

ONE STRONG, UNITED VOICE FOR MINNESOTA WORKERS



Honoring our veterans

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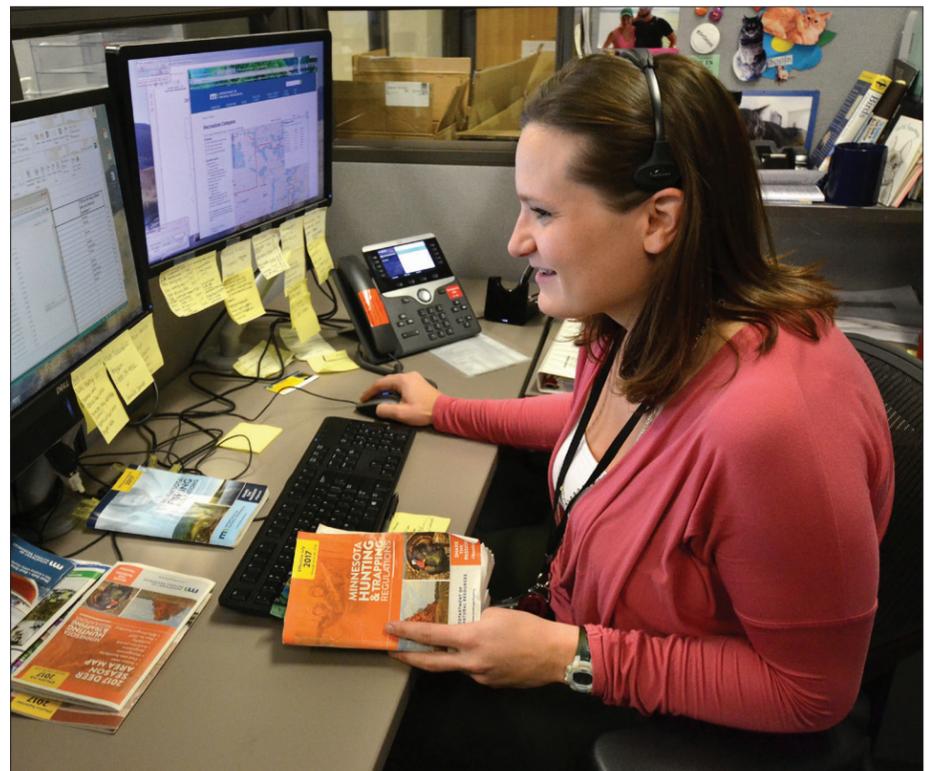
AFSCME Local 735's Darcy Soland (right) who works at the Fergus Falls Veterans Home, takes WWII veteran Rollie Kenyon and his wife, Evie, on outings like this one to the American Legion. She co-founded a group to help pay for equipment and field trips for vets.



Rescuing 'Bambi'

This fawn was stranded on a busy highway until MnDOT worker Walter Hodgeman of AFSCME Local 221 came by.

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Making deer season safe, successful

Deer season is an explosion of phone calls for DNR information center worker Sonja Davidson, an AFSCME Local 1465 Executive Board member.

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Supreme Court case threatens public workers

Janus v. AFSCME is a plot to rig the economy against us



As the U.S. Supreme Court prepares to hear *Janus v. AFSCME* this month, the future of working Americans hangs in the balance. The case aims to make the entire public sector “right-to-work” in one fell swoop.

We know strong unions are the best defense against endless attempts to rig the system against working people. Day after day, the privileged elites find new ways to attack our employment rights, wages and earned benefits.

Today – with a shrinking middle class and a growing gap between the rich and the rest of us – the last thing America needs is an assault on the freedom of working people to form strong unions and speak up for ourselves and our communities.

Janus is a purely political scheme bankrolled by the National Right to Work Foundation and the Liberty Justice Center. They’re out to eliminate unions from America’s economic and political landscape because they want to be able to call all the shots. They don’t want working people to have the ability to join together and influence decisions that affect our lives. They don’t believe we should have the same rights CEOs have to negotiate a fair return on our work.

These anti-union forces are part of a network funded by billionaires and corporate elites who use their massive fortunes to tilt the playing field in their favor. Their multi-million dollar campaign seeks to “defund and defang” and weaken labor unions, as exposed by a recent article in *The Guardian*.

The Liberty Justice Center, the legal arm of the right-wing Illinois Policy Institute, is arguing on behalf of Illinois state employee Mark Janus, the primary plaintiff. They argue that state employees should not be forced to pay union dues.

