



MOVE

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



School bus drivers put the brakes on privatization

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DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Worth the investment

Those obsessed with cutting government spending are ignoring both history and the needs of the middle class.



BY
HENRY BAYER

THOSE OF US WHO CARE ABOUT OUR KIDS AND OUR GRANDCHILDREN SHOULD MAKE SURE THAT EDUCATION AT ALL LEVELS REMAINS A NATIONAL PRIORITY AND THAT MEDICARE AND SOCIAL SECURITY ARE LEFT INTACT NOT JUST FOR US, BUT FOR THEM AS WELL.

Anti-government zealots, right-wing pundits and their political soul mates in Congress constantly implore us to cut public spending.

ACCORDING TO THEIR SCRIPT, INCREASED GOVERNMENT SPENDING WILL BURY OUR KIDS AND GRANDKIDS under a mountain of debt from which they'll never dig themselves out.

Their warnings ignore the fact that our national debt as a percentage of national income is on a downward trajectory and that just as families with larger incomes can handle more debt (e.g. mortgage, car and student loans), the government can take on proportionately more debt, too, as the economy expands.

Borrowing itself isn't necessarily bad for us or our kids.

Our parents and grandparents, who survived the Depression of the 1930s, went on to fight a successful war against fascism, vastly expand educational opportunity through a massive expansion of higher education – allowing many of us to become the first in our families to go to college – and build an interstate highway system that brought the nation closer together and created economic efficiency at the same time.

I don't know what our country would be like if our forebears had refused to make those investments, but I doubt that we'd have the same quality of life that we do today.

Of course, had they simply borrowed and not paid the bills, we would have drowned in debt.

But they weren't afraid to tax themselves to pay for a war or build schools. And they particularly were not afraid to tax the rich among them, the same people whose tax rates have plummeted since the Reagan era, even as their share of wealth has increased exponentially.

Contrast that with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which were put on the national credit card at the same time President Bush and Congress enacted a

massive tax cut whose benefits went mostly to the rich.

They weren't thinking about our kids' future when they engineered that plan.

Not only was the Greatest Generation willing to pay their bills, they were willing to establish and strengthen what were, at the time, bold social programs which would benefit themselves and future generations.

I don't think my own experience is unique. In their retirement years, both of my parents relied mainly on Social Security for their income. And both of them had the costs of long illnesses before their deaths borne largely by Medicare.

My folks didn't regard these as "entitlement programs." They saw them for what they are – programs folks pay into with every paycheck to provide them economic and medical security in their retirement years.

Enemies of these programs say that those retired or nearing retirement age needn't worry, that even if they are cut back, both Medicare and Social Security will be there for us.

That's great. But what about our kids? If these programs aren't there for them, what will they do when they retire? Will they live in poverty without adequate access to health care? Will they become a financial burden to their kids?

If the anti-government forces really cared about the next generation, they wouldn't cut funding for higher education and saddle our kids with higher student loan debt.

Those of us who care about our kids and our grandchildren should make sure that education at all levels remains a national priority and that Medicare and Social Security are left intact not just for us, but for them as well.

We should also point out

that there are many ways to ensure that future generations are not saddled with unaffordable debt.

We could cut off access to offshore tax havens that cost the government billions in tax revenue every year.

We could insist that U.S. corporations pay taxes on their profits when they are earned, not when they decide to repatriate the earnings. According to the AFL-CIO, American companies have as much as \$1.9 trillion sheltered overseas. As the Federation states, "that would make a nice down payment on fixing the debt."

We could tax the rich at the rates in place during our most prosperous period – from the end of WWII to the 1970s, when, incidentally, the average CEO's pay wasn't 354 times the pay of their average employee.

Here in Illinois we could close \$2 billion in wasteful corporate tax loopholes - money which could be used to help pay for public safety, health care and education for our kids.

The Greatest Generation to whom we owe so much didn't believe in tearing public services down. They expanded them, even if they had to borrow and spend, and tax themselves to do it.

I shudder to think what this country would look like if we follow the prescription of the doctors of doom who say America must lower its sights and trim its sails to remain great.

That's not how we became a great nation, nor is it a course that will reverse the decline of the middle class, whose size and income is steadily eroding.

Shame on those who ignore history and cloak their desire to protect their riches with rhetoric about their alleged concern for future generations.

And double shame on us if we fall for their phony claims.

On the Move

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Push is on to increase disability worker pay

For individuals with developmental disabilities in Illinois, direct support workers are like family. Basic tasks like getting dressed and preparing meals could not happen without their assistance.

THE WORK IS PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY DEMANDING. IT REQUIRES PERSEVERANCE, patience and the ability to gain the trust of people who struggle to adapt to change.

"The whole focus is making them as independent as possible, whatever that might be," said Yolanda Woods, President of Local 2481 and a direct care worker at Springfield's Hope Institute. "What we're trying to do is help them reach their potential."

Yet for this important, often exhausting work, direct care workers often find themselves making wages that still leave them below the poverty level.

Direct care workers are employed by private agencies, usually non-profit organizations. However, their wages are largely governed by grants administered by the state – and the money provided by those grants has remained the same since the economic downturn began in 2007.

Because the agencies have not received cost-of-doing-business adjustments from the state to help them keep pace with inflation, workers haven't received the wage increases needed to keep up either.

Workers in AFSCME-represented agencies have fared better than most because the union has been able to bargain modest raises or bonuses. But that still doesn't bring them up to the level where they should be.

"Funding for workers is being squeezed out by the increasing need for services and the rates don't change unless the legislature does something," said Anne Irving, AFSCME Council 31's Director of Public Policy.

That's why AFSCME has joined with a number of the agencies where union members work to launch a new



campaign to press state legislators to appropriate additional funding for direct care workers' wages.

The campaign has a simple message: Direct support work is vital and difficult – and direct support workers deserve wages that lift them out of poverty. Right now the average wage in this sector is \$9.35 an hour, while the poverty level for a family of four is \$23,550. The new Care Campaign wants to first increase wages by \$1 an hour – then push on to bring workers all the way out of poverty by securing state funding that would bring the average wage to \$13 an hour.

Low wages not only harm workers and their families, they also result in high turnover, which erodes the quality of care provided to individuals.

"The biggest challenge of

the job is the high turnover rate," said Rosalind Wakefield, President of Local 4008, which represents Little City Foundation workers in Palatine. "Just when you get comfortable working with a group of residents, you're moved to someone else."

While this is disruptive for workers, it's the people they help who suffer the most, Wakefield said.

"They're so used to routine and they form bonds with the staff they're working with and have to turn around and do it again and again," she said.

Yurvette Simmons, who works for United Cerebral Palsy of Will County, said the low pay in direct care has led to staff shortages and incredibly long work weeks for those who remain.

"My work week is supposed to be 35 hours but I

In 2008, direct care workers rallied to improve pay and maintain funding for services. This scene could repeat itself as workers fight for wages to lift themselves out of poverty.

have worked in one week probably almost 90 hours because we are so short-staffed," she said. "We're overworked and tired because we don't make enough to survive. We cannot provide proper care for individuals because we're too tired. A lot of us have worked ourselves to where we're sick."

Exhaustion is only the beginning for many direct care workers. Many have families of their own yet have to get by on the same wages earned by a teenager on a summer job.

"There are a few of our members who go to the local churches to get food to make ends meet," Wakefield said. "There was one member I talked to who said her son was acting up because he felt

she cared more about work than him. To provide for her household, she had to work all those extra hours to give him what he needed."

Increasing the flow of state money to direct care agencies would help address those problems and allow workers to focus not just on a job, but on a mission – improving the lives of those in their care.

"We have created a relationship to where, when I come in, I'm seeing my family," Simmons said. "To not be able to take care of them because of these cuts, it bothers me. It angers me to the point where I've gotten out and talked more about what we need for them. If I had the world to give to them, I would."

New state contract—the fight goes on

A FSCME and Gov. Pat Quinn's administration agreed to a new contract after a 15-month negotiating process that pushed workers to the brink – headed into the final round of negotiations, strike preparations were under way across the state.

“WE WERE READY TO DO WHATEVER WAS NECESSARY,” SAID AFSCME COUNCIL 31 ORGANIZING DIRECTOR TRACEY ABMAN. “The growing support for a strike was clear and I think that put a lot of pressure on the administration to finally work constructively to reach a settlement.”

Once the state signaled its openness to negotiating, both sides hunkered down to see if an agreement could be reached.

At 12:30 a.m. on Feb. 28, mere days after a contract had seemed out of reach, the State Bargaining Committee gave unanimous approval to the tentative agreement.

“When I went down to bargaining, I was convinced I’d be coming back to Chicago to ask my members to take a strike vote,” said Safiya Felters, President of Local 2854. “Instead, we met to ratify a new contract.”

That ratification vote took place over two weeks in March. The final tally showed 96 percent of union members backed the agreement, with many seeing it as proof of the value of worker solidarity.

“I’m very pleased with the new contract. I think all the action by workers played a big role in showing strength in numbers and leadership,” said Dorothy Fairman, a social worker at Madden Mental Health Center and a member of Local 386. “It really was all for one and one for all. The administration knew we were ready to go the extra mile.”

The contract will see employee wages increase 4 percent over the life of the agreement, with half that increase coming in July 2013 and the remainder one year later.

The agreement also includes expanded rights on layoff, increases in longevity bonuses and no changes in hol-

idays. It also continues the Upward Mobility Program, which gives state workers access to an affordable college education.

