Union approval ratings soar to 65%, highest point since ‘03

Labor unions’ approval rating among Americans continues to rise, according to polling results released by Gallup in advance of Labor Day 2020. The survey, conducted from July 30 to Aug. 12, found 65% of Americans approve of unions, the highest rating since 2003. Public support for labor unions has been generally rising, Gallup noted, since hitting its lowest point of 48% in 2009, during the Great Recession.

Among Democrats, 83% approve of unions. Approval among Republicans was 45%, among independents 64%.

Unions’ favorability held strong despite the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Gallup noted that unions’ popularity has tended to ebb and flow with the nation’s economic fortunes. The lowest ratings to date have been recorded during particularly weak economic times, including the Great Recession.

Pollsters speculated the difference now might be unions’ focus on issues outside of the economy, like health, safety, job security and racial justice. AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, the nation’s top-ranking labor leader, called that a tribute to “the resilience of our movement.”

“Union members have answered the call of COVID-19,” he said. “Every day and in every way, we’ve served, we’ve sacrificed, we’ve healed... We’ve honored the country we love, the country unions built.”

Workers at Surly’s Minneapolis beer hall protest with supporters from the community, calling out the brewer for union-busting. The protest, which attracted members of several local unions, took place the day before Labor Day.

Workers tap community support, put Surly on notice: ‘We’re not done here’

By Michael Moore
Union Advocate editor

Credit Surly for this much: the union-busting craft brewer inspired one raucous Labor Day-weekend rally, drawing nearly 200 people to a protest outside its destination beer hall in Minneapolis.

Workers at the gleaming new complex in Prospect Park went public with their plans to unionize Aug. 31. Two days later, they received layoff notices, and Surly owner Omar Ansari, citing COVID-19 restrictions on restaurants and bars, announced the beer hall would close indefinitely Nov. 2.

But on the Sunday before Labor Day, workers like Megan Caswell were in the streets, serving Ansari with notice that they aren’t going away quietly, even if the beer hall is.

“We’re not done here,” the bartender said. “We’re still fighting.”

Caswell and her co-workers aren’t fighting alone.

UNITE HERE Local 17, the union representing more than 6,000 Twin Cities hospitality workers, has pledged legal action against Surly. And the public demonstration followed (CONTINUED ON PAGE 6)
Go Figure

$42,000
Earnings lost by the average U.S. worker in 2018 as a result of widening income inequality

$92,000
What the average worker’s annual income would have been in 2018 if wages had kept pace with economic growth since 1975

$630,000
What the average member of the top 1% would have earned in 2018, instead of $1.4 million

Source: “Trends in Income From 1975 to 2018,” published last month by the RAND Corporation

Partner Voices: Buddy Robinson

President Trump is taking aim at Social Security

You wouldn't know it from watching the news, but Social Security’s future is on the ballot in 2020. If President Trump is re-elected, it’s clear that he will try to greatly weaken and even eliminate Social Security. That’s despite his repeated – but hollow – claims to protect it.

This should not come as a surprise. When he first ran for president, as a Reform Party candidate in 2000, Trump said he wanted to privatize Social Security, calling it a “Ponzi scheme.” He wanted to eliminate guaranteed benefits and have people gamble on the stock market instead. He also promoted raising the age requirement for full benefits up to 70.

After starting to serve as president in 2017, Trump’s budget proposals each year have sought large cuts in funding for Social Security disability. His latest one, for fiscal year 2021, seeks to cut $75 billion over 10 years from programs that benefit people with disabilities (over half of whom are 55 or older). This includes $10 billion in Social Security Disability cuts, plus plans to reduce the number of people enrolled by about 5 percent. That would be accomplished with harsher work rules that determine who can qualify. Another cut is to lower the initial retroactive benefit for people 55 or older. This includes $10 billion in Social Security Disability cuts, plus plans to reduce the number of people enrolled by about 5 percent. That would be accomplished with harsher work rules that determine who can qualify. Another cut is to lower the initial retroactive benefit for people 55 or older.

