HEALTH CARE: IT’S TIME FOR A SOLUTION

AFSCME has a plan to guarantee quality, affordable health care every American can count on. Sen. John McCain would leave us at the mercy of the insurance industry. A look at the two plans.
McCaın’s Health Care Plan: Wrong for Workers

John McCain’s health care proposal does not address the problems affecting our health care system, where workers are at the mercy of the insurance industry and left to fend for themselves. We compare McCain’s health plan with AFSCME’s proposal to guarantee affordable, quality health care we can all count on.

Driving to a Better Future

Wanting respect on the job in Indianapolis, some 400 school bus drivers, monitors and mechanics employed by national contractor First Student Inc., won a voice and built a union with Council 62. Recently, they secured a first contract that paves the way for a brighter tomorrow.

AFSCME Across America

Thousands of Pennsylvania child care providers and other workers across the country gain a voice on the job through AFSCME, while thousands more win historic first contracts. Meanwhile, AFSCME members show pride in their communities by donating to veterans and even helping to build a Habitat for Humanity house.
FLOOD RELIEF

Your donation will help members who assisted during Midwest storms, even as their own homes were in jeopardy.

Torrential floodwaters this June spilled over banks and burst through levees, sweeping away homes and ravaging entire communities in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Wisconsin and other states. Hundreds of thousands were affected. In Iowa alone, at least 38,000 were left homeless. Many, such as these employees of the Des Moines Water Works — members of Local 3861 (Council 61) — filled sandbags to protect their neighborhoods even as their own homes were at risk. The International Union sent staff to join the relief efforts, and also opened a fund to aid our Midwest sisters and brothers. To make a donation to the Fallen Heroes Fund, visit afscme.org, or send a check payable to the fund, to 1625 L Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036-5687. Indicate that your contribution should be used to help victims of the Midwest floods. Photo: Martin Sonnenberg
IN MY LAST FEW COLUMNS, I discussed how the economic downturn under the Bush administration is hitting us where we live and work. Polls now indicate our economic woes are the number one issue for Americans.

We’re experiencing the slowest job growth since the Great Depression, and long-term unemployment has nearly doubled since President Bush took office. Almost 5 million more Americans live in poverty; with 8.6 million more without health insurance. Household median income is down $1,000 and falling. In the first quarter of 2008, food and beverage costs rose over 5 percent and energy costs climbed 8.6 percent, while wages continue to lag behind.

The ‘R’ Word
Bush and his cronies avoided the “R” word until it landed in CEOs’ decked-out boardrooms and splattered on Wall Street traders’ expensive Italian shoes. But working people know they’ve been living for years on the brink of a recession.

As gas prices climb and home prices fall, while we hemorrhage trillions on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the national deficit hits $9.3 trillion, average Americans suffer cuts in essential domestic programs like education and health care. States — bound by law to balance their budgets — and local governments are.experiencing fiscal crises.

Public Services & Workers Sacrificed
Because of the weak economy, over half our states face fiscal year 2009 deficits with a widening budget gap. Across the country, government workers and the services they provide are prime targets for elimination.

New Jersey came up with $1 billion in cuts, underfunding employee pension contributions by half. Now Gov. John Corzine has put 3,000 state jobs and three state agencies on the chopping block.

Other states are also turning to extreme measures: Ohio may reduce state staff by 2,700 and close two mental health hospitals. California’s Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger suggests slashing 10 percent at most agencies. Nevada has a 4.5 percent across-the-board cut for all agency budgets in 2008 and expects another reduction for 2009.

And it doesn’t end there. Look at Maine. Gov. Jon Baldacci proposed slicing the education budget by $20 million, threatening to privatize a Bangor facility serving children with severe mental disabilities, resulting in a loss of 43 state jobs.

Look at New York. Ordered to roll back non-personnel spending by 5 percent, the state might close facilities, and cut state aid to localities such as New York City.

In New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Texas, federal infrastructure spending has fallen to 4 percent, saddling these states and localities with three-quarters of all infrastructure spending. The result? Proposals to privatize state roads in a wrong-headed move to reduce costs.

Address Our Issues
With states and municipalities desperate for help, what lifeline does President Bush toss them? More tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy. This didn’t work before, and it won’t work again. It’s time to deep-six the Bush economic scam.

We must give ordinary Americans, especially low-income people, tax relief — money that they, in turn, will spend. We need a temporary increase in Food Stamps and an extension of unemployment benefits. Increasing the federal Medicaid matching rate would be effective. For economic and safety reasons, we must repair the infrastructure — with the added benefit of creating jobs immediately. By lessening

“GIVE ORDINARY AMERICANS TAX RELIEF — MONEY THEY’LL SPEND.”

budget cuts to the states, we would provide temporary fiscal relief. This would save needed programs and jobs — in some cases, it could even result in new jobs.

