



# The St. Paul Union Advocate

122nd Year, No. 9, Issue 5426

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

April 2019

## Do Something!

### Rally for \$15 at MSP Airport

First, Minneapolis workers won \$15. Then St. Paul workers did the same.

Now, workers at MSP International Airport are fighting for a \$15 minimum wage, and they plan to leverage the national spotlight – and increased airport traffic – of the Final Four to advance their cause.

Workers will stage a rally Thursday, April 4, to call on airport commissioners to do right by the people whose work makes hosting events like the Final Four possible in our community.

The event is scheduled to start at 3:30 p.m. at a location to be announced. (Monitor [www.stpaulunions.org](http://www.stpaulunions.org).)

Sponsors include the MSP Airport Workers Council and the following local unions: UNITE HERE Local 17, SEIU Local 26, the Teamsters and the Machinists.



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Connect with us online for labor news, events and more.



Project labor agreements establish fair wage and benefit standards on construction projects across Minnesota, including Catholic Charities' new Opportunity Center and Dorothy Day Residence in downtown St. Paul. The \$100 million facility, backed by both public and private funding, will include 177 permanent housing units and offer services, including health care, to families in need.

Union Advocate photo

## Minneapolis project labor agreement under attack in federal court

### Union Advocate staff

Right-wing legal funds have been on the offensive in recent years, waging a shadowy campaign in courtrooms across the country to strip working people of their freedom to join together and negotiate a fair return on their labor.

Last month, that campaign took aim at members of Minnesota's Building Trades unions.

A non-union contractors' association and one of its members, Waconia-based Laketown Electric, is suing the Minneapolis Public Schools, claiming in a complaint filed in federal court March 13 that the district's project labor agreement (PLA) violates their constitutional rights.

MPS negotiated its PLA with the Minneapolis Building and Construction Trades Council in 2004. All construction firms seeking contracts to build or repair any of the district's facilities must agree to the terms of the PLA.

Among those terms: hiring highly skilled tradespeople,

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 8)

## LIUNA Local 563's Fowler honored by Kasper, St. Paul Regional Labor Federation

Joe Fowler, a LIUNA member since he was 17, has risen through the union's ranks to become business manager of Twin Cities-based LIUNA Local 563. Last month, St. Paul Regional Labor Federation President Bobby Kasper, himself a Local 563 member, presented Fowler with a Labor Leader of the Year award.

The honor is in appreciation of Fowler's service to both his local union and the local labor movement. Under Fowler's leadership, the local played a critical role in efforts last year to elect labor-endorsed candidates, including Gov. Tim Walz.

"I really wish the award would have gone to Local 563 instead of to myself," Fowler, 37, said. "I am one person, but it was an act of an engaged membership who did all of those volunteer shifts. I just tried to lead by example."

"I was grateful to have had Joe's commitment and help during the elections," Kasper said.

With so many attacks on union members and their freedoms, Fowler said, unions have no choice but to fight back to preserve their standards, their rights and their quality of life.



St. Paul Regional Labor Federation President Bobby Kasper presented Local 563 Business Manager Joe Fowler with the Labor Leader of the Year award at a local meeting last month.

submitted photo

"My job is to continue to grow the union by building relationships with community leaders," Fowler said. "I do whatever I can to create an environment where our contractors can compete, so they are able to provide our members with a good, middle class living with excellent health benefits and a dignified retirement."



## Go Figure

**\$2.5 billion**

Average daily increase in the total wealth of billionaires across the planet last year

**10,000**

People who die every day without access to health care

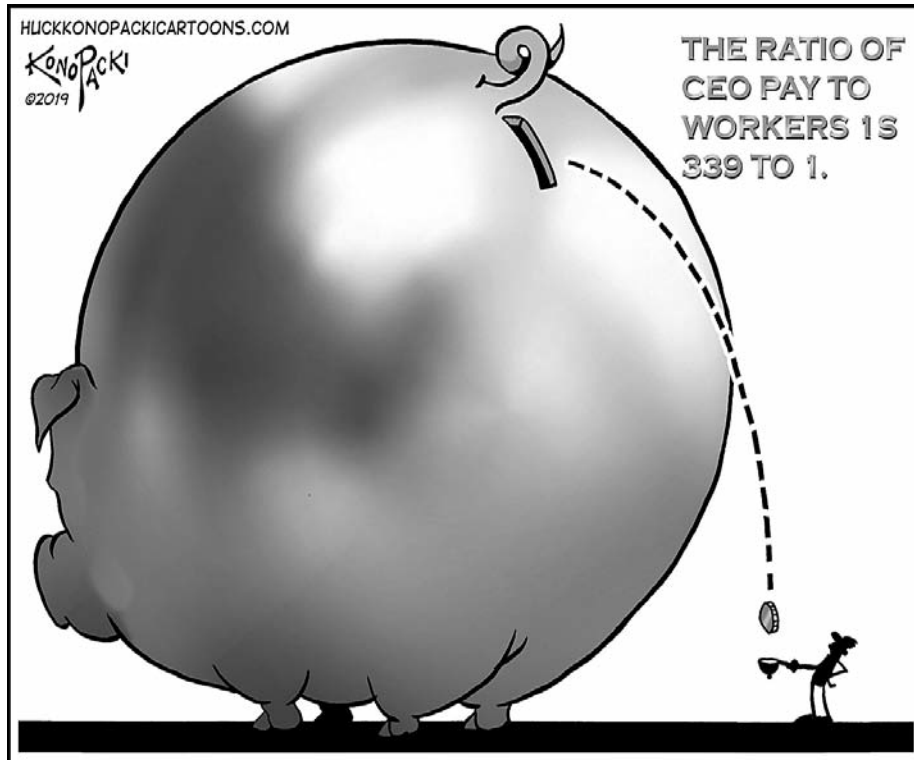
**26**

Number of billionaires it takes to equal the wealth of the world's poorest 3.8 billion people

**4 cents**

Share of every tax dollar collected worldwide that comes from taxes on wealth

Source: Oxfam International



Labor Voices: Mike Bubalo

## 2019 is an opportunity to take action, organize and build power

Six months ago, Minnesota's working people faced the prospect of an anti-worker Governor and anti-worker Legislature turning Minnesota into Wisconsin — where attacks on working people have cost jobs and held down wages. We organized and won the 2018 elections.

Now, 2019 is an opportunity to take action, organize and build power for our members, apprentices and retirees, and all working people. Together, we can advance our shared values of dignity, justice and freedom by making our voices heard and holding politicians accountable for getting the job done.

One place to start is by supporting Governor Tim Walz's and Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan's budget and bonding proposals.

Their proposed budget reflects our shared priorities: bringing down the cost of healthcare, improving education and ensuring communities across the state are prospering.

The Walz and Flanagan budget and bonding proposals will fix our roads and bridges and invest in water and housing infrastructure, creating jobs for Minnesotans and growing our economy.

Laborers are making their voices heard by taking action: Hundreds of us have contacted our state legislators asking them to fix our roads and bridges to ease congestion and improve safety. Dozens of us have testified at House Transportation Committee hearings in Saint Cloud, Minneapolis, Blaine, Savage and Mankato.

