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

Braving the elements

Public employees help communities cope with winter woes

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DIRECTOR'S REPORT

False premises, false promises

If Bruce Rauner wants to run Illinois like he ran his companies, everyone will all be the worse for it

BY
HENRY BAYER

IN RAUNER'S BOOK IT'S OK FOR HIM AND HIS WEALTHY FRIENDS TO PAY TO PLAY ALL DAY LONG.

Can billionaire Bruce Rauner's big bucks bury the truth under an avalanche of advertising? Maybe, just maybe, not.

With less than a month until the gubernatorial primary election, Illinois voters are finally starting to get a glimpse of the real Bruce Rauner. It turns out that most of Rauner's campaign narrative is as phony as the folksy good ole boy persona he adopted for his TV ads.

For months, Rauner's denied press reports that he called the Chicago Schools Superintendent to get his daughter into an elite high school from which she'd been rejected. But at a debate in Springfield on February 19, Rauner changed his story, saying he'd "misspoken" when he denied making the call – and just couldn't remember whether he had or not.

When criticized by his opponents for demonizing public employee unions, calling them "immoral" and claiming they routinely "bribe" politicians, Rauner changed course to assert that he wasn't against public employee unions – he just didn't want employees to be to be "forced" to belong to a union.

Oops, from one lie to another in no time flat.

In truth, employees become represented by a union only when a majority has chosen to do so. And even then, anyone choosing not to be a member has that option, instead paying only a fee for those services the union is compelled by law to provide.

So the hedge fund honcho has hedged on the facts, but continues to maintain that he is "not a politician." No, Rauner says, he will "run state government like a business." He will apply the principles and values from his experience in the private sector, where he made billions of dollars, to public service.

Since Rauner's never held public office, it's fair to make an assessment of his business record to gauge what kind of public official he might be.

Among the many companies in which Rauner had a substantial interest was Trans Healthcare (THI), which he co-founded in 1998. By 2004, the company owned more than 200 nursing homes and claimed more than $1 billion in revenue.

What Rauner's firm never bragged about was the steep cuts in staffing and other operating costs imposed by THI that resulted in tragedy for nursing home residents. You won't hear Rauner talk about the $1.2 billion jury award to a Florida man whose mother died after she fell 17 times in one of its nursing homes or the $200 million judgment awarded to the family of a 92-year-old woman who fell to her death in a wheelchair in another THI facility.

In each of these cases and others, Rauner has tried to avoid responsibility through a series of complex financial and legal maneuvers, including claiming his companies had no assets, despite the fact his personal wealth alone was worth billions.

This is Rauner's so-called "business acumen"? Anybody can slash staff to make higher profits – if they're willing to put human lives at risk. Is this the type of man we want overseeing care of senior citizens in our state?

Illinois regulates and funds nursing homes under its Medicaid program. Rauner says he'll cut Medicaid costs. Will he do it the way he ran his business, by sacrificing residents' safety and well-being, even their lives?

Rauner and his firm turned their attention to trucking in 2007 when they bought the Cardinal Logistics trucking company. They immediately declared that their employees were "independent contractors," thereby absolving the company of any obligation to pay Social Security and unemployment taxes or to carry workers' compensation insurance for their drivers.

Once again Rauner's duplicity was caught out. It turned out that those "independent contractors" were still Cardinal employees under the law, and when they retained a lawyer, the workers won a $3.75 million settlement in a case their attorney called "one of the most blatant cases of misclassification" ever seen.

In order to squeeze every possible penny of profits out of his investment, Rauner's firm was willing to deny employees the most basic of benefits, benefits that even a company as stingy as Walmart provides for its employees simply because the law requires it. It's not hard to imagine the kind of devastating changes Rauner would try to impose on state employees, including outright privatization of their jobs, if he were governor.

Despite Rauner's unethical business track record, he has the nerve to call public employee unions "corrupt" – alleging that "by their very nature" they represent "pay-to-play politics."

In Rauner's book it's OK for him and his wealthy friends to pay to play all day long – whether it's politics, pension fund investments or nursing homes. They want to be able to make the big bucks, but they don't want working people to earn a living wage or have access to decent health care or have a pension to sustain them in retirement. The mask is slipping off Rauner as the ugly face of corruption and greed is ever more clearly exposed.

Let's continue to do our part to make sure that the truth is told so that Bruce Rauner, who already owns nine homes, doesn't get the keys to another.

Cover photograph by Randy Squires

Council 31 AFSCME
We Make Illinois Happen

On the Move

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dmiller@afscme31.org
or:
AFSCME, On the Move,
205 N. Michigan Ave., 21st Floor,
Chicago, IL 60601

Henry Bayer, Executive Director
Roberta Lynch, Deputy Director
David Miller, Editor
Dolores Wilber, Designer

Extreme weather no match for determined public employees

At a time that attacks on public service workers seem unrelenting, along comes the coldest winter Illinois has seen in decades to powerfully demonstrate just how valuable these men and women are to the communities they serve.

Todd Hazelwood (top) and Curtis Yokem (bottom), members of Local 3417, have both driven plows and salt trucks for the City of Springfield Office of Public Works during this year's winter storms.

BEGINNING WITH THE "POLAR VORTEX" COLD SNAP ON JANUARY 6, THIS WINTER HAS BEEN DEFINED by single-digit and sub-zero temperatures, wind chills exceeding 10 below zero and regular snowfalls. Through all of it, public employees have been on the job to keep people safe and ensure basic government functions, even when that meant working long hours in dangerous conditions.

"We're trying to make things easier for homes, businesses, churches and especially schools that are using buses to get kids around," said Curtis Yokem, a Local 3417 member who has been clearing streets for the City of Springfield's public works department.

Yokem was among thousands of public employees who worked outside in early January when many businesses, government offices, and schools were shuttered in the face of wind chills that dropped to 30 degrees below zero in some areas.

"I don't mind that other people don't have to work," Yokem said while on the job. "It actually helps us out because we can get out there and we don't have to deal with traffic and people getting stuck."

Workers clearing roads of snow and ice might be the most visible example of public service workers on the job in extreme cold. But they're far from the only ones braving the elements.

Record-breaking cold means that whenever the temperature rises, water mains are more likely to burst open. Those same temperature changes also create the perfect recipe for potholes that need to be filled. Heavy ice and snow can cause power lines to snap, requiring quick action from utility workers. For many core government functions – like water treatment plants or correctional facilities – closing for a day is simply impossible.

Pushed to the limit

IN SMALLER municipalities, the extreme weather has required all hands to be on deck and significant cooperation among different departments – in some cases, just to ensure people were able to get to work.

"Our police department has one four-wheel-drive vehicle. They had to transport the police dispatchers to and from work in that vehicle," said Patty Butkauskus, president of Local 726, which represents city employees in Pana, a town of 5,800 people in central Illinois.

Brian Blodgett, who was manning the city's water treatment plant when the "vortex" descended on the state, worked 22 hours straight when conditions were at their worst.

Road conditions were so bad, Blodgett said, that he was unable to leave at the end of his shift – not that his replacement could have made it in, anyway.

Blodgett didn't have coffee to help keep him awake, but he did have plenty of work to do.

"We have a water line that brings water in from the lake and it had to be rotated every 20 minutes because it was so cold," he said. "That kept me pretty busy. Plus I had to shovel the walk and throw salt down and go outside to get water samples. I just tried to stay busy."

Finally, at 5:30 a.m. – after 22 hours of work and more than 24 hours without sleep – rescue came in the form of a streets department employee who picked up Blodgett's replacement, drove to the plant, and then took Blodgett home.

"I was pretty delirious by time I got home," Blodgett said. "I was beat, mentally and physically."

"In a lot of ways it's like a first responder role. The police and fire can't get through. We're the only ones who can." – John Bilecki

Proving their value

THE LONG HOURS AND HARD work put in by public service workers this winter has demonstrated the value of their work – and highlighted the cutbacks that have resulted in some agencies being stretched to their limit.

In southern Illinois, State Police dispatchers worked up to 16 hours straight when the weather was at its worst. Some who weren't working opted to crash on futons in the office instead of risking a return trip home amid dangerous road conditions.

Cathy Bencini, a State Police dispatcher and member of Local 1048, said such problems wouldn't have happened had it not been for cutbacks that resulted in one dispatch unit covering 32 counties.

"We used to have four districts in this area and employees lived in the district where they worked," she said. "But when the Illinois State Police decided to consolidate us, that meant that some people who work here lived hours away, even in good weather."

Still, Bencini and her co-workers did their best to help people who were stranded on the road and dealing with other emergencies. "We had people stranded on the interstate for long periods of time," Bencini said. "I think this is the worst it's been in a long time especially since we're not familiar with all the territory. There's no way one human being can know 32 counties."

In Will County, where some elected officials lashed out at county workers before and during an 18-day strike by Local 1028 last fall, the weather put a spotlight on the essential role those employees play.

"If that strike would have gone another week, the county would have been in deep, deep trouble. As soon as we came back, it started snowing and it hasn't really stopped," said John Bilecki, a snow plow driver for the county. "We're getting out of the plow trucks to check on people and get them medical attention. In a lot of ways it's like a first responder role. The police and fire can't get through. We're the only ones who can."

