



ON THE MOVE

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Museum of Science & Industry workers are ready to strike!

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BY ROBERTA LYNCH

WE CANNOT
SIT ON THE
SIDELINES
AND WATCH
THIS ALL-OUT
ASSAULT.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Public employees: Punching bags for billionaires?

How did it happen? Suddenly, it is all too painfully clear that public employees—in every branch of government and in every type of work—have become punching bags for America’s billionaire class.

How can it be that millions of Americans who do some of the most challenging and essential work in our country have become the target of such unrelenting animosity?

Actually, it all began right here in Illinois over a decade ago. Bruce Rauner’s run for governor and subsequent reign in that role was almost solely devoted to his crusade to take down public employees and their unions.

There was some dispute at the time as to whether Rauner was “just” a millionaire or whether he made it into the billionaire category. But there was never any doubt that one of his most enthusiastic cheerleaders, Ken Griffin, was the personification of that new billionaire class, wielding untold wealth and power.

Once elected, it quickly became clear that Rauner had no clue how to make government operate more efficiently—nor did he really seem interested in doing so.

In truth, Bruce Rauner was really and exclusively about taking down public employee unions—so he could then take down public employees.

Even back then I was deeply puzzled as to why guys like Rauner and Griffin, with immense wealth at their disposal and immense influence, would devote their time and energy to trying to drive down the modest wages and silence the voices of public workers.

At the bottom of it all was the seemingly insatiable urge to take away the jobs of these workers, either through privatization of the services they provided or by abandonment of those services altogether.

Very strange, to be sure. After all, those jobs—good union jobs that pay a fair wage—are an essential part of our state’s economy. It is only on a foundation of such stable, family-supporting employment that our economy can grow and thrive. And one would think such growth would be a positive factor for those as

devoted to accumulating wealth as that duo.

But no, they’ve got a different take. Perhaps because it’s not just about wealth or “influence” but power—raw power, as in total and complete control, as in being able to act with impunity, without regard for the rule of law.

Fortunately, that kind of consolidation of power in the hands of a very few wasn’t in the cards in Illinois. We fought back against Rauner’s assaults at every turn and blew the whistle very loud on his failure to keep Illinois even modestly functional as the state debt soared, the state’s credit rating plummeted, and vital services suffered.

You know the ending to that particular story—a win for the people of Illinois. Once voters decisively defeated him in the next election, Rauner quickly abandoned our state and hustled off to Florida—with Ken Griffin trailing close behind.

Lessons learned! Or so one would have hoped.

Instead, today we find ourselves facing an assault on public employees and our unions far more vicious and sweeping than Bruce Rauner ever attempted. Rauner, it turned out, was hampered by a lingering regard for the rule of law.

That regard is alarmingly absent in today’s billionaire class—as currently embodied in the horse whisperers of the Trump administration. It is an administration built from a blueprint that attempts to enshrine that class in power, possibly for decades to come—embodied in the Heritage Foundation’s governing plan, Project 2025.

Starting with that row of billionaires lined up behind Trump at his inauguration and running straightaway to the handing off of the entire federal government to the whims of Elon Musk in the first months of the new administration, it’s been all too clear that the billionaire class—freed of any restraints—is now calling the shots.

And it’s also very clear that

their target is public employees and our unions—beginning with the entire federal workforce. In just the first nine months of the Trump administration, more than 200,000 workers have been summarily dismissed from their jobs, leaving many federal agencies—and vital national government functions—in alarming disarray.

And just to be sure that the workers who remain are sufficiently beaten down, the Trump administration has been tearing up their union contracts and totally obliterating their bargaining rights. Memos issued to employees take the tone of overlords addressing their serfs.

But the billionaires just keep rolling along, accumulating more wealth by the minute. The big ugly bill recently enacted will force sweeping cuts to vital services, while actually providing additional tax breaks for the wealthiest Americans.

If it were up to the billionaire class, Social Security and Medicare would be gone. So why would we need a Social Security Administration? Public lands would be sold off to the highest bidder. So why would we need a National Parks Service? Corporations would manage their own poisonous pollutants. So why would we need an Environmental Protection Agency? You get the picture.

We cannot sit on the sidelines and watch this all-out assault on federal employees and the services they provide. When public employees in Illinois were under attack, we organized an all-labor march in Springfield that brought out scores of private sector workers who were not directly impacted by Rauner’s assault but understood the urgent need for a unified labor response.

We need that kind of unity and determination even more today. We need to stand up for the federal employees who are under such unrelenting attack because, believe me, we are next on the billionaires’ hit list. If we act decisively now, we can forge a force powerful enough to resist their takeover of our country. We can restore the rule of law. We can protect programs like Social Security so vital to the lives of everyday people. We can protect our jobs. And we can preserve and strengthen our union—all unions—so that public workers will have a voice on the job and a fighting force to defend our American democracy. 



ON THE MOVE

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We Make Cook County Work!

AFSCME members in Cook County stand up, organize and win

AFSCME members who work for Cook County ran a lightning campaign for a fair contract extension.

Waging a strong campaign in a very short timeframe, union members made sure county management knew they were united in demanding a good agreement.

Thirteen Cook County AFSCME locals together represent thousands of employees who work in the county jail, health department, courts, public defender’s office, and more. In short, AFSCME members in Cook County make the county work—and they were demanding to be paid fairly for it.

They came together, lifted up their voices and made sure management heard. Over a few short weeks in July and August, members showed their AFSCME green at worksites all throughout county government.

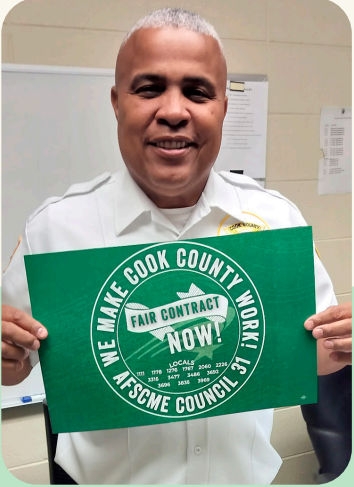
In the end, they came away with a one-year extension that significantly raises wages, holds the line on health care costs, and sustains all the rights and protections of their current union contract.

