

# The St. Paul Union Advocate

127th Year, No. 10, Issue 5477

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

May 2024

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[www.stpaulunions.org](http://www.stpaulunions.org)  
Connecting union members in Ramsey, Washington, Dakota and Chisago counties.

## Health care unions back debt reform push in Legislature

By Michael Moore  
*Union Advocate editor*

Jennifer Schultz has been cancer free for over two years, but being free from the debt she's amassed in her battles with the illness feels a long way off for the four-time survivor from St. Paul.

"Sometimes it feels like I'm in a constant cycle of medical debt," Schultz told labor, faith and community activists who rallied April 15 in the Capitol rotunda.

"There are weeks when I have to choose between filling up my gas tank, buying groceries for myself and making a full payment toward my cancer bills."

Schultz and other activists applauded a package of debt-related reforms advancing through the DFL-controlled Legislature this session.

Proponents of the Minnesota Debt Fairness Act, including faith-based organizations, health care workers' unions and Attorney General Keith Ellison, called it a first step toward correcting a debt collection system that needlessly forces families across the state into poverty.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 9)



## A SHOW OF SUPPORT FOR SCIENCE MUSEUM STAFF UNION

Fifteen months after voting to unionize, workers at the Science Museum of Minnesota are still without a first contract. At a rally outside the St. Paul museum last month, they accused museum executives with dragging out talks at the bargaining table – and violating workers' rights away from it. The new unit got a boost from fellow members of AFSCME Council 5, who joined the informational picket line during a break from their annual convention, held at RiverCenter the same day. Read more on Page 4. Union Advocate photos

## Solidarity Alert!

### Tell your state lawmakers: Striking workers deserve access to unemployment insurance!

When working people go on strike and win, all workers win. For proof, look to last year's UAW strike against the Big 3 automakers, which not only resulted in better pay and benefits at unionized plants, but prompted employers across the auto industry to boost their pay.

Our nation's labor laws remain heavily skewed in favor of employers, who can temporarily replace workers, stall negotiations, make threats, cut off health care and more. This leaves going on strike as a tactic of last resort because it often means no pay

for workers and families.

That's why it's time to begin balancing the scales in Minnesota and give striking workers access to unemployment insurance.

Unemployment insurance can't replace a livable income, but it would put food on the table and take away employers' power to "starve workers out" by delaying negotiations.

Tell your lawmakers why it's time for striking workers to have access to unemployment insurance by signing onto the petition at [aflcio.mn/ui24#](http://aflcio.mn/ui24#).



Members of UAW Local 722, who work at GM's parts facility in Hudson, Wis., picketed during the historic "Stand Up Strike" last fall.

UA file photo

## Go Figure

**1,875**

Number of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) inspectors, including both federal and state agencies

**166 years**

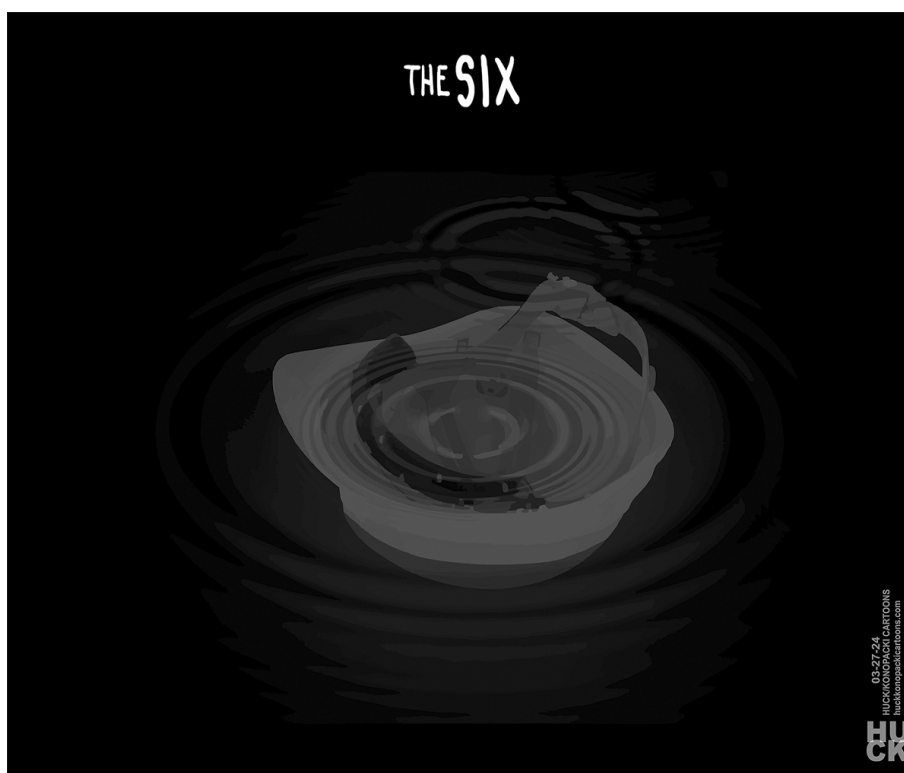
Length of time it would take OSHA, at current staffing levels, to inspect every U.S. workplace

**\$3.99**

Amount that OSHA spends per worker at its current budget level

**\$4,597**

Average penalty for firms that commit a “major” OSHA violation”



### Partner Voices: Commissioner Nicole Blissenbach

## Every worker should return home safe

Every year on April 28, we commemorate Workers Memorial Day, where we remember and honor all workers who lost their lives on the job.

Workers Memorial Day was established April 28, 1970. April 28 is also the anniversary of the Occupational Safety and Health Act going into effect and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) being established one year later, in 1971.

Although there has been great progress in worker safety during the past 53 years, far too many workers continue to be injured or lose their lives while at work.

Here in Minnesota, our state OSHA plan investigates every workplace fatality under its jurisdiction. Many of these tragic losses are preventable if safety standards are followed, proper controls are in place, and proper equipment and training are provided to workers.