From small towns like Pana to the streets of Chicago, public employees across the state have put their own comfort and safety at risk to provide vital services on which citizens depend.

"Too many politicians are out there bashing public employees every chance they get – seeking to slash their wages and benefits and denigrate their work," said Council 31 Executive Director Henry Bayer. "But we don't see Bruce Rauner and other public employee bashers out there plowing roadways or rushing to the scene of an accident. These public employees deserve everyone's appreciation for helping to protect human lives and keep Illinois

Debunking Bruce Rauner's big lies

Bruce Rauner has built a big lead in the race for the GOP gubernatorial nomination, thanks largely to a nearly unlimited flow of cash from his own pocket and from his friends in the corporate elite that has allowed him to blanket the state with advertising.

But no matter how much money Rauner spends – and he's spending a lot – there's one thing his message always lacks: the truth.

Rauner's told many lies on the campaign trail – here are some of the worst, and the truth behind them.

**LIE:
Corrupt "union bosses" run Springfield**

**REALITY:
Rauner's an insider who's benefited from ties to politicians and criminals**

Rauner alleges that "corrupt union bosses" run Springfield by "bribing politicians with taxpayer money," resulting in public employees getting "more lucrative pensions, higher and higher pay, free health care."

Where to begin? Rauner's so-called bribes are the political contributions unions routinely make to endorsed candidates – contributions public employees fund from their own income. Those contributions pale in comparison to those made by the corporations Rauner sides with. Generally speaking, big corporations outspend unions 11-1 in political campaigns.

Plus, any public employee can tell you that political contributions didn't result in "lucrative pensions" or "free health care." Any wage gains public employees have made only came after lengthy, difficult contract battles.

Rauner, however, has enriched himself quite a bit in his dealings with public officials. His firm had the now-jailed political operative Stu Levine on his payroll for $25,000/month while Levine was serving on the pension investment board that just coincidentally voted to hire Rauner's firm (GTCR) to manage its investments. He also gave the Democratic governor of Pennsylvania $300,000 – and subsequently his firm was also chosen to manage pension fund investments in that state.

**LIE:
Bruce Rauner is a "regular guy"**

**REALITY:
Rauner is a billionaire hedge fund investor with fancy homes and wealthy friends**

Rauner likes to wear Carhartt jackets in his ads and tout his $18 wristwatch. But don't think for a second he can relate to the struggles of ordinary working people.

Rauner reportedly owns nine homes – and believes tax laws don't apply to them. He cheated on his Illinois property taxes, claiming the homestead exemption on three homes, even though it's only allowed on one.

When it came to ensuring a quality education for his daughter, Rauner played by his own rules. When she failed to make the cut for one of Chicago's top public schools, Rauner made a call to the schools superintendent and used his clout to win her a spot. Subsequently, Rauner gave $250,000 to a special fund for that school.

Rauner is on the record saying "I will advocate moving the Illinois minimum wage back to the national minimum" – a reduction of $1/hour. Though he's tried to backtrack on that statement after a storm of criticism, it's clear where he really stands.

**LIE:
Rauner likes public service workers – he just doesn't like "union bosses"**

**REALITY:
Rauner's entire platform is based on driving down wages and benefits for public employees**

Rauner says he just wants to run " the union bosses" out of Springfield – but all of his proposals are actually aimed at undercutting the wages and benefits of public employees, eliminating public pensions and, ultimately, doing away with collective bargaining rights.

What Rauner hates about "union bosses" is that they've helped to improve the working lives and economic prospects of union members.

Rauner opposed the recent pension cuts made by the General Assembly because they didn't go far enough in wiping out public employee pensions. He wants to switch all employees to 401(k) plans only.

He doesn't believe public employees should be allowed to be union members, saying "by their very nature" public employee unions represent a "fundamental conflict of interest with the people of Illinois."

He also praises other Midwestern states like Michigan and Indiana that have passed right-to-work (for less) laws, saying that Illinois should "move in that direction."

**LIE:
Rauner is a respectable businessman**

**REALITY:
Rauner's career is full of shady deals and corporate corruption**

In 2000, Rauner's firm used a vehicle called Trans Healthcare to acquire more than 200 nursing homes, acting quickly to reduce staff and cut other operational costs. The result: shameful, even deadly, conditions for nursing home residents.

A jury in Polk County, Fla., returned a $1.1 billion verdict against the firm in what was described as "corporate corruption" that ultimately led to the death of a nursing home resident. According to trial testimony, GTCR and other defendants "conspired to run a nursing home chain into insolvency without regard to the harm nursing home residents would experience."

**LIE:
Rauner is a straight-shooter**

**REALITY:
Rauner is a hypocrite**

Rauner wants to eliminate pensions even though managing public pension fund investments helped make him wealthy.

Rauner bashes teachers' unions but pulled strings to ensure his daughter could go to a school where she'd be taught by Chicago Teachers Union members.

There's only one thing clear about Bruce Rauner: He wants to destroy public employee unions in Illinois, and he's willing to spend whatever it takes to make sure he gets the chance to do so.

Unions sue to overturn pension theft law

The fight to save retirement security for state and university employees, waged for more than two years in the halls of the state Capitol, is now set to move into the courtroom.

On Jan. 28, AFSCME and its allies in the We Are One Illinois union coalition filed a lawsuit in Sangamon County Circuit Court seeking to overturn SB 1, the law passed by the General Assembly and signed by Gov. Pat Quinn in December that makes unfair, blatantly unconstitutional cuts to pension benefits.

Lawyers for the We Are One coalition filed the complaint on behalf of all active and retired enrollees in the State Employee Retirement System (SERS), the State University Retirement System (SURS) and the Teachers Retirement System (TRS).

"The 'pension theft' law violates the Illinois Constitution, which unequivocally states that a public employee's pension is a contract the state cannot diminish or impair," AFSCME Council 31 Executive Director Henry Bayer said. "Together with the We Are One Illinois coalition, our union is seeking justice from the courts to throw out this unfair and unconstitutional law."

Twenty-five active and retired public employees are named as plaintiffs in the suit, including six active AFSCME members, as well as two AFSCME retirees.

"Both retired and current State employees rely for retirement security on the full pension payments the State has promised," the coalition's complaint reads. "Personal financial commitments and planning based on the State's promise – often years in the making – now are in jeopardy."

The complaint also examines the history of the state constitution's pension protection clause, which supporters of cutting public employee pensions have argued does not apply to the current situation, given the state's dire financial situation.

However, the complaint notes, this is exactly the kind of scenario that was anticipated when the clause was added to the constitution more than 40 years ago.

"For many individuals, their State pension is their life savings and is all that that stands between them and poverty," the complaint reads. "In 1970, the State recognized this situation and took action to assure the retirement security of these public workers… Concern that pension system funding issues might lead the State to abandon its pension obligations to the men and women who serve Illinois and its municipalities prompted Illinois to adopt the Pension Clause."

The lawsuit argues that the numerous changes in SB 1 (now Public Act 98-0599) – including raising the retirement age and slashing cost-of-living adjustments – would diminish the benefits of some retirees by hundreds of thousands of dollars over the course of their retirement. Further, the law's 1 percent reduction in employee contributions is little more than a fig leaf.

In one example, an SERS member who retired at age 60 with 25 years of service and a final salary of $60,000 would see benefits fall by over $287,000 through the course of a 25-year retirement, while saving only $24,126 in reduced contributions.

Unresolved issues

Before the complaint was filed, the We Are One Illinois coalition attempted to come to an agreement with the attorney general to request a delay in the law's implementation until the lawsuit could run its course. The law is schedule to go into effect in June 1.

"The consequences could be enormous if this law goes into effect before its constitutionality is determined," Bayer said. "If the state ends up losing its case, it would have to provide retirees with benefits they would have otherwise received. Public employees might find themselves on the hook for contributions that had been reduced. That also carries tax consequences for every individual active employee."

Despite the issues that could arise if the law is struck down, the attorney general refused to agree to a stay in the law's implementation. The coalition has reserved the right to request such a stay on its own.

The state is also contesting the venue where the suit will be tried. The We Are One Illinois coalition has argued it should be tried in Sangamon County, where most of the pension funds at issue are located. Its central location also makes it accessible to all named plaintiffs. Further, suits filed by two other groups against the law have also been filed in Sangamon County.

The state is seeking to have those suits and the We Are One Illinois suit consolidated and heard in Cook County. As On the Move went to press, no decision had been made on the venue.

Plaintiffs ready to be heard

AFSCME members named as plaintiffs in the suit describe it as an honor to be representing their fellow union members before the court.

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Chicago pensions are next General Assembly target

With the ink barely dry on legislation slashing the pensions of state and university employees, the General Assembly is already moving to do the same to pensions for City of Chicago employees and retirees.

While no legislation had been introduced as On the Move went to press, the general outlines put forward by Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel indicate that he is pushing for similar – or even more dire – cuts as in the new law affecting SERS, SURS and TRS.

