

# The St. Paul Union Advocate

129th Year, No. 7, Issue 5494

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

February 2026

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Thousands march through downtown Minneapolis during the labor-endorsed "Day of Truth and Freedom."

Union Advocate photos



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

## LABOR DEMANDS ICE OUT

*Unions at center of community resistance to federal immigration surge in Twin Cities*

Over local 700 businesses closed Jan. 23, as thousands of protesters marked a "Day of Truth and Freedom" in the streets of downtown Minneapolis, marching in subzero temperatures to demand an end to federal immigration operations in Minnesota.

Local labor organizations, including the Minnesota AFL-CIO and area labor councils in the metro, endorsed the massive march, which culminated with a rally at Target Center. And union members showed up for the event in any number of ways.

Trained union peacekeepers helped direct traffic around the march and keep protesters safe. Union stagehands volunteered their labor to prepare the arena.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 5)



On the "Day of Truth and Freedom," educators held a teach-in about the impacts of Operation Metro Surge. Find photos on Page 4.

*Movement mourns killings of Renee Macklin Good, union member Alex Pretti*

Unions in Minnesota and across the world shared messages of grief and condemnation after federal agents shot and killed two 37-year-old constitutional observers, Renee Macklin Good and union member Alex Pretti, during a violent surge in immigration raids across the state last month.

Labor also called for full and fair investigations into the deadly shootings and accountability from federal authorities at every level, from the agents on the ground in Minneapolis to executives in the White House, who callously slandered both victims and blocked local law enforcement from investigating.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 4)

## Go Figure

### \$18 million

Metro Surge's weekly cost to taxpayers at the operation's peak last month, when over 3,000 federal agents were in Minnesota

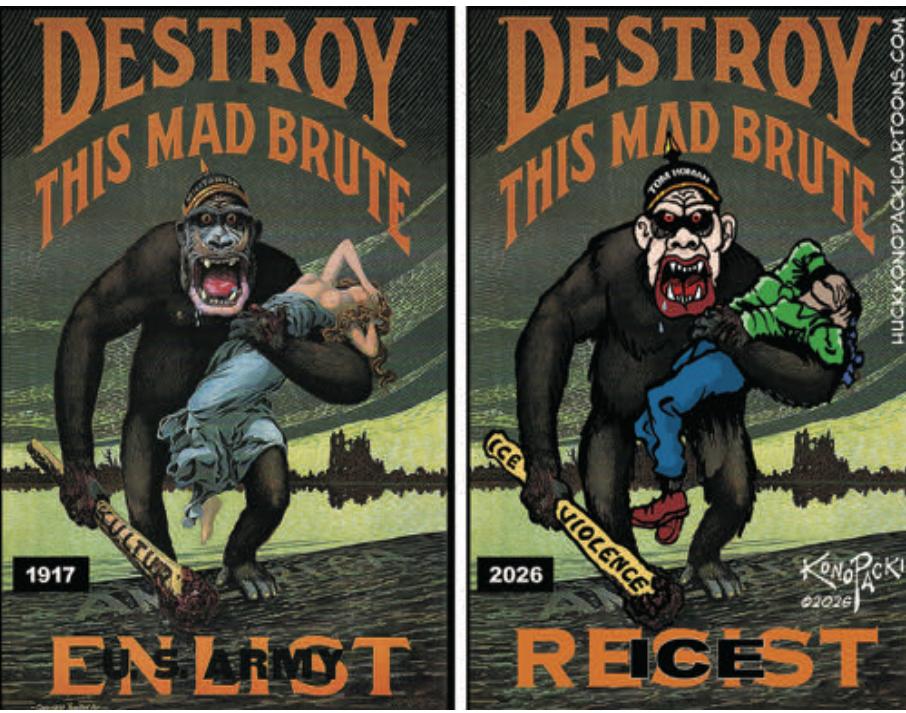
### \$4.5 million

Weekly cost of ICE and Border Patrol agents' lodging and meals

### \$2 million

Overtime pay Minneapolis police collected from Jan. 8-11, as local law enforcement statewide has seen requests for assistance rise

Source: North Star Policy Institute



### Labor Voices: Jeff Kolnick

## The massive deployment of federal immigration agents here would appall the Founders

The Twin Cities metropolitan area is under occupation by armed federal agents. According to the Census Reporter, there are roughly 3.7 million people living in the metro area, and last month there were over 3,000 militarized federal agents occupying our state. An additional 1,500 active duty troops from the army's 11th Airborne Division were on standby, ready for deployment to Minnesota.

Let's put that in perspective. During the last year of his first term, President Trump negotiated a full withdrawal from Afghanistan, which at the time was a nation of 39 million people, to be completed in early 2021. In 2019, there were between 12,000 and 13,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan. At the start of the Biden administration, there were only 2,500 U.S. soldiers remaining there.

I say this because the Trump administration has decided to send more armed federal agents to the Twin Cities than Joe Biden inherited in Afghanistan. That's too many armed federal agents under any circumstances.

Two U.S. citizens have already been killed who would be alive today absent the occupation. Many U.S. citizens have been detained and physically abused, and many more such instances have been endured by legally authorized immigrants.

We are about to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. The Founders of the United States were intensely suspicious of standing armies in peace time. If they were British citizens, the colonists asked, why were the Red Coats stationed in Boston? They included, among their reasons for dissolving their ties to King George, the following:

"He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures."

In 1787, at the Constitutional Convention, future President James Madison made the following observation:

"A standing military force, with an overgrown executive will not long be safe companions to liberty. The means of defense against foreign danger, have been always the instruments of tyranny at home. Among the Romans it was a standing maxim to excite a war, whenever a revolt was

**"Some might suggest the millions of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. constitute a foreign invasion. Hogwash."**

– Jeff Kolnick



apprehended. Throughout all Europe, the armies kept up under the pretext of defending, have enslaved the people."

