NO. 226 • FALL 2026

ILLINOIS COUNCIL 31
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF STATE, COUNTY
AND MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES - AFL-CIO

ON THE MOVE

ALWAYS TOGETHER

AFSCME STRONG!

Non-Profit Org
U.S. Postage
PAID
AFSCME

AFSCME Council 31
205 N. Michigan Ave.
21st Floor
Chicago, IL 60601

STATE BARGAINING COMMITTEE GEARS UP PAGE 6

WHAT'S AT STAKE ON NOV. 3 PAGES 8-9

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE STATE BUDGET PAGE 10

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Collective bargaining takes collective action



BY ROBERTA LYNCH

WE DON'T JUST DEPEND ON A BARGAINING COMMITTEE, BUT ON A BARGAINING FORCE.

Labor unions have many facets, many strengths, many tactics, many forms of activity. But nothing is more fundamental to the collective power that a union represents than collective bargaining. It is the means by which working people come together to improve our workplaces, our standard of living, and the quality of our lives.

The forms of bargaining often differ depending on the traditions and structures of each union. But at its core, collective bargaining is a legally guided process through which workers can determine what is most important to them, and their employer is required to engage in good-faith negotiations to reach an agreement that addresses those concerns.

In our union, members elect, from their own ranks, representatives to engage in that bargaining process. With input from the membership, the committee then identifies the goals it will work to accomplish in the negotiations. And then they sit down at the bargaining table—yes, there is almost always a real table—with the union on one side and management on the other.

That's the framework, but that's not the whole picture. Yes, employers are required to bargain in good faith with the union. But they're not required to agree with the union. And that's where the challenges arise. Some employers actually care about their employees and want to do right by them. In those all-too-rare instances, agreements can be reached in a matter of a few months. But all too often—especially in these times of tight budgets—employers come to the table with their only goal being to hold the line on everything, or even to roll back gains previously made.

That's when it's critical to remember that collective bargaining is rarely just about what happens at the bargaining table. Over the course of decades, AFSCME in Illinois has secured thousands of union contracts—every one of them representing steady progress in transforming members' lives: Family income has increased, standards of living have risen, access to quality health care has expanded, workplaces have become safer, rights have been strengthened, and workers' voices have been heard, loud and clear.

We accomplished all that because we don't think only of a bargaining table, but of a bargaining arena. And we don't just depend on a bargaining committee, but on a bargaining force—all members united in working to win the best possible contract. We don't just sit; we stand, we march, we rally, we push, we picket, and in extreme circumstances, we shut it all down, we go out on strike.

In October, we held the first meeting of the bargaining committee for a new state of Illinois contract which embodies the aspirations of some 40,000 state employees. The current contract expires on June 30, 2027. The committee, 220 members elected by 70 state local unions, is reviewing nearly 1,000 proposals submitted by members all across the state in order to determine what our union's priorities will be in this round of contract negotiations when they get underway in January. Committee members are also getting to work to set up Member Action Teams in their local unions that can serve as communication and mobilization networks as needed.

We're also going back to the bargaining table in early '27 for two other large employee groups—the city of Chicago and Cook County. And then there will be dozens of other rounds of negotiations—some just getting started, some where we've already been battling for months (even years!) at universities, in local governments, and at nonprofit entities from one end of the state to the other.

None of these negotiations will be easy. We are living under the dark cloud of Trump Administration policies that have slashed billions of dollars in federal funding from state and local governments—all to provide ever-bigger tax breaks for the ever-wealthier billionaire class.

Now our employers will come to us pleading revenue shortfalls, spiraling health insurance costs and pressing other needs. And they won't be lying. But they will, in essence, be wrong. We can't let them just sit back and do nothing while the Washington axe falls heavy on our heads.

Winning fair contracts in the coming year will require massive grassroots action, but it will also require ever more intensive action in the legislative and electoral arenas to win back the revenues that have effectively been stolen from working people. It will require new revenue-raising measures that raise taxes on the millionaire class that has reaped so many benefits in our current political ecosphere. And it will be up to us to lead the way in that battle.

There's a reason why national polls increasingly indicate that more and more Americans have a positive view of unions—and many say they would join a union if they could. Collective bargaining is a big part of that reason. It's about collective power. Not only do unions provide us with the right to bargain collectively to improve our lives, they provide us with the ability to take the kind of collective action that backs up that bargaining.

That's what our union is all about. We've surely got some tough times ahead to win the contract fights that are looming. But we are a tough bunch, battle-tested and determined to continue to move forward. It will take all of us standing together, refusing to be divided or distracted, unwavering in our commitment, to continue to make real progress for ourselves, for our families, and for generations to come.

Council 31 AFSCME
We Make Illinois Happen

ON THE MOVE

Illinois *On the Move* is published four times annually by Illinois Public Employees Council 31 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO.

Send correspondence to: bconboy@afscme31.org or AFSCME, *On the Move,* 205 N. Michigan Avenue, 21st Floor, Chicago, IL 60601

Roberta Lynch, Executive Director
Ben Conboy, Editor
Julie Wildman, Designer

COUNCIL 31 EXECUTIVE BOARD OFFICERS

Executive Director
Roberta Lynch

Deputy Director
Mike Newman

Executive Vice President-Local Government
John Rayburn, Local 1215

Executive Vice President-Private Sector
Yurvette Simmons, Local 3237

Executive Vice President-State Employees
Crosby Smith, Local 2645

Executive Vice President-University Employees
Chuck Carver, Local 1110

Secretary
Loretta Soresie, Local 2615

Treasurer
Terrence Boone, Local 672

BOARD MEMBERS

State Employees Conference Board Co-Chairs
Arnold Black, Local 2971
Will Lee, Local 494
Danny Williams, Local 29

REGION I VICE-PRESIDENTS
D. Safiya Felters, Local 2854
Jennifer Howard, Local 2081
Larry Lawrence, Local 3696
Eileen O'Neil, Local 1891
Martha Stroger, Local 55
Denise Williams, Local 1669

REGION II VICE-PRESIDENTS
Ruben Delgado, Local 1514
Timothy Olaosebikan, Local 3492
Tom Opolony, Local 89
Tamara Rietman, Local 3693
James Stickle, Local 1274
Alice Sutherland, Local 448

REGION III VICE-PRESIDENTS
Robert Flack, Local 268
Craig Linne, Local 2073
Jack Matthews, Local 1964
Nicholas McLaughlin, Local 2856
Kimberly Pope, Local 981
David Schultz, Local 1019

REGION IV VICE-PRESIDENTS
Jerry Grammer, Local 1175
Keith Kracht, Local 203
John Medley, Local 1805
Molly Schroader, Local 799

TRUSTEES
Bonnie Brimm, Local 3280
Minda Williamson, Local 1028
Ona Rivero Winfield, Local 141

RETIREE CHAPTER 31 PRESIDENT
Larry Brown

Obama Foundation & Presidential Center employees forming union with AFSCME

Employees of the Barack Obama Foundation and Presidential Center announced on Oct.7 that they're organizing a union with AFSCME Council 31.

