

The St. Paul Union Advocate

123rd Year, No. 10, Issue 5437

For union homes in Ramsey, Dakota, Washington and Chisago counties

May 2020

Do Something!

Tell us: What's on your mind?

The COVID-19 pandemic has turned the world upside down. Now, working people are faced with unprecedented challenges, from putting ourselves into harm's way to finding ourselves faced with economic hardship. This crisis puts even greater emphasis on the need for working people to have a voice at the workplace and in the halls of government.

As we face these difficult times, the state's labor movement is committed to fiercely advocating for all working Minnesotans.

But union leaders can't do that unless they hear from union members.

What challenges are you facing? What do you think state and federal lawmakers should prioritize?

The Minnesota AFL-CIO, the state's largest labor federation, wants to know where you stand. Take their short survey online at aflcio.mn/2VroDK7.

UNION MEMBERS ON THE FRONT LINES

Minnesota's response to the COVID-19 pandemic depends on essential workers like these



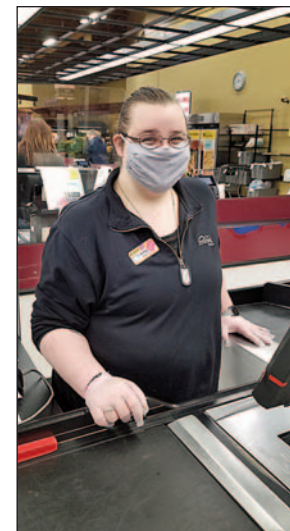
SEIU Healthcare Minnesota installed these banners outside Twin Cities hospitals last month. Union President Jamie Gulley said it's a small token of the state's appreciation for health care workers "all they have done and sacrificed to keep our families safe."



ATU Local 1005, which represents Metro Transit operators and mechanics, pushed management hard to give drivers proper social distance from passengers. At press time, nine Met Council workers had tested positive for COVID-19, and 348 were in isolation.



Members of UFCW Local 1189 are keeping food and critical supplies on the shelves of local grocery stores, but they're asking for our help keeping themselves – and all of us – healthy. **Story on Page 4**



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Labor Voices

Nurse: 'I want my death to make you angry'

By Emily Pierskalla, RN
Minnesota Nurses Association

What is it like being a nurse in a pandemic? Every day I bounce through the stages of grief like a pinball. The ricochet and whiplash leaves my soul tired and bruised.

Denial: I have spent less and less time in the denial stage. Still, I see many of my loved ones, politicians, and laypersons still stuck in this phase.

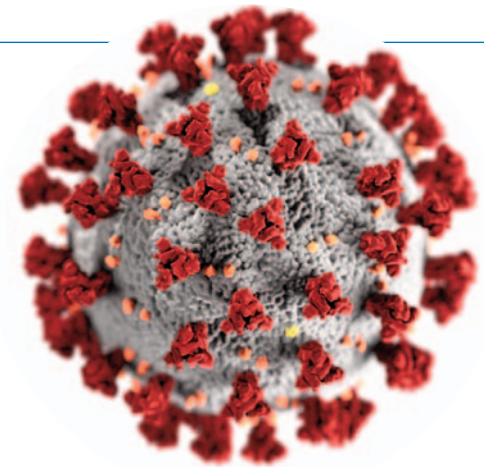
Anger: When our elders and immunosuppressed folks are referred to as disposable members of society, when the pocketbooks of stockholders are considered more important than human lives, when we've known for decades this pandemic was coming, I burn with anger,

anger at the system that prioritizes profits over health. It's the system that regularly runs out of "essential" and "critical" supplies seasonally.

I have anger knowing the fragility of our supply chain has been exposed time and time again, especially after the earthquakes in Puerto Rico, and yet nothing was done to reinforce them.

Bargaining: The governing bodies bargaining with supply chain availability over scientific evidence. A paper bag is given magic powers to somehow preserve masks that are already expired and soiled. Droplet precautions are now satisfactory for airborne illnesses (but don't you dare leave scotch tape on the walls).

Depression: Heaviness in my heart



knowing my co-workers and friends will become unwilling sacrifices so the system can continue in its self-destructive path. And there's grief for the many people I will not have the resources to care

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 4)

Go Figure

3,000-plus

Complaints related to COVID-19 received by the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration this year, according to a Washington Post report.

165

Number of years it would take OSHA to inspect every U.S. workplace at its current level of staffing – the lowest in history.

39 (and counting)

Months since OSHA had a full-time director, making it unlikely Trump will fill the job in his first term.



Labor Voices: Jigme Ugen

For Asian American workers, two pandemics

Over 2 million Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPI) work in healthcare, transportation and service industries. The alarming influx of racism, bigotry and xenophobia against them has been a tremendous burden to members of this community as they simultaneously try to survive a global pandemic and work without proper personal protective equipment.

There are countless incidents of micro-aggression, bullying and hate crimes across the country. Take the stabbing of a 2-year-old and 6-year-old simply for being Asian, or a Burmese father and son stabbed at a Sam's Club in Texas. The FBI warns of a potential surge.

Sadly, this kind of racist resentment is a recurring pattern in American history, particularly during health crises or in wartime.

Chinese immigrant workers can be traced back to the California Gold Rush in the 1840s and, later, in the mining and railroad industries. They were seen as taking other people's jobs away and working for less.

On May 6, 1882, President Chester A. Arthur signed the Chinese Exclusion Act into law, which placed a 10-year moratorium on all Chinese migration. It is considered one of the most toxic and disgraceful anti-immigration measures in American history. It was supposedly repealed in 1892 but remained enforced all the way until 1943. One of the driving forces behind the passage of this law was the Knights of Labor organization.

During the 1980s, when severe oil and gas shortages threw the U.S. manufacturing sector into crisis, politicians, corporations and labor unions used the Japanese auto industry as the scapegoat. Everyone who looked Asian became a potential target of hate crimes, and people who drove Japanese cars were shot at. In 1982, a 27-year-old Chinese American, Vincent Chin, who was celebrating his bachelor party, was bludgeoned to death by two white autoworkers in Detroit. The perpetrators were heard shouting, "It's because of you m@f#rs that we're out of work!" Chin's killers never spent a full day in jail and were fined only \$3,000.

Racism against Asian-Americans is real, and it is dangerous. COVID-19 is not the only invisible enemy we face during this pandemic.

We need to take racism against Asian-Americans more

"This virus does not discriminate based on workers' race or immigration status, and neither should we."

– Jigme Ugen



seriously. If you see a co-worker being harassed or hear racist jokes, always be an ally. Intervene and speak up, because people's behaviors will not change if they do not believe a problem exists or sense a real reason to change. Let the labor movement's tradition – "an injury to one is an injury to all" – be applicable for everything.

Many national labor unions, civil rights groups and racial justice organizations have issued calls to action denouncing the discrimination against AAPI, and the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus drafted a letter urging public officials to help prevent the spread of misinformation. As local unions, we should sign onto these letters, provide similar public statements and pass resolutions denouncing racism towards AAPI – and most importantly share this information with our members.

Now is also a good time to check on your AAPI members, whether it's through email, text, personal calls, etc. Listen and re-affirm that they are not alone.

We need to learn from our history to change it, and have the courage and leadership to counteract fear and anxiety. In addition, I highly encourage you to be cognizant of maintaining adequate AAPI representation in leadership positions and board seats in our unions.

This virus does not discriminate based on workers' race or immigration status, and neither should we. And when we get to the other side of this crisis, let's be able to say that this virus brought the best out of us, that we endured it together with complete solidarity and kindness, and that no worker was left behind.

– Jigme Ugen is a Tibetan refugee. He is the executive vice president of SEIU Healthcare Minnesota. He also serves as president of the Minnesota Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance and is a Minnesota AFL-CIO board member.

Letters

- Send letters to: 353 W. 7th St., Suite 201, St. Paul, MN 55102
- Fax them to 651-293-1989
- Email them to: mmoore@stpaulunions.org

The Union Advocate

Official publication of the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation, AFL-CIO
353 W. 7th St. #201, St. Paul, MN 55102.
Phone 651-222-3787 x112; fax 651-293-1989;
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This issue went to press April 21
It was scheduled to go in the mail April 24
Next news deadline: Friday, May 15

Remaining publication dates in 2020: May 22, July 24, Aug. 28, Sept. 25, Oct. 23 and Dec. 11.

