Robert Peters (D)**
 Senate District 10: **Cristina Castro (D)**

Illinois House

House District 1: **Aaron Ortiz (D)**
 House District 2: **Theresa Mah (D)**
 House District 3: **Nidia Carranza (D)**
 House District 9: **Lakesia Collins (D)**
 House District 10: **Jawaharial "Omar" Williams (D)**

House District 16: **Yehiel "Mark" Kalish (D)**
 House District 20: **Michelle Darbro (D)**
 House District 26: **Kam Buckner (D)**
 House District 27: **Justin Q. Slaughter (D)**
 House District 29: **Thaddeus Jones (D)**
 House District 31: **Mary Flowers (D)**
 House District 32: **Andre Thapedi (D)**
 House District 40: **Jaime Andrade (D)**
 House District 41: **Janet Yang Rohr (D)**
 House District 54: **Maggie Trevor (D)**
 House District 60: **Rita Mayfield (D)**
 House District 65: **Martha Paschke (D)**
 House District 66: **Suzanne Ness (D)**
 House District 79: **Charlene Eads (D)**
 House District 83: **Barbara Hernandez (D)**
 House District 115: **Johnnie Ray Smith II (R)**

JUDICIAL

1st Supreme Court District
 (Freeman): **P. Scott Neville**
 1st Appellate Court District
 (Neville): **Michael Hyman**
 1st Appellate Court District
 (Simon): **John Griffin**

COUNTY

Cook County

State's Attorney: **Kim Foxx (D)**

Rock Island

County Board: **Joshua Ehrmann (D)**
 County Board: **Will Tolmie (D)**
 County Board: **Brad Beeding (D)**

Winnebago

County Chairman: **Joe Chiarelli (R)**
 County Board: **Robert Young (D)**
 County Board: **John Penney (R)**

Kane

County Board: **Matt Hansen (D)**
 County Board: **Susan Starrett (R)**

Jackson

Circuit Clerk: **Cindy Svanda (D)**

*NOTE: AFSCME does not normally make endorsements in uncontested races.

Register & Vote!

Illinois' primary Election Day is March 17. To make your voice heard, be sure you are registered to vote—and be sure to vote! Here's everything you need to know.

To vote, you must:

- Be a U.S. citizen.
- Be at least 17 years old on or before the primary election and turn 18 on or before the date of the general election.
- Live in your election precinct at least 30 days before Election Day.
- Not be serving time in prison as a result of a conviction (those released from prison are eligible to register and vote in Illinois).

Ways to register:

- Online registration is open until March 2 for those with a state license or state ID.
- Register in person at a designated location near you during early voting from March 2 to March 16.

Visit the Illinois State Board of Elections website at elections.il.gov for detailed information and to register online.



**Vote Early through March 16
or Vote on March 17, Election Day!**



Forming a union is our right. And it's worth the fight.

Despite all the obstacles, workers in Illinois and across the country continue to seek to exercise their right to unionize. Tens of thousands are coming together to form unions, defying employer threats and intimidation.

Federal law gives American workers in the private sector the right to join together with co-workers to form a union and bargain collectively with their employer. State law in Illinois does the same for public employees.

Sounds clear and simple, but in reality, forming a union in a non-union workplace can be extremely difficult. Too often, workers face intimidation, harassment and retaliation.

"Many workers start a new job and a union is waiting for them. Their rights and benefits are well-established in a longstanding union contract," AFSCME Council 31 Organizing Director Abbey Davis said. That's the experience of most Illinois AFSCME members who work for state or local government.

Even so, "there are still hundreds of thousands of workers in our state who don't have union representation," Davis said. "For many of them, having a voice on the job is a much higher hill to climb."

That's because employers don't want to give up power, and laws to protect workers aren't strong enough.

Employers don't want to give up power

In a non-union workplace, the employer has all the power and control over working conditions and compensation. All too often, they'll fight to retain it at any cost.

"Employers often say they don't want a union because they don't have the money—recognizing that unions seek to raise wages," Davis said. "But they spend more money fighting the union with lawyers and consultants than they would need to spend on wage increases."

It's especially shocking to discover how many nonprofit agencies or even governmental bodies will devote scarce resources to battling employees who seek a voice on the job.

At a nonprofit disability agency where employees recently formed a union with AFSCME, the employer paid four out-of-state "union avoidance" consultants \$3,000 a day plus travel and lodging expenses.

At another agency where workers wanted to form a union with AFSCME and the labor board

ruled that separate elections would need to be held at each of its three facilities, the employer closed down the facility where union support was strongest. After those workers lost their jobs, employees at the other facilities were too frightened to move forward.

"It happens all too often," Davis said. "Although having a union can help improve services, stabilize the workforce and even find cost-saving efficiencies, employers want total control."

"We make sure employees know what to expect and prepare them for the fact that management will try to intimidate and mislead them, even threaten their jobs," Davis said.

Labor laws aren't strong enough

The National Labor Relations Act of 1935 codified the rights of workers to join a union free from retaliation, but the Labor Management Relations Act of 1947, known as the Taft-Hartley Act, restricted union activities and power.

The Taft-Hartley Act led to a cottage industry of anti-union consultants—often lawyers—who advise employers on how to get away with stomping out a union organizing effort.

Anti-union tactics include holding mandatory “captive audience” meetings on work time, intimidating employees and inundating them with propaganda. Anti-union consultants will harass employees at home or at their second job, urging them to vote against the union. They will threaten pro-union employees with demotions, lower pay, cuts in hours or even termination.

UCAN—a well-known, publicly funded non-profit in Chicago that helps at-risk youth—paid a high-priced “union avoidance” firm to fight employees as they formed their union with AFSCME. Workers who voted to join the union more than two years ago finally won their first contract (see page 13) early this year.

More than 800 employees at CGH Medical Center in Sterling who recently voted to join AFSCME are awaiting labor board certification. But the city-owned hospital hired a \$500-an-hour anti-union lawyer to do everything possible to delay.