The new agreement raises wages by 6% through the end of 2026, with an additional \$2,500 lump sum payment on Dec. 1.

It comes on the heels of a 5% pay raise union members received on June 1.

97%

of members voted YES to ratify the agreement!



Dred McCurry
AFSCME Local 1276
Cook County Health

“This contract extension is more than just the continuation of terms. It’s the statement of our values as public service workers. For our members, it means stability, recognition, and it sends a clear message that our work matters. It also reflects on the strength of our collective voice and the power of solidarity.”

Rob Mulac
AFSCME Local 3692
Cook County Sheriff’s Department

“The lump-sum payment is going to be a big thing for a lot of our members. They won’t have to fight and scrounge for overtime to do something nice for their families around the holidays.”

Lilliana Estrada
AFSCME Local 3969
Cook County Public Guardians

“Given the hard times, this extension gives our members financial stability. Everyone is facing increases in health care costs, and we were able to ensure that insurance costs wouldn’t rise for any of our members. It makes everyone feel appreciated.”

LeDonna Rollins-Barnes
AFSCME Local 3477
Cook County Juvenile Probation Officers

“Nobody’s certain what will happen with today’s economy, and our members are happy they have an extra measure of protection with this extension. This extension sends the message that, when it comes to fighting for fairness, this union never quits.”

Museum of Science and Industry employees authorize strike

Museum of Science & Industry (MSI) employees represented by AFSCME Council 31 voted to authorize a strike if necessary, union members announced at a news conference on Sept. 23.

More than 95% of union members cast a vote; 90% voted yes to authorize a strike.

“The message to management is loud and clear: The status quo is unacceptable, the days of poverty wages are over, and the time for delay is past,” said David Dowd, a guest engagement facilitator and a member of the union bargaining committee. “We MSI employees are standing united, and we are willing to do whatever it takes to win the fair contract we deserve.”

The union bargaining committee is now empowered to call a strike if and when necessary.

Management hasn’t given workers a raise since 2022. Employees say they work

second jobs, skip meals and still struggle to support their families on museum wages that start at the city minimum.

“The public needs to know that this world-class institution pays us poverty wages,” said Josh Garcia, a guest engagement representative at the museum and a member of the union bargaining committee. “Today many of our colleagues make just \$16.60 an hour. That’s not enough to get by, especially when the cost of living keeps going up.”

Employees are also frustrated with management’s intransigence on a number of other important issues:

- Refusing to agree to any improvements to vacation or sick time;



Museum of Science & Industry workers after announcing the results of their strike authorization vote.

- Refusing to agree to any holiday pay for part-time workers;
 - Refusing to agree to any premium pay for bilingual employees; and
 - Refusing to agree to any paid parental leave at all.
- Tara Foster, a senior educator at the museum and a member of the union bargaining committee, said. “We

choose to work at MSI because it is a mission-driven organization with a mission that we love.

“The work is meaningful, and in the past, there was a level of respect for us as professionals, and a level of flexibility that allowed for work-life balance, that meant a little bit less pay was a trade we were willing to make,” Foster continued.

“But it’s getting harder to feel that way. Turnover is high because pay is low, and those positions have not been filled, so staffing is down and our workload is up.”

As *On the Move* goes to print, the union bargaining committee has not yet called a strike, but may do so at any time unless an agreement is reached. 

Chicago History Museum employees won’t be intimidated by union-busting

Since Chicago History Museum employees formed their union with AFSCME Council 31 in the spring of 2025, museum management has followed a repugnant path of retaliation and malice towards employees.

In the days after employees overwhelmingly voted Yes to form a union, management fired four union supporters who had no record of discipline. Some had been there for decades and all had loved working for the museum.

Then management cut librarians and research-access employees to part-time, hollowing out what had been a crucial resource for the public and other researchers.

Workers rose up and fought back, organizing several actions to hold management to account. Museum patrons are taking notice of their struggles.

On Aug. 18, two researchers at the University of

Illinois-Chicago authored an op-ed in the *Chicago Sun-Times* calling out the museum’s cuts to library and research staff for making it harder for students to have access to research materials.

“Support from each other is what’s keeping us going,” said Nio Lozinski, a member of the bargaining committee and a visitor service representative at the museum. “This is the line in the sand—this is where it stops. We’ve never been able to fight back before, but now we can.”

In their months-long fight against their hostile boss, employees have been buoyed by the solidarity of other AFSCME



Chicago History Museum workers with the AFL-CIO’s bus.

members and retirees, as well as that of community members and other union allies who have come to fight alongside them.

At an August rally, they had the support of AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Fred Redmond, who was in Chicago as part of the nationwide Better in a Union bus tour.

“Courage is what every one

of you is showing right now. It is the same courage that has fortified Chicago’s workers throughout the history of this great union city,” Redmond said at the rally.

With the community on their side, museum employees are resolute: They won’t let management’s union-busting tactics gain steam.

Management’s efforts are intended to divide employees, but so far the opposite is true: They’ve never been more united.

“It would be very easy to give up if it was just me alone,” said Hannah Johnson, a member relations manager at the museum. “But it’s not just me. It’s all of us together.” 

JTDC employees make a difference for troubled youths

Members of AFSCME Local 3696 who work for the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center have a difficult and demanding job.

When someone under the age of 18 is charged with a serious crime in Cook County, they often await trial at the JTDC.

Employees there work diligently to make sure that not only are the youths' health care and mental health needs met, but that they gain the tools they need to improve their lives when they leave.

"It makes us feel good to know that our work, the hard work that we do on a daily basis, is not in vain and we see the positive impact we have working in this type of environment," said Local 3696 President Larry Lawrence.