It is important to remember that every worker who loses their life on the job is more than just a number. It is in their memory that we continue to fight for every worker’s right to be safe at work.

In Minnesota, we are taking action to address workplace hazards that lead to workplace injuries, illnesses and fatalities. Our agency has increased worker protections with new OSHA standards and added additional OSHA investigators across the state.

Minnesota OSHA’s first-in-the-nation ergonomics program establishes standards to reduce the risk of workplace ergonomic injuries in industries where they are common. New worker safety requirements were established for warehouse distribution centers, and the Department of Labor and Industry (DLI) is now required to open investigations into those worksites when injury rates warrant such scrutiny.

A new meatpacking industry workers rights coordinator at DLI will bring much needed focus to workplace safety among meat and poultry processing workers. The coordinator is responsible for submitting a yearly report with recommendations to promote better treatment of meat processing workers.



UA file photo

**“In Minnesota, we are taking action to address workplace hazards that lead to workplace injuries, illnesses and fatalities.”**

– Commissioner Nicole Blissenbach

From the very first day on the job, every worker is entitled to a safe and healthy workplace that is free of hazards. It is our goal that every worker knows about their rights and feels empowered to raise concerns when they believe their workplace is unsafe.

On this Workers Memorial Day – and every day after – let’s do all we can do to ensure every worker goes home safe and healthy at the end of their workday.

A safe workplace isn’t a privilege, it’s every worker’s right.

– Nicole Blissenbach serves as commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry.

## Letters

- Send letters to: 353 W. 7th St., Suite 201, St. Paul, MN 55102
- Email them to: [mmoore@stpaulunions.org](mailto:mmoore@stpaulunions.org)

## The Union Advocate

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# Indeed Brewing workers win union recognition

By Michael Moore  
Union Advocate editor

Indeed Brewing has a union label. Workers at the taproom and production facility in northeast Minneapolis successfully formed a union last month after over two years of organizing with the Twin Cities hospitality union, UNITE HERE Local 17.

The new bargaining unit brings together 31 workers, an overwhelming majority of whom not only signed union cards, but added their mugshots to a photo petition that organizers delivered to brewery management April 1.

Ten days later, Indeed formally agreed to recognize the union.

Indeed is the second craft brewery in the Twin Cities where workers have formed a union. Fair State Brewing Cooperative granted its workers' request for representation by Local 17 in 2020, and they settled a first contract in August 2021. The union also represents workers at Brother Justus distillery.

More organizing gains could be ahead for craft beverage workers, thanks to a pro-worker provision in Minnesota's new cannabis law, passed by DFL lawmakers last year. It includes a labor peace requirement for companies

seeking a license to produce cannabis or THC products - like the seltzers that have popped up in so many local taprooms, including Indeed's, in recent years.

Local 17 organizer Anders Bloomquist, a former Fair State worker, said craft beverage makers that want to continue making their own products with THC will likely need to work with unions like UNITE HERE to prove that they meet the licensing requirement.

"We are anticipating that a fairly large number of employers who are producing THC beverages will be signing labor peace agreements to get their licensing," Bloomquist said. "This will be a process that we're excited for - to have those labor peace agreements and begin talking with the workers there about why they might want to join a union."

"We're ready to help anyone in this industry who decides it's time to make a real change."

The victory at Indeed is the latest in a string of successful organizing campaigns for Local 17. Workers at seven Twin Cities venues operated by First Avenue formed a union last November, and workers in the Macalester College



dining facility joined UNITE HERE in April.

"When workers see other workers stand up and make a real change in their life, it tells them it's possible to make a change in their lives too," Bloomquist said. "Lots of workers are deciding it's time for something different."

Indeed Brewing is located at 711 15th Ave. NE in Minneapolis. The venue offers a tap room, to-go sales, event spaces and an outdoor patio.

See a full list of union bars, restaurants, clubs, hotels and craft beverage spots at [uniteherelocal17.org](http://uniteherelocal17.org).

## Camp gives middle schoolers a taste of construction work

Registration is open for the "Learn2Build Day Camp," which offers middle-school students an opportunity to explore the world of construction through hands-on experiences.

The camp will run from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, June 1, at the JK Movement Center, located inside the Oxford Community Center in St. Paul. Participation is free for students in grades 6-8, and adult caregivers are encouraged to participate in the activities.

Campers will learn about tools of the carpentry trade, build a birdfeeder and enjoy a free lunch.

Learn more about the camp and register online at [constructioncareers.org/learn2build](http://constructioncareers.org/learn2build).

"Learn2Build" is sponsored by the Construction Careers Foundation, a Minnesota-based nonprofit organization founded in 2005 to increase the diversity of entrants into the construction trades and foster long-term construction careers.

## Racial justice workshop coming to St. Paul

Union members and leaders will gather June 5-6 in St. Paul to deepen their understanding of how race impacts organized labor during the Minnesota AFL-CIO's Racial Justice and Solidarity event, hosted by SEIU Healthcare Minnesota and Iowa.

Participants will learn about the history of race in labor organizations and how it continues to have an impact. They will explore ways that union members can change practices and systems that contribute to injustice and exclusion in their organizations.

For more information, contact the state AFL-CIO's training specialist, Robyn Gulley, at [rgulley@mnaflcio.org](mailto:rgulley@mnaflcio.org).

## Know your enemy with course on 'Right to Work'

A community class offered by the University of Minnesota's Labor Education Service (LES) on May 29 will dig into the history and impact of so-called "Right to Work" laws.

These anti-union measures erode workers' ability to build power through collective bargaining. Participants in the virtual class, which runs from 1 to 3 p.m., will learn about the laws' racist origins in the U.S. South, how similar measures have evolved over time and how workers have organized and fought back along the way.

LES community classes offer union members, leaders and activists one-day opportunities to learn and grow their skills. Learn more and register online at [bit.ly/Spring2024CommunityClasses](http://bit.ly/Spring2024CommunityClasses).



Union bricklayers' starting wage is \$30.97 per hour plus benefits.