“We need more labor board officers, tighter timelines with faster certification and better standards of union recognition, plus punitive consequences that put the burden on the employer, not the worker,” Davis said. “Right now, labor board regulations allow the employer to drag out the process, which can deflate employee morale.”

Trump dumping worker protections

President Barack Obama strengthened worker protections at the National Labor Relations Board, improving the union recognition process, expanding protections for workers’ rights and allowing unions more access to workplaces for organizing. But the Trump administration is reversing those gains.

At the same time, instead of allowing Democrats to appoint board members as the law provides, Trump is leaving those seats vacant. That’s left the NLRB with just three members, all of them Trump appointees whose decisions consistently thwart workers’ attempts to gain union recognition.

A recent report by the Economic Policy Institute details how Trump has “systematically rolled back workers’ rights to form unions and engage in collective bargaining with their employers, to the detriment of workers, their communities, and the economy. ... The Trump board and [NLRB general counsel] have elevated corporate interests above those of working men and women and have routinely betrayed the statute they are responsible for administering and enforcing.”

Workers won't give up

Protecting the unfettered right to join a union is critically important not only for individual workers and their families, but for communities and the economy as a whole. The percentage of American workers in a union dropped to its lowest level ever in 2019—just as wage and wealth inequality have peaked.

This is no coincidence. And that unequal distribution of economic wealth and power trans-

lates into “shocking disparities in political power,” according to a Harvard University report. “A large part of the explanation for our current crisis of economic inequality is the decline of the labor movement. Unions redistribute wealth—from capital to labor, from rich to poor—and without unions we have lacked for a check on economic concentration.”

As the report said, “Democracy at work should be a right, not a fight.”

Despite all the obstacles, workers in Illinois and across the country continue to seek to exercise that right. Tens of thousands continue to come together to form unions, defying employer threats and intimidation.

“It’s always so inspiring to see groups of workers who stand up to all of the lies and coercion because they want to make their lives better,” Davis said, “and even more inspiring to watch them go on and do just that.”



Arzell Thomas

A community support specialist, Thomas has worked at UCAN for 26 years. He and his co-workers voted to join AFSCME almost two years ago. After a long fight they finally won their first contract.

We get up every morning and come to work because of the kids we serve. But after 26 years I make just \$29,000 a year. We want to take care of the clients, but we have to take care of our families too!

Employees here start at minimum wage. Most don’t last a year. It’s hard to focus on the work when you’re trying to live paycheck to paycheck. We’ve had some employees working here full time and still homeless. To get on the health insurance is almost \$700 a month.

When we started organizing, we didn’t know how hard it would be. Instead of paying workers what we deserve, they paid a union-buster thousands of dollars to intimidate us. When we tried to share information about the union, they would rip down our flyers. But they let anti-union workers put up posters calling us “cockroaches.”

Instead of paying workers what we deserve, they paid a union-buster thousands of dollars to intimidate us.

That’s the most hurtful part. I spent 26 years with this organization, but I was treated like a second-class citizen.

At UCAN, we never had a voice. Now we do. Sitting across the bargaining table for the first time, that was something else!

Brandi Barron

Barron works as an electronic medical records trainer at CGH Medical Center, where more than 800 employees recently voted to join AFSCME. Management has targeted her and other union activists for retaliation.

I got suspended for five days because of hearsay complaints. I was put in my office to work on educational documents and had to send progress reports at the end of each day. I stuck to exactly what they told me to do, but they didn’t think I was making the right kind of progress.

Then they cut down my hours. All of this was in direct relation to my union activity.

I started out advocating for the union to help other people. I knew that I would have some trouble because nobody likes change, but I didn’t think it would be this severe, considering I know what I’m doing is right.

I support the union and there is no reason for them to retaliate against me. I don’t stop their voice. Why do they try to stop mine?

They’re trying to get me out of there, but there are a whole bunch of strong leaders. I’m just one. They’re not going to take down this whole thing if they take me out.



I started out advocating for the union to help other people. I knew that I would have some trouble but I know what I’m doing is right.

We're up for the count

2020 Census: Critical for public services

Every decade, America counts its population in the US Census. The results have a far-reaching impact on communities, cities, counties and states as the count determines the allocation of more than \$675 billion in federal funds, grants and support—as well as congressional representation.

Illinois missed out on critical federal dollars and may lose up to two congressional seats due to undercounting in the last census. That's why the state is investing more money than any other (outside of California and New York) on ensuring every person is counted in 2020.

“Having fair representation in the US House is critical for our state.”

The Illinois Complete Count committee of the Illinois secretary of state's office is working to make sure that investment pays off.

"Census data determines how federal funding is divided up among the states for vital services like education, and healthcare, and road construction," Gov. JB Pritzker said. "Billions of dollars per year in federal funding to Illinois are on the line, and so is our representation in U.S. Congress, and that of course determines what that federal funding will look like."

Counting every person

In 2010, the United States Census Bureau missed an estimated 59,800 Illinoisans, including 36,000 children under the age of five. Because of that undercounting, Illinois lost \$122 million in federal health funding and \$2,700 per child each year in federal assistance.

The number of seats each state has in the US House of Representatives is based on population. And Illinois is almost guaranteed to lose at least one of its seats because of a steep drop in population

over the last decade.

If Illinois loses one seat, it will most likely be from Southern Illinois. But it's possible that Illinois could lose two seats—the other likely from Northern Illinois—if the undercount is large enough.

If Illinois loses two seats, the state's representation in the house would be reduced to 16—the fewest since Abraham Lincoln was president.


"Having fair representation in the US House is critical for our state," said AFSCME Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch. "We need advocates for federal dollars that provide strong public services and much-needed infrastructure improvements in Illinois. That's why it's so important that every single Illinoisan is counted in the 2020 Census."

Be counted in 2020

The 2020 US Census begins April 1. Participating will be easier than ever. The Census Bureau is accepting responses online (via desktop, laptop, phone or tablet) and by phone in addition to the traditional paper method.

