

# The St. Paul Union Advocate

129th Year, No. 3, Issue 5490

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

September 2025

## Union Proud!

### Stop by the Labor Pavilion at the State Fair

Every day during the Minnesota State Fair, the Minnesota AFL-CIO will offer a fresh lineup of family-friendly programming at the Labor Pavilion, putting a spotlight on the work union members do in our communities.

The Labor Pavilion is located at the corner of Dan Patch and Cooper, near the Snelling Avenue entrance.

Programming at the pavilion typically includes demonstrations, contests, live music and giveaways. Members of affiliate unions host kiosks with opportunities to support their issue campaigns and learn about careers in their industries.

Find more programming information online at [mnaflcio.org](http://mnaflcio.org).



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



Jennings Mergenthal, who worked as a community engagement specialist at the Science Museum of Minnesota before being laid off, questions the organization's decision to eliminate every position dedicated to its access and equity program. Union Advocate photos

## MUSEUM WORKERS SOUND ALARM

*Sidelined by management, Science Museum workers appeal to public as cuts threaten programs, access*

**By Michael Moore**

Union Advocate editor

Nicole Dzenowski, a paleontologist with the Science Museum of Minnesota, was on a field expedition in Montana when she received the news that her position managing Minnesota's only active fossil-preparation lab was being eliminated.

In a virtual staff meeting that followed, Dzenowski learned her lab, which maintains a collection of hundreds of thousands of fossils, would remain open with support from volunteers – in direct violation of the newly negotiated contract covering over 200 Science Museum workers, members of AFSCME Council 5.

Within weeks, management had offered Dzenowski the position back on a part-time basis, but she and other union members say that her experience epitomizes the museum's indifference to frontline workers and their union contract – and to the organ-



Paleontologist Nicole Dzenowski says the Science Museum backtracked after eliminating her position in violation of the union contract.

ization's mission – as it plows ahead with a plan to eliminate 43 full-time positions.

"I am grateful that I will, in part, get to keep my job," Dzenowski said. "I am grateful that the scientifically significant fossils that our collection houses will get taken care of..."

"I can be grateful for all of those things while also still recognizing that the way these layoffs have unfolded does not feel like management

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 16)

*Historical Society's plan to close sites, lay off staff deserves scrutiny, union says*

**By Michael Moore**

Union Advocate editor

Union members are demanding answers from Minnesota Historical Society executives after a shakeup that resulted in 36 layoffs and reduced access to sites and materials maintained by the organization.

"We want to see the receipts," AFSCME Local 3173 President Jacob Rorem said.

The layoffs, announced July 28, impacted 28 members of the bargaining unit, which covers about 80% of MNHS's workforce. A few members were able to continue their employment with MNHS by transferring to open positions.

MNHS laid off seven workers in June 2024, and management had been hinting at deeper cuts to come. They cite a structural deficit, as revenues from membership sales and site fees, state allocations, grant funding and other sources have not kept up with rising costs.

While the layoffs did not come as a shock, Rorem said, the lack of transparency about

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 17)



## Go Figure

**\$18.9 million**

Average total compensation for S&P 500 company CEOs in 2024, up 7% from the previous year

**285-to-1**

Average ratio of CEO pay to median worker pay last year

**\$97,813,843**

Starbucks CEO Brian Niccol's 2024 compensation – 6,666 times more than his median employee

**\$738 million**

Estimated total tax breaks for S&P 500 CEOs in President Trump's "Big, Beautiful Bill"

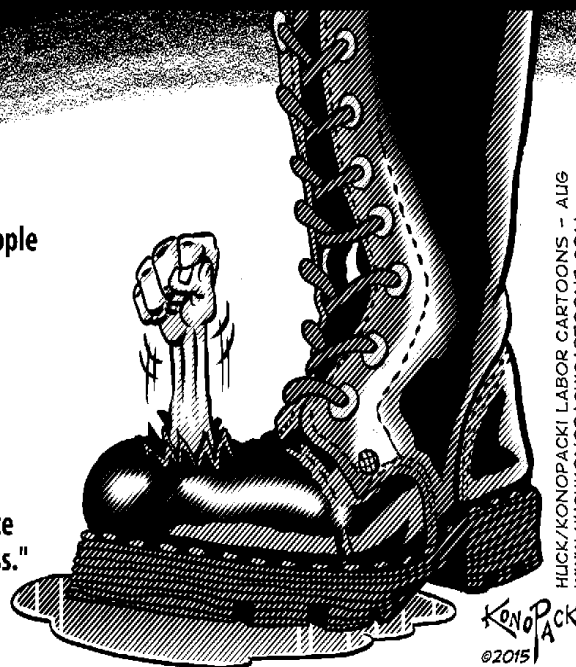
Source: AFL-CIO Executive Paywatch report

**FIGHT BACK ON LABOR DAY**

"Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, ...

The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress."

- Frederick Douglass

**Labor Voices: Kera Peterson****Workers deserve freedom, fairness and security**

As American workers, our labor takes many forms. We create wealth, build communities and deliver the goods and services that grow our economy. We serve the public, care for the sick and create a safety net for the most vulnerable. We educate, advocate and strive for a better world. But no matter where we work, no matter who signs our paychecks, we all share the dignity that our work brings.

That's what we, as Americans, celebrate on Labor Day – the struggles, values and shared interests that united previous generations in the fights for child-labor laws, health and safety standards and the eight-hour day. Throughout our history, the labor movement has had the vision to imagine a life for working people that didn't exist yet. As union members, we stand on the shoulders of workers who found the collective will to make that vision a reality. On Labor Day we honor their sacrifices, and we renew our commitment to carrying on the fight for what all workers deserve: freedom, fairness and security.

That's what our labor movement is fighting for every day, and we're doing it in the face of unprecedented attacks from union-busters – and that includes the Trump administration. Union members know firsthand the value that comes with the freedom to form a union, to bargain a contract and to speak up with one powerful, unified voice. It's a freedom that the American public overwhelmingly supports. It's a freedom we can't afford to take for granted. Right now, unions are fighting back in court to stop the president and his crony cabinet from stripping federal workers of their union contracts, and from seizing control of the National Labor Relations Board, an independent agency charged with upholding collective bargaining rights.

Our unions also lead the fight for fairness, for a just share of the wealth that workers create and for a square return on a hard day's labor. Workers deserve an economy built on fairness, too, but the president and Republicans in Congress are taking our country in the opposite direction. The AFL-CIO's annual "Executive Paywatch" report, released last month, found that the CEOs S&P 500 Index companies out-earned their workers by a 285-to-1 ratio,

**"No matter where we work, no matter who signs our paychecks, we all share the dignity that our work brings."**

– Kera Peterson



on average, last year. That means the median employee would have had to start working in the year 1740 to earn what the average CEO raked in last year alone. And the president's signature tax and spending bill, which overwhelmingly benefits corporations and the wealthy, will only make inequality worse.

Meanwhile, the rest of us are left to weather rising health care costs, cuts to public services and the economic uncertainty resulting from the president's tariffs. When we say American workers deserve security, we mean a country where children and families don't have to struggle to afford food, housing and health care. We mean a nation where no one is targeted for who they are or where they were born, and where we can raise children and retire in dignity. That's what our unions are fighting for.

Our movement faces attacks on multiple fronts right now, and that can feel overwhelming. No single march, protest or campaign will deliver the kind of change we know our country needs, the freedom, fairness and security that workers deserve. But every organizing drive, every strike, every time workers and their allies take action together is an act of radical hope. We bet on our solidarity and our collective power because we've seen it work before. Yes, the moment is tough, but toughness defines working people.

That's what we celebrate on Labor Day.

– Kera Peterson is president of the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, which brings together 140 local unions representing workers in Ramsey, Dakota, Washington and Chisago counties. Learn more about the federation and its work at [stpaulunions.org](http://stpaulunions.org).

