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MOVE

Illinois Council 31—American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees—AFL-CIO

Rough waters ahead



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Illinois' new governor launches wave of attacks against public employees, unions

See page 3



On the Move

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Super-rich attempt Illinois takeover

Trying to shut out working families



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

CITIZENS UNITED ACCELERATED THE STEADILY SWELLING INFLUENCE OF THE UBER-WEALTHY

You have to go all the way back to ancient Athens to find an explanation for what's happening in our state – and our country – today.

IT WAS THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHER Aristotle who first used the term “oligarchy” to refer to rule by the rich, warning against the dangers posed to democracy when a small elite takes control of the reins of power to advance its own interests.

That danger has never been more real in our own lifetimes than it is right now – most especially here in the state of Illinois. Bruce Rauner, our state's billionaire governor, spent more than \$25 million of his own money to win election and then immediately created a \$20 million “intimidation fund” to threaten any politician who doesn't go along with his agenda.

Rauner's rise to power was fueled by close ties to other billionaires, like Chicago-based hedge fund honcho Ken Griffin, who attracted national attention when he bemoaned the fact that the super-rich don't have “enough influence” on politics.

The reality, of course, is that the U.S. Supreme Court's 2010 Citizens United decision striking down campaign finance restrictions accelerated the steadily-swellng influence of the über-wealthy on the political process. That means the very rich exert ever more sway over not just the outcome of elections, but also the critical policy issues that affect all our lives.

There are many goals that unite the New American Oligarchy to which Bruce Rauner belongs: the privatization of public services, a tax system that shields their riches, the destruction of public education, diminished workplace rights and consumer protec-

tions, lower wages, and more of that ilk.

But there's no doubt that their first and foremost goal is to clear the playing field of the only entity that has the resources and determination to stand up to them – America's labor unions.

Pundits all across Illinois have been puzzling as to why Governor Rauner, faced with a massive budget shortfall and in need of all the help he can get to resolve it, would make an assault on labor unions a top priority. But that's just what he's done, scarring his very first State of the State address with ugly, divisive rhetoric and flat-out false attacks on unions. And then following that up with an unconstitutional executive order that seeks to deprive AFSCME and other unions in state government of the resources to effectively represent employees.

When he should be seeking to unify Illinois citizens, the governor's out there almost every day seeking instead to stir up hostility against state employees and other union members – portraying us as “overpaid” and blaming us for the state's \$4 billion budget shortfall.

Rauner's launched a full-fledged attack on the members of building trades unions as well, pressing to drive down their wages too by eliminating prevailing wage standards and project labor agreements.

But while it may seem mysterious to many in the media, Governor Rauner's obsession with weakening Illinois unions fits within the context of the corporate elite's nationwide crusade to eliminate organized labor from the American politi-

cal landscape. It's part and parcel of their determination to drive down the standard of living of middle class families in our country – and shift an ever greater share of the nation's wealth into their own pockets.

Rauner's attack on fair-share fees and his support for “right-to-work” zones is no more about the rights of workers than allowing corporations to give unlimited amounts of money to politicians is about freedom of speech.

This became even clearer when the governor unveiled his budget plan, which pushes for drastic cuts to state employee pension and health care benefits, as well as steep cuts in funding for cities, counties, state universities, and nonprofit service agencies – cuts that will harm public service workers all across Illinois.

Yet in all his complaints about conflicts of interest, all the blame he spreads for driving up state spending, and all his talk of “shared sacrifice,” never once has the governor expressed any concern about the vast sums of money poured into political coffers by the state's super-rich and big corporations or suggested eliminating some of the \$2 billion in tax giveaways that Illinois' own oligarchy takes from the state treasury every year.

While Rauner rails against public employees coming together to have a voice in the political arena through their union, he sees no “conflict of interest” in taking big contributions from those big businesses that benefit from the state's tax loopholes.

The New York Times described Governor Rauner's actions as a “war on workers.” If we want to defend the middle-class standard of living we've worked so hard to achieve and the democracy that is the bedrock of our nation, it's a war we can't afford to lose.

Governor ramps up attacks on Illinois union members



Almost from the moment he took office in January, Gov. Bruce Rauner made it clear that he has no plans to cooperate with public employees and their unions on moving Illinois forward.

THE NEW GOVERNOR USED HIS INAUGURAL ADDRESS TO TAKE A BASELESS POTSHOT AT PUBLIC employees, claiming that union contracts were no more than “sweetheart deals.”

That remark, however, would pale in comparison to the proposals and actions he took during his first month in office, particularly his Feb. 9 executive order to ban state agencies from collecting “fair-share” fees from bargaining unit members who choose not to join a union but still enjoy the benefits of a collective bargaining agreement and union representation.

“Bruce Rauner’s scheme to strip the rights of state workers and weaken their unions by executive order is a blatantly illegal abuse of power,” Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said.

The executive order stated that fair share fees should stop because they help unions bargain for better wages and benefits.

The flimsy logic of

Rauner’s executive order made it clear that his action was driven by hostility toward unions and not any legal principle. Fair-share fees are authorized in state law and have been found constitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court.

“Bruce Rauner’s logic is that fair-share fees are unconstitutional because he says they are,” Lynch said. “Perhaps as a private equity CEO Rauner was accustomed to ignoring legal and ethical standards, but Illinois is still a democracy and its laws have meaning.”

As *On the Move* went to press, AFSCME and other unions representing state employees were preparing to take legal action to challenge the order. In a positive sign, many other unions in Illinois – including private-sector unions – have signaled they stand by their state employee counterparts. AFSCME international President Lee Saunders has also pledged the full support of the national union in the fight.

“Our union and all organized labor will stand together with those who believe in democracy to overturn Bruce Rauner’s illegal action and restore the integrity of the rule of law,” Lynch said.

Weaken the middle class

RAUNER’S EXECUTIVE ORDER followed the release of other proposals clearly designed to cripple unions in Illinois.

In his State of the State

address, and in a series of presentations delivered in recent weeks, Rauner has not only unveiled a staunchly anti-union agenda but also attempted to scapegoat workers for the problems confronting Illinois.

In the weeks since taking office, Rauner has made one proposal after another aimed at weakening unions and the middle class in Illinois, including:

- Banning public employee unions from making contributions to political candidates.
- Allowing local governments to establish “right-to-work” zones in which employees would not be required to pay union dues or fees while still receiving the benefits of union representation, weakening unions’ ability to negotiate fair wages and benefits.
- Weakening programs that help struggling families, like workers’ compensation and unemployment insurance.
- Weakening prevailing wage laws and eliminating project labor agreements, both of which ensure public works projects create good, family-supporting jobs.
- Reducing the pension benefits of current public employees, possibly by moving them to a 401(k)-style plan.

“The proposals made by the governor would do little to solve the fiscal problems facing Illinois, but would do a whole lot to take money out of the pockets of middle class families,” Council 31 legislative director Joanna Webb-Gauvin said.



Even as Rauner is seeking to reduce the political power of public employees, he has proposed nothing to limit the already outsized influence of the wealthy and large corporations.

“The governor’s proposal to bar public employees from participating in our democracy would further tilt a playing field already weighted heavily in favor of big business and the wealthy,” Lynch said. “And while seeking to shut working people out of the halls of power, he leaves free access to the scores of corporations that have secured for themselves tax breaks costing Illinois taxpayers some \$2 billion annually.”

A united labor movement

ILLINOIS AFL-CIO PRESIDENT Michael Carrigan said Rauner has been on a “blame crusade” that unfairly targets public employees.

“While he points to the

salaries of those cooking the food in the cafeterias, guarding the prisoners and plowing the snow and ice from our roads as the culprits in our state financial woes, he is silent on the hundreds of tax breaks granted to large businesses and low corporate income tax in Illinois,” he said.

John Penn, Midwest Regional Manager for the Laborers, said Rauner’s State of the State address was “one of the most divisive speeches in memory, blaming unions for everything from high taxes to inflated construction costs.”

“The governor is wrong when he says that the problems in our state stem from teachers and other middle class public workers having too much say in how Illinois is run,” Illinois Education Association President Cinda Klickna said. “The opposite is true. With corporate interests spending unheard of sums in politics, the need for a strong voice for the middle class has never been greater.”

WORKERS AT RISK:

Union exposes the truth about assaults at Logan CC

After being converted to a women's prison in March 2013, Logan Correctional Center saw a severe spike in violent incidents – a reality the facility's staff has dealt with every day.

SO WHEN A REPORT FROM THE JOHN HOWARD ASSOCIATION, A PRISON REFORM GROUP, CAME out claiming that there had been only three violent incidents in the first nine months after the conversion, employees knew the truth was being swept under the rug.

Once AFSCME looked into the matter, the real facts were brought to light. According to DOC records obtained by the union, Logan had 170 assaults from March to November 2013, and 217 more from December 2013

through the beginning of October 2014.

