

## Exit Interview: Mary C. Turner

## 'I'm the one who brings reality'

As the Biden-Harris administration assembled its COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force in the weeks following the inauguration, there was one health care leader the president asked for by name: Mary C. Turner, president of the Minnesota Nurses Association.

Turner had moved Biden to tears during a press conference roundtable in November 2020, as she described what she and other nurses working in North Memorial Health Hospital's intensive care unit were experiencing at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Turner accepted Biden's appointment to the 12-member task force, but admits that initially she felt intimidated to be working among experts in public health and other fields, who were accustomed to high-level discussions of data and policy. "I'm just a bedside-care nurse, who the hell am I anyway?" she remembered thinking.

A phone call to Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith, chair of the task force, erased any lingering doubts.

"She said this to me," Turner recalled. "Out of all 12 people, you're the only one President Biden knows personally. He said that Mary Turner is so passionate about her patients, we've got to have her on the task force. Just be who you are, and you're going to be just fine."

The task force began meeting in late February and will deliver its final recommendations to President Biden later this month. Turner discussed the experience this interview, which has been edited for length.

**UA:** When the task force began meeting, vaccine production was just starting to ramp up. How has the scope of its work changed since then?

**MT:** We've had different topics, everything from vaccine hesitancy to the mental health of frontline workers and children. Then we did personal protective equipment, testing and what do we might do for

the next pandemic. We've had four subgroups that meet, too. It's been a lot of reading, a lot of meetings.

**UA:** What perspective or guidance has the task force delivered to the administration?

**MT:** The topic we started out with, vaccine hesitancy and immunizations, was cool because we had recommendations right away that we got to the president. Now, that's not to say every state used those suggestions, but I know we did here in Minnesota. One of the recommendations was for migrant workers, to actually go in vans and take the vaccines right to them. And going by zip codes, into neighborhoods – those were all recommendations that came in that first month.

We also were instrumental in pushing OSHA to implement emergency temporary standards (in June), which, unfortunately, only covered health care workers. In the final report, we are pushing not just temporary but permanently updated OSHA standards, rather than guidelines, for all workers.

**UA:** I imagine you're guided here not just by your experience as a nurse, but also as a labor leader.

**MT:** It's funny because one of the chairs of our committee is a hospital administrator. He's trying to say we don't want standards, we want guidelines. I say, 'No we don't! Guidelines aren't enforceable!' ...

If OSHA would have implemented standards instead of guidelines from the start, so many (workers) wouldn't have died. That's the reality of it. Guidelines give our employers free reign to just think of the bottom line and not necessarily keeping workers safe. If I do nothing else on this task force but to push through permanent, updated OSHA standards, I'll consider my work successful.

I'll be honest, though. It seems like whenever we run into a problem, especially in health care access, inevitably



MNA President Mary Turner serves on the Biden-Harris COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force. submitted photo

somebody will say, 'Mary, the only way that's going to be solved is Medicare for all or some kind of system where everyone has health care.' A lot of the issues with our pandemic are due to our broken health care system.

**UA:** How do you feel you've influenced the task force?

**MT:** I may not be the one who can bring all the fancy data, but what I am is the only frontline worker with eyewitness testimony. I'm the one who brings reality. They're all wonderful people, but I'm the only one who has been not just in my COVID ICU, but at the forums and picket lines and actions, where I have been with other frontline workers from different industries. I've heard all their stories. I am the dose of reality.

**UA:** What is it like to work closely with these experts, and then turn on the TV or log into social media and see disinformation on full blast?

**MT:** I think we all have a family member who's in denial and watches more YouTube than they should. But it's heartbreaking at the bedside for me. People coming in now, unvaccinated, it's so tragic. That's what all of that misinformation is doing. So it's almost a joy to go back to any meeting of the task force and be back to reality.



## The St. Paul Union Advocate

125th Year, No. 5, Issue 5451

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

October 2021

## Do Something!

## Check voting off your to-do list

Early voting is open for local elections happening across the east-metro area Nov. 2.

In addition to municipal and school board contests, local voters this fall will determine the fate of operating levies that provide critical funding for public school districts, as well as other ballot questions.

Find out what's on your ballot by using the Minnesota Secretary of State's online tool:

[pollfinder.sos.state.mn.us](http://pollfinder.sos.state.mn.us).

Voters may cast an early ballot by mail or in person at their local elections office. Learn more about early voting options available in your community – and registering to vote before Election Day – at [mnvotes.org](http://mnvotes.org).

The St. Paul Regional Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, has endorsed operating levies in two suburban school districts: the Roseville and Stillwater area schools.

The SPRLF also endorsed St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter for re-election, and four candidates for St. Paul school board: James Farnsworth, Halla Henderson and Uriah Ward, as well as Clayton Howatt, who is running in a special election.

Additional endorsements are likely to be announced this month. Find the most recent list at [stpaulunions.org/about-us/endorsements](http://stpaulunions.org/about-us/endorsements).



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



Art teacher Lindsay Walker greets returning students at Benjamin E. Mays elementary school with sidewalk chalk and confetti in one of several back-to-school celebrations staged by members of the St. Paul Federation of Educators across the city Sept. 9. "I am so excited to see the kids and get the year started," Walker said.

Union Advocate photo

## As driver shortage hampers start of school, unions point to low pay, benefits

By Michael Moore  
Union Advocate editor

A shortage of school bus drivers hampered the start of school in St. Paul and districts across the state this fall, but it came as no surprise to local union leaders, who have long pushed officials to head off the crisis with better wages and benefits, including unemployment insurance.

"We can fix this problem, but first we have to understand what caused the shortage," said Teresa Jakubowski, a driver in the Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan district. "If we want to get out of this mess, it has to be done with higher wages, better benefits and access to unemployment benefits."