It was clear to the nation's Founders that federal forces were meant to fight foreign enemies and defend the United States from other nations. Among their first actions after the end of the Revolutionary War was to disband the Continental Army. Federal forces were never meant to occupy American cities and rural areas.

Some might suggest that the millions of undocumented immigrants in the United States constitute a foreign invasion. Hogwash. The undocumented here come from many nations and arrived for as many reasons. It was not and is not an organized foreign invasion.

U.S. federal forces are meant to protect us from foreign threats, not to occupy the streets and farms of America in unmarked cars and wearing masks and picking up people without judicial warrants based on how they look, or speak, or what neighborhood they live in, or how they get to work, or where they work.

What is happening in Minnesota is un-American. It would make the Founders wonder what has become of their project. After 250 years, we now resemble the British more than we do the Patriots, except the Red Coats had the courage to show their faces.

– Jeff Kolnick is a retired professor of history who served his union, the Inter Faculty Organization, as a negotiator and local president. He is a founder of the Fannie Lou Hamer National Institute on Citizenship and Democracy. His column was first published by the Minnesota Reformer at minnesotareformer.com.

## Letters

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

## The Union Advocate

Official publication of the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation, AFL-CIO.  
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This issue went to press Jan. 29  
It was scheduled to go in the mail Feb. 6  
Next news deadline: Feb. 18

The Union Advocate will publish 10 issues in 2026. Press deadlines are scheduled Jan. 29, Feb. 19, March 19, April 16, May 14, July 16, Aug. 20, Sept. 17, Oct. 15 and Dec. 3.

Advertising deadlines precede our press dates by three days. To advertise, contact the Advocate office for display options and rate information, or download an ad flier online at [advocate.stpaulunions.org/advertise](http://advocate.stpaulunions.org/advertise).

Subscriptions are \$15 for calendar year 2026. Mail payment to Union Advocate, 353 W. 7th St., Suite 201, St. Paul, MN 55102.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: The Saint Paul Union Advocate, 353 W. 7th St., STE 201, St. Paul, MN 55102-2314. Published monthly except during July and December by the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation, 353 W. 7th St., STE 201, St. Paul, MN 55102-2314. (USPS 647820) (ISSN 24723320)

Periodicals postage paid at St. Paul, MN.



Member International Labor Communications Association.

## ESFL hosts 'Reel Stories: Labor in Film'

Trilingua Cinema, a non-profit traveling cinema that uses multilingual films to build community on St. Paul's East Side, will screen a series of labor-related films – free for all who attend – this winter at the East Side Freedom Library.

Each film illuminates the struggles, victories and everyday courage of working people, according to organizers, who will pair the films with a community conversation about the history and future of the labor movement.

Scheduled screenings, which begin at 6 p.m., include:

- "Salt of the Earth," Feb. 19. The film tells the story of Mexican zinc miners and their families who engage in an historic strike in post-World War II Arizona. Its creative team consisted of blacklisted Hollywood writers, directors, and actors, and the film's cast includes actual participants in the strike. The screening will be introduced by a local scholar-activist, who will also lead a post-film discussion.

- "A Bug's Life," March 19. This family-friendly film is, beneath the surface, a story of collective resistance. The screening will include an interactive activity for children in attendance.

The East Side Freedom Library is located at 1105 Greenbrier St. in St. Paul.

## SPPS community class digs into organizing

The St. Paul Public Schools' Adult and Community Education offerings this spring include "History & Organizing: Tactics of The Labor Movement: Post-World War to Present."

Led by Carson Starkey, an organizer with the Northern Midwest Regional Council of Carpenters, and Peter Rachleff, a retired Macalester College history professor, the course will consider the U.S. labor movement's post-war trajectory – and its impact on the quality of life for working people.

Classes will begin March 2 and meet the following three Mondays from 6:30 to 8 p.m. in person at the East Side Freedom Library, 1105 Greenbrier St. in St. Paul. Register at [commed.spps.org](http://commed.spps.org).

## St. Croix retirees aim to bridge political divides

Union retirees in Washington County are organizing a public program this month focused on bridging political divides, featuring Hamline Professor David Schultz.

The St. Croix Valley Retirees Club invites union members and retirees to "Bridging Political Divides, Young and Old, Rural and Urban" on Feb. 24, beginning at 10 a.m. at the Stillwater Public Library, 224 Third St. N.

Members of the public are welcome, and free parking is available in the ramp connected to the library building.

# Nearly 2,000 HealthPartners clinic workers authorize strike

By Michael Moore

Union Advocate editor

A union of 2,000 health care workers held informational picketing at HealthPartners last month, after taking the extraordinary step of voting to authorize a seven-day strike weeks before their contract was set to expire Jan. 31.

The vote Jan. 14 drew support from 99% of participating members of SEIU Healthcare Minnesota and Iowa. At a press conference the following day, union members said they hoped to send a message to the employer.

"We know these things always go to the last minute," longtime HealthPartners worker Chris Grimes said. "But it's time they get serious and get the job done."

The SEIU bargaining unit at HealthPartners includes workers in nearly all facets of care, excluding doctors and dentists, at more than 25 clinics across the Twin Cities. The unit brings together nurses, dental hygienists, midwives, physicians assistants and lab techs – in total, workers in over 80 different jobs.

Members of the union's bargaining

team said the early, overwhelming strike vote – followed by informational picketing at the Como Clinic on Jan. 23 – indicates their unease over the employer's hardline approach to this round of talks, especially when it comes to their health benefits.

HealthPartners' industry-leading benefits were a critical factor in Dr. Beth Smith's decision to accept a position as a psychotherapist in the system nearly a decade ago. But Smith, a member of the union's bargaining team, said she was "shocked" to see the out-of-pocket increases the employer is now demanding.

"It is hard for me to think about the negative impact this is going to have on my colleagues, my fellow union members, if these proposed health insurance cost increases go into effect," Smith said. "Many people choose to work for HealthPartners because of the benefits, just like me."

She added: "People will leave and care will suffer" if the employer's demands take effect.

