



The St. Paul Union Advocate

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

April 2021

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Connecting union members in Ramsey, Washington, Dakota and Chisago counties.



Minnesota Nurses Association President Mary Turner speaks at an event in St. Paul to call attention to issues facing frontline, essential workers. Union Advocate photo

Smith fights to include pension fix in latest relief package

By Michael Moore
Union Advocate editor

The \$1,400 stimulus checks made headlines, but the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan, signed into law by President Joe Biden last month, also includes \$86 billion to stabilize distressed multiemployer pension funds over the next three decades.

The emergency funds will protect pension benefits earned by 1.5 million active and retired workers nationwide, including about 22,000 Minnesota retirees who paid into the Central States Pension Fund.

It's a historic win for local retirees and their grassroots fight for pension relief, and for Sen. Tina Smith, who has championed the issue from her seat on the committee overseeing pension law since taking office three years ago.

During a Zoom call to celebrate the victory March 19, Teamster retiree Dennis Kooren, who lives in the Fargo-Moorhead area, told Smith it

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 5)

A YEAR ON THE FRONT LINES

State's essential workers reflect, call on lawmakers to act

By Michael Moore
Union Advocate editor

Essential workers on the front lines of the COVID-19 outbreak have heard plenty of praise over the last year. Protection has been harder to come by.

One year to the day COVID-19 was declared a national emergency March 13, essential workers from across Minnesota gathered virtually and in person near the Capitol in St. Paul to reflect on their experi-

ences, honor the sacrifices many have made and call for policy measures to ensure an equitable recovery.

Minnesota Nurses Association President Mary Truner, who works as an ICU nurse at North Memorial Hospital, said essential workers "are keeping Minnesota going in the hospitals, in the streets, in the grocery stores, in the kitchens."

Elia Starkweather, a Minneapolis janitor

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 8)

Marathon Lockout

Teamsters' union family sticking together as refinery picketing enters third month

By Michael Moore
Union Advocate editor

SAINT PAUL PARK — Megan Christner and Amber Marlatt could never put a price on the value of their husbands' safety at work. So it infuriates them to see their husbands' employer, the Marathon oil refinery here, do just that.

"It's his life we're talking about,"

Marlatt said of her husband, Dave. "And Marathon cares more about saving money?"

"I'm just blown away that someone could be so selfish."

Outraged and unreserved, Christner, Marlatt and dozens of other family members and friends took over the Teamsters Local 120 picket line outside

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 9)



Locked-out workers' family and friends picket the Marathon refinery. Union Advocate photo

Well Said!



“Workers in Alabama and all across America are voting on whether to organize a union in their workplace. This is a vitally important choice as America grapples with the deadly pandemic, the economic crisis and the reckoning on race that reveals the deep disparities that still exist in our country. And there should be no coercion, no threats, no anti-union propaganda.”

— President **Joe Biden**, to Amazon warehouse workers (and managers) in Bessemer, Alabama, who began voting in a historic union election last month



Labor Voices: Julie Bleyhl

It's time to tax 'pandemic millionaires'

The COVID-19 pandemic is wreaking havoc on the working class and our most vulnerable residents. Food and housing insecurity and job loss are emblematic of the issues the COVID-19 pandemic is illuminating: structural inequity and the growing wealth and income gap.

Public employees have been forced to sleep in ice houses and hotel rooms to protect their families from contracting COVID-19. They go to work every day knowing they are putting themselves and their family at risk while serving the people of Minnesota. In return, all they ask for is dignity and respect, fair wages and decent benefits. They believe in paying taxes for the services Minnesotans need, but they also want to make sure the wealthy pay their fair share to pay for these services.

While public employees put Minnesotans first, 'pandemic millionaires' have grown their wealth by over \$1.1 trillion since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a Forbes article published in January. Meanwhile, Americans are struggling to pay for their prescriptions, heat their homes, pay for their child's new winter coat and put food on the table.

But Gov. Tim Walz is taking action to bring fairness and justice to our tax code, and we call on the Legislature and the public to seriously consider his proposal.

Gov. Walz's plan would create a fifth-tier income tax, which is long overdue and very popular. According to a recent Data for Progress survey, 67% of Minnesotans strongly support or somewhat support raising taxes on the wealthy and large corporations.

It is difficult to comprehend how our tax code still treats income over \$1 million, \$5 million, or \$10 million the same as income over \$250,000. As Minnesotans, we can agree that couples making over \$20,000 every week are better positioned to pay a higher tax rate.

This is true in normal times; it is all the more vital in the wake of a global pandemic that has caused historic financial pain for so many working people and families while others have actually benefited from the COVID-19 pandemic. Front line workers continue to pull us through the hardest times we've experienced in genera-

“While public employees put Minnesotans first, millionaires have grown their wealth by \$1.1 trillion during the pandemic.”

— Julie Bleyhl



tions, and 'pandemic millionaires' should be expected to step up and do just a little bit more to help Minnesota recover.

High-quality public services, safe and dignified conditions for all workers, and investments which expand access to the American dream are not free, they must be prioritized and paid for. Minnesotans support Gov. Walz's tax plan because it will make more of those investments possible; it will ensure the fiscal stability necessary to continue our history of high-quality services for the public; and it does so by asking 'pandemic millionaires', the folks who have benefited the most by our economic system, to pay a tiny bit more while lowering the income tax for over 1 million workers in our state.

For the last decade, leadership in the state executive branch has tirelessly advocated and worked to stabilize our state budget. Former Gov. Mark Dayton's legacy of fiscal stability, strategizing for the long-term and asking the wealthiest to contribute a tiny bit more have made all recent investments possible. Gov. Walz wisely carries that legacy on and keeps the torch of fiscal stability burning bright for future generations.

In our fight for racial, social and economic justice, Gov. Walz's plan to tax pandemic millionaires is a critical step forward in building our new future and recovering from this global pandemic.

— Julie Bleyhl is the Executive Director of AFSCME Council 5, a public employee labor union representing more than 43,000 workers from across Minnesota. Our members advocate for excellence in services for the public, dignity in the workplace, and opportunity and prosperity for all workers. Learn more at afscmemn.org.

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

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Guest Commentary

From the eight-hour day to the \$15 minimum wage

By Peter Rachleff and Kristi Wright
East Side Freedom Library

The study of labor history, while rooted in the past, has everything to do with how we envision the future – and how we chart a path to get there. At the East Side Freedom Library, we think that placing the movement for the eight-hour day in conversation with the movement for a \$15 minimum wage can help us learn how to shape our future.