In July, the JTDC received official validation for the quality of that work: A survey from the National Commission on Correctional Health Care (NCCHC) found

that in every area, JTDC staff and policy meet or exceed national health standards for juvenile detention centers.

While the certification from the NCHCC confirms that their facility is up to par, the fulfilment JTDC employees get from being positive role models every day is what really keeps them going.

"I feel like if we're going to have an impact on the future, we need to be a part of the process," Lawrence said. "And we're a part of that process every day. We try to give them a different perspective on what life can be if they lead it in a positive way."

Tacadia Thompson has worked as a caseworker at the JTDC for 16 years. She works with youth charged as adults, which often means they're accused of violent crime.



Members of AFSCME Local 3696 take pride in making a difference at the JTDC.

Her job is to advocate for their needs—answering questions about court proceedings and helping them communicate with their family and attorneys.

It can be difficult knowing that some of the youth she works with have been charged with brutal crimes, sometimes against other youths. Still, Thompson approaches her work with an open heart.

"They're charged with something bad and these kids are scared," Thompson said. "They may have fallen in with a gang because that's all they knew in their neighborhood. It can be a lot to handle sometimes, but we need to treat these kids with compassion."

Thompson tries to speak to the youth on their level and forge real connections

with them. One of the most rewarding moments of her job is when she hears from someone she had helped down the road.

"When I get a call from one of the youth and they say, 'You were real with me. You made sure I did the right thing. Thank you.' Those are things that make me say, 'I did a good job today,'" Thompson said.

With union leading the way, Ludeman employees showcase their facility

Members of AFSCME Local 2645 who work at Ludeman Developmental Center in Chicago's south suburbs made the most of a recent opportunity to shine a bright light on their work caring for individuals with severe developmental disabilities.

Federal inspectors visited Ludeman in August to assess the facility's protocols for transitioning residents out to safe placements in the community.

On their tour of the facility, inspectors stopped and asked questions of employees. By the time they left, they could see what made Ludeman and its staff so special.

The success of the visit even had management praising the union and its members for their stellar work preparing for the inspection. At Ludeman, stellar work is the norm, AFSCME Local 2645 President Crosby Smith said.

"If there were questions asked of them, staff were able to answer and speak facts,"

Smith said. "People were impressed with the attitudes and the spirit of the workers that they encountered. That's where we did a great job: Showing the knowledge and the skills that our members bring to the job every day."

"That's because it takes someone who is committed to work here, and that's what showed through during this visit," he noted.

Ludeman employees take their work seriously. Caring for

people with disabilities isn't just a job—it's a calling.

"We remember everyone we helped," Smith said. "We remember how their attitude changed when they get a good shave, or when you trim their hair, or we went shopping for new clothes and they're excited."

Working at the DHS facility means that every day brings something new. There are always new challenges to be confronted.

Even with all the challenges that come with such work, the bright spots are never far from reach. The joy of the people whose lives they've changed is always close in union members' minds.

"Our individuals smile just because they see us come through the door in the morning," Smith said. "You speak to them and their smile gets wider. They're happy to see you. That's an amazing feeling."



Ludeman employees are united in their efforts to uplift the value of their work.

Champaign Public Library employees kick off union campaign

Workers at the Champaign Public Library marked Labor Day by announcing their decision to form a union with AFSCME Council 31.

When certified, the Champaign Public Library Workers Union/AFSCME will represent more than 100 frontline CPL employees.

In a public letter announcing their decision to form a union, workers said they want to create stable and sustainable paths to ensure they can continue serving their community to the best of their ability.

“We love the Champaign Public Library and consider it an honor to be a part of such a vital community institution. As a part of our love for CPL, we want to continue building our capacity to provide excellent service in a sustainable way, and in order to do this, the current climate within the library must be improved,”

workers wrote in the public letter.

Workers also say they’re organizing to achieve better wages and benefits, advancement opportunities, sustainable staffing, and increased accessibility for both staff and visitors.

For Danotra Brown, a 35-year library employee, it’s simple: Forming their union is about demanding respect.

“We want a say,” Brown said. “We want management to know that we work hard, and we want to be appreciated and respected.”

Brown has worked with the same library visitors since she started there in the 1990s. That experience has taught her that consistency matters, and the high staff turnover

the library has experienced in recent years is something she wants to fix through the union.

Elise Feltman is a children’s librarian at the Douglas Branch, which serves the city’s east side. She loves working with the community and

“seeing how much of a difference we make in people’s lives every day.”

While they hope the union will strengthen workers’ bonds with the community, Feltman says their efforts to build a better future at the library is already strengthening the

bonds among employees.

“We’re all feeling like we’re part of a team, part of something bigger,” Feltman said. “It’s exciting to know that we’re laying the foundation for the next generation of people who are coming into the library.”



Shortly after announcing they formed their union, CPL employees marched with their new AFSCME family in the Champaign Labor Day parade.

Adler Planetarium workers join the AFSCME museum wave

Adler Planetarium employees are the latest group of cultural and museum workers to form their union, they announced in an open letter to their coworkers on Sept. 30.

“All of us at the Adler deserve to be heard,” the letter says. “... A union is our answer to the question we have all heard management ask: ‘How do we improve the Adler for the future?’”

Workers say their concerns—about lack of staff and resources, communication from management, and changes to procedures without input from employees, among other issues—“come from a place of love and appreciation for the Adler and the communities we serve.” They say that forming their union is “an opportunity for discussion, growth, and change.”

The Chicago planetarium is the oldest in the western hemisphere. For nearly a century, it has taught generations about the wonders of space.

Sam Donnell, an operations support representative at the planetarium, said it fills him with joy to see young students learn from the museum’s shows and exhibits.

“I really see how many people come and enjoy this place and see how many children come and have the time of their lives learning about space and all these amazing discoveries,” he said.

Donnell and his coworkers know that through their union, they’ll be able to make the planetarium better for everyone.

“It’s not just about the benefits that we may be seeking, it’s about the benefits [to the planetarium] as a whole,” Donnell said.

