

ON THE

MOVE



Public works employees put safety first

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

We've seen this playbook before

And we defeated it



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

AS WE LOOK BACK TO THE BATTLES OF A DECADE AGO HERE IN ILLINOIS, ONE THING IS VERY CLEAR: WE WON!

Amidst all the tumult of recent weeks regarding the inauguration of a new president of the United States, I realized that this month was also the 10th anniversary of another inauguration—the installation of Bruce Rauner as governor of Illinois. And I couldn't help but fasten on the similarities of these two transitional moments.

Like Donald Trump, Bruce Rauner ran as a disrupter—and came into office promising to shake up Springfield, just as Trump is setting out to disrupt Washington, D.C. Trump, of course, has vastly more resources at his disposal to carry out his agenda, but Rauner was no less single-minded in his assault on government.

Like Rauner, Trump has a fierce dislike—maybe even hatred—of government workers and an intense determination to nullify the union rights and civil service standards that provide them with a measure of protection from the winds of political change and the whims of the politicians.

Bruce Rauner arrived in Springfield convinced that as a super-wealthy, uber-elite private sector moneymaker, he knew more than anybody currently working for state government and that his brilliant organizational insights would enable him to quickly transform its mission and operations.

Just as we see with Donald Trump today, Rauner's first priority was stirring up animosity toward public workers and their unions. That hostility was not just limited to state government. Many people forget that one of his first campaigns was an effort to enact so-called "right-to-work" ordinances in units of local government all across Illinois that would function to drive unions out of cities and counties. The labor movement mobilized big time and blocked those efforts at every turn.

So Rauner, in collaboration with his allies at the Illinois Policy Institute (IPI), then turned all of his venom on state workers, seeking to portray them as overpaid and unproductive. He stalled contract negotiations,

blocking pay raises and withholding step increases, and eventually tried to force a strike that would close down all of state government.

Lacking even a vague vision of what streamlining state operations would actually look like, Rauner soon foundered, unable to demonstrate even minimal progress that actually improved the lives of Illinois citizens. In desperation, he actually brought the IPI operatives into leading positions in state government. And, guess what? After all their years of attacking government, they couldn't figure out a single thing to do to make it better—leading Rauner to get rid of most of them in a matter of months.

At the same time, he refused to participate in the budgeting process unless the state legislature acted to repeal union rights for public employees altogether—leaving the state adrift and thousands of those who depended on state funds frightened and confused.

The words are a little different but the policies coming out of D.C. today—fast and furious—are alarmingly similar. Trump too has turned his governmental streamlining operations over to outsiders—in this case, to the ultra-right-wing billionaire, Elon Musk. Yes, the same Elon Musk who said striking autoworkers should be fired and who fired his own employees by the thousands.

Meanwhile, Trump put another man in charge of the inner operations of the federal government. After denying any familiarity with the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 report issued last year, Trump has now appointed one of the document's chief authors, Russell Vought, as the head of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

Vought's animus toward government and government workers may be even more extreme than Musk's—and unlike Musk he is not likely to easily get distracted by the opportunity to put a man on Mars (yes, in Musk-world, it will certainly be a man).


It would appear that Vought views his mission as fomenting actual hatred of public employees, recently saying: "When they wake up in the morning, we want them to not go to work because they are increasingly viewed as villains."

Public workers as the "villains" of our time?

As we look back to the battles of a decade ago here in Illinois, one thing is very clear: We won!

Rauner never succeeded in his goal of permanently deconstructing state government. He never succeeded in convincing the state legislature—or most Illinois citizens—that state employees were the enemies of the people. And, of course, he never succeeded in getting re-elected.

He was effectively blocked at every turn because AFSCME members, as well as our allies in other unions, refused to stand down or back down. Because we remained steadfast and determined to continue to do our jobs serving the people of this state to the best of our abilities. Because we reminded our fellow citizens of the vital importance of the services we provide. And because we stood firm in unity and solidarity at the bargaining table, at marches and rallies, and—of course—at the ballot box.

The lesson for today? We know that an injury to one is an injury to all. We know that when federal government workers are attacked and belittled, that is an attack on all of us—every government worker everywhere. We know that if the basic rights of public sector workers can be taken away if they don't conform to the ideology of the current officeholder, then none of us can count on keeping our jobs for very long. And, most importantly, we know that we can win. Bruce Rauner is long gone and we're still here. If we remain united and determined to resist, we'll still be standing strong four years from now. 



ON THE MOVE

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Keeping up the fight to fix Tier 2

A FSCME and our allies in the We Are One Illinois coalition are vowing to carry the fight for pension fairness forward into the spring legislative session, but it's going to take the involvement of every AFSCME member to get it over the finish line.

Over the past year, union members built a powerful movement dedicated to ending the unfair pension system in which public employees hired after Jan. 1, 2011 must work longer for a lesser "Tier 2" benefit than "Tier 1" employees hired before that date. Members have educated lawmakers, lobbied, mobilized, strategized, and stood together for dignity and security in retirement.

They packed eight town hall meetings from one end of the state to the other. On Nov. 13, they came to the State Capitol, some 3,000 strong, and held one of the largest rallies the Capitol rotunda had ever seen.

Coalition members sent tens of thousands of emails to legislators over the course of a few weeks. On Jan. 6, public employees shut down some legislators' phone lines as the coalition generated some 6,000 calls in a day.

But more work remains to be done to truly address the Tier 2 crisis this spring.

Lawmakers must see urgency of problem

Every day that lawmakers refuse to address the Tier 2 pension problem, it gets worse.

"Tier 1 employees are already retiring," said Chris Besant, a mental health technician at Shapiro Developmental Center and a member of AFSCME Local 29. "With such a massive gap in benefits between Tier 1 and Tier 2, we're already seeing retention of new employees suffer."

Tier 2 requires employees to contribute the same amount from every paycheck toward their pension but to work longer than their Tier 1 coworkers before they can collect their benefits. When they do retire, the benefit they receive isn't enough to ensure security and dignity.

The disparity is worsening the already brutal staffing crisis in vital public service jobs. Tier 2's inadequacy has made it harder to attract good candidates to careers in public service.

"Fixing Tier 2 is not just a matter of fairness; it's a necessity for ensuring the future of public service," said Rachel Overstreet, a social caseworker in Cook County and a member of AFSCME Local 3696. "The current system leaves hard-working individuals paying into a retirement plan that provides fewer benefits and less security."



Public employees pack the room at the Tier 2 Town Hall meeting in Springfield.

That's why Sen. Robert Martwick introduced the Fair Retirement and Recruitment Act, a union-backed bill that would make numerous improvements to Tier 2, including bringing the final average salary calculation back in line with Tier 1, implementing a 3% across-the-board cost-of-living increase, aligning the Tier 2 retirement age with Tier 1, and more.

When the coalition pushed for a vote on the legislation in January, some legislators agreed that the Tier 2 system desperately needed fixing. But far too many others insisted the bill was too costly and wouldn't commit to support it.