UA file photo

## Bricklayers union offers free pre-apprentice training

Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers Local 1 will offer a free, unpaid pre-apprenticeship training program for workers with no experience. The program will run for six weeks this summer, from June 3 through July 12.

The Local 1 newsletter reports a 90% job placement rate with a \$30.97 per hour starting wage, plus benefits.

During the training program, pre-apprentices will be able to choose a career path as a bricklayer or pointer-cleaner-caulker. For more details, visit [bactraining.org/become-apprentice](http://bactraining.org/become-apprentice).

Workers with some experience can call 763-404-8345 to schedule an evaluation.



## Let's get together, union members!

The St. Paul Regional Labor Federation's local labor assemblies bring working people and retirees together to exchange ideas and take action on issues that matter most in their communities. Assembly meetings are open to all union members who live or work in our four-county area.

### Chisago County Assembly

May 28th, 6 p.m.

To register for the Zoom meeting, email [cnocerini@stpaulunions.org](mailto:cnocerini@stpaulunions.org)

### Dakota County Assembly

May 9th, 7 p.m.

Dakota County United Educators, 6950 West 146th St., Apple Valley

### Ramsey County Assembly

May 28th, 6 p.m.

Saint Paul Labor Center, 353 7th Street West

### Washington County Assembly

May 22nd, 6 p.m.

Washington County Gov't Center, Stillwater



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Science Museum of Minnesota workers supported their union's bargaining team during an informational picket and rally outside the museum in St. Paul last month. Union Advocate photo

## Museum workers rally public support for contract campaign

By Michael Moore  
Union Advocate editor

Union members at the Science Museum of Minnesota tapped into a well of solidarity during their contract rally April 2, pulling support from hundreds of fellow AFSCME Council 5 members taking part in a convention across the street.

Together, they turned Kellogg Avenue's sidewalk into a river of AFSCME's trademark green, holding informational picketing to demand museum management pick up the pace in negotiations over a first union contract for the newly formed bargaining unit of over 200 workers.

"It's been a real slog," Gretchen Haupt, a member of the Science Museum of Minnesota Workers Union, said. "But the small gains we have gotten usually come after some action or public pressure. That's why we're out here today."

When Haupt and other museum workers voted to unionize in January 2023, they cited a need for pay transparency, fair grievance and disciplinary processes, and compensation increases to reflect their skill levels and experience. The union's bargaining team has turned those issues into more than 20 contract proposals over the course of negotiations that began over eight months ago.

Getting management to counter their proposals, though, has taken as long as five months. And when they do get a response, Haupt said, it's usually unproductive.

"They laughed, actually, at our initial pay scale proposal," she said. "But they still haven't said what they would rather have, other than the way it is now. It's really disheartening."

During the rally, Science Museum workers described a growing frustration among their ranks. Several speakers wondered how the nonprofit could claim, in its statement of values, a commitment "to achieve collective liberation" while showing such disdain for collective bargaining.

For Megan Goeke, an evaluation and research associate, the frustration has been building for some time. She has been stuck at the bottom of the recommended pay range - or lower - for her job classification since accepting her current role with the Science Museum six years ago. As she gained experience and moved closer to her docto-

ral degree, Goeke asked for a pay increase, but management refused, keeping her at the bottom of the pay scale.

"I love my work, and I truly believe in the vision and impact the Science Museum of Minnesota has on our community," Goeke said. "When I decided to go into nonprofit museum work, I knew I wouldn't see the biggest paycheck in town, but what I didn't know is that my pay would forever be limited by my initial pay."

Her message to museum management: "I've experienced my share of delays. Let's see some action."

But instead of working swiftly toward a first contract, Science Museum management has been engaging in unfair labor practices, according to 12 separate complaints filed by Council 5 with the National Labor Relations Board since workers voted to unionize.

The NLRB has upheld three charges, and others remain pending. Many of the complaints allege that the museum has made unilateral changes to benefits and working conditions - and even layoffs - without engaging the union.

Bart Anderson, Council 5's interim executive director, said Science Museum bosses seem to believe that ignoring their workers' union will make it go away. In fact, he said, it's only going to bring more public pressure on the museum.

"AFSCME Council 5, our union of more than 43,000 workers, is standing firm on our commitment to support our Science Museum of Minnesota members every day as they fight to secure a first contract that respects the rights, contributions and dignity of all workers," he said.

By sticking together as a bargaining unit and rallying public support to their campaign, union members at the museum believe they have the formula to achieve a fair first contract, Haupt said.

"It's not just a small group of people who are at the bargaining table, we have broad internal support," she said. "And today we're showing we have broad community support, too."

### Show your solidarity!

Supporters can sign a petition calling on the Science Museum to stop committing unfair labor practices and settle a fair contract online at [bit.ly/FIRSTcontract](http://bit.ly/FIRSTcontract).



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## In win for pipe trades, Heights development lands \$4.7 million loan for geothermal energy

A first-of-its-kind, \$4.7 million loan from Minnesota's newly authorized "green bank" will fund a geothermal energy system at The Heights development coming to St. Paul's East Side, creating both clean energy and good jobs for local pipefitters.

The Minnesota Climate Innovation Finance Authority (MnCIFA) announced the loan, its first ever, last month. State lawmakers established and funded the finance authority last year with an eye toward accelerating clean energy projects across the state.

The loan will provide The Heights Community Energy with funding to construct and operate a district geothermal energy system on the site formerly occupied by Hillcrest Golf Club, now owned by the St. Paul Port Authority, whose development plans include 1,000 new housing units and 1,000 living wage jobs.

"Using the Earth's natural energy to heat and cool a whole community is a big step toward achieving our local climate goals," St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter said. "Together, with the support of MnCIFA and our partners at the Port Authority and District Energy, we're building a neighborhood that can be a blueprint for a cleaner, more sustainable future."

It's a future that members of St. Paul Steamfitters Pipefitters Local 455 have been preparing for.

The union has lobbied for investments in geothermal energy - and has put its money where its mouth is. Three years ago, Local 455 installed a cutting-edge geothermal cooling system in its apprenticeship training center, a 100,000-square-foot facility located off L'Orient Street and Maryland Avenue in St. Paul.