Most importantly, unlike the current administration’s plans, these remedies will help jump start our economy. By implementing them, the federal government can change the flagging course of our nation and invest in America and American workers.
THE DIAGNOSIS IS SIMPLE: Our health care system is broken and it’s hurting America’s families and businesses. That’s why AFSCME is waging a national campaign to win a common sense solution to our crisis — one that guarantees quality, affordable health care for all.

U.S. Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), the presumptive Republican Presidential nominee, rejects this goal. Instead, he would continue the policies put forth by Pres. George W. Bush without addressing the problems that afflict our broken system.

Fixing America’s health care system must be a priority for all of us — especially union members. As health care costs rise, we are being forced to sacrifice our wage increases at the bargaining table just to maintain our health care. Health insurance premiums are going up three times faster than our pay, and many of us are shouldering a growing share of the costs. We are paying more and getting less — while being forced to fight with the insurance companies to get our care covered and our bills paid.

Our Benefits at Risk
The average annual cost for health insurance premiums is more than $12,000, almost two times what it was in 2000, when President Bush took office. Likewise, the average cost paid by workers is now nearly $3,300 a year, more than twice what it was eight years ago.

Rising costs have a double effect. On the one hand, they squeeze state and local government budgets, making it harder for public...
employees to negotiate wage increases at the bargaining table. Cost hikes also put our jobs at risk as employers are lured by private contractors who promise to do the same work for less cost — because they pay lower wages and don’t provide workers with any health benefits.

As health expenses skyrocket, more people are now uninsured. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 47 million Americans had no health insurance in 2006, nearly 8.6 million more people than in 2000.

With costs so high, the uninsured usually wait until an illness becomes serious before seeking medical attention. As a result, they must often resort to costly emergency rooms because they don’t have a regular doctor. When those without insurance can’t pay their bills, the hospital must make up the difference by charging the rest of us more. This is problematic for the uninsured and those of us who have insurance. For an average annual family policy of $12,000, more than $1,000 covers costs for the uninsured. Paying the bill this way is expensive and inefficient.

That’s why the time is now to guarantee quality, affordable health care we can all count on. To achieve this, AFSCME has developed “Health Care for America” — an initiative to protect and improve our health benefits, control skyrocketing costs and assure affordable coverage for everyone.

How does AFSCME’s plan compare with McCain’s prescription for America’s health care system? AFSCME WORKS examines both programs so you can decide for yourself.

AFSCME’s Plan: Health Care for America
AFSCME’s Health Care for America is a five-point plan to secure affordable health care for all:

- **Guaranteed choice of plans** — If you like your plan, you should be able to keep what you have.
- **Employers pay their fair share** — All employers should provide benefits to their employees or make a contribution towards their health care costs.
- **Government must be an advocate for us** — The government should help lower the cost of health care and improve quality, as well as keep insurance and drug companies in check. We need to regulate what insurance companies charge, how they pay claims, and prevent them from delaying and denying care.
- **Choice of a public plan** — Everyone should be able to choose a public plan like Medicare, the most cost-effective program in the country. That’s because it allows people to select their own health care providers, and then the cost of illness is spread over a large pool of patients.
- **Comprehensive, quality benefits** — Everyone must have comprehensive benefits and high-quality care.

McCain’s Plan: You’re On Your Own
John McCain takes a totally different approach than we do. Taking the lead from a widely-criticized proposal advanced by President Bush in 2007, he wants to radically transform our health care system from one where people get insurance on the job to one where people are left to fend for themselves in an unregulated insurance market. While AFSCME’s initiative spreads risks and costs by bringing people together, McCain’s plan encourages employers to drop their group coverage, forcing us to be on our own in the marketplace. While AFSCME’s plan would preserve comprehensive benefits, McCain’s would encourage the development of a system with very high deductibles, up to $11,000, and high individual co-payments for services.

Senator McCain will also impose a massive new tax burden on workers by treating their health benefits as income. In other words, if your employer contributed $9,000 a year towards the cost of your health insurance, you would be taxed on that amount even though you never received this money in cash. This tax increase would be partially offset by a modest tax credit that covers less than half the average health plan premium. His rationale is that by shifting costs to workers, we will use less health care. As he said during a Republican primary debate in December: “[N]obody ever washed a rental car. And that’s true in health insurance. If they’re responsible for it, then they will take more care of it.”

This is why we call McCain’s approach the “you’re on your own” plan. He would make federal tax code changes that would encourage employers to stop offering health benefits. This scheme will only push more people into substandard individual plans that would cost them more than acquiring them as part of a group. His plan means getting less — and paying a lot more than we do now.

McCain’s plan would leave patients at the mercy of the insurance companies by overriding state rules that protect consumers from company
Reforming our ailing health care system will be a high-stakes battle pitting working families against powerful interests seeking to preserve the status quo: the drug industry, insurance companies and the politicians that cater to their every demand.