"The department will continue to deny that violence is taking place, but the statistics speak for themselves," said Local 2073 President Shaun Dawson, a correctional officer. "We've had officers and nursing staff kicked, punched and scratched. People have had bodily fluids thrown at them."

Specifically, the records obtained by the union describe inmates fighting, punching, kicking, biting, striking with objects such as food trays or a broom, strangling with a cord, stabbing with a pen, spitting in faces, head-butting, stomping, slapping and throwing urine or boiling water.

Like other DOC facilities, overcrowding is a significant issue at Logan. The facility was built to safely hold 1,106 inmates but, according to the most recent filings, it is now severely overcrowded with 1,961 inmates.

Meanwhile, statewide corrections staffing has been

slashed 30 percent in recent years – from nearly 17,000 employees in 2001 to fewer than 11,000 today.

"There can be upwards of 40 or 50 inmates in the day room at one time with one officer assigned to monitor those maximum security inmates," Dawson said.

Mismanaged transition

COMPLICATING MATTERS AT Logan, employees say, is a pattern of mismanagement. One glaring example is the significant increase in the number of inmates with mental illness, without any training for staff in how to deal with mental health issues.

"I think it's a combination of overcrowding, a lack of training given to staff and I just don't think the facility is built for maximum-security and inmates with severe mental illnesses," said Meredith Jones, a correctional officer. "It absolutely feels more dangerous than it used to. Every day people go to work wondering if they're going to get



assaulted."

Dawson said more training for COs on handling inmates with mental illnesses is especially critical since staffing of mental health professional is also lacking.

"We have no 24/7 mental health professionals on the ground," he said. "There are periods of 12-16 hours where there are no mental health professionals here."

Some inmates are also exploiting a system that hands out less discipline to inmates who are severely mentally ill, said Shannon Kelly, a correctional lieutenant at Logan.

Kelly said employees feel abandoned by the state. "We're on the frontlines protecting public safety, but the state's not doing anything to protect us," he said.

WORKERS AT RISK:

Conditions at IYC Kewanee worsen in wake of Joliet closure

A steep increase in assaults at IYC Kewanee has exposed the danger of hastily closing facilities without considering the consequences.

WHEN IYC JOLIET WAS SHUT DOWN IN 2013, MANY OF THE YOUTH WHO LIVED THERE WERE transferred to Kewanee.

Kewanee previously housed sexually aggressive youth and provided a therapeutic environment. It now also houses all youth who have committed serious crimes, such as armed robbery, rape or murder – many of whom are 17-20 years old and awaiting transfer to adult facilities.

"These aren't kids," Local

801 President Tod Williams said. "These are young men facing adult crimes, looking at 40 years in prison."

DJJ policy requires that these offenders, despite their age and the nature of their crimes, must be disciplined the same way as other youth in the system. That means even horrific offenses are dealt with by requiring the youth to complete a 59-minute "timeout."

"I had an officer get urine thrown in his face and the kid got a 59-minute timeout," Williams said. "The kids know there's no punishment for them."

Recent incidents at Kewanee include:

- Staff finding shanks – hand-made weapons that indicate both youth who want to harm staff or other youth, and youth who don't feel safe and think they need to protect themselves.

- A youth punched a staff member in the jaw after attempting to stab another youth in the neck and back.
- A staff member had to be hospitalized after he was repeatedly kicked in the head by a youth who has assaulted several other staff.

Chaos follows closure

LOCAL 801 CHIEF STEWARD Shannon McDermott said management wasn't prepared to deal with maximum-security violent offenders when they were transferred from Joliet.

"The maximum-security youths feel very entitled. They don't feel like they have to abide by the rules and there's no respect for anyone," she said. "If they have a question, you have to respond immediately and in the exact manner they want or there's going to be trouble."

The union raised con-

"Somebody's going to get killed or seriously injured if something isn't done soon."
— Tod Williams

cerns that youth being transferred from Joliet required oversight different from the norm at Kewanee, but the department did little to ensure the facility or the staff was prepared.

"Joliet held them accountable for actions and didn't give in to demands," Local 801 Vice President Jim Hardy said. "When they brought them here, management didn't have a clue how to handle these guys."

With management proving unresponsive to employees' concerns, Local 801 members recently met with

lawmakers, including Reps. Mike Smiddy (D) and Don Moffitt (R), to talk about other solutions. Williams said nearly every member of the local who wasn't on duty attended the meeting, reflecting the urgency of the issue.

Problems at Kewanee need to be solved soon, Williams said, or the facility's ability to provide a vital service will suffer. Some employees are already leaving for other, safer jobs, fearing that the consequences of staying could be deadly.

"When your staff are willing to take a pay cut to go to another department, that throws up a lot of red flags. Then we get new staff come in for a couple weeks and they quit," he said. "Somebody's going to get killed or seriously injured if something isn't done soon. It was bad before, but it's intolerable now."

Governor's budget would mean devastating cuts to services

The fiscal 2016 budget proposed by Gov. Bruce Rauner would make life more difficult for Illinoisans who depend on vital public services while asking nothing of the wealthy and large corporations.

THE GOVERNOR'S PROPOSAL, REVEALED FEB. 18, CALLS FOR A STAGGERING \$6.7 BILLION IN CUTS THAT WOULD HARM A MULTITUDE OF STATE AGENCIES. AND THE PROPOSED CUTS GO WELL BEYOND STATE GOVERNMENT, HITTING UNIVERSITIES, LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND COMMUNITY NON-PROFIT AGENCIES.

"The governor is wrong to propose a budget that gives billions in tax breaks to corporations and the wealthy while making billions in cuts to vital public services," Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch said. "The people of Illinois want and deserve policies that improve public services, grow the middle class and offer fair solutions to our state's real problems – not extreme cuts."

The only bit of good news in the governor's proposal was his plan to hire 470 additional correctional officers.

"That's undoubtedly a step in the right direction for DOC," Lynch said. "But much more is needed."

Widespread impact

GOV. RAUNER'S BUDGET PLAN WOULD SIGNIFICANTLY LIMIT THE ABILITY OF DEPARTMENTS LIKE DCFS AND HUMAN SERVICES TO

help some of the state's most vulnerable residents. Combined, the two departments would have to cut around 700 positions under the governor's plan.

The budget plan would also cut funding to state universities by one-third, which could result in job cuts and tuition increases. Cuts in funding to local governments would also likely require layoffs and reductions in services in cities and counties across Illinois.

The governor also proposed cutting the pension and health insurance benefits of state and state university employees. He wants to shift current employees to a lower tier of benefits or a 401(k)-type plan as of July 1 – a move that would violate the state constitution's pension protection language.

The health insurance cuts he is pushing for would

increase health care costs for employees and reduce the quality of care to which they have access.

"State and university employees have already shouldered significantly higher health care costs in recent years," Lynch said. "If the governor intends to propose further changes to health coverage or employee costs, he must do so as part of state contract negotiations now underway."

The burden of proposed cuts to Medicaid would fall on the backs of struggling families, home health care providers, nursing homes and community disability agencies.

The wide-ranging cuts mean that all AFSCME members have a big stake in the budget battles that are now getting underway in Springfield.

"The involvement of

AFSCME members, telling the story of the services and value they provide, will be essential to convincing lawmakers to reject the governor's proposal," Lynch said.

An unbalanced plan

WHILE MAKING DEEP CUTS TO vital services, Rauner's budget leaves untouched \$2 billion in tax giveaways and loopholes that benefit large corporations and the wealthy.

It also contains no new revenue, leaving in place the income tax rates that took effect on Jan. 1. An analysis by the nonpartisan Center for Tax and Budget Accountability found that the expiration of 2014 tax rates is draining \$5 billion a year from state government – \$1.2 billion of which is going to the top 3 percent of income-earners alone, with another \$1.3 billion to corporations.

"The governor in effect wants to fund these giveaways to big corporations and the wealthy few by making more than \$5 billion in cuts to essential public services, harming every Illinois resident but especially those struggling to join or remain part of the middle class," Lynch said.

WORKERS AT RISK:

Chester MHC employees demand action to reduce violence



Chester MHC employees have picketed before to demand management focus on employee safety.

Employees at Chester Mental Health Center are calling for action by the Department of Human Services to reduce the threat of violence and end management practices that make it difficult for workers to defend themselves in dangerous situations.

CHESTER HOUSES SOME OF THE MOST DANGEROUS CRIMINALS IN THE STATE – MEN DEEMED NOT GUILTY BY REASON OF INSANITY, ALONG WITH ACCUSED CRIMINALS WHO HAVE BEEN FOUND UNFIT TO STAND TRIAL. ASSAULTS ON STAFF ARE COMMON AND COSTLY, IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE.

"It's been bad for a while

and it's getting worse due to the fact that they have our members afraid to step up and do their jobs," Local 424 President Randy Clover said. "If we try to contain a patient these days, there are so many people looking at what we do."

