

Stepping UP

ONE STRONG, UNITED VOICE
FOR MINNESOTA'S WORKERS

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

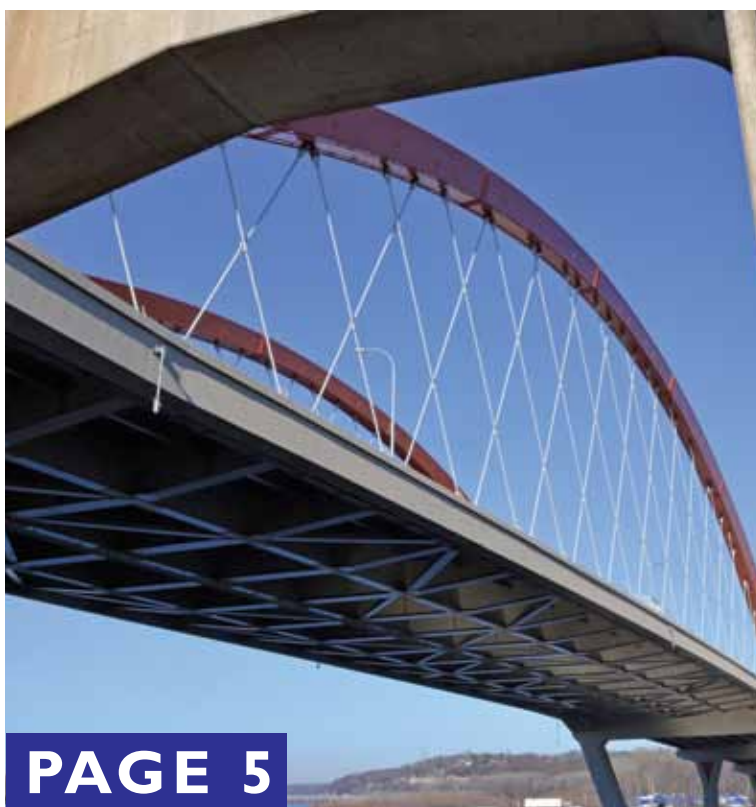
Volume 9, No. 1
January-February 2014



The job is
HARD
Forming
a union wasn't

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Carrie Notch and Phil Pascuzzi are investigators in the Hennepin County medical examiner's office. They helped co-workers join Local 2864 to gain more influence in dealing with the challenges of their job.



PAGE 5

The new Highway 61 bridge in Hastings is a symbol of how Minnesota needs to build a transportation network that makes prosperity possible. It is one of AFSCME's main goals when the Legislature reconvenes in February.

A Bridge to the Future



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Two Minnesota groups – the Center of the American Experiment and the Freedom Foundation – are tied to a national network of state-based “stink tanks” and “investigative reporters,” all funded by some of the same wealthy people and foundations behind ALEC.

ALEC's Slimy Cousins

Mandela's Legacy

Our union pays respect to freedom fighter Nelson Mandela, whose journey from political prisoner to president led South Africa out of apartheid. As Mandela rests in peace, we draw inspiration from his life and his words. We strive to create a more fair and free world worthy of his personal sacrifice.

Fight for freedom

Under the brutal apartheid regime, from 1948 to 1994, black people couldn't vote or live in certain places in South Africa. Mandela led the movement against apartheid and its institutional racism, poverty and inequality. For that, he was sentenced to life in prison in 1964. Over the next 26 years, Mandela became a human symbol of resistance to apartheid. From his Robben Island prison cell, he recognized that "difficulties break some men but make others."

As Mandela's fame grew, calls for his freedom came from our union and around the world. His release in 1990 was celebrated as an end to apartheid. Four months after his release, Mandela attended the AFSCME International Convention in Miami, where he thanked our union for aiding him and his movement for freedom. He compelled us to "keep the pressure on" wherever human dignity is under assault.

Reconcile differences

"As I walked out the door to the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison," recalled Mandela. As the first president of a democratic South Africa, Mandela united a nation scarred by hatred and division. He became the president of all South Africans, no matter their color.

Mandela's inauguration was an amazing act of reconciliation. He stood beside the white Afrikaners who had oppressed his people, and he invited his jailers to sit in the front row. Having the courage to forgive his enemies is what makes Mandela the transcendent leader of our time.

"No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion," said Mandela. "People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."

Overcome inequality and poverty

"Overcoming poverty is not an act of charity, it is an act of justice," Mandela said. "Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made



and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings."

Mandela's wise words compel us to confront income inequality in America. Just compare the fortunes of the Walton family and their customers, who no longer can afford to buy anything that isn't made in China and sold by someone making close to minimum wage. The six Walmart heirs now hold more wealth than 42 percent of all Americans combined, according to the Economic Policy Institute. Anyone who works full-time shouldn't have to live in poverty. That's why our union will not rest until the minimum wage is raised to at least \$9.50 an hour.

We also share Mandela's belief that "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." Prejudice will not end until we close the achievement gap, in which students of color consistently score lower than their white classmates. While this disparity is a national problem, we should be particularly embarrassed that Minnesota's gap is wider than Mississippi's. To narrow the gap, our union champions expanded early-childhood education, smaller class sizes, and opportunities for low-income students to afford college.

Mandela advised us, "To be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others." We unite to carry forward his legacy of freedom, equality, and reconciliation.