Take a trip into labor history with us. At the time of the American Revolution, one journeyman shoe-maker out of every two could expect to become a self-employed master shoemaker. Decades of a division of labor and the invention of machines brought a very different world of work into being. By the Civil War, only one journeyman out of twelve became a self-employed master shoemaker. His 11 peers looked forward to a lifetime of wage labor. Facing that future, hours of work and days off altogether became serious issues for individual workers and the unions they organized.

As artisan work structures evolved into structures of permanent wage labor, unions not only bargained over the length of the working day, but also participated in social and political movements seeking to pass laws regulating hours and schedules. The more that individual employers insisted that granting “their” workers shorter hours would leave them at a competitive disadvantage, the more that unions sought city, state and even federal legislation.

The call for “eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, eight hours for what we will” became the rallying cry for the American labor movement after the Civil War, even as most workers put in 10-, 11- and 12-hour days. Skilled building trades workers, railroad workers, miners and factory workers came together with one vision and one voice. In 1886, the country’s two major labor organizations, the Knights of Labor and the Federation of Organized Trades and

Labor Unions joined together to call for a nationwide general strike. Their members pledged to walk out on May 1 and not to return to work until every worker was offered a standard eight-hour day.

At the center of the movement was the McCormick Harvester Works in Chicago, the largest factory in the U.S., with a workforce that included unskilled as well as skilled workers, and immigrants and workers of color alongside native-born whites. When police broke up a rally at the factory gates on May 4, there was violence and bloodshed. Strike leaders were arrested; some would be tried for murder and executed. The movement came to a halt for a generation, but workers and their unions revived the movement for an eight-hour day, and, after yet more years of organizing and protesting, finally received it with the passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1938.

It had taken three generations to make the eight-hour day a reality. Many of you might well be thinking how elusive that reality has remained, from Amazon warehouse workers assigned mandatory overtime, to fast food workers assigned “clopen” shifts, closing at night and opening the next morning. But the struggle, especially in the extended periods when it had traction as a movement, enabled the labor movement to reach beyond the boundaries of formal unions and the procedures of collective bargaining, connect workplaces with communities, unite experienced union members with women and men new to labor organization, and bring workers of color and immigrants into conversations, relationships and solidarity with white men. It was also a fertile ground for workers to make art and music, and dream of a better way of life.

It is frustrating that a parliamentary maneuver allowed Congress to avoid dealing head-on with the issue of a \$15 minimum wage. But that it had to consider raising the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$15

suggests the power that this movement – and its core ideas – now manifest. The Fight for \$15 began in 2012 when two hundred fast-food workers walked off the job to demand \$15 an hour and union rights in New York City. Today, it is a global movement of fast-food workers, home health aides, childcare teachers, airport workers, adjunct professors, retail employees and other underpaid workers in over 300 cities on six continents. Unions are among this movement’s most important supporters and resources, but it also includes workers without union affiliations, members of worker centers, teenagers, seniors and immigrants with and without documentation, encompassing a diverse group of whites and people of color with men, women and individuals across the spectrums of sexual orientation and gender identity.

In its inclusive membership, its vision of broad and sweeping change, and its insistence that all workers should share in the wealth that they produce, we can recognize this movement’s kinship with the movement for the eight-hour day. Organizers of the Fight for \$15 proclaim on their website:

“When we first took the streets, the skeptics called us dreamers. They said a \$15 wage was ‘unwinnable.’ We didn’t listen. We organized and we fought for what we knew was right. We didn’t win these increases because we elected supportive politicians to office. We won because we made them support us...”

“We’ve already won raises for 22 million people across the country – including 10 million who are on their way to \$15 – all because workers came together and acted like a union.”

The workers rallying outside the McCormick Harvester Works on May 1, 1886, would have understood them perfectly. As we try to rebuild the U.S. labor movement in the third decade of the 21st century, in the wake of the pandemic and the killing of George Floyd, it is important that we hear this message, too.



Online screening of ‘Stand!’ will raise funds for labor nonprofit

The musical “Stand!” tells the story of the 1919 general strike in Winnipeg, and the movie adaptation was scheduled for wide release in 2020 – before the COVID-19 pandemic shut down movie theaters.

Now, the movie musical is available for streaming, and producers are teaming up with the St. Paul Labor Studies and Resource Center (LSRC), the nonprofit arm of the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation, to present “Stand!” as a fundraiser beginning May 1.

Viewers who purchase a \$20 “ticket” to stream the film through a link provided by the Regional Labor Federation will see \$12 of their ticket price go toward the LSRC, which helps union members in need across the Twin Cities’ east-metro area.

Find a link to purchase tickets at stpaulunions.org.

The film’s Hollywood director, Robert Adetuyi, and composer-producer Danny Schur will celebrate opening night of the film’s run May 1, with an interactive discussion after the 7 p.m. screening.

Attend your precinct caucus remotely

It may be an odd-numbered year, but there are still important elections in the east metro, including contests for St. Paul mayor and school board.

Union members are encouraged to attend their political party’s precinct caucuses, which are the first step in shaping the parties’ goals and determining their endorsed candidates. But caucuses are likely to be much different this year, as a result of the pandemic.

The St. Paul DFL will hold its caucuses remotely. Residents have until April 9 to register at saintpauldfi.org. After registering, participants will receive a postcard with information about how to participate.



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 22, 4:30 p.m.

To register for the Zoom meeting,
email cnocerini@stpaulunions.org

Dakota County Assembly

April 8, 7 p.m.

To register for the Zoom meeting,
email cnocerini@stpaulunions.org

Ramsey County Assembly

April 26, 6 p.m.

To register for the Zoom meeting,
email jkitto@stpaulunions.org

Washington County Assembly

April 28, 6 p.m.

To register for the Zoom meeting,
email jkitto@stpaulunions.org



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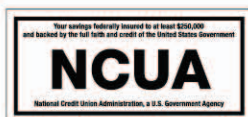


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Twenty ways the American Rescue Plan helps working people

Last month Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act (ARA), a \$1.9 trillion bill to help fight the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. President Biden signed the law March 11, directing significant assistance to the American people during this unprecedented crisis.

Here are 20 ways the American Rescue Plan will help working people:

1. Funding public health. The law provides \$48.3 billion for testing, contact tracing and personal protective equipment. The measure invests \$7.5 billion in vaccine distribution, \$5.2 billion in procurement of vaccines and supplies and \$10 billion to expanding domestic production of related supplies under the Defense Production Act.

2. Increasing workplace safety. The Labor Department will receive \$200 million for pandemic-related worker protection activities. Half will go to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to support enforcement and worker training in high-risk sectors, like meat processing, health care, correctional facilities and agriculture.

