



ON THE

MOVE

COMBATTING THE VIRUS THE FIGHT GOES ON



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ON THE MOVE

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Solidarity calls on us to stand together

With unity comes progress



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

WE REFUSE TO REVOKE OUR SOLIDARITY

Solidarity is the foundation on which the American labor movement is built. In fact, every labor movement around the globe rests on this same base. In the recognition of our shared struggles and our shared hopes lies the truest potential for our shared progress.

Solidarity is a firm insistence on our connection to each other—our defiant rejection of the repeated attempts to divide us. It has been the hallmark of countless victories, large and small, for AFSCME members across Illinois. Driving out Bruce Rauner and regaining the wages he stole from us; beating back attempts to privatize services like water treatment and trash collection in cities and towns; halting planned layoffs; securing long overdue raises for frontline caregivers in nonprofit agencies; blocking steep cuts to state university budgets. It's a list that could go on for pages.

Solidarity calls on us not just to stand together when our own interests are directly at stake, but to reach out to help our fellow union members when they are besieged, even if we are not. Over the past year, as the coronavirus pandemic radically reshaped our home and work lives, we have been reminded anew that this social connectedness is what unionism is all about.

Solidarity is members of Local 29 at Shapiro Developmental Center in Kankakee traveling to the Ludeman Developmental Center in Park Forest last spring. Employees at Shapiro had spent months battling more than a hundred cases of COVID before achieving a measure of containment. They could have taken a well-deserved rest. Instead, they had a special banner made with the message "AFSCME Local 29 Shapiro Supports All Ludeman Heroes" and carried it onto the grounds of the Ludeman Center to show their support for the AFSCME members there who faced an even more severe COVID outbreak that had taken the lives of a number of the facility's residents and employees.

Solidarity is Local 172 at Mabley Center in Dixon and Local 817 at Dixon Correctional Center bringing food and words of encouragement to the health care workers at CGH Medical Center in Sterling who are on the front lines fighting the coronavirus pandemic even as their employer is viciously fighting their ongoing effort to form a union with AFSCME.

Solidarity is the leaders of Locals 448, 2515, 692 and 1058 coming out to show support for the members of Local 3315 at the Rockford Public Library who are battling callous and irresponsible library management to prevent layoffs and secure basic COVID-19 protective measures.

Solidarity is Local 2767 at McFarland Mental Health Center joining the picket line when Local 3982 at the Springfield Housing Authority was in a tough contract fight.

And solidarity is what drove Locals 988, 2025 and 2615 to help pack meetings of the Rock Island County Board in support of Local 2371's crusade to halt the privatization of the Hope Creek Care Center.

Solidarity can be as simple as one member volunteering to work overtime so an exhausted co-worker can get some desperately needed rest, or as major as a local union voting to prioritize raises for lower-wage workers in contract negotiations.

Our solidarity has seldom been more critical than it is at this moment when we are beset not just by an unprecedented pandemic that's stricken so many of our members, but by a concerted effort by outside forces to sow conflict and division in our ranks. Groups like the Illinois Policy Institute, its numerous offshoots and their

billionaire backers like Bruce Rauner and Ken Griffin continue to have an obsessive focus on trying to destroy public employee unions.


They thought they had taken us down when the anti-union majority on the U.S. Supreme Court acted to ban union fair share fees in the case of *Janus v. AFSCME Council 31*. Although former state employee (now IPI talking head) Mark Janus was the nominal plaintiff in the case, Governor Rauner claimed it as his own, boasting that the ruling would lead members to drop out of their unions.

In reality, union members have withstood an unrelenting campaign of lies and distortions by the Rauner cabal. Ignoring the barrage of slick mailers and social media saturation, they have instead reaffirmed their membership, with tens of thousands signing pledges to remain AFSCME Strong. And local union members across the state have taken up the task of educating new employees about the importance of union representation, mutual support and signing up as a union member.

Simply put, we refuse to revoke our solidarity.

Now the IPI is using the defeat of the Fair Tax constitutional amendment as a pretext to renew its campaign against public employee pensions—this time, almost certainly, with more money from its wealthy backers. When that assault comes, we must be fully armed to fight back—standing together as one in defense of the retirement security we have worked so long and so hard to achieve.

In a recently-published excerpt from his new book, Pope Francis pointed out: "The pandemic has reminded us that no one is saved alone. What ties us to one another is ... solidarity."

This we know from all of our own efforts through the years: The stronger we forge the bonds of solidarity, the more we reach out across whatever lines seem to divide us, the greater the odds that we can prevail in all the challenges before us. 

COVID-19 strikes hard—leaves lasting impact

How two AFSCME members are fighting back

There's still a lot to learn about COVID-19. The novel coronavirus can result in few to no symptoms in one carrier, while devastating another person with severe illness. And researchers are just starting to understand the longer-term consequences of infection.

According to experts at the Mayo Clinic, COVID-19 can damage the lungs, heart and brain, which increases the risk of persistent health problems: "Imaging tests taken months after recovery from COVID-19 have shown lasting damage to the heart muscle, even in people who had only mild COVID-19 symptoms."

Some 4,000 Illinois AFSCME members on the front lines of public service—including in prisons, libraries, congregational care facilities and dozens of other sites—have tested positive for COVID-19.



Terry Viane, AFSCME Local 801

The battle of a lifetime

AFSCME Local 801 member Terry Viane is back at work at the Illinois Department of Corrections Kewanee Life Skills Center after six months of battling a particularly severe case of COVID-19.

Viane doesn't know how he got the virus. His daughter Pearl Wheeler, a fellow AFSCME member at Kewanee, said her father has always worn a mask and sanitized his hands. But one day in March he started feeling very fatigued. After a couple weeks of feeling weak and exhausted, he got a COVID test. Two days later—before he got the results—he laid on the kitchen floor and asked his wife to call an ambulance.

"I remember them loading me into the ambulance and that was pretty much it until a few days before I got out of isolation at the ICU," Viane

recalled, his voice still raspy from being on a ventilator. He was in an induced coma for 28 days.

A team of specialists worked on Viane's case while

"I can't speak highly enough about the health care professionals."

family and friends in every corner of the world prayed for his recovery. Since Viane couldn't have visitors during his long hospital stay, his union brothers and sisters at Kewanee planned a giant Facebook Live event where everybody at work lined up outside the facility and said hello. It boosted his spirits to know so many people were rooting for him.

Wheeler remembers the hospital staff calling and urging the family to sign a 'do not resuscitate' order for her dad. But the family felt that Terry had more fight in him. And they were right. After 54 days in the hospital, Viane was wheeled out past rows of cheering health care workers.

"I can't speak highly enough about the health care professionals, all the way from the doctors and specialists to nurses, and to the CNAs that come in and clean you up," Viane said. Four months after he got out of the hospital—42 pounds lighter than when he went in—Viane was back at work.

Those months were some of the hardest of his life.

"They had me do rehab, occupational therapy, every day at the hospital," he said. "At home it was a challenge to walk, a struggle to get out of a chair. I was pretty weak.

"They told me, 'You might have to face the fact that you may never be back the way you were or go back to work,'" Terry recalled. But he said that just gave him the incentive



While AFSCME Local 801 member Terry Viane battled COVID-19 in the hospital and at home, his daughter Pearl Wheeler, their family and their fellow AFSCME members supported him from a distance.

he needed to fight. "You can't just roll over," Viane, a veteran of the U.S. Navy, said determinedly.



Christine Rivera, AFSCME Local 3492

A caregiver's story

Christine Rivera is a longtime frontline caregiver at Ray Graham Association, a nonprofit disability agency, and a union activist in AFSCME Local 3492. She was working in a different home for individuals with disabilities than she usually did when she was exposed to the virus.

