KATRINA & BUSH
From relief to rebuilding — nearly two years of inaction and neglect.
HEALTH CARE FOR ALL!

With 47 million Americans without health coverage, and rising health care costs busting state and local budgets, plus increasing pressure at contract time, it’s time for real health care reform. To call attention to Connecticut’s 400,000 uninsured, thousands of activists — including hundreds of AFSCME members — gathered at the capitol in Hartford to demand that Gov. M. Jodi Rell (R) and the Legislature take action to provide affordable universal health care.

“We need health care for all!” was the rallying cry of AFSCME members who gathered at the doorstep of the Connecticut State Capitol. Many of them, like elementary school custodian and Local 1186 member Cliff Moore, shared their harrowing stories about the nation’s neglectful health care system.

“A co-worker became ill, she had cancer and had to drop off the payroll. She had no health care. How
Still Hurting After Katrina

Hurricane Katrina was made of wind and water, but the Bush administration’s inattention to a crumbling infrastructure, slow response time and failure to keep its promises, created a disaster of its own. AFSCME WORKS examines White House inaction in the wake of the storm and talks to a few of the more than 800 AFSCME members who are still struggling to rebuild.

One on One with Member Susan Patron

Los Angeles Public Library senior librarian Susan Patron, a member of Local 2626 (Council 36), received the prestigious Newbery Medal for her most recent children’s novel, The Higher Power of Lucky. Patron’s book has also stirred a debate over censorship and the freedom of speech.

Lobby Days

The voices of AFSCME members were heard loud and clear at state houses across the country on vital issues including funding of public services, improved prison staffing, full funding for contract raises, improved safety at mental hospitals, better pay and more.

do you fight cancer if you can’t afford to pay the medical bills? Our union held a successful fundraiser and that helped, but if we had universal health care she would have been taken care of,” said Moore.

As the General Assembly debates historic legislation to establish a comprehensive universal health care system, AFSCME remains at the forefront of the movement for change. Photo: Bill Burkhardt
OUR GOVERNMENT is spending $400 billion a year on private contractors who are doing everything from feeding soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan to collecting debts for the Internal Revenue Service. This is all part of President Bush’s unprecedented attack on the public sector. His gospel: privatization at any cost.

The war in Iraq provides the clearest example of the impact. There are now as many individuals working for private contractors there as American troops. Many of these contractors are entitled to immunity from civilian lawsuits and are not bound by the military’s court martial system. The result? No accountability.

Beyond Iraq, the Bush administration’s push to privatize vital services has reached new heights of absurdity: The General Services Administration hired a private contractor last year to review cases of incompetence and fraud by federal private contractors.

Pressure to Privatize

Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., is another example of privatization gone wrong. The hospital was founded in 1909 to integrate patient care, teaching and research. Yet the soldiers who put their lives on the line have been receiving care at Walter Reed that would make its founders sick. Recent news reports showed soldiers in a bug- and rodent-infested, moldy building — forgotten and ignored.

The hospital would close and their jobs in the meantime were being outsourced.

Ultimately, contractor IAP Worldwide Services was selected, leading to recently exposed problems. It is no coincidence that former executives of Kellogg, Brown and Root, a Halliburton subsidiary, lead IAP. (IAP, by the way, is the company that couldn’t even manage to deliver ice to Hurricane Katrina victims.)

Imperiling Services

Bush’s privatization policies at the federal level have imperiled public services and influenced state and local governments. Workers do more with fewer resources while poorly performing contractors get additional business even after doing a poor job.

Meanwhile, Bush devotees push privatization in their states, as Republican Gov. Mitch Daniels (formerly head of the Office of Management and Budget in the Bush administration) has in Indiana. More than 1,500 Indiana state employees — members of AFSCME Council 62 — were forced to leave their jobs and become employees of Affiliated Computer Services Inc., a company that now has the job of deciding who should receive Food Stamps, Medicaid and other aid. Daniels has also privatized the state’s toll highway, and others are following his example.

But even this isn’t the worst of it. As the President cuts even more taxes for the wealthiest Americans and continues his own spending binge, he’s making it harder for future generations to fund public services.

A Government of the People

Instead of enriching the private sector at the public’s expense, politicians should be strengthening the public sector. Bush’s assault has harmed public services and all Americans have suffered. AFSCME’s job is to fight back. Winning Congress in 2006 was a good start, but we must follow through in 2008 by electing a President who will build a strong public sector. A government that is truly of, by and for the people cannot be contracted out.
AMERICA’S CURRENT ECONOMIC policy — catering to those who live on Wall Street, not Main Street — must change. Our economy must work for workers, not against them. Something’s terribly wrong when so many of us are plagued by debt in one of the wealthiest nations in the world. The current free-market, anti-worker economy not only encourages workers to go into debt by spending more than they earn, it’s put our country at risk by increasing the national debt to over $8 trillion.

**Economic Chains**
Let’s get the word out: Stagnant and shrinking wages mean stagnant and shrinking power — our power to form unions, bargain collectively and make a decent living. Meanwhile, employers have even more power, so they outsource work, deny and withhold pay increases, and refuse to provide benefits like health care and retirement security.