A steward with Local 284 of

the Service Employees International Union, Jakubowski spoke with reporters during a virtual press conference arranged by her union as school districts scrambled to address the driver shortage.

In the St. Paul Public Schools, administrators abruptly changed start times the week before

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 9)

## Newly elected AFL-CIO officers make history

The nation's largest labor federation has its first female president, after members of the AFL-CIO Executive Council voted Aug. 20 to elect Liz Shuler to the post.

Shuler replaced the late Richard Trumka, who served as president from 2009 until his unexpected death Aug. 5.

"I am humbled, honored and ready to guide this federation forward," Shuler said after her election. "I believe in my bones the labor movement is the single greatest organized force for progress."

A member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Shuler

previously worked closely with Trumka as the AFL-CIO's secretary-treasurer.

To fill that role, Executive Council members elected Fred Redmond, international vice president of the United Steelworkers. Redmond is the first African American to hold the federation's second-highest office.

Redmond pledged support for Shuler's vision to "build on the labor movement's legacy of change, writing a new chapter that brings the promise of union membership to workers across this country."

Executive officers' terms run through



Liz Shuler



Fred Redmond

June 2022, when the AFL-CIO will hold a delegate convention in Philadelphia.

## Frustration builds as state lawmakers blow deadline for plan to pay frontline workers

By Michael Moore  
Union Advocate editor


Essential workers last month took aim at Republican members of a legislative work group tasked with delivering \$250 million to Minnesota's essential workers, accusing them of holding up the process in an attempt to pit frontline workers against each other.

"We went to work for the last 18 months," said Rachel Hanneman, a member of the Minnesota Nurses Association who has worked in COVID-19 intensive care units at multiple hospitals. "And now we are asking you to go to work for us."

Hanneman and other union members spoke during a press conference Sept. 15, nine days after the work group's deadline for delivering a plan to the Legislature for distributing \$250 million in compensation for essential workers, allocated in the state budget passed in July.

Lawmakers on the work group missed the deadline because they could not agree on an inclusive path forward, with Republican members demand-

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 9)






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## Go Figure

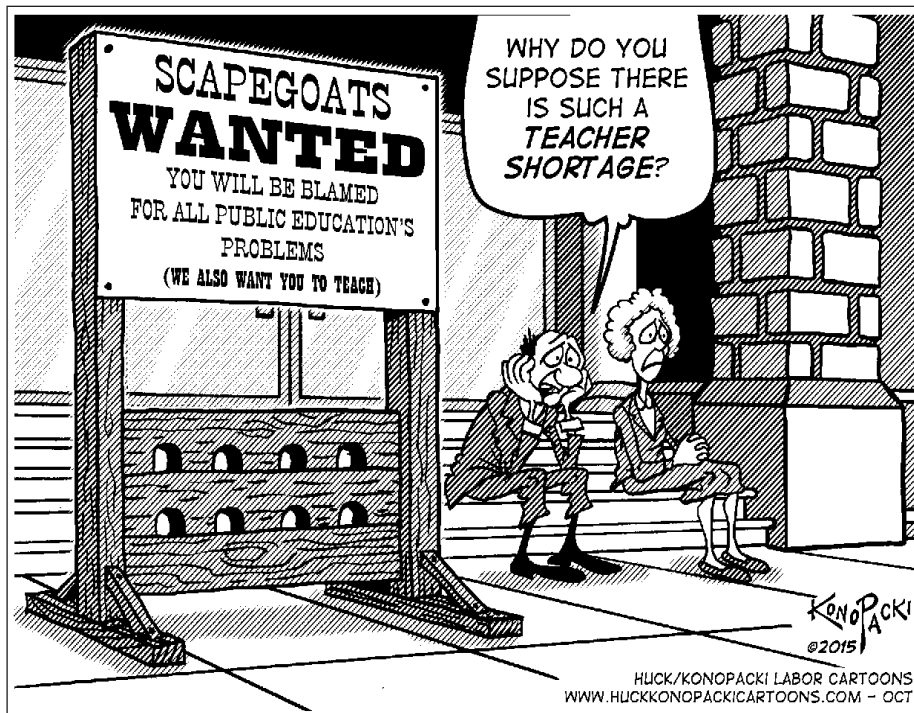
**68%** Share of Americans polled by Gallup who said they approve of unions, the highest rating since 1965

**77%** Union approval rating among young adults

**72%** Union approval rating among those with household incomes less than \$40,000

**9%** Share of U.S. adults who are members of a labor union

Source: Gallup.com, Sept. 2, 2021



## Labor Voices: Jacquelyn Kelly

### Investment, worker voice critical to addressing care crisis

What we decide to do today will create the foundation on which our families will build their tomorrows. This is true for many parts of life, but it is especially true in the care field. As a home care worker and the mother of a child who needs care support, this issue is personal for me. As a leader in my union, SEIU Healthcare Minnesota, I've come to learn that my fight is more common than I ever could have imagined.

For most of our history, home care workers (also sometimes known as Personal Care Attendants or PCAs) have been paid the minimum wage (or less) with little or no benefits. In Minnesota that was the case before we formed our union, winning what is still the largest union election in Minnesota history and bringing together over 25,000 caregivers, mostly women and people of color.

From when before we had our union until now, we've seen wages almost double (we will get to \$15.25 in our current contract) and now have paid sick time, paid holidays, training and much more. But we still have so much work to do.

Like most parents of teens who are quickly coming of age, I often think about my child's future and transition into independence. As a home care worker for my 16-year-old son, I spend every day working to support his independence, but also worry about the systems we have in place to support him if I am not able to support him.