And, on Wednesday, April 3, we will join together with our brothers and sisters in the building trades and lobby our elected officials at our Day on the Hill.

Together, we can continue to organize, build power and make a difference in working people's lives.

That's why at Laborers Local 563, we are continuing our "Proud Member" training program, where

**"Laborers are making their voices heard by taking action."**

— Mike Bubalo



members can learn more about our local's history and feel the power of belonging to a union by building skills and taking action.

It took me 13 years to get active in my union. I joined the Laborers in 1986 as a mason tender. In 1999, I got active, wanting to be more involved and know what the union is about.

I joined the Local 563 executive board in 2005 and was hired on as an agent in 2009. Today, I serve as an officer of my local as well as an executive board member for the Minneapolis Regional Labor Federation, AFL-CIO.

I am proud to make a difference in the lives of our members, apprentices, retirees and workers across the region.

Get involved! Whether it is going to your union meetings, participating in a training, writing a letter to the editor, liking and following your union on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, lobbying your elected officials at your Day on the Hill, or volunteering on the phones, doors or in your community — you have the power to make a difference in working people's lives.

Feel the power! Use the power!  
**BE THE POWER!**

— Mike Bubalo is financial secretary-treasurer of LIUNA Laborers Local 563. This column originally appeared in the Minneapolis Labor Review.

# 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](mailto:mmoore@stpaulunions.org)

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## Educators unveil new logo at union's centennial celebration

By Michael Moore  
Union Advocate editor

Public educators in St. Paul have broken a lot of ground since forming their union 100 years ago. They were the first teachers in the state to unionize, and the first in the country to go on strike.

True to form, they broke more ground at a centennial celebration last month, unveiling a logo to match their union's new name, the St. Paul Federation of Educators.

Union delegates voted to change the name last year, after SPFE's three bargaining units – teachers, educational assistants, and school and community support professionals – bargained and settled contracts with the St. Paul Public Schools simultaneously for the first time.

SPFE President Nick Faber said the union's rank-and-file members pushed for the name change.

"We want to be a union that is focused on equity, inclusion and access," Faber said. "It seemed really important to be intentional about who is in our name and make sure everybody feels included."

### 'Hardwired' for justice

The union hasn't shied away from thinking big over the last 100 years, as St. Paul educators have built a reputation for challenging school officials, the community and themselves to change for the better. Being on the cutting edge of the fight for justice and equity, Faber said, is "really hardwired" into the local's DNA.

Case in point: SPFE was founded by women teachers in St. Paul who, despite a local law banning teachers from unionizing, joined together to fight for equal pay, smaller class sizes, better working conditions, tenure protections and the right to organize.

The organizing drive did not go unnoticed by bosses. Urged on by the business community and city councilors, school administrators retaliated against union activists, transferring or denying promotions to some – and firing others.

Still, "about 300 of the most progressive and forward-looking" women

teachers, as The Union Advocate described them, chartered Local 28 of the American Federation of Teachers on June 18, 1918. A year later, men organized a teachers' union of their own, and the two locals merged in 1957.

### Connections to the past

Educators found a home in the labor movement from the jump. A 1918 battle over merit pay, which would have left teachers' salaries up to their bosses' whims, saw 5,000 workers to join educators in the streets for a protest that helped beat back the proposal.

In 1946, St. Paul teachers became the first in their profession nationwide to go on strike, responding to years of budget cuts and – after five and a half weeks on the picket line – winning higher wages, funding for school repairs and free textbooks for all students.

The connection between what St. Paul educators were fighting for 70 years ago and what they continue to fight for today, Faber said, isn't lost on SPFE members, who came close to striking in both 1989 and 2018.

"If you look at the 1946 strike, a lot of things the teachers were walking out about are familiar," Faber said. "Educators have always understood that their working conditions are our students' learning conditions."

### A centennial celebration

That legacy was proudly on display March 1 at SPFE's centennial celebration.

As the event opened, word began spreading throughout the ballroom that striking educators in Oakland, Calif., had reached a settlement that included \$38 million in pay raises, more funding for professional support staff and special education staff, and lower class sizes.

The Oakland union was among several that participated in an "organizing institute" sponsored by the National Education Association last year. St. Paul's union leaders led workshops with leaders from Oakland and other locals on bargaining for the common good – that is, looking to contract negotiations not only as an opportunity to address their needs, but the needs of the students and



families they serve.

Faber said it was exciting to watch Bay Area teachers put the strategy into action this winter.

"Our members definitely feel an incredible amount of pride in what we do here locally," Faber said. "We're really unique in that we feel both in solidarity with our national and state organizations, and at the same time we've been able to do this cutting-edge work that's really hardwired into our DNA."

Mayor Melvin Carter and former Mayor George Latimer joined the centennial event, as did previous SPFE presidents Denise Rodriguez and Mary Cathryn Ricker, the newly appointed commissioner of the state's Department of Education.

Also in attendance: Education Minnesota President Denise Specht, St. Paul Regional Labor Federation President Bobby Kasper and presidents of both nationwide teachers' unions, the AFT's Randi Weingarten and the NEA's Lily Eskelsen Garcia.

"From the time it was chartered, Local 28 has been a positive, progressive force in our community and our labor movement," Kasper said. "I was honored to celebrate SPFE's centennial with the teachers who make our schools great."

## Devote a Saturday to your health

Get the latest tips on how to embrace healthy lifestyle choices at the Health and Benefit Fair, a free event open to all working people and their families April 13 from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Minneapolis Convention Center.

Sponsored annually by the Labor/Management Health Care Coalition of the Upper Midwest and its member funds, the event features over 85,000 square feet of exhibition space, with information, education and activities focused on improving the health and lives of working people.

Featured exhibitions include the Kidz Zone, a blood drive, the Mothers Against Distracted Driving crashed car, first aid demonstrations, healthy cooking demonstrations and "walk-through" inflatable organs.

Learn more at [www.healthand-benefitfair.org](http://www.healthand-benefitfair.org).

## Dig deep into the 1944 DFL merger

In 1944, Minnesota's Democratic Party merged with the Farmer-Labor Party, creating a unique twist on the two-party system that endures today. An educational forum April 16 will commemorate the 75th anniversary of the historic merger.

The forum, sponsored by the Minneapolis Regional Retiree Council, will begin at 7 p.m. at the CWA Local 7200 hall, 3521 E. Lake St., Minneapolis.

Organizers say the event will begin with a screening of short clips from a forthcoming film on the Farmer-Labor Party. Afterward, former Secretary of State Mark Ritchie will lead a panel discussion with labor, political and community organizers about ongoing efforts to build progressive organizations and power – and what lessons from Minnesota's past still apply.

## March for hotel workers on May Day

When your union contract is set to expire on International Workers Day, what do you do? You plan to get in the streets, of course!

Some 1,200 workers are in negotiations with eight Twin Cities hotels this spring, and their union, UNITE HERE Local 17, is planning a march in downtown Minneapolis on May 1, the date their contracts are set to expire.

