

Stepping UP

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

Issue 7
November-December 2018



2018



I AM UNION

COUNCIL 5
AFSCME
MINN. CLC



ONE STRONG, UNITED VOICE FOR MINNESOTA WORKERS

In the weeks leading up to the election, **AFSCME** members came out in force to help get voters to the polls.

Together, we knocked hundreds of doors and had thousands of conversations with our friends, neighbors, coworkers and loved ones about our union values and the candidates who share them.

Our hard work and collective action paid off - big time.



Top to bottom: **AFSCME International Secretary-Treasurer Elissa McBride** and **Council 5 president Pat Guernsey** knock doors for **Kelly Moller** in Shoreview; **Member organizer Denna Thurmond** finds great signs along her door-knocking route; **AFSCME** members get ready to door knock with our endorsed candidate, **Ilhan Omar**, who we successfully elected to serve in the **U.S. House**.



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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Working Minnesotans come together, emerge victorious in midterm election

November's midterm was, as we've all heard, one of the most important elections of our lifetimes. Our rights, our freedoms, our health, safety, security and dignity were all on the line.

Working Minnesotans didn't just get the message. We shouted it from the rooftops.

Hundreds of AFSCME members stepped up in droves to phone bank, door knock, and mobilize Minnesota voters to help elect candidates who support working families and will fight for a future where every Minnesotan has access to the resources, care and opportunities we all deserve.

For months, AFSCME members have been spreading out across the state, talking to workers and neighbors about our Minnesota values, our vision of unity and hope for our state, and the candidates who share those values and that vision.

In the final days leading up to the election, AFSCME members came out in force to ramp up our GOTV efforts in every part of the state. Together, we knocked hundreds of doors for our endorsed candidates in Rochester, Minneapolis, Saint Cloud, Duluth, Brainerd and everywhere in between.

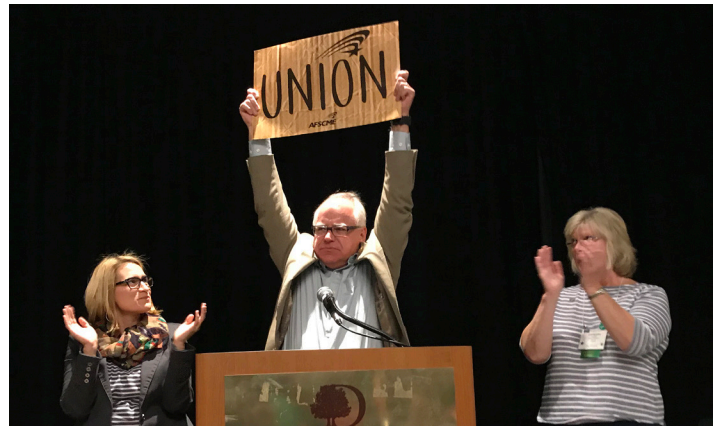
On November 6, all that hard work paid off. As the results came rolling in, it became clear that working people across the country were the true winners of this crucial election.

Here in Minnesota, our endorsed candidates swept the statewide races. Our candidates for Governor and Lt. Governor, Tim Walz and Peggy Flanagan, beat out Republican Jeff Johnson, who's said he'd love to "go all Scott Walker" on Minnesota.

U.S. Rep. Keith Ellison, a proven champion for working Minnesotans and strong labor ally, was elected as Minnesota's next Attorney General. In the race for Secretary of State, incumbent Steve Simon was easily re-elected. Julie Blaha, a former math teacher and longtime union activist, was victorious in her bid for State Auditor.

In the race for U.S. Senate, our endorsed candidates Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith easily beat out their opponents. Klobuchar and Smith have both been tireless advocates for working people in Minnesota and across the country.