Drug and insurance companies have a vested interest in influencing public policy and legislation. As the Congressional Quarterly website reported on Sept. 17, 2007, “In the first half of 2007, the health care sector doled out more than $227 million for lobbying efforts — the first time spending has topped $200 million.”

The insurance industry made $15 billion in profits in 2006 amid spiraling costs for the rest of us. Meanwhile, pharmaceutical companies were the second most profitable U.S. industry in 2006, with profits of nearly 20 percent compared to the average 6 percent for all Fortune 500 companies. On top of that, the average 2006 compensation for CEOs in the health and disability insurance business was $8.7 million while the average pharmaceutical industry CEO raked in $4.3 million. This, at a time when the average worker earns less than $30,000 a year and faces a daily battle to put food on the table, gas in the car and a roof overhead.

BIG MONEY IN THE INSURANCE LOBBY

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Here are three things you can do to help win quality, affordable health care for all:

1. Tell your elected officials to support reform.
   Go to afscme.org/healthcare and sign the “AFSCME Health Care Petition.”

2. Talk to your co-workers, family and friends.
   Download the Health Care for America leaflet so you can share more information about AFSCME’s plan for change.

3. Get active on health care reform!
   Support candidates and elected officials who are willing to take the lead on this important issue.

Which Side Are You On?

Should America guarantee quality, affordable health care we can all count on or will we continue to be at the mercy of the insurance industry?

For AFSCME, the answer is clear. That’s why our union is chairing the AFL-CIO’s campaign for health care reform and is a co-chair of Health Care for America Now!, a national, grassroots movement powered by millions of supporters who believe in an America where every family deserves the best medical care in the world.

You can get involved by taking the steps at the right.
Making It Happen — in San Francisco!

38th International Convention

Some 6,000 delegates, alternates and guests will gather July 28 to August 1 at the Moscone West in the heart of the City by the Bay for AFSCME’s 38th Biennial Convention.

In addition to focusing on how to return the White House to the hands of working men and women, delegates will consider the key policy resolutions and constitutional amendments that will guide the union for the next two years. They will also elect all of AFSCME’s International Executive Board members — president, secretary-treasurer and 32 vice presidents.

Pres. Gerald W. McEntee and Sec.-Treas. Bill Lucy will call on attendees to continue implementing the sweeping measures of the Power to Win plan — a historic strategy approved by delegates to the 2006 Convention, which is already remaking AFSCME from top to bottom.

A major part of the plan includes showcasing the importance of public workers — and the services we provide — through AFSCME’s new tagline, “We Make America Happen.” The theme will serve as a focus of the Convention, which will place special emphasis on unity, political activism and growing the union, and include remarks from leaders in politics, labor and other areas.

Registration for delegates and alternates opens at 1:00 p.m. Saturday, July 26, and closes at 1 p.m. on Tuesday, July 29.
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Ari Rabkin, residential counselor, John L. Gildner Regional Institute for Children and Adolescents; member, Local 631 (AFSCME Maryland) Photo: Luis Gómez

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DRIVING TO A BETTER FUTURE

AFSCME is helping outsourced workers gain dignity and respect on the job. Here is how hundreds of Indianapolis workers employed by international contractor First Student Inc. built a union — and laid the groundwork for a better future — with Council 62.

BY CLYDE WEISS

ABOUT 19,000 STUDENTS who attend the Indianapolis Public Schools place their safety in the hands of some 400 bus drivers, monitors and mechanics who work for First Student Inc., the largest school bus contractor, worldwide. Driver Grigitte Yancey places her trust in that same company — her employer — to make sure her vehicle is roadworthy.

Yancey is confident that the mechanics won’t let her drive a bus in poor condition. But until she and her co-workers joined forces with Council 62 last August and won their first contract this April, she had little faith that her managers were as concerned about safety as they were about profits, which are sent to England where the company is based.

“We’d write up these buses and tell the mechanics the steering wasn’t working, or the emergency exit doors weren’t operating,” but the problems wouldn’t get fixed, she says. “The mechanics couldn’t do their jobs effectively because management wouldn’t order the parts.”

Yancey refused to drive mechanically unsound buses, even though some First Student managers would occasionally insult and even threaten to terminate drivers who insisted on safety versus meeting a schedule. She says some other drivers did go out in buses in need of maintenance because “they wanted to keep their job.”

That hasn’t been the case since the First Student employees joined AFSCME and won a first contract, which addressed their concerns. “Working conditions have already made a 180 degree turn, and safety has improved,” says David Warrick, executive director of Council 62 and also an International vice president. “The contract ensures they will be treated with dignity and respect.”
**Breaking New Ground**

The First Student campaign is one of several being launched by AFSCME affiliates as part of a national initiative to organize workers in the private sector who provide publicly funded services.