The new union will represent more than 250 people who work in all aspects of Obama Foundation operations, including at the Obama Presidential Center in Chicago, at the foundation's Washington, D.C. offices, and throughout the country.

The announcement came in an open letter signed by 68 employees and sent to their co-workers.

"We are the workers who spend our days fulfilling the vision and values of the Obama Foundation," they wrote. "We strongly believe in the mission to 'inspire, empower, and connect people to change their world,' and now we'd like to change ours."

The letter continued: "Every day we come together across departments and across the country to bring President and Mrs. Obama's vision to life. We have faced many challenges while doing the unprecedented work of realizing that vision"—citing heavy workloads, inadequate benefits, insufficient support from management, and high employee turnover.

They cite President Obama's 2016 *Open Letter to America's Hardworking Men and Women,* in which he wrote, "If I were looking for a good job that lets me build some security for my family, I'd join a union. If I saw a problem in my workplace, I'd organize my coworkers to do something about it."

"These employees are the heart of the Obama Foundation. Every day they do the work that makes the new Presidential Center such a remarkable addition to our city," AFSCME Council 31 executive director Roberta Lynch said. "Together in our union, they can ensure that the Foundation and Presidential Center are every bit as good a place to work as the Center is to visit."



Ignacio Salinas
Visitor Services Associate
"I want to ensure we have a seat at the table on policies that affect us and ensure we have a better workplace for me and my colleagues."



Shania McDonald
Visitor Education and Engagement Associate
"I previously worked with the National Park Service, including at sites like Pullman National Park, and I know it's really important for workers to be united and bargain for the rights they deserve."



Obama Presidential Center employees launched their union with overwhelming support from the center's patrons.

Champaign public works employees answer the call during record storm season

Summer 2026 was one of the most active and destructive storm seasons in Illinois history. Through August, the National Weather Service issued more than 1,300 thunderstorm and tornado warnings, more than in any other year on record. Illinois was hit by more tornadoes than any other state.

Several communities were devastated. After the storms passed, residents had to pick up the pieces—but they didn't have to do it alone. AFSCME members in public works departments across Illinois were there to help.

In Champaign, members of AFSCME Local 1960 met the challenge. The city's Public Works Department often sends a crew and equipment—including bucket trucks, loaders and dump trucks—to storm-impacted communities, and this year was one of their busiest years ever.

Just before the Fourth of July, an F2 tornado struck Charleston, 40 miles south of Champaign. At its peak the twister was 800 yards wide, and its path stretched nearly 14 miles. Trees were uprooted, several homes were destroyed, and part of Charleston Middle School's roof was ripped off.

"The size of the trees that were blown over was unbelievable," said Dave Richmond, an arborist and treasurer of Local 1960. "One oak tree was probably 160 years old. I've never been in an event where there was that much debris."

For weeks, Champaign crews worked day and night to help the community get back on its feet, cleaning up debris and making sure damaged trees were safe.

"You could see when you talked to people that they didn't expect their life would go back to normal so quickly, but it did," Richmond said. "You could see the stress melting away from them."

Charleston was one of three communities Local 1960 helped this year through the Illinois Public Works Mutual Aid Network, which lets storm-struck cities request help from member cities. Champaign crews also spent time in Pesotum and Bloomington after severe storms impacted those areas.

The experience that comes from working a storm is the best training a worker can get, Richmond said. After each deployment, management asks crews what worked and what didn't.

"We've got such an experienced crew now that, if we have a tornado in Champaign, we won't be in shock," Richmond said. "We'll be ready to roll."



Members of AFSCME Local 1960 remove debris so residents can get back on their feet

For Richmond, it shows the value of a strong union.

"If we didn't have the union behind us, it would be more top-down, where you're just ordered to go do something and you wouldn't have input," he said. "It's about respect. Management values our opinions more than in some places."

AFSCME International Convention recap: Through the eyes of a first-time delegate

These reflections on the 47th AFSCME International convention were written by AFSCME Local 3696 member Ryan McIntyre, a Cook County Board of Review employee and first-time convention delegate. This thorough recap, sent to members of his local as part of a membership report on the convention, offers a glimpse through the eyes of a new AFSCME member.



The Council 31 convention delegation stands together in support of a resolution.



Ryan McIntyre

This year, I had the incredible opportunity to represent AFSCME Local 3696 at the 47th AFSCME International Convention in Chicago. As a first-time delegate, I went into the week excited to learn more about our union beyond our own local and Council 31. I came away with an even greater appreciation for just how large, diverse, and powerful AFSCME is.

Monday: The Convention Officially Begins

Monday marked the Opening General Session of the convention. Council 31 Executive Director Roberta Lynch officially opened the convention and welcomed AFSCME delegates from across the country to Chicago.

International President Lee Saunders delivered the opening keynote address, and throughout the session delegates were reminded of the history, solidarity, and fighting spirit that have defined AFSCME.

Following the general session, delegates participated in committee meetings and a wide range of workshops. Topics included getting out the vote, building power from day one, organizing around workplace issues, developing new activists, defending workplace equity, Shop Steward 101, and many others.

Tuesday: Connecting Across AFSCME

The morning began with sector roundtables for members working in areas such as health care, higher education, housing, public works, cultural institutions, and other public-service sectors. These provided members with an opportunity to meet and network with AFSCME siblings from around the country who perform similar work and face many of the same challenges.

Wednesday: The Power of Partnership and Solidarity in Action

One of the day's major programs was "Power of Partnerships," moderated by President Saunders and featuring leaders from three other major national unions.

The discussion reinforced an important message: The challenges facing working people cannot be confronted by any one union alone. Building a stronger labor movement requires unions to work together, organize together, and stand together.

Later that day, we had an opportunity to put those words into action.

Convention delegates joined Shedd Aquarium workers outside the aquarium for a direct-action rally demanding a fair contract.

For me, this was one of the clearest demonstrations of what union solidarity looks like. Thousands of delegates had traveled to Chicago to conduct the business of our union, but when fellow workers were fighting for a fair contract, we left the convention hall and stood beside them.

Thursday: Elections and Honoring Public Service

Thursday began with delegates voting for Executive Vice Presidents, International Secretary-Treasurer, and International President.

