

Stepping UP

ONE STRONG UNITED VOICE
FOR MINNESOTA WORKERS

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

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The collective-bargaining victory by AFSCME's Child Care Providers Together is the biggest expansion of workers' rights in Minnesota in 40 years. When the Legislature finally passed the bill – after 27 hours of filibuster – providers were ecstatic about finally getting a chance to vote to form a union. At the Capitol, Lisa Thompson, of St. Paul; Karla Scapanski, of Sauk Rapids; Hawo Gurey, of Minneapolis; and Marline Blake, of Minneapolis, celebrate with the legislation's chief sponsor, Sen. Sandy Pappas.



Local 1307 member Alex Soyannwo and more than 100 co-workers mobilize to end deteriorating working conditions at Anoka Metro Regional Treatment Center.

Progress! We changed the course of history

Now that the dust has settled on the 2013 legislative session, one thing is clear. We changed the course of history to make Minnesota a more fair and inclusive state where worker rights are expanding.

While workers in other states are losing rights, we won the largest expansion of collective bargaining in Minnesota in 40 years. Child-care providers and home health-care workers now will be able to vote to join a union. That will give more than 24,000 caregivers the opportunity to unite for a better future and advocate for quality care that families can afford. It's a victory that benefits working families, our children, the elderly, and persons living with disabilities.

We lobbied harder and smarter than anyone else. Child-care providers wrote more than 900 letters to their legislators. Union supporters made 11,788 calls and sent 9,699 emails to pass the bill. Members in green shirts had countless conversations that turned opponents into supporters.

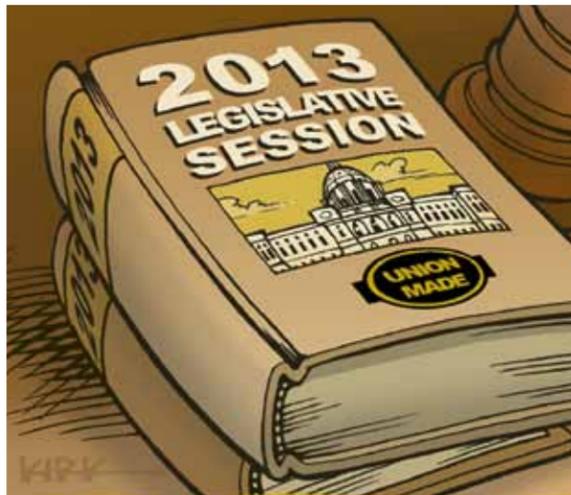
Debate over the Family Child Care Providers Representation Act was fierce. It chewed up scarce time before the House and Senate adjourned. During overnight floor sessions, the bill miraculously survived 27 hours of Republican filibusters and 49 amendments meant to undermine it. The victory vote drew thunderous cheers from union supporters in the House gallery, prompting Rep. Pat Garafalo to angrily denounce us: "We're not in charge – let them applaud. They own the place!"

Garafalo wouldn't understand. Providers had struggled eight years for this, and they were overcome by raw emotion and tears of joy. While union supporters locked arms and sang "Solidarity Forever," Sauk Rapids provider Karla Scapanski proclaimed: "This has got to be the best day of my life... The more we get together and stand up for what's important to us, the stronger we are."

Growing our membership is how we build power and prosperity for workers. Please thank the 35 senators and 68 representatives who voted for the bill, and Gov. Dayton, who signed the bill into law. The chief authors – Sen. Sandy Pappas and Rep. Mike Nelson – deserve our gratitude for standing up to hours of badgering from opponents. Unfortunately, all Republicans opposed the legislation. So did these members of the DFL caucus: Senators Terri Bonoff, Greg Clausen, Melisa Franzen, and Bev Scalze, and Representatives Tim Faust, Tina Liebling, Jay McNamar, Kim Norton, and Gene Pelowski.

A better budget and fair taxes

Gov. Dayton and DFL legislators also passed a budget that ends a decade of deep cuts and puts fairness back in the system. It strengthens the middle class and Minnesota's economy by lowering property taxes and making investments in job creation and education. It pays for new investments by closing corporate loopholes and asking the



To see photos of AFSCME members in action during the long legislative struggle, go to www.flickr.com/photos/afscmemn. Or scan this QR code with your mobile device.



richest 2 percent – those who earn an average of \$617,000 – to pay their fair share of taxes.