Every household will have the option of responding online, by mail or by phone. Depending on how likely an area is to respond online, individuals will receive either an invitation encouraging them to respond online or an invitation along with a paper questionnaire in mid- to late March.

Anyone who hasn't completed their online or paper Census form by the end of April will receive an in-person visit from a census outreach worker.

"Let's make every person in Illinois count," Lynch said. "Complete your census form quickly and encourage your family, friends and co-workers to do the same." 

CENSUS 101

Everyone counts.

The census counts every person living in the U.S. once, only once, and in the right place.



United States
Census
Bureau

2020 Census: Get the Facts

The US Census is coming up soon.

The outcome will be critically important for AFSCME members and the communities we serve. Here's what you need to know:

- ✓ Census 2020 begins April 1.
- ✓ Participating in the Census is our civic duty: It's a way to participate in our democracy and say, "I COUNT!"
- ✓ It's easy! You can participate online, by phone or by mail.
- ✓ Billions of dollars are at stake. If our neighbors don't get counted, our workplaces don't get the necessary funding to provide critical services like schools, roads, public works and other vital programs.
- ✓ Do you know someone who needs a flexible job with a good salary and an even better mission? They can apply to work for the Census at 2020census.gov/jobs.

University employees striving for a better future

AFSCME members at NEIU win contract after tough bargaining



Local 1989 members at NEIU celebrate a fair contract.

After nearly two years of bargaining, AFSCME Local 1989 members at Northeastern Illinois University won a five-year agreement that raises wages and moves the local closer to a step plan that rewards years of service.

It wasn't easy. Union members had to fight the university every step of the way, enduring furloughs and layoffs in the process.

"We are short on people, offices are closed, we're running around trying to be a resource for students. We're making it happen, but we're stretched," Local 1989 President Chaelecia Cooper said.

The university kept refusing to reward hard work and dedication, pushing back on fair wage proposals time and again.

"People have very good reason to be frustrated and I'm also frustrated," said bargaining committee member Jen Sevilla. "But we found the ability in the frustration to be one local. We're working toward the same goal together."

Union members rallied together and held regular pickets on campus, testified at board of trustees meetings and dropped

in during the president's office hours and addresses. Striking Chicago teachers and AFSCME members from other locals joined their campus actions, boosting morale.

The union ultimately prevailed through unity, Cooper said. "We're always thinking about everyone else along with ourselves and that's how it should be. It's a collective. We told NEIU it's not going to be another day; it's going to be now."

An agreement was reached quickly after a federal mediator was appointed. The contract provides 11% wage increases over the life of the contract plus an extra 2.5% bump in the last three years that the local can allocate. They plan to raise pay in disproportionately underpaid positions, moving the unit closer to the goal of a pay schedule with automatic step progressions.

The university can expect more of the same determination next time around, Cooper said. "We are here and we aren't going away. We are invested. We are NEIU."



Local 3236 member Sandy Nordine. Photo: Alex Gant | Vidette Photographer

ISU still at table

AFSCME Local 3236 members at Illinois State University are still fighting after 19 months without a contract. The university is saying it doesn't have money but the union is standing strong, Council 31 Staff Representative Renee Nestler said.

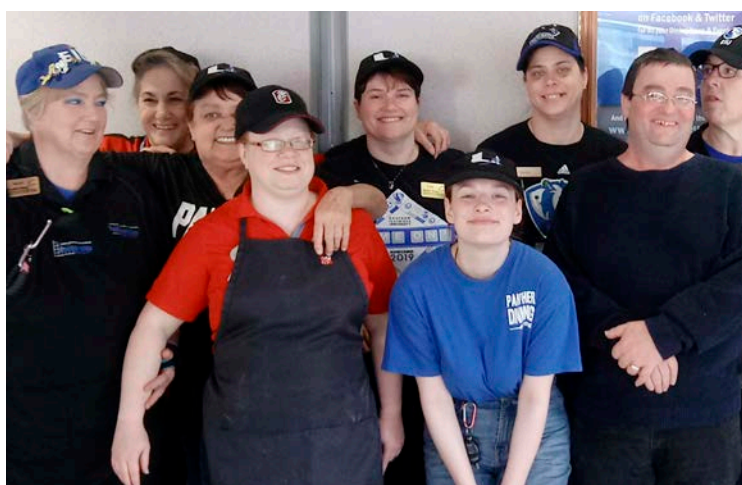
The support of the university community has kept spirits up. Faculty, staff and students packed the halls in support of the union's fight at a Jan. 27 action.

"Clerical staff are crucial," recently retired faculty member Barbara Heyl said. "We can't teach without their support; we really rely on them."

EIU membership grows

Food court employees just joined the ranks of AFSCME Local 981 at Eastern Illinois University.

"For years they never had a



New members of Local 981, food court employees at EIU.



Wrongly accused, made whole

Virginia Sandstrom was chanting along with dozens of other union members standing up for a fair contract outside the NEIU president's office on July 31. A woman on management's negotiating team came up and told her to stop yelling at her.

"I said, I'm not yelling at you, I'm chanting," Sandstrom recalls. Shortly after, Sandstrom saw a commotion and the woman was sitting down at the top of a stairwell. She asked her if she was OK as others helped the woman to her feet.

A few days later Sandstrom received a notice of termination for "creating a hostile environment in the work place."

Despite telling her side of the story, Sandstrom was terminated—but the union fought successfully to make it a paid leave while investigation took place.

Six months later the union had an arbitrator subpoena the university; the union was ready to make its case. Instead of making their own, the university quickly settled and put Sandstrom back to work at the same job. They removed all records of the incident from her personnel file and must post on employee bulletin boards about the settlement to clear her name.

"It was very stressful, and I feel like I have PTSD," Sandstrom said. "But everyone's been really supportive. Without my union, I don't know where I would be right now." 🦅

set schedule, their hours could be changed with no notice. They didn't have two days off together, it was hard to take time off and seniority didn't matter," Local 981 President Renee Kerz said.