News and advertising deadlines precede our publication dates by seven days.
To advertise, contact the *Advocate* office for display options and rate information, or download an ad flier online at advocate.stpaulunions.org/advertise.

Subscriptions are \$15 for calendar year 2020. Mail payment to Union Advocate, 353 W. 7th St., Suite 201, St. Paul, MN 55102.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: The Saint Paul Union Advocate, 353 W. 7th St., STE 201, St. Paul, MN 55102-2314. Published monthly except during July and December by the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation, 353 W. 7th St., STE 201, St. Paul, MN 55102-2314. (USPS 647820) (ISSN 24723320)
Periodicals postage paid at St. Paul, MN.



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Nurse: 'I want my death to make you angry'

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)
for and save.

Acceptance: I have accepted that I will be infected with COVID-19 at some point. I am not scared of getting sick. I am scared of infecting those who will not survive. I check every day on our state's available hospital beds and ventilators. I wonder, if my illness becomes severe, will there be resources left for me?



By Emily Pierskalla, RN

And then I'm tagged in another social media post praising me for being "a hero." And I'm instantly flung back into the pinball machine as my emotions ricochet through the stages.

If I die, I don't want to be remembered as a hero. I want my death to make you angry too.

I want you to politicize my death. I want you to use it as fuel to demand change in this industry, to demand protection, living wages, and safe working conditions for nurses and ALL workers.

Use my death to mobilize others.

Use my name at the bargaining table.

Use my name to shame those who have profited or failed to act, leaving us to clean up the mess.

Don't say "heaven has gained an angel." Tell them negligence and greed has murdered a person for choosing a career dedicated to compassion and service.

- Emily Pierskalla's essay originally appeared on the MNA's website, mnnurses.org.

Grocery clerks ask customers to #ShopSmart during pandemic

Going grocery shopping? Retail workers have a few polite requests for your consideration.

Wear a mask if you have one. Go alone if you can. Keep six feet between you and others in the store. And don't leave trash - especially not gloves or tissues - on the floor.

In other words, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 1189 President Jennifer Christensen said, "shop smart" until the pandemic is over - please and thank you.

"It's about keeping yourself safe, keeping the workers safe and keeping the community safe," said Christensen, whose union represents workers at Cub Foods, Jerry's, Kowalskis, Lunds and Byerlys, Festival, Cooper's, Oxendales and other union grocers in the east-metro area.

"It's about all of us doing the right thing to ensure that everybody has safe access to food."

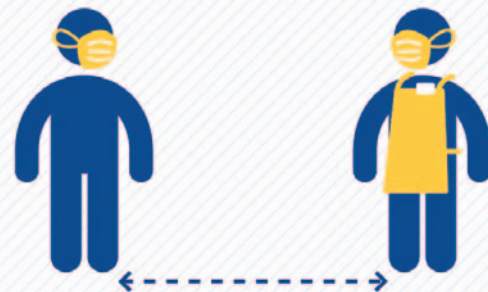
So far, Minnesota has avoided the fate of areas forced to limit the number of customers allowed into the store at one time, or consider delivery-only options. And UFCW members, many of whom are earning bonus "appreciation pay" during the pandemic, want to keep it that way.

"Our members are going to work, and I know they're happy to be working, proud to be working," Christensen said. "And they want to stay working, but that means they need to stay healthy."

The UFCW's international union launched the #ShopSmart campaign on social media and other channels last month after a poll of some 5,000 members found 85% said customers are not practicing social distancing, 62% said customers are blaming employees for shortages and 43% report-

TAKE THE PLEDGE:

Wear your mask inside the store, keep 6 feet of space or more.



#SHOPSMART

ed instances of customers shouting at employees

"We really are all in this together," Christensen said. "It's a people business, and it's hard to get away from people in these stores. They weren't built for social distancing. But you can get six feet apart if you try, and that's what we're asking."

Meanwhile, Christensen said, Local 1189 has been working to supply every grocery worker who wants one with a mask and gloves.

No UFCW Local 1189 grocery workers had tested positive for COVID-19 when this edition of The Union Advocate went to press.

- Michael Moore, UA editor



Be proud of your hands.
They build amazing things.
Still, you have to wash them. A lot.

For those in trades, your hands are a vital tool. They build hospitals and clinics that will save lives in this challenging time. But while you're taking care of others, don't forget to take care of yourself—with vigorous hand washing, safe distancing and as much down time at home as you can get. Stay well. We'll be here for you when you need us.



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Workers Memorial Day

Fallen workers remembered remotely as pandemic prevents in-person memorial

St. Paul and Minneapolis Building Trades councils would have held their annual Workers Memorial Day event in the Workers Memorial Garden on the State Capitol grounds last month.

The following is a list of names that would have been read at that ceremony – names of union tradespeople who died in the previous year as a result of work-related injuries or illnesses.

- Cory Buerke, Cottage Grove, age 38, member of Bricklayers Local 1, construction accident.
- Justin Duerr, Des Moines, Iowa, age 23, member of Laborers Local 563, auto accident
- Tor Heglund, Waconia, age 43, member of Painters Local 386, auto accident on way to work.
- Eric Koeppe, Litchfield, age 48, member of Operating Engineers Local 49, construction accident.

- Dennis “Denny” Moore, Clear Lake, age 82, retired Plumbers Local 15 business agent, Mesothelioma.

- Mark Olson, Browerville, age 44, member of Operating Engineers Local 49, construction accident.

- Zachary Pumper, Savage, age 34, member of Laborers Local 563, construction accident.

Their names would have been etched into white crosses, which members of their respective unions would have draped with a black scarf as a bell rang out.

Online ceremony

The Minnesota AFL-CIO planned to video-stream a remote Workers Memorial Day ceremony April 28, beginning at 6 p.m.

To participate in the ceremony, go to the federation’s Facebook page: facebook.com/mnaflcio.



Building Trades union members paused to observe Workers Memorial Day last year. The St. Paul and Minneapolis Building and Construction Trades councils hold a ceremony each year in the Workers Memorial Garden on the State Capitol Grounds. file photo

Workers Memorial Day, and still no federal action to protect workers from COVID-19

By Michael Moore

Union Advocate editor

Every year on April 28, local unions hold Workers Memorial Day ceremonies to honor their members who died in the last 12 months as a result of work-related injury or illness – and to renew the call for safer workplaces.

This year, with Minnesota under a statewide stay-at-home order, observances were canceled.

That meant no black scarves draped over crosses bearing the names of the fallen, no mourners standing shoulder to shoulder, offering prayers and observing moments of silence to mark the solemn day.

But with many union members on the front lines of efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19 – often without the necessary protective gear – unions planned to mark Workers Memorial Day 2020 with an urgent call, as the rallying cry goes, to “mourn the dead and fight like hell for the living.”

“As the virus continues to spread, many employers are woefully unprepared,” AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, the nation’s highest-ranking labor leader, wrote in a letter to affiliate unions. “Guidance from federal authorities has been inconsistent at best and dangerous at worst...”

“Working people are doing our part in the face of the COVID-19 outbreak. Now our government must do the same by issuing strong enforceable protections for all workers at risk during this pandemic.”

Letting bosses off the hook

So far, Labor Secretary Eugene Scalia has resisted union demands to



establish emergency temporary standards for workplaces during the pandemic. Instead, the federal agency charged with protecting workers’ health and safety, OSHA, has distributed “guidance” to employers, none of which is enforceable.

A report published in the Washington Post last month revealed OSHA received more than 3,000 complaints related to the coronavirus from January through early April. The total number of worker complaints, though, is likely much higher, as some states, including Minnesota, collect and investigate OSHA complaints on their own.

Making matters worse, the Trump administration has chipped away at the number of federal OSHA investigators, which stands at its lowest point in the agency’s history. And despite the public health crisis, the agency’s director chair sits unfilled.

Meanwhile, the Centers for

Disease Control last month loosened guidelines covering essential workers who have been exposed to COVID-19.

Previously, the CDC urged workers to self-quarantine for 14 days before returning to work. But the new guidelines permit essential workers to make an immediate return, as long as they remain asymptomatic, take their temperature prior to work, wear a mask and practice social distancing “as work duties permit.”