PEOPLE awards were presented recognizing political activism throughout our union, and longtime Illinois Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky received AFSCME's Spirit of Public Service Award in recognition of her years of advocacy for workers and public services.

Friday: A New Generation of AFSCME Leadership

Friday brought the convention to a close.

Delegates learned that Nicole Pollard had been elected AFSCME's new International Secretary-Treasurer and Patrick Moran had been elected our new International President.

Both delivered acceptance speeches before being sworn into office alongside three new Executive Vice Presidents, officially beginning a new chapter in AFSCME's leadership.

Throughout the week, delegates also debated and adopted dozens of resolutions establishing AFSCME's positions and priorities on some of the most important issues facing working people. Delegates passed resolutions supporting:

- Medicare for all;
- Affordable housing;
- Protecting and expanding Social Security;
- Expanding paid leave;
- Supporting and organizing cultural workers;
- Passing the PRO Act and expanding labor and collective bargaining rights;
- And many more.

These debates were an important reminder that our union's work extends beyond negotiating wages and benefits. AFSCME members are workers, parents, renters and homeowners, patients, voters, immigrants, neighbors, and members of communities across this country. The decisions made in our workplaces, legislatures, and communities are interconnected.

What I Took Away from My First Convention

Going into this convention, I knew AFSCME was a large union. But there is something entirely different about sitting in a convention hall surrounded by thousands of AFSCME members from across the country and seeing the diversity of the work our members perform.

We may work in different professions, but so many of the challenges we face are the same: protecting good public-sector jobs, securing fair wages and benefits, defending our rights, and making sure working people have a voice in our workplaces.

Delegates were not simply there to listen to speeches. We voted on the direction and priorities of our union. We attended workshops so that we could become better organizers, activists, and union members when we returned home.

Our local is one small part of a much larger movement—but every local, every workplace, every steward, every activist, and every member matters. AFSCME's strength comes from us—from members organizing together, supporting one another, participating in our union, and understanding that an injury to one truly is an injury to all.



Thousands of AFSCME members rallied for Shedd Aquarium workers fighting for a first contract.

AFSCME members elect new leaders

Patrick Moran and Nicole Pollard to lead AFSCME into the future

AFSCME members elected Patrick Moran as AFSCME International President at the union's 47th International Convention in Chicago.

Nicole Pollard was elected International Secretary-Treasurer.

Moran is a lifelong organizer who has spent more than two decades helping workers form unions nationwide.

Before his election as president, he served for 14 years as president of AFSCME Maryland Council 3, tripling the council's membership and becoming one of that state's largest unions of public service workers.

Under Moran's leadership, Council 3 won collective bargaining rights for 15,000 public employees, including the Office of the Public Defender, county library workers and frontline state supervisors.

The council negotiated the first statewide master agreement for University System of Maryland workers, secured more than $23 million in back pay for state correctional officers who were victims of wage theft, and won the state's only pandemic hazard pay settlement for frontline workers.

"I am honored to accept this responsibility. Nicole and I are ready to meet this moment," said Moran. "For 90 years, AFSCME members have been shaping and making history. Every generation of our union has faced its defining moment. Now it's our turn. We will fight and build power like our future depends on it because it does. We will protect our neighbors and strengthen our communities. This is our fight, and together, we've got the power to make change."



Nicole Pollard and Patrick Moran were elected Secretary-Treasurer and President.

Nicole Pollard, an AFSCME member for 23 years, served as AFSCME International executive assistant to former President Lee Saunders. She makes history as the first African American woman to serve as AFSCME's secretary-treasurer.

Over her career, Pollard has served as legal counsel to three international unions representing workers across sectors and helping unions navigate complex legal, financial and organizational challenges.

She has knocked on doors to organize new workers, bargained national and local contracts, and represented workers in grievance and arbitration proceedings. She worked with AFSCME leaders to build the union's racial and gender equity program, COURAGE to be Stronger, and partnered with AFSCME members to protect voting rights and ensure fair, secure elections.

Moran and Pollard pledged to build on that momentum by investing in bold, direct member engagement and mobilization. Their platform focused on growing worker power, protecting and expanding public services, and improving the lives of working people by taking on the fights ahead.

Thank you, Lee Saunders

International President leaves AFSCME stronger and more vital than ever

After 14 years as president and a lifetime of service to working people and the labor movement, Lee Saunders retired from his role as AFSCME International President following the international convention in August.

"Serving as AFSCME president has been the privilege of a lifetime," Saunders said in his farewell address. "The struggle to win dignity and respect for working people isn't something I read about in a book or studied in a classroom. It's in my DNA."

Saunders began his career with AFSCME in 1978 as a labor economist. He served as assistant director of research and collective bargaining services, director of community action and deputy director of organizing and field services. Saunders also served as executive assistant to the president of AFSCME and was responsible for managing one of the most effective political and legislative operations in the history of the American labor movement.

Under Saunders' leadership, the union launched the AFSCME Strong program, which builds power through internal and external organizing and recognizes the individual contributions AFSCME members make to serving and strengthening their communities. The program is credited with growth in AFSCME membership despite current challenges faced by the labor movement as a whole.

Under President Saunders' leadership, AFSCME met some of the most challenging moments facing working families with clarity and resolve. During the COVID-19 pandemic, as AFSCME members risked their lives to serve their communities, President Saunders helped secure emergency funding from the federal government with the passage of the American Rescue Plan, preserving essential public services and saving jobs in communities across the country.

Amid historic political division and uncertainty, Saunders' leadership preserved AFSCME's unity and strengthened solidarity among union members.

Today, AFSCME is continuing to grow and create new opportunities for collective bargaining in states across the country, opening the door for thousands more public service workers to have a real voice on the job.



AFSCME President Lee Saunders has retired after 14 years leading AFSCME.

"It has been an honor to work on behalf of America's public service workers," Saunders said. "Leadership changes hands, but the power stays exactly where it has always been, with the workers. Worker power endures, and AFSCME is built for the fights ahead."

STATE BARGAINING COMMITTEE GEARS UP FOR MASTER CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS

AFSCME members in state government are gearing up for negotiations for a new state of Illinois master contract, which covers more than 42,000 state employees in every part of the state.

Council 31's state bargaining committee, elected by union members in each state local union, is one of the largest and most robust bargaining committees of any union in the country. All state locals are represented on the committee in proportion to the size of their membership, resulting in a body that is more than 200 members strong.

Members on the bargaining committee do not take the responsibility lightly. When they are elected to the committee, they go through a training program to equip them with the knowledge and skills they'll need at the negotiating table.

It takes deep dedication and strong commitment. The meetings can be long and will likely go on for months. Committee members sacrifice time spent with their family and friends.

