

The St. Paul Union Advocate

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

April 2026

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Inside: Unions ‘deeply concerned’ about California-based health giant’s intent to acquire Allina – Page 8



Members of Doctors Council - SEIU who work as doctors, nurse practitioners and physicians’ assistants at Allina clinics and urgent cares across the metro held a one-day strike last November. UA file photo

Allina clinicians vote to authorize open-ended strike as talks continue

By Michael Moore
Union Advocate editor

Still without a first contract two years into the collective-bargaining process, primary care providers at Allina Health clinics and urgent-care centers announced last month that they have voted to authorize an open-ended strike.

Doctors Council - SEIU, which represents about 650 doctors, nurse practitioners and physicians’ assistants in bargaining with Allina, said 90% of participating members supported giving their union leaders the power to call a strike if they deem it necessary.

Members of the bargaining team said talks scheduled March 16 and 26 would be pivotal in making that decision. Health care unions are required to give their employers at least 10 days’ notice before striking.

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

Lawmakers take up educators’ urgent call for new insurance pool

By Michael Moore
Union Advocate editor

House and Senate authors of a statewide health insurance pool for school employees, one of Education Minnesota’s top priorities this session, outlined their legislation’s path forward last month.

Joining a day of action sponsored by the statewide educators’ union to drum up support for the idea among lawmakers, Rep. Liz Reyer (D-Eagan) and Sen. Mary Kunesh (D-New Brighton) said they hoped to pass bills this session that would survey school districts about the insurance coverage they provide.

The data is necessary, Kunesh said, to calculate costs of the proposal, known as the Educator Group Insurance Program (EGIP). Kunesh and Reyer said they are aiming for EGIP’s full passage in 2027.

“This session, the goal is to vet concepts through committees,” Kunesh said during a press conference with educators at the Capitol on March 18.

Modeled after an existing program that covers State of Minnesota employees and after programs in other states, EGIP is Education Minnesota’s preferred approach to stabilizing school districts’ skyrocketing



Rep. Liz Reyer of Eagan joins members of Education Minnesota at a Capitol press conference about the Educator Group Insurance Program, legislation Reyer authored. Union Advocate photo

health insurance costs.

The issue has increasingly become a stumbling block for local unions in contract negotiations, as educators and other school

employees are repeatedly forced to choose between absorbing big premium hikes or accepting lower wage increases.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 5)

Go Figure

380 Worker deaths each day, on average, in 2025 from job-related injuries and illnesses

\$3.85 Congress' budget allocation to the Occupational Health & Safety Administration, for each worker the agency is charged with protecting

191 years Estimated length of time it would take OSHA to inspect every U.S. workplace at current staffing levels, the agency's lowest ever

Source: AFL-CIO



Partner Voices: Commissioner Nicole Blissenbach

A commitment to safety on Workers Memorial Day

Every year we gather on April 28 to commemorate Workers Memorial Day in honor of the workers who lost their lives on the job during the past year. Workers Memorial Day began in 1970 and, just one year later, in 1971, the Occupational Safety and Health Act went into effect and established OSHA. That first law, and every worker-protection effort before and after, was championed and passed through the organizing power of the labor movement and its commitment to worker safety.

From the very first day on the job, every worker is entitled to a workplace free from hazards. At the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry (DLI), it is our goal that every worker knows about their rights and feels empowered to raise concerns when they believe their workplace is unsafe. When employers follow required safety standards, have proper controls in place and make safety and health programs a priority, everyone is safer and our state is stronger.

During the reporting year that ended Sept. 25, 2025, the number of fatalities in Minnesota workplaces under Minnesota OSHA (MNOSHA) jurisdiction was 23. The highest causes of death were contact with an object or equipment and falls.

In September, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) conducted a statewide safety stand-down in recognition of two deaths at roadside construction worksites. It was the first statewide stand-down, meant to pause work to honor the individuals lost and refocus on safety in work zones. MnDOT's action was a meaningful and deliberate moment to reflect and recommit to safety for all workers.