Both the St. Paul and Minneapolis regional labor federations have endorsed the May Day march, and supporters from the labor movement and community are welcome to participate. It will start at 4:30 p.m. in Peavey Plaza.

## 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.

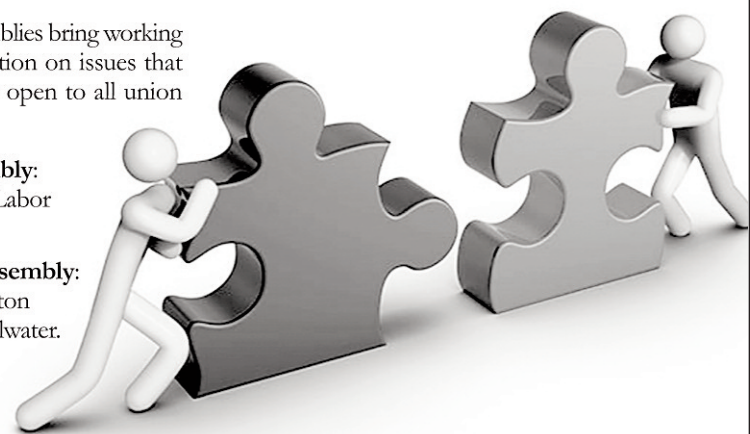
**Chisago County Assembly:**  
April 25, 4:30 p.m., Wyoming  
Public Library, 26855 Forest Blvd.

**Dakota County Assembly:**  
April 11, 7 p.m., Dakota County  
United Educators,  
6950 W 146th St., Apple Valley.

[www.stpaulunions.org](http://www.stpaulunions.org)

**Ramsey County Assembly:**  
April 22, 6 p.m., St. Paul Labor  
Center, 353 W. 7th St.

**Washington County Assembly:**  
April 24, 6 p.m., Washington  
County Gov't Center, Stillwater.





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# Building Trades lift up women in construction at annual awards ceremony

By Michael Moore  
Union Advocate editor

At a sold-out ceremony in Minneapolis March 6, a standing-room-only crowd of union members, business agents and public officials celebrated the increasing number of tradeswomen working on construction sites in Minnesota.

The annual Women Building Success Awards honored apprentices, journey workers and advocates for their work to promote opportunities for women in the Building Trades and to strengthen the bonds between tradeswomen and their unions.

"Everybody wants a friend at work," Carpenters Local 322 member Katie LaPlant said. "Sometimes it's hard to find friends at work when you're a woman working with, sometimes, guys who don't think you should be doing what you're doing."

"But when you form sisters' groups, you make your friends at work. You're meeting people who are in the same scenario that you're in. They love their work, you love your work and you have a common bond."

For her efforts to create space for tradeswomen to get together and support each other, LaPlant, who lives in south Minneapolis, received the 2019 Journey Worker of the Year award. Veing Paborriboon of Sheet Metal Workers Local 10 received the honorable mention award in the same category.

Other 2019 winners included Apprentice of the Year Laura Tracey, a member of Local 110 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers from Falcon Heights. Honorable mention went to Stepany Slaney of Sprinkler Fitters Local 417.

Tasha Lawrence, a member of St. Paul Plumbers and Gas Fitters Local 34 who lives in Mounds View, won Advocate of the Year. Honorable mention in the category went to Wendy Stuhler of Operating Engineers Local 49.

## Building sisterhood

Women make up less than 10 percent of the construction workforce, and the share of women doing trades work – as opposed to administrative work or management jobs – is even smaller.

That means the construction jobsite can be an intimidating, isolating place for women workers, Lawrence acknowledged.

"I go out on the jobsite, and it's only me a lot of times," she said. "I want other women to feel comfortable out on the jobsites, to see other women, to support other women."

Tracey, who is working to create an affinity group within IBEW Local 110 for women members, said the worksite culture is changing in positive ways.



Women Building Success award winners this year, announced during an event at Surly Brewing in Minneapolis, are (L to R) Stepany Slaney of Sprinkler Fitters Local 417, Laura Tracey of IBEW Local 110, Veing Paborriboon of Sheet Metal Workers Local 10, Katie LaPlant of Carpenters Local 322, Wendy Stuhler of Operating Engineers Local 49 and Tasha Lawrence of Plumbers Local 34.

Union Advocate photos



Advocate of the Year Tasha Lawrence joins St. Paul Plumbers Local 34 Business Representative Dean Gale (L) and Financial Secretary-Treasurer Jeff Huberty at the awards ceremony.



"Failure is not in Laura's DNA," IBEW Local 110 Business Manager Jamie McNamara said of Apprentice of the Year Laura Tracey. "Flat out, we need more people like Laura Tracy in our unions."

"I would definitely recommend other women look at getting into the Trades," she said. "It's not as scary as it seems, and it's not like it used to be. So far I've had no troubles at all. All the guys are nice, it's a fun work environment and I love going to work."

"I feel like women just don't know this is an option – and one of the best options."

## Benefits for workers, employers

The benefits of hiring women cut both ways. It's good for women and good for employers.

On average, women working in the construction trades earn about 96 cents for every dollar earned by men. That's miles ahead of the economy as a whole, where women earn 81 cents on the dollar,

"We all love the money," LaPlant

said. "If you're a woman and you're looking to make a career where you're on your own two feet and owning homes and owning cars and doing the things you want to do, the Trades are a great place."

Lawrence pointed to another advantage of working in the union Trades.

"Safety," she said. "All the union contractors work safe. We know if we go to a job, we're going to come home to our families every night."

For employers, Lawrence added, "women are great assets" to have on construction jobsites.

"We handle things differently," she explained. "We have a different perspective of how we see things and how we deal with issues."

An added benefit? For Tracey, pay-



Journey Worker of the Year Katie LaPlant shows off the 2019 Women Building Success award, fashioned to look like a ladder. "We're all hard working, and we all enjoy what we do," LaPlant said of women working in the Building Trades.

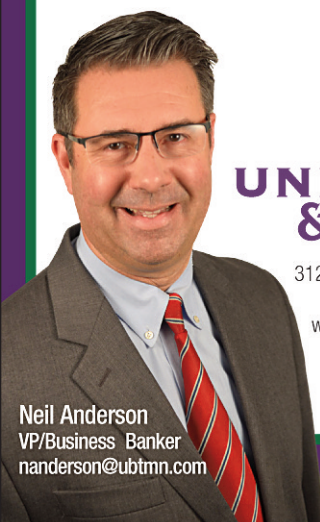
ing union dues means she doesn't need to splurge on a gym membership.

"I love that I can have fun and move around all day," she said. "I'm using my brain, problem solving, and I don't have to go to the gym at the end of the day because I worked all day."



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## Labor News in Review

### MSP HOTEL WORKERS UNIONIZE

Workers at the newly built hotel at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport won a voice at work Feb. 28, when a mediator certified their request for representation by UNITE HERE Local 17, the Twin Cities hospitality union.