“The loosened guidelines are dangerous, and risk exposing other workers and the public to infection, with supposed mitigation measures that are far less effective in reducing the threat of spreading the virus,” National Nurses United Executive Director Bonnie Castillo said.

Where’s the PPE?

In March, as Minnesota hospitals scrambled to prepare for an influx of COVID-19 patients, union nurses began collecting N-95 masks, gloves and other personal protective equipment (PPE) at the Minnesota Nurses Association’s St. Paul offices.

It was a chilling indication that hospitals and nursing homes here were anticipating the same shortages – PPE, ventilators, testing kits – reported by facilities in other parts of the county.

Unions, including AFSCME, SEIU and the Nurses, called on President Trump to use the power of the Defense Production Act to speed up production of PPE and needed medical supplies. But Trump has so far used the DPA sparingly, pitting hospitals and state governments against

each other for access to a limited supply of lifesaving equipment.

A report issued April 16 by the Public Accountability Initiative found Trump bowed to pressure from corporate lobbyists with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, who urged him not to deploy the DPA.

Many of the most powerful corporations in the Chamber, the report found, have direct financial interests in how the COVID-19 response plays out. That includes medical manufacturers like 3M and Honeywell, major employers of frontline workers and big banks.

“The largest, wealthiest, and most powerful corporations and industries have to show leadership by looking past their bottom lines,” SEIU International President Mary Kay Henry said. “Unfortunately their response so far has been nothing short of appalling.”

Death toll climbing

It’s a cruel irony that Workers Memorial Day observances had to be canceled at a time when so many working people – essential workers providing care to the sick, delivering food to families, stocking shelves with the supplies we need – are putting themselves at risk just by reporting to their jobs.

The AFL-CIO created an online memorial to American union members who died after contracting COVID-19.

As this edition of The Advocate went to press, the number of deaths listed on the page stood at 124. None of the fallen was from Minnesota.

View the memorial at aflcio.org/covid-19/memoriam.

Building Trades unions move quickly to keep tradespeople safe on jobsites

By Michael Moore

Union Advocate editor

Minnesota's construction industry has not shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic, but it's not business as usual on the job site either, as local Building Trades unions and their contractors make adjustments to prevent the virus' spread and keep tradespeople healthy.

"Any time you work construction, there's high risk involved. These are risky jobs," Pipefitters Local 455 Business Manager Tony Poole said. "But this virus, it definitely changes the game."

The outbreak prompted Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz to declare a state of emergency in March, closing most public gathering places and ordering businesses to allow their employees to work from home if possible.

For tradespeople, of course, it's not.

Construction unions worked with the governor to get their industry on the "essential services" list, allowing work to continue. Now, unions are working to give their members the tools they need to stay safe as they continue building the state's critical infrastructure.

That starts with education.

The Minnesota Building and Construction Trades Council has created a page on its website, mntrades.org, with an evolving list of resources on the virus and best practices for preventing its spread on the job site. Most craft unions also maintain COVID-19 resources on their local websites.

"We're sending out communications through our website constantly, just about every day, with CDC recommendations and information about COVID," Poole said. "And we're sending mass text to all members when something is particularly important."

Unions also are working with their contractors to incorporate best practices into the workflow, LIUNA Local 563 Business Manager Joe Fowler said.

"We've been really working with the contractors on social distancing," Fowler said. "Providing more sanitization stations. Requiring workers to break separately. Forgoing toolbox talks every morning, or doing them weekly instead of daily."

In some cases, unions are supplying needed equipment to their members directly. Local 455 delivered gang boxes stocked with hand sanitizer, soap, disinfectant cleaner, paper towels, toilet paper, gloves, N-95 masks and more to several large jobsites across the east metro, after hearing from workers concerned about sanitation.

"If you're working around somebody who's not wearing a glove, and you've got to work on that same piece of equipment?" Poole said. "We want our members to be able to disinfect what they feel they need to disinfect. Rather than wait, the local took it upon itself to supply some of these sites with what our people need."

Union leaders are taking COVID-19 – and their members' concerns about the pandemic – seriously, Fowler added.

"We want to keep people working, but we don't want any of our members working in an environment that they feel is unsafe," he said. "If they feel that way, they need to reach out. We're still open for business."



St. Paul Pipefitters Local 455 delivered gang boxes filled with cleaning supplies and protective gear – and, yes, toilet paper – to its larger job sites last month. Smaller sites received supplies as well. "We want these job sites to stay open," Business Manager Tony Poole said. "The best way to have our members continue to work is to keep them safe."
 submitted photos

**WORK SMART
WORK HEALTHY**
BUILDING TRADES & COVID-19

**STAY HOME
IF YOU FEEL
SICK**



**CLEAN YOUR
HANDS**

BE AWARE

CLEAN YOUR TOOLS,
PACK YOUR LUNCH,
DON'T TOUCH YOUR
FACE & DON'T
CONGREGATE



WORK SAFE

CONTACT YOUR
UNION IF YOU HAVE
QUESTIONS



West St. Paul shoots down effort to repeal prevailing wage

By Filiberto Nolasco Gomez

Editor, www.workdayminnesota.org

At the March 23 West St. Paul City Council meeting, during the "Citizen Comment" segment, a deluge of callers dialed in to voice their strong opposition to a proposal that would rescind the city's 2007 prevailing wage ordinance.

The ordinance is applied to private development that receives public monies, and the reversal would have specifically benefited Dominion Development Company.

Resembling a call-in radio show without a filter and with the acoustic quality of a drive-through window, Mayor David Napier patiently took each call. Many questioned whether this was the appropriate time – during a public health crisis – to consider a reversal of the prevailing wage ordinance.

The council considered the repeal after developer Dominion indicated it might withdraw the development proposal if prevailing wages were required, arguing it would increase construction costs by 25%.

That figure, unions argued and City Manager Ryan Schroeder admitted, was dubious.

Dominion plans on constructing 137 units of workforce housing and 232 units of independent senior living on the site of a former Kmart in West St. Paul. The project will cost an estimated \$100 million. Dominion plans to apply for tax-exempt

bonds and tax credits from Dakota County and tax-increment financing from the city.

Union representatives and other callers reminded council members that prevailing wage requirements exist to ensure local wage standards are maintained when taxpayer funds facilitate a development project.

Prevailing wage ordinances are designed to combat wage theft and labor trafficking – practices that Dominion has been accused of violating in the past. At a recent housing forum in Minneapolis, one construction worker described working on Dominion's Legends of Spring Lake Park project for a subcontractor, whose practices he compared to "a chain of theft that goes down, down, down and those people at the very bottom (are) those of us in the Latino community."

"We strongly oppose this attack on living wages for construction workers and will join the St. Paul Building and Construction Trades Council in strongly opposing any elected official who stands against prevailing wage protections," LIUNA warned in a written statement to the board.

The City Council seemed to have heard community members. While concerned that the project might not move forward they collectively felt the repeal of the prevailing wage ordinance was unnecessary.

The measure was unanimously voted down.

**BUILDING
TRADES**

Building Trades
COVID-19 resources at
www.mntrades.org

COVID-19 response likely to alter Labor 2020 political push, but how?

By Bill Moore

Special to The Union Advocate

COVID-19 is disrupting life as we know it and may do so for a while yet. But Minnesota labor leaders are determined that it will not stop efforts to inform and mobilize union voters for the 2020 election.

The Minnesota Labor 2020 campaign is alive and well – and ready to adapt to challenges and changing circumstances.

“Our work this election year is incredibly important,” St. Paul Regional Labor Federation President Kera Peterson said. “We have to engage as many union members as possible as voters and volunteers, not only to elect a president who respects and stands up for working families, but to assure worker-friendly majorities in both the Minnesota Senate and the U.S. Senate.

Work to assure a complete count for the U.S. census is also important, Peterson added: “We need to be doing that now, and also working to make sure union members and retirees are registered to vote.”

Minnesota AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Brad Lehto reported that officers, leaders and political organizers from affiliated unions and labor councils around the state already have formulated a Labor 2020 plan. Now, they are working on contingency plans.

“If things get better,” Lehto said, “we’ll keep moving ahead with the current plan. If things get worse we’ll have options.”