Even before COVID there was a "care crisis" that meant there were close to 10,000 open positions because people didn't want to do this physically and emotionally challenging work for the meager pay and benefits. In many cases, like mine, a family member provides the care, but thousands of people hire someone they don't know to provide this intimate level of care. If this was you or your loved one, you'd want workers who feel respected and like their work had value, wouldn't you?

I know my family will likely need home care workers for that independence to be possible, and I worry a lot about how that is going to be possible if we don't have the care workers we need. The care industry is

**"We need to pivot from treating care as a problem for individuals and toward understanding it as a shared experience across society."**

– Jacquelyn Kelly



one of the fastest growing jobs in the country. I worry that if I can't offer a living wage, benefits and a viable long term career path, caregivers will choose to move into other employment situations that provide more stability and less risk.

That's why it is critical that congress pass President Biden's Better Care, Better Jobs act, which would see a historic \$400 Billion dollar investment in care work. This would create over a million jobs and help workers in non-union states with tools to organize into a union.

An investment in home care is not only supporting care workers, but also our disabled and elderly friends and neighbors who simply want to be able to live safely at home. An investment in making sure all people have the right to choose the life they want for themselves. We need to pivot from treating care as a problem for individuals and toward understanding that it is a shared experience across our society.

We need to reckon with the fact that through most of our history our country has seen care work done by women, and especially women of color, as not real and valuable work. Care workers have been left out and left behind for too long. After COVID, I hope we all know better now. Our communities, our families, our economy, we are all depending on the women doing this work to keep all of our lives going, and what could be more valuable than that?

– Jacquelyn Kelly is a home care worker from Oakdale and member of SEIU Healthcare Minnesota.

## 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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Erica Dalager Reed, Liaison



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# TOGETHER AGAIN ON LABOR DAY AT THE FAIR

It's a tradition that began over a decade ago: the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation celebrates Labor Day with a marching unit in the Minnesota State Fair's daily parade through the fairgrounds. With the return of the fair this year, the RLF and its affiliate unions renewed the tradition, albeit in a scaled-back way. In some years the union delegation has exceeded 200 people, but organizers capped the number at 75 this year to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread.

Still, the marching unit kept the "labor" in the fair's Labor Day festivities. As in previous years, local union members carried their union banners and wished fairgoers a happy Labor Day. A truck decked out in red, white and blue carried Uncle Sam as a tribute to the American worker. And the Twin Cities Labor Chorus sang traditional labor anthems.

New this year, many union members carried signs urging support for the Richard L. Trumka PRO Act, federal legislation that would make it easier for working people who want a union to form one and bargain for improved wages, benefits and working conditions. Named after the former AFL-CIO president, who died suddenly in August, the PRO Act will hold corporations accountable for union-busting and strengthen democracy in the workplace; protect workers' rights to form and join unions, including in new industries like Big Tech; and repeal racist "right to work" laws. Learn more about the measure online at [aflcio.org/pro-act](http://aflcio.org/pro-act).



The Labor Day parade is a family affair for members of Sheet Metal Workers Local 10. Young children of union members rode in the bed of Local 10's pickup truck during the parade.



Uncle Sam, played by Minnesota Nurses Association organizer Matthew Parris, salutes the American worker as part of the Labor Day parade unit.



Members march behind the banner of Branch 28 of the National Association of Letter Carriers, which is based in St. Paul.



Each year on Labor Day, the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, organizes a marching unit in the Minnesota State Fair's daily parade through the fairgrounds. Carrying the federation's banner this year were President Kera Peterson and Brian Beedle, vice president for Washington County. The federation brings together over 100 affiliated unions representing nearly 60,000 members who live and work in Chisago, Dakota, Ramsey and Washington counties. Learn more about the federation and its work at [stpaulunions.org](http://stpaulunions.org).

Union Advocate photos



Union members took advantage of the large crowd of fairgoers to raise awareness of the PRO Act, federal legislation that would make it easier for workers to form unions – and harder for corporations and bosses to bust them.

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





# Minutes of the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation

SEPTEMBER 8, 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, Gibbons, Guertin, Luneburg, Madden, Markham-Kocurek, McNamara, Peterson, Sansom, Slattery, St. Aoro, Tastad-Damer, Terry, and Vandassor. Excused were Engeldorf, Michelson, Schmidt, and Varco. Absent were Beedle, Gorman, Hoppe, and Ryan.

## MINUTES

**M/S/C TO APPROVE MINUTES OF JULY 14, AND AUGUST 11, 2021, AS PUBLISHED IN THE UNION ADVOCATE NEWSPAPER AFTER THE ACTING SECRETARY-TREASURER NOTES THERE ARE NO ADDITIONS OR CHANGES CALLED FOR.**

## COMMITTEE ON POLITICAL EDUCATION (COPE) MINUTES SEPTEMBER 8, 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 attendance were Beissel, Edwards, Gibbons, Guertin, Hoerth, Krey, Luneburg, Madden, Markham-Kocurek, McNamara, Peterson, Sansom, Slattery, St. Aoro, Tastad-Damer, Terry, Vandassor and Varco. Excused were Engeldorf, Michelson, Schmidt and Wise. Absent were Beedle, DeRoy, Gorman, Hoppe, Lohmann, Mayer, Naseth, and Ryan. Items to come before this board included:

- The National AFL-CIO has approved the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation's request to conduct the endorsement process remotely due to COVID restrictions.
- The Ramsey County Labor Assembly requested consideration of granting Labor Endorsement of the Roseville ISD 623 Operating Levy
- The Washington County Labor Assembly requested consideration of granting Labor Endorsement of the Stillwater ISD 834 Operating Levy
- President Peterson reported on the number of events the RLF had to support the Pro Act over the last month as this continues to be a national priority.
- **M/S/C TO RECOMMEND LABOR ENDORSEMENT OF ROSEVILLE ISD 623 OPERATING LEVY AND STILLWATER ISD 834 OPERATING LEVY.**