Under terms of a labor-peace agreement with Local 17, management of the InterContinental Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport Hotel allowed workers to bypass the National Labor Relations Board's lengthy election process and, instead, organize by signing union authorization cards.

Over 80 percent of the hotel's 160 workers signed cards, which the union delivered to hotel management in January. After an official count by the state's Bureau of Mediation Services, workers are poised to begin bargaining their first contract in the near future.

"We hope to start as soon as possible," Local 17 Secretary-Treasurer Sheigh Freeberg said. "Workers want to win the union health insurance and raises, and they are excited to have a voice to address department-specific concerns."

The 12-story luxury hotel features 291 rooms, two restaurants, 30,000 square feet of event space and TSA access to Terminal 1. It is the first hotel housed within MSP's jurisdiction.

### NURSES BUILD POWER IN ND

Nurses at CHI St. Alexius Medical Center in Bismarck, ND, sent a clear message with their overwhelming vote to affiliate with the Minnesota Nurses Association: Working families want to belong to unions.

"This victory is especially noteworthy because North Dakota has anti-union laws that discourage unionizing," said Angie Grosz, an RN at St. Alexius. "It shows that working families know that unions help them build better lives for their families and communities."

"St. Alexius nurses believe belonging to a union will help us provide top quality care to all our patients by having a voice in our workplace," said Lauren Buol, an RN at the hospital. "Nurses believe coming together and speaking with one voice is the best way to advocate for our patients."

As new members of the MNA, St. Alexius nurses also join the ranks of National Nurses United, the largest union and professional organization of nurses in the U.S., representing more than 150,000 RNs. NNU was formed in 2009 as a nationwide movement of registered nurses leading on not only issues of nursing practice, patient advocacy and workplace standards and conditions, but also health care reform and social advocacy.

"We are thrilled to have these nurses join us as proud union members and we applaud their determination in successfully organizing in the hostile environment of a right-to-work state," said Kathy Dennis, a registered nurse at Dignity's Mercy Hospital in Sacramento and vice president of NNU. "We stand with them in solidarity as they begin negotiations for their first contract. We look forward to working with the Bismarck unionized nurses as our employers jointly merge into a single hospital corporation, CommonSpirit Health."

Dignity Health and CHI merged to form CommonSpirit Health earlier this year. Registered nurses with the California Nurses Association were vocal patient advocates during the numerous hearings on the proposed merger. The nurses' demands were reflected in the terms of California Attorney General Xavier Becerra's final approval of the merger.

This is the first union in North Dakota to affiliate with MNA and NNU.



Amazon workers at the Shakopee fulfillment center shared this photo, taken during a three-hour strike last month, on social media. Awood Center photo

### MN AMAZON WORKERS STRIKE

Workers at Amazon's fulfillment center in Shakopee, site of a historic protest during the 2018 holiday shopping season, continued their fight for better jobs and fair treatment from the company last month, as a majority of workers in the facility's STOW department staged a three-hour strike during the night shift March 7.

The Awood Center, a Twin Cities-based worker center focused on organizing East African people, reported on its Facebook page that 30 workers participated in the strike.

The Awood Center also shared a photo of the handwritten demands Amazon workers submitted to their managers during the action. They included specific measures to control the pace of work and keep workers safe. Workers also called for greater job security and a meaningful voice on the job, including a formal "committee where workers' concerns are heard."

Workers also renewed their demand that Amazon stop counting prayer and bathroom breaks against the rate that measures how much work employees do per hour. Workers whose rates fall beneath a certain level risk losing their jobs.

### AG SUES TO PROTECT WORKERS

Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison last month joined a coalition of attorneys general fighting a new federal rule that would roll back employers' obligations to report workplace injuries and illnesses to the public. Their lawsuit, filed last month, challenges an "illegal and unjustified" attempt by the Occupational Health and Safety Administration to roll back electronic reporting requirements it issued in 2016.

"Part of helping Minnesotans afford their lives and live with dignity, safety and respect means keeping them safe from injury and illness at work," Ellison said. "The federal government's rollback of the OSHA reporting rule makes this harder by making it harder for employees to make sure they're working for safe employers, for the state to do its job to enforce our laws that keep workers safe, and for Minnesota businesses to make sure their business partners are operating a safe workplace."

The 2016 requirements, devised with input from businesses, industry groups, labor unions, experts and others, compelled employers with 250 or more workers to submit to OSHA information from three different workplace injury and illness tracking forms that employers are required to maintain anyway.

The information, advocates argued, would help OSHA and states target workplace safety enforcement programs, encourage employers to abate hazards before they resulted in injury and empower workers to identify risks and demand improvements.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 7)





## Kiss me, I'm union

Who needs to go looking for a pot of gold when you carry a union card? Three St. Paul Building and Construction Trades unions sponsored units in the city's St. Patrick's Day Parade this year. Members of (clockwise from top-left) Heat and Frost Insulators and Allied Workers Local 34, Sheet Metal Workers Local 10 and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 110 proudly marched behind their union banners – decked out in the color of the day, of course. The parade has become a popular, annual event for members of all three unions.

Union Advocate photos

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6)

## GROCERY WORKERS IN CONTRACT TALKS

It's time to show a little solidarity in the checkout line.

St. Paul-area union grocers are in negotiations with United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1189 on new contracts covering nearly 4,000 retail workers in the east metro. Existing agreements are set to expire this month.

Four grocery chains – Cub Foods, Jerry's Foods, Kowalski's Markets and Knowlan's Fresh Foods – are participating jointly in bargaining with Local 1189, while Lunds & Byerlys is opting to bargain separately, looking to secure an "industry-leading" contract, Local 1189 President Jennifer Christensen said.

The union's approach to bargaining, Christensen added, is to ensure "union grocery jobs provide economic security for our members and preserve the benefits our members have worked hard for and deserve." Among workers' top priorities: raising starting and top wage rates, and securing sick time.

Find a full list of union grocers at [www.ufcw1189.org](http://www.ufcw1189.org).

## FIGHTING FOR THE DREAM

Unions last month stood in solidarity with immigrant workers and families at risk of deportation, calling on Congress to create permanent protections for Dreamers and Temporary Protected Status holders – and place them on a path to citizenship. The nation's largest labor federation, the AFL-CIO, and more than 30 national unions signed onto the letter to Congress, arguing the threat of deportation increases workers' vulnerability to exploitation.

TPS status allows hundreds of thousands of immigrants to live and work legally in the U.S. after fleeing crises in their home nations. That includes thousands of native Liberians in Minnesota, home to the nation's largest Liberian population, who fled civil war decades ago. Many could face deportation if President Trump does not reverse an order he gave last year to strip a temporary legal status known as Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) for Liberians living in Minnesota on March 31, 2019.

Many Liberians and other TPS holders are members of unions. Terry O'Sullivan, general president of LIUNA, said tens of thousands of his union's members are impacted by TPS and DACA. Painters Union President Ken Rigmaiden said TPS and DED holders deserve to stay. "Many TPS recipients are members of our union, and I know that they work hard, pay their taxes and play by the rules," he said. "Deportation back to their homeland country to face violence or disaster conditions would shatter their orderly lives and our economy."