In solidarity,

Eliot Seide
Executive director



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 opportunity and prosperity for all workers.

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(elected October 2012)

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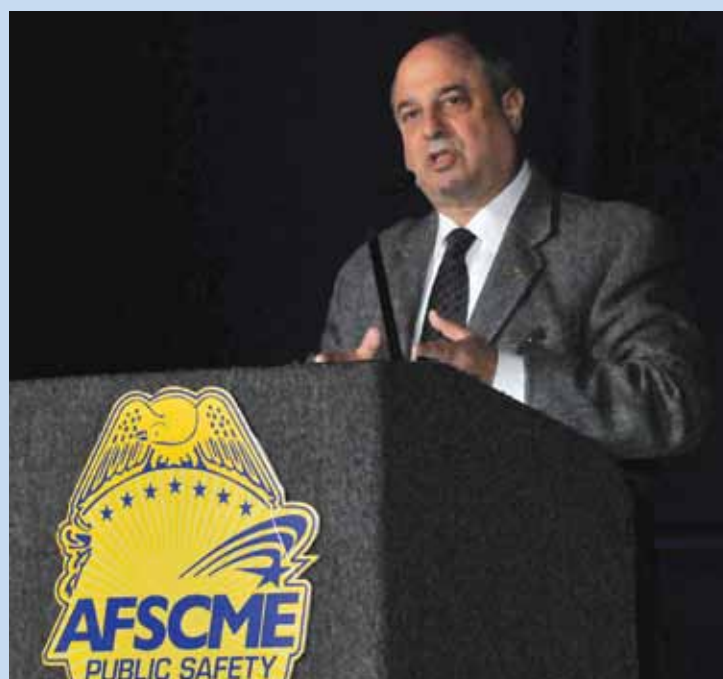
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Executive director Eliot Seide leads a plenary session on "Public Safety and Politics" at AFSCME International's Public Safety Conference in Columbus, Ohio. Seide emphasized not only the importance of political action, but also the importance of looking past political differences among us to focus on what unites us.

The conference also honored Council 5 corrections locals for their work to fight outsourcing and successfully mothball the private prison in Appleton.



Stepping UP

Judy Wahlberg, President
Eliot Seide, Executive Director

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Being a medical examiner investigator, Carrie Notch says, is “never easy. You get more comfortable with time. You get better at it with time. But it never gets easier.”

The work is hard enough – investigators find forming a union doesn’t have to be

Investigators in the Hennepin County medical examiner’s office have a hard, thankless job. But one thing at work wasn’t a challenge: forming a union. Thanks to an accretion agreement between AFSCME and Hennepin County, the investigators were able to unionize last year as soon as a majority signed cards saying they wanted representation.

Clerical and technical workers in the ME’s office – including lab workers who prepare bodies before and after autopsies – already are organized. They are members of Local 34. The ME investigators now are part of Local 2864.

A stronger voice

As the scope of the Hennepin County ME’s office has expanded, investigators felt administration was backsliding in how it responded to their concerns, Carrie Notch says. “We felt that becoming unionized possibly could change that and give more power to employees,” she says.

Last year, the Hennepin County ME took on responsibility for cases in Dakota and Scott Counties, too. To cover the additional caseload and territory, there are now 14 full-time investigators, plus additional investigators who are part-time, intermittent, or on-call. Investigators work a variety of 8- and 12-hour shifts, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Time off, seniority, and uncompensated training are among issues investigators feel they can improve, says Notch, who is now a steward for her bargaining unit. They’ve gotten at least one immediate victory: a wage differential when they train other employees.

Making sure investigators stay healthy is another goal Notch hopes being unionized can help accomplish. The county now has counseling services available to manage stress, for example, but participation is optional and voluntary. She and some co-workers think requiring regular debriefings with professionals who understand the nature of their work could help investigators better address potential problems – before they get serious.

Death is just part of the job

Homicides and suicides. Fires, traffic fatalities, industrial accidents, and overdoses. Mysterious illnesses. Decomposing remains found in homes, in rivers, or in the woods.

These are all typical days at work for investigators in the Hennepin County medical examiner’s office. Investigators are the frontline workers who recover bodies, then build the medical case determining how somebody died. It is physically and emotionally demanding.

By law, the ME’s office determines the cause and manner of any death that is sudden, unexpected, or “due entirely, or in part, to any factor other than natural disease.” It is AFSCME investigators who start that process.

“Law enforcement is in charge of the scene, but we’re in charge of the body,” says Carrie Notch, who has been with the ME’s office 13 years. No one is supposed to move a body or disturb the scene until the investigator gives the OK. Ultimately, it is the investigator who must physically remove the body – and do so in a manner as respectful as possible, she notes.

Their job is a rigorous combination of on-the-scene and behind-the-scenes work. Investigators examine the site of a death, take photos, and gather evidence. Then they do research. They review the decedent’s medical history and recent activities. They interview family, associates, medical and law enforcement personnel, and first responders. They prepare a

complete report that pathologists use when conducting an autopsy.

The ME’s office is responsible for reviewing all deaths that occur outside a hospital – and even some that occur inside one. It is set up to do more sophisticated forensics work than a typical county coroner can.

