AFSCME Works

The Magazine of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO

AFSCME’s Edge

Rooted in History. Redefining Our Future.

PAGE 12
The heart of a lion. That’s how former Pres. Bill Clinton described AFSCME Pres. Gerald W. McEntee and indeed, he is fearless. As the leader of AFSCME for 31 years and a member for 56, he marched this union through many challenges and dedicated his life to defending public workers. But he didn’t stop there.

He led the struggle for equal pay for women, demanded an end to South African apartheid, fought Social Security privatization and helped win health care coverage for all Americans.

President McEntee spoke up for what is right and for those who could not speak up for themselves, no matter how dangerous or unpopular the fight. (See commemorative poster at center for more details.)

President McEntee: The 1.6 million members of AFSCME thank you for your tireless commitment to improving the lives of working families.

Thank you,
President McEntee
What Public Service Workers Really Do

The next time a politician tries to blame a public service worker for the country’s economic meltdown — stand tall, speak up, be proud of the work you do!

Download your own copy of this poster, which plays on a popular Internet joke called “What I Really Do” at AFSCME.org/whatireallydo

Ron Burgundy for President?

It’s almost painful to watch. Mitt Romney, candidate of the 1 percent, tries to win votes and show he can relate to everyday folks by saying, “The trees are the right height. . . . I like seeing the lakes. . . . I love cars.”

That sounded awfully familiar to us. Is Mitt taking a page out of the Ron Burgundy “Anchorman” playbook?

See this and other videos at YouTube.com/AFSCME
The Good Fight

“"It has been a privilege to stand with you all these years.""

Sitting down to pen my last column for *AFSCME WORKS*, I am reminded of my father. A trash collector and union leader, he taught me that nothing mattered more than solidarity. He showed me that a good cause was always worth a good fight.

In the 1960s, I saw a good cause: 75,000 public service workers in Pennsylvania without a union. I led those workers in a good fight. We won the right to bargain collectively. We won fairness for workers.

**Bigger Fights, Bigger Wins**

But then as now, I knew that AFSCME always builds towards bigger fights, bigger wins.

The 1994 midterm elections were an all-out bloodbath. Republicans took control of the House and Senate, determined to gut Medicaid and Medicare. We fought the good fight. We stopped the privatization of health care services that seniors and low-income families rely on. And then we shook up the AFL-CIO, which desperately needed a sea change.

In 2005, Pres. George W. Bush announced his devastating plan to privatize Social Security. Again, we fought the good fight. We saved Social Security. Out of that fight, with an eye towards building a stronger organization, our Power To Win plan was born.

Though Power To Win gave us several years of powerful victories, we took a hit in the 2010 midterms. The right took back the House, 11 governorships and came after us. Like before, we made a plan — this time with our groundbreaking Battleground State Partnerships — and fought to victories in Wisconsin, Ohio, Florida and elsewhere.

**Tribute to the People**

These defining moments in AFSCME’s 75-year history are a tribute to the people who made them happen: people like you. You have revitalized this movement, this country. You have reaffirmed the meaning of my father’s lesson on solidarity, and it has been a privilege to stand with you all these years.

On the eve of my retirement as president of our great union, I can look back with pride on all we’ve done to improve the lives of working Americans.

Our work is far from finished. Our accomplishments, our achievements are at risk. Corporate-backed politicians are trying to steal what we have fought for.

Even as we face our fiercest foes, I am not worried. You have proven that even in the face of the worst, you always give your best. Just as I knew AFSCME was meant for bigger, for better, back in the 1960s, I know that we are gearing up for the biggest wins we’ve seen in 2012 and beyond. Pulling together as one, I have no doubt that we will prevail.

Thank you, sisters and brothers, for your support, your commitment, your fight during the 56 years I have been a member of AFSCME and the 31 years I have had the honor of serving as president. You are just getting started. While leaders come and go, because of people like you, our union stays and stays and stays.

Gerald W. McEntee
President
We’ve seen attacks against public services and union members intensify during the past year. Corporate-backed politicians continue to make us pay for state and local budget crises we didn’t create. They claim our members’ pay and pensions are the causes of the problems. But the real problems are the governors, mayors, state legislators and all the others who stubbornly refuse to make the richest Americans pay their fair share.

Looking for politicians like Rick Snyder in Michigan or Jan Brewer in Arizona to see the light is like waiting on a cat to bark. So we’re fighting hard and finding partners across the country. We haven’t won all the battles — but we’ve beaten the odds. (See “Bracing for Battle,” P. 21.) Through it all, our solidarity has encouraged working people to demand their rights. Our successes — and even our short-term losses — are inspiring us to keep standing up and fighting back.

Showing Our Strength

We defeated Florida Gov. Rick Scott’s plan to privatize 27 prison facilities. Had we failed, he would have come after every other public service. We did it by working with both Republican and Democratic legislators. Our members persuaded lawmakers that Scott’s plan wouldn’t save money and might cost lives.

In New York, even though Gov. Andrew Cuomo won a partial victory on pension reform, we mitigated some of the worst aspects of his proposal. Cuomo won legislative approval to force workers to contribute even more to their pensions, but we defeated his effort to create a defined contribution plan, similar to a risky 401(k), for new union employees.

That would have placed workers’ future in the hands of the same Wall Street firms that crashed our economy.

We came together, in solidarity, like never before. We showed our strength.

Writing Our Story

As President McEntee and I emphasize in our book, The Main Street Moment (See P. 10), we’ve got to move the fight beyond our union by building coalitions.

In the November elections, we must work to defeat the anti-worker politicians de-funding and privatizing public services, destroying retirement security and weakening workers’ rights, whether they’re in the statehouse or have their sights set on the White House.

Most of all we must remember — especially as we celebrate our 75th Anniversary — that we’ve faced challenges in every era. And each time, we’ve risen to those challenges. That’s not just the AFSCME story of yesterday. That’s the AFSCME story of today, and it will be our next chapter.
Who Are the 1 Percent?
We’re 99 Percent Sure
It’s Not Us

The growing divide between the wealthiest Americans and the rest of us has often been described as a gap between the ‘1 Percent’ and the ‘99 Percent.’ Here’s a look at who those folks really are.

How many are there?
1.4 Million

Average adjusted gross income:
$1.14 million in 2008

SOURCE: ECONOMIC POLICY INSTITUTE

VITAL STATS

86 Million Served Under Obamacare
That’s how many have already benefitted from the free, preventative services — such as cancer and diabetes screenings, flu shots and wellness visits for women, children and seniors — enacted last year by President Obama’s Affordable Care Act. No wonder so many people are proudly proclaiming, “I love Obamacare!”

SOURCE: THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

What if GE paid its fair share in taxes?

Working families pay our fair share of taxes every April while the ultra-wealthy and large corporations are paying less and less. In fact, many outsized firms pay nothing at all, as General Electric famously managed to do in 2010, despite showing $10.5 billion in profits.

It’s an outrage. And it got us wondering, if GE paid its fair share in taxes like the rest of us, what could our communities do with the $2.67 billion in lost revenue?

We could pay wages for these public service workers...

- 55,558 Firefighters
- 52,706 Librarians
- 39,179 Registered nurses
- 55,620 Police and sheriff’s patrol officers
- 94,996 School bus drivers
- 106,641 Teachers assistants

Visit AFSCME.org/taxday
Poll: The Rich Should Pay Their Fair Share

The public is alarmed by severe economic inequality in America. A Washington Post-ABC News poll this winter reveals Americans are ready to see the wealthy pay their fair share in taxes. They are also troubled by Republican Presidential candidate Mitt Romney’s revelation that he pays 13 percent in taxes. Here are the five takeaways:

68 percent say the current U.S. tax system is stacked in favor of the wealthy.