## Labor Health & Benefit Fair

Health & Benefit Fair, LLC

April 13, 2019

8 am - 2 pm

Minneapolis Convention Center



**FREE**

Admittance for  
All Working  
Families

[HealthandBenefitFair.org](http://HealthandBenefitFair.org)

Facebook.com/LaborHealthandBenefitFair



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# Lawsuit looks to overturn decades of legal precedent upholding PLAs

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

sometimes from a union hiring hall; and paying into an established, high-quality health and benefit fund maintained by Building Trades unions and their signatory contractors.

But attorneys from the California-based Pacific Legal Foundation argue that's a violation of the plaintiffs' constitutional rights to free speech, due process and equal treatment under the law.

Brendan Cummins, an attorney at Minneapolis-based Cummins and Cummins, LLP, who has worked with PLAs for decades, said the lawsuit's arguments are "ideologically driven" and not based in fact.

"They're claiming the PLA discriminates against non-union contractors by precluding them from bidding and winning work on school projects," Cummins said. "That is false. Union and non-union contractors have bid on and won work in the Minneapolis Public Schools."

That includes contractors from the non-union industry group suing the school district, Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC), Cummins said. Dozens of non-union contractors have won bids from MPS since the project labor agreement went into effect 15 years ago, according to Minneapolis Building Trades President Dan McConnell.

"Anyone can bid on and work on these jobs under a PLA, both union and non-union," McConnell said.

"PLAs ensure a steady supply of high quality, well trained labor" he added. "Most of the major projects in Minnesota and around the country are done under PLAs and for good reason because they ensure the quality of labor you need and they ensure the work gets done on time and on or under budget."

## PLAs benefit workers, employers

Property owners, developers and governments enter into PLAs to ensure fair wage and benefit standards on their construction projects. The agreements establish terms and conditions for construction employees and contractors on a project, from wages and benefits to overtime pay, grievance procedures, drug testing, holidays and more.

By setting those terms and conditions at the outset, project owners make their labor costs more predictable, weed out irresponsible bidders and ensure labor peace for the entirety of the project. Several studies show projects built under PLAs are more likely to be completed on time, within budget and with quality construction.

PLAs are commonly used on large-scale construction projects like hospitals and pro-sports stadiums.

"PLAs have been used successfully



Work on Catholic Charities' expansion in downtown St. Paul, the result of public and private investment, has been governed by a project labor agreement with the St. Paul Building and Construction Trades Council.

Union Advocate photo

on many important high-profile projects in Minnesota: U.S. Bank Stadium and the 35 W Bridge just to name a few," McConnell said. "We have a track record of building large-economic-impact projects on time and on budget, and with a workforce that reflects the diversity of our state.

"We help build communities and grow our economy."

## Another legal attack

Laketown Electric is hardly the first non-union contractor to claim discrimination as a result of a project labor agreement. And legal precedent is not on the plaintiffs' side.

When a non-union contractor challenged the PLA governing the Rochester Civic Center development in 1999, Cummins helped represent the Southeast Minnesota Building Trades all the way to the Minnesota Court of Appeals. That court, Cummins said, heard many of the same arguments Laketown is making now.

"Supposedly, non-union contractors can't bid. Supposedly, everyone's got to become a union member," Cummins said. "That's not true. Anyone can successfully bid and be awarded work, provided they agree to abide by the PLA."

Still, the backing of an out-of-state legal fund indicates this case is about more than the Minneapolis schools' building projects. And the plaintiffs' free-speech argument has a dis-

turbingly familiar ring to it.

Laketown's attorneys argue that requiring non-union contractors, as a condition of working on public projects, to offer benefits through the union-sponsored funds amounts to a violation of their free speech rights. They claim unions' benefit funds spend money on "speech activities" like politics and union advocacy, whether or not contractors agree with it.

That's already against the law, Cummins said.

"The PLA only authorizes contributions to benefit funds that directly benefit the employee," he said.

But appealing to the First Amendment worked for anti-union attorneys in *Janus v. AFSCME*, the Supreme Court decision last year that made right-to-work the law of the land in public-sector workplaces nationwide. Attorneys from the Pacific Legal Foundation, which has had ties to tobacco and oil companies since its founding in the 1970s, might be trying to see if a similar line of attack sticks to project labor agreements as well.

"I believe this is part of an upsurge in cases doing what Justice Kagan warned about in her dissent in *Janus*," Cummins said. "They're attempting to weaponize the First Amendment against working people. And it's focusing on government agencies – that's really where they're focusing their attack."

## PLA builds MN United's new stadium in Midway

Minnesota United and Mortenson Construction announced last month that construction of Allianz Field, the \$250 million, privately-funded soccer stadium in St. Paul's Midway district, is complete. The project wrapped in time for the Loons' home opener April 13.

It's another example of how project labor agreements deliver results for developers, workers and the communi-

ty. Mortenson reported that 2,020 craft workers earned \$46.5 million in direct wages on the project.

"Construction extended across 20 months and we worked through two tough winters," Mortenson's Greg Huber said. "The fact we were able to stay on schedule is a testament to all the people who had the commitment and passion to build this incredible stadium."

## A helping hand for homeless veterans



In February, staff and volunteers from the St. Paul Regional Labor Fed's nonprofit Labor Studies and Resource Center delivered 100 hygiene kits to the Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans (MACV). The kits included items donated and purchased by RLF delegates, and assembled by volunteers during a warm-up party following the Winter Carnival Grande Day Parade. Pictured are AFL-CIO Community Services Liaison Lynne Larkin-Wright (L), RLF volunteers Mary Sansom and Tom Edwards (front), and Ed Williams of MACV.



# Report: Workplace fatalities rising as Trump administration scales back OSHA enforcement

A report issued last month suggests the Trump administration is hazardous to workers' safety on the job.

The number of workplace fatality investigations across the U.S. rose to a 10-year high in the 2018 fiscal year, according to an analysis of government data by the National Employment Law Project. Meanwhile, the Trump administration's Occupational Safety and Health Administration is steadily scaling back worksite safety enforcement.

Debbie Berkowitz, NELP's program director for worker health and safety and a former senior official with OSHA, called the trends "alarming."

"We're seeing huge red flags in the continued drop in enforcement and staffing at OSHA, while the number of workplace fatality investigations is at a decade high," Berkowitz said. "That's a clear indication that workplace deaths are on the rise."

The report's release came as unions across the country were making plans to observe Workers Memorial Day April 28. It's the day each year when working people make time to remember those who have died as a result of workplace injuries or illnesses – and to renew the call for safety on the job.

This year, that call takes on an even greater urgency.

Among the NELP report's findings:

- The number of workplace fatality investigations conducted by OSHA last year – 929 – reached a 10-year high. The total increased by 100 over 2017 levels.

- OSHA now has the lowest number of health and safety inspectors in the agency's 48-year history.

- Because of a lack of inspectors, OSHA is forgoing on-site inspections of workplaces reporting

multiple cases of severe injuries.