The puzzle: How somebody died

Investigators face challenges that go beyond the sometimes gruesome situations they walk into. In the field, investigators face all kinds of circumstances, not all of them safe, Notch says. They often work surrounded not only by biohazards and other safety issues, but also by emotionally charged bystanders.

“You have to be calm, keep your emotions in check,” Notch says.

In deaths that are suspicious or possibly criminal, ME investigators and law enforcement work side by side. But they work with very different purposes, Notch says. The medical examiner’s office is focused exclusively on determining how the person died. It’s up to police to determine who might be responsible.

“But the cause and manner of death, based on our information, will play a role in what law enforcement will charge, if anything,” Notch says.

Still, the medical examiner’s role is to issue conclusions that are

independent, unbiased, logical, and scientific. So in Hennepin County, although ME investigators and sheriff’s deputies cooperate on the scene, and although the ME’s office and the sheriff’s crime lab share the same building, they don’t share access or data.

Coping with families – and stress

The ME investigators’ job doesn’t end after they move the body back to the morgue, where they prepare it for autopsy or for release to the family.

They are the ones who must officially deal with relatives.

“You’re human, but you have to try to keep it together.”

– Carrie Notch

That is rarely easy, Notch says. “Everybody grieves differently. The challenge is, you’re dealing with people who are ultimately at their worst. They just lost a loved one. Emotions are high.” In

the middle of this, she says, “you have to ask difficult, personal questions – questions that are hard for families to answer.”

Even though Notch has a graduate degree in forensic science, no training prepares investigators for what they face every day, she says. The truth is, some cases “remain with you for years.”

The best investigators, she says, learn to “leave work at work. Otherwise, it will consume you. You deal with your emotions later, in whatever way you choose – exercise, family. Hopefully, they are positive choices.” ■

77 percent

of workers who would get a raise are adults

73 percent

have at least a high-school degree

44 percent

have at least some college education

73 percent

work at least 20 hours a week

77 percent

are the only wage-earner in their family

Source: Minnesota Jobs Now Coalition, "A Raise for Minnesota"

Raising the wage achieves good things

Raising the state's minimum wage to \$9.50 an hour would give 357,000 Minnesota workers a pay raise. It would increase spending power in the state by nearly half a billion dollars a year. It would be especially good for women and workers of color.

Those are key findings in a report from the Jobs Now Coalition, which details the economic and community benefits of raising the wage to \$9.50 by 2015. That is the wage the House of Representatives approved last spring. AFSCME and allies now are pushing the Senate to finish the job when the Legislature reconvenes in February.

Who really benefits

The Jobs Now report blows up outdated stereotypes and misperceptions about minimum-wage workers in today's economy. For example:

- A typical minimum-wage worker is an adult, not a teenager in an after-school job.
- Raising the wage to \$9.50 would immediately improve

economic security for 63,000 working parents; those higher wages for parents will directly improve life and achievement for 137,000 children.

The report especially highlights how raising the wage would benefit women and communities of color:

- 57 percent of workers who would get a raise are women, even though women are less than half the workforce.
- The vast majority of workers who would get a raise are white. But a wage increase to \$9.50 has a bigger impact on communities of color: 29 percent of Latino workers and 22 percent

of African-American workers would get a pay raise.

The Jobs Now report also illustrates how the minimum wage lost its historical purchasing power. One example: The federal minimum would be \$10.50 if it had kept up with inflation in the past 45 years. The Minnesota bill adjusts the future wage to inflation.

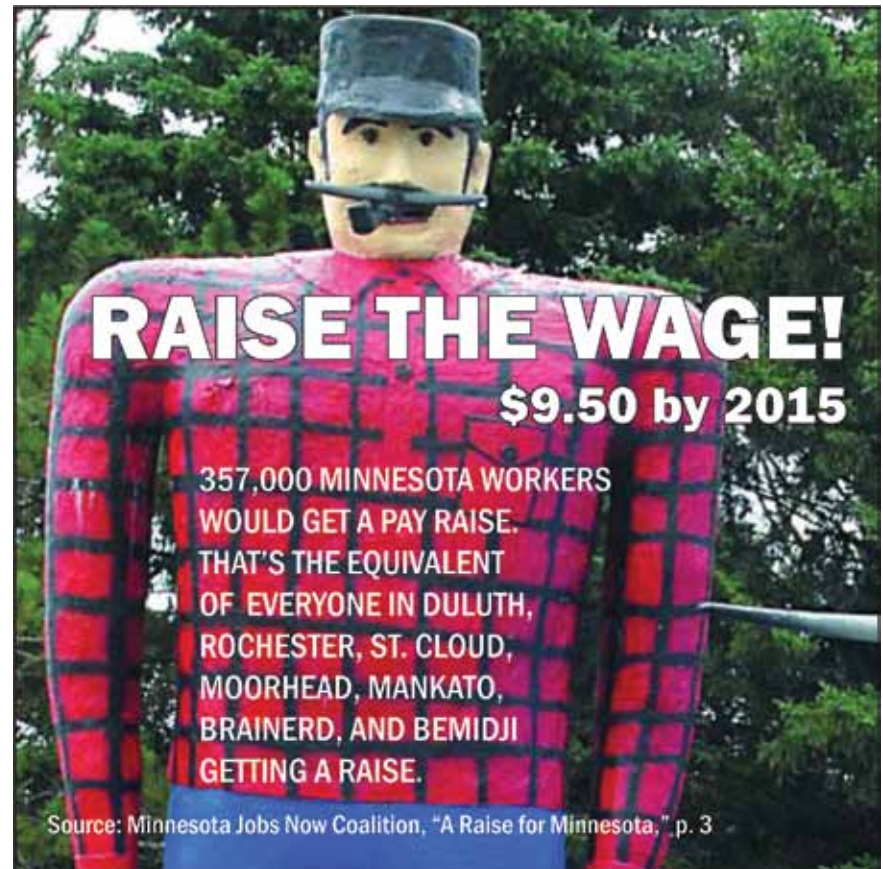
The House bill also continues to outlaw a "tip penalty," that prevents the state from establishing a lower, second-tier wage scale for restaurant staff and others who work for tips.