3. Relief for local governments. State, local, tribal and territorial governments will receive \$350 billion to cover budget losses and emergency spending during the pandemic.

4. Safe, open schools. The law invests \$125 billion in helping local authorities reopen public schools safely, address instruction loss and support students as they recover from the effects of the pandemic. It also provides \$39.6 billion to colleges, universities and their students, at least half of which must be spent on emergency financial-aid grants.

5. Stimulus checks. Individuals making less than \$75,000 and married couples making under \$150,000 are receiving \$1,400 in direct payments for themselves and dependents claimed on federal tax returns.

6. Extended unemployment benefits. Pandemic-related unemployment assistance set to expire on March 14 was extended for another six months. That includes the \$300 supplement to unemployment benefits. The American Rescue Plan also exempts from federal taxation the first \$10,200 of unemployment benefits received by taxpayers making less than \$150,000.

7. Relief for multiemployer pensions: See inset.

8. Fully subsidizing COBRA. The law subsidizes 100% of health care premiums for COBRA-eligible individuals who lost their jobs or had reduced hours for six months. The employer or health plan can claim a refundable tax credit against their Medicare payroll tax liability for the cost of the premiums.

9. Payroll support for the airline and aerospace industries. The law includes \$15 billion for the wages and benefits of employees of airlines and contractors in the airline industry and another \$3 billion to create a payroll support program for aviation manufacturers.

10. Transportation investments. Public transit agencies will receive \$30.4 billion in grant funds to cover operating expenses, including payroll costs and personal protective equipment. Amtrak will receive \$1.7 billion to recall furloughed workers and restore the frequency of long-distance routes.

11. Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). The law extends eligibility for the PPP forgivable loans to more tax-exempt groups, including certain labor organizations. A new grant program will make \$28.6 billion available to restaurants.

12. Addressing child poverty. The child tax credit will be expanded through 2021, with a maximum credit of \$3,600 for each child younger than 6 and \$3,000 for other children. It also makes the credit fully refundable.

13. Expanding tax credits for child and dependent care. The Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit will expand to \$4,000 per child or \$8,000 for two or more children, and it becomes fully refundable. It invests \$39 billion in child care, including \$15 billion in grants to states to help low-income families and essential workers.

14. Emergency paid leave for federal workers. A \$570 million Emergency Federal Employee Leave Fund will provide up to 15 weeks of emergency paid leave for civilian employees and postal workers, including those who have COVID-19, are caring for someone with COVID-19, are looking after children during virtual classes or are obtaining a vaccine.

15. Extending sick, family and medical leave tax credits. The law extends current tax credits through September 2021 and expands eligibility to include state and local governments.

16. Extending the employee retention tax credit. The current tax credit will run through Dec. 31,

2021, with a higher percentage of wages covered for severely distressed businesses.

17. Expanding the earned income tax credit. Both the credit percentage and phaseout thresholds will expand through 2021.

18. Veteran retraining. The law invests \$386 million to create a rapid retraining program for veterans who are unemployed because of the pandemic.

19. Housing assistance. The law directs \$21.6 billion toward emergency rental assistance to prevent evictions and \$10 billion to help homeowners avoid foreclosure. Another \$5 billion will fund emergency public housing vouchers; \$5 billion more will address homelessness.

20. Nutrition assistance. A 15% increase to monthly benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is extended through Sept. 30, 2021.

— This list was compiled by Kenneth Quinnell, who writes for the *aficio.org* blog.



Sen. Tina Smith met with Central States pensioners at the St. Paul Labor Center in March 2018 to discuss the Butch Lewis Act, which she fought to include in the latest round of COVID relief.

file photo

Smith celebrates pension rescue with Central States retirees

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

felt like he and other Central States pensioners had been through “six years of purgatory,” waiting to see if their earned benefits would be stripped or saved.

“This is bittersweet,” Kooren said. “We’ve been fighting so hard for so long, it’s hard to believe we even won.”

After the Great Recession, trustees for the troubled fund warned that, without federal relief, it would run out of money around 2025. Instead, Congress passed a law in 2014, authored by former Minnesota Rep. John Kline, allowing multiemployer pension funds to seek authorization to cut retirees’ benefits.

But retired Teamsters in Minnesota and across the Midwest pushed back hard against the proposed cuts.

Steve Baribeau, a Teamster retiree and co-chair of the Twin Cities-based group Save Our Pensions MN, remembered a hearing on the University of Minnesota campus, where people using “wheelchairs, walkers and canes” crowded into an auditorium to plead with a Treasury representative not to approve Central States’ proposed cuts.

“It was clear they could not go back to work, and they needed their pensions,” said Baribeau, who himself faced a 47% reduction in benefits

under the proposal.

After the Treasury Department rejected Central States’ rescue plan, retirees in every corner of the state began organizing, mobilizing and lobbying in support of the Butch Lewis Act, named in memory of a Teamster from Ohio who led the fight to protect pension benefits.

Smith has often said a 2018 meeting with retirees in Duluth, during her first weekend as a U.S. Senator, stuck with her, guiding her work on the issue. In her call with pensioners, Smith recalled a conversation with one woman in Duluth who said she had no backup savings.

“She said, ‘Senator, I saved, and I did everything right. But it’s hard for me to work right now. And I don’t have a Plan B. My Plan B is living under a bridge if I lose my pension.’”

As negotiations played out over the latest round of COVID-19 relief, Smith fought for inclusion of the Butch Lewis Act. The measure provides funds to prevent benefit cuts, but also to stabilize multiemployer pension funds that are struggling financially, keeping intact the federal Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation as a backstop for benefits.


Additionally, the Butch Lewis Act restores benefits to tens of thousands of retirees and workers whose pensions have been cut since Kline’s 2014 law took effect.



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AT&T workers and supporters from the labor community demonstrate outside a wireless store in West St. Paul, among three the company plans to sell off this spring. Workers in the stores are members of CWA Local 7250.

Union Advocate photo

Union pledges fight as AT&T plans more Twin Cities store closings

Local job cuts at AT&T will continue this spring, when the company plans to close three more wireless retail locations in the Twin Cities suburbs, according to Communications Workers Local 7250.

The union, which represents AT&T wireless sales reps, technicians and call-center employees in Minnesota, received official notification of the store closings last month.

AT&T closed nine retail stores across the state last summer, and has been shamelessly outsourcing and offshoring American jobs at a steady clip in recent years. The cuts have come despite AT&T's promise that then-President Trump's 2017 tax cut, which put billions into the company's coffers, would create new jobs.