In another major victory, Minnesotans elected State Representative Ilhan Omar in her bid to fill Ellison's Fifth District seat in the U.S. House. Omar will be the first Somali-American to serve in Congress (she's also a former AFSCME



Lt. Governor-elect Peggy Flanagan, Governor-Elect Tim Walz and AFSCME Council 5's recently retired president Judy Wahlberg celebrate our union power at the Council 5 Convention in Bloomington (listed left to right).

member). Additionally, we successfully elected Angie Craig (District 2), Dean Phillips (District 3), Betty McCollum (District 4) and Collin Peterson (District 7) to represent working people in the U.S. House.

This election season also featured dozens of hotly-contested local races. We proudly endorsed candidates who will stand with working people, who are committed to working across our differences to bridge gaps and bring Minnesotans together.

We were especially thrilled to help elect AFSCME Local 2938 members Kelly Moller (District 42A) and Zack Stephenson (36A) to the Minnesota House of Representatives. Stephenson and Moller will join four AFSCME members who are already serving in the State Legislature: Local 2938's Rep. Jamie Becker-Finn (District 42B); Local 3318's Rep. Erin Koegel (37A); Local 2864's Rep. Diane Loeffler (60A) and Local 8's Rep. Dave Pinto (64B).

The list of victories for working people in this year's midterm goes on. At the doors, on the phones, in our workplaces and around our kitchen tables, AFSCME members played a major role in making those victories possible. Our solidarity and our hard work truly paid off.

Through thousands of conversations with our neighbors, coworkers, friends and loved ones, AFSCME members mobilized voters and helped elect powerful candidates who share our union values: health care everyone can access and afford; quality public education for every kid of every race, creed and income; security, safety and dignity at work and in retirement; and living wages that allow every working family to thrive – not just survive.

Member involvement wins historic pe



Constant and visible involvement by AFSCME members at the Capitol paid off this year with big legislative wins that will make life better for workers and our families.

Members and retirees won two huge and long-sought victories.

On May 31, Gov. Mark Dayton signed a bill to stabilize

and protect public pensions for decades to come. The historic pension reform will immediately save \$3.4 billion and fully fund our public pension systems within 30 years. It covers more than 500,000 state workers and retirees. It involves shared sacrifice by all parties: the state, workers and retirees.

On March 26, the House and Senate overwhelmingly approved contracts for state public workers in the executive branch. The



contracts brought 2 percent raises retroactive to 2017, 2.25 percent this year, and step increases.

The contracts also held the line on health care costs and improved health and dental benefits.

Pension legislation, contract approvals



seemed like the pension bill was ticking away to the same fate. A strong coalition made up of the Pension Commission, labor unions and community groups had produced a clean bill. It sailed through the Senate, which voted unanimously to pass the bill March 26 under the leadership of GOP Pension Chair Sen. Julie Rosen.

But Republican House Speaker Kurt Daudt played politics with workers' pensions. He waited two months to take the bill up, then finally brought it to the floor with just a few minutes left of the session.

As for approval of the state contracts, that was a year in coming, which meant workers' well-deserved raises came a year late, too. Last fall, Republicans on the Subcommittee on Employee Relations stopped the approval process.



But member involvement paid off and reversed that decision this legislative session. About 1,000 AFSCME members packed the Capitol Rotunda for Day on the Hill.

Six days later, the Senate passed the contracts 66-0, and the House 93-33. The 33 House members who voted against the contracts are the same hardline conservatives behind anti-worker, anti-union measures.

That same usual list of Republicans tried to inject their poison pills into numerous bills. The ugliest of the measures would have made it harder to get state contracts approved, and made it tougher for state workers to win decent health insurance. But AFSCME members and pro-worker legislators beat those bills back.

Thanks to member involvement, state workers know they can count on their pensions for a dignified retirement after a lifetime of hard and dedicated public service. And their contracts will continue to improve the quality of life for them and their families.

What was remarkable in both cases was the concerted effort by AFSCME members and retirees to apply constant pressure on legislators to get the job done.

To get the pension bill passed, members and retirees attended every Legislative Commission on Pensions and Retirement hearing. They made hundreds of calls. They visited legislators every single week.