Raise the Wage Rally: Feb. 25, 3 p.m. Capitol Rotunda

Contact your state senator

The Minnesota House has passed it. Gov. Mark Dayton says he'll sign it. That means raising Minnesota's minimum wage this year depends on the state Senate. To make it happen, tell your senator to raise the wage to \$9.50.

- To find your senator's phone number, go to: www.senate.mn; click "2013-2014 Senator Information."
- If you don't know who your senator is, call 651-296-0504.



Low minimum wage means taxpayers are subsidizing low-wage employers

Half the Minnesota workers who make less than \$9.50 an hour work in just two sectors: retail, and leisure and hospitality (which includes restaurants, hotels and resorts).

Rep. Ryan Winkler, author of the House bill to raise the minimum wage, points out that most of the state residents who work – yet still receive public assistance – have jobs in those two sectors. "Workers are putting in as many hours as they can, and are doing the best they can, yet still qualify for public assistance," Winkler said.

In fact, research by Minnesotans for a Fair Economy estimates that the 12 biggest big-box retailers in Minnesota cost taxpayers \$150 million – because their workers supplement salaries with public benefits such as Medicaid, SNAP, the Earned Income Tax Credit, and cash assistance.

That kind of indirect taxpayer subsidy to low-wage employers is a national disease:

- Researchers at the University of California say that more than half of fast-food workers rely on at least one form of public assistance to support their families.
- A report from the National Employment Law Project says taxpayers cough up nearly \$7 billion a year to compensate fast-food workers for the pay and benefits their employers don't provide them. ■

The national perspective

Minnesota's minimum wage is \$6.15, the third lowest in the country. The federal minimum wage is \$7.25. The District of Columbia and 21 states have a minimum wage higher than \$7.25.

These states are raising their minimum wage in 2014:

- California (\$9, rising to \$10 by 2016)
- Connecticut (\$8.70, rising to \$9 in 2015)
- New Jersey (\$8.25, indexed to inflation)
- New York (\$8.75, rising to \$9 in 2015)
- State of Washington (\$9.32, indexed to inflation)
- Washington, D.C. (\$9.50, rises to \$11.50 by 2016, then indexed to inflation)

Propaganda buster: A higher minimum wage actually can help small businesses

Opponents claim a higher wage will punish small businesses. But that's not true, for at least three reasons. In fact, small businesses and low-wage workers share a common foe: corporate chains that try to impoverish both of them.

Fact No. 1: Two-thirds of employers who pay minimum wage are not mom-and-pop operations. They're big

companies, with at least 100 workers, the National Employment Law Project says.

Fact No. 2: In Minnesota, 77 percent of small businesses are not affected by a higher minimum wage at all, the Jobs Now Coalition says. Those businesses are owner-operated, with no employees.

Fact No. 3: Raising Minnesota's minimum wage to \$9.50 will put \$471 million more into workers' pockets, according to the Economic Policy Institute.

That additional spending power means increased sales for businesses because, in reality, low-wage workers overwhelmingly spend their additional

income on essential needs.

In addition, innovative employers find that paying a higher wage reduces turnover, which actually reduces business costs and increases productivity. That's a model followed by firms as diverse as Costco on the national level, and Punch Pizza in the Twin Cities.



Council 5's goals for this year's Legislature

Raising Minnesota's minimum wage to \$9.50 an hour is only one of AFSCME's priorities for the 2014 legislative session. Building on last year's success, here is our list of unfinished business:

Transportation. Approve a comprehensive, long-term funding package so Minnesota can erase its transportation deficit. We need to guarantee we have a system with safe roads and bridges, and easy access to public transit. We need to guarantee we have the workforce and funding in place so the state can properly maintain and improve transportation networks to support living-wage jobs and expand access and opportunity for all.

Outsourcing. Add requirements so local units of government can't outsource public jobs, services, and infrastructure to for-profit corporations. Apply the principles of the state's Transportation Taxpayer Accountability Act to the local level. Make sure

local governments prove who really can do the job most efficiently and effectively. (See related story on Page 7.)

Workers' rights. Provide the staff and commitment necessary to eliminate backlogs and obstacles that derail workers' organizing attempts. Outlaw use of public money to bust unions – such as the more than \$350,000 that South Metro Human Services spent on legal fees to fight workers who wanted to join AFSCME.

Child care and early childhood education. Bring conformity and reliability to child-care payment and compliance procedures. Make sure home child-care providers have access to the training they need to participate in the Early Learning Scholarship Program for the kids they care for.

Pensions. Support reasonable

policies that enhance the continued financial stability of defined-benefit pensions. Oppose bills that cut public workers' pension eligibility.