Health care costs will increase, but at a far lower rate than management had been demanding. And those increases cannot take effect unless the wage increases called for the contract also take place.

The agreement represents a major victory for state employees, especially given what the employer had been demanding over the many months at the bargaining table: no wage increases for three years, no step increases until fiscal 2015, reductions in holidays and vacation time, no Upward Mobility Program and much steeper increases in health care premiums.

“It’s been a very long, hard fight to achieve this contract which values the work that state employees continue to do and protects the economic gains our union has made,” AFSCME Council 31 Executive Director Henry Bayer said. “We came so far because we stood together through the most difficult times, in unity and solidarity, with determination and fortitude. If we continue to display that unity and determination, we can make sure that we secure a contract of which we can all be proud.”

Action shifts to Springfield

THE RATIFICATION OF A NEW CONTRACT for state workers may have marked the end of a long, statewide struggle, but it also marked the beginning of a new fight focused on Springfield.

A key condition of the tentative agreement supported by AFSCME’s State Bargaining Committee was that the new contract would not become valid until the terms of the previous contract were honored.

Until those issues are resolved, the contract will not become official.

“The contract has been ratified, but not signed, and it will not be until those conditions have been satisfied,” Bayer said.

One of several issues standing in the way of the contract being official is the status of the state’s appeal of a Cook County Circuit Court ruling that found union members are owed back wages resulting from the pay increases the Quinn administration had refused to honor.

While Quinn’s office agreed to withdraw its appeal, the decision ultimately rests in



Members of Local 2854 vote to ratify the new contract for state workers.



Council 31 Staff Representative David Dover answers questions about the new state contract at a ratification meeting for Local 2081.

the hands of Attorney General Lisa Madigan. Her office has said it is conducting a review of the appeal and has not decided whether to withdraw it.

If the appeal is not withdrawn, then the contract will not be signed and the union will submit the tentative agreement once again to members for a re-vote based on the new information.

“Members ratified the tentative agreement based on the understanding that the state would not pursue its appeal,” Bayer said. “They should have the opportunity to consider whether the ratification should stand if the appeal isn’t withdrawn.”

Meanwhile, the Quinn administration is moving forward with other actions to see that the terms of the previous

contract are honored. The fiscal 2014 budget submitted by the governor includes funding to bring all employees to their proper wage level pursuant to the previous and current contracts.

The administration is also moving to disperse as much of the \$42 million held in escrow as can be legally released toward payment of back wages that are still owed.

That leads to the other hurdle in honoring the previous contract: The remaining back pay owed to employees, approximately \$150 million, must be appropriated by the General Assembly. A supplemental appropriations bill to do that was slated to be introduced in April.

However, some legislators have signaled reluctance to

support the supplemental because in this tight budgetary climate, they want to see the state’s limited funds spent on other priorities.

“We see this as a straightforward problem with a straightforward solution,” Bayer said. “Contracts must be honored. The General Assembly should pass the supplemental appropriation quickly. That’s the simplest solution for everyone.”

But seeing that solution put into law may require further action by state employees.

“Union members need to be prepared to mobilize and put pressure on their elected officials to do their job and honor this agreement,” said Council 31 Deputy Director Roberta Lynch.



State employees and retirees have twice rallied at the State Capitol, in August 2012 (at left) and January 2013 (below) to prevent the passage of pension-cutting legislation.

Pressure amps up in Springfield for pension fix

As On the Move went to press, legislators in the General Assembly were still weighing various proposals aimed at addressing the state's pension funding crisis.

WHILE NO RESOLUTION APPEARED IN SIGHT, IT REMAINED CLEAR THAT MANY POLITICIANS are still pushing plans that would make public employees and retirees shoulder the entire burden for addressing the funding shortfall – even though they played no role in creating it. All of the plans target participants in the SERS, SURS and TRS pension systems.

“Active employees and retirees have to remain on high alert and ready to act,” said Council 31 Executive Director Henry Bayer. “If the leaders in the assembly think they have a pension-cutting bill that can pass, they’ll put it to a vote quickly. We need to be ready to take action on a moment’s notice.”

The state House already passed a bill (HB 1165) that would drastically reduce the pension cost-of-living adjustment for retired state and uni-

versity employees, as well as teachers. That bill would eliminate the COLA entirely for the first five years of retirement or until the age of 67, whichever came first, as well as change the formula by which the COLA is calculated.

HB 1165 would hit retirees living on fixed incomes especially hard. They retired based on the commitment that their pension would keep pace with inflation. Under HB 1165, they would lose purchasing power year after year.

“We all know that Illinois is facing a real pension crisis and public employees are prepared to do their part to solve it,” Bayer said. “But we will not allow legislators to place the whole burden on the backs of current employees and retirees.”

“Legislative leaders should sit down with the We Are One Illinois labor coalition to develop a plan that fairly shares the burden and truly fixes the problem,” he said.

Keeping up the fight

SO FAR, PUBLIC EMPLOYEE UNION members and retirees have twice beaten back attempts to pass pension-cutting legislation, with large turnouts at State Capitol rallies in August of last year and in January.

But just because lawmak-



“We need to be ready to take action on a moment’s notice.”
— Henry Bayer

ers have been unable to get a bill through both chambers of the General Assembly so far, that doesn’t mean it won’t happen. The cold, hard reality of the state’s fiscal situation makes it all too likely that

some action will be taken soon.

And if something does happen, it could happen very quickly.

“The leaders can get something introduced and passed within 24 hours if they have the votes,” said Council 31 Legislative Director Joanna Webb-Gauvin. “That won’t leave us time to organize a rally or a protest in the rotunda. But we will have time to send e-mails and make phone calls. People need to be ready when the time comes.”

If leaders in the General

Assembly attempt to pass legislation in such a way, stopping it will require a massive turnout from workers and retirees in front of their computers and on their phones.

“We need to make it clear to the politicians in both parties that voting against the retirement security of public workers will have real consequences,” Bayer said. “When you work for decades to ensure a middle class way of life and a secure retirement, you can’t let someone take that away from you.”

School bus drivers stave off privatization push

During the school year, the first and last school employee a student interacts with each day isn't always a teacher – often, it's a bus driver or monitor.

DRIVING A LARGE, YELLOW BUS MAY BE THE MOST OBVIOUS JOB THESE WORKERS DO, BUT IT'S HARDLY THE ONLY ONE. They have to keep an eye on dozens of rambunctious children or rowdy teenagers. They have to memorize local neighborhoods, stops and houses. They have to look after the condition of their vehicle. They handle transportation to and from field trips, sporting events and other extracurricular activities. Some also provide assistance to children with disabilities or behavioral issues.

Their work may too often be overlooked by students, parents and school administrators. But for those behind the wheel, it's a deep source of pride.

"I've been driving buses for almost 10 years now. Sometimes when kids see me out of school at the supermarket, they come up and give me a hug," said Kelly McDonald, a member of AFSCME Local 3057 and driver for the Valley View School District, which serves children in Romeoville and Bolingbrook. "That's a rewarding thing for me. If something goes wrong at home or you hear of something bad happening to one of the kids on your route, it touches you."

Putting the needs of children first seems like an obvious requirement for any school district's transportation program. Yet it's becoming increasingly common to put that task in the hands of private companies that see profit as the primary goal.

Looking for a quick way to save money, some school districts have completely or partially outsourced their transportation operations to private companies. Many others have at least explored the idea.

The drivers at the Valley View School District faced the threat of privatization last year. But by forming an alliance with concerned parents, they were able to beat back the threat.

"From a bus driver's standpoint, you have to look at what we have to offer versus a private company," said Jim Canady,

president of Local 3057. "There are benefits to having your own drivers versus an outside company. An outside company is here to make a profit – everything they do is about that. If you're looking at a bus service done through a school system, they're not looking for profit."

That difference can have significant repercussions. Private companies will often try to make extra money by renting out buses for chartered trips, putting pressure on drivers to work faster and compromising safety. Private companies may also wait longer to upgrade vehicles or regularly make drivers change their routes – something that can be especially troubling for students with disabilities.

"We had one kid that was very emotionally disturbed," McDonald said. "He would spit on you if you got too close to him. But he got comfortable with us. At the end of the school year, he was almost looking forward to seeing the same driver and the same monitor. If that driver or monitor wasn't there, whoever was there had a hard time. Private companies don't get that."

The law on their side

THANKS TO ACTIVISM BY AFSCME and other allies, there are protections against privatization in Illinois law. In 2007, unions won passage of a law (Public Act 95-241) that prohibits privatization from upending existing collective bargaining agreements. The law also requires school districts to provide 90 days' notice of an intent to privatize work.

Under the law, private firms must hire the district's displaced employees and provide them comparable benefits, as well as provide detailed information about cost projections and employees it plans to bring on board. The school district is required to show the impact of privatization on costs and conduct at least one public hearing on any pending contract with a private firm.

Most recently, that law was put to use by bus drivers working for McLean County Unit District 5 in Bloomington. In that case, the state Educational Labor Relations Board found management had acted with "anti-union animus" when it decided to contract out transportation work.

But while the law ensures the privatization process is done fairly and transparently, it does-



Local 3057 member Rod Gonzalez checks the fluids of a school bus between routes at the Valley View School District's transportation center.



Jim Canady, a bus driver for Valley View School District and president of Local 3057, performs a safety inspection of a school bus.

n't halt the process entirely. When privatization does take place, it often has unintended side effects.