The committee met in October to review all proposals submitted by local unions and adopt those that will be presented to management at a special labor-management meeting in December. Bargaining will then get underway in January.

AFSCME's current state contract, negotiated in 2023, won significant improvements to wages, benefits and working conditions that have carried members through the present day. Building on that progress in the next contract will require AFSCME members throughout state government to be prepared to take action in support of their bargaining committee.



Mark Rosenkoetter
AFSCME Local 2856
Department of Corrections/Graham Correctional Center

"All working people are dealing with higher prices in the grocery store and basic needs to support our families and pay the bills. We live in a time when average people are experiencing a squeeze for those kitchen-table items. This fight is about maintaining our middle-class standard of living."



Shaleah Blackshear
AFSCME Local 785
Department of Human Services/ Kiley Developmental Center

"We're going to be one voice, one union fighting for a fair contract. We all deserve the respect we're fighting for because we're the backbone of the state—that means fair wages, keeping up with the cost of living, a safe working environment, affordable health care and job security. There's no backing down—let's stand together."



Barbara Traylor
AFSCME Local 1805
Department of Children and Family Services

"The union is only as strong as the members–because we are the union. At the bargaining table, the support of the members is going to be so important. It's going to be boots on the ground. When a call goes out to take action, we all need to be ready to support it."



Latoya Meadows
AFSCME Local 3436
Department of Juvenile Justice/ Illinois Youth Center-Chicago

"Management needs to see every AFSCME member in the state fighting together. We have the numbers, and we need to show them we're here—management needs to see our numbers. We're ready to stand, ready to move and we have the support. That's going to be the biggest difference-maker."



Peyton Bernot
AFSCME Local 2224
Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity

"Gas is almost $5 a gallon, and diesel is north of $6 because of factors coming out of Washington, D.C. Money is on peoples' minds. Securing decent wage increases is on the front of all of our minds. As bargaining begins, stay alert. Go to a meeting. Get involved."

AFSCME sues Pritzker, DHS to keep Choate working

Council 31 has filed a lawsuit seeking to halt the state of Illinois' plan to close major portions of Choate Mental Health and Developmental Center. If the state is allowed to move forward with its plan, some 280 Choate employees would be laid off and mental health and disability services in southern Illinois would be gutted.

Council 31 filed the lawsuit in circuit court in Union County, where Choate is located. It has been assigned to a judge in neighboring Jackson County.

The state's threatened cuts violate multiple state laws intended to protect essential services for people with mental illness and developmental disabilities and to prohibit disruptive closures to large facilities without adequate oversight, AFSCME's lawsuit argues.

AFSCME filed the suit alongside Union County state's attorney Tyler Tripp and AFSCME Local 141 president Tina Winfield.

The lawsuit names the State of Illinois, Gov. JB Pritzker, the Illinois Department of Human Services and IDHS secretary Dulce Quintero as defendants.

AFSCME's lawsuit asks the court to stop the state from taking further steps to slash services and jobs at Choate and to direct DHS to comply with all applicable laws.

"AFSCME members who work at Choate care about the individuals they support and are committed to the mental health and disability services they provide," AFSCME Council 31 executive director Roberta Lynch said. "Southern Illinois needs these services, and state laws exist to protect them. That's why we're asking the court to step in."



Members of AFSCME Local 141 are standing together and rallying their community against the state's efforts to close parts of their facility.

Since the state's sudden announcement that it would drastically reduce services at Choate came down in July, AFSCME has been fighting back.

Members of AFSCME Local 141, which represents around 450 Choate employees, have been organizing in their communities, urging local residents and business owners to show their support for Choate, and gathering thousands of signatures on a petition telling the governor to reverse the decision.

Many of those petition signers have left powerful comments on the petition testifying to Choate's importance.

"Southern Illinois can't afford to lose Choate. The impact would be catastrophic," wrote one signer.

"Choate is the only facility that made a life change for our daughter. Southern Illinois needs long-term, inpatient psychiatric care," wrote another.

WELCOME TO AFSCME, IDOC GRADUATES!



Congratulations to the graduates of the August IDOC Decatur Academy Class, who are now on their way to vital careers in public safety.

WE'RE GOING TO THE POLLS

BECAUSE WE KNOW WHAT'S AT STAKE

IN 2026, A LOT IS AT STAKE: Our jobs, health care, retirement security, the freedom to join a union, even basic workplace protections. Anti-union politicians want to take it all away. We can fight back, keep what we've earned and build the future we deserve. Our power comes from our solidarity, and by voting for pro-worker allies who will make life more affordable for working families, we have the power to elect leaders who will stand up for working people and help build thriving communities.

Anti-worker forces led by Trump's administration are going all-out to undermine and restrict voter turnout. The administration has taken unprecedented steps to control the electoral process leading up to the midterm elections, including trying to purge eligible voters from the rolls, fire election officials, target pro-democracy organizations, intimidate volunteers trying to register their neighbors to vote, and make it harder for everyone to vote.

But early votes are already being cast and the administration's efforts aren't bearing fruit as of now, since the U.S. Supreme Court blocked Trump's plan to limit the delivery of mail ballots.

AFSCME members won't be intimidated. We know what's on the line.

WE WON'T BACK DOWN
AND WE WON'T STAY HOME

There's **too much on the line** for working people.

☑ **GET OUT AND VOTE, EARLY OR ON NOV. 3.**

Visit **AFSCME31.org/Vote** for AFSCME PEOPLE's candidate recommendations and more information on voting.

WE KNOW WHAT'S AT STAKE

Funding for public services

The so-called Big, Beautiful Bill—the notorious law that gave more tax breaks to the richest 1% of Americans than the bottom 60% combined—won't only worsen income inequality. It's already wreaking havoc on state and local government budgets.

Illinois is set to lose $48 billion in federal Medicaid funding over the next 10 years, according to an Illinois Economic Policy Institute study.

The loss of those billions means the state must make up the deficit in other ways, potentially by cutting funding for other areas of state government.

Compounding that enormous loss of funding, the same ILEPI study found that the federal funding cuts will shrink Illinois' economy by $10 billion per year, which in turn will reduce available revenue to local governments.

These catastrophic cuts will be felt by every AFSCME member in Illinois.

Making life affordable

Inflation has increased by 7% over the last two years alone—and it's on pace to accelerate.

Diesel prices, which contribute to the cost of groceries and many other household staples, reached all-time highs in September, with a gallon reaching $7 in some parts of the country. Gas prices are also at multi-year highs. If diesel and gas prices stay high, the cost of basic staples like food, clothes, and household products will climb, too.

Tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs have been erased. Grocery prices are going up. Housing isn't getting any cheaper. And mortgage rates are climbing to highs not seen since the financial crisis in 2008.

