How young activists like Elvyss Argueta are preparing to lead AFSCME into the future.
House Bill is Best Remedy for Nation’s Broken Health Care System

The U.S. House of Representatives approved a bill in November that moves the nation closer to the objective of quality, affordable health care for all. The measure includes a public option that would help reduce costs through competition. Most importantly, the legislation does not tax the health care coverage of millions of working Americans. By contrast, the health care measure passed by the U.S. Senate in December levies a tax on health care coverage and excludes a public option. The fight for true reform continues. AFSCME WORKS examines the latest developments.

Preparing to Lead

Young activists are the key to AFSCME’s future. Our union’s strength, vitality and vision depend on young members to step up to the plate and make a difference. We profile three such leaders-in-training who have already won the admiration of their own union’s elders. They are members of AFSCME’s Next Wave.

FEED BACK

THE FUTURE BEGINS TODAY

When it comes to preparing for tomorrow, the present and the past have critical roles to play. On pages six to nine of this issue of AFSCME WORKS, you will read about three leaders — men and women under the age of 35 — who are readying themselves to stand at the helm of the union and chart its path toward the future. But these young activists aren’t reaching these goals on their own. They are mentored by seasoned leaders and activists who use their experiences to ensure AFSCME has a strong and vibrant future. Here is what some of these veterans have to say:
One-On-One
Richard Trumka, the AFL-CIO’s secretary-treasurer since 1995, was elected to replace retiring AFL-CIO President John Sweeney to lead the 11-million-member federation. AFSCME WORKS sits down with this third-generation Pennsylvania coal miner to learn about his plans to strengthen the labor movement, and win on important issues that make a difference in the lives of working families.

Ask AFSCME
Last spring, with the support of AFSCME and other groups, Congress passed a law that eliminates many credit card fees and arbitrary rate hikes starting this February. In response, all major credit card issuers have raised rates, some as high as 18 percentage points, and made other changes. But the 165,000 members who carry the AFSCME Advantage Credit Card still have lower rates. Learn why AFSCME Advantage is still advantageous.

AFSCME Across America
Alaska state troopers become television stars; 2,600 New Mexico family child care providers build their own AFSCME affiliate; members of Ohio Council 8 help persuade voters to raise taxes to save critical public services; a Wisconsin corrections officer serving in Afghanistan lands on the cover of Time magazine. These are just some of the stories that made news.

AFSCME’s Future
We have reached out to young members. Now, they are participating in union meetings and one has just been elected local vice president. We know we must educate our young members, because they are AFSCME’s future.

They Teach Us, Too!
My number one goal is helping young members participate. They are always eager to get involved. And the best thing about all of this is that even though we think we’re teaching them, they are teaching us, too!

Lisa Edwards
Graphics Specialist, Martin County School District
President of Local 597, Council 79 (Florida)
Photo: Doug Martin

A Critical Role to Play
We are ensuring our young members realize that they can be leaders and that they have a critical role to play in keeping their union strong. It’s up to them to protect the gains that have been won by older workers.

Arie Walker
Account Technician, Department of Children and Family Services
Local 1805, Council 31 (Illinois)
Photo: Jeffrey Sherman Jones, Jr.

William Copland
Community Corrections Specialist, Kennewick Department of Corrections
President of Local 1253, Council 28 (Washington)
Photo: Tim Welch
FOR EIGHT YEARS, working families struggled to survive under an administration that failed to protect workers, oversee financial markets or acknowledge corporate abuses. Year after year, we watched a privileged few soar to incredible heights of wealth while many others fell into debt and despair. And the struggle continues. Eighteen million Americans are jobless and our unemployment rate is higher than it’s been since 1983. From Alaska to Puerto Rico, hundreds of thousands of AFSCME members have been laid off or forced to take furloughs days. Those who remain on the job are doing double and triple duty, especially in unemployment insurance and social service offices serving record numbers of clients in these troubling times.

A Good Start
President Obama’s efforts early in 2009 stopped the recession from becoming a depression. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, signed by the President last year, went a long way toward stabilizing the economy, and AFSCME led a national campaign to win its passage. The Economic Policy Institute estimates that in the first eight months of its existence, the law saved or created over 1 million jobs. Additionally, a study by Mark Zandi of Economy.com found that every dollar in direct federal aid that went to state governments because of the recovery act generated $1.38 in economic activity.

An Important Move
But more must be done to generate a strong recovery.

That’s why AFSCME enthusiastically applauds the U.S. House of Representatives for its December passage of the Jobs for Main Street Act of 2010 (H.R. 284) — a $48 million investment that will help get the nation back on track. By extending unemployment insurance and temporary health care coverage, this measure helps those who are looking for work. It will also create and save jobs by making targeted investments toward infrastructure, small businesses, job training and the hiring and retention of police officers and firefighters.

Our union was founded as our nation struggled to recover from the Great Depression — and we support this measure all the way. Our members’ financial security and the future of the public services we provide are at stake.

State Budgets Still Hurting
2009 was tough. 2010 and 2011 are expected to be even worse for states, cities, counties, schools, universities and hospitals that employ AFSCME members. The public services we provide will be decimated without strong federal action.

The situation is deteriorating because states’ fiscal year 2010 budget deficits total $181 billion — the largest shortfalls on record. State tax revenues in the second quarter of 2009 were nearly 17 percent lower than they were in the second quarter of 2008; during the same period, income tax revenue was down by over 27 percent.

AFSCME is working to protect jobs and services and rebuild communities. We are laying the groundwork for additional relief to state and local governments. We are also educating and mobilizing member activists — especially at the state level where fights are toughest — to oppose budget cuts and protect jobs, benefits and services.

A critical part of that effort includes mobilizing and building support in the Senate for action on the jobs bill. You can join the fight by calling the Senate today at (202) 224-3121. Tell them this is a crucial fight for America’s families and for our communities. Tell them that the loss of a job is much more than a statistic — it is a human tragedy.
As America’s downward economic spiral continues — costing us good jobs and livable wages — it’s time to examine a primary cause: We import more and export less. The result is a trade deficit that rose almost $2 billion between August and September of last year. Unless we do business differently with other countries — more export and less import — our unemployment may stay above 10 percent for a long time.

Some economists seem to believe it’s okay when international trade causes us to lose a hundred manufacturing jobs in places like Ohio and Pennsylvania, as long as we add a hundred construction jobs elsewhere. But here’s the reality: When the housing bubble burst, those construction jobs disappeared. In the end, we traded good manufacturing jobs for no jobs at all!