72 percent support raising taxes on those with incomes higher than $1 million annually.

36 By a 36-point margin, those polled say Romney does not pay his fair share of taxes. Nearly half of Republicans polled also agree with that statement.

10 By a 10-point margin, President Obama leads Romney when asked who they trust to do a better job on handling taxes.

55 Asked who they trust to “protect the middle class,” President Obama led Romney by 55 percent to 37 percent.

SOURCE: WASHINGTON POST-ABC NEWS POLL

To read these reports and stats, visit AFSCME.org/fyi
From state to state, workers are joining AFSCME for a stronger voice on the job

**FLORIDA**

Building a union in ordinary times is tough enough. But the remarkable growth of Miami-Dade County Florida Employees Local 199 (Council 79) is proof that you can build a union even in the face of adversity. In fact, workers sought to join the union — representing 9,000 workers in Miami-Dade — because of the adversity.

Last summer, the local set a membership goal of 60 percent, from a starting point of 21 percent. It now approaches 32 percent — more than 1,000 new members. One of the volunteer member organizers responsible for that success is Mario Ambrose, 51, a record specialist with the Miami-Dade County Clerk of the Courts, as well as a steward and contract negotiating team member for Local 199.

Ambrose says he was “reared to believe that the union is one of the most important entities in a community,” and was eager to learn about organizing and determined to build the union’s strength.

Meeting with workers at their homes, Ambrose (and other organizers) made their case. “What I emphasized is that it’s a numbers game,” he said. “They don’t take us seriously because we don’t have the numbers. We need members to be able to fight.”

Fighting is exactly what they did. Members crowded the county commission budget hearings last year and reached out to the community to fight for public services. Also, Local 199’s contract was coming up for renegotiation.

Members ratified a new three-year contract in January. Although it contains some compromises, the union was ultimately able to preserve the bulk of the cost-of-living adjustment received last summer. It also maintains merit and longevity pay.

Still, workers continue to join Local 199. “They understand it’s going to take a union to fight, not a just a work unit,” says Ambrose.

Workers are also organizing with AFSCME in other states. Here is a list of some recent victories:

**ILLINOIS**

One-hundred-and-seventy-five employees of the Village of Schaumburg have joined Council 31. Also joining the council: 55 employees of the State Board of Elections, through the state’s majority interest petition process; 25 employees at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago, which agreed to voluntary recognition of the new AFSCME members; and 25 employees at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana.

**MASSACHUSETTS**

Forty-two bus drivers, monitors and mechanics employed by First Student in Falmouth recently joined Council 93.

**NEW HAMPSHIRE**

Twenty-seven public works and recycling department employees of the Town of Hooksett voted overwhelmingly to form a union with Council 93.

**NEW MEXICO**

Eighty corrections officers at the Bernalillo County Juvenile Detention Center have joined Council 18. Also gaining Council 18 representation: 34 court specialists at the Bernalillo County Courthouse, 20 corrections officers at Valencia County Detention Center and 15 dispatchers at the Grant County Regional Dispatch Authority.

**NEW YORK**

One hundred and eighty-eight full- and part-time employees of Mastics-Moriches-Shirley Community Library on Long Island have joined Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA)/AFSCME Local 1000. Also joining CSEA: 70 Sodexo food service employees who work at Mount Saint Mary College. Voting overwhelmingly to join DC 1707 were 100 employees of Episcopal Social Services, which provides services to the developmentally disabled.

**WASHINGTON**

One-hundred and forty-two employees of home care service provider Kitsap Tenant Support Services have joined Council 28, overcoming a vicious anti-union campaign that included the firing of eight workers.
Nearly 5,000 AFSCME delegates and guests will gather June 18–22 in Los Angeles to set the union’s course for the next two years at the 40th International Convention. The week’s events will include a special celebration of AFSCME’s 75th Anniversary.

AFSCME members will get fired up at the Convention to re-elect Pres. Barack Obama, to fight legislative battles in the states where workers’ rights are threatened and to hold the pro-worker majority in the U.S. Senate and take back the U.S. House of Representatives. They will also prepare to campaign to ensure labor-friendly majorities in various state legislatures and in Puerto Rico. AFSCME activists will be in the City of Angels showing their determination to fight like never before for worker rights. Delegates will elect a new leader to succeed Pres. Gerald W. McEntee, who has announced he is retiring after 31 years at the helm of the union.

Registration
Registration for delegates and alternates opens Saturday, June 16 at 1 p.m. and closes at 1 p.m. on Tuesday, June 19.

Reception
A delegates’ reception will be held Sunday, June 17, at the JW Marriott Los Angeles at L.A. Live from 6 to 8:30 p.m.

Retirees Council
AFSCME’s Retirees Council will meet June 16–17, the weekend before the Convention opens.

Convention Delegates
February 19 was the earliest date for the election of Convention delegates, except for members of affiliates that meet less than four times a year. This does not apply to any elected officer serving as an automatic delegate.

Credentials
Regular credentials must be postmarked no later than May 29. Credentials postmarked after that date are considered irregular, and those delegates will not be included in the initial Report of the Credentials Committee. They will be included in any reports after the Convention votes to seat them.

Resolutions/Constitutional Amendments
Resolutions and Constitutional Amendments should be sent to the International Secretary-Treasurer and must be postmarked no later than May 29, 2012. Resolutions and Constitutional Amendments not postmarked by this date may only be considered after a two-thirds consenting vote of the Convention.

Sector Caucuses: “Turning the Tide in 2012”
On Tuesday morning, in 21 simultaneous caucuses, AFSCME members from across the country who do the same work will come together to talk about the biggest issues they face on the job. We’ll talk about what’s at stake in 2012. We’ll brainstorm about how to get co-workers to join with you in “turning the tide.”

Workshops
Workshops will be held on Sunday, June 17 from 1:30 – 3 p.m., and Monday June 18 from 2 – 3:30 p.m. Select workshops will be offered in Spanish.

Orientation
A briefing for first-time delegates and alternates will be held in both English and Spanish on Sunday, June 17 from 3:30 – 5 p.m.

Convention App
This year AFSCME will release the first-ever Convention app for smartphones and tablets. Available for both iOS (iPhone, iPad) and Android devices, the app will give attendees instant access to schedule changes, news and alerts, area maps, transportation information, videos and more. Instructions for downloading the app will be available on the Convention website at AFSCME.org/convention.

AFSCME PEOPLE Photo Booth
Stop by any day during the Convention and pose for your best shot with family, friends and members of your delegation. Have some fun capturing memories and taking home photo souvenirs of this historic event.

Check the AFSCME Daily publication at Convention or the AFSCME website, AFSCME.org/convention for updates, list of sector caucuses, workshop descriptions and more details.
AFSCME’s McEntee and Saunders Release Book This Spring

The Main Street Moment: Fighting Back to Save the American Dream offers searing look at income inequality

BY KOREY HARTWICH

Unprecedented attacks on workers’ rights. Growing income inequality. In a new book out this spring, AFSCME Pres. Gerald McEntee and Sec.-Treas. Lee Saunders examine these issues and provide a roadmap to economic justice. Their thesis: When unions are strong, America is strong.

In The Main Street Moment: Fighting Back to Save the American Dream, McEntee and Saunders tell the stories of individual members nationwide who are fighting the attacks by politicians and the 1 percent. They write: “We stand at a crossroads. We can either continue down the path of greater income inequality, ceding our voices and our democracy to the wealthy and the powerful. Or we can fight back. That is what men and women across America have chosen to do to make this Main Street’s moment. They chose to fight and to build a better future—for themselves, for their communities, and for this country that we love. We have written this book to enlist even more Americans in the struggle to save the soul of our nation and return power once again to the people. We know that, together, we can win this fight.”