In response to the drive to cut City of Chicago employee pensions, unions

AFSCME retiree Louise Bates-Spencer speaks at a Chicago press conference announcing the kickoff of We Are One Chicago.

representing city workers have joined to form the We Are One Chicago coalition. Members include AFSCME Council 31, the Chicago Federation of Labor, the Chicago Teachers Union, the Fraternal Order of Police, the Chicago Firefighters Union, SEIU Local 73, the Illinois Nurses Association, the Chicago Police Sergeants' Association and the Chicago Police Lieutenants' Association.

City of Chicago employees prepare to lobby legislators at the State Capitol.

On Feb. 19, We Are One Chicago brought some 1,000 active and retired City of Chicago employees to Springfield, where they packed the Capitol Rotunda and let lawmakers know that the continued attacks on the retirement security of public employees won't go unchallenged.

"I paid my share into the pension every pay period under the promise that it would be matched and that my pension would be there," said Louise Bates-Spencer, an 81-year old former Chicago Department of Health employee who retired in 1998. "They made sure I paid into my pension, but all that time they were taking my share, the city didn't pay its share."

Senate President John Cullerton has said cutting the pensions of City of Chicago and Chicago Public Schools employees and retirees is the General Assembly's top priority this year.

"The pensions for Chicago is a real major issue which we have to deal with because if we don't, we've got built in triggers that would require dramatic increases in contributions into those pension funds," Cullerton told the Chicago Tribune. "It's a crisis if we don't do anything."

The Tribune reported that Cullerton urged unions "to help negotiate an agreement on retirement benefits lest lawmakers act on their own" – even though Cullerton himself abandoned legislation (SB 2404) he had negotiated with the We Are One

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Fair tax campaign at a crossroads

The clock is now ticking in Illinois – but what it's ticking toward is uncertain.

It could be counting down toward an Illinois where the temporary income tax increase is allowed to expire without replacement, leaving the state starved of revenue and forcing cuts to not only state jobs and services, but to school districts, municipalities, counties and universities that are already operating on a bare-bones level.

But it could also be counting down toward a better Illinois – a state where people and businesses with higher incomes pay their fair share, generating revenue that will allow the state to provide its citizens with robust public services.

As part of A Better Illinois, the broad coalition working to put a fair tax proposal on the November ballot, AFSCME members will play a key role in determining which of those outcomes ends up as reality.

"If the temporary tax increase is allowed to expire without raising replacement revenues, the state is going to fall off a fiscal cliff and AFSCME and public service workers will go right along with it," Council 31 legislative director Joanna Webb-Gauvin warned delegates at February's PEOPLE Legislative and Endorsement Conference. "This will be our top legislative priority this spring."

The proposal supported by A Better Illinois is a simple amendment to the state constitution that would allow the General Assembly to set lower tax rates for lower incomes and higher rates for higher incomes. Currently, all individuals and businesses in Illinois pay the same rate.

PEOPLE delegates attended workshops on the fair tax campaign at the Legislative and Endorsement Conference on February 1.

Growing the grassroots

While AFSCME lobbyists are among those pressing legislators to support bringing the proposed amendment to the floor, perhaps more important are efforts by AFSCME and its coalition partners to gather signatures of supporters who will be called upon to apply grassroots pressure.

Much work remains if the union is to meet the goal it adopted by delegates at last year's convention of collecting 50,000 signatures.

"Members need to be circulating petitions among their co-workers, their friends and their family. Getting more people involved means lawmakers hear from more of their constituents and we have a better chance of winning," Council 31 community affairs director John Cameron said.

AFSCME put the fair tax campaign front and center at February's PEOPLE conference – every workshop was focused on the signature-gathering effort.

Those workshops emphasized a few key points:

• The fair tax needs to be placed on the ballot by May through a three-fifths majority vote in both the House and the Senate.

• If the proposal is placed on the ballot, it would be ratified if 60 percent of those voting on it supported it or if 50 percent of all those casting a ballot supported it.

• Along with collecting signatures, AFSCME members need to be talking to as many people as they can about the need for a fair tax in Illinois.

• Thirty-four states and the District of Columbia, as well as the federal government, have a fair tax system similar to that proposed by A Better Illinois.

• Most of the states that neighbor Illinois have a fair tax, including Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri and Kentucky.

"We need to emphasize the 'fair' in this plan," Cameron said. "Almost everyone in Illinois agrees that our tax system is broken and that the wealthy have benefited disproportionately from economic growth. The fair tax balances that out and ensures that more people can benefit."

Overcoming the opposition

The proposal backed by A Better Illinois enjoys strong approval from the public, has the backing of more than 100 unions, community organizations, faith-based groups and small businesses, and has already won support from dozens of lawmakers.

> **"If the temporary tax increase is allowed to expire without raising replacement revenues, the state is going to fall off a fiscal cliff."**
> **– Joanna Webb-Gauvin**

However, opponents of the plan – taking their marching orders from big business – are already working to derail it. At a recent meeting, House Republicans signaled unanimous opposition to the fair tax.

While Democrats have the votes – barely – to put the proposal on the ballot on their own, it's unlikely they'll all end up backing it. Some are too tightly tied in with "pro-business" interests.

That means getting the fair tax on the ballot will require the support of some Republicans – particularly those from downstate.

"We've had a lot of facilities downstate that have closed or been threatened by closure," Council 31 regional director Eddie Caumiant said. "If we have a fair tax, we can help put the focus back on improving facilities and services instead of eliminating them."

PEOPLE delegates prepare for challenging election year

PEOPLE conferences are normally focused on candidate endorsements, with delegates from local unions and retiree subchapters across the state selecting candidates to back in upcoming races.

YET THE MOST CRUCIAL VOTE AT THIS YEAR'S CONFERENCE WASN'T ON ENDORSING SOMEONE – IT was on defeating Bruce Rauner, the Republican gubernatorial candidate who's made it clear that cutting the wages and benefits of AFSCME members is his top priority.

That vote – the last of the conference held Feb. 1 in Springfield – will largely define Council 31's political program this year, particularly if Rauner prevails in the March 18 primary.

"Bruce Rauner is determined to eliminate public employee unions in Illinois," Council 31 Deputy Director Roberta Lynch told more than 500 delegates at the conference. "What he hates about us is that we have grassroots people power. We don't have a lot of time to stop him, but we have the ability to do so."

Lynch noted that a Governor Rauner would be more than someone difficult to bargain with – he'd have no commitment to bargaining at all and would launch an assault on the foundations of public employee unions in Illinois.

"Bruce Rauner and his national counterparts the Koch brothers are out to destroy unions in this country," she said. "They want to have unbridled power to impose their will on working people – and to line their own pockets.

State Sen. Toi Hutchinson addresses PEOPLE conference delegates.

"Look at your union contract and realize it could be gone," she said. "It could completely disappear in just four years if Bruce Rauner becomes governor."

Conference delegates also adopted legislative priorities for the coming session, chief among them being the campaign to put a fair tax constitutional amendment on the November ballot (see facing page).

This year's conference, however, included fewer endorsements than normal – many legislators effectively made themselves ineligible for support from AFSCME after they voted for SB 1, the "pension theft" bill the union is now challenging in the courts.

Other races went without an endorsement because candidates were running unopposed. However, delegates did take the step of endorsing two candidates running unoppposed: Mike Frerichs, a Democrat running for state treasurer, and Republican Judy Baar Topinka, the incumbent state comptroller.

"Over the past year Mike and Judy did what too few politicians were willing to do – stand with public employees in the fight to defend our pensions," Council 31 Executive Director Henry Bayer said. "It's only appropriate that we announce our support for them early and enthusiastically."

Wishbone, jawbone and backbone

WHILE PUBLIC EMPLOYEES HAVE few people they can count on in the General Assembly, delegates were also reminded that working people, particularly those in unions, still have the power to effect real change.

Sen. Toi Hutchinson, a strong ally in the legislature, addressed the conference, noting that succeeding in the political arena required "a wishbone, a jawbone and a backbone," and that "AFSCME has those in spades."

"I know things are hard and it may seem that the work you and your membership are doing is under attack," she said. "But these things are cyclical. We are going to come out of this. We are never done as long as we are all standing next to each other."