Since then, Local 455 has guided dozens of leaders from the private and public sectors on tours the facility and its hydraulic cooling system, showcasing the pipe-heavy geothermal approach to communities looking to increase their climate resilience.

"Everybody talks about wind, everybody talks about solar because those are things people can see and

understand," Local 455 Business Manager Tony Poole said during a recent tour of the facility. "People need to be talking about geothermal... Our members want to hear elected officials talking about this technology."

The union's outreach efforts appear to be paying off. Once completed, The Heights will house one of the largest district geothermal energy systems in the state and the first to use aquifer thermal energy.

It will also help the city and state meet their goals to be net zero by 2050 for greenhouse gas emissions across all sectors.

"This is a precedent for what is to come," Ward 6 Councilmember Nelsie Yang said. "I look forward to continuing to work with community leaders and all of our partners in advancing towards environmental and climate sustainability for all."



Plans for The Heights development on St. Paul's East Side include 1,000 new housing units and 1,000 living wage jobs. St. Paul Port Authority image

### Union petitions up 35% in first half of fiscal year, NLRB reports

Union organizing among U.S. workers continued to surge over the last six months, according to data released by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) in April.

During the first six months of Fiscal Year 2024, which ended March 31, petitions for union elections filed at NLRB field offices rose 35% over the same period in Fiscal Year 2023.

The NLRB reported that 1,618 petitions were filed during this time, compared with 1,199 in the first half of the last fiscal year. At the same time, unfair labor practice (ULP) charges filed across the NLRB's field offices increased by 7%.

The agency has become swamped with case filings due to the rising interest in union organizing and activism among workers since the COVID-19 pandemic. Petitions for union elections have increased in each of the last two fiscal years.

Because of the increased demand for the NLRB's services, the agency says more resources are desperately needed. Last year, Congress gave the NLRB a \$25 million increase, which ended a hiring freeze, prevented furloughs, and allowed the NLRB to backfill some critical staff vacancies. But staffing in NLRB field offices has shrunk by 50% over the past two decades.

"Congress needs to fully fund the NLRB to effectively and efficiently comply with our Congressional mandate when providing quality service to the public in conducting hearings and elections, investigating charges, settling and litigating meritorious cases and obtaining full and prompt remedies for workers whose rights are violated," NLRB General Counsel Jennifer Abruzzo said.

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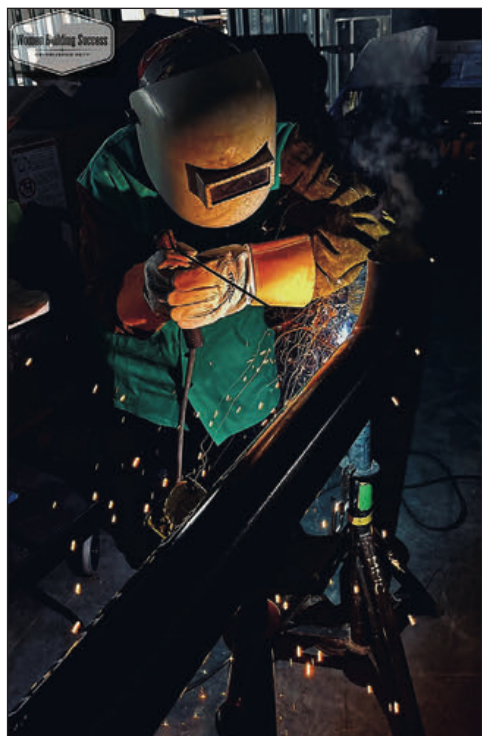
## Nominations open for Women Building Success awards

Know a tradeswoman who deserves recognition for her hard work, dedication and leadership? Nominate her for a 2024 Women Building Success award!

The Minnesota organization will hold its annual awards ceremony June 6 at Kellerman’s Event Center in White Bear Lake, and nominations are open through May 20 in four award categories: Apprentice of the Year, Journeyworker of the Year, Tradeswomen in Leadership, and Women’s Advocate of the Year.

Find a nomination form and more information about the awards ceremony at [womenbuilding-success.org](http://womenbuilding-success.org) (no hyphen).

Founded in 2017, WBS is dedicated to recognizing and promoting the success of women in Minnesota’s union construction trades.



## CAPTURING TRADESWOMEN AT WORK

Women Building Success photo contest showcases career opportunities



Selected winners from the 2024 Women Building Success photo contest include photos by (clockwise from top-left) Madyson Brady, Pipefitters & Steamfitters Local 455 (1st place, “Me at Work”); Jacqueline Bartosh, Laborers Local 563 (2nd); Delaine Reale, Piledrivers Local 1847 (3rd); Derra Range, Laborers 563 (tied for 1st place, “Jobsite”); and Danielle Rose, Ironworkers Local 512 (2nd place, “Tools & Craftsmanship”). View all winning photos across four categories at [womenbuildsuccess.org](http://womenbuildsuccess.org).



SCAN TO LEARN MORE



# PROUD TO SERVE THE HARD WORKING UNION FAMILIES OF MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL

## Labor Q&amp;A: Michael Houston

## 2023 Teacher of the Year reflects on 'life-changing event'

The 2024 Minnesota Teacher of the Year will be named at a ceremony in St. Paul on May 5, and Harding High School math teacher Michael Houston, the 2023 award winner, will be the one to make the big announcement.

The ceremony will mark the end of a momentous year for Houston, a member of the St. Paul Federation of Educators who also works as adjunct professor at Concordia, teaching math classes to prospective elementary teachers. Houston discussed his experience – and how he tried to use the platform – in this Union Advocate interview, which has been edited for length and clarity.

**UA:** What's been your role in the process of naming a new teacher of the year, beyond making the announcement?

**MH:** As the incumbent, I am a part of the interview panel... Once they have all the applicants, we kind of go through and rate our top 40 or 50 applicants, and from there pull out a number of semifinalists. People who are part of the panel then do a two- or three-minute interview with them, and we rank the top 10 to come up with the finalists. On the Saturday of Teacher Appreciation Week, the finalists come in and do an interview with the panel for a half hour. And on Sunday during the ceremony, I'll give a speech, and then name the 2024 Teacher of the Year.