That will never happen, AT&T retail sales consultant Larry Thompson said, unless executives feel pressured to live up to their promises. Thompson, a Local 7250 officer who works in the company's St. Paul store, said the union is at work on plans to exert that pressure.

"We all see the writing on the wall," he said.

A year ago, Local 7250 represented workers in 36 AT&T Wireless locations statewide. By June that total will have dropped to 24.

Each store employs five sales reps, on average. They typically earn around \$17 per hour in base pay, plus commission and benefits, Thompson said.

The company closed 250 stores nationwide last summer and, in October, warned of more cuts to

come. CWA Local 7250 President Kieran Knutson said the three Minnesota stores set to close this spring – in Apple Valley, Shakopee and West St. Paul – are among 95 closing nationwide in April and May.

CWA's nationwide contract with AT&T guarantees workers the opportunity to transfer to other wireless stores within a 30-mile radius or, if they meet the qualifications, to work from home as a customer-service consultant.

That softens the blow some. But Thompson said customer-service reps earn considerably less than sales reps without commission, and AT&T "has closed so many stores, we're running out of places to put people."

Stores slated to close typically reopen as nonunion "authorized retailers," selling AT&T products and services but not owned by the company. The products are the same, but the experience inside the store is different for both workers and customers.

"They typically reduce sales staff to the bone, and they don't offer the same kinds of benefits, wages and job security that our contract guarantees on top of the commissions," Knutson said.

"They don't operate with the same integrity," Thompson added. "Everybody who works at a corporate-owned store has had a negative experience with authorized retailers because of that."

"We get paid well, we do a great job and we keep our jobs. It's that simple."

– Michael Moore, UA editor

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Labor News in Review

BIDEN DELIVERS ON POSTAL PLEDGE

After a union-driven campaign delivered more than 400,000 signatures to President Joe Biden's desk, the president delivered, submitting three pro-Postal Service nominees to open seats on the USPS Board of Governors in February.

Now, the U.S. Mail Not for Sale campaign is bracing for a new fight: stopping Postmaster General Louis DeJoy's plot to permanently slow the delivery of first-class mail.

Already, a group of 50 Democratic lawmakers, which includes Minnesota's 2nd District Rep. Angie Craig, has begun pressuring Biden to take more decisive action to stop DeJoy's efforts to slow mail delivery and weaken the federal agency.

Three weeks after Biden announced his nominees to fill the board's open seats, the Democratic lawmakers sent a letter to Biden calling on him to remove the six sitting members of the Board of Governors immediately and replace them with nominees "of the caliber" of Bidens February nominees.

The nine-member board could then fire DeJoy, whose efforts to undermine the public postal service, including the removal of mail sorting machines from postal distribution centers in the runup to the 2020 election. The agency's shakeup drew protests across the country and forced DeJoy to slow his plans for reform.

"The Postal Service is in free fall," Craig and other lawmakers wrote.

Under DeJoy's leadership, they added, "the Postal Service was blatantly misused by President Trump in an unsuccessful gambit to influence a presidential election, the Postal Service is currently failing to meet its own service standards with historically low rates of on-time delivery, and conflicts of interest appear to be a requirement for service."

Biden's first three nominees to the Board of Governors, meanwhile, reflect postal unions' call for a diverse, pro-postal board. They include a former lawyer for the American Postal Workers Union, a voting rights advocate and a former deputy postmaster general.

APPRENTICESHIPS BACK ON TRACK

President Biden drew praise from Building and Construction Trades unions for moving quickly during his first month in office to strengthen apprenticeship programs, reversing the Trump administration's executive order creating Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Programs, or IRAPs.

Construction unions fought hard to keep IRAPs out of their industry, and they praised the president for closing the loophole for avoiding the rigorous standards of registered apprenticeship.

"IRAPs undermined training and safety standards across multiple industries and encouraged employers to lower apprentices' wages and benefits," said Lonnie Stephenson, president of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. "They were a direct threat to world-class training programs like the IBEW's."

In a meeting with Stephenson and other Building Trades leaders in February, Biden reaffirmed his support for expanding high-road apprenticeship programs and supporting pre-apprenticeship outreach efforts. After the meeting, Biden directed the Department of Labor to reinstate the National Advisory Committee on Apprenticeships, which brings together labor, industry and education leaders to identify ways to expand high-road apprenticeship.

"These executive decisions are the right ones to help strengthen America's working class today and tomorrow," said Sean McGarvey, president of North America's Building Trades Unions.

UNION DRIVE AT NONPROFIT COUNCIL

The Minnesota Council of Nonprofits is devoting time and resources to derailing its employees' union drive rather than granting their request for voluntary recognition. The new union, organized with support from the Minnesota Newspaper and Communications Guild, announced March 20 via social media that their request for recognition had been denied by Executive Director Jon Pratt.

"After consulting with an anti-union lawyer from (Nilan Johnson Lewis), Jon Pratt has decided to ignore our decision to form a union and is forcing us to go to an election," the union tweeted. "We all took a vote when we signed our (union authorization) cards... Repeating this process is a waste of time, money and an anti-union tactic."

Workers at MCN, the largest statewide association of nonprofits in the U.S., announced March 12 they had formed a union with the local News Guild-CWA affiliate. The announcement came two days after workers asked management for voluntary recognition during a biweekly staff meeting.

MCN employees have been organizing since late 2019, when frustration grew after policy changes and decisions about workload and new programming were made without input from staff, who are responsible for implementing them, organizers said in a statement.

Workers are asking MCN to increase their commitment towards racial justice, which has been part of MCN's strategic plan for years.

"It can be overwhelming for staff of color to endure the tepid gestures toward racial equity when we need bold and unapologetic efforts," Ileana Mejia, a public policy advocate at MCN, said. "Through a union, I will be able to bring my full self and voice and articulate the needs we as workers of color have and actually move forward on concrete issues that affect us."

MCN provides some benefits for staff, but workers believe the organization can do more to improve their working conditions, especially regarding issues of racial justice in the nonprofit sector. They are working to establish a model of collective decision making that ensures the value of each worker's time and labor is respected and justly compensated, and that invests in employee professional growth and satisfaction in the workplace.

"As a union what we fight for isn't just a suggestion. It's a negotiation; it is real power," policy fellow Abimael Chavez-Hernandez said.

Follow the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits Union on Twitter, and sign their petition calling on MCN to recognize their union, at twitter.com/mcnunion.