Historic investment in education

Nearly a billion dollars in new funding for education invests in every learner from preschool through college. For the first time, Minnesota will offer all-day kindergarten to every child. It will award early learning scholarships to 10,000 preschool children. To make higher education more affordable, tuition is frozen for the next two years at the University of Minnesota and all MnSCU campuses.

Property tax relief

Property taxes have increased 86 percent statewide over the past decade, with costs falling hardest on the middle class, seniors, and small businesses. To hold down property taxes, the budget restores the state's commitment to cities, counties, and school districts, and provides direct relief to homeowners and renters.

Civil rights

In addition to historic steps forward for economic equality, Minnesota is now the 12th state to legalize marriage for same-sex couples.

While Gov. Dayton and the DFL Legislature accomplished our top priorities, work remains. Raising the minimum wage and funding transportation infrastructure will top the to-do list when legislators return to St. Paul on Feb. 25, 2014.

Be proud of all we achieved, and be prouder still of everything we can accomplish now that our union is growing.

Eliot Seide
Executive director

A NEW ERA OF PROGRESS!

- Expand union rights for child-care providers
- Invest in every learner from preschool to college
- Preserve local services to keep communities strong
- Fix the state's chronic deficit – without gimmicks
- Make the richest 2 percent pay their fair share of taxes
- Provide property tax relief for homeowners and renters
- Create a health-insurance exchange that protects MinnesotaCare jobs
- Allow everyone to marry the person they love



AFSCME Council 5 is a union of 43,000 workers who provide the vital services that make Minnesota happen. We advocate for excellence in public services, dignity in the workplace, and prosperity and opportunity for all working families.

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(elected October 2012)

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Stepping UP

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Tired of being walked on

Lake County workers take a big step forward with contract campaign that proves their unity

For AFSCME workers in Lake County Health and Human Services, frustration was building. They had gone nearly 15 months without a new contract. They had not had a pay raise since January 2011. But it was more than that.

Yes, county negotiators were “playing games,” in the words of union steward Crystal Emerson, who was on the Local’s bargaining team. The county was cutting off negotiations after as little as 20 minutes, refusing to reply directly to union proposals, scheduling meetings few and far between, even dragging things out despite mediation.

But the county had used those tactics before. “It was exaggerated behavior this time – less communication, less time spent face to face – but not totally abnormal,” Emerson says. The money being proposed wasn’t great, but members were not surprised, because that’s what other unions had gotten.

Taking it personally

Still, when county negotiators presented their “last, best, final” offer in March, something unexpected happened. The two dozen members, who are part of Local 66, overwhelmingly rejected the offer and authorized a strike.

“It’s always been, we’re the unit that would never strike,” Emerson says. “We just weren’t going to do it.”

The bargaining unit includes social workers, child-support officers, public health nurses, and financial and support staff. “We deal with people,” says negotiating team member Jessica Dugas. “We deal with clients – and nobody wants to abandon their clients. We take it personally.”

But what members took personally this time was the way the county was treating *them*. “They weren’t respectful,” Emerson says. “When we would give them an offer, they wouldn’t go through the offer and say, ‘We don’t like this, we don’t like this.’ They would just send us back a copy of their previous offer. ‘No’ was the only word they knew.”

What especially set workers off were language changes the county wanted. One eliminated all non-discrimination language in the contract. The other allowed the county to keep a “secret” personnel file to discipline members – even if write-ups had been expunged from a worker’s regular personnel file.

“It was just wrong,” Emerson says. “There was no reason for it to change. Everybody felt the same way about that: This is one step too far. We’re not going to take this anymore.”

Different faces

The strike authorization vote was a response to years of feeling pushed around by county administration, Dugas says. “People were just to that point where they were fed up.”

“They were just pushing us around – and we were done,” Emerson says.

The vote was only the start. Immediately, members started meeting weekly. They spent part of their time in strike training, and part of it planning actions – or, as Dugas describes it,



JESSICA DUGAS: “When we took that strike vote, I remember feeling like, oh my God! I was really proud of us.”



CRYSTAL EMERSON: “It was little steps – asking one person to talk to one person, really breaking everything down into little bite-size pieces, so it didn’t seem overwhelming to anyone.”



KELSEY OLSON: “As long as you have a way to keep everybody informed, people will continue to be involved.”

“What can we do this week that will keep their attention?”

Mostly, however, the meetings were an opportunity for more members to step forward and demonstrate that “the union” was more than the people at the bargaining table.

“We were going nowhere,” Emerson says. “We needed to put some pressure on them. The negotiating team basically told our unit: ‘We can’t do everything.’ They needed to see other faces besides just ours.”

Members responded to the challenge.