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

## EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES SEPTEMBER 8, 2021

- 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.** The President reported on appointing Stacy Vanderport, Mounds View Education Association, to replace Nick Faber who retired; tenth annual Labor Bowl raised over \$30,000, thanks to everyone who made it a success; and the Labor Day Parade at the Minnesota State Fair.
- **M/S/C TO APPOINT STACY**

## Well stocked for the school year ahead



Educators in the Chisago Lakes School District check out the trove of school supplies donated by union members active in the Chisago County Labor Assembly. Assembly Chair Michael Madden and St. Paul Regional Labor Federation organizer Colleen Nocerini delivered the supplies Aug. 26, just in time for the start of the new school year. Supplies were purchased with funds raised by the assembly from affiliated unions and their members. Pictured (L to R) are Laura Schmitz, Kennedy Wetzel, Alyssa Bjelland, Samantha Vittori, Madelyn Audette, Tracy Kaiser, Shannon Wood, Michael Madden, James Green, Julie Robideau, Colleen Nocerini and Bayley Thauwald. Meetings of the Chisago County Labor Assembly are open to all members of local unions that affiliate with the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation, AFL-CIO. Learn more about the assembly and its work at [stpaulunions.org](http://stpaulunions.org).

submitted photo

## VANDERPORT, MOUNDS VIEW EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, TO REPLACE NICK FABER'S TERM.

- ORGANIZING UPDATES/CAMPAIGNS: AFSCME, BCTGM, IUPAT and SEIU gave an update on their organizing activities.
- The following resolution: **RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF UNITED WAY CAMPAIGNS** WHEREAS: Union members are first and foremost members of their community, they are caring individuals who believe in giving back to our communities, and who also believe in the power of collective action and standing together to make our communities better places to live, work and retire; and WHEREAS: The partnership between Labor and United Way is about advancing the common good and it is through this partnership that the AFL-CIO Community Services Liaison Programs in Duluth, Minneapolis, and Saint Paul were formed. These programs provide services to our unions and their members in times of lay-off, plant closings and other life changing events; and WHEREAS: Our historic partnership with United Way, which started more than 75 years ago, continues to grow, and expand through our shared commitment of focusing on education, jobs, and safety net issues in our community; now, therefore be it RESOLVED: That the 55th Constitutional Convention of the

Minnesota AFL-CIO go on record to urge all unions and their members to support their local United Way Campaigns in our state and distribute this resolution and letter of support to all affiliates of the Minnesota AFL-CIO.

## M/S/C TO RECOMMEND SUPPORT OF RESOLUTION TO THE RLF DELEGATION

- REQUESTS:
  - **M/S/C FOR THE RLF TO BE A GOLD SPONSOR AT A COST OF \$500 TO THE CTUL'S 2021 ANNUAL GALA BEING HELD ON THURSDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2021.**
- There being no further business to come before this board, the meeting adjourned.

## REPORT OF THE TREASURER

Acting Secretary-Treasurer Sansom reported on the financial status of the Federation as of August 2021. The report was accepted as read.

## PRESIDENTS REPORT

President Peterson thanked everyone who made the St. Paul Labor Studies and Resource Center's Tenth Annual Labor Bowl a success and the Labor Day Parade at the Minnesota State Fair.

## STAFF/LABOR LIAISON REPORTS

- Erica Dalager Reed, AFL-CIO Community Services Liaison, reported that LSRC's Tenth Annual Labor Bowl raised over \$30,000 to benefit the

program, the Labor Day Parade had 75 participants in our marching unit and blood drives.

- Colleen Nocerini, Political Organizer, gave a political update.

## REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

- Michael Madden reported on behalf of the Chisago County Labor Assembly. We received donations from member unions to teachers for the school year. Our next meeting will be the fourth Tuesday of the month at 6 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 p.m. via zoom.
- Kera Peterson reported on behalf of the Washington County Labor Assembly. Our next meeting will be the fourth Wednesday of the month at 6 p.m. via zoom.
- Theresa St. Aoro reported on behalf of the Ramsey County Labor Assembly. Our next meeting will be the fourth Tuesday of the month at 6:00 p.m. via zoom.

## NEW BUSINESS

President Peterson called for a floor vote to grant labor endorsement for Roseville ISD 623 Operating Levy and Stillwater ISD 834 Operating Levy, and to approve the Resolution in Support of United Way Campaigns to the 55th Constitutional Convention of

## Endorsement notice

At the Oct. 13 delegate meeting, the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, may consider recommendations from its labor assemblies to issue endorsements in local elections and ballot measures.

For information on the endorsement process, call 651-222-3787.

the Minnesota AFL-CIO.

**M/S/C TO GRANT LABOR ENDORSEMENT FOR ROSEVILLE ISD 623 OPERATING LEVY, STILLWATER ISD 834 OPERATING LEVY, AND TO APPROVE THE RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF UNITED WAY CAMPAIGNS TO THE 55TH CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION OF THE MINNESOTA AFL-CIO.**

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

Submitted by,  
**MARY SANSOM**  
Acting Secretary-Treasurer



## Labor Events

## CTUL to hold fundraising gala

CTUL will hold its annual gala Thursday, Oct. 21, with both virtual and in-person programming in its parking lot at 3715 Chicago Ave. in Minneapolis, home to one of the Twin Cities' best public murals.