Eyes are on employees all

the time, thanks to widespread use of security cameras at the facility. Management has claimed the cameras are to help improve safety and monitor patients, but employees believe they're the ones who are actually being watched.

"Instead of viewing the video after violent incidents at regular speed, management watches the video over and over in slow motion, looking for any deviation from training," a Council 31 report on Chester found. "Management fails to recognize that the video image captures staff engaged in an incident that may result in their not going home that night, making split-second decisions."

Management's practices have resulted in employees being disciplined for petty infractions, like placing their hands on their hips, as well as for taking reasonable measures to defend themselves and co-workers.

Punished for self-defense

BEN SAUER, A SECURITY THERAPY

aide, was dismissed from Chester MHC last summer after he and a co-worker took action to restrain a patient who was threatening them.

"Every time he came past he'd accuse us of stealing his stuff and threaten to beat us up," Sauer said.

After the patient refused to go to his room and continued making threats, Sauer and his co-worker decided to address the threat.

"We placed him in a physical hold and got him out of the chair, walked him to the restraint door, and placed him in restraints."

The decision to restrain the patient, who was unharmed during the incident, was made by a nurse at the facility. Yet management came down hard on Sauer almost immediately, placing him for 60 days in a control room with no duties.

"We're sitting there on display so that when people come into work, they know that we did something wrong," he said.

After that, Sauer was told to not return to the facility and eventually found out he had been found guilty of physical

abuse. Sauer, who is fighting to be reinstated through the grievance process, said his experience has made others at Chester afraid to deal with dangerous situations.

Council 31 has recommended several policy changes at Chester to address violence – and management's response to it:

- Focus on violence prevention, not on staff punishment.
- Provide clear directives to staff on when to engage patients acting destructively, without second-guessing.
- Provide staff training that is realistic about the type of patients Chester treats.
- End the distorted use of video camera monitoring.

Michelle Swallers, a security therapy aide who has missed months of work while recovering from injuries suffered when a patient attacked her, said it was time for such changes, and time for management to back its employees.

"Anytime there's a complaint they come down on us and the patient sees that," she said. "The patient gets away with things while they undermine us."

Profiteers distort public services for personal profits

The term “profiteering” conjures images of cutthroat companies taking advantage of a war to make a quick buck.

PROFITEERING DOESN'T REQUIRE A WAR, THOUGH, ESPECIALLY WHEN CASH-STRAPPED STATE AND local governments are desperate to balance budgets but unwilling to raise revenues – a situation currently plaguing Illinois. Today's profiteers take advantage of this scenario by offering to privatize government jobs and services – often through a subpar replacement.

Since they answer to investors instead of the public, profiteers can too often wind up distorting the service they provide into one that actually undermines the public interest, rather than upholding it.

Maximus: Money wasted, health care put at risk

WHEN SELLING THEIR SERVICES to governments, profiteers always lead with the promise of cost savings. Yet one of the most recent attempts at privatization in Illinois would have cost the state millions had AFSCME not taken action.

When the state needed help with Medicaid eligibility redeterminations, instead of hiring more staff, it entered into a contract with Maximus, a private firm that promised efficiency and savings.

Instead, the result was



confusion and waste.

“It caused confusion for both our customers and the members,” said human service caseworker Dena McGill, who testified at the arbitration hearing on a grievance filed by the union to challenge the subcontracting. “It took us away from processing applications for food stamps and

TANF when we're already understaffed and overworked.”

AFSCME's evidence demonstrated that the state would save over \$18.1 million a year by using state employees instead of using a contractor – a figure the state never disputed.

Eventually, the state and

the union came to an agreement to end the contract with Maximus – before more damage could be done.

Privatized probation: Criminalizing poverty

ONE OF THE MOST EXTREME examples of profit-making at the expense of the public good is the growing privatization of probation services.

In an expose published in 2014, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution found that privatizing the state's probation program resulted in the creation of what were effectively debtors' prisons after private firms imposed excessive fees on those serving probation.

The newspaper's reporting found that, in one example, a private company's monthly charge for supervising a felony probationer was nearly double the fee charged by a court that provided supervision on its own.

“There are also add-on fees, and probationers can be required to pay even more for drug testing, electronic monitoring and classes,” the Journal-Constitution reported.

The complicated scheme of fees resulted in people who

Continued on page 15

Hope Creek nursing home remains under public control

When Rock Island County voters narrowly rejected a November referendum aimed at ensuring the Hope Creek nursing home remained in public hands, employees and supporters of the facility feared the worst: privatization.

LESS THAN THREE MONTHS LATER, HOWEVER, THOSE WHO WANTED TO KEEP THE HOME under public control found another path to victory. In January, the Rock Island County Board – after talks with nursing home employees – voted to retain ownership of the home while creating an independent board that will oversee its operations and hire a management company to run the home day-to-day.

“I think it's a workable solution. As a union, we went

in and sat down with management and discussed different options,” said Rhonda Westmorland, a receptionist at the home and vice president of Local 2371. “It's not my first choice but I can work with this.”

Recovering from a loss

AFTER THE REFERENDUM FAILED to approve a needed tax levy for the home, spirits were low – Hope Creek employees and the community had worked hard to gather support for the referendum, only to lose by a narrow margin.

“I was devastated. We had worked very long and hard on it,” Local 2371 President Shelley Close said. “Everybody was concerned they were just going to up and sell the home.”

Prospects began to improve, however, when the Local 2371 bargaining team and the county board decided to incorporate talks about the home's future into ongoing contract negotiations.

“We were bargaining the third year of the contract and figured we should talk about the big picture,” Council 31



Employees and supporters of Hope Creek nursing home packed Rock Island County Board meetings to demand the home stay under public control.

staff representative Miguel Morga said. “We checked our egos at the door, sat down and got to work. We were able to create an alternative to this sell-or-lose money mentality.”

A workable plan

NURSING HOME EMPLOYEES agreed to changes in scheduling procedures that would reduce expenses without lowering pay or benefits. The talks also produced the idea

of an independent oversight board that would include health care experts, hopefully removing politics from future decisions on the home's operations.

“The county board doesn't know a lot about running a nursing home and they're hoping this independent board can change that,” Close said.

Nursing home employees felt the management company wasn't a necessary element of the plan, but a majority of

the county board disagreed. And that choice was far better than selling or leasing the home, which would have put it under the control of a for-profit entity.

“My grandmother lived here. She worked her whole life in this community supporting the community,” Westmorland said. “She needed a place to go. Under the sale or lease option, she'd have no place to go. It's important to keep Hope Creek here for our people.”

Cook County employees keep pushing for fair settlement

In February, the Cook County Board got a taste of the frustration that's been building for more than two years among County employees seeking a fair contract.

SOME 90 AFSCME MEMBERS REPRESENTING 15 COOK COUNTY LOCAL UNIONS PACKED THE hearing room at a Feb. 10 County Board meeting – a show of unity county commissioners were unable to ignore.

Over more than two years of bargaining, county employees have repeatedly rejected proposals from County Board President Toni Preckwinkle's administration that would have represented a cut in take-home pay. Plus, the County is still demanding that employees give up almost all retroactive pay.

Management has yet to put a credible economic package on the table, insisting the bargaining committee agree

to increased health insurance costs while refusing to offer fair wage increases – a proposal that amounts to a cut in pay after two years without a raise.

"Progress has been incremental, and I'm being generous when I say that," said Joe Gump, a member of Local 3315 who serves on the county bargaining team.

Still, what movement has come during negotiations has often followed direct action by members, including informational pickets, County Board actions, and calls to Preckwinkle's office. The bargaining team hopes the big showing at the County Board hearing will increase the pressure even further.

"The importance of a demonstration like this is to send a consistent message to President Preckwinkle that we deserve a fair contract," Local 1767 President Steve Ramsey said. "We want her to understand that we're the frontline county workers who make the county work."



Ramsey said the actions are starting to generate results.

"We had commissioners speaking up on our behalf and that has never happened during previous commission meetings," he said. "I think that showed President Preckwinkle that they'd like to see some movement."

A lack of commitment

THE COUNTY'S APPROACH TO bargaining was a major focus of testimony given by Council 31 regional director Helen

Thornton.

"It is hard for our members to believe that this administration has a genuine commitment to the collective bargaining process when we come to bargaining session after bargaining session and see almost no movement on the County's part," she said. "The County is still insisting that we accept almost no retroactive pay and pay higher health insurance costs that would take a big bite out of any proposed wage increase. This is unacceptable."

After two years without a

pay raise, economic realities are hurting county employees' quality of life, Thornton said.

"They have mortgage payments to make, tuition bills that are due. Some are saving to purchase their first home; others are worried about paying their taxes," she said. "They deserve decent wages. They deserve a fair contract."

Chuck Luna, president of Local 2226, which represents correctional lieutenants, said the county needs to change its approach to talks.

"They claim they're broke consistently, but they keep hiring directors and other top brass," he said. "It's arrogant and shows a lack of concern for the employees."

