Working families made big gains at the ballot box. Now, it's time for us to win on our issues.
5 The Road Ahead

Working people won big in last November’s election, helping to reclaim Congress, plus many statehouses and governorships from public officials who carry the favor of Big Business at the expense of the rest of us. Now it’s our turn to set things right. These three stories examine our legislative goals, the effort some of our affiliates made during the campaign and the election bids of candidates from within our own AFSCME ranks.

12 Proud to Serve America

AFSCME in the Public Service

PAGE 12. The members of our union provide services in so many ways, and for so many people, that it boggles the mind! Public Employee shines a spotlight on the important jobs of our members — jobs that not only keep America moving today, but help to strengthen our nation for tomorrow.

SICK, WORRIED & OVERLOOKED

PAGE 18. The tragedy of 9/11 continues for New York’s first responders — the brave men and women who worked in the rubble. Now, their own health is at risk, both physically and emotionally. What’s it like for some of these heroes? We talked to members of DC 37 to find out.

26 Standing Up & Speaking Out

Thousands of home care and family child care providers across the nation are joining AFSCME to make a better life for themselves and the people in their care.
It’s Time to Win for Working Families

Voters rejected the Bush administration’s anti-worker agenda in last fall’s elections. They sent a clear message that they want their leaders to stand up to the powerful lobbyists and stand up for a new agenda that puts working families first.

We knew the stakes were high and that’s why our union conducted an unprecedented “get out the vote” effort. More AFSCME members participated than ever — making more calls, distributing more workplace fliers and knocking on more doors than in any previous midterm election.

Our efforts were part of the AFL-CIO’s 2006 union voter mobilization program, the most ambitious initiative in our history, reaching 13.4 million voters in 32 states. In the final four days alone, union members made 3.5 million house calls, telephoned 7.9 million union voters and leafleted 6,130 worksites. AFSCME played a major, and widely recognized, role in the elections at the state and federal levels.

But now that the victory celebrations are over, we must hold our elected leaders accountable for safeguarding public pensions, funding essential services and defending workers’ rights.

WHY ACTIVISM MATTERS. Politics is important for our union because we elect our bosses — the people who determine our wages, benefits, and working conditions.

We build political power because it gives us the support we need at the bargaining table, in Congress and state legislatures, and when it’s time to stand with other workers who want to build strength by joining AFSCME. Political power helps us achieve good contracts, enact legislation that protects our bargaining rights and win on issues affecting all working families, like protecting Social Security.

Unfortunately, we know the havoc anti-worker politicians can wreak. When Mitch Daniels of Indiana, Ernie Fletcher of Kentucky and Matt Blunt of Missouri were elected as governors (Daniels and Blunt in 2004; Fletcher in 2003), they immediately rescinded state employees’ bargaining rights. We cannot let that happen in any other state or local government. That’s why we must continue to elect more pro-working family candidates.

WHAT NOW? Our priority is to press our leaders to take action to help families get ahead. We want to adequately fund and strengthen public services, improve public schools and make college tuition more affordable.

What’s more, we want lawmakers to protect Social Security and Medicare, and make health care affordable and universally available. We also want lawmakers to raise the minimum wage, restore workers’ freedom to form unions by passing the Employee Free Choice Act and stop sending our jobs overseas.

It’s up to us to hold the lawmakers we’ve elected accountable for achieving these goals. In fact, holding politicians accountable is a key part of the Power to Win plan endorsed by delegates to our 2006 International Convention.

Power to Win, our union’s plan to grow and to build political power, challenges all of us to get active at the grassroots level to achieve the results we seek. That can mean organizing rallies at the State House and at city council offices, or going door to door as volunteer member organizers.

As the New Year begins, it is fitting that we recommit ourselves to activism. That’s the way we can contribute to building the responsible government Americans want and deserve. We look forward to working with officials on both sides of the aisle who believe in that ideal and support our values and vision.
The Republican National Committee constantly argues that their political tent is big and there is room for all. At a meeting a little over a year ago, then-Chairman Ken Mehlman even apologized for his party’s past history of discrimination, racism, and its practice of excluding minorities in general and African Americans in particular. Last July, President Bush made essentially the same argument — that people should give the national Republican Party an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment on a range of issues important to African Americans.

But if the party really wants to understand why millions of African Americans view it with disdain, it should check its actions in the senatorial campaign in the state of Tennessee. There, the actions of the national Republican Party — under the leadership of Mehlman and Bush — denied the state the opportunity to prove that it could move from the dark days of racism to a brighter future for every citizen of that state.

POISED TO MAKE HISTORY. Former House Speaker Tip O’Neill said that all politics is local, and to a great degree that is true. In the recent senatorial election, the state of Tennessee was poised to make history for every segment of its society — rich and poor; working people; professionals; religious and business leaders; and young people seeking to believe in the process — every slice of our society that makes us who we are.

During a primary that bruised both parties, Tennessee’s voters selected two candidates, who met their criteria for leadership, to carry their party’s banner into the general election: Congressman Harold Ford Jr. of Memphis, and Robert Corker, former mayor of Chattanooga.

The state was poised to make history. And I don’t mean by electing Harold Ford Jr. I mean the state could have made history by having a campaign for one of the most important offices in our nation based on the issues, leadership, vision, capacity, experience and history of public service.

From small towns to big cities, the candidates shared their views and their visions for their state and this nation with people from every walk of life. From small cafes and donut shops to the large churches and mass meetings, from town hall meetings to statewide debates, the candidates went out and spoke with the people of Tennessee about the issues. In each campaign, there were seniors who had never participated before; there were young people who had said they would never participate again, but became excited by what they saw happening right there in Tennessee.

RACISM IS ALIVE & WELL. Anyone who believes Mehlman and Bush, and thinks that things have changed, need look no further than the Republican National Committee’s anti-Ford Playboy ad — one so sleazy, so distasteful, so well-designed to dredge up the old hatreds so prevalent in the South. Clearly, it was dirty business as usual for them.

The fact that Harold Ford Jr. lost the election is not the issue that leaves me troubled. It is the fact that Tennessee lost an opportunity to elect an individual to high office based on the issues most important to Tennesseans, whether that individual was Robert Corker or Harold Ford Jr.

Unfortunately, I must thank Ken Mehlman and the Republican National Committee for creatively reminding us that at the highest level of their party, racism is alive and well and just waiting for the opportunity to be used.

In Tennessee’s U.S. senate election, “it clearly was dirty business as usual.”

With then-incoming Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) (right) who visited AFSCME headquarters in December to thank members of the International Executive Board for the union’s decisive role in the 2006 elections.
On Election Day 2006, America’s voters rejected the Bush administration’s agenda. We said no to giving special favors to the privileged while blocking a minimum wage increase. No to privatizing Social Security, our most important family protection program. No to spending hundreds of billions of dollars and thousands of lives in Iraq while ignoring the war on the middle class here at home. No to energy and health care policies that have fattened oil and pharmaceutical industry profits without helping working families afford today or build for tomorrow.

We demanded a decisive new course for our country. Now we’re determined to organize at the grassroots and work with lawmakers on both sides of the aisle to change America and renew economic opportunity for all.