On Jan. 22, the Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability (COGFA) released a new report claiming the Fair

Retirement and Recruitment Act would add billions of dollars to the state's already hefty pension debt.

Grassroots involvement is key

The headwinds against pension improvements are strong, but they can be overcome if every public employee steps up to demand change.

The grassroots efforts of AFSCME members will be key in this fight moving forward. The AFSCME legislative team will be hard at work all session building support for the bill, but they can't do it alone. They need AFSCME members everywhere to rise up and demand their lawmakers pass the bill.

"Lawmakers need to feel pressure from their constituents.

They need to see that Tier 2 is a real problem in the communities they represent, and they need to know their constituents are demanding change," said Joanna Webb-Gauvin, Council 31's legislative director.

Sen. Martwick has already committed to reintroduce the Fair Retirement and Recruitment Act in the upcoming spring legislative session, but it's become clear that in order for lawmakers to pass a bill to fix Tier 2, it will need to be accompanied by additional revenue for the state—something AFSCME and our allies stand ready to advocate for.

"This fight is about more than retirement; it's about the quality of life we can expect after years of service and the legacy we leave for future generations," Overstreet said. 🐦



Some 3,000 public employees rally in the Capitol rotunda on Nov. 13 to demand pension fairness.

New administration, new threats

Upon taking the oath of office on Jan. 20, President Trump wasted no time in signing a number of executive orders threatening working people and steering the federal government to accomplish the agenda of his billionaire supporters.

The most alarming of the new administration's actions was a memo issued by the Office of Management and Budget on Jan. 27 to all federal agencies to "temporarily pause all activities related to obligation or disbursement of federal financial assistance."

Together, the funds withheld total more than \$1 trillion, and represent critical funding for state and local governments, universities, Head Start programs, hospitals, nonprofits and so much more. Much of the funding, either directly or indirectly, funds employers for whom AFSCME members work.

The administration's move to cut off funding was ripped straight from the Project 2025 playbook. The new director for the Office of Management and Budget, Russell Vought, was one of Project 2025's lead authors.

On the morning of Jan. 28, Gov. J.B. Pritzker announced the state could no longer access the federal Medicaid portal it uses to receive reimbursements for health care provided under the program. These reimbursements are the primary funding source for many institutions where AFSCME members work.

In calling on the administration to reverse course, AFSCME International

President Lee Saunders said that the withholding of funds "will hurt families, seniors and people with disabilities who depend on Medicaid for health care; new mothers and newborns who need nutrition assistance; kids who receive education through Head Start; people who rely on housing assistance to keep a roof over their heads, and so many others."

Council 31 Director of Research and Employee Benefits Martha Merrill said that these funding cuts, even if temporary, could have put serious strains on the state budget.

"Even the short-term economic impacts of these cuts could be severe," Merrill said.

As *On the Move* goes to print, a federal judge has ordered the administration to reinstate funding.

Targeting federal employees and public services

Trump has signed nearly 50 executive orders, including the implementation of Schedule F, which makes it easier for the president to fire thousands of federal civil service workers and replace them with political appointees. This order directly



targets federal employees, who possess years of experience specific to their roles and show up to work each day hoping to provide important services to the country.

Unions (AFSCME among them) representing federal employees are educating members about their rights in these unprecedented circumstances and some have already taken legal action to try to prevent the mass firings that Trump seems to be planning.

In a further attempt to gut the federal workforce, on Jan. 28 the Trump administration offered buyouts to 2 million federal employees.

Another order signed by Trump establishes the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), an effort spearheaded by billionaire Elon Musk as he attempts to

cut \$2 trillion from the federal budget.

If DOGE were to cut that much spending, it would mean thousands of workers would be fired, important programs like Social Security, Medicaid and Medicare would be drastically cut, and important funding for state governments would be eliminated. Illinois receives about \$4 billion annually in such funds, so cuts would be devastating, especially as the state is already projecting a \$3 billion shortfall in next year's budget.

ICE raids raise concerns regarding access to worksites

In addition to the flurry of executive orders, Trump began expanding raids by

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) as his administration seeks to ramp up the deportation of undocumented immigrants.

Chicago was one of the first locations targeted in these raids, with dozens of arrests made in the city in the first week of Trump's presidency. Council 31 is pushing all governmental entities where AFSCME members work to establish guidelines for employees in the event ICE comes to their workplaces.

Given conflicting laws and regulations that are sowing confusion across the country, AFSCME is pressing management to make sure no member is put in a position to lose their job if ICE comes to their workplace.



ON THE MOVE

will be printed quarterly beginning with the Spring 2025 issue. We know that an increasing number of our members prefer to receive union communications digitally, but there are still many loyal readers who wish to keep receiving the print newspaper.

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- Take action!

Forecast: \$3 billion shortfall in FY26 state budget

State must find new revenue sources

Illinois could face a \$3 billion shortfall in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget due to slowing revenue and expected increases in ongoing expenditures, according to forecasts issued by the Governor's Office of Management and Budget (GOMB) and the Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability (COGFA).

The main cause of the potential deficit is the flattening of incoming revenue, while expenditures are expected to maintain an upward trend. In response to the forecasts, the Pritzker administration

recently updated its guidance to agencies, requesting each review its FY26 budget submissions to identify potential cuts and efficiencies in order to help close the gap.

While the forecasts are troubling on their own, the potential financial situation may be made all the worse by the incoming Trump administration. Both forecasts were released before the November presidential election and thus do not account for any potential cuts to the streams of federal funding that come to Illinois.

These cuts may include funding for Medicaid, federal disaster response, and education, among other federal programs eyed for cuts by Trump's administration. Should the new administration move ahead with these cuts, the costs would be


shifted to Illinois and affect the 2026 budget as well.

The Pritzker administration's response to the potential shortfall is worrisome. The governor has indicated that his administration will not actively advocate for any new tax or revenue streams.

It's thus up to AFSCME and our allies to gather support and momentum needed to pass legislation that increases revenue and avoids any potential shortfalls. This legislation may include changes to both the income and sales tax structures — including possible changes to sales taxes to include services.

The solution to any shortfall cannot be balancing the budget on the backs of the state's workers or the services that Illinois provides to its residents.

AFSCME has made it clear that layoffs, furloughs and service cuts are unacceptable, and that revenue is the only solution that will lead to lasting financial stability.

As in every budget process, the AFSCME legislative team will be a steadfast presence in the legislature's budget-making process and will press lawmakers on the need to raise additional revenue to avoid slashing public services. 

We care, we count: DSPs set to fight for another wage increase

Campaign has increased wages 78% since 2017—but more must be done

AFSCME members who care for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities in community settings are preparing to once again take their fight for fair pay to Springfield this spring.

During the campaign, direct support professionals (DSPs) organize and lobby lawmakers, making the case for why their work is important and why they deserve to be paid fairly for it.