"After I worked at that site, two days later I started getting symptoms," Rivera recalled. "And then a couple other people started getting sick. I was

very terrified, and the doctors didn't know what to tell me except not to go to the hospital unless I couldn't breathe."

Rivera had a headache, sinus issues and felt disoriented. She had stomach problems, muscle aches and was running a fever. When she started to feel like she couldn't breathe, she called an ambulance. The EMTs picked her up with hazard suits on.

In the emergency room, the doctors gave Rivera medication to open her windpipe and stabilized her breathing with oxygen. They sent her home that day, but it was 52 days before Rivera went without a fever for more than 72 hours.

While she was sick, family members dropped off food outside her door. "It was really hard going through that all by myself," she said.

When she finally went back to work, she noticed she still wasn't feeling 100%. She had a lot of inflammation from the virus that irritated the existing arthritis in her body, she developed anemia and she's seeing a neurologist due to persistent "brain fog," where she finds it difficult to recall things.

"I have all these underlying

conditions I didn't have before," Rivera said. "All little souvenirs of COVID."


Trying to stay safe

Rivera cares for her mother who is undergoing chemotherapy and she herself is more vulnerable than ever to sickness. She's very nervous to go to work where employees are regularly at risk for exposure due to the nature of their jobs.

"We wear masks all the time, but we get close, aiding, assisting, bathing, brushing teeth, feeding, giving medication," she explained. "We don't have enough gowns; we don't have goggles or face shields even though we're so close to bodily fluids. I just don't feel safe."

Like Rivera, Terry Viane and his daughter encourage their fellow AFSCME members to stay safe on the job and at home.

"I don't shy away from going out when I need to, but you better believe we're wearing masks," Viane said.

"This virus is very scary," Wheeler said. "It's very fast and very unpredictable. Please take precautions so we can all go back to normal." 

County health departments on front lines of pandemic

AFSCME members play pivotal role in stopping the spread

Emergency preparedness and response is a core function of county health departments, and so is responding to infectious diseases and slowing their spread. More than 1,000 AFSCME members are working in dozens of county health departments all across the state.

In addition to their ongoing public health services—including immunizations, pre- and neo-natal care and community education—these union members are on the front lines of combating the coronavirus pandemic.

From the onset of the current health crisis, local health departments have been engaged in communicable disease investigations, contact tracing, data collection and mitigation efforts.

Data collected by local health departments is needed to understand factors such as transmission rate, incubation periods and

fatality rates, and for monitoring hot spots and educating the public about mitigation strategies.

LINDSAY SLEADE

AFSCME LOCAL 3738
RN, CASE MANAGER | SANGAMON COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

We have quite a few members—environmental inspectors, nurses, clerical, security—who have all come together to do what we can to help out. We’re working overtime on the community hotline, doing contact tracing, trying to meet the needs of the community in fighting the pandemic.

We’re also doing our regular jobs and maintaining programs. We still need to serve our clients because we’ve seen a lot more food insecurity and increased need for services because people are losing their jobs.

My job is a program called Better Birth Outcomes. I work with high-risk, low-income pregnant women. Normally I would do home

visits once a month throughout their pregnancy but now I’ve been doing my program by phone and video chat. I’ve seen a little different population of clients since the pandemic. I’ve always had a variety, but now I have clients with Master’s degrees. The pandemic has affected everybody at all different levels. I’m glad I can continue working and helping those clients. I’m ready to get back in person as soon as it’s safe to do so because I miss getting out in the community.

As a union, we’ve worked with management from the beginning, taking a preventative approach to make sure our members stay safe at work. The biggest challenge for our members is probably that balance between home life, child care, working overtime and balancing day-to-day duties with the addition of new duties. I think every single member has stepped out of their comfort zone and done something to help with the pandemic.

NORA ARCH

AFSCME LOCAL 3966
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT | KANE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

I’m chief of logistics for the emergency preparedness team. Ever since the pandemic started in March, we’ve been trying to get everything organized and ordered. I have to order everything in bulk—thousands of thermometers, hand sanitizer, wipes. We need to make sure we have enough PPE supplies for the health department and for our county buildings, the courts, juvenile justice, the sheriff’s department, the long-term facilities.

We’ve had H1N1 and Ebola, but they didn’t last that long. The coronavirus was totally different. We had a process for emergency response but trying to get everything done was difficult. It was so hard just to get everything in order. You only have seven hours a day. I’d punch back in at night, working over and beyond my scheduled hours because we’re in a crisis. I had to do it.

This is not going away any time soon. We need to make sure everybody is on board. This is a pandemic; we need to be a team. We have to all come together and help each other. If we don’t have each other’s back, it can turn into a bad situation.

JOLENE DIEHL

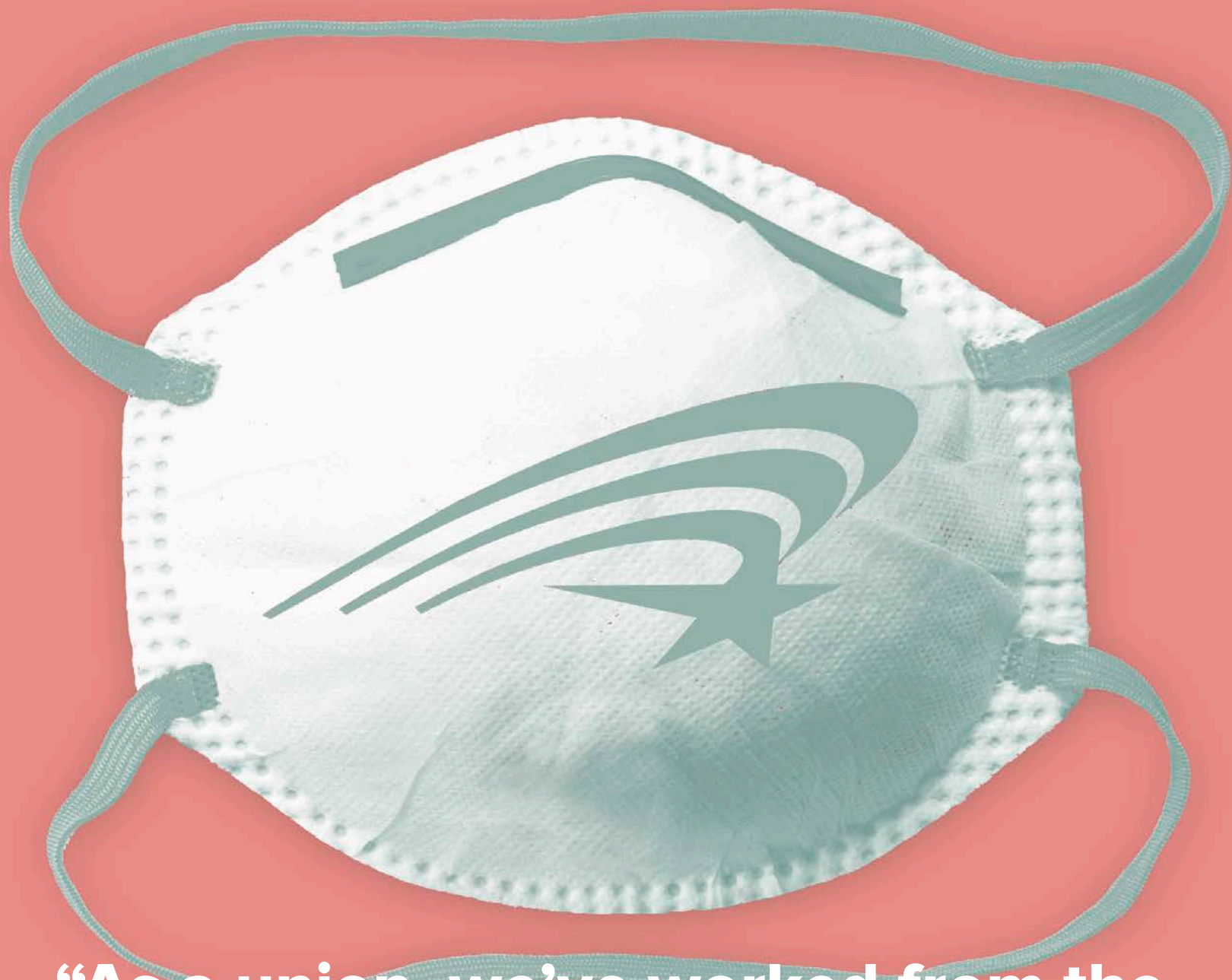
AFSCME LOCAL 2025
RN, INFECTIOUS DISEASES | ROCK ISLAND COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

It’s so important that we collect the information for the state to be able to get all the data they need to identify cluster cases or outbreaks. Each county reports their data to the state to the best of our abilities.