Keeping each other informed, involved

Kelsey Olson, a public health nurse, was one of the first to step up. She started taking notes for a few friends who couldn’t attend one meeting. “If I’m going to share notes with them, I might as well share them with the whole group,” Olson says. So she took charge of all communications, including sending regular emails and text messages to the entire unit.

Olson’s involvement had a big impact, Emerson says. “Seeing someone step up who hadn’t been seen as a ‘union person,’ that made other people more comfortable.” It also required people who usually step up “to just keep their mouth shut a little bit longer,” Emerson says, so someone else could volunteer.

“One person would get a little more interested, and this person would get a little more and, all of a sudden, everyone was interested,” Olson says. “That was huge for us, getting people to recognize that there was strength in numbers.”

Getting their attention

That strength and unity made itself evident quickly. Members scheduled “solidarity days.” They wore green bracelets. They put posters in their cars and office windows. They picked days to wear green clothing.

One of the most effective tactics was what Emerson calls “our little walkabouts.”

Essentially, everybody took their break at the same time, walked across the street as a group, and met in the break room in the Courthouse building, where administration is housed.

“People saw us coming through,” Dugas says. “We didn’t really need to speak to anyone when we were there. We just were there.”

“We consistently had like 20 people, pretty much everybody in the building,” Olson says.

“It really disturbed them,” Emerson says. “It was just action by being.”

Outside support

Members also worked to build support among other unions. They made simple requests, Emerson says: wear a bracelet, display a sign, “call the administrators and tell them to bargain in good faith and knock off the crap.”

That outreach definitely touched a nerve. “We’ve heard stories of supervisors in other bargaining units outwardly telling them they were not allowed to wear our bracelets,” Dugas says.

In the end, all the actions had the impact that was needed at the bargaining table. On April 15 – one day before the local’s strike deadline – negotiators reached a tentative agreement.

Building for the future

Among other things, the agreement removed all the county’s bad language proposals. But to union activists, what’s in the contract itself is less important than *how* they got the contract.

“We had really good turnout, even for little things,” Olson says. “People knew what was going on and they felt confident enough to stay involved.”

That’s important, because the contract expires at the end of 2013. That means members expect to be back in negotiations within a few months.

“I think we’re in a much better position for next time,” Dugas says. “We’re prepared. We know what’s involved. We’re more unified.”

“The hornets’ nest has been poked,” Emerson says. “I don’t think that they see us as somebody that’s weak anymore.” ■



DHS commissioner Lucinda Jesson (front) and deputy commissioner Anne Barry listen to workers' stories. Right: General maintenance worker Chuck Sinclair talks about conditions at Anoka Metro Regional Treatment Center.



Workers at a DHS mental-health hospital were fed up. Conditions were out of control and getting worse. Members of Local 1307 decided that, if there was any hope of turning things around, they had to take matters into their own hands. So they did.

FIXING IT THEMSELVES

It was an amazing scene. For 90 minutes, five legislators sat stunned while more than 100 workers at Anoka Metro Regional Treatment Center risked telling the truth. With story after story, the workers detailed deteriorating conditions at the state mental-health facility. There were violent assaults. Severe staff shortages. Unimaginable amounts of mandatory overtime.

Rep. Jim Abeler, who represents the Anoka district, labeled what he heard “intolerable.”

Three weeks later, workers met in private again. This time, it was DHS commissioner Lucinda Jesson and deputy commissioner Anne Barry who listened to workers share their desperation and frustrations.

“Things have got to change,” Local 1307 president Jackie Spanjers said.

Within a week, that change started:

- For the first time in more than a year, Anoka started hiring full-time human service technicians.
- A few weeks later, Jesson appropriated money to add 20 full-time HSTs and LPNs – above and beyond the previously unfilled vacancies.
- Part-time workers got the option to go full-time, complete with the benefits and scheduling preferences that go with it.
- There will be float pools and overlapping shifts to further minimize staffing problems.
- Additional security officers became more visible and available to protect staff and patients.
- Jesson sent her own HR director into Anoka to clean up the personnel issues workers described. And Jesson put a freeze on hiring administrators.

Meanwhile, the Legislature ordered DHS to work with unions to resolve



Rep. Jim Abeler listens to workers.

staff shortages, safety, and overtime issues in Anoka and elsewhere.

The change started because members of Local 1307 quit waiting for their bosses to fix things. Instead, they used their collective power to take action and go directly to those who could get things done.