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— AFSCME President Gerald W. McEntee
AFSCME’S
EIGHT-POINT AGENDA FOR THE 110TH CONGRESS

1 STRENGTHEN PUBLIC SERVICES.
Increase public investment in the critical services provided by our members, including lifeline entitlement programs such as Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, and also domestic spending priorities like education, Head Start, child care and job training; stop the executive branch’s efforts to outsource publicly administered programs such as Food Stamps and employment services; increase oversight of contracted-out services; close corporate tax loopholes and repeal tax breaks for companies that outsource American jobs overseas.

2 PROMOTE HEALTH CARE SECURITY.
Build a political movement to win universal health coverage and reduce skyrocketing medical costs; mandate that Medicare bargain for lower drug prices as well as fix the prescription drug law to protect beneficiaries and limit states’ costs; and improve Medicaid and the State Children’s Health Insurance Program to provide coverage for more children.

3 PROTECT RETIREMENT SECURITY.
Safeguard and strengthen Social Security and defined benefit pensions at the state and local levels. AFSCME opposes any measure that cuts or takes away guaranteed benefits.

4 RAISE THE MINIMUM WAGE.
Increase the federal minimum wage to $7.25 an hour after being stuck at $5.15 an hour for almost a decade. A society that demands hard work should reward hard work.

5 RESTORE WORKERS’ FREEDOM TO FORM UNIONS.
Pass the Employee Free Choice Act, which would require employers to recognize a union after a majority of workers sign cards saying they want one, and stop employers from intimidating and harassing workers who want a union; and reverse the nefarious National Labor Relations Board’s ruling that allows employees to deny workers’ rights by classifying them as “supervisors.”

6 MAKE ELECTIONS FAIR.
Increase funding for HAVA (Help America Vote Act of 2002) to ensure that voting machines are secure and every vote is counted; and increase government oversight of elections.

7 A FAIR JUDICIARY.
The U.S. Supreme Court is sharply divided on issues of critical importance to AFSCME’s members. We must ensure that future nominees to the federal bench will defend workers’ rights as well as civil rights.

8 EXPAND REGULATORY OVERSIGHT.
The present administration has weakened the government agencies that keep workers safe, including the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency. We will support legislation that preserves and expands protective safeguards for our members, including extending OSHA coverage to all public-sector employees.
The hard work of AFSCME members and the literally countless hours put into our get-out-the-vote efforts paid resounding dividends at the polls on Nov. 7. In addition to taking control of Congress from the hands of a rubber-stamp majority that has legislated against our best interests for years, we also elected pro-workers governors and state legislators, and made our voices heard on key ballot initiatives. In six states voters raised the minimum wage and called for it to rise with inflation. In the three states where it was on the ballot, voters rejected so-called Taxpayers Bill of Rights (TABOR) initiatives — reckless spending restrictions that would force cuts on essential services while costing the jobs of our members.

A TURNOUT LIKE NO OTHER. Nationwide, thousands of activists took part in AFSCME’s “labor to neighbor” effort to help get out the vote for worker-friendly candidates, participating in phone banks, labor walks, worksite leafleting and numerous campaign events. “This election was a clear message from the American people that they want their leaders to stand up to the lobbyists and big corporations that have controlled our government for too long,” says AFSCME Pres. Gerald W. McEntee, who is also the chair of the AFL-CIO Political Committee. Union members and the labor movement’s political operation were hugely responsible for the extraordinary results. Overall, union families made up 23 percent of the vote on this off-year Election Day. In battleground states where U.S. Senate seats were in play, 73 percent of the union vote went to Democratic candidates, compared to 55 percent for all voters.

Pro-worker forces also elected a majority of governors, including Martin O’Malley in Maryland and Ted Strickland in Ohio — both big victories for public employees. In New York, Eliot Spitzer was elected governor. In Iowa, Chet Culver became the second Democrat elected to the governor’s post in more than 40 years, and Massachusetts elected Deval Patrick its first African-American governor. AFSCME helped retain key governorships, including Jennifer Granholm in Michigan; Jim Doyle in Wisconsin; Ted Kulongoski in Oregon; and Bill Richardson in New Mexico.

WIN ALL ACROSS THE NATION. The Democratic Party also posted major gains in state legislatures — the source of state budget funding for many AFSCME contracts — picking up 10 chambers, including the House in Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Oregon and Pennsylvania; the House and the Senate in Iowa and New Hampshire; and Wisconsin’s Senate.

The November elections signified an unprecedented effort on the part of AFSCME. As part of a reinvigorated AFL-CIO Labor 2006 program, we mobilized more members and recruited more volunteers than in any previous mid-term election. (For details, see “From the President,” Page 3.)

“The House of Labor elected many strong, pro-worker leaders,” McEntee says. “And we are going to hold them to their campaign promises to raise the minimum wage, safeguard public pensions, reform health care, fund essential services and defend workers’ rights.”

Make no mistake about it. The next two years will be pivotal for enacting our legislative agenda and paving the road to the White House in 2008.

Through door knocking, phone banking, leafleting and more, AFSCME mobilized working family voters and helped change the direction of the nation.

By Gonzalo Baeza

UNIONS MADE THE DIFFERENCE

Exit polls show that union households provided the margin of victory in the 2006 elections.

VOTING IN 2006 U.S. HOUSE RACES

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<th>UNION HOUSEHOLDS</th>
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<td><strong>DEMOCRAT</strong></td>
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Source: AFL-CIO Post-Election Survey/Hart Research
A well-coordinated campaign known as the Maryland Initiative combined the efforts of Maryland Public Employees Council 67, Maryland State Employees Council 92, the Association of Classified Employees (ACE)/AFSCME Local 2250 and AFSCME Retiree Chapter 1. With the election of Gov. Martin O’Malley and U.S. Sen. Ben Cardin, the results speak for themselves. Joining forces to pursue a shared legislative and political agenda, the affiliates held trainings for leaders and activists, conducted joint candidate interviews and created a common plan to mobilize union members in the days preceding the primary and general elections. They also moved previously inactive members into the action, like Valerie Carroll, a former service manager who retired last July. Carroll worked as a phone bank volunteer in Local 2250’s headquarters in Landover. An AFSCME member since 1992, her political activism surfaced in recent years.

As she explains it, “I have never been political in my life. When I found out who really was for and was against working people I said, ‘well, the thing to do is get out there and also get other people to do the same.’”

In addition to electing candidates, the votes of working families resulted in several ballot initiative victories. Here is a sampling of what we did.

**RAISED MINIMUM WAGE**
Arizona, Colorado, Missouri, Montana, Nevada and Ohio

**DEFEATED PUBLIC SERVICE CUTS**
Maine, Nebraska, Oregon

**DEFEATED 65% SOLUTION**
Colorado

*Sixty-five percent solution is an effort to force cuts in the support services AFSCME members provide that schools depend on.
No matter the party, AFSCME stands with candidates who stand with us. That was especially clear in the state of New York, where Bob Rauff, executive vice president of Local 881 of the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA)/AFSCME Local 1000, carried out an effective bipartisan effort. CSEA members there helped re-elect assemblyman Marc Alessi (D), a former CSEA staffer, and state Senators John Flanagan (R) and Caesar Trunzo (R).

"Whether the candidate was a Republican or a Democrat, this election was about the issues that are most important to our members," notes Rauff, whose family boasts a strong union background.