We have 15 contact tracers. We ask



Local 3738 member Lindsay Sleade is one of hundreds of AFSCME members in county health departments across the state focused on stopping the spread of COVID-19.



“As a union, we’ve worked from the beginning to make sure our members stay safe at work.”

[people with COVID-19] who they have had direct contact with, and a majority of people do want to be forthcoming and share the information, but there are just so many cases. One positive case could have four contacts or 20, or maybe they went to a wedding, a funeral, a birthday party. The virus can spread like wildfire through those events. It’s really hard to keep up.

We’re trying to get people to understand the importance of wearing a mask and social distancing to keep safe. We’re seeing teenagers and middle-aged people getting very sick. COVID does not discriminate. It’s an ever-changing virus. Our hospitals are overwhelmed with cases. That’s really scary.

There are people who didn’t believe in masks and didn’t believe in COVID-19. They didn’t believe it, but they contracted it; some died. We see a lot of people who thought it was their allergies or a sinus infection. Some of the symptoms can be so mild but then you expose 30 people, and it might not be mild for them.

Everyone has to do their part. Put other people before yourself until everyone is safe, keep them in your forethought with every decision you make. Wear a mask. Stay at home. That way everyone’s family stays safe, that way we make sure everyone keeps their loved ones with them. Together we can keep the death toll down and flatten the curve until we have a safe and effective vaccine.

DAVE DELROSE

AFSCME LOCAL 1028
MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELOR | WILL COUNTY
HEALTH DEPARTMENT

It’s been really challenging. We’re in one of the worst zones in the state and one of the first to be put on restrictions. We improved over the summer but now our region’s positivity rate is still exceeding 14% a day. Our local hospitals all went into warning status about ICU beds a few days ago.

It’s all-consuming right now. Our communicable disease staff have been overwhelmed and working tremendous hours since the springtime.

And we’re still providing regular services to the community. WIC and family health services are mostly still being provided on-site with more restrictions. Our community health center has been open and seeing patients.

Right now, the health department is trying to put plans together for receiving and distributing the vaccine when it becomes available. The logistics will be very complicated. Other places will get vaccines too—doctors, pharmacies, etc.—but health departments will get the bulk of the vaccines for distribution in their counties.

I think the workers who have been coming to work every day, doing what they should and continuing to serve the public under these difficult circumstances, should be commended.

The next thing we’re all hoping for is that our legislators in Washington put together a stimulus package that includes aid to state and local governments. It would be good to see a light at the end of the tunnel.

CHRISTINA HEWING

AFSCME LOCAL 3323
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH INSPECTOR |
SHELBY COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

I’m an environmental health inspector. Today I’m doing septic inspections; yesterday was water well inspections. Part of my job is to get the information to restaurants to make good choices for public health and safety. I am now trained to do contact tracing and help the nurses with returning phone calls and writing and filing paperwork.

As a department we’re doing flu shots, immunizations for the kids; WIC is still up and going. All the normal stuff that we do plus COVID-related work and contact tracing.

Guidance changes almost daily. We check every morning what guidelines have changed and what information we have to get out there. Everyone is trying their best. It can be overwhelming sometimes but we take it one day at a time.

Sometimes it’s one phone call at a time. It’s a rollercoaster, some days are good and some are bad. I try to stay on the positive side but sometimes I just need to get outside and take a walk. 🐾

Making education a priority with AFSCME

AFSCME members and their families eligible for free college degrees



A FSCME Local 3537 President Chuck Coulter is a busy man. He has his hands full as the father of five kids, a full-time maintenance worker at the DeKalb County Nursing and Rehabilitation Center and president of his local union. But he's managing to fit in one more role: college student.

Coulter has been trying to finish his college degree for nearly 20 years, but it was hard to take time and resources away from family or work to attend classes. When he heard about the online AFSCME Free College program, he decided that the opportunity was too good to pass up. The benefit makes it

possible for AFSCME members, retirees and their families to earn an associate or bachelor's degree online, completely free.

"I've always told my kids that they have to get a college degree," Coulter said. "But my 18-year-old daughter Baylee asked me, 'Why do I have to go to school when you never did?'"

So that's a driving factor for me to complete this program. Because now I can tell my kids I did."

Baylee is also an AFSCME

With classes all online, Coulter is able to do his school work on his own time, after work, on his lunch breaks and after he puts his kids to bed.

"A college degree is a stepping stone and AFSCME can [help you get] there."

member, working alongside her dad as a dietary aide at the county nursing home. Coulter has three more daughters — Lilyan (15), Sydney (13) and Taytum (5)—and a son, Lincoln (3). "They are why I do what I do with so little time. They keep me motivated," Coulter said.

He was nominated for the National Community College Honors Society and is focusing his studies on business management and labor relations, hoping to work for a union like AFSCME someday.


"I want to let people know that when you fight together

and take care of each other, you have the power to make sure everything is fair," Coulter said. "As steward and president, I have helped a member who changed positions get the pay raise she was entitled to and I've helped get a member's job back who was wrongfully fired. I want to keep helping people."

After he gets his associate degree, Coulter plans to progress to AFSCME's new free bachelor's degree program, which allows students to complete their degree online at Ohio's Central State University with no out-of-pocket costs for tuition, fees, or e-books. The program was formerly low-cost but has been made free to help union members grappling with the effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

Coulter can confirm that it's absolutely free of charge. "The only money I've paid toward this was to forward my transcripts from my previous university," he said. "Oh, and I maybe bought a notebook and an extra flash drive."

Coulter encourages his members—especially the younger employees—to take advantage of the AFSCME Free College program to expand their opportunities in life.

"This degree can be their ticket. They can better themselves," Coulter said. "A college degree is a stepping stone and AFSCME can be the reason they got there. It's a huge membership perk." 

For more information, call 888-590-9009 or visit FreeCollege.AFSCME.org or BachelorsDegree.AFSCME.org.

New AFSCME members in Oak Lawn

Oak Lawn Public Library employees have formed a union with AFSCME Council 31. The nearly 80 librarians, library assistants, library associates and pages voted to join the union and filed their petition with the Illinois Labor Relations Board in October.

They join more than 3,000 other Illinois AFSCME members who work in libraries. One of the main reasons

they wanted to unionize was to improve safety for themselves and library patrons during the COVID-19

pandemic.

"There were a lot of problems we couldn't fix ourselves," library assistant Eric Guzman told the *Daily Southtown* newspaper. "Everything felt like we weren't being heard. One of the ways we thought we could get heard is through the union."

The workers felt a heightened sense of urgency after a security officer died in April after being sickened with COVID-19 but management didn't tell other staff to quarantine or get tested.