Minnesota State Building and Construction Trades Council Executive Director Jessica Looman shares Lehto’s determination.

“During this time of uncertainty, the AFL-CIO is working to adapt their voter education and mobilization

plans to address many different contingencies,” she said. “The Minnesota Building Trades will also work to ensure that our members’ voices are heard in 2020.”

Texting could be key

As an example of adjustments that may need to be made, Lehto pointed to worksite conversations. They won’t be possible if worksites are shuttered.

“Our whole worksite program would have to change,” he said. “One option we’re exploring is peer-to-peer texting, where worksite leaders could communicate via text messages with co-workers who are working from home or laid off.”

The Service Employees (SEIU) developed and implemented this in the last election cycle and it worked well, Lehto added, joking, “We’re all going to become experts in tech.”

Jamie Gulley, President of SEIU Healthcare Minnesota and the SEIU Minnesota State Council said, “This pandemic has made clear how important it is to have elected officials who care about working people.

“We know there may be challenges in our usual election plans that focus on person-to-person conversations with possible social distancing still in effect. Luckily, we have experience with texting, online ads, phone calling and relational organizing tools that will help make sure we do everything possible to elect candidates who support working people.

“No matter what tools we end up using, we are going to have tens of thousands of conversations about electing candidates who see this pandemic not as a chance to divide us and give more to the rich, but as a sign we need to pass laws that put Minnesotans’ health before corporate profits, and to support our Unions for

All agenda to make sure every Minnesotan – no matter our job, race, zip code or gender – can live a safe and healthy life.”

Getting social – at a distance

Another route Minnesota Labor 2020 planners are exploring to reach union members with relevant information in pandemic times is digital communications and paid media.

Already in the works are some 15-, 30- and 60-second videos of union members from various unions saying why unions matter to them personally, and how working people need each other and won’t buy attempts to divide us by race, ethnicity or other differences.

Door-knocking, too, is a traditional election year tactic that wouldn’t work if COVID-19 exposure testing and contact tracing don’t reach necessary levels and stay-at-home policies persist into the fall. Volunteers likely will be reluctant to risk exposure to the virus, and people won’t want to open their door to a stranger.

Phoning is an option, but has proved less effective in recent years, and traditional phone banks often involve bringing volunteers together in close quarters.

“If phoners are unable to social-distance, virtual phone banking is a way around that,” Lehto said. “Volunteers can access a list on their home computer or, if they find that difficult, they can get a paper list to phone from home.”

Regardless of how it gets done, the Labor 2020’s work is critical, Minnesota AFL-CIO President Bill McCarthy said.

“While this pandemic may change the methods used to communicate with union members about the election, it underscores why the 2020 election is so important,” he said. “We need to elect leaders who will join

with us to make sure no worker is left behind, and we emerge from this crisis stronger than before.”

Retirees get early start

Members of at least one Minnesota labor organization are on the phones already. The Minnesota State Retiree Council has launched an effort to make sure retired union members are registered to vote. “Comparing union lists with state voting records finds 6,000 Minnesota union retirees not registered to vote,” State Retiree President Ken McInnis reported.

Retiree Council Election Work Coordinator Carol Freeman and other volunteers have asked for clearance from Minnesota AFL-CIO affiliated unions to call their retired members who aren’t registered to vote.

Meanwhile, they’re calling everyone on retiree council mailing and email lists to learn how retirees are staying informed. If they’re not already subscribed to the Retiree Bulletin, Election Work Co-Coordinator Martha Johnson signs them up and also points them to the Retiree Council website, www.mnretired.org, and Facebook page, [facebook.com/mnaflcioretired](https://www.facebook.com/mnaflcioretired).

Another retiree initiative is advocating for Vote-by-Mail legislation.

The State Retiree Council passed a resolution urging the State of Minnesota to send a voter registration form, together with an application for an absentee ballot, to every unregistered Minnesotan who is eligible to vote, including pre-paid postage for return. The Minnesota AFL-CIO Executive Board adopted the resolution.

“Given the current majority in the Minnesota Senate, I can’t imagine the measure will pass the Legislature,” McInnis admitted. “But if legislators really believe that voting is what democracy looks like, they’ll support it.”

As mail volumes plummet in pandemic, unions push Congress for relief

Perry Schmidt is used to delivering between 1,200 and 1,300 pieces of mail along his route each day. Now, the St. Paul letter carrier is delivering between 400 and 600.

He’s not alone. As the COVID-19 pandemic has spread across the country, the volume of mail handled by the U.S. Postal Service has cratered, prompting the agency to warn Congress it will run out of cash sometime this summer.

“It’s hard to say if we’re ever going to recover from this,” said Schmidt, a member of Branch 28 of the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC).

Postal unions aren’t going down without a fight, however. They have launched an all-out lobbying campaign, warning supporters that, unless the USPS receives a lifeline in the next COVID-19 stimulus bill, critical public services could disappear. Among them:

- **Prescription delivery.** The Postal Service delivers about 1 billion prescriptions to American households

each year. In a pandemic, with people trying to limit their exposure to public places, that service is vital.

“As more and more people are at home, they have to get their prescriptions, and they have to get them on time,” said Todd Elkerton, president of the American Postal Workers Union’s St. Paul local. “That’s a big deal.”

- **Voting by mail.** Many states are considering allowing vote-by-mail systems as a result of the pandemic. That won’t be possible if the agency goes under.

- **Rural service.** President Trump has made no secret of his preference for privatizing the Postal Service, going so far as to convene a task force to make recommendations on the subject.

That would be disastrous for many remote and rural areas of the country. USPS typically delivers 470 million pieces of mail each day to all 159 million addresses in the country. Private companies likely would deliver only where they can turn a profit.

“We’re the lifeblood of these small communities,” Elkerton said. “Without a post office, there’s really not a town in some of these areas.”

In addition to providing temporary relief to the USPS, federal lawmaker should repeal the law requiring the agency to prefund its retirees’ health benefits 75 years in advance.

The prefunding mandate was a poison pill that privatization advocates successfully attached to a bigger spending bill in 2006, designed to make the Postal Service appear bankrupt. But no other public or private employer is subject to a prefunding requirement of the kind.

“If you took off the prefunding mandate, it would look like we were actually making money,” Elkerton said. “But it’s a hard thing to explain in sound bites. It’s hard to get that point across.”

Of course, their jobs aren’t the only thing USPS workers have to worry about right now. As essential workers during the pandemic, they risk coming

Act now: Save our Postal Service!

- Learn more about the campaign to save the public post office at usmailnotforsale.com.

into contact with the novel coronavirus every day.

Anxiety spread throughout the agency after two USPS workers from the same station in New York died after contracting COVID-19.

So far, Minnesota is faring better. At press time, among 13,000 postal employees in Minnesota and western Wisconsin, which make up the agency’s Northland region, just four had tested positive for the virus, Elkerton said. Minnesota’s USPS workers had seen just one positive case.

“There’s a lot of fear and anxiety, but really we’ve kind of beaten the odds here,” he said.

– Michael Moore, UA editor

Guest Commentary

Lessons from labor history can inform our movement during COVID-19 crisis

By Peter Rachleff

Co Director, East Side Freedom Library

COVID-19 is the biggest crisis of our lives, and workers are on the front lines. Large, profitable employers expect workers deemed “essential” — those in healthcare, grocery stores, food production, and shipping, among others — to risk their health and safety and that of their families, many for meager pay and benefits. Portions of the economy have shut down, leaving millions jobless with a threadbare social safety net. Where do we look for ideas about how to respond?

At the East Side Freedom Library, we believe that studying our past offers valuable lessons for the present. We collect resources and host programs which help us understand how workers developed organizations and strategies to confront the key challenges of their lives. The current situation has led us to reconsider the Minneapolis Teamsters strikes of 1934. Their dramatic story shows that the labor movement is strongest when unions boldly organize workers on the job and in the community around a shared vision of fairness and justice.

These strikes changed the course of history, transforming Minneapolis from a notorious anti-labor bastion into a “union town.” In the depths of the Depression and the depths of winter, a group of dedicated activists in the city’s coal yards bypassed the traditional strategy of organizing workers into separate unions depending on the work they did. They organized coal heavers, warehouse workers, truck drivers, and helpers into a single union. With the support of working people and families throughout the city, they won a brief strike in February 1934.