CTUL stands for Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en la Lucha, or Center for Workers United in the Struggle. The worker center offers opportunities and support to workers in low-wage, frequently exploitative industries like fast food, retail cleaning and non-union construction. Through worker-led initiatives, CTUL members have recovered over \$2 million in unpaid wages and damages, and have won long-term changes – including pathways to forming a union – for over 5,000 low-wage workers.

Learn more about the gala – which will feature a program, music and dancing – and how to support CTUL's work online at [ctul.net](http://ctul.net).



## Young workers looking to build power

The Minnesota AFL-CIO is launching an initiative to engage young workers in efforts to strengthen worker power statewide. As a first step, organizers are asking young workers interest in participating to fill out a short survey online at [aflcio.mn/yworkerpower](http://aflcio.mn/yworkerpower).

## Freedom Library tackles sports, activism

Dave Zirin, who writes about the intersection of sports and activism for The Nation and other publications, will discuss his new book, "The Kaepernick Effect," at the East Side Freedom Library in St. Paul Sept. 26.

The University of Minnesota's Mi'Chael N. Wright, a PhD student and former Division I athlete who organized support for taking a knee in 2016, will join Zirin at the event.

The event is a fundraiser for the ESFL and will support the independent, nonprofit library's equity work in community. Find ticket information at [EastSideFreedomLibrary.org/Zirin](http://EastSideFreedomLibrary.org/Zirin).



The "world famous" Teamster horses, Thunder and Lightning, give carriage rides outside Local 120's union hall in Blaine.

## Teamster horses bring union's history to life

Before they were driving 18-wheelers and UPS trucks, Teamsters drove horses. The union's name refers to the people who drove a team of horses pulling a wagon, and the Teamsters' logo still features two horses, Thunder and Lightning.

It's a history lesson Teamsters Local 120 brought to life Aug. 25 at its union hall in Blaine, where Thunder and Lightning (or their descendants, at any rate) made a guest appearance, offering wagon rides to members and their families.

Shawn Gordon, a member of Teamsters Local 41 from Kansas City, Mo., travels across the country with Thunder and Lightning as part of his nonprofit organization dedicated to raising awareness of the Teamsters' early history.

Gordon's nonprofit has decked out an old freight wagon with benches that are perfect for leisurely rides, and he sits in the driver's seat, dressed like a Teamster might have around the time of the union's founding in 1903.

"The wagon you're in is a little fancier than they would've used back then, but it's a freight wagon," Gordon told riders in Blaine. "And this is the original way people got their goods."

"We're trying to preserve that, to keep our heritage alive and remember where we came from as a union. At the same



Shawn Gordon gives children a quick lesson in the driver's bench. Several Local 120 members brought their families to the hall for carriage rides, food and fellowship. Union Advocate photos

time, we want to try and get younger people engaged again, to use the past to reflect our future."

– Michael Moore, Union Advocate editor



## 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

Oct. 26, 6 p.m.  
To register for the Zoom meeting,  
email [cnocerini@stpaulunions.org](mailto:cnocerini@stpaulunions.org)

### Dakota County Assembly

Oct. 14, 7 p.m.  
To register for the Zoom meeting,  
email [cnocerini@stpaulunions.org](mailto:cnocerini@stpaulunions.org)

### Ramsey County Assembly

Oct. 26, 6 p.m.  
To register for the Zoom meeting,  
email [jkitto@stpaulunions.org](mailto:jkitto@stpaulunions.org)

### Washington County Assembly

Oct. 27, 6 p.m.  
To register for the Zoom meeting,  
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## Report: Unionized women out-earn women in non-union jobs

A report issued last month by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research confirms the powerful impact union membership has on women working in the U.S.

The report, Stronger Together: Union Membership Boosts Women’s Earnings and Economic Security, shows that in many key economic areas, union membership pays significant dividends to women, including higher wages and a narrower wage gap between women and men.

It also details how these benefits often mean the difference between making rent and housing insecurity for women and their families.

Benefits of union membership for women workers, according to the report, include:

- Higher wages. Women covered by a union contract earn on average \$195, or 22.6%, more per week than non-unionized women.
- Narrower wage gaps. Women covered by a union contract earn 87.3 cents for every dollar paid to union men compared to non-unionized women who earn 82 cents for every dollar paid to non-unionized men.
- Making rent. The difference in the median pay for women covered by a union contract compared to non-union-

ized women translates to 81 percent of annual median rent costs nationally.

In 43 states, at least half of the yearly average rent costs could be paid with the yearly union wage advantage, according to the report. And in 12 states, the union wage advantage pays for a full year or more of average rent.

The report also confirmed that less union power means lower wages for all workers. In states with restrictions on the ability of unions to bargain on behalf of workers – so-called “right-to-work” states – wages are lower than in other states. That’s the case regardless of gender and union membership status.

AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler, who in August became the first woman elected to the labor movement’s highest-ranking office, called the study compelling proof of the positive impact unions have on women’s lives.

“For America’s workers who join together and have a union voice on the job, the higher wages, better benefits and safety protocols are undeniable,” said Shuler, who serves on the IWPR’s leadership board.

“This new report reaffirms that being in a union has a direct and significant impact on equity for working women and their families – from improved day-to-day financial stability to retirement

security. We want all working people to have the benefits of a union.”

In every state, the full-time weekly earnings of women covered by union contracts are higher than the earnings of women not represented by unions, but the advantage varies greatly by state.

In Minnesota, the weekly union wage advantage for women is, on average, \$99. That’s roughly an 11% advantage over their nonunion counterparts.

The advantage was largest for women in states like Wyoming, Rhode Island, and Alaska, where the wage advantages exceeded 40%.

Union membership also translates into improved employee benefits for women workers, according to the report.