Soon after the employees filed for their union, management announced budget cuts. But at the same time, "they are wasting precious

"I love this library."

library resources fighting our legal right to union representation," employees said in an online petition that urges community members to call on the library board

to stop cuts to the library and legal roadblocks to union representation.

"We are nine months into a global pandemic and there are so many people struggling and in need of community services," the petition states. "This is the absolute wrong time to be taking resources away from those who need it most to fight our legal right to have a real voice on the job."

"I love this library," Guzman said. "We serve the public. [Having a union] will help us provide better service." 

Cook County contract negotiations begin

Negotiations for new collective bargaining agreements for some 5,000 AFSCME members in Cook County government got underway in October. The current agreements expired in November, but the contract terms will remain in effect during the bargaining process.

Since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, thousands of Cook County employees have remained on the job providing vital services to their communities, often at great risk to themselves. That's why the union's first focus is securing a special Memorandum of Understanding that would immediately strengthen employee rights and protections in this high-risk COVID-19 environment.

United across local unions

As has been done in the past, a large bargaining committee is negotiating universal contract terms while 14 local

unions representing different offices and divisions of county government meet separately to bargain over concerns and challenges unique to those employees.

AFSCME-represented employees work in all areas of Cook County government and include adult and juvenile probation officers, correctional sergeants and lieutenants, social workers, public defenders, investigators and more.

The bargaining committee is seeking to address a number of urgent concerns related to the pandemic, including expansion of remote work, accommodations for remote learning and timely




More than 5,000 AFSCME members in Cook County government are joining together to fight for a fair contract.

notification of positive COVID-19 cases. The parties have not yet exchanged economic proposals.

With increased social distance restrictions in place in Cook County, all bargaining sessions have moved to

online Zoom meetings.

"This year looks different from any other," said AFSCME Council 31 Deputy Director Mike Newman, who leads negotiations for the union. "One thing that will never change, however, is the need

to remain united and resolute, prepared to take action whenever needed. There's a long road ahead and collective action will be essential to winning the contract that Cook County employees deserve." 

City of Chicago and Cook County budgets avert layoffs

Like so many other local governments in Illinois and across the country, Cook County and the City of Chicago face severe budget shortfalls. The coronavirus pandemic has required additional public service expenditures while at the same time taking a bite out of revenues.

Cook County budget

In October, County Board President Toni Preckwinkle presented an FY 21 budget plan that dipped into the rainy day fund to avoid all but a very few layoffs, but significantly reduced budgeted staffing levels by eliminating vacant positions. Of those targeted for layoff, the Preckwinkle Administration maintains that most will be eligible for

other positions in county government.

But there are still many unanswered questions about the staffing changes in the health system that will result from the repurposing of Provident Hospital and the closing of two outpatient clinics on the South Side. AFSCME is concerned about whether the proposed health systems budget could negatively impact health care delivery in South Side communities that already lack sufficient resources to

meet their needs.

There are also concerns regarding slated reductions in the number of Adult Probation positions. Caseloads are rising for probation officers because part of the coronavirus containment strategy at Cook County Jail has been to release a number of incarcerated individuals and place them on probation. This strategy only makes sense if there are sufficient probation officers to be able to effectively monitor these individuals.

Claudia Martin, Ron Johnson and Kim Flanagan from AFSCME Local 3486 testified at Cook County Board budget hearings to highlight the problems that result from inadequate staffing levels and call for the restoration of 25 of the positions slated for elimination. Because of their advocacy, the county board passed a budget amendment in late

November that will restore some of these vitally needed positions.


Chicago budget

In the city of Chicago, AFSCME supported measures put forward by Mayor Lori Lightfoot to raise additional revenues and close a more than \$1 billion gap in the FY 2021 budget. But the union was strongly opposed to the mayor's original plan to lay off more than 350 city employees, which would disproportionately impact union members.

AFSCME's lobbying team worked closely with the Chicago Federation of Labor to identify operational efficiencies and new revenue sources that could save as much or more as would be saved by laying off city workers. As a result, Mayor Lightfoot canceled the slated layoffs and the revised budget proposal was approved by the

City Council.

"AFSCME will continue to fight to prevent layoffs and protect the public service workers who have remained on the job in Cook County and the city of Chicago throughout the pandemic, often at great personal risk, to maintain vital services in the face of this unprecedented public health crisis," said Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch.

At the national level, AFSCME is continuing to play a leading role in the battle to enact a new COVID-19 stimulus package that will provide the federal assistance that is critical to local governments like Chicago and Cook County. With a new administration in Washington this January, there is hope for a major infusion of funds for these and other struggling local and state governments across the country. 



COVID-19 SURGES INTO VETERANS HOMES

Struggling for safety of residents and staff

C OVID-19 is especially lethal to confined groups of elderly and ailing individuals. That fact makes state veterans' homes particularly vulnerable to the virus. But AFSCME members are doing everything they can to stop it in its tracks.

For many months, LaSalle, Quincy, Anna and Manteno Veterans' Homes have maintained strict social distancing practices, required face coverings, conducted daily screenings of staff and residents and kept the facilities clean. Visitors are not allowed in the homes and staff are encouraged to practice social distancing when they aren't at work.

But despite all these efforts, the coronavirus has swept into the vulnerable homes, infecting hundreds of staff and residents and resulting in the deaths of dozens of residents. The biggest outbreak happened this fall in the LaSalle Veterans' Home. As *On the Move* went to print, the home reported more than 200 COVID-19 cases, including 98 employees and 108 residents, with 31 resident deaths.

"Our veterans affairs department has really done an outstanding job of keeping the veterans in our veterans' homes safe," Governor J.B. Pritzker said while sharing news of the outbreak. "They really have. And so this is a blow to all of us. It's something that they've been working against the entire time."

LaSalle is not alone. Since the pandemic hit Illinois, the Quincy home has reported more than 80 cases and one death, Manteno more than 100 cases and more than 15 deaths, and 13 cases at Anna.

The situation is heartbreaking for residents' families and for the staff who care for the residents every day. And for many staff, it's been a struggle to get healthy again after falling prey to COVID-19.

Steve Doris

Local 1563

Manteno Veterans' Home

You have to have a special place for people in your heart to work at a Veterans' Home. When their family doesn't come see them on Christmas or Father's Day or Mother's Day, you're there. Our union members are selfless. They put the residents first.

I got COVID-19 in May. The day after I tested positive, I just went downhill. I was

taken away from my house in the ambulance. I grabbed the EMT and said, 'Please don't let me die.' I was on oxygen 24 hours a day in my home for three months. I would cough so hard I would throw up. I had to sleep sitting up. Over time I've gotten better, but I get out of breath walking down my hallway to go to the bathroom.

Yesterday my doctor told me that my heart has been severely damaged from COVID-19; it's weakened. I'm only 44 years old and I don't want to have to leave my job. It breaks my heart a little bit that I've

been sick with this COVID. It's changed my life forever.

Our local vice presidents, my executive board, they have been running that local like a fine machine. I really, truly appreciate what they've done. They've taken the weight of my duties and put it on their shoulders and not complained.



Working as a team, AFSCME members are caring for residents of Illinois's four state veter...

I haven't missed a paycheck since May; I'm still getting full pay and it's because of AFSCME. Knowing that my check is there helps my recovery. A lot of people don't have a union like AFSCME. To me, AFSCME is the number one union when it comes to taking care of their members.

People have to learn to put their fellow man first; you have to think about everyone else. The mask is not just to protect you but for other people. My wife got COVID and she was fine, but for me it's taken a huge toll. It hits everyone different. I know people want to go out and be with their families. But please, skip this year's holidays so next year you can be there.

Tammy Rietman

Local 3693

LaSalle Veterans' Home

The LaSalle-Peru area is number nine in the country for COVID. It's devastating. The nursing staff saw 17 residents die in just two weeks. Those residents were like family to us. Some of us will have PTSD. People who don't work in health care don't get that. Half of our building is now a COVID unit.