"Becoming a part of our bargaining unit makes a lot of that possible. It makes life easier and more consistent."

The unit approached AFSCME members last summer

and secured a first contract within a year. They got raises that will keep them earning above the minimum wage as it increases, two days off in a row each week and a reliable schedule.

"We're making a difference on this campus," Kerz said. "You can't stay on the sidelines. You have to stand up and be a voice with us. That's what makes us strong." 🦅

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL



Employees at Erie House in Chicago won their first union contract.

First contract for new AFSCME members at Erie House

IN MAY 2018 MORE THAN 100 employees at Erie House in Chicago voted to join AFSCME. In December 2019 they settled their first collective bargaining agreement.

Erie House is an education and resource center serving the immigrant community with early childhood education and family support, as well as adult and after-school programming. Employees organized a union because they felt working conditions and services would improve with more support and respect from management.

“Erie does a lot of amazing work in the immigrant community, providing a large variety of social services,” said Katie VanderHeide, the organization’s database administrator and a member of the bargaining team. “Our frontline employees embody the essence of Erie House and I wanted to ensure they had a seat at the table. I knew that a union would make their voices heard.”

Council 31 Staff Representative Matthew Lange led the bargaining team, which, along with VanderHeide, included Erika Flores, Danny Collins, Riza Falk, Jose Frausto and Jesus Gonzalez Flores.

Together, the team secured a three-year contract guaranteeing 8% across-the-board increases over the life of the

agreement. Now employees have access to an unpaid personal leave and two weeks of paid child care leave (both new benefits), and they can roll over three vacation days into the next fiscal year, eliminating a “use it or lose it” policy.

Eligible employees will receive cell phone and clothing stipends, access to tuition assistance and debt-relief plans and paid time for professional development.

With a large number of Spanish speakers in the

“Our frontline employees embody the essence of Erie House.”

bargaining unit, the committee secured a new policy that requires all official organizational communications— memos, policies, procedures, manuals, all-staff meetings, etc.—to be offered in both English and Spanish.

“We’re proud of the new policies we got in place, which

show that there is value in our own families as well as the work we do here at Erie,” VanderHeide said. “But a lot of what we’re excited about is accountability and knowing that the rules are the same across the board. We’re excited for some basic background rights and securities that come

with a union, like a set discipline and grievance policy.”

Erie House is celebrating its 150th anniversary in 2020 and the staff look forward to working hard to serve the community.

“It felt really good to be at the table, have candid conversations, and to have equal weight,” VanderHeide said. “After some tense times, I don’t feel like we’re fighting over this anymore. Now management and the union are excited to move forward together.”



State labor federation elects new leadership

Congratulations to newly elected Illinois State AFL-CIO officers Tim Drea (president, center) and Pat Devaney (secretary-treasurer, right). Drea most recently served as the federation’s secretary-treasurer and takes the helm as former President Michael Carrigan retires from a career dedicated to Illinois workers. Devaney comes to his new position from the Associated Fire Fighters of Illinois where he served as president. The state federation has an executive board that’s made up of representatives from 35 affiliated unions, including AFSCME Council 31.



Excellence on the job

A school custodian and AFSCME Local 672 member since 1992, Diana Winthurst received an award for her outstanding performance and dedication to the Moline-Coal Valley School District community. “Diana is a proud AFSCME member and is always giving 100%,” Local 672 President Terry Boone said. “We congratulate her for this well-deserved award.”

UCAN employees win first union contract

AFTER MORE THAN TWO years of organizing a union and bargaining a contract, AFSCME members at UCAN in Chicago overwhelmingly voted to ratify their first union contract.

The three-year agreement ensures that employees at this publicly funded nonprofit youth care agency have the basic rights and protections that union contracts provide as well as guaranteed wage increases and lower health insurance costs.

"I'm very elated that we have finally reached a tentative agreement," said Rhonda Nesbitt, a community support specialist who has worked at UCAN for 15 years. "Although it was long, the fight was worth it. I'm most proud of my team because we encouraged and leaned on one another during stressful times."

The fight was indeed long. Nearly 200 employees voted to join AFSCME in March 2018 after an intensive anti-union campaign waged by management. But by sticking together and engaging the community in their effort, the workers won their union and negotiated a remarkably good first contract.

In addition to union rights, a grievance and arbitration process and just-cause discipline standards, employees can be secure in their ability to advocate for themselves and their co-workers.

Starting wage rates were set, hiking pay for several positions, plus 3% across-the-board raises in each year of the contract. Longevity pay, shift differentials and position progressions based on years of service will also give many employees a much-needed income boost.

"Everybody is happy with the pay increases," said Devon Streeter, a residential treatment specialist who has worked at UCAN for more than three years. But it was more gratifying "getting management to budge on things that mattered to us day-to-day. We got breaks, shift differential pay, extra holidays. These are the things we're really excited about."

Streeter said employees were forced to work long hours with no break because management said it was just part of the job. "Can you imagine a 14 to 16-hour shift and not having a single break? People had to



Members of the AFSCME bargaining team celebrates after a successful first contract ratification.

sneak out. That's how we've been working."

UCAN will also pay more toward employee health insurance. Before they paid between 50-60% of the premium and now they will pay 75%. Fer-

"Although it was long, the fight was worth it."

nanda Royal, a program support specialist who has worked at UCAN for 18 years, said she's most proud of that win.

"It feels good to know that everyone now has the opportunity to be paid for the work we do," she said, and that employees now have "affordable medical insurance with UCAN paying the bulk of the price."

Streeter said he wasn't supportive of unionizing at first but after talking to co-workers he got on board and eventually joined the bargaining committee. Being at the table with UCAN confirmed just how much the union was really needed. He wanted to make sure to give credit to his co-workers who were in the fight from the beginning.