Lawyers for AFSCME Council 31 insist these “fair share” dues only pay for collective bargaining and do not subsidize political activities. Under current law, every union-represented worker may choose whether or not to join the union, but the union is required to represent all workers whether they join or not. Since all workers benefit from the union’s gains – like better wages, affordable health care, job safety and protection against unfair firing – it’s only fair that everyone pay their fair share.

Anti-union forces figure that abolishing fair share fees will drain unions of the resources we need to effectively represent our members’ interests.

We know that if we want to keep our union strong, we need to stand together. That’s why nearly 34,000 members of Minnesota Council 5 have recommitted to our union through the AFSCME Strong program. Nearly 83 percent of us have signed membership cards again to make it clear that we won’t let anyone take away our union.

Odds are that the high court will rule against working people. No matter what they do to us, we are not quitters. We won’t quit on each other, and we won’t quit on the fight for a better life for all people.

We believe in a world where working people have the freedom to form strong unions and speak up for ourselves and our communities. Where union membership is high, entire communities enjoy wages that represent a fair return on their work. Here in Minnesota, members of strong unions are scoring victories like higher minimum wages for all workers, safer nurse-staffing levels for patients and smaller class sizes for students.

Our unions are a source of unity and stability as the wealthy and powerful seek to rig the system and pit working people against each other. We join together like a family. We draw strength from our diversity and our rich history – and we feel connected and hopeful about our future.

Together we will lead with an agenda that puts our shared values first. We believe in real freedom and opportunity. That means having a voice on the job, affordable health care, time off to care for those we love, and the promise of retirement security after a lifetime of hard work.

All of us, standing proudly together, can create a just future that works for everyone. We must always remember that nobody can take away our union; only we can give it away.

When the court rules on *Janus* this spring, we will be ready.

In solidarity,

John P. Westmoreland
Executive Director



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

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(elected September 2016)

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Stepping UP

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Council 5 has new executive director



John P. Westmoreland, the former assistant director, started his new role on Nov. 1.

He replaced founding director Eliot Seide, who retired mid-December after aiding the transition.

“Our union is in good hands,” Seide says. “Under John’s leadership, our union won’t miss a beat as we continue our program with energy and discipline.”

Westmoreland says he plans to meet with leaders of every local and build “a coalition of the willing.”

“I want to empower people,” he says. “If I can do it, there’s no reason they can’t. I’m not going to be a vending machine for answers: I will help you find them. What do you need from me to be able to accomplish that goal? I don’t like fixing things – I like resolving them.”

Westmoreland says he believes in building teams and relationships, good communication, methodical attention to detail and follow through.

Before he was Council 5’s assistant director, Westmoreland was the northern field director; a field representative for Council 5 and Council 6; and an elections project organizer. Prior to that, he worked as a correctional officer in Stillwater, where he served multiple roles in Local 600; on the corrections Negotiations Master Team; the Corrections Policy Committee; and the Council 6 Executive Board.

Q&A

Do you have a union background?

My dad was a 49er (IUOE Local 49) all his life. My mother was a financial worker in Pine County. Now that my dad has passed away, my mother still gets her portion of his pension. My maternal grandfather was a Teamster. There was a union ethic in my household growing up. It was just part of who you were.

Why did you want to get involved?

When you work in a prison, you join your coworkers. The grievances that we had mattered to us, and it’s more than just grievances, it’s management, bargaining, communicating with each other. As members, as stewards, as activists, we knew what was best for us. I got active and got a

bunch of my coworkers active so we could deal with our terms and conditions of employment. We wanted to keep the institution, the staff and the public safe.

I spent a bunch of time lobbying for staffing and against the privatization efforts in corrections. We got funding for 116 positions in three facilities, for Rush City Correctional Facility.

Together you can get things done. It’s the power of more voices, solidarity and the coalition of the willing.

What is your philosophy?

You want to be empowering people to be their own solution. I’m very big on modeling behavior. My retired field representative, Sid Helseth, he was a great mentor. When it came to lobbying at the Capitol, Sid would say, ‘You’re the expert, you need to be the one down there.’ He didn’t feel the need to be the spokesperson, he would challenge you and guide you. When you raised an issue, he would say, ‘Great, what are you going to do about it? How are you going to fix it?’ The ultimate thing I understood from Sid is this is about relationships.

What’s your biggest achievement?

The biggest accomplishment was changing the way we delivered field services in Duluth (a model he’s since brought to the entire Council). You weren’t siloed into your assignment, everything was shared work. Before, what always bothered me was if you were out sick and I’m the local president, I didn’t have anybody to go to. With the new approach, if you were sick or on vacation, somebody else would be there to pick it up. Everything became what I call a class project.