Luna said that while previous actions have produced results, more members still need to get involved, too.

"I think we need to have more actions but also more people at the actions we do have," he said. "We need to stand unified in order to make this work."

Rauner bombshell doesn't deter state bargaining committee

The first meeting between the AFSCME state bargaining committee and negotiators from Gov. Bruce Rauner's administration was marked not by talks inside the room, but by what happened outside it.

IN THE MIDST OF THE FIRST DAY OF TALKS, THE COMMITTEE LEARNED OF RAUNER'S EXECUTIVE order forbidding state agencies from collecting "fair-share" fees from bargaining unit members who are not in the union – a direct violation of the current state master agreement. The executive

order was obviously timed to coincide with the first day of bargaining, and to set the tone for future bargaining sessions.

After Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch denounced Rauner's order, the entire bargaining committee launched a spontaneous demonstration of solidarity, chanting as state negotiators left the room.

"The bargaining committee isn't going to let Gov. Rauner's actions distract them from their purpose," Council 31 Deputy Director Mike Newman said. "We're determined to negotiate a fair contract."

A chance for community outreach

SINCE RAUNER ISSUED HIS EXECUTIVE order, his attack on pub-

lic employee unions has dominated the headlines – not just in Illinois, but on the front pages of national newspapers.

Rauner's actions have raised public awareness of unions in a way rarely seen in Illinois. That presents an opportunity, Lynch said.

"There is an awareness of unions right now that gives us an opening to strengthen ties in our communities," she said. "With Rauner so unfairly attacking state employees, we have an opportunity to engage with community groups and other organizations and seek their support."

That support will be essential in the fight for a fair contract and the union is prepared to tell the story of the work state employees do and the challenges they face.

"Politicians like Bruce Rauner have the bully pulpit at any hour of the day or night to advance their own agenda," Lynch said. "State workers, on the other hand, are out on the frontlines at every hour of the day and night doing the real work of state government. That's why AFSCME is putting a high priority on telling their stories."

What's at stake

THE UNION AND THE RAUNER administration have yet to exchange formal proposals, but if the governor's words and actions are any indication, the contract fight will be a tough one.

In an appearance at the University of Chicago ahead of his State of the State address, Rauner blamed Illinois' \$4 billion budget short-

fall on what he alleged were frontline employees' high salaries and excessively generous benefits – a claim that relies upon heavily massaged, cherry-picked data.

Rauner's also criticized previous union contracts as "sweetheart deals," implying that the terms were unduly beneficial to state workers as a result of union political contributions.

"Nothing could be farther from the truth," Lynch said. "Every union contract we've won was hard-fought, sometimes taking many, many months and plenty of activism. Despite the governor's actions and rhetoric, we are still prepared to negotiate in good faith on a contract that recognizes the hard work performed by state employees every day."



Union pride runs deep in



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The Rockford Symbol stands as a monument to the city's past as an industrial center and also represents the hope of forging a new identity for the future.



Rockford



When the labor movement in Illinois is under attack as it has been before, Rockford and its surrounding communities show the spirit of solidarity remains strong.

That spirit was on display at a recent Rockford City Council meeting. Head Start employees turned out to urge city aldermen to put pressure on negotiators to reach a fair settlement. They've gone six years without a raise, despite performing vital work helping the city's low-income children and families.

"We're trying to get the city to be more involved," said Kristen Hughes, an assistant teacher at Head Start and member of Local 1058, which represents the employees. "Aldermen need to become knowledgeable on what our program does and how we impact the community."

Head Start employees weren't alone, though. Even though the meeting was held on a night with freezing temperatures – and one day after a historic blizzard hit northern Illinois – the Rockford labor movement turned out in force to back up their union brothers and sisters.

"I think we always have good numbers out supporting each other – police unions, fire unions, city and county workers, we're always there to help each other," said Rusty McClain, a retired state employee. "We just have a really good network here in Rockford."

At the city council meeting, AFSCME members who work for the City of Rockford, local public schools, community disability agencies and Winnebago County were all on hand. Members of other unions, including the United Auto Workers, were also in attendance.

"We tend to all help each other. We have some of the same problems," said Betty Christensen, a paraprofessional for the Rockford School District. "When we had our struggles we had a lot of other AFSCME people that came and walked with us."

AFSCME HELPS SPARK A LABOR REVIVAL

Rockford has long been a working-class town where labor unions were deeply entwined in the fabric of daily life.

"Rockford was famous for being a union town because of the factories and the UAW," said Kathy Lane, President of Local 448, which represents state employees. "The laborers and the building trades are very strong in the Rockford area."

Yet the face of labor in Rockford is changing, for reasons bad and good. As has been the case in similar communities, Rockford's manufacturing base has eroded during the past 30 years. But at the same time, public employees, many represented by AFSCME, have made themselves a formidable force.

"I think it's a combination of good leadership we've had in this area and knowing how important it is to make sure the members are aware of day-to-day things going on, not just with their locals but with the surrounding locals," said Jay Ferraro, a recently retired Council 31 staff representative who led the first

wave of public employee organizing in the area in the 1970s.

Today a new wave is taking hold. In recent months, employees at community disability agencies like Milestone and Mosaic have organized under the AFSCME banner. Paraprofessionals and county deputy clerks, long represented by AFSCME, have had to rekindle their organizing fervor in order to win fierce battles for new contracts that fairly value the work they do.

"I think the community as a whole is starting to recognize we need strong unions and more union members because that will help their economy," Lane said. "The better our wages, the more money that goes into the community."

WELCOMING NEWCOMERS

New union members have quickly been accepted into the fold. Leaders of new AFSCME locals at community disability agencies are already attending meetings of Rockford United Labor – the area's umbrella organization for the labor movement.

"It was such an overwhelming, amazing feeling," said Nicole Henson, who was recently elected president of Local 2512 at Milestone. "There's a lot of camaraderie. You know you're not alone in whatever fight you're going through. I think it shows that the working sector is more united than we realize and I didn't experience that until we got a union. Until then, I thought we were alone in the universe."

Ferraro said including young workers is essential to keeping labor strong in Rockford.

"It's about continually educating the younger work force that's coming in to know where we came from," he said. "People nowadays are hired and they don't remember – how could they? – the years we struggled with wage freezes or paltry increases."

Challenges still remain, though. Recently organized employees at Rock River Academy, another community disability agency, were devastated to learn their facility would be closing. Locally, some politicians are opposed to unions and any attacks on labor coming from Springfield would be felt hard in Rockford.

But those who are working to weaken the middle class will have a tough time succeeding if workers remain united – and in Rockford, they are determined to do just that.

"We're all a really tight-knit group and we all support each other in whatever endeavors we have," said Garry Cacciapaglia, president of Local 1058. "If there's a rally for the bus drivers or the paraprofessionals, I want to be a part of that. I want to support them because I know if I need their support, they'll be there for us."

Chicago runoff election offers chance to elect pro-worker aldermen

The April 7 runoff election in Chicago will give voters in nine of the city's wards the opportunity to elect aldermen who have pledged to be a voice for working families and have earned AFSCME's endorsement.

SOME OF THOSE CANDIDATES ARE RUNNING FOR OPEN SEATS WHILE OTHERS ARE WAGING UPHILL BATTLES AGAINST ENTRENCHED INCUMBENTS. IN TWO CHICAGO WARDS, INCUMBENTS WITH STRONG AFSCME VOTING RECORDS ARE FAC-

ing stiff challenges in the runoff.

In the northwest side's 45th Ward, Ald. John Arena – one of the few members of the City Council with a 100 percent AFSCME voting record – will

face off against John Garrido in a rematch of their 2011 runoff, which Arena won by only 29 votes. Garrido has the backing of Mayor Rahm Emanuel's political operation.

The contest in the south side's 16th Ward will pit AFSCME-backed Ald. Toni Foulkes against Stephanie Coleman, the daughter of a former alderman. Foulkes has an 83 percent AFSCME voting record. Though she is an incumbent, her ward map was changed greatly by redistricting.

AFSCME members in those wards should be prepared to

not just cast their ballot on April 7, but also volunteer their time.

"Aldermen who stand with working people need to know that working people also stand with them," said Adrienne Alexander, AFSCME's City Council lobbyist.

Important victories

AFSCME's PEOPLE PROGRAM provided volunteers and resources to several candidates who won outright in the Feb. 24 election.

Those victories include the

38th Ward, where incumbent Ald. Nick Sposato won more than 53 percent of the vote despite a new ward map that required him to introduce himself to scores of new voters. Sposato has a 100 percent AFSCME voting record.

The union also helped elect two new voices to the council: In the 35th Ward, Carlos Ramirez-Rosa defeated incumbent Rey Colón. In the 17th Ward, David Moore was elected to an open seat. Both candidates have pledged to be a voice for working families in their wards.