The percentage of women covered by a union who participate in a pension plan, 62.1%, is almost twice as large as women who are not unionized.

Approximately four in five women represented by a union have employer- or union-provided health insurance coverage, whereas health insurance coverage among non-unionized women is only 70.8%.

While it is well-known that the economic “she-cession” has left women in every state struggling with housing insecurity. As many as one in five women have reported being behind on their

housing payments because of the pandemic in Alabama, New York, and Mississippi.

Nationally, the median cost of renting an apartment in the United States is 30.5% of the median woman’s salary. But for women covered by a union, rent is only 25.4% of their median earnings. For non-unionized women, it rises to 31.9%.

“When it comes to the economic security of American families, the data is clear: Union membership means better wages and narrower gender wage gaps across the board,” said C. Nicole Mason, president of the IWPR. “For women, that can mean the difference between making rent and the fear of eviction, between feeding their family and child hunger.”

The report offers several policy recommendations for extending economic security to more women in the American workforce. They include ensuring gender and racial equality are central to all economic policies, supporting policies that increase collective bargaining and protect workers (like the PRO Act), improving women’s access to jobs with strong union representation and increasing women’s representation in union leadership.

Download and read the report online at iwpr.org.

## Union leader: ‘This is not a bus driver shortage; this is a bus driver crisis’

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

school was to begin. Families in several districts reported finding out they would temporarily need to arrange transportation to and from school for their children.

Teamsters Local 320, which represents transportation workers in the Minneapolis Public School, said the bargaining unit, which typically includes about 170 workers, was down to 90.

“This is not a bus driver shortage; this is a bus driver crisis,” Local 320 Communications Director Gus Froemke said. “People are on the edge.”

### Split shifts, limited hours

Typical wages for drivers are \$17 to \$20 per hour, according to Local 284 President Kelly Gibbons, who drove bus for 18 years in the West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Area Schools.

But driving bus is part-time work, and the split between morning and afternoon shifts makes it hard for bus drivers to supplement their income with a second job. Drivers often must build up seniority to bid for additional duties, like field trips and extracurricular routes, Gibbons added.

“Sometimes a beginning bus driver can’t get more than four hours a day,” she said. “Who can live on four hours a day?”

“You come in the morning, and you come in the afternoon. It’s split up, there’s down time in between and sometimes there’s not enough time even to go home. Some drivers are just sitting in the

transportation center, not getting paid.”

In the Rosemount district, Jakubowski said, drivers see just four full paychecks per year, with scheduled school breaks, cancelations and holidays cutting into the rest. Drivers able to work in the summer see their hours cut in half, she said.

### Long fight for UI

Access to unemployment insurance would help retain drivers through the lean times, advocates said.

While construction workers, landscapers, resort workers and other seasonal employees are eligible for unemployment, hourly school employees are not, according to the state’s unemployment statute, because they have a “reasonable assurance” of returning to work.

Earlier this year, the DFL-controlled House included language reversing that policy in its jobs bill, but a lobbying group for school districts succeeded in keeping it out of the Senate bill. The measure never made it to Gov. Tim Walz’s desk.

Gibbons did not mince words in pinning partial responsibility for the transportation crisis facing local districts on the administrators and lawmakers who blocked the unemployment measure.

“This is a discriminatory law, and it’s time to make real positive change for the workers, for the kids and for the school districts we represent,” Gibbons said. “Our members were on the front line every single day since this pandemic started. Our members have gotten sick.



SPFE members roll out the red carpet for students returning to Benjamin E. Mays elementary on the first day of school. Union Advocate photo

They’ve had long-term effects of COVID. Some have died.

“We need to make sure they are respected, valued and paid.”

### Pandemic makes things worse

Bus driver shortages plagued school districts before the pandemic, but COVID-19 exacerbated the problem everywhere. In a survey of school transportation providers conducted earlier this year by three industry groups, 78% of respondents indicated the shortage is getting “much worse” or “a little worse.”

Jakubowski said many drivers who left her district were people who previously retired from a different career and had taken jobs as drivers to keep busy

and serve their community. But when the pandemic hit, the risks of continuing to drive outweighed the benefits.

“We’ve been relying on (previously retired workers) for a long time, and we shouldn’t be,” Jakubowski said. “We need to bring in new workers who are younger, who will be there for a lot longer.”

That means anteing up for higher wages and better benefits.

“The people who safely drive your children to and from school should be valued, full-time employees with a livable wage,” Jakubowski said. “That would allow us to draw new employees from all age groups.”

## Painters picket Prospect Park hotel project, citing area standards

Members of the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades District Council 82 set up an area-standards picket Sept. 9-10 at the Home2 Suites construction site, located on University Avenue in the Minneapolis neighborhood of Prospect Park.

Union painters said an out-of-state subcontractor, Painting America Inc., has been undercutting area standards for wages and benefits in the craft at this and other projects across the Twin Cities – and they’ve had enough.

Francisco Altamirano, a field representative for the union, said the general contractor, Richfield-based Weis Builders, has increasingly been working with Painting America, despite going union in other crafts.

To blunt the Painters’ picket, Weis opened two entry gates on the project, one for union workers and one for non-union workers. Legally, the union could picket only outside the non-union gate, which Weis set up on a side street, out of sight for anyone driving along University Avenue.

The double-gate system also gave bosses the ability to fine union members who didn’t show up for work, as they weren’t technically crossing a picket line.



District Council 82’s area-standards picket at a Weis project draws support from other Building Trades unions. Union Advocate photo

Still, members of several other Building Trades unions honored the Painters’ picket. They included the Cement Masons, Electrical Workers,

Elevator Constructors, Heat and Frost Insulators and Sprinklerfitters.