**Letters**

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

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353 W. 7th St. #201, St. Paul, MN 55102.  
Phone 651-222-3787 x112; fax 651-293-1989;  
e-mail: [mmoore@stpaulunions.org](mailto:mmoore@stpaulunions.org)

Editor: Michael Moore

**SAINT PAUL  
REGIONAL LABOR FEDERATION**

Phone: 651-222-3787 Fax: 651-293-1989  
Website: [www.stpaulunions.org](http://www.stpaulunions.org)

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## Building Trades' Ribfest to raise funds for military families

Enjoy finger-licking food, live music and family fun Sept. 13 at Yellow Ribbon Ribfest, presented by the Minnesota Building Trades.

Admission is free, with food and drinks for sale. All proceeds from the event benefit programs to support military service members, veterans and military families.

Held at the National Guard Readiness Center in Arden Hills, Ribfest will kick off with a career fair from noon to 2 p.m., followed by an opening military ceremony at 2:15 p.m. and live music from Rich and the Resistors from 3 to 5 p.m.

A rib-tasting competition will begin at 2:30 p.m. and run until 5:30 – or until the food is gone. New or experienced cooking teams may join the contest, and volunteers are needed as well.

Learn more online at [yellowribbonribfest.org](http://yellowribbonribfest.org).

## Registration open for Labor Ed's fall classes

The University of Minnesota's Labor Education Service (LES) will continue its series of community classes for workers this fall. The brief, online courses are tailored to busy activists looking to sharpen their skills or explore new topics.

Classes include "Graphic Design and Canva for Labor Organizers," "Steward Training" and "Video Production for Organizers."

Another course, "Emblems of Solidarity: Teaching Labor History With Union Buttons," will use historic artifacts from union drives in several industries to shed light on how workers formed unions and overcame internal divisions – and what lessons organizers can take from them today.

Community Classes are offered on a sliding fee scale, ranging from free to \$100.

Learn more and register at [z.umn.edu/LESCommunityClasses](http://z.umn.edu/LESCommunityClasses).

# Stagehands say conditions improved after Yacht Club picket

By Michael Moore  
Union Advocate editor

Stagehands who worked the Minnesota Yacht Club festival in St. Paul this summer got a bump in pay after union members set up a picket line outside the three-day event, IATSE Local 13 says.

"The picket worked, and I'm very proud that we put it up," Local 13 business agent Kellie Larson said. "The goal was to inform workers that their working conditions were subpar, and we were able, through the informational picket, to get those conditions brought up to something that was better."

Local 13 announced it would picket the Minnesota Yacht Club, which drew crowds of around 35,000 to Harriet Island July 17-19, after union members rejected a contract proposal from the live-events company behind the festival, RockForce Labor.

The wages, benefit contributions and work rules in RockForce Labor's offer lagged area standards set by union stagehands in their contracts with local performing-arts venues, Larson said.

"They put up a hard final offer, I brought that to my membership and they voted it down," she said. "They said they would rather bring awareness to the public that this was not safe or standard working practices."

Timing played into the decision, too. Local 13 is currently in bargaining over its arena contracts, and union members worried that agreeing to a substandard contract, even temporarily, would send the wrong message to local employers.

"If I take a lowball offer in that way, just 'to take the deal,' I would be undercutting all of the working conditions we have in the Twin Cities," Larson said.

Among the provisions the union found unacceptable were terms of the so-called "turnaround time," the gap between when stagehands wrap work on one show and start work on the next. RockForce wanted Yacht Club stagehands to tear down after the last act ended its show and be back to work within six hours, Larson said. Local 13's contracts provide at least eight hours.

"We start work when everyone leaves, from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m.," she explained. "It's hard work, and it's dark,



Local 13 members and supporters picket outside the stagehands' gate during the Minnesota Yacht Club festival.  
submitted photo

especially at outdoor festivals. You're walking out of the place at 2 a.m. and walking back in six hours later for sound check? That's really tight."

Stagehands install speaker stacks and sound gear, stage lighting, monitors and more. For festivals like Yacht Club, work typically starts early, as stagehands unload and install gear for each act, then run it through a sound check.

"That's five or six different looks we have to go through," Larson said. "Sound check for band No. 1, let's say Green Day, is at 8 a.m. We do a 90-minute sound check and start falling back to each act that will come before them. All day, we're just unloading gear, doing sound checks, setting up for the next band."

"The work we do is dangerous and hard, and we're doing it at a time of day that doesn't make sense for most humans. That's why we have some of these clauses in place, so we do have the best workers, with the best mental capacity to do the work."

RockForce Labor launched this spring, consolidating nine live-events production companies into one, with eyes on luring business from "concerts, festivals, sporting events, live broadcasts, awards shows and corporate activities."

It made a splash in the live-events industry, and Larson said she faced pressure from her international union to get a deal done and prevent any bad blood.

"I tried to bargain with the company," she said. "I told them, 'I can give on wages if you can get the turnaround time better. But the company just wouldn't negotiate, and our members didn't really feel safe working under those conditions.'"

Instead, RockForce subcontracted the stagehands' work to a Wisconsin-based company, and Local 13 members hit the picket line, where they engaged both concertgoers and stagehands passing through the gate.

"After three days on the line, what I heard from workers inside the gate was that they had transitioned from 1099s to W-2 work, with workers-comp insurance," Larson said. "And they moved up to the \$28-per-hour range. They also moved from no minimums and no double time to a 4-hour minimum and double time after midnight, which kicked in on Saturday."

If true, it bodes well for Local 13 members' chances of reaching a deal should the festival return to St. Paul next year.

"We'll see what we can do to repair the relationship," Larson said.



## 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**  
September 23rd, 6 p.m.  
To register for the Zoom meeting,  
email [cnocerini@stpaulunions.org](mailto:cnocerini@stpaulunions.org)

**Dakota County Assembly**  
September 11th, 7 p.m.  
Dakota County United Educators,  
6950 West 146th St., Apple Valley

**Ramsey County Assembly**  
September 23rd, 6 p.m.  
Saint Paul Labor Center,  
353 7th Street West

**Washington County Assembly**  
September 24th, 6 p.m.  
Washington County Gov't Center,  
Stillwater



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



# St. Paul educators reach tentative deal, shift focus to levy-referendum drive

The St. Paul Federation of Educators last month reached a tentative agreement on new union contracts covering about 4,000 teachers, education assistants and school professionals working in the state's second-largest school district.

If union members and the Board of Education vote to ratify the two-year contracts, they could take effect before the district's first day of school.

That's a big departure from recent bargaining cycles, which take place every two years. Talks between the St. Paul Public Schools and SPFE typically extend deep into the school year and have often required assistance from a state mediator.

Educators had voted to authorize a strike in each round of talks since 2018. They went on strike for a week in 2020.

This time around, SPFE and the district committed to a robust summer bargaining schedule, meeting for full days instead of evenings. Union negotiators credited the early settlement to engagement both from rank-and-file members, who spoke to the union's proposals during open bargaining, and from district leaders.

Erica Schatzlein, SPFE's lead negotiator, said newly hired Superintendent Stacie Stanley and school board members – at least one of whom attended every session – set a new tone for the collective bargaining process.

Stanley's predecessor, Joe Gothard, would "show up on the first night in a suit, stand up, give a speech and then we would not see him again typically until very close to a strike date," Schatzlein, who has been part of the union's negotiations team since 2012, said.

"Dr. Stanley wasn't there all the time – we expect that she can't be – but she was there often. In crunch time she was there pretty much the whole time, for a lot of hard discussions, and she participated. She offered some solutions. It was a very different vibe."

## Focused on dignity

Educators and the district make bargaining sessions open to the public, and SPFE took steps to turn out its members in support of their negotiators. The union provided child care, held cookouts and brought in an ice-cream truck.

SPFE also took a new approach to presenting its contract proposals, organizing members with similar interests into "bargaining action teams," which joined the union's elected negotiators whenever those issues were on the agenda.