Statewide, AFSCME’s six affiliates played an instrumental role in returning the governor’s office to the Democrats after 12 years of Republican control. Long-time attorney general and AFSCME ally Eliot Spitzer was elected governor while U.S. Sen. Hillary Clinton romped to a second term and Democrat Andrew Cuomo won his bid to succeed Spitzer as attorney general.

Scores of union households and dedicated activists from Council 8, the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association (OCSEA)/AFSCME Local 11 and the Ohio Association of Public School Employees (OAPSE)/AFSCME Local 4 played a pivotal role in effecting a sea-change in state politics, electing democratic Congressmen Ted Strickland to the office of governor and Sherrod Brown to the U.S. Senate.

"Public employees, school bus drivers, food service workers and many others came from all over the region. You name the city in Ohio and members were showing up in Columbus to help with our phoning operation and other activities," reports OCSEA retiree Frances Henderson, a former customer service specialist at the state department of Public Safety. "It was really great to see everyone together in unity."

AFSCME activists made sure every voter they contacted understood the high stakes of the election.

Private workplaces made a difference in state races, picking up 10 legislative chambers.

**GAINS ACROSS THE NATION**

Working families made a difference in state races, picking up 10 legislative chambers.

**HOUSE**

Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Oregon and Pennsylvania

**HOUSE AND SENATE**

Iowa and New Hampshire

**SENATE**

Wisconsin

*COOPERATIVE EFFORT* — Volunteers, including Gov. Ted Strickland’s wife, Frances (left), paint “Strickland for Governor” on the barn door of OCSEA Assembly member Sonny Bright of Chapter 2100.

*NEW YORK*

**OHIO**
OREGON

Council 75 has a strong track record of turning out the vote. To help in 2006, Matt Hilton from AFSCME Local 328 took time off from his job at the Oregon Health Sciences University and devoted numerous hours to “tracking which members had voted and who hadn’t,” he says.

“Unlike most of the nation, all of Oregon’s elections are conducted by mail, with ballots sent out about two and a half weeks prior to the election. We at the council call our system ‘ballot-hunting,’” Hilton explains.

And the results could not have been better, with Democrats retaining the majority in the Oregon Senate and regaining control of the state House after 16 years. In addition, Gov. Ted Kulongoski (D) won re-election by defeating Republican Ron Saxton.

Wisconsin

For many AFSCME volunteers in Wisconsin, the days leading up to Election Day consisted of nonstop hours. Darold “Dode” Lowe, president of AFSCME Retirees Subchapter 52, described a typical day as a volunteer: “We would hand out literature to our members as they came to work as early as 6:30 a.m. Then we would be dropping literature at workplaces for one of our endorsed candidates and finally we’d be making phone calls for the AFL-CIO members out of AFSCME headquarters. I probably volunteered between 5 and 7 hours a day.”

Along with re-electing Gov. Jim Doyle (D), AFSCME helped Democrats win control of the state Senate and take seven Democratic seats in the Assembly.

PREPARING FOR VICTORY — From left to right: Sara Racine (Local 952 treasurer) and Valerie Stevens (Local 428 vice president), both of Council 48 and facing the camera, were among the AFSCME members who participated in a Nov. 3 rally in Milwaukee for Gov. Jim Doyle (D) and U.S. Sen. Herbert Kohl (D). Both were re-elected four days later.

GETTING OUT THE VOTE — Matt Hilton from Local 328 (Council 75) took time off from his job at the Oregon Health Sciences University in order to help AFSCME get out the vote.

RALLYING IN OREGON — Scott Tabor from Local 350 and Local 189 Pres. Carol Stahlke at a “Ted Kulongoski for Governor” rally.

Joe Baessler
Dan Loving
Anna Case
Nothing provides greater protection for public services like electing AFSCME members — the people who understand the issue best. Here are just a few members of our union who ran for office last year. If you know of others, please forward them to Public Employee magazine, 1625 L Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036-5687. Or send via e-mail to pubaffairs@afscme.org.

Standing Strong in Colorado. State Rep. Debbie Benefield got re-elected for another two-year term. A member of AFSCME Local 821 (Council 76), her victory was instrumental in thwarting the Republican attempt to regain control of the state Legislature.

Happy in Hawaii. Faye Hanohano-Kaawaloa, an administrative lieutenant at the Kulani Correctional Facility and former secretary-treasurer of United Public Workers (UPW)/AFSCME Local 646, won an open seat and will succeed state Rep. Helene Hale. Hanohano-Kaawaloa will represent Puna, one of the nine districts on the Island of Hawaii.

Victories in Iowa. Kevin McCarthy, a prosecutor in the Polk County Attorney’s office and a member of Local 1868 (Council 61) won his re-election bid as state representative. Fellow House Democrats voted McCarthy Iowa House majority leader in late November.

Rep. Ray Zirkelbach, of Monticello, was unopposed. A corrections officer at Anamosa State Penitentiary and a member of Local 2994, he has represented Jones County and a portion of Dubuque County since 2004. However, Zirkelbach has had the opportunity to serve only one year (2005) in the Legislature. The 28-year-old specialist in the Army National Guard (Reserves) is currently deployed in Iraq, but is scheduled to return this spring.

Members who also won in Iowa include: Tom Hockensmith (former member of Local 3450) re-elected as Polk County supervisor; Patrick “P.J.” Jennings (Local 3462) Woodbury County attorney; state Rep. Todd Taylor (Local 3012) re-elected to represent a portion of Cedar Rapids; and state Rep. Wes Whitehead (Local 212) re-elected to represent Sioux City.

Making a Difference in Maryland. Kris Valderrama-Lobo, of the International Union’s Public Affairs Department, was elected to the Maryland House of Delegates from Prince George’s County. Valderrama-Lobo’s father, former State Delegate David Valderrama, was the first Filipino American to become a member of a state Legislature on the United States mainland.

Members who also won in Maryland include: Gary English, Municipal Employees Local 44 (Council 67), chief shop steward and Kory Blake, Council 67 staff representative. Both were elected to the state Democratic Central Committee.

Minnesota Gains. Bradley Powers, a technician with the state Department of Transportation and a member of Local 586 (Council 5) was elected to the Windom City Council as a “member-at-large.” He defeated the incumbent with 61 percent of the vote.

Surprise in Wisconsin. Democrat Dawn Marie Sass, a custody placement specialist at a Milwaukee juvenile detention center, defeated 12-year Republican incumbent Jack Voight to become state treasurer. Sass, a member (and former treasurer) of Local 645 (Council 48), won by 8,648 votes — a true accomplishment.

GROWING OUR OWN

At election time, AFSCME members not only get out the vote. They get elected, too.

By Gonzalo Baeza

Fighting for Working Families — AFSCME headquarters staffer Kris Valderrama-Lobo was elected a member of the Maryland House of Delegates from Prince George’s County.

Big Change — Dawn Marie Sass was elected state treasurer in Wisconsin.

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Early in the morning, when most Americans are still asleep, Vince G. Jackson rises from his bed to collect the trash of St. Louis residents. Sanitation work ranks as one of the most dangerous jobs in the nation. Yet, like the other AFSCME members profiled on the following pages, Jackson perseveres and continues to make a difference.
AFSCME members are the heartbeat that keeps America alive. People count on us to be there — serving food in school cafeterias, nursing them back to health, repairing sewer lines, stopping a crime or saving a life. Families in cities, states and towns depend on us to deliver vital services — that keep America moving forward.