Their success inspired other Minneapolis workers to believe that if they organized together, if they practiced solidarity, and if they involved their families, they, too, could change their lives. Over the spring, activists and organizers built one industrial union of all workers involved in trucking. Five thousand joined. The union built a “Committee of 100,” a network of stewards and rank-and-filers to link workplaces. They organized an Unemployed Committee to advocate for those without work. They started a daily newspaper, *The Organizer*, to tell their story to the wider community. And they organized a Women’s Auxiliary, which ran a commissary and a soup kitchen.

These steps became critical in May, when, challenged by employers and the fiercely anti-union Citizens’ Alliance, the union struck. They needed all of these innovations to strengthen internal solidarity and gain the solidarity of the community. Their roving pickets challenged scab-driven trucks, and they engaged in physical battles with the local police. In two weeks, they had won many of their demands. When employers tried to undercut their agreements, the union called its members — now 10,000 — back on strike. They held firm for several weeks, and finally won secure contracts, significant raises, and work rules and working conditions that became the model for the industry nationwide.

The Teamsters’ story is instructive for our situation. Their strategy prioritized internal and external organization, linking workers and their families to the union, other unions, and the community. They practiced anti-racism and sought workers of color for membership and leadership roles. The local union’s

new constitution even required that every meeting include a presentation on labor history.

No wonder we celebrate this event at the East Side Freedom Library. But the point is not just to celebrate history but to learn from it.

Labor’s crisis did not begin with COVID-19. For decades, employers have evaded labor protections through outsourcing and subcontracting. They have eroded wages and benefits, and through the legislatures and courts attacked the right to picket or have a union at all. This pandemic has laid bare just how far we have slid in terms of work rules, wages, health care, sick pay, and workplace protections. It has also revealed how “essential” workers are to the safety, security, and quality of life enjoyed by our community. Like when those coal yard workers went on strike, the contradictions are clear.

We founded the East Side Freedom Library in 2014 to share stories of the labor movement and to inspire solidarity among unions and with our diverse communities. We are proud to preserve and present our shared history. We have been inspired by recent actions taken by local educators and Amazon workers, and workers elsewhere as well as by the dedication and determination of nurses and healthcare workers to speak up for their rights and for the people who depend upon them. Informed by the lessons of the past, when we fight together, the future is ours to win.

— Peter Rachleff wishes to acknowledge the work of Kristi Wright in conceptualizing and writing this article. Wright was a union organizer among graduate employees at the U of M and is currently working with the library to expand and deepen relationships with labor.

Book Review

More than a building, library is a building block on East Side

By John Crea

Special to The Union Advocate

In Greg Gaut’s “Reinventing the People’s Library,” we find a nicely woven story about a place, a people and a public space.

The place is the east side of St. Paul, where an ancient river punched through the limestone bluffs, allowing easy access to the Mississippi River.

The people are the Dakota tribes, who had for thousands of years taken advantage of the gentle terrain to set up camp, followed by wave after wave of immigrants, the first from Europe, then Africa and Latin America and Asia. These settlers were and still are a hearty blend of working-class families and the merchants who serve them.

The public space is the East Side Freedom Library, a magnificent edifice on the corner of Greenbrier and Jessamine, near the busy intersection of Payne and Maryland. The building is a gem, one of over 1,600 public libraries Andrew Carnegie helped build in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was designed by the prolific St. Paul architect Charles Hausler, an impressive building in the beaux arts style, with classic lines and functional space.

We learn from the author that public libraries, like public education, are relatively recent developments, and though not uniquely American, certainly instrumental to the rapid growth of this country.

The St. Paul Public Library was firmly established downtown on Rice Park, and to encourage access to its materials set up branch libraries throughout the city, often sharing space with larger retail stores in the neighborhoods. These temporary branch outlets proved so popular that the

library worked with the Carnegie foundation to get three permanent branches built.

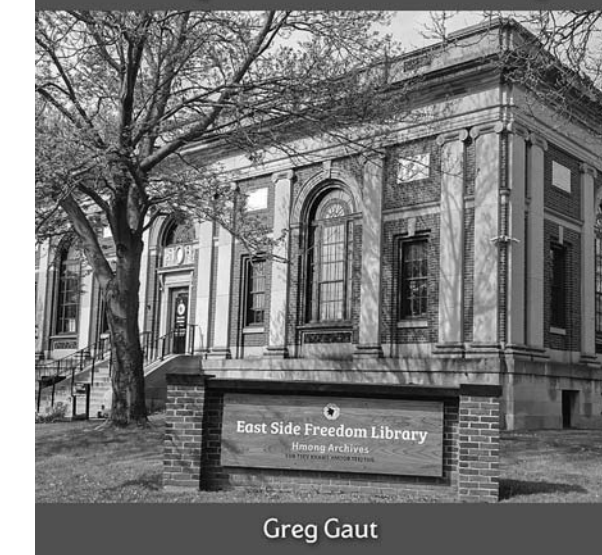
One of those, the Arlington Hills Public Library, opened its doors in 1917. The book tells us how the Arlington library served as a valuable resource for almost 100 years, serving successive communities of skilled workers and laborers.

In 2014, the St. Paul Public Library teamed up with the City of St. Paul to construct a new building on the corner of Payne and Maryland to house a community center and the Arlington Hills branch library. This left the classic Carnegie building open and available to be repurposed.

Stepping up to take advantage of this opportunity were Peter Rachleff and Beth Cleary, two professors at Macalester College. These east-side residents have a goal of building bridges between the long-established communities in this area with the newest immigrants from southeast Asia, Latin America and east and west Africa.

To this end, they signed a long-term lease with the City of St. Paul for the classic building on Greenbrier to house their own and their friends’ extensive personal libraries and cultural artwork from throughout the community. Rachleff and Cleary formally established East Side Freedom Library to provide the space and facilities for shared programs that support the mission of their new organization: “to contribute to the movement of social justice and equity by encouraging solidarity among working people.”

The author, Greg Gaut, does not miss the rich irony of the very progressive East Side Freedom Library finding a home in a staid structure built on

**Reinventing
the
People’s Library**

“Reinventing the People’s Library” is available at the East Side Freedom Library, 1105 Greenbrier St., St. Paul.

the backs of the laborers in the steel mills and coal mines of Carnegie’s empire. It would be wonderful to be able look ahead at the next 100 years of this library’s life to see how the ESFL is promoting solidarity among the vibrant tapestry of cultures that will then call St. Paul’s east side home.

— John Crea is author of “Recalibrating the Labor Market: How to Have Your Cake and Time to Eat It Too.”

Labor News in Review

WORKERS' COMP FOR FRONT LINES

Gov. Tim Walz last month signed legislation expanding workers' compensation eligibility to emergency first responders and front-line workers, making them eligible for benefits if they test positive for COVID-19.

"Minnesotans came together – labor organizations, businesses, Democrats and Republicans – to move this legislation forward," Walz said. "Our first responders and frontline workers are making tremendous sacrifices – and it's our duty to protect them as best we can."

The law protects doctors and nurses, firefighters, paramedics, police, long-term care workers, home health workers, correctional officers and child care providers by creating the presumption that a COVID-19 infection is work-related, unless the employer is able to prove that infection happened elsewhere.

Union members cheered the legislation.

"Those of us on the front line of caring for Minnesotans who possibly have COVID-19 are taking increased risk to our health," said LaTanya Hughes, a home care worker from Minneapolis and vice president of SEIU Healthcare Minnesota's home-care sector. "I'm so thankful that our union family fought to make sure we were included."

AFSCME Council 5 mobilized two dozen local unions in support of the legislation, Executive Director Julie Bleyhl said.

"Our state's correctional officers, security counselors, health care workers and others are workers that are keeping our society functioning well in this time of great crisis and of many unknowns," she said. "What we do know, however, is that we can rely on the men and women on the front-lines of this pandemic who bring incredible passion, public service, and heart to their work on behalf of every Minnesotan."

"We are proud to have been at the forefront of this battle for first responders," added Brian Aldes, Teamsters Local 320 secretary-treasurer. "As we learn about COVID-19 and it's long-term effects, we are grateful first responders will receive the coverage they deserve as they continue to serve our communities during this crisis."