AFSCME 2014 March Primary Recommendations

Constitutional Offices:
- Governor – No Recommendation
- Attorney General – No Recommendation
- Treasurer – **Mike Frerichs (D)**
- Comptroller – **Judy Baar Topinka (R)**

U.S. Congress
- CD04 – **Luis Gutierrez (D)** – Chicago
- CD13 – **Ann Callis (D)** – Southwestern Illinois

Illinois House of Representatives
- HD20 – **Mo Kahn (D)** – Park Ridge
- HD26 – **Jhatayn "Jay" Travis (D)** – Chicago
- HD39 – **Will Guzzardi (D)** – Chicago
- HD40 – **Nancy Schiavone (D)** – Chicago
- HD42 – **Adam Johnson (R)** – DuPage County
- HD79 – **Kate Cloonen (D)** – Kankakee
- HD96 – **Sue Scherer (D), Michael Bell (R)** – Springfield
- HD110 – **Kevin Garner (R)** – Southeastern Illinois

Illinois Appellate Court
- 1st District (Gordon Vacancy) – **Freddrenna M. Lyle (D)**

Cook County Board
- 1st District – **Richard Boykin (D)**
- 4th District – **Stanley Moore (D)**
- 5th District – **Deborah Sims (D)**
- 8th District – **Eddie Reyes (D)**

Champaign County Board
- 7th District – **C. Pius Weibel (D)**
- 9th District – **Shara Jo Harrison (D)**

Kankakee County Board
- 4th District – **Sam Payton (D)**

Knox County Board
- 2nd District – **Russell Nelson (D)**

Lake County Coroner
- **Jason Pratt (D)**

Rock Island County Board
- 5th District – **Paris Fotos (D)**

Will County Board
- 9th District – **Lauren Staley-Ferry (D)**

A MESSAGE THAT'S HARD TO IGNORE

In February, the campaign to improve wages for workers in community disability agencies delivered a message that will be impossible for Gov. Pat Quinn to ignore.

Outside his office, box after box piled up as direct support personnel (DSPs) – who care for people with developmental disabilities – delivered postcards urging the governor to include funding for improving DSP wages in his upcoming budget.

In all, more than 15,000 signed postcards were dropped off at Quinn's office, a tangible sign of the strong support that exists for paying direct support workers wages that would lift them out of poverty.

"They find money in the budget for all sorts of different things. I'm sure they can find money for this," said Tressa Wilson, a DSP at Milestone in Rockford, where employees recently voted to join AFSCME. "I have to work overtime to make ends meet. My 18-year-old daughter wants to go to college and I don't know how I'm going to afford that."

The Care Campaign – a coalition of employers, direct support workers, families of people with developmental disabilities, and advocacy groups – is urging Quinn to include money in his budget that would allow agencies to raise DSP wages by $1 an hour from the current average of $9.35 an hour.

Beyond that, the Care Campaign is also lobbying the General Assembly to adopt legislation that would raise those wages to $13 an hour, lifting all disability workers above the poverty line.

"Right now we're forced to compete with fast food restaurants on wages," said Kim Zoeller, President of the Ray Graham Association, a suburban Chicago provider. "We need the governor to raise our rates so that we can pass it along to our employees."

Agencies like Zoeller's receive nearly all of their funding directly from the state – and those funding levels have not increased since 2007.

Direct support personnel assist adults and children with developmental disabilities, aiding them in achieving greater independence. They also provide essential peace of mind to the families of these individuals.

"The employees here today are the backbone of the community medical care system," said Janet Stover, President of the Illinois Association of Rehabilitation Facilities. "They are the linchpin of person-centered support. Having a workforce that's at poverty level like this is an insult to the people they assist every day."

AFSCME members from Ray Graham, Milestone, from Easter Seals/United Cerebral Palsy of Will County, Arc of Rock Island and Springfield's Hope School were on hand to personally deliver postcards to Quinn, as well as take their message to the media.

Before postcards were delivered, a press conference at the state Capitol drew coverage from TV, radio, newspapers and online. The main message: Direct support providers are indispensable and deserve better.

In a Springfield Journal-Register editorial published only days after the event, the paper called DSP wages "shockingly low," noting that they lead to high turnover and added stress on workers who already have difficult jobs.

"The plight of Illinois' 31,000 direct support workers and the families they support — both at work and at their own homes — is too important to continue overlooking," the editorial noted. "They deserve a decent living wage."

The support for improving DSP wages also includes legislators who are backing bills (SB 2604/HB 3698) that would establish a $13/hr. minimum wage for DSPs over the next three years.

"When we put money into the pockets of low-wage workers, that money gets spent," said Rep. Gabel, lead sponsor of HB 3698. "The people here today work hard. Their job is not easy. They deserve to be paid more."

Perhaps no group appreciates the work of direct support personnel more than the families of people with developmental disabilities, who are able to go to their own jobs with the peace of mind that comes from knowing a qualified professional is helping a member of their family get through the day.

Charlotte Cronin said her son, Daniel, depends on direct support workers in more ways than one.

"For Daniel, they are his first responders, his EMTs and the glue that holds his life together," she said as she embraced Wilson. "We should be ashamed of the current situation. They deserve so much better."

The Care Campaign

Stateville CC overcrowding highlights need for reform

When the Quinn administration began its push to close correctional facilities like Tamms CC and Dwight CC, correctional employees warned that overcrowding in other facilities would result.

The administration dismissed those worries as overblown, but as a recent report out of Stateville Correctional Center near Joliet shows, employees' fears were more than justified.

In late December, the Associated Press exposed overcrowding at Stateville, reporting that "hundreds of newly convicted prisoners are sleeping in a gym, a health care unit, converted common spaces and 'staging areas' next to bus garages after they arrive from county jails."

Inmates who weren't in cells slept in open-top plastic shells with mattresses inside – units correctional officers referred to as "boats."

"At its worst, we would have close to 200 inmates in our bullpen, which is just ridiculous," James Porter, a correctional officer at Stateville, told On the Move. "It's not very safe."

Porter said prison administrators were constantly shuffling inmates in and out of various parts of the prison. Since Stateville serves as the main intake center for newly-convicted inmates, there's a steady flow of new prisoners into the facility. The problem was that there weren't an equal number being sent to other facilities to serve out their sentences.

"I think the closing of the other institutions caused this," Porter said. "By them closing, the guys we'd normally ship out on a regular basis, there wasn't enough space to ship them. They stuck them with us until room became available."

Ralph Portwood, president of Local 1866, which represents Stateville employees, told the AP that administrators were housing inmates in areas that were never meant to be used for housing.

"It's like a big garage," Portwood said. "There's no insulation. It wasn't built to house inmates with proper ventilation and light. There's one toilet, no shower, one drinking fountain."

A threat to safety

In settings like that, tensions can run high. Outside of the more controlled environment prisoners are normally housed in, it becomes more difficult to maintain safety and order.

Porter described one incident in which a fight between two inmates threated to spiral out of control.

"They were fighting in the cage and there's 40 guys in there," he said. "You're afraid to go in there because you don't know if it's a setup. It's not like going into the cell and there's two guys fighting. You have 30 other guys in there and all the other bullpens are watching this going on."

The AP's report sparked a dispute with the Department of Corrections over exactly how many inmates were in Illinois prisons. A follow-up report by The Huffington Post noted, "Illinois is still 15,344 over the amount of people it can comfortably and safely detain in prisons – a number that could swell as further cuts loom overhead."

Situation improved – temporarily

As for Stateville, the "boats" are now gone – coincidentally, they disappeared right around the time the AP's article appeared. But that doesn't mean inmates are all in proper housing units. Some are being housed in offices once reserved for medical staff or inside the prison's gymnasium – something that had been an effective way to reduce stress among the population.

"They've changed over a couple offices in the hospital to temporary living areas. They moved all the doctors' tables and chairs out," Porter said. "They have 100 guys sleeping in the gym. They took all the weights out and there's metal bunk beds in there now."

While the extreme overcrowding at Stateville may have been temporary, there's no reason to expect it won't happen again.

One ray of hope comes from a committee that includes IDOC administrators and Council 31 local union leaders working together to address problems facility-by-facility. The panel, established by the most recent collective bargaining agreement, is currently visiting prisons across the state, attempting to identify and remedy problems at individual facilities and across the corrections system as a whole.

Portwood, who serves on that committee, said he's hopeful it can prompt changes that will reduce the severity of overcrowding.

"This committee is going to have the chance to address some long-neglected issues," he said. "It's going to take a long time, but it's going to make the workplace safer."

Chicago pensions

Continued from page 5

Illinois union coalition that would have provided a fair solution to the funding crisis facing the SERS, TRS and SURS pension funds.

City employees and retirees united

"City employees and retirees live in, serve and anchor neighborhoods throughout Chicago," the We Are One Chicago coalition announced upon its launch. "They make enormous contributions to our city's economy, vibrancy and safety. They constitute Chicago's working and retired middle-class families. Residents rely on them in every community to educate our children, care for our most ill and protect our lives and property."

The coalition is making sure lawmakers know that city employees and retirees do not receive Social Security – their pension amounts to their life savings. It's also calling for the city to address its $29 billion pension fund shortfall by adding revenues instead of making cuts.

"The fiscal problems Chicago faces cannot be solved by slashing modest pensions. It will take a serious commitment of new revenue," the coalition announced. "It's wrong to punish public servants for the actions of irresponsible politicians and the big Wall Street bankers and CEOs who fueled the Great Recession."

The retirees who were at the Capitol made sure lawmakers heard that message directly.

"The politicians didn't pay their share while we earned our pension, we worked for it, we paid for it and it's our livelihood," Bates-Spencer said. "Now it's like they're throwing seniors to the wolves."

More to come?

City of Chicago pensions wouldn't be at such high risk today if the cuts to state and state university pensions had not already passed. Those cuts are now being challenged in state court. If the court allows them to stand, it is all too likely that cuts to other systems would follow.