Any given night, on average, 15 percent of people who are employed are homeless — in some places, it’s higher. That’s an outrage! No one who works in America should be homeless in America. We should not live in economic fear. That is not freedom. That’s enslavement.

In the March/April issue of **AFSCME WORKS**, I discussed how moving to a high-wage strategy, rewarding workers for their labor would benefit everyone. Before it’s too late, we must create a strong grassroots movement to provide activists with tools to change America’s unfair economic policies.

**Road to Recovery**
To counter the corporate agenda’s devastation, the AFL-CIO is developing an economics education program built on a Working Families Agenda:
- Anyone in America who wants to work should have a job.
- All workers and their families should live in dignity with health care and a secure retirement.
- Every worker should enjoy the freedom to form a union and bargain collectively.
- All workers should share equitably in a strong American economy.

The AFL-CIO’s program promotes fair trade agreements, a fair share of taxes paid by U.S.-based corporations, and a national strategy to invest in communications, transportation infrastructure and rebuilding manufacturing.

The National Labor College (NLC), the only accredited higher education institution solely for union members, will take the lead on developing training materials. In fact, our union offers NLC scholarships for AFSCME members. To learn more about NLC, go to: [www.nlc.edu](http://www.nlc.edu).

At AFSCME, basic economic education must be a core element of all our new Leadership Academy programs. Therefore, we’ll be creating an online economic workshop as part of the Academy’s Web Track, which you can visit at [www.afscme.org/academy](http://www.afscme.org/academy).

Education will power up activists to end our current unfair economic system, and build one where wages and benefits rise along with productivity. Once we learn how to move money and benefits from the wealthiest few to the struggling many, we can achieve universal health care and secure pensions. By defending against corporate greed, we’ll gain union protection for any worker exploited by an employer and once more have a government that works for everyone.

**Land of Opportunity**
As we connect with the AFL-CIO program and build our own Leadership Academy, let’s remember that this period leading up to the 2008 elections offers an historic opportunity. At AFSCME, we are committed to do all we can to elect a President who will put workers first when it comes to the economy. Assuring that our government invests in a high-wage strategy may turn out to be the most important lesson of our lifetime.

**“WE SHOULD NOT LIVE IN ECONOMIC FEAR. THAT IS NOT FREEDOM. THAT’S ENSLAVEMENT.”**
NEARLY TWO YEARS LATER, AFSCME members and their families exemplify the plight of many Gulf Coast families who are still struggling in the wake of the Bush administration’s shocking neglect of public services and inept response to America’s greatest natural disaster.

On Aug. 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina — this country’s most destructive and costly natural disaster — ripped apart the lives of more than 800 of our New Orleans members and their families. Oblivious to the human impact, the Bush administration launched a second disaster driven by poor leadership which exposed, for all the world to see, its abject indifference toward the millions of Americans who live in poverty.

Tragic photos broadcast via television and the Internet showed thousands of people stranded in oppressive heat for days on rooftops, along highways and inside the increasingly filthy Louisiana Superdome. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) head Michael Brown claimed unbelievably that he “didn’t know they were there.” Still, George W. Bush told him during a briefing, “Brownie, you’re doing a heck of a job.”

Perhaps Bush was referring to how quickly no-competitive-bid contracts to political friends like Halliburton and Bechtel were being doled out.

Neglected Public Services
For generations, Katrina will stand as a tragic example of how Bush’s public services and pro-privatization policies have imperiled this nation, and how cutting taxes and starving the nation’s infrastructure can turn a horrible storm into a series of nightmares. Had they not been neglected, the levees might have held. Had the Bush administration not outsourced and privatized disaster management, FEMA might have been there when people needed help. As public outrage grew, President Bush promised to “do what it takes... to help citizens rebuild their communities and their lives.” His administration has yet to make good on the claim.

Meanwhile, once vibrant neighborhoods remain littered with debris and stench. Fewer than half of the area’s hospitals are functioning. Big Charity Hospital, which employed many AFSCME members, remains closed. From the Lower Ninth Ward to East Biloxi, survivors have yet to receive any real aid from the government. For several months following Katrina, hundreds of empty FEMA trailers remained unused while thousands of homeless struggled to survive. Today, thousands continue to live in FEMA trailers. Others await insurance payments so they can rebuild. Just this February, the first new houses were completed in the Lower Ninth Ward, and more than a quarter of a million people remain displaced from their homes.

Amazingly, in the face of such slow recovery, the administration has continued to cut critical social programs, which make up the vital safety net that is needed by Katrina’s victims and millions of Americans.

Abandoned By Bush
Just look at the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Section 8 program, which allows low-income families to seek homes in the private real estate market. With proper funding, the program could have helped resettle Katrina’s victims faster. Instead, says an op-ed piece published this March in The New York Times, the administration’s mishandling of the housing crisis “often looked like an attempt to discourage survivors from applying for help.”