Lowering the exorbitant and ever-increasing cost of living requires electing leaders who will fight for the interests of working people, not billionaires.

Defending union rights

From its earliest days, the Trump administration fixed its sights on unions.

In the first year of his second term, Trump tore up union contracts for federal correctional officers, health care workers at the VA, TSA agents and others.

The termination of these collective bargaining agreements led to the immediate cancellation of certain rights and benefits for which federal union members fought hard. For example, 400,000 employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs lost four weeks of paid parental leave their union contract had previously afforded them.

Ending workplace safety rollbacks

The Trump administration fired 90% of the staff of the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health. Crucial programs were cut, including 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 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.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE STATE BUDGET



Boil it all down and any budget—from your household to the US government—is based on two things: Money coming in, and money going out. On this page we'll break down the Illinois state budget—where the money comes from, where it goes, and just as importantly, what's wrong with it and how it can be fixed.

Who cares? We all do!

It's no stretch to say that every AFSCME member has a big stake in the state budget. The annual spending plan debated each winter and ultimately approved each spring at the State Capitol in Springfield decides how much money state government will expend on its priorities.

That includes all the jobs that state employees do, such as mental health and disability care, prisons, child protection, state parks and veterans' homes, to name just a few.

And that's just the start.

The state budget also determines major chunks of funding for state universities; local school districts; entities such as disability care provider agencies, hospitals and nursing homes that receive state reimbursements; and city and county governments.

And it pays for benefits, including pensions for both active and retired state workers and university employees, and health insurance for them and their families.

How is it paid for?

More than half of the state's general fund revenue comes from income taxes paid by individuals. Sales taxes account for another 20%. Corporate taxes and federal funds are the next largest sources, each just under 10%. Lottery and other forms of gambling are about 2%, with the rest made up by investment income and miscellaneous fees.

The looming hole

Cuts to federal funding—part of the so-called "One Big Beautiful Bill" passed last year by Republicans in Congress and signed into law by President Trump—pose what's probably the biggest immediate challenge. Under that law, Illinois will lose $8.4 billion over five years for Medicaid and SNAP (food assistance).

"Initial estimates show a billion-and-a-half dollar hole in the state budget in FY28," AFSCME Council 31 director of employee benefits Martha Merrill says. "That continues to grow through subsequent fiscal years."

Other reports estimate the hit from OBBBA could be even larger. There are other complicating factors, too. The state's budget already has what's called a "structural deficit" because the tax system does not grow at a rate needed to support maintaining services. The structural deficit is estimated at around $2 billion in the coming year, according to Merrill.

And just as inflation pushes up the cost of living for working people when we go to the grocery store or gas station, it increases costs for state government, meaning tax dollars don't stretch as far.

And that's just the cost of continuing state-funded programs, services, jobs and benefits at current levels. Add in the need to increase funding for schools, state universities, and local governments, to meet the higher payments required on the pension funding ramp, to settle a new union contract for state employees, to continue raising wages for direct support personnel (DSPs) and more, and the dollar divide becomes a canyon.

In all, Merrill says, "The state budget is becoming more challenging this coming year, and exponentially harder in future years. A holistic approach is needed, because it's not a one-year problem; it's a progressively deteriorating situation in terms of lost revenue."

The possible solutions

Taxing the rich. Ending the ban on different income tax rates for people with different incomes requires an amendment to the Illinois Constitution. That's the right thing to do, it's more important than ever, but it's difficult: AFSCME supported such a change—the Fair Tax Amendment—in 2020, but it lost at the polls following a blizzard of spending by Republican billionaire Ken Griffin.

More recently, some have suggested an amendment to allow for higher taxes only on millionaires. In principle, that's a more than fair solution. Illinois is among a minority of states that actually prohibit a progressive income tax structure. But it's hard to see this solution addressing our current revenue woes. It couldn't be on the ballot before 2028 and wouldn't take effect even if passed until the 2030 budget year. And as 2020 showed, there's no guarantee voters would approve.

Closing loopholes. Corporate taxes and sales taxes have their challenges, too. The Constitution ties the income tax rate paid by corporations to the rate paid by individuals, so corporate income taxes can't be raised without jacking up what everybody pays. Corporations use loopholes—like moving money abroad—that hide their profits from being taxed fairly. (The "Big Beautiful Bill" shoveled even more giveaways to big business and billionaire investors, making the situation worse.)

AFSCME strongly supports continued efforts to close corporate tax loopholes at the state level and to decouple Illinois tax law from changes at the federal level that unfairly privilege big business and the very rich.

State sales taxes apply only to the goods we buy—like clothes, shoes, furniture and restaurant meals—not services that tend to be used by those with more income, like spa treatments, lawyers and investment advisers.

Applying the sales tax to such services could raise revenue for the state while making the tax code a little bit fairer for working folks.

Likely what is needed is some combination of the above revenue-raising measures.

As we go forward, we'll need to fight on two fronts: We need to be part of a nationwide effort to force repeal or amendment of the Ugly Bill and we need an Illinois strategy to win support for new revenue measures here in our own state.

As AI evolves, AFSCME is ready for the fight

Last spring—when AFSCME Council 31's AI regulation bill, known as the Meaningful Human Control of Artificial Intelligence Act, House Bill 4980, was introduced in the General Assembly—lawmakers and most of the public were focused on chatbots, like ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, and Claude. Called large language models, these tools create entirely new content in response to a user's input.

In just six months since, the AI landscape has radically shifted. While chatbots show no sign of falling in popularity, an even more powerful form of AI technology—agentic AI—has come onto the scene, posing further danger to our livelihoods.

Instead of simply entering a prompt into a chatbot and receiving some sort of content in response, agentic AI is autonomous technology that can make and execute decisions without any human input.

For example, an AI agent could be set up to not only determine whether applicants for public assistance are eligible, but to issue denials without any human oversight of the decision-making process.

AI agents are being sold to and deployed across the public and private sectors at a rapid pace, and with the Trump administration showing no willingness to regulate this technology, it's up to working people to protect our jobs and the services we provide.

Despite big tech opposition, AFSCME continues pushing bill limiting AI

The AFSCME-backed AI bill, HB 4980, would be a strong start to prevent AI technology from being used in employment decisions like hiring, firing, promotion and performance evaluations by a public-sector employer.

The bill requires human oversight and control over any automated decision, requires employers to negotiate with unions before acquiring and deploying any AI system, and requires the suspension of any such technology if an independent audit finds bias or inaccuracies until remedied. The bill also establishes strong enforcement mechanisms and anti-retaliation protections for employees.