When certified, Adler Planetarium Workers United/



Through their union, Adler Planetarium workers are seeking fair pay, respect and a stronger voice on the job.

AFSCME will represent approximately 80 employees responsible for every aspect of its operations, from greeting visitors to operating telescopes, running events, maintaining the building, facilitating educational programming, and carrying out

essential administrative work in marketing, development, IT and more.

In forming their union with AFSCME, Adler workers follow the lead of colleagues at the Field Museum, Shedd Aquarium, Museum of Science

& Industry, Art Institute, Museum of Contemporary Art, Notebaert Nature Museum, Chicago History Museum and Newberry Library, all of which have organized in recent years as part of AFSCME’s Cultural Workers United campaign.

Building solidarity and community on the softball diamond

On a crisp September day, Logan County’s softball fields were laid out for a day-long tournament.

The players? AFSCME members who work at more than a dozen Illinois Department of Corrections facilities throughout the state. They traveled to Lincoln from far and wide, to engage in friendly competition, build solidarity and blow off steam.

“We’re all in the same boat,” said Eric McNamara, Local 2073 vice president and a key organizer of the tournament. “We all deal with the same stuff daily. It’s nice to be here for each other in person when we don’t get to do that a lot.”

The first game began at 11 a.m.; the last out was recorded well after the sun went down. AFSCME retirees served as umpires while families and kids filled the park having a good time.

The tournament also raised more than \$1,500 for a good cause, the Special Olympics. Athlete Ben Simpson threw out the first pitch. It was such a success that the Special Olympics has already said it wants to increase its

involvement with next year’s tournament, where organizers hope to add as many as 10 more teams.

Members of AFSCME Local 2073 who work for Logan Correctional Center organized the first annual softball tournament last summer as an act of resistance, “to call attention to the closure threat the state has hung over Logan,” Local 2073 President Craig Linne said. “We wanted to get everyone together to show that we’re united.”

The state announced in early 2024 that it intends to close Logan CC somewhere down the road. AFSCME members have pressed IDOC for more information about the facility’s future, but have gotten none.

Logan is a highly specialized facility for female offenders, and the people who work there possess a wide range of skills that aren’t found in any one correctional center throughout the state. Logan has designated mental health



Danville employees raised the trophy as victors. Special Olympics star Ben Simpson (second from right) helped deliver the trophy.

facilities, as well as minimum-, medium- and maximum-security inmates.

“I don’t think the department could ever find a suitable replacement for this

population, and they won’t be able to find another staff that can do what we do every day,” Linne said.

While Local 2073 members seek answers and fight to keep their facility open, residents of Lincoln are left wondering what will happen to their small town if the department packs up hundreds of good-paying union jobs and moves them elsewhere in the state.

“We’re community people,” McNamara said. “That’s the message we want to send.”

Local 2073 is eager to continue hosting and growing the tournament—not just to strengthen the bonds of IDOC employees who are separated by hundreds of miles, but to show that they are irreplaceable members of the community.



Teams were fielded from more than a dozen correctional facilities throughout the state.



The tournament raised good money for a nice cause: The Special Olympics.

YOUR GOVERNMENT (NOT) WORKING FOR YOU

HOW FEDERAL BUDGET CUTS AND FIRINGS ARE WORKING AGAINST AMERICAN WORKERS

As public service workers, AFSCME members know that government is supposed to work for the people, not against them.

But increasingly, vital public services are being gutted, federal agency budgets are being slashed by the billions and workers are being fired by the thousands.

The jobs lost and programs cut aren't just line items on a budget. They represent crucial programs that

provide services to veterans, ensure access to health care, and prevent workplace injuries.

And to what end? Just to fund more tax breaks or lucrative contracts for America's billionaire class that is expanding its wealth and reach with each passing day.

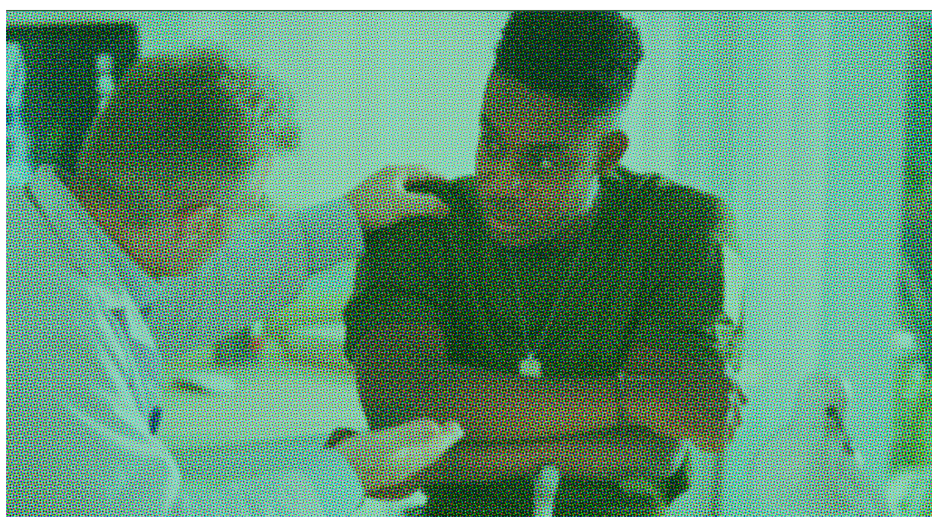
While the full effects of these sweeping cuts have yet to be felt, the warning signs are everywhere. Let's take a look.



Workplace safety

The Trump administration fired 90% of the staff of the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health. Crucial programs for the agency that have been cut include investigations into workplace disease outbreaks, programs to study and reduce the risk of cancer among firefighters and studies and treatments for black lung disease afflicting coal miners.