AFSCME members who survived Katrina called on Congress to oppose the new tax breaks and devastating cuts to much-needed public service programs. At congressional briefings, town hall meetings and other events their first-hand accounts made clear that proper funding and maintenance of public services is vital — particularly in times of crisis. At the same time, AFSCME members traveled to the area to give aid and contributed generously to a special fund used to help the victims resettle into temporary housing.

But before these members’ lives — and the tens of thousands of Gulf Coast residents they represent — can truly be set right, George W. Bush must keep his administration’s promises and stop turning his back on Katrina’s victims. He must view Katrina as the humanitarian crisis it is, not as an opportunity to line the already fat pockets of privateers.
Like many Hurricane Katrina survivors, Daren Stacker of Local 872 (Council 17) and his family are still struggling to rebuild their lives, waiting for government relief that will “allow us to pick up the pieces and move on.” Before Katrina, Stacker was the head custodian of the New Orleans public school system. He has lived in Houston for almost a year now and has been unable to find a permanent job. Out of desperation, he accepted temporary employment as a custodian of a charter school in New Orleans. He works 12-hour days and commutes 10 hours every two weeks to be with his family. He hopes to save enough money so he can rent a place for his wife and three children. But finding affordable housing in New Orleans has been difficult. “It’s been frustrating trying to provide for my family,” he says. “Our government has let us down. Renters like me who wanted to come back should have been given assistance. And the way we were laid off by the New Orleans public school system without any assurance of re-employment was a slap in the face.”
For seven hours before the storm hit, Michael Mitchell had transported nearly 1,000 refuge-seeking passengers across the Mississippi River until the ferry he operated was shut down. Only then did he drive home to East New Orleans to evacuate his own family. Mitchell’s selfless devotion to duty typifies the heroism of AFSCME members in times of crisis. Weeks later, the ferry boat captain — a member of Council 17’s Local 3805 — visited his neighborhood, only to find his two-story home under 12 feet of water. Determined to return to the area, Mitchell has worked hard and long hours to salvage what’s left of his house. Along with his wife and three children, they have endured living in a 30-foot-long, 6-foot-wide and 6’4” high trailer for several months. Mitchell, who is almost 6’4” himself, developed back aches from constant stooping. Meanwhile, with their savings almost depleted, the Mitchells are faced with mounting bills and high insurance costs. “We only got $5,000 in wind damage from our homeowner’s insurance,” Mitchell explains. “If the levees had been fixed, we wouldn’t be in this awful state.” He further laments the fact that in his neighborhood, only half of the residents have returned, “so electricity has not been fully restored and there are no grocery stores nearby.”
A Medicaid analyst for the state’s Department of Health and Hospitals, Charssie Muse and her family lost nearly all of their possessions when the hurricane destroyed their home in St. Bernard Parish. After living with relatives in Baton Rouge for more than a year, Charssie and her husband Lionel decided to return and rebuild their house. But “getting back on our feet and starting all over again has not been easy,” she says. “Bureaucratic red tape has made it impossible for us to get building materials so we can do all the repairs.”

Like many victims who are still reeling from the horrors of the flood-ravaged city, Charssie admits to being depressed most of the time, although she doesn’t contemplate committing suicide anymore. Still, she says, “I feel like I’m lying in a coffin after crawling to bed in this trailer. Unless the government follows through with its promises, it will be a long time before our neighborhood becomes alive and well again.”
By the time she was 8 years old, Susan Patron already knew she wanted to write. “Our teacher read us a book called *Charlotte’s Web* and it made a big impression on me. Ever since then I’ve wanted to write a story as powerful as that one. It was the first time I understood books could touch people in such a way,” says Patron, a member of AFSCME Local 2626 (Council 36).

E.B. White’s classic novel sparked in Patron a lifelong love of literature. A senior librarian at the Los Angeles Public Library and member of AFSCME since 1972, Patron has come a long way since the days when she used to write for her local’s newsletter, *The Communicator*. She is now a critically acclaimed author and recipient of the 2007 Newbery Medal for the most distinguished American children’s book published in 2006. Her book, *The Higher Power of Lucky*, tells the story of 10-year-old Lucky Trimble and her life among the eccentric characters of the California desert community of Hard Pan (population 43).

Aimed at readers age 9 to 11, the book received critical acclaim and significant controversy. It was denounced by several librarians who threatened not to order it because of a minor scene in the story where a character recalls how a rattlesnake bit his dog in the “scrotum.” Use of the word stirred a debate that generated nationwide media attention.

The outrage, however, was met by eloquent freedom of speech defenses on Patron’s behalf by writers and activists across the country. During National Library Week (April 15 to 21), AFSCME ran a full-page ad in *The New York Times* book section congratulating Patron for her “remarkable literary achievement” and highlighting the crucial work of library workers nationwide. Other organizations such as the American Library Association and the American Association of School Librarians also came out in the writer’s defense.

What do you think about the controversy surrounding your book?
I was very surprised by that but overall it’s been very exciting. It’s been very heartening to discover how strong the profession of librarianship is in terms of intellectual freedom.