In Illinois, more than 27,000 people with intellectual or developmental disabilities live in community residences and rely on DSPs to assist them with daily tasks, ranging from personal hygiene care to teaching essential life skills.

The agencies DSPs work for are almost entirely dependent on state funding, meaning that employee wages are tied to the amount of money the state legislature appropriates to those agencies.

Historically, Illinois was ranked near the bottom of states for spending on developmental disability services, but every year AFSCME pushes to increase funding for community disability services in the legislature. Over the


past eight years, Illinois has increased funding for direct care staff wages by 78%, from \$11.46 an hour in 2017 to \$20.50 an hour in 2025.

Last year, AFSCME advocated for a \$3 an hour increase for frontline personnel to meet the Guidehouse study recommendations commissioned by the state in 2018. In the end, the budget included a \$1 hourly increase—not as high as it should be, but AFSCME secured legislative language ensuring that at least 75% of that funding should go toward DSP base wages.

"We've worked hard to get to a place where our wages are enough to take care of our families," said Yurvette Simmons, a DSP at UCP-Center for Disability Services in Joliet and the president of AFSCME Local 3237.

With a projected \$3 billion shortfall in the state budget for the coming year, intensive grassroots lobbying efforts will be key to securing any wage increase.

AFSCME is planning meetings with legislators in their districts and a DSP Lobby Day at the State Capitol on April 30, where DSPs will meet face-to-face with their lawmakers to educate them on why the state must increase funding for their wages.

"DSPs are necessary to this state," Simmons said. "We're just asking lawmakers to value us as such." 



AFSCME DSPs will head back to Springfield this spring to lobby lawmakers for another wage increase.

Challenges loom in spring legislative session

At the State Capitol, the new legislative session brings a raft of tough challenges and looming threats. Chief among the challenges will be ensuring passage of an FY 26 budget that does not cut jobs or services, despite a large projected deficit (see p. 5).

The deficit will have a chilling effect on other legislation, too. “Any proposal that will cost money will make legislators very nervous—even if it doesn’t have a direct cost, but there’s a perception that it could,” AFSCME Council 31 Legislative Director Joanna Webb-Gauvin said.

That unease will be one of the key obstacles to overcome in the ongoing battle to improve Tier 2 pension benefits (see p. 3), despite the fact that the pension systems have already stated that there will not be any immediate financial impact from the We Are One Illinois pension legislation.

One of the biggest unknowns going into the legislative session is the new Trump administration’s avowed goal of slashing federal government spending. Federal funds are key to many aspects of state operations, such as DHS centers for

individuals with developmental disabilities.

Key players in the new administration are also eager to privatize current government programs—which could threaten thousands of state and local government jobs here in Illinois. AFSCME will be working with concerned legislators—both in the U.S. Congress and in the State Capitol—to block such privatization schemes.

These potentially tough times make the role of AFSCME members especially important when it comes to making sure state senators and representatives hear from us, by participating in lobby days, rallies, making phone calls and sending emails.

University employees can help to build support for a new bill to **set a minimum wage for non-instructional employees at state universities**. They do essential jobs—cleaning and



maintaining buildings and grounds, preparing and serving food, performing clerical work that supports faculty and students, and more—but make 21% less than comparable jobs in state agencies.

A wage floor would improve living standards for the lowest-paid workers, allow universities to better attract and retain employees, and raise pay for all.

The union will also push again for a bill making clear that universities can negotiate employee rights and protections greater than those

provided by the State University Civil Service System.

For employees of cities, counties and other local governmental bodies, AFSCME will urge a **greater share of income tax revenue to flow through the Local Government Distributive Fund** (LGDF), an important revenue source that supports jobs, pay and benefits while easing pressure on local sales and property taxes.

AFSCME Retirees Chapter 31 will keep working for the creation of a **Prescription Drug Affordability Board**

with the power to review and reduce the cost of commonly used pharmaceuticals.

And Council 31 will push again for passage of **Illinois Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act** legislation, this time in the form of two bills: One providing that if an employer engages in bad-faith bargaining, a contract can be settled by interest arbitration, and another to create financial remedies for unfair labor practices where traditional remedies can’t fully right the wrong. 🐦

Task force tackles AI

These days, AI seems to be everywhere—at the top of every Google search, talked about in TV commercials and integrated into the latest iPhone. But what is AI, and how will it affect our lives and work over the coming months and years?

Those questions were recently tackled by the Generative AI and Natural Language Processing Task Force, a bipartisan group convened by the state of Illinois to “investigate the opportunities and challenges” associated with artificial intelligence.

In December 2024, the task force delivered its findings in a report, laying out the scope of the challenges and opportunities presented by the adoption of generative AI technology,

which is expected to grow into a \$1.3 trillion industry by 2032, per *Bloomberg*.

Big business is optimistic about AI, but it’s clear that the corporations pushing for its widespread adoption see it as a tool to accomplish one of their major goals: reducing the size of their workforces.

AFSCME Council 31 Regional Director Dave Beck served as one of labor’s voices on the task force, encouraging a

cautious approach to any implementation of AI.

“As with other technologies, union members must remain vigilant regarding the implementation of artificial intelligence in the workplace to ensure that it is used only in a manner to enhance our work and improve job quality,” Beck said. “AI should never be used to replace public service employees, or to surveil or exert control over their daily work lives.”

Worryingly, many state and local governments across the nation have already started testing the waters with AI. Some states, including Illinois, have begun using AI to analyze data, manage caseloads and more.

Last year, the creative fields were one of the first major battlegrounds where unions stood up to the bosses

“Union members must remain vigilant regarding the implementation of AI in the workplace.”

on the AI issue, with the Writers Guild of America and the Screen Actors Guild each embarking on months-long strikes that placed restrictions over AI usage at the center of their demands.

Those strikes were successful. Writers received protections against studios creating scripts with AI programs,

and actors won language that guarantees that—in the event a studio uses digital replicas in productions—actors are paid at the rate they would otherwise earn if they performed the work in person.

Other union wins around AI include the creation of a tech-labor partnership between Microsoft and the AFL-CIO that seeks to ensure that worker perspectives are included in the development and usage of AI at the company, and includes a neutrality guarantee should workers decide to form a union.

For state employees, Council 31’s legislative team and departmental liaisons are on guard against the promotion of AI to do work currently performed by union members. 🐦

IDOC completes first phase of mail-scanning rollout

Digital mail-scanning systems are making their way to the Illinois Department of Corrections facilities at last.

For more than two years, AFSCME has been pushing management to address the problem of drugs being smuggled into correctional facilities through the mail. In early 2024, the AFSCME IDOC Standing Committee reached an agreement with the department to transition to a system in which all mail is digitally scanned and displayed on tablets distributed to incarcerated individuals.

Despite opposition from inmate advocacy groups, the mail-scanning process has finally begun to move

forward. IDOC contracted with a new vendor, ICSolutions, to upgrade infrastructure that will allow for mail to be scanned.