Tougher clientele

Local 1307 represents about 240 front-line workers at Anoka. Most of them are human services technicians and licensed practical nurses. The hospital treats mentally ill patients who have been civilly committed by a court until they are fit to stand trial or to be transferred.



LPNs Angela Onyemeh-Sea (above) and Jolene Hartman (left) tell how excessive overtime affects their family life.

Many patients have additional issues – drug addiction or medical problems such as diabetes – that complicate their psychiatric treatment.

But staff say more patients also are violent, aggressive, or just plain unpredictable. “They get some real bad actors,” says Paul Thompson, chief steward for Local 1307.

The biggest problem was inadequate staffing, especially among HSTs. Between January 2012 and March 2013, Anoka lost 22 full-time HSTs. Not one of those vacancies was filled, the Local says.

One consequence of staff shortages was unfilled shifts. A lot of them. Two-week work schedules routinely had as many as 80 open shifts. If a co-worker did not volunteer to fill an open shift, the worker on the previous shift “got stuck.” They were forced to work mandatory overtime – 16 hours straight. Too often, “getting stuck” became a daily occurrence.

In addition, part-time staff routinely had to work full-time hours. LPN Donna Altmann was hired part-time, but says that, for 15 straight months, she worked at least 80 hours in every two-week pay period.

Workers tired of putting health at risk

During the meeting with legislators, Local 1307 members taped photos on the wall and testimonials from more than 30 staff who had been injured on the job. Among AFSCME members alone, there were more than four dozen injuries just in 2012.

Injuries resulted from all kinds of assaults. Workers were attacked while giving medication, giving injections, doing blood tests, giving physical therapy, breaking up fights, or just being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Staff were scratched, punched, beaten, kicked in the head, slammed onto tables or onto the floor, jumped from behind, choked, cut, or had hair pulled out.

One HST was stabbed in the eye with a pencil. Others endured concussions, memory loss, ruptured discs, torn rotator cuffs, or worse. One registered nurse, attacked last September, was still out of work six months later. The most brutal attack occurred in November, when a patient with a criminal history severely beat three staff members, including a security officer who suffered brain bleeding.

Another LPN, Ann Menard, pointed out that part-timers like her get only one weekend off each month – if they are lucky. “I have to schedule my entire life for those two days. I have



HST Josie Nehwah tells legislators she had only one holiday off in five years. Below: Local 1307 president Jackie Spanjers. "It didn't need to get to this point," she says. "But I think they realize now: We're done. We're tired. We need to make it better."



Above: Office specialist Heather Gruye emphasizes that direct-care staff are not the only ones affected by issues at Anoka. Left: HST Bonnie Wanous makes a point with deputy commissioner Anne Barry.



to tell friends or family, you have to get married or have to get buried on those two days."

"They were not letting us have lives outside of work," Spanjers says. "Someone would say, 'I have to pick up my kids from child care' and they'd be told, 'What's more important: your family or your job?'"

Local 1307 tried to address staffing, scheduling, and safety issues through labor-management discussions. The response? What one union member called "the bobblehead" – a lot of shaking of heads among managers, but no action.

Tired of waiting

"I was so frustrated," Spanjers says. "Paul and I could keep beating our heads against the wall. But in order for us to make any progress, the membership had to be the driving force."

What the Local came up with was a plan to ratchet up pressure until members got action. The Local started with a letter that, within three days, 108 members signed. The letter first went to Anoka's chief administrator, Nancy Webster Smith, and to Pat Carlson, who was then CEO of DHS' State Operated Services, which oversaw Anoka.

When Carlson dragged her feet in responding, the Local went up the chain. The next letter went to Jesson and Barry. The letter after that went to Gov. Mark Dayton.

Legislators respond

Meanwhile, the Local kept Abeler in the loop. When Carlson finally responded in writing – with a memo that Local leadership considered vague and full of alibis – the Local approached Abeler about gathering



Sen. John Hoffman asks workers a question about their schedules.

legislators to talk with workers directly. The result was a meeting March 27 in which front-line workers got to tell their stories face to face.

"The membership thought that if you really want to make change, you've got to be a part of it," Spanjers says. "And they really opened up."

Trying to get their lives back

The workers focused on how their jobs were taking a growing toll on their health and family lives.

Michael Richard talked about working 72 hours' overtime in one two-week period. That's almost the equivalent of two full-time jobs.

"I work the night shift," says HST Alex Soyannwo. "If I get stuck working the day shift, I go home, come back to work that night, get stuck again. I'm lucky to get 8 hours' sleep in two days."