Do you consider the attacks on your book to be censorship?
Librarians refer to censorship when a book is already on the shelves and it’s removed. I don’t think that is what happened in this case. It hasn’t been banned anywhere that I know of. Nonetheless, some librarians have chosen not to buy it in the first place, which is in some ways a more insidious form of censorship and one that’s much more difficult to pinpoint.

Do you think librarians should weigh in on the appropriateness of a certain book?
We all have selection policies that clearly spell out what our goals are. Here at the L.A. Public Library, if people are asking about a book, it’s popular, it’s on best-seller lists and it’s won major awards, those are sure signs to us...
that we need to get copies because our patrons want to read it. We don’t have all the money or all the space in the world, and we do have to select but popularity and demand are important factors to consider. We don’t put ourselves in the position to say whether or not it’s appropriate because we feel that is a parent’s role, not ours.

Have you received any feedback from regular readers?
There were some 450 letters to The New York Times after they ran a front-page article on the controversy. These were parents as well as people from all walks of life and a lot of them were saying: ‘It is pretty ridiculous to judge a book on the basis of one word.’ On the other hand, others chimed in saying that it was sensationalistic to use that word and yet they hadn’t read the book.

Will the debate sparked by The Higher Power of Lucky affect your writing?
Not at all. My tools are words and I will always write, choosing words very carefully.

More Than A Book . . .

The 1.4 million men and women of AFSCME congratulate librarian and author

Susan Patron

Winner of the 2007 John Newbery Medal, the highest honor in children’s literature, for her newest work.

“The Higher Power of Lucky”

We salute the remarkable literary achievement of Susan Patron, a senior librarian at the Los Angeles Public Library and a longtime member of Local 2626 of AFSCME Council 36.

America’s public libraries play a critically important role in our national life. Today marks the beginning of National Library Week, honoring the library workers who nourish young minds and inspire the next generation of readers. We stand united with the American Library Association in our commitment to freedom of thought and expression.

... An Achievement

Words of Support | AFSCME’s

Two AFSCME members who serve the nation with pride and purpose.

BY JON MELEGITO

PADDLING DOWN THE RIVER

While most New Yorkers know about the Bronx Zoo and the Botanical Garden, not many know about the Bronx River — an eight-mile stretch of the city’s only fresh-water river that runs right through the borough.

That, Michael Hunter says, is what he wants everyone to see and experience. A member of DC 37’s Local 299, Hunter is the Canoe Program Coordinator of the Bronx River Alliance, a community/government partnership managed by the city’s Parks and Recreation Department. This babbling stream is where Hunter can be found most days of the year — leading a fleet of anywhere from 10 to 25 canoes carrying dozens of curious school-age kids on a science field trip. The river provides a rare glimpse of life that many New Yorkers never see: beautiful gardens and wild life in the north, scrap yards and run-down neighborhoods further down south.

During winter months, the 28-year-old volunteers as a ski/snowboard instructor for kids with physical and mental disabilities. He also works with the Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice — a group of young people living in low-income communities along the river. Recently, they organized a major cleanup effort, removing 45 abandoned cars and a thousand tires from the water.

“We are bringing people together from all walks of life and from different parts of the city,” Hunter says proudly about his job. “Even if we only reach 1 percent, we will have spawned a new generation of stewards who will care about this river and what it means to their lives.”
“I was in tears and it opened my eyes,” Daisy Jackson says, remembering the day a little over a year ago when she learned through a film how Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1968 death in Memphis occurred while he was there supporting sanitation workers who were fighting to get the city to recognize their AFSCME union, Local 1733. “I realized we can get things done if we all stick together.”

Jackson, 50, a family child care provider for three years, says, “I thought I was earning well until I did the math during a meeting with other providers and learned that I was only making $1.88 per hour. Then I thought of other providers who were underpaid and I couldn’t see how they could survive.” Discovering Dr. King’s connection to AFSCME solidified her resolve to sign up for the union.

Jackson joined the 40,000-strong Child Care Providers Together Michigan — a joint effort between AFSCME Council 25 and the United Auto Workers — which last year gained representation through the largest card check in modern history. As a new member, she participated in lobbying activities, demonstrations and home visits in her neighborhood on Detroit’s East Side. Her efforts drew the admiration of neighbors who elected Jackson the Democratic precinct chair. “We got everybody who cares about children to go out and vote for Governor Jennifer Granholm and the Democrats because they oversee the child care budget,” explains Jackson, whose candidates won.
LOBBY DAYS

Iowa
Winning fair share — which would allow unions to charge non-members a fee (in lieu of dues) for the valuable services they receive, such as negotiating contracts and workplace representation — topped Council 61’s 2007 legislative agenda. While the measure passed in the state Senate, unfortunately it did not have enough support to be voted on in the House. Activists have vowed to continue the fight next year. Nonetheless, the council scored major victories, including a one-dollar cigarette tax increase to fund vital state services, a fully funded salary bill for state employees and a measure that prohibits private, for-profit prisons in Iowa.