Wages have been a sticking point, too. Despite having entered bargaining

two months earlier, HealthPartners still had not offered any wage increases at the time they took the strike vote, SEIU members said.

The demands come after HealthPartners rankled many longtime employees by changing their pension benefits, Grimes added.

"We need to see something different from management, not the increases in premiums and other benefits they are proposing to cut," he said. "I'm willing to strike for our health care benefits and for a fair wage increase that keeps up with inflation for myself and my co-workers."

SEIU cannot strike until after their contract expires, and they must give 10 days' notice first.

The two sides remained in negotiations at press time, but HealthPartners had begun recruiting strikebreakers through a temp agency, according to a post on SEIU Healthcare's social media platforms.

The union accused the employer of "dangling short-term bribe money – \$500 bonuses, plus \$10-per-hour premiums – to scabs if there is a strike" in February.

## Labor candidates win local special elections, preserve House tie

The labor-endorsed candidates in two east-metro House districts won special elections Jan. 27, keeping the chamber deadlocked at 67 DFLers and 67 Republicans.

Meg Luger-Nikolai, a labor attorney and union member, won in District 67A with 95.2% support. The St. Paul district was formerly represented by St. Paul Mayor Kaohly Her.

Shelley Buck, a non-profit executive, ran unopposed in District 47A, located in Woodbury. The seat became vacant after Amanda Hemmingsen-Jaeger won a special election for Minnesota Senate last November.

The Legislature is scheduled to begin its 2026 session Feb. 17.

## Federal workers describe impact of Trump-Musk cuts

**BALTIMORE** – One of every eight federal workers is now out of a job.

That's according to Kendrick Roberson, the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) vice president who leads the union's work on civil rights.

The latest employment data back his statement. In December 2024, the federal government employed 2.413 million workers, not counting contractors or the postal workers. One year later, federal employment was down to 2.145 million.

But the impact of such a drastic reshaping of the federal government goes beyond the sheer numbers, participants in a panel discussion – and members of the audience – said during the AFL-CIO's Martin Luther King conference in Maryland last month.

And the carnage may not be over. The temporary funding law to keep much of the government going was set to expire at midnight Jan. 30, raising the

possibility of another federal shutdown. The law's ban on Vought's further firings would then expire, too.

But the impact is not just numbers, said Roberson and a panel of three federal workers, who asked their names not be disclosed to protect against retaliation.

"We collect statistics on why people develop various cancers," a National Cancer Institute employee said. "Then we send dollars back to universities and research organizations" which work on prevention and cures. Trump stopped those grants.

"Last year was chaos at the VA," another worker said, as tens of thousands of people were fired and 35,000 slots were left empty. The result was a drastic decline not in quality of care, but in its frequency.

"A lot of veterans have been calling in to me, asking, 'Do we have a hospital any more?'" the worker added.

– PAI Union News Service



# 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

February 25th, 6 p.m.

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

### Dakota County Assembly

February 12th, 7 p.m.

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

### Ramsey County Assembly

February 25th, 6 p.m.

Saint Paul Labor Center, 353 7th Street West

### Washington County Assembly

February 26th, 6 p.m.

Washington County Gov't Center, Stillwater



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

## Guild demands feds stop targeting journalists

Responding to reports that journalists were targeted with chemical munitions while covering a protest last month, the Minnesota Newspaper and Communications Guild issued a statement demanding federal agents "allow reporters and photographers to do their jobs without threat of physical harm."

The statement, made on behalf of the union's 500 members, came after protests erupted in Minneapolis on Jan. 24 following the killing of Alex Pretti.

The Guild reported that one of its members was targeted with chemical munitions during the protest. On her social media account, KARE-11 anchor Jana Shortal also described being pushed and pepper-sprayed at the scene, despite clearly identifying herself as press.

"This is unacceptable," the Guild statement said. "Members of the press must be able to report the news without interference from law enforcement, a right guaranteed by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution."

"We demand that federal agents respect that right."

## Worker center wants ICE off jobsites

The Twin Cities worker center CTUL is pressuring one of the largest home-builders in Minnesota - Fortune 500 member D.R. Horton - to keep federal immigration agents off its jobsites unless they have a judicial warrant.

The push comes after ICE agents raided and harassed workers three times at a D.R. Horton development in Shakopee.

CTUL has ramped up its organizing in recent years to stop labor abuses in the non-union construction industry.

Take action in support of the campaign at [bit.ly/ProtectConstructionWorkers](http://bit.ly/ProtectConstructionWorkers).



Union Advocate photos

## Lessons in heartbreak, resilience

As demonstrators gathered in a park two blocks away, rank-and-file members of the Minneapolis and St. Paul educators unions held a teach-in at Minneapolis City Hall, dramatizing the heartbreak impacts of "Operation Metro Surge" on their schools.

The somber event featured sing-alongs, readings from a children's book and a group discussion - guided by a teacher at the whiteboard - about how communities and elected leaders can help students and families who have gone into hiding or, worse, seen family members disappear. St. Paul and Minneapolis are among metro-area school districts that have adopted a hybrid learning model, and the classroom at the teach-in reflected that reality, with empty desks and floor mats marked with signs depicting the fate of absent students.

"Students and staff have been abducted, schools stalked and teargassed, with classrooms missing more students every day," said Drake Myers, an education support professional in Minneapolis. "I don't know a single educator who wants our federal tax money going to pay for this."

## Labor movement pledges to fight for justice after federal agents kill two in Minneapolis

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler, the nation's highest-ranking union officer, said the killings, both captured on video, made clear to the world that U.S. immigration policy is "aimed at stoking violence and chaos," not keeping communities safe.

"America's unions join the call for ICE to immediately leave Minnesota before anyone else is hurt or killed," Shuler said. "We demand local authorities conduct a full, transparent investigation that will lead to accountability for this tragic and violent act, and for Congress to use its power to hold ICE accountable."