Those kind of hours leave workers fatigued and more likely to make mistakes. "It's unsafe for us, it's unsafe for patients," Richard says.

"I love the money – don't get me wrong," Soyannwo says. "But you can't plan anything with your family or anyone. What good is the money if it comes at the cost of my health or my family?"

Escaping downward cycle

The understaffing and excess hours were causing other problems. For example, workers couldn't get vacation and holidays.

HST Darron Delvin says that on his unit, it was impossible for more than one AFSCME member to take vacation at the same time. "We used to be able to handle three vacations at once," he says. "It's been a year and a half since my last vacation, and it's not for lack of trying. It is mathematically impossible to take all the vacation we have earned."

The inability to take vacation impacts family life, Delvin says. That causes more workers to take sick leave, which causes more back-to-back shifts, which causes more burnout, which causes the cycle to repeat.

At the end of Jesson's meeting with workers, she told them: "I'm a mother of four. I can't imagine doing what some of you described. We should not be making you choose between your family and your job."

Beginning the turnaround

Thompson expects the staffing changes that the workers forced will make that choice less necessary. "It's incredible progress, and obviously they heard us," Thompson says. "They heard our members. Once those positions are filled, the good news is – the great news is – more people will be able to get time off," he says. "There should be a huge reduction in sticks, mandatory overtime."

"It's definitely not the fix," Spanjers says. "But it's a start."

Thompson hopes the changes signal a deeper shift at Anoka. "Some of the supervisors have gotten it, that we're done screwing around, frankly. You really can't treat people like you had been." ■

HONORS



Hannah Kangas

Kangas wins AFSCME scholarship

Congratulations to Hannah Kangas, winner of one of the 10 Family Scholarships awarded by AFSCME International for 2013.

Hannah is the daughter of Local 4001's Eldon Kangas, who is a general maintenance worker at Central Lakes College in Brainerd, and Michelle Kangas, who was a longtime member of 4001 before transferring to a MAPE position. In the essay Hannah wrote as part of her application, she recalls walking picket lines with her parents during the 2001 state workers' strike.

Hannah, who is graduating from Brainerd High School, plans to major in psychology at the College of St. Benedict. The \$2,000 AFSCME scholarship is renewable for up to four years of college education.



Jerry Serfling

Serfling receives lifetime volunteer award

Retiree Jerry Serfling – a longtime staff member at Council 5 and its predecessors – received the 2013 lifetime achievement award for his volunteer work in Washington County. Serfling is active in organizations such as United Way of Washington County East, River Valley Action, the Nellie Stone Johnson Scholarship Foundation, and the Fare for All food program.

"Almost all of my volunteer work grows out of my labor work," Serfling says. Being a lifelong union member plays a vital role in another way. "I retired with a defined-benefit plan, so I don't have to keep working," he says. That gives him a secure retirement, which frees up his time to remain active in his volunteer efforts.

Nutrition educators give us plenty of **FOOD** **FOR** **THOUGHT**

It's the kind of practical advice we all need: How to make better choices in what we eat. How to stretch our grocery dollars and buy more food that's better for us. How to cook tasty, nutritious meals at home more often, and rely on sugary snacks and fast-food less often.

It's the kind of advice you can get from community nutrition educators like Betty Wistrom. "Most people feel it's challenging to find healthy food on a budget," says Wistrom, a nutrition educator in Lake County for 25 years. "That's where working with them on shopping skills, menu planning, and reading labels helps them realize they can eat healthier."

The nutrition educators are part of the University of Minnesota Extension Service, and members of U of M Technical Local 3937. In every county of Minnesota, they go into classrooms, retirement homes, preschools, and community centers. They give cooking demonstrations, share recipes, preach food safety, and explain how to create balanced, affordable meals and diets.

Colorful lessons

With the Extension's curriculum, even schoolchildren learn how to decipher the "Nutrition Facts" tables on food packaging. And everybody learns about the U.S. Department of Agriculture's new "Color My Plate" recommendations, which replace the "food pyramid." To expand their clients' tastes, nutrition educators love whipping up easy-to-make skillet meals or great-tasting smoothies – packed not only with fruit, but also with surprise ingredients such as kale or fresh spinach.

Most of the time, educators emphasize the same things – more fruits and vegetables, more whole



Nutrition educator Jane Rezac prepares a "rainbow smoothie" for a Head Start class in Dakota County. "Preschoolers like color, understand color, and like to work with color," she says. "And parents want to find techniques that help their children to be healthy."