"They went through hell and got everything rolling," Streeter said. "They gave people the opportunity to fight for what's right and what we believe in. They taught me the value of speaking out."

The bargaining team was

led by Council 31 Staff Representative Kathy Steichen. The team evolved over the more than 18 months of bargaining, but the core team that brought home the contract included Royal, Nesbitt and Streeter, along with Arzell Thomas, Julia Beard, Art Gage and David Shields.

"It's been a great journey," Streeter said. "There were ups and downs but now we can all breathe easy. I now know that in due time I can be comfortable with the job I have. It's a good job and can be a great job. It's a glorious feeling."

raises wages 9% for everyone—and 30% for the lowest-paid employees—in addition to securing paid parental leave for the first time.

A big priority for Local 3783 members was improving pay and benefits for library pages, who make significantly less than other full-time employees.

"We strongly believe pages should have access to the same benefits as other employees and continue to make incremental progress towards that [and] put significant pressure on management

team tries to get more for us because we're under different guidelines than the other employees," said Lisa Guagenti, a page in adult services. "Every little bit helps."


Guagenti has two children in college and works two other part-time jobs to supplement her income. She's worked at the library for four years after visiting it for two decades as a patron.

"I live in Elk Grove, so I see people I know," she said. "It's friendly. It has a nice community feel."

The bargaining team also fought off management's attempt to deny employees the ability to trade shifts, a common and helpful practice at the library.

Guagenti said having a voice on the job is the most valuable part of being a union member. She said she's seen her co-workers use the grievance process to protect the rights, pay and benefits they have worked so hard to secure.

"If you feel you've been treated unfairly, you have someone who can help you," she said. "That's what I like about having the backing of a union. You feel supported as an employee."

The bargaining committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Colin Theis and included Local 3783 President Jan Chrzan, Vice President Josh Fulkerson, Recording Secretary Aleksandra Podraza and Trustee Rhonda Szewczyk. 



Local 3783 bargaining team members Jan Chrzan, Josh Fulkerson and Rhonda Szewczyk (Aleksandra Podraza not pictured).

Pushing for higher pay at Elk Grove Village library

EMPLOYEES AT THE PUBLIC library in Elk Grove Village won a four-year contract that

to raise wages on a faster pace," the bargaining team said in the tentative agreement summary.

The team was able to ensure that page wages increase faster than the state minimum wage. Pages will also see more paid time off during the life of the contract.

"Every year the bargaining

SHORT REPORTS



Nevada state employees secured collective bargaining rights in 2018. The first units are now certified by the state labor board.

Good news in Nevada

NEVADA STATE EMPLOYEES ARE one step closer to the bargaining table as the state's labor board certified AFSCME Local 4041 as the exclusive representative for three bargaining units—corrections, health care and health care professional employees.

These state employees have been working to secure union rights for decades. But it wasn't until 2018 that union-backed, Democratic candidates won enough legislative seats—and the governorship—to secure passage of legislation establishing those rights. And in June, Nevada Gov. Steve Sisolak signed into law a historic bill granting 20,000 state workers the right to collectively bargain.

Now, some 2,000 union members in these three newly certified bargaining units will select a bargaining team to negotiate their first contract with the State of Nevada in the coming months.

"This is an exciting day for Local 4041 members. We are one step closer to taking our seat at the bargaining table to negotiate wages, working conditions and safety on the job, and resources so we can continue to provide our communities with the best services possible," said Harry Schiffman, Local 4041 president and an electrician at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas.

"Thousands of Nevada state employees are ready to make changes in our workplaces through collective bargaining, and thousands more will join soon as additional units ready to file for exclusive representation as AFSCME."

Federal EPA employees stand up

IN THE FACE OF MASSIVE STAFFING cuts and deregulation that ignores science and undermines public safety, employees at the federal Environmental Protection Agency are coming together and demanding a workers' bill of rights.

"There's been an attack on the EPA from a lot of directions, an attack on EPA science, an attack on our regulations, and an attack on the workers who actually do the work," said Bethany Dreyfus, president of the American Federation of Government Employees Local 1236, which represents EPA workers.

The union argues that the Trump administration has waged an all-out assault on workers at the EPA. The new bill of rights aims to improve working conditions and ensure a fair contract for the nearly 8,000 employees represented by

AFGE while embracing scientific integrity.

"EPA employees have committed our careers to protecting human health and the environment, working day-in and day-out to keep our air clean, ensure our water is safe to drink, and clean up our land so that we may live and work on it," Dreyfus said.

"That's why we're not just standing up for a fair contract, we're fighting to be able to do our jobs and protect public health—and we'll keep fighting until our voices are truly heard."

Trump tax cut favors wealthy

THE \$1.5 TRILLION IN TAX CUTS that President Donald Trump and his congressional allies signed into law three years ago have helped the wealthy enrich themselves but left working people behind. The big winners are not the workers promised

wage boosts, but corporate executives and shareholders.

Bloomberg Business reported on Jan. 16 that the Trump tax cut was a \$32 billion "windfall" for the country's six biggest banks: JPMorgan Chase & Co., Bank of America Corp., Citigroup Inc., Wells Fargo & Co., Goldman Sachs Group Inc. and Morgan Stanley.

The tax cut package slashed the corporate tax rate from 35 to 21 percent. But instead of investing in their employees' wages and benefits, these big companies took their tax cuts and simply bought back a record amount of their own stock—a financial practice that rewards shareholders.

"These detrimental results should be no surprise as the tax law is in fact working out according to plan: helping the rich and powerful," said AFSCME Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch.

"The tax law is working out according to plan: helping the rich and powerful."

In fact, "the tax savings have spurred the banks to record profit," Bloomberg stated, with the six biggest banks posting \$120 billion in net income for 2019. "They had never surpassed \$100 billion before the tax cuts."


New state laws push wages up

ALTHOUGH THE TRUMP FEDERAL tax cuts failed to produce promised wage growth, state legislatures are taking on that challenge. In 2020, minimum wages will increase in 25 states and 49 localities. The wage hikes constitute the greatest number ever in one year.