### Honoring Renee

Family and friends remembered Macklin Good, killed by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent Jan. 7 in Minneapolis, as a mother, wife and

poet, who died trying to keep her neighbors safe.

"Renee was a Christian who knew that all religions teach the same essential truth: we are here to love each other, care for each other, and keep each other safe and whole," Becca Good, Renee's wife, said in an open letter.

Minnesota's labor movement quickly condemned Good's killing. State AFL-CIO President Bernie Burnham issued a statement noting that bystander video showed Good posed no threat to the agent who fired his weapon, and Burnham praised the work of constitutional observers like Good.

"We stand in solidarity with committed residents who find the courage every day to protect their immigrant neighbors and coworkers from ICE agents violently trampling our constitutional rights," Burnham said. "Our

hearts are especially with Renee's family and loved ones."

### Losing a union brother

Pretti was shot several times by a Customs and Border Patrol officer Jan. 24. For the labor movement, his death hit even closer to home.

An intensive-care nurse at the Veterans Affairs hospital in Minneapolis, Pretti was a member of American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) Local 3669, a union affiliated with the AFL-CIO.

Local 3669 President Jake Romans, who worked with Pretti as a nurse at the VA, remembered him as someone who always looked for ways to help others, including the veterans he cared for and the people he worked with.

"I saw him a week before he died," Romans said during an online memorial for Pretti. "He asked me, 'What's

going on with the union?'"

"Our union is heartbroken," AFGE President Everett Kelley added. "An AFGE member is dead. And a family's life has been forever changed."

Kelley said the national union planned to hold a public memorial for Pretti on Feb. 1, near the Minneapolis VA hospital. Through their grief, though, AFGE and other unions pledged to remain steadfast in their demand for justice.

"Alex Pretti was a patriotic ICU nurse at a VA hospital who devoted his life to serving America's veterans," Kelley added. "AFGE calls for a full and transparent investigation into Alex's killing, led by an independent third party. We also call for bipartisan congressional oversight to uncover the truth, ensure accountability and begin repairing the damage to public trust."



The "Day of Truth and Freedom" march against the federal surge in violent immigration enforcement stretches for blocks of downtown Minneapolis, as protesters make their way toward a rally at the Target Center.

Union Advocate photo

**Unions stand with community against ICE, CEOs mostly silent**

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Teachers, health care workers and other union members marched with signs of labor support.

Organizers behind the one-day action called for "No Work, No School, No Shopping." While most labor groups that endorsed the action cautioned union members to follow the terms of their contracts, which typically include no-strike clauses, hundreds of independent restaurants and retailers closed. And weather-related school closings made it easier for families and workers to march, too.

The solidarity on display Jan. 23 offered a stark contrast to the silence from Minnesota's large corporations.

In response, workers, faith leaders and community groups ramped up the pressure on corporations like Target, Delta and Starbucks last month, demanding they refuse to allow federal agents on their properties – and use their clout in Congress to freeze funding for Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

A delegation of clergy members took those demands into a meeting with Target CEO Brian Cornell on Jan. 22. In a statement after the meeting, they said Cornell's response fell short of "the urgency this moment requires."

The clergy were announcing plans for sit-ins as this edition went to press.

## Worth it? 'Metro Surge' costing taxpayers \$18 million per week

Researchers at the North Star Policy Action estimate that Operation Metro Surge is imposing significant and growing economic costs on the state, in addition to its substantial human toll.

The labor-backed think tank issued a report last month that estimated federal immigration operations are costing taxpayers at least \$18 million per week in direct expenses, while broader economic disruptions continue to unfold. It called the estimate conservative.

"Operation Metro Surge is draining public resources and destabilizing daily life across Minnesota," Jake Schwitzer, the organization's executive director, said. "Taxpayers are spending millions of dollars every week to fund an ICE enforcement campaign whose increasingly unprofessional and violent tactics are keeping people home, shuttering businesses, and slowing the economy."

"Our report shows these costs are already substantial and will continue to grow."

The report estimates that direct taxpayer expenses associated with Operation Metro Surge total at least \$18 million per week, including:

- \$8.9 million per week in compensation for federal agents.
- \$4.5 million per week for lodging and meals for out-of-state agents.
- \$1.6 million per week in detention

costs, assuming only half of arrests result in detention.

- \$3 million per week in statewide local police overtime

The report did not include other costs, including overtime bonuses for federal agents, aviation costs, vehicle rentals, court proceedings and potential civil liability, indicating that the true taxpayer cost is likely substantially higher.

Beyond direct government spending, Operation Metro Surge is disrupting economic activity across Minnesota, the report found.

As federal enforcement tactics escalate, fear and uncertainty are increasingly shaping decisions about whether to go to work, shop for necessities, attend school or participate in community life.

Reporting from across the Twin Cities and other targeted areas has indicated that businesses are closing or reducing hours, workers are staying home, and consumer activity has slowed significantly. Non-immigrant residents and businesses are also curtailing activity amid heightened instability.

If enforcement continues and tactics intensify, the economic impact is likely to deepen, Schwitzer said. "Our report shows these costs are already substantial and will continue to grow."

The full report is available online at [northstarpolicy.org](http://northstarpolicy.org).



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Airport workers, Uber and Lyft drivers and clergy decry racial profiling and abductions at Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport during a press conference in Terminal 1. Union Advocate photos

## Minnesota unions to employers: 'Keep ICE out of our workplaces'

As federal immigration raids spread across the Twin Cities last month, several local unions stepped up to demand their employers protect both workers and the people they serve.

From health care workers and letter carriers to educators and transit workers, the message was clear: keep ICE out of our workplaces.

At Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, hospitality workers, support staff and drivers with Uber and Lyft saw an escalation of immigration activity in early January.

At a press conference with union and faith leaders, airport workers described being stopped by federal agents on their way to work – or even on the job – and asked for documentation that they are in the country legally.

Uber Driver Hamsa Hussein said federal agents at the airport were clearly stopping drivers based on their appearance.