Minnesota has its own state-plan OSHA program, which received final approval from federal OSHA in July 1985, to protect workers at private and public worksites. The program has two parts: MNOSHA Workplace Safety Consultation and MNOSHA Compliance. Workplace Safety Consultation works with employers and employees to solve safety and health problems before they occur. It offers free, on-site consultation services upon request to help employers improve their safety and health record and lower accident costs. Its staff members can help employers recognize hazards, make recommendations for solving problems and suggest other sources of help that are available.

MNOSHA Compliance enforces regulations through work-

“We need to work together to make sure employers embrace safety and health, so that every worker goes home safe every day.”

– Nicole Blissenbach



site inspections, responds to employee complaints, conducts accident investigations and provides education and technical assistance. If a fatality occurs in a worksite under its jurisdiction, staff members investigate to determine whether existing MNOSHA standards were violated and whether the promulgation of additional standards is necessary to help avoid a recurrence of similar accidents.

In Minnesota, our commitment to safe workplaces is stronger than ever. When I came to work for the DLI, I wanted to make a difference in the lives of workers across Minnesota. I joined a workforce of more than 600 dedicated people working in service to all workers of Minnesota, ensuring safety and health in the workplace is a right that is realized. It is now more important than ever to protect the rights that exist for workers, while advocating to advance safer working conditions that will save additional lives. On Workers Memorial Day – and throughout the year – we need to work together to make sure employers embrace safety and health as a core value in their operations so that every worker goes home safe every day.

A safe workplace isn't a privilege, it's every worker's right in every workplace in our state. On this Workers Memorial Day – and every day after – let's do all we can to keep ourselves and our workplaces safe.

Each person we lost this year leaves behind a loving community of family, friends, neighbors and coworkers. We remember their loved ones in our collective memory, through memorials, through public actions like a statewide stand-down and in our commitment to creating safe workplaces for all.

– Nicole Blissenbach is commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry.

Letters

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

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For ‘courage and commitment’ in resisting federal surge, Minnesota labor movement receives human rights award

The AFL-CIO last month named Minnesota’s labor movement one of two recipients of the 2025 Meany-Kirkland Human Rights Award, pointing to local union activists’ “courage and commitment to fighting for democratic rights” during the violent surge of federal immigration enforcement that began in December.

The annual honor, named after the U.S. labor federation’s first two leaders, celebrates the most powerful examples of solidarity in action from across the world.

Minnesota’s labor movement shares the 2025 award with the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (BKDP), recognized as a “leading example of the global labor movement’s role in defending democratic rights.”

The Belarusian government has cracked down harshly on independent unions since they helped lead a massive anti-government protest in 2020. Last September, over 50 union leaders were released after nearly five years in prison, but many were immediately deported across the Lithuanian border and continue to remain in exile.

The AFL-CIO Executive Board announced the Meany-Kirkland Award winners March 4. Here are excerpts from the board’s statement, available in full at aflcio.org.

Democracy, worker and human rights, and peace itself are in retreat globally. A steady rise of emboldened autocrats worldwide has created a dangerous playbook for governance in which power is concentrated; oligarchs control wealth and information; workers’ rights are eroded; and international laws and standards can be ignored or overruled by force.

The government of Belarus has carried out relentless and systematic persecution of workers and independent unions for decades, leading to the imprisonment of more than 200 trade unionists. The Belarusian struggle is not isolated but rather a global warning. Beginning in 2025, the Minnesota labor movement resisted federal occupation



Labor helped organize a massive “ICE Out” protest in Minneapolis Jan. 23. file photo

across its state through grassroots coalition-building and demonstrated the power of solidarity in the face of authoritarianism.

What happened in Belarus and Minnesota illustrate what is at stake – and what is possible – globally. Our Belarusian and Minnesotan siblings are a ground-level reminder of how we as a global labor movement defend democracy and move forward – by being unimpaired, living in truth, and not backing down from our commitment to advance worker and human rights...

Communities across the United States are rapidly experiencing the consequences of an authoritarian government. In December 2025, the Trump administration launched a violent and militarized anti-immigrant occupation of Minnesota. Federal agents shot and killed two Minnesotans, unlawfully detained countless others, and unleashed weeks of senseless chaos and fear throughout the state’s communities.