Currently, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle is attempting to work with unions representing county workers on a fair, balanced pension reform plan. But if those talks don't produce a result, the county could seek to implement cuts by going to the General Assembly on its own.

Even the well-funded Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund is under attack – right-wing groups and their allies in the media are now attacking the "13th check" IMRF enrollees receive each year to compensate for the lack of a compounded cost-of-living adjustment.

"If you think your pension is safe, think again," Council 31 executive director Henry Bayer said. "This isn't just about state employees or City of Chicago employees. This is a coordinated assault on the retirement security of all public employees in Illinois. Every AFSCME member needs to be ready to stand up and fight."

SHORT REPORTS

Protesters rally against the Trans-Pacific Partnership. (PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ILLINOIS FAIR TRADE COALITION.)

Proposed trade agreement would further weaken middle class

DEMONSTRATING THE POWER BIG CORPORATIONS HAVE IN WASHINGTON, THE WHITE HOUSE AND MANY members of both parties in Congress are pushing to "fast track" the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a proposed trade agreement that would send good, middle class jobs out of the United States.

As proposed, the agreement would put American workers in direct competition with those from countries like Malaysia and Vietnam, where wages and benefits are far lower and safety and environmental regulations are nearly non-existent.

The proposal was negotiated largely in secret and now the Obama administration and some in Congress want to see it approved with little chance to change it. They want to give the White House "fast-track authority," which would allow the president to submit trade agreements to Congress and subject them to a quick up-or-down vote. Changes would not be allowed under the "fast-track" process.

That could be potentially disastrous for American workers, many of whom remember the exodus of good jobs and stagnation of wages that followed passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the 1990s.

Clinton administration Labor secretary Robert Reich – who has said he regrets not doing more to improve NAFTA – has called the TPP "NAFTA on steroids."

The TPP "is a high priority for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and its corporate patrons because it would strengthen patent and copyright protections abroad, and encourage American corporations to make even more stuff overseas and ship it here," Reich said in a post on Facebook. "Americans benefit from cheaper goods from abroad only if Americans have the money to buy them. But this massive deal would further erode the jobs and wages of working and middle-class Americans while delivering its biggest gains to corporate executives and shareholders."

A broad coalition of labor, environmental, consumer advocacy, global health and Internet freedom organizations are working to slow the march toward the TPP. Recently, they got some good news: Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nevada, announced his opposition to putting TPP on a fast track.

"I'm against fast track," Reid said. "Everyone would be well advised just to not push this right now."

Reid has been joined by House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., who recently announced her opposition to the legislation.

Reid's move effectively halts the TPP and other trade agreements for now, but with Republicans working hard to take control of the Senate in the 2014 elections, the threat is by no means over. Senate Minority Leader Mitch Mc Connell, R-Ky., who would become the Majority Leader if the Republicans regain control of the Senate, is an outspoken advocate of the Obama administration's proposal.

Hundreds of state employees see union rights stripped

AS A RESULT OF THE PASSAGE OF SB 1556 last January, the Quinn administration is now in the process of notifying hundreds of state employees that they no longer are entitled to union representation.

The new law gave the administration a virtual free hand to designate up to 1,900 union members to be removed from bargaining units of AFSCME and other unions representing state employees. It is based on greatly expanded definitions of what constitutes supervisory and managerial duties – and provides only the most narrow basis (and limited time frame) to appeal the designation.

Council 31 has provided employees who are potentially affected by the law with information on their appeal rights and is providing representation for many of them before the Illinois Public Employee Labor Relations Board which is the body that hears the appeals. However, the way the law is written means these appeals are an uphill battle – and a steep one at that.

To date, the Labor Board has affirmed the exclusion of 410 AFSCME-represented positions, 102 of which were vacant. Since January 9th, CMS has petitioned to exclude an additional 509 AFSCME-represented positions (380 filled; 129 vacant).

Employees targeted for removal from a bargaining unit will have special protections as a result of an agreement reached by Council 31 with the Quinn administration: Their salaries cannot be lowered upon being removed from the bargaining unit and some may also be able to move into vacant positions within the bargaining unit if they so desire.

Employees who are removed from the bargaining unit can still remain members of AFSCME, giving them the right to union representation under Civil Service and Personnel Rules, and on issues in the legislature and other forums.

Adult educators awarded pay for prep time

MEMBERS OF LOCAL 3506, which represents adult education instructors at the City Colleges of Chicago, have prevailed in a dispute over whether they were entitled to retroactive pay for time spent preparing for classes.

In March 2012, after nearly two years of negotiations, the union and management came to agreement on a new contract, which stipulated that instructors would receive one hour of pay at $8.25 an hour for every four hours of teaching time. This was a substantial improvement over the previous agreement, which saw prep time paid at $5.25 an hour and placed an annual cap on such compensation.

By the time the agreement had been reached, the instructors had been without a contract since July 2010 – the new agreement was retroactive to that date.

However, management claimed the provision relating to prep time pay was not retroactive, prompting a grievance from the union.

In a ruling on January 31 of this year, an independent arbitrator came down strongly on the side of the instructors. He noted that "the Union's evidence leaves no doubt, whatsoever, that at the bargaining session held on October 28, 2011… Union negotiators raised the matter of retroactivity with the Employer and from the Employer's response they unequivocally concluded that prep pay was agreed to be retroactive to the effective date of the new Agreement."

While management disputed the union's characterization of the Oct. 28, 2011 meeting, the arbitrator noted that the union's argument was backed up by notes taken on that day, while "the Employer's version is not backed up by anything in writing."

AFSCME members running for SERS board

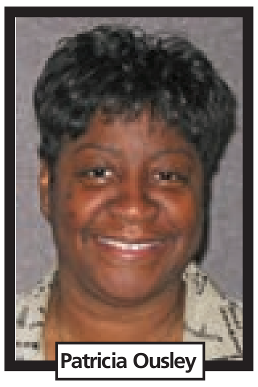
THREE ACTIVE AFSCME MEMBERS ARE running for positions on the Board of Trustees of the State Employees Retirement System (SERS), which oversees the pension fund covering state employees.

Two are incumbents seeking re-election: Dave Morris, Local 805 in Springfield, and Patricia Ousley, Local 1006 in Chicago. The third candidate is Cameron Watson, Local 3549, Jacksonville Correctional Center. He is running to replace Patricia Rensing of Local 943, who is stepping down from the board. All three candidates are members of the AFSCME Council 31 Executive Board.

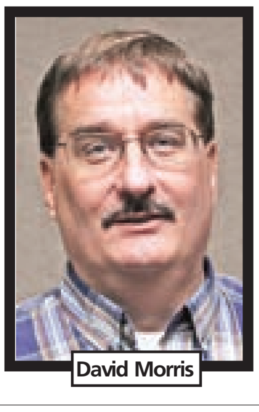
Four positions on the board are held by active state employees enrolled in the SERS system. Two other slots are held by retirees – AFSCME is backing Al Latoza for one of the retiree positions (see Retiree Notes, p. 14).

All active state employees enrolled in SERS will be eligible to vote for the new trustees. Ballots will go out on May 1 and must be returned by May 31.

For more information on the SERS candidates, check out the next issue of On the Move, which will come out in mid-April.


Patricia Ousley


Cameron Watson


David Morris

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

Better wages, lower insurance costs in Williamson County Assessor's Office

WAGES FOR MEMBERS OF LOCAL 3369 in the Williamson County Assessor's Office will increase by over 20 percent over the course of a new, five-year contract.

The new contract will also see the county pick up a large majority of dependent health care costs – a big shift from the previous agreement, Council 31 staff representative Kevan Plumlee said.

"Their insurance language used to say the county would pick up 100 percent of the employee health cost but the employee had to pick up 100 percent of their family," he said. "We renegotiated that so the employee pays $16 a month for their own coverage, but the county picks up 70 percent of family coverage."

The new agreement will also help cover the cost of professional certifications, said Chad Havens, the local's president.

"There's some more incentive for employees to get certification, so they'll get more education and better wages and the county gets better employees," he said. "The employer is going to have a better workforce based on having more schooling behind their assessors."

The bargaining team included Plumlee, Havens, Rose Maurizio and Lindsey Craven.

Gains at Clearbrook Center, but hopes for more state aid

LIKE MOST OTHER AGENCIES that provide direct support for people with developmental disabilities, Clearbrook Center in Arlington Heights has limited flexibility when it comes to raising wages of direct support providers – nearly all of its money comes from state grants that haven't increased since 2007.

Still, the agency and members of Local 2871 managed to agree last fall on a new three-year contract that will raise DSP wages by 2 percent each year.

That's a significant improvement over the past, said the local's president, John Demmert.

"The negotiations went really well considering the fact that the state hasn't given places like Clearbrook anything," he said. "In the past we had to give up holidays or personal days just so they could add that pay as a little bit of a raise. This time we didn't have to give anything up and they were able to give us a 2 percent raise each year."

The contract also allows for the creation of a "sick bank" so that employees who are not using their sick days can donate them to employees who have exhausted theirs.

Demmert said employees and management are both hoping the state will soon provide an increase in funding to community care agencies – that's the primary goal of the Care Campaign, which is strongly supported by AFSCME.