"We've already gotten an outsourcing company here that does some of our routes," said James Banks, a driver for Peoria Public Schools District #150. "It's not good for camaraderie. Their drivers don't directly report to our supervisors. They kind of ignore what our bosses say. We've got to follow certain guidelines and they don't."

Yet it's not uncommon for bus drivers from private companies to transition to working

directly for a school district, Canady said – both for the benefits of being in a union and also working for an organization that puts the needs of children first.

"The majority of people that come here stay here because it's a top-notch organization," he said. "You can't say that for some of these private companies. If you look at us right now, we have so many

people coming to us from the private companies."

But despite the many advantages of directly employing school bus drivers, many school board administrators maintain a short-term focus on how many dollars are being spent – an outlook that forces drivers to make some tough decisions.

Canady said Valley View School District bus drivers agreed to significant concessions in order to stave off privatization.

"Our school system couldn't afford to pay out \$20 an hour on a consistent basis when you look at what the private companies are paying. It put us behind the 8-ball," he said.

Bus drivers face other pressures, too. Unlike teachers who are paid a salary during the summer, bus drivers are paid hourly – meaning during the summer, work for their school district is scarce.

But, Canady said, drivers feel a deep connection to the welfare of the students they transport – something that shows when a student is possibly in danger or missing.

"The kids are a precious commodity," he said. "We go into a different mindset when it comes over the radio that we have a missing student."

"We are really responsible for their safety and that includes getting them from home, to school and back home, and transporting them in safe conditions. That's a big pressure."

Loretto Hospital nurses ratify first contract

RN's at Chicago's Loretto Hospital are celebrating the ratification of their first contract, the culmination of a process that began last year with an organizing campaign focused on giving nurses a voice in patient care.

TODAY, AS MEMBERS OF AFSCME LOCAL 1216, THEY HAVE THAT AND MORE.

The new contract establishes a committee of rank-and-file nurses that will provide input on patient care, patient satisfaction and staffing ratios. It also protects nurses against attempts to unilaterally change shift schedules, institutes improved overtime pay, and locks in wage increases in each year of the agreement.

It also gives nurses access to the basics of a union contract, such as grievance procedures.

"I feel like we have a little more say-so in what goes on in the hospital. We have a voice now," said Mabel Coleman,

one of the Loretto nurses. "Management was doing whatever they wanted to do."

The nurses' organizing push came after new hospital management began making drastic changes without even consulting staff, including placing some nurses on 12-hour shifts and laying off others with little notice and no way to fight back.

"They were going to lay the nurses off with one day's notice. They were going to send them out without any pay," said Cora Fields, a nurse in the hospital's behavioral health department. "What they were planning on doing was downright cold and heartless, but because the union stepped in, we got nurses with seniority able to stay. Those who were laid off got severance pay and the choice to come back."

The nurses reached out to AFSCME early last year and began an organizing campaign that was met with a negative response by manage-

ment. "Years ago we had tried to form a union and they fired people. They had mandatory meetings, telling people they didn't need a union," Coleman said.

But this time, when an election was finally held in May, the union came out on top.

The new contract requires management to give ample notice of any signifi-

cant changes to nurses' working arrangements, particularly shifts and hours. It ensures that no nurse will work more than five days in a row without the nurse's permission. It also will boost nurse pay by 8 percent over the life of the contract – with the possibility of another wage increase if the hospital receives high marks on patient satisfaction surveys.

Fields said she and her fellow nurses feel great about having the contract in place, calling it the result of a persistent, determined organizing effort.

"The biggest thing about organizing a union is keeping people motivated," she said. "You have to keep the spirits up to keep people moving. You need strong leaders, strong motivators."



Emanuel pushing hard to cut city worker pensions

Pension benefits for public service workers are under siege throughout Illinois, with one of the strongest pushes coming from Mayor Rahm Emanuel's administration in Chicago.

THE CENTERPIECE OF THE EMANUEL ADMINISTRATION'S "REFORM" PLAN IS A DRACONIAN proposal that would freeze

the retirement cost-of-living adjustment for both current and future retirees for 10 years – a move that would make retirees' buying power plummet.

The city's proposal would also reduce the benefit multiplier for current employees, reducing the benefits they would receive – a crippling blow, considering city employees do not receive Social Security.

Yet for all the administration's pressure, it's clear that city workers aren't willing to accept what they're being offered. In March, the Chicago Police Sergeant's Association overwhelmingly rejected

a tentative contract agreement that Emanuel had promoted as a "blueprint" for dealing with the city's other pension fund shortfalls.

The vote dealt a blow to Emanuel's efforts to make workers bear the entire burden for pension fund fixes. It also suggests that AFSCME members, most of whom are enrolled in the city's deeply underfunded Municipal fund, can win if they mobilize in opposition to the Mayor's plans.

"City of Chicago workers and retirees need to be ready to stand up and fight," said AFSCME Council 31 Regional Director Nefertiti Smith.

"City of Chicago workers and retirees need to be ready to stand up and fight."
—Nefertiti Smith

"Workers' retirement security is on the line and the cuts Mayor Emanuel wants to impose are simply unacceptable."

The threat is real and immediate. It's likely Emanuel could push to have pension cuts for city workers included in any pension legislation that moves forward in

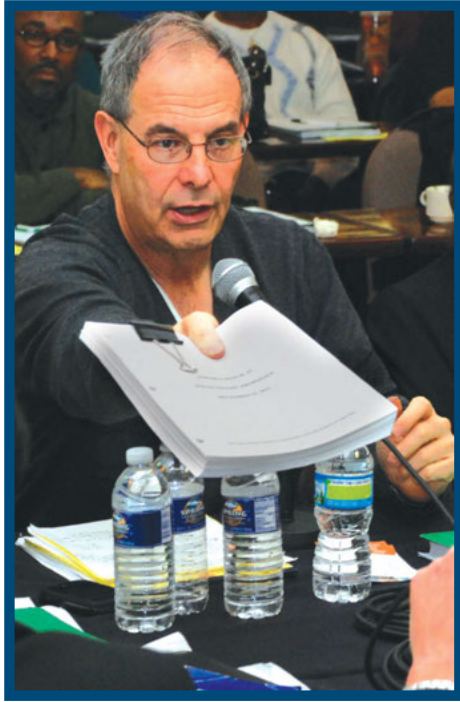
the General Assembly this spring.

"It's a confusing situation," Smith said, "because there's no bill in Springfield right now that would impact city employees."

The problem is that an amendment affecting City of Chicago workers could be added to other legislation at the very last minute when there's little time to lobby.

"That's why it's critical that City of Chicago AFSCME members reach out to their state legislators right now and urge them to vote against any pension bill that does not have the support of their union," Smith said.

On the front lines



Members of AFSCME's State Bargaining Committee reflect on the fight for a fair contract

Dec. 15 2011: Council 31 Executive Director Henry Bayer presents the union's opening contract proposal to management negotiators.



Feb. 28, 2013, 12:30 a.m.: Negotiations come to a close after the AFSCME State Bargaining Committee reaches a tentative agreement.

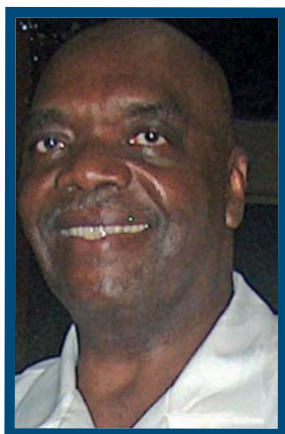


**Michael Yana,
Local 141**

I've never been a member of the bargaining committee before. I thought I had an idea of what took place but it was definitely eye-opening when I walked in to see what we were dealing with, what we were facing. The state's position wouldn't

move – they would posture and come in with no real offers. It was kind of a shock.

Sometimes it's difficult to get large groups of people to understand where our power lies and what shows our strengths, which is showing up in large numbers or making phone calls. . But I think with this contract, people understand that's what did it.



**Enus Higgins,
Local 448**

It was a long 15 months. I don't think I've ever gone through a contract negotiation for that long. This was quite different.

I've gone on strikes before. My experience is that when we stay together, we can make it. The membership let us know they were strong and trusted us when we

went to the table and tried to bargain.

I remember talking to members back home, worried they'd be wearing down, but they never expressed that to me. People stayed pumped up and stayed involved. I didn't want to give up and I know members didn't want to give up either.



**Safiya Felters,
Local 2854**

My local used to have a lot of division and factionalization. But every day, I was able to reach one person. I taught people what I was taught. It took a lot of engagement and persuasion. Our local membership had been so disengaged. But at the end of the day I saw a local of nearly

800 people that barely knew each other go from despair to success.

It showed me what solidarity is about. It's not just a cute word. It's about people standing together. I get it now, and I think our members get it now. I think the members and I understood is that this isn't a spectator sport. If you're on the sidelines and complaining, you're not going to win.



**Kyle Seiffert,
Local 203**

It was exciting to see and watch our leadership work like they do. It brings everything into perspective – how passionate people are about us. I wish everyone could have the opportunity to see what I've seen because it's very motivating.

This was a good deal for the state and a good deal for the workers. It showed that we're trying to create a better life for employees and we won't quit, no matter what odds face us, until we feel like we've gotten what's in the best interests of our members.

It was difficult coming back after every negotiation and telling our members that we're not getting any movement, but that was also the exciting part. We had to get our members moving. It was empowering getting members active who have never been involved. You see the union moving in the right direction.



**Charlie Allen,
Local 472**

It was a long, hard fight. This is my third contract negotiation and it was unlike anything anybody's ever seen. It was worse than pulling teeth. But we stuck to our guns and we held out. In the end we were able to bring a fair contract back to our members.