Across the country, AFSCME represents more than 150,000 public school employees — with the majority receiving paychecks directly from their school districts. The rest work for private contractors, including more than 1,600 employed by First Student in California, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

Helping First Student personnel gain a voice on the job through organizing is critical. As the country’s largest private school bus operations firm (with nearly 100,000 people throughout the United States after merging with Laidlaw, another bus operator), the company represents a national threat to public employees in the bus transportation sector. The reason is simple: If First Student and similar firms can win school district contracts by underpaying its workers, those employed in the public sector — and who earn more and receive better benefits — could find themselves outsourced or unemployed.

By raising the wages and benefits of First Student workers, Council 62 is making it more difficult for Indianapolis Public Schools to outsource some 300 drivers, monitors and mechanics who still work directly for the district and who have been represented by AFSCME for the past three decades.

A good union contract also holds First Student accountable to basic labor standards.

In July 2001, the Indianapolis Public Schools awarded a contract to First Student to operate about 70 percent of bus routes. Since then, unjust treatment at the hands of some company managers smoldered until the employees “just couldn’t take it any more,” recalls driver Michael Hall. “I saw a lot of good employees leave.”

A fellow First Student driver, LaVitra Evans, agrees. “How people could just lose their jobs for no reason at all — that really concerned me,” she says. “A lot of people were getting fired who shouldn’t have been.”

Favoritism on shift and route selections added fuel to the fire. Melissa Lawrence, a monitor who helps children board and get off their bus, plus straps them into their seats and makes sure they’re well-behaved in transit, says management assigned the best routes “to people they liked” instead of through seniority.

**Paving the Road**

Though resolute in their goal to gain some control over their workplace conditions, First Student’s employees knew they faced a difficult battle. Yancey knew she needed a lot of help if they were going to succeed.

Among the first co-workers she reached out to was her bus monitor and friend, Toshiba Wallace-Williams, who says management’s flagrant refusal to follow seniority rules when making assignments was a big reason she was ready to stand up for her rights.

Bus driver Evans was also prepared to fight for a union. “I knew it would benefit us in the long run,” says the eight-year employee of First Student. “I just didn’t think people were being treated right, and I saw the union as a way to change that.”

Hall, another bus driver, knew that an organizing campaign would be tough. But he also believed the workers were up to the challenge. “Some people have been here 20 years and have
A REAL VOICE: A FIRST CONTRACT

“What we were getting before was nothing, and now we’re getting something,” says First Student bus monitor Melissa Lawrence. “I think the bargaining committee did a good job.” Here are the contract’s highlights:

- **Health care is more affordable:** First Student will now pay 50 percent of insurance premiums ($742 to $1,150 per year per employee).
- **Mechanics now have clear authority to remove unsafe buses from service.**
- **Grievance procedures are now in place:** plus binding arbitration that will help deal with any alleged management mistreatment.
- **Strict seniority rule is now followed for granting routes,** and a union representative must be present when routes are chosen. “They won’t be done under the table,” says Lawrence.
- **Hourly wages increased for all job categories,** averaging 8.2 percent over three years. A nine-year driver, for example, will make $15.30 an hour at the end of that period.

nothing to show for it — no retirement plan, no benefits, no nothing,” he explains. “This was the right time and the right place to get something like this done.”

In March 2007, the activists quietly launched their organizing drive to build support without triggering employer opposition. Thirteen employees meeting at a local restaurant formed the “Indy First Student Organizing Committee.”

The group soon began knocking on the doors of fellow workers, collecting about 80 signed membership authorization cards. Then, one morning in May, they “went public” by distributing leaflets at the worksite and delivering a letter to First Student officially announcing the campaign.

At that point, some managers tried to intimidate the workers and shut down the organizing drive. “They were making things harder on people they knew were involved in the union — messing with people’s hours,” recalls Lawrence, the monitor.

First Student also passed out leaflets telling of the disadvantages of joining a union, but driver Hall says that tactic failed “because people were really fed up.” Within two weeks of the campaign’s launch, 65 percent of First Student’s 400 employees had signed authorization cards, more than twice what they needed to call for an election. Just before summer break in June 2007, the organizing committee held a meeting with the employees to explain what to expect when they returned, and to answer any lingering questions.

Union ‘Yes’

Once school resumed in August, First Student managers cracked down even harder, meeting individually with employees and holding mandatory group meetings in a final effort to frighten the workers and pressure them to vote “no.” It didn’t work. On August 21, the vote was an overwhelming “Yes!” for AFSCME.

Victory quickly gave way to urgency: changing their hard-won election win into a binding contract. A bargaining committee — including Yancey, Evans, Wallace-Williams and Hall — was elected to review the workers’ key concerns and establish goals. Better pay was important, says Hall, “but sometimes just having a voice in the company you work for is more important than the money.”

They also wanted an affordable health plan. Although First Student had offered individual medical coverage, the company contributed nothing toward the premiums.