The pension bill was three years in the making. Republican leaders halted two previous attempts. In 2016, they tried to put the entire cost of reforming the pension system on the backs of retirees. Last year, they tried to tie the bill to efforts to prohibit local governments from improving wages or working conditions such as paid sick leave.

In the minutes before midnight this legislative session, it

Photos clockwise from top left: Gov. Dayton with AFSCME members before the pension bill signing; Day on the Hill; AFSCME political organizer Laura Askelin and Executive Board member Jen Guertin anxiously watch the pension vote tally; AFSCME members and staff set up a gauntlet to thank senators after they approved the pension bill; and members attended every single pension hearing.

Workers flock to unions following U.S.

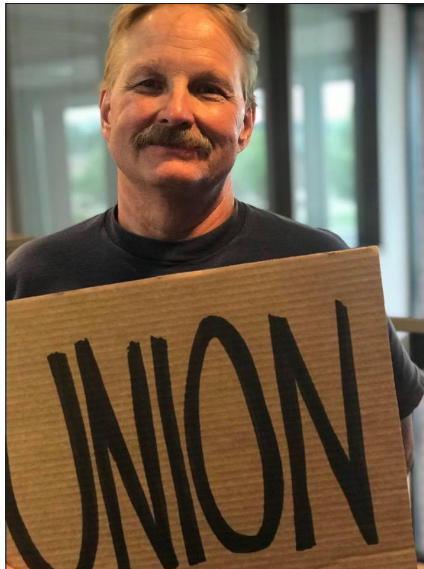
When the U.S. Supreme Court's *Janus* decision came down, billionaires, big business and their anti-worker think tanks licked their chops, predicting the end of unions.

But AFSCME Council 5 and workers across Minnesota are proving them wrong. We're showing big money and big corporations just how powerful workers can be when we exercise our freedom to join together, and we use our collective voice to create better workplaces and communities. Since the U.S. Supreme Court decision in June, 2,294 people have joined AFSCME Council 5. They decided to become full members to support their union, their co-workers and their communities. More than 400 are joining PEOPLE or increasing their contributions to elect pro-worker candidates.

Dr. Seymour Gross, a senior clinical psychologist at Hennepin County Mental Health Center, is among the new members. He was fair-share for many years. But then the Supreme Court ruling against unions and workers came down. He called the ruling "awful" and "harmful."

"After the Supreme Court decision, I figured that joining was what I *could* do," he says. "I believe in the benefits of unions. Politically that is being attacked. And now with Trump, I want to reinforce the idea that it is a good thing to do, just the principle there is some ability to have power with authority that may not always be considerate."

The *Janus* decision alerted Hennepin County principal



planning analyst Todd Bennington that he wasn't a full member. Like many people, he thought he already was one because he believed joining was automatic. After the court ruling, he immediately became a member of AFSCME Local 2864 to "affirm the importance of unions and union representation.

"Unions are one of the remaining bulwarks protecting working people from complete economic exploitation," Bennington says. "I also worry that, particularly among professional staff, too many feel like such representation and workplace protections aren't needed anymore, which is very naive.

"The next few years will be difficult ones for most people in this country, and one way that I can do something proactive and positive to minimize that pain is by standing in solidarity

Supreme Court's 5-4 Janus ruling



Photos clockwise from opposite page: Vets Home pharmacy techs Steven Keu and Sarah Lamb made sure they were members; Local 868's Darrin Aarre, Scuffy Paulson and Eric Ptacek proclaim they are #UNION; Local 744 member Fatmata Turay signs a PEOPLE card as member organizer Starr Suggs waits to award Turay with a new PEOPLE jacket; AFSCME-endorsed Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey with members; and Local 221's Duane Butorac.

with my fellow working Americans as a full AFSCME member," he says.

Dozens of AFSCME members have taken to social media, sharing photos proclaiming they are #UNION.