Unfortunately, when the bill was introduced in the state House of Representatives in the spring, it faced difficult headwinds both from the tech lobby and from the Pritzker administration, whose team pushed to bury it without proposing alternative language. As a result, the bill was never called for a vote.

> **"No matter the reason, management must bargain the implementation of AI if it impacts our work."**

Instead, the General Assembly passed and Gov. Pritzker signed the Artificial Intelligence Safety Measures Act. It includes some important provisions but doesn't regulate how employers use AI nor protect jobs in any way.

Gov. Pritzker has signaled he'll focus on passing the Illinois POWER Act—a data center regulation bill—and has announced the creation of an AI cabinet, but there's no indication that a labor representative will be included.

Staying vigilant at the bargaining table

AFSCME is committed to the legislative fight to make the Meaningful Human Control of Artificial Intelligence Act into law in Illinois. But as that fight continues, members should be sure to take the fight to other arenas—like the bargaining table.

"As AI technology continues to advance, protecting ourselves in the workplace is more important than ever. That's why AFSCME members should be vigilant about ways that management may try to incorporate AI in their workplace," said AFSCME Council 31 Regional Director Dave Beck, who serves on the AFSCME International Future of Work and Technology Task Force. "No matter the reason, management must bargain the implementation of AI if it impacts our work. AFSCME members should let their staff representative know when they hear that AI may be introduced at work so that we can protect our rights and the integrity of our work against AI abuses."

At the bargaining table, some AFSCME locals are already beginning to confront the threat of AI. One ongoing battle is taking place in Cook County, where Sheriff Tom Dart is seeking to acquire an AI-enabled surveillance technology for use in Cook County Jail.

AFSCME Local 2226 is engaging in impact bargaining with the employer to make sure that the technology can't be used to discipline employees, a sworn officer retains decision-making authority, and questionable facial recognition tech can't be used in any circumstance. Other AFSCME locals have also begun negotiating over AI in their collective bargaining agreements.

AI development is showing no sign of slowing down. That's why our union will stay aware and ready to fight back wherever and whenever we can to protect our jobs and the services that Illinois residents depend on.

AFSCME members adopt AI resolution at convention

The resolution commits our union to defending workers from the encroachment of AI by:

- **Insisting that artificial intelligence and technology use are recognized as mandatory subjects of bargaining for federal, state and local government workers.**
- **Insisting that AI and technology use are recognized as mandatory subjects of bargaining for federal, state and local government workers.**
- **Opposing government and tech industry efforts to use AI and technology as excuses to eliminate public service jobs.**

Who is behind the AI "boom"?

The CEOs

These are a few of the billionaires pushing AI tech, no matter the risks or pitfalls for users or those impacted by AI decision-making.



OpenAI's Sam Altman
Net worth: $3.5 billion



Anthropic's Dario Amodei
Net worth: $7 billion



xAI's Elon Musk
Net worth: $1 trillion



Meta's Mark Zuckerberg
Net worth: $230 billion

The AI Lobby

The lobbying group TechNet, which represents Big Tech interests, is on the record opposing HB 4980.

The super PAC Leading the Future spent millions of dollars in Illinois' primary elections supporting pro-AI candidates with mixed success. Leading the Future is backed by millions from Big Tech CEOs.

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

Rockford bus drivers defeat privatization and win strong contract

BEFORE THEY ENTERED BARgaining for a new union contract, members of AFSCME Local 1275 who work as bus drivers for Rockford Public Schools felt like the odds were stacked against them.

But with unity, persistence and support from their community, they overcame some of management's most harmful proposals—and won a contract that puts them on sound footing for years to come.

Because management didn't hire enough drivers over the last two years, the school district was facing a serious driver shortage. Management's first response was to attempt to outsource their work by offering a $57 million contract to a California-based contractor, who would ship in out-of-state drivers to cover as many as 50 routes.

"These drivers had no connections to the community," said Craig Neilson, a bus driver and member of the Local 1275 bargaining committee. "When you live in the community, you take more pride in the work."

Union members quickly spread the word about the plan to rely on these out-of-state drivers. Parents were not happy, voicing their anger at school board meetings and on social media.



Members of AFSCME Local 1275 made it a priority to defeat management's efforts to privatize their work.

Defeating this privatization scheme would be a key priority for the local as they entered bargaining. They were ready to fight not just to protect their work, but also to win better benefits and wage increases to help keep up with the cost of living.

After a hard fight, they came away with a fair contract that accomplishes everything they fought for.

For the first time, Local 1275 secured minimum staffing levels in their contract. That means the school district will be required to hire more drivers, allowing the union to push forward on its goal of phasing out contract drivers entirely.

In addition, they won wage increases of 17% over the three-year agreement.

"It looked dire at the beginning," Neilson said. "But we're feeling great about this contract now."

The bargaining committee included Neilson, Leah Robinson, Ken Long, Sue Miller, Tracey Anderson, Jeremiah Gandy, James Wood, Keely Muraski, Elizabeth Peck, Barb Hengels and Nicole Allen. The committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Sara Dorner.

Adler Planetarium workers win first contract

WHEN WORKERS AT THE Adler Planetarium began bargaining their first union contract, they were reaching for the stars. But what they ultimately needed to get it done is found all around us on our own planet: Solidarity.

The 68 employees at the planetarium, the oldest in the western hemisphere, formed their union with AFSCME in early 2026.

Workers like Hunter Miller take pride in bringing the limitlessness of the cosmos within reach for half a million visitors a year. He's a public programs senior associate who served on the union bargaining committee.

"What I hear from a lot of people is that the vastness of space makes them feel very small," Miller said. "But I encourage people to think about it the other way around. Think about how big the universe is, but how much impact we can have as individuals. We're a small piece of the puzzle but we all can make a big difference."

Planetarium employees were inspired to form their union after seeing what workers at every other major cultural institution in Chicago were able to achieve when they formed unions with AFSCME.

After their successful union vote, the negotiating committee wasted no time in getting to the bargaining table. Six months after forming their union, they had their first contract in their hands.

In the three-year agreement they won a $325 ratification bonus for all members and raised wages as much as 15.5%, with the highest increases going to the lowest-paid employees. They won crucial gains like more holidays and paid time off, and extra pay for employees using translation skills on the job.

The final contract was ratified with 97% of members voting Yes.



Adler Planetarium workers won higher wages, additional time off, and more in their first union contract.

"All of us are really excited to have the sense of unity that a union provides, but also that strength in numbers, knowing that we have someone supporting us through challenging times at work," Miller said. "That's the unwritten part of a union —that support for each other."

The bargaining committee included Miller, Jonesy Jones, Kat English, Zach Wolfenbarger and Chris Gella. The committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative John Rizzo.