Trump has done something with Social Security in light of the pandemic: He is allowing businesses to forego collecting their employees’ Social Security payroll taxes from September through December. After that, those missing taxes would have to be collected and paid. Not surprisingly, few businesses are choosing to follow this option. To get a four-month vacation from the payroll taxes, only to have to pay them back, doesn’t make any sense.

Trump has said that, if re-elected, he will consider doing away with the payroll tax altogether. If that were to occur, and no other revenue source were found to replace it, then we already know the result. Social Security’s chief actuary has testified that if this happens, all Social Security disability benefits will cease in mid-2021, and all Social Security retirement benefits will cease in mid-2023.

What was he thinking? Despite his coyness, we can see what Trump really wants: his long-held dream of turning Social Security into a privatized gamble.

— Buddy Robinson

“Despite his coyness, we can see what Trump really wants: his long-held dream of turning Social Security into a privatized gamble.”

— Buddy Robinson

Editor’s Note: “Voices” is a forum for opinions across the labor movement. It appears regularly in The Advocate. We encourage readers to respond to our columnists’ opinions. To write a letter to the editor, see the upper-right hand corner of this page. To inquire about contributing to “Voices,” call 651-222-3787, extension 112. This column does not reflect the position of the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation or its assemblies.

The Union Advocate

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Lyne Larkin-Wright, Liaison

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Calling on City to act in support of students

Dear Mayor Carter and City Council,

On Aug. 5, the SPPS Board of Education and Superintendent Joe Gothard made the decision to begin the school year in distance learning. As educators, we believe this is the best option to keep our students, families and coworkers as safe as possible at this time.

In making this courageous decision, we also recognize that many of our students and families will face serious challenges as they navigate caring for their children at home while providing basic needs for their households. As our public schools have become the last social safety net, many families will look to us for solutions. We cannot and should not, take on this fight for necessary resources alone. The City of St. Paul must prioritize the needs of families in this critical time.

As we start the school year, one of the biggest barriers our families face is access to reliable high-speed internet. This past spring, many of our students struggled to complete assignments using their phone, often going over data plans and resulting in costs families could not easily afford. Our district purchased hot spots, attempting to fill the needs of students, but they were unreliable and came at a high cost to a school district that is already pushed to the limit financially.

SPPS, and the city more broadly, are already burdened by the consequences of generations of disinvestment and a legacy of policies rooted in racism.

Decades of unfunded education mandates have required residents to bear the cost of educating our children by voluntarily increasing our taxes.

We cannot wait any longer to address the urgent needs of our communities.

The health and economic effects of this pandemic have made it impossible for us to ignore the fundamental inequities in our city, schools and communities. A return to normal will not be possible for some time, if ever, and for our Black and Indigenous communities and other communities of color, “normal” represents a state of unacceptable inequity. We, as a community, have a profound moral decision ahead of us.

Therefore, we’re calling on the St. Paul City Council to work with our school district and state legislators to secure a high-speed internet network for the City of St. Paul.

Our students can’t wait. Our families can’t wait. Our city can’t wait.

- This letter was signed by members of the St. Paul Federation of Educators’ Committee on Political Education and reprinted here, as an open letter, at the union’s request.

---

General Election: November 3, 2020

LABOR ENDORSED: EAST METRO

Labor-endorsed candidates share our values as union members, like making work pay and supporting our freedom to join together

President Joe Biden
Vice President Kamala Harris

U.S. Senator Tina Smith

U.S. House of Representaives
Angie Craig, 2nd District
Betty McCollum, 4th District
Tawnya Zahradka, 6th District

Minnesota Senate
District 32: Joshua Fike
District 38: Justin Stoffelahn
District 39: Josiah Hill
District 41: Mary Kunes-Podein
District 42: Jason Isaacson
District 43: Charles Wilger
District 51: Jim Carlson
District 52: Matt Klein
District 53: Susan Kent
District 54: Karla Bigham
District 56: Lindsey Port
District 57: Greg Clausen
District 58: Matt Little
District 64: Erin Murphy
District 65: Sandy Pappas
District 66: John Marty
District 67: Found Hawj