Numerous AFSCME members are taking their commitment to another level: They are joining PEOPLE or increasing their contribution levels.

"When you join PEOPLE, there will be more power to help the people so they have a voice," explains Local 744 member Fatmata Turay.

"If my money can help elect government officials who will help workers, it would be fantastic for us," she says. "We're praying so God can change it around."

"It's very good for us to have a union," Turay adds. "Sometimes, the advantage can be too much for management. If a union is there, they speak out for us and protect our jobs, too."

Growing our union: New groups

A desire for respect and a seat at the table motivated several new groups – and workers from numerous job titles – to join AFSCME this past year.

At a time when unions nationally are under attack by think tanks funded by wealthy extremists and corporate CEOs, workers from several cities turned to AFSCME in search of the same ideals – and progress – that have formed unions since the beginning.

Workers at the city of Hopkins, North St. Paul and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board are some of the newest members of Council 5. So are dozens of workers in previously non-union job categories who opted to join existing locals.

“It makes us stronger with the employer to have more people,” says HCMC Local 2474 president Sara Franck. “Union folks have better increases and better benefits. If you’re non-union, you’re at will. They can do whatever they want with you; if they don’t want to give you a raise this year, they don’t have to.”

The new members want the power and freedom of a collective voice. They want respect and fairness in the workplace. They share a strong sense of pride in their jobs and their communities, and they want to ensure they can keep making their cities and counties better places to live.

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

“I feel like the playing field got a little more level,” said Karin Derauf, a North St. Paul administrative assistant.

North St. Paul workers joined because they were vulnerable as the only group of city employees left without collective bargaining protection.

Hennepin Healthcare (HCMC) added workers in multiple job titles including nuclear medicine techs, polysomnographic techs, childbirth educators, opticians and in grant administration. Hennepin County added workers in titles including specialists in community health or property management.

The Hopkins and Minneapolis Park workers switched from association representation to AFSCME.

“We wanted help at the negotiating table,” said Hopkins



Ricardo Levins-Morales, Copyright 2009, RLMartstudio.com

Hopkins seek a voice at work



Top photo: The City of Hopkins organizing team included: Mary Lein, Penny Penner, Liz Page and Brian Stevens. **Bottom photo:** David Garmany and Diane Moe, park directors with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, are president and secretary, respectively, of one of AFSCME's newest locals.



It's striking how many of the same concerns Hopkins, Minneapolis Parks and North St. Paul shared going into their first AFSCME contract negotiations: fair and transparent pay; improved communication from management; training; competitive wages to keep attracting qualified workers; and locking in existing health and retirement benefits.

Most of all, they wanted to have a say in the workplace.

"We want a culture where every voice matters," said Hopkins worker Mary Lein. "I really think

housing inspector Liz Page. "We also wanted the large membership and 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."

Workers organized using simple, powerful tools: They met, had one-on-one conversations about why union representation is essential, and they put in time and effort. They held group meetings to keep everyone informed.

people want to be valued. They want to be part of something bigger and better."

Person by person, relationship by relationship, these organizers are helping build our union.

Strong unity leads to great con



When we think of unions, solidarity is one of the first words that comes to mind. In 2018, several AFSCME locals tapped that bedrock principle to create momentum and change.

In Ramsey County, five locals that bargain together won their best contract in years, thanks to solidarity and planning.

Across the state, locals representing child protection workers continue to raise awareness about the need for more staffing and training to keep kids safe. They raised public awareness and created a sense of urgency that will drive future change.

“We’ve become visible to our members but also more visible to management, and they’ve become more aware of the power we’ve got,” says Local 151 vice president Linda Oeltjenbruns, a Ramsey County social worker.