Chicago History Museum workers overcome union-busting to win first contract

CHICAGO HISTORY MUSEUM workers have ratified their first-ever union contract, with 96% of voting members voting Yes to approve an agreement that delivers raises, stronger benefits and new protections on the job.

The agreement raises the wage floor to a $20-an-hour minimum and delivers across-the-board pay increases of 3% a year, plus a $500 ratification bonus, longevity payments and bilingual pay for employees who use second-language skills on the job.



Chicago History Museum workers overcame an anti-union campaign to win pay increases, more parental leave and affordable health care in their first union contract.

Their contract also expands paid leave for every employee, covering holidays, sick leave and vacation time. Workers locked in their existing health insurance with no increase in cost and won a stronger retirement plan.

For the first time, CHM workers also have a fair grievance and arbitration procedure to resolve problems on the job, along with quarterly labor-management meetings where the union and museum leadership can address issues as they come up.

The contract is a victorious end to a hard-fought two-year campaign. CHM employees announced their organizing drive in February 2025 and voted overwhelmingly to join AFSCME that April.

Museum management at the time responded by firing four union activists and disciplining seven more in a wave of illegal anti-union attacks. AFSCME filed unfair labor practice charges, and the National Labor Relations Board found the museum had broken the law. In July, the union won a settlement requiring the museum to expunge the discipline and reinstate the wrongfully terminated workers with back pay.

The two leaders of the museum's illegal anti-union assault, CEO Donald Lassere and HR Director Shatierra Parks, no longer work at the museum.

With that fight behind them and new museum leadership in place, CHM workers turned their focus to the bargaining table, coming away with a contract that reflects the strength they built by sticking together from the very first organizing conversations through their ratification vote.

The bargaining committee included Alice Matthews, Brigid Crawley, Marissa Croft, Nio Lozinski, Josh Sundermeyer and Max Lewontin. The committee was led by Council 31 Staff Representative Erik Thorson.

CELEBRATING LABOR DAY THE AFSCME WAY



AFSCME Local 494



AFSCME Local 1805



AFSCME Local 3350

AFSCME members across Illinois joined our communities on Labor Day to celebrate our work and show our union pride!

SHORT REPORTS

DSPs win wage increases



DSPs of AFSCME Local 3348 organized to demand higher wages for their work.

LAST SPRING, DIRECT SUPPORT professionals (DSPs) who care for people with disabilities fought for fair wage increases in the state legislature. Now, most of those locals have secured agreements with their employers that codifies those wage increases in their union contracts.

This was a very difficult year at the State Capitol. With the Trump administration's incoming cuts to public services set to leave big holes in the state budget in coming years, lawmakers were deeply skeptical of approving any new spending.

Even so, AFSCME-represented DSPs were determined to win the wages they deserve. DSPs organized days of action, called their lawmakers, and in April, dozens went to Springfield to speak to legislators directly about the need to raise wages.

As a result of AFSCME members' lobbying efforts, the state legislature passed a 60-cent hourly wage increase. And some AFSCME local unions seized the opportunity to fight for even more, like AFSCME Local 3348, which represents employees at Pinnacle in Kankakee.

Members stood together and ultimately won an additional $1 an hour on top of the legislative wage increase, local president Paul Leach said.

"We explained to management the struggles our members are facing with inflation and the state of the economy right now," Leach said. "Almost every member of our local signed a petition demanding fair wages. And because we stayed strong and united, we won."

Chicago and Cook County budgets avoid layoffs, but warning signs loom

COOK COUNTY'S PROPOSED $9.69 billion budget for 2027 closes a $550.8 million shortfall without layoffs. That's welcome news for the AFSCME members who keep county government running, but long-term trouble lies ahead.

To fill this year's budget gap, the county is leaning heavily on one-time fixes. What's needed is sustainable, long-term revenue growth.

The budget shortfall is particularly bleak in Cook County Health, after President Trump's signature "Big, Beautiful Bill" slashed billions in health care funding. The health and hospitals system expects its revenue to drop by $138 million in 2027 even as its costs rise by $100 million as more uninsured residents seek care. Thousands of Cook County residents will lose health insurance under the Affordable Care Act, while many more will lose Medicaid coverage after the Big, Beautiful Bill's sweeping cuts.

The city of Chicago, meanwhile, faces another massive budget deficit. At a projected $882.4 million, the gap is some $283 million smaller than last year's projection. But with most financial loopholes closed and one-time fixes exhausted, funding city operations without layoffs or service cuts will be extremely difficult.

Mayor Johnson has promised his final budget will not include layoffs. Yet, as in the FY 2026 cycle, a majority of 29 alderpeople oppose a corporate "head tax" on large employers and an increase in property taxes, two potential revenue sources. The administration's slowness in implementing revenue measures from the FY26 budget also means the city has yet to realize their full financial benefit.

AFSCME has already won support from 48 alders for a letter calling for sister agency employees to be held to the same standards as city employees on debt owed to the city. Paying that debt could raise some $20 million, a small but important first step.

AFSCME intends to be deeply involved in shaping the best possible budgets for both the county and the city, meeting with elected officials to develop long-term revenue solutions that put them on sound financial footing for years to come.



To end the city of Chicago's budget woes, the city needs long-term sustainable revenue.

AFSCME lawsuit ends federal policy of conducting layoffs during government shutdowns

THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION policy instructing federal agencies to conduct layoffs during a government shutdown has been withdrawn under a new court settlement reached with AFSCME and other unions that represent federal workers. The settlement brings to a close the litigation, which had previously resulted in an injunction that led to the rescission of thousands of layoffs and blocked countless more.

It also orders federal agencies to remove any authorization for a reduction-in-force from their current shutdown plans, and to provide 30 days' notice if those plans change before the end of 2026.

"We brought this case forward in defense of our nation's federal workers—including the highly skilled, nonpartisan professionals AFSCME represents who have dedicated their careers to keeping our communities safe and healthy," said AFSCME President Patrick Moran.

"But this billionaire-run administration continues to put politics between these essential workers and their public service, at great expense to our communities. We're glad this settlement places limits on their ability to use federal workers as bargaining chips to push their extreme agenda during the next government shutdown, but the fight is far from over."

Moran said AFSCME will continue to stand up to this administration's attacks on federal workers and to organize.

RETIREE NOTES

Retirees get out the vote

"SENIORS ARE WORRIED about everything, especially due to the fact that we are on fixed incomes," said Larry Brown, president of AFSCME Retirees Chapter 31. "We are constantly hearing about threats to our retirement security, like the Social Security funding shortfall and AI in Medicare, and on top of that, we all have to deal with the ever-increasing price of basic food. That's why so many of us are engaged in this election."