Improving economic growth and increasing overall job creation means creating good trade agreements with good trade partners. Unfortunately, that’s not the current situation. Since being admitted to the World Trade Organization, China has headed the list of bad trade partners — unfortunately other Asian nations are following suit. As Economic Policy Institute (EPI) economist Robert Scott noted in his July 2008 EPI briefing paper, “Trade with less-developed countries has reduced the bargaining power of all workers in the U.S. economy.” In fact, the annual salaries of all workers without a four-year college degree — the majority of our workforce — are roughly $1,400 lower today because of this competition. We certainly don’t need trade partners who steal our jobs and reduce our incomes. Unfortunately, that’s exactly what China is doing.

China’s Double-Cross

Between 2001 and 2007, growing trade deficits with China displaced over two million American workers. More than one-third of these workers held manufacturing jobs and dropped out of the labor force altogether, while average wages of those who secured re-employment fell between 11 and 13 percent. Lost jobs and smaller paychecks in the private sector mean decreased spending and lower tax revenues.

These last two hit public sector workers in the form of layoffs and less money for critical government programs at a time when they are most needed.

China’s dishonest trade practices have hurt America deeply. For example: Their government illegally subsidizes products — like glass — so they can be sold cheaply. And when Chinese tire manufacturers first open for business, they’re required to export 100 percent of their products for the first five years. None can be sold in China! How can we honestly compete when cheap products are easy to come by? Fortunately, President Obama has put restraints on the tire industry. But more needs to be done as other nations adopt China’s ways.

The result of poor trade practices is that demands for goods produced in every region of America have been reduced, costing jobs in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. According to EPI, the biggest losers were California, with a job loss over 300,000; Texas, which lost more than 200,000; and New York with a loss of over 125,000.

America’s Bottom Line

The next time someone tries to sell us a bill of goods about how unchecked globalization won’t hurt, we must counter with our experiences of economic insecurity and permanent wage losses. The promise that imports lead to new job opportunities in expanding export sectors like China are false. They’ve led to trade imbalance and less lucrative jobs or long-term unemployment. And facing the threat that they can be replaced by cheap foreign labor, workers have lost bargaining power. Let’s encourage our legislators to revamp trade policy. It’s a critical step in reinvesting in our nation and our workers so we can truly repair our economy.

“Workers face the added threat that they can be replaced by cheaper foreign labor.”

Recognizing Achievement

At a December International union event celebrating the accomplishments of staffers who have given three decades of service to AFSCME. Photo: Luis Gómez

William Lucy

International Secretary-Treasurer

America’s Trade Avalanche

FROM THE OFFICERS

Photo: Luis Gómez

September 2010 AFSCME.org

AFSCME WORKS JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2010 AFSCME.ORG
The next generation of AFSCME leaders is one that considers iPods and social networking websites like Facebook and Twitter necessary items in labor’s modern tool chest. These men and women — 35 and younger — view their union through new eyes, with fresh ideas. They deserve to be heard, encouraged and included.

AFSCME WORKS profiles three of these young activists: members who have set out to learn more about their union and influence its future. They’re all part of the union’s Next Wave — groups of young members who come together at the local, state and national levels to make AFSCME stronger.

Hundreds of these youthful activists met last June in Chicago for the first national Next Wave conference. The meeting emerged from a realization that AFSCME needs to build a new generation of leaders who can take the reins in the years ahead.

Approximately 13 percent of AFSCME’s 1.6 million members are in the 35-and-under age group. Let’s meet three of these talented individuals.
ELVYSS ARGUETA didn’t give much thought to unions — his or any other — until his local steward told him about ‘Thirsty Thursday.’

“I didn’t want to go to any union meetings because I didn’t know what to expect,” explains the 27-year-old employee of Transitions Projects, a nonprofit housing agency for the homeless in Portland, Ore. His union, Local 88 (Council 75), represents approximately 2,800 Multnomah County employees, including approximately 55 who work at Transitions Projects.

But Argueta did comprehend the value of Thirsty Thursday, an informal gathering of Local 88 members. “I needed friends, so it served as a way of making them,” he says, adding, “It also gave me more information about the union.”

“That’s when Elvyss stepped out of the woodwork and started participating,” says Becky Steward, a business analyst for Multnomah County and president of Local 88 at the time. “Elvyss is able to communicate his passion for workers, and his passion is contagious,” she adds.

Passion is a word that seems to define Argueta. “Elvyss has a passion for social justice,” remarks Council 75 Exec. Dir. (and AFSCME International vice president) Ken Allen. Through a contract fight in 2007, he says, Argueta “figured out the union is the avenue to carry out that passion.”

Allen remembers well the first time he met Argueta. They were both at city hall to lobby about the union’s contract. “He let me know this wasn’t the last time I’d see Elvyss Argueta.”

Not long after, at a contract rally at Transitions Projects, Argueta made true on his promise. “It was a wet, rainy Portland night,” Allen recalls. Approximately 125 people were there — nearly all of them “Next Wavers.”

“They had their iPhones hooked up to the sound system, blasting music out at this worksite,” says Allen. “It was a huge amount of fun, and Elvyss was one of the ringleaders.”

By then, Argueta had jumped head first into what he now calls the “deep end of the pool,” where his enthusiasm has flourished through union activism. “Next thing you know,” he says, “I’m doing things like training and volunteer member organizing.” He also sits on his local’s contract bargaining team and was elected to the local’s executive board.

Making Connections
Elvyss found his voice through Next Wave, which he calls a “catalyst or the door into the union” — but one with a unique approach for young members. “You need to connect one-on-one first” before talking union, he explains. That’s why they conduct food banks, plant trees and do other non-traditional union activities. “We’re trying to show we’re not just about benefits and salaries. We’re also about social justice.”

At Council 75’s biennial convention in 2007, Argueta was elected the Next Wave committee’s statewide facilitator. “I’m the point person,” he explains. “My job is to contact people in the council’s six districts to find out how their programs are going, and to facilitate meetings.”

As for the future, Argueta isn’t sure. He’s satisfied with his current role as an activist, but says running for a union office isn’t out of the question.
MEGHAN CULPEPPER, 24, carries a torch of union activism that was first held in Pennsylvania by her grandmother and continues today with her mother. But the lighting of Culpepper’s fire wasn’t automatic.

“I didn’t want to be involved with the union,” she admits. “That’s the irony of my whole story.”

The tale begins with Culpepper’s late grandmother, Edith Culpepper. During the early 1970s, Edith was involved in Pennsylvania Council 13’s fight for the first contract for state workers. It’s the same council that AFSCME International Pres. Gerald W. McEntee helped build. At its 1973 founding convention, McEntee became the council’s executive director.

Edith’s daughter, Joyce Culpepper, continued the family’s council activism. She became president of AFSCME Local 1420, then president of District Council 90 and currently serves as vice president of Council 13. Joyce is also a member of DC 90’s executive board.

Now a third generation of Culpeppers is carrying forward the family tradition of labor activism. Meghan says her mother, Joyce, “begged me” to get involved in her union, Local 1224 (DC 90). For more than a year, however, she couldn’t. “The meetings were on the day I had class,” Meghan explains.