CWA WINS BONUS PAY FROM AT&T

Workers at AT&T call centers and retail stores in Minnesota as well as AT&T technicians in the field are receiving a 20 percent pay bonus for working during the COVID-19 crisis, thanks to a national agreement negotiated between the Communications Workers of America and AT&T.

"AT&T is 'all hands on deck' right now," commented Shari Wojtowicz, president of CWA Local 7250, which represents about 500 AT&T workers in Minnesota.

In addition, the agreement allows many workers to work from home. Before the COVID-19 crisis, "we didn't have working from home options in any of our contracts," Wojtowicz said. She said the new national agreement included "a pretty liberal at home policy" and that "we have a lot of people working from home statewide."

AT&T also provided workers with 80 hours of "paid excused time," soon extended to 160 hours, for workers who needed to self-quarantine, or who are at high risk, or who have school age children or daycare age children, or who are caring for a family member.

When the COVID-19 crisis hit, AT&T closed 22 of its 36 retail stores in Minnesota — which were deemed essential businesses by Gov. Tim Walz's emergency orders. Wojtowicz reported April 14 that the company planned to re-open six of the stores.

She said the stores are operating with reduced staff and have implemented several safety measures including limiting the number of customers in the store to one customer per worker, allowing no children in stores, asking customers to wait outside the store, limiting the number of products on display for customers to touch, and providing staff with masks, gloves and hand sanitizer.

Retail workers who are working reduced hours are receiving their full pay for the number of hours they normally would have worked, Wojtowicz said. "The company sees a lot of value in still maintaining a store where people can come in and get the quality of service that AT&T is known for," Wojtowicz said.

(To find CWA-represented AT&T retail stores in Minnesota, visit cwa7250.org and click on the link for "Mobility Store Finder.")

At the call center where Wojtowicz works, she said work stations have been reconfigured to put workers far apart from each other and that additional cleaning measures have been implemented. Workers like her work there with privileged customer information and are not allowed to work from home.

AT&T technicians who visit customer sites to maintain equipment, however, face greater risks, Wojtowicz said. They have some PPE — masks and gloves — she reported, but "is it enough? They're not walking around with N95 respirators."

So far, Wojtowicz reported, AT&T retail store staff have not taken ill from COVID-19, but an AT&T store in Eagan was closed for cleaning after a contractor working in the store tested positive. The company failed to notify all store employees, Wojtowicz said. "We notified every retail worker in the state of Minnesota."

– Steve Share, Minneapolis Labor Review

STADIUM VENDORS SEEK RELIEF

UNITE HERE Local 17 represents 700 concessions employees who serve Minnesota Twins fans at Target Field. The delay of the Major League Baseball season means those folks are not working and are not getting paid.

Local 17 is calling on the Twins to join other team owners who have stated they will take steps to ensure that stadium workers are paid.

The workers are employed by Delaware North, which contracts with the Twins to provide stadium concessions. Local 17 is asking the Twins to continue to pay Delaware North so that it can pay the concession workers.

In a statement on Facebook, the Major League Baseball Players Association declared that it "stands in solidarity with ALL of the employees — including UNITE HERE concession workers — whose efforts enable players to perform at ballparks across the country and who now need support during this unexpected shutdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic."

– Minneapolis Labor Review

LABOR ENDORSED

The Minnesota AFL-CIO last month announced the state labor federation's general board has endorsed Representatives Angie Craig, Betty McCollum, Ilhan Omar, and Dean Phillips for reelection this fall.

"The COVID-19 pandemic and its fallout is making it crystal clear that elections have serious consequences and reinforces the importance of electing leaders who will have working Minnesotans' backs," said Minnesota AFL-CIO President Bill McCarthy. "These four members of Congress, along with Senators Klobuchar, Smith, and Congressman Peterson, have always supported workers and are

fighting to ensure working people come first in all pandemic relief legislation."

Earlier in March, the Minnesota AFL-CIO endorsed Senator Tina Smith, Congressman Collin Peterson (7th District), and Dan Feehan (1st District). The Minnesota AFL-CIO and Area Labor Councils will continue to screen and endorse candidates in the coming months and weeks as the 2020 general election draws closer.

Read The Union Advocate's interview with labor endorsed Rep. McCollum on Page 12 of this issue.

LABOR BOWL MOVED TO AUG. 6

There's still time to register your team for the 10th Annual Labor Bowl – plenty more time, as it turns out.

The bowling fundraiser, which benefits the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation's nonprofit organization, typically takes place each spring, but it has been rescheduled to Aug. 6 in accordance with the state's stay-at-home order. The site, Sun Ray Lanes in St. Paul, remains the same.

Shifts at 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. remain open for teams of four or five bowlers. Teams are asked to pledge \$100 per bowler. All donations are tax-deductible.

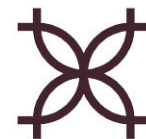
Proceeds benefit the St. Paul Labor Studies and Resource Center, which assists and advocates for union members and their families in Chisago, Dakota, Ramsey and Washington counties through the AFL-CIO Community Services program. Community Services liaisons connect union members to community resources and financial assistance during times of crisis, and help prepare local unions for strikes or layoffs.

To register a team of bowlers, call Laura at 651-222-3787, ext. 117, by July 13.

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Jeff Schrempp
President

Resources for workers during the COVID-19 pandemic

Efforts to halt the spread of COVID-19 are creating immediate economic hardship for many working families.

The Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation's nonprofit organization, the Saint Paul Labor Studies and Resource Center (LSRC), has compiled a list of resources available to help working people stay safe, healthy and economically secure during the public-health crisis.

The list is published on the federation's website, stpaulunions.org, and is updated regularly by the federation's AFL-CIO Community Services liaisons. Please help them spread the word to anyone struggling during this challenging time!

Staying healthy

The Minnesota Department of Health recommends the following tips, whether you're staying home during the pandemic or going to work. (And remember, if your employer tries to prevent you from taking the steps necessary to protect your health, alert your union immediately!)

- Cover coughs and sneezes with an elbow or sleeve.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds, especially after using a tissue, going to the bathroom or before eating. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your face – especially the eyes, nose and mouth – with unwashed hands.
- Maintain six feet of “social distance” with other people.
- Stay home if you have cold- or flu-like symptoms, for seven days after your illness' onset or three days after your fever resolves (without fever-reducing medicine). Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Talk to someone if you're experiencing mental distress. Free emergency assistance is available around the clock by texting the letters MN to 741 741. Reach the Minnesota chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) at 1-888-NAMI-Helps, or the Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health at 1-800-528-4511 for help navigating the mental health system, support or additional resources.

Unemployment

Unemployment Insurance can provide immediate, emergency relief for many workers impacted by COVID-19, including people who have been laid off or who have seen their hours reduced. Gov. Tim Walz moved quickly to streamline UI benefits during the crisis, while federal lawmakers created a new program called Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation, providing 13 weeks of extended unemployment benefits for certain workers.

- Learn more about expanded access to UI during the COVID-19 response at www.ulmn.org.
- The best way to apply for Unemployment Insurance benefits is online. Applications are accepted weekdays from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. In response to a surge of filings, the agency has begun restricting applications to people with Social Security Numbers ending in certain digits Monday through Wednesday. Anyone can apply Thursday and Friday.



- Operators are available to assist people filing for unemployment Fridays only, from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., at 651-296-3644.

- The federal CARES Act provides an additional \$600 in unemployment compensation to eligible workers, and makes benefits available to self-employed people, independent contractors and others who are not typically eligible. The National Employment Law Project has helpful information about who qualifies on its website: nelp.org.

Community support

Greater Twin Cities United Way is a longstanding partner in the AFL-CIO Community Services program, and the nonprofit is stepping up to help working families during the COVID-19 pandemic in several ways.

- United Way's 211 hotline is staffed 24 hours each day by specialists ready to answer people's questions and connect them to local resources. **Just dial 211, or text the letters MNCOVID to 898-211.**
- Learn more about how Greater Twin Cities United Way and its 95 nonprofit partners are assisting the pandemic response at www.211.org.

Housing

Evictions have been suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic, but resources remain available to working people concerned about keeping their homes.