"Clearbrook did the best they could with what little they had," Demmert said. "If the Care Campaign goes through, that'll be an even bigger bonus for people."

The bargaining team was led by Council 31 staff representative Kathy Steichen and included Demmert, Tony Ortega, Ashley Brice, Karen Johnson, Sam Scholtens, Scott Corey, Prince Aletise and Robin Gruenfeld.

Tough talks yield gains in Glendale Heights

MEMBERS OF LOCAL 3768 IN Glendale Heights have a new, two-year contract that will see wages rise while keeping insurance costs in check.

That agreement didn't come easy though. Initially, management pushed hard for an agreement that would have left employees worse off.

"They didn't want to give us a raise and they wanted to raise our health insurance so much that people would be losing money," Local 3768 President Jackie Fonte said. "They originally wanted us to pay $200 a month for health insurance."

In the end, the local was able to keep the increase in health care costs to $5 while also securing a 2 percent increase in wages in each year of the agreement.

"They wanted to exclude certain categories from the wage increases, but we held off on that," Council 31 staff representative Richard Berg said. "They wanted to give a wage increase to some but not others. It was tough bargaining."

The bargaining team, led by Berg, included Fonte, Connie Sevcik, Sue Jacoby, Theresa Morton and Tom Hogan.

Mediation needed for Peoria Housing Authority

AFTER A YEAR AND A HALF OF bargaining, members of Local 3464 and the Peoria Housing Authority finally came to a three-year agreement, but only after a federal mediator intervened.

The final agreement includes little in terms of economic gains for employees, with pay freezes in the first two years and a 2.25 percent wage increase in the final year. However, the contract does contain some improvements in language related to subcontracting.

The prolonged fight means the local is already preparing to go back to the bargaining table for its next agreement. Local President Sherry Carter-Allen said having a contract to build on is better than having none at all.

"That was one of the worst contract battles that I've ever experienced," she said. "Is it a good contract? No. But the last thing we wanted to do was go back to the table without our own contract because we knew we wouldn't have a chance. Our director had tried to impose her own contract unilaterally before."

Council 31 staff representative Tim Lavelle led the bargaining team, which included Carter-Allen, Jimmey Garry, Dorean Stephens and Vernon Thomas.

Double-digit gains for Peoria County professionals

THE PEORIA COUNTY URBAN planners and engineers in Local 3473 are celebrating a new, five-year contract that puts them on par with similar employees in the region.

Getting there was no small feat, however – it required a contract that includes a 10 percent wage increase in its first year, followed by a 9.25 percent bump spread out over the following four years.

"They had done a comparability study that was three or four years old and in that study there was a difference in pay of 17 or 18 percent. When we brought that up, they were willing to go up to 10 percent," Council 31 staff representative Tim Lavelle said. "The county was willing to realize the professionals were underpaid and to compensate them."

Local 3473 President Andrew Braun said the agreement is good for the county, helping it retain highly-qualified employees.

"If you value your employees, you should make an effort to make us want to stay instead of getting our experience and going somewhere else," he said. "They realized that our positions have an added value. For instance, grant writers help secure dollars and generate funding."

The bargaining team, led by Lavelle, included Braun, Carl Bjerk and Josh Sender.

Good relationships lead to good contract in Macon County

MACON COUNTY EMPLOYEES WILL receive a 3 percent wage increase in each year of a new four-year contract ratified by Local 612 members last fall.

Negotiations with management were fast and without much controversy – relations between the union and the County Board have been positive for some time, Local 612 President Stacy O'Neill-Clark said.

"We work really well together," she said. "We try to get along and see that there's mutual respect. It works for us and for the county."

The new contract provides an extra boost for the county's animal control wardens whose salaries were significantly below those in nearby jurisdictions.

Under the new agreement, animal control wardens will have $3,000 added to their base pay and will then receive the same wage increases as other county employees. Starting salaries for wardens were also increased.

Along with Hooser and O'Neill-Clark, the bargaining committee included Craig Culp, Monica Probus, Laura Zuber and Merry Neff.

Wages improve at Orchard Village

EMPLOYEES AT ORCHARD VILLAGE, a Skokie-based provider of direct support for people with developmental disabilities, will see wages rise by 6 percent over the life of a new, three-year bargaining agreement.

Importantly, wage increases are somewhat front-loaded, with a 2.5 percent bump coming in the first year. The contract also includes a restoration of a 401(k) program.

Salaries are still low, however, and more significant improvements aren't likely until the state provides more grant money to Orchard Village and other community disability agencies, Council 31 staff representative Kathy Steichen said.

"They really need a rate increase to do something dramatically different," she said. "They need the increase because they're having trouble attracting people. These jobs are so undervalued, underpaid and underappreciated but they're so vital."

Local 3863 President Kelly Turnage said Orchard Village management have good intentions, but little flexibility.

"Overall, the negotiations went decently," she said. "But they can only do so much."

Joining Steichen and Turnage on the bargaining team were Clearolie Jones and Gwen Jackson.

Patience pays off in City of Canton

BEFORE BEGINNING TALKS ON A new contract, City of Canton employees knew the mayor at the time wasn't going to be a good negotiating partner – so they decided to wait.

That decision seems to have worked out. Talks with the current administration, which is friendlier toward labor, yielded a contract that will see wages rise by 11.25 percent over four years.

The new mayor, Jeffrey Fritz, didn't shy away from working with Local 1372, Council 31 staff representative Randy Lynch said.

"With Canton being a small town, they knew what he was like," Lynch said.

Along with wage increases, the contract includes extra vacation time for employees who have worked for the city for more than 20 years.

Many of the local's members are in the city's public works department. Local President Ron Robinson said the extra vacation time may come in handy for employees who have helped the city cope with extreme winter weather.

"This new administration was really easy to work with," Robinson said. "It was a night and day difference compared to the previous mayor. They kept in touch with us all the time."

The bargaining team, led by Lynch, included Robinson, Pam Smith, outgoing president Sam Swickard, Marshall Black, Jolena Trone and Rick Murphy.

Care Campaign spurs progress at Easter Seals Rehab Center

When members of Local 3237 at the Easter Seals Rehabilitation Center in Joliet headed into contract negotiations last year, they had big goals but modest expectations.

After all, direct support agencies like theirs were almost entirely dependent on state funding, which hadn't increased since 2007.

Still, the bargaining committee made its initial proposal. Then, to their surprise, management came back with a counteroffer that was even better.

"When we came in, we said we wanted to bring the starting rate to $9.25 an hour and we thought we were going to have an argument," Local 3237 President Yurvette Simmons said. "In the past management has told us they didn't have the money. But when we came back to the table, the director was ready to give us more than we had asked for."

Management, led by agency CEO Debbie Condotti, made a counteroffer that was beyond employees' expectations: a $10 an hour starting wage for new employees, along with a $1 an hour increase for all current employees. Wages would also go up another 50 cents an hour over the life of the agreement. Plus, Condotti proposed signing bonuses for employees based on seniority, as well as improved holiday pay – including triple time for major holidays.

"When she put it on the table like that, our mouths dropped and our hearts started racing," Simmons said. "I told her I could get that ratified in two days."

It turned out that Condotti had been swayed by the beginnings of the Care Campaign – the effort to win passage of legislation that would allocate funding so that direct support agencies could pay their employees wages that would lift them out of poverty. (For the latest on the Care Campaign, see pages 8-9.)

"I don't think she had ever really thought about the fact that they were paying wages below the poverty level. The Care Campaign helped her realize that," Council 31 staff representative Jeff Dexter said.

Paying better wages also makes the agency work better, Dexter added.

"They have trouble in that industry hiring," he said. "The agency knew it had to get some kind of decent entry rate to attract people and keep people."

High turnover rates are problematic for direct care providers, and not only because they have to spend time training new employees. People with developmental disabilities often develop strong attachments to their support providers, who in many ways become part of their family.

Unfortunately, chronically low wages – combined with long hours and demanding work – have created a revolving door that disrupts the continuity of care.

"There are a lot of single women here working multiple jobs and raising children," said Herbie Jean Shaw, the local's vice-president. "It's a

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The wealthy 1 percent: No criticism allowed

The wealthy elite have spent years attacking labor unions and any politician that dares to try restrict their unfettered ability to make big profits. Despite amassing untold amounts of wealth, they don't hesitate to agitate for keeping workers' wages low and their job rights few.

They oppose raising the minimum wage, extending unemployment benefits or ensuring safe working conditions.

Bruce Rauner, the frontrunner in the GOP gubernatorial primary, is already on the record saying he actually wants to reduce the minimum wage, literally taking money away from people already under the poverty line. This from a man whose reported personal income in 2012 was north of $50 million.

As in Rauner's case, the super-rich are only too ready to spend at least some small portion of their wealth to undercut their fellow Americans – whether it's a matter of influencing policy, like cutting the minimum wage, or trying to marginalize those with whom they disagree. Rauner, for instance, repeatedly calls union leaders "corrupt" without offering a shred of evidence to back up such a slanderous term.