With school and a job, “I had enough on my plate.”

Her attitude changed about two years ago when she learned about “30 under 30,” Council 13’s outreach program for young members. Culpepper was intrigued and asked her council’s education department to let her know if something else came up. “I was trying to get my foot in the door,” she says.

Council 13’s organizing director, Carla Insinga, told her about AFSCME’s emerging Next Wave program. It was the beginning of a new relationship with her union. Chosen to become a member of her council’s Next Wave steering committee, Culpepper jumped in with both feet. She even introduced President McEntee at the first national Next Wave conference last June in Chicago.

“I was inspired” by Next Wave, she said in her introductory remarks. “I wanted to be part of something that was bigger than me.”

First Steps
An employee at the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency, Culpepper now finds time for her union. She even worked on AFSCME’s political campaign to help elect Pres. Barack Obama. “That was my first taste of activism,” she says. “After that, I mainly focused on Next Wave.”

Culpepper also co-chaired a Next Wave class for new and young members last year. They taught parliamentary procedure, the operation of a local and the history of AFSCME.

Approximately 50 people showed up — most of them 35 or younger. “It was good seeing people there who appreciated AFSCME enough to join the union to help it to grow,” she says.

Culpepper ran for her local’s executive board last fall. Although she didn’t win, she’s upbeat. “I did well. It makes me want to run again.”

She now attends steward training classes and other union events in an effort to keep learning. “That’s what AFSCME’s done for me,” she says. “I’m constantly learning something new.”

“I’m glad she’s taking up the reins,” her mother says. “If the young ones aren’t taught to carry on for the next generation, their interest in unions will fade away.”

“Meghan grew up as part of our AFSCME family,” adds Council 13 Exec. Dir. David R. Fillman, who is also an International vice president. “It gives me a real sense of pride to watch her take her rightful place as a union leader. There’s no doubt in my mind that great things are in store for her as she meets the challenges of her generation, and continues the fight for working men and women.”
MATT DAVIS, a Wisconsin state corrections officer, is the embodiment of an energetic, youthful AFSCME leader. At 33, he’s already a steward, a member of Local 48’s executive board, and an elected representative of his union’s Coalition of Correctional Institutions committee.

Larry Lautenschlager, president of Local 48 and treasurer of Council 24, recognized Davis’ zeal for activism the first time he showed up at a union meeting approximately five years ago. Back then, Lautenschlager was uncertain about Davis’ enthusiasm.

“Matt asked a lot of questions,” Lautenschlager explains. “I didn’t know how to take him. I thought, maybe he was there to cause problems.”

Lautenschlager realizes now he misunderstood the young man’s single-minded focus on the concerns of the roughly 100 corrections officers represented by the local. But that’s just a portion of the 740 Department of Health Services and Department of Corrections employees the local represents at two distinct but adjacent psychiatric care institutions in Winnebago.

Most of the local’s members are nurses’ aides, psychiatric care technicians, food service employees, maintenance and grounds workers and clerical staff. It was understandable that Lautenschlager thought Davis focused his concerns too narrowly.

But Davis, who works at the Wisconsin Resource Center, says he had strong opinions about issues affecting his fellow COs, and just wanted to raise his concerns with his union’s leaders.

“Not that we were ignored, by any means,” he emphasizes. Still, he was determined to let his local’s leaders know what was going on with them.

Months later, Davis got more active, applying to the local’s executive board to become a shop steward. “I was just interested in becoming a more vocal representative” he says.

Once again, Lautenschlager wasn’t sure what to make of this up-and-comer. “I’ll tell you, it wasn’t an automatic decision” to approve Davis’ steward application, he says. They asked themselves — recalls Lautenschlager — “Does Matt actually want to become a steward for his own satisfaction, or is he in it for the members?”

The board supported Davis, who quickly justified their faith in him. He represented his own unit, and took great interest in the entire Local 48 membership. “I’m here for everyone,” Davis declares.

“He surprised us,” Lautenschlager says. “Our stewards are involved in labor-management meetings, so we started getting Matt involved in some of that. He took front stage on a lot of issues.”

Demonstrating Leadership

“I stand up for what I believe in,” says Davis. His activism was duly noted. Within a few years, Lautenschlager and other executive board members asked Davis to get even more involved.

“Some of us saw Matt was doing a wonderful job as steward, and he was young, so we got together and said, ‘You ought to run for president or vice president.’ He said, ‘No’ — he needed to get some more experience.”

Davis agreed to fill a temporary opening on the executive board until elections were held six months later. Then he put his hat into the ring and won a full two-year term that expires this April.

At AFSCME’s Next Wave conference, Davis learned ways to encourage other new and young members to get more involved in their union. He’s now considering seeking a higher union post. “We think he’d be great,” says Lautenschlager.

Council 24 Exec. Dir. Marty Beil agrees:

“Matt is a resourceful, motivated leader. He has made a commitment to make the concerns of young members heard and to offer a new direction, not only in his local and in the council, but in the workplace as well. Matt truly is one of our leaders for the future.”

Learn more, go to afscme.org/nextwave.
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES’ BILL
BEST REMEDY FOR NATION’S BROKEN HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Senate version falls short of true reform that guarantees quality, affordable health care for all. The battle continues.

THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES in November approved a health care bill that goes far toward achieving the long-sought goal of affordable health care for all — a measure that would not tax our health care benefits and includes a public option to help reduce the high costs that put insurance out of reach for millions of Americans. The U.S. Senate passed its own version on Christmas Eve that stops far short of that goal. As AFSCME WORKS went to press in January, House and Senate leaders were beginning negotiations to work out their differences and send a final bill to the White House.

While we are a step closer to an historic achievement that has so far eluded seven U.S. Presidents, we have much work to do to ensure that the final legislation adopts features of the House bill that protect the coverage we have, help lower our costs, and ensure that our family members, friends and neighbors have access to affordable coverage.

Taxing Your Benefits
Working families are already struggling with the high cost of health care coverage. The last thing they need is a tax on their medical insurance. The House bill would finance reform fairly by imposing a small surcharge on wealthy families — those earning more than $1 million annually ($500,000 for an individual).

The Senate bill, on the other hand, would tax the benefits of working families through an excise tax on high-cost health plans. That would force many of our employers to demand reductions in benefits, increases in deductibles and co-payments,
or both. AFSCME leaders and activists around the country are lobbying hard against this tax.

**Employer Responsibility**
The House bill would build on our employer-based system of coverage by requiring them to provide good insurance to their workers and to pay a substantial share of the premiums. As a result, millions more workers would have benefits provided through their job, instead of having to purchase coverage on their own.