One of Jane Rezac's favorite lessons is demonstrating how much fat and sugar are in popular snacks. Top: By measuring out shortening, Zack Stahope gets to see how much fat he eats in a popular fast-food meal. Zack then calculated how long and hard he would have to exercise to burn it off. Bottom: Rezac labels how much sugar a 20-ounce soft drink contains. She then has participants measure out the teaspoons so they can see firsthand what they consume.

grains, more water or real juices instead of soft drinks, cooking from scratch instead of using box mixes. But they learn quickly to customize topics to their audience, says Jane Rezac, an educator in Dakota County for 15 years.

For children or young families, it might mean promoting fruits and vegetables through a "rainbow of colors" approach. For seniors, nutritional information might be less important than day-to-day tips on how to cook for only one person. For working moms, educators might emphasize how to save time by planning meals in advance and working creatively with leftovers. For teens, it's opening their eyes to the truth about sugary soft drinks and junk food.

Retirees aren't sitting on sidelines

After two years of groundwork, AFSCME retirees officially founded Minnesota Retirees United Chapter 5 during a statewide convention April 30. More than 2,400 AFSCME retirees in Minnesota already are part of Retirees United, determined to remain active in fighting for collective-bargaining rights, strong public services, and a retirement with dignity. Retirees are organized into six subchapters: Northeast, East Metro, West Metro, Central Lakes, Best of the West, and South Sixth.



Newly elected president Jeff Birttinen addresses the retirees' convention.

Labor Bowl raises \$21,000

Local 2822 (Hennepin County Clerical and Related) and Local 2508 (City of St. Paul Clerical) made sure there was fun to spare at this year's Labor Bowl. They were among union members who raised more than \$21,000 for the St. Paul Labor Studies and Resources Center, which provides training, layoff assistance, and other services to union families in need.



Todd Carey (right) accepts congratulations from his Local 2822 teammates during Labor Bowl.



CCPT's Leonard Winborn – who runs a child care in Richfield with his wife, Cynthia – practices infant CPR.

Becoming better child-care providers

As part of their mission to lift their profession by improving standards and training, members of AFSCME's Child Care Providers Together got together in Alexandria in April to update their first-aid and CPR skills.



“I’m in a lot of schools, and it scares me, what I see these kids eat. So I always let them know, it’s a matter of choices. You can keep on, and this stuff will kill you.” – Annie Van



Annell Aleman listens as Annie Van talks to a class at St. Paul’s Gordon Parks High School about simple ways to make food tastier and healthier.

Part of the community

Wistrom is an example of how nutrition educators tackle food issues on an individual *and* community basis. In rural Lake County, she’ll meet one-on-one with families. But she also shares nutrition, shopping, and recipe advice during weekly food shelf hours in Two Harbors.

Phil Arnold, who helps run the food shelf, says he often has no control over what food is available. “Last week, we got cases of garbanzo beans. And people don’t know what to do with them. So that’s where Betty comes in.

“She finds recipes. She made hummus, and people went nuts. Thanks to her efforts, people know how to step out of their comfort zones.”

This summer, Wistrom will teach at the new community garden. “She’ll take it from ‘this is how you grow this stuff, this is what you do with it,’ and then get into how to store it, how to preserve it, how to use it in meals,” Arnold says.

Beyond packaging

Educators know they are swimming upstream against a food industry that is a marketing machine for packaged, processed foods that are filled with sugar, salt, and additives.

So nutrition educators give practical alternatives. “I can show you how to make that breakfast sandwich with a whole-wheat muffin and a real egg,” says Annie Van, a nutrition educator in Ramsey County for 32 years. “And you’ll know what’s in it!”

Educators urge participants to compare costs and



Nutrition educator Betty Wistrom talks over recipe options during her weekly visit to a food shelf in Two Harbors.

ingredients. They compare how much they pay per serving with packaged lettuce vs. a head of lettuce, for example, or the nutritional value of natural peanut butter vs. hydrogenated varieties.

“Ultimately, this is about people changing their behavior,” says Amy Viniard-Weideman, assistant dean of the University of Minnesota Extension.

Nutrition educators inspire that change. More than 60 percent of participants change their diets, Viniard-Weideman says. More cook more often at home. More do comparison shopping.

“That old saying, you are what you eat? It’s that simple,” Van says. “It starts with what you put in your body. It’s that simple.” ■

Federal budget cuts put nutrition program at risk

The state’s community nutrition educators remain in the field only because the University of Minnesota Extension is keeping the program afloat through September, in the face of federal budget cuts.