Revenue. No retreat on 2013 laws that make corporations and rich individuals pay their fair share. No reductions in business taxes without replacing the lost revenue.

Human services. Defend the Minnesota Sex Offender Program and the specialized role it plays. Prevent unnecessary licensing and background checks on human services personnel.

Corrections and public safety. Prohibit private prisons. Increase staffing levels where needed. Eliminate contracts with private and out-of-state food vendors, and the safety threats these contracts present.

Bonding. Invest in brick-and-mortar projects that protect the health and safety of public workers. ■

Council 5
Day on the Hill:
March 25



GET A MOVE ON

AFSCME has joined MoveMN, a diverse coalition dedicated to erasing Minnesota's transportation deficit by securing a comprehensive funding package during the 2014 legislative session.

Getting there: Watch a 3-minute video that shows how we all have a stake in getting from "A to B": Go to <http://bit.ly/17kSFQh>

Sign up: To show your support, sign up as an individual member: Go to movemn.org.

Moving forward with a surplus

Projections that Minnesota will have a \$1 billion balance in its current two-year budget show the wisdom of investing in jobs, education, and a tax system that's more fair. Because of the fiscal turnaround, Minnesota can:

- Finally pay its debt in full to local schools
- Begin the next budget with an \$825 million surplus on the books – the first time that's happened in 15 years

Other economic statistics show Minnesota has regained all the jobs it lost in the Great Recession. That means 122,000 people are back to work since January 2011. Minnesota has the nation's fifth-fastest-growing economy, and Forbes ranks us the eighth-best state for business.

Local 66 member helps veteran gain \$300,000

Because Local 66 member Brian Rulifson uncovered a decade-old error – then took the time to get it fixed – an Army veteran in St. Louis County now has a \$306,962 check for benefits he should have been receiving since 2004.

The veteran also will get disability benefits for the rest of his life, and have guaranteed medical care for a cancer that's linked to his service in Vietnam.

"It was a life-changing event," Rulifson says. "I'm glad I could be part of it."

Rulifson is a veterans' service officer for St. Louis County. He'd been on the job less than six months when the Vietnam vet walked into his Virginia office, in need of emergency assistance. While working through the veteran's file, Rulifson discovered that the man has been diagnosed with what's called "a presumptive cancer" – an illness likely to be the result of military service. The man had filed a claim in 2004, but the Veterans Administration denied it.

That didn't seem right to Rulifson, who served 20 years in the Navy himself. So he went to bat. After

teaming with Vietnam Veterans of America, Rulifson persuaded the VA to reopen the case.

The result: The VA reversed its decision and declared that the veteran's disability is "100 percent service connected." The back pay is the largest settlement for a veteran in St. Louis County history.

Veterans are owed "a debt of gratitude from the nation that can never be repaid," Rulifson says. "Whether they're wounded, they have a disease, or they have injuries nobody else can see, the nation owes them a thank you."



Local 66 member Brian Rulifson says he was just doing his job when he fought to get a veteran more than \$300,000 in retroactive benefits.



Who's got the power?

Executive board members of Local 2672 at the Department of Labor and Industry mixed mirth and message on Halloween: Sharon Kirscher, Sara Sjoberg, Lorinda Floding, Kathy Perreault, and Lenny Kukuruza dressed up as Rosie the Riveter, inspired by the iconic "We Can Do It!" poster.



Fighting hospital's snow job

A little snow didn't stop members of Locals 977 and 2474 at Hennepin County Medical Center from continuing their struggle for a fair contract. Members marched in December, part of their effort to fight off the hospital's attempts at takebacks. The hospital was trying to cut parts of their pay, raise their health insurance costs, and restrict use of paid time off.



The faces of courage

Members of Council 5's Child Care Providers Together celebrate the 2013 Leadership Award for "courageous leadership and grassroots organizing" given to Lynn Barten during Take Action Minnesota's annual banquet in November in Minneapolis. Barten, a child-care provider from Alexandria, is one of the members of Local 3400 who helped providers gain the right to join a union during last year's legislative session. CCPT members are (from left) Barten, Lisa Thompson, Karla Scapanski, Hawo Gurey, Marlene Blake, and Clarissa Johnston.

BRIEFS

ALEC, slimy cousins are still coming after us

Last time, we exposed legislators and corporations. This time, we expose their ‘stink tanks.’

Much of the money behind ALEC’s corporate infiltration of state legislatures is also behind two other secretive groups – the State Policy Network and Watchdog.org – a new report shows.

The **State Policy Network** finances more than 60 ideological “think tanks” that masquerade as independent policy organizations, according to a report from the Madison-based Center for Media and Democracy.

Two of these state think tanks – which the report playfully shortens to “stink tanks” – are in Minnesota: the **Center of the American Experiment** and the **Freedom Foundation of Minnesota**.

The State Policy Network follows a playbook similar to ALEC’s. ALEC – the American Legislative Exchange Council – thrives by disseminating cut-and-paste “model legislation” that is written by corporate lobbyists.

Similarly, the stink tanks in the State Policy Network publish deceptive, academic-type research, sometimes cloning language from state to state. Their research isn’t intended to provide objective evaluation; instead, it typically disseminates corporate and right-wing ideology and wish lists.