Maryland
The fight for fair share will continue in Maryland, where nearly 300 activists showed up in full force on March 12 for a massive, statewide “Lobby Night” rally in Annapolis to push the union-building initiative. Members met with legislators to also demand protection of state jobs and improved staffing levels and benefits.

The event was the high point of a sustained, two-month lobbying campaign — one that came on the heels of working families electing more pro-worker, pro-union candidates to the General Assembly and sending AFSCME friend and fair-share-supporter Martin O’Malley (D) to his first term in the governor’s mansion.

AFSCME members turned out like clock work every Monday — showing up weekly from January until the General Assembly adjourned in April. Their efforts paid off. In spite of a tight 2008 budget, the Legislature approved cost-of-living and step increases. They also gave the nod to an employer match of up to $600 when state here we come | Local 2840 (Council 61) members (from left) Celia Robertson and Denise Allan prepare to meet their representatives at the state capitol.

Building a Stronger Maryland | AFSCME Local 1319 (Council 92) Pres. Sheila Hill, a corrections officer, addresses the crowd. Next to her is a sign laying out AFSCME’s top priorities for “Building a Stronger Maryland”: quality public health services, fair compensation for skilled employees, fair share and better security at state prisons. On March 29, Governor O’Malley took steps toward the latter goal by closing the Maryland House of Correction, a 129-year-old, 840-inmate facility that has been the site of repeated violence, including the fatal slayings of two officers.

Photo: Jon Melegrito

IOWA

MARYLAND
When it comes to raising our voices in the halls of power and holding politicians accountable on issues that are vital to working families, no one does it better than AFSCME members. From West Virginia to Washington state, from New York to Iowa, AFSCME activists organized at the grassroots and the capitol to champion adequate funding for public services, improved staffing levels and other critical issues.

employees in the state employee pension system contribute to their deferred-compensation plan.

**New Mexico**
Over 100 Council 18 members descended on the state capitol in Santa Fe on Feb. 27 for Lobby Day—one of the highlights of a legislative session that reaped excellent results for state workers. Contract raises for Council 18 members were fully funded by the Legislature and signed by Gov. Bill Richardson (D). In addition, lawmakers passed an AFSCME-supported tax expenditure bill to increase government transparency. Council 18 was successful in defeating yet another so-called “right to work” bill to undermine unions in the state, and played a key role in passing legislation raising the state’s minimum wage to $7.50 per hour by Jan. 1, 2009.

In spite of the wins, Council 18 is not resting on its laurels and is now preparing for the next legislative session, where one of the main goals is to pass a child care organizing bill—allowing providers to form a union.

**New York**
Lobby Day for AFSCME District Council 1707 took place on March 27 as nearly 150 activists took their message to Albany and the New York State Legislature.

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**New York**
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In addition, members are supporting a bill to combat violence in the workplace, including providing much-needed security staff for day care centers.

**Washington**
Members of the Washington Federation of State Employees (WFSE)/AFSCME Council 28 made their voices heard at the state
The capitol in Olympia during a “Budget Lobbying Blitz.” Foremost: securing full funding for negotiated state employee contracts and improving safety at the state's mental hospitals. Standing 40,000 members strong, WFSE claimed victory in both instances. The state budget will fund pay raises of 3.2 percent as of July and 2 percent in 2008. The Legislature also passed a $3.3-million hospital safety bill, which slated $250,000 for safety equipment, 12 additional food service aides and other needs. In addition, Council 28 won passage of a measure granting bargaining rights for adult family home providers and allowing them to negotiate reimbursement rates, health benefits and training.

**West Virginia**
For 15 consecutive years, members of Council 77 have gathered for Lobby Day, held on the President’s Day holiday, at the state capitol in Charleston. Over the last few months, the council’s members lobbied for a long-sought wage increase. Their sustained grassroots campaign, which culminated on Lobby Day, resulted in the Legislature approving across-the-board pay raises for all of West Virginia’s state workers.

AFSCME members continued to make big strides in April as Gov. Joe Manchin III (D) announced a two-year pilot project allowing some 5,000 workers from different state agencies to “meet and consult” with management to address issues such as staffing, wages and benefits. Since West Virginia does not permit formal collective bargaining, this initiative marks a landmark gain for Council 77 members, granting them a voice to improve working conditions and the services they provide.

**Work Shouldn’t Hurt!** The toll of assaults on staff at Washington state’s mental hospitals — employers of over 2,600 Council 28 members — has grown alarmingly, putting personnel at risk while costing millions in workers’ compensation claims and lost workdays. To raise awareness of their demands for safe staffing and safety equipment, many of the nearly 100 activists at the “Budget Lobbying Blitz” wore bull’s-eyes on their chests and carried signs declaring: “Work Shouldn’t Hurt!”

**Making Their Voices Heard** State Sen. Finance Chair Walt Helmick (D) answers questions from an audience of over 100 AFSCME Council 77 members. Photo: Carolyn Johnson
As public service workers we elect our bosses — the politicians who impact our pay, benefits and working conditions. The year 2008 offers the most talented and diverse field of candidates in years, giving us an historic opportunity to elect a candidate who will fight for working families.