- HOME Line provides free legal assistance to qualified renters. To talk to an attorney, call 612-728-5767, or go to homeinmn.org for more information.
- The Minnesota Homeownership Center helps people buy and stay in their homes. Find a list of COVID-19 housing resources at www.hocmn.org, or call 651-659-9336 for assistance.
- Find more information about housing supports during the COVID-19 response from Minnesota Housing at www.mnhousing.gov.

Financial assistance

Counties provide financial assistance and arranges food supports for eligible families. To learn more:

- In Ramsey County, call 651-266-4444.
- In Hennepin County, call 844-803-8466.
- In Chisago County, go to www.chisagocounty.us. Click “Human Services.”
- In Dakota County, call 651-554-5611.
- In Washington County, call 651-430-6459.

Food

- Many schools are continuing to provide meals for students while schools are closed due to

the COVID-19 virus. Check with your local school district for more information.

- Hunger Impact Partners helps local families secure meals for children. Learn more at hunger-impactpartners.org.
- Second Harvest Heartland suggests calling ahead before visiting your local food shelf during the pandemic. Find a map showing resources near you at www.hungersolutions.org/find-help.
- Fare For All, which sells deeply discounted grocery bundles at monthly sites throughout the state, temporarily canceled sales after the governor's emergency declaration. But the agency was working on a drive-through model for sales as this issue went to press. Monitor fareforall.org for updates.

Tax relief

- The deadline for filing 2019 state and federal income taxes has been pushed back to July 15.
- The CARES Act provides direct “Economic Impact Payments” – or stimulus checks – of up to \$1,200 per person, depending on income, and \$500 per child. Track yours online at irs.gov/coronavirus.

Other bills

- Student loan borrowers may be able to suspend payments during the pandemic. Learn more at studentaid.gov.
- Xcel Energy has announced it will not disconnect any household's utilities during the pandemic. Learn more at xcelenergy.com/covid-19_response.
- Water shutoffs have been suspended in the City of St. Paul and other communities served by the city's Regional Water Services during the pandemic. Sign up for email alerts from the city about its COVID-19 response at www.stpaul.gov.

Avoiding scams

The Federal Trade Commission offers the following tips for avoiding illegal coronavirus-related schemes:

- Don't respond to texts, emails or calls about checks from the government.
- Ignore online offers for vaccinations and home test kits.
- Hang up on robocalls. Scammers are using them to pitch everything from low-priced health insurance to work-at-home schemes.
- Watch for emails claiming to be from the CDC or WHO, and don't click on links from sources you don't know.
- Do your homework when it comes to charitable donations. Never donate in cash, by gift card or by wiring money.

Giving back

- Greater Twin Cities United Way has launched the Twin Cities COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, dedicated to ensuring access to food, shelter, child care, sanitary supplies and financial assistance during the pandemic response. **To contribute, text GTCUWCOVID19 to 51555.**
- The American Red Cross has a “critical need” for blood donors right now. To schedule an appointment, call 651-291-6789, or find a drive at redcrossblood.org.



Minutes of the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation

APRIL 8, 2020

The Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation met in regular session remotely due to COVID 19 on the above date and was called to order with the Pledge of Allegiance by President Peterson at 6 p.m. Board members in attendance were Beissel, Dreyer, Edwards, Engeldorf, Faber, Gibbons, Guertin, Luneburg, Madden, Maki-Green, Markham-Kocurek, McCarthy, McNamara, Meyer, Michelson, Mullin, Peterson, Robles, Ryan, Sansom, Schmidt, Seath, Slattery, St. Aoro, Vandassor, Varco and Weed. Excused were Beedle B and Beedle G. Absent were Froemke, Gorman, Hoppe and Terry.

CREDENTIALS

Credentials were received from AFSCME Local 707, IUOE Local 70, LIUNA District Council, Roofers Local 96 and Sprinkler Fitters Local 417. President Peterson administered the Oath of Obligation to those new delegates and alternates present on-line.

MINUTES

M/S/C TO APPROVE MINUTES OF MARCH 11, 2020, AS PUBLISHED IN THE UNION ADVOCATE NEWSPAPER AFTER THE SECRETARY NOTES THERE ARE NO ADDITIONS OR CHANGES CALLED FOR.

COMMITTEE ON POLITICAL EDUCATION (COPE) MINUTES APRIL 8, 2020

COPE met in regular session remotely on the above date and was called to order by President Peterson at 5 p.m. Board members in attendance were Angrimson, Beissel, Dreyer, Edwards, Engeldorf, Faber, Gibbons, Guertin, Hoerth, Luneburg, Madden, Maki-Green, Markham-Kocurek, Mayer, McCarthy, McNamara, Meyer, Michelson, Mullin, Naseth, Peterson, Robles, Ryan, Sansom, Schmidt, Seath, Slattery, St. Aoro, Vandassor, Varco and Weed. Excused were Beedle B and Beedle G. Absent were DeRoy, Froemke, Gorman, Hoppe, Krey, Lohmann,

Qualy, Terry and Wise.

Items to come before this board included:

- President Peterson reported on the legislative priorities at the Capitol. The first responders bill was approved. A deal was reached on the Insulin Bill. The bill on hourly school employees is being blocked.

- We also started the year with our robust Labor 2020 field program. However, we now need to re-evaluate the program to figure out how we proceed. This will be a challenging time and there will be a Labor table meeting hosted by the Minnesota AFL-CIO.

- Colleen Nocerini, Political Organizer, has connected with the candidates on-line and is reminding them of the questionnaires that will need to be filled out.

There being no further business to come before this committee the meeting adjourned.

EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES APRIL 8, 2020

The Executive Board met upon conclusion of COPE with those same members present who are duly elected to this board.

Items to come before this board included:

PRESIDENT'S REPORT.

President Peterson reported on:

- The Fifth Annual Union Resource and Job Fair has been rescheduled for Thursday, June 4, 2020, at the Electrical Industry Building, located at 1330 Conway Street in St. Paul, from 3 to 6 p.m.
- The Tenth Annual Labor Bowl for St. Paul Labor Studies and Resource Center will be rescheduled for Thursday, Aug. 6, 2020. Shift times available are 2 and 4 p.m.
- The Worker's Memorial Day events have been cancelled. There might be a possibility of an online, activity so please share with your members.
- The Letter Carriers' Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive has been postponed.
- All Assembly meetings have



Over 60 delegates to the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation participated in the April 2020 meeting via Zoom last month. Several held up signs showing their support for working people on the front lines of the fight to control the COVID-19 pandemic, from hospital workers to grocery clerks, nursing home workers to janitors and beyond.

Endorsement notice

The federation may consider recommendations for endorsement of Ramsey County Commissioner candidates at its May 13 delegate meeting.

been canceled.

- ORGANIZING/UPDATES/CAMPAIGNS:
 - AFSCME Council 5, ATU Local 1005, Minnesota Nurses, Postal Workers, SPFT Local 28, SEIU Local 284, SEIU HC Minnesota, UFCW Local 1189 and UNITE HERE Local 17 updated everyone on the impact of COVID-19, as well as their organizing activities.

There being no further business to come before this committee, the meeting adjourned.

REPORT OF THE TREASURER

Secretary-Treasurer Engeldorf reported on the financial status of the Federation as of March 2020. The report was accepted as read.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

President Peterson reported on the following:

- The Saint Paul RLF will be flexible to support you as much as possible. Thank You to all of those who are continuing to work during these challenging times. Lynne Larkin-Wright, AFL-CIO Community Services Liaison for the St. Paul Labor Studies and Resource Center (LSRC), will be referring union members in our four-county area to our partner United Way's 2-1-1 hotline. United Way is setting up a COVID-19 fund to give grants to agencies to help with meeting basic needs. They are sending grant money to LSRC, Teamsters Service Bureau and Working Partnerships.



President Kera Peterson administered the Oath of Obligation to a delegate, elected from one of the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation's 100-plus affiliate unions, attending his first meeting last month, held remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Letter Carriers Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive is being postponed. NALC will give updates later.
- Fifth Annual Union Resource and Job Fair has been moved to Thursday, June 4, 2020. Todd Dahlstrom is tracking union employers who are hiring.
- Tenth Annual Labor Bowl has been rescheduled for August 2020.
- Worker's Memorial Day "in-person" activities have been cancelled. There could be a possibility for an online event organized by the Minnesota AFL-CIO.
- The Minnesota AFL-CIO State Retiree Council fundraiser has been postponed.

with Union Advocate Editor Michael Moore to put resources up on the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation's website. If you need resources, please call her at 651-846-9316. She has met with UNITE HERE about a hospitality fund being set up in Minneapolis.