The thing that really irks me is that some people are saying it's the staff's fault. But everybody in every department has been doing a phenomenal job. We're doing everything we possibly can to keep the residents safe and healthy and alive.

Nursing staff are working 12-16 hours a

day in full PPE; it's hot and hard to breathe. You have people who get overheated. I have to tell them to take breaks. Yesterday was my only day off in 11 days. You're not there and you'll feel like you need to be there. I would go in even if I didn't get paid. I know they need help and I'm not going to let them hang.

For the staff at our facility, and I'm sure at all the facilities, the residents become their family. A lot of the guys have Alzheimer's, so they don't understand. It's heartbreaking for the staff to hear, "I can't live like this, why is this happening?" These guys are having to fight a battle again in their life that they should not have had to fight.

Anna Aumiller

Local 3780

Anna Veterans' Home

It's been going well under the circumstances. We've had hardly any positive cases and we have enough supplies. The hardest part is our veterans not being able to see their loved ones. They're only allowed to meet through the windows. We use FaceTime. And they have us. We're familiar faces.

With all of us working together, we've kept our residents from getting sick. But it's been hard on all of us.

We work a lot of overtime to fill empty spots if somebody tests positive. We test all the employees every week. We also started allowing new residents. We have

a pod outside, which holds five residents, and they are quarantined there for 14 days before they can move in. We have to pull staff from the floor to be with them 24-7, which causes us to be short-handed.

I've been there almost 25 years. I

"They have to fight a battle again in their life that they should not have had to fight."

remember when we went out on strike in August of 1996 after I started. There are only five of us left from that time. We help the younger members to understand how important the union is and that everything we have is because of the union.

Jennifer Hudelson

Local 1787


Quincy Veterans' Home

COVID has been a challenge for every Veterans' Home. I can't say how proud I am of our AFSCME members who are really doing their jobs and stepping up, as they always have in times of need.

This isn't our first go-round. Even though this is different, we are stronger because of what happened with the Legionnaires outbreak in 2018. We're more informed. We know the task at hand. We know we've just got to keep fighting.

I believe the Quincy home has been doing a wonderful job keeping things at bay, but now it's hit us. We were preparing for it. We knew it wasn't *if* we'd get it but when. We've been coping with it and doing the best we can like everybody else. But the staff is getting sick and worn out. And the residents are missing their families.

The window visits are wonderful, but rough at the same time. I worked on the locked [memory care] unit and you should see their faces when their wives and children show up at the window. One guy never talks, but he said "come in" when he saw his wife.

As a union we have done so much to protect our members and our residents. We work together. And that's what so great about it. I'm just so proud to be part of the AFSCME family. 



Veterans' homes—Anna (pictured above), LaSalle (pictured on cover), Manteno and Quincy—during an unprecedented public health crisis.



Election 2020: A year

This year's general election was like no other. It was a defining moment for our country, our state and our union as we waited to see who would lead our country during this unprecedented time of uncertainty and upheaval.

The good news is that Vice President Joe Biden, a staunch supporter of public employees and the labor movement, won a decisive victory over President Donald Trump. There are no shortcuts to democracy. It took nearly a week for dedicated public service workers in election authorities across

the nation to tally the votes. Despite the Trump campaign's assault on that democratic process—through delay tactics, intimidation, and phony legal challenges—in the end, Biden won 306 Electoral College votes to Trump's 232, and won the popular vote by nearly 7 million (with the most votes for

any president in history).

Control of the U.S. Senate still hangs in the balance with runoff elections for both Senate seats in the state of Georgia, where voters chose Joe Biden for president. AFSCME is working to help the Democratic candidates in that state so that Mitch McConnell won't be able to continue blocking a COVID-relief stimulus package that would aid state and local governments.

Here in Illinois, AFSCME has much to celebrate, including a solid win for Senator Dick Durbin and victories for the great majority of Congressional, state legislative and local government candidates the


“There are no shortcuts to democracy.”

union endorsed.

But there were significant losses too. The defeat of the Fair Tax constitutional amendment plunges our state into a massive fiscal crisis which—absent a new federal stimulus package—is likely to hit AFSCME members, especially those in state government and state universities, very hard.

Union members suffered another serious loss in our

state when Illinois Supreme Court Judge Tom Kilbride fell short of the 60% he needed to win another 10 years representing the Second Judicial District. Kilbride had ruled repeatedly in favor of protecting public employee pensions.

The campaigns against both the Fair Tax amendment and Judge Kilbride were backed by the Illinois Policy Institute and bankrolled by billionaire Ken Griffin, who want to drastically reduce public pensions and undermine the economic security of working families in Illinois. Despite these losses, AFSCME is ready to continue fighting for a strong middle class. 

Fair Tax falls short, “painful cuts” loom

A top priority of AFSCME for more than a decade fell short when voters rejected the Fair Tax constitutional amendment by a significant margin.

The measure would have raised more than \$3 billion a year for important priorities like schools, health care and jobs by requiring rich people to pay their fair share in taxes on income over \$250,000 a year.

The ballot initiative's defeat blows an even bigger hole in a state budget already reeling from the fallout of the coronavirus pandemic. Instead the threat of what Governor JB Pritzker calls “painful” cuts, closures and layoffs now looms.

To be approved, constitutional amendments must receive Yes votes from either 60% of those voting on the question or more than 50% of all voters casting ballots. With nearly all ballots counted, the

Fair Tax tally was about 2.65 million Yes (46.7%) to 3.03 million No (53.3%).

In a statement, John Bouman, the chairman of Vote Yes for Fair Tax—the labor and community coalition in which AFSCME played a leading role—said that too many Illinoisans fell prey to the “opponents of tax fairness, the millionaires and billionaires who are desperate to protect their own special deal, [who] poured millions of dollars into false attacks designed to frighten and confuse voters.”

Gov. Pritzker was far and away the largest funder of the Vote Yes campaign. Prominent organizational supporters included nearly the entire labor

movement, led by the Illinois AFL-CIO, alongside allies such as the AARP, the Shriver Center on Poverty Law and the League of Women Voters.

Big money on other side

Opposition to the Fair Tax amendment was funded almost exclusively by the likes of billionaire CEOs Ken Griffin, Dick Uihlein and Sam Zell—the same big-money interests that fueled Bruce Rauner's campaigns for governor. They were joined by anti-worker front groups like the Illinois Policy Institute and the Koch Brothers organization Americans for Prosperity, along with corporate interests like the Illinois Chamber of Commerce, the Civic Federation and the Commercial Club of Chicago.

Those opponents argued that pensions, public services and jobs should be cut instead of raising taxes on rich people and

big businesses. Although many of the opposition groups themselves had previously called for taxing retirement income, they ironically used the false prospect of a retirement tax as a scare tactic against the amendment.

“The opponents of the Fair Tax lied about what would happen if it passed, and they left all of the working people of Illinois holding the bag,” Gov. Pritzker said at a news conference after Election Day. “They opposed it for their own selfish interests” and “threw the middle class under the bus”.

Defending jobs, services


With the amendment's defeat, the current year's state budget is now short more than \$1 billion in Fair Tax revenue that had been factored into the fiscal 2021 spending plan.

As a result, “There will be cuts and they will be painful,” Pritzker said.

Council 31 will be vigilant to oppose any potential state employee layoffs or facility closures, reductions to funding for local governments, universities, school districts and not-for-profit community agencies that employ AFSCME members, and renewed attacks on public employee pensions that the Fair Tax opponents are already mounting.

The union will push instead for revenue-raising measures to close the budget gap without damaging cuts.