STILLWATER CO-OP HAS A CONTRACT

Workers at River Market co-op in Stillwater voted to approve their first union contract in February, winning holiday pay, wage increases and language enabling workers to bid for new positions.

The bargaining unit covers 37 co-op employees, including front-end, deli, produce and maintenance workers, as well as stockers, cooks and others. Workers began organizing their union in fall of 2019, and they voted to join United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1189 in mail-in balloting held last summer.

Bargaining began in July 2020, and workers focused on language that would ensure regular wage increases, job security and equitable treatment.



STATE WORKERS SET FOR TALKS

AFSCME Council 5, the union representing some 18,000 people employed by the State of Minnesota, has assembled delegates to begin contract negotiations with the state this spring. For the first time, negotiations will take place remotely.

Council 5 is the largest union representing state and local government employees, and Executive Director Julie Bleyhl told the 300 delegates to the contract assembly in a video address last month that it will take "people power" to win a contract that fairly invests "in the workers who keep our state functioning even in the hardest of times."

The state projects a \$1.6 billion budget surplus over the next two years. While that's good news, Bleyhl said, Council 5 will push hard for lawmakers to take up Gov. Tim Walz's proposal to raise taxes on Minnesotans earning more than \$500,000 and married couples earning more than \$1 million.

"We need to pass Gov. Walz's tax bill and his budget that invests in state agencies' budgets," Bleyhl said, adding that in contract talks the union will "focus our attention on the bread-and-butter issues that bring us all together, which is a fair and strong contract that treats you with dignity and respect that you deserve."

"The work you have done since the first day of your employment through the COVID-19 pandemic justifies you to be treated with respect and dignity."

TUITION FREEZE ON THE TABLE

Several Augsburg students stood with staff members as they fought for recognition of their union last fall. Now, union members are returning the solidarity.

The newly formed Augsburg Staff Union, organized with Office and Professional Employees (OPEIU) Local 12, entered its first collective bargaining session with university administrators March 9. In addition to proposals regarding better wages and health care, the new union presented proposals to make parental leave more equitable and a two-year tuition freeze for Augsburg students.

"From the beginning, we have always been committed to bringing staff together to make improvements that will benefit all of our Augsburg community," said Annie Chen, a program assistant and member of the union bargaining team. "Today we made good on that commitment and brought substantive solutions to the table that will help improve equity and reduce chronic burnout and turnover."

The union, which won recognition in an election earlier this year, includes 134 employees who work in a wide range of departments and offices at the school, including residence life, admissions, development, library services, athletics and more.

High turnover of staff has been a top concern. In a recent survey conducted by the staff union, 70% of respondents said they have worked at Augsburg 5 years or less and 76% said they do not see a clear path to advancing their careers at the school.

The union's wage proposal would increase minimum pay for Augsburg staff to \$48,500 per year, which research shows is the minimum living wage for a family of four with two incomes in Hennepin County. The union's health care proposal would provide full coverage for single employees and reduce premiums for family coverage.

The staff union also proposed a 2-year tuition freeze and health care benefits for all Augsburg students, a move Junior Class President Anna Cox said she appreciated. "Augsburg is only able to thrive when all of its community members are given the confidence that they are supported and given a seat at the table," Cox said. "The Augsburg staff union is a key part in including unheard voices."

St. Paul Park refinery picks fight with Trades, too

Teamsters aren't the only union members Marathon is looking to replace with nonunion, out-of-state workers at the St. Paul Park refinery. They aren't the only ones fighting back, either.

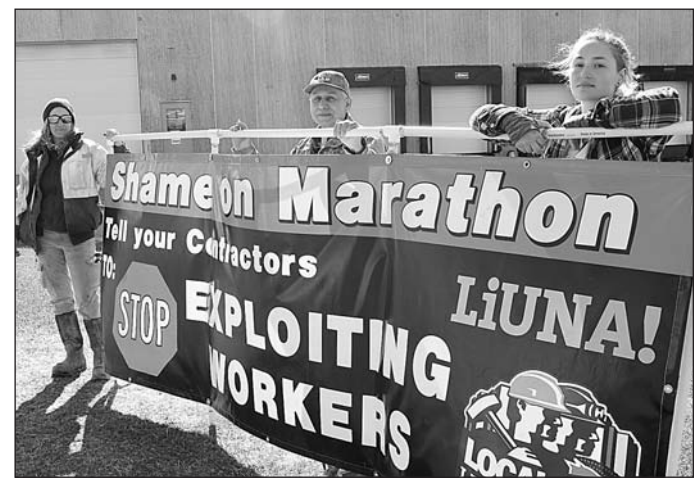
In March several Building and Construction Trades unions began setting up banners around the refinery, publicly shaming Marathon for turning its back on Minnesota contractors and tradespeople – and for putting the safety of St. Paul Park and surrounding communities at risk.

Although some of the banners are within shouting distance of locked-out Teamsters' picket lines, the two disputes are not connected. Both reflect a troubling disregard for community safety on Marathon's part, however.

"Marathon has been going down this pathway for a long time," Don Mullin, executive secretary of the St. Paul Building and Construction Trades Council, said. "They've been taking on efforts to be anti-organized labor because that's the way they do it in other states."

The dispute heated up this year after Marathon informed a union contractor there was no work forthcoming at the refinery, despite a scheduled maintenance turnaround beginning in late April. Turnarounds involve dangerous work, Mullin said, and can mean hundreds, even thousands, of jobs for tradespeople at a refinery like the one in St. Paul Park.

But rather than trust that work to highly skilled tradespeople who live



Members of Building and Construction Trades unions put up banners outside the Marathon refinery in St. Paul Park March 13, calling out the company for shifting work to low-road contractors that undermine area safety and wage standards. Clockwise from top-left are: Pipefitters Local 455's (L to R) Troy Heidrich, Dan Clark and Jacob Bear; Laborers Local 563's Sarah Monkey, Stephen Cruz and Jade Monkey, Sarah's daughter; International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 110's Matt Walker, Dick Schmitt and Nick Rosenberg; and Ironworkers Local 512's Ted DeSantell (L) and Nate O'Reilly.

Union Advocate photos

and work in the area, Marathon is cutting costs by bringing in workers from across the country.

Not only does that undermine Minnesota's labor standards, Building Trades unions say, it calls into question the safety of work being done at the refinery, located near homes and busi-

nesses in St. Paul Park and Newport.

Mullin accused Marathon of scraping the "bottom of the barrel" for tradespeople, bringing them in from Texas, Louisiana, Kentucky and elsewhere. He said unions are taking a stand because Minnesota deserves better, and he encouraged members of

the public to do the same.