It also brought the staff together as a team, recognizing the magic is in communicating with each other and helping each other, knowing what you’re all dealing with so anybody can be of help. Many people have pieces of the answer to a question. If I assume I have the answer, it assumes there is only one answer and I have the right one. That doesn’t work. Together, we can come up with a solution.

What are some other achievements?

We changed the recommitment cards. In the last two years, we have done more to change how we build, interact with and utilize our data and analytics than

we had in the previous 10 years because I approach everything with, why can’t we? Everything we do, how do we know if it has value if we can’t measure it, if we can’t share that progress?

We brought MemberLink online so members can access their own information. It gives you more time for a conversation. Now workers and activists can get back to building relationships.

One of the things I’m most proud of in this role is rebuilding our relationship between field services and the international union. That’s something that has paid huge dividends.

Like the MAC (Member Action Center). Two of the things members care about are, Where is my grievance? And why can’t anybody answer a simple question? If you’re out in the field, if you’re in a conversation, if you’re out there being effective, you’re not back here processing those files. The staff was too busy to get to the files, and they weren’t answering phones because they weren’t here.

Grievances, if you can’t get to it for a month, it doesn’t matter if it’s a winner or a loser. The employer knows there’s no recourse. There is no justice in waiting. It was important to fix that problem. We’re now within three months of the final employer step to being ready to go arbitration. The phones get answered, always.

You need to be methodical. You need to think it through and then carry it out. You can have the greatest plans on the planet. If you can’t carry them out, it doesn’t mean anything.



Where do you plan to take Council 5?

This is a great council. Our legacy, we are second to none. We are both leaders and learners. But we can always be better, and I will strive for this to be the best union for our members that it can be.

I’m going to begin by meeting with every local’s leadership and find out what’s important to them. We can’t dictate what’s coming at us but we can dictate our capacity to manage it.

What challenges do we face?

We’ve been preparing for Janus – the overturning of Abood – for two years. It’s coming. We have to shift gears from preparing for it to surviving in it. But I think the greatest challenge we face in this next year is the 2018 governor’s election, bar none. ‘Right to work’ won’t end us – the loss of collective bargaining will. We cannot lose the 2018 governor’s race.

What else should members know?

I’ve been a member for 32 years, I will always be a member. I believe in our union. I have no idea how not to be a member of this union. It is who I am.

Council 5's 2018 legislative agenda



The 2018 legislative session begins Feb. 20 and must adjourn by midnight May 21. AFSCME members and lobbyists will be at the Capitol to weigh in on a variety of important issues:

PELRA & PERB

- Protect the Public Employment Labor Relations Act.
- Support funding for the Public Employment Relations Board.

Pensions

- Support defined-benefit pension plans and oppose defined-contribution and hybrid plans.

Staffing Levels

- Support safe staffing for health and human services, corrections, public safety, and veterans' homes.
- Support full and adequate staffing for all state, university and local government programs and services.

Tax Policy and Revenue

- No retreat on new funding sources without replacement of those sources.
- Oppose erosion of the fourth-tier income tax.
- Oppose exempting Social Security benefits from income tax.
- Oppose estate tax cuts.
- Protect increases to local government aid and county program aid and ensure safety and security for residents in and around sanctuary cities.

Privatization

- Oppose outsourcing of public services, programs, and employees.

Corrections and Public Safety

- Ban private prisons and oppose the leasing of CoreCivic's Prairie Correctional Facility.

DNR

- Support insourcing of jobs from the Conservation Corps to the Department of Natural Resources.
- Protect sustainable funding for programs and staff.

Early Childhood Care, E-12 Education, & Higher Education Programs

- Support Early Childhood programs, E-12 Education and Higher Education.
- Protect job security of Minnesota State and University of Minnesota members.
- Support student debt relief.
- Support increased Child Care Assistance Program rates and automatic CCAP eligibility for foster parents.

Health and Human Services

- Support funding for additional mental health and chemical dependency programs and staff.
- Support sustainable, dedicated funding for long-term care.
- Protect MinnesotaCare, MNsure, and the provider tax.
- Support funding for additional county child protection screeners, investigators, and case managers.

Transportation

- Support a dedicated gas tax and a comprehensive, long-term transportation funding package which must include increased General Fund appropriations for maintenance, inspection, and design.