Deeply moving and eye-opening, The Main Street Moment examines the central role unions play in protecting all Americans against widespread economic collapse.

Profits from the sale of the book, published by Nation Books, will go to the AFSCME Fallen Heroes Fund, which provides emergency relief and immediate assistance to members who are the victims of natural disasters and other tragedies.

Purchase the book at the AFSCME Web Store (AFSCME.org/store) or in bookstores.

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LI JUNG CHAN

**AFSCME PEOPLE**

Donor

ASSISTANT TEACHER
New York City
DC 1707, Local 205

I have been a public service worker for 23 years. The union works for the members’ benefit. We need that representation to stand up for us. You can’t fight city hall alone as effectively as doing it as a group. With the union we have collective bargaining, and everything is binding and written down. There is no question what our rights are and what we work for. It’s important that we have that financial ability to help elect leaders in our country who look out for us. That is our goal. If we just sit and sulk, we’ll never get anywhere. We need to deliver that message.

FLOYD WRIGHT

**RETIRED WATER TREATMENT PLANT OPERATOR**, Gallipolis, Ohio
Vice President, AFSCME Retiree Subchapter 102

**Why did you get involved in the union?**

When I first came on the job in 1979 we didn’t have a union and because of that we didn’t have a voice. But we fought hard and organized in 1984 after the governor signed the collective bargaining law in 1983. We won our representation election with Council 8 in a nearly unanimous vote, and I served as the first president of Local 1316, Gallipolis City Employees.

**In 2001, something unusual happened. Tell us about that.**

After the 2000 Census, Gallipolis lost its city status because of a population dip. Under Ohio law, villages are not required to recognize unions, and Gallipolis opted out when our contract expired in 2001. But I still kept active with AFSCME. As a retiree, I contribute to AFSCME PEOPLE. I was active in the fight against Senate Bill 5.

**Why do you think it’s important to still be involved in the union?**

I retired in July 2011 after 32 years. I still consider myself part of the union family and I want to help out as much as possible. Working union members may not have as much time to get involved, but we retirees do. What we do now not only affects us retirees, but also current and future workers.

MIKE RIDER **NEXT WAVE MEMBER**

CODE ENFORCEMENT OFFICER, Tulsa, Okla., Local 1180

**How did you get involved in the union?**

I started as a 911 dispatcher and was real happy when I got the job. But when I started, I saw employees who were exhausted and forced to do mandatory overtime. We tried employee advisory committees to get some solutions, but nothing happened. We lobbied successfully to get the city to change an ordinance allowing 911 employees to unionize.

**What do you consider to be important about the union?**

We have collective bargaining. We have our rights. We made some major changes, such as getting rid of forced overtime and getting the city to pay double time whenever anyone works overtime. We have been able to show the workers that the union was the solution.

**How do you encourage other young workers to join the union?**

First, I educate them on the history. I tell them this didn’t happen overnight. Education is a big component. We lay out the facts and show them that the way to real change is through the union, through collective action.

To find out how to become a part of AFSCME’s Next Wave, for members 35 and younger, go to [AFSCME.org/nextwave](http://AFSCME.org/nextwave).
AFSCME’s Edge

Rooted in history. Redefining our future.

BY CLYDE WEISS AND KATE CHILDS GRAHAM

There’s an edge to AFSCME these days. True, we are rooted in 75 years of history. But in big ways and small, unprecedented attacks have AFSCME members from coast to coast standing up in solidarity and doing things differently.

We’re using new technology and reaching beyond traditional borders to organize. We’re building unprecedented coalitions to make sure we mobilize an army of activists ahead of elections and ballot initiatives. At boot-camp style media trainings, we’re helping our members develop their stories of public service for TV, radio and news interviews — to make them prominent in the national conversation about labor. We’re using YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, texting and e-mail alerts to quickly get in front of the public with powerful, smart and viral messages about the work we do and the politicians who just don’t get it. And, by expanding our outreach to our youngest members — AFSCME’s Next Wave — we are solidifying our commitment to the next 75 years of workers.

Some people think unions are a thing of the past. AFSCME is proving them wrong. Here’s how.

ORGANIZING
Crossing Boundaries to Win Big

In the coming weeks and months, AFSCME is piloting a new program that combines our organizing work with innovative touchscreen tablet technology. Using handheld devices, members in Wisconsin can sign a union card or a petition right on the screen. Their information goes into a master database, which enhances both privacy protection and data collection. If they think a co-worker might be interested in union membership, organizers can pull up a list of their colleagues with a swipe of the screen and note that tip. If there’s a great video to show them about the benefits of unions or the attacks we face, YouTube is only a click away.

We’re traveling 3,000 miles, from the beating heart of New York City to the mountains of northern California, to help organize new members of AFSCME.

A group of uniformed EMTs and paramedics from the New York City Fire Department traveled to California this winter and successfully helped organize 260 paramedics, EMTs and vehicle supply technicians who work for Rural Metro Ambulance in Santa Clara County, Calif.

These men and women, known as Volunteer Member Organizers (VMOs), spoke with their California counterparts about their own experiences with AFSCME,
and made the case for joining United EMS Workers – a family of 20,000. The first task for the VMOs from the Big Apple: Dispel misconceptions. A key concern was that a union that represented municipal workers would not relate to private-sector employees’ needs.

“They thought we didn’t have much to worry about,” said Jose E. Gonzalez, a member of Uniformed EMS Officers Union/AFSCME Local 3621 (DC 37). “But we explained to them it didn’t matter — that we all do the same things. What’s important is to have representation. That’s where we started telling them our experiences.”

“They talked to us on a person-to-person level — that there was no difference between us,” said Santa Clara paramedic Samantha Tennison. “They absolutely made it crystal clear we do the same job, regardless of who we work for.”

In turn, Rural Metro workers relayed to the New Yorkers their own concerns about work conditions and frustrated career ambitions.

“It seemed like they had no future, no career ladder, no job security,” said Oren Barzilay, an executive board member of Uniformed EMTs, Paramedics & Fire Inspectors F.D.N.Y/AFSCME Local 2507 (DC 37).

“When I came to EMS in 1995, we had no future here, either,” Barzilay said. But that changed as their union grew stronger through member activism. “We’ve made historical changes, not just for us, but nationally. EMS is now a career. We’ve been able to gain job security, health benefits, and a pension. I sat down with Samantha and explained that all these things we had were achieved not because we were special, but because we were committed to improving our work conditions.”

Tennison liked what she heard. “It was really exciting to see just what they were able to do in New York — to transform their job into a profession.” With her East Coast teammates by her side 12 to 14 hours a day, she and other Rural Metro workers began spreading the gospel.

When the vote was tallied in February it was overwhelming: United EMS Workers/AFSCME Local 4911 was born. Nobody voted against joining the union.

“I cried,” Tennison said. Barzilay adds, “We were both crying actually.”

Less than a month later, their victory was repeated in another Northern California county when 140 paramedics, EMTs, dispatchers, and supply service technicians at Medic Ambulance in Solano County voted in droves to become part of the new AFSCME union.

**POLITICAL ACTION**

**We’ve Got an App for That**

A different type of coalition building is catching fire in other parts of the country. The newly formed We Are Ohio and We Are Wisconsin coalitions brought AFSCME members together in the past year not just with their own colleagues, but with other union members and non-union community members. We built coalitions that reached beyond labor and fought under one umbrella for worker justice like never before.

Rocky Jolly, Local 11 member and president of Chapter 2529, was a part of We Are Ohio. From phone banking to data entry, Jolly did it all and, through it all, employed...
We Are Ohio’s boots-on-the-ground attitude to topple Gov. John Kasich’s anti-worker Senate Bill 5. When it came to political action, Jolly said, “We Are Ohio was on top of it.”