"It's disgusting what Marathon is doing," Mullin said. "We need to write Marathon or call them and tell them this is the wrong way to handle their business. They need to be a good community partner. Right now they're not."

— Michael Moore, UA editor

Praise is not enough without action, Minnesota's essential workers tell lawmakers

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

and officer of Service Employees (SEIU) Local 26, added that while people may "call us essential workers, angels, superheroes who go to work every single day, nobody's taking care of us like we are human beings."

To truly support essential workers, Starkweather and others at the event said, state lawmakers should pass a bill that would provide Minnesotans with paid quarantine leave, retroactive to the start of the emergency. And workers like Starkweather, from communities hit hard by the pandemic, should get priority access to COVID-19 vaccination.

"The people who should be getting the vaccines are the ones I see dying in the ICU – the elderly and people from the BIPOC community," said Turner, who serves on the Biden administration's COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force. "It's as easy as that."

'Make this right'

The anniversary event, co-sponsored by the We Make Minnesota coalition and several local unions,

came as the debate over paid leave was heating up at the Capitol. Workers said the issue is a matter of justice for the working people, disproportionately women and workers of color, who could not work from home during the pandemic.

Gulad Amhed, who works at an Amazon warehouse in the metro area, said several of his coworkers have come to work even after being exposed to the virus because if they miss a paycheck, they fall behind on their bills.

"We don't get quarantine pay," said Amhed, who is active in the Awood Center, a local organization for workers from the East African immigrant community. "We are asking the government to pass that leave policy so we can take care of our health and also our families."



Starkweather

The Center for Disease Control recommends most people quarantine for at least 10 days after coming into close contact with someone who has COVID-19. But too many workers, like Amhed, don't get paid if they stay home from work, unless they have accrued enough paid time off.

But many workers are burning through their PTO and sick time during the pandemic trying to keep their coworkers – and the community – safe.

In a survey of MNA members, 71% of nurses who responded said they had given up PTO, sick time or paid hours for pandemic-related reasons. The average amount of lost time was 23 hours.

Health care workers "have isolated themselves in hotel rooms, basements, even backyards because, most of all, they can't afford to get sick," Turner said. "We have to make this right."

Measures in the Minnesota House (HF 41) and Senate (SF 331) would provide up to 100 hours of paid leave to workers excluded from a COVID-19 relief law passed by Congress last year.

Gov. Tim Walz has included funding for the measure in his budget proposal.

Remembering and fighting on

As essential workers press for action at the Legislature, the strain of 12 months working in uncertain and often-chaotic conditions remains with them.

Starkweather said she feels like she's aged nine years in the 12 months since the national emergency began. After contracting COVID-19 in January, she worried not only about her health and her family's health, but also about how she would pay the bills without going to work.

She also still mourns the loss of a fellow janitor with whom she worked side by side for three years on the overnight shift. He died in August after contracting the coronavirus.

"It's really painful to see that empty chair every single day in the building, to see the places he used to work, where he used to clean," Starkweather said. "It's really hard."

"I'm here to ask for something better for us."

Families stand with locked-out refinery workers as Marathon lockout drags on

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

the refinery March 11, showing the depth of community support behind nearly 200 union members who have been locked out by Marathon since Jan. 22.

"I stand behind him 1,000%," Christner said of her husband, Jason, an operator at Marathon. "I would be out here every night if I could, every day if I could. I told him do not back down. You've got to stand up for what you believe."

What Christner and his fellow Teamsters believe is that Marathon's contract demands, which the company has clung to in more than 24 bargaining sessions since November, would make workers inside the refinery less safe from workplace accidents – and put nearby communities at risk.

Members of Local 120's bargaining team say the company is dead set on shaking up staffing at the facility. Management wants to replace some skilled, highly trained, experienced union members with workers from lowest-bidder subcontractors, including firms from outside Minnesota.

That's a concern both for Teamsters and for their loved ones, many of whom already have grown accustomed to worrying about what happens inside the refinery.

Megan Christner said she remembers telling Jason not to apply for a job at the refinery in the first place because of the risks and hazardous materials involved. "Those are thoughts, when he goes to work, that I still have," she said.

"The company is penny pinching," Christner added. "They want to save a buck. But this is about lives, about our husbands and our friends and our family members coming home."

Amber Marlatt said the thought that Dave, an operator at the refinery, would feel less safe working under Marathon's contract proposals, is "heartbreaking and scary."

"We have two girls, 4 and 8, and they want their dad to come home," Amber Marlatt added. "I need him to come home. That's why we're not giving up."

Family members aren't the only outsiders with a stake in the standoff between Marathon and Local 120 over safety. The refinery is nestled between residential areas of Newport and St. Paul Park, along the banks of the Mississippi River.

In April 2018 an explosion rocked the Husky Energy refinery in Superior, Wis., and ensuing fires prompted local authorities to evacuate people living nearby. Two dozen people working in the facility were injured.

Among the Teamsters locked out by Marathon in St. Paul Park are several workers trained in fighting chem-



Amber Marlatt and Megan Christner picket with fellow spouses, friends and family members of locked-out Marathon refinery workers in St. Paul Park last month.

Union Advocate photos



Friends and family of locked-out refinery workers say the best way to support the union is by letting Speedway know gas from Marathon is putting their community at risk.

ical fires. Most fire departments in the area focus on training to fight residential fires, union members say, leaving the refinery poorly protected during the lockout – and potentially, if management gets its way in negotiations, for good.

It's no surprise, then, that the March 11 event drew community members to the picket line, support Christner called "refreshing to see."

"People are here because this is

where they live, and they don't want to see something potentially bad happen in their community," she said.

"Marathon is paying all these people to come in from out of state and work during this lockout, paying for their expenses, paying for their hotels. Meanwhile, their loyal workers are out here on the line, fighting for the community's safety. People appreciate that."

Four ways to support locked-out Teamsters

- Join them on the picket line.
- Spread the word that Speedway and Sam's Club are continuing to source their gas from Marathon's St. Paul Park refinery, despite safety risks posed by the lockout.
- Donate to the Marathon Refinery Teamsters Assistance Fund: www.workingpartnerships.betterworld.org
- Call or email Marathon exec Amy Macak, and tell her Minnesota safety matters. She's at 618-554-2062 or amacak@marathonpetroleum.com





Volunteers are pictured from St. Paul Regional Labor Federation food giveaways held in partnership with (clockwise from top-left) St. James AME Church and Rev. Stacey Smith, CWA Minnesota State Council and its affiliates, United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1189 and Teamsters Local 120. View volunteer photos from each event at facebook.com/SaintPaulRLF/photos.