Bonding

- Support asset preservation and construction projects that improve the health and safety of our members.
- Department of Corrections: St. Cloud perimeter wall, Lino Lakes and Willow River expansions.
- Health and Human Services: Anoka and St. Peter.



Paid Family Leave

- Support paid family and medical leave; support earned sick and safe time.

Minimum Wage

- Protect indexing of the minimum wage.

Local Government Control

- Protect the authority of local governments to improve wages, benefits, and working standards.

Voting Rights

- Protect the right to vote.

Participation in caucuses, legislative special elections is crucial

Democracy is not a spectator sport!
Join your neighbors and union members at a
Precinct Caucus on Tuesday, Feb. 6 at 7 p.m.
Find your location and learn how it works:
www.sos.state.mn.us/elections-voting

Control of the Minnesota Senate hangs in the balance with an upcoming special election – and another election being blocked by a state leader who is violating our Constitution.

State Senate president Michelle Fischbach became lieutenant governor when Tina

Smith took Al Franken's seat. Now she's trying to stay in the Minnesota Senate, too, to help her Republican Party maintain its narrow anti-worker majority. But our state Constitution prohibits her from simultaneously holding both jobs.

Constituent Destiny Dusosky of Sauk Rapids has filed suit in Ramsey County, pointing out she's being deprived of representation. The lawsuit asks a judge to declare Fischbach's dual offices unconstitutional and to make her give up the Senate seat. That would lead to a special election, which could swing the Senate pro-worker.

A different special election that would help tip the balance toward workers is Feb. 12. AFSCME members have endorsed former state rep. Karla Bigham, a Washington County commissioner, for Senate District 54, the seat previously held by Dan Schoen. The district includes parts of southern Washington County and northeastern Dakota County.

If voters elect Bigham, the Senate moves one vote closer to a pro-worker majority, from 34-32 to 34-33. Fischbach following the law and vacating her Senate seat would tie the vote, and it could tip the vote toward workers and their families depending on who replaces her.

In the House, another key special election Feb. 12 could elect AFSCME-endorsed Melissa Wagner to District 23B, replacing Tony Cornish.

Special elections and the Fischbach lawsuit aren't the only things that will determine whether our lawmakers are pro-worker or not.

Precinct caucuses on Tuesday, Feb. 6 at 7 p.m. will help decide our future in 2018 and beyond. Find your polling place at <http://sos.state.mn.us/elections-voting>.



North St. Paul organizes for dignity and respect

Workers for the City of North St. Paul have their own union, thanks to a strong and unified campaign.

“Having a seat at the table is what’s most important, being able to voice our opinions, feeling like our opinion does matter,” says North St. Paul fire inspector Dan Krier.

“I feel like the playing field got a little more level,” says Karin Derauf, an administrative assistant in community development.

The new AFSCME group includes workers in numerous city departments. It’s divided into two units: the essential unit for fire and code enforcement; and the non-essential unit, which voted unanimously to join AFSCME Council 5.

“What sparked it was we started seeing some practices from management that were pretty questionable,” Krier says. “We were the last group of workers to not have collective bargaining protection. We were wanting those type of fair practices for us as well.”

Issues included workers being promised raises they didn’t get; the elimination of pay ranges; disparities between benefits for part-timers; employees held in temporary-status limbo; and the city filling vacant positions by offering lesser titles and lower pay while requiring the same workload.

“I’ve had three co-workers leave that I have taken on work from, including the finance director, who makes it four,” says utility billing coordinator Barb Huelsman. “I got a quarter an hour raise.”

Like Huelsman, who’s been at North St. Paul more than three decades, many of the workers are experienced veterans at their jobs with years of proud service. They wanted to make life better for fellow workers, residents and the city itself; and to ensure workers could keep providing exemplary public service.



Workers from the City of North St. Paul are in negotiations after forming their own union with AFSCME. (Front row, left to right) Barb Huelsman, Cynthia Govan and Karin Derauf. (Back row, left to right) Martin Waldera, Terri Slama, Dominic Jara and Lauren Pack.

“I wanted to protect my fellow employees,” Huelsman says. “That’s what pushed me to start. Now it’s like my eyes are open. I’m starting to see the inequity of how we’ve been treated. We should be a place where people want to go to work. We are the City of North St. Paul. We should be treated with respect and be treated fairly.”

Workers stayed strong in their desire to form a union, even as the former city manager dragged the process out for months by trying to exclude several workers. Halfway through their drive, when they learned that city manager was leaving, they decided to keep moving forward anyway. They wanted to ensure they’d have a voice and collective power – no matter who was running the city.

“We just know we’re stronger as 18 people than as one person,” Krier says.