The coalition “was one of the greatest things I have seen as far as collaboration, of us all coming together in a new way,” Jolly said. “We have to keep that unity and solidarity to keep fighting the battles we’ve got to fight.” Not only did these coalitions help unions pool our resources and streamline our message, they “ignited our own members to become more active.”

And the coalition building expanded nationally last year. AFSCME partnered with the United States Student Association to build the student movement in Michigan, New Jersey and Colorado. Our partnership helped bolster USSA’s numbers, to better fight the attacks that affect all of us, issues such as education funding and voter rights.

To sway federal policymakers on legislation like Rep. Paul Ryan’s anti-working family budget plan and the payroll tax cut, AFSCME is using a trailblazing hotline system to make it easy and efficient for members to get in touch with their representatives. With this system, AFSCME members can call an 800 number, punch in their home zip code, hear a few points on the issue and get patched directly through to their legislator’s office. We’ve got an unlimited number of lines so we can more efficiently mobilize members by issue and constituency. For instance, we have a dedicated line for retirees to call on Medicare, Social Security and other retirement issues. And after a call is made, AFSCME tracks it to see how many calls have been made to each office.

For state-level political action, AFSCME developed a smartphone app to make it quick and simple for members to contact their state legislators. With the app, all members have to do is type in their address and with a tap, they can send an e-mail or call their legislator. In places like Wisconsin, Ohio, New York and Florida, this app and the strategy behind it has given us a winning edge.

COMMUNICATIONS
A Reality Show Worth Watching

Before news mixed with opinion and traveled at the speed of a tweet, the face and voice of public workers was that of your next-door neighbor, your trash collector, the person who looked after your children. Now, corporate-backed politicians and pundits scream the loud-
We have to keep that unity and solidarity to keep fighting the battles we’ve got to fight. (These coalitions) ignited our own members to become more active.”

— Rocky Jolly, Local 11 member and president of Chapter 2529

AFSCME.org 15
“We are striving to protect jobs and ensure equality, but we are not alone here. We have neighboring OAPSE locals. We also have AFSCME’s support, which reaches across this nation.”

— Mark Harrington, president of Local 310 of Ohio Association of Public School Employees OAPSE/AFSCME Local 4 and a member of the Next Wave Advisory Committee.

Harrington is both president of Local 310 of Ohio Association of Public School Employees OAPSE/AFSCME Local 4 and a member of the Next Wave Advisory Committee created by Pres. Gerald W. McEntee last July. President McEntee envisioned a committee that advised on policies and issues from young workers’ perspectives, and Harrington is especially suited to that task. A technology technician for Hilliard City Schools near Columbus, he understands the latest technology and the social networking it enables with young people.

“We know how AFSCME works, but how does it work for young people?” he asks. “We have to make it appeal to the next generation.”

That relies in part on effectively using smartphones and tablets, Facebook and Twitter. Those social media platforms and the Next Wave Toolkit (which makes it easier to start new chapters, host events and get more involved in the union) help young members get — and stay — connected. “That’s where the youth go,” explained Harrington. “We can meet them on the phone or on Facebook and say we have a rally, we need your support, and we hope they get involved and show up.”

But those sophisticated tools of the younger generation must be paired with the enthusiasm that Harrington and other Next Wave leaders bring. As Harrington explains it, “I think what I provide to the Next Wave is desire” — the kind of desire that motivates action.

The difficulty of creating such desire among younger union members, he noted, is “the concept that it’s the ‘me generation.’ If they all think they can do it on their own, we’ll see a drop in union membership nationwide. It is better for us to band together.”

Harrington tells people, “we are striving to protect jobs and ensure equality, but we are not alone here. We have neighboring OAPSE locals. We also have AFSCME’s support, which reaches across this nation. We have the ability to fix problems without having to reinvent the wheel alone.”

To further that work, AFSCME leaders created the biennial Next Wave Conference, where young members gather to exchange ideas, get support from colleagues and participate in development workshops. And yes, there’s a conference app for that, too.

“We’re just trying to get our young folks involved with our good leaders today, to help them understand how the union runs,” says Harrington.

And how does that union run? Better, faster, stronger, smarter. That’s AFSCME’s edge.
AFSCME: Fighting, Protecting

BY JON MELEGrito AND TiffANie BRIGHT

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FSCME is celebrating its 75th Anniversary and WORKS celebrates the key moments in the union’s history. In this issue, we look at the union’s role in fighting for health care reform, protecting Social Security from privatization, electing Pres. Barack Obama and rising up in Wisconsin when Gov. Scott Walker gutted collective bargaining. That was the spark that ignited pro-worker protests across the United States and it inspires us as we look toward the next 75 years of AFSCME’s history.

Reforming Health Care

In July 2008, AFSCME launched a nationwide campaign for quality, affordable health care for all. To ensure the broadest support for President Obama’s health care reform, AFSCME led the formation of Health Care for America Now! (HCAN), the nation’s leading grassroots health care advocacy organization. A June 2009 rally on Capitol Hill drew more than 10,000 supporters, including 2,000 AFSCME activists. “We have an historic opportunity to achieve what Americans need: health care reform with increased efficiency and more choice,” said Pres. Gerald W. McEntee at the rally.

During the two-year campaign, AFSCME activists made more than 100,000 personal visits, phone calls, e-mails and letters to their members of Congress. The campaign also featured AFSCME’s “Highway to Health Care Reform” bus tour, which visited 19 cities in 10 states, urging the public to demand real reform from their members in Congress. AFSCME leaders and members also testified before congressional committees. The massive grassroots mobilization and lobbying efforts were instrumental in the Affordable Care Act’s passage. President Obama signed the landmark legislation on March 23, 2010.

Preserving Social Security

In 2005, Pres. George W. Bush launched an ill-fated effort to privatize Social Security. Why did it fail? Because AFSCME members and retirees showed up at every stop of his road tour and expressed outrage at his plan to turn Social Security into a system of risky personal investment accounts that would be dependent on a volatile stock market. In April during the campaign, AFSCME working members and retirees joined more than 3,500 other union activists from around the country to voice their outrage in a rally in Washington. In a dramatic and historic procession, scores of U.S. senators and representatives filed onto the layered stage to stand as one to send Bush and his congressional allies a roaring
message: “Don’t privatize Social Security!” then-Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, then House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, President McEntee and other speakers denounced Bush’s plan, which he ultimately abandoned. Today, AFSCME is a leader in the new national Campaign to Strengthen Social Security, a coalition of 60 groups dedicated to preserving this safety net.

**Bringing Hope to America**

AFSCME’s 38th International Convention in San Francisco in July 2008 endorsed then Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) for President of the United States. “If we can just unite this country around a common purpose then there’s no obstacle we cannot overcome,” he told nearly 6,000 enthusiastic delegates, alternates and guests, via a satellite address. “We need a president who doesn’t denigrate public service by privatizing jobs every chance he gets, but who promotes their value like AFSCME does.” Also addressing the Convention was then U.S. Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) who made a passionate call for AFSCME members to ensure victory for Obama in the November 2008 election. “We have to work hard, but the reward is a nation and a government that upholds our values,” she said. “We can’t do that without AFSCME.” For 10 weeks after the Convention, thousands of AFSCME activists fanned out across the country knocking on doors and making phone calls to win back the White House.

**Pulling Together Across the Country**

When corporate-backed politicians, including Gov. Scott Walker of Wisconsin, mounted an unrelenting attack against unions in February 2011, AFSCME fought back to preserve collective bargaining and prevent the destruction of the working class. In the state where AFSCME was born, thousands of Wisconsin public service workers and supporters stormed the Capitol in Madison to oppose Walker’s anti-union bill. Many AFSCME activists also visited their representatives to make their case. Although the union-busting measure passed, the Wisconsin uprising ignited a national grassroots movement of workers standing up for the right to be represented by a union. Fired up and energized, AFSCME activists helped launch a campaign to recall senators who supported the bill. As a result of the successful recall of two Republican senators and the resignation of another Republican senator (who was targeted for recall) months later, Walker lost his 19-14 working majority, putting the state Senate at an even 16-16 split. Walker himself, along with his lieutenant governor and four Republican lawmakers, are on a recall ballot this summer, after more than 1 million people signed petitions.