Yet despite their willingness to slander others without regard for the truth, the wealthy 1 percent takes great umbrage if anyone dares to criticize them – even if every word said about them is true.

In January, billionaire venture capitalist Tom Perkins went so far as to actually compare criticism of the 1 percent to persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany.

"I would call attention to the parallels of fascist Nazi Germany to its war on its 'one percent,' namely its Jews, to the progressive war on the American one percent, namely the 'rich,'" Perkins wrote in a letter published by The Wall Street Journal.


Venture capitalist Tom Perkins compared criticism of the 1 percent to persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany. (Bloomberg.com screenshot)

Soon after Perkins' comments, another billionaire, real estate investor Sam Zell, complained that the 1 percent were "getting pummeled", asserting that they fully deserved whatever wealth they had amassed. Zell asserted that "the 1 percent work harder, the 1 percent are much bigger factors in all forms of our society."

Statements like these – and the reality of widening inequality in the United States – show that the wealthy elite appear to be ever more out of touch with the rest of society, even as they seek ever greater control over social and economic policy.

"Extreme inequality, it turns out, creates a class of people who are alarmingly detached from reality — and simultaneously gives these people great power," Nobel Prize-winning economist and New York Times columnist Paul Krugman wrote in response to Perkins' letter. "They're accustomed to being treated with deference, not just by the people they hire but by politicians who want their campaign contributions."

Money talks

With the 2014 elections nearing, the 1 percent's political operation is once again preparing to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to elect candidates who will carry out their agenda: attacking unions, weakening workers' rights, loosening financial, workplace safety and environmental regulations, and opening up more loopholes that will allow them – and the corporations they control – to hoard even more wealth.

Leading this charge are the usual suspects: Charles and David Koch, two of the richest men in America.

The Koch brothers recently held one of their regular political conferences at a posh resort in Palm Springs, Calif. The gatherings are highly secretive, but a list of donors was leaked to Mother Jones magazine, which reported that the list "illustrates the interwoven nature of the Koch brothers' corporate, political, and philanthropic activities." Among those gathered were "more than 40 donors courted by the Kochs

Continued on page 15

RETIREE NOTES

Anti-worker groups target IMRF retirees, calling inflation protection a "bonus"

SINCE 1992, RETIREES WHO PARticipate in the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund (IMRF) have received an additional pension check every year to account for inflation. Known as the "13th Check," this retirement benefit serves the same function as COLA increases in Social Security and other retirement systems.

In the wake of the unconstitutional "pension theft" bill enacted in December affecting state and university workers, right-wing anti-worker groups have now turned their fire on the pension benefits of municipal and county retirees. Reboot Illinois, a front group for anti-union money, has been shopping a story around Illinois news outlets that inflation protection amounts to "getting to win a little lottery jackpot every year."

The characterization of the 13th check as a "bonus" and as a drain from other local government resources was swiftly refuted by IMRF Executive Director Louis W. Kosiba:

"[These stories] implied the monies used were diverted from more important services the unit of government could provide, but dollars levied to fund retirement benefits can only be used for retirement benefits," Kosiba said. "So, when is a bonus not a bonus? When it is used to fight inflation as part of a comprehensive compensation package."

In the last few years misleading news stories about state retirement systems have become a popular way for anti-union groups to attempt to shift public opinion on pensions, and these groups often pay big to attract people with insider media contacts. Reboot Illinois, for instance, has hired Madeleine Doubek to be their Chief Operating Officer. Doubek was a senior editor with the Daily Herald, the first newspaper to run a story calling the IMRF benefit a "bonus". And who was the Daily Herald's primary source for that story? Doubek herself.

Emanuel targets City of Chicago pensions

CHICAGO MAYOR RAHM Emanuel has jumped on the pension-slashing bandwagon, stepping up pressure on the General Assembly to make cuts to the pension benefits of City of Chicago active and retired employees, as well as employees of the Chicago Public Schools.

Chicago retirees, like many other public sector retirees in Illinois, do not receive any Social Security benefits – so their city retirement benefits are all they have to rely on. Their economic security was already undercut last year when Mayor Emanuel altered City policy to make retirees pay much more toward the cost of their health care coverage.

Emanuel is working hard to turn public sentiment against public employees – blaming city pensions for decreases in school funding that resulted in the closure of 50 public schools last year. Yet in 2013 Emanuel pushed through a plan to build a $300 million basketball stadium for DePaul University – a private school.

A report released by the Chicago Teacher's Union also stated that enacting Emanuel's pension plan would harm retirees and negatively impact the city's economy to the tune of $270 million over five years.

The unions representing City of Chicago and CPS employees have come together to fight back. AFSCME, CTU, FOP, Firefighters, SEIU, INA and PBPA have formed We Are One Chicago which kicked off that effort with a rally and lobby day at the State Capitol on February 19 (see p. 5).

Sub-chapter president running for SERS board seat

A LEADER OF AFSCME RETIREES CHAPTER 31 IS RUNNING FOR A position on the Board of Trustees of the State Employees Retirement System (SERS).


Al Latoza

Al Latoza, president of Sub-Chapter 93 based out of the Marion/Carbondale area, is running to fill the seat left vacant by the passing of Virginia Yates, former Chapter 31 president.

Two positions on the board are held by retired state employees enrolled in the SERS system. Shirley Byrd, Executive Vice-President of AFSCME Chapter 31, currently holds the other retiree seat. Four other slots are held by current employees.

All retired state employees who are annuitants of SERS will be eligible to vote for the new trustee. Ballots will go out on May 1 and must be returned by May 31.

For more information on the SERS election, check out the next edition of Retiree Notes, which will come out in mid-April.

New health insurance plan for state and university retirees goes into effect

AS OF FEBRUARY 1, MANY STATE and university retirees have a new health insurance plan. Under the state's new Medicare Advantage program, retirees who are annuitants of either SERS or SURS and who are Medicare-eligible will now receive their Medicare and State Health Insurance benefits through a single insurance carrier.

Under the terms of AFSCME's Master Contract with the state, the new health care plans must be comparable in benefits, access, and cost to the previous plans. While Council 31 has determined the new plans meet these standards on paper, it will continue to monitor implementation to ensure that the terms of the contract are met and that retirees continue to get the level of health care benefits that they earned.

In order to ensure that the new health plans are comparable, any state and university retirees that find that they are paying more for health care or prescriptions should contact their sub-chapter president, or David Amerson, Council 31 retiree coordinator, at (217) 757-3314.

The transition to the new Medicare Advantage plans originally stems from the passage of SB 1313 by the General Assembly, which cancelled the state's promise to provide premium-free health care to retirees. Council 31 sued to overturn SB1313 on the grounds that it violated the state constitution's provision protecting retirement benefits. That case is still awaiting a decision from the Illinois Supreme Court.

Retiree wins award for letter criticizing pension cuts, state tax policy

AFSCME RETIREE BILL THOMAS has won the Golden Pen award given by the Southern Illinoisan, the largest newspaper in Southern Illinois, with the largest vote tally in the award's history. The Golden Pen award goes to the best letter to the editor, as voted by readers.

Thomas wrote that the budget problems of the state would better be fixed by tax reform rather than raiding pension benefits. Citing a study conducted by the bipartisan Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, the letter stated that Illinois' budgetary woes can be traced to inadequate revenue caused by an "antiquated tax system."

Thomas wrote that pension-cutting legislation "fails to address the problem that led to the pension systems being underfunded in the first place: poor tax policy." He went on to note that "For decades, lawmakers dealt with this structural deficit by diverting what they should have paid into the pension systems to instead subsidize the cost of service delivery."

"Gutting pension benefits may appease the bloodthirsty and give the appearance that legislators are 'making the tough decisions' but it will do nothing to fix the real problem," Thomas wrote.

Thomas worked at Southern Illinois University for 25 years. He is a resident of Carterville and a Trustee for AFSCME Retirees Sub-chapter 93, based in Marion.

Retirees Chapter 31 website to relaunch

AS ON THE MOVE WENT TO PRESS, THE FINISHING TOUCHES WERE BEING put on a revamp of the Retirees Chapter 31 website.

The new site, rebuilt from the ground up, will highlight retiree-related news items featured on the main Council 31 website. It will also make it easy for recent retirees to join Chapter 31 and provide quick access to a schedule of sub-chapter meetings.

"We gathered input from retirees to ensure we provided them with a one-stop shop for their needs online," Council 31 retiree coordinator Dave Amerson said.

The site's launch is scheduled for early March. When complete, it will be available at www.afscme31.org/retirees.

Campaign for pay justice continues

The General Assembly's spring session will see the most concerted effort yet to ensure that all state employees receive wages they should have earned under the previous union contract.

AFSCME IS FIGHTING FOR PAY JUSTICE IN TWO VENUES – THE LEGISLATURE AND THE COURTS.

The goal is to force the state to pay wages employees at five agencies should have received had it not been for Gov. Pat Quinn's decision to withhold scheduled pay increases in fiscal 2011 and 2012.

"Workers negotiated these wages, then they went out on the frontlines and earned them," said Council 31 Deputy Director Roberta Lynch. "It's about time they were paid, and we're not going to stop fighting until that happens."