**UA:** That sounds like a lot of interaction with your peers. What has struck you during those conversations?

**MH:** It's only affirmed all the thoughts I've had that we have passionate educators in this state who want what's best for their students. And along the way I've met even more amazing and inspiring future educators while visiting colleges and high schools where students are enrolled in career pathway courses. I

think we're in good hands.

**UA:** What's your message to aspiring educators?

**MH:** In my teaching I'm pretty straightforward and upfront. I keep it real, and I try to do that when I'm talking to prospective educators as well. I generally share my own personal educational journey because that may resonate with many of the audiences. I talk about the tenets of teaching: opportunity, being creative with your curriculum and, most important, legacy.

**UA:** What was the experience like as a finalist?

**MH:** Last year was my second time being a finalist; I was a finalist in 2017 as well. But the first time was a whirlwind. In that short weekend you really build a bond with those finalists; you quickly learn a lot of the commonalities that you see among great educators. You see the best teachers in our state and how they're advocating for our students and our profession. It's a life-changing event.

**UA:** Since winning the award, how have you tried to use the platform that comes with it?

**MH:** My passion work is making math more equitable for students that we serve. A lot of the math that we teach is geared toward students who are aspiring to attend college, but many of our students aren't aspiring to be college students. So I've tried to incorporate personal finance and financial literacy into my curriculum, to use mathematics that will help students navigate the world in which we live. Minnesota legislators just passed a law where students, starting in 2027, will need to take a personal finance course as a graduation requirement. That really ties right in with my work.

It's also been part of my platform to speak about having more mental health services in our schools and recruiting and retaining teachers of color... But over the course of the year, what I noticed was that my platform



2023 Minnesota Teacher of the Year Michael Houston

sort of shifted to advocating for the profession, particularly around the collective bargaining that was going on. I tried to shine a light on all those districts where contracts were unsettled at the time, including St. Paul.

School districts are getting record funding, yet the compensation and benefits for teachers haven't increased along with it. I think teachers aren't feeling valued, especially when we are the ones on the front lines dealing with the aftermath and the trauma of COVID.

**UA:** Is there a moment over the last year that will always stand out in your memory?

**MH:** Probably not a specific moment, but what I really appreciate is running into former students when I visit a college, when they come and listen to my stories and share how much of an impact I've had on their lives. Teaching has felt like a thankless job over the last decade. When a teacher hears they're doing something right and has an impact, it feels meaningful.

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# State legislators look to crack down on employers who misclassify workers

By Steve Share

Minneapolis Labor Review editor

"We worked 5-6 days a week, an average of 12 hours per day and never received overtime pay," said Jose Alfredo Gomez Rosales, who recently shared his experience working as a roofer paid in cash in testimony to the Labor and Industry Finance Committee of the Minnesota House of Representatives.

One day, Rosales continued, he fell from the roof of a two-story house. His injuries were so severe he was airlifted by helicopter to a hospital. He stayed there several days and had several surgeries. He received hospital bills in excess of \$60,000, but his boss said he wasn't covered by insurance.

"I wasn't receiving any benefits so we did not have money to pay for our basic needs," Rosales told the committee.

Stories like the one shared by Rosales illustrate what happens when workers are misclassified as independent contractors by unscrupulous employers or contractors.

Misclassified workers don't have payroll taxes withheld. They don't have protections like overtime pay and workers compensation insurance. They're often

victims of wage theft. They're not protected as employees under the National Labor Relations Act and other employment laws, and they're not able to accrue benefits under Minnesota's new earned sick and safe time law.

To address the rampant problem of worker misclassification, State Rep. Emma Greenman (D-Minneapolis) has introduced legislation that would establish new tests for clarifying whether a worker is an employee or independent contractor. The bill would increase penalties and enforcement when a worker is misclassified, and direct state agencies to work together to address misclassification and coordinate enforcement.

Greenman also serves as chair of a task force on worker misclassification created by Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison.

"In the task force, we've had six hours of testimony," she said. Many of the stories workers told were "scary and devastating," she reported. "How do we make sure we're preventing workers from being cheated out of the social safety net?"

"Misclassification impacts many of our members, particularly in the construction industry," said Briana Kemp,

policy lead for worker center CTUL. "It really has become the norm in the industry outside the union sector to misclassify workers as independent contractors."

"This is incredibly harmful to workers and their families, especially in the construction industry, which is one of the most dangerous industries," Kemp noted.

"Misclassification is an enormous problem in the construction industry," said Lucas Franco, research manager for LIUNA Minnesota & North Dakota.

Franco cited a report by the Midwest Economic Policy Institute that, using 2020 government data, estimates more than 30,000 workers are misclassified in Minnesota's construction industry - more than 20% of the state's construction workforce. "It makes it hard for companies that want to play by the rules... you're getting undercut by companies that rely on misclassifying workers" to drive payroll costs down, he added.

"This growth of independent contracting has really revolutionized employment relationships," Franco said. Many times workers don't know they're independent contractors until they get hurt, he added.

"Rarely does misclassification happen

without wage theft," added Richard Kolodziejewski, government affairs director for the North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters. "Workers are being misclassified more often than not by dishonest contractors who are choosing to exploit workers." For these companies, he added, "the financial gains are far too great for them to stop."

At press time, both Greenman's bill and a companion bill in the Senate, with Sen. Clare Oumou Verbeten (D-St. Paul) as lead author, were advancing through the committee process in their respective chambers.

"This law is going to level the playing field for honest contractors," Kolodziejewski said.

The bill also will give individuals a private right of action to file a claim if they've been misclassified, noted Carin Mrotz, senior advisor in Attorney General Ellison's office, who staffed the misclassification task force. "We want people to be able to fight for what they deserve," she said.