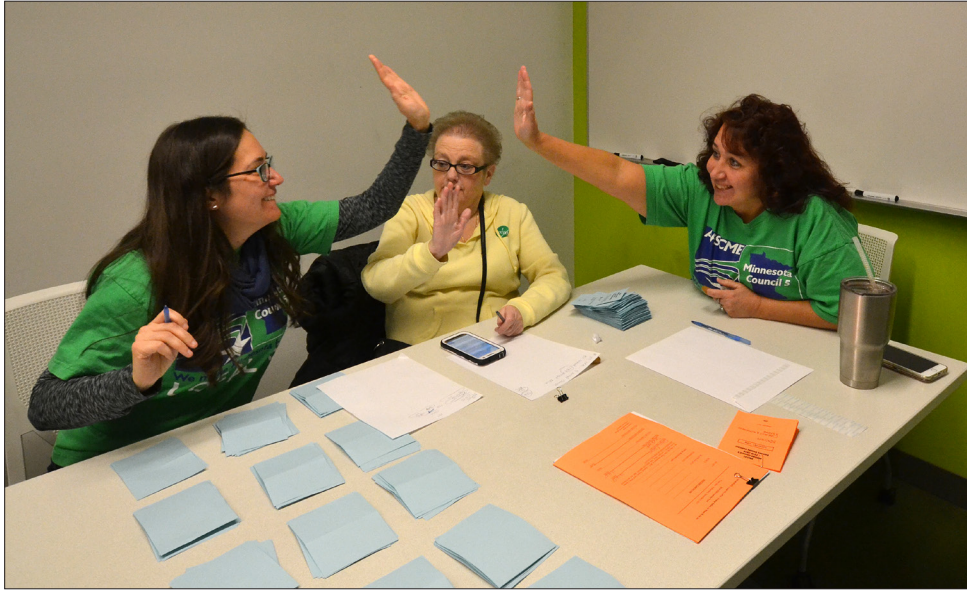
Months before negotiations even started in Ramsey County, AFSCME locals took steps to build unity and support.

Local 8’s Susan Rowan says they met early on and surveyed what workers were most interested in. That reminded

everyone it was contract time and got them fired up.

Local 707 had such strong interest in its election, 100 percent of workers became full AFSCME members so they could vote. That engagement continued into

tracts, fresh energy for locals



Photos, clockwise from left: Ramsey County AFSCME members celebrate the overwhelming vote to approve their contracts. The county workers won the best contract in years thanks to unity, planning and being willing to share personal stories about why benefits and contract language are important; Margaret Berger, Sara Nott and Dawn Flores of Local 151 share a high-five after learning their contracts passed by a wide margin; Child protection workers Melissa Dolan, Eric Jayne and David Yang and Council 5 legislative representative Ethan Vogel testify before a state Senate committee.

negotiations and the contract vote.

Local 151 increased its outreach through member education and events, which included lunches with pizza, labor history talks and AFSCME legislative updates, and tailgating at St. Paul Saints games. The local increased communication with members and updated them regularly on negotiations. Last summer, Local 151 designed and bought new T-shirts.

“People are interested,” Oeltjenbruns said. “They want to take part. They understand how important it is. The outcome is the contract - we got a very good contract.”

There was a single moment that was a turning point that created a strong sense of unity. A power outage shut down Government Center East. When workers from Locals 8 and 151 arrived to

work, they were locked out. The county refused to pay them and made them take vacation days.

Workers were so outraged, they overflowed the next union meeting wearing AFSCME green and walked three blocks to the courthouse chanting, “Pay us now, pay us now!”

They won new contract language to cover future emergencies like this. The three-year contracts included 2.5 percent raises each year; paid parental leave; increased tuition reimbursement; safety leave and expanded sick leave; and largely held the line on health care costs for 2,180 workers.

Increased activism and solidarity by child protection workers was spurred by some well-intended reforms with unintended consequences. The reforms created

soaring caseloads, but didn’t provide enough staffing to keep up with the influx. The reforms led to an increase in investigations, more children being placed out of their homes and a shortage of foster care placements.

Child protection workers have come by the carload from the Iron Range, western Minnesota and the Twin Cities. They’ve brainstormed with their AFSCME legislative team, packed legislative hearings and offered lawmakers real solutions to the crisis.