"These increases will put much-needed money into the hands of the lowest-paid workers, many of whom struggle with high and ever-increasing costs of living," said Yarnet Lathrop of the National Employment Law Project.

The minimum wage law signed last year by Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker raised the wage to \$9.25 on Jan. 1. On July 1, there will be a second increase to \$10 per hour, with further increases to \$15 in 2025.

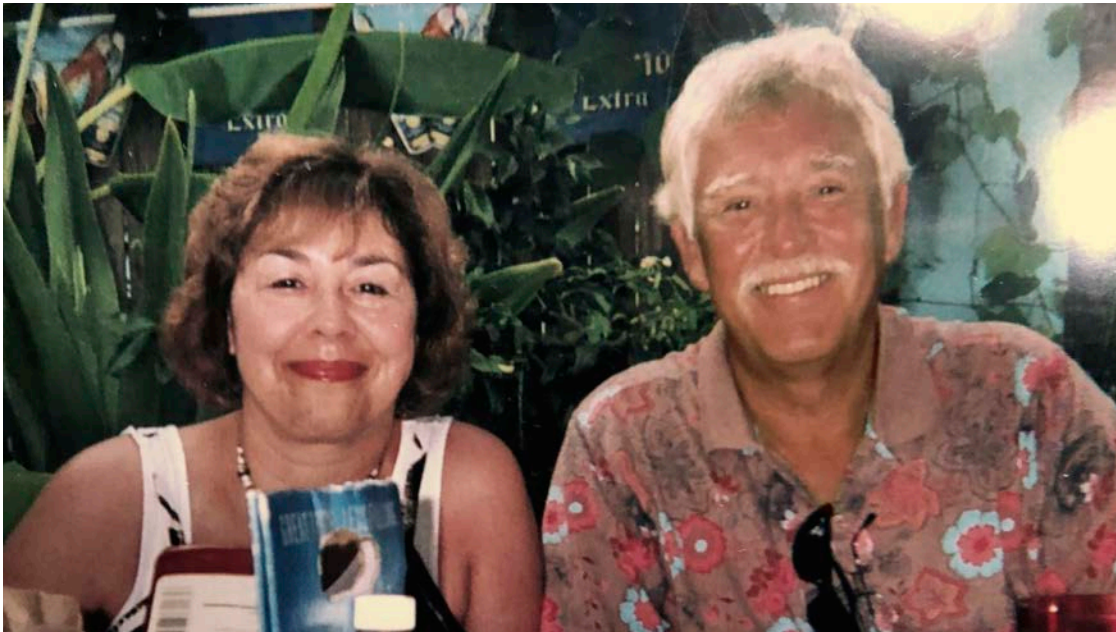
Labor groups like Fight for \$15 pushed for years for a living wage. Companies and states are finally catching up. Large corporations like Amazon have increased their minimum wage to \$15 an hour. And even McDonald's—one of the staunchest opponents to increasing pay for underpaid workers—announced in April that it would no longer fight proposals to raise the minimum wage.

However, the federal minimum wage has remained stagnant for a decade at just \$7.25 an hour—or \$15,000 a year. It's the longest this country has gone without an increase in the federal wage. 



Labor groups like Fight for \$15 pushed for years for a living wage. And finally in 2020, a record number of cities and states are increasing their minimum wages.

RETIREE NOTES



Mary Lou and Kenneth Bradford were among dozens of SERS retirees who received notice they were no longer insured by the state.

AFSCME Action: SERS retiree health insurance

KENNETH AND MARY LOU Bradford were among dozens of SERS retirees who received notices at the beginning of December from the Illinois Department of Central Management Services (CMS) stating they would no longer have health insurance through the state as of January 1, 2020.

"We were terrified," Mary Lou said.

CMS said that notices had previously been sent to SERS retirees who had turned 65 informing them that upon becoming Medicare-eligible they could no longer stay in their current health plan and had to enroll in a Medicare Advantage Plan during the open enrollment period (October 15 to November 15). The state took the position that any retiree who failed to respond and select a Medicare Advantage plan during open enrollment had opted out of insurance.

AFSCME Retirees Chapter 31 received dozens of calls from retirees like the Bradfords who were shocked and alarmed to receive the CMS notice regarding termination of their health coverage. Chapter 31 immediately began an investigation.

As it turned out, the notice sent to retirees earlier in the fall was marketed with the TRAIL logo—Total Retiree Advantage Illinois—rather than coming from CMS. It's likely that many retirees did not recognize the TRAIL logo or understand that vital information about their insurance was in those envelopes. Rather, it looked more like the other solicitations that bombard

"President Trump indicated a willingness to cut Social Security if elected again."

people when they turn 65.

"CMS told us we chose not to continue to have coverage," Mary Lou said, "I can't think of any senior that would do that, especially given all of the health issues many of us face."

In fact, one member who was impacted has terminal cancer, another had a stroke, and yet another has multiple sclerosis.

AFSCME wasted no time in reaching out to CMS to get the problem fixed. Initially the agency was reluctant to provide any relief, but after AFSCME pointed out how disastrous it would be for retirees to be left without insurance coverage, the state agreed to reverse course.

CMS contacted each affected retiree to provide a one-time open enrollment period which ensured no coverage gap, and all retirees who took that opportunity now have coverage once again.

AFSCME Chapter 31 Retirees is on the job for all of us!

Retirement security shrinks

THE NUMBER OF SENIORS IN the U.S. who have access to the three-legged stool of retirement security has shrunk to 6.8%, leading to an increasing reliance on Social Security and a 200% spike in the number of older Americans living in poverty.

Long considered the ideal for a secure retirement, the

three-legged stool includes (1) access to Social Security, (2) a defined benefit pension and (3) individual savings, typically from a defined contribution plan. But in recent decades, the number of retirees who receive pension benefits has significantly declined.