In the following pages of Public Employee, we highlight some of our members — a land-use planner whose job requires her to strike a delicate balance between available space and people’s vision of how to use it; a crime scene investigator whose work can be the thin line between a verdict of guilt or innocence; and a library associate whose bookmobile has delivered smiles and knowledge to children and seniors in some of St. Paul’s most troubled neighborhoods.

We also tell the stories of six members of New York City’s DC 37. Their jobs placed them on the front line after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. More than five years later, their suffering continues.

Finally, there is the tale of David McGuinn, a Maryland corrections officer, who made the ultimate on-the-job sacrifice when he was murdered by two inmates in an overcrowded Maryland prison.

These are the faces and the jobs that make up the mosaic that is our great union — jobs that are important today and serve as the foundation for a better tomorrow.

By Jon Melegrito
Not everyone thinks land-use planning is exciting, but to Javonna Marroquin, her job in Josephine County is far from boring. Not as electrifying perhaps as space exploration, but it’s close. As a planner, she says, “I see myself serving as a bridge between human beings and the planet.”

Consider, for instance, recently submitted applications for land use, which Marroquin routinely reviews: One petitions for “bed and breakfast” lodgings in tree houses. Another requests permission for a vending stand close to a farm to sell organically produced vegetables, while a third envisions 160 acres of farmland becoming a recreational campground.

“The routine part is easy,” she says. “I simply go over the applications to ensure they meet our land-use criteria,” which includes issues such as constitutional rights, traffic, fire safety, sewage disposal, pesticide control and the implications to a neighbor’s adjoining private property. After discussing her findings with a team of planners, Marroquin makes presentations at public hearings.

“The ‘fireworks’ are what gets the adrenaline flowing — behind the scenes, and at times in front of TV cameras. “This is the exciting part, dealing with the emotions of everyone involved,” Marroquin says. “And passions can get very heated.”

She’s referring of course to county officials who have the law to uphold, entrepreneurs who have vested interests to promote and residents who have strong opinions about what government can or cannot do with the land.

Despite her personal feelings about a request, Marroquin must remain neutral at all times, neither recommending approval nor rejection. She can only present the merits of a case — an important step in a process that is by its very nature confusing and complicated, even before the political, economic and environmental wishes of participants become involved.

No doubt, it’s a tough job. “I can relate to the expectations of people who reside here,” Marroquin explains. “Half of them are for more growth and development, and the other half are for a more sustainable environment, with less commercial encroachment. This county is zoned for farm and forest land so any threat to this rural culture is always a big deal. They need to know if a subdivision is about to sprout in their backyard.”

A 29-year-old mother of a teenager, Marroquin studied geography in college where she discovered that “there’s a healthy way to interact with the earth.” She cites the number of farmers, for instance, who don’t have health care insurance. Some of them go into organic farming in an effort to
protect their own health and avoid the high cost of medical care—a move that also benefits the communities they serve. “I bring this unique rural perspective to my job as a planner,” she adds.

As president of Local 3694 (Council 75), Marroquin brings that outlook to her union work. As a member of the labor/management committee and her local’s bargaining team, she has actively promoted the adoption of a health and wellness program. “Employers need to see the benefits to their employees of regular exercise and good nutrition. It could be as simple as posting healthy tips on the web. Healthy workers are happier and more productive.”

Marroquin is credited with initiating the union’s Community Action Support Team (CAST). “It’s our way of giving back to the community, but most of the time our members don’t know how,” she explains. “So we’ve come up with several projects in partnership with churches and non-profit organizations.” CAST recently helped raised $900 for the Muscular Dystrophy campaign.

“My passion for helping people love this planet comes from my Peruvian roots,” Marroquin says. “My dad lived in Lima where, despite the poverty, the people’s rich culture is drawn from their love of the land and their connection to it.”

Putting the Pieces Together

“The CSI guys.” That’s what employees at the Honolulu Police Department’s criminal investigation division call John Wadahara and his 13 co-workers. Well before the CBS show became a hit, they went about tasks they considered routine: searching and preserving physical evidence at crime scenes, working closely with police detectives and lab technicians, preparing reports and exhibits, and sometimes testifying in court.

With the creation of television shows focused on forensic investigation, like “CSI” and “Law and Order,” more public attention is being paid to the field, and more applicants are seeking entry into the profession. But contrary to the glamour and drama displayed on television crime shows, “a lot of what we do is really gory and tedious stuff,” explains Wadahara, a 22-year veteran police evidence specialist and a member of the Hawaii Government Employees Association (HGEA)/AFSCME Local 152. “A lot more work is involved than just collecting blood samples and taking pictures of mutilated corpses. We have to be persistent in searching for subtle clues. Sometimes it’s the little things that tell you whether someone’s death is natural or suspicious,” Wadahara says.

And getting all the clues right is critical. “Putting a convict behind bars or exonerating the innocent hinges on how thoroughly

“I see myself serving as a bridge between human beings and the planet.”
— Javonna Marroquin
we collect every piece of physical evidence — a fingerprint, a bullet casing — and properly protecting it,” Wadahara points out. “I perform my job in a way that ensures the justice system works.”

Wadahara recalls the worst mass murder in the state’s history when a gunman killed seven Xerox Corp. employees at their downtown Honolulu building. “The first thing I did was organize my team of five specialists, then talk to detectives on the scene,” Wadahara says. “Matching what they hear from detectives with what they see is the most critical step in the entire process. With seven corpses lying in different locations, we had a lot of ground to cover that day.”

To Wadahara, the evidence recovered by investigators was just as important as the arrest of the gunman who was eventually tried and convicted. “That was a very rewarding experience because we were all part of a group that got the job done: collect and present evidence that put a murderer behind bars.”

Although their work is often unseen and unrecognized, Wadahara says of his team, “we are the backbone of proving a case for conviction or acquittal.”

To cope with the daily stresses of a job focused on the dead and the dying, Wadahara makes time to attend to the living. Twice a month, he transports his cooking gear to a shelter and prepares food for Honolulu’s homeless. An avid gardener, he also brings vegetables and fruits — mostly papayas and avocados — to a senior citizen’s center in Oahu’s Manoa Valley. “I want them to eat healthy and live well,” he says.

The rest of his spare time is focused on building the future. During this year’s midterm elections, Wadahara took to the streets to wave signs, knock on doors and hand out flyers. “I always feel energized when I’m out there pounding the pavement, knowing that our efforts — educating voters and getting them out to vote — is essential in holding our elected officials accountable,” Wadahara explains. “Television may have made our detective work popular, but only political action will ensure that the valuable services we provide are recognized and appreciated.”

Due in large part to HGEA’s efforts in last year’s midterm elections, 75 (or 82 percent) of the union’s 92 endorsed candidates won. To the CSI guys, that’s just as important as solving a crime.
‘I Have the Best Job’

Rain or shine — and sometimes in sleet and snow — Robin Madsen gets behind the wheel of a 36-feet-long, 26,000-pound bus every weekday morning, fills it up with about 25 gallons of gas, and hits the road. Loaded with more than 5,000 volumes of books, magazines, videos, DVDs and CDs, her bookmobile is a welcomed sight at nursing homes, child care centers, high-rise apartment complexes and neighborhood playgrounds in the poorest parts of town. At each stop, there’s always a large crowd of kids, adults or senior citizens eagerly waiting for Madsen and two other workers.