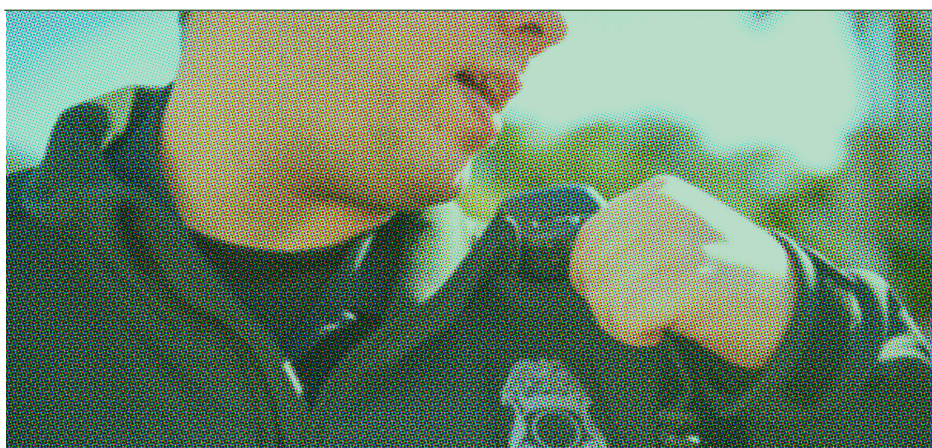
They've also eliminated some 200 full-time employees in the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), which will result in 30% fewer workplace inspections—the lowest number of inspections in the agency's history.



Assistance for military veterans

Since the beginning of 2025, the Department of Veterans Affairs has fired or laid off 30,000 employees. Some 10,000 of those employees are veterans themselves.

The recently enacted “big bad bill” will cut as much as \$12 billion from the Veterans Health Administration's medical budget, diverting some of those funds towards what's being termed “Community Care,” essentially privatizing veterans' health services.



Law enforcement

In April, the White House slashed nearly \$900 million in funding for law enforcement. Those cuts include policing and prosecution programs like the state anti-terrorism trainings, rural violent crime prevention programs, programs that aided victims of violent crime, and drug addiction services.



Health care

The so-called Big Beautiful Bill cuts \$1 trillion in Medicaid and \$500 billion from Medicare over the next 10 years. The impacts of these cuts will be wide-ranging and catastrophic.

Fourteen million people are expected to lose health care coverage, forcing health care costs across the board to rise.

Other crucial health programs like the Environmental Public Health Tracking Program were gutted entirely.



Environmental protection

Nearly a quarter of all Environmental Protection Agency staff have been laid off or fired. The new budget would ratchet those cuts up to 54% of the agency’s total staff.

Program budgets have been slashed as well. For example, \$1.5 billion for clean water programs has been cut, as has 49% of the budget for enforcing criminal charges against polluters.



Air safety and transportation

In February, the administration fired 400 employees of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). They were radar operators, landing personnel and navigational aid maintenance workers—all of them crucial to the safety of airline passengers.

Project 2025 author and chief of the White House Office of Management and Budget Russell Vought announced he was pausing billions in funding for transportation projects destined for states across the nation.



Critical infrastructure

Russell Vought announced the cancellation of \$7.6 billion in grants supporting hundreds of energy projects in 16 states. \$583 million of that was set for Illinois projects, including \$30 million for a carbon capture project at the University of Illinois and \$150 million for improvements to the state’s electrical grid.

Thousands of construction jobs were effectively eliminated as a result of these cuts.



Education

Nearly 50% of staff at the Department of Education has been laid off or fired.

The so-called Big, Beautiful Bill cut federal student loan programs by \$300 billion, making it harder and more expensive for students to go to college, which will push down enrollment at many universities, especially public universities where children of the middle class have the best opportunities for higher education.

Layoffs have already begun to hit AFSCME members at universities in Illinois who were working under the federal program that helped fund nutrition education across the state. Some 230 employees, many of them AFSCME members, have already lost their jobs.

ALERT!

Health care crisis incoming

WORKING PEOPLE ARE DOING EVERYTHING THEY CAN TO GET AHEAD,

but the rising cost of health care is creating a crisis—and it could soon reach a boiling point.

After Republicans in Congress pushed through a bill that cuts billions in funding for health care, it is all too likely costs for consumers will skyrocket, while hospitals and health centers will be forced to close.

Our union contracts protect us—for now. But when employers start getting hit with higher health care costs, they're going to come to union members, asking us to fork over more to help pay for higher premiums.

Not only is health care about to become more expensive, it's going to become harder to access.

Some rural hospitals have already begun to close, citing the disastrous cuts to Medicaid. Nine rural hospitals in Illinois alone are at risk of closing.

Billionaires and their anti-union 'yes-men' in Congress have jacked up costs. They are forcing job cuts. They're pushing smaller hospitals out of business. They're making our communities sicker—all to make sure the richest 1% get to keep more for themselves.

We need more affordable health care, not less. We'll need to stand up with our allies and fight together to make sure our health care doesn't skyrocket in price and to protect the health care choices we have now. 

Trump administration ramps up anti-union rampage

In yet another anti-union action by the Trump administration, the head of the Federal Bureau of Prisons announced on Sept. 25 that the administration has unilaterally terminated the union contract covering 30,000 federal correctional officers across the country—including hundreds here in Illinois.

Federal corrections workers are represented by the American Federation of Government Employees, the largest union for federal employees. “It’s outrageous,” said Ryan Bell, president of AFSCME Local 2052 at Danville Correctional Center. “Those workers have every right to that contract. The fact that anybody—whether it’s the president or a governor—can rip up your contract and say your collective bargaining rights don’t matter, that’s terrible for every worker.” Bell is worried about the precedent that this decision sets for other employers. “My fear is that this will trickle down, and other unions could be next,” he said.