A report from the National Institute on Retirement Security (NIRS) indicates that 40% of older Americans rely on Social Security for 90% or more of their income. Social Security alone is not considered enough for a secure retirement, and it was not intended to stand alone.

The average Social Security benefit in 2019 was \$1,461 a month (\$17,532 a year). Social Security benefits typically replace approximately 40% of pre-retirement income. Most financial planners recommend at least a 70% income replacement rate for retirees. In fact, the analysis by NIRS indicates that if Social Security income had been 10% greater in 2013, there would have been about 500,000 fewer older households in poverty.


Any decrease in Social Security benefits would push even more retired Americans into poverty. That's why so many seniors were deeply alarmed when President Trump recently indicated a willingness to consider cutting Social Security if he wins a second term.

Without defined benefit

pensions, the number of older households receiving public assistance would have increased by almost 19%, the report says, and the number of older persons receiving Medicaid by more than 15%.

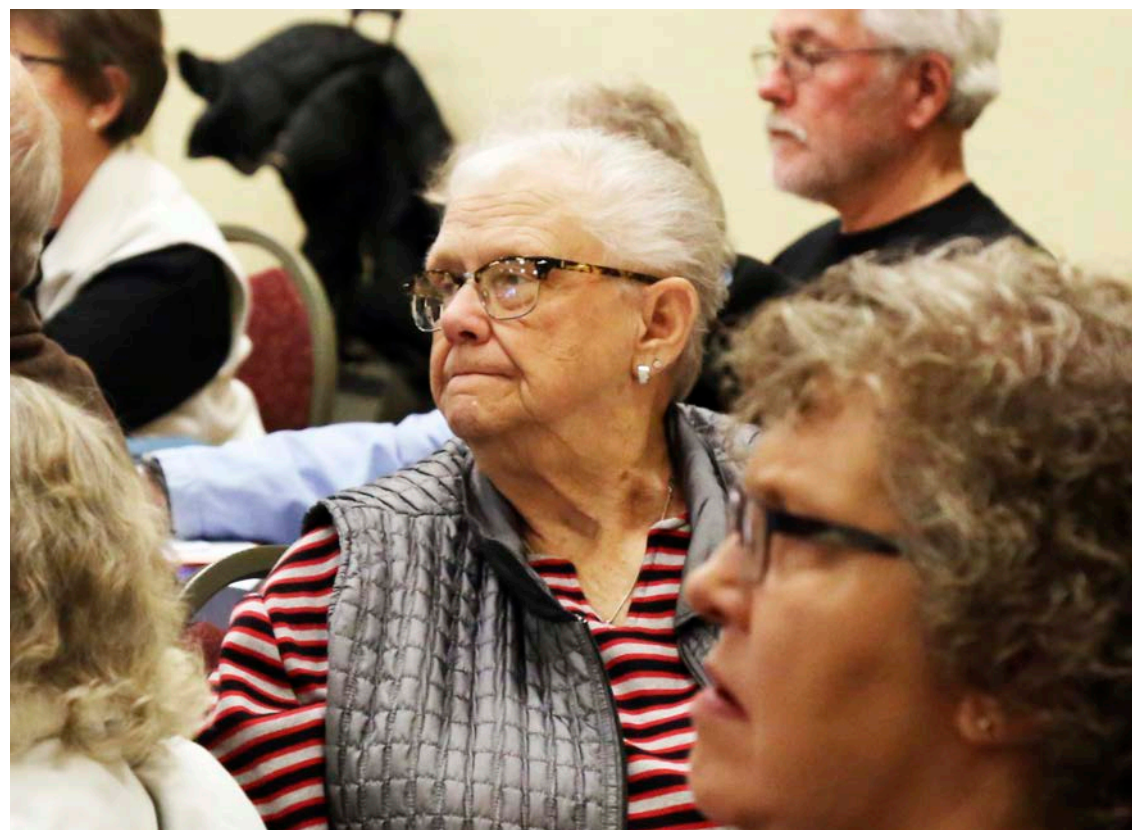
"It is clear from the data that pensions serve an important function in keeping working families in the middle class in retirement," NIRS executive director Dan Doonan said. "We are on a treacherous path for the future with dwindling pensions and proposals to cut Social Security."

Email Alerts!