Like the ice cream truck, the bookmobile is welcomed everywhere — with one critical difference: Everything on it is free. One of about 700 across the country, Madsen’s bus provides basic library services to nearly 50 sites — circulating close to 80,000 items a year.

A library associate with the Saint Paul Public Library, Madsen, president of Local 1842 (Council 5), has driven the city’s only bookmobile for 26 of the 30 years she has been an AFSCME member. A dedicated union activist, she is also a volunteer member organizer who helped University of Minnesota and University of Wisconsin library workers form a union. “It was a great experience,” she recalls. “I was able to tell them first hand the benefits of belonging to AFSCME.”

And just as union membership opens doors for workers, Madsen’s career on the bookmobile creates opportunities for the residents of St. Paul — visiting places where people have a hard time getting to a brick and mortar building. “We have a growing population of Hmongs and Somalis here,” says Madsen, who also helps a lot of new immigrant kids with their homework. “For many of them, it’s their first contact with the public outside of their own community. It’s such a thrill for them to get their first library card, and it’s enriching for me as well.”

Among Madsen’s delightful experiences is her regular visits to neighborhoods. “These kids come back years later with their own children,” she recalls. “And you can’t help but wonder what would have happened to them if the bookmobile didn’t stop by.”

Madsen adds: “What keeps me going is the thought that if we didn’t come, these people would be deprived of our services. Without a doubt, I have the best job in the library.”
Sick, Worried & Overlooked

That’s the plight of AFSCME members who have been physically or psychologically ill since they helped combat the effects of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

By Roger M. Williams

Photography by Mark Haven

NEW YORK CITY

It’s been more than five years since terrorist attacks leveled the World Trade Center. Yet the wounds inflicted remain raw and burning — except for the relatives of victims, nowhere more strongly than among the city workers directly impacted. Many of these men and women belong to DC 37, this city’s large AFSCME affiliate, and they played key roles in helping the city cope with the attacks.

Not all of DC 37’s members who were affected by the disaster have come forward, making the number necessarily rough. However, the union estimates it at 4,200. Some 3,000 of them were employed by the uniformed Emergency Medical Services (EMS) of the fire department, the remainder by a wide variety of other municipal agencies. For many of the workers, the cause of their illness is obvious: inhaling dust and germs; being frightened and/or sickened by
what they witnessed or the duties they performed. For others, the causes are less clear.

In the cases where the cause of ailments are not clear, governmental authorities have often taken the position that the disabling conditions are not demonstrably 9/11 related, so not covered under many or any of the standard systems of compensation: disability pay, line-of-duty injury pay, workers’ compensation, Social Security.

Worse, eleven months after the disaster, President George W. Bush refused to release the $5.1 billion Congress approved for supplemental homeland security programs, including $90 million to monitor the health of Ground Zero workers. Later, he tried to take back another $125 million that was promised for the workers. A year after that, it was revealed that just days after the tragedy, the Bush White House pressured the Environmental Protection Agency to downplay the reports of health hazards that arose from the buildings’ fall.

Public Employee recently interviewed a half dozen of these workers, spread across five locals and several different types of jobs. The survivors are remarkably calm in the face of their own daunting conditions. But they’re also angry at the agencies they feel have failed them. Local 2507’s Michael Kenna says that city officials, for example, “haven’t been willing to do anything unless you push and push. I had to get an attorney to call one agency just to get it to acknowledge my application for assistance.”

DC 37 quickly pressed for respirators, registration of workers who were at Ground Zero, and money for medical care and tracking. Both the council and several of its locals have continued to lobby for action — and justice. The International has fought for action at the federal level, continuing to call on the administration to allocate funds to monitor workers’ health, and working with such influential legislators as Sen. Hillary Clinton and Reps. Carolyn Maloney and Jerrold Nadler, all New York Democrats. Says Maloney, “DC 37 has been at the forefront of this problem, working with me to get Washington’s attention on this health disaster that the Bush administration doesn’t seem to care much about. I am hopeful that the recent election results will move the issue up the priority list.”

‘I Just Wanted to Help Our Country’

A small woman with a big job, Renée Boyd has for 18 years wrestled heavy equipment on highway-repair jobs for the city. For relaxation, she played softball and handball. So her lungs could certainly handle physical strain. But a couple of days at Ground Zero left her with incipient asthma and inflamed sinuses. Subsequent duty in
the area brought on the kinds of nightmares no respirator can ward off.

“My job down there was making sure our workforce had everything it needed and was operating it in a safe manner,” Boyd says.

Like the great majority of her colleagues, she didn’t worry about her own health: “I just wanted to help our country and our workers recover from that terrible crime.”

Her troubles came later, not only with breathing (walking up stairs now leaves her short winded) but also with peace of mind. She was gripped by “an overwhelming feeling of sadness from what I had seen, what my friends told me about their jobs and the fear that it could all happen again at any time.”

Boyd has been in therapy ever since. Nevertheless, on return trips down to Ground Zero, the dark memories come flooding back.

Boyd carefully modulates her complaints. She knows that many others who responded that September day — and survived — have it worse than she does. Indeed, one of her co-workers, a young man with no history of heart disease, recently quit his job after suffering a second post-9/11 heart attack.

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But she admits to apprehension about her future: “I’ve gotten the forms for workers’ comp, and I’m going to file them … just in case something happens down the line.”

**From Heroics to Health Worries**

Far into the night of 9/11, Emergency Medical Technician Michael Kenna delivered victims from Ground Zero to a makeshift hospital. Long after that, he sorted out and recorded body parts. All the while, he waded through debris. Higher-ups provided no respirators, only flimsy paper masks that were often coated with dust when the workers received them.

For months afterward, Kenna had no idea that sickness was overtaking him. “It started slow. I vomited blood and wasn’t feeling too good overall, but I didn’t think much about it.” In April 2004, however, he was sent to the hospital with an assortment of ailments: lung disease; post-traumatic stress disorder that produced outbursts of uncontrollable rage and sobbing; “fluttering” vocal cords that altered his voice; sleep apnea; and acid reflux that had him popping more than two dozen Rolaids a day.

Kenna has applied for a three-quarter pension and workers’ comp, but meanwhile has continued to work at his longtime station in the South Bronx. He no longer deals with emergencies, however: The former marathon runner now can handle only light duties. And he cannot work overtime, which has cut his income in half. Medical bills are another huge worry. Because a specialist, not his primary care physician, has pre-
scribed them, insurance is not covering his blood tests. “And I’m taking 17 drugs a day; simply meeting the co-pays is killing me.”

With a weary shake of the head, Kenna mutters, “Make my life easier. Just pay for my meds.”

**9/11 Creates Double Trouble**

On her way to work near the World Trade Center, Brenda Bradford emerged from the subway just as the first tower collapsed; panicked, with adrenaline pumping, she ran uptown — farther than she would ever have thought possible. Then, after a week of supposed clean-up, her office building re-opened, obliging the city employees assigned there to return to it.

Bradford sorely needed that intervening week. Distraught by what she’d seen and heard, and by the confirmed or apparent deaths of people she knew, she “couldn’t leave home.” When she dragged herself back into the office building, a few blocks from Ground Zero, she found “lots of dust and air filters that hadn’t been cleaned. A lot of us [in her office] used masks. And outside, it smelled like a morgue.”