**Have You Seen This Video?**

We said ‘I Am a Man.’ We stopped the privatization of Social Security. We rallied for health care for everyone. For 75 years AFSCME has been standing up for workers and their families. Celebrate the Green Machine’s service to America in a powerful video at [AFSCME.org/75](http://AFSCME.org/75) or scan this code with a smartphone to play the video.
Standing With Main Street

These Brave Republicans Are Crossing the Party Line to Support Working Families

BY PATRICIA GUADALUPE

In this current political climate, where bipartisanship is nearly non-existent and too many politicians are aligning themselves with corporate interests to protect the 1 percent, several Republicans stand out for resisting right-wing idealogues and standing up for working Americans.

In Wisconsin, state Sen. Dale Schultz is a political moderate who has sided with working families on several key issues. Last year, Schultz was the lone Republican who voted against Gov. Scott Walker’s proposal stripping collective bargaining rights from public service workers. “Public employees are willing to make sacrifices on things like wages and benefits, but we need to preserve collective bargaining as a tool which has helped keep labor peace in this state for decades,” Schultz said.

In New Hampshire, efforts by corporate interests and their political allies in the House to push through right-to-work-for-less legislation failed when 49 Republican members opposed the law’s passage.

In Florida, state Sen. Mike Fasano incurred the ire of his party — which holds the majority in the Legislature — and joined 20 other legislators in rejecting the country’s largest prison privatization plan ever proposed in a 21 to 19 vote. Gov. Rick Scott and other supporters of the plan said it would save the state much-needed funds, but Fasano called it a “bailout” for private prison companies, said it put the public at risk and that it could kill jobs. Fasano was stripped of his chairmanship of the Senate criminal justice budget committee, but called it the right thing to do for the 3,800 state corrections officers. “There is no question that families will be affected. Communities will be affected. People will not have a job and the trickle-down effect will be enormous,” he said. Speaking to AFSCME’s International Executive Board in March, Fasano said, “Our role as elected officials should not be performed out of loyalty to party.”

Several other Florida Republican senators, including Charlie Dean and Steve Oelrich, both former sheriffs, also voted against the bill, saying “jailing for profit” was not “for the public good.” Sen. Dennis Jones told the daily Tallahassee Herald Tribune that state employees shouldn’t be attacked. “What is wrong with state employees? We should be taking care of them rather than kicking them under the bus.”

Speaking Up at the Statehouse

It might be the most important day on the political calendar, even more so than Election Day. It’s Lobby Day — when AFSCME activists head to their statehouses and tell legislators they will be held accountable. Read this online-only story about Lobby Days across the country at AFSCME.org/lobbydays or scan this code with your smartphone to head right to it.
Bracing for Battle

BY JON MELEGRITO

Despite defeating Florida Gov. Rick Scott’s plan to privatize prisons in his state, racking up special election wins for pro-labor candidates in Iowa and New Hampshire, and big court victories in Michigan and Arizona, the attacks on working families persist. In the first half of 2012, legislatures dominated by right-wing lawmakers unleashed a wave of harmful, anti-worker legislation. And it wasn’t just Republicans responsible. New York’s Gov. Andrew Cuomo sold out workers there by ramming his harmful Tier 6 plan through the Legislature, and though we defeated the worst part, it will mean cuts for future public employees. Here’s a look at some of the key battles in the months ahead:

Alaska
A top priority this year for the Alaska State Employees Association (ASEA)/AFSCME Local 52, is repeal of the defined contribution, 401(k)-style retirement plan that has hurt the retirement security of state workers hired after July 1, 2006. A bill in the Senate calls for a more secure defined benefit option for employees.

Arizona
Despite being rebuffed by the courts for passing laws later ruled unconstitutional, Gov. Jan Brewer and her allies continue pushing bills designed to destroy public employee unions. In March, the House passed Brewer’s “personnel reform” bill HB 2751, which would make it easier to fire workers without cause and reduce accountability in state government. But energized AFSCME members and community supporters are determined to stand up against attempts to take away workers’ rights.

California
A Corporate Power Grab ballot initiative — which prevents workers from voluntarily having political contributions deducted from their paychecks — is slated for the November election. AFSCME is also gearing up to oppose harmful pension cuts at the state level. Meanwhile, workers in San Diego and San Jose are mobilizing community support to defeat ballot initiatives that would slash the retirement security of middle class families, and elect worker-friendly politicians for mayor and city council.

Colorado
Republicans have introduced right-to-work-for-less legislation this session. Also expected are several anti-collective bargaining bills targeting state and municipal workers. AFSCME members are also fighting layoffs of public service workers, pension-gutting proposals and increased health care costs.

Louisiana
AFSCME members led a coalition of community supporters and religious congregations to stop Gov. Bobby Jindal’s plan that would hurt middle-class Louisianans. The public made the governor and his allies back down from a scheme to sell a state prison. Public service workers are also fighting back moves by the governor to gut pensions and undermine their job security.

Michigan
Lawmakers are pressing for right-to-work-for-less legislation that even Gov. Rick Snyder has called too divisive. To ensure that such anti-worker measures are blocked, AFSCME and other union members are working hard to get a proposed constitutional amendment on collective bargaining on the ballot this fall. Supporters are confident they will collect more than the required 322,609 voter signatures by July 9.

New York
This winter, Gov. Andrew Cuomo pushed an agenda that hurt public workers. The Legislature passed the governor’s Tier 6 plan that targeted pensions and retirement security. Undaunted, public services workers from AFSCME Council 35, DC 37, Council 66, Council 82, CSEA Local 1000 and District Council 1707 and their allies stood strong to fight back, softening the blow to future workers by defeating the worst components of the plan. In the months ahead, we will continue to make Wall Street and the super wealthy pay their fair share to raise necessary revenue to aid municipalities and close corporate loopholes.

Wisconsin
Gov. Scott Walker faces a recall vote this summer, thanks to a massive petition-signing effort that yielded more than 1 million signatures. Also scheduled for June 5 are the recall elections for lieutenant governor and four Republican senators.

Visit AFSCME.org/blog for state updates
Selling Off the Public Good
These guys have a bridge to sell you. A statehouse, too.

BY PATRICIA GUADALUPE

It’s a story of modern-day Robin Hoods who have the plot all wrong. Corporate raiders more concerned about profit than the public good, eager to swoop in and make a little money off the current anti-worker environment. Politicians are using the current economic crisis as an excuse to pursue a privatization agenda that is nothing more than an attack on public service workers and taxpayers. Who gets robbed? We do.

When it comes to privatization, “Unfortunately there’s no shortage of bad ideas,” says AFSCME Sec.-Treas. Lee Saunders. “Every time a new scheme to sell a prison or put an unqualified driver behind the wheel of a school bus comes along, it’s the privateers who are responsible. These guys are in our statehouses, they’re in the corporate boardrooms. And they’re all out for one thing: money.”

Let’s take a look at some of the worst offenders:

Florida Gov. Rick Scott
Scott tried to push through a bill that would have privatized half of the state’s entire prison system, eliminating 25,000 public jobs, and he has tried to privatize Medicaid in Florida. Scott is the founder of Solantic, a chain of urgent-care clinics in the state. After winning office, Scott transferred his $62 million stake in Solantic to his wife. When Scott signed an executive order requiring random drug testing of many state employees and job applicants, guess which company landed the lucrative contract for the testing? Solantic.