When the current union contract went into effect, all covered state employees received salary adjustments in 2013 that brought their pay to where it would have been had the increases not been withheld. The administration also agreed that agencies could use leftover funds to pay back wages, which many did.

Unfortunately, five agencies – the departments of Human Services, Corrections, Juvenile Justice, Natural Resources and Public Health – did not have the necessary funding left to make employees whole. That's left the state owing over $112 million to these workers.

AFSCME has been fighting to have this money paid out since it was first withheld – first by taking the issue to an arbitrator who sided with the union. The state appealed that decision to a circuit court judge, who once again came down on the side of state employees. In that case, the judge ruled workers were owed the money. However, he also declined to order payment, instead ruling that the legislature would have to appropriate funds.

The state appealed that ruling as well, but the Quinn administration finally dropped its objection as part of the agreement on a new state contract. While the governor supported dropping the appeal, the decision ultimately fell to Attorney General Lisa Madigan, who disagreed, meaning the case is still before the courts.

Legislative push

THE LAWSUIT, HOWEVER, WOULD become moot if the General Assembly passed a supplemental bill appropriating money for the back wages.

Two bills introduced at AFSCME's behest, HB 3764 and SB 2603, would do just that. The Quinn administration backs the legislation and it appears majorities in both chambers do as well.

However, legislative leaders have not committed to act on the bills. That's where AFSCME grassroots lobbying comes in.

"Nothing is more important to advancing passage of this legislation than the direct involvement of union members across the state," Lynch said. "We need legislative champions who will put pressure on leadership to move this forward."

To help create that pressure, local unions are organizing legislative mass phone-calling, as well as actions at district offices to make sure that legislators get that message.

Court case moving, but slowly

AFTER THE ATTORNEY GENERAL declined to drop the state's appeal, progress on the case slowed as her office requested multiple extensions on filing its brief, which finally happened in December. AFSCME was set to file its reply as On the Move went to press.

"We are going to do more than argue against the state's position," Lynch said. "We're also going to argue the circuit court didn't go far enough. State employees – and the sanctity of their union contract – shouldn't have to wait on the legislature. The court should order the state to pay out back wages immediately."

After the union files its brief, the state will have 35 days to respond – and could ask for further extensions. After that, the union will have another 14 days to file a final rebuttal. Only after that will the court set a hearing date.

For members who want their back wages with due dispatch, the General Assembly is the best option.

"The legal system moves at a snail's pace," Lynch said. "We need to keep the pressure on our legislators so they know their constituents are hurting. This isn't just another unpaid bill. This is about the people they represent."

As part of the ongoing fight to restore back wages owed to state employees, AFSCME members have delivered "Collection Notices" to members of the General Assembly.

Pension lawsuit

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"No one thinks they'll be rich off a pension, but we do want a certain quality of life," said Stephen Mittons, a child protection investigator for DCFS. "There are over 600,000 of us impacted by this and to be representing them means a lot to me."

According to the complaint, Mittons stands to lose over $418,000 over 25 years upon his retirement. He said the lawsuit reenergized him after a disappointing end to the pension fight in the legislature.

"It let me know that we were in this for the long haul," he said. "Seeing how we come together and fight gave me a second wind."

Gary Ciaccio, a mental health technician at Shapiro Developmental Center, is on the cusp of retirement and stands to lose over $33,000 in benefits. He said he fears the precedent that would be set if the state could cut pensions.

"If they decide our contract and agreement on pensions is meaningless and the constitution isn't upheld, they could cut it even more if I retire," he said. "It's going to make people fearful of retiring."

Ellen Larrimore, a library specialist at Northeastern Illinois University, will, under the new law, see her benefits fall by over $17,000 upon retirement. She said her feelings represent those of her co-workers.

"It feels like theft," she said. "Our pensions are being stolen out from under us. We feel wronged. It's not our fault. The lawmakers chose not to fund the pensions and now we're paying for it."

Caryl Wadley-Foy worked for 32 years at Shapiro Developmental Center in Kankakee before retiring. Under the new law, her benefits would fall by over $92,000.

"I was a very active AFSCME person for my whole career, as a member and a leader," she said. "I had a big smile on my face when I was asked to be on this lawsuit. I felt that I was contributing. AFSCME is my hope. It always has been."

Easter Seals

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struggle for them."

"Our director said she didn't know how she would be able to fund this, but if that meant doing extra fundraising to get employees above poverty, that's what she'd do," Simmons said. "When we continued talking about the Care Campaign she said she was behind it 110 percent and she would be on the frontlines with us. I applaud her for stepping up to the table like that."

"There's a long road ahead," Simmons added. "We all have to stick together to make it happen and as long as we can stick together and show we're not backing down, I think we will succeed."

In the meantime, employees are celebrating their new contract – one that respects and appreciates the hard work they do.

"A lot of agencies haven't come to the table with anything – they've asked for deductions and takeaways," Simmons said. "It felt good as a worker to say to we have an employer that is willing to work with us."

1 percent

Continued from page 13

including hedge fund and private-equity billionaires, real estate tycoons, and executives of top corporations."

Prominent names on the list include John Schnatter, the founder of the Papa John's pizza chain who has railed against the Affordable Care Act, and Chicago-based hedge fund manager Ken Griffin, whose net worth is estimated at $4.4 billion.

The wealthy elite are trying to influence more than elections – they're also out to ensure that wages for the 99 percent remain low after decades of stagnation.

The New York Times recently reported on the Employment Policies Institute, which is leading the charge against an effort in Congress to lift the minimum wage to $10.10 an hour. The group's name and its glossy reports suggest it's a serious academic institution. In reality, the Times reported, the group "is run by a public relations firm that also represents the restaurant industry, as part of a tightly coordinated effort to defeat the minimum wage increase."

Preserving a piece of Chicago's labor history

Chicago already has a rich labor history. Now, a coalition of community leaders, labor historians and Democratic and Republican lawmakers are working together to protect a key part of it.

Today, the Pullman Historic District on Chicago's South Side is a 300-acre neighborhood where local residents live, shop and socialize. Earlier in its history, however, it was host to a number of pivotal moments in the history of the American labor movement.

The Pullman district was the first planned "company town" in the nation, established by George Pullman, who founded the railroad car manufacturing company then headquartered there. It was the site of a strike that was one of the first demonstrations of labor's national power. Later, it served as the birthplace for the first union led by African-Americans.

Now, the push is on to honor that legacy by making the area a national park.

In January, U.S. Sens. Richard Durbin (D) and Mark Kirk (R), and U.S. Rep. Robin Kelly (D), announced they were sponsoring federal legislation (S 1962) that would make the Pullman district part of the National Park System, advancing a goal long held by neighborhood residents, the Historic Pullman Foundation and the Illinois Labor History Society.

"By elevating Pullman to National Park status our bill will provide preservation and conservation opportunities for the site, increase tourism and facilitate job creation on Chicago's South Side," Durbin said. "It will also add an important historical site that truly represents America's cultural and ethnic diversity to the National Park Service's register."

The economic benefits of a National Park designation could be substantial, Kirk said.

"According to the National Parks Conservation Association, the Pullman National Historic Park could bring 300,000 visitors each year and create 356 new jobs, providing $40 million annually to our community," he said.

A COMPLICATED HISTORY

George Pullman saw the town as a "model community" shared by company executives and workers – all living the way he thought they should.

That arrogance would ultimately lead to strife. As the Chicago Sun-Times noted in an editorial supporting the National Park designation, "Mr. Pullman did not understand human nature. He learned the hard and bitter way that most folks prize personal freedom — to run for political office, join a union, buy a newspaper of their choosing, drink a beer in a bar, or paint a kitchen wall whatever color they like — over the conformist comforts of a rich man's paternalism."

In 1894, after Pullman tried to increase rents while slashing factory workers' wages, thousands walked off the job. The strike spawned a national boycott that brought the nation's railroads to halt.

Though the strike was put down after President Grover Cleveland ordered military intervention, it served as an early demonstration of the power of labor solidarity. The events also led directly to the establishment of Labor Day as a federal holiday.

Later, the Pullman company – which not only built cars, but operated them – saw the birth of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first African-American union recognized by the American Federation of Labor. The union, led by A. Phillip Randolph, would go on to play a key role in the Civil Rights Movement.

Paying respect to that past and helping the current neighborhood now and in the future are the main goals of the national park legislation.

"This bill is for future generations of Americans who will one day visit Pullman and learn about the vital role it played in our nation's labor history and civil rights history," Kelly said. "Pullman has an inspiring story to tell."

Larry Spivack, a Council 31 regional director who also serves as president of the Illinois Labor History Society, said designating the Pullman district as a National Park would not only aid the revitalization of Chicago's south side, but also create a tremendous educational opportunity.

"The Chicago area is the richest in the nation with respect to the rich diversity of race, immigration, and workers' struggles to win decent working conditions, and the relationship to the industries in which they worked," Spivack said. "In telling this story we can teach current and future generations how we became such a great city and such a great nation. With National Park status the Pullman community will be history's greatest teacher in an urban environment."