Rooted in years of coalition-building, the Minnesota labor movement responded to the federal occupation with phenomenal coordination and

effectiveness. As the surge impacted virtually every union and union member, everyone played a critical and unique role in protecting their members and communities.

This broad-based coalescing culminated in a powerful and uplifting day of action on Jan. 23, 2026, during which unions showcased the diversity of their strengths. This unprecedented day of direct action was immediately followed by the murder of Alex Pretti, a nurse for Veteran Affairs and AFGE union member, at the hands of a federal agent. The labor movement’s critical infrastructure provided union and community members the space and tools to grieve, organize and fight back for their rights in the wake of Pretti’s murder.

Minnesota has and will continue to serve as an inspiring template for what is possible when communities come together and fight for all workers.

For their courage and commitment to fighting for democratic rights, the AFL-CIO is pleased to award the Minnesota labor movement with the George Meany-Lane Kirkland Human Rights Award.

Pancake brunch to benefit CTUL

Twin Cities worker center CTUL – Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en la Lucha – will hold its 2026 Pancake Brunch fundraiser April 18 at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Minneapolis.

Tickets are available at bit.ly/CTULPancake26, with prices on a sliding scale from \$25 to \$100. There is a \$10 student rate.

In addition to food, the family-friendly event will feature raffles, speeches and opportunities to learn more about CTUL’s worker-led efforts to educate and build power in the workplace and local communities.

Nellie Stone Johnson Scholarship Dinner

Tickets are available for the 39th annual Nellie Stone Johnson Scholarship Dinner on April 16th at the DoubleTree Hotel in Bloomington. This year’s theme is “The Power of Possibility: Four Decades of Access and Achievement.”

The scholarships support students who attend Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, with a focus on driving recruitment, retention and program completion among students of color.

The fundraising dinner honors Nellie Stone Johnson, a long-time member of the MnSCU system’s board. The endowment is a permanent reminder of Nellie’s contributions to civil rights, human rights and the rights of workforce cultural diversity initiatives.

Go to www.nelliestone.org for registration and ticket information.

Conference takes aim at prison labor

A daylong conference at Metro State University in St. Paul on April 10 will raise public awareness of involuntary servitude in Minnesota’s prisons.

Registration is open for the 12th annual Understanding and Responding to Mass Incarceration (URMI) Conference, which will explore the theme “End Slavery in Minnesota Prisons.”

Article I, Section 2 of the Minnesota Constitution bans slavery in Minnesota “otherwise than as punishment for a crime of which the party has been convicted.” This clause has been used to continue the practice of involuntary servitude for incarcerated people, who earn sub-poverty wages.

Organizers promise “a day of truth, testimony and transformation” at the conference, which will feature the voices of incarcerated workers, their families, civil rights leaders and a panel of experts.

The annual URMI conference is free and open to all. Registration is required at libguides.metrostate.edu/URMI.



Let’s get together, union members!

The St. Paul Regional Labor Federation’s local labor assemblies bring working people and retirees together to exchange ideas and take action on issues that matter most in their communities. Assembly meetings are open to all union members who live or work in our four-county area.

Chisago County Assembly

April 28th, 6 p.m.

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

Dakota County Assembly

April 9th, 7 p.m.

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

Ramsey County Assembly

April 28th, 6 p.m.

Saint Paul Labor Center, 353 7th Street West

Washington County Assembly

April 22nd, 6 p.m.

Washington County Gov’t Center, Stillwater



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At the Capitol



Rideshare drivers, lawmakers and labor leaders gather for a media availability outside the House chambers to voice concerns about legislation that would allow autonomous vehicles to operate in the state. photo courtesy SEIU Minnesota State Council

Pump the brakes on self-driving cars, workers tell lawmakers

By:Michelle Griffith
minnesotareformer.com

Minnesota labor advocates last month urged Minnesota lawmakers to refrain from allowing autonomous vehicles to operate in the state until they clarify Minnesota's laws to ensure that self-driving cars are safe and well-regulated.