Corrections Corporation of America
One of the largest companies in the private prison market, CCA would have taken over prisons in Florida had the Scott-backed proposal been successfully ratified by the state Legislature. In Puerto Rico, the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation awarded a two-year contract worth $20 million to the Corrections Corporation of America. They’ve completed the $73 million acquisition of an Ohio penitentiary that can hold up to 1,800 inmates. In total, CCA runs more than 60 facilities housing 75,000 inmates. CCA has sent letters to many states, offering to buy state-run prisons in exchange for a 20-year management contract and guarantees that the prisons will be at least 90 percent full.

Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder
In Michigan, where state officials have already privatized cafeteria workers and janitors in public schools, Snyder has tried to privatize prisons and road and infrastructure maintenance. The Legislature is considering a bill to sell a now-vacant prison in the western region of the state to any prison contractor who will produce cost savings of at least 10 percent for the state. No word yet if they’ll use 10 percent fewer locks.

South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley
In South Carolina, even the school buses are being sold for profit. It’s just one way that politicians and corporations are targeting education (the most obvious being efforts to privatize custodial services, cafeteria workers, and to sell the schools themselves to for-profit companies.) Legislation introduced in South Carolina’s General Assembly would require districts to own and operate their own school buses or contract with third-party providers by next year. Haley contends the state should focus resources solely on educating students, not on actually getting them to school in the first place.

IBM
In Indiana, a consortium of companies led by IBM took over the state’s welfare system, and thousands of Indiana residents abruptly and erroneously lost their benefits due to a slew of computer problems. In 2009, Gov. Mitch Daniels canceled a 10-year contract with the company, acknowledging that among the services that “just didn’t work” was the idea of replacing public caseworkers with private centralized call centers.

1. Sell the state Capitol, House and Senate buildings and nine-story executive office building for $81 million to a private company.

2. Lease the buildings back. Call it a ‘cost-savings measure.’

3. Decide on a whim to buy all the building back because hey, it’s your state’s centennial!

4. Avoid pointing out to taxpayers that you just lost $24 million of their money on the whole scheme.

Many of the same state and local governments that sold privatization as a cost-savings scheme are finding the opposite is true. North Dakota’s efforts to privatize Medicaid claims processing have run into chronic delays and cost hikes, and will not work until next year. An Affiliated Computer Services exec blamed software glitches. The project scheduled for 2010 now won’t be ready until mid-2013.

North Carolina lawmakers questioned state Medicaid leaders about claims processing delays now that a for-profit company, Computer Sciences Corporation, is in charge. State auditors estimate it will cost more than double the $265 million originally budgeted because of the delays. Another company had received a contract to process the state’s Medicaid claims, but that contract was terminated after delays and skyrocketing costs.

In what is probably the most bizarre and spectacularly ineffective privatization plan of all time, Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer in 2010 sold private companies state government buildings for $81 million, then leased them back, then repurchased them to celebrate the state’s centennial saying the purchase was needed because, “Most of our Capitol complex is not ours.” The cost? $105 million. So much for saving taxpayer money.
PHOENIX ARIZONA

‘Our Democracy is Not for Sale!’

In their fight back against Gov. Jan Brewer and her corporate-backed allies in the state Legislature, AFSCME members and community supporters have scored some victories while bracing for more battles ahead.

Pushed by groups such as the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) and the Goldwater Institute, Arizona lawmakers have been ramming through a raft of bills designed to destroy public employee unions. One was a brazen attempt last year to take away workers’ right to voluntarily contribute to their unions’ political action funds.

AFSCME and other labor groups sued, and a judge later ruled the law unconstitutional. The court also ruled that a law passed last year increasing the contribution that state employees make to their pension funds, from 50 percent to 53 percent, is unconstitutional. As a result, more than 200,000 public service workers will receive a refund.

This year, despite being rebuffed by the courts, Governor Brewer plans to take away civil service protections for 30,000 state workers, a return back to the spoils system where politics have an undue influence in public service. At the state Legislature, the Republican-controlled Senate passed several bills out of committee that would eliminate collective bargaining entirely and all-but eradicate workers’ rights to organize. Another proposed measure ends payroll deductions for voluntary contributions to a union’s political action fund — something already declared unconstitutional by a judge last year.

“We reject all these attempts to destroy our rights and protections,” says Sheri Van Horsen, president of Local 3111. “Our democracy is not for sale.”

Workers are winning some battles. Last year, anti-worker candidates for mayor and council in Phoenix were defeated. In Peoria, city workers helped block an attempt to privatize sanitation services. “With this victory we are empowered to take on anyone who wants to put profits over people,” said Randy Cordero, a city utility worker for more than 23 years and president of Local 3282.

DES MOINES IOWA

Workers Win Court Victory Over Illegal Closures

All Iowans — especially the unemployed and those dedicated public service workers who try to help them get back on their feet — won a constitutional victory this spring over Gov. Terry Branstad’s abuse of his authority.

The unanimous state Supreme Court ruling stems from the Homan vs. Branstad case that Council 61 helped bring to the justices over the governor’s veto last July of portions of a budget bill.

His actions led to the shuttering of 36 unemployment offices throughout the state. In their place, the state installed hundreds of computer stations in libraries and other locations where Iowans searching for work were supposed to access the programs.

Council 61 and several Democratic legislators sued, arguing the governor acted improperly, violating the state’s Constitution. A lower court agreed with the union’s arguments. When it reached the high court, the judges concluded that “the Legislature appropriated funds to (Iowa Workforce Development) with strings attached and our constitution does not permit the governor to cut the strings and spend the money differently.”

The high court’s unanimous decision “confirms that the governor can’t veto the will of the people of Iowa,” said Council 60 Pres. Danny Homan, also an AFSCME International vice president.
Arkansas and Ohio

In Memoriam: Barbara Ester, Gary Wilson and Ken Stiver

The AFSCME family mourns the recent loss of three members: Sgt. Barbara Ester, a property officer at the East Arkansas Regional Correctional Unit; Gary Wilson and Ken Stiver, wastewater treatment plant operators for the City of Struthers, Ohio. All died in the line of duty.

A founding member of Local 2899 (Council 38), Ester, 47, was stabbed by an inmate, on Jan. 20, while investigating a report that the inmate had contraband items. She was rushed to the infirmary and later transported to a hospital where she died.

Ester was a 12-year veteran of the facility. Her husband and co-worker, Lathen Ester, said that his wife of six years was loved by everybody who knew her. “She was a mother to a lot of the younger inmates coming in who didn’t have the mother figure in their lives.”

Adds Local 2899 Pres. Willie Robinson: “Sister Ester went about her job with a great sense of pride.”

The alleged killer, serving a sentence for first-degree murder, was immediately moved to a maximum security wing at the prison. Corrections officials say Ester’s killing is the first death of a corrections officer at the hands of an inmate since 1995 in that state.

In the City of Struthers, Ohio, an explosion fatally injured two members of Local 759 (Council 8).

Gary Wilson and Ken Stiver were going about their maintenance tasks in a room at the wastewater treatment plant when an electrical spark ignited methane gas. The March 1 accident claimed the lives of both men who were hospitalized for several weeks. Wilson died on March 29 and Stiver on April 16.

“Brother Wilson and Brother Stiver lived lives of service devoted to their community,” says Council 8 Pres. John Lyall. “Our hearts go out to their families.”

Wilson was instrumental in organizing his co-workers to form Local 759.

AFSCME honors all workers killed or severely injured on the job by celebrating Workers Memorial Day each year on April 28.
Sanitation Workers Join Thousands in March to Protect Voting Rights

AFSCME members, Sec.-Treas. Lee Saunders, Rev. Al Sharpton and thousands of other activists this March reenacted Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s historic march from Selma to Montgomery.