The first step in the process involved shifting the phone system from the old vendor to ICSolutions and required swapping out all of the phones in each facility. This work began on Dec. 9 and was completed on Dec. 20.

Per the department, management expects the next steps in the process to continue through the spring and expects the rollout of tablets

to incarcerated individuals to conclude by June 2025.

“We’re keeping the pressure on to get this transition done as quickly as possible,” said Council 31 Labor Relations Specialist Chuck Stout. “Every day counts.”

In September, AFSCME Council 31 released *The Growing Plague of Drugs in Illinois Prisons*, an analysis of the dramatic increase in drug use among the prison population in Illinois.

One recommendation AFSCME outlined in the report was to digitally scan all incoming mail, as the mail—including legal mail—has become the primary method in which drugs enter the facilities.

One major problem is the explosion in the abuse of synthetic drugs and wasp



A member of AFSCME Local 494 holds a “Scan the Mail” sign during the Safety Matters pickets on Oct. 17.

spray, such as Raid, which can be sprayed onto a piece of paper disguised as legal mail. Offenders then smoke

the paper, putting staff at risk when they encounter the secondhand smoke in cells and galleries. 🐝

Southern Region Training Academy already making a difference in IDOC

The Illinois Department of Corrections has entered into an agreement with John A. Logan College in Carterville to make the college its Southern Region Training Academy, which will accommodate an additional 100 trainees per cadet class.

The idea for establishing regional training academies came out of the AFSCME-IDOC Standing Committee and the Joint Committee on Recruitment, Hiring and Retention. Those committees pressed IDOC to make it easier for cadets to enter the academy by establishing regional training sites closer to where recruits live.

Another location has been identified in Morris, which will serve as the training pipeline for northern Illinois prisons, and is expected to be operational soon.

Understaffing is one of the biggest problems confronting AFSCME members in IDOC. The department says it wants to hire more staff but has difficulty

recruiting new hires; among the barriers to recruiting enough cadets is the time away from home the academy requires.

Cadets entering the academy in Decatur often must travel great distances, meaning that they need to stay overnight for six weeks. For some, that means being away from family responsibilities. In a lot of cases, that’s a dealbreaker.

Adding a southern training site is already making a difference.

Rick Hepp, the president of AFSCME Local 1175 at Menard Correctional Center, said one cadet bound for the Decatur facility had to drop out after his wife was diagnosed with a serious health issue. He

couldn’t risk being away from her for six weeks.

Instead, the union was able to secure him a place at the new Southern Region Training Academy in Carterville, meaning he can commute to the academy every day and still be home every

night to care for his wife.

“I believe you’re going to see more and easier recruitment now that they have options and they can go home every day,” Hepp said. “It’s closer for a lot of them. It’s got ‘plus’ all over it.”

Over the years, Hepp said he’s seen many cadets drop out of the academy due to the strain from being away for six weeks puts on their home life and relationships.

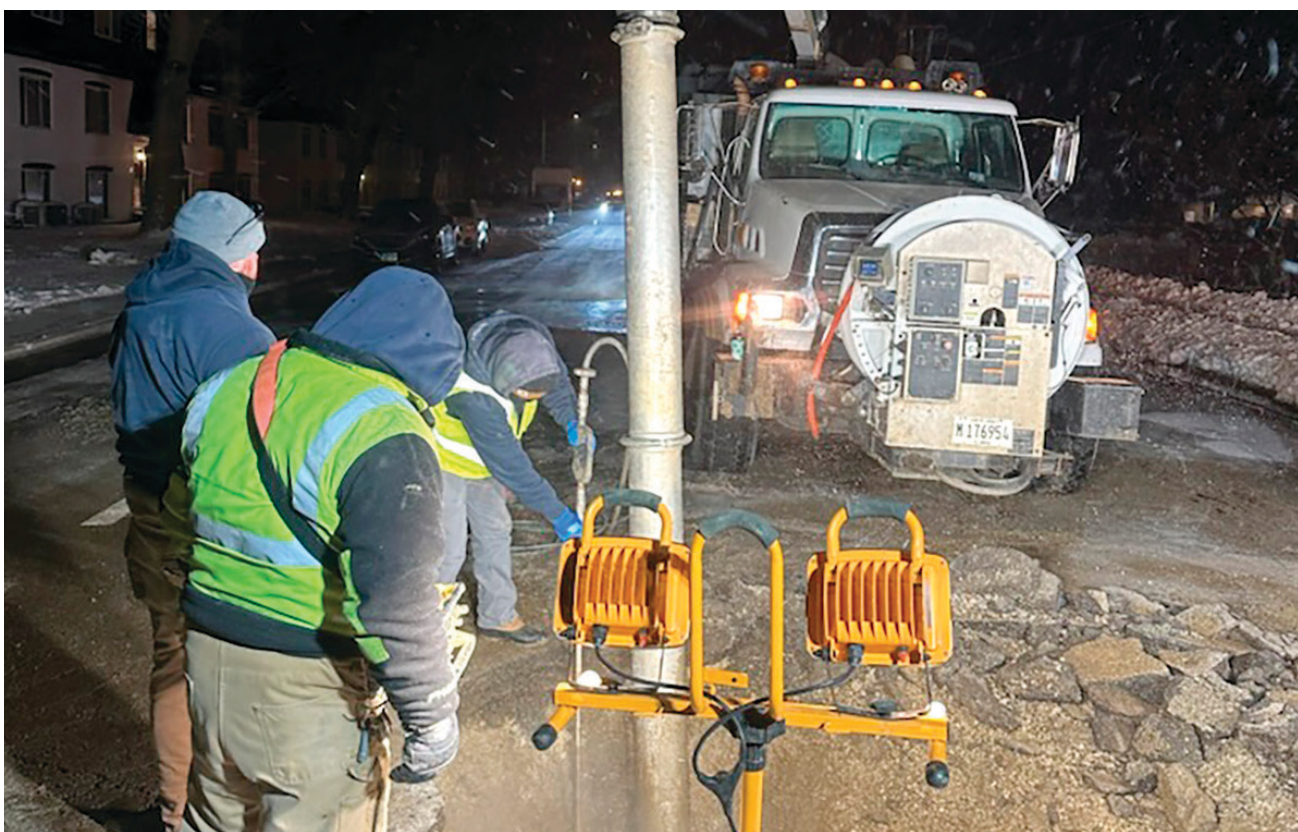
“This is a powerful new tool for us,” he said. 🐝



IDOC cadets at the Decatur training academy

PUBLIC WORKS EMPLOYEES ARE ON THE JOB

NO MATTER THE WEATHER





In public works, safety is always top of mind

Among AFSCME members in municipal government, those in public works departments are the true jacks of all trades. From filling potholes and plowing snow to trimming trees and spraying pesticides, public works employees are responsible for a wide variety of tasks that make their communities safer.

But with so many responsibilities come varying challenges. Among the biggest is making sure that public works employees themselves are safe on the job, no matter what the day's work is.