To determine who merits our support, AFSCME has an exhaustive review process to find out: Which candidate has the best record of fighting for America’s working families? Who has stood with our union in contract battles and organizing campaigns? Who will support public services, oppose privatization, fight for universal health care and real retirement security? And who is best positioned to win?

As AFSCME Pres. Gerald W. McEntee has said, “The decision will hinge on the candidate’s record, position on the issues, the viability of their campaign, and their ability to inspire and motivate our members.”

We took the first step in the review/endorsement process on Feb. 21, by hosting the nation’s first Presidential Candidates Forum in Carson City, Nev., providing members with a first-hand look at candidates’ views on the issues. You can watch the forum by going to afscme.org.

**A Bottom-Up Process**

Member participation will be key, with opinions being collected via local union meetings, polling and the Internet. A special 2008 election website will debut this summer.

In June, candidates will address more than 2,000 leaders and activists as they meet in Washington, D.C., for AFSCME’s National Leadership Conference and fine tune plans to build a volunteer member army to take back the White House.

The entire process will be guided by a Presidential Search Committee made up of AFSCME leaders who will meet individually with Republican and Democratic candidates and review their records and positions on the issues. The committee will also suggest next steps, which could include an endorsement recommendation to the International Executive Board.
Visit the magazine’s home on the web for up-to-the minute updates about AFSCME victories and news on critical issues, or to write a letter to the editor or submit your question to Ask AFSCME.

Offering hour-long, online training modules on health care reform; local union treasurers’ classes; effective communications; orientation to AFSCME; and Power to Win — plus new workshops on organizing; grassroots legislative action; disciplinary hearings; and education economics. For more, visit www.afscme.org/academy.

Sign up to become an AFSCME e-Activist and make your voice heard on affordable health care, retirement security and more.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. lost his life in Memphis, Tenn., while supporting sanitation workers in their fight to get recognition of their AFSCME union, Local 1733. Today, the AFSCME International Union, affiliates, members, friends and supporters are making tax-deductible donations to help build the memorial to Dr. King on the National Mall. Log on and find out how to make your contribution today!

Get special deals on products and services, like the Union Plus Auto Buying Service — offering no hassle, no haggle purchases of new and used cars and trucks — and the Union Plus Premier Motor Club.
Salt Lake City

UTAH

UTAH DISPATCHERS RECOGNIZED FOR COMPOSURE DURING SHOOTING

When a gunman opened fire on shoppers at the Trolley Square Mall near downtown Feb. 12, AFSCME members answered the flood of 911 calls that came in to police and fire department switchboards. For staying calm “under fire,” the dispatchers were honored by the City Council at a ceremony 10 days after the incident.

Lyn Creswell, the city’s chief administrative officer, praised about a dozen members of Utah Public Employees Local 1004 — police and fire dispatchers — for their “quiet, competent voices that provided sanity and safety” during the shooting, which left five dead and four wounded by a heavily armed 18 year old.

The frantic phone calls began about 6:40 p.m. Sue Fleck, one of nine police dispatchers on duty at the time, saw the phone lines light up. Among other callers, Fleck spoke to a panicked woman who was hiding out in a store closet with five others, including a child, and wanted to know what was happening. As calmly as she could, Fleck told her to stay where she was, and if they could, to lock down the store.

Fleck could hear gunshots in the background.

Within minutes of the first 911 call, the shooter was killed in a hail of bullets from law enforcement officers.

The police and fire dispatchers were praised for keeping their cool while urging desperate callers to stay composed as well. “It’s just our job,” says Fleck. “I don’t look at us as heroes.” Still, she adds, “I was so proud of everybody — how we became a team” in the midst of a crisis.

Top, left to right: Fire Dispatch Operations Manager Scott Freitag (white shirt), dispatcher Connie Kelson, fire dispatcher Shahara Clark, Fire Dispatch Supervisor Laurie Wilson-Bell, fire dispatcher Shawna Smith and the city’s Chief Administrative Officer, Lyn Creswell.

Bottom, left to right: Police Dispatch Operations Manager RoxAnn Cheever, police dispatcher Sue Fleck, Chief of Police Chris Burbank (standing behind Fleck) and dispatchers: Corby Beauchaine, David Wagstaff (behind Beauchaine), Brandon England, JoAnn Ryan, Trynktee Peat, Cortney Haggerty (standing behind Peat), Ilias Politis (also the local’s steward), and the city’s Chief Administrative Officer Lyn Creswell.

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

**California**
In the city of San Jose, 148 classified employees of the Oak Grove School District — including custodians, gardeners, bus drivers and clerical workers — joined Council 57.

**Connecticut**
A 25-member unit of police officers in the Town of Suffield voted unanimously to leave their existing union to join Council 15.

**Montana**
In Bozeman, 24 emergency operators employed by the Gallatin County Dispatch joined Council 9.

**New York**
More than 300 employees of the MetroPlus HMO of the city’s Health and Hospitals Corporation voted for DC 37 representation. The sales representatives and assistants handle applications by Medicaid recipients and others who use the HMO. They become the newest members of Local 1549, an 18,000-member local that already represents clerical and administrative employees at MetroPlus, among others.