Workers like Rosales, meanwhile, are organizing with CTUL to press non-union contractors to adopt a set of standards to protect workers from misclassification, wage theft and other abuses.



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## Commentary

### Uber and Lyft: The corporations that cry wolf

By Terri Gerstein and Laura Padin

In response to a new Minneapolis law setting a minimum wage for ride-share drivers, Uber and Lyft are doing the business equivalent of taking their ball and going home: They're threatening to leave the city if the pay standard takes effect. They're also lobbying the state to pass a law preempting the pay standard.

But this isn't just about one Minneapolis ordinance. To understand what's really going on, we need to zoom out from the Twin Cities and consider what Uber and Lyft are doing nationally and internationally.

In a nutshell, when laws not to their liking are passed, these gig corporations have repeatedly threatened to stop operating in a jurisdiction. Minnesota leaders should recognize this maneuver for what it is: gig corporations' fearmongering rejection of the notion that democratically enacted laws should apply to them.

Uber is perhaps the champion of this maneuver: It's pledged to leave Barcelona, Quebec province, Seattle and the entire country of Austria. Some instances have been unrelated to workers' rights. In Phoenix, Uber and Lyft threatened to suspend airport service in response to a city council bill instituting a per-trip fee on airport pick-ups and drop-offs, so

ridehail corporations would contribute to the airport's infrastructure, like other airport vendors. When the law finally took effect, they didn't suspend services, after all.

When legislators pass laws that hold ridehail corporations accountable or treat them like all other businesses or employers, Uber and Lyft whip out a well-worn corporate playbook: claim the sky is falling to customers, workers, policymakers and communities by misrepresenting policy proposals or exaggerating their potential impact, and threatening to leave unless policymakers back off.

But other cities have legislated minimum pay for drivers and the sky has not fallen. In 2018, New York City enacted the country's first minimum pay standard for ridehail drivers; it resulted in a 9% increase in pay, and a more recent pay standard for food delivery workers has similarly positive results.

A similar history played out in Seattle, which passed a similar law in 2020. Both success stories took place over the loud objections of Uber and Lyft.

Uber and Lyft also routinely say that raising pay will lead to high fares for customers, but a new analysis of 1 billion Uber rides between 2019 and

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 9)



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2023 found fares increased at a higher rate in Chicago – which has no driver pay standard – than in New York.

Clearly, Uber and Lyft have a boy-who-cries-wolf problem. But could they really follow through this time?

They may want to make an example of Minneapolis, to quell similar efforts in Chicago, Colorado and elsewhere. On the other hand, the only U.S. jurisdiction we're aware of that they did leave, briefly, was Austin, Texas (over fingerprinting requirements imposed in a ballot initiative).

If Uber and Lyft did leave Minneapolis, the workers, vehicles and customers central to their businesses would all still be there. To be sure, their departure would cause some initial disruption, but a number of other companies are already chomping at the bit to provide a fairer alternative, should the ridehail behemoths depart, including a driver-owned co-op platform. This would help break the Uber/Lyft duopoly and revitalize competition.

The government, too, can play a role: a City Council committee is considering allocating funds to support new companies, which may be better suited for the work. Dallas recently selected Alto — a ridehail service that treats drivers as employees with rights and benefits — for a five-year contract for curbside airport service.

Uber and Lyft are playing a game of chicken with serious self-risk: If they leave Minneapolis and everything turns out fine, their threats to leave other markets will forever lose their punch.

Minneapolis has taken an important step in passing this pay floor. It's unconscionable that drivers have been working, in the Twin Cities and most of the country, with no minimum wage at all. Indeed, a state-commissioned expert study found that Minnesota Uber and Lyft drivers often make less than minimum wage, after their expenses are deducted. That study recommended a slightly lower rate than Minneapolis adopted, but one thing is clear: In addressing this issue, state lawmakers should not preempt local authority to act, because doing so would be harmful for democracy.

The real issue here is whether businesses that are no different from others – except that they hire workers via an app – should be able to write their own rules, or whether the government, representing the people, should make these decisions.

– Gerstein is the director of the NYU Wagner Labor Initiative. Padin is director of Work Structures at the National Employment Law Project. Their column was originally published on the MN Reformer website, [minnesotareformer.com](http://minnesotareformer.com).



Members of the Minnesota Nurses Association supported a bill that would reform medical and other types of debt.

## Labor-backed debt reform bill passes on House floor

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Pastor James Alberts of Higher Ground Church of God in Christ in St. Cloud – one of three religious leaders who spoke at the rally – said debt forgiveness is value shared among faith communities, from Judaism and Islam to Christianity. Alberts pointed to the Lord's Prayer, which asks for "forgiveness of debts as we forgive our debtors."

"Mercy and forgiveness are missing in our debt collection system, and here in Minnesota it is time to act in every way we can to fix this," he said. "We must pass debt relief now."

Medical debt is the Minnesota Debt Fairness Act's primary focus, and members of the Minnesota Nurses Association were well represented at the rally. Jennifer Michelson, a retired United Hospital nurse, said MNA members see the strain of medical debt firsthand.

"I didn't take care of very many patients who could cover the full cost of the care they received," she said. "It's hard for our patients to heal if their energy is going toward worrying about medical bills that they can't afford to pay, or how their families will take care of it if they pass away."

The proposed legislation would repeal a state law that automatically transfers medical debt to a patient's spouse. In Minnesota, medical debt is the only kind of debt transferred in this way.

The Minnesota Debt Fairness Act would also ban medical providers from refusing care – or threatening to do so – to a patient with outstanding bills. A study by the Peterson Center on Health Care found 60% of people with medical debt have deferred care to avoid going further into the red.



Keith Ellison spoke in favor of the Minnesota Debt Fairness Act. Union Advocate photos

Additionally, health providers or their collections agents would be barred from reporting patients' debt to credit bureaus because, Schultz said, bad credit "shouldn't be a side effect of getting sick."

Other provisions in the bill would apply more broadly to the state's debt collection system, making adjustments based on income levels to the maximum percentage of someone's wages that creditors can garnish – and shielding the last \$4,000 in Minnesotans' bank accounts from garnishment.