Schatzlein, an English-learner teacher at Nokomis North Middle School, declined to discuss economic gains until they had been presented to union members, but she said the strategy built on the SPFE's work over the last two decades to expand the scope of bargaining and push for the "schools St. Paul students deserve."

"We went into this round talking about dignity," she said. "We're in a political climate right now where things that would have shocked us eight years ago are happening all the time. So what do we need to do to shore up our contract language to provide dignity for our members and our students and families across the district?"

The district agreed to language that protects students' right to be addressed by their preferred name and pronouns – and protects educators from discipline for using them. SPPS also agreed language that recommitments the district to educating every student in the district, regardless of immigration status.

The new contract delivers new standards on staffing, training and beyond for educators at RiverEast, which provides therapeutic services to students in the district with acute special-education needs.

Another contract gain will give school nurses more time to complete legal paperwork and track down the authorizations they need to administer medications or

other health services to students. Schatzlein said the bargaining action team of SPFE nurses was especially effective at the negotiations table.

"They came and presented the proposal and said, 'This is what we need,'" she said. "And at the next meeting, the district's head of Health and Wellness came to the table and actually said that's not what nurses need."

"That's really shocking if you think about it, to say, 'I know better what the workers need than the workers who are doing the work.' That's what happens in open negotiations; those voices have been heard by all of our members in attendance. It's really powerful."

## Rallying behind 'Vote Yes'

By wrapping up negotiations early, SPFE and school leaders can shift more of their focus to advocating – in harmony – for the levy referendum before voters in the district this fall.

SPPS is seeking an increase to the current annual operating levy of \$1,073 per student. If approved by voters, it would generate about \$37.2 million per year – and stave off the same amount in cuts to staffing and programs beginning next school year, the district says.

Superintendent Stanley, in announcing the tentative agreement with SPFE, said the district is "focused on coming together as one community," noting that includes "informing St. Paul residents about the upcoming referendum this November."

SPFE already has endorsed the "Vote Yes" campaign.

"We did have an eye to whether, if we are all in the throes of negotiations, we were going to be able to devote the energy necessary to campaign," Schatzlein said. "Our feeling was if the district can get its house in order to settle this sooner, then we're going to do that as well. And I feel confident that we're taking our members a good settlement."

– Michael Moore, UA editor



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# Trump administration releases \$6.8 billion for schools after Ellison, other AGs sue

The Trump administration agreed to release \$74 million in federal funding promised to Minnesota schools July 25 after abruptly freezing it earlier in the month. The move came after attorneys general in several states, including Keith Ellison, filed a lawsuit claiming the freeze was unconstitutional.

The administration initially withheld \$6.8 billion for K-12 schools nationwide, claiming officials needed to conduct a review of whether the funds supported programs with “a radical leftwing agenda.”

The funds draw from six longstanding programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education.

They help offset the costs of career and technical education, after school programs, English language courses and teacher training initiatives at school districts across Minnesota.

Since taking office in January, the Trump administration has drawn a flurry of lawsuits as federal agencies block spending authorized by Congress – a clear abuse of the executive branch’s constitutional authority.

But Republicans in Congress have shown no interest in standing up to the president, leaving the legal fight to Ellison and other attorneys general, along with unions and other public interest groups.

“I am very disappointed that it took multiple lawsuits and bipartisan pushback to convince the Trump administration to release the crucial education funding they had illegally frozen,” Ellison said in a statement after the Education Department announced it would release the funds.

The so-called “review,” he added, succeeded in one thing only: sewing chaos across the public education system.

“These are our tax dollars, and Minnesotans have a right to expect them to be used to support our students and our schools,” Ellison said. “Given that the administration’s promises are typically worth little, I will continue to monitor the situation closely to ensure the administration keeps its word and will not hesitate to take them back to court if that’s what it takes to get Minnesota’s money back.”



Keith Ellison

# Have a Safe and Happy Labor Day!



Saint Paul Steamfitters Pipefitters Local 455 wishes all working men and women health, respect and prosperity on this Labor Day.

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*Labor Day 2025*





# Trump rips up union contracts at VA in move federal workers call 'retaliatory'

The Trump administration extended its assault on federal workers' union rights last month, as the Department of Veterans Affairs terminated collective bargaining agreements covering most of the agency's workforce of about 480,000.

VA Secretary Doug Collins' announcement on Aug. 6 came just days after a federal appeals court delivered a blow to unions that are challenging President Trump's March 27 executive order excluding most federal agencies and workers from collective bargaining.

The appeals court lifted a preliminary injunction, issued by a lower court, that blocked the executive order on grounds that it was likely illegal. The VA said its termination of most union contracts was a "response" to the executive order.

Unions, meanwhile, called the move retaliatory.

The American Federation of Government Employees, which represents about 300,000 VA employees, has been sounding the alarm about Trump appointees' proposal to cut VA staffing and services to 2019 levels. If implemented, some 80,000 workers – including 20,000 veterans – could lose their jobs.

AFGE and other VA unions call the proposal a first step toward privatization.

"The real reason Collins wants AFGE out of the VA is because we have successfully fought against disastrous, anti-veteran recommendations from the Asset Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission which would have shut down several rural VA hospitals and clinics, opposed the Trump administration's plan dismantle veteran health care through the cutting of 83,000 jobs, and consistently educated the American people about how

private, for-profit veteran healthcare is more expensive and results in worse outcomes for veterans," AFGE President Everett Kelley said.

"We don't apologize for protecting veteran healthcare and will continue to fight for our members and the veterans they care for."

The VA's announcement strips bargaining rights from "nurses, doctors, benefits specialists, housekeepers, electricians, painters, food service workers, lawyers, dentists, pharmacists, crisis responders, mental health specialists, cemetery workers, janitors and more," according to AFGE.

More than 4,000 VA workers in Minnesota lost their contractual protections in the move.

Members of National Nurses United (NNU), the Service Employees (SEIU) and two other unions also received notification that their bargaining agreements had been terminated.

The agency did spare police officers, firefighters and security guards from the change – a fact that didn't sit well with Jane Nygaard, a retired nurse who continues to serve as a vice president of AFGE Local 3669, representing professional employees at the VA Hospital in Minneapolis.

"They initially stated that all this had to do with national security, one might question why unions that represent the VA with the same mission would be exempted and others not," Nygaard said. "This is just plain union-busting."

NNU, which represents 16,000 nurses at 23 VA facilities, warned in a statement that efforts to silence workers' voice on the job would be bad not only for federal employees, but also for the people who rely on them.

"Studies have shown unionized hospitals have better outcomes than non-unionized hospitals because nurses and other staff are able to speak up about their concerns and hold management accountable," NNU said. "Veterans deserve nurses who are free to advocate for their care without fear of retaliation, discipline or losing their jobs."

AFGE said it was "assessing our options" to challenge the termination of their contracts at the VA, noting that federal Office of Personnel Management has issued guidance instructing agencies "not to terminate any CBAs until the conclusion of litigation."

Despite the ruling that allows Trump's executive order to remain in effect, unions' lawsuit challenging the executive order underpinning the VA decision continues to play out.

"We remain fully committed to fighting this case on the merits and are confident in our ability to ultimately prevail," Kelley said.

Within days of Collins' move to curtail union rights at the VA, other agencies had issued similar announcements, including the U.S. Customs and Immigration Services, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

An estimated 30,000 federal workers at those three agencies lost their union protections.

– Union Advocate staff

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### Do Something!

- Congress has the power to restore bargaining rights to federal workers, and overturn President Trump's executive order allowing agencies to rip up their union contracts. It's the **Protect America's Workforce Act**.
- The bill already has bipartisan support, but GOP leaders won't give it a vote until enough lawmakers sign onto a "discharge petition" bringing the bill to the floor.
- Call **844-994-4554** to ask your member of Congress to sign the discharge petition in support of the Protect America's Workforce Act (H.R. 2550).