They’ve continued to push for more staffing, along with more training to recruit and keep workers.

Their continued efforts and long-term commitment to making change and keeping kids safe is building real momentum. They’ve increased public and legislative awareness of the issue.

“These are children who are valuable, they are lovable,” testified child protection worker Eric Jayne from Local 151. “They deserve a permanent home. They deserve to have child protection workers who have the time so they can actually be a positive force in their lives. Currently, it’s difficult to have the opportunity to be that positive force in their lives – and not only their lives, but their parents’ lives so the kids can come safely home.”

The inspiring unity between these various locals serves as a clear example of just what can be accomplished when AFSCME members plan well, stick together and speak out.

“We try to get the message out we’re all in this together,” said Local 151 president Dawn Flores.

Staffing up for safe prisons for v

Most of us get to take for granted the freedom of being able to provide for ourselves and our families, and then come home safely after a good day's work.

That hasn't been the case for Minnesota state correctional workers. In July, corrections officer Joseph Gomm was murdered by an inmate at MCF-Stillwater. In September, our correctional brother Joseph Parise died after helping stop an inmate's attack on a fellow officer at MCF-Oak Park Heights.

Gomm and Parise's deaths are part of a string of assaults by inmates on our AFSCME members in dark blue. That number has skyrocketed since January.



Leaders from AFSCME correctional locals across the state – who make up the Council 5 Corrections Policy Committee – are working hard to prevent future staff assaults and to make sure Gomm and Parise did not die in vain.

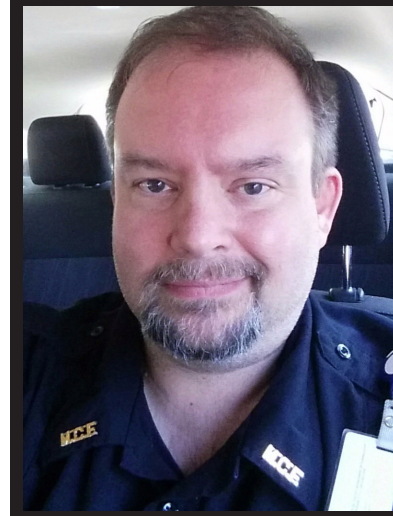
They have stepped up their meetings with the DOC and with any legislators willing to honor Gomm by taking action.

They conducted a careful study at each institution to determine how much additional staff is needed to keep workers, institutions and communities safe. On Oct. 18, they released that figure publicly: Lawmakers must provide funding to hire 327 corrections officers and 75 to 100 other employees to keep workers, institutions and communities safe.

“Our union, AFSCME Council 5, has asked the Legislature for years for additional staff,” said Council 5 associate director Tim Henderson. “Every prison is dealing with staffing shortages that have put workers in danger. Hiring these additional workers will provide additional safety and security for our staff and the public, which is one of our most fundamental responsibilities.”

The CPC has presented other demands including:

- Putting security first at every facility. While programming is important, security is the bedrock.
- Filling vacant positions.
- An end to forced overtime.
- A renewed focus on retention and recruitment.
- Respect in the workplace so workers are heard and involved in decision-making.
- The tools, equipment and training needed to do the job safely.



In honor and
our fallen C
Joseph
Joseph

They've made progress.

The Department of Corrections is moving to inmates who assault staff. Corrections workers at Stillwater and refused to let Light Industry patrol in pairs.

The AFSCME correctional leaders also have

workers and communities



Photos clockwise from far left: The funeral procession for Joseph Parise; fellow officers serve as pallbearers for corrections officer Joseph Gomm; COs show up in force to lobby lawmakers for more funding and to stop the reopening of the Appleton prison; and AFSCME correctional leaders call for more funding to keep staff, institutions and communities safe. (Photos courtesy of David Pierini and DOC)



memory of
O brothers
Gomm
Parise



of attacks, their families and impacted coworkers get the immediate support they need.