"Our motto is, 'Everyone goes home safely,'" says AFSCME Local 2891 President Eric Stojakovich, a utility maintenance worker in the Village of Homewood Water Department.

When it comes to keeping to that motto, they've built a strong 'safety-first' culture that empowers workers to speak up when they feel their safety is at risk.

"Everybody agrees—if we don't feel comfortable, then we can say that we have to rework something to get a job done," says Local 2823 President Brad Washkowiak, a laborer in the City of LaSalle Department of Streets.

Risks around every corner

Though safety is the priority for AFSCME members in public works, the job still comes with risks, especially for streets workers.

"These days, distracted drivers are worse. The biggest issue we can't control is the maniacs still going 45 mph down a 25 mph road," Stojakovich says. "I tell the workers to keep their heads on a swivel. I've seen cars get hit, plow trucks get hit, but fortunately never a person. And now there are electric cars, which don't make as much noise, so it's hard to hear them coming."

It's an important reminder: Next time you're driving near a snowplow or maintenance workers on the road, make sure to slow down and give them some extra room.

Investing in safety and certifications pays off

In some cases, the emphasis on safety in public works also benefits cities financially, while keeping work in-house and performed by trained AFSCME members.

The only LaSalle city employee licensed to spray pesticides for mosquitoes, Washkowiak maintains seven different category licenses that allow him to work on various foliage. When he

learned that LaSalle was contracting out with a landscaping company to spray the city's 12 acres of sports fields, he volunteered to do the work himself.

"I figured that I could do it myself, and even if I did it all on overtime, it would still be cheaper than what they pay the landscaper to do it. The city saves thousands of dollars by having me do it rather than contracting with the outside company," Washkowiak says.

Prioritizing safety in the union contract

In some cases, local unions representing public works employees have used contract negotiations to add language emphasizing or improving safety for workers on the job. AFSCME Local 2819's contract with the City of Ottawa contains provisions that compensate workers for attending both mandatory and non-mandatory trainings, and includes stipends for various certifications, such as commercial driver's licenses, water operator licenses, playground-safety inspection certifications, and pesticide-spraying licenses.

"Safety is a two-way street. It's a liability issue for the city if someone gets hurt doing something we aren't trained in," says Local 2819 President Bob Anderson, a laborer in the city's street department. "It's in the city's best interest for us to be the best-trained we can be for the citizens we serve."

Because of Ottawa's focus on safety, Local 2819 members don't hesitate to ask for support or additional funding for safety in labor-management meetings.

"We brought up in labor-management meetings, that we needed better signage and reflection for workers doing road construction," Anderson says. "The council agreed to spend that money to increase safety and get us what we needed."

This mindset also applies whenever a tragedy occurs, so that workers are always prepared for the next instance. Following a tragic incident when an employee died from a heart attack, Local 2819 succeeded in convincing the city to provide CPR training and to have defibrillators at hand.

When it comes to staying safe on the job, Anderson preaches a simple rule both to public works employees and the public.

"A little bit of common sense goes a long way," Anderson said. 🦅

Help keep our public works brothers and sisters safe

- Always yield to snowplows and give them a wide berth.
- NEVER try to pass or drive beside a snowplow.
- Give all roadworks vehicles extra space.
- Never talk on the phone in a work zone—it's still illegal even if it's hands-free.
- 1,610 people are injured in work zone crashes in Illinois each year—slow down and use caution.



Volunteer member organizers grow our union stronger

Shaleah Blackshear has lived in Lake County most of her life. The people who work for the Lake County Health Department are her neighbors. They're the friendly faces she sees at the grocery store. Some are longtime family friends.

So when AFSCME began helping employees at the health department to form their own union, the union called on Blackshear to help the organizing effort as a volunteer member organizer (VMO).



Shaleah Blackshear after finishing her work on the Lake County organizing drive.

Now, Blackshear, a member of AFSCME Local 785 at the Ann Kiley Developmental Center in Waukegan, is volunteering her time and knowledge of the union difference to help organize new AFSCME members.

VMOs like Blackshear have a story to tell to workers thinking about organizing unions of their own. They see firsthand the transformative power unions have on their workplaces. For Blackshear, that revelation came when she first started working as an educator at Kiley in 2022, her first job in a unionized workplace.

"The union was so welcoming," Blackshear said. "I started in May, and by July I already received a raise. I was shocked, but I learned it was because of our contract—it was because of AFSCME. I



David Schultz (front right) with other VMOs in Maryland.

want other people to have the same experience I did when I joined the union."

VMOs from Council 31 don't just work locally. David Schultz, the president of AFSCME Local 1019 and an employee of the Illinois State Museum, stepped up to help grow our union's national strength during an effort to organize frontline supervisors in Maryland.

"State employees in Illinois have similar struggles to state employees in Maryland," Schultz said. "We have similar working conditions and our


funding comes from the same places. We're really able to connect with other members on a personal level."

One Maryland state worker Schultz spoke to was concerned about their current inability to improve their job-related skills and promote to higher pay grades.

"In Illinois, we're very lucky. We have extremely good language in our contract about promotions and job mobility," Schultz said. "Non-union employees don't have that. I was able to tell her how the union has established the

Upward Mobility Program for state employees in Illinois, and with their own union, they can fight for that too."

VMOs like Blackshear and Schultz aren't just doing the work because they're effective at signing up new members. For them, preaching the benefits of unionization to prospective members is a labor of love.

"When I'm out there talking to people, I feel so connected to this movement that's happening all around the world," Blackshear said. "We're making a difference." 

AFSCME locals merge at SIUE

Two AFSCME locals on the Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville (SIUE) campus have joined forces to become one stronger union.

The local unions—one representing administrative and clerical employees, the other building service and facilities management workers—have fought side by side for years. Now, they're united under the banner of AFSCME Local 2887.

"The bigger we are, the stronger we are. The stronger we are, the more we can take care of each other," said Amy Bodenstab, who was elected president of the newly unified local.

During a nearly two-year struggle for a fair contract in 2023-24, the two locals shared the same goals, coordinated aggressive actions, and forged stronger solidarity. Yet despite

those bonds, they were forced to bargain separately. Management wanted to divide them.

Now they'll use their power to bargain their next contract as one.

"The larger the sum of our parts, the louder our message

"The larger the sum of our parts, the louder our message will be."

will be," said Tyler Toussaint, a building service worker and the chief steward for the facilities




SIUE employees have united under the banner of AFSCME Local 2887.

management unit. "This merger isn't just out of necessity for making sure we're all on the same page as far as negotiations go, but as far as being heard, it was the utmost importance that we could use all of our

voices as one collective to grow our strength together."

Not only did the locals concentrate their power, but they grew the ranks of their union in the process. Previously unrepresented, some 100 SIUE

employees in IT and grant writing, among others, have now joined the union.

"Numbers matter," Bodenstab said. "We're going to keep organizing new titles and building power." 