# Trump blames the messenger after agency report shows jobs growth slowing

**By Mark Gruenberg**  
PAI Union News Service

President Donald Trump didn't like the bad economic news released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in July, so he lashed out by firing Dr. Erika McEntarfer, the non-partisan labor economist serving as BLS commissioner.

That set off jitters among economic forecasters – and investors – who count on BLS's neutrality. Many raised questions about whether whoever Trump appoints to succeed McEntarfer could be trusted not to manipulate the numbers.

The actual July data showed private firms claimed to create 83,000 new jobs that month, adjusted for seasonal factors. But governments shed 10,000 jobs bringing the net figure down to 73,000. Unadjusted, the increase was 44,000 jobs, net.

The federal government alone lost 12,500 jobs in July and 84,000 so far this year, as the Trump administration's mass firings began to hit home.

But the real crunch will come when the federal workers who took buyouts through Sept. 30 hit the jobless rolls after that, BLS explained. For now, they're still "employed" but on furlough.

Other adjustments came as BLS collected more jobs surveys for May and June.

The initial reports for those two months showed firms created 291,000 jobs. But the agency revised that estimate to just 33,000 jobs.

Trump blew up, accusing McEntarfer

of "a lengthy history of inaccuracies and incompetence."

"Under McEntarfer, the Bureau of Labor Statistics consistently published overly optimistic jobs numbers—only for those numbers to be quietly revised later," Trump fumed in a statement that preceded a long list of what he called "errors" and "leaks."

But Heidi Shierholz, president of the nonpartisan Economic Policy Institute (EPI), said revisions in the monthly job creation numbers are normal.

"In a move straight out of the autocratic playbook, Trump fired the commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics because he didn't like the jobs numbers," said Shierholz, who served as chief economist for the Secretary of Labor during the Obama administration, between stints at EPI.

"BLS is one of the most respected statistical agencies in the world, known for its methodological rigor, independence, and transparency. The president's actions show a complete misunderstanding of how government statistical agencies operate."

"The U.S. looks set to run into the next economic downturn flying blind. The cost of this incompetence will be felt by working people first. And it's undemocratic and economically dangerous."

Trump's "belief the BLS commissioner personally 'produced' the jobs numbers is preposterous," she continued. The data is "the product of careful work by hundreds of expert economists, statisti-

cians and civil servants following transparent, well-established methodologies."

It's also dangerous because businesses use the BLS numbers as a guide to investing and hiring, and the Federal Reserve uses them to set interest rates, driving the cost of borrowing – everything from car loans and home mortgages to multimillion-dollar construction projects and the federal deficit – up or down. State and local governments also use the data

to plan budgets.

The jobs report wasn't the only disappointing economic news in July. Inflation remained above the Federal Reserve's target of 2% for lowering interest rates.

Consumer prices were up 2.7% in July compared to the previous year, according to the Labor Department. Excluding the volatile food and energy categories, core prices rose 3.1%, a sign Trump's tariff policies may be starting to affect prices.



## Happy Labor Day, union members!

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From

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### Iron Workers Local 512

## Happy Labor Day to all Union Families



IATSE Local 13 - Stagehands, Wardrobe, Wigs, Hair and Makeup



# U of M Teamsters authorize strike, target move-in week on campuses

By Max Nesterak  
minnesotareformer.com

The union representing more than 1,400 service workers across the University of Minnesota's five campuses filed an intent to strike Aug. 7 as negotiations stall over wages and health care costs.

Teamsters Local 320 said 97% of cooks, groundskeepers, truck drivers, custodians and other unionized service workers voted to authorize a strike in July and could walk off the job as soon as Aug. 20, raising the prospect of major disruptions to campus operations as students return for the fall semester.

"Our pay isn't keeping up with inflation and many of us are forced to work multiple jobs," said Christy O'Connor, a 26-year senior building and grounds worker in a statement.

The university has proposed raising workers' health care costs by 10%, which would eat away much of the 4.5% wage increase proposed by the university over the next three years, according to the union.

The Teamsters' latest proposal calls for 17% raises over three years.

A spokesperson for the University of Minnesota said they are bargaining in good faith, but higher education faces significant financial headwinds.

"The university is not immune to those challenges," the spokesperson wrote in a statement. "The university has plans in place should a strike occur and is fully committed to minimizing any disruption this action might cause for our students, faculty, staff and community."

The university also wants to be able to bypass seniority and pay new hires higher wages than current staff in the same position – a nonstarter for the union. The university turned to gig workers in the past to fill open dining services positions, paying people with no experience 35% more per hour than



Marissa Bremer-Roark, a building and grounds worker at the University of Minnesota, leads her fellow workers in a chant calling for higher wages on Aug. 30, 2022. Minnesota Reformer photo

full-time staff with years of service.

Also at issue is the company that runs the university's food service operations, Chartwells Higher Ed. The union alleges the company's supervisors have harassed and unfairly disciplined rank-and-file workers, who are managed by Chartwells but employed by the university.

Chartwells did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

"UMN's workers should not be facing systemic poverty and racial disparities driven by the university's own policies.

With a \$6 billion endowment and \$71 million budget surplus, UMN should be dismantling inequity, not reinforcing it," Teamsters Local 320 Secretary-Treasurer Brian Aldes said in a statement.

Service workers at the university also authorized a strike three years ago, but called it off after reaching an agreement that raised the minimum hourly wage from \$15 to \$20.

In announcing their intention to strike, the union boasted of its large strike fund that would allow its

members, many who live paycheck-to-paycheck, to forgo wages and walk the picket line in the event of a protracted strike. The International Brotherhood of Teamsters approved enhanced strike benefits for U of M members of \$1,000 per week, which exceeds the weekly pay of many members, the union said.

The intent-to-strike filing triggered a 10-day cooling off period during which the two sides must negotiate in sessions facilitated by the Bureau of Mediation Services.

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

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St. Paul  
Plumbers  
Local #34*





# Nurses union blasts RFK Jr. as feds axe funding for vaccine research

Union nurses last month blasted the Trump administration's plans to halt federal support for mRNA vaccine development as a "deadly mistake."

Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. announced the move Aug. 5. The department will terminate nearly \$500 million in funding for 22 research projects exploring potential uses of mRNA technology, which delivered the COVID-19 vaccine.

In his announcement, Kennedy claimed a review of data showing mRNA vaccines failed to "protect effectively against upper respiratory infections like COVID and flu."

Those claims are unfounded, National Nurses United said in a statement released the day after Kennedy's announcement.

The union of 225,000 health care professionals nationwide, including members of the Minnesota Nurses

Association, pointed to research by leading public-health and science organizations proving mRNA vaccines are safe and effective. The mRNA technology also holds promise for combatting other illnesses like cancer, nurses noted.

"RFK Jr.'s decision to slash mRNA vaccine investments – using deceptive claims that cast doubts on the scientifically irrefutable fact that vaccines save lives – will harm nurses, who are on the frontlines of every pandemic, and the patients we serve," NNU said.

Unlike traditional vaccines, which have taken at least four years to develop, mRNA vaccines can be developed quickly and adapted to combat new strains of a virus. Scientists devel-

oped the first vaccine for COVID-19 just 11 months after identifying the virus behind it. A recent study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that COVID vaccinations averted 2.5 million deaths from 2020-2024.

Federal funding was critical to developing the COVID vaccine. Nurses warned that pulling back that public investment will make the nation more vulnerable during the next pandemic.

"Our country needs every tool in our arsenal to prepare for what scientists have predicted: the frequency and severity of pandemics will grow as climate

change and biodiversity losses progress," NNU said.

"Vaccines remain one of the most powerful collective health tools we have. They protect all of us, but especially our seniors, children, and our most vulnerable, as well as the frontline workers who don't have the luxury to work from home when

emergencies arise. Cancelling investment in the most promising vaccine technology we have is a deadly mistake."

Already, scientists are testing mRNA vaccines for use against other infectious agents, including Ebola and Zika virus.