Minnesota House
District 32B: Katie Malchow
District 38A: Kris Fredrick

District 38B: Ali Wazlawik
District 39B: Sherry Christensen
District 41A: Connie Bernardy
District 41B: Sandra Feist
District 42A: Kelly Moller
District 42B: Jamie Becker-Finn
District 43A: Peter Fischer
District 51A: Sandra Maslin
District 51B: Liz Reyer
District 52A: Rick Hansen
District 52B: Ruth Richardson
District 53A: Tou Xiong
District 53B: Steve Sandell
District 54A: Anne Claffin
District 54B: Kelsey Waite
District 56A: Jessica Hanson
District 56B: Kael Berg
District 57A: Robert Blumen

Ramsey County Commissioner
District 1: Nicole Fretheim
District 2: Mary Jo McGuire
District 7: Victoria Reinhardt

Chisago County Commissioner
District 2: Rick Greene
District 3: Katie Werman Roche
District 5: Mike Robinson

Dakota County Commissioner
District 3: Laurie Halverson
District 4: Joe Atkins
District 7: Mary Hamann-Roland

North Branch
Mayor: Jim Swenson
City Council: Amanda Darwin

West Saint Paul
City Council Ward 2: Robyn Gilley

District 57B: John Huot
District 58A: Erin Preese
District 58B: Sara Wolf
District 64A: Koshy Her
District 64B: Dave Pinto
District 65A: Rena Moran
District 65B: Carlos Mariani
District 66A: Alice Hausman
District 67A: John Thompson
District 67B: Jay Xiong

As election draws near, Minnesota AFL-CIO launches largest digital ad buy, member-engagement program in federation’s history

The Minnesota AFL-CIO, the state federation of more than 1,000 local unions representing more than 300,000 working people, last month announced a $400,000 statewide digital ad buy to encourage union members to support labor-endorsed candidates.

The video and banner advertisements have been running on social media platforms, websites and streaming video services since Sept. 4. The ads are directly targeted to reach households with likely union-member voters and will run until the polls close Nov. 3.

The videos feature members from a cross-section of Minnesota unions speaking about their union values and why voting for the labor-endorsed slate of candidates, led by Vice President Joe Biden, is an expression of those values.

“Union members in communities across Minnesota are about to begin voting in one of the most consequential elections in our state and nation’s history,” Minnesota AFL-CIO President Bill McCarthy said. “Our goal with these ads is to cut through the online noise and disinformation so union members learn about the issues and the candidates from their fellow workers.”

The Minnesota AFL-CIO’s ad buy complements the federation’s broad, member-to-member voter outreach, worksite organizing and member-engagement programs as critical components of the Labor 2020 political program.

Through Election Day, union volunteers will be making more than half a million calls in support of labor-endorsed candidates.

Meanwhile, worksite organizing and the member-engagement program have been training and mobilizing hundreds of union activists to have one-on-one conversations with their coworkers.

Minnesota union members will also receive more than 600,000 pieces of mail, including a sample ballot highlighting labor-endorsed candidates.

While COVID-19 has changed some of our outreach tactics, it has not changed our resolve to deliver the union vote for our endorsed candidates up and down the ballot,” McCarthy said. “We are ready to help build a more just and equitable Minnesota that puts workers first.”

On the web
- View the Minnesota AFL-CIO’s digital ads on the federation’s website, mnaflcio.org.
- On Facebook or Twitter? Find, like and follow the federation’s accounts by searching for @mnaflcio.
Just days after health care workers at two metro-area hospitals announced they had overwhelmingly voted to authorize a strike last month, Allina Health declared it would take legal action in response to any picketing of its facilities, prompting union members to postpone their plans.

Allina’s position – that the front-line, essential health care workers cannot legally picket while on strike – defies common sense and has no merit, union leaders said.