Jon Zumekhr, the president of the union that represents corrections workers at FCI Thomson Federal Prison in the Quad Cities area, said he was stunned to learn of the administration’s decision. “I want people to understand that contract was legally binding and was agreed upon by both parties,” Zumekhr told WHBF news. “When people talk about respect for the rule of law, how can anybody say respect for the rule of law when they take away a contract?” Some 1 million federal workers are asking themselves the same question. Since taking office, Trump has terminated the union contracts which

protected some 320,000 employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs, hundreds of thousands of employees of the Department of Defense, 82,000 Treasury employees and many more. The Trump administration has cancelled these contracts under the vague guise of a threat to “national security.” In total, the number of union members covered by the contracts the Trump administration has ripped up

total 7% of the entire nation’s union workforce. Those workers no longer have the right to have a union representative in disciplinary meetings. They’ve lost the safety protections they negotiated. Some have lost the additional four weeks of parental leave they negotiated in their contract. Most of all, they’ve lost the safety and security that their unions afforded them. Although AFGE is the largest union representing

federal workers, AFSCME also represents several thousand federal workers. AFSCME has joined AFGE in fighting these measures in court in a number of instances. But while there have been a few legal victories that temporarily halted the massive union-busting while the core issues are being litigated, for the most part, the courts have allowed the administration to proceed with wiping out unions in the federal government.



AFGE members have so far borne the brunt of the Trump administration’s anti-union stance.

AFSCME LOCAL 2464 MAKES HISTORY



For the first time ever, on Oct. 6, all three of the Jackson County Ambulance Service’s EMS crews were staffed entirely by women!

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

NEIU workers win “life-changing” contract

AS MEMBERS OF AFSCME Local 1989 at Northeastern Illinois University entered contract negotiations in 2024, they weren’t feeling like management respected the important work they do.

Many employees at NEIU have worked there for years, even decades. “I’ve been around NEIU since 2002,” Local 1989 president Mary Serio said. “I know this university, I know the issues the students go through.”

Union members had a plan to turn up the pressure on management. In February, they set up a table in a heavily trafficked part of the university with a giant Valentine’s Day card to get the attention of university president Katrina Bell-Jordan.

Colorful and boldly stating their Valentine’s Day message—“Love is a Fair Contract”—the card soon garnered dozens of signatures from AFSCME members, as well as students, faculty and other campus workers.

Next, local union members marched into Bell-Jordan’s office to deliver the card.

“The message we sent was that we are important to the life of this university,”



Members of AFSCME Local 1989 at NEIU in Chicago won their contract by staying united and engaging the campus community.

said Criage Althage, a library specialist and member of the union bargaining committee. “This helped us show that management was holding back the progressive change we were demanding.”

In the contract ratified by members in July, the union made significant gains on several fronts.

One of the biggest fights during bargaining was over parental leave. The bargaining committee succeeded in tripling the amount of leave members are entitled to after the birth or adoption of a child.

The union also won improvements to bereavement

leave and extended tuition waivers for workers who may be laid off so they can continue their education.

The new contract raises wages by 12% across the board over four years. The union also won the right to a pool of equity money totaling \$415,000 to be distributed by mutual agreement throughout the bargaining unit over the life of the contract.

“Some people are going to get some life-changing raises as a result of this contract,” Serio said. “That means a lot to a lot of people.”

The union bargaining committee included Serio,

Althage and Rebekah Fitchett. The committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Kathy Steichen.

IL Central bus drivers and monitors step up

THE 50 SCHOOL BUS DRIVERS and monitors from the Illinois Central bus company near Peoria have seen what AFSCME has accomplished for other school bus drivers in their region.

When they formed their own union in 2024, they vowed to achieve that same kind of progress for themselves.

At the top of their list was securing improvements for the bus monitors.

Bus monitors play a critical role when the bus is in motion. With the driver focused on safely operating the bus, monitors are there to make sure the students are taken care of while on the road.

But management wasn’t treating bus monitors with the respect they deserve. Their fellow union members were ready to stand up for them.

“Management had made some very demeaning statements about monitors,” said Jack Nannen, a driver who served on the bargaining committee. “All of us drivers got together and agreed that we had to fight for them.”

The bargaining committee was also seeking something that’s the bare minimum in every modern workplace: bathrooms with running water. The company’s employee rest rooms had been in disrepair for years, and employees were forced to use portable outdoor toilets, even in inclement weather.

The members of AFSCME Local 3733 might be new to bargaining, but they knew beyond any doubt that they had to stick together and stand firm. And that’s just what they did. In the contract ratified by members, monitors won a \$3 hourly increase in the first year, and 3% in each

FAIR WAGES FOR SIU SCHOOL OF MEDICINE STAFF!



Members of AFSCME Local 370 who work for the SIU School of Medicine in Springfield and Decatur took to the picket line in frustration over management’s lack of movement at the bargaining table. SIU employees give their all to their patients—the school should pay them a living wage in return.



School bus drivers and monitors who work for Illinois Central made sure every member of their local made gains in their new contract.

of the contract’s remaining two years. They also bumped up field trip pay by almost \$5 an hour.

And they got management to agree to meet the most basic of necessities: remodeled indoor bathrooms complete with running water.

“Things are now a lot better at Illinois Central,” Nannen said.

The bargaining committee included Nannen, Kevin Weisling, Connie Alberts, Peggy Smith and Dave Plunkett. The committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Nick Richards.

Dolton employees outlast notorious mayor

THEY STAYED UNITED AND determined, and now members of AFSCME Local 2199 who work for the village of Dolton have won the fair contract they deserve after the village spent years stalling while its mayor spent taxpayer funds lavishly.

The village in the south suburbs of Chicago is small and quiet, but it attracted an outsized share of attention in recent years due to the notoriety of its former mayor, Tiffany Henyard.

Henyard has been the subject of a federal investigation over allegations of fraud, corruption and financial mismanagement, as well as verbally abusing village residents.

During her time as mayor, Henyard racked up millions of dollars in debt for the small village, driven in part by

excessive credit card spending and six-figure taxpayer-funded trips to Las Vegas.

Henyard’s terrible reputation among the village’s residents was even starting to unfairly blow back on union members who were just trying to do their jobs. Local 2199 members work in the public works department and in administrative positions throughout the village.