Health problems have accumulated: thyroid disorder, leading to weight gain and removal of a (benign) lobe; sleep apnea, prompting her to attend sleep clinics; acid reflux, “which I’d never had.” Her use of medications and doctors has ballooned, and she participates in a federal program that provides transportation for those who have difficulty moving about.

Bradford worries mostly about even-worse health issues that may lie ahead. “If there’s a class-action suit [on behalf of 9/11 workers] down the line, who knows if I’ll still be alive to take part?” But there is, she adds, a bright note: “I find that I don’t put things off — like travel — any more. The things I can do, I force myself to do.”

**Katrina Dealt Final Blow**

“Marked depression and anxiety … to the point of paranoia with auditory hallucinations and illusions … nightmares and flashbacks about his experiences on 9/11, and feels unjustifiably guilty about his performance on that day.”

So reads a psychiatrist’s evaluation presented by Rene Davila, which ended by “strongly supporting a conclusion of post-traumatic stress disorder of an incapacitating degree.” Davila was the first fire department EMS officer at the Trade Center. He worked 16 hours straight that day and at his nearby station for long afterward. In addition to stress, he suffered knee injuries, a hacking cough and high blood pressure. Yet Davila, at this writing, is off the Fire Department payroll and so short of money that he could...
lose his Queens apartment; “I’m even trying to sell my boyhood collection of baseball cards,” he says.

Davila’s psychological problems flared when Hurricane Katrina wallop the Gulf Coast. Television and newspaper images of Katrina’s destruction magnified in his mind the horrors of 9/11, and he obsessed over the losses of home, job, car — “the whole chain reaction.” Too ill to work, he was placed on medical leave in December 2005, and was dropped from the payroll four months later. He has been denied both workers’ comp and line-of-duty pay. Unable to pick up the premiums, he has lost his job-related medical insurance. He feels that the fire department has essentially abandoned him: “When I told my captain about the problems I was having, he said, ‘Go get a cup of coffee.’”

For his AFSCME local, however, the lieutenant has nothing but praise: “The president — Tom Eppinger — has been outstanding. He even offered to loan me money out of his own pocket.”

‘You’ve Got Lung Disease’

Picture a middle-aged man tethered to an oxygen tank around the clock while he cares for himself and his Alzheimer-stricken mother. That was Bob Ziehl’s plight for two years. And with his pay at first suspended and then reduced, he had to fund even that difficult existence himself, cashing in a life-insurance policy to do so.

Lung disease was the culprit. Ziehl did not work at Ground Zero, on 9/11 or later. But, breath after breath, he inhaled literal snootfuls of dust as city vehicles from Ground Zero rumbled through his workplace — Manhattan’s Queens Midtown Tunnel — spreading pollutants as they went.

Others on his crew, all members of Local 1931, seem to have emerged without serious problems, but not Ziehl. Seven weeks after the terrorist attacks, coughing and short of breath, he was told by a doctor, “Get into a hospital. You’ve got lung disease.” Ziehl says with a shrug, “Nobody in our tunnel crew was wearing a mask all that time. Who knew?” Alarmed by his test results, doctors ordered him to rest at home. Wherever he went, the cord from his oxygen tank trailed along.

Test after test followed, as did a steady intake of steroids and other drugs. Although they were covered, he soon lost his income. His desperation went beyond financial: “If I didn’t live, what would happen to my mother?”

His health gradually improved, and afraid he’d lose his job altogether if he stayed away longer, he eventually resumed work, placing his mother in a nursing home in order to do so. A final injury: Ziehl received no pension credit for the two years he was disabled.
‘I’ve Been to 87 Funerals’

Because he’s a friendly guy who has put on magic shows for workers around the city, Bill Gleason has paid a stunning psychological price for 9/11: “I knew 141 people who got killed that day, and I’ve been to 87 of their funerals.” He worries, with reason, that his own funeral might be number 88.

Gleason worked in the thick of things from Sept. 11 through 14, and kept returning to Ground Zero for weeks. After only a day, he couldn’t breathe through his nose. Did he worry? “Nah. I told myself, ‘With all this going on, I don’t have the right to complain.’” Yet not long after came respiratory disease and — medically connected, experts said — appendicitis. Then came a sinus emergency. In each case, he had surgery and returned to work after a three-week recovery. But the cumulative damage was grave: An exam revealed a 28–30 percent decrease in pulmonary function.

Still Gleason reported for duty. “I couldn’t say no. I had buried so many of my friends, and so many other people were missing.” March 2004 brought a massive asthma attack. Doctors told him to put in for retirement, and when the attacks continued, he did so. Retired now for more than two years, he gets to spend more time with his family and work with a Boy Scout troop. Each day, however, he suffers through several asthma attacks; and each month, his meds and anti-asthma shots cost a staggering $7,000. Although his insurance company pays those bills, it doesn’t always pay on time, subjecting him to harassment from collection agencies.

“They say all this has cost us at least 12 years of our lives,” muses the 46-year-old Gleason. “I figure I won’t see 70.”
Maryland CO Makes Ultimate Sacrifice

JESSUP, MARYLAND

David McGuinn, a member of Local 1678 (Council 92), worked at the maximum-security Maryland House of Correction in Jessup. He was attacked July 25 by two inmates while conducting a routine prisoner head count at the facility. Prosecutors said they will seek the death penalty for both suspects.

McGuinn was the first corrections officer to be murdered inside a Maryland prison since 1984 and the state’s second to be killed last year. The first was CO Jeffery Wroten, 44, who was shot with his own gun in January of last year.

The 42-year-old McGuinn’s death might have been prevented. Council 92 had long warned the administration of now former Gov. Robert Ehrlich Jr. (R) that its efforts to reduce staffing levels would be detrimental. The union also complained of poor training and inadequate safety equipment. The state’s own Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services reported that the rate of assaults on its COs had nearly doubled from 2004 to 2005, from about 3.5 to about 6.5 per 100 inmates. Yet, at the time of McGuinn’s slaying, 47 CO positions remained unfilled at Jessup, which is 100 years old.

Since then, the state has begun to make changes. Officials transferred the most dangerous inmates to other facilities and converted the institution to a minimum-security prison. John A. Rowley, acting commissioner of the Division of Correction, announced a $5 million initiative to improve surveillance, buy new protective gear and hire more officers. There is also a new warden at the Jessup facility, and top prison management met with Council 92 in recent months to discuss ways to improve prison safety.

More changes are likely now that Maryland has a new governor. Democrat Martin O’Malley, who was endorsed by Council 92, declared during his campaign, “We have to hire more officers and pay them more.” In addition, he committed to re-instituting labor/management meetings that allow officers to communicate their concerns directly with management. That practice was halted under the Ehrlich administration.

Delegates to AFSCME’s 37th International Convention in Chicago last August held a tribute to McGuinn, raising more than $7,000 for his family. 

By Clyde Weiss
Victory!

For Puerto Rico local, hard work at the bargaining table pays off in wage increases and more.