“We have never seen an employer use this tactic before,” SEIU Healthcare Minnesota President Jamie Gulley said. “It is stunning to see the lengths Allina is apparently willing to go to stop frontline health care workers from standing up for safe working conditions.”

Still, Gulley said, union members opted to postpone the 48-hour strike, originally scheduled to begin at 6 a.m. Sept. 14, out of an abundance of caution. They pledged that a new strike date would be announced soon.

At issue in the labor dispute is whether the hospital workers should get the pay and protections they value as other Allina workers, including proposed increases in paid time off and improvements to their health insurance and retirement plans.

“All front-line health care workers should get the pay and protections we need to keep ourselves and our patients safe,” Grack said. “We haven’t gotten COVID pay despite the many challenges we’ve faced, and even before COVID we weren’t getting what we deserved. We’re willing to strike because the work we do is important, and Allina needs to show they value their workers and patients.”

Said Phil Goodmanson, a special imaging technologist with 10 years of experience at St. Francis: “We are simply asking for the things that other workers in our hospital already have so we can continue to provide high-quality care for our community. We hope our willingness to take this step shows Allina we are serious about fighting for what is right.”

Allina’s move to stifle worker voice with a lawsuit, Gulley added, “would be beyond the pale during normal times, but seeing how far they are seemingly willing to go to stop health care workers from standing up for what is right during a global pandemic is hard to fathom.”

**SEIU members at two metro hospitals postpone strike after Allina threatens lawsuit**

The strike vote, essential healthcare workers say, was part of a push to get the same health and safety benefits as other Allina workers, including proposed increases in paid time off and improvements to their health insurance and retirement plans.

“All front-line health care workers should get the pay and protections we need to keep ourselves and our patients safe,” Grack said. “We haven’t gotten COVID pay despite the many challenges we’ve faced, and even before COVID we weren’t getting what we deserved. We’re willing to strike because the work we do is important, and Allina needs to show they value their workers and patients.”

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**AFL-CIO launches web tool to help workers win safety protections on the job**

From hospital workers to teachers, from meat processing to transit workers, working people are putting their health on the line just by going to work every day. As the pandemic ravages the country, the nation’s largest labor federation, the AFL-CIO, has launched a new “Am I Safe at Work?” web tool to raise awareness of what a safe workplace should be.

The web tool contains information to help workers identify key COVID-19 risks in their workplaces, tools for joining together with co-workers to fight for better safety protections, and guides for contacting a union to help negotiate safer working conditions. Access it at aflcio.org/safe-at-work.

“No one should be at risk of acquiring COVID-19 because they are working tirelessly to provide necessities for their family and our country,” AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said. “Working people have organized to fight for safer working conditions for decades, forming unions to win protections and save lives. This web tool will help workers demand safer workplaces.”

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the AFL-CIO has been at the forefront of fighting for safer workplaces across the country. The new website, organizers say, is a critical tool that empowers workers to fight for COVID-19 and other safety protections and prevent the spread of the coronavirus.
When stagehands do their job well, nobody notices them. But last month members of Twin Cities-based Local 13 of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) put their jobs, which have dried up during the COVID-19 crisis, into the spotlight with a march and rally through downtown Minneapolis.

Dressed in black, about 100 local stagehands and other professionals from the live-events industry marched Sept. 10 from the Orpheum Theater to Peavey Plaza, pushing the familiar black “road cases” used to haul equipment for stage performances.

Along the way marchers passed several of the city’s most iconic theaters and concert halls, which have gone dark since the pandemic reached Minnesota in mid-March. The industry was among the first to close and, speakers at a socially-distant rally after the march said, will be one of the last to return.

“We are all standing by, ready to go back to work when it’s safe to do so,” Mat Tervilliger, business representative for IATSE Local 13, said. “But we need support so the industry will still be here with the workforce it needs to come back.”

Far from a niche in the local economy, live events in Minnesota are a $12.2-billion industry, according to a 2017 report. Since the shutdown began, 96% of companies in the industry have cut staff, and 77% of the people who work in live events have lost their entire income, according to a nationwide survey.