Employers who decline to provide coverage would be required to pay 8 percent of annual payroll into a fund to help subsidize it for low- and moderate-income workers who purchase coverage on their own. Small employers would receive an exemption and be eligible for subsidies to purchase coverage for their workers. By contrast, the Senate bill would not make employers provide coverage or pay their fair share of reform’s cost. Instead, employers that fail to provide coverage would pay a very small penalty. As a result, almost the full financial burden for coverage for these workers would be borne by the workers themselves and by the government through subsidies provided to these families.

**The Public Option**
A robust public insurance option is the key to preventing insurance companies from putting profit ahead of providing health care coverage. This alternative program, run by the federal government, would help lower costs and improve coverage by creating real competition in the insurance market.

The House bill comes closest to achieving this goal. It would enable participants who enroll in a new insurance exchange pool to choose between private health plans or a quality, public health insurance plan option similar to Medicare but available to people under 65.

The Senate bill does not include a public option.

**Combining Bills**
While there are many provisions of the bill passed in the House that address most of our concerns, several features of the Senate bill represent an improvement over our current situation.

For instance, both the House and Senate bills would provide subsidies for low- and moderate-income workers who do not receive coverage through their jobs and must buy health insurance on their own. By extending coverage to those without it, both bills would reduce the cost-shifting that happens in our current health care system when uninsured individuals are unable to pay for their care. This practice now adds more than $1,000 per year to the premiums of insured families.

In addition, both the House and Senate bills address many abuses by insurance companies. The House version would prohibit insurance companies from denying coverage for pre-existing conditions, or dropping coverage when people get sick. It would also prevent plans from establishing lifetime and annual limits on how much can be paid out to an individual, and ensure that those with major health problems like cancer will receive the care they need. The Senate bill also addresses these reforms — but less comprehensively.

Under both bills, insurers would be required to spend no less than 80 percent of premiums on health care services, reducing what can be diverted to marketing and profits.

For the elderly, both the House and Senate would eliminate over time the so-called ‘donut hole’ of Medicare Part D. Currently, those with extra high medication costs experience a gap in coverage, forcing them to pay more than $4,000 out-of-pocket annually for medications until their prescription drug coverage resumes. Importantly, both bills reduce government subsidies to private Medicare Advantage plans that compete with traditional Medicare. These subsidies undermine the financial stability of Medicare and force seniors in traditional Medicare to pay higher premiums.

**Importance Of Reform**
The need to reduce the explosion of health care costs is clear. We’ve negotiated good coverage, but over the years, we’ve also given up wage increases in order to hold onto our benefits. But the path we are on is not sustainable.

The cost of insurance will continue to rise because the system is geared to increase profitability while reducing care for those who need it the most. It’s no mystery why insurers drop people with significant medical problems or refuse to cover pre-existing conditions. It causes the insurance companies to lose money.

The problem is too big to be solved through collective bargaining alone. That’s why we need comprehensive reform now. AFSCME will judge the final bill on its ability to protect the coverage we have and help control skyrocketing costs. — The Editors
From his upbringing in a western Pennsylvania union family to his current position at the helm of the American labor movement, Richard Trumka’s trajectory has been one of leadership. Elected president by delegates to last summer’s AFL-CIO convention, Trumka began working as a coal miner at the age of 19 and rose through the ranks of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). He was UMWA president for 13 years and was elected secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO in 1995.

Trumka has vowed to reenergize labor through increased organizing and by making sure Congress stands for working families on issues like health care and the right to join a union. He could not have a better team to help him out. Along with backing Trumka, delegates reelected Arlene Holt Baker as executive vice president. Holt Baker, a former AFSCME International union area director in California, is the first African American to serve as one of the top three executive officers of the federation. Delegates also elected Elizabeth Shuler as the federation’s new secretary-treasurer. At 39, Shuler, former executive assistant to International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Pres. Edwin Hill, is the youngest person ever to become an officer of the AFL-CIO.

AFSCME WORKS spoke with Trumka about his vision for a revitalized labor movement and what must be done to turn the economy around.

How did your upbringing prepare you for the presidency of the AFL-CIO? Specifically, how did the rigors of mine work shape you for the challenges you face today?

I am a third generation coal miner. Both of my grandfathers, my dad, his brothers, and many of my uncles and cousins were mineworkers. As a result, I was always exposed to the United Mine Workers of America.

Working in a mine did a couple of things for me: One, it really teaches you the importance of solidarity and people depending on one another, because your health and safety, and in fact your life, depend on the person next to you doing his or her job. It also illustrates the importance of hard work and how insignificant you can be when it comes to pitting yourself against nature.

Why is health care reform so important for union members?

Everyone knows that the health care system is broken. Union members know that every time they go to the bargaining table, they give up wage increases in order not to lose their health care benefits. Premiums are increasing faster than wages, and many times union members are forced to pay higher premiums and co-pays. We can’t fix the economy without fixing health care first. The AFL-CIO and AFSCME have laid out proposals and principles on how health care reform will work, and that’s what we’re fighting for.

During the 2008 Presidential election, you delivered a passionate speech on racism. You said that nothing had “inflicted more pain and more suffering,” and you called on labor to challenge it. How best can we meet that goal?
One of the surest ways is to have all of our members start to confront racism and prejudice wherever they encounter it. When you see people being discriminated against because of the color of their skin, sex, gender, national origin or sexual orientation you’re allowing it to go on. We have to continue to educate our members about how racism divides us. It allows the employer to be stronger and all of us weaker.

You recently said that “we need to be a labor movement that stands by our friends, punishes its enemies and challenges those who can’t seem to decide which side they’re on.” How do we need to keep telling our story to everybody and go to politicians, senators and Congress people and demand that they stand up for working families. We need to call, write, leaflet the worksite and talk to anybody who’s not quite decided on where they are and tell them that this is a time when you really have the chance to stand up for working people in this country. Everybody agrees that the American system is broken, that it doesn’t work for working people. Now is the time to fix it. Politicians have a chance to stand with workers or stand against them. It’s their decision which way they go, just as it’s our decision whether to support them or not.

You have indicated that you will make the labor movement more relevant to younger workers. What will be your first steps toward meeting that goal?

We already took our first step when we elected our secretary-treasurer, Elizabeth Shuler, the youngest officer ever in the AFL-CIO. We’re going to show that agenda to people who seek our support. If they don’t support our agenda, then obviously our members will have to make a decision based on that. I believe that in the future we’ll withdraw support for those who don’t stand up for the working class.

The Employee Free Choice Act would make it possible for workers to form unions free from intimidation and harassment from their employers. What will you do to help Congress pass this critical legislation and retain key provisions such as majority sign-up and binding arbitration?

You have indicated that you will make the labor movement more relevant to younger workers. What will be your first steps toward meeting that goal?