Minnesota’s Center of the

American Experiment, for example, sought \$40,000 from the State Policy Network to orchestrate a campaign attacking public employee pensions, according to documents obtained by *The Guardian* newspaper. An earlier batch of State Policy Network reports promoted anti-union “right to work” legislation in multiple Midwestern states.

Dragging ALEC, accomplices into the light

In 2011, the Center for Media and Democracy helped expose ALEC, its role as a corporate front group, and the money behind it. Council 5 members called out and confronted Minnesota legislators who paid dues, attended ALEC meetings, and pushed ALEC’s legislation.

That state and national exposure cost ALEC more than 400 legislative members, more than 60 corporate members, and hundreds of thousands of dollars in dues and sponsorship revenue, according to documents obtained by *The Guardian*.

But many of the same donors from the 1 percent are still at it. They and their foundations still bankroll ALEC. And the Koch Brothers, Walmart heirs, and others continue to pursue the same goals by also pouring money into the State Policy Network, according



Council 5 illustration by Kirk Anderson

to the Center for Media and Democracy.

The tax-exempt status of the network’s stink tanks lets them keep the names of their donors secret. Nonetheless, documents show the State Policy Network is supported by the likes of the Koch-funded **Donors Capital Fund** and **Donors Trust**, the **Searle Freedom Trust**, Wisconsin’s **Bradley Foundation**, and the Coors family’s **Castle Rock Foundation**.

The policy network, the report says, serves as a middle man: It funnels millions of dollars from corporate sources into stink tanks, which churn out policy sludge for right-wing causes. Just as in Minnesota, the network is financing campaigns in other states to “reform” public pensions, reduce state revenue, and weaken collective bargaining, according to grant requests obtained by *The Guardian*.

A Republican clubhouse

The center’s report also details how staff and board slots at both Minnesota stink tanks are packed with Republican operatives and campaign donors. Examples:

Scott Honour, a Republican candidate for governor, is a Center of the American Experiment board member.

Another board member,

Molly Corrigan Cronin, chairs the U.S. Senate campaign of Republican **Mike McFadden**.

Another board member, **Robin Norgaard Kelleher**, is an attorney at Seaton, Beck & Revnew – the state’s most blatant, anti-union law firm. It is in cahoots with the **National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation**, which is trying to overturn union rights for child-care providers in

Minnesota and to undermine workers nationwide.

The Center of the American Experiment is also the source of the “Minnesota Policy Blueprint.” That book was a road map for Gov. Tim Pawlenty and Republican legislators in their quest to cut taxes on the rich, give free reign to businesses, outsource public services, and eliminate public workers. ■

Organizations hide behind tax-exempt status

Both the Center of the American Experiment and the Freedom Foundation of Minnesota are classified as 501(c)3 nonprofits. By law, their tax-exempt status requires them to be nonpartisan and independent.

However, the Center for Media and Democracy questions whether the Center of the American Experiment actually violated its nonprofit status in 2012. It points to the active role the Center of the American Experiment took in redistricting and in supporting the voter restriction amendment.

ALEC also is surrounded by questions about the legality of its activities. Common Cause, for example, is suing to revoke ALEC’s 501(c)3 tax-exempt status, claiming ALEC’s lobbying activities violate federal law.

But just as ALEC’s benefactors are masking their efforts by using the State Policy Network, ALEC is trying to dodge image problems by rebranding itself, too. ALEC is spinning off some activities into what it calls the “Jeffersonian Project,” according to documents obtained by *The Guardian* newspaper.

The Jeffersonian Project would be a 501(c)4 “social welfare” organization. However, it would be completely under ALEC’s control, and would be able to pursue political activity in a way that a 501(c)3 cannot – or at least cannot pursue legally. ALEC also believes a 501(c)4 designation will lure more corporate donors, according to documents *The Guardian* obtained. ■



Protesters greeted delegates at a 40th birthday event for ALEC in Washington, D.C., in December.

Bye-bye, ALEC

These are some of the corporations that quit because they no longer could stand the heat of being associated with the American Legislative Exchange Council:

Amazon	Express Scripts/	Merck
Bank of America	Medco	MillerCoors
Best Buy	General Electric	Pepsi
Blue Cross	GlaxoSmithKline	Procter &
Blue Shield	Hewlett-Packard	Gamble
Bristol-Myers	Intuit	Unilever
Squib	John Deere	Walgreens
Brown-Forman	Johnson &	Walmart
Coca-Cola	Johnson	Wells Fargo
ConocoPhillips	Kraft	Wendy’s
CVS Caremark	McDonald’s	Western Union
Dell Computers	Medtronic	YUM! Brands

Keep the heat on

Force more corporations to quit ALEC:

- Text “ALEC” to 225568.

Ask your state legislators:

- Are you a member of ALEC?
- Have you ever sponsored bills based on ALEC’s model legislation?



The stink tanks' pipeline to the media

In general, the stink tanks in the State Policy Network provide a deceptive veneer of scholarship to justify free-market and right-wing goals. Stink tank findings – even when outside researchers debunk them – provide talking points for partisans. The findings then get repeated through media and social media coverage.

Bluestem Prairie (a blog that covers Greater Minnesota) is among those shattering the illusion that stink tank research is independent and nonpartisan.