Landmark legislation ends unfair Social Security penalties for public employees

After year upon year of an intensive grassroots lobbying campaign, in the final days of 2024, the U.S. Congress finally passed legislation to eliminate the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) Social Security rules, which had for 40 years unfairly harmed public service retirees.

On Jan. 5, President Joe Biden signed the bill into law.

“The bill I’m signing today is about a simple proposition,” Biden said. “Americans who have worked hard all their lives to earn an honest living should be able to retire with economic security and dignity. By signing this bill, we’re extending Social Security benefits for millions of teachers, nurses and other public employees and their spouses and survivors.”

Biden was introduced at the signing by an AFSCME retiree, Bette Marafino, a retired community college professor and a member of Connecticut Retiree Chapter 4, who led a task force that pushed for GPO-WEP’s repeal.

Marafino described how her grandparents’ Social Security benefits kept them out of the

poor house, an actual building located a few blocks from their home.

“I think the vision of the people who were there in that poor house motivated me and others on the task force...to help correct the injustice that my fellow public service workers who keep our communities running have had to endure,” said Marafino.

Together, the GPO-WEP provisions unfairly harmed approximately 25% of public employees who had both earned a pension and were eligible for Social Security.

The WEP reduced Social Security benefits by up to 55% for workers who earned a pension from a job in public service but also received Social Security benefits from less than 30 years



AFSCME retiree Bette Marafino (in white), a retired community college professor and a member of Connecticut Retiree Chapter 4, shakes hands with President Biden.

in a Social Security-covered job. On a similar basis, the GPO similarly harmed spouses of retired or deceased public employees.

The repeal of these provisions means current retirees will finally get the full Social Security benefits they deserve, and current employees don’t need to worry about being unfairly penalized when they retire.

In a statement, AFSCME President Lee Saunders, who was at the signing, said, “Finally, GPO-WEP is gone for good. These outdated rules denied over two million retired public service workers their hard-earned Social Security benefits. With President Biden’s signing of the Social Security Fairness Act, GPO-WEP becomes a thing of the past.”

GPO-WEP

For more on the action taken by Chapter 31 Retirees to advocate for the repeal of GPO-WEP, see Retiree Notes, Page 15.

SETTING THE AGENDA



400 delegates and guests gathered in Springfield on Jan. 25 to set our union’s legislative agenda for the upcoming year (see more on p. 6). Attendees heard from Illinois AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Pat Devaney, who energized members for the continuing effort to fix Tier 2, while State Sen. Chris Belt thanked AFSCME members for the public services we provide every single day.

Library programs aid communities during winter

The winter months can be the hardest for many communities served by public libraries. Whether residents have insufficient heat, lack adequate winter clothing, or can't access child care, the holiday season often brings just as much stress as it does joy.

But in communities across the state, library workers are doing what they can to ease those strains.

In Chicago, members of AFSCME Local 1215 at the Chicago Public Library are some of the first people to meet these needs. In addition to their regular work, library staff are a crucial source of community support in winter—especially over the holiday break.

“With schools closed for two weeks, we see a ton of kids in the libraries. They love to do arts and crafts and play board

games,” said Corina Pedraza, a Children’s Library Associate at the Back of the Yards branch. “It’s a busy time for us.”

This work doesn’t just occur in the library itself. Children’s librarians also travel to schools and child care centers for reading events with Santa and the Grinch.

The winter months also provide opportunities to bring the community together—especially when families need somewhere to go that doesn’t cost anything.

At the Waukegan Public Library, AFSCME Local 3077

member Maria Guerrero—a children’s librarian—organized a Winter Wonderland event and a Noon Year’s Eve celebration for families, with balloon animals, craft projects, and a balloon drop. Each event brought more than 100 people to the library.

“I’m really appreciative about how well it’s received in the community, that we are able to get the word out to come to the library and enjoy our resources and free programs,” Guerrero says.

AFSCME Local 76 member Brandon Buckley runs a seed library and holds a seed swap each winter. The St. Charles Public Library event gives community members the opportunity to get free seeds to begin their gardens when the spring thaw comes.

The seed swap attracts about 150 people and kicks off the year with an event that gets community members looking forward to the spring.



Members of AFSCME Local 3077 host a Winter Wonderland event annually.



Chicago Public Library employees host regular programming for children during the winter months.

“It’s a great event, and everyone is always so cheerful and happy. It’s a signal that spring is coming,” Buckley says. “It’s a great way for people who haven’t gardened or who want to try something new to get some seeds and try it out without having to pay money.”

While rewarding, this work is often difficult—especially in Chicago, where the city’s libraries remain understaffed and workers are asked to cover even more hours. Worse, the city’s budget crisis—while resolved for now—led to thousands of vacancies being eliminated, including many in the library department.

“Staffing has been the number one issue that we’ve had to deal with since taking on Sunday hours. We’ve never

had enough staff to deal with all those hours,” Pedraza says.

In St. Charles, library workers unionized in 2021 but finalized their first contract in 2023. Now, the improved benefits are keeping employees in their jobs longer, allowing for more stability.

“The contract has really helped cut down on turnover,” Buckley says. “It’s a lot lower than it was in previous years, which is great.”

AFSCME is continuing to reach out to library employees across the state who don’t yet have union representation. “Library employees are so vital to their communities,” says AFSCME Associate Director Tracey Abman. “It’s critical that they have a voice on the job and the best possible working conditions.”

MUSEUM WORKERS STANDING STRONG



As brutal cold overtook the state, Field Museum workers held a rally on Jan. 22 to demand a fair contract and call out management for retaliating against members of the union bargaining committee. Management’s response? They locked employees out of the museum’s main entrance in the frigid cold.

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

Local 473 wins longevity recognition

MEMBERS OF AFSCME LOCAL 473 who work for Winnebago County were feeling ignored by management. They weren't receiving the recognition their dedication to the county and its residents deserved.

Over the last several years, the county has had increasing difficulty retaining employees. In their new contract, Local 473—which represents some 500 employees of Winnebago County's jail, nursing home, circuit clerk's office, public works and more—set out to change that.

"We wanted retention pay for the whole county. That was our main goal," said Local 473 President Jenny Williams, an 18-year correctional officer at the Winnebago County Jail.

Union members had their solidarity on display throughout the lengthy contract negotiations. Every Wednesday, they wore stickers declaring their support for their bargaining team.

"Management didn't want to budge, but we stood firm," Williams said.

Management's tenor changed after Williams, flanked by her fellow union members, delivered an impassioned speech at a meeting of the county board.

"I told them that they had the money to pay us and they should be ashamed of themselves for how we haven't kept up with the cost of living," Williams said.

The action worked, and an agreement on a new contract was reached just weeks later.

In the final four-year contract ratified by members, Local 473 succeeded in securing retention pay—and more. Base pay will go up a minimum of 10.5%, with 12 high-turnover titles receiving larger increases in the first year of the contract.

They also established a joint labor-management task force to study, identify and address the recruitment and retention problems plaguing each department.

The union accomplished a range of other priorities, too, including increasing uniform allowances and improving rights around paid time off.