City workers hope to win salary ranges so there’s transparency in pay and a reward for gaining experience and skills; more competitive wages to attract strong candidates; additional training; more concise and accurate job descriptions; and to secure their health and retirement benefits.

“I would like to see the pay ratio versus the job duties match, the workload ratio to pay ratio match,” Derauf says. “You can’t have one person or two people doing everything for a whole department.”

“It gives me confidence that I can be here until I retire,” Huelsman says.

Improving life for Hopkins workers, residents

When workers in the City of Hopkins decided to organize with AFSCME, their choice came fast and furious.

It took just three weeks for 28 employees to switch from an association (formed 45 years ago) and join Council 5. These workers are spread across the city, and their vote was nearly unanimous.

“I wasn’t surprised,” says housing inspector Liz Page. “I was excited for the group and proud. They showed up and demonstrated we’re willing to step up for ourselves. We do have some power. We have people working on our side.”

Workers say joining AFSCME was a direct result of their commitment to their jobs, the city they work in and their residents. Many volunteer in the community with groups like Big Brothers Big Sisters.

“We care about our small town outside of the big city,” Page says. “We are vested. We are public workers.”

The decision to join AFSCME was a perfect storm. Workers who’d served as long-time negotiators were about to retire, taking their knowledge with them. The city’s class and compensation study took several months to finish, with little communication from officials. Workers don’t believe it’s thorough, accurate or fair.

“We wanted help at the negotiating table,” Page says. “We also wanted the large membership and



Hopkins city workers Mary Lein, Penny Penner, Liz Page and Brian Stevens helped organize coworkers to make sure everyone’s voice will be heard.

all the benefits that come along with that, the legal knowledge of labor law that comes with AFSCME, a union voice. We have people working on our side.”

“I think there’s a sense of relief in knowing the class and compensation study isn’t just going to be a one-sided, final determination that won’t be reexamined in any way,” says building inspector Brian Stevens. “There’s going to be some sort of coordinated response from employees, and we feel our voices will be heard.”

To gauge support, Hopkins workers talked one-on-one and held meetings that quickly grew in

both size and enthusiasm. Workers have a wish list:

- Open communication with management, including the ability to give input.
- 21st-century contract language.
- A transparent, fair wage and compensation study.
- Decreased turnover.
- Worker training to ensure residents keep receiving a high level of service.

“We want a culture where every voice matters,” accounting technician Mary Lein says. “I really think people want to be valued. They want to be part of something bigger and better.”

DNR workers take hassle out of deer season

When deer-hunting season is about to open each year, Department of Natural Resources workers say there's a buzz in the air.

In the week leading up to the start of firearm deer season, they'll answer thousands of questions from hunters. They'll sell hunting licenses. They'll prepare to help test for Chronic Wasting Disease.

When hunters head into Minnesota's woods and fields to get their deer, it's thanks to these DNR workers that they can do so safely.

"Deer season is an explosion of phone calls," says AFSCME Local 1465 Executive Board member Sonja Davidson, who works in the DNR information center. "Over the last couple of months, we've really been hyping up for this."

A typical Monday might entail 250 calls. The Monday before deer opener in November, there were more than 700; the Friday before, there were upwards of 1,200, she says.

"We have everybody on the phone," Davidson says. "We are working overtime to answer the public's questions. We've been having potlucks. We've been organizing daily fun activities to keep our energy up. It's all of us working together at night, the phone ringing nonstop and calls in queue all the time."



(Top) Kevin Habeck works at the DNR's Saint Paul office. (Right) Katie Steffl of AFSCME Local 694 shows students how to test for Chronic Wasting Disease. (Photo courtesy of Katie Steffl)



Hunters have all kinds of questions: Where can we hunt? Which trails are open? Where is my license valid? What about Chronic Wasting Disease testing? Do we need to wear blaze orange?

"Every time that phone rings, you never know what you're going to pick up," Davidson says. She keeps a list of the funniest questions asked throughout the year: How do I get a woodchuck out of my snowblower? Where do Minnesota restaurants get their walleye from? 'I saw a peacock on my property. Is the DNR releasing them?'

She and other workers say the call center is crucial for a safe hunting season.

"If people have questions, they're not fully understanding things," says Brenda Thompson, a customer service specialist in the DNR license center and Local 1465 secretary. "It's good they're calling the DNR to get the proper answer rather than asking a friend or the guy at the gas station."

She says the work DNR staff do to promote and protect our natural resources is essential.