Employees in Kankakee, Lake counties latest to join AFSCME

Two groups of employees, both frustrated with their working conditions, are the latest to successfully organize a union with AFSCME.

AT THE KANKAKEE COUNTY TRAINING CENTER (KCTC) IN BRADLEY, EMPLOYEES VOTED TO ORGANIZE IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO WORK TOGETHER FOR GREATER FAIRNESS.

"A lot of family members of management were coming in and getting hired into positions over people that had been there for years," said Priscilla Williams, a directional trainer and a leader of the organizing effort. "Certain consequences wouldn't apply to certain people. Someone would be written up for something and then someone would do the same thing and nothing would happen to them."

Williams is one of many KCTC employees who provide vocational training to adults with developmental disabilities. The agency contracts with outside companies that pay the adults to assemble, sort and package goods. KCTC also has a residential program for about 60 adults who live in group homes throughout the area.



Employees at the Lake County Circuit Clerk's office (left) and the Kankakee County Training Center (right) have voted to form unions with AFSCME.



High turnover has been a problem at KCTC. The revolving door of employees made it more difficult to provide quality services, since people with developmental disabilities often have difficulty adjusting to new people and new routines.

"More than anything they need consistency," said Dorothy Robinson, a direct support provider who works in one of the group homes. "They need to know the same person is coming at the same time every day."

When AFSCME organizers began to meet with KCTC employees, they found the biggest barrier was lingering pessimism from previous failed attempts at organizing.

"Getting them over that hurdle and realizing this time would be different was difficult," Council 31 organizer Jenny Vitzileos said. "But the issues were still there, the concerns were still there. People felt they had nothing to lose – they were basically mak-

ing minimum wage."

Employees hope that they can now negotiate a contract that improves wages and puts clear, consistent policies in place so that they can focus on the residents they serve.

"I'm providing care so that our adults can work in the community," Williams said. "I love it. I wouldn't have been here for 10 years otherwise."

Quick path to majority in Lake County

SOME ORGANIZING CAMPAIGNS take months or even years to reach a conclusion. But thanks to a well-orchestrated effort, Lake County Circuit Clerk employees managed to sign up a majority of their co-workers only a few days after taking their campaign public.

Workplace conditions in the Circuit Clerk's office took a turn for the worse after a new clerk took over in 2013. Policies were either unknown to employees or unevenly enforced. Unfair treatment

was on the rise.

"People were getting written up for petty stuff and policies weren't being enforced across the board," said Jamie Hacker, a principal court clerk. "I was written up for having a disagreement with my partner and even though we handled it by ourselves without involving anyone else, we still got written up."

Employees in the Circuit Clerk's office knew that AFSCME had experience representing workers at similar offices in counties throughout the state. With morale low and conditions not improving, they decided to build support for a union.

Leaders of the organizing effort worked quickly by visiting co-workers after hours. Within a matter of days, a majority of employees had signed cards expressing support for a union – catching management off guard.

"It's a testament to the leaders and how determined they were to move this for-

ward," Council 31 organizer David Marlow said. "We had a really tight plan before we launched. Once we went public it was so quick management didn't have a chance to respond."

Rather than moving forward in a constructive manner with the newly-formed union in his office, the Circuit Court Clerk has used legal maneuvers to delay recognition of the union. Despite these attempts to stall, Council 31 organizers are confident that the union will be certified.

More than ever, employees are committed to winning recognition and moving on to contract talks.

"We just want some respect," said Jennifer Price, a principal court clerk. "We want a disciplinary policy and procedure. A raise would be nice, but really that's not our top priority. We just want some security and want to know someone will have our backs and fight for us."

Why “right-to-work” is wrong for Illinois

In his State of the State address, Gov. Bruce Rauner said local governments should be allowed to implement what he called “employee empowerment zones” – but there’s nothing empowering about them.

THESE ZONES ARE JUST ANOTHER NAME FOR “RIGHT-TO-WORK,” A POLICY DESIGNED TO ELIMINATE UNIONS AND WEAKEN THE VOICE OF WORKERS.

Supporters of “right-to-work” tend to describe it with language designed to distort its real purpose and confuse voters. The real truth is far more sinister.

What is “right-to-work”?

IN “RIGHT-TO-WORK” STATES, employees in the private sector

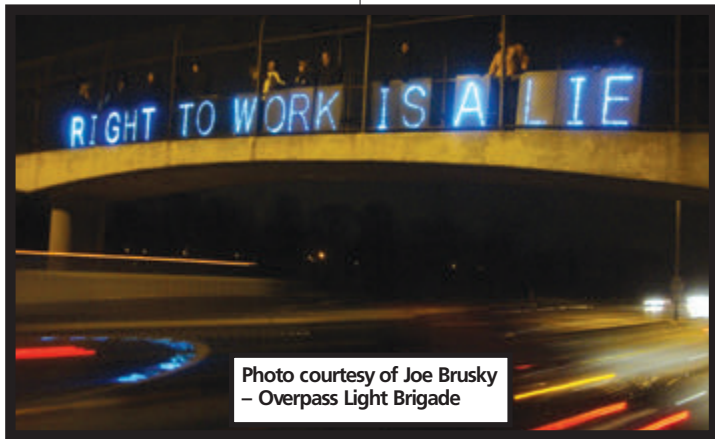


Photo courtesy of Joe Brusky – Overpass Light Brigade

who are covered by a collective bargaining agreement do not have to pay any dues or fees to the union to cover the cost of representing them in bargaining, grievances and other mat-

ters. This is different than in states like Illinois, where employees represented by a union either pay dues or a fair-share fee that covers the basic costs of representing them.

What does this have to do with my right to work?

NOTHING. MUCH LIKE “EMPLOYEE empowerment zone,” the term “right-to-work” is designed to hide the policy’s real intent. No one in the United States is required to join a union as a condition of employment. In Illinois and other states with strong unions, workers who benefit from a collective bargaining agreement can be required to pay a fee covering the union’s services – usually less than full membership dues. But in states that have passed “right-

to-work” laws, that fee is optional.

Who’s behind Right-to-Work laws?

RIGHT-TO-WORK LAWS ARE A TOP priority for organizations like the Illinois Policy Institute, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Right to Work Committee and the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC).

These groups, thanks to funding from large corporations and the wealthy, make contributions to anti-worker politicians and fuel massive campaigns aimed at convincing officials and the public that right-to-work is good policy. States that have recently adopted right-to-work laws have used ALEC’s model legislation.

These organizations and their backers have consistently opposed unions and have worked to dismantle other programs, like Social Security, that help middle-class Americans.

Continued on page 15

BANNING FAIR-SHARE FEES = “RIGHT-TO-WORK”

In states like Illinois, the law allows unions representing public employees to collect the proportionate share (“fair share”) of the costs of representation related to wages and conditions of employment from employees who don’t join the union. That’s because these employees still receive the benefits of union representation.

Fair-share fees ensure that everyone in a union-represented workplace contributes to the cost of the union’s activities from which they benefit. Otherwise workers who pay their dues are forced to “subsidize” those workers who don’t – a situation identical to that created in the private sector when

states pass “right-to-work” legislation.

Whether it’s a ban on the collection of fair-share fees or the passage of “right-to-work,” the impact is the same: non-members can refuse to contribute anything toward the cost of the union representation from which they benefit.

The intent is not to help workers, but rather to weaken unions and prevent workers from coming together to improve their lives.

Studies have shown that allowing employees to benefit from the union’s efforts without contributing toward costs eventually lowers the standard of living of all workers.

SHORT REPORTS

Chicago cab drivers raise money for fallen colleague

GROWING A UNION IS ABOUT more than contracts and bar-

gaining – it’s also about building a community of workers who will support one another in times of need.

Members of Cab Drivers United/AFSCME did just that

when they learned of the Jan. 8 shooting death of cab driver Chinedu Madu. To honor Madu and support his widow and young son, the drivers raised money to help with funeral costs.

Cab drivers also want to see the City of Chicago implement reforms to protect the well-being of the city’s 12,000 drivers so that such tragedies become far more rare. The community of cab drivers was rattled again in February when another driver, Seneca Richardson, was shot during an attempted robbery.

“Every single day we head

out onto the road, we provide millions of Chicagoans a vital service, but we’re also prime targets for violent crime,” said David Adenenkan, a Cab Drivers United member.

Adenenkan spoke at a brief memorial for Madu at O’Hare Airport. The drivers also held a memorial at Midway Airport, with Madu’s family present for both memorials.

“We talked about needed reforms to ensure each and every one of us make it home safely to our families at the end of a shift,” said Cheryl Regina Miller, a long-time Chicago cab driver who spoke at the Midway Airport memorial.

Koch Brothers and allies plan to spend \$900 million on 2016 elections

CHARLES AND DAVID KOCH – the billionaire industrialists who head a vast network of organizations dedicated to weakening unions and the middle class – are planning a \$900 million campaign aimed at swaying the 2016 elections in their favor.