The area-standards picket is part of an ongoing campaign to uphold wage

and benefit standards in their industry, while also pushing back against employers who illegally misclassify their workers as independent contractors.

## Republicans on pandemic pay work group drag feet in apparent effort to divide workers

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

ing that the fund be administered in a way that would favor health care workers – and exclude many workers who kept the state running after the outbreak.

That’s not sitting well with many union members, including health care workers like Carmen Brown.

“I am a health care worker, and as a health care worker I am offended that Minnesota Senate Republicans are holding up paying all frontline workers bonuses,” said Brown, who works at Hennepin Healthcare and serves as president of AFSCME Local 977, representing clerical and general workers at the hospital. “To exclude anyone, that’s to say that you’re not part of the team.”

Workers potentially excluded if Republicans get their way include janitors and security officers, child care workers, school staff, meatpackers and retail workers – the same frontline workers celebrated as heroes for facing new, unknown risks after the pandemic hit in March 2020.

Many have been able to work from home during the pandemic. For essential workers, staying home to quarantine, care for family members, wait for test results or recover from illness has meant losing wages or burning through their paid time off.

Lawmakers, in fact, created the \$250 million compensation fund as a compromise, after failing to reach agreement on legislation that would have provided back pay to essential workers for hours lost during the pandemic.

Elia Starkweather, a janitor in Minneapolis and member of Service Employees (SEIU) Local 26, exhausted her sick days after contracting COVID-19 in January. She said 1,000 members of her union have



Elia Starkweather, a janitor and member of SEIU Local 26, was among frontline workers who spoke at an event commemorating the anniversary of a COVID-19 state of emergency earlier this year. SEIU photo

gotten sick or been forced to stay home with a sick family member. Some, she said, have had to quarantine multiple times. Four Local 26 members have died from COVID-19,

Lawmakers, Starkweather said, “see us as just numbers” and not “as human beings, as people who have family.”

Lawmakers also set up the compensation fund as acknowledgement of the psychological and emotional toll the pandemic continues to take on many workers on the front lines.

Laura Heezen, a behavior analyst with Minnesota

Department of Veterans Affairs, said she and her co-workers, members of the Minnesota Association of Professional Employees (MAPE), were tasked with administering to the population most vulnerable to COVID-19, the elderly.

“During the pandemic MAPE members came into (Veterans Homes) to care for veterans who were scared, sick and missing their loved ones,” Heezen said. “Residents had to be quarantined, alone in their rooms, sometimes for months at a time. After a while, we were at a loss for words trying to encourage them in their darkest days and hours.

“This task force is taking too long, and they’ve done nothing to provide actual relief for the workers so desperate for reprieve.”

Several unions and community organizations that signed onto a joint statement to Republican members of the work group, calling both for an equitable distribution plan and for lawmakers to allocate more dollars to expand the fund beyond \$250 million.

“We worked to not leave anyone behind during COVID, and now some legislators are holding up Essential Worker pay in order to exclude us?” the statement said.

“Many of us lost pay when we had to quarantine or be vaccinated. Yet when our bills come due, we have to pay them. The bill for this working group is overdue, and it’s time they deliver.”

The statement was signed by AFSCME Council 5, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1005, the worker center CTUL, Education Minnesota, the Minnesota AFL-CIO, MAPE, MNA, SEIU locals 26 and 284, UNITE HERE Local 17 and United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1189, among others.










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## Labor News in Review



Striking window cleaners, members of SEIU Local 26, picket in downtown Minneapolis during a 10-day strike that ended Aug. 26 with union members winning higher wages and a groundbreaking registered apprenticeship program.

SEIU Local 26 photo by Matt Mead

### VICTORY FOR WINDOW CLEANERS

After 10 days on the picket line, Twin Cities window cleaners won historic new union contracts that include industry-leading wages, better benefits and funding from their employers for a first-of-its-kind registered apprenticeship program to elevate standards in the high-risk profession.

Citing unfair labor practices, members of Service Employees (SEIU) Local 26 began their strike Aug. 16, moving their picket line to multiple locations in Minneapolis and St. Paul, and at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, where dozens of airport janitors honored the picket line.

The union and contractors – Columbia Building Services, Final Touch Commercial Cleaning and Apex North – reached a tentative agreement to end the strike Aug. 26 at 1 a.m.

“The last 10 days were so beautiful, and I’ll never forget the unity for the rest of my life,” window cleaner and union steward Eric Crone said after the strike ended. “From my fellow window cleaners to people on the street honking horns and pumping their fists, the solidarity we experienced is something I’ll treasure forever.”

“I’m so proud we stuck together and won our apprenticeship program and obtained fair raises.”

Once registered with the state’s Department of Labor and Industry, the window cleaners’ apprenticeship will be the first of its kind in Minnesota, standardizing safety practices and training in the industry.

Other highlights of the contract include increased sick and disability pay, and wage increases of 12% over four years. That makes pay for window cleaners in Minnesota the second-highest in the nation, behind only New York, according to SEIU.

“Our strike showed that no one will just give anything to us, but you have to stand up and fight for what you deserve,” Crone said. “I hope our strike, and our strong new contract, show other essential workers that when you band together and stay the course, you can get results.”

Window cleaners returned to work Aug. 27.

### TWO FROM LABOR ON NEW COUNCIL

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz last month issued an executive order establishing a new Governor’s Council on Economic Expansion. The 15-member body includes two representatives from the labor movement: Minnesota Building and Construction Trades President Joe Fowler and SEIU Healthcare Minnesota Executive Vice President Brenda Hilbrich.