Scientists also believe the technology could produce treatments to fight cancer, sickle-cell anemia, diabetes and other diseases.

"The pulling of this investment by RFK Jr. and the Trump administration is part of a broader political project that intends to put the burden of surviving pandemics, and health threats in general, on the individual," NNU's statement said. "Nurses condemn this lack of planning and preparedness."

**"Cancelling investment in the most promising vaccine technology we have is a deadly mistake."**

– National Nurses United

## Newly organized cultural, higher-ed unions to join Freedom Library's annual solidarity picnic

Enjoy food and live music, and hear from area workers who are making history in the fight for strong unions during the East Side Freedom Library's annual Labor Solidarity Picnic on Saturday, Sept. 6.

The free, family-friendly event will run from 1 to 4 p.m. at the independent, nonprofit library, located at 1105 Greenbrier St.

Scheduled guests include activists behind successful organizing and contract campaigns at Macalester College, the Minnesota Historical Society and the Science Museum of Minnesota, as well graduate student workers at the University of Minnesota.

**'Fight for More Time'**

Later this month, the Freedom



**East Side Freedom Library**

Library will hold a panel discussion about an internal campaign at one local union, the Minnesota Association of Professional Employees, to advocate for a 32-hour workweek.

"The Fight for More Time: A Campaign That Can Revitalize Our Unions" will take place from 1 to 3 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 27 at the Freedom Library. The event is free and open to the public.

Learn more about the Freedom Library and its programming online at [eastsidefreedomlibrary.org](http://eastsidefreedomlibrary.org).



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*A message from the members of Local 1005*

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Members of SEIU Healthcare Minnesota and Iowa picketed during a four-day strike at Stillwater Medical Group in July.

Union Advocate photos

## After striking in July, HealthPartners workers in Stillwater win their biggest wage increases ever

They went on strike for four days in July, and workers at HealthPartners Stillwater Medical Group were ready to do it again in August before settling a contract that delivered the largest across-the-board wage increase the group has ever won, among other gains.

Members of SEIU Healthcare Minnesota and Iowa voted to ratify the three-year contract Aug. 11, one month to the day their strike ended. The union said 95% of voting members supported ratification.

"We are proud of today's vote that ratifies our new contract," Ellie Conway, a certified medical assistant who served on the bargaining team, said. "Because we stuck together and showed our collective power, we were able to win real gains that will benefit both ourselves and our patients."

The bargaining unit brings together over 80 CMAs, licensed practical nurses and other workers in Stillwater Medical Group's family-medicine, OB/GYN, pediatrics and specialties departments.

SEIU members went into contract negotiations last spring fired up, having recently beat back an attempt to decertify their union just weeks before bargaining was scheduled to begin. Workers voted to keep their union, with 72% support.

"The employer was very vocal in the decertification about how they could work with us so much better without a union," Conway said. "Fortunately, the members saw through those empty promises."

Although Stillwater Medical Group is under the HealthPartners umbrella, its workers bargain their own contract, outside a larger agreement covering over two dozen HealthPartners sites in the metro.

Stillwater workers aimed to narrow gaps between their contract and other HealthPartners workers' during this round of bargaining.

They made significant strides, including 10.5% raises over the 3-year life of the contract, increased longevity bonuses and increased pay differentials for picking up open shifts. The contract also secured new nondiscrimination language, according to the union.



But workers had to fight hard for every one of those gains over the course of nine bargaining sessions from May to August.

On the last day of SEIU members' strike July 11, HealthPartners called the negotiating team back to the table but refused to budge from their previous proposal. Within two weeks, the bargaining unit had voted to authorize a strike again – this time threatening an open-ended walkout.

The sides reached a tentative agreement in bargaining Aug. 6.

In a statement, the bargaining team called the agreement "the direct result of our membership's unity and willingness to stand up for what health care workers and our patients deserve."

That fight isn't over, Conway said.

"As we look forward, we know that we still have more work to do and will begin right away to build towards our next contract fight to be ready to win even more," she said.

– Union Advocate staff

## CBO: Republican megalaw helps earners with high and middle incomes, hurts poorest

By Jacob Fischler  
minnesotareformer.com

About 10 million people, mostly Medicaid recipients, will lose access to health insurance and 2.4 million fewer people per month will participate in a federal food aid program under Republicans' massive tax cut and spending law, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office reported Aug. 11.

Median-income U.S. households will see a small overall gain in resources from President Donald Trump and the GOP's "big, beautiful" law, CBO said.

But major changes to Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, mean Americans at the bottom of the income distribution will see a net loss of benefits, CBO said.

The law, which both chambers of Congress passed without any Democratic votes and Trump signed July 4, significantly narrows eligibility for Medicaid and SNAP.

Those changes, even combined with federal tax cuts, will lead to a roughly 3% drop in resources over the next nine years for households in the bottom tenth of earners, the CBO analysis said.

"The changes in resources will not be evenly distributed among households," the congressional scorekeeper said. "The agency estimates that, in general, resources will decrease for households toward the bottom of the income distribution, whereas resources will increase for households in the middle and toward the top of the income distribution."

The projection shows households in the bottom two-tenths of the income distribution would see a net loss of resources.

Households in the middle 20% of the income distribution would receive, on average, between \$800 and \$1,200 more per year, which would account for 0.8% to 1% of their income.

At the top of the income distribution, households in the top tenth would see, on average, \$13,600 more annually, about 2.7% of their projected income, from 2026 to 2034, the CBO said.

But the lowest tenth of households by income would see a drop of about \$1,200 per year, which accounts for 3% of that group's projected income, the CBO said.

Roughly 10 million people will lose access to health insurance by 2034, the CBO projected. Most of that group, 7.5 million, would lose Medicaid benefits.

A single section of the law creating new work requirements for Medicaid recipients would result in 5.6 million people losing access to care, the CBO said.

The law also creates new work requirements for SNAP participants and mandates that at least some states pay for a portion of the benefits. States had never been required to cover any share of the cost of SNAP benefits.

The changes to work requirements will result in reduced participation in the program by about 2.4 million people, the CBO said in another analysis published Monday.

The changes to state cost-share in SNAP will save the federal government about \$41 billion from 2026 to 2034, CBO said. The agency expects states to pick up most, \$35 billion, of that spending.

But the new requirements for states would still likely lead to 300,000 people fewer accessing benefits monthly. The report considered state officials would choose from policy responses including cutting benefits, reducing eligibility or leaving the program altogether in response to the new cost-share.



## Wishing a happy and safe Labor Day to all workers!



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## Labor Day greetings to all union families!

*International Union of Elevator Constructors Local 9*  
[www.local9.com](http://www.local9.com)



**On Labor Day let us  
remember the men  
and women that have  
fought tirelessly for  
Workers Rights.**

**United we Stand.**

## Happy Labor Day!

*— A message from the St. Paul Building & Construction Trades Council*



## Happy Labor Day to our union family!

We are proud to be part of our diverse  
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solidarity with ALL workers as we build  
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St. Paul Federation of Educators Local 28  
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Minnesota Building and Construction Trades Council leaders held their annual convention in St. Cloud July 24-25. Mike Ganz of the Central Minnesota Building Trades Council leads the Pledge of Allegiance on the convention's opening day, flanked by State Council President Dan McConnell (L) and Secretary-Treasurer Don Mullin.

photo by Vince Muzik/Fair Contracting Foundation

## Building Trades president to Trump: 'We need your help'

**WASHINGTON** – In an unusual public plea, North America's Building Trades Unions President Sean McGarvey wrote an open letter to the nation's most-prominent former builder, GOP President Donald Trump, asking him to save, not axe, construction and infrastructure projects that could employ tens of thousands of tradespeople in the next few years.

Whether Trump will read the letter, much less reverse course, is open to question. Trump and many Republican partisans are in denial about climate change and global warming.

They have moved to block funding clean-energy projects and virtually wiped out previous spending authorizations for them in Trump's signature tax and spending law, passed in July as the "Big, Beautiful Bill."