The highlight for me was the tenacity of the whole committee as one – we all stood together and stood our ground. We got our members on board, especially when talk of a strike came around. The leadership statewide and local leadership got all the members on board. We were ready to go if we had to.

Every negotiation has challenges, but this was beyond a challenge. It turned into a marathon. But we got it done.

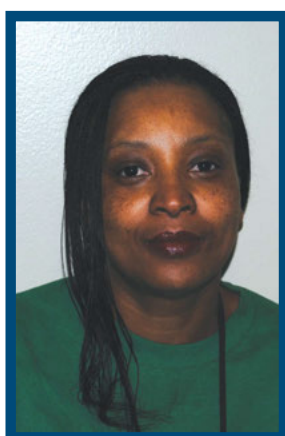


**Dan Downen,
Local 3600**

I was really kind of surprised at management's unwillingness to compromise or move on anything. I truly believe they moved because they realized we had organized and could actually pull off a strike.

When I started attending the bargaining sessions, I was a newly elected president. It helped me in my organizing efforts in my local. I used that as a tool to build solidarity. We've made a lot of strides and had success because of this contract fight.

I think given the circumstances, it's an excellent contract. The majority of my membership feel that way, too.



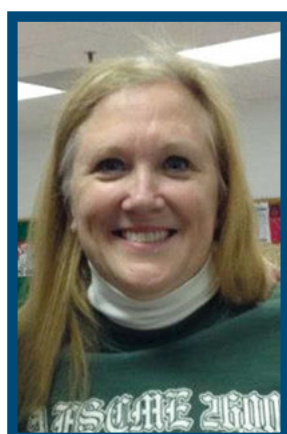
**Linda Hall,
Local 386**

When I was elected to the bargaining committee, I thought we didn't have a say. I thought we were there to show the leadership support and let management know we were standing together. I didn't realize we'd have a voice in what was being said. The leadership can't do any-

thing without talking to the bargaining committee. I thought that was kind of cool.

It was a great experience. I was willing to go however long it would have taken us to get what we needed. If it took us three years, we were going to be right there. If we had to do more, we would have still been right there.

Even though we might have different opinions, when we stand together it shows the strength and power we do have. We showed determination, and most of all we showed unity.



**Melanie Hoyle,
Local 2600**

I learned a lot of patience and I learned not to get disheartened and that this is a long-term fight and not something that can be settled overnight. When you bargain, you don't just bargain the contract you're in right now – you also are bargaining for future contracts, too. There was a huge weight on our shoulders every time we went in there.

I think the low point was when Quinn canceled our contract. We were scared about what was going to happen next. To have a governor just so blatantly disregard us and our work was really tough to take. But that caused us to start to organize and talk about a strike vote. That's when our people really started to pull together. We saw activism in our workplaces we had never seen and I am so proud of our members.

**Opposite page:
Scenes from the contract fight:
The AFSCME Truth Squad confronts
Gov. Pat Quinn (1); state employees
participate in Statewide Unity Days in
November 2012 (2-4) and February
2013 (5, 6); the Truth Squad tracks
Quinn in Chicago (7) and Decatur (8).**

Cook County canine officers win OT pay, but not without cost

The officers of the Cook County Sheriff's canine unit have something to celebrate, but only after paying a hefty price: Their unit no longer exists.

IN FEBRUARY, AS PART OF A SETTLEMENT OF A LAWSUIT SPARKED BY AFSCME AND BROUGHT BY the Illinois Department of Labor, the Sheriff's office agreed to pay 26 officers in the county's Canine Patrol/Bomb Unit for overtime earned while caring for their dogs while off duty on weekends. The settlement, totaling more than \$250,000, will see some officers receive in excess of \$25,000.

But while the money is welcome, officers are still angry over the decision by Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart—made while the case was still unwinding—to eliminate the Canine Patrol/Bomb Unit.

Officers kept their jobs, but since 2010 they've been doing it without their trusted canine companions.

"It's a bittersweet victory," said one of the officers, Local 2264 member Tim Gorniak. "The sheriff retaliated against us by retiring our dogs and sending us back to patrol. We won the battle but at a heavy cost."

Before the unit was disbanded, Gorniak was paired with Laika named after the dog the Soviet Union shot into space in the 1950s. The partnership didn't end when Gorniak was done with his shift. Every day,

Laika would come home with Gorniak to eat and rest up.

Of course, to a dog, Saturday and Sunday are just like any other day—meaning that on weekends, Gorniak had to make sure Laika got the right amount of exercise and activity. And unlike a dog that's merely kept as a pet, Laika's weekend activities weren't optional.

"A lot of time and energy and expense goes into caring for these dogs," Gorniak said. "We asked for one hour each weekend day to care for these dogs. You can't just hand the keys to your neighbor and ask them to do it. There was a lot of pressure on officers that no one took into account."

No one, including the sheriff's office. While officers were compensated for taking care of their dogs on holidays and vacation days, they weren't getting paid for time worked on the weekend.

Such compensation wasn't a part of the officers' collective bargaining agreement, but the Sheriff's Office policy appeared to be a clear violation of state labor law. That led to a complaint being filed with the Illinois Department of Labor in 2008.

"It was a no-brainer," said

AFSCME Council 31 attorney Scott Miller. "When it comes to dog handlers, their work at home caring for the dog needs to be compensated."

The officers' case eventually won backing from the state Attorney General's office. After much delay, the two sides agreed to settle, with each officer guaranteed a minimum \$1,000 payment.

Unfortunately, that came well after Dart decided to dis-

band the unit—one that had once been a source of pride for the county, with its officers and dogs often giving assistance to other law enforcement agencies.

"We did jobs for the DEA, the FBI, the Coast Guard," Gorniak said. "We had hundreds of letters of support asking not to shut us down. They turned a blind eye to that."

The dogs were often used to sniff out bombs and drugs

and assist in missing persons cases. But they also provided cover for officers, acted as a deterrent and were effective at immobilizing criminal suspects.

"Everyone we worked with loved the dogs because it made the job safer," Gorniak said. "99 percent of the time when the dog showed up, the bad guy knew it meant business. They didn't want to fight with a dog. Even the most violent subjects would surrender."

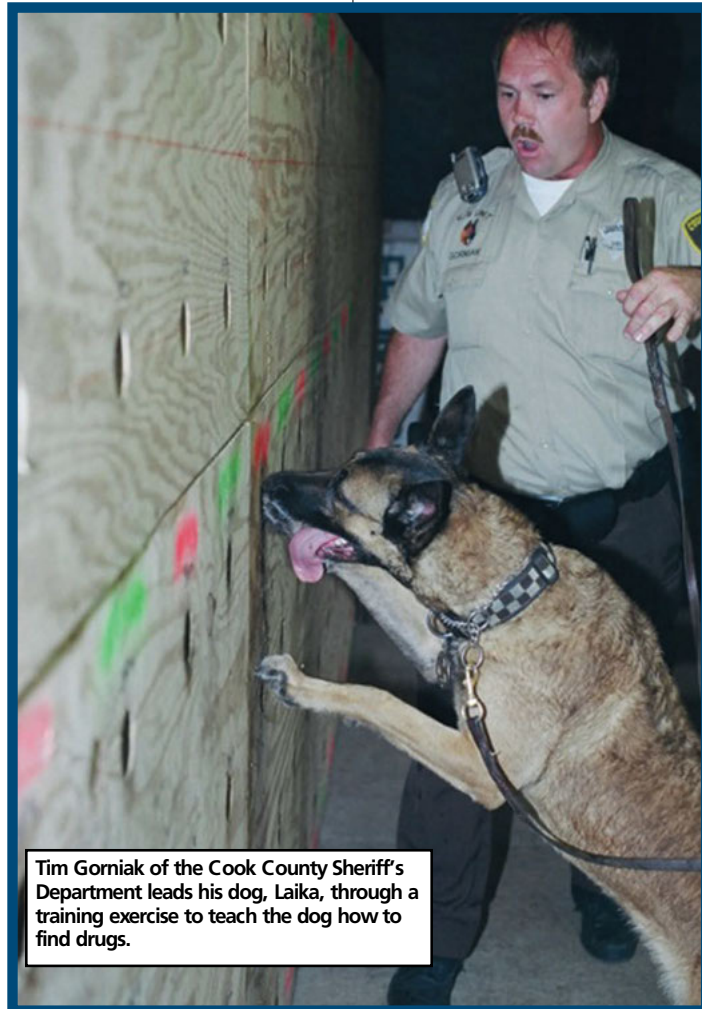
Fortunately for the dogs, when the canine unit was disbanded, officers were given the chance to buy their dogs and take them home as pets—an offer many quickly accepted.

Laika now lives with Gorniak's family in southwestern Cook County. But due to her police training, she's not a typical household pet.

"The things that make it a good work dog don't make it the best home dog," Gorniak said. "My dog is very aggressive toward gunfire. When you hear a thunderclap, there's a reason the dog jumped up and ripped the blinds off the window twice. During bad storms, I have to lock her up to keep her from destroying the house."

While they're no longer partners on patrol, Laika's loyalty hasn't waned a bit.

"I cannot get out the bed in the middle of the night to use the bathroom without the dog sitting by the door," Gorniak said. "The dog will follow me downstairs to watch me do a load of laundry."



Tim Gorniak of the Cook County Sheriff's Department leads his dog, Laika, through a training exercise to teach the dog how to find drugs.