ONE MILLION POUNDS

St. Paul unions' free food distribution efforts pass million-pound milestone

The St. Paul Regional Labor Federation and its non-profit Labor Studies and Resource Center (LSRC) have taken a leading role in connecting Minnesotans with fresh food available through a new USDA program this winter. And on March 20 in St. Paul Park, their efforts hit a major milestone: 1 million pounds of food distributed into local communities.

"With demand for emergency food assistance at an all-time high during the pandemic, it's been amazing to see local unions step up this winter to connect more Minnesota families with free, fresh food available through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farmers to Families Food Box program," Regional Labor Federation President Kera Peterson said.

The giveaway at the American Legion in St. Paul Park, just blocks away from the Marathon refinery where nearly 200 Teamsters have been locked out for two months, was the 29th coordinated by the Regional Labor Federation since October. Eleven more events were on the calendar for March, with more coming in April. (Find a list at stpaulunions.org or the federation's Facebook page.)

At each event, the nonprofit LSRC accesses a USDA truckload of food and partners with local unions, labor councils and community organizations to stage contactless distribution events. Each event requires dozens of volunteers to unload and distribute about 1,300 packages of fresh food, each weighing about 30 pounds.

"Logistically, we need forklifts, we need pallet jacks, and we need people who can operate them – that's what unions and our partner organization are providing," said Erica Dalager Reed, an AFL-CIO Community Services Liaison with the LSRC. "They're also providing the empathy and connection that all of us so sorely need."



Volunteers with District Council 82 of the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades load food into a pickup during a giveaway at their union hall in Little Canada. Union Advocate photos

Applications open for Nellie Stone Johnson Scholarship

Applications for the Nellie Stone Johnson Scholarship are currently being accepted for the 2021-2022 academic year. The scholarship is available to minority students from union families attending or planning to attend one of the State Colleges and Universities System schools.

Minnesota State consists of 30 colleges and 7 universities with 54 campuses throughout Minnesota, and offers thousands of programs.

To be eligible, a scholarship applicant must be a racial minority and a union member, or be the child, grandchild or spouse of a union member. Scholarships are awarded to both full-time and part-time students who will be attending a Minnesota State tech or community college or state university in the fall of 2021.

Find application information at nelliestone.org.

Considering a career in carpentry?

If you're interested in becoming a carpenter or know someone who is, check out APEX Industry Orientation, a career readiness program hosted by the Carpenters Training Institute in St. Paul this spring and summer.

Over five weeks, participants will get an introduction to major areas of the field of carpentry, including jobsite readiness and expectations, working hands-on with common hand tools and power tools, construction techniques, and an introduction to lifts.

The first training group tentatively is set to begin April 26. Trainings will run weekdays from 7 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Graduating participants will receive a full set of essential hand tools and a tool bag.

Applicants must have a high school diploma or GED and a driver's license. For more information or to register, contact Chelsea Hoops at choops@carpenterstraininginstitute.org or 651-289-5054.

East Side Freedom Library offers History Day help

Saturdays through April 24, the East Side Freedom Library is offering a National History Day "Zoom Room," where experienced mentors will provide guidance and access to resources for students engaged in History Day projects.

The "Zoom Room" will be open from 9:30 a.m. to noon each Saturday.

The library encourages students to make an initial contact by e-mail at info@eastsidefreedomlibrary.org. But students are also welcome to just show up in the "Zoom Room."

Learn more about History Day help and other offerings at the ESFL at eastsidefreedomlibrary.org/events.

Labor mourns Jerry Beedle

Longtime labor activist and St. Paul Regional Labor Federation delegate Gerald "Jerry" Beedle Jr. died March 15. He was 87.

Beedle was a proud union member during his career with the Carpenters. In retirement he remained active in the work of the Regional Labor Federation, the St. Paul Building and Construction Trades Council, the Minnesota State Retirees Council and labor's coordinated political programs.

Beedle resided in St. Croix Beach and often volunteered his time and talents in support of labor- and DFL-endorsed candidates in Washington County, where he put up and took down thousands of yard signs over the years.

He also volunteered in support of the United Way of Washington County East, and Beedle was a familiar face at labor and community blood drives, donating dozens of gallons of blood to the American Red Cross during his lifetime.

"Jerry worked tirelessly to make his community a better place, and his dedication to his family, friends and the labor movement were unwavering," St. Paul Regional Labor Federation President Kera Peterson said. "Undoubtedly, those of us who knew Jerry as a union brother and a friend will miss him."

Beedle was a member of Carpenters locals 87 and 322 and District Council 82 of the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades (IUPAT).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, no public funeral services for Beedle will be held. In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations in Beedle's honor be made to the St. Paul Labor Studies and Resource Center, c/o Brian Beedle, 1840 Queens Ave. S, Lakeland, MN 55043.



Wearing his Carpenters union hat, Jerry Beedle volunteered at the Valley Outreach Food Shelf in Stillwater during the National Association of Letter Carriers' annual Stamp Out Hunger food drive in May 2014. A resident of St. Croix Beach, Beedle was an active volunteer with the United Way of Washington County East and the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation's Washington County Labor Assembly. He died March 18 at the age of 87.

Union Advocate file photo



Minutes of the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation

MARCH 10, 2021

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

CREDENTIALS

Credentials were received from UFCW Local 1189 and USW Local 662. President Peterson administered the Oath of Obligation to those new delegates and alternates present on-line.

MINUTES

• **M/S/C TO APPROVE MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 10, 2021 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 10, 2021

COPE met in regular session remotely on the above date and was called to order by President Peterson at 5 p.m. Board members in atten-



dance were Beissel, Edwards, Engeldorf, Faber, Gibbons, Guertin, Jones, Hoerth, Luneburg, Madden, Markham-Kocurek, Mayer, McCarthy, McNamara, Michelson, Mullin, Naseth, Peterson, Roth, Schmidt, Seath, Slattey, St. Aoro, Vandassor, Varco and Wise. Excused were Angrimson, Beedle B., Beedle G., Fromeke, and Terry. Absent were DeRoy, Gorman, Hoppe, Krey, Lohmann, Ryan, and Sansom.

Items to come before this committee included:

• The American Rescue Act, PRO Act, HF 984 apprenticeship level training programs and SEIU contract bill were discussed.

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

EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES

MARCH 10, 2021

The Executive Board met upon conclusion of COPE with those same members present who are duly elect-

ed to this board.

Items to come before this board included:

• President Peterson administered the Oath of Obligation to new executive board members present on-line.