Council 5 members plan to keep showing up in force at the Capitol during the legislative session.

oward imposing stiff segregation time for
ers shut down Industry with heavy tools
y reopen until there were enough COs to

worked with DOC to make sure victims

“We and the Department both recognize we need adequate staffing for security and programming to guarantee a safer and more positive work environment,” said Local 915 president Jeff Vars, a corrections officer at Oak Park Heights Correctional Facility.

“Even though we have a staffing number, we realize the work isn’t over,” Vars said.
“We’re not going to wait until the legislative session starts. We’re going to jump on it.”

A better life

Union jobs gave Amanda and Justin Aurelius something priceless this summer and fall: Time off together with their new baby and toddler son, and the means to buy their very first house.



"It's been the best time," says Justin, an AFSCME Local 701 Executive Board member and father of two. "It's like winning a lottery ticket, the time with your family, the bonding."

The Granite Falls couple's situation was much different after the birth of their oldest son, Marvin. Justin didn't qualify for paid parental leave yet, and Amanda worked in the private sector.

"I had a C-section," Amanda recalls. "After 10 days, Justin was going back to work. I couldn't lift Marvin the first six weeks. Financially, it was really difficult. We had to move in with my mother-in-law at one point."

This time around, because they both had union-won paid parental leave, Amanda had time to heal. She had her husband by her side. They had time to bond with their new baby and help their older son adjust. And they didn't take a financial hit.

"A lot of young people don't have a clue about unions," Justin says. "They don't realize the benefits, how important they are to the rest of your life. If you don't have a college degree, if you're a working-class person, the fact you have someone on your side fighting for a better wage, a better quality of life, it's very important."

Justin already knew the benefits of being union, having worked at UPS before. But Amanda says she had no clue until Justin got a job at an MSOCS group home. She knew unions existed, but didn't know what they did or why they were important. She began noticing Justin's benefits, all won by his union. When she got a job at that group home, she joined AFSCME Local 701, too.

The couple works to help people with disabilities live more

independent lives. The job is as demanding as it is rewarding. They work holidays, changing shifts and can work overnights. The people they serve have conditions like schizophrenia and severe autism.

"I love giving back," Justin says. "They smile and it will bring a big smile to your face, the improvement you see. The dignity of service, we give them the same service you'd give your mother. Every day you go in, you give them our best."

"It's really gratifying," Amanda adds.

Thanks to their union, the couple is treated with the same dignity they provide their clients. So they watched anxiously when the Supreme Court's anti-worker *Janus* decision came down. They've heard coworkers talk about dropping their membership.

But Justin points out that the money paid in dues is a drop in the bucket compared to the benefits won.

"Freeloaders, it's not fair," Justin says. "If you're getting something out of your union, you should pay something into it. It hurts all of us if you're not going to contribute to what we're building towards."

"To choose to not pay union dues, it could wipe it out," Amanda says. "We don't want that. We wouldn't have the life we have if it wasn't for our union. We could lose what we have if people decide to leave."

"We don't want right to work," Justin adds. "We want our union. It protects all of us and gives us the benefits we need to move forward and make a better life for all of us."



Top photo: Assistant teacher Heather Lynch reads to her students.

Bottom: (Front row, left to right) Steward Emily Erpelding; staff campaign co-chair, Heather Lynch; Laura Elliott; and Kelli Kern. (Back row, left to right) Mandy Sumwalt; Lily Bray; and co-chair Magn Wakeham. Other active team members included Claire Brodjieski, Mary Leinfelder, Sarah Santiago, Louii Thomsen and Margo Welshinger; Local 3937 president Mary Austin; and Local 3800 president Cherrene Horazuk.

United effort keeps U of M child center open

Early child development teachers were working with their young students at the University of Minnesota when parents arrived with disturbing news.