We already took our first step when we elected our secretary-treasurer, Elizabeth Shuler, the youngest officer ever in the AFL-CIO. We’re already starting to look like the labor movement that we want to represent. The next thing we’re doing is systematically reaching out to these young people and bringing them in to talk to them, to learn about their wants, their needs and to let them learn more about us. We need to become more relevant and more meaningful to our youth.

As former UMWA president you have a track record of promoting unity within that organization and eventually bringing it under the AFL-CIO umbrella. What steps will you take to reunite the labor movement and build a stronger federation?

We’ve already started that process. UNITEHERE! has already come back into the labor movement. We’ll systematically reach out to the rest of the unions so that they come back into the federation and we’re all stronger. Having said that, there are two types of unity: There’s unity in name and there’s unity of purpose. To us, unity of purpose is the most important thing. We’ve had some important success with the latter. We’re all together supporting the Employee Free Choice Act and we’re all together on health care. Unity is a continuous process.

Public sector employees help our communities not only by fighting for justice in the workplace but by providing the vital services that keep them strong. How can public service workers contribute to creating a stronger labor movement?

One of the strong points of the labor movement is public sector employees. They are one of the sectors that have been growing. Some of our elected officers, including AFSCME’s Gerald McEntee and William Lucy, are among the best leaders we have. Right now, many states are having a hard time. The public sector can help create a stronger labor movement by doing two things: One, bring bargaining to every public sector worker because there are still too many out there who don’t have the ability to do collective bargaining. Two, keep strong budgets so that the people who make the country work don’t pay the price for the inefficiencies and the bad economy that was created by Wall Street.
Across the nation, AFSCME affiliates, councils and locals remain committed to the goal of boosting participation in the PEOPLE MVP program by 25 percent in 2011. PEOPLE is the political program that energizes our legislative goals and powers our support for worker-friendly candidates at all levels of government. As we look toward the challenges and opportunities of the future, we know that it’s time to make PEOPLE stronger than ever!

As part of that effort, PEOPLE now includes a new, internet-based rewards program allowing members who reach MVP status — by contributing at least $100 per year — to accumulate points and redeem them for a wide variety of quality merchandise.

Here are answers to common questions about this unique, new program:

**How do I become an MVP?**
Contribute at least $100 a year to PEOPLE. If you have payroll deduction with PEOPLE check-off, ask your employer for an authorization card to complete, indicating the amount you want to donate. If you don’t have payroll deduction, get the form from a union officer. You’ll need to authorize monthly contributions from your credit card, checking account or savings account.

**How do I register?**
Go to peoplerewards.afscme.org. Sign on with the ID number located on your union membership card, which was mailed recently. A valid e-mail address is required to register.

**What if I don’t have a computer?**
Call (202) 429-1021 to request a printed catalog.

**How do I access the MVP Rewards program?**
From afscme.org, click on the MVP PEOPLE Rewards button and follow the links. Or, go directly to peoplerewards.afscme.org. Following registration, you may log in to your account by using your e-mail address and password.

**Must I register to earn points?**
MVP contributors will earn points automatically. However, to take full advantage of the program, participants must register at the Rewards site. You’ll need to authorize monthly contributions from your credit card, checking account or savings account.

**Do my points roll over year to year?**
Yes.

**Do points expire?**
Not as long as you are an active MVP participant.

**Will I receive credit for past years of contributions to PEOPLE?**
All participants will have a zero point balance when the new program begins and points will accumulate as contributions are made.

**How do I find my point balance?**
It will appear on your online account. You will also receive an e-mail each time points are uploaded to your account.

**Contributions or gifts to AFSCME PEOPLE are not deductible for federal income tax purposes. All contributions to AFSCME PEOPLE are voluntary and will be used for political purposes. Contributions are not a condition of membership or employment and refusal to contribute is free of reprisal. In accordance with federal law, AFSCME PEOPLE accepts contributions only from AFSCME members, executive and administrative personnel, and their families. Contributions from other persons will be returned.**
Does the AFSCME Credit Card Still Offer an Advantage?

IT HELPS MEMBERS who use credit cards save money and get comparable rates, better terms and unique union-member-only benefits. But changes to the program, and to the credit card industry, have some cardholders wondering if the AFSCME Advantage card still offers benefits.

The hard work of union, consumer, community and civil rights groups led to last year’s passage of the Credit Card Accountability, Responsibility and Disclosure (CARD) Act. When the law takes effect this February, terms will be more transparent, and many fees and arbitrary rate hikes will be eliminated.

Several changes created by the new law were already in place for AFSCME members. The AFSCME card doesn’t allow unfair practices like double-cycle billing or price hikes when a payment arrives a day late. These practices will be prohibited through the Credit CARD Act, giving all consumers the same protections AFSCME Advantage cardholders have had for years.

All major credit card issuers have responded to the new law by raising interest rates three to 18 percentage points. Rates that were fixed have become variable. But the average rate increase for union cardholders is two percentage points, with some increasing by five — much less than the industry average.

Union cardholders have a lower rate because Union Privilege, the organization that develops most AFSCME Advantage benefits, is backed by the strength of millions of union members. That power helped us negotiate with the bank that issues the credit card and keep rate increases lower.

For union cardholders, this is the bottom line: The financial benefit of the changes created by the Credit CARD Act outweigh the cost of the increase in rates and other changes. For example, over-limit fees and online payment fees will be eliminated. Payments will be applied to the highest rate balances first and late fees must be reasonable and proportional.

Union power also eliminated penalty-pricing on existing balances. (Other cards continue to charge penalty rates as high as the Prime Rate + 29.99 percent on existing balances.) The strength of union members also ensures the AFSCME Advantage Credit Card will continue to have strict rules limiting when rates can be increased on new transactions.

When it comes to protecting members, the AFSCME Advantage Credit Card leads the way.

For more on AFSCME Advantage benefits, visit afscme.org and click on “Members Only,” or call Susan Welsh at 202-429-1079, or 800-588-0374.

Still Fighting
AFSCME, the AFL-CIO and Union Privilege have joined with Americans for Financial Reform to call for the creation of an independent watchdog to oversee financial products for consumers.

The new Consumer Financial Protection Agency would ensure that consumers have the clear, accurate and honest information they need in order to make sound financial decisions.

To become part of the solution and take action now, visit ourfinancialsecurity.org.
The United Nurses Associations of California/Union of Health Care Professionals (UNAC/UHCP/AFSCME) has won a $60,000 federal grant to improve patient care at Riverside’s Parkview Community Hospital and Medical Center.

The union, which represents approximately 250 registered nurses at the Southern California hospital, will work with the facility’s Registered Nurse Advisory Committee (RNAC) to develop a customer service program intended to bring together patients, employees and physicians. Their goal: determine the best way to provide health care services.

The union says the grant, from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS), should help foster “positive and effective labor-management communication and cooperation.”