The Local 473 bargaining committee included Williams,



Members of AFSCME Local 473 after demanding a fair contract at a meeting of the county board

Chris Davis, Mario Donaldson, Jason Ferro, Cody James, Chris Keaster, Brian Klus, Diane Roberson and Angie Smith. The committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representatives Chris Hooser and Cody Dornes.

UCAN employees' new contract strengthens their ability to serve

AFTER NEARLY A YEAR OF negotiations, workers at UCAN who provide vital services to vulnerable youth have secured a fair contract with significant wage increases and improved benefits.

UCAN is a social services agency based on the West Side of Chicago. Every day,

the nearly 200 employees of AFSCME Local 3096 work hard under difficult and demanding circumstances, teaching youth between the ages of 17-21—many of whom have suffered serious trauma—the skills they need to build meaningful lives.

The AFSCME members who work there are treatment specialists, case managers, maintenance workers, housekeepers and more.

While Local 3096 members take pride in being there for the youth who need them, their work sometimes comes at a personal cost.

"We love the work we do and want to stay at UCAN, but we needed to be heard," said Lynette Kincaid, the president of AFSCME Local 3096 and a 28-year UCAN veteran.

In their effort to be heard by management, union members took to the picket line outside the facility, where their solidarity sent a powerful message.

"Every day more and more people came out. They took their lunch breaks just to blow their horns in support," Kincaid said. "It made everyone realize that in our numbers, we were powerful."

The new contract includes wage increases of 14% to nearly 30% for all bargaining unit employees, with

some increases retroactive to October 2023—meaning big backpay checks for many members.

The agreement also doubles shift differentials and provides additional paid time off for long-time employees.

The impact of the successful contract campaign extends beyond just wages and benefits. Workers who were once hesitant to speak up are now actively engaging with their union and advocating for workplace improvements.

Perhaps most importantly, the contract victory has given workers the security and support they need to focus on their crucial mission: helping vulnerable youth transform their lives.

The Local 3096 bargaining committee included Kincaid, Julia Beard, Tanya Dillard, Jean Dummer, Derrick Kent, Gene White and Rhonda Nesbitt. The committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Kathy Steichen.



UCAN employees stand strong for a fair contract.



Members of AFSCME Local 3096 include maintenance workers, housekeepers, case managers, treatment specialists and more.

SHORT REPORTS



Members of the American Federation of Government Employees are in the sights of the Trump administration.

BLS report shows the union difference

ON JAN. 28, THE U.S. BUREAU of Labor Statistics released its annual report detailing union density in the United States. The report charts trends in union membership across both the private and public sectors in each state from year to year.

In 2024, the union membership rate—the proportion of workers in the U.S. who are members of a union—was 9.9%, totaling some 16 million people. However, the public sector continued to maintain much stronger union density, with a union membership rate of 32.2%, compared to 5.9% for the private sector.

In Illinois, the union membership rate improved from 12.8 to 13.1% last year, an addition of some 26,000 union members from 2023. The fight continues to make sure that this promising trend continues—and spreads nationwide. While the nationwide membership rate remained flat, there were nearly 1,800 union elections in 2024, with workers prevailing in the vast majority. Public support for unions is at a nearly 70-year high, according to the AFL-CIO.

The union difference is clear among full-time wage and salary workers across the country, union members earned a median of \$1,337 per week, compared to a median of

\$1,138 for non-union workers—a nearly 15% difference.

“AFSCME is proud to report that tens of thousands of new members have joined our union family. This growth comes after a year of relentless organizing, with new AFSCME locals forming in health care, emergency response, public safety, the cultural sector and more,” said AFSCME President Lee Saunders in response to the report. “The message we are hearing across all workplaces is clear and consistent: Organizing in a union is the best way to ensure workers have the freedom to secure a better future, especially in the face of rising attacks by billionaires and anti-union extremists who see our growth and seek to stop it.”

Council 31 Deputy Director Mike Newman reappointed to Labor Advisory Board

ON JAN. 27, GOV. JB PRITZKER announced he would appoint AFSCME Council 31 Deputy Director Mike Newman to a second two-year term on the Illinois Labor Advisory Board. The board’s function is to provide a forum for parties to discuss matters regarding Illinois workers, and guidance

to the Illinois Department of Labor on policy and enforcement of labor laws.

Newman’s appointment now heads to the Illinois Senate for confirmation. He’s one of 13 members on the board, with five representatives from labor, five from management, and three from the public. All are appointed by the governor.

“IDOL has made significant strides in recent years in enforcing wage and hour laws and regulations concerning working conditions,” Newman said. “Of particular focus for me and our members is on the renewed commitment to enforcing OSHA for public employees.”

Federal workforce in turmoil as Trump administration threatens massive downsizing

PRESIDENT TRUMP HAS established an entity of questionable authority—the so-called Department of Government Efficiency, headed up by the ultra-right wing billionaire Elon Musk—with the goal of slashing government programs.

At the same time, Trump has appointed Russell Vought, a ferocious antagonist of the federal civil service and union

rights for federal workers, to head up the Office of Management and Budget, which oversees most personnel matters in the federal workforce.

On Jan. 28, the administration sent an email to all federal employees offering them a “buyout”—that is, they will be allowed to keep their jobs until September before willingly resigning. In exchange, they will presumably be protected from immediate termination and will be exempt from the recent return-to-office mandate for federal employees during those months.

In response, the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), the largest union for federal workers, pointed out that the size of the federal workforce hasn’t meaningfully grown in the last 50 years, but more Americans rely on the services those employees provide.

“Purging the federal government of dedicated career civil servants will have vast, unintended consequences that will cause chaos for the Americans who depend on a functioning federal government,” AFGE President Everett Kelley said in a statement. “Between the flurry of anti-worker executive orders and policies, it is clear that the Trump administration’s goal is to turn the federal government into a toxic environment where workers cannot stay even if they want to.”

Public employee bargaining rights under assault in Utah

WHILE PUBLIC SECTOR unions are under attack on the federal level, several states are also continuing their own assaults on collective bargaining rights. The latest to do so is Utah, where the House of Representatives passed a bill on Jan. 27 banning collective bargaining for all public sector unions in the state.

Along with members of AFSCME Local 1004 who are municipal and state workers, the bill targets some 18,000 teachers in Utah, as well as firefighters and police officers. Should the bill be signed into law, public sector unions would no longer be able to negotiate a contract with for the employees they represent—a foundational pillar of collective bargaining.

Public sector workers strongly opposed the bill, gathering some 13,000 signatures in a petition against it. However, the Utah House’s Republican majority passed the bill by a 42-32 vote, with 18 Republicans joining all 14 Democrats to vote against it. The bill now heads to the state Senate where it will go into committee before coming up for another vote in the upper chamber. 