The measure delivered a \$4.5 trillion tax cut that overwhelmingly benefits corporations and the wealthy. The GOP funded it, albeit partially, slashing Medicaid and SNAP benefits – but also by killing tax incentives for green-energy projects, passed during Joe Biden's presidency.

In his open letter, NABTU's McGarvey implored the president to think of the workers behind those canceled projects.

"Mr. President, we need your help. You're a builder," McGarvey began his July 23 missive. "You've forgotten more about what it takes to develop and build a project than practically anybody in the world ever knew. You are working hard, attempting to make deals and bring jobs back."

"But right now, some people around you are canceling job-creating projects – and with them, thousands and thousands of good-paying, blue-collar construction jobs. We're starting to see a softening in the construction job market."

"We've seen real backsliding on

infrastructure, energy and labor standards. And, as every builder knows, uncertainty is a death blow. And week after week, the hits keep coming."

Projects and worker protections McGarvey highlighted include:

- California's high-speed rail project. Canceling it would put "1,500 construction jobs a day at risk," McGarvey said. But the California project has been financially troubled from the start.

- The \$2 billion Allston Multimodal infrastructure project in Massachusetts. That would kill 3,000 transportation construction jobs and risk \$25 billion in area development.

- A \$1 billion natural gas plant in Tennessee, eliminating 2,000 jobs.

- Construction of a microchip plant in Michigan, funded through Biden's CHIPS Act. That would cost 5,000 jobs.

- A "major" Energy Department loan for the \$11 billion Grain Belt Express transmission line from Kansas to Indiana. Some 22,000 jobs would go.

- Prevailing wage rates for construction workers at NASA's Cape Canaveral.

"These aren't isolated incidents," McGarvey added. "\$17 billion in energy projects have been canceled just this year, costing some 19,000 real, existing, good-paying American jobs due to policy uncertainty in Washington."

McGarvey concluded: "This is just a small sampling. While the media chases other stories, construction workers are being left behind. Although you and your administration are working on massive deals, these jobs would carry construction workers through until those larger projects come to fruition, years from now."

"Mr. President, please help blue-collar construction workers and their families."

– PAI Union News Service



# Report: Pay gap between workers, CEOs increased again in '24

By Mark Gruenberg  
PAI Union News Service

You've heard of huge pay gaps between corporate CEOs and their rank-and-file workers, but this one is positively prehistoric.

The median Starbucks barista, earning under \$15,000 a year, would have had to start working at the coffee company in 4643 B.C. and continue working until 2024 to earn an amount equal CEO Brian Niccol's total compensation last year.

That startling, Stone Age fact comes from the AFL-CIO's annual Paywatch report – and goes a long way toward explaining why Starbucks workers are unionizing at a breakneck pace.

The nation's largest labor federation draws on federal records to compile the report, which this year also included a tally of how much corporate CEOs put into Donald Trump's 2024 campaign – and how much they can expect to cash out now that congressional Republicans have passed Trump's signature tax and spending bill.

Using federal Securities and Exchange Commission data, Paywatch found that last year the average CEO at a S&P 500 company – the largest firms in the nation – took home \$18.9 million in total compensation, 7% more than the year before.

For CEOs, most of that “compensation” was in stock options and other sources available only to the richest of the rich, thanks to the tax code. That includes rising value of the CEOs' stock in their own firms, which corporations juice through buybacks – literally buying back their own stock, a maneuver that wasn't even legal until the Reagan years.

By contrast, the median pay for a U.S. worker last year was \$49,500, 3% more than the year before, AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Fred Redmond told a virtual press conference July 23.

Put the two pay figures together and you get a CEO-worker ratio of 285-to-1. A worker would have to toil from 1740, 35 years before the American Revolution began, until now to earn as much as that average CEO did last year.

“Workers want to help share in the profits they create every day,” said Redmond. “And 285-to-1 is not a fair ratio.”

Even that ratio understates the chasm between CEOs and the rest of us. The largest earner of all was Brad Jacobs, CEO of QXO, Inc., formerly Beacon Building Products, described in Wikipedia as “one of the largest distributors of commercial and residential roofing materials” in the U.S.

Jacobs's compensation last year totaled \$189.37 million. Suffice it to say the average member of the United Union of Roofers and Waterproofers earned nowhere close to that.

“As far as CEO pay is concerned, they should be paid what they're worth,” Redmond said, without putting a



Starbucks workers are pictured on strike at the unionized store in St. Paul in 2023. Their CEO raked in 6,666 times more than the median employee did last year. file photo

number on it. “But a high pay ratio at a company” between the CEO and its workers shows “something is significantly out of balance.”

“And these companies treat their workers as disposable commodities.”

Starbucks certainly does, as evidenced by its continuing war against its baristas who are unionizing. The company has committed 300-plus labor

law violations, ranging from nasty discipline and illegal firings to sudden store closures just before or after union wins.

And its CEO, Niccol, earned \$97.813 million last year, or 6,666 times the median pay of a Starbucks worker. No other firm had a ratio of even half that.

Niccol and other CEOs in the report can expect to shield even more of their earnings from income taxes moving for-

ward, thanks to the so-called “big, beautiful bill.” They will see an average tax cut of about \$500,000.

The tax cut will throw the workers pennies – and increase costs for workers who see higher health care premiums as the health care system absorbs a massive cut to Medicaid funding. Meanwhile, the federal debt is expected to grow by \$3.4 trillion as a result of the new law.

“We're also calling out firms who have scratched Trump's back,” Redmond said. “A number of CEOs of Big Tech, including Amazon, Meta and Palantir each gave a million dollars to his inaugural committee.”

In return they got the tax break, lucrative contracts and – for those in labor-law trouble – Trump's firing of National Labor Relations Board member Gwynne Wilcox, depriving the board of the three-member quorum it needed to do business.

Proposals have been floated in Congress and in the states over the years to put curbs on CEO pay and compensation. Given how much compensation comes from stock options and buybacks, National Nurses United and Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., both push a small stock transfer tax on each transaction.

It would curb both pay and unwarranted speculation, they say.

## Union members allege Hormel violated new sick time law

By Max Nesterak  
minnesotareformer.com

The union representing more than 1,600 Hormel workers in Austin announced a class action lawsuit July 30 alleging the meat processing giant violated Minnesota's earned sick and safe time law for 14 months by forcing workers to use vacation time if they called in sick.

Minnesota's sick and safe time law, passed under a Democratic trifecta in 2023, requires employers to provide one hour of paid leave for every 30 hours worked – up to six days per year for a full-time worker.

Workers may use the time to recover from an illness, care for a sick loved one, seek safety from domestic abuse or because of weather-related closures.

Tim Louris, the attorney representing the workers, said Hormel refused to provide most of its production, maintenance and quality control employees with additional paid leave when the law took effect in 2024.

UFCW Local 663, the workers' union, challenged Hormel and a labor arbitrator ruled earlier this year that the company could not use paid vacation to comply with the state law.

The union called the lawsuit a “first of its kind” since the new law took effect Jan. 1, 2024.

Louris said the company began fol-

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- **When do benefits start to accrue?** Day 1 of employment.
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- **How can I tell if I'm earning benefits?** Employers must show your total ESST hours available for use and your total used at the end of each pay period.

lowing the law on March 1 but still owes workers compensation for robbing them of the benefit for more than a year. He could not provide an estimate for how much he believes workers are owed.

Hormel said in a statement it does not comment on pending litigation.

Longtime Hormel worker Dan Lenway — lead plaintiff in the lawsuit — said the law has been a lifeline for workers, who used to face disciplinary action for missing work due to illness.

“It means we don't have to risk our jobs or our wages just to take care of our health or our families,” he said.

Senate Majority Leader Erin Murphy, DFL-St. Paul, stood alongside workers at the Austin Labor Center in support of their lawsuit and the state's sick leave law.

“I don't want to have to think about the sandwich that I'm going to eat ... I want workers in our food industry to come to work healthy,” Murphy said.