Cook County wants pension change

As the drumbeat for so-called reform continues for state pension funds, active and retired Cook County workers may soon need to wage their own fight to protect their retirement security.

THE THREATS THEY FACE ARE SIMILAR: THE "REFORM" BEING PUSHED BY COOK COUNTY Board President Toni Preckwinkle's administration would raise the retirement age, increase employee contributions and lower benefits for current retirees.

However, there is one crucial difference: Preckwinkle has, so far at least, proven willing to communicate with the unions representing county employees in an effort to find a solution both sides can live with.

"We're actually meeting and talking and looking to find a solution," said Scott Adams, AFSCME Council 31's Director of Research and Employee Benefits.

Preckwinkle's proposal is also notable in that it doesn't ask employees to shoulder the entire financial burden. The county would increase its contributions as well.

But despite those positive developments, the county's proposal as it now stands would still mean substantial cuts in benefits. Proposed

reductions in the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) alone would reduce the value of pension benefits for both current and future retirees by as much as 30 percent over two decades.

The Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL) has convened a work group of the unions representing county employees to develop a unified response to President Preckwinkle's initiative. The CFL work group has made clear to the county that its current proposal is not acceptable.

"We know that significant changes are needed to ensure the solvency of the county's pension system," said AFSCME Council 31 Associate Director Mike Newman. "But working people and retirees didn't cause these problems and shouldn't have to shoulder most of the burden in fixing them."

While negotiations are continuing between the CFL

work group and the Cook County Board, the pension debate in Springfield also demands attention, since any legislation passed there could become the model for changes in Cook County as well.

The County Board cannot make changes to the pension system on its own. Any changes must be done through legislation passed by the General Assembly. That means any changes to state workers' pensions—even those that violate the state constitution—could well be replicated for county employees.

"AFSCME members in Cook County need to be ready to join this battle, and they should be keeping an eye on what's happening right now in Springfield," Newman said. "If state workers see their pensions cut, benefits for Cook County workers might be next on the chopping block."

SHORT REPORTS

Quinn signs bill stripping more than 3,500 of bargaining rights

ON APRIL 5, GOV. PAT QUINN signed into law legislation (SB 1556) that takes away collective bargaining rights from more than 3,500 state workers, including up to 1,900 who are already AFSCME members.

"It is outrageous that the governor has made it one of his top priorities to take away bargaining rights. The labor movement fought hard to defeat this legislation and we will continue to fight to minimize the damage that it will do to employees," said AFSCME Council 31 Executive Director Henry Bayer, who called the bill "a blatantly anti-worker piece of legislation."

The law will hit especially hard among public service administrators in various departments. The Illinois Labor Relations Board had previously certified them as employees covered by the collective bargaining law. The Quinn administration, however, has argued that PSAs hold management positions, even though they have little actual authority.

AFSCME is working to limit the bill's impact in discussions with the state's department of Central Management Services. The union is pushing for an

enforceable agreement that will reduce the number of positions that can be removed from the bargaining unit, prevent pay cuts for individuals who are removed, and offer those targeted for removal the option to take other positions within the bargaining unit if they want to continue to have contractual rights.

Study shows government employees face more workplace violence

A NEW STUDY FROM THE U.S. Department of Justice shows government workers face many dangers on the job – more than most workers, in fact.

According to the study, released April 11, government workers at all levels experienced 18 non-fatal violent incidents for every 1,000 workers between 2002 and 2011. Private sector workers experienced only 5.2 incidents per 1,000 workers.

While much of the gap can be attributed to the large number of security personnel employed by the government, even when those jobs were eliminated, there were still 8.7 violent incidents per 1,000 workers, compared to only 4.7 in the private sector.

The threat of violence is especially severe for state, county and local government workers. In 2011, the rate of workplace violence against state, county, and local employees (21.6 incidents per 1,000 workers) was more than five times the rate of federal employees.

The study did contain some positive news. It found that the rate of workplace violence experienced by state, county and local government workers declined about 82 percent between 1994 and 2011.

AFSCME-endorsed candidate wins Joliet City Council seat

THE FIGHT AGAINST PRIVATIZATION received a boost April 9 when Jim McFarland won a seat on the Joliet City Council.

McFarland, who was endorsed by AFSCME, has been a vocal opponent of bringing an immigrant detention center to Joliet. Some city officials have pushed to build the center in the city and have it run by a private firm, Corrections Corporation of America. McFarland says he opposes having that company – or any other private firm – run the proposed facility.

"I think the residents of Joliet spoke loud and clear that they don't want a for-profit prison in Joliet," McFarland told The Herald-News.

The race for the remaining spots on the City Council is very tight. Two other AFSCME-endorsed candidates were still in the running as On the Move went to press.

Bills would protect personal information of DOC, DCFS, State Police and county jail workers

LEGISLATION (SB 1723) NOW pending in the Illinois General Assembly would offer greater protections to employees of the state Department of Corrections, Department of Children and Family Services and the State Police.

Under current law, the addresses of most state employees are in the public record. Employees in DOC, DCFS and the State Police have been exempt from this for security reasons. However, if those employees had a spouse working in a department without such protections, their addresses would still be available. The legislation would ensure that the spouse's information was also not included in the public record. AFSCME is pushing to have spouses of Department of Juvenile Justice employees, as well as other sensitive positions, included in the legislation.

Another bill (SB 2153) would exempt from the Freedom of Information Act records requested by county jail inmates if they include records from staff members' personnel files, staff rosters or other staffing assignment information.

Obama pushes to fix federal labor board as GOP attempts to shut it down

DAYS AFTER PRESIDENT OBAMA announced nominations aimed at restoring a quorum on the National Labor Relations Board, Republicans in the U.S. House

passed a bill that would paralyze the board, which addresses unions and labor disputes in the private sector.

There is currently only one person on the board who was confirmed by the Senate – Chairman Mark Pearce, a Democrat whose term expires in August.

Obama has nominated Pearce to another term, along with two Republican nominees. They join the nominations of two other Democrats, Sharon Block and Richard Griffin, who have been blocked for months by Senate Republicans.

In early 2012, Obama had installed Block and Griffin on the NLRB using his recess appointment power, which allows the president to fill vacant positions when the Senate is not in session. However, a federal appeals court ruled in January that these appointments were not valid because the Senate was technically in session – it was holding "pro forma" sessions every three days. These sessions last only minutes and were required because the GOP-led House refused to adjourn.

House Republicans are also working to prevent the NLRB from functioning. On April 12, they passed a bill that would freeze all activities of the NLRB that require a full quorum, or three members. It would also bar the NLRB from enforcing any decisions it has made since Jan. 4, 2012, the day Obama made the disputed recess appointments.

While the bill will not be taken up by the Democratic-led Senate, its passage and the filibuster of Obama's nominees reflect the anti-worker mindset of Republicans in Congress.

Library workers remain dedicated amid budget pressures

For people who are struggling in a down economy, few places offer a better value than a public library.

LIBRARIES PROVIDE FREE INTERNET ACCESS FOR THOSE WHO HAD TO ELIMINATE IT TO MAKE ends meet, or need it to search for jobs. They offer educational activities for children whose parents can't afford preschool. Parents who can't take their family to the movies know the library is a safe place to go and rent a DVD. And of

course, libraries continue to offer both the latest in popular books and classic fiction.

Yet at a time when libraries are most needed, the people who make them such a valuable community resource – librarians and support staff – are often seen as a prime target for cuts by local elected officials.

"Our funding has gone down and we've suffered layoffs. We're still working with reduced hours and reduced staff," said Karla Janssen, a librarian at the Rockford Public Library and president of AFSCME Local 3350. "The city council thought we didn't need help. The problem with that line of thinking is that in



Local 1215 member Caroline Broeren, a children's librarian, leads a storytime session at Chicago's Wrightwood-Ashburn branch.

times of economic crisis or trouble, libraries are busier than ever. That's our peak."

Library workers in Rockford recently ratified a new contract after beating back

attempts by management to transfer work out of the bargaining unit to volunteers, eliminate overtime on Sundays and take health insurance away from part-time workers.

"We knew volunteers would never do bargaining unit work as long as we were able to stand there," Janssen said. "Who would volunteer to do the kind of jobs we do? It looks wonderful from the outside, but they don't know the nitty-gritty of it."

Library work is much more than stamping books in and out and shushing patrons – a stereotype that persists even as library workers handle

Continued on page 15

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL



Members of Local 1058 vote to ratify a new contract with the City of Rockford.

City of Rockford workers make major gains in new contract

AFTER 15 MONTHS OF NEGOTIATIONS, CITY OF ROCKFORD employees ratified a contract that will see wages increase by 7 percent over the life of the agreement.

The contract also includes an out-of-pocket cap on health insurance premiums and a strong “me too” provision that locks in premium rates until employees in other unions catch up or exceed those paid by AFSCME members.

The city’s negotiators were initially doing little to move toward an agreement, said Local 1058 President Garry Cacciapaglia.

“What we had to go through to finally get to an agreement was very difficult,” Cacciapaglia said. “They were basically surface bargaining. It wasn’t until we really sat down and had a 12-hour negotiating session that we finally got some progress.”

In exchange for increases in wages and limits on health insurance premiums, workers accepted a cap on compensatory time. Under the terms of the new agreement, employees can have no more than 80 hours of comp time accrued at any time.

The new contract comes after not only a contentious bargaining process, but also a previous agreement that saw workers go four years without improvements in wages while accepting concessions on health care costs.