The vast amount of money, provided by the Kochs and their like-minded allies, will put their organization at the same level, financially, as the Democratic and

Republican parties.

But while political parties and candidates must disclose the source of their dollars, much of the Koch network – which consists of only a few hundred wealthy individuals – operates in secret through organizations that do not need to report the source of their funding.

If past elections are any indication, this money will go toward electing candidates who back the Koch agenda: eliminating unions, cutting taxes on the rich, weakening regulations on big business and gutting programs that help the poor, elderly and struggling working families.

“The Kochs and their allies are simply trying to buy elections,” Council 31 Deputy Director, Mike Newman said. “The only way to counter such vast amounts of money is for AFSCME members – and all working people – to become engaged and involved.”

Lawsuits on pension cuts, back wages continue

THE CASE AGAINST THE LAW known as SB 1, which reduces the pension benefits of SERS, SURS and TRS participants, remains before the Supreme

Continued on page 12



2015 legislative agenda: Defend union rights, protect strong public services

Confronting a governor who seems determined to weaken unions in Illinois, a gaping hole in the state budget and continued threats to the future of public employee pensions, AFSCME members have no shortage of items on their legislative agenda.

THE CHALLENGES AND GOALS FOR THE YEAR WERE THE MAIN FOCUS OF THE ANNUAL COUNCIL 31 Legislative Conference, held Jan. 24 in Springfield. Some 500 delegates representing AFSCME locals from throughout the state gathered to adopt the agenda and discuss strategies for moving it forward.

Blocking Gov. Bruce Rauner's anti-worker proposals – including bringing so-called right-to-work zones to Illinois and weakening the ability of public employees to participate in the political process – may be the highest priority for the year.

"That's where the battle is going to be," Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch told the delegates. "Bruce Rauner and the corporate elite in this state are not stopping and they're not relenting. We have to be prepared to respond in kind."

Rauner has amassed a \$20 million war chest to help him advance his political agenda. Competing with that will



New state Treasurer Mike Frerichs defended the right of public employee unions to be involved in the political process.

require not only a strong PEOPLE program, but also an unprecedented effort to make the public aware of the value of public services and the employees who provide them.

"We have to reach out into the community and put a real human face on who we are," Lynch said. "We have to talk to our friends and neighbors and let them know what public employees do. Grass-roots action can beat big money if enough union members are involved."

Preserving gains, pushing for progress

THE KEY ISSUES ON THE AGENDA agreed upon by delegates focus on preserving hard-won gains while also making progress on several important issues:

- Raising the revenues needed to sustain vital services at all levels of government.
- Passing a state budget that avoids layoffs, facility closures and cuts to public services.
- Putting on the 2016 ballot a proposed constitutional



State Sen. Sam McCann said public employees deserve respect from both political parties.

- amendment that would allow the state to implement a "fair tax" with higher rates on higher incomes and lower rates on lower incomes.
- Increasing funding to community disability agencies in order to improve the wages of

- direct support providers.
- Opposing any legislation that would weaken pension protections in the state constitution.
- Opposing any legislation that would allow any form of "right-to-work" in Illinois.

- Opposing any legislation that would reduce the ability of public employees and their unions to participate in the political process.
- Opposing any legislation that would weaken workers' compensation, unemployment insurance and other programs that help struggling families.

Bipartisan allies

WHILE THE WEALTHY ELITE stands opposed to the union's goals, public employees still have allies in Springfield on both sides of the aisle.

Republican state Sen. Sam McCann, who spoke at the conference, defended public employees.

"I never thought I'd see a time when it would be a partisan issue to support working people," McCann said. "It burdens my heart to know you get up every day and go to work to serve the public and yet it's almost impossible for you to be respected by some. This isn't about partisanship or politics, it's about people."

Democratic state Treasurer Mike Frerichs, who took office in January, spoke in support of the right of public employee unions to be involved in the political process.

"I stand with you to promote the common good in every corner of the state, and it is under attack," treasurer Frerichs told the delegates. "I know you want to be part of the solution. [That's why] I reject the argument against union involvement in shaping public policy. I encourage you to keep speaking out in your communities and at our Capitol as well."

SHORT REPORTS

Continued from page 11

Court with a hearing expected in March.

The We Are One Illinois union coalition, which is leading the fight against the law – and includes AFSCME as a

leading member – received good news in January when the Supreme Court refused to accept "amicus," or "friend of the court" briefs filed by an array of organizations supporting the law, which has been declared unconstitutional by a lower court.

Had the court accepted the briefs, the We Are One Illinois coalition would have had to spend time and resources responding to each one, dragging out the lawsuit. The court's rejection of the briefs keeps the case on its existing schedule.

In January, Attorney General Lisa Madigan's office filed a petition with the

Supreme Court asking it to hear an appeal of a lower court's ruling that state employees owed back wages under the previous state master contract must be paid. Thousands of employees from the departments of Corrections, Juvenile Justice, Natural Resources, and Human Services are still owed money for wage increases withheld in fiscal 2011 and 2012.

In September, a panel of state appellate court judges ruled that employees must be paid the wages they are owed.

AFSCME attorneys have urged the Supreme Court not to take up the state's appeal. If the court does not take the

case, the Appellate Court's ruling will stand. If it does take the case, there will be further briefs and, very likely, oral arguments before the Supreme Court over the coming months.

Larry Marquardt Scholarship applications due April 17

COUNCIL 31 IS ACCEPTING applications through April 17 for its annual Larry Marquardt Scholarship.

Applicants must be either a member of AFSCME Council 31 or the dependent child of a Council 31 member or

retiree. Members must be in good standing for at least one year. The scholarship is open to high school seniors and college students under the age of 25, as well as any Council 31 member who plans to attend school full-time.

Two scholarships of \$1,000 each will be awarded for each school year. For more information and to download an application, visit the Council 31 website.

The scholarship honors Larry Marquardt, the first executive director of Council 31 and a tireless organizer and union leader who dedicated his life to improving the lives of working people.

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL



Stephenson County nursing home employees gain first contract

AFTER A YEAR AND A HALF OF BARGAINING – AND MORE THAN A DECADE OF STAGNANT WAGES – STEPHENSON County nursing home employees have won their first union contract.

The bargaining team secured a four-year agreement that includes a 4.5 percent wage increase in the first three years, retroactive to 2013, and a wage reopener in the final year. For the first time, nursing home employees will receive time-and-a-half for working four holidays. Overtime pay will kick in after 8 hours on any shift – previously, employees had to work 40 hours in a week before receiving overtime.

The contract also requires management to schedule employees consistently and provide advance notice, significantly improving the work-life balance for nursing home staff.

“That was one of the most important things we wanted,” said Melissa Piggues, a member of the bargaining team. “We’ve never had a consistent schedule. They made our schedule different every two weeks and people weren’t able to make time for their kids.”

As bargaining stretched out over months, employees decided to take action away from the table to generate pressure on management and build community support.

“We started off doing small things and then we escalated,” Council 31 staff representative Sara Dorner said. “We did a vote of no confidence in the administrator. We did two pickets. We had presence at county board meetings. We were beating this drum asking for a full-time schedule and a living wage.”

Piggues said the support from families of nursing home residents was essential to winning a fair agreement.

“We got more people talking in the community, including resident’s family members who spoke up for us at the board meetings,” she said.

The bargaining team, led by Dorner, included Piggues, Ann Mitchell, Rick Brock, Marylon Brooks, Teresa Diddens and Dennis Archer.

Champaign County workers extend agreement for one year

WITH BUDGET UNCERTAINTY ahead, the bargaining team for Local 900 accepted an offer from management to extend a group of contracts covering Champaign County employees.

Under the 13-month extension, wages will rise by 2 percent plus an amount required to offset an increase in health insurance premiums.

“They’re in a budget transition so it would have been hard to sit down and negotiate a contract,” local President Maurice Taylor said. “When we go into talks next year we’ll know more about the financial situation the county’s in. We didn’t want to sit down until we definitely know what’s going on with the budget and who we have to work with.”

Council 31 staff representative Michael Wilmore said the bargaining committee was also eager to avoid another difficult bargaining process after a clash over the contract for the county nursing home.

“They had hired an outside attorney who was not creating a lot of goodwill,” Wilmore said. “I told the county administrator that didn’t do them any good and asked if we could avoid that on the other contracts. It was at that point they asked about really simplifying it and just having a one-year extension.”

Attempt to gut contract in Galesburg defeated

TALKS FOR A NEW CONTRACT covering City of Galesburg employees got off to a difficult start, but ended with a three-year agreement that includes wage increases and no takeaways.

Management’s initial proposal was “ludicrous,” Local 1173 President Rick Fielder said.

“Initially they wanted to rewrite virtually our entire contract,” he said. “The initial proposal was so ridiculous we couldn’t even talk to them.”

The bargaining team held firm until management took its demands off the table. Eventually, the two sides came to agreement on a contract that includes a 2 percent wage increase in each year.