"I think nature has a lot to offer people, but nature kind of gets taken for granted," Thompson says. "We don't take a lot of time to think about the services nature provides, to appreciate what's out there. It's not there for human purposes only. It's thinking about how everything is bigger than ourselves."

Kevin Habeck answers questions and sells licenses at the DNR front counter in Saint Paul. "We're pretty serious about our jobs and what we do for the state of Minnesota," the Local 1465 treasurer says. "We have a good knowledge base."

He's been at the DNR since 2002, long enough to develop fans: "They come in just for you," Habeck says. "That makes me feel good. The younger generation will come, the older generation will come. The grandfathers and grandmothers,

they'll say, 'Hey kid, how are you?'"

He tells them he hopes they get the big one this year. "It's a pretty rewarding job," Habeck says. "I don't see myself anywhere else."

When deer season draws near, DNR workers hit the fields and forests, too. Laborers like Tom Simone, who splits his time between the DNR's Fish and Wildlife Division and Forestry, clean and mow parking lots, trim paths between the lots to connect them, and mow walking paths for hunters.

This season, the Local 1465 member joined a Chronic Wasting Disease sampling team in Garrison, one of numerous test stations in north-central, central and southeast Minnesota. So far, CWD has only been confirmed in the wild in southeast Minnesota.

"The area I'm in is under surveillance," Simone says. "They found Chronic Wasting Disease on a couple of deer farms. The whole point is to see if CWD has transferred to the wild herd."

Katie Steffl of AFSCME Local 694, an office administration specialist in the DNR's Madelia Research Office, was on a testing crew, too.

Hunters brought in their deer, and then workers slit the animals' throats so they could pull out lymph nodes for testing. They recorded details like a deer's age and sex. Steffl helped train others in the technique, too.

"I loved the interaction with hunters and getting to hear their stories," Steffl says. "I liked learning more about the deer and everyone working as a team. I grew up in a hunting family. It was really cool to see people bringing them in."

She says potentially helping stop the spread of the disease was rewarding. "It makes you feel like you want to do more and more, contribute more."

Crisis shows member the caring power of her AFSCME union

the **UNION** difference

When Kimberly Bishop and her family moved to Minnesota in search of jobs and a better life, they

didn't know a family crisis would stretch their resources to the breaking point. The American Red Cross phlebotomist with Local 3931 was surprised to find another AFSCME member there to help and to learn just how much her union had her back.

"My family and I just moved here from North Carolina in May, looking for work. We wanted to live somewhere where it's a nice place to raise our kids. We're thinking of our future. We want them to live in a nice area overall with a good cost of living, jobs and services. My oldest son is autistic. We're considering his future when we're gone.

I worked in the health care industry for 20 years. I had always wanted to work for the Red Cross, but there was never anything listed. Then I found a posting.

When I went in for my interview and she gave me the job description, I was like, wow, I didn't even know they did all of that. You set up bloodmobiles, you do your job, break it down and go home.

I was in the middle of training for my new job when I found out my mom was really sick and I needed to go see her. She was dying.

She lived in California. I was there for a week with her. I said my goodbyes. The day after I left, I got the call she had passed away.

Because I'm new, none of that week off was paid. (I later got three days of bereavement). The week I was gone fell in the pay period where they took out my premium for my health insurance.

I talked to my field representative and told her, I don't know what I'm going to do. I've only got \$100 for two weeks. I've got two kids. We're not going to make it. I'm just stuck between a rock and a hard place right now.

We didn't have savings. We had moved here in May but I didn't start working until July. My husband wasn't working yet. We didn't think it would take us that long to find a place to rent and a job. We ran out of money.

It was really hard for us to ask. The rep told me we do



Members honor, care for our veterans



War veterans sit excitedly around a long table at the Fergus Falls American Legion Post 30, basking in the atmosphere.

Darcy Soland, a recreation assistant at the Fergus Falls Veterans Home where these men make their home, is a blur of motion. She helps one vet take his jacket off, makes sure another gets his fair share of onion rings, and figures out if a vet who can no longer speak wants his usual order of shrimp, all at the same time.

In between, the vets give her the business; their faces light up as she gives it right back. The vets immediately start a contest over who's the oldest.

"I'm the oldest one," claims World War II veteran Clinton Neu, pointing at volunteer and fellow vet Harold Zilmer. "He's not as old as me."

How old are you? "Old as the hills," Soland teases. Then Neu learns he's only turning 94, while Zilmer is turning 95.

"He's older," Soland says. "You lose."

"She always wins," Zilmer jokes.

"I love you anyhow," Neu tells Soland.