“The workers have been making big sacrifices for years,” said Council 31 staff representative Ed Sadlowski. “It was at least four years without a wage adjustment for city workers. They’ve made concessions on health insurance changes in the last contract. They stood in solidarity with the community and accepted sacrifices.”

Sادلowski said the local remained united throughout the negotiations, despite a diverse membership.

“There’s good leadership in each department. There’s people from streets, water, the police department, 911 call centers, clericals,” he said. “They’re all at the table and they all took ownership.”

The bargaining team was led by Council 31 staff representative Ken Anderson and included Cacciapaglia, Bob Rever, Brian Jacobi, Tony Garcia, Ron Reinagle, Doug Passmore, Christina Loudermilk, Julie Michalsen, Ned Friel, Aquanetta Smith, Darius Morrow and Brian Collins.

Picket breaks logjam in Orland Park

AFTER NEARLY TWO YEARS OF talks that included some fierce verbal fireworks, grassroots pressure by City of Orland Park workers finally succeeded in forging an agreement.

The four-year contract will see wages increase by 7.8 percent over the life of the agreement, well above the 4 percent initially proposed by management.

“There was a lot of distance between us and management,” said Local 368 President Tim Lynch. “They wanted to raise our health insurance by 600 percent. It was ridiculous.”

When talks looked like they were going nowhere, the local’s membership held an informational picket and made sure the public knew about negative comments the management representatives had made about frontline city workers.

The picket drew support from about 75 employees, including maintenance workers, road construction crews and police dispatchers.

“I saw a good amount of solidarity out there,” Lynch said. “I would say it went a long way in getting them to come to an agreement.”

Eight is enough for Anchor House employees

FOR THE EIGHT MEMBERS OF AFSCME Local 1232 who

work at the Anchor House shelter for teenage boys in Chicago, contract negotiations were a cause for concern.

“There are so few of them and we went into negotiations thinking they were trying to get rid of us,” said Council 31 Staff Representative Lora Harris. “But in the end we were very pleased. It was the first time we got anything in there for part-time employees.”

The three-year agreement includes wage increases of 1.5 percent in each year and also grants a floating holiday to those with five years

of service.

The Anchor House employees are part of Local 1232, which includes employees of Methodist Youth Services. Anchor House employees negotiate separately from the rest of the local.

“I thought it would be a tough negotiation, but we did it in one day and everyone was satisfied,” Harris said. “They hadn’t had raises in three years, so we were very pleased.”

Interest-based bargaining yields 9.5% wage increase for City of Decatur workers

CITY OF DECATUR WORKERS ARE satisfied with a new five-year agreement that will see wages increase by 9.5 percent over the life of the agreement, including 2 percent bumps in each of the agreement’s first three years.

Council 31 Staff Representative Chris Hooser attributed the negotiation’s success to the use of interest-based bargaining.

“It forced the parties to stay in the room and work through all issues, keeping caucuses to a minimum,” Hooser said. “It fostered a greater understanding of the issues and built better communication and relationships between the two sides.”

The agreement also capped health insurance premium increases at 2 percent for the first year of the agreement and 7.5 percent annual-

ly for all remaining years. Plus, the employer must provide documentation to substantiate any increases.

Local 268 President Jerd Morstatter said that while negotiations took some time – the first wage increase is retroactive to May 2012 – members are satisfied with the outcome.

“We felt that we improved the language to better protect the members,” he said. “It wasn’t confrontational and the overall outcome was pretty good.”

Joining Hooser and Morstatter on the negotiating team were Jerry Potts, Chris Gessaman, Stacey Hill, Tom Cook, Cliff Bruce and Steve McCall.

Rock Island Co. Airport Authority workers fight off take-aways

ON THE VERGE OF GOING TO arbitration, workers at the Rock Island County Metropolitan Airport Authority reached a five-year agreement with management, ending a contentious bargaining process.

The new agreement will see members of Local 3744 receive a 2 percent wage increase in each year of the contract. Just as important, the local’s membership fought off management’s attempt to take away step increases, increase employee insurance costs and freeze wages.

“Management saw that we weren’t going to bend,” said Council 31 Staff Representative Tony McCubbin. “It was perseverance by the bargaining committee and the local’s members, standing strong, that sent the message that we weren’t going to play around.”

Contrary to management’s original wishes, the agreement maintains the status quo on health insurance costs and step increases.

“We stayed together and stuck to our original proposal,” said Local President Jeffrey Swan. “We had a date set for arbitration, but then management came back with their last proposal and it was identical to our last offer. We couldn’t turn that down.”

The local’s bargaining team, led by McCubbin, included Swan, Rob Albert, Eric Weighall, Scott Crowl and Kathy Green.

Continued on the facing page

State toll road workers prevail in I-PASS dispute

Continued from the facing page

Wages, retiree health care improve for Peoria County Health Dept. employees

INCREASED WAGES AND PROTECTIONS for retiree health care are among the improvements in a new three-year agreement covering members of AFSCME Local 3665 at the Peoria County Health Department.

Wages will increase by 2 percent in the first year of the contract, followed by increases of 2.25 percent and 2.5 percent. Provisions covering retiree health care – which had been addressed in a side agreement – were made part of the contract itself.

“It was a good negotiation. Management was interested in getting a deal so we only met eight times,” said Local President Joe Bechtold III. “Both sides were reasonable and had a realistic outlook.”

The agreement also provides increased flexibility to workers in using benefit time, which can now be taken in 15-minute increments, as opposed to 1 hour under the previous agreement.

The bargaining committee included Bechtold, Brian Johnson, Corine Smith, Marianne House, Michelle Bailey, Renee Spradlin, Robert Rivoli and Tina DeVall.

IYC medical vendor employees win wage increases

HEALTH CARE WORKERS AT Department of Juvenile Justice facilities throughout the state won wage increases in a new contract.

The workers are employed by a medical services contractor, Correctional Healthcare Companies, and are members of different AFSCME locals based at each facility. However, they negotiate a contract that covers CHC workers at all DJJ facilities.

Members were pleased with the agreement, which will see wages increase by 7 percent over five years.

“We were trying to get the best that we could for our people,” said Lori Gibson, an RN at IYC Kewanee, who served on the bargaining committee.

The contract will see workers’ health insurance premiums increase, though both sides agreed that health care costs and benefits could be renegotiated later once the impact of the Affordable Care Act is clearer. Employees also preserved their 401(k) benefits.

Gibson said the tone of the negotiations was positive, even when the two sides disagreed.

“We were able to express our concerns to the company and they were willing to hear them,” she said. “I felt like they were hearing what we were saying – even if they weren’t always in agreement.”

The bargaining team included Gibson, Council 31 Staff Representatives Joe Pluger and Ty Petersen, Ewa Morre, Sherri Hurley and Julie Szafranec.

Iroquois County workers see little improvement in new contract

FACED WITH A COUNTY BOARD determined to keep wages in place while hiking up health care costs, Iroquois County employees accepted a new contract that freezes wages for two years.

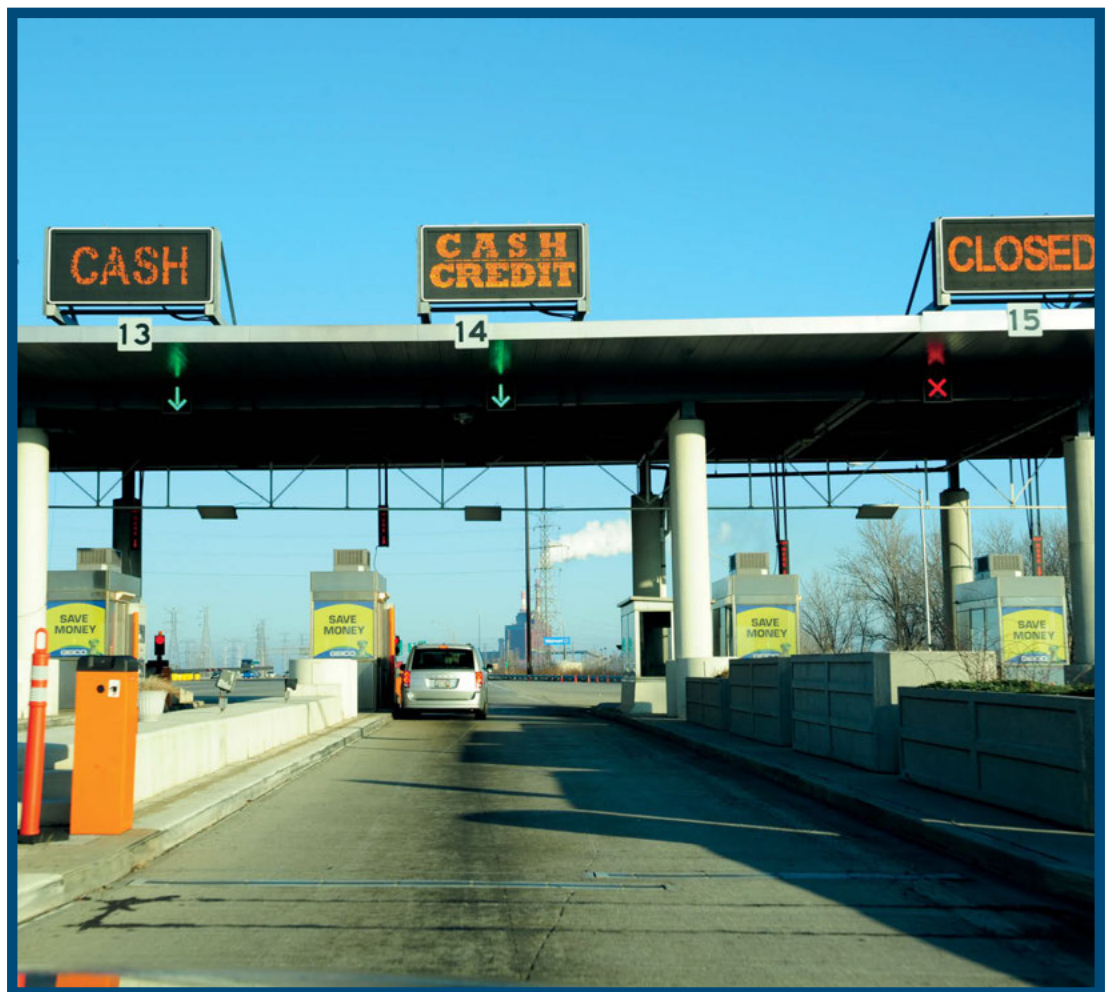
The agreement also includes a \$650 signing bonus for members of Local 3312 and keeps health insurance premiums stable.