"This is so you don't go to the grocery store to buy groceries for your family and find out you have zero dollars left in your account," Rep. Liz Reyer (D-Eagan) said. "We know this happens. It's not right."

After the rally, members of the House voted to advance a commerce policy bill that included the Minnesota

Debt Fairness Act's key provisions.

But the Senate's companion bill, passed earlier in the session, did not address debt reform, meaning representatives of the two chambers need a conference committee to settle on a final bill to send to Gov. Tim Walz before lawmakers' deadline to adjourn May 20.

Attorney General Ellison urged activists at the rally to keep the issue on their representatives' agenda.

"This is a moral issue," he said. "It's not just a legal issue, it's not just a political issue, it's a moral imperative to pass this bill. Those signs that you brought, don't just leave them here. Take that sign with you and put it up somewhere people can see it..."

"I want the world to know that we're passing this bill today, and this is not the end of it."

## Plumbers' volunteer day provides no-cost repairs to homeowners in need



Members of St. Paul Plumbers Local 34 joined the Water's Off 2024 day of service March 23, volunteering their time and talents to provide plumbing and home-care services to 65 low-income, elderly and disabled homeowners across the Twin Cities. Local 34 and Minneapolis Plumbers Local 15 sponsor the event each year in partnership with members of the Minnesota Mechanical Contractors Association and the Metro Plumbing Heating Cooling Contractors, who donate materials necessary to keep Water's Off free to homeowners identified for assistance by Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties. Since its inception 30 years ago, Water's Off has provided repairs to over 4,000 Minnesota households at a value of over \$2 million, thanks to union volunteers who have donated more than 14,000 service hours. The event also raises awareness of the importance of water conservation. Minnesota's annual service day has since become a model for plumbers' volunteer programs across the U.S.

Union Advocate photo

## Biden administration delivers on rail unions' top safety demand

By Mark Gruenberg  
PAI Union News Service

**WASHINGTON** – The nation's rail unions and the AFL-CIO's Transportation Trades Department are hailing the Biden administration's final rule mandating two-person crews on all but a few of the nation's freight trains.

About the only union-side objections to the new Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) rule, published April 2, were that it shouldn't override even tougher state laws, which apply the two-person crew mandate to all freight trains, even on small short lines.

The rule, strenuously opposed by the nation's freight railroads, orders a minimum two-person crew – engineer and conductor – on all freight trains, especially those miles-long trains the nation's big, Class I railroads run.

Unions have lobbied for two-person crews – both at the Transportation Department, the parent agency of the FRA, and on Capitol Hill – for years, but the rail lobby has always blocked congressional action. And it convinced the GOP Trump administration's FRA to allow one-person crews as a money-saver.

Unions say two-person crews are a safety measure and that the presence of a second worker can either prevent accidents or, when they occur, reduce the hazards to railroaders, communities and

the environment.

"This rule acknowledges crew size is fundamentally a safety issue at its core," Transportation Trades Department President Greg Regan said. "Rail workers experience the risks of the job daily, and have made it clear that two-person crews are inherently necessary to ensure the safe operation of our rail systems."

"While the FRA has considered action on crew size for almost a decade, operational and safety changes across the rail industry the last several years have only heightened the need for strong crew size regulations."

Rail workers have been calling for regulation mandating a two-person crew for over a decade.

"For the past 13 years our union, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) advocated for a federal rule requiring trains be staffed by a minimum of one certified engineer and a certified conductor," BLET/Teamsters President Eddie Hall said. "We also repeatedly tried to reason across the bargaining table for railroads to adopt these minimum staffing requirements."

Hall credited the Biden administration for acting to make railroading safer in every state, rather than allowing states to create a patchwork of regulations. Eleven states had passed their own two-person crew mandates.



Rail workers held a contract rally at BNSF Railway's Northtown Yard in Fridley in 2022. Workers' top demands at the time were paid sick days and two-person crews. The Biden administration has since delivered on both issues.

UA file photo

"As trains, many carrying hazardous material, have grown longer, crews should not be getting smaller. I personally have operated freight trains that stretched over three miles in length" as an engineer on the Southern Pacific and Union Pacific, Hall said.

A rail re-regulation bill, introduced by Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) with bipartisan support, includes two-person crews as a safety measure, but the powerful

freight railroad lobby has sidetracked it.

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said the Biden administration cut through congressional gridlock to deliver basic safety protections for rail workers and communities.

"This rule requiring safe train crew sizes is long overdue, and we are proud to deliver this change that will make workers, passengers, and communities safer," Buttigieg said.



# Minutes of the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation

## APRIL 10, 2024

The Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation met in regular session 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 Beedle, Beissel, Bell, Butts, Cook, Edwards, Engeldorf, Gale, Gibbons, Guertin, Hoerth, Luneburg, Madden, Markham-Kocurek, McNamara, Michelson, Mills, Mullin, Peterson, Roth, Schmidt, Seath, Slattery, and Tastad-Damer. Excused were Hill, Hoppe, Ryan, Sansom, Sturdivant, VanDassor, Vanderport and Varco. Absent was Olson.

President Peterson read the Code of Conduct. She will go over the Code of Conduct at the beginning of each meeting. The Code states: The AFL-CIO is committed to providing an environment free from discrimination and harassment. We ask all meeting participants to embrace our values of equity and equality and conduct themselves in this meeting consistent with those values. The RLF meetings that are held the Second Wednesday of the month will have a designee as the first point of contact for anyone who thinks they have experienced discriminatory, harassing or otherwise unacceptable behavior. President Peterson has assigned two designees as points of contact that will be announced at the start of each meeting. We urge you to contact him/her if you have any concerns. The designees are Bunny Engeldorf, Secretary-Treasurer and Perry Schmidt, Vice President.