The law has faced stiff resistance from many business leaders and Republicans, who with moderate Senate Democrats pushed to weaken the law this year.

That effort largely failed, with the Legislature approving only minor tweaks to the rules.



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## Workers sound alarm as Science Museum eliminates programs, slashes payroll

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

has followed our contract and considered any alternatives to these layoffs – let alone any and all.”

Dzenowski and other Science Museum workers – some impacted by the layoffs, some not – laid bare their frustration with the process and their concerns about the institution’s future during a press conference July 29 outside the museum’s Kellogg Boulevard entrance.

Museum management announced plans to shrink its operating budget from \$38 million to \$31 million July 9, pointing to “fundamental shifts in consumer behavior following the pandemic” that have resulted in lower attendance at museum’s across the U.S. The Science Museum also saw federal grant funding pulled back by the Trump administration earlier this year.

But rather than taking a collaborative approach to navigating the new industry landscape, Science Museum union members said, management has shut them out of the planning process.

“We wouldn’t be here today if Science Museum management wasn’t too afraid to actually listen to their workers, who have brought forward ideas of building a better Science Museum but have been ignored,” Council 5 Director Bart Andersen said.

### Decisions behind closed doors

Workers’ requests for information about how leadership arrived at decisions, like eliminating programs or consolidating departments, have gone mostly unanswered.

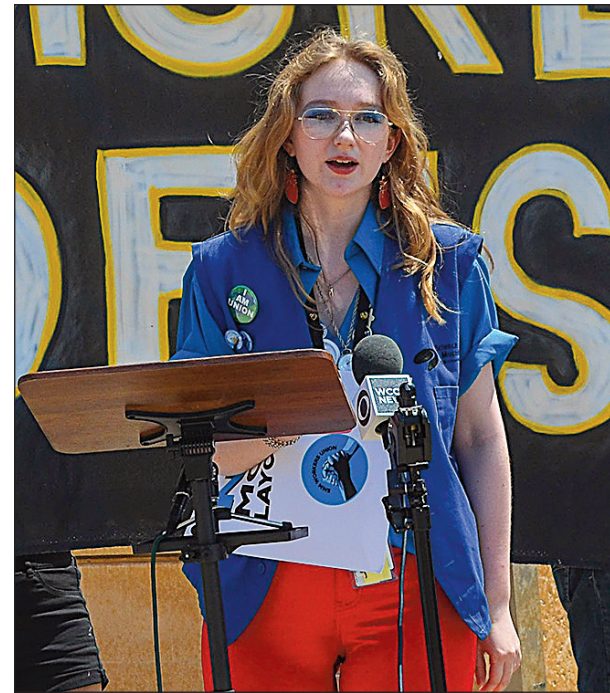
Sheridan Small, a program specialist, questioned the museum’s plans to discontinue camps – her area of focus – after this season. Small, who accepted the year-round position last March and will be laid off effective Aug. 22, said the move will eliminate a program that brings families – and revenue – to the museum.

“This is one of the museum’s strongest membership drivers,” she said. “Families join to get early access and discounts (on camp registration). Even with the materials and staffing costs, this program pays for itself. It doesn’t drain resources, it generates them.”

Small isn’t the only one struggling to understand management’s reasoning. Grace Richter, who works on the museum floor, said union members in her department have asked how this round of layoffs will be different from last year’s, which eventually forced management to address staffing shortages.

“They have refused to be transparent with my team or grant information requests from the union, and have not engaged in any dialogue,” she said.

“In the 2023-24 fiscal year, our CEO Alison Brown made \$572,000 – a huge jump from the previous year,” Richter added. “If our leaders are going to make that much money while I barely make \$35,000 a year,



Grace Richter, who works in visitor experiences at the Science Museum, questioned management’s commitment to transparency. Union Advocate photo

shouldn’t they be able to provide us with a bare minimum of transparency on why crucial museum staff are losing their jobs?”

### Betrayal of values

Other workers worried the layoffs signal the Science Museum is walking away from its commitment to inclusion and community access.

Ashley Hausch said her entire department dedicated to evaluation and research will be eliminated, and so will the museum’s ability to track visitors by zip code – a critical piece of determining how diverse the museum’s visitor population is.

Jennings Mergenthal, a community engagement specialist, said his department, which seeks to build relevant connections between community members and the museum’s offerings, had been eliminated, too. The move, he said, will increase the distance between museum leaders and the communities the Science Museum claims to serve.

“If the museum wants to act like a business, it should be honest about that,” Mergenthal added. “But if it wants to keep saying that it’s a public good and receive state grants and appropriations in service of the public, then it needs to listen to the community feedback it receives.”

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# Workers question how layoffs align with Historical Society mission

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

what factored into the decision-making process has left union members frustrated with management – and anxious about MNHS's future.

"It's been a hard week and a half as people try to process the news," Rorem said. "We know there's a budget problem, but there hasn't been a clear explanation as to how these cuts are going to help address that – what the decision-making process was, what the evidence or data they were using to make these decisions was."

"It's something we are continuing to press because even if we ... don't necessarily agree with those decisions, we have a right to understand them and understand how (management) is stewarding the resources of our organization and of the state."

## Losing 'the face of MNHS'

One thing is clear: the restructuring will reduce public-facing services offered by MNHS.

The plan will eliminate regular summer programming – and most staff – at three sites: the Charles Lindbergh House in Little Falls, Historic Forestville in Preston and the Snake River Fur Post in Pine City.

All three sites will offer visitors free, self-guided tours instead.

Lacey Fontaine, a program associate at the Lindbergh House, said she and all but one of her co-workers, the site manager, will lose their jobs when the season ends Aug. 31.

"We're eliminating positions that actually help the public," Fontaine said. "We are the face of the Historical Society, not necessarily the people making these decisions in the background."

Visitors, meanwhile, will lose the opportunity to engage with staff members like Fontaine, who holds a master's degree in public history, about



Lacey Fontaine engages with a visitor to the Charles Lindbergh House and Museum in Little Falls, one of the sites due to eliminate most programming. submitted photos

issues that still resonate today.

"As complicated as Charles Lindbergh was, he was good at one thing, and that was initiating dialogue with the public," she said. "We're losing all that important dialogue, that education and the discussion about where historic figures fit into our lives today."

"In today's political climate, I don't think that's the best thing."

Layoffs also targeted four workers in the Gale Family Library at the History Center in St. Paul.

As a result, the research library will no longer hold public visiting hours and, instead, will require visitors to schedule appointments.

Rorem said the change would impact historians, people doing ancestry and genealogy projects and journalists



Jacob Rorem



Lacey Fontaine

working on a deadline. "Most of the time they do not want to plan that far ahead," he said.

## Plea for public support

Many challenges facing MNHS are also playing out at museums and cultural institutions nationwide, like falling

attendance levels since the pandemic and a decline in philanthropic giving.

The union drive, too, may have played in a role, Rorem acknowledged, by forcing MNHS leadership to reckon with "a business model that existed for a long time that relied on low wages, on people dedicating themselves to the mission of an organization and sacrificing in terms of wages and benefits."

MNHS workers voted overwhelmingly to form their union in November 2021 and ratified their first contract in March 2023. The bargaining unit, affiliated with AFSCME Council 5, brings together over 200 workers.

"We've been able to raise wages for a big chunk of our bargaining unit by a huge amount," Rorem said. "We have six weeks of paid parental leave that we didn't have before. We have protections from arbitrary or unfair discipline."

"It's been really valued by our membership."

Rorem called it a "disheartening and scary" time for workers at institutions like MNHS, and he said the union would appeal to the public, including state lawmakers, to step up support for the organization and its mission – and to hold its leadership accountable.

"We have a mission to serve the public," he said. "The resources we take care of are the resources of the people of Minnesota. We'd love them to continue to visit us and utilize what we have."

Fontaine said she's already on the hunt for a new job where she can continue engaging people in conversations about how the past influences the present.