"This is not how things are supposed to be working," he said. "It's about intimidation, not safety. No one should be treated like a suspect for showing up to work."

UNITE HERE Local 17, which represents over 250 food-service workers at the airport, reported that over a dozen of its members had been detained last month – on both sides of MSP's security checkpoints. Geof Paquette, an internal organizer with Local 17, said anyone working behind the checkpoint must pass a rigorous federal background check.

"All of these workers who were kidnapped had the proper authorization to be working in an airport behind security,"

he said. "They're doing it the right way. They're doing it the legal way – and they're still targeted."

Many hospitality workers, as a result, are simply staying home, Paquette added. He noted that it's also happening at the airport and in restaurants and hotels, many occupied by ICE agents themselves.

Local 17 is helping the families of members who have been detained track and support their loved ones. The union also is raising funds – nearly \$100,000 as of press time – to support workers and their families with food, rent and other costs.

Union members working in local hospitals, meanwhile, reported seeing federal agents lurking near their campuses or waiting outside patients' rooms – with some patients even being shackled to their hospital beds.

Dr. Zach Perez, a first-year resident at Hennepin County Medical Center and a member of the SEIU-affiliated Committee of Interns and Residents, said an alarming number of patients are skipping appointments, not picking up medications and forgoing treatment.

"This is an extremely preventable public health crisis, and it's created by ICE," Perez said during a unity break with members of AFSCME, the Minnesota Nurses Association and the Minnesota Newspaper and Communications Guild outside HCMC on Jan. 23.

Perez added a message for business leaders, hospital executives and elected officials: "Work together to rid our community of this disease."



Members of several health care unions gather outside HCMC for a "unity break" to decry ICE's presence in their facilities.

## Labor Department issues grants to support suicide prevention in construction industry

By Michael Moore  
Union Advocate editor

The Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry awarded new grant funding last month to help two organizations tackle a leading safety hazard in the construction industry: mental health.

Minnesota Building Trades unions and their partners represented by the Associated General Contractors (AGC) pushed hard at the Capitol last year to get lawmakers to address the mental-health crisis in their industry, pointing to suicide rates among construction workers that are four times higher than the national average – and even higher among men.

With the combined \$750,000 in new funding, two organizations – the AGC of Minnesota Foundation and Suicide Awareness Voices of Education – will create outreach and engagement programs tailored to construction workers, aimed at promoting mental well-being and preventing suicide.

In a statement announcing the grants, DLI Commissioner Nicole Blissenbach said prioritizing construction workers' mental health "will save lives."

### Unique stressors

The new grant program is modeled after a similar initiative, led by the

state's Department of Agriculture, to address higher suicide rates among family farmers.

Both farmers and tradespeople face stressors unique to their communities. For construction workers, they can include working long hours away from home. And employment is cyclical for most; when their trade wraps work on one project, there is no guarantee of a job waiting for them on another.

**"We changed the culture around safety. Now we need to change that culture around mental health, to remove the stigma and let our people know it's OK to talk about it."**

– Joel Smith,  
LIUNA Minnesota & North Dakota

LIUNA Minnesota and North Dakota President and Business Manager Joel Smith, a leading advocate for the DLI's new grant program, said the macho culture on a construction job site can make some tradespeople hesitant to ask for help dealing with stress.

But the construction industry has

changed its culture before, Smith added.

"Thirty-four years ago when I got my start, safety wasn't emphasized nearly as much," Smith said during a breakout on mental health during LIUNA's infrastructure summit last October.

"We changed the culture around safety. Now we need to change that culture around mental health, to remove the stigma and let our people know it's OK to talk about it. But it's going to take all of us."

### A tailored approach

For its part, the unionized trades and their contractors in Minnesota already have begun the work of changing their approach to mental health, even before lawmakers approved funding for the new grant program.

Many unions and their contractors have begun including mental-health awareness into their first-aid trainings and increasing the number of times workers can access their employee-assistance programs (EAPs). LIUNA rolled out a hardhat sticker – "What's Underneath Your Hardhat?" – encouraging members to look out for each other's wellbeing.

With the new grant funding, AGC CEO Tim Worke said, the contractors' foundation and its partners in labor – and, he hopes, local developers – will

# 988

## SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE

Text or call 988 to find judgment-free support for mental health, substance use, and more. Or chat with someone at 988lifeline.org.

expand on work to break stigmas around mental health in the industry.

Plans include an expanded suicide prevention training, with a new, tailored curriculum that will reach more than 1,500 construction apprentices statewide.

During the summit last fall, Worke said the stakes are high not just in terms of saving lives, but for the industry's success in recruiting and retaining young workers, too.

"I'm absolutely convinced that if we cannot change folks in the industry that do not value mental health, the workforce is going to respond with their feet," he said. "They're going to move to another industry that does."

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**Building Trades Credit Union**



# Building Trades mobilize members, tap labor solidarity to fend off attack on prevailing wage in West St. Paul

By Michael Moore  
Union Advocate editor

By mobilizing their members and tapping solidarity from the local labor movement, Building Trades unions won an unexpected fight over prevailing wage in West St. Paul last year.

The city has long required developers to pay prevailing wages on any project that receives \$50,000 or more in public assistance. But in July council members and the mayor voted narrowly to allow exemptions on certain projects, with an eye toward a housing development at 150 Thompson Ave.

The vote caught Building Trades unions off guard, but it also "kicked us into overdrive," Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 110 representative Brian Winkelaar said. "We thought West St. Paul understood our issues."

Electricians were among four crafts that would have been exempted from prevailing wage on the 150 Thompson project, along with plumbers, sheet metal workers and sprinkler fitters.

But other unions in the St. Paul Building and Construction Trades Council treated the proposed exemption as an attack on their members, too.

Pervailing-wage rules establish minimum hourly rates, plus benefits, that contractors must pay their workers. The rates are determined by an annual survey so that they reflect area standards, and they are specific to each construction trade.