## GUEST SPEAKER

Linda Leighton, Remember 1934 Committee, spoke to the delegation. This year will mark the 90th anniversary of the historic 1934 Minneapolis Truckers' Strike. A series of educational events are planned, that will start in May and culminate in a large community event on Saturday, July 27, 2024, at Wabun Picnic Area, Minnehaha Park, located at 4655 46th Avenue South, Minneapolis.

The committee is asking unions to be a co-sponsor of the picnic and to donate \$100 or more to aid in underwriting the costs. Checks should be made out and mailed to: Rember 1934, P.O. Box 19581, Minneapolis, MN 55419.

## MINUTES

**M/S/C TO APPROVE MINUTES OF MARCH 13, 2024, AS PUBLISHED IN THE UNION ADVOCATE NEWSPAPER AFTER THE SECRETARY-TREASURER NOTES THERE ARE NO ADDITIONS OR CHANGES CALLED FOR.**

## COMMITTEE ON POLITICAL EDUCATION (COPE) MINUTES APRIL 10, 2024

COPE met in regular on the above date and was called to order by President Peterson at 5 p.m. Board members in attendance were Beedle, Beissel, Bell, Butts, Cook, Edwards, Engeldorf, Gale, Gibbons, Guertin, Hoerth, Lohmann, Luneburg, Madden, Markham-Kocurek, Mayer, McNamara, Michelson, Mills, Mullin, Peterson, Roth, Schmidt, Seath, Slattery, and Tastad-Damer. Excused were Hill, Hoppe, Ryan, Sansom, Sturdivant, VanDassor, Vanderport and Varco. Absent was Olson.

Items to come before this committee included:

- Beth Commers, City of Saint Paul, Human Rights & Equal Economic Opportunity, spoke about the proposed Wage Theft Ordinance.

## M/S/C FOR THE RLF TO SUPPORT A WAGE THEFT ORDINANCE IN THE CITY OF SAINT PAUL.

- President Peterson reported on the MN AFL-CIO friendly incumbent endorsement process and the MN Legislative session.

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

## EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES APRIL 10, 2024

The Executive Board met 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 Labor Bowl, Thursday, May 2, 2024, with shift times are 2:00, 4:00 and 6:00 p.m.; the Union Job and Resource Fair on Thursday, May 16, 2024, at the IBEW Local 110 Union Hall; and the St. Paul Labor Studies and Resource Center's AFL-CIO Community Services Liaison open position.

- ORGANIZING: UPDATES/CAMPAIGNS:** AFSCME Council 5, IATSE Local 13, Minnesota Nurses Association, SEIU Local 284, SEIU Healthcare MN & IA and UNITE HERE Local 17 gave updates on their organizing activities.

- REQUEST** for the RLF to co-sponsor the Remember 1934 Commemorative Picnic at a cost of \$200.

## M/S/C FOR THE RLF TO CO-SPONSOR THE REMEMBER 1934 COMMEMORATIVE PICNIC AT A COST OF \$200.

## M/S/C FOR TONIGHT'S SECOND COLLECTION TO GO TO THE REMEMBER 1934 FUND.

- THANK YOU NOTE** received from the Minnesota AFL-CIO State Retiree Council for the RLF's \$500 contribution.

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 March 2024. The report was accepted as read.

## REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

- Michael Madden reported on behalf of the Chisago County Labor Assembly. Thank you for building union movement, he said. We worked to pass operating levy – but it failed. There is war on educators being played out in Minnesota. The Chisago school board knows the problem, but the issue is funding. Our next meeting will be on the fourth Tuesday via zoom at 6:00 p.m.

- Connie Beissel reported on behalf of the Dakota County Labor Assembly. Its annual Worker's Memorial Day service will be on April 28, 2024, at 1:00 p.m. at the Lebanon Cemetery in Apple Valley. Bill Moore will lead a prayer, and the Twin Cities Labor Chorus will be singing. All elected officials in Dakota County have been invited to attend. The Letter Carriers food drive will be on May 11. Only participate if you received a card in the mail; that means your city has a food pantry to take the food to. The next meeting will be the second Thursday of the month at 7:00 p.m. in person.

- Brian Beedle reported on behalf of the Washington County Labor Assembly. The assembly is continuing to work with local food shelves and looking for volunteers for Fare For All at Grace Lutheran Church in Oakdale. Its next meeting will be on Wednesday, April 24, 2024, from 6:00 – 7:30 p.m. at the United Steelworkers Local 11-418 Union Hall located at 8839 96th Street South in Cottage Grove.

- Martin Hoerth reported on behalf of the Ramsey County Labor Assembly, which met last month and talked about the legislative session. Its next meeting will be on the fourth Tuesday of the month at the St. Paul Labor Center at 6:00 p.m. If you live or work in Ramsey County please attend upcoming screenings. Hoerth will have more information at the end of May.

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

President Peterson reported on the Labor Bowl, the Union Job and Resource Fair, the number of bills at the Capitol, unemployment insurance for striking workers, last week's rally for the Science Museum workers, and

## SPRLF Retirees to meet May 15

The Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation Retirees meet the third Wednesday of each month. Meetings are open to retired members of unions affiliated with the SPRLF.

Meetings start at noon at the Saint Paul Labor Center, 353 7th Street W.

For more information about the Retirees, contact Tom Edwards at edwardsapwu2@aol.com, or call 651-222-3787.

Education MN and SEIU Local 284 working under expired contracts.

## MINNESOTA AFL-CIO REGIONAL ORGANIZER REPORT

- Jared Muskovitz, Regional Organizer for the East Metro, St. Paul and Eastern Suburbs reported on the Racial Justice and Solidarity event on April 18-19 from 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Cloquet Public Library, and another event June 5-6 from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the SEIU HC MN & IA offices. He also reported on the Three-Day Organizing Institute from May 1-3

at the Minnesota Nurses Association offices.

## GOOD AND WELFARE

The Minnesota State Retiree Council's 19th Annual Fundraiser will be held on April 27 at the Sheet Metal Workers Local 10 Hall.

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

Submitted by,  
**BERNADINE ENGELDORF**  
Secretary-Treasurer

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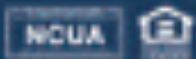
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