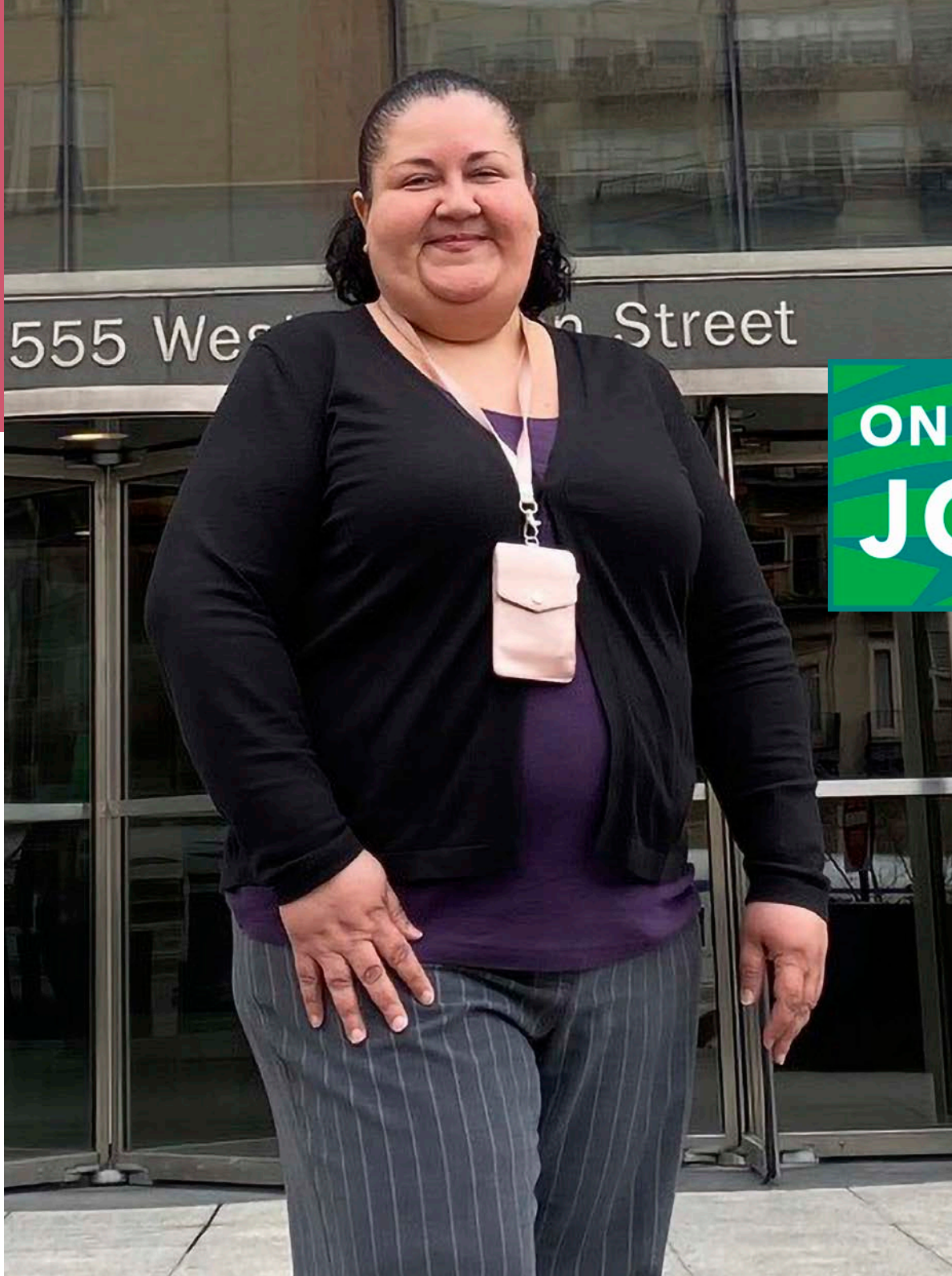
DON'T MISS ANYTHING! IF YOU don't already receive emails from Chapter 31 Retirees, email mbritton-sipe@afscme31.org to sign up. 

SAVE THE DATE! Rx Affordability Lobby Day March 3 | 11 a.m. | Springfield

We are suffering while pharmaceutical manufacturers make record profits. It's time for our state to ensure all Illinoisans can afford their medications because prescription drugs don't work if people can't afford them! To learn more, contact Retiree Coordinator Maria Britton-Sipes at MBritton-Sipe@afscme31.org.



AFSCME Chapter 31 retirees gathered with Council 31 members at the Feb. 1 PEOPLE conference in Springfield to approve the union's 2020 legislative agenda and make endorsements for the March 17 primary election (see page 6-7).



Melinda Barrett

AFSCME Local 2060

VICTIM WITNESS SUPERVISOR
COOK COUNTY STATE'S ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

Tell us about your job at the Cook County State's Attorney's Office.

The victim witness assistance unit in our office assists victims of violent crimes as they navigate the criminal justice process. There are more than

spouse, a child, a relative—and they are desperate for safety. Many people who come in are questioning themselves, even in the midst of the risk to their security. They want to be heard because they've been silenced in a violent relationship. They haven't had the authority or luxury to express themselves without ramifications.

I listen. I put them at ease. I help them with

“Domestic violence impacts the whole community. And so do the services we provide.”

50 victim specialists represented by our local union. We have very large caseloads and cover all crimes handled in six different courthouses. We inform people about the court process and accompany them to court. We look to see what their needs are as a result of being a victim and partner with social services agencies for service referrals like counseling, housing, clothing, immigration issues, whatever they need.

I work in the domestic violence division. The people we help are dealing with a lot of trauma because of abuse by a loved one—their

their concerns and issues. We help them do what they need to do to be safe and happy.

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

I know there is ugliness and evil in this world but working in law enforcement and victim advocacy gives me hope. People come here broken. They feel defeated. They are crying and upset. We try to restore some semblance of who they were

and give that power back and that hope that things will get better. Some days are hard, but most of the time something happens in this courthouse to make me feel like I've done a good job.

This is who I am. It's my identity. I advocate for people who are experiencing the worst, most traumatic experiences of their lives. I love to help and empower people to advocate for themselves. When they leave here, they have the tools they need. They feel that they do have it within themselves to overcome the obstacles they're going through. They feel they aren't alone. To see them get on their feet is the reward.

How does your job provide a valuable public service?

Domestic violence impacts individuals, entire families and the whole community. And so do the services we provide. We help individuals get medical care if they need it and other supports so they can go to work and take care of their family. We make sure children are in a safe place. Maybe they are missing school because mom is in a shelter or the car was taken. We make sure the kids are going to school and getting counseling if they need it. Helping victims know they are not alone is so important.

How does your union improve your work?

Our union is important because we're able to do our job more effectively. We're here to advocate for victims and empower them. Having a union empowers us to be able to help them. We have a good camaraderie among the victim specialists because we see so much trauma. We debrief and talk about things and how it impacts us. We're united.

How has your union job impacted your family?

After 16 years on the job I got laid off due to budget cuts. I got pregnant right after I lost my job and had a baby with special needs. I had just received my last unemployment check and was wondering what I was going to do when I got a call from the office that I was being recalled. I got my dream job back. That was absolutely only done because we had a union contract with recall rights based on seniority.

It was scary times and it was hard, but I didn't lose hope. I knew my rights and I was in contact with my union and that put me at ease. I came back and worked my way up, and last year I got a promotion to be the supervisor of the unit. My heart has always been with helping victims of violent crime and I never would have gotten my job back without my union. 🦅