Soland, the vice president and chief steward of Local 735, is among many dedicated workers at our state Veterans Homes in Fergus Falls, Hastings, Luverne, Minneapolis and Silver Bay who care for our veterans when they can no longer care for themselves.

The service these workers provide those who served our country isn't limited to the vets' physical health, comfort and safety. They take vets



(Clockwise from top) World War II veteran Clinton Neu enjoys chatting with Darcy Soland (right) and teasing her over dinner at the American Legion. The vets on the outing served in WWII, Korea and Vietnam. Soland leans in to hear vet Richard Suchy before helping him cut up his dinner.

on outings partly funded by the Council 5 Veterans Initiative, which raises money through candy sales and a matching grant from AFSCME International. The money helps the homes buy items they couldn't otherwise afford, everything from exercise equipment and a transit van in Hastings, to dinner and fishing trips.

"It's important to get these guys out into the community. If they can't get out into the community, they're going to be sitting in the home," Soland says. "These guys are the reason why we're here. My grandpa was a veteran. These guys are like my grandpas."



To supplement these donations in Fergus Falls, Soland and her boyfriend started a group called Boots on the Ground. The motorcycle

fun run, gun raffle and silent auction kicked in \$33,000 in 2017 to help pay for nearly 300 outings, a greenhouse and \$10,000 toward a transit van.

"Every day at the Veterans Home is Veterans Day because this is the last stop, the last place they're going to live," Soland says. "They're having everything ripped away from them. Their independence is pretty much gone. We have to make every day special for them."

Several Vets Home coworkers and AFSCME members share this belief and help: April Grothe, Jamie Martin, Vi Davis, Chris Jordan, Stephanie Auck, Shalan Wynn and Brad Anderson volunteer with Boots on the Ground. "They're part of the blood, sweat and tears that make it happen," Soland says.

The veterans say they can feel how special they are to workers and their community, thanks to outings like dinner at the Legion.

"Best dang time there is," Neu says. "It's the best damn fish you could ever buy. It's the only place you get a good meal, and it reminds me of the days in the Army. We used to go out to beer joints and stuff like that. This looks a lot like that."

"It means everything in the whole world," says Ruben Runningen, who served in the Korean War as an Army machine gunner. "I can't drive. I lost my driver's license due to bad eyes."

His favorite thing? The company, he says. "It makes me feel appreciated for the service we did for our country."

The men here are especially grateful for workers like Soland who make it all possible. Runningen says she's a wonderful person – and a great dancer.

"What do you want me to tell you about her?" Neu asks. "How about a bunch of lies?" He laughs. "Nah, she's a good kid. I love her to pieces. She doesn't love me, but I love her."

"I love you," Soland replies. "I love you every day that ends in Y."

They smile, then return to their dinners.

To get involved in Council 5's Veterans Initiative, contact Eric.Jacobson@afscmemn.org. Learn more about Boots on the Ground at www.bootsonthegroundvetsrun.org.



AFSCME member Lynne Larkin-Wright takes joy in helping union members help fellow union members through the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation.

have someone I can get you in contact with who may be able to help: Lynne Larkin-Wright (the Labor

Studies and Resource Center's AFL-CIO community services liaison, who connects union workers with services). Lynne gave me a listing of all the food pantries in Mankato. Then she asked me what grocery stores we had. She said, 'Oh good, Cub Foods is union, we can work with them.' When I got the gift cards in the mail, I'm like holy crap. It was \$80 total!

It was a huge help. We were really scrounging. I had luckily paid all my bills with my previous paycheck. I was able to get a little bit from the church, dry foods, which definitely helped. But the situation left us completely devastated for food, for gas for the car, anything else we needed. It just left us flat. The help was tremendous.

I was surprised. I had never worked union before. I had no idea of the resources. I went to a local meeting because I had no experience with a union. I wanted to be involved so I can feel empowered, so I knew how things worked, so I knew what I was getting into.

The fact they stepped in to help me and my family, it was a really personal gesture. I'm really moved. It made me feel happy that I'm with a union that cares about us as people.

Before we switched to union benefits, I was paying over \$1,000 for my medical benefits. Now it's about \$400 for the whole family. It's a lot cheaper now. With the other changes, we get more money on the per diem.

Ever since we went union, there is definitely more of a camaraderie. We have a voice. The concerns we have are going to be heard. We're talking to each other, we're uniting about concerns we have. It's definitely brought us closer together."