“They said, you guys are closing,” recalls assistant preschool teacher Magn Wakeham. That’s how staff learned the university planned to shut down the Child Development Center in 18 months to expand the Shirley G. Moore Laboratory School. “Parents are crying, staff are crying, and kids are wondering what’s going on.”

The move would have left 140 young children without their beloved teachers and 130 workers without jobs, including 40 fulltime staff – nearly all AFSCME members – and 85 college students.

To add insult to injury, the department dean kept minimizing what workers do, saying it wasn’t the university’s responsibility to run a daycare, recalls preschool teacher Mandy Sumwalt.

The U of M Child Development Center is so well-respected, it’s viewed as a model for early childhood education across Minnesota and other states. The UMCDC serves as a training site for students in several majors including child psychology,



physical therapy and early childhood education who may observe or do practicums in the classrooms; and provides research opportunities for faculty to learn more about early child development and quality care.

“When you get the news, you think, my life is over, you have nowhere to go,” Wakeham said. “But we had a union to go to that could fight with us. We were not fighting alone.”

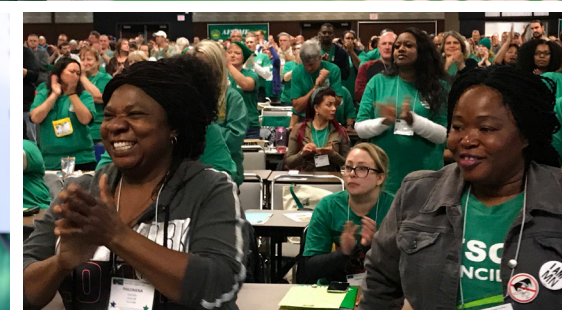
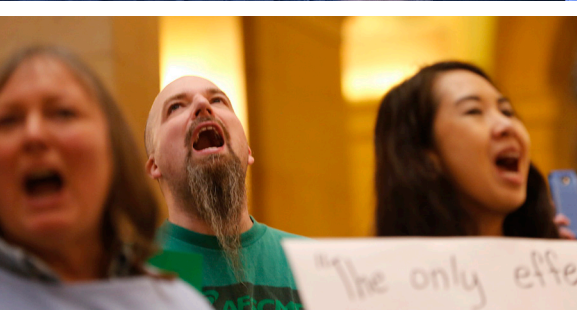
Parents, teachers and staff quickly mobilized. Parents

formed a committee, a Facebook page and reached out to the media. They called lawmakers and signed petitions.

AFSCME 3937 and 3800 members designed T-shirts, signed member cards and met with the dean. They handed out buttons and fliers. They attended the State of the University address in their green shirts, asked about the university’s justification for closing the UMCDC and swarmed the president afterward.

They attended Council 5’s Day on the Hill, talked to lawmakers and got strong support from other locals and unions.

(Continued on page 16)



United Effort (continued from page 15)

All the while, “We were maintaining our high-quality education,” says preschool teacher Kelli Kern.

“We agreed this decision is horrible, but we are here for the children, and we need to keep showing why children should come here,” says Wakeham, who co-chaired the staff campaign with Heather Lynch. “We were doing what we could as a teaching staff team. We didn’t want it to affect the children.”

Members encouraged each other not to jump ship. Families didn’t leave, either.

Within two months, the U’s president postponed the closure and formed an advisory committee. AFSCME had seats at the table due to our strong contract language. On Sept. 18, the U announced its decision to keep the center open, merge it with the Lab School and build several more centers to meet the need for child care.

“We’re the little guy, and we won,” Kern says. “It made me feel like we’re heard.”

“It feels important to be part of the movement for quality early childhood

education because it’s been undervalued and nonexistent in our country, and it’s been valued in other countries,” Sumwalt said. “These are critical years of development for kids. These are the years that determine success for the rest of their lives. We all understand that. Now we’re making other people care, too.”

Their victory brought them together as a staff and made them stronger as a union.

“If we work together, we’ll be protected,” Wakeham said. “Our voices will be heard. The more voices we have, the stronger we’ll become.”

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