“Once we got into negotiations they started withdrawing all that stuff and came back to us with a reasonable proposal,” Council 31 staff representative Randy Lynch

said. “They got the hint we weren’t going to do anything with what they had proposed.”

The bargaining team included Lynch, Fielder, Eric Heiden, Jason Asbury and Marc McMahon.

Quick resolution follows slow start in Macoupin County

MACOUPIN COUNTY EMPLOYEES won wage increases of 2 percent per year for three years in two new contracts ratified in October.

Local 3176 President Sarah Oswald said talks had a “hard and slow” start but management soon decided to accept many of the bargaining team’s proposals.

“I’m not sure if they changed their mind or were just tired of dealing with us,” she said. “They had said their last offer on wages was .5 percent and we got 2 percent, so we’re all pretty happy about that.”

The contract also includes an inclement weather policy that will require management to see that employees have safe access to county buildings in the event of snow and ice.

“They wouldn’t clear the sidewalk and people were falling in the parking lot and that was dealt with,” Oswald said.

Council 31 staff representative Frank Prochaska led the bargaining team, which included Oswald, Donna Fritz, Michelle Novack, Trish Baum, Diane Hillig and Jamie Gardner.

ARC of Rock Island County employees fight off takeaways

THE BARGAINING TEAM AT ARC of Rock Island County, a non-profit community disability agency, knew wage increases would be hard to come by in a new contract – state funding for such agencies hasn’t increased since 2007.

Though their four-year agreement only increases wages by 1 percent, the bargaining team is proud of its work in fending off management’s attempts to extract major concessions.

“They came to the table with a bunch of takeaways and I’m satisfied we managed to get all that off the table,” Local 3538 President Rob

RETIREE NOTES

Rauner proposes scrapping constitution's pension protections

GOV. BRUCE RAUNER DIDN'T mention any plans for public employee retirement benefits in his Feb. 4 State of the State address, but a list of items he released to lawmakers the day before the speech contained a more detailed agenda, which included "pursue permanent pension relief through a constitutional amendment."

Many suspect that this amendment would target the pension protection clause of the state Constitution, the same clause that was the cornerstone of the state's Supreme Court's decision to strike down recent attacks on state and university retiree health care.

In fact, legislation has already been introduced by state Rep. Joe Sosnowski (R-Rockford) to place a repeal of the pension protection clause on the 2016 ballot. If such a ballot measure were approved by voters, lawmakers would have a free hand to slash pensions. The bill is currently in the House Rules Committee.

No need to reply to "class notices" on premium refunds

RETIRES IN THE SERS AND SURS systems had to begin paying premiums – or pay higher premiums – for health care benefits starting in July 2013. This stemmed from a state law passed in 2012 that was challenged in the courts by AFSCME and partner unions – IFT, FOP and INA. Last July, the Illinois Supreme Court sided with the unions, ruling that the premium increases are unconstitutional.

The court granted an injunction against any further collection of the increases. Now, union attorneys are working to ensure that the increases retirees paid for health care premiums are refunded in an orderly and accurate manner.

At a hearing on December 18, Sangamon County Circuit Court Judge Steven Nardulli approved a timeline for disbursing the refunds to affected retirees. This timeline also ordered the state to calculate and include in the refund the interest that is owed to each retiree for the

withheld health care premiums. According to this schedule retirees should receive their refund by June 2015.

The "class notices" regarding the refunds are now being sent out to all affected retirees. You do not need to reply to the notice in order to receive your refund. The court has set up a website to provide you with relevant court orders. You can access this site at: www.kanervahealthinsurancerefund.com.

Judge to decide on halting Chicago pension law

AS ON THE MOVE WENT TO press, AFSCME was waiting to find out whether a Cook County Circuit Court judge would halt the implementation of the law cutting pensions for City of Chicago retirees until a union-backed lawsuit challenging the law is resolved.

Last spring, Mayor Rahm Emanuel pushed the General Assembly to pass a bill (SB 1922) that would sharply reduce pension benefits for employees and retirees who participate in the City of Chicago's Municipal Employees Annuity and Benefit Fund (MEABF).

On Dec. 16, AFSCME, along with three other unions, filed a lawsuit in Cook County Circuit Court seeking to overturn SB 1922. Joining AFSCME in the lawsuit are the Chicago Teachers Union, the Illinois Nurses Association and Teamsters Local 700.

In mid-January, union attorneys made a motion before Cook County Circuit Court Judge Rita Novak asking the court to temporarily restrain the City from implementing the law. City attorneys have strongly opposed the motion.

401(k)s a bad deal for retirees, taxpayers

MANY IN THE CORPORATE ELITE, including Gov. Bruce Rauner, claim that the only way to solve Illinois' pension funding crisis is to switch from the defined-benefit plans used today to 401(k)-style plans that would put public employees' hard-earned contributions in the hands of Wall Street money managers.

Along with 401(k)-style plans not being able to offer any fixed or stable retirement income, such plans jeopardize the ability of pension funds to pay out benefits to current retirees. A new study also shows 401(k)-style plans are bad for taxpayers, too.

The study, conducted by The National Institute on Retirement Security (NIRS), examined three states that switched to 401(k)-style defined contribution retirement plans.

In all three states – Alaska, West Virginia and Michigan – funding for pension plans got worse. When the changes were made, backers of the switch predicted it would solve funding problems.

In one notable example, Alaska switched newly hired state workers from its two biggest traditional defined benefit plans to a defined contribution plan beginning in 2006. Yet the funding gap doubled, from about \$6 billion in 2006 to \$12 billion last year, according to the state. In 2014, Alaska made a \$3 billion cash infusion into the defined benefit plans to shore them up.

"I voted against the change, and now the state had to come in with a bailout. It's exactly what I said would happen," said Mike Hawker, an Alaska Republican assemblyman.

AFSCME retiree marks 45 years in leadership roles



AUDREY EGERTON, AN AFSCME Retiree Chapter 31 executive board member and president of the Quincy sub-chapter, has attained an astonishing 45 years of service in leadership positions in AFSCME.

Audrey was president of Local 1787 at the Illinois Veterans Home in Quincy for 14 years from 1970-1984 and sat on the Council 31 Executive Board from 1978-1988. During that time, Audrey was involved in the first state contract negotiations in 1975 and played a key role in building Council 31 into the union it is today.

Upon retirement, Audrey became involved with AFSCME Retiree Chapter 31, serving as Quincy sub-chapter president for an unprecedented 27 years, including service as Vice-President and then Executive Board Member of Chapter 31. Among her many honors, she is an inductee into the AFSCME Retiree Chapter 31 Hall of Fame.

"One thing that I'll never forget is how poorly public workers were treated before we got our first contract," Audrey said. "We had to fight hard for many years to get to a place of respect and security for our members."

"The attacks on public workers have always been there, and many would like to see things go back to the way they were before we had a union," she continued. "We have to keep fighting every day to maintain our place in the middle class."

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

Continued from page 13

Tolmie said. "It was a long battle and the gains were minimal but we're glad to get what we did."

Council 31 staff representative Miguel Morga said management's initial list of changes was 120 items long and included deal-breakers such as mandatory drug testing. Eventually, those were withdrawn in favor of a contract that includes some improvements, such as extra bereavement leave. Employees also received signing bonuses.

"This was an example where the committee stuck to their guns," Morga said. "They focused on where they could get some improvements. Even facing considerable challenges, the committee really held together and communicated with the membership."

The bargaining team, led by Morga, included Tolmie, Jim Hanne, Greg Jackson, Sue Liggitt and Melanie Gresch.

ISU clericals secure improvements on union rights, probationary work

THE NEW FOUR-YEAR CONTRACT covering clerical workers at Illinois State University includes provisions aimed at ensuring Local 3236 members properly exercise their union rights.

The bargaining team pressed for and won a provision that requires management to inform employees of their right to union representation at any disciplinary meeting.

"If the employee doesn't want anyone with them, they have to sign a waiver," Council 31 staff representative Renee Nestler said. "They've made some improvements on making sure employees know about their rights and have some contact information for the union."

The contract also corrects an issue whereby probationary employees would be let go without any explanation. Now, such employees can ask for a written evaluation in the middle of their probationary period to see where they're doing well and where they could improve.

"After a number of years with skeletal crews, when someone leaves and a new person comes in with no training, it can be very difficult," local President Nancy

Kerns said. "There were a number of people not making it through probation and it wasn't really their fault."

The bargaining team secured a 2 percent wage increase in the first year with reopeners in the following three years, along with an agreement from management to use those reopeners to address long-standing wage inequity issues.

"You could be here 14 years and someone could come in off the street and be making more money than you do," Kerns said. "They are having some problems hiring and keeping people, so management's attitude about this has really changed."

Nestler led the bargaining team, which included Kerns, Marsha Perry, Deborah Brown and Angie Cowles.