The marchers — representing unions, and civil rights and faith organizations — showed their solidarity in the face of right-wing attacks on voting rights and immigrants. Participants, including members of AFSCME Local 1733, Georgia Local 3 and Local 1644, took turns marching portions of the 54-mile route from Selma to Montgomery as Dr. King did in 1965. Once they arrived in Montgomery, they took part in workshops and rallies over several days.

Rodriguez Lobbins, a sanitation worker for the city of Memphis, felt the weight of Dr. King’s legacy. “I’m taking action to stop those forces who want to roll back Dr. King’s work and the progress we’ve made over the last four decades,” Lobbins said. “We are united in this struggle.”

Saunders rallied the marchers, calling out politicians who claim their attempts to pass laws disenfranchising voters are an effort to end voter fraud. “It’s really about ending the right to vote — stealing that right from people who don’t look like them and who don’t share their philosophy that the poor should be faceless, voiceless and powerless,” he said. “But we refuse to let them do it.”

Dr. King’s 1965 Selma to Montgomery march called international attention to oppressive laws in the South that prevented African-Americans from voting. Upon arriving in Montgomery, after an arduous journey during which he and other marchers peacefully resisted acts of police brutality, Dr. King delivered his famous “How Long, Not Long” speech on the steps of Alabama’s state Capitol.

In a landmark ruling in May, the Missouri Court of Appeals ordered the state to certify an election for 13,000 home care workers who had voted overwhelmingly two years ago to be represented by their own union.

That union, the Missouri Home Care Union, is a partnership between Council 72 and the Service Employees International Union.

“Since 2008, Missouri voters and Missouri in-home care providers have spoken repeatedly in favor of allowing providers to organize themselves to protect the consumers who rely on these programs and improve training and wages,” said home care provider Elinor Simmons of Moline Acre. “Thousands of caregivers are vindicated, now that the courts have recognized the validity of the democratic choice they made to be represented by the Missouri Home Care Union.”

The providers were granted the legal right to form a union after the Missouri Quality Home Care Act passed in 2008. They voted overwhelmingly to join the Missouri Home Care Union in 2009 but a judge blocked certification of their ballots after Integra Health Care Inc. challenged the election.

In 2010, a second election was held, and again a majority of those casting ballots voted in favor of the union, overcoming an aggressive anti-union campaign run through home care agencies and in the press. After that vote also was challenged, a court voided the election results, leading to the appellate court ruling in March upholding the providers’ vote to form their union.

The providers now have the power to negotiate for improvements in the state’s consumer-directed Home Care Program, and to address issues like lack of health insurance, or paid sick and vacation days.
City Workers Fight Pension Lies

Calling a ballot measure targeting pensions “needlessly divisive and legally risky,” San Jose city workers of Local 101 are bracing for battle over their retirement security.

Their concern is with a ballot measure pushed by Mayor Chuck Reed and supporters on the City Council to force current city workers — who are already dealing with over 20 percent cuts to pay and benefits — to pay even more out of their paychecks.

“The city will end up spending more money defending its own questionable actions because this measure is a breach of contract and it will be challenged in court,” says LaVerne Washington, a legal analyst and president of Confidential Employees Organization (CEO), a chapter of Local 101. “We had offered a retirement solution in negotiations, but the city simply refuses to bargain with us fairly.

“It will have a harmful effect on the incomes of thousands of tax payers. This could have been avoided if city leaders had worked with us in good faith to find a solution.”

This political attack on retirement security came a few weeks after an NBC Bay Area report uncovered that Reed had been using a made-up figure inflated by more than $250 million to scare the public about pension costs.

“We’re dealing with human beings and their lives, not just raw numbers,” said Councilmember Kansen Chu, one of three members who sided with working families. But a majority of the San Jose City Council voted to put legally dubious changes to pensions on the ballot.

AFSCME Members Rebuild after Deadly Tornadoes

When tornadoes devastated towns and cities across the Midwest and South in February, they killed at least 39 people and damaged property in 10 states. AFSCME members were not only among those helping to recover from the disaster, but also among those who lost loved ones, homes and possessions.

A tornado swept through Harrisburg, Ill., killing six and flattening entire neighborhoods. Among those killed was the aunt of an AFSCME Council 31 member who works at the Illinois Youth Center. At least seven AFSCME families lost their homes.

“Our members are kind of devastated,” said Randy Milligan, president of Local 779. “One lost his [work] uniform and boots. I set up an account for him at a boot store. We hooked him up with a utility belt, too.”

To help with the financial burden, Milligan worked the phones, reaching out to members, getting their disaster request forms filled out and sent to Council 31. Other locals have also stepped up to help. Local 1805, for example, delivered more than 200 pounds of hamburger to be served at a senior center providing free meals to victims. Union leaders from the Pinckneyville, Tamms and Vienna corrections centers also assisted with rescue and clean-up.

“What’s most impressive, though not surprising, is how quickly our members responded and how substantially they did so,” said Ed Caumiant, Council 31 regional director for southern Illinois.

Responding to the disasters, the national union committed $100,000 from its Fallen Heroes Fund, which provides immediate assistance and recovery funds to members hit hardest by such disasters. You can aid in the recovery efforts by giving to the Fallen Heroes Fund. Go online to AFSCME.org/fund or donate by check, payable to the AFSCME Fallen Heroes Fund and mail it c/o the fund at AFSCME, 1625 L St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036-5687.
AFSCME WORKS SPRING 2012
PHOTO: AISHA SALLEH

AFSCME ACROSS AMERICA

CITY OF PAWTUCKET
RHODE ISLAND

Court Decision a Victory for Retirees

Retirees who once worked for the public school system in the City of Pawtucket can continue to count on the health benefits they were promised, thanks to a court decision earlier this year that overruled the city’s decision to arbitrarily change what was in the contract.

As stipulated in the retirees’ contract, the City of Pawtucket had been paying their medical benefits until they became eligible for Medicare, but in 2007 the city started sending invoices for a premium co-share. Union activists cried foul.

Local 1012 (Council 94) filed a lawsuit on behalf of the retirees, arguing that a promise is a promise.

In her decision, Judge Sarah Taft-Carter said the contract provided a “vested benefit” which could not be changed during retirement. “The Court has determined that plaintiffs’ rights have vested, and thus they cannot be altered by the defendants without plaintiffs’ consent.”

“The court’s decision represents a significant victory for retirees by affirming that employers cannot unilaterally cut retirement benefits,” said Council 94 Pres. J. Michael Downey. “We look forward to having the court determine the appropriate remedy for these retirees.”

TULSA OKLAHOMA

Knock, Knock. Who’s There? A Proud Union Member.

It’s intimidating knocking on someone’s door and asking them to join a union. Even knowing it’s a co-worker may not calm the jitters. But when you begin to explain that there is power in numbers and that coming together as a union gives workers a voice, it gets easier.

That’s what eight members of Local 1180 learned one February weekend in Tulsa when they knocked on co-workers’ doors to encourage them to join the union. These Volunteer Member Organizers (VMOs) have never done anything like this before. But the preparations, field training and house calls made believers out of them.

Local 1180 represents approximately half the city’s employees, so about 2,000 are not yet members. That’s the challenge. The citizens of Tulsa deserve the vital services provided by the city’s water, sanitation and road maintenance workers, airport safety officers, 911 emergency operators and administrative employees. But privatization threats and anti-worker legislation could cost jobs and a deterioration of services.

The VMOs participated in a three-day training, learning one-on-one communication skills. Partnering with experienced organizers, they headed out to make house calls. Similar VMO training programs are held across the nation.