“FMCS played an important role in getting us to our first union contract and continues to extend its support to ensure that we have a strong voice for patient care in the workplace as we work together with management to make Parkview better,” says Penny Brown, RN, president of the Parkview Registered Nurses Association.

“Health care facilities that truly seek to provide the highest quality of patient care utilize all of the resources at their disposal, including their staff,” says Kathy J. Sackman, RN, president of UNAC/UHCP/AFSCME and an AFSCME International vice president. “The FMCS grant will help create an amicable working environment that will contribute to moving Parkview forward in a positive direction toward providing high-quality patient care.”

Nome

ALASKA

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC FEATURES TROOPERS

The Alaska state troopers — members of the Public Safety Employees of Alaska (PSEA)/AFSCME Local 803 — are considered the “first line of defense on the last frontier.” Now they’re also TV stars.

The National Geographic Channel premiered a documentary of the troopers’ critical duties last fall. Filmed over 10 months in 2008, and airing over five weeks, the show followed various troopers performing their dangerous jobs.

In one episode, Anne Spears — one of only three women troopers in the unit — drove more than 100 miles to a remote village to make an arrest and transport the offender via snowmobile to the nearest jail. Of her work, she says, “I’m often out in the middle of nowhere by myself. Law enforcement is tough enough but it’s a lot tougher in a state where just about every resident is armed, the weather is treacherous and wild animals are nearby.”

Spears patrols 15 villages from an off-road post in Nome, a western Alaskan city of 35,000 residents. Riding in a boat or a snowmobile or flying a small plane, she responds to all calls — from drunkenness to domestic assaults — often without any backup.

“The series gives you a glimpse of the reality of what we do serving the people of Alaska,” says Spears. “Because of the unusual challenges we face everyday, we are unlike any law enforcement agency anywhere else in the U.S.”

She hastens to add, “This is the best job I ever had because I get to travel off the beaten path to remote places in this vast state, often expecting the unexpected and meeting diverse people who need our help.”

TV Star Alaska state trooper Ryan Bowens talks to villagers in Juneau. State troopers respond to calls often without any backup. Photo: Rob Cox
Las Vegas

NEVADA

PUBLIC SAFETY CONGRESS MEETS

More than 500 law enforcement and corrections officers gathered in Las Vegas last November for the Public Safety Congress. The conference occurs every two years and provides attendees with an opportunity to discuss critical issues like prison overcrowding and use of force in law enforcement.

During the opening ceremonies, members gave a rousing ovation to the loved ones of fallen comrades who were in attendance: Dennis Morgan is the son of Wayne “Cotton” Morgan, a Tennessee corrections officer who was gunned down while escorting a shackled prisoner outside a courthouse in Kingston, Tenn. Peggy Vallandingham is the wife of CO Robert Vallandingham who was killed in 1993 during an 11-day prison riot at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility in Lucasville. The crisis led to the founding of AFSCME Corrections United. Donna Aponte is the wife of New Haven, Conn., police officer Dario “Scott” Aponte who died in a car crash. Aponte’s co-worker and fellow member, Diane Gonzales, was involved in the same accident and remains in a coma.

Charles Caple, a 20-year veteran of the Corrigan Correction Institute and a member of Connecticut Council 4, received the Corrections Officer of the Year Award. He was injured in 2008 while saving his partner’s life during a brutal attack.

During his address to the members, President McEntee vowed to put the power of AFSCME behind the passage of the Public Safety Employee-Employer Cooperation Act — a measure currently pending in Congress that gives all public safety officers the right to form a union and bargain collectively. “With this bill, we’ll be able to organize even more,” he declared. “We will continue to fight until this act is law.”

Sec.-Treas. William Lucy assured the attendees that AFSCME will continue to “lead the way in getting you the tools you need, and the respect you deserve, for the most dangerous jobs in America.”

The three-day event featured plenary sessions, workshops and roundtable discussions on collective bargaining, health care reform and building the union.

Albuquerque

NEW MEXICO

CHILD CARE PROVIDERS BUILD A UNION

Approximately 2,600 family child care providers statewide have won a place at the table and can now speak with one powerful voice after voting to join Child Care Providers Together (CCPT)/New Mexico, an affiliate of Council 18.

The providers, who care for children whose parents are eligible for state child care assistance, began their quest to form a union three years ago. They achieved their first victory last April when Gov. Bill Richardson (D) signed a new law allowing registered and licensed providers to be represented by a labor organization.

Their second victory — achieved in October — was to certify Child Care Providers Together (CCPT)/New Mexico as their union representative. To accomplish this, providers reached out to others to explain the process and encourage them to mail in their ballots.

Through phone calls and door-knocking, registered child care provider Sylvia Ruiz of Las Cruces spread the union message of power through unity. When providers try to deal with the state on their own, she explains, “nobody listens to you, so we have to stick together to voice our concerns about what we want. When we went to them in numbers, the officials said, ‘Okay, sit down.”

The new union members want more benefits and pay, says Ruiz. “We’re only making about $4 to $6 per day per child, but we have these kids more than the parents do. I have mothers who are nurses, so they’re working 12-hour shifts.”

State-licensed provider Nancy Mosier and her husband, Michael, also found time to build their union — even while they operated a group home for 12 children in Raton, a small city in northeast New Mexico. Nancy says they wanted to help organize providers because they deserve to be treated with respect, like state employees.

Once approached to join the union, she says, “We were interested immediately. We wanted the right to speak out on what we need as professional day care providers.” Today, that right has been won.
Across America
Wisconsin
SOLDIER ANSWERS THE CALL

Hundreds of AFSCME members have been placed on active duty since 2001, many serving in Afghanistan, Iraq and other foreign countries. But only one of them — United States Sgt. First Class Chet Millard — has landed on the cover of Time magazine.

In his civilian life, Millard, 32, is a corrections officer at the Jackson Correctional Institution in Black River Falls and a member of Local 219 (Council 24). Since 2003, Millard has served in both Afghanistan and Iraq as one of approximately 100 Wisconsin National Guard soldiers currently deployed to the area.

In September, Millard, the commander of Wisconsin National Guard’s 951st Engineer Company, lead a platoon of soldiers on a mission to disarm roadside bombs in Eastern Afghanistan when an explosion ripped through their vehicle. Millard and his three comrades survived, but he suffered brain trauma and bruises to his back and knees. Even so, he got back on his feet and rejoined his unit once his injuries healed.

His story might have gone unnoticed outside the military and his circle of family and friends but for a photo of Millard, lying on a gurney awaiting a medivac helicopter. The shot was published on the cover of Time’s October 12 issue, which featured a story on the war in Afghanistan.

In a blog about the unit, one reporter noted, “They bear the burdens of the bombs they found, or worse yet, the ones they missed.”

His parents, wife and four kids welcomed his return in November, the end of a 15-month deployment for the soldiers of the 951st.