Waymo's self-driving cars are currently operating in Minneapolis, but people are driving them for now. Drivers are using the cars to map the city and gather data about navigating Minneapolis streets, Axios reported.

Minnesota doesn't have laws regulating autonomous vehicles, and some lawmakers argue that the state needs to get them in place now to ensure the introduction of self-driving cars doesn't cause chaos.

"We have a lot of factors that need to go into rolling this out in the state of Minnesota, and absent our action, it will just happen pretty much against our will like has happened with so much tech throughout the country," Sen. Erin Maye Quade, DFL-Apple Valley, said at a Capitol press conference March 3.

Uber famously sidestepped taxi regulations when the company started operating in markets around the country — calling itself a technology platform rather than a ride-hailing company — and then often used their foothold to influence the passage of industry-favorable regulations.

Waymo, a California-based company, is operating in 10 major cities in

the U.S., including San Francisco, Austin, Atlanta and Phoenix.

Minnesota labor advocates are concerned that the influx of Waymo cars will displace ride-hail drivers, who have become an influential interest group at the Capitol in recent years.

Widespread use of Waymo self-driv-

"We support thoughtful innovation, but innovation must come with rigorous testing, transparent reporting, enforceable safety standards and clear protocols for first responders."

– Hannah Alstead,
Teamsters Joint Council 32

ing cars by Uber and Lyft could destroy the livelihoods of thousands of Minnesotans, who have flocked to driving for its decent pay and flexible hours.

A day after workers' press conference, the House Transportation Committee heard a bipartisan bill regulating self-driving cars. Labor advocates say the legislation would give companies free reign to operate in the state.

"We support thoughtful innovation, but innovation must come with rigorous testing, transparent reporting, enforceable safety standards and clear protocols for first responders," said Hannah Alstead, Teamsters Joint Council 32's

political director.

Waymo cites data showing that self-driving cars are safer than human drivers.

A company research paper that was peer-reviewed and published in a journal found that there were 91% fewer serious crashes compared to human drivers.

"Almost 400 people were killed on Minnesota's roads last year, with thousands more injured — often in life-altering ways. Waymo's technology ... is another solution to this pervasive road safety problem," a Waymo spokesperson said in a statement.

Waymo has hired four Minnesota lobbyists to advocate for it at the Minnesota Capitol, according to the Campaign Finance Board.

The bill lawmakers will debate Wednesday (HF 3513) creates a regulatory structure that grants the commissioner of the Department of Transportation the authority to greenlight autonomous vehicle companies for operation here. The commissioner could also suspend or revoke that authorization.

The bill also would clarify that law enforcement can issue citations to autonomous vehicles if they break the state's traffic laws.

Labor advocates and some Democratic lawmakers are calling for the prohibition of self-driving cars in Minnesota until an advisory board completes a study and a permit process is created for autonomous vehicle companies.

Report examines union-busting in Minnesota nursing homes

Researchers at Columbia University issued a report last month that shines a light on rampant union-busting in Minnesota's nursing-home industry, particularly in facilities that rely heavily on public subsidies.

The report, "Democracy Denied at the Bedside: Union Avoidance in Minnesota's Nursing Home Sector," draws on years of qualitative research and a statewide survey of nearly 2,000 certified nursing assistants to reveal a "pattern of anti-union tactics" in the state's nursing homes.

Columbia Labor Lab sociologist Adam Reich, one of six researchers who worked on the report, said the team began digging into labor relations in Minnesota's nursing-home industry shortly after the pandemic, which sparked a surge in union-organizing efforts among health care workers.

In addition to analyzing data — from their CNA survey, from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and from the Minnesota Department of Health — researchers embedded themselves into multiple union organizing efforts from 2021 to 2025.

The report includes firsthand accounts from workers reacting to their bosses' anti-union campaign, including misinformation, so-called "captive audience meetings" and, most shockingly, appeals to nursing home residents and their families to encourage caregivers to vote "no."

At one nonprofit nursing home with a religious affiliation, an administrator leaned on Biblical proverbs to suggest that union organizers were wolves in sheep's clothing.