“Doing a cold call on somebody’s door — somebody you may work with but don’t know — and saying, ‘I want to learn about your experiences and talk to you about joining the union,’ is very intimidating at first,” says Robert Mulvihill, a mechanic and also one of the VMOs (as well as a steward) for Local 1180. “But after you get past the initial butterflies in the stomach, it’s incredibly satisfying knowing you’ve made a difference, whether or not you got them to sign a union card. You’re showing them the members of the union are there for them.”

Tulsa, Okla., Local 1180 members prepare to make house calls as part of their VMO training. They reached out to co-workers to have a greater voice on the job.
Prison Sale Abandoned Under Public Pressure

Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal and his allies in the state Legislature backed down from plans to sell a state prison in Avoyelles Parish in April, responding to a public outcry led by AFSCME members.

AFSCME members spoke with local religious leaders and before community groups to stress the importance of protecting public safety. By building coalitions with community groups and religious congregations, and visiting with their local lawmakers, AFSCME members and their allies were able to stir a public outcry to kill the prison sale.

Although the Louisiana House of Representatives voted 62 to 43 to take the sale of the corrections facility off the table, they revamped the bill to allow for the state corrections department to shop out the prison’s services for a 10-year contract with a privateer, pending approval from the Legislature’s budget committees.

However, a privatized facility could result in a $24,000 drop in corrections officers’ annual salaries — assuming the officers were even rehired by the corporation.

With corrections officers’ job security and the public safety of the people of Louisiana at stake, AFSCME members and community allies will continue to fight the prison privatization scheme.

Public Workers Rescue Family from Blaze

An encroaching blaze didn’t stop two Ohio Department of Transportation employees from running toward danger to help save a family this winter.

John Beckley and Bob Griffith are highway technicians and members of Ohio Civil Service Employees Association (OCSEA)/AFSCME Local 11.

They were on their late night shift in Carroll County in January when they saw a barn on a family’s property engulfed in flames. The fire also threatened nearby homes.

The men rushed to the house and woke the family, then notified the fire department, who knocked the fire down before it could spread to the home and neighboring properties.

Fire officials commended Griffith and Beckley for their quick thinking and heroic actions, as did their employer and the local newspaper.

“They saved lives and we couldn’t be prouder,” said OCSEA Chapter 1000 Pres. Sabrina Bell. Carroll County Assistant Transportation Manager Ken Manfull added, “We’re so proud of these guys.”
Pres. Gerald W. McEntee, Sec.-Treas. Lee Saunders and AFSCME’s international vice presidents met with President Obama and Senior Adviser David Plouffe at the White House during the board’s quarterly meeting. President Obama echoed the economic message he’s been sharing with Congress and the American people, saying that he will continue fighting to ensure the wealthiest Americans pay their fair share in taxes. He focused on the need for job growth in the country, as well as job training programs, and a robust education system that prepares students for the jobs demanded by the current global economy.

At the AFSCME board meeting, international vice presidents were briefed on state legislative battles and public sector pensions. They were also briefed on the re-enactment of the Selma to Montgomery march for voting rights (See p. 26.)

The board welcomed special guests Republican Sen. Mike Fasano of Florida, who stood with workers to fight privatization in his state (See p. 20), and Professional Fire Fighters of Wisconsin Pres. Mahlon Mitchell, a candidate for lieutenant governor in Wisconsin’s upcoming recall elections.

New York State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli addressed the group and called for a national dialogue to restore retirement security. The IEB adopted a resolution to this effect.

They also adopted a resolution extending condolences to the family of Trayvon Martin, a teenager shot to death in Florida. It included a call to repeal Florida’s “Stand Your Ground” law, which undermines the role of public safety officers.

Looking ahead to this year’s elections and ballot initiatives, President McEntee said that “AFSCME activists stand ready to change the electoral landscape this fall.” AFSCME members previously endorsed President Obama in his re-election campaign against Mitt Romney.

McEntee commended AFSCME members for collecting more than enough signatures to repeal Michigan’s “local dictator” law and to recall Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, his lieutenant governor and four state senators this summer. The IEB approved a set of recommendations by the Election Rules and Procedures Review Committee for this summer’s 40th International Convention. The report was based on testimony from AFSCME members who attended hearings across the country.

“They have a deep and abiding interest in making sure our elections are fair, open and transparent,” said International Vice Pres. Joe Rugola, committee chair. “We made substantive changes governing each of those areas, with the purpose of ensuring every delegate’s vote is made freely and counted accurately.”

Members’ concerns focused primarily on bloc voting regulations, election observers and the nominations process. These recommendations will be voted on by the Convention delegates following deliberation by the Convention’s Rules and Election committees.
Musician and activist Tom Morello of Rage Against the Machine and The Nightwatchman is winning critical praise and awards for his advocacy on behalf of working men and women everywhere. He talks about why he’s passionate about unions and the lines of “This Land is Your Land” they didn’t teach you in school.

You stood on the steps of the Wisconsin Capitol last year, firing up the crowd with your music. What made you decide to take on that fight?

My mom was a public high school teacher in Illinois for over 30 years. So, when Governor Walker began attacking public service employees in Wisconsin, I took it personally. As soon as I heard about what was going on, I was on the first plane out there to do whatever I could for the cause. I strongly believe that unionism is the counterbalance to corporate greed and malfeasance. If they can break unionism in Wisconsin, they can break it anywhere. We aren’t going to let that happen.

While on the road, have you seen that spark that was lit in Wisconsin catch fire in other states?

Yes, in Ohio where they defeated that awful bill (S.B. 5). Also, I think that as we near the potential recall of the Wisconsin governor, it is an important, galvanizing moment for working people and for unions. We need to do more than just stop bad legislation. That plan means we’re just barely holding the line against our extinction. We need to expand workers’ rights, not just hold on to what we’ve got.

Many AFSCME members were there with you in Wisconsin. What was that experience like, to stand in front of so many people fighting for their rights and working families?

Union public service workers are very dear to my heart. The day that I got back from Wisconsin last February, I wrote a song called “Union Town” about my experience in Madison. That was fleshed out into an eight-song record under the same name and I donated all the proceeds to the union struggles across the Midwest. The courage of the public service workers in Wisconsin and across the country has been a great inspiration to me and my music.

While we’re talking music, what is your favorite protest song?

Woody Guthrie’s “This Land Is Your Land.” Many don’t know it’s a protest song because when you were eight years old and sang it in school, they censored out the three radical class warfare verses. But if you listen to the song in its entirety, it is a great alternative national anthem and a great protest song.

You yourself are a member of Musicians Union Local 47 and the Industrial Workers of the World. What does it mean to be in a union?

I grew up in a union household. It was crystal clear from the time I was a tot that unions were our counter-weight to the bosses getting away with bad things. Whatever you let them get away with, they will. If you’re alone, you don’t stand a chance in fighting it. But when we come together as a union, we can be very powerful.

—Kate Childs Graham
“Since when are hardworking men and women who are putting in a hard day’s work every day — since when are they special interests? Since when is the idea that we look out for one another a bad thing?

“I remember my old friend, Ted Kennedy — he used to say, “What is it about working men and women they find so offensive?” This notion that we should have let the auto industry die, that we should pursue anti-worker policies in the hopes that unions like yours will buckle and unravel — that’s part of that same old “you are on your own” philosophy that says we should just leave everybody to fend for themselves; let the most powerful do whatever they please. They think the best way to boost the economy is to roll back the reforms we put into place to prevent another crisis, to let Wall Street write the rules again.

…We’ve got a lot of work to do. We’ve got a long way to go before everybody who wants a good job can get a good job. We’ve got a long way to go before middle-class Americans fully regain that sense of security that’s been slipping away since long before this recession hit. But you know what, we’ve got something to show — all of you show what’s possible when we pull together.”

—Pres. Barack Obama, in a speech this spring.