

2020 AFSCME Council 5 Member Convention Goes Virtual

For the first time, AFSCME Council 5 hosted its annual member convention virtually. The successful transition to an entirely online format is a testament to the durability of our union.

It was a tough decision for the planning committee to make when they determined that the safest option during the COVID-19 pandemic would be to hold the annual convention online. Every year, members look forward to gathering in person to advance our shared values as a union.

But with Governor Walz's order to limit in-person gatherings, and out of concern for the health and well-being of our members - especially those who are vulnerable to the virus - we began planning our first online convention.

On Thursday, September 24, AFSCME IU President Lee Saunders kicked off the convention with an update on AFSCME's work across the country.

"We must adhere to our shared values of social justice, racial justice, and gender equality, and live up to the legacies of John Lewis and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.," said Saunders. "We cannot shy away from talking to one another, even during heated discussions."

Saunders concluded, "We have a lot at stake in this election, and our historic all-hands-on-deck approach is going to be critical to elect leaders who share our values."

Executive Director Julie Bleyhl continued this message with an update on Council 5's ongoing work.

"Senate Republicans played political games with the contracts of more than 50,000 workers, but we stuck together, got the contracts



STEPPING FORWARD TOGETHER

ratified, and protected our collective bargaining rights," Bleyhl said. "We began an unprecedented organizing outreach campaign. We have signed up new members during this process and are building the strength of our union by "Stepping Forward Together."

Governor Walz addressed members in attendance with a grave but encouraging message about the future.

"This last session, we did a lot of great work together, including extending workers compensation to thousands of more workers if they contract COVID and investing CARES Act funds in our state and local government public services," said Walz. "We will have a tough year ahead with our budget and the continued effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. My door always remains open to AFSCME Council 5, and we'll work together at the decision-making table as we move forward."

Outgoing AFSCME Council 5 President Pat Guernsey addressed the convention with a powerful appeal to members to help elect pro-labor candidates up and down the ballot.

"No matter where you live, it's important to become involved in your local election," said Guernsey. "COVID-19 has affected the way we campaign this year. But we're AFSCME. We're going to get this done on behalf of the 43,000 workers we represent, their families, friends, coworkers, and their communities."

Chapter 5 Retirees President Jeff Birttnen shared his perspective on the organizing work retirees have done in Minnesota and around the country, even through a global pandemic.

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GOTV - are you signed up?

With just four weeks left before Election Day, now is the time to get involved and make sure your neighbors are ready to vote!

Have you signed up for your shift? With voter contact events now completely online, it's easier than ever to get involved. Whether you're new to voter outreach or a seasoned pro, **we need your help!**

We need volunteers to talk to voters now - before time runs out. **Sign up for a shift at forms.gle/cPQf8kuYcpNmbLmt9.**

It's a fact that union members are among the most successful persuaders for working people. Every vote matters, and we need your help to make sure that everyone makes their voice heard in November.

Sign up now at forms.gle/cPQf8kuYcpNmbLmt9 !

“Every generation stands on the shoulders of those who came before,” said Birttmen. “As retirees, we stood on the shoulders of others when we first joined the union. Now, we are proud to be the shoulders for all the working people in this fight with us.”

A highlight of the convention was the annual awards for locals and members whose accomplishments in local development, communications, organizing, and political activism over the past year were exceptional.

Local 999 at St. Stephen’s Human Services won the Mike Buesing Local Development Award for engaging members throughout their newly-formed local while often negotiating virtually and ultimately ratified their very first TA - all during the pandemic.

Local 1307 members at Anoka-Metro Regional Treatment Center (AMRTC) won the Eliot Seide Communications Award for their informational picket for better security in their workplace, and for taking direct and public action to protect workers, their clients, and their communities.

Minnesotans for Better Mental Health Care won the Jerry Wurf Organizing Award for their advocacy for members’ mental health in these challenging times, and the support network they built for members to stay in touch and share their stories during quarantine and social distancing.

The Corrections Policy Committee won the Rick Scott Political Award for their work at the Capitol - and especially their annual Day on the Hill - fighting for pensions and safe staffing, against 12-hour shifts, and for the funding they need to keep themselves and our communities safe.

Though the convention was shorter than an in-person event would have been, the core functions of a convention were completed successfully. But one key item of business remains: our bi-annual officer elections.

Though we could not gather in person, the power of our connection and solidarity pulled us together even in

an online setting. The Council 5 Virtual Member Convention was proof of our strength - we never give up, and we never quit and we will live up to our convention’s theme: Stepping Forward Together.

Support Our Endorsed Candidates!

Have you voted yet? Mail-in ballots are landing in mailboxes across the state, and early voting locations are open in every county.

We need your help to elect candidates who will support working people - check our endorsements page now to see who needs your vote at afscmemn.org/2020-election-endorsements.

But AFSCME members know voting isn’t enough. We need all our union siblings to roll up their sleeves and work to elect honest, principled leaders who will put working families first. Check out our voter contact events on the previous page!

The future of working people across the country is in your hands. Vote union - and vote now!

Togo and Willow River May Close

- Unless MN Legislature Passes

Supplemental Budget

For weeks, AFSCME members and the community have been fighting to keep the doors of the Togo and Willow

River Correctional Facilities open. This is essential for the employees who earn a living there, to the inmates who access proven solutions to rebuild their lives there, and for the community who benefits from the economic impact of these essential jobs.

AFSCME members have been fighting hard, but without supplemental funding from the Minnesota Legislature, Togo and Willow River and other facilities/ programs will close - and that will be just the start of layoffs across all sectors.

Public service employees who have put their lives on the line during the pandemic do not deserve to be thanked with a pink slip. Call your legislator now and urge them to pass the supplemental budget we need to keep all essential workers on the job and serving our communities!

Resources for Members

Stay up to date on all the latest news by following @afscmemn5 on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Get guidance and resources at afscmemn.org under the COVID-19 tab.

Look for action alerts via email and text so you know when to take action to protect working families. We are all in this together, siblings.



Sargeant Matt Stone (pictured here with his family) is just one of the many union members who would lose their jobs if Togo and Willow River close. They deserve better than a pink slip.