"One story that sticks in my mind is a worker whose manager told them that they were going to talk to the pastor of the church they both attended about how this worker was organizing," Reich said.

But the report's key finding is the crossover between homes that receive public funds and those that run union-avoidance campaigns. It's already raising questions among unions in the industry about whether public funds are being used to stifle workers' voices.

Rasha Ahmad Sharif, SEIU Healthcare MN & IA's vice president for the sector, said workers deserve answers.

"While not surprising, we are still outraged to see that money that workers have been pushing to go to essential workers caring for Minnesotans is being spent trying to stop workers from forming unions because employers are too scared of their workers practicing their federal rights and gaining the bare minimum that their employers refused to give them," Ahmad Sharif said.

Pooling risk statewide would reduce costs, improve educators' coverage, union says

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Over 150 union members joined the day of action at the Capitol, and many carried signs bearing the exact amount by which their district's health insurance costs have increased in recent years – 30% in Mankato, 34% in Lyle, 54% in New Ulm.

By consolidating the purchasing power of every school district into a statewide risk pool, EGIP would cut down on brokerage fees and level the playing field in negotiations with large insurers like UnitedHealthcare and Blue Cross MN, advocates say.

"Minnesota's school districts are small buyers in a market that rewards large ones," Education Minnesota President Monica Byron said. "Every year, hundreds of school districts negotiate alone against a multi-billion-dollar insurance industry that knows exactly how much leverage it has. Educators pay for that power imbalance in higher premiums, worse coverage and impossible choices."

Because the risk pool in most school districts is relatively small, they often see a dramatic spike in coverage costs after an employee experiences a health crisis, Byron added. "Every school district in Minnesota is just one sick employee away from a crisis that it cannot manage."

That's what happened to Amanda Kottke, a science teacher in the Glencoe-Silver Lake district. Her son spent 10 "long, terrifying days" at Children's Hospital last year receiving treatment for complications from a ruptured appendix.

Kottke, who has a high-deductible plan through her employer, acknowledged that concerns about out-of-pocket costs factored into her family's initial decision to hold off on a \$250 trip to the urgent care. But the hospital stay left Kottke with a much larger bill – and feelings of "guilt and trauma" that she now can't afford to address in therapy.

"We were asked to pay our \$10,000 deductible up front, and we couldn't," Kottke said. "They then suggested \$900 a month until the bill was paid off, and we couldn't do that either."

Now her district, which already has seen insurance costs increase 165% over the last six years, is seeing bids for insurance plans next year come in 30% to 50% higher, she said.

The rising cost of their health insurance comes with public costs beyond the strain it creates on districts' budgets. (The proposal would include a "hold harmless" provision to ensure districts' costs don't increase with EGIP.)

Education Minnesota reports that high insurance costs are a leading factor in driving licensed educators

away from the profession. Lower-paid school employees, meanwhile, often forego the district's insurance and look to public programs for coverage.

Kunesh and Reyer, EGIP's authors in the legislature, said most lawmakers agree that public schools' rising insurance costs are an urgent problem. Reyer had a message for those who are still skeptical EGIP is the solution.

"They have not offered a systemic solution, and that's what we need," she said. "Every day without a solution is another educator choosing between a paycheck and a family's health care. Minnesota can do better than that."



A high-deductible insurance plan left Glencoe-Silver Lake science teacher Amanda Kottke's family with steep medical bills after her son's hospitalization.

State data shows sharp uptick in uninsured rate

Minnesota's uninsured rate last year increased from an all-time low to the its highest point in six years, according to data released last month by the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH).

The latest Minnesota Health Access Survey found that 5.8% were without health insurance in 2025, up from 3.8% in 2023, meaning an estimated 116,000 more Minnesotans went without health insurance.

Minnesota Commissioner of Health Dr. Brooke Cunningham called the report "deeply disturbing."

"For most people, health care is unaffordable without insurance," she added. "This results in delayed or deferred care and worse health outcomes, more medical debt for families, and increased rates of uncompensated care for health systems."