Through complex bargaining, the workers achieved many of their goals and ratified their first contract by a two-to-one margin. “I feel our contract is a good start, like a foot in the door,” says Evans.

First Student employees still receive less pay and fewer benefits than their colleagues who work directly for the school district. But Warrick says the private-sector folks understand they’ve taken “a step in the right direction.” He adds, “Organizing at First Student and improving wages and benefits will help protect other AFSCME-represented positions. It won’t be as easy for First Student to undercut Indianapolis Public Schools’ workers” when the district calls for new transportation bids in years to come.

Council 62 now represents more than 1,300 employees who perform services (directly or by contract) for Indianapolis Public Schools, including custodians, maintenance workers, food service employees, teaching assistants, transportation workers and mechanics.

A Fresh Start

Yancey, president of her new union, Local 3826, says their first contract gives her hope “that we can have an environment where we can just do our job.”

“Now, you can’t just talk to us any kind of way. It’s about giving us respect,” she explains. “Management cannot come in and say, ‘We’re going to change this and that, or fire you for this or that.’ As long as we have the union, they’ll have to go by the contract.”

A single parent who says she lives “from paycheck to paycheck,” Yancey notes that the contract also will make it just a little easier to make ends meet.

Evans, her union’s new recording secretary, says she’s already noticed encouraging signs — such as better communications with management — since the union was formed. “Hopefully, I will be here long enough to see a real positive change, as far as people being treated fairly and making decent pay.”

Lawrence says she has “high hopes” for her future as well. “With the management they have in position now — and with the strong union we’re building — it’s going to get better. We’ll have a whole new ballgame for the next school year.”

Now treasurer of his union, Hall credits the “unique blend of the organizing committee” for their success. “You need people who are committed, people who are willing to hit the streets and knock on people’s doors to make them realize why it’s in their interest to have some voice in what’s happening in their lives — to make it a better place to work.”

Building a union and winning a fair contract “makes me feel proud,” says Wallace-Williams, the local’s new executive board member. “If anybody is trying to get a union, I say: Go for it!”
Recognizing that the future strength of AFSCME rests in their hands, Generation X members have begun meeting informally to form a new group — one that will boost activism and develop leadership skills among those 35 and under, and infuse the labor movement with fresh energy.

“Many of AFSCME’s members — about 30 percent — will be retiring in 10 years,” says Natasha Pranger, 32, a member of Local 304 (Council 28) and a Washington state forensic scientist. “Our challenge is to gather the collective wisdom and experience of our brothers and sisters, and get the younger ones actively engaged in building power in our unions.”

To address these issues, Pranger — and 31 of her peers from across the country — met one weekend in May at the National Labor College, just outside Washington, D.C. Calling themselves the “Next Wave,” they started developing a tool kit that affiliates can use to reach out to under-35 members. The kit includes such topics as recruitment, relevance, image/identity and culture, technology, political action and education.

A work in progress, the kit will be updated regularly. Other Next Wavers, who comprise 11 percent of AFSCME, are being encouraged to add their own ideas. The materials will be made available at the International Convention in July.

“I’m really excited about what we as Next Wavers can do to strengthen our union,” says Cornelia Lee, a senior therapist at the North Jersey Developmental Center and a member of Local 2211 (Council 52). “We are, after all, the future of the labor movement.”

We Are the Future | Participants from all across the country came to the first-ever “Next Wave” conference near Washington, D.C. Photo: Luis Gómez
CALIFORNIA

CONTRACT WORKERS TO BECOME UNIVERSITY EMPLOYEES

Nearly 200 contracted-out food service workers at the University of California at Davis have won their lengthy battle to become full-time UC employees.

The victory, announced in April, means that workers will transition from their current employment with Sodexo Inc. to become direct UC Davis employees and automatically join AFSCME Local 3299 — no later than April 2009.

“It’s going to be great for the workers when they see the changes that happen when they are UC employees. I hope we can get it done as soon as possible,” says Local 3299 Pres. LaKesha Harrison.

Demonstrations by students, workers and members of Local 3299 persuaded UC Davis administrators that their outdated employment policy could no longer be justified. The campus is the last in the large, statewide system that continues to outsource dining services.

Members of Local 3299 also are engaged in an intense fight over livable wages on behalf of some 11,000 patient care workers and more than 9,000 service employees throughout the UC system. They have been working without a contract since early last year. See the back cover for more about their ongoing struggle.

CONNECTICUT

SCHOOL CUSTODIANS SAY ‘NO’ TO ARAMARK

About 200 protesters — members of Connecticut Council 4 and their supporters — demanded at an April rally that the New Haven public school system stop contracting out food service and facility maintenance work.

School administrators later agreed not to renew the food service contract that privateer Aramark held through August. The company, which provided services to the school district for the past 12 years, has a separate maintenance contract that remains in effect.