Council 24 Exec. Dir. Marty Beil reflected on Millard’s heroism, saying, “You see and hear about these kinds of things on the six o’clock news. But when it’s in your family, it sends goose bumps and a new sense of respect and appreciation for what these brave individuals do and the risks they take to protect our country.”

Proud Family | Sgt. First Class Chet Millard’s family poses with the Time magazine cover showing the wounded soldier. From left, Ashley, Lexy, Millard’s wife, Dawn, Gunnar, and Hunter. Photo: Karla Sullivan
ILLINOIS

AFSCME WINS REPRIEVE FOR STATE WORKERS

The jobs of 2,600 state employees facing layoffs were spared, temporarily, through a court ruling won last fall by Council 31.

The first wave of layoffs would have affected more than 500 workers, mostly state prison employees. But a preliminary injunction, issued by a judge of the First Judicial Circuit Court in Johnson County, blocked the state pending resolution of three union grievances, including one over outsourcing. The state appealed the ruling.

Council 31 argued that the administration of Gov. Pat Quinn (D) failed to complete bargaining with the union over the impact of layoffs, such as the health and safety risks posed to workers in already understaffed prisons. The council has warned that threatened job cuts would harm vital services, erode public safety and drive up overtime costs.

The council also contends that state employees should be performing work now done by contractors.

“AFSCME calls on Governor Quinn to use this opportunity to revisit his ill-advised layoff plan,” said Council 31 Exec. Dir. Henry Bayer, also an AFSCME international vice president. “He should rescind the layoffs, protect vital services and save jobs. To save money, he should look at these tens of millions of dollars in private contracts, eliminating those that aren’t needed and bringing in-house work that should be done by state employees.”

Bayer said Quinn also should hire public employees to reduce costly overtime. In June alone, Department of Corrections employees worked more than 145,000 hours of overtime.

“The real root of this issue is the state budget crisis,” Bayer added. “The governor and every state lawmaker should commit to passing comprehensive tax reform that raises adequate revenue to fund essential services and preserves the jobs of those who provide them.”

From state to state, workers are organizing with AFSCME for a stronger voice on the job. Here are some recent victories:

Connecticut
Twenty-two Madison police officers have joined Council 15.

Illinois
Five-hundred state public service administrator option 2s, who perform audits and other functions for many state agencies, joined Council 31. It took 18 months for their ballots to be counted, however, as the state had challenged the composition of the bargaining unit. The election was whether to join AFSCME, another union or no union. In a separate election, 180 nurse supervisors (PSA option 8Ns) also joined Council 31. They work in mental health and developmental centers, in prisons and other state agencies.

Massachusetts
Two-hundred-and-fifty registered nurses and licensed practical nurses employed by the University of Massachusetts have joined Council 93. The health care professionals service all the state’s correctional facilities. Also, 53 drivers and mechanics employed by First Student in Shelburne Falls/Huntington have joined Council 93. First Student is the world’s largest school bus contractor.

Minnesota
Fourteen engineers, city planners and other professional employees of the city of St. Cloud joined Council 65 through voluntary recognition. Also joining the council: seven employees in the city of Eden Valley, including five police department workers; five municipal liquor store and public works employees in the town of Winton; five department heads and supervisors in the southern town of Wells; and the chief of police of the city of Gibbon was certified as a bargaining unit.

New York
Twenty-one employees of the non-profit Institute for Community Living (ICL) have joined DC 1707 through card check recognition. In addition, another 20 ICL employees in Brooklyn joined through an election. The union now represents approximately 120 workers at eight ICL facilities in New York City. ICL serves more than 8,000 people with mental and developmental disabilities in New York and Pennsylvania.

Ohio
Forty-five bus drivers employed by First Transit at Miami University in Oxford (Miami Metro) voted overwhelmingly to join Council 8. Also, 14 transportation workers employed by the Riverdale Local Schools have joined the Ohio Association of Public School Employees (OAPSE)/AFSCME Local 4.

Pennsylvania
Fifty-four employees of Locust Grove Nursing Home have voted to join District Council 86. The workers include certified nursing assistants, maintenance employees and dietary aides. Also joining DC 66: 25 employees of the Lewisburg Area School District, including custodial and maintenance workers, cafeteria employees and crossing guards.

Tennessee
After a three-month organizing campaign, more than 200 newly employed corrections officers at the Morgan County Correctional Complex recently joined Local 2173, increasing its membership ranks to 442 despite repeated attempts by the Morgan County Department of Corrections to bust the union. Bill Shillings, president of the local, says their 96 percent membership rate is remarkable in a Southern right-to-work state.
Across America

COLUMBUS

MEMBERS HELP PRESERVE FUNDING FOR PUBLIC SERVICES

At a time when many cities around the country are cutting budgets to make up revenue shortfalls, members of Council 8 helped persuade Columbus voters to raise their taxes to save critical public services. This was a major victory in a city that hadn’t changed its 2 percent income tax rate in 27 years. A half-percent rate hike — to be paid by city residents and those who work in the city — was unlikely to pass without a concerted effort by its supporters. That’s why members of Locals 1632 and 2191 stepped up to the plate, helping to make thousands of phone calls to potential voters and delivering 5,000 door hangers to homes in high-turnout Democratic precincts.

The need for new tax revenue was critical. Earlier in the year, Mayor Michael Coleman (D) warned that Columbus faced mass police and fire layoffs — and severe service cuts — if residents failed to approve the income tax rate increase intended to raise more than $96 million per year.

The efforts of Council 8 members proved essential: Out of more than 89,000 votes cast in last summer’s special election, the tax increase passed with a margin of just 3,050 votes.

“This shows that with strong city leadership, a solid message, and a mobilized union membership, people will raise their taxes to save city services,” says Doug Moore, president of city workers Local 1632 (Council 8). “Clearly, the citizens of Columbus feel their quality of life is important and are willing to pay for strong public services they see as a value.”

Even The Columbus Dispatch cited the union’s leadership in helping to unite the community behind the tax hike, which is expected to provide funds to reopen 11 city recreation centers and bring back some of the more than 170 AFSCME members who were laid off in 2008.
Davida Russell knows that operating a public transit vehicle in an urban center is a stressful, unhealthy job. She’s driven buses for more than two decades. “Soon as you hit the road, you face all kinds of challenges — from traffic congestion and air pollution to threats of physical assault,” she says. “By the time you get home, you’re grouchy and completely exhausted.”

Russell is president of Local 744 of the Ohio Association of Public School Employees (OAPSE)/AFSCME Local 4. She works for the Transportation Service Center of the Cuyahoga County Board of Developmental Disabilities, which employs 135 drivers and monitors. Each day, these hard-working AFSCME members clock more than 3,360 miles transporting 3,500 “medically fragile students” to various job centers and schools.