RETIREE NOTES

Concerns grow over nominee to lead Medicare and Medicaid

DONALD TRUMP HAS NOMINATED Mehmet Oz—more commonly known by his TV moniker “Dr. Oz”—to lead the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the government agency that administers Medicare, Medicaid, and the Affordable Care Act marketplace.

A significant concern by patient advocacy groups is that Oz has invested tens of millions of dollars in health care, tech, and food companies, posing serious conflicts of interest. His holdings include a stake in United Health Group, a company beset by controversy over its high rate of claim denials.

Oz gained national recognition in 2009 when he became

a regular part of the Oprah Winfrey Show. In his own spin-off, The Dr. Oz Show, he dispensed nutritional and lifestyle advice, portraying himself as a trusted doctor who explained health matters in an approachable way.

Unfortunately, his show often blurred the lines between medical advice and advertising, failing to make clear to his audience how closely he worked with the companies he pitched. This resulted in multiple lawsuits that alleged he made misleading claims by promoting products of questionable medical value. Several of the companies he promoted drew the attention of federal regulators.

United Health Group is one of the largest health care companies in the nation and arguably the most important business partner of CMS, through which it is the leading provider of commercial health

plans available to Medicare beneficiaries.

UnitedHealth also offers managed-care plans under Medicaid, the joint state-federal program for low-income people, and sells plans on government-run marketplaces set up via the Affordable Care Act. Oz also had smaller stakes in CVS Health, which now includes the insurers Aetna and Cigna.

An additional conflict of interest lies with the new Medicare negotiations of prescription drug costs. Oz holds stock in several large pharmaceutical companies.

Some members of Congress have expressed concerns over a 2020 op-ed in which Oz advocated to eliminate traditional Medicare and replace it with the private Medicare Advantage plans he profits from.

While Dr. Oz has said he would stop promoting wellness products if he's confirmed,

according to ABC News, many are waiting to see if he will divest from the companies that he would be regulating through CMS.

Landmark victory: WEP/GPO repealed!

IT'S AN ASTONISHING accomplishment, and AFSCME retirees helped make it happen: After 40 years of public employees seeing their earned Social Security benefits cut or eliminated, Congress passed and President Biden signed the Social Security Fairness Act.

This bipartisan legislation repeals the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP), two provisions of Social Security law that deprived millions of public service retirees of the Social Security benefits they have earned.

Action by Chapter 31 members and retirees across the nation made a difference that millions of public service retirees will feel in coming years.

AFSCME Retirees made thousands of phone calls and sent more than 5,000 letters to legislators to build support for the bill. It took all of us, but we kept our collective voice loud and got the Social Security Fairness Act passed in the House and the Senate with bipartisan support.

It wasn't easy. Various bills to repeal GPO and WEP were introduced in Congress over the years. Anti-retiree politicians in the Senate tried to kill this one until the last minute, but we won.

This is historic progress. Soon, all public service retirees and their spouses will begin to receive the full Social Security benefits they've earned. 🦋

SUB-CHAPTERS GIVE BACK

“Sub-chapter 85 members recognize that there are many local nonprofit organizations working hard to meet the ever-growing needs of the community,” said David Ford, president of Sub-chapter 85, representing retirees in Bond, Clinton, Fayette, and Marion Counties. “That’s why we decided to make donations to the Mission Centralia, CCBA Food Pantry, Home to School Program, Salvation Army, Humane Society, Centralia Community Youth Center, Sandoval Shalom, Sleep in Heavenly Peace, Golden Age Senior Citizens Center, and Wamac Food Pantry.”

Sub-chapter 85 was one of many sub-chapters giving to community organizations that struggle to keep up with demand for assistance.

Representing retirees from Henry, Mercer, & Rock Island Counties, Sub-chapter 74 collected food for the Veterans Outreach Center and gave \$250 to the local food bank.

“Those of us who are very fortunate need to pitch in, especially to local charities that are currently overwhelmed,” said Sub-chapter 74 President Jan Lease.





Frankie Williams

NATURAL RESOURCE TECHNICIAN II
ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
AFSCME Local 1048

Tell us about your job.

I work for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources at the Little Grassy Fish Hatchery in Williamson County. We raise fish—channel catfish, blue catfish, largemouth bass, black croppie, bluegill—that get delivered to 185 state-managed bodies of water throughout the state.

In an average year, we'll raise 1 million fish here, and we'll deliver them for people to catch from Jo Daviess County all the way up to Cook County, from small ponds to bigger lakes.

The year is split into two different cycles. During the winter, we're doing a lot of preventive maintenance, repairing equipment, and getting ready for the production season in the spring. Once spring hits, we get busy. We start off with millions of eggs that we put out in the ponds and raise the fish from there.

We're very reliant on Mother Nature. We have disease outbreaks and die-offs, just like you would in nature. We have to deal with predators, like the otters that come in from Crab Creek to steal our fish.

What does an average workday look like?

In the spring, we're taking care of the fish and making sure everything's functioning properly. We're always checking the quality of the water, making sure there's enough oxygen, that the pH levels are right, that the temperature is warm enough.

Our delivery season picks up in July. During the summer, we hand-load our tanker trucks with thousands of pounds of fish, and we'll take off for ponds and lakes all around the state and deliver the fish for fishermen to catch. Sometimes this could mean being back before lunch, or we could be on the road for 16 hours.

How'd you get into working at the fish hatchery?

My dad worked at the fish hatchery starting in the 1980s. I really grew up around it. He used to work the weekend shift a lot, so he would bring me in

to work with him. We would also come here on field trips for school.

Myself, I'm a fisherman, but I wouldn't say I'm very good. I've enjoyed the outdoors my whole life and I've been a Boy Scout leader for 25 years. It's good to be around nature.

Where do you find pride in your work?

One of the best parts of the job is being at the boat ramps and talking to the fishermen. Even when they're grumpy about the species that we're dropping off, they're thankful

we're doing it. It's always nice to get that feedback from the public. We don't always get that in state service and it's good to see that people appreciate what we do. I think it's an overlooked gem of DNR.

We let the public come in and they're able to see the full operation. I've seen a lot of kids leave with a whole new outlook on fishing and what the DNR does.

How did you get involved in the union?

Twenty years ago, I worked at Murphysboro Boot Camp [an Illinois Department of Corrections facility]. I was the treasurer of my AFSCME local there. When you work in corrections, you really form a strong bond with your union because so much of your daily life and your safety depends on it.

When Murphysboro was closed, I ended up using my right to a voluntary reduction to come work at the hatchery. But that involvement with the union stayed with me. I became the hatchery's steward for Local 1048. It's rewarding to help people and see them gain the knowledge of the contract for themselves.

Are there any other ways you serve your union?

I'm serving on the bargaining committee for the supplemental agreement to the state contract covering DNR employees. That's been a super-rewarding experience. Seeing everyone working cooperatively towards a common goal is neat.

It's nice to be a part of something that's going to help our members for years to come.

I've been absolutely amazed to see all the union work that goes on behind the scenes not just for DNR employees, but at our other agencies like DHS and DCFS. 