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Starbucks Workers union's new wage offer lures coffee chain back to bargaining

By Mark Gruenberg
PAI Union News Service

NEW YORK – A new contract offer by unionized Starbucks workers, with a slightly lower minimum wage for baristas and other workers, prompted plans to restart talks between the monster coffee chain and negotiators from its 650-plus unionized U.S. stores.

Starbucks Workers United's new proposal to Starbucks is a \$17 minimum wage, with 4% annual raises and contract language requiring a minimum of three workers per shift, news reports said.

Starbucks did not present a counteroffer, but it confirmed talks had been scheduled to restart on March 30. When talks restart, they'll be the first face-to-face discussions the two sides have had in over a year.

The union's new minimum-wage and raise proposals are lower than the workers' original demands: a \$20 hourly minimum with 5% raises.

"Baristas recently met, deliberated and found consensus around fair and reasonable measures to support baristas," Jasmine Leli, a three-year barista and a union negotiator, said in a statement via SWU. She added that union members are "in conversation with the company about the road back to the bargaining table."

Workers also continue to seek "just cause" standards for discipline, antidiscrimination language, enforceable health and safety measures and staffing guarantees.

They also demand the firm add hours to current workers' time on the job before hiring new staff.

One sore point for workers is that baristas who do not clock a minimum of 20 hours weekly cannot qualify for company-offered benefits, including tuition reimbursement, 401(k) and health insurance. Starbucks' top

brass, the union alleges, directs area managers to juggle workers' schedules – already erratic – to ensure baristas work fewer than 20 hours.

Starbucks has long complained that union members' demands are "financially unsustainable."

But the firm has put no such constraints on CEO Brian Niccol's total compensation. Filings with the federal government in March showed Niccol earned \$3 million last year, including \$20 million in stock options and deferred compensation. It was his first full year as company CEO.

Niccol garnered that sum despite a slump in coffee sales in the U.S., as a long pre-holiday SWU strike and publicity about the firm's bad record with its workers took hold among consumers.

SWU made those same points in a recent briefing call with pro-union investors, who are considering a fight at the company's annual board meeting. Worker advocates challenged the reputational and financial damage management has caused by its mistreatment of the unionized workers.

Formal negotiations between SWU and Starbucks broke down in December 2024. A federal mediator has since been assigned to assist with settling a first contract.

Starbucks insists it wants to reach a contract and is "bargaining in good faith," but even as the two sides appeared ready to resume talks, SWU continued to allege that the corporation had violated labor law wholesale.

The union, an affiliate of the Service Employees (SEIU), filed two nationwide complaints alleging unfair labor practices with the National Labor Relations Board in February, alleging Starbucks made unilateral changes in working conditions during bargaining.

Additionally, Starbucks has consistently ignored nationwide court orders to bargain. Other national-level charges include intimidation and retaliation against pro-union workers, including deliberately cutting their hours.

The NLRB's administrative law judge last September characterized Starbucks's labor law-breaking as "a scorched-earth campaign" against the workers' organizing drive. Since then, the workers had to file an additional 30 local and regional unfair labor practices complaints against the firm, too.



Members of Starbucks Workers United held informational picketing outside a unionized cafe in St. Anthony last fall. UA file photo

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Organizing Report

Twin Cities Habitat workers are latest from nonprofit sector to join Council 5

By Michael Moore

Union Advocate editor

Workers at Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity voted to form a union last month, becoming the newest group of nonprofit employees to organize with Council 5 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

The new bargaining unit brings together about 100 workers from Twin Cities Habitat and its lending subsidiary, TCHFH Lending, Inc. Members work in construction, real estate, the Habitat ReStore, resource development and other programs and services.

The National Labor Relations Board tallied results of the mail-in election March 17. The union prevailed 43-31, with eight void ballots and one challenged ballot.

The employer and Council 5 released a joint statement from their leaders - Council 5 Executive Director Bart Andersen, Twin Cities Habitat CEO Chris Coleman and TCHFH Lending President Robyn Bipes-Timm - pledging to move forward together.

"Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity and AFSCME Council 5 believe every eligible employee deserves the opportunity to make their choice freely and privately, and Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity shared with staff that their

decision would be supported no matter the outcome," the statement reads.