For more than 40 years, these workers operated out of a dingy and dirty garage. “Just the sight of the place drained your energy. But because there’s a special group of very sensitive children and adults to transport, we have to be at our best at all times, to ensure that they reach their destinations safely,” says Russell.

Eight years ago, the county board decided to renovate the garage, and the superintendent reached out to the union for ideas. The workers jumped at the opportunity. With management’s encouragement, they created an ambitious plan. Today, the old garage has been transformed into a modern “state-of-the-art” two-story complex with furnished offices and conference rooms, a gym, a kitchen, a spacious lounge and picnic areas.

“When I saw the facility, I couldn’t believe my eyes,” exclaims AFSCME Pres. Gerald McEntee. “It’s truly remarkable what good labor/management relations can do to improve workplace conditions.”

“The pleasant atmosphere has made a huge difference in the attitudes of workers,” Russell adds. “Now, they can rest and relax and have peace of mind before getting back on the road.”

Russell recalls that when the project was first considered and management asked for their input, “that was a breath of fresh air. We finally got respect. It was also the beginning of an equal partnership that has served us well, especially the developmentally disabled citizens of Cuyahoga County.”
Across America

Pennsylvania

Philadelphia

COs Entitled to Arbitration

Nearly 2,000 corrections officers in the city of Philadelphia are entitled to reach new collective bargaining agreements through arbitration, a Commonwealth Court ruled late last year.

“We knew that if we kept on fighting, we would win,” says CO Lorenzo North, president of Local 159 (District Council 33).

For years, the COs settled their contracts through collective bargaining. But, in 2008, the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board ruled that the city had engaged in an unfair labor practice by refusing arbitration with Local 159.

The city appealed and even offered a $1,000 pay bonus to all 15 locals within DC 33. Local 159 declined to accept the offer so the members could continue their legal fight.

Washington

DC

UDW Member Testifies at Workers’ Rights Hearing

More than 300 workers, including union members from AFSCME, AFT, IBEW, IFPTE, Iron Workers, UAW, UNITEHERE! and Workers United, participated in the First National Asian Pacific American Workers’ Rights Hearing at the AFL-CIO to share their stories and talk about the challenges of organizing new members.

Co-hosted by the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA) and the new leadership of the AFL-CIO, the event focused on employer abuse, immigrant exploitation, wage theft and union suppression. Participants renewed their commitment to fight for worker solidarity and economic justice.

“As home care providers, we face the challenges of isolation every day,” said Nicanora Montenegro, a member of UDW Homecare Providers Union/AFSCME. “We work alone and do not have opportunities to support each other. With a union, we are able to bargain for better wages and health benefits. I can’t imagine providers in California or anywhere else in this country not having a union to protect them.”

U.S. Rep. Judy Chu (D-Calif.) addressed the participants and vowed to work for the passage of the Employee Free Choice Act.

“We need this bill passed, now more than ever,” she declared. “Workers aren’t getting the respect and dignity they deserve and they need the strong voice on the job that unions provide.”

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AFSCME'S POLITICAL REBATE PROCEDURE

Article IX, Section 14, of the AFSCME International Constitution includes a rebate procedure for members who object to the expenditure of union funds for partisan political or ideological purposes. The rebate is not available to those who are members under a union shop or similar provision — or to non-members who pay agency shop or similar fees to the union.

The timing of the rebate procedure is tied to the International’s recent fiscal year, which ended December 31. The procedures, including the requirements for submitting a proper rebate request, were adopted by delegates to the International Convention and are spelled out in Article IX, Section 14, of the International Constitution and summarized below. THESE REQUIREMENTS ARE STRICTLY ENFORCED.

Eligible members who object to the expenditure of a portion of their dues for partisan political or ideological purposes and want to request a rebate must do so individually in writing. Written requests must be postmarked between April 1 and April 16, 2010, and must be sent via registered or certified mail to BOTH the International Secretary-Treasurer AND the council with which the member’s local is affiliated (or if no council affiliation, to the member’s local union).

The request must contain the following information: the member’s name, Social Security number or member number, home address, e-mail address, if available, and the AFSCME local and council number to which dues were paid during the preceding year. This information must be typed or legibly printed. The individual request must be signed by the member and sent by the individual member to: William Lucy, International Secretary-Treasurer, AFSCME, 1625 L St., NW, Washington, DC 20036-5687, AND to the council with which the member’s local is affiliated (or if no council affiliation, to the member’s local union). Requests from more than one person may not be sent in the same envelope. Each request must be sent individually. Requests must be submitted in writing each year.

Upon receipt of a valid rebate request, an application for partisan political or ideological rebate will be sent to the objecting member. The objecting member will be required to complete and return the application within 30 days of its issuance. The application will require the objecting member to identify those partisan political or ideological activities to which objection is being made. In determining the amount of the rebate to be paid to any member, the International Union and each subordinate body shall have the option of limiting the rebate to the member’s pro-rata share of the expenses for those activities specifically identified in the application.

Any member who is dissatisfied with the amount of the rebate paid by the International Union or any subordinate body may object by filing a written appeal with the AFSCME Judicial Panel within 15 days after the rebate check has been received. Appeals should be sent to the Judicial Panel Chairperson at the AFSCME International Headquarters at the address listed above. The Judicial Panel will conduct a hearing and issue a written decision on such appeals, subject to an appeal to the full Judicial Panel. If dissatisfied with the Judicial Panel’s ruling, a member can appeal to the next International Convention.
San Juan, Puerto Rico | Puerto Rican public employees — including thousands of members of Servidores Públicos Unidos (SPU)/Council 95 — flooded the streets of Hato Rey, a neighborhood in San Juan, to protest Gov. Luis Fortuño’s decision to lay off 17,000 government workers. Led by SPU, labor unions and thousands of their supporters across the island called for a one-day national strike last fall, closing government offices and schools.

“The Puerto Rican people will not take this abuse,” said SPU Pres. Annette González. “We’ve sent a clear message to Fortuño that we reject his ideology of privatization. We will not stop until he understands that these measures are not the way to pull us out of an economic crisis.”

“In a recession, smart leaders borrow money to turn things around,” AFSCME Pres. Gerald W. McEntee told SPU members in San Juan. “Now is the time to stimulate the economy, not to shut it down.”

The All Puerto Rico for Puerto Rico coalition is coordinating the protests against Fortuño’s plan to balance the island’s $3.2 billion budget deficit on the backs of working families. Invoking Law 7, a bill that overrides collective bargaining agreements between the government and unions, the governor has fired thousands of workers during his first year in office.

In a dramatic demonstration of opposition to the governor’s proposed layoffs, 19 union leaders and members — including some affiliated with SPU — occupied the Office of Management and Budget in San Juan in December, while others protested and sang Christmas carols outside the agency.

Photo: Miguel Maldonado