“Residents would pull up to us while we were on the jobsite and make comments to us about the mayor,” said Local 2199 President Len Bowman. “It was like they saw us as an extension of her, which absolutely was not the case.”

It wasn’t fair to the union



Members of AFSCME Local 2199 who work for the village of Dolton won a fair contract despite contending with a reckless mayor.

members who make Dolton work.

They were seeking fair wage increases and a crucial bump for public works employees with commercial driver’s licenses.

For administrative employees, the local wanted to develop promotional pathways and smaller steps between classifications so workers could move up the pay scale quicker.

Eventually, the stalling ended and real negotiations began. The result was a contract with advances on a number of fronts.

The local won fair wage increases across the board, totaling 18% over the five-year contract. They succeeded in creating new promotional paths for administrative employees and won a \$3-per-hour bump for any public works employee who got their CDL, up from \$2.

“We’re moving forward and trying to make a new path for our union,” Bowman said.

The bargaining committee included Bowman, Patricia Byrd and John Conway. The committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Lloyd Marshall.

LOCAL 2371 SAYS “ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!”



Members of AFSCME Local 2371 at Hope Creek Nursing, Rehab and Care Center in East Moline have had management stonewall them at the bargaining table for two years. Hope Creek management must reach an agreement on a fair contract now.

SHORT REPORTS

Fix Tier 2 fight goes on

THE WE ARE ONE ILLINOIS Coalition—comprised of AFSCME and our allied public sector unions—made a huge push to pass legislation to address the injustices of the Tier 2 pension system during this spring’s legislative session.

The bill backed by our coalition was intended to be a partial step forward that would be more palatable to lawmakers concerned about the potential costs of some of the fixes. To address this concern head on, the bill the coalition was backing in the spring would have had no cost to the state in the first year.

But then the U.S. Congress passed the so-called Big, Beautiful Bill—legislation that has stripped billions in funding for the state. As panic ensued in the General Assembly, about the disastrous impacts the bill will have on the state budget, lawmakers became much more reluctant to take action. So the session ended without even modest steps forward in tackling the Tier 2 injustice.

But we aren’t giving up. The fight to fix Tier 2 is plowing ahead.

This summer, coalition leaders, including Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch, have met with legislative leaders to brief them on the bill and build support for it.

One thing is clear: There will be stiff headwinds. The impacts of federal cuts are still causing fear in the halls of the Capitol.

To pass legislation fixing Tier 2, we’re going to need to put pressure on our lawmakers to restore the promise of a fair retirement benefit after a career in public service. Stay tuned for ways you can get involved.

Mail scanning: It’s finally happening

AFTER AFSCME AND THE Illinois Department of Corrections reached an agreement to bring mail-scanning technology to every state prison, union members took heart, hoping that the years of heightened drug use by individuals in custody would be coming to an end.

As of Oct. 3, that promise became a reality: Mail scanning is now fully operational at every single state prison.

In recent years, smuggling drugs into prison through the mail has become frighteningly common among individuals in custody, and as a result, drug exposures and hospitalizations of prison staff have gone through the roof.

Now, corrective action is being taken at last. In addition to shifting to electronic scanning of the mail, the

department has ended an emergency rule that allowed books and magazines to be dropped off at the front gate. Now, AFSCME members no longer need to handle those materials. Instead they have to be sent in from an authorized publisher or book distributor.

Though there are some operational hiccups that will get ironed out with time, mail scanning is thus far working as intended.

AFSCME members in IDOC should be proud of their efforts in getting mail scanning across the finish line.

Council 31 Biennial Convention gets underway!

AS ON THE MOVE GOES TO print, hundreds of delegates and guests from Council 31 local unions are gathering in Springfield for the 24th Biennial Council 31 Constitutional Convention.

Under the banner of “All In”, local union delegates are charting the path ahead for our union, attending educational seminars to make their local unions stronger, and building solidarity with one another.

Assembled delegates and guests are hearing rousing speeches on the state of our union from Council 31

Executive Director Roberta Lynch and Deputy Director Mike Newman, as well as motivational addresses from AFSCME International President Lee Saunders and Illinois AFL-CIO President Tim Drea.

Follow AFSCME Council 31 on all social media platforms to keep up with the daily activity at the convention.

50,000 Workers Strong! AFSCME Cultural Workers United Hits 5-Year Milestone

AFSCME CULTURAL WORKERS United hit a milestone this year. 50,000 workers at museums, libraries, zoos and other cultural institutions across the nation have won a voice on the job by forming a union with AFSCME.

From coast to coast, cultural workers began joining together to address issues that had long plagued anyone trying to build a career in the cultural field. Dismal wages that were often viewed as concessions for working at prestigious institutions. Lack of accountability and transparency from management. And an overall exclusion of workers’ voices in setting workplace policies.

In recent years, thousands of cultural workers

have formed new unions with AFSCME in big cities, small towns, and rural areas all over the country, from New York to California.

And nowhere is the boom in cultural worker organizing more manifest than in Illinois.

In just a few short years, thousands of cultural workers throughout the state have formed their unions with AFSCME Council 31 at famed institutions such as the Art Institute of Chicago, the Field Museum, the Museum of Science and Industry, the Shedd Aquarium, the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, the Chicago History Museum and the Museum of Contemporary Art.

Library workers have been particularly energized to join the CWU wave. Employees at Chicago’s Newberry Library, Urbana Free Library, Mississippi Valley Public Library, Niles-Maine District Library, and more, have all formed their unions with AFSCME in recent years.

Many of these new unions have since ratified their first union contracts, which include gains such as significant wage increases, unprecedented longevity bonuses, compensation for bilingual employees, improved job advancement and training opportunities, paid parental leave, and benefits that also cover part-time employees.



Demanding mail scanning was a chief demand in 2024’s statewide Safety Matters pickets.

RETIREE NOTES

AFSCME retiree takes the helm at IARA

AFSCME RETIREES
Sub-chapter 60 member Peter Mendoza was elected president of the Illinois Alliance of Retired Americans at the 2025 biennial IARA convention in September.