Those in the industry who suddenly found themselves out of work, including independent contractors, had access to enhanced unemployment benefits – the extra $600 per week – provided by the initial round of federal pandemic relief, the CARES Act. Many independent venues, meanwhile, took advantage of loans and grants through the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) to stay afloat.

But without another round of federal relief this fall, workers and business owners warned, many stages and workers will have no choice but to abandon the scene.

They called on the Republican-controlled Senate to pass the HEROES Act, which House Democrats passed way back in May, to renew the enhanced unemployment and PPP programs. Industry advocates also pushed the RESTART and Save Our Stages measures, which would partially bail out business owners in hard-hit industries like theirs.

Dayna Frank, CEO of First Avenue, acknowledged that hopes for any additional federal relief were dimming, but she urged supporters to keep the spotlight on their industry’s fight.

“What is life without concerts, without the theater?” she asked. “I don’t know anyone who wants to live in that world. That’s why we need to let everyone know that world is a real possibility.

“Unless we make a loud enough noise, they’re going to forget about us.”

Learn more about the economic and cultural impact of the live-events industry, and how to help it survive the pandemic, at lecmn.org.
A ‘prime opportunity’ for workers, communities to take on Amazon

By Kristi Wright and Peter Rachleff
East Side Freedom Libary

A decade ago, the Labor Movement was on a roll. But it’s been a roller-coaster ride since then. While the movement has made some gains, Amazon stands as a dominant force in the e-commerce space, exploiting workers and controlling both local and national economies. The company’s reach extends beyond its warehouses to its partnerships with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the CIA, and local law enforcement agencies. As the company grows, so does its grip on workers, e-commerce, cloud computing, and the political landscape.

The movement has not forgotten the lessons of Labor Day. As the reopening of restaurants and bars marks the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, workers and their unions are stepping up to challenge Amazon’s dominant position. The movement is winning victories, but the fight is far from over.

Guest Commentary

Food-service workers on an organizing roll

The reopening of restaurants and bars this summer sparked a flurry of union-organizing drives in the Twin Cities, with workers and their union, UNITE HERE Local 17, achieving historic results.

- Workers at Tattersall Distilling became the first U.S. craft distillery workers to unionize Aug. 20.
- On Labor Day, workers at Stilheart and Lawless distilleries, both in Minneapolis, announced they had won union recognition.
- The Minnesota Nurses Association, United Food and Commercial Workers, Service Employees, St. Paul Federation of Educators and other unions joined the rally, too.

Like any other workers, Surly workers are fighting for a voice on the job, a voice in their safety and a voice in their welfare,” said Mat Terwilliger, business agent for Surgeon Local 13. “I’m going to support that anywhere it happens.”

Members of the Minnesota Nurses Association, United Food and Commercial Workers, Service Employees, St. Paul Federation of Educators and other unions joined the rally, too.

Like any other workers, Surly workers are fighting for a voice on the job, a voice in their safety and a voice in their welfare,” said Mat Terwilliger, business agent for Surgeon Local 13. “I’m going to support that anywhere it happens.”

Al uum, president of AFSCME Local 2822, which represents Hennepin County workers, said she is encouraged to see union organizing happen in the food-service industry, where research shows workers face greater vulnerability to wage theft and harassment.

"I think momentum is starting to swing," she said. "It's really exciting." The community support hasn't gone unnoticed by Surly workers. Natalie Newcomer, a former server who was fired by Surly on Aug. 5 in retaliation for union organizing, she believes — said it was disheartening for workers to see their concerns about safety, economic security and customer experience dismissed so casually by management.

"It's been really beautiful to watch the community get together and fight for what is right," Newcomer said. "Our family has only grown stronger.