By Gonzalo Baeza

Seven months of arduous contract negotiations paid off in September for Puerto Rico’s Vocational Rehabilitation Employees Union, Local 3251 of Servidores Públicos Unidos (SPU)/Council 95. The unit’s members, who work for the island’s Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, won an exceptional three-year contract with wage hikes, productivity bonuses and increased benefits.

“Our negotiation was extremely successful, especially if we look at the fiscal situation that Puerto Rico is going through, where only a few months ago we had a government shutdown that left thousands of people temporarily unemployed,” says Local 3251 Pres. José Ramírez Montalvo.

Nearly 98 percent of the unit’s 805 members voted in favor of the agreement, which established a $100 per month wage increase as of last October, and two more $100 monthly hikes this year and the next. Until now, the average salary of an ARV employee was $1700 per month. The contract also raises the employers’ share of medical benefits from $100 per employee per month to $150 a month for the next two years and $160 a month during the third year.

“This is in all likelihood the best possible contract we could get,” adds Ramírez Montalvo after the end of negotiations. Rehabilitation employees will receive additional lost-time pay for union activities and contract ratification bonuses of $100 to $130 depending on the employee’s rank and years of service.

This is the first contract negotiated and ratified by SPU since the fiscal crisis and the government shutdown that affected Puerto Rico during the first two weeks of May.

IN MEMORIAM, LUIS FUENTES

The playwright George Fabricius once said: “Death comes to all. But great achievements build a monument which shall endure until the sun grows cold.” Few words could describe more aptly what the life of Luis Fuentes Ayala, 48, meant to his family and Servidores Públicos Unidos (SPU)/AFSCME Council 95.

Fuentes, who died on June 4, 2006, due to diabetes-related causes, was a founding member of SPU and served for the last four years as president of Local 3227, Unit A, representing the clerical personnel at Puerto Rico’s social services department, known as the Departamento de la Familia. He worked for over two decades at Familia’s offices in the Municipality of Canóvanas, about 15 miles east of San Juan, and leaves a wife, Jessica Benítez Castro, a daughter and a son.

As one of SPU’s first Volunteer Member Organizers (VMOs) in the wake of Puerto Rico’s unionization bill of 1998, Fuentes’ work was fundamental. Between 1999 and 2001, he played an active role in the organizing campaigns at Familia and several other commonwealth agencies. Described as a “model VMO” by SPU Pres. Ellie Ortiz, Fuentes contributed his time to help unrepresented workers all over the island gain collective bargaining.

“Luis was one of our most outstanding organizers and was a founding member of SPU in 1995,” says Ortiz.

Primarily known as a tireless activist for the rights of public employees, Fuentes’ interests went well beyond his organizing tasks. He was an accomplished “salsero” (salsa musician) and often displayed his talents at union meetings.

Fuentes was buried in the northeastern coastal town of Loíza in a ceremony attended by over 100 of his SPU brothers and sisters. — G.B.
Thousands of family child care and home care providers across the nation are winning with AFSCME! Hard work, long hours, little pay and scarce benefits are ties that bind workers in two of this nation’s most demanding professions — home care and child care.

Through an aggressive national campaign, our union is standing with these workers in their fight for dignity and respect. Today, we represent 150,000 family child care professionals, including child care providers, Head Start workers, day care center employees and early childhood workers in schools and other settings. We also represent 80,000 home care workers in the public and private sector and have campaigns to represent thousands of other home care providers in nearly a dozen states. Some recent highlights:

**California**

**Saving Affordable Health Coverage**
The United Domestic Workers of America (UDW-NUHHCE), an AFSCME affiliate, reached an agreement last October with San Diego County officials protecting major medical health insurance for nearly 3,000 home care providers. Their insurance plan would have expired the next day had an agreement not been reached. UDW’s success not only preserved members’ insurance, it actually reduced their costs by 33 percent.

“Health insurance is the only benefit we receive for our work,” says Kerry Lingo, a UDW member and provider. “We were very scared that it would be taken away. But we rallied together and won.”

The efforts of United Child Care Union stopped a proposal that would have cut California family child care providers’ subsidies and hurt low-income and minority communities. Their work paved the way for a new reimbursement system that promises access to quality subsidized care.

**Iowa**

**One Step Closer**
Some 3,000 home care providers who organized with Council 61 last year overwhelmingly ratified a first-ever “memorandum of understanding” in December. Their agreement establishes an automatic 3 percent raise (retroactive to July 1, 2006), providing the resources they need to strengthen their home care programs and provide quality services.

Iowa’s 6,000 registered child care providers also achieved a landmark victory. Last January, Governor Tom Vilsack (D) signed an unprecedented executive order granting bargaining rights to the providers, who have authorized Council 61 to represent them in contract negotiations under the banner of their new union, Child Care Providers Together/AFSCME.

**Michigan**

‘Our Protective Shield’
Tired of inadequate state funding, and reimbursement rates for their services as low as $1.35 per hour in some cases, child care providers knew they had to act. First, they launched a two-year-long organizing campaign. Then, they won recognition of their union through the largest card check in modern labor history. (In card-check agreements, management agrees to voluntarily recognize the union if a majority of employees sign authorization forms or “cards.”) With the help of recently re-elected Gov. Jennifer Granholm (D), they now have
collective bargaining rights. Following recognition of their union, 40,000 child care providers now have a voice with Child Care Providers Together Michigan, a joint effort between AFSCME and the United Auto Workers. “The union will be our protective shield as we fight for our rights,” says Detroit provider Francisco Medina. “We won it just in time.”

MINNESOTA
First in the State
Fourteen hundred licensed Minnesota child care providers now have a voice at work, thanks to a unanimous decision by Hennepin County commissioners to partner with Child Care Providers Together/AFSCME Council 5. CCPT has been seeking partnerships with counties because they regulate child care and pay subsidies established by the state. Ramsey and St. Louis counties have also partnered with the union to improve child care by working with 865 licensed providers in Ramsey County and 420 in the Duluth and Iron Range areas.

NEW JERSEY
A Stronger Voice
Nearly 5,000 home-based child care providers are gaining power with an executive order signed last August by Gov. Jon Corzine (D) authorizing Child Care Workers Union (a joint effort by AFSCME New Jersey and the Communications Workers of America) to represent these independent contractors. Corzine’s measure marks the culmination of a year-long campaign of door-to-door talks and activism by child care providers to organize.

OREGON
Historic First Contract
Four thousand five hundred providers represented by Child Care Providers Together/AFSCME Council 75 reached an agreement with the state that includes a landmark “Bill of Rights” and provisions to increase and expedite subsidy payments, a grievance procedure and more. “We’re going to be the first child care providers who will be working hand in hand with the state as a team,” says provider Regina Martinez of Ontario, Ore.

WISCONSIN
‘No Longer Alone’
More than 7,000 licensed and certified child care providers throughout the state have a mighty voice to negotiate improvements to child care services, thanks to an executive order signed last October by Gov. Jim Doyle (D), who was just re-elected. An independent arbitrator later certified Child Care Providers Together/AFSCME as their exclusive union representative. “We are no longer alone,” says Sonia Aguilar Villarreal, a union supporter who runs a day care center on Milwaukee’s south side.

Child care providers in New Mexico, New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania are also joining together to improve and organize the child care profession. PE
Across the Nation

New York City

Long Struggle Pays Off for Public Health Nurses

Nearly a decade of demanding better working conditions and three years of negotiations have paid off for the United Federation of Nurses and Epidemiologists, Local 436 of DC 37.