“It’s difficult to feel our power when you feel less secure because you’re on a fixed income,” Mendoza said. “But through organizations like IARA and through our retiree sub-chapters, seniors have a voice that can’t be ignored. I’m honored by my election and promise to use my time as president fighting tooth and nail for Illinois’ seniors.”

The IARA unites retirees in labor and other community organizations to protect retirement security, Medicare, Social Security, and programs like Meals on Wheels. Mendoza and IARA’s new board are committed to growing this organization and continuing to educate the public, policymakers and elected officials about critical issues facing older Americans and working families.

Social Security Trustees Report

TRUSTEES FOR SOCIAL
Security and Medicare estimate that the programs’ combined trust fund reserves will run out a year earlier than previously projected.

They found that if Social Security’s Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Disability Insurance trust funds were combined, they would be able to pay 100% of scheduled benefits only until 2034.

Politicians who advocate slashing Social Security will try to use this news to justify cutting benefits or privatizing the program. Both of those courses of action would be wrong for America’s seniors.

What’s needed—and supported by the majority of the American people—is increasing Social Security revenue. The program has captured a declining share of income as wealth inequality worsens, because wages



AFSCME retiree Peter Mendoza.

above \$171,100 aren’t subject to Social Security contributions.

It’s time to lift the payroll wage cap and make the wealthy pay their fair share. The Social Security

actuaries estimate this measure alone would add \$3.5 trillion to the trust fund over just 10 years.

Unfortunately, Congress passed President Trump’s so-called Big Beautiful Bill

AETNA ALERT

Aetna announced it will leave the Illinois insurance marketplace in 2026. This does not impact state and university retirees in the TRAIL MAPD program that provides coverage through Aetna’s MAPD PPO plan.

which flatlines funding for the Social Security Administration that’s long been chronically underfunded.

Now’s the time to build back reserves in the Social Security trust fund. We shouldn’t take a bad deal that cuts benefits for the growing share of Americans who need Social Security for most or all of their income in retirement. 🐦

RETIREES CALL OUT BILLIONAIRE-BACKED MEDICARE CUTS

A photograph of a group of retirees at a protest. They are holding signs that say "HANDS OFF SOCIAL SECURITY", "STOP BILLIONAIRE TAX BREAKS", "SAVE PUBLIC SERVICES", and "SAVE MEDICAID". A woman is speaking at a podium with a microphone. The background is a plain wall.

AFSCME Chapter 31 Retirees took part in events thanking U.S. Reps. Eric Sorensen (D-17), Nikki Budzinski (D-13), and Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-8) for standing up against President Trump’s so-called “Big Beautiful Bill” that includes a 10% cut to Medicare.

Betty Christensen represented Retirees Sub-chapter 69 at the event with Rep. Sorensen. After 31 years as a paraprofessional in Rockford Public Schools, she’s concerned for retirees who depend on Medicare.

“I couldn’t imagine what my life would be like if Medicare wasn’t there for me or if Social Security benefits were slashed,” Christensen said. “I know, with the cost of living, many seniors are being forced to make tradeoffs that no one should have to make.”



Bobbie Jackson

FAMILY SUPPORT SPECIALIST
ROCKFORD HEAD START

AFSCME Local 1058

Tell us about your work.

I've been with Head Start for 25 years. I started as a teacher, did my internship there, and just never left. I love working with little kids and making a difference. Right now, I'm a family support specialist. We're there at 7:30 AM, helping teachers, helping families, riding the bus, doing arrivals, and meeting with families to help them get the resources they need.

How do you make a difference every day?

Right now I have a family that was living in a shelter. The mom got into her own apartment but was having a hard time paying for everything because she just started working. I referred her to different agencies to help with rent assistance. She wants to go back to school, so I'm helping her find the next GED class signup. We're getting her resources for

Christmas gifts because that's going to be tough—every little bit of money she makes is accounted for.

We help families in so many ways. We helped one mom get her child special education services faster. I have families who still reach out to me years later. People invite me to graduations.

Sometimes I'm the first person students see when they come through the door. When they have that big smile and you give them a hug, it makes that transition easier. It helps them know they're coming to a place where they'll be loved and cared for.

What does the Head Start program mean to families and students?

Head Start is important because we help the family as a whole. We're working with not just the child but the entire family to empower them

and better their lives. The mom I mentioned earlier feels hopeless right now, but when I talked to her about other families I've worked with over the years, she cried. It gives her hope that she's not stuck where she's at.

For a lot of kids, this is where they eat. This is where they have stability. We let families know they're not stuck in their current situation.

What are some challenges you face working for Head Start?

I have 125 families on my caseload—which is way too many to give them the services they truly need. It's not hands-on enough for me. I'm trying to get as much done as I can while keeping up with all the paperwork, and sometimes things get missed. We haven't been fully staffed for years.

What do the politicians who bash Head Start not understand about what you do?

A lot of politicians don't understand what it's like to be desperate. They don't understand what it's like to feel like your world is coming to an end, to not know where your next meal is coming from.

They can't understand what it's like unless they've seen it firsthand and see how much we mean to these kids and their parents. One parent told me that the day she signed up her kid for school, she had given up all hope until she met me. She was jobless, had been in a bad car accident, and lost child care. Within a week, I had her kid in child care, and now she's working for Head Start as one of our parental aides.

How does your union help you succeed?

I don't know if I would still be working for the city without our union. Years ago, when my son was in third grade and needed emergency surgery, they took me out of the running for a promotion because I was missing work for his medical care. A week later, we got our union.

The union has protected many of our staff's jobs. Another family support specialist was terminated unjustly a year ago. We fought for her, got her job back, and now she's our supervisor. My coworkers and I serve on negotiations because somebody has to stand up with a strong voice to fight for what's right.

It's a very stressful job—it's not for the weak. Without our union fighting for us, we'd be in an even worse position.