Council 4 members want the city to bring maintenance work in-house. “We don’t need an overpaid middle man to lead us down the path of destruction,” says Robert Montuori, president of Local 287, which represents about 200 New Haven school custodians.

“The math is tragically simple,” says Council 4 Exec. Dir. Sal Luciano, who is also an International vice president. “High cost plus poor service equals Aramark. New Haven students and the community deserve better.”

Addressing an enthusiastic throng of protesters gathered at City Hall, Pres. Gerald W. McEntee was equally blunt: “We want to tell the aldermen and the mayor that it is their job to fire Aramark and get them out of town.” He also announced a $20,000 contribution toward Council 4’s anti-Aramark campaign.
From state to state, workers are organizing with AFSCME for a stronger voice on the job. Here are some recent victories:

**Connecticut**
Sixteen employees of the South Norwalk Electric and Water Department recently joined Council 4.

**Indiana**
After the Monroe County Library Board of Trustees approved an AFSCME-backed collective bargaining ordinance in December, a unit of 106 library employees voted 2-1 in favor of joining Council 62 — the second time public library workers have joined the council in recent months.

**Minnesota**
Thirteen Hennepin County vocational counselors, who help adults with profound mental and emotional problems develop the skills they need to get a job, joined Local 2864 (Council 5). In Mahnomen County, 22 social service employees, including case aides, clerical staff, social workers and financial technicians, joined Council 65. In Rice County, five information technology employees also gained representation with the council.

**New York**
Four hundred direct care workers from The Guild for Exceptional Children in Brooklyn voted to join Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA)/AFSCME Local 1000. The employees, who serve people with developmental disabilities, joined last November through majority sign-up (sometimes called card check). After a challenge, the workers were required to hold a supervised election, which they won in March. Also, 21 employees at the Sharon Baptist Church Head Start, in the Bronx, joined DC 1707 through a voluntary recognition agreement.

**Ohio**
Fifteen employees of the Village of Granville overwhelmingly voted to join Council 8. They include water distribution and equipment operators, mechanics, tree trimmers and dispatchers.

**Virginia**
Forty-eight bus operators employed by Arlington Transit and 23 bus mechanics and supply staff at the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission voted to join Local 3001.

**Wisconsin**
Seventy-four Douglas County Courthouse employees — office workers, deputies, economic support specialists and others — voted overwhelmingly to join Council 40.

**COMMUNITY EDUCATION A HIT WITH KIDS**
Four-year-old Bryan Yamamoto gets a golf lesson from his father, Wynn, during a “Day to Discover” event held at the Ali‘iolani Elementary School on Oahu this spring by members of the Hawaii Government Employees Association (HGEA)/AFSCME Local 152. Established in 2005 to showcase the jobs of HGEA members, the Day to Discover also allows members to build a closer relationship with the communities they serve.

*Photo: Tania Ishimaru*
When they decided to do something new and challenging to benefit their community, the Women’s Committee of Local 1664 (Council 25) thought big: They built a house!

Each weekend over two months last winter, about 10 bus drivers for Utica Community Schools went to work with Women Build, a Habitat for Humanity International program, to construct a three-bedroom, one-bath house. “They’re not real big, but they’re made quite well, if I do say so myself,” says driver Chris Vandenbussche, who is also an executive board member for both Council 25 and Local 1664.

The women first helped raise funds for the project, which — depending on location — can cost $80,000. Then they attended six homebuilding classes at a local Lowe’s hardware store. Afterward, they joined a team of more than 60 women who erected the house — now occupied by a young mother with three children — from the ground up.

Local 1664 Pres. Janette Heslet, a member of the construction crew, says the project “helped us show that being part of a union is not just about our jobs, it’s also about showing we’re linked to the community.”

The women — and men — of Local 1664 are already planning their next project: building wheelchair ramps for needy children or senior citizens in the community. “We’re going to do it on our own,” says Vandenbussche.

**Housing, AFSCME Style**

Members of Local 1664 (Council 25) stand on the porch of a house they recently built through Habitat for Humanity. Holding the banner are Kim Sortzi (left) and Chris Vandenbussche. In the top row (left to right) are: Sharon Lautenbach, Maggie Abdalla, Bonnye Hambly, Gloria Devos, Diane Bely, Deanna Butka and Martha Bailey. Photo: Janette Heslet

**Walker Methodist Employees Win First Contract**

After a five-year struggle, more than 400 employees of Walker Methodist Health Center in Minneapolis have their first contract!

The new agreement runs through September 2009. It was overwhelmingly ratified in April by two separate bargaining units of Local 3532 (Council 5). The largest group consists of some 350 nursing assistants, food service employees, maintenance workers, housekeepers and activity aides. About 60 LPNs make up the second group.

Their battle began in 2003 when the two units held elections to join Council 5. After management appealed, the LPNs’ votes were sealed. The employees then launched an intensive campaign to build support in the faith community and among the general public to get Walker’s management to withdraw its appeal. Last year, the National Labor Relations Board sided with the workers. Contract negotiations started this spring.