Polls reflect that seniors report feeling much worse off financially than two years ago. They're ready to turn those feelings into action by voting and volunteering for candidates willing to stand up for programs like Social Security and Medicare.

AFSCME Retirees are getting people signed up to vote, taking those who need a ride to the polls, volunteering to be election judges and doing outreach to encourage other seniors to engage by phone-banking and knocking on doors.

Retiree member Greg Johnson from Rockford is one of hundreds of retirees writing postcards to reach voters in key races with a personal message about what's at stake.

"I know that dark money is a factor in an election, but dollar bills don't vote, people do. I believe it's important to reach out to our fellow members to remind them to vote during this critical time," Johnson said.

Visit AFSCME31.org/Vote to view AFSCME PEOPLE's candidate recommendations for the Nov. 3 General Election.



Rachel Barksdale-Little of Retirees Sub-chapter 78 mails a stack of postcards urging her fellow retirees to vote for candidates who will stand up for seniors and working people.

Retirees rein in unfair auto insurance increases targeted at seniors

DURING THE SPRING LEGISLATIVE session, AFSCME Chapter 31 Retirees supported Senate Bill 714, a measure to prevent auto insurance rates that are excessive, inadequate or unfairly discriminatory.

Sponsored by Democratic senators Ram Villivalam, Doris Turner and Christopher Belt and Rep. Thaddeus Jones, the bill was approved, was signed into law in August and will take effect next July.

The new law authorizes the Illinois Department of Insurance to review rate filings and requires insurers to give at least 30 days' notice before raising auto insurance renewal premiums by more than 10%. It also prohibits excessive, inadequate or unfairly discriminatory rates that don't reflect actual driving risk, and expands access to insurance discounts for drivers aged 55 and older.

The legislation means more money in the pockets of working and retired Illinoisans who had been facing large, inconsistent and irrational increases.

"Many of us retirees were talking about seeing drastically increasing car insurance costs," said Gwen King, an executive board member of Chicago's Retirees Sub-chapter 60. "We realized that insurance companies can increase rates for seniors despite our age group having significantly safer driving records as a group."

According to claim data from the Insurance Information Institute, average premiums go up 8 to 12% between ages 70 and 72, then continue rising at each renewal. By age 75, drivers in most states pay 15 to 25% more than they did at 68, even with no accidents or violations.

A 2020 report from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that older adults are more likely to practice safer driving behaviors than other age groups.

Sub-chapter 60 members wrote letters to their legislators and other elected leaders to call attention to these discriminatory practices and ask for their support in changing the law.

Before SB 714 passed, state law allowed insurance companies to charge higher premiums based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status or disability.

"The focus on factors outside of our driving records—whether it's age, race, gender or religion—is unfair, and it is textbook discrimination," King said. "When we work together in our union, we have power to make changes that directly impact our pocketbook, and this is a clear example of it."

Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans honors VP Mary Jones

FOR HER MORE THAN FIVE decades of service to the labor movement, AFSCME Chapter 31 Retirees Vice President Mary Jones was presented with the Beatrice Lumpkin Award at the Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans Senior Power Luncheon on Oct. 7 in Chicago.

Mary became an AFSCME member in 1971 when she was hired by the city of Chicago. While working for the city, she served as a union steward, on the negotiating team, and in many other roles. After retiring in 2004, she became president of the City of Chicago's Retirees Sub-chapter 60 and was elected to the Chapter 31 Executive Board.

She is a member of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, the Coalition of Labor Union Women, and the Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans.

Bea Lumpkin was an American labor activist, member of the Chicago Teachers Union, and a founding member of the Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans. She died in June just two months shy of her 108th birthday.



Sub-chapter 60 President Mary Jones is honored by IARA President Peter Mendoza, who is also a Sub-chapter 60 member.



ON THE JOB

Ethan Kibler

ON-THE-JOB INSTRUCTOR/COLLECTIONS SPECIALIST 2

AMERICAN RED CROSS

AFSCME Local 2691

Tell us about your work.

I'm a collections specialist 2 and an on-the-job instructor for the Red Cross, which means I train new Red Cross employees on how to perform different blood-drawing procedures. I also run blood drives. Every new employee gets the same full training, even those who have been through phlebotomy school. We start with whole blood, move to platelets, then to red blood cells.

Whole blood is what most people picture when they think of drawing blood. We collect everything. For platelets and power reds, we run the blood through a centrifuge, keep the cell type we need, and give the rest back to the donor. Platelets, the clotting factor in blood, are often used for cancer patients, since chemo wipes them out. Red cells carry oxygen and nutrients, and they keep trauma patients alive after extreme blood loss.

How did you get into this line of work?

I love animals, so I worked at several veterinary clinics before a friend told me I should come to the Red Cross. She was right. I get social interaction, great coworkers, and a great cause. I had wonderful trainers who taught me from nothing, and now I do for new people what they did for me.

How do you make a difference every day?

I feel good about what I do, and I know I make a difference. It's challenging and you have to know what you're doing. Every blood draw is a bit of a challenge, because everybody's veins are different. Over time you learn techniques for feeling where to stick. With experience, you can run whole blood drives.

Knowing that each successful donation helps someone who's probably having the worst day of their life is a great motivator. When I first started the job, the weight of that was heavy. You struggle, you fail a lot, and you ask for help, but every so often it still gets you. A friend of mine died of cancer last year, and his wife began donating platelets. Many donors have had a loved one go through cancer and give to offset that. That hits hard.

Why did you get involved in your union?

It started with caring about my coworkers. I lead new employee orientations, so I meet every new member and explain what being in a union means. Many of them don't have a clue, but I didn't either at first. I learned how much of a difference a union can make when I first joined the negotiations committee and started meeting with upper management and went through every line of the contract.

Management has to care about the bottom line—the goals, the finances. But our union cares about the people. I care about my fellow union members, and it's nice to stand up for people the company relies on and remind management how its decisions affect them.

How does your union protect you on the job?

Our contract sets wage baselines and premiums for different positions. At the bargaining table, wages weren't even on management's list, though they were our main point. I was shocked—they had to stop the meeting because they weren't expecting us to bring up wages. But we told them we need fair wages that help keep us at the job and help us support our families.

Having protections around discipline and discharge is another big one. Our contract lays out the steps for progressive discipline, and I can't count how many times I've reminded management of that when they wanted to discharge someone, and how many people we've been able to protect from overreach.

The grievance process lets us draw attention to our concerns. For example, there was a point where we were so understaffed that we had only two people working a blood drive. We filed a grievance and management had to listen to our concerns. Recently, management thought they had to lay off staff in Peoria, but in doing so, they ignored half the contract's layoff protections, and we saved those employees' jobs.