Bluestem points out that at least four staff members at one Minnesota stink tank – the Center of the American Experiment – are officially registered as paid lobbyists. (They are Kim Crockett, Katherine Kersten, Peter Nelson, and Mitchell Pearlstein.)

The Center for Media and Democracy highlights another ruse the State Policy Network supports. In 39 states – including Minnesota – the **Franklin Center for Government and Public Integrity** oversees a network of “news bureaus” with “investigative reporters.” These bureaus mostly publish online, but they also operate a news service that offers articles free of charge to local newspapers.

Fake reporting

The Minnesota version is connected to **Watchdog.org**, whose stories focus on right-wing obsessions. In Minnesota, Watchdog frequently runs articles opposing the campaign by child-care providers to form a union. Other articles routinely attack public pensions, public employee pay and benefits, and public spending of all sorts.

Late last year, for example, Watchdog went after St. Louis County workers, who were

in last-ditch negotiations to avoid a strike. Watchdog targeted these AFSCME members by trying to tie them to a story from a conservative Washington website about how public workers are “overpaid.”

There’s further evidence that Watchdog is hardly a source of independent journalism. Its “reporter” in Minnesota is **Tom Steward**. But Steward is actually a staff member at the Freedom Foundation of Minnesota and a former public relations agent for Republican candidates and office holders.

Not surprisingly, the Center of the American Experiment frequently publishes Steward’s “stories” on its own website. In addition, Steward is a columnist in the “Your Voices” section of the *Star Tribune*’s website. The *Star Tribune* never discloses Steward’s Freedom Foundation job; instead it lets Steward hide behind his title of Minnesota bureau chief for Watchdog.

But Steward and Watchdog.org are not the only ways the think tanks infiltrate Minnesota media. Personal connections allow them to push their agendas directly into Minnesota’s biggest media outlets:

Katherine Kersten, a senior fellow at the Center of the American Experiment, is a regular columnist for the *Star Tribune*.

The Center’s founder, **Mitchell Pearlstein**, is a former *Pioneer Press* editorial writer. He continues to show up regularly in newspapers, radio, and television.

Craig Westover, another former *Pioneer Press* editorial writer, is another frequent contributor to print and website editorial pages. He was a regular blogger for the **Minnesota Free Market Institute**, which merged with the Center of the American Experiment in 2012. ■

Find out more about SPN

- <http://bit.ly/1hlzTrK>
- www.stinktanks.org

Attacks on public employees mask bigger ambush on all workers

There’s no doubt that public workers and public employee unions are under siege. But these well-publicized attacks divert attention from an even more insidious effort that is undermining wage and job security for all workers – especially those who don’t have unions, an analysis by the Economic Policy Institute says.

In state after state, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), and its corporate partners are systematically eroding labor standards, the report says. New laws adopted since 2010 in dozens of states are chipping away at overtime pay; sick leave; meal breaks; job safety; protections against on-the-job discrimination; child labor provisions; unemployment insurance; workers compensation; minimum wage, prevailing wage and living wage standards; pension and retirement security; who is classified as an employee and who is an “independent contractor;” and the ability of workers to sue for back pay, wage theft, or other remedies when employers screw them over.

“This policy agenda undercuts the ability of low- and middle-wage workers, both union and nonunion, to earn a decent wage,” says Gordon Lafer, the report’s author.

Unions lead the resistance

It is union members who have the organizing, financial, and political ability to fight this corporate agenda, Lafer says.

That explains why ALEC, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Federation of Independent Businesses, the National Association of Manufacturers, and other corporate trade groups are so vigorously trying to get their puppets in elected office to eliminate public workers and their collective-bargaining rights.

In some cases, such as in Minnesota, union workers have been able to fight off, minimize, or even reverse these attacks. But nonunion workers are not so fortunate, the report says.

By demonizing public workers and trying to turn private-sector workers against them, the corporate attacks managed to distract nonunion workers from the fact that the rug is being pulled out from under them, too.

“The assault on unions is not part of an agenda to lift the living standards and political power of nonunion workers,” the report concludes, “rather, it is part of a coherent agenda to do just the opposite.” ■



AFSCME’s striping crews in MnDOT dispel the myth that the private sector is more efficient than public employees. The AFSCME crews in Minnesota paint lines on highways for half the price that private competitors charge.

New tactics back privateers into a corner

AFSCME is part of a new ground-level campaign that’s turning the tables against those who try to outsource public services to for-profit corporations. The “Taxpayer Empowerment Agenda” provides specific ways to hold states, counties, cities, and school districts accountable if they even think about outsourcing services or selling off public infrastructure.

The goal is to make sure taxpayers – not corporations – control what taxes pay for. “We want to change the discussion,” says Donald Cohen, executive director of the group In the Public Interest. “We want to put them [privateers] on the defensive.”

Do it right, or don’t do it at all

The Taxpayer Empowerment campaign provides a playbook to put into action if a threat of outsourcing arises. “A lot of times, these things happen fast, and elected and community folks don’t know how to deal with it,” Cohen says.

To help, the campaign includes 10 questions opponents should ask immediately if a public agency or community considers outsourcing. “If you ask the right questions, a lot of times, they don’t have answers,” Cohen says.

“That slows them down. Or it can stop them.” (To see the 10 questions, scan this QR code on your mobile device.)



The agenda sets up standards that governments should follow in discussing outsourcing, and forces privateers to back up their rhetoric about the performance and savings they promise.