An across-the-board increase in the flat-rate income tax is one potential option. Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton previously said an increase of 1 percentage point would be needed if the Fair Tax amendment failed.

Another possibility is closing corporate tax loopholes, an option long supported by AFSCME and already being explored by some Democratic lawmakers. 



like no other

What this election means for us

*John Cameron
On the Record*



*AFSCME Council 31 Director of Political and Community Relations
John Cameron is retiring after more than 40 years as a political strategist and activist. He's been on the front lines of countless battles. He advised Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky from her earliest days in politics and President Barack Obama when he served in the Illinois legislature.*

What does the election mean for Illinois AFSCME members?

Unfortunately, a lot of hard work lies ahead. If we're not able to change the U.S. Senate, it will be difficult to secure significant budgetary help from the feds for our state and local governments. Fortunately, we won't have to be constantly on the defensive at the national level—it is no small thing to have a President that respects working people and supports organized labor.

How does our union make endorsement decisions?

I'm proud to say that AFSCME Council 31's endorsements are made through a thoroughly democratic process. Rank-and-file leaders from every local union across the state can participate. Local, state and federal candidates are endorsed based on their AFSCME voting records or questionnaire responses at regional and statewide meetings of local union representatives.

What challenges do we face now?

Obviously, the immediate challenge is the economic impact of COVID-19 on reducing public revenues while increasing the need for public services. Without the Fair Tax in place, it will be very hard to address either—lawmakers are going to be gun shy about voting for any tax increases at a time we'll need them more than ever.

Longer term, we're going to see a renewed effort by the Illinois Policy Institute and its wealthy backers to gut public pensions. And it won't just be an attack on state pensions, but those for local government and university workers as well.

We are going to have to advance some proposals for raising revenue that don't fall heavily on the backs of working people, like cutting the tax giveaways to the same corporations whose owners spent all that money attacking the Fair Tax. And

we're going to need to call on those allies we helped elect—and re-elect—in the tough times to come.

Tell us what lessons you've learned from your career in politics and labor.

There are many, but the biggest is that to secure justice means equalizing power, which is what the labor movement is all about: giving a voice to working people, and the dignity and respect that comes with a voice. That power is built on our unity, in both the workplace and in the voting booth. And that unity comes from the nit-


“We're going to need to call on allies we helped elect in the tough times to come.”

ty-gritty work of building solidarity in our local unions—the hard, day-to-day effort to build mutual trust and commitment.

The labor movement is necessary not just for democratizing the workplace but for upholding and extending democracy in our political system and in our larger society. It is the only force seriously countering the continued growth of income inequality.

What are your hopes for the future?

I hope that we develop a way to get past the geographic and cultural divide in this state (and nation) that has only widened in the last two decades.

Because we are a statewide union, we know the needs of regular people are the same across the state—the basic economic security that comes from a decent job with good wages, the ability to raise and educate our children, and the ability to look forward to a secure retirement. We need to see our commonality rather than be blinded by our differences. 

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL



AFSCME Local 3328 members worked for two years to negotiate a fair contract: "It was a very long fight ... but we never were alone when things got tough."

Hard-fought gains for DuPage County probation employees

AFTER TWO YEARS OF FIGHTING for a fair contract, more than 100 members of AFSCME Local 3328 won a four-year agreement with the 18th Judicial Circuit Court that raises wages, improves paid-time-off policies and added six new support staff titles to their bargaining unit of probation employees. The local also fended off layoffs that President Kathy McNamara said management had "poked and hinted at quite a bit."

Local 3328 members include adult and juvenile probation officers, report writers, pre-trial and home detention monitors, clinicians, screening and transportation teams, drug court officers, high-risk and sex offender probation, and more. The new support staff members include legal secretaries, account clerks, court interpreters and drug testing technicians.

"Our members provide a very important service to the community," McNamara said.

The bargaining committee secured two years of 2% raises for all members retroactive to 2018. The newest members received 2% raises in the final two years of the agreement. The probation officer staff won 2.5% in the final year of the agreement.

The bargaining team also secured gains in flex-time policies—allowing employees to reduce their lunch to a half hour and flex the other one-half hour by starting work later or leaving work earlier—and increased comp-time banking.

"It was a very long fight, but when we got frustrated, AFSCME was there to support us," McNamara said. "We never were alone when things got tough. As a union we organized pickets, the media came out, we contacted local state representatives and senators. We were tired but we never gave up and fought hand in hand with one another."

In addition to McNamara, the bargaining team included Brad Neely, Deena Kuranda, Jodie Foxx, Eileen Barker, Glenn Frietag, Christina Maloney and Pete Stouffles, and was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Ken Anderson.

Making gains at Head Start

AFTER MORE THAN 15 months of negotiations, including 14 sessions with a federal mediator, AFSCME Local 2217 members at Springfield Urban League Head Start won major improvements and resisted takeaways proposed by management.

They secured good wage increases, improved temporary

assignment rights, recall notice, holiday schedules, and vacation accrual, and contained health insurance costs.

"I'm proud," said Carolyn Morgan, a bargaining team member who has worked at Head Start for nearly 30 years. "We got raises for our union members and extra vacation

"They found out that we were stronger than they thought."

and holiday time, to say we appreciate all that you've done."

Morgan loves her job as a home visitor, where she meets children and families in their homes—from pregnancy to three years—teaching parents and helping kids with developmental skills.

The work has changed in the face of the pandemic. Classroom activities are now done online and over the phone. Staff puts together packets and sends them to the families and will soon issue tablets for Zoom sessions.

Morgan said the contract gains come on the heels of other improvements, like making sure job descriptions were changed on paper when they change in the classroom. A year ago, at an informational picket, Shai Miller, a family resource advocate, explained the situation.

"We take on many other job titles than what we actually signed a contract for. I signed up to be family resource advocate. I have been a teacher's

assistant, I have been a teacher, I have been a data clerk, I have helped take kids to bathrooms," she said. "We demand our respect and if you're not going to give us our respect, we're going to have to fight back."

And they did. "I think it's getting better," Morgan said. "I don't think that the next contract will take as long [in 2022], because now they know what we want by how hard we'll fight for it. They understand that we won't back down. They found out that we were stronger than what they thought we were going to be."

Led by AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Erik Hostetter, the bargaining team included Carolyn Morgan, Kim Rush, Brittney Johnson, Janet Pryor, Donna Stimmage, Jennifer Grimble and Cora Carter.

Raising the floor for a better future

AFSCME LOCAL 3280 PRESIDENT Troy Milligan said the local's recent contract negotiations with the Egyptian Health Department in Eldorado were "a little unorthodox. Management came in and said they wanted to raise the base salaries pretty significantly."

The bargaining team was in agreement; in fact, the local had already advocated this approach in previous years.

"We have had problems recruiting and retaining staff because of the low starting salaries," Milligan said. "This has been a lot of years in the making. Finally they realized

that higher salaries are the only way to recruit and retain good people."

Starting salaries increased by \$2,000 to as much as \$9,000 depending on the position and required education level. The raises were retroactive to July 1.

"We were just absolutely thrilled," Milligan said. "It's still hard to recruit an RN at this salary but at least it's improving, and the benefits that go along with this job are very appealing and hard to pass up, especially when you have children."

AFSCME Council 31 Staff

"This has been a lot of years in the making."

Representative Ty Petersen led negotiations for the local with Milligan. They were joined by committee members Gayla Schalk, Mickey Pankey, Jan Kuppert, Brittney Roberts, Stacey Miller, Kari Lane and John Moore. The ratification vote was overwhelmingly in favor of the agreement.

Milligan has worked for the health department for more than three decades. He said the last eight months have been a real challenge for the team with services going online and the workload increasing to trace COVID-19 contacts.