Any regrets?
"Absolutely not," said Caswell, who joined the rally after finishing a shift behind the bar. 'I've never organized anything in my life — maybe my sock drawer. It's been a real education, and I would do it again in a second if need be.
SEPTEMBER 9, 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 5 p.m. Board members in attendance were Beedle B., Beissel, Edwards, Engeldorf, Faber, Gibbons, Guertin, Madden, Mullen, Peterson, Schmidt, Seath, St. Aoro, Terry, Vandassor and Varco. Excused were Dreyer, Maki-Green, Markham-Kourek, Nelson, Peterson, Robles, Sansom, and Weed. Absent were Beedle G., Fazio, Gorman, Hoppe, Lohn, Luneburg, and Ryan.

MINUTES

M/S/C TO APPROVE MINUTES OF JULY 8 AND AUGUST 12, 2020, AS PUBLISHED IN THE UNION ADVOCATE NEWSPAPER AFTER OF JULY 8 AND AUGUST 12, 2020, EDUCATION (COPE) MINUTES THUS PUBLISHED IN THE UNION REMOTELY DUE TO COVID 19 ON THE ABOVE DATE AND WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 5 P.M. BOARD MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE WERE BEEDLE B., ANGRIMSON, BEEDLE B., BEISSEL, EDWARDS, ENGELDORF, FABER, FABER, GIBBONS, GUERTIN, HOFFMAN, LAPIDUS, LANE, MADDEN, MADDEN, HOFFMAN, GUERTIN, STEINHORST, ST. AORO, TERRY, VANDASSOR AND VARCO. EXCUSED WERE DREYER, MARIKO GREEN, MARKHAM-KOUREK, NELSON, PETERSON, ROBLES, SANSOM, AND WEED. ABSENT WERE BEEDLE G., FADIO, GORMAN, HOPPE, LOWN, LUNEBURG, AND RYAN.

ITEMS TO COME BEFORE THIS COMMITTEE INCLUDE:

- The Ramsey County Labor Assembly supports the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation recommendation that the Minnesota AFL-CIO grant labor endorsement to Athena Hollins, House District 66B.
- The Minnesota AFL-CIO is continuing to offer trainings.
- Octoberfest 2020 has officially been cancelled.
- The Jean Jones Schools Supply Initiative was successful. Thank you to everyone who donated. We will once again be sponsoring our annual Labor of Love – Sponsor a Family program. Sponsor a Family and meet adjourned.

EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES SEPTEMBER 9, 2020

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

MINUTES TO COME BEFORE THIS BOARD INCLUDE:

- PRESIDENT’S REPORT
  - President Peterson thanked Jaihami Lamara and Colleen Nocerini for their help with the Fifth Annual Union Job and Resource Fair, held on Thursday, Aug. 20, 2020. We had 100 job seekers that participated. Donations were received in the amount of $24,495 for the St. Paul Labor Studies and Resource Center’s (LSRC) Labor Bowl. The Jean Jones School Supplies raised $797 to secure school supplies to Title One Project REACH of the Saint Paul Schools. In the next few days, the affiliated unions will receive announcement of our annual Labor of Love – Sponsor a Family in the mail, and since we will be having the October RLF meeting remotely, the Oktoberfest fundraiser has been cancelled.
- ORGANIZING UPDATES/CAMPAIGNS:
  - APWU, IATSE Local 13, NALC, Saint Paul Building and Construction Trades Council, Saint Paul Federation of Educators, SEIU Health Care Minnesota and United Steelworkers Local 11-418 gave updates on their organizing activities.

THANK YOU NOTES received from East Side Freedom Library for the RLF’s $2,500 donation, Homes for Our Troops for the RLF’s $500 donation, and Saint Paul Schools – Title One Project REACH for the school supplies that were delivered through the Jean Jones School Supply Initiative.

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

REPORT OF THE TREASURER

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

PRESDENTS REPORT

President Peterson reported on:
- We have started online banking; it has been very positive, and we are extending an invitation for volunteers to join us. Thank you for release staff from ATU Local 1005, IBEW Local 110, IUPAT District Council 42 and UFW Local 1189.
- Our priorities will be Dakota and Washington County:
  - The Minnesota AFL-CIO is continuing to offer trainings.
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