The Taxpayer Empowerment Agenda is built around basic principles of transparency, accountability, oversight, and public control of public services. “These are things that people think already happen, but they don’t,” Cohen says. “We want to start saying: Do it right. The reality is, if you do it right, you usually don’t do it.”

Where things go wrong

In December, In the Public Interest released a nationwide report giving details of nearly two dozen outsourcing schemes that cost taxpayers more, not less. That includes a \$143 million technology contract that Minneapolis gave to Unisys – then renewed twice without competitive bidding. That happened even though Unisys did not provide the favorable pricing its contract required.

The report also highlights how performing public work in-house can result in better quality at a lower price. One of the examples: how MnDOT’s highway striping crews can paint epoxy stripes for half the cost of private competitors.

More information: www.inthepublicinterest.org



Local connects members 1 by 1

It's been said: "Make no little plans." Martin Hoerth and the executive board in St. Paul Public Schools Local 844 are taking that conventional wisdom seriously.

With a contract that expires this year, Local 844's leaders are reaching out to uncover members' priorities for bargaining. But they want to accomplish more than that: They want to set up the infrastructure to connect members during negotiations – and beyond.

The wrinkle is, Hoerth's members work in 67 different buildings, spread all over the state's second-largest school district.

"We basically had problems with members not feeling connected," he says. "A lot of them are in elementary schools, where we maybe have only two AFSCME members – one clerk and one tech."

Two-way communication

So, after consultation and training through Council 5's education department, Local 844's eight executive board members divvied up the district and started visiting members in every single building.



At Highland Park High School, Marty Hoerth talks with Local 844 member Stacy Hanson about priorities for upcoming contract negotiations.

Local leaders are using a personal survey about contract priorities to focus their conversations with full members and fair-share members alike. That one-on-one approach is getting a stronger response than the

last round of contract talks, Hoerth says, when the local used an online questionnaire to solicit feedback.

Local leaders are also discovering something they didn't expect. "The biggest thing is just the

commitment of members to the union," Hoerth says. "Even though they don't show up to meetings or seemingly were uninvolved, they're very positive when you come out. They're willing to do things."

One thing members are stepping up to do is serve as an official union contact for their building or department. "We're going to have probably 70 to 80 people who are involved in a small way, but an important way. It's just going to make it so much easier," he says. "This is what could connect us all."

The school-by-school network of contact people will make it easier to distribute union news one-on-one, Hoerth says. It will also help funnel information back to leadership. For example, it will help union activists reach out to new hires long before their names show up on district paperwork.

"There's a strategy behind this, and it does work," Hoerth says. "It's a lot of work in the run-up but, after this, we don't need to cover 67 sites with eight people anymore."

"There's definitely a lot less to do with teamwork." ■

SOLIDARITY CORNER

The real deal

The official list of union-made, American-made cars

These days, it's hard to track where cars, trucks, and SUVs really are made. Here's a list of vehicles that are built union – either by United Auto Workers members in the U.S., or by members of their partner union in Canada. For the most-up-to-date list of vehicles from 2014 (or earlier years), go to: www.uaw.org/cars. Or, scan the QR code to store the list on your mobile device.



Ford's F-150 pickup is union-made in the U.S. and the nation's top-selling vehicle.

Union-made in the USA

Buick: Enclave, LaCrosse, Verano



Cadillac: ATS, CTS, ELR (electric), Escalade (ESV and Hybrid)

Chevrolet: Corvette, Cruze (gasoline and diesel), Express, Impala,

Malibu, Sonic, Suburban, Tahoe, Traverse, Volt

Chrysler: 200, Avenger, Dart

Dodge: Durango

Ford: C-Max, E-Series vans, Escape, Expedition, Explorer, F-Series pickups, Focus (gasoline and electric), Mustang, Taurus, Transit Connect

GMC: Acadia, Savana, Yukon (Hybrid and XL)

Jeep: Cherokee, Compass, Grand Cherokee, Patriot, Wrangler

Lincoln: MKS, Navigator

Mitsubishi: Outlander Sport

SRT: Viper

Union-made in the USA – maybe

Some of these vehicles are assembled in the U.S., some are not. Check the VIN (vehicle identification number); if it starts with a 1, 4, or 5, the vehicle is assembled in the U.S. If the VIN begins with 2, it is assembled in Canada; if the VIN begins with 3, it is assembled in Mexico.

Chevrolet: Equinox, Silverado

Ford: Fusion

GMC: Sierra

Ram: 1500

Union-made in Canada

Buick: Regal

Cadillac: XTS

Chevrolet: Camaro, Impala

Chrysler: 300, Town and Country

Dodge: Challenger, Charger, Grand Caravan

Ford: Edge, Flex

GMC: Terrain

Lincoln: MKT, MKX

LABOR HISTORY



Artist: Ricardo Levins-Morales (Northland Poster Collective)

Levins-Morales' 1997 poster brings the myriad values and accomplishments of the labor movement to life. He highlights achievements that contemporary workers often take for granted: living wages, safety on the job, equal pay, and time off to enjoy life. Rather than remain rooted in the past, however, the poster includes the timeless Frederick Douglass quote at the bottom, which reminds workers of what it takes to gain and keep such breakthroughs: "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."

This labor history poster is one of a series compiled by Council 5.