The council is tasked with providing recommendations on expanding Minnesota’s economy, including strategies to leverage the remaining American Rescue Plan funds in ways that advance equitable economic growth. Other appointees include business, philanthropic and non-profit leaders from across the state.

“As we continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic and look toward the future, we must take bold action to build back Minnesota’s economy stronger than before, with people – our strongest asset – at the center of the blueprint,” Walz said.

In addition to serving as state president of the Building Trades, Fowler is business manager of LIUNA Local 563, the union representing construction laborers statewide and in North Dakota.

“I am excited to begin this important work as part of a group that includes some amazing leaders from multiple industries,” Fowler said. “As a group we are committed to working collaboratively, to bring our best ideas to the table, and to ensuring that Minnesota is a place that provides economic opportunity for all of us.” Hilbrich leads the hospital sector of SEIU Healthcare Minnesota, which unites nearly 50,000 health care and long-term care workers statewide.

Hilbrich applauded Walz for bringing together a diverse group of leaders to “find innovative ways to ensure Minnesota’s economic future includes all of us, no matter our race, gender, or zip code.”

“While Minnesota is the best state in the country for some of us, we know that too many Minnesotans have been left out and left behind,” she added. “I’m excited to dig into this work to make our state more equitable and strong, so every Minnesotan – no exceptions – can live a safe, healthy and happy life.”

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### UNFI CUB THREATENS PENSION

Cub Foods’ parent company, UNFI, is threatening to stop paying into a union pension fund covering about 230 bakers at corporate-owned stores in Minnesota, according to Local 22 of the Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco and Grain Millers (BCTGM), which has mobilized a fight to protect workers’ retirement benefits.

Local 22 began contract negotiations with UNFI last month. Not all Cub Foods stores in the Twin Cities are owned by UNFI.

“They’re not talking about bargaining about it; their lawyer just informed us on the first day of negotiations that they are withdrawing from our pension fund the 1st of the year,” Local 22 President Wally Borgen said. “Our pension is fully funded at 104%. There’s no reason to pull out of a great benefit for these workers.”

Additionally, three members of Local 22 have filed grievances accusing UNFI of stealing paid vacation hours. It’s a slap in the face, Borgen said, to workers who have kept shelves stocked in grocery stores during the pandemic.

“Thousands of people were pouring in and out of those stores, putting our members at higher risk than your average worker,” he said. “They came to work knowing that they’d probably walk through a COVID cloud at some point.”

### MILLERS STAND UP FOR WAGES

UNFI isn’t the only boss ruffling BCTGM Local 22 members’ feathers. Grain millers at two General Mills elevators in Minneapolis unanimously authorized a strike Sept. 9 after management refused to put more money into wages during negotiations, which began in June.

Within a week of the strike vote, General Mills had upped the offer, and Local 22 members had a new, four-year contract with 3% raises in the first and second years.

## Machinists Local 459 members fight off divisive, two-tier pay scale at Culligan

By sticking together in solidarity, members of Machinists Local 459 who work at Culligan Water Systems in Minneapolis succeeded in eliminating a divisive, two-tier wage system in a new, one-year contract ratified in August.

A two-tier system pays one group of employees a higher rate than another for the same job classification. Kyle Lokkesmoe, Local 459’s shop steward at Culligan, told the International Association of Machinists’ website that members recognized that, when it came to the health of their bargaining unit, the two-tier scale was toxic.

“Everyone was pretty much on board,” Lokkesmoe said. “They all knew it had to go away. It wasn’t going to move ahead smoothly if we still had a two-tier pay scale in our shop.”

Lokkesmoe also knew that he and other Tier 1 employees had to compromise.

“Those on the first tier were OK with maybe not getting exactly what they wanted to just have a one-tier shop,” said Lokkesmoe. “It just showed that we were all in it together, doing the right thing.”

The company compromised, as well, by showing a willingness to sit down at the bargaining table, share financial information and work together to make

it happen. Negotiations began in mid-July and lasted about two weeks.

IAM District 77 Directing Business Representative John Steigauf said the company hadn’t been following the two-tier wage structure anyway, so it was easier to argue the facts at the bargaining table.

“They were bringing people in above the starting rate,” said Steigauf.

The local pushed how unfair the system was and bombarded the company with facts.

“We started hammering on a fairness factor,” said Steigauf.

“I’m so proud of Local 459, District 77 and the strong membership at Culligan for achieving what they deserve,” said Steve Galloway, a vice president for the union’s Midwest Territory. “This shows what solidarity can mean for our members, families and communities.”

Low-morale and animosity on the shop floor are now things of the past, as members look forward to continuing a relationship with Culligan that began with a first contract in 1967, said Business Representative Andrew Peltier.

“You have to ask for what people want, be able to justify it and have a lot of strong arguments,” he added.



Old Dutch workers, members of BCTGM Local 22, plan to fight increasingly heavy workloads.

submitted photo

### WHISKEY CO. WORKERS UNIONIZE

Workers at another craft beverage producer in the Twin Cities have unionized. UNITE HERE Local 17, the area’s hospitality union, announced last month that employees of Brother Justus Whiskey Company in north-east Minneapolis won voluntary recognition from management and will begin bargaining a first contract.

The organizing drive drew unanimous support from the 10 whiskey makers in the new bargaining unit. After all 10 agreed to sign union-authorization cards, workers marched on their boss, who later recognized the union.

“We’ve only worked together a short time but have already come together in this truly meaningful act of solidarity,” union member Carly Dahl said. “Together, we’re going to make Brother Justus an even better place to work.”

Brother Justus, which specializes in making American single-malt whiskeys, joins a growing list of local craft distilleries and breweries where workers have formed unions in recent years, including Fair State Brewing Cooperative, Du Nord Craft Spirits and Tattersall Distilling.



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