“The contract will provide job security, which we’ve never had before. It will also give us a voice on the job,” says Nickson Nyankabaria, a restorative nursing aide and a member of the union’s negotiating team.

“The contract gives us peace of mind,” adds LPN Joan Nyakundi. “I hope we keep an open door with communications between workers and management.”

Contract highlights include a formal grievance procedure; a labor-management committee to address staffing, scheduling and other issues; holiday pay and paid breaks; and a 1.12-percent wage hike, retroactive to October 2007, with further pay negotiations to begin this October.
NEW YORK

‘WE CARE ABOUT DAY CARE’

Members of Local 205 (DC 1707) are fighting Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s plan to close more of their city-operated centers. Since 2004, when Bloomberg took office, 17 of the city’s roughly 350 child care centers have been closed and many others downsized. Testifying in April before the city’s General Welfare Committee are (left to right): Doreen Dickens, shop steward at Andrew Landi Day Care Center; Joan Morgan, shop steward at Blanche Community Progress Day Care Center #2; and Kimberly Comes, shop steward at The Originals of Jamaica Day Care Center. Morgan told the officials: “We provide three meals a day and offer an excellent education, and a place where children can develop physically and mentally. If parents lose these services, it will be a tremendous loss. They will have to stop working to take care of their kids, who depend on us.” Local 205 represents more than 6,500 day care providers employed by the Administration for Children’s Services.

Enid, Lawton and Tulsa

OKLAHOMA

MUNICIPAL WORKERS JOIN AFSCME, WIN HISTORIC FIRST CONTRACTS

More than 800 Tulsa municipal employees recently voted to have a voice with Local 1180, while some 700 employees of the cities of Enid and Lawton have become the latest municipal workers in the state to win first contracts under a 2004 law championed by AFSCME, which gave non-uniformed employees the right to organize and bargain.

The Tulsa technical and administrative office employees joined some 1,000 other Tulsa municipal workers represented by AFSCME. Oklahoma’s Public Employees Relations Board certified the new bargaining unit in May after a majority of workers submitted signed cards saying they wanted to make AFSCME their union.

In Lawton, the City Council approved a two-year contract in March covering 450 city workers represented by Local 3894, who had earlier ratified the agreement with an overwhelming vote.

Their contract includes a 3-percent wage hike through 2009, a $225 signing bonus, improved vacation, a grievance procedure, binding arbitration protection and a reduced probation period for promotions.

In Enid, 255 city employees voted unanimously in February for their first agreement, which city commissioners also approved after more than a year of negotiations. The workers — members of Local 1136 — won a 7 percent across-the-board wage increase from March to July of this year, followed by a 5 percent hike in July that extends through 2009. The agreement also includes a $300 signing bonus, increased longevity pay, a performance-based, merit-pay plan, grievance procedures and arbitration protection.

These three historic victories follow the achievement last October of a first contract by some 90 employees of the city of Moore, who are represented by Local 2406.

Testifying Queens day care workers, members of Local 205 (DC 1707), seek full funding of their facilities. Photo: Neal Tepel
THOUSANDS MORE VOTE ‘YES’ FOR CHILD CARE PROVIDERS UNITED

Twenty thousand home-based child care providers throughout Pennsylvania have joined with 3,700 state-registered and licensed providers to form their own union, Child Care Providers UNITED (CCP UNITED).

An overwhelming majority of the home-based providers voted this spring to join CCP UNITED, which is jointly affiliated with AFSCME and the Service Employees International Union. Although these providers receive a state reimbursement, they are exempt from state certification because they are only allowed to care for up to three children.

Registered providers voted last October to join CCP UNITED. Regulated by the state, they can care for up to six children.

“This is an exciting day for family child care providers and the working parents who depend on us,” says Philadelphia provider Sherrie Richardson. “Now we have one strong voice and can work with the state to improve regulations, increase training opportunities, and win other changes that will raise the quality of child care in Pennsylvania.”

Clearfield County child care provider Bonnie Caldwell, who is also executive director of CCP UNITED, says the union is transforming child care in Pennsylvania. “Studies have linked quality child care in the early years with better academic performance and less problematic behavior among schoolchildren,” she explains. “With our new, unified voice we’ll be able to raise child care standards across the entire state.”