"The Trump administration is cutting back on OSHA enforcement activity, putting workers' lives at

risk and undercutting businesses that play by the rules and prioritize worker safety," said Berkowitz. "That's a far cry from putting workers first."

## Workers Memorial Day observances

- The St. Paul Regional Labor Federation's Dakota County Labor Assembly will hold a Workers Memorial Day observance at 11 a.m. April 28. Participants will gather at the **Monument to Fallen Workers** in Apple Valley's Lebanon Cemetery, near the intersection of County Road 42 and Pilot Knob Road.
- The St. Paul and Minneapolis Building Trades councils will hold observances Monday, April 29, at the **Minnesota Workers Memorial Garden** on the State Capitol grounds, beginning at 10:30 a.m. The ceremony will move to the St. Paul Labor Center, 353 West 7th St., if it rains.



## FARE FOR ALL

*Food that makes cents*

### Save 40 percent on groceries!

The St. Paul Regional Labor Federation is pleased to encourage union members and their families to participate in Fare For All Express. Stretch your budget by picking up a package of fresh fruits, vegetables and frozen meats at the sites below each month. Fare For All is open to anyone who eats! There are no questions asked, no forms to fill out. And the more people who take advantage of the program, the better the discounts get – and the more neighborhoods it can serve.

**Give it a try!**

#### East Metro Locations – March 2019

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| • Burnsville: Diamond Ed. Ctr.<br>April 24, 3 to 5 p.m.                      | • Roseville: Real Life Church<br>April 16, 3 to 5 p.m.                     |
| • Cottage Grove: All Saints<br>April 4, 4 to 6 p.m.                          | • St. Paul: Hallie Q. Brown Ctr.<br>April 18, 4 to 6 p.m.                  |
| • Eagan: Easter Lutheran<br>Church by the Lake<br>April 9, 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. | • St. Paul: Hazel Park UCC<br>April 3, 4 to 6 p.m.                         |
| • Forest Lake: VFW<br>April 24, 4 to 6 p.m.                                  | • St. Paul: West 7th<br>Community Ctr.<br>April 5, 10 a.m. to noon         |
| • Maplewood: Redeeming Love<br>April 8, 3:30 to 5:30 p.m.                    | • South St. Paul: Central Square<br>April 23, 4 to 6 p.m.                  |
| • North Branch: Trinity Luth.<br>April 10, 2 to 4 p.m.                       | • Stillwater: Community Thread<br>April 16, 4 to 6 p.m.                    |
| • Northfield: St. Dominic<br>April 11, 3:30 to 5:30 p.m.                     | • White Bear Lake: Community<br>of Grace Lutheran<br>April 12, 2 to 4 p.m. |
| • Oakdale: Grace of God Luth.<br>April 22, 3:30 to 5:30 p.m.                 |  |

Questions? Please go to [www.fareforall.org](http://www.fareforall.org) or call 763-450-3880.

*New Location!*

## Fourth Annual UNION JOB & RESOURCE FAIR

**THURSDAY, APRIL 4, 2019**

3:00–4:00 pm | Employer Panel  
4:00–7:00 pm | On-site Hiring Event

### INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF ELECTRICAL WORKERS, Local 110

1330 Conway St, St Paul 55106 • Bus route 63K, 3rd St E & Clarence St



## DISCOVER YOUR PATH TO A UNION CAREER!

Earn while you learn ★ Rise above minimum wage

## YOU ARE WORTH IT!

Learn about the advantages of a union job! Information about record expungement and community resources will be available. A list of participating employers will be posted March 22, 2019 at [eastsidefreedomlibrary.org](http://eastsidefreedomlibrary.org) | For more information, contact Peter Rachleff at 651-230-3294.



# Getting to know the freshman class



Union members and retirees met face to face with newly elected members of the Minnesota House during a series of informal events hosted by the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation in February and March. The meetings offered workers an opportunity to share their views with lawmakers and learn more about the issues before the Legislature this session. Lawmakers pictured clockwise from top-left are: Rep. Steve Sandell (Woodbury-53B), with St. Paul RLF Political Director Kera Peterson; Rep. Hunter Cantrell (Savage-56A), with Teamsters Local 320's Gus Froemke (L) and Teamsters Local 120's Paul Slattery; Rep. Anne Claflin (South St. Paul-54A), with UFCW Local 1189's Mike Dreyer; and Rep. Alice Mann (Lakeville-56B), with RLF President Bobby Kasper. Learn more about the Regional Labor Federation's work, and discover opportunities to make your voice heard, online at [www.stpaulunions.org](http://www.stpaulunions.org).

Union Advocate photos

# Walz proposes \$1.3 billion infrastructure plan

By Steve Share

Minneapolis Labor Review editor

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz proposed a package of nearly \$1.3 billion in state infrastructure investments Feb. 26.

Highlights of the proposed bonding package include \$300 million for higher education projects, \$345 million for transportation and transit projects, \$217 million for agriculture, environment and natural resources projects, and \$150 million for housing. The package includes 73 projects across the state.

"This is not a wish list. This is what's needed," Walz said, speaking at a press event to announce the bonding package at an affordable housing development at Fort Snelling for formerly homeless veterans.

"We intentionally made recommendations that were fiscally responsible," commented Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan.

While the state Legislature typically considers a large bonding bill in even-numbered years, "for the last 30 years there have only been two years when we haven't had a bonding bill," reported Myron Frans, Minnesota budget commissioner.

Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka, R-Nisswa, has expressed opposition to passing a large bonding bill this year, which Walz acknowledged at the news conference.

But, Walz stressed, "'no' is not a plan for the future."

"I'll make the case," Walz said. "Minnesotans will decide."

Investing in state infrastructure brings jobs, and the Minnesota State Building and Construction Trades Council immediately announced support for Walz's bonding proposal.

"By making substantial capital investments in transportation, higher education, housing, corrections and state asset preservation, the Walz-Flanagan Administration is demonstrating its commitment to meeting our state's construction needs now and, in the future," said Executive Director Jessica Looman.

"This bonding proposal will create jobs for Building Trades members in the entire state of Minnesota," said Craig Olson, secretary-treasurer of the state council and president of the Duluth Building Trades. "The investments in our higher education campuses, our water infrastructure and local roads and bridges will help support our communities and grow the economies of greater Minnesota."

Register your team by April 19th!

# 9TH ANNUAL LABOR BOWL

Thursday, May 2 | Sun Ray Lanes

Our annual fundraiser benefits the Labor Studies and Resource Center, a nonprofit that assists and advocates for union members in the East Metro.



Bowlers are asked to raise \$100 in pledges for LSRC.

(Teams of four bowlers = \$400, teams of five = \$500.)

To register as a team or individual, call 651-222-3787 x117 by April 19.

All donations are tax-deductible.

Download pledge forms at:

[www.stpaulunions.org](http://www.stpaulunions.org)

# MN Retiree Council plans fundraiser

Mark Saturday, May 4, on your calendar. It's the date of the Minnesota State Retiree Council's annual "Fun(d)raiser" bash. The event will run from 3 to 7 p.m. at Sheet Metal Workers Local 10's union hall, 1681 Cope Ave., Maplewood.