Funding comes through the federal farm bill, says assistant dean Aimee Viniard-Weideman. But the program took a 28 percent cut in January, when Congress slashed what are called SNAP-ED funds.

In Minnesota, educators serve 73,000 participants. They must work almost exclusively with low-income families, such as children who receive reduced-fee lunches, adults with disabilities, families receiving food assistance, or seniors on fixed incomes.

Their classes deliver a huge return on investment, Viniard-Weideman says, regardless of how you track it. Well-nourished children have better attendance in school, for example. Seniors are more likely to remain independent, living in their own homes.

More concretely, every \$1 spent on nutrition education saves \$10 in health-care costs down the road, she says. Taxpayers would pick up many of those medical bills. “That’s the public value of nutrition education,” Viniard-Weideman says.



Sonia Meline, a nutrition educator for eight years in Norman County, pilots a “Go Wild” curriculum in the Ada-Borup school district. “It’s an awesome, fun job,” she says. “I’ve got a whole county’s worth of kids that are looking at the Nutrition Facts. We look at the sodium levels, we look at the calcium levels, we look at the added sugar versus the natural sugars. And the kids really get into it.” The flip side, she says, is that students often recognize her in the grocery store. “So I don’t do anything but buy ‘good food.’ If my husband wants any of his goodies, he has to buy his own, in his own cart – away from me.”

Knowledge and power

When it comes to strikes, what works, what doesn’t – and why? In a free-flowing discussion, Council 5 retirees and Next Wavers shared experiences, wisdom, and ideas on how best to use workers’ ultimate power of withholding their labor and shutting down a workplace.



Retiree John Raplinger and Next Waver Kyle Edwards, University of Minnesota Clerical Workers Local 3800, listen to the strike discussion.

Veterans of state, county, and university walkouts covered topics ranging from the timing, preparation and power of a strike, to the real (and perhaps unexpected) economic, personal and workplace impacts.

A couple of universal lessons:

- Don’t leave a tuna sandwich locked up in a desk during a walkout.
- The best strike never happens – because solidarity is so obvious that it scares the employer into settling.

Now a citizen

Maslah Jama, a member of Hennepin County Social Services Local 34 and a Council 5 volunteer member organizer, recites the Pledge of Allegiance after taking his oath of citizenship during a March ceremony in St. Paul.



Maslah Jama



175 people observe a moment of remembrance during the Workers Memorial Day ceremony in Mankato.

We’ll never forget

AFSCME locals and MnDOT teamed up in Mankato, Rochester, and the Twin Cities April 29 to honor Workers Memorial Day.

At ceremonies, chairs draped with safety vests and hats commemorated the 49 MnDOT and private-sector highway workers killed on the job in years past. Speakers urged motorists to slow down, move over, and keep workers – and themselves – safe this construction season.

“Give us the room we need,” Local 868’s Jeff Paulsen urged.

BRIEFS



The 2013 legislative session proves that elections do matter. Last November, we threw out the “team extreme” Legislature. The result: Big wins for the middle class this spring. Here’s a glance at what we’ve accomplished – so far.

Workers’ rights

We reversed the nationwide war on workers with historic legislation that extends collective bargaining to family child-care providers and personal care attendants. It is the biggest expansion of workers’ rights in Minnesota in 40 years.

More than 12,000 child-care providers will be able to vote on forming a union. That will give providers a unified voice to improve the future for themselves, children, and working parents.

Make taxes fair

It won’t be as easy for corporations and the richest Minnesotans to avoid paying their fair share. That means we won’t have to keep picking up their tab. New legislation:

- Applies a fourth income-tax rate to the richest 2 percent of households – those with average taxable incomes of \$617,000 a year
- Closes a major corporate tax loophole
- Cuts down on tax breaks by levying sales tax on some exempt business transactions
- Levels the playing field for local merchants by requiring online retailers to charge sales tax

Property tax relief

After a decade in which the tax burden was shoved onto property owners, new legislation provides:

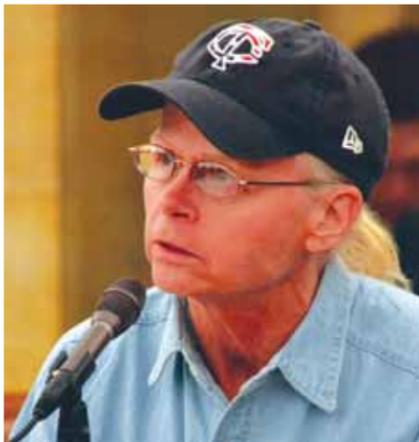
- \$135 million in direct relief to homeowners and renters
- A one-year freeze on local property tax levies
- Relief to keep communities strong. This includes levy aid to school districts, \$80 million more in Local Government Aid to cities, \$40 million more in aid to counties, and \$10 million to townships.