“The county board is determined to run over anything and anyone in its way,” said Council 31 Staff Representative Michael Wilmore. “The membership was willing to fight for more than a year just to get what it got.”

Wilmore said management had suggested wage increases could be possible when the previous agreement was worked out. However, in the time since then, the county’s health care costs increased and support for worker wage increases diminished.

“They were back in the black but the county ended up paying significantly more for the health insurance and not passing it along to the employees,” Wilmore said.

The bargaining team included Wilmore, Local 3312 President John Smith, Louise Bruens, Jackie Burkiewicz and Debbie Plunkett.



Imagine having a job that required you to pay money to enter your work-site every day.

THAT WAS THE SITUATION CONFRONTING EMPLOYEES OF THE ILLINOIS STATE TOLL HIGHWAY AUTHORITY, including some 234 administrative workers represented by AFSCME Local 3883.

Since at least 1960, employees of the Toll Highway Authority have been exempt from paying tolls if they had to use the Tollway while traveling to and from work or undertaking other travel connected to official business. Most recently, this benefit was provided by giving employees I-PASS transponders for their vehicles.

Yet in November 2011, the Toll Highway Authority announced without any warning or discussion with the union that it was revoking this benefit, meaning Authority workers would have to pay to use the Tollway while commuting to work.

“The way I look at this is that when I’m on my way to work, I might not be on the clock, but that road is my work,” Local 3883 President Robert Homeyer said. “I and others actively call in issues

that are going on with the road, whether there’s debris on the roadway or some other issue. We’re all involved in making sure the roadway is clean and moving for everyone.”

AFSCME and unions representing other workers immediately demanded to enter bargaining over the policy change – a request the Toll Highway Authority refused, claiming the matter was not subject to bargaining.

In response, the unions filed an unfair labor practice charge with the Illinois Labor Relations Board. More than a year later, the board ruled decisively in favor of workers, finding that the Toll Highway Authority could not take away the benefit without going through the collective bargaining process.

The administrative law judge (ALJ) found that “disallowing the use of non-revenue transponders for commuting will force employees to either pay the full cost of tolls to commute to and from work or alter their routes to avoid tolls, potentially resulting in longer

routes to and from work.”

For some workers, that would amount to hundreds of dollars in commuting costs per year.

“We’ve got employees that work at all corners of the system,” Homeyer said. “We’ve got people that work on other parts of the system but live further north, south or west. There are many individuals that are coming from the farther end of the system to get where their daily location is. With the tolls increasing, that would definitely be an economic impact.”

The ALJ found that the Tollway Authority failed to negotiate and required that any change to the policy on I-PASS transponders must be made through the collective bargaining process.

Homeyer said the issue may come up in the next round of bargaining, but for now, employees are enjoying the victory.

“We believe that it’s a benefit for the Tollway to continue this program,” he said. “We believe that it’s beneficial on both sides.”

“The way I look at this is that when I’m on my way to work, I might not be on the clock, but that road is my work.”

—Robert Homeyer

RETIREE NOTES

Fight for affordable retiree health care continues

WHILE AFSCME CONTINUES TO challenge a new law that took away a longstanding benefit that provided health insurance to many retired state and state university employees without any premium cost, the Union has also worked to ensure that the new State of Illinois master contract keeps retiree health care affordable.

After Sangamon County Circuit Court Judge Stephen Nardulli granted the state's motion to dismiss a union-backed lawsuit against the new law (Public Act 97-695 – passed into law as SB 1313), AFSCME and its allies decided in early April to appeal Judge Nardulli's ruling.

PA 97-695 orders the Illinois Department of Central Management Services (CMS) to develop a premium payment schedule for all SERS and SURS retirees. Previously, most retirees did not have to contribute toward their individual premiums, although they paid toward dependent premiums as well as copays and deductibles.

The original proposal developed by CMS would have cost retirees over 20 percent of their pension in many cases. The Union made it a top priority in state contract negotiations to beat back such onerous increases. After more than 15 months of bargaining, that goal was achieved—with no retiree who formerly paid no premium being required to pay more than 4 percent of their pension

toward their health care premium.

"While we continue to fight in the courts over the constitutionality of SB 1313 we understood the union could not stand by and allow the state to impose outrageous premiums on retirees that live on a fixed income," says Virginia Yates, president of Chapter 31. "The state bargaining committee fought till the very end to get retiree health insurance costs as low as possible and to establish a labor-management health insurance committee to ensure that the implementation of the contract is as seamless as possible."

Under the new agreement, retired state workers pay premiums equal to 2 percent of their pension for those who are not Medicare-eligible, and 1 percent for those eligible for Medicare. The new rates become effective July 1, 2013.

One year later, non-Medicare-eligible retirees will see premiums increase an additional 2 percent, with those eligible for Medicare seeing a 1 percent increase. Those retirees who are over 65 and not Medicare Eligible will also pay 1 percent as of July 1, 2013 and an additional 1 percent as of July 1, 2014.

"I am so thankful that the bargaining committee fought to reduce the premiums that we retirees will have to pay," said Audrey Allman, a member of Galesburg sub-chapter 77. "I can handle 1 percent this year and an additional 1 percent next year, but I could not have paid the 20 percent that the

state was pushing."

In addition, Medicare Eligible retirees will be enrolled in Medicare Advantage plans as of January 1, 2014 that are comparable to current plans in terms of level of services and range of providers.

Home care providers run out of funds

The Department on Aging ran out of appropriations authority to pay home care providers on March 15 – until more funding is approved, no more bills can be submitted by the more than 25,000 home care providers to the comptroller's office for payment.

Home care providers support seniors with critical assistance, cooking meals, cleaning laundry, and administering to important medical needs. Without this help, 80,000 seniors in Illinois could lose their independence and be forced into costly long-term institutional care.

The General Assembly only approved eight months of funding last year, and the Department on Aging needs \$173 million to plug the hole.

Compounding the problem further, the department has been carrying bills from one year to the next for several years at an ever growing rate.

With providers already months behind on receiving payments, the lack of future funds could push some to close their doors. In a survey done by the home care provider association of its membership, 37 percent of respondents said an

additional month in payment delays would put them out of business.

Agencies that handle home care duties have been asked to keep providing the care and continue submitting invoices for the services.

It would take about \$300 million to provide services through the end of the fiscal year on June 30. Already, home care providers, seniors and people with disabilities have rallied several times at the capitol to push the General Assembly to appropriate the needed funding.

"Chained CPI" proposal hurts seniors, especially women

A METHOD OF MEASURING INFLATION called "chained CPI" has found its way into President Obama's budget proposal. Implementing it would result in a cut to Social Security benefits.

AFSCME International President Lee Saunders called the proposal "a very bad idea."

CPI stands for consumer price index, a formula that looks at how the prices of various goods change over time. The CPI is the basis for cost-of-living adjustments in programs such as Social Security, veterans benefits and food stamps.

Chained CPI is a twist on that: It measures living costs differently because it assumes that when prices for one thing go up, people settle for cheaper substitutes. A proposal to switch to chained CPI essentially cuts the amount of the cost-of-living adjustment.

This reduction will hurt

senior citizens as the years go by. Seniors spend much of their money on health care, where lower-cost substitutes are rare and prices overall are rising much faster than inflation.

The AARP has reported that this change would disproportionately impact women. They found that women earn less on average than men, are more likely to work part time and are more likely to have gaps in their employment. These factors result in lower average annual Social Security benefits for women who receive about \$13,000 compared to men, who on average receive about \$17,000.

Another factor is that women tend to live longer, making up a larger share of the population as it ages. Because the chained CPI would cut benefits more with every passing year, women will see a greater share of these cuts.

CLUW award given to AFSCME activist

ON MARCH 21ST, MARY JONES, president of AFSCME Chicago Sub-chapter 60 and a Chapter 31 Executive Board Member, was honored by the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW). Jones received the Florence Criley Award, which is given to women who are strong leaders in the union movement and their communities.

Criley was an activist in both the labor movement and women's rights from the 1930s till her death in 1976. She assisted in the establishment of CLUW which strengthened women's role and involvement in the labor movement.

The award was presented to Jones for her service as president of AFSCME sub-chapter 60, as a member of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU), and as a member of CLUW. Mary was active in the union movement while working and has remained involved in retirement. While working at the Chicago Public Library, she served as a steward, executive board member, and on the negotiating committee for AFSCME Local 1215.