"If it doesn't work out, it doesn't work out, but I'm hoping things will shift in the future where I can rejoin this business," she said.

"We're losing that connection to history, and it's really sad."

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# Minutes of the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation

## JULY 9, 2025

The Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation met in regular session on the above date and was called to order with the Pledge of Allegiance by President Peterson at 6 p.m. Board members in attendance were Beedle, Beissel, Butts, Cook, Edwards, Engeldorf, Gale, Guertin, Hill, Hoppe, Madden, Markham-Kocurek, Michelson, Mullin, Peterson, Roth, Ryan, Sansom, Schmidt, Seath, Slattery, Tastad-Damer, VanDassor and Vanderport. Excused were Beere, Gibbons, Hoerth, Luneburg, and Varco. Absent: Olson.

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

## MOMENT OF SILENCE

President Peterson called for moments of silence for Melissa and Mark Hortman, and for union sister Linda Hamilton.

## CREDENTIALS

Credentials were received from Saint Paul Federation of Educators Local 28. President Peterson administered the Oath of Obligation to those new delegates and alternates in attendance.

## ST. PAUL LABOR STUDIES AND RESOURCE CENTER BOARD JULY 9, 2025

Business to come before the LSRC Board to be acted upon consisted of LSRC's 2024 Audit, presented by Paul Slattery, Trustee.

## M/S/C TO APPROVE THE 2024 LSRC AUDIT.

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

## COMMITTEE ON POLITICAL EDUCATION (COPE) MINUTES JULY 9, 2025

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

Items to come before this committee included:

- President Peterson spoke to the board regarding the City of Saint Paul Ballot Question that will be on the ballot on November 4, 2025:

"TITLE: Referendum on Ord 25-2 amending the City Charter  
QUESTION: Should Ordinance Ord 25-2, amending Chapter 6.03 of the St. Paul Charter, regarding Administrative Citations take effect? Ordinance Ord 25-2 amends the City Charter to authorize the issuance of Administrative Citations that may result

in the imposition of civil fines for violations of City Ordinances. Administrative Citations are not Criminal Citations. A 'Yes' vote is a vote in favor of amending the City Charter to allow the City to issue administrative citations. A 'No' vote is a vote against amending the City Charter and against administrative citations."

## M/S/C TO RECOMMEND TO THE DELEGATE BODY LABOR ENDORSEMENT OF BALLOT QUESTION ON ORD 25-2.

- Peterson also reminded people that there will be a Special Election on August 12 for Saint Paul Ward 4 City Council. The Saint Paul RLF has not endorsed in this race.

- THANK YOU NOTES received from the Minnesota DFL for the RLF's support of \$1,500 to the Minnesota DFL's 13th Annual Humphrey-Mondale Dinner.

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

## EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES JULY 9, 2025

The Executive Board met with those same members present who are duly elected to this board. Items to come before this board included:

- PRESIDENT'S REPORT Trustee Paul Slattery presented the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation 2024 Audit. President Peterson reported on the following: the Union Job and Resource Fair was successful, and thank you to all the volunteers that helped; the federation's application to participate in the State Fair Labor Day Parade was submitted and accepted, and we are hoping to have 20 unions with 10 members each participating; reminder of United Way's statewide and local information and referral line; we are available to have conversations related to the tragedy and unspeakable events that occurred after the Humphrey-Mondale dinner last month; strategic planning with the Minnesota AFL-CIO; attendance at the Chicago Conference AFL-CIO Central States convening.

- ORGANIZING UPDATES/CAMPAIGNS: AFSCME Council 5, the Postal Workers (APWU), MAPE, the Minnesota Nurses Association, Saint Paul Federation of Educators Local 28, SEIU Healthcare Minnesota and Iowa and UFCW Local 1189 gave updates on their organizing activities.

## M/S/C TO APPROVE THE SAINT PAUL REGIONAL LABOR FEDERATION 2024 AUDIT AS PRESENTED BY PAUL SLATTERY.

- M/S/C FOR THE RLF TO MAKE A \$400 CONTRIBUTION TO THE MINNEAPOLIS BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION TRADES COUNCIL'S 29TH ANNUAL DOLLARS AGAINST DIABETES GOLF TOURNAMENT.

## M/S/C FOR THE RLF TO MAKE A \$500 CONTRIBUTION TO THE LABORERS' FAMILY FUN-RAISER AND PICNIC.

- THANK YOU NOTES received from Home For Our Troops for the RLF's \$500 contribution.

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

## REPORT OF THE TREASURER

Secretary-Treasurer Engeldorf reported on the financial status of the Federation as of June 2025. The report was accepted as read.

## REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

- No report given on behalf of the Chicago County Labor Assembly. The assembly will meet on the fourth Tuesday of the month via zoom at 6 p.m.
- Brian Beedle reported on behalf of



A crew of volunteers with the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation and its nonprofit arm, the St. Paul Labor Studies and Resource Center, joined United Way Action Day at RiverCentre in St. Paul Aug. 7. The union volunteers joined an effort to stuff 60,000 backpacks with supplies for area kids heading back to school this fall. Volunteers, L to R, included (front row) RLF political organizer Colleen Nocerini, Connie Beissel, Tom Quinn, (middle) Bryan Nocerini, Sheila Pokorny, Mary Samson, Cheryl Dreyer, (back) Gary Richardson, Bob Ryan and Mike Dreyer. The nonprofit LSRC is a longstanding partner of Greater Twin Cities United Way, providing resources and referrals to union members during times of financial uncertainty.

submitted photo

the Washington County Labor Assembly. The scholarship applications have been reviewed, and a winner has been chosen. The winner will be announced soon. The St. Croix Valley Retiree's club will be holding their union picnic on Aug. 11, 2025, at Lakeside Park in Bayport. The next meeting will be on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 6 p.m.

- No report given on behalf of the Ramsey County Labor Assembly. Its next meeting will be on the fourth Tuesday of the month at 6 p.m.

- Connie Beissel reported on behalf of the Dakota County Labor Assembly. The assembly sent out its annual school-supply drive letter last month. Thank you to the locals that have donated. The next meeting will be on the second Thursday of the month at 7 p.m.

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

President Peterson reported on the Union Job and Resource Fair, the federation's participation in the Minnesota State Fair parade on Labor Day, the assassination of Minnesota House Speaker Emerita Melissa Hortman and Mark Hortman, the violence against State Sen. John Hoffman and his family, and United Way's statewide and local information and referral lines, 2-1-1 and 9-8-8.

## NEW BUSINESS

- President Peterson called for a floor vote on the COPE Committee's recommendation to grant Labor endorsement of ballot question on Ord 25-2.

## M/S/C TO APPROVE THE ST PAUL RLF'S BOARD RECOMMENDATION TO SUPPORT A "YES" VOTE ON REFERENDUM ON ORD 25-2 AMENDING THE CITY CHARTER.

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

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



## SPRLF seeks to hire political organizer

The Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation is hiring a full-time political organizer.

Political organizers carry out the work of developing and implementing electoral, legislative and issue campaigns that advance the goals

of organized labor, working in coordination with the federation's affiliate unions, the Minnesota AFL-CIO and the national AFL-CIO.

Find a full job description and more at: [stpaulunions.org/about-us/jobs](http://stpaulunions.org/about-us/jobs).

## Saint Paul retirees to meet Sept. 17

The Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation Retirees will meet Sept. 17 at noon at the Saint Paul Labor Center, 353 7th Street W.

Meetings are open to retired members of unions affiliated with the SPRLF.

Retirees interested in learning more about the group are welcome to attend.

The group meets the third Wednesday of each month.

For more information, contact Tom Edwards at [edwardsapwu2@aol.com](mailto:edwardsapwu2@aol.com).

## Notice of possible endorsement

At its Sept. 10 delegate meeting, the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation may consider granting labor

endorsement in local elections and ballot initiatives.

For more information, call 651-222-3787.



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