Federal, state and local governments use prevailing-wage laws to ensure public investments support good jobs – and prevent low-road contractors from squeezing workers' pay to win a public bid.

"This was an opportunity for the West St. Paul City Council to stand up and say, we want livable wages in our community," St. Paul Building Trades Executive Secretary Don Mullin said. "We asked them to stand up for the middle class, to hold a standard in our neighborhoods – and they held that standard."

The council originally scheduled a vote on the exemption for 150 Thompson in early September, but Building Trades unions successfully lobbied members to pump the brakes.

In the meantime, union organizers went to work, scheduling meetings with council members, encouraging tradespeople who live in West St. Paul to raise their voices and building support among the broader labor community.

"We had support from the nurses, SEIU, AFSCME, IBEW, the Building Trades," Winkelaar said. "People said, 'Even though it might not affect me, we're standing with them.'

"There's so much division in our world, whether it's between parties or between unions, it really was great to see everybody come together."

When the issue finally came before the council Dec. 8, union representatives and a strong majority of council members had identified a path forward for the 150 Thompson project that also protected prevailing wage.

With a crowd of about 75 union members in the meeting room, the council voted to apply the State of Minnesota's rules on prevailing wage to 150 Thompson. Those rules allow contractors to hire regis-



Union members crowd into the West St. Paul City Council's meeting room during a vote over prevailing wage.

photos courtesy IBEW Local 110

tered apprentices, who earn less than journey-level tradespeople, to work on projects covered by prevailing wage.

The move will give the developer some relief while ensuring an even footing for union contractors in the bidding process, as the overwhelming majority of registered apprenticeship programs are sponsored by unions.

Council Member Robyn Gulley said the vote

showed West St. Paul does, in fact, understand labor's issues.

"One of the reasons that we protect strong wages is that they protect people in the community who work on these projects, and that is incredibly important," said Gulley, a labor organizer and educator, who has earned an early labor endorsement in this year's Senate District 65 election.

"We cannot sacrifice our workers."



Mississippi Market workers celebrated after filing for a union election with UFCW Local 1189 in summer 2024.

file photo

## First union contract delivers wage and benefit gains, voice on the job for Mississippi Market workers

By Michael Moore

Union Advocate editor

Members of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1189 voted last month to ratify a first contract with Mississippi Market after 11 months of bargaining with the St. Paul co-op grocer.

Union negotiators said the three-year contract delivers on the demands that sparked co-op workers' organizing drive, including more agency in the workplace, economic gains and improvements to scheduling.

Clara Cady, produce buyer and lead who served on Local 1189's bargaining committee, described the process as empowering.

"I feel like I have a voice in the workplace now, and I feel like my peers and my co-workers have a voice in the workplace," Cady said. "That's what we all deserve."

The bargaining unit brings together over 150 workers at Mississippi Market's three locations. They voted to form a union with Local 1189 in October 2024.

Bargaining began the following January, after the busy holiday season had passed – and after union members had an opportunity to participate in a survey of what they wanted to accomplish in a first contract. At the top of the list, Cady said, were fairer scheduling policies and more communication with management.

The new contract delivered on both.

A new labor-management committee (LMC) allows workers to bring their issues and ideas to management in a formal setting. Cady, who works at the co-op on Dale Street and Selby Avenue, said she envisions the committee as a place to work through ongoing safety concerns at her location.

"A lot of these concerns have been brought up to the market, and people feel like it's fallen on deaf

ears," she said. "A lot of what, I think, people wanted was that feeling of being heard – and in return, hearing from management, 'We're going to address this, and here's how.'

"Now, anyone can go and voice their concerns regarding whatever issues they may have, and it will be addressed in those LMC meetings."

Workers also now get their schedules two weeks in advance, with changes allowed only if they are agreed to by staff. The contract includes protections for workers who are late or miss work during a severe weather event, and it bars managers from scheduling them to "clopopen" – working consecutive closing and opening shifts.

The first contract improves union members' wages and benefits, too. A restructured wage scale will deliver two raises per year – one on a worker's hiring anniversary date and another on the anniversary of the contract ratification.

Co-op workers also won more paid time off, longer breaks and a more generous and flexible bereavement policy.

Local 1189 President Adam Evenstad credited Mississippi Market workers, who "trudged through a long, hard-fought process" but "never waivered" in their support for each other.

"Their solidarity has been inspiring," he added.

For her part, Cady said she was proud of the new contract and glad she participated in the negotiations process, even if it meant stepping outside her comfort zone.

"I think a lot of us felt very out of our element sitting in a room across from a lawyer and all of these higher ups from your job," Cady said. "But I learned so much about myself, and I feel really good about the way we were able to advocate for my peers and for my co-workers."

## Organizing Report

# Baristas, nurses, more health care workers vote to form unions after NLRB resumes elections

Baristas at a Starbucks in St. Paul voted 18-1 in favor of forming a union with Workers United on Dec. 10.

The National Labor Relations Board oversaw an union election at the 2525 West 7th St. location, near the intersection with Davern, over two months after workers there petitioned for representation. The delay stemmed from the federal-government shutdown that began Oct. 1 and halted the NLRB's work for over six weeks.

St. Paul barista's overwhelming victory restores the number of Minnesota locations where workers have formed unions with Starbucks Workers United (SWU) to 14. Starbucks abruptly closed a unionized store at 300 Snelling Ave. S in September, giving workers just two days' notice.

Several other organizing elections took place in the Twin Cities in the weeks after the shutdown ended.

- Workers at Chapel View Homes, an assisted living facility in Hopkins, voted to join SEIU Healthcare Minnesota and Iowa in an election overseen by the National Labor Relations Board on Dec. 16.

The bargaining unit includes over 140 workers, from registered nurses and other health care staff to laundry aides, cooks and custodians.

- Family Tree Clinic staff members voted 28-9 in favor of forming a union with Council 5 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. Voting took place Dec. 11.

Family Tree provides reproductive and sexual health care in Minneapolis' Whittier neighborhood.