"Our entities are fully invested in our team members. We are appreciative of the respectful approach and investment shown throughout this process from eligible employees, Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity, TCHFH Lending, Inc., and AFSCME Council 5, and we thank the NLRB for facilitating the vote."

Twin Cities Habitat workers formally requested recognition of their union from management in late January.

The union launched an Instagram account, @tchfhworkers, around the same time.

The Twin Cities Habitat campaign is the latest in a string of successful nonprofit organizing drives supported by Council 5 in recent years, from legal-aid and health-outreach services across the region to cultural hubs like the Minnesota Historical Society, the Walker Art Center and the Science Museum of Minnesota.

Andersen, Council 5's executive director, said unions across the country are seeing an "explosion" of interest from workers - and organizing to meet that demand.

"These workers are fighting to ensure they have a voice on the job and can collectively bargain for higher wages, better benefits, safety on the job

and dignity and respect for the work they do to uplift our communities," Andersen said. "Labor unions not only have a duty and responsibility to build our unions internally, but to also ensure we provide a space and support for unorganized workers to come to and help form a union in their workplace."

Methodist security officers demand recognition

In-house security officers at HealthPartners' Methodist Hospital held a press conference outside the St. Louis Park facility March 4 to announce that they are forming a union with Service Employees (SEIU) Local 26 - and to demand management commit to a fair process for recognizing their union.

The bargaining unit would include about 30 workers.

Joined by members of the Minnesota Nurses Association and SEIU Healthcare Minnesota and Iowa who also work at Methodist, security guards said they want the protections of a union contract too, citing staffing concerns, low pay and the need for a voice in decisions that affect their work.

"Our experiences and insights are valuable, and having more of a voice would help us make it a better and safer workplace," Holden Eliason, a security guard with three years' experience at

Methodist, said. "That's why we need to unionize."

A majority of Methodist security guards have signed a petition calling on HealthPartners management to "agree to a fair process for security workers to vote on unionization free of management intimidation or harassment."

Management declined to sign onto the workers' request.

"We tried asking nicely, but management said no," security guard Asher Krantz said. "The thing is, the problems we security officers are experiencing are still here, and we still need more of a voice on the job..."

"That's why we are announcing this union effort publicly and asking for the community's support."

Voting at Alamo Drafthouse

Workers at Alamo Drafthouse in Woodbury were scheduled to vote in a union election March 27, according to filings with the NLRB.

About 60 workers were eligible to participate.

Workers at the cinema and dining franchise's Woodbury shop petitioned for representation with Communications Workers (CWA) Local 7250.

Workers at Alamo Drafthouse locations in New York, Colorado and Austin have moved to unionize in recent years, too.

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An emerging voice for nonunion nursing home workers



Minnesota nursing home workers who don't have a union on the job launched a new advocacy group, Nursing Home Workers United, last month. Organizers rallied in St. Paul before a meeting of the state's Nursing Home Workforce Standards Board. The new organization formed, in part, as a response to employer groups' legal effort to disband the standards board, which has established a higher minimum wage poised to take effect soon. Union Advocate photo

Local unions warn against impacts of health care consolidation as California-based Sutter Health looks to acquire Allina

For over a decade, union members who work at Allina Health – including registered nurses, mental health care workers and, most recently, primary-care doctors – have been warning the large, not-for-profit health system increasingly puts profits before patients.

Now, Allina unions are voicing concerns that the trend will only worsen if their system is absorbed by an even larger nonprofit health system, California-based Sutter Health. The two systems on March 17 announced Sutter's intent to acquire Allina by year's end.

In a statement responding to the news, the Minnesota Nurses Association, which represents thousands of registered nurses at Allina hospitals, including United Hospital in St. Paul, said the planned acquisition "reflects a growing and troubling trend that impacts patients, health care workers and communities."

"Corporate mergers and health care monopolies like this are driven by power and financial priorities rather than patient care and healthcare expertise," MNA added.

The Service Employees (SEIU) union released a similar statement on behalf of members of its Doctors Council who work in Allina clinics and urgent cares and frontline workers who are members of SEIU Healthcare Minnesota and