**Ohio**
Twenty-three case workers employed by the Scioto County Children Services Board of Directors voted to join Local 2501 (Council 8). The local also represents more than 100 employees of the Scioto County Department of Job and Family Services.

**Washington**
Seventeen facility service workers at the University of Washington’s Bothell campus will be represented by Local 1488 (Council 28).

Nearly 800 Kaiser Permanente nurses working at some 200 locations throughout Southern California used a process known as “majority sign-up” to join AFSCME affiliate United Nurses Associations of California (UNAC)/UHCP/NUHHCE. Their success offers more proof for why passage of the Employee Free Choice Act — legislation that would protect workers’ rights to form unions without employer intimidation — is critical.

The employees — including certified nurse midwives, case managers, discharge planners and nurse educators — joined 10,000 other Kaiser Permanente nurses who have become UNAC members since the 1970s.

Kaiser’s management agreed to remain neutral during the nurses’ campaign to organize through majority sign-up. Also known as “card check,” the procedure allowed the nurses to gain recognition of their union once a majority had signed cards indicating they wanted one. It was the same system employed during Kaiser organizing drives since 1997, and comes on the heels of passage of the Employee Free Choice Act in the U.S. House of Representatives. The bill, now pending in the Senate, would level the playing field between private-sector workers and their employers during efforts to build a union.

“I’m overjoyed,” says Frank Schubert, RN, who works in centralized outpatient utilization management. “The union will help us have a voice to be more effective patient advocates.”

“Now that 800 more nurses at Kaiser Permanente have joined UNAC/UHCP, the voices of health care professionals are even stronger and we can have an even bigger role in helping Kaiser Permanente be the best place to get care and to work,” adds Kathy J. Sackman, RN, UNAC/UHCP president and an AFSCME International vice president.
PENNSYLVANIA

HELPING OUR TROOPS: PUBLIC EMPLOYEES MAKE IT PERSONAL

When it comes to giving a helping hand, the members of Local 2326 (Pennsylvania Council 85) can stand proud: Their successful “Support Your Troops” project shows public employees not only care about their community, they put that care into action.

The local, which represents some 185 state workers — mostly employees of Clarion University — collected a bulging pickup-truckload of various toiletries and drink mixes. The local branch of Veterans of Foreign Wars, which created the list of items needed by soldiers who hail from Clarion County and surrounding areas, volunteered to ship parcels to Iraq, Afghanistan and Korea.

The brainstorm for the project came from custodian Diane Whitton, whose son, Billy, 21, is an Abrams tank repairman scheduled to serve in Iraq this year. Last December, he came home with a friend during leave from his Army base in California. “I was just so proud of both of them,” Diane says, and decided right then to start a collection drive. She brought her idea to the attention of Anita Lahr, president of Local 2326. The union quickly agreed to sponsor the drive.

Each item received a sticker identifying the union local and a statement of AFSCME’s support. Lahr, a clerk typist for the university’s biology department, says the “very successful” effort, which will expand to include donated phone cards, demonstrates that “we have a love for our state, country and our hometown — and that public employees do things beyond our work to help our country and our communities.”

MINNESOTA

UPDATE: WALKER METHODIST WORKERS WIN!

Nearly four years after voting to join Council 5, LPNs and other employees at Walker Methodist Health Center in Minneapolis have their AFSCME union.

Walker’s LPNs, nursing assistants, housekeepers, maintenance, laundry and dietary workers cast their votes in two separate elections in 2003, but the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) sealed the ballots after management of Minnesota’s largest nursing home appealed. In late April and early May, the NLRB finally certified both votes, opening the door to a first contract for all 550 workers represented by Council 5.

LPN Tracy Plante, whose story was featured in the last edition of AFSCME WORKS, says Walker’s employees finally can celebrate “because we know that our votes count, and we will have a powerful voice to improve patient care.”

Washington DC

FIRST LAW ENFORCEMENT CONFERENCE

AFSCME’s first-ever law enforcement conference will be held Sept. 5-7 in Washington, D.C., at the same time as AFSCME’s biennial Corrections Congress. Both meetings will be at the Hyatt Regency Washington on Capitol Hill. The events will be separate, but attendees will join together for one day to lobby for a bill (H.R. 980) that would require all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, to provide a mechanism for collective bargaining rights for all police, firefighters, correctional officers and EMTs.

More information, including a registration form, will be available soon on afscme.org.

Supporting the Troops
Clarion University of Pennsylvania employees — members of Local 2326 (Council 85) — help to provide drink mixes, toiletries and more to American soldiers overseas. Participants include from left: Jan Edmonds, Anita Lahr and Diane Whitton; second row: Trish Karg and Marcy Schlueter; third row: Scott Stewart and Bill Smith; fourth row: Ron Cypert and Deb Johnston.