Admission is free, and the event will feature food, music, hourly raffles, a silent auction and a statewide raffle for seven major cash prizes between \$100 and \$500. The winning tickets will be drawn at the event, and winners need not be present at the drawing.

Proceeds support the council's work to speak with a unified voice on policy issues of importance to retired people. For more information or to purchase raffle tickets, call 651-227-7647, x121.

Bobby K	6	4	1	X	8	7	2	X	4	4	9	9	8	1
	6	26	44	52	61	79	87	106	115	124				







# Minutes of the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation

**MARCH 13, 2019**

The St. Paul Regional Labor Federation met in regular session on the above date and was called to order with the Pledge of Allegiance by President Kasper at 6 p.m. Board members in attendance were Beedle B, Beedle G, Beissel, DeRoy, Engeldorf, Faber, Gorman, Guertin, Haugen, Kasper, Luneberg, Madden, Markham-Kocurek, McNamara, Mullin, Ryan, Sansom, Schmidt, Slattery, and St. Aoro. Excused were: Gibbons, McCarthy, Meyer and Varco. Absent were: Dreyer, Hoppe, Maki-Green, Monsour and Weed.

## GUESTS

• City of Saint Paul council member Kassim Busuri spoke at the delegate meeting. He is Somali and was appointed to the St. Paul City Council on February 26, 2019. He would like to see the Eastside come back and develop and bring jobs. The Hillcrest site is looking at industrial and housing development with parks.

## CREDENTIALS

• Credentials were received from APWU Twin Cities Postal Data Center and SEIU 284. President Kasper administered the Oath of Obligation to those new delegates and alternates present.

## MINUTES

• **M/S/C TO APPROVE MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 13, 2019 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 MARCH 13, 2019

COPE met in regular session on the above date and was called to order by President Kasper at 5 p.m. Board members in attendance were Beedle B, Beedle G, Beissel, DeRoy, Edwards, Engeldorf, Faber, Gorman, Guertin, Haugen, Hoerth, Kasper, Krey, Lohmann, Luneberg, Madden, Markham-Kocurek, Mayer, McNamara, Mullin, Qualy, Ryan, Sansom, Schmidt, Slattery, St. Aoro and Wise. Excused were: Angrimson, Gibbons, McCarthy, Meyer and Varco. Absent were: Ahmad Sharif, Dreyer, Hoppe, Maki-Green, Monsour and Weed.

Items to come before this board included:

• The Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation screened for the North St. Paul/Maplewood/Oakdale Schools Bond Referendum. The committee agreed to table the referendum by one month unless there is a change in the School Boards stance and commitment to prevailing wage.

• Kera Peterson, Political Director shared what has been happening with the Paid Family and Medical Leave, Ending Wage Theft, Fair Tax Conformity for Working People, 40-Hour Workweek. The next Labor Lobbyist Meeting is Friday, March 15, 2019 at the MN AFL-CIO. Washington County is in the process of scheduling a Meet and Greet.

• We will be hosting a Dakota County Meet & Greet being held Thursday, March 14, 2019 from 7:00 – 8:30 p.m. at the Dakota County United Educators in Apple Valley. We are also sponsoring the New Brookwood Labor College Launch Party and Fundraiser on Wednesday, March 20, 2019 from 5 to 8 p.m. here at the Labor Center. Our fourth annual All Union Job Resource

## 'Meet & Greet' builds stronger relationships in Dakota County



The St. Paul Regional Labor Federation's Dakota County Labor Assembly held a "Meet & Greet" with state legislators March 14. The event offered union members the opportunity to share ideas and concerns with several participating lawmakers, including Sen. Karla Bigham, Sen. Jim Carlson, Sen. Greg Clausen, Sen. Matt Little, Rep. Robert Bierman, Rep. Rick Hansen, Rep. John Huot, Rep. Sandra Masin and Rep. Ruth Richardson.

submitted photo

Fair will be held on Thursday, April 4, 2019 at the IBEW Local 110, 1330 Conway Street in St. Paul.

• President Kasper reported on the meetings we had with the following elected officials: Shelly Christensen 39B, Ruth Richardson 52B, Tou Xiong 53A, Steve Sandell 53B, Anne Claffin 54A, Hunter Cantrell 56A, Dr. Alice Mann 56A, Robert Bierman 57A, John Huot 57B and Koahly Her 64A.

• **M/S/C TO TABLE THE NORTH ST. PAUL-MAPLEWOOD-OAKDALE SCHOOLS BOND REFERENDUM FOR ONE MONTH.**

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

## EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES MARCH 13, 2019

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 Kasper reminded everyone of the Trades Women Build National Ninth Annual Conference, October 4-6, 2019 at the Hilton Minneapolis. You are invited to an Open House and March for the St. Patrick's Day Parade, March 17, 2019 at noon here at the Labor Center. Kasper also encouraged the delegates to attend our Labor Assembly meetings in Ramsey, Dakota, Chisago and Washington Counties. We want to have influence so please attend the meetings to talk and discuss issues.

• **ORGANIZING/UPDATES/ CAMPAIGNS:**

– Wade Luneberg, UNITE HERE Local 17 announced that the Intercontinental Hotel at Minneapolis St. Paul airport had a successful union election. This is their first contract for over 160 members.

– MNA organized over 300 registered nurses at St. Alexius in Bismarck, North Dakota and McCloud County Public Health RN's and Social workers.

– AFSCME is currently in the early stages of organizing mental health workers in the Twin Cities.

– Teamsters 120 is working on legislation for unemployment –currently they are unable to collect. Teamsters thanked Bobby Kasper and the Saint Paul RLF for their support at the hearing.

## • REQUESTS:

– **M/S/C FOR THE RLF TO MAKE A \$6,000 DONATION IN TWO INSTALLMENTS TO THE EAST SIDE FREEDOM LIBRARY.**

– **M/S/C FOR THE RLF TO BECOME A PLATINUM SPONSOR AT A COST OF \$3,000 TO THE ST. PAUL LABOR STUDIES & RESOURCE CENTER'S NINTH ANNUAL LABOR BOWL.**

– **M/S/C FOR THE RLF TO MAKE A \$2,500 CONTRIBUTION TO THE BROOKWOOD LABOR COLLEGE.**

– **M/S/C FOR THE RLF TO MAKE A \$500 CONTRIBUTION TO THE MINNESOTA STATE RETIREE COUNCIL'S ANNUAL FUNDRAISER BEING HELD ON SATURDAY, MAY 4, 2019 FROM 3:00 – 7:00 P.M. AT THE SHEET METAL WORKERS LOCAL 10 HALL.**

– **M/S/C FOR THE RLF TO MAKE A \$250 CONTRIBUTION TO THE SIXTH ANNUAL NORTHLAND CUP CHARITY HOCKEY GAME BETWEEN SAINT PAUL AND RAMSEY COUNTY.**

– **M/S/C FOR THE RLF TO MAKE A \$250 CONTRIBUTION TO THE MENTORING YOUNG ADULTS RE-LAUNCH PARTY BEING HELD ON MARCH 28, 2019 FROM 5:00 – 7:00 P.M. AT 550 RICE STREET.**

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 February 2019. The report was accepted as read.