No gimmicks

The Legislature erases the state’s chronic budget deficits without borrowing, without shifts, without one-time accounting tricks, and without a government



The landmark collective-bargaining victory for AFSCME’s Child Care Providers Together was eight years in the making. In the end, the legislation had to survive 10 committee hearings, a record 17-hour filibuster by opponents in the Senate, and 10 hours in the House. For the House proceedings – spread out over three grueling legislative days – opponents prepared 119 amendments to cripple the bill. Moments after the final legislative vote, providers – including Marline Blake (left), of Minneapolis, and Danette Allrich-Osano, of St. Paul – celebrated in the halls of the Capitol.



Steve Johnson, head of Council 5’s DNR Policy Committee, testifies in the successful effort to strengthen state nurseries. New legislation allows nurseries to resume sales to qualifying private landowners.

shutdown. The package takes a balanced approach: It raises the revenue necessary to eliminate a \$627 million deficit, and re-invests the rest in brainpower and infrastructure to grow the state’s economy for years to come.

Education

Higher education: After years of cuts, the Legislature strengthens the affordability, accessibility, and accountability of the MnSCU and University of Minnesota systems by:

- Adding \$250 million to higher education, including \$80 million



AFSCME members were a constant presence throughout the legislative session. (From left): Rick Pospichal of Southeast MnSCU Local 945; Sandra Berrian, of Minneapolis Veterans Home Local 744; Rick Castillo, of University of Minnesota Clerical Workers Local 3800; and Sharon Morcom, of Northeast DNR Local 718, track a Senate committee hearing.

- for each system. Most of the money freezes student tuition for two years and increases financial aid for students of modest means.
- Increasing oversight of how both systems spend state money. This is a victory for Clerical Workers Local 3800, which has been highlighting administrative bloat at the U of M for years.

K–12: The landmark achievement is all-day kindergarten for any family who wants it. The two-year budget also increases the basic per-pupil payment to schools by 3 percent.

Early childhood: For the first time, the state formally recognizes the importance of preparing children to succeed in school. The centerpiece: \$40 million for “MinneMinds” scholarships that help parents afford quality preschool child care.

Health care

- Public employees will staff and operate MNsure, the new statewide health-insurance exchange for individuals and small businesses.
- The MNsure board of directors includes Peter Benner, longtime chief negotiator for union members in the State Employee Group Insurance Plan.
- Nursing homes and other long-term care facilities get a 5 percent rate increase; a portion will go for staff pay raises.

- After a string of year-to-year allocations kept the facility open, Willmar Regional Treatment Center gets more stable funding.
- DHS gets more resources to reassign patients who no longer need high-level care at Anoka Metro Regional Treatment Center or the state hospital in St. Peter.

Transportation

A “status quo” transportation bill includes a “fix it first” road maintenance program statewide.

In Greater Minnesota, it features a \$300 million trunk highway program and \$11 million more for public transit. In the Twin Cities, \$37 million helps keep Southwest Corridor light rail alive.

Civil rights

Beginning Aug. 1, Minnesota becomes the 12th state to recognize same-sex marriage. AFSCME was the first union in Minnesota to fight for marriage rights for our LGBT brothers and sisters.

Pensions

- Stabilizes public pension funds by building in automatic adjustments to contribution rates, based on fund strength.
- Allows Retirees United members to deduct their monthly dues and PEOPLE contributions directly from pension checks. ■

THE TO-DO LIST FOR 2014

- Minimum wage:** The House and Senate agreed to raise the state minimum wage from \$6.15 an hour. But they failed to agree on what the new minimum should be. As a result, 300,000 low-wage workers won’t get a desperately needed pay raise this year.
- Bonding:** Capitol preservation will continue, as will a \$19 million expansion at the Minneapolis Veterans Home. But an \$800 million bonding bill failed. Among the investments and jobs lost:
 - \$193 million in construction and preservation on University of Minnesota and MnSCU campuses
 - \$36 million for buildings to separate sex offenders at the State Security Hospital in St. Peter
 - \$18 million for improvements at the St. Cloud and Shakopee prisons
 - \$15 million for new state trails
- Transportation:** A statewide plan to build a robust and diverse 21st-century transportation network – and how to pay for it – remains a work in progress.