Short talks but big gains for Joliet Grade School employees

JOLIET GRADE SCHOOL #86 employees needed only one bargaining session to secure a three-year contract that will see wages rise by 10 percent.

Local 949 President Jack Hicks said the district's teachers had won a similar wage increase and the local's membership, which includes engineers, custodians, truck drivers and groundskeepers, opted for the same.

"We felt that 10 percent guaranteed with no change in insurance was a good deal for the next three years," he said. "It was pretty simple. Management was for it so it worked out well."

Council 31 staff representative Joe Pluger led the bargaining team, joined by Hicks, Tim Stilwell, Rebecca Janocik, Cynthia Mackins, Ron Catchings, Michelle Clay and Randy Williams.

Wage increases, new titles for Decatur Sanitary District employees

DIFFICULT NEGOTIATIONS HAVE yielded a four-year agreement for Decatur Sanitary District employees in Local 268.

While the contract includes an 8.5 percent wage increase and two new titles, it was not won easily.

"Management came in a couple times and attacked us, sometimes over things that had nothing to do with us," the local's president, Tim Gordon, said. "We did get them to

back down on some stuff, but it was one of the most difficult contracts I've been involved with."

Talks were particularly difficult because of management's insistence on implementing a two-tier wage structure that would affect new hires, though the union persuaded management to bring the tiers closer than originally proposed.

"Management recognized that we weren't going to allow this huge disparity between

tiers," Council 31 staff representative Chris Hooser said. "Negotiations started out a bit contentious but as they unfolded the employer recognized they needed to move away from some proposals. That was due to the committee's willingness to stand firm."

Hooser led the bargaining team, which included Gordon, Matt McElroy, Joe Chapman, Blake Dotson and Todd Speckman.

Right-to-work

Continued from page 11

How does "right-to-work" hurt the ability of unions to continue to advance workers' interests?

"RIGHT-TO-WORK" LAWS CREATE WHAT'S CALLED A "FREE RIDER" problem. Some workers, knowing they can get the protections and benefits of the union without paying toward the cost of the union's activities, will choose to not pay any dues or fees.

However, labor law still requires the union to provide the exact same services to everyone covered under a collective bargaining agreement. Over time, this spreads the union's resources thin, making it less effective. It's a downward spiral that can leave a union financially depleted and ineffective – and that's exactly why the enemies of working families are the chief proponents of right-to-work laws.

How does "right-to-work" hurt workers?

STATES WITH "RIGHT-TO-WORK" LAWS HAVE WEAKER UNIONS THAT not only cannot do as much for their own members, but also can't set a standard that helps raise the wage levels of all workers. Statistics show that:

- The average worker in states with right-to-work laws makes \$5,971 (12.2 percent) less annually than workers in other states when all other factors are removed.
- Median household income in states with these laws is \$6,568 (11.8 percent) less than in other states (\$49,220 vs. \$55,788).
- People under the age of 65 in states with right to work laws are more likely to be uninsured, less likely to have job-based health insurance and, when they do, pay higher premiums on average.

Would "right-to-work" help or hurt Illinois?

IN THE SHORT TERM, "RIGHT-TO-WORK" WOULD DO NOTHING TO address the fiscal crisis now facing the state. In the long term, the consequences could be disastrous.

"Right-to-work" supporters rely on cherry-picked data to bolster their claim that the policy attracts jobs. But as Moody's Analytics reported, "union strength is just one factor businesses look at when deciding whether to set up shop or relocate. Energy and other costs also matter, as do a slew of other factors... that make it extremely difficult to gauge the effects of right-to-work laws on job creation."

Even if the policy did draw jobs to the state, the other effects of "right-to-work" would outweigh any positives, Moody's observed, saying "laws that hurt unions shift the balance of power from employees to owners, [and] tend to erode wages and lead to a more uneven distribution of the gains of economic growth."

Profiteers

Continued from page 6

thought they had completed probation instead being sent back to prison due to fines they didn't even know they owed – not to the government, but to a private company.

"A string of lawsuits argue the system effectively criminalizes poverty and that some companies have illegally forced offenders to pay for things, such as electronic monitoring and drug testing, beyond what was ordered by the courts," the paper reported.

Private prisons: Bad for staff, inmates and taxpayers

DUE TO A LAW THAT AFSCME lobbied to enact over two decades ago, Illinois currently bars private prisons. But given that the new governor's chief financial officer is one of the nation's biggest boosters of prison privatization, it's all too likely that the issue will surface here in our state.

Private prison firms like the Corrections Corporation of America and GEO Group have become infamous for running understaffed facilities where employees are underpaid and inmates are mistreated.

And in many cases, private prisons actually cost taxpayers more. In Arizona, a study found that the state had lost \$3.5 million a year after allowing for-profit prisons.

Contracts governing private prisons even ensure money keeps flowing to profiteers when crime rates fall by requiring occupancy rates as high as 100 percent. That means inmates from state-run facilities will be shuttled to for-profit facilities – at taxpayer expense – to fulfill the terms of the contract. The Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition estimated that state wasted at least \$2 million in taxpayer money using CCA's prisons instead of its own.

A report from the non-profit think tank In the Public Interest said such contracts made no sense during a time of tight budgets.

"With governmental priorities pulling public funds in so many different directions, it makes no financial sense for taxpayers to fund empty prison beds," the report said.

CSI: Illinois?

Not exactly

State Police crime labs pursue the truth while dealing with cuts and backlogs

Solving a crime begins with the work of police officers and detectives who gather witness accounts and collect evidence at the scene.

Often, though, the answer to the question “whodunit?” is determined through the lens of a microscope, a reading from a spectrograph or the results of a chemical analysis – all handled by the scientists of the Illinois State Police Forensic Sciences Command who are members of AFSCME locals throughout the state.

At three labs in Springfield, as well as labs in Chicago, Rockford, Joliet, Belleville and Morton, scientists in a number of disciplines analyze evidence to confirm, or not, the suspicions of law enforcement personnel. In 2014, crime labs completed analysis on more than 91,000 cases received from the state police and hundreds of local police and fire departments.

“All we care about is testing the evidence. If it helps the prosecution, that’s great. If it helps the defense, that’s good, too,” said James Ercoli, a scientist at the Joliet lab. “I just want a result that’s accurate. Every forensic scientist has to have personal ethics and hold themselves to a high standard.”

Ercoli specializes in trace chemistry and analyzes evidence for small amounts of liquids, fire debris, paint, glass and other substances. He mostly deals with evidence from arson investigations and often works with local fire departments. In fact, he’s a volunteer firefighter in his own community.

After 32 years in the crime lab, Ercoli says he still loves the work.

“It’s a challenge to try and find materials in

the evidence we have, but it’s a challenge I enjoy,” he said.

Many forensic scientists are enthusiastic about their work, which is the culmination of years of scientific study and learning, including keeping up with the latest developments in their field. But the job also includes an enormous amount of responsibility since the scientists are part of a criminal justice system that has strict rules for the handling of evidence.

“Everything has to be precise and everything has to be backed up. Every hand-to-hand transfer is documented,” said Moses Boyd, who works out of the Chicago lab and focuses on drug chemistry. “It all has to be in place so we can go to court and testify without being impeached. It’s just about the truth.”

Not like TV

Forensic scientists tend to scoff at shows like CSI that dramatize their work and make viewers think every case has a quick and tidy resolution.

“On CSI they make it look like you get your evidence back in one hour,” Boyd said. “We don’t have trucks or mobile instruments. Everything happens in a lab and we deal with things in the order they come in. Every case is a high priority and sometimes they take days or weeks.”

The sleek labs seen on TV don’t reflect the daily reality forensic scientists face. Some labs are showing their age, Ercoli said.

“Joliet is an old building. They’ve had to fix the roof and the water lines and we still have HVAC problems,” he said.

Contending with cuts

Fulfilling their responsibilities has become more challenging for these state employees lately due to cutbacks in state funding and facility closures. Last year, two labs in southern Illinois were consolidated into one facility in Belleville.

The cuts mean that backlogs have grown at most labs.

“Backlogs have grown, mostly I would say due to a decline in personnel,” said Marla Spangler, a drug chemistry specialist who works at the Belleville lab. “We just took over some southern Illinois counties that had been serviced by another lab. But we only got five out of about 20 of their employees. We doubled our area and our caseload but we did not double the personnel.”

Backlogs are especially difficult to deal with at the crime lab because there’s no such thing as speeding up science – evidence must be handled properly and equipment has to be maintained. The integrity of results can suffer if work is rushed, along with safety in the lab.

“You have to be careful – that’s why you can’t rush through things,” Spangler said. “For example, the stuff that gets sent in from meth labs can involve acids and combustible materials.”

Plus, a mistake in the lab could be the difference between a guilty person going free or an innocent person winding up behind bars.

“At this kind of job you can’t rush things when you’ve got someone’s life on the line,” Spangler said. “You’ve got to take your time and do the case and there’s no rushing through it.”