Thanks to a new economic agreement with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, nearly 850 public health nurses working in the city’s public schools will now have full-time union health fund benefits, year-round health insurance and paid holidays.

“Nurses in the schools put in 35 hours a week. But they often work more. As part of the emergency response system, they are told to stay on standby. Nonetheless, the city treated them as part-time people and only gave them part-time benefits,” says Local 436 Vice Pres. Judith Arroyo.

The nurses’ salaries will now be paid out over 12 months instead of 10 but their annual earnings will increase thanks to their gains, including 12 paid holidays, increment payments, health insurance for the whole year and bereavement leave.

The agreement came as part of negotiations held over the last three years between the city and Local 436 and the United Federation of Teachers. “We’d been fighting for these benefits for over 10 years. The city refused to give them to us because nurses don’t work over the summer,” adds Arroyo. “But some of us do work summer school and respond to emergencies during that time. Our feeling was: ‘If we have to be available to you for the whole year then compensate us appropriately.’”
Some Minnesota children have benefited from the hard work of two warm-hearted women — Dianne Mitzuk, a file manager for the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and member of Local 2829 (Council 5), and her daughter Becky, a teacher of special-needs preschoolers in St. Paul.

For their efforts to collect donated winter clothing for needy children, the two were selected as joint winners of Minnesota AFL-CIO’s 2006 Terrel Merriman Community Services Award, named after a Salvation Army volunteer. Council 5’s nominating letter described how the Mitzuks’ personal desire to help those with limited resources grew so popular that “AFSCME members throughout the state were cleaning out their closets and donating to Dianne’s ‘little ones.’”

Hundreds of St. Paul children — many from countries scattered across the globe — have benefited from the clothing drive in the two years since the campaign’s inception.

Becky got the idea for a used winter clothing bank after watching youngsters come to school without jackets, sweaters or even mittens — even as temperatures plummeted below freezing. “She called me up and said, ‘Mom, I need your help,’” Dianne recalls.

Posting a sign in her workplace requesting donations is “all it took,” Dianne says. Bags of items soon began piling up in her home.

By the second year of their efforts, students at seven schools had winter clothes.

“We’re not doing this for an award,” says Dianne. “We’re doing this because these kids need to be warm. But it was a huge honor — very humbling. It is the kindness of many people that make this possible.”
OKLAHOMA 

More than 800 municipal employees in three cities joined AFSCME last year under a state law granting them collective bargaining rights for the first time.

“We look forward to making our hometown a better place to live,” says Karolyn Anders, a senior adult coordinator for the city of Lawton’s Parks and Recreation Department, following last October’s ruling by the Public Employees Relations Board (PERB) to certify AFSCME as the exclusive representative for 450 municipal employees.

Their victory was the culmination of a battle that began in 2004 with the passage of a statute — championed by AFSCME — requiring cities of 35,000 people or more to recognize the freedom of non-uniformed employees to join unions. Some 9,000 workers across the state were affected. In November of that year, employees of the city of Enid were the first to petition PERB to recognize their AFSCME union. But city officials quickly filed suit to block the measure.

In July 2005, the Oklahoma Supreme Court sided with Enid and ruled the law unconstitutional. AFSCME appealed, pointing out that the court’s decision conflicted with 80 years of legal precedent on population-based laws. In a historic reversal, the court declared the law constitutional in March 2006 — then reaffirmed its decision six months later on an appeal from the city of Lawton.

Finally, PERB could formally verify that a majority of Enid’s 280 employees — and those employed by Lawton — had designated AFSCME as their union. “The certification was a long time coming, but it will mean that we can now work in partnership with city management to make Enid a safer and healthier place to live,” says Eldon Stephens, a 17-year veteran city employee who works for the solid waste department.

About 100 employees in the city of Moore also have won union recognition, and thousands of city employees throughout the state have also been motivated to organize with AFSCME.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Elevator mechanics, plumbers, sheet metal workers, groundskeepers and others responsible for maintaining the Library of Congress are feeling more empowered these days. Last October, they voted overwhelmingly for union representation. The 84 workers — who are employed by the Architect of the Capitol — join 180 other AOC laborers and custodial workers of Council 26’s Local 626.

“This is a landmark election,” says Local 626 Pres. Wally Reed. “The employees of AOC showed tremendous courage in stepping forward and demanding a voice in the workplace. The union looks forward to working with management to resolve issues affecting this group.”

Early last year, Council 26 brought to the attention of Congress health and safety issues affecting workers on Capitol Hill. At a hearing in May, senators were outraged to learn that utility workers for six years have been exposed to carcinogenic asbestos and falling concrete from dilapidated ceilings and walls.

As a result of AFSCME’s encouragement and public pressure, the U.S. Senate appropriated $100 million to fix the problems. “Now that AOC workers have a union, they’ll have a stronger voice in advocating for their issues,” says Carl Goldman, Council 26 executive director.
University Workers Build Union, Seek Pay Equity

Carrying a 12-foot-wide banner and petitions bearing signatures of hundreds of supporters, more than 100 custodians, librarians, housekeepers, groundkeepers and office support staff employed by New Mexico State University/Las Cruces delivered a simple message to university Pres. Michael Martin last November: They want a “first class pay raise.”

After falling behind other state and university workers in wages and benefits, the workers organized for power last year. In June, 1,300 NMSU employees, mostly based in Las Cruces, joined Council 18 after a hard-fought campaign. Now, as members of Local 2393, they are battling for a decent wage on par with workers at comparable universities.

In addition to petitions, the workers delivered to Martin a letter calling on his administration “to work with our union now — at the bargaining table — so that we may go together to [the Legislature in] Santa Fe to fight for real pay raises for staff and a brighter future for our students.”

The administration, however, has refused to address NMSU workers’ concerns about wages or the cost of health insurance premiums. “It looks like we’re going to have to fight for everything in this contract,” says Local 2393 member Melinda Caskey, an NMSU clerical employee. “We’re all one unit and we’re all in this together.”

AFSCME’S POLITICAL REBATE PROCEDURE

AFSCME’s Constitution includes a rebate procedure to protect the rights of members. This is a procedure for members who object to how the union spends money for partisan political or ideological purposes. It is not open 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 steps in the procedure is tied to the International’s fiscal year. The procedures, including the requirements for submitting a proper rebate request, are spelled out in Article IX, Section 14, of the International Constitution. THESE REQUIREMENTS WILL BE STRICTLY ENFORCED.

Here’s how it works: 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 between April 1 and April 16, 2007.

A request must be timely filed by registered or certified mail with BOTH the International Secretary-Treasurer AND the council with which the member’s local is affiliated, if any, OR the member’s local. The request must contain the following information: the member’s name, Social Security number, home address 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., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036-5687, by registered or certified mail. 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 in a timely manner. The application will require the objecting member to identify those partisan political or ideological activities to which objection is being made, and no rebate will be made to any member who fails to complete that portion of the application. 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.
Forty thousand Michigan child care providers are standing up for dignity and respect through Child Care Providers Together Michigan, a joint effort between AFSCME and the United Auto Workers. Recently, they won recognition of their union through the largest card check in modern labor history. For more on how family child care and home care providers across the nation are standing up and speaking out with AFSCME, see Page 26.