Members of the bargaining unit work as nurses, care coordinators, medical assistants, educators and more.

In a post on @familytreeworkers, the bargaining unit's Instagram account, members said they look forward to negotiating a first contract that centers worker sustainability, so that union members can better serve their patients and the community.

"We are providers, teachers, mentors, advocates. In this time of crisis, fear and uncertainty, we show up with compassion and courage. Forming a union is another embodiment of those values; workers deserve the same dignity and care we lead with!"

- Registered Nurses in the non-invasive cardiology lab at Methodist Hospital in St. Louis Park voted Dec. 11 to join the Minnesota Nurses Association. The vote was 9-1.

Patti Anderson said several demands were behind the organizing drive, including compensation that's in line with their nursing peers at Park Nicollet and other HealthPartners facilities.

Nurses also cited interest in responding with a collective voice to rapid changes in hospital policies, which, they say, are affecting nurses' workloads and patient care.

"The nurses of the non-invasive cardiology lab bring an exceptional level of dedication and care to patients, and we deserve fair compensation for the care provided," Anderson said. "We chose to unionize to ensure we are able to best support our patients continued high-quality health care."

– Michael Moore, UA editor



MN Trades Academy interns learn the basics at the Finishing Trades Institute of the Upper Midwest. file photo

## Paid internships available for students considering construction careers

Know a young adult who's considering a career in the construction trades - or who should be? High-school students ages 16 to 21 can get paid to explore careers in Building Trades through the MN Trades Academy (MTA) summer internship program.

Over the course of eight weeks, interns will receive a practical introduction to a range of construction career paths, including carpentry, pipefitting, electrical work and more. They will also learn about related fields like architecture, surveying, estimating, project management and building design.

Interns go through OSHA 10 safety training, learn to identify and safely use hand and power tools, tour job sites, study construction math and receive guidance and mentoring from industry professionals.

MTA partners with four metro-area youth employment agencies: Right Track in St. Paul, Hired in Ramsey County, Step Up in Minneapolis and BrookLynk in Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center.

Interns must submit applications to those agencies and meet their eligibility requirements. Application deadlines vary.

Students can find and fill out an interest form to receive more information at [constructioncareers.org](http://constructioncareers.org), or call 507-458-3131 for more information.

MTA is a program of the Construction Careers Foundation, the career-outreach initiative supported by over 20 local Building Trades unions.

### Saint Paul RLF retirees to meet Feb. 18

The Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation Retirees will meet Feb. 18 at noon at the Saint Paul Labor Center, 353 West 7th St.

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).



**We're looking for new friends.**

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[facebook.com/SaintPaulRLF](https://facebook.com/SaintPaulRLF)

### State workplace injury rate holds steady at all-time low

The Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry (DLI) released data last month showing the state's estimated workplace injury and illness rate remained unchanged from 2023 to 2024, at an estimated 2.9 non-fatal incidents per 100 full-time-equivalent workers.

That's the lowest rate recorded since the state began tracking the data point in 1973.

The rate is part of the annual Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, which covered some 2.89 million workers. The survey estimated that Minnesota saw 66,000 nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses in 2024, a slight increase from 65,100 estimated cases in 2023.

Injuries accounted for 62,600 (95%) total recordable cases in 2024; illnesses were an additional 3,400 cases.

While the state's injury rate was its lowest on record in 2024, it was higher than the national rate of 2.6 cases

per 100 workers, estimated by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"Daily attention to workplace safety and health directly improves the safety and health outcomes for workers, reduces preventable work-related injuries and illnesses and ensures more workers go home safe and healthy at the end of each work shift," DLI Commissioner Nicole Blissenbach said.

In Minnesota, industries with the highest rate of injury and illness were state hospitals and local government nursing care facilities, with rates over 10 cases per 100 workers. Occupations that saw the highest number of incidents resulting in lost work hours were service, transportation and material moving, and production occupations.

Private-sector employers accounted for 87% of recordable injuries and illnesses in 2024.

### Gallup: Nurses are most trusted profession - again

For the 24th consecutive year, nurses finished atop a Gallup survey asking Americans to identify the most honest and ethical profession - an especially meaningful honor, the nation's largest union of nurses said, at a time when public health is under attack.

"Topping the poll in 2025 is especially moving because this past year has been a time when nurses rose up as patient advocates on all fronts," National Nurses United President Mary Turner, a longtime ICU nurse at North Memorial hospital in Robbinsdale, said.

"We have been fighting to protect our patients from Medicaid cuts and the loss of Affordable Care Act subsidies, standing up and saying ICE does not belong in our hospitals, calling out attacks on the union rights of federal workers - including 15,000 of our Veterans Affairs nurses - and so much more."

The Gallup poll, conducted over two weeks in December, found 75% of U.S. adults said nurses have

"high" or "very high" honesty and ethical standards.

Gallup first conducted its "Honesty and Ethics Poll" in 1976 and has updated it annually since 1990. Nurses have taken the No. 1 spot in all but one year since they were added to the survey in 1999.

The exception is 2001, when firefighters were measured on a one-time basis shortly after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Turner said nurses would use their public support to continue sounding the alarm about devastating cuts Medicaid and Affordable Care Act subsidies - and their impact on the nation's health.

"We want our patients to know that, even when times are tough, union nurses are tougher," Turner said. "It's possible to have a healthy society that prioritizes care, compassion and justice, and as nurses, we will stay loud and keep fighting for that healthy future so our collective power can win the public health protections our patients deserve."



# Minutes of the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation

## NOVEMBER 12, 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, Gibbons, Guertin, Hoerth, Hunt, Madden, Markham-Kocurek, Michelson, Peterson, Ryan, Sansom, Schmidt, Seath, Strom. Excused were Gale, Luneburg, Mullin, Roth, Slattery, Tastad-Damer, VanDassor, Vanderport and Varco. Absent: Hill and Olson.

President Peterson read the Code of Conduct. The RLF 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 Secretary-Treasurer Bernadine Engeldorf and Vice President Perry Schmidt.