Florence Blimling (1928-2013)

FLORENCE BLIMLING, A TRUSTEE for Chapter 31 and member of AFSCME sub-chapter 82 in Jacksonville since 1991, passed away in February. Florence retired in 1991 from the School for the Deaf in Jacksonville after a total of 30 years of service to the state.

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Retirees get answers to health care questions

AFTER THE TENTATIVE AGREEMENT ON A NEW CONTRACT WAS REACHED, many retirees had questions about how the new contract would affect them.

In the weeks after the agreement was announced, retirees were able to have those questions answered at sub-chapter meetings attended by retiree coordinators, Council 31 staff or local leaders.

"Chapter 31 members are deeply relieved that the steep increases in premiums, copays and deductibles Gov. Quinn

had been demanding for many months were nowhere to be found," said Jack Graves, president of Freeport sub-chapter 71.

Graves said Executive Board member Lou Cook briefed the sub-chapter at a meeting that took on a celebratory tone once questions were answered.

"Many of us have serious illnesses and conditions, and with the approval of this contract, they will continue to receive the medical care they need to protect their lives and remain a strong part of this union," he said.

Strike may be only recourse in LaSalle County

A FSCME members in LaSalle County are discussing the possibility of a strike amid ongoing frustration over bargaining talks with the county board.

EVEN THOUGH THE COUNTY'S GENERAL FUND IS FLUSH, MANAGEMENT NEGOTIATORS HAVE RESISTED even modest wage increases for the 300 county workers who are members of Local 978.

"The county doesn't want to give us anything, even though some non-union

employees have seen wages increase by more than 10 percent," said the local's president, Vickey Leadingham.

"The local is just pretty shocked because we had taken small increases in the last contract," said Council 31 staff representative Randy Dominic. "County management said that if we stuck with them until reserves are built up, they'd reward us. Now they're built up but they only offered 1 percent for each year initially."

The previous contract also saw workers accept increased health care costs – with the promise of improved wages in the next contract.

"They said help us do this for two years and when we bargain in 2013 we should be

able to make it up to you because we'll save money. And they have saved money, but they don't want to give any more," Leadingham said.

The difference between the economic packages being proposed by the union and management is actually relatively small – about \$18,000, said Leadingham, who noted that the county has already paid out \$6,000 for meetings and mileage in connection with the prolonged bargaining.

Leadingham said the business background of county board members may have something to do with their sudden reluctance to work on a deal.

"This board that we're with is a lot of businesspeople

and some of them commented that we shouldn't get a raise every year when their workers don't," she said. The relationship wasn't always this bad. In fact, the current round of negotiations got off to a good start, Dominic said, with both sides using interest-based bargaining to expedite the process. But that process broke down once wages and benefits were up for discussion.

"It worked well and we thought we would have a good working relationship with the county," Dominic said. "But when you get to the economics, a lot of the time you end up going to traditional bargaining and caucusing."

The reason for the county board's sudden unwillingness

to bargain is unclear. However, the local's membership is clear on what lays ahead – if no agreement can be reached, three bargaining units may go on strike, while two others will take the matter to arbitration.

"I met with everyone and what they're telling me is they'll strike," Leadingham said.

Members of the local have been active throughout bargaining, staging an informational picket and actively confronting county board members.

"It's really impressive," Dominic said. "They're putting out bargaining bulletins and newsletters now. It's building a lot of solidarity."

RETIREE NOTES

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Previously, she was employed at the Jacksonville State Hospital as a switchboard operator and Passavant Hospital as a surgical technician. She had helped to establish AFSCME as the union for state employees in Illinois and immediately joined Chapter 31 upon retirement.

Florence was often heard telling others about the experience of working without a union and that union membership provided a protection against mistreatment by management, established safety standards for those in dangerous positions and allowed workers to fight to maintain retiree benefits.

Blimling worked tirelessly to improve working conditions and workers' rights. She was inducted into the AFSCME Hall of Fame in 1999. Beyond her extensive efforts with AFSCME, Blimling served in various roles in her local community, including the home extension club of Scottville.

"Florence was someone you could always count on to respond whenever the call for help was issued," said Retiree Coordinator Maria Britton-Sipe, "We're going to miss her 'can-do' attitude and encouragement."

Library workers remain dedicated

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a range of tasks, including IT support, tax preparation, child education and job search assistance.

Libraries have also adapted to the growth of digital books by loaning out e-books and e-book readers and providing technical support for owners of Kindles and similar devices.

All that work demands not only a sharp mind, but also the ability to stay on one's feet for hours at a time. In some cases, it also requires librarians to be on the road – Rockford's public library provides a service that visits local schools to spark students' interest in reading.

"Any little bit of education helps and the teachers really appreciate it," said Amy Pfeifer, a child services librarian in Rockford. "It's a good way to promote the library services – I can talk to children in those settings. I think we're a great gem in the community. People are sometimes shocked when they find out what we offer."

Plus, as cities have shrunk library budgets, the people who work at them are often required to do work beyond what their job title suggests.

"Even though I'm an adult services librarian, I'm often in the children's department and I'm going to interact with the parents, the children," said Mina Duarte, a librarian at the Chicago Public Library's Roosevelt branch. "When we only have one reference person, we have to interact with everybody. We do have a cybernavigator that assists with computers but he's only here 20 hours a week."

Library workers in Chicago are all too familiar with the threat of cuts. Mayor Rahm Emanuel's administration pushed hard to cut library hours and jobs – at one point, Emanuel ordered all the library's neighborhood branches to close on Mondays. However, a strong campaign by library workers that enlisted the support of the community forced the administration to back off most of its demands, saving hundreds of jobs.

"They didn't think there was an importance to the library when they were trying to balance the budget on our backs," said John Rayburn, president of Local 1215, which represents CPL employees. "We had to show

them that we are very important. We're a safe haven for kids to go to when a parent doesn't get off of work until late. There are people who do research on their own books who thank us for providing the tools they need. It's not just a place where people hang out."

Caroline Broeren, a children's librarian at Chicago's Wrightwood-Ashburn branch, said those who want to cut library hours and jobs tend to

be strangers to the services she and others provide.

"It's incredibly frustrating because I feel like the administration doesn't understand the value of libraries," she said. "They're not in the position of not knowing how the Internet works, or not even being able to afford a computer. I think they really leave out the people who aren't privileged enough to have those things."

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CORPORATE TAX LOOPHOLES: EASY TO OPEN, HARD TO CLOSE



The fight to preserve pension benefits for Illinois' public workers has put a much-needed spotlight on the billions in corporate tax loopholes that litter the state's tax code.

AFSCME and its union partners in the We Are One Illinois coalition have identified \$2 billion in loopholes in the Illinois tax system that could be eliminated to generate revenue for vital state services and preserve public employees' retirement security.

The list includes carve-outs that range from blatant giveaways to well-intentioned failures, including:

- A law that allows Big Oil to avoid paying income tax on profits derived from off-shore drilling.
- A loophole that lets huge retailers like Wal-Mart write off the cost of collecting and remitting state sales taxes.
- A sales tax exemption specifically for the purchase of newsprint and ink which overwhelmingly benefits the corporate-run media.
- An exemption for satellite TV providers on a tax that cable TV providers already have to pay.

What they all have in common is ineffectiveness – the loopholes identified by the We Are One Illinois coalition aren't doing anything to save or create jobs in Illinois, and they aren't doing anything to help the state's working families.

That raises some important questions: How did these loopholes become law in the first place? And

why are they so hard to eliminate?

The answer to the first question is that, in many cases, well-connected companies or industries – employing powerful lobbyists – get loopholes put into legislation by making big promises to politicians eager to demonstrate they care about creating jobs.

"We find a lot of the loopholes are enacted with the promise of creating or protecting jobs, or helping businesses," said Mark Murphy, a fiscal policy analyst at AFSCME's international headquarters in Washington, D.C. "Elected officials are constantly on the receiving end, hearing new promises about what these tax breaks will do. It's unseemly. It distorts what the tax code should look like."

Murphy said Illinois' research and development tax credit is a good example of this phenomenon.

"Its purpose is to incentivize research and development in Illinois, but we know from other states this doesn't work," he said. "Even in California, they found the R&D credit didn't stimulate anything. The fact is that state corporate income taxes are such a small part of a firm's expenses that it's hard to create an incentive program that makes enough of a difference to where it will influence behavior."

But other loopholes represent clear abuses of the political system by big business. The most blatant example in Illinois may be a tax break for the Chicago

Mercantile Exchange.

"The Chicago Mercantile Exchange tax break was basically a shake-down," Murphy said. "They threatened to leave the state if they didn't get their way. Illinois is giving away \$85 million a year to an entity that obviously has plenty of money. Were they really going to leave Chicago? That's hard to believe."

It's easy to see how politicians could be taken in by false promises – or intimidated into putting a loophole into law. Yet even when these breaks fail to produce the desired result, they remain law year after year. How?

Murphy said a lack of oversight – and no requirement to prove effectiveness – often keeps ineffective loopholes on the books.

"If there's a program that isn't meeting the needs it's supposed to, every year that program has to compete for funding with every other program out there," Murphy said. "I think the history of state budgets shows that bad or inefficient programs get wiped out. In contrast to that, tax loopholes get written into the tax code and are put on auto-pilot. They're the roach motels of state politics – they go in and never come out."

"We're providing a much-needed accountability for these things that go on from year to year without having to prove their value," Murphy said. "We want the resources to use for public needs. We want to take that money and devote it to things people need."