- Colleen Nocerini, political organizer, has received information from candidates. Most of them are filling out the requested form.

There being no further business to come before this delegation, the meeting adjourned.

Job Openings

SAINT PAUL REGIONAL LABOR FEDERATION
AFL-CIO

The Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, is seeking to fill two full-time job openings on its professional staff:

- Political organizer
- AFL-CIO Community Services liaison

Job descriptions and details about the RLF's hiring process will be posted online:

www.stpaulunions.org/jobs

Submitted by,
BERNADINE ENGELDORF
Secretary-Treasurer

Exit Interview: Betty McCollum

'This is not the time for wishful thinking'

The global pandemic has elected officials spending less time shaking hands and more time taking calls – so much time, in fact, that Congresswoman Betty McCollum recently treated herself to a pair of Apple AirPods.

"I am on the phone from about 8:30 in the morning to about 6:30 at night, then on and off a little bit on the weekends," she laughed. "It's not the most efficient way for us to legislate, but we're figuring out how to do it."

After being endorsed by the Minnesota AFL-CIO last month, the 10-term DFLer from the state's 4th Congressional District carved out 30 minutes of phone time for this interview with The Union Advocate, which we've edited lightly for length and clarity.

UA: Federal lawmakers have so far passed three sweeping measures to address the public health and economic crises caused by COVID-19. Where have you directed your focus during this process?

BM: My focus first and foremost has been on working people and their families, and on making sure we have health care facilities that are open and able to run. That meant having the personal protection for frontline workers in our hospitals, as well as in our community clinics.

And then we needed to make sure that we have testing, which the president has failed miserably at. In order to open up our economy, in order to lift some of these stay-at-home orders, we have to have tests. People need to be able to be diagnosed quickly and effectively ... so that we can work on the next phase, which is coming up with treatment and coming up with a vaccine.

So my focus has been on what we need to do to keep our families safe...

UA: We're still hearing alarming accounts from health care and other frontline workers about lack of PPE and medical equipment. Is there more Congress should do, or is it now a supply-chain issue that falls more on the executive branch and states?

BM: This is a supply-chain issue that I have been concerned about since we had our last epidemic, with H1N1 and SARS. When I was in the Minnesota statehouse, I had the opportunity to work with (former state epidemiologist) Dr. Michael Osterholm. He has been a mentor to me on this. When we were going through the anthrax situation in Washington, D.C., I learned we don't keep enough of a stockpile or manufacture enough of the things we need... Masks, gowns, syringes, the cotton swabs they need to do the tests – there are so many things we don't manufacture in this country. When trade shuts down because of war, trade shuts down because of disruption or trade shuts down because of pandemic, we as

a country make ourselves vulnerable.

It's something a lot of us in Congress have been talking about for years. Then the crisis goes away, and everybody doesn't want to deal with it. We have to deal with it this time. I hope we've learned our lesson.

UA: Congress has allocated a lot of money to make sure workers remain employed during the crisis, with access to paid leave if they need it. Are you confident that's happening as the bills are being implemented? And is there proper oversight to ensure corporations benefiting from the stimulus are using that money to pay their workers?

BM: Two great points that you bring up... With the CARES Act, we knew there were going to be a lot of people who would not be able to go to work. You look at the restaurants right now, they had to close down because of all the contact. We put in place unemployment insurance, and the State of Minnesota ... had money in hand to get the money out the door even faster. Sure there's been hiccups with that, but I feel confident a lot of these issues will get smoothed out and money will get out to families...

But you also asked about oversight. And for the president of the United States to say (Congress) didn't need any oversight, with the way he's been firing people who have been in place for years to work with Congress on oversight of taxpayers' dollars? Just because he doesn't agree with them, he's firing them. That's wrong. Democrats in the House are going to do our very, very best to make sure these funds are spent the way they were meant to be: to save lives, to keep families from suffering more than they already have and to get our economy back up and running.

UA: The Postal Service says it's likely to run out of cash by September. Cities and other local governments are looking at historic shortfalls. Is there a chance Congress would act to address some of these things in a second stimulus?

BM: I'm on the Appropriations Committee, and we were working with our authorizers on a major infrastructure bill, which, on and off, the president has been interested in working with us on. We could get people back to work, we could get people off the bench, building roads, bridges, broadband, energy efficiency in our schools. But we found out Mitch McConnell was not interested in doing that.

We still know that our hospitals need money, and we need money for vaccine work. And we know social distancing works; we need to figure out a way to get the economy moving safely. So while these businesses lay and wait for that moment when it's safe for workers to go back, we have to keep those small community businesses – the hair salons, the restaurants, the plumbing and electric companies – able to keep their employees on hold in a way that provides them some stability and security.

UA: I know you've been a strong supporter of our postal unions here in St. Paul. What does Congress need to do to keep the post office open?

BM: Well there are bills out there the postal unions have been talking about for years, we just need to pass them. Just think, in a presidential election year, as we're slowly starting to recover from a pandemic, if we don't have letter carriers out there delivering ballots. We know what the weather can be like here in November, to ask people to social distance and stand in line outside to vote like they did in Wisconsin? That would just be wrong.

UA: You will once again be the labor-endorsed candidate on the ballot in the 4th district this year. Has the COVID-19 crisis heightened the stakes of our choice this November, not just locally, but nationally?

BM: I think it really has. When I saw what was happening in China in January, it took my breath away. That's a communist government. We don't hear about those things as fast as if it had happened in Canada or Australia. So when we hear about it, you know it's been going on a long time. COVID-19 is an invisible enemy – that's that only thing the president has said that I'll agree with him on.

His job was to work with world leaders, to work with the WHO to collect the information, to start gearing up and buy ventilators and PPE, to get what we need to keep America safe – and he just failed to do it.

His comments speak for themselves. *It's just like the flu, or it will all be gone this spring.* None of them were based on science; they were all based on wishful thinking. When the health and safety of the people that look to you for leadership is on the line, that's not the time for wishful thinking. That's the time for hard thinking. And he failed us miserably.

UA: The labor endorsement came despite positions you've taken on mining in northern Minnesota that are at odds with some Building Trades unions. What do you say to tradespeople who want an opportunity to work those jobs?

BM: First off, I'm not opposed to mining in northern Minnesota, the way it's often stated generally. I'm a member of the Steel Caucus. I'm on the Defense Committee. I know how important it is to our national security that we have the ability to make it in America. And I've carried a lot of language in the interior bill so that steel for taxpayer-funded projects, we make it in America.

In the early days of taconite mining we learned that it caused some great harm to our waterways, and we've been cleaning that up since then. We've learned how to be respectful of our environment and not damaging our water quality anymore when taconite mining. The sulfide-ore copper mining in northern Minnesota is a different type of mining than taconite. The waste product kills everything in the water. There is no second chance, no do-over.

The Superior National Forest has 20 percent of the fresh water in our U.S. Forestry system. All the water adjacent to the Great Lakes on the Minnesota side is in the Boundary Waters area. We are known for fresh water. We are known for clean water. You need fresh, clean water in order to survive... We have a moral responsibility to protect clean, fresh drinking water for our children and future generations.

I think jobs are important. I think jobs in northern Minnesota are extraordinarily important. The only thing I asked is ... prove it to me scientifically that we can do this safely. And 20 months into a 24-month study, the Trump administration stopped the study. They will not show me one piece of paper from it, not one scrap. I've repeatedly asked for it. It was paid for with taxpayer money. And before the study was completed, they started removing the moratorium on the leases. I think a reasonable person could say, why did you stop the study? It should bring great concerns to all of us, including my brothers and sisters in northern Minnesota, why we can't see the study. What don't they want us to know?

UA: Finally, how has COVID-19 impacted your office's work?

BM: We are here to serve you. Our office is open for business, and we are really anxious to help people navigate their way through COVID-19.



Rep. Betty McCollum

WORK INJURY?

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