

# RETIREE NOTES



AFSCME Chapter 31 executive board member Don Todd speaks at a news conference on the bill to cap insulin prices in Illinois.

## Bill capping insulin cost passes

AFSCME JOINED THE ILLINOIS Alliance for Retired Americans, the American Diabetes Association, Citizen Action/Illinois, AARP and others in the Protect Our Care – Illinois Coalition to win the passage of Senate Bill 667, which caps the cost of insulin, in the fall veto session. Illinois is just the second state to do so.

“Like many of our members, I am among the 1.3 million Illinoisans living with diabetes, a dangerous but manageable disease,” said Don Todd, AFSCME Chapter 31 executive board member and president of the Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans. “It’s immoral for the drug companies to drive up the cost of insulin with no end in sight when it is so necessary and abundantly available.”

Currently, nearly a third of seniors in the U.S. have diabetes or pre-diabetes and are faced with massive hikes in the cost of some insulins. In fact, the cost of popular types of insulin has tripled over the last decade, increasing the price in some instances by as much as 800 percent. The new law will cap those costs at \$100 for a 30-day supply and require further study of prescription drug costs by the state Department of Insurance.

“The bill is a victory for the people in state-regulated health plans,” said Chapter 31 Retiree Coordinator Maria Britton-Sipe.

While the cap won’t apply to plans offered by large employers governed by the federal Employee Retirement

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Income Security Act, it’s estimated to affect approximately 20 percent, or 260,000, of Illinois’ 1.3 million insulin users.

“Thanks to countless grassroots advocates and the brave individuals who stepped up and shared their testimonies, the Illinois General Assembly sent a clear message that our state will no longer allow pharmaceutical companies to take advantage of Illinoisans living with diabetes by charging exorbitant prices for lifesaving insulin medication,” said the bill’s chief architect, Senator Andy Manar.

The passage of SB 667

proves that grassroots action can overcome opposition from big pharma and insurance companies. The Protect our Care – Illinois Coalition will continue efforts to make other widely used prescription medicines more affordable.

## SERS addresses back-pay backlog

OVER THE COURSE OF EIGHT years, AFSCME waged and ultimately won an intensive battle to ensure that every state employee received the back pay

they were owed, either for a pay increase withheld by former Governor Pat Quinn or step and longevity increases withheld by Bruce Rauner.

But the work wasn’t over.

SERS participants who retired from the state after 2011 and were owed back pay for wages, steps, or longevity received the money they were owed. But then they were told that the adjustment to their retirement benefits incorporating those increases might take up to three years to process.

“That was simply unacceptable,” said Chapter 31 President Larry Brown. “So AFSCME pressed SERS to take action to ensure pensions are adjusted in a timely manner.”

Last month, Chapter 31 sent a letter to SERS, communicating that retired members shouldn’t have to wait years to receive the pension benefits they earned. In addition, the union contacted those SERS trustees who are AFSCME members and requested that they too express their concerns about the lengthy delays.

In response to AFSCME’s advocacy, at its October 29 meeting the SERS Board approved the hiring of additional full-time staff, as well as an increase in overtime and temporary support employees, in order to aggressively manage the backlog of benefit adjustments.

These measures are anticipated to significantly reduce the estimated time needed to make the necessary adjustments to pension benefits based on back pay received.

“AFSCME Chapter 31 was established to protect the benefits that retirees have earned and to improve the quality of our retirement years,” Brown said. “Our progress in reducing the time for pension benefit adjustments clearly demonstrates the reach we have as organized public sector retirees.”

## Season of giving

THE 35 SUB-CHAPTERS OF AFSCME Retiree Chapter 31 generously donate to charities in their communities, including food banks, humane societies, homeless shelters, veterans’ programs and more.

“We know that today’s real average wage, after accounting for inflation, has about the same purchasing power it did 40 years ago,” said Barb Franklin, president of Sub-chapter 88 in the Champaign area. “Many of us with good benefits want to do our part to help those who need it, especially during this time of year.”

Sub-chapter 68 in DuPage County voted to support three homeless shelters and the Honor Flights for veterans this year, according to president Kim Johnson.

“During the holidays, countless people are facing struggles, be they financial, physical or emotional,” she said. “Any way we can assist in helping them cope brings us closer to achieving the true sense of community.”



## Staying active and informed

AFSCME Sub-chapter 87 retirees met with Senator Andy Manar in Decatur on December 9. They talked about the importance of passing the Fair Tax in November and continuing to lower skyrocketing prescription drug costs.