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

• President Kasper honored Roy Magnuson with the Lifetime Labor Leader Award. He thanked him as he transitions to new work with the Ramsey County Sheriff's office. He is a wonderful organizer and we will miss you.

• Kasper also thanked all members and past leaders of this organization. I give credit to President Knutson for setting up four different labor assemblies so we could be "present" in the various areas.

• He also announced establishing the Eastside Freedom Library's Brookwood Labor College. We will be hosting the launch party and fundraiser being held here on March 20, 2019.

## STAFF/LABOR LIAISON REPORTS

• Vicki Beebe, AFL-CIO Community

## Farewell to a familiar face



Roy Magnuson (R), a longtime delegate and trustee from the Saint Paul Federation of Educators, resigned from the St. Paul RLF after taking a position as public information officer in the Ramsey County Sheriff's office in January. At the March delegate meeting President Kasper presented Magnuson with a Lifetime Labor Leader Award in recognition of his many year's of service to the labor movement.

Services Liaison, talked about the upcoming Launch Party and Fundraiser for Brookwood Labor College, Union Resource and Job Fair being held on April 4, 2019 and the Ninth Annual Labor Bowl on Thursday, May 2, 2019.

## REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

• Connie Beissel reported on behalf of the Dakota County Labor Assembly. Please join us for a Meet & Greet, Thursday, March 14, 2019 from 7:00 – 8:30 p.m. at the Dakota County United Educators, 6950 West 146th Street in Apple Valley.

• Theresa St. Aoro reported on behalf of the Ramsey County Labor Assembly. They discussed Legislative priorities, 2019 Saint Paul municipal and school board elections.

• Michael Madden reported on behalf of the Chisago County Labor Assembly. The Assembly needs to do a better job at outreach. President Kasper continues to provide help, support and organizational outreach. Promotional of Labor GOTV for MN Senate District 11B Special Election is a current opportunity to mobilize members to help to elect another strong labor representative at St. Paul in a red district.

• Brian Beedle reported on behalf of the Washington County Labor Assembly. We discussed the following: Minnesota AFL-CIO's legislative priorities, Senate District 11 special election, the Saint Paul RLF organizing meetings with labor endorsed Freshman Representatives, Josiah Hill announced he is running for Senate District 39 in 2020.

## GOOD AND WELFARE

– Saint Paul Teachers had their 100th Anniversary Celebration Party. Teachers standing up for students and public education.

– The Saint Paul Labor Center will have an Open House and St. Patrick Day Parade on March 16, 2019 from 12:00 – 4:00 p.m.

– Josiah Hill announced he is running for Senate District 39. Please help him out.

– Pheasants Forever Chapter is selling raffle tickets for \$5.00.

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

Submitted by  
**BERNADINE ENGELDORF**  
Secretary-Treasurer



## Exit Interview: Labor Commissioner Nancy Leppink

**'My passion is to help government be effective and efficient'**

In his choice to head the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry, Gov. Tim Walz identified a candidate worth waiting for. In accepting the post, Nancy Leppink's career came full circle.

Commissioner Leppink joined the governor's cabinet Feb. 13, a month after Walz's swearing-in. Leppink needed extra time to relocate from Geneva, Switzerland, where she served as a branch chief for the International Labour Organization, overseeing efforts to improve worker protections in 187 member states.

But St. Paul is where Leppink began her career as a watchdog for workers' rights 34 years ago, advancing from the state Attorney General's Office to a position as chief general counsel in the labor department. Later, she went to work in the Obama administration as a leader in the U.S. Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division.

Leppink talked about the experience and vision she brings to her new job in this interview, which has been edited to fit this space.

**UA:** How has the transition from Geneva to Minnesota gone?

**NL:** Relatively well. It helped that there was a seven-hour time difference, so when I was done with my workday in Geneva it was the beginning of the workday in Minnesota. I was able to stay connected to the department over Skype.

**UA:** It must be a relief to focus on one job now.

**NL:** Absolutely. One job, one time zone – that helps a lot. I do have the advantage that some of the learning curve was reduced because I do have a familiarity with the department and the scope of its administration and enforcement of the laws.

**UA:** That familiarity must have enabled you to pitch a vision for the department during the inter-

view process. What did that vision look like?

**NL:** When I was interviewed, the governor and lieutenant governor raised with me what they were hearing from Minnesota regarding the issues related to the mandate of this department... I was thrilled about the desire to move forward on paid family and medical leave, and not surprised by the issues regarding wage theft. When I was with the U.S. Department of Labor, heading the Wage and Hour Division, (wage theft) was a significant issue even a decade ago across the country.

My overarching vision for the department is that we are well equipped to fulfill our responsibilities in the future world of work, that we are prepared for what the future is going to bring. With regard to wage theft and other enforcement (roles) the department has, my vision is that it be much more data driven, and that we are much more proactive. Right now we're primarily responding to complaints. But often when you are responding to complaints, you are not addressing really critical situations where vulnerable workers are employed and are not going to complain. Furthermore, it doesn't tend to get at more systemic business models and business practices.

**UA:** The nature of work is at a pivotal point. With the rise of the gig economy, a more decentralized workplace and other fundamental changes, how do regulators keep up?

**NL:** We need, to a degree, to rethink the laws and regulations we're putting in place. We have laws on the books that require notices to be posted at workplaces. So obviously, if people aren't going to workplaces anymore, how do we achieve that notice obligation when you don't have everyone punching a clock where they can look up at the bulletin board?

Furthermore, how do we effectively communicate to workers in languages they understand?

**UA:** What did you learn during your time with the ILO?

**NL:** The ILO is a specialized agency of the United Nations. It has tripartite governance; it's governing body is composed of workers, employers and governments. So how the organization approaches making change in countries is very much through the engagement of those partners. It's absolutely essential to find common ground and, once you find it, sustain that common ground.

**UA:** The issues we're dealing with here – wage theft, paid family leave – are they similar or different to the things workers around the world are facing?

**NL:** One of the challenges of globalization is that it has facilitated the dissemination of business models and practices. Uber is an issue in Brazil and in Argentina and in New Zealand and in Singapore. Use of independent contractors, misclassification of workers – these things have become universal. Also, the massive flow of migrant workers – with the challenges of ensuring decent work for those workers – is also now a global issue.

**UA:** What drew you, in 1985, to the work of protecting workers' rights? And what keeps you in it?

**NL:** When I started, I was representing the Human Rights Department, looking at issues related to discrimination and sexual harassment. At that point, government was really the only place proactively working to address those issues. What I realized is we were adding a lot of responsibilities to government, but government oftentimes was ill-equipped to take on that responsibility... My passion is to help government be effective and efficient in performing that role.



Nancy Leppink



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