You can help out fellow union members going through hard times by donating to the LSRC, 353 W. 7th St., #201, Saint Paul, MN 55102. Write "emergency assistance" on the memo line.



Rescuing animals all in a day's work for MnDOT man

MnDOT worker Walter Hodgeman was driving down the highway picking up trash and chunks of blown-out semi tires to prevent accidents when he spotted a small, wobbly creature.

It was a fawn on the center median of busy Highway 610.

"If it goes one way, it goes into the ramp that would take you to Coon Rapids Boulevard," recalls Hodgeman of AFSCME Local 221. "If it goes the other way, it's right up on the freeway. I didn't see the mother anywhere in sight."

When the fawn began moving, Hodgeman started thinking, How could he could scoot across the highway and shoo the animal to safety? Then it plopped down on the median.

"I walked right up to it and it just lay there, so I picked it up," he says. Hodgeman tucked it into the cab of his Ford F-150. "It just sat in my lap on the way back to the shop."

He explained the situation to his supervisor, who approved him taking personal time to bring the fawn to the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Roseville, which successfully released it back into the wild.



(Left) MnDOT worker Walter Hodgeman rescued this fawn from a busy highway. (Top) He saved this injured hawk while helping clear a rollover accident. (Photos courtesy of Walter Hodgeman)

at 35-W to West Highway 10. The hawk couldn't fly. Hodgeman called the Raptor Center, which sent someone to pick it up.

He says the guys in his MnDOT shop get a kick out of him rescuing animals.

"I've been interested in wildlife my entire life," he explains. "I've hunted pheasant and deer; you name it, I've been out hunting it at one time or another. Part of the job is picking up dead deer and stuff. I'd rather pick it up now than when it's dead because I know at least now it has a chance."

Hodgeman says he enjoys his job with MnDOT, where he started in 2013 as a laborer. Before that, he was a printer for 20 years until the company he worked for got bought out.

That's when he got his job with the state.

"I love it," he says, adding it's important to him to work union. "I think we're well respected. I think we're pretty well taken care of."

Billionaire spends millions to gut public pensions

Hardworking Americans' right to retire with dignity is in danger because billionaires are spending a lot of money to take away our pensions.



Billionaire John Arnold

John Arnold is one of the worst offenders. He's a former Enron trader who's spent \$50 million of his own fortune trying to gut retirement security nationally. Enron's implosion caused billions of dollars of losses, yet Arnold escaped with an \$8 million bonus just before the crash.

Now he's funding ballot initiatives, tainted research, lobbying and political campaigns to eliminate traditional pensions that retirees can count on, including:

- Convincing cities and states to cut employee pension benefits.
- Donating to right-wing think tanks to do "research" advocating to eliminate public pensions.
- Giving almost \$10 million to Pew to do the same, according to the National Public Pension Coalition.

Arnold keeps trying to manufacture a pension crisis to give fake ammo to some GOP lawmakers determined to cut pensions.

Except in Minnesota, there is no crisis. Pension reforms and strong investment returns have stabilized our pension funds following the Recession. MSRS, PERA and TRA have \$63 billion

in assets, so there's no need to panic. Minnesota taxpayers pay only 15 cents of every dollar in public pension benefits; the other 85 cents comes from employee contributions and investment returns. And that tax money comes back to the public: Every dollar that goes into a pension fund generates \$9.98 spent in our communities.

Instead of trying to gut public workers' hard-earned retirements, lawmakers should look to an obvious funding source, the \$80 billion a year states and cities spend on corporate subsidies.

Public employees have worked hard for years and have earned their pensions. AFSCME will keep fighting for secure retirements for our fellow union members and for all workers.

Learn about public pensions at <https://protectpensions.org/> and Arnold at https://youtu.be/xhUBS_T21Is.



SER (the Subcommittee on Employee Relations) recommended that the full Minnesota Legislature reject contracts that would cover nearly 30,000 state workers represented by Council 5 and MAPE. It was a 6-4 party line vote with Republicans voting to reject the contract. State employees in AFSCME's multi-unit are working under their current contract.

ANY WAY YOU MEASURE IT

SCOTT WALKER'S TEA PARTY WISCONSIN	MARK DAYTON'S PROGRESSIVE MINNESOTA
• Household income: \$59,800	• Household income: \$70,200
• Poverty rate: 10.7%	• Poverty rate: 8.7%
• New jobs in 2017: 18,700	• New jobs in 2017: 37,800
• 20th best-run state	• 2nd best-run state
• 21st best place to do business	• 3rd best place to do business
• \$1.7 billion budget deficit	• \$1.5 billion budget surplus