• **PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

President Peterson reported on the appointment of Diana Tastad-Damer, UFCW Local 1189 to replace Mike Dreyer, UFCW Local 1189 to the RLF Executive Board, USDA Farmers to Families Food box program, Union Advocate Newspaper, and the Stand Movie Fundraiser for the St. Paul Labor Studies and Resource Center.

• **ORGANIZING UPDATES/CAMPAIGNS:** The CWA Local 7250, Saint Paul Building and Construction Trades Council, Saint Paul Federation of Educators, SEIU Healthcare Minnesota, Teamsters Local 120, and USW gave an update on their organizing activities. Thank you to the Building Trades, Laborers, and all other unions for doing

the food drives.

• **M/S/C TO APPROVE THE APPOINTMENT OF DIANA TASTAD-DAMER, UFCW LOCAL 1189 TO THE SAINT PAUL REGIONAL LABOR FEDERATION EXECUTIVE BOARD REPLACING MIKE DREYER, UFCW LOCAL 1189.**

• **M/S/C TO MAKE A \$2,000 CONTRIBUTION TO THE GREATER TWIN CITIES UNITED WAY FOR THE 2020 AND 2021 CAMPAIGN.**

• **M/S/C TO SPONSOR THE 2020 AND 2021 LOANED LABOR REPRESENTATIVE PROGRAM OF GREATER TWIN CITIES UNITED WAY AT A COST OF \$1,000.**

• **M/S/C TO MAKE A \$500 CONTRIBUTION TO JEWISH COMMUNITY ACTION'S 19TH ANNUAL FREEDOM SEDER.**

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 2021. The report was accepted as read.

PRESIDENTS REPORT

President Peterson reported on the ProAct, American Rescue Plan, participation in volunteerism in the food distribution program. She also thanked members for fighting for workers. Solidarity is the name of the game right now.

STAFF/LABOR LIAISON REPORTS

• Erica Dalager Reed, AFL-CIO

Community Liaison, announced that labor's food distribution events account for 20% of the USDA Farmers to Families food boxes coming into the state. We have multiple events scheduled at unions throughout the metro, state and North Dakota. We will be having a Stand Movie Fundraiser for St. Paul Labor Studies and Resource Center on May 1, 2021.

• Jasmine Kitto, Political Organizer, reported on upcoming legislative activity. If you are interested in participating, please email Jasmine.

REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

• Michael Madden reported on behalf of the Chicago County Labor Assembly. Our next meeting will be the fourth Thursday of the month at 4:30 p.m. via zoom.

• Connie Beissel reported on behalf of the Dakota County Labor Assembly. Our next meeting will be the second Thursday of the month at 7:00 p.m. via zoom. If you would like to participate RSVP to Colleen.

• Theresa St. Aoro reported on behalf of the Ramsey County Labor Assembly. Increasing volunteer Project involvement was discussed. We are open to inviting speakers to the group to increase turnout.

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

Submitted by,
BERNADINE ENGELDORF
Secretary-Treasurer

Guest Commentary

Film stimulus would position state to capitalize on pent-up demand for new TV, movies

By Casey Lewis
SAG-AFTRA Twin Cities

Two things our country learned over the past devastating 12 months are that the American worker is the backbone of our economy, and we love to be told stories through movies and TV shows.

The pandemic forced this country to realize that day-to-day, week-to-week labor is what keeps our economy running strong. The success of our economy is not determined by what companies are being invested in or traded. It is determined by the labor that goes into the products and services those companies produce, but more importantly the health and safety of those doing the work. Take them out of the equation, and it all falls to pieces. Keep them healthy, safe and paid fairly, and they go out and keep the economy churning along by putting their hard-earned pay back into the system.

Americans have learned how to do some of our work remotely, but the strength of our success comes from people being able to come together safely to get the jobs done, be it in teaching, construction, transportation, food service or health care.

The other thing we all experienced together during our time apart was the joy and sense of normalcy we experienced watching movies and TV. Everyone's got their preferences while they pass the time, escape reality, laugh or cry or feel everything in between, or learn about themselves or something new. The past year we've used these stories to help keep us sane, either watching them ourselves or plopping the little ones down in front of the box so we could get work or something else done. Entertainment has helped keep us going.

You wouldn't be surprised to know making these products – movies and TV shows – also requires laborers to come together safely to get the job done. The entertainment industry, like so many others, took a massive hit during the pandemic. Writers are still churning out work. Producers are still able to line up deals. But with safety concerns it is logistically and financially difficult to bring workers together to produce content. It's being done, but at a trickle. As you would expect there is a huge back up in the production line.

So, what does all this have to do with the lives and work of working people in Minnesota?

Two state lawmakers, Rep. Dave Lislegard and Sen. David J. Tomassoni, recently introduced tax credit production incentive bills in the Legislature, HF 1975 and SF 1986. Several union groups are supporting the measure, including the Minnesota AFL-CIO, the Teamsters, the Stagehands (IATSE) and SAG-AFTRA, which presents performers and broadcasters.

The film stimulus bill is designed to encourage out-of-state production companies to come here to make their content, employing Minnesotans, buying Minnesota goods and services, and paying Minnesota taxes, while building a foundation for that industry to thrive here. In return, after these production companies have paid 100% of the Minnesota payroll and sales taxes incurred during production, they can receive up to 25% tax credit on qualified expenses. These out of state production companies can then sell their full-value tax credits to Minnesota-based companies at a discount.

It is literally a win for the production company, a

win for the Minnesota company getting the tax break, and a win for Minnesota, with the jobs and economic development created from the outside industry coming here to make their products – work that wouldn't have come to Minnesota but for the incentive.

It's important to note here that the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) released a study in 2019 showing that movie and TV production created 2.6 million jobs in the U.S., paying \$177 billion in wages. Of those 2.6 million jobs, two-thirds of the work was in "indirect industries," like construction, transportation, retail, hospitality and others.

Bringing jobs and economic development to Minnesota under the proposed film stimulus bill would be an enormous boost to our economic recovery after the pandemic. Production companies have a backlog of content they are waiting to produce, and as demonstrated these past 12 months, there is a demand for it. But we need to act now.

To learn how you can support bringing these good, middle-class and blue-collar jobs to Minnesota, go to www.sagaftra.org/TC. The legislative session is moving quickly, and we have a short window of opportunity.

– Casey Lewis is a Minnesota actor, member of the SAG-AFTRA Twin Cities Local Board and delegate to the Minneapolis Regional Labor Federation.



Casey Lewis



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