Publicly funded family child care providers have won the right to form a union in 10 states since 2005. The Pennsylvania providers’ victory is part of a national movement to gain dignity and strength by joining with AFSCME, which now represents about 188,000 family child care providers, plus more than 15,000 day care and Head Start workers, in California, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

Day of Victory | Pennsylvania child care providers Ethel Soloman (left) and Sherrie Richardson (holding shirt) celebrate after some 20,000 home-based providers joined Child Care Providers UNITED. Photo: Vanessa Clifford

‘OPERATION VETERANS HOPE’ BEGINS

Thermal clothing, computer game consoles, a large-screen television and other items were donated in April to residents of the Southeastern Veterans Center in Spring City by members of Council 13 and District Council 88. “To all the veterans here today, a heartfelt ‘thank you’ from every member of the AFSCME family,” said Council 13 Exec. Dir. David R. Fillman, who is also an International vice president. “For the many sacrifices you’ve made for our country, please accept today’s donations as our humble gesture of gratitude.”

Members of District Council 88 contributed to the Southeastern Veterans Center, the first of six centers that will receive donations throughout the year.

The council’s program is part of a new nationwide initiative, AFSCME’s Matching Fund for Veterans, which provides support for state veterans’ homes, where many AFSCME members work. Through matching grants, AFSCME affiliates are encouraged to “adopt” these homes and to initiate their own fundraising drives.

In addition to Pennsylvania, AFSCME represents veterans’ home employees in Alaska, California, Connecticut, Illinois, Indianapolis, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Rhode Island, Washington and Wisconsin.
THOUSANDS OF MUNICIPAL WORKERS WIN FIRST CONTRACT

More than 13,000 Houston city employees, represented by the Houston Organization of Public Employees (HOPE)/AFSCME Local 57, have won the first-ever contract between a Texas city and its non-uniformed civilian workforce.

The City Council overwhelmingly approved the three-year contract in March, days after the near-unanimous ratification vote by members of HOPE, a partnership formed between AFSCME and the Service Employees International Union.

The contract’s key provisions include an immediate, across-the-board 3 percent raise for all employees, followed by annual 3 percent hikes starting in fiscal 2010; a $9.50/hour minimum wage that will rise to $10 by September 2009; a “performance pay pool” that will fund merit-pay increases; and the establishment of worker-management consultation committees to promote better communication and strengthen city services.

Willie Moore, a systems support analyst for the Department of Public Works and Engineering and a former president of AFSCME Local 1550, has worked for this landmark achievement for two decades. As a member of the contract negotiating team, he’s especially proud. “This is a tremendous deal,” he says. “It’s a gratifying feeling knowing that perseverance counts. If you believe in the system and the solidarity of the union, you will succeed.”

A critical issue that emerged during 11 months of negotiations was whether managers should be covered by the contract. The city didn’t want to include them, “but we insisted” that they should be, says Moore. The union prevailed. Now, all managers other than department directors are included.

HOPE was established in 2006 after AFSCME successfully lobbied the state legislature to extend “meet-and-confer” rights to city workers, giving them the same rights as police and firefighters.

**Building a Better Future**

Wisconsin child care providers — with help from their bargaining team members — have won a real chance to improve their lives and the services they offer. Photo: Robert Allen

**Voting ‘Yes’!**

Houston city workers — members of HOPE — vote on their contract. Photo: Evan Yeats

**CHILD CARE PROVIDERS WIN LANDMARK FIRST CONTRACT**

Thousands of Wisconsin child care providers — members of AFSCME/Child Care Providers Together (AFSCME/CCPT) — have ratified a historic agreement with the state that will provide them with new rights and benefits, and help to improve their lives in the years ahead.

Part of Wisconsin Councils 40 and 48, AFSCME/CCPT represents about 7,000 in-home child care providers — self-employed, independent contractors who are licensed and certified by the state.

“We finally have a seat at the table and a real voice in making sure children across this state get the best care possible,” says Madison provider Oma Vic McMurray, who is also a member of the union’s bargaining team.

The three-year agreement — approved in June — is the result of a meet-and-confer process authorized by an Executive Order signed in 2006 by Gov. Jim Doyle (D). With their new contract, the providers now play a formal role in the regulatory process, such as making sure the rules and regulations that govern their work are fair and consistent.

The providers also have a grievance procedure to ensure due process, a committee to address future subsidy increases and an extensive provider “Bill of Rights.”

The state will work with CCPT members on ways to make comprehensive health insurance coverage accessible and affordable. “This is a tremendous step forward for professional child care providers, but it is only a first step,” says member Genniene Lovelace-Michel of Sauk City, who is also on the union’s bargaining team.
For months, some 20,000 University of California patient care and service employees represented by AFSCME Local 3299 have fought for a fair contract.

This June, they saw firsthand how belonging to a high-powered union generates high-powered support. Former Pres. Bill Clinton, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., retired General Wesley Clark, U.S. Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) and syndicated columnist Arianna Huffington all announced that they would not speak, as they had planned, at June commencement ceremonies at UCLA and UC/San Diego in a show of support for the workers’ struggle for justice.

The UC employees have been fighting for a contract that will boost their earnings to match other area hospitals and colleges. In June, they rallied at UCLA (pictured) and other campuses statewide to build public unity for their cause. Photo: Matthew Simmons