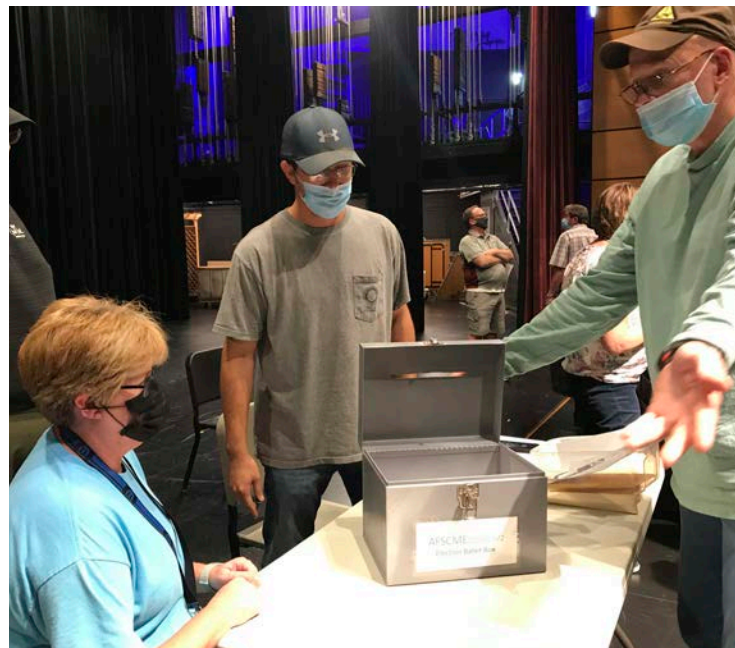
The last few weeks have been even tougher. "This is really bad," Milligan said. "The cases are out of control and the positivity rate is unreal."



Standing up for fair pay at Head Start, AFSCME Local 2217 members in Springfield held pickets and solidarity actions.



"Having a union helps keep things moving forward."—Local 1268 President Karen Beauchamp on her local's negotiated improvements.



Local 672 members count ballots at their contract ratification meeting in November.

Rewarded for hard work, solidarity

AFSCME LOCAL 1268 MEMBERS at Kreider Services, Inc. in Dixon are direct-support personnel (DSPs) and skilled support specialists who care for people with disabilities throughout western and northwestern Illinois. Their road to a new contract was paved by the countless phone calls, postcards and lobby days they've done—alongside other AFSCME locals across the state—to win more state funding for DSP wages.

While some locals have struggled to get the wage increases promised by employers, Local 1268 President Karen Beauchamp said they got those raises plus a little more in a new two-year agreement.

"We've always struggled to get somewhere financially, but this time we got more sick time and more on the check," Beauchamp said.

Together the team also won wage raises, longevity increases, increased vacation time, and a signing bonus based on years of service.

Beauchamp said the progress was just what employees need during the challenging time of grappling with COVID-19. "They are trying to do positive things to keep staff encouraged," she said, but more important is the unity their union brings.

"Having a union has definitely helped with the wage increases. It helps keep things moving forward and not become stagnant. If there wasn't the union, they could

just do what they want; we'd have to just take it or leave it."

Beauchamp was joined on the bargaining committee by Vice President Jacqueline Long, Recording Secretary Jennifer Reiners, Treasurer

"If there wasn't the union, we'd have to just take it or leave it."

Carrie Vaughn and Executive Board Member Jackelyn Horton. Negotiations were led by AFSCME Council 31 Staff Representative Joshua Schipp. Sessions were held in person, with masks and social distancing, with some people participating over Zoom.

Staying strong in Moline-Coal Valley

SPACED OUT IN A LARGE auditorium and wearing masks, members of AFSCME Local 672 at Moline-Coal Valley School District #40 ratified a two-year agreement in November.

The new contract secures annual cost-of-living raises, step increases and a higher starting wage, but local President Terry Boone said the bargaining team was most proud of protecting union jobs.

"We went with keeping jobs as our priority and I'm proud we didn't lose any," Boone said. He worried because the city of Moline is

looking at outsourcing jobs due to financial hardship—rather than dipping into its rainy-day fund—and has left some 30 positions unfilled during a hiring freeze.


"We have eight retirements coming up in the spring," Boone said. "Management said they are filling every position. That's eight lucky people with good jobs and good benefits. Our jobs support us and our families, and we bring that money

right back to our communities. We support schools, food banks, the city itself."

Boone said while negotiations were successful, bargaining with masks and social distance is difficult. You can't see the expressions on your co-workers' faces or those across the table. He said it took longer than normal, but in the end the team was very pleased with the agreement.

"During COVID it's our

job to clean and maintain the schools to keep the community safe," Boone said. "We uphold high standards and the Moline-Coal Valley community really values us. We've proven our worth."

In addition to Boone, the bargaining committee included Scott VanBlaricome, Hadley Swanson, Rich Quintana and Kim Kirschenmann, and was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Audie Schmidt. 



SUPPORT FOR ROCKFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY EMPLOYEES

Since the onset of the pandemic, the Rockford Public Library has refused to engage constructively with members of AFSCME Local 3350 who want common-sense safety measures put in place. Then the library board announced a plan to close two branches and lay off members of the local. AFSCME leaders from area locals stepped up to support library employees in their fight to preserve services and jobs. Pictured after a meeting with Rockford Mayor Tom McNamara, from left to right: Janella Herbig, Local 3350, Rockford Public Library; Latoya Johnson, Local 2515, Mosaic; Garry Cacciapaglia, Local 1058, City of Rockford; Kathy Lane, Local 448, Northwestern Illinois State Employees; and Sandra Patlan, Local 692, Rockford Public Schools paraprofessionals.

COVID rages on in Illinois and the nation

A second coronavirus wave has hit the United States, and Illinois hasn't been spared. In mid-November, the state announced a stay-at-home advisory for the second time in 2020.

Illinoisans are advised to stay home as much as possible, only leaving for essential activities like work, school, grocery shopping and to access health care.

Referring to the upcoming holidays, Cook County Department of Public Health senior medical officer Dr. Rachel Rubin said, "Now more than ever, we must come together to stay apart. We know limiting gatherings with friends and family can be hard, but we also know that virtual celebrations will save lives."

The pandemic is indeed worsening. When Pritzker warned of a statewide shutdown on November 12, the public health department had reported a one-day record of 12,702 confirmed and probable COVID-19 cases.

As *On the Move* went to print, the total number of COVID-19 cases in Illinois stood at 761,000, with 13,650

deaths and a statewide test positivity rate hovering at about 13%. The stay-at-home orders are intended to save lives, in part by ensuring that hospitals have the capacity to care for those with the most severe symptoms.

The second wave is a global phenomenon, with several European nations already announcing second lockdowns. President-elect Joe Biden has named a COVID-19 advisory board to correct the nation's course.

"Dealing with the corona-



"The advisory board will help shape my approach to man-

"Now more than ever, we must come together to stay apart."

virus pandemic is one of the most important battles our administration will face, and I will be informed by science and by experts," Biden said.

aging the surge in reported infections; ensuring vaccines are safe, effective, and distributed efficiently, equitably, and free; and protecting

at-risk populations."

Illinois has surpassed its previous record of people sick with the virus needing hospital care.

"We never saw [these numbers] in Wave One," Illinois Department of Public Health director Dr. Ngozi Ezike said. "This is an all-time high, and I am telling you that that number is only going to increase based on the number of cases we have

identified over the last several weeks."

"The numbers don't lie," Gov. Pritzker said. "If things don't take a turn in the coming days, we will quickly reach the point when some form of a mandatory stay-at-home order is all that will be left. With every fiber of my being, I do not want us to get there. But right now, that seems where we are headed."