United in Victory
After years of hard work to form a union with Council 5, Walker Methodist Health Center staff will now have a voice at the table. Photo: Jennifer Lovaasen/Council 5
Joseph Rugola, executive director of the Ohio Association of Public School Employees (OAPSE)/AFSCME Local 4 and an International vice president, was recently elected to the top post of the Ohio AFL-CIO following the April 27 retirement of Pres. Bill Burga.

“We’re proud of what the labor movement has accomplished in our state, notably the election of Governor Ted Strickland [D] along with other pro-working family candidates, and our successful effort last fall to bump the minimum wage from $5.15 per hour to $8.85,” Rugola says. “I intend to build on Bill Burga’s achievements and to keep on fighting for the rights of working families.”

Under Rugola’s leadership, OAPSE has grown from over 25,000 members to more than 38,000 — one of the most successful organizing records in the labor movement today. Considered one of Ohio’s most vocal and effective advocates against privatization and for strong public education (waging battles against school vouchers), public libraries and Head Start programs, Rugola is widely praised for his efforts on behalf of public school students. He has also represented OAPSE on a number of coalitions addressing public education issues.

Rugola was elected OAPSE executive director in 1988, after 10 years of OAPSE field experience as a representative and organizer.

There seems to be no shortage of hired guns willing to criticize public workers and public services. Recently, Council 4 took to the television airwaves and fought back with their “Proud to Serve You” ad campaign.

The spots ran in February and March throughout most of the state. They were made in response to Republican Gov. M. Jodi Rell’s veto of a bill intended to combat corrupt privatization by establishing rigorous standards for state agencies that want to dole out contracts. The commercials presented the flip side of privatization: hard-working public employees who are accountable for their job performance every day.

“This commercial highlights the positive contribution public service workers make in a variety of crucial jobs,” says Council 4 Exec. Dir. Sal Luciano, who is also an International vice president. “Proponents of privatization may paint a negative picture of public service workers, but the fact is that our members are hard working, dedicated and efficient.”

The effort follows the council’s 2005 multi-media campaign called “Privatization Equals Corruption,” which fought the outsourcing of public services and Social Security.
WOMEN’S MUSEUM HONORS ROBERTS

DC 37 Exec. Dir. Lillian Roberts is among a distinguished group of women recognized this year by the National Museum of Women in the Arts — the only museum in the world dedicated to women artists. As part of its 20th anniversary, the museum will host several Legacies of Women celebrations, which will include the “Salute to Women’s Leadership” CD-ROM featuring women who have led the way in fields beyond the arts. The CD-ROM will serve as a teaching tool for women and girls.

“I was proud that Lillian will be part of this important project. Now, others will know the difference she has made in our union and in our nation,” says President McEntee.

Roberts also was one of six individuals recently honored by U.S. Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) at the senator’s annual African American Heritage Celebration, held in New York. Roberts was cited for her dedication to her union and DC 37’s successful launch of the Municipal Employees Housing Program, which provides the union’s members with housing assistance.

YOUNG PEOPLE: AFSCME’S ‘NEXT WAVE’

Securing the future of tomorrow’s working families depends on nurturing the young leaders and activists of today. That’s why Oregon Council 75 has launched an innovative new program designed to increase union activism among its young members by developing their political, legislative and organizing skills.

Called “The AFSCME Northwest Next Wave Project,” the initiative is already demonstrating success. In April, about 15 members, all 35 years or younger, were awarded scholarships to attend — as non-voting guests — the council’s biennial convention in Bend. There, they (and 10 other young member delegates) conducted the first meeting of the statewide Next Wave Committee, electing eight regional co-chairs and two lead chairpersons.

With more AFSCME activists approaching retirement, building the union’s strength among young members is increasingly important, and the Next Wave project will also work to increase the youthful members’ participation at affiliate conventions and the 2008 International Convention.

Support for this new effort is on the rise: Plans are underway to expand the Next Wave Project in the northwest, with the Washington Federation of State Employees/AFSCME Council 28 next in line to do so.

ATTENTION SEPT. 11 VOLUNTEERS!

If you traveled from outside New York state to volunteer at the World Trade Center disaster site (or at nearby locations such as the Staten Island landfill), you should register with the New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health to qualify for 9/11-related workers’ compensation. Even if you are healthy now, you must register by Aug. 14, 2007, to be eligible should you develop an ailment in the future that is demonstrated to be linked to exposure to conditions at Ground Zero. For details, go to www.nycohs.org, or call 1-866-WTC-2556 to request a form.
Hundreds of University of California students, workers and members of AFSCME Local 3299 rallied in March to demand that some 500 contracted-out food service workers at the UC Davis campus be hired as full-time employees. The workers, employed by Sodexho, receive less pay and fewer benefits than their university-employed counterparts at other UC campuses. “People know that I work hard at the university,” says Lidia Uribe, a cook with seven years of service. “What they don’t understand is that I don’t work for UC. But I deserve to.” Local 3299, which has grown by an impressive 2,000 members just since January, represents service and patient care workers throughout the 10 campuses and five medical centers that constitute the statewide UC system.

Photo: Stacey J. Miller/Woodland Daily Democrat