## CREDENTIALS

Credentials were received from AFSCME Local 2508 and Twin Cities Postal Data Center Local 7019. President Peterson administered the Oath of Obligation to those new delegates and alternates in attendance.

## MINUTES

**M/S/C TO APPROVE THE MEETING MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 10, 2025, AS PUBLISHED IN THE UNION ADVOCATE NEWSPAPER AFTER THE SECRETARY-TREASURER NOTES THERE ARE NO ADDITIONS OR CHANGES CALLED FOR.**

## COMMITTEE ON POLITICAL EDUCATION (COPE) MINUTES NOVEMBER 12, 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, Gibbons, Guertin, Hoerth, Hunt, Madden, Markham-Kocurek, Mayer, Michelson, Peterson, Ryan, Sansom, Schmidt, Seath, Strom. Excused were Gale, Luneburg, Mullin, Roth, Slattery, Tastad-Damer, VanDassor, Vanderport and Varco. Absent: Hill, Lohmann and Olson.

Items to come before this committee included:

- President Peterson and the committee recapped the Election results, special primary elections for House Districts 47A and 64A.

- Thank you note received from Jim DeMay for the RLF's \$500 contribution toward the Mounds View School District Capital Projects Levy.

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

## Labor delivers winter gear for kids in need



Thanks to support from the local labor community, the Jean Jones Initiative's annual winter-clothing drive delivered \$2,830 worth of gear to the Saint Paul Public Schools' Project REACH office last month. Additionally, members of Saint Paul Steamfitters-Pipefitters Local 455 pitched in with a coat drive at their union hall. The Jean Jones Initiative, named after a longtime SPPS educator and union leader, is coordinated by the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation's nonprofit arm, the St. Paul Labor Studies and Resource Center.

submitted photo

## EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES NOVEMBER 12, 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.

President Peterson reported on Labor-Red Cross Blood Drive being held on Wednesday, Dec. 3; the Jean Jones Coats Initiative; Holiday Party immediately following the December delegate meeting at IBEW Local 110; AFL-CIO Protecting Our Cities and States Convening; and nonviolent direct-action training.

- ORGANIZING UPDATES/CAMPAIGNS: AFSCME Council 5, the Minnesota Nurses Association and Starbucks Workers Union gave updates on their organizing activities.

- **M/S/C FOR THE RLF TO MAKE A \$500 CONTRIBUTION TO PRIDE AT WORK**

- **M/S/C FOR THE RLF TO PURCHASE \$300 WORTH OF CUB FOOD GIFT CARDS TO DONATE TO AFGE FOR THEIR EVENT.**

- THANK YOU NOTES received from APWU Local 65 for the RLF's \$300 contribution to their Second Annual Membership Appreciation Picnic.

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 October 2025. The report was accepted as read.

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

President Peterson reported on election results; Labor-Red Cross

Blood Drive on Wednesday, Dec. 3, here at the Labor Center; holiday party at the IBEW Local 110 union hall following the December delegate meeting; AFL-CIO Protecting Our Cities and States Convening; and nonviolent direct-action training.

## REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

- Michael Madden reported on behalf of the Chisago County Labor Assembly. He thanked Colleen Nocerini, political organizer, for her work on Get Out The Vote, and he also thanked the Chisago teachers. The assembly meets on the fourth Tuesday of the month via zoom at 6 p.m.

- Brian Beedle reported on behalf of the Washington County Labor Assembly. The Washington County Labor Assembly's next meeting will be combined with its holiday party.

- Martin Hoerth reported 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. After its last meeting, members are looking to help Federal Workers. They will be passing the hat to purchase Cub Foods gift cards for an event that the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) is having on Nov. 24. They will raffle off the gift cards to AFGE members. The assembly's next meeting will be on the second Thursday of the month at 7 p.m.

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

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

Items to come before this committee included:

- President Peterson reported on the special primary elections Dec. 16 and special elections Jan. 13, 2026, for House Districts 47A and 64A; and on the Minnesota AFL-CIO endorsing Robyn Gulley for SD 65.

- Thank you note received from Rafael Ortega, Ramsey County Commissioner District 5, for the RLF's \$250 contribution.

- **M/S/C FOR THE RLF TO MAKE A \$1,000 CONTRIBUTION TO MEG LUGER NIKOLAI, SENATE DISTRICT 64A.**

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

## EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES DECEMBER 10, 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.

President Peterson reported on meeting our goal of 24 donors for the Labor-Red Cross Blood Drive and the possibility of hosting a summer blood drive. She also discussed Labor of Love – Sponsor A Family; scheduled delivery of Coats and Winter Gear to Title 1 Project REACH on Jan. 6 and Democracy Defense training – anyone interested should see her.

- ORGANIZING UPDATES/CAMPAIGNS: St. Paul Building Trades, the Letter Carriers, SEIU Local 284, SPFE Local 28 and UFCW Local 1189 gave updates on their organizing activities.

- THANK YOU NOTES: received from United Union of Roofers Waterproofers & Allied Workers for the RLF's \$400 contribution to their USA's 15th Annual Roofers Twin Cities Sporting Clays Shoot.

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 November 2025. The report was accepted as read.

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

President Peterson thanked the delegates for all the work they have done and to our dedicated St. Paul RLF staff. She called 2025 the year of special elections, with special primary elections next Tuesday, Dec. 16, and noted that SPFE Local 28 is hosting a door knock on Sunday in House District 64A. Unions are engaged in democracy defense, training about 500 community activists, and Peterson encouraged delegates whose unions are interested in information to contact her or Todd Dahlstrom at the Minnesota AFL-CIO. "We are looking out for our neighbors, and wish everyone a safe and happy holiday season."

- **PRESIDENT PETERSON DEFERRED ALL REPORTS UNTIL JANUARY 2026 TO ACCOMMODATE THE 2025 HOLIDAY PARTY.**

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

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

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