STAY RESILIENT DURING THE PANDEMIC

Human beings respond to stress in the same way we respond to physical danger: fight, flight or freeze. And facing the impact of a global pandemic at home and in your community can be extremely stressful, especially for frontline workers. All of us are dealing with a range of stress reactions and feelings: Fear, anxiety, loneliness, insomnia, irritability, anger and depression are all normal.

Resilience is the ability to face and recover from adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats and prolonged stress. The more resilient you are, the more able you are to bring yourself back to your steady, safe state. Try these strategies to help yourself stay mentally and physically resilient during this difficult time.

Sleep

Develop a good routine to fall asleep and stay asleep.

Exercise

Move your body. Dance, run, jump, walk.

Connect

Be with people who care about you.

Reframe

See silver linings, a new angle, a glass half full.

Let go

Accept the things you cannot change.

Take action

And change the things you can.

Self-compassion

Be kind to yourself, appreciate yourself.

Give back

Doing something for others replenishes you.

Be present

Practice mindfulness with four slow, deep breaths.

Ask for help

Reach out to a counselor, doctor or spiritual leader.

RETIREE NOTES

COVID can't stop retirees

SENIORS HAVE TRADITIONALLY been one of the most reliable and active voting blocs, but many wondered if COVID-19 would change that in the 2020 general election.

While knocking on doors and turning out for election activities weren't safe options, members of AFSCME Retirees Chapter 31 found new ways to stay involved by volunteering for virtual phone banks and launching letter-writing campaigns to educate voters on issues and get out the vote.

One retiree well-known for his volunteer work is Liam McDonnell, a member of AFSCME Sub-chapter 86 who has been active in elections since 1983.

"While this election has definitely been strange," McDonnell said, "it was also extremely important and most retirees I know seemed engaged."

Many candidates and political campaigns grasped the immense power of the senior vote, creating ad campaigns targeting seniors in an attempt to sway their votes. In fact, nearly a quarter of the electorate (23%) is age 65 and older, the highest share since at least 1970, according to the Pew Research Center.

"Since older adults are more likely to turn out to



AFSCME Sub-chapter 86 member Liam McDonnell calls voters from home.

"The importance of the senior vote should not be overlooked. Our lives and our security are at stake."

vote, it's possible that older generations will form a larger share of actual voters in 2020 than their share in

the electorate," the report stated. That's what happened in 2016 when seniors, who only accounted for 43% of

eligible voters, cast 49% of the ballots.

"The importance of the senior vote should not be overlooked," McDonnell said. "As a group, seniors are very engaged. We pay close attention because our lives and our security are at stake."

Inadequate increases in Social Security

SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS for approximately 70 million Americans will increase by a modest 1.3% in 2021. This year's increase is one of the smallest ever, averaging out to just \$20 more a month. It exceeds only the meager 0.3% increase in 2016 and no increase at all in 2015.

The annual cost-of-living adjustment is tied by the Social Security Act to the increase in the Consumer Price Index as determined by the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"The current inflation index doesn't reflect reality for seniors, who spend twice as much on health care as the average population," stated the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare. This includes Medicare premiums, which have been rising much faster than inflation. Social Security benefits have lost nearly

a third of their buying power since 2000.

AFSCME and the Alliance for Retired Americans continue to support legislation to change the basis for Social Security increases to the Consumer Price Index for the Elderly, which much more accurately reflects the cost of what retirees purchase, including health care and housing.


Dept. on Aging sets plan

EVERY THREE YEARS, THE Illinois Department on Aging submits a plan that outlines goals, strategies and objectives to address the changing needs of older adults across the state.

The 2021-2023 plan is more important than ever because the number of seniors in Illinois has grown to more than 2.8 million, representing 22% of the population. Unfortunately, the number of older adults living in poverty in Illinois is also growing to 9.9%. The area with the highest percentage is Chicago, where 14.9% of seniors live in poverty, but rural areas are not exempt. The second highest is in the southern tip of the state with 10.46% of seniors living in poverty.

The overarching goal of the state's plan is to ensure that older Illinoisans and their caregivers have the "necessary services that allow for independence and the ability to maintain their quality of life."

Some of the strategic priorities are support for older adults to remain independent and in their homes; responding to reports of abuse, neglect and exploitation through Adult Protective Services and Long-term Ombudsman; and addressing social determinants of health including but not limited to housing, food, education, employment, healthy behaviors, transportation and personal safety.

As the aging population grows, it is ever more important to support efforts and spread the word of programs to assist seniors. 

If you or someone you know needs assistance, you can contact the Illinois Department on Aging's Senior Helpline at 1-800-252-8966.



Like many other retirees, AFSCME Sub-chapter 60 President Mary Jones and her family contacted voters together in the days and weeks leading up to the election.



Red Cross employees make a stand

A FSCME Local 2691 members at the American Red Cross in Peoria (the organization's "Heart of America" region) held an informational picket on November 12, calling for improved COVID safety procedures to protect employees and the public.

Blood-collection workers—called phlebotomists—are on the front lines despite the pandemic, collecting blood from 20 to 50 donors in a typical a day. At least 10 employees have been sickened with COVID-19 and dozens more have had to self-isolate for 14 days or more because of COVID exposure on the job.

Despite being an organization dedicated to saving lives, Red Cross has been putting its employees' well-being at risk by punishing those who call in sick with COVID-19 symptoms and refusing to pay workers who have been ordered to stay home after being exposed to the coronavirus at work.

At the start of the pandemic, the Red Cross nationally refused to allow staff to wear masks, saying it could "scare away donors." It finally relented after a staffer in St. Louis died from COVID-19 that she likely contracted at the workplace. Management also failed to notify staff of COVID exposures promptly or at all.

These initial issues have improved some but not nearly enough, Council 31 Staff Representative Joe Jay said. At the same time it has refused to pay staff who are ordered to quarantine due to workplace exposure, the organization has disci-

plined employees for not reporting to work even when displaying COVID-19 symptoms.

One AFSCME member was sick with COVID for two months and therefore unable to work. Despite having contracted it on the job, Red Cross discontinued her health insurance benefits.

"Staff should not be punished, sent home with no pay, when we're being exposed because we're doing our jobs," Local 2691 President Bobbie Terrell said. "We were told to take our temperatures at home before reporting to work. But then employees doing that were being disciplined for not coming to work when they have a 102-degree fever. It makes no sense."

Terrell has worked at the Red Cross for 11 years. As union president, she also participates in the national coalition of unionized Red Cross employees. Each local unit has its own collective bargaining agreement, but there's also a national-level contract. At the regional level, they have been told that the problems employees are facing are a "national issue" and not in each regional management's control. Fed up, Terrell and her fellow union members decided to take a stand.

"We've been talking to them for months. We're tired of being pacified. We're tired of hearing, 'It's out of our hands,'" Terrell said.

AFSCME Local 2691 is the first group in the national coalition to take the fight public. Their picket garnered media attention on TV and radio news.

"It was like everybody was just accepting the problem. Our thinking was if we just sit on our hands nothing will get done," Terrell said. "Since

our demonstration, other people in the coalition want to take public action too."

Terrell said her local's main goals are to have employees covered by paid time off while they're quarantined to alleviate the burden on their families and to redesign the unfair attendance policy, which is exacerbating an already high turnover rate. Collective, public action is an important tool for them to accomplish these goals.

"Our thinking was if we just sit on our hands, nothing will get done."

And it's working. Just a few days after the public protest, Red Cross agreed to offer quarantine pay for staff—nationwide. Now employees who must quarantine will be paid for two weeks at 80% pay, per incident, covering multiple quarantine periods if needed. AFSCME is now negotiating for the hard-won quarantine pay to be retroactive.

The local isn't stopping now. Next is the attendance policy.

"They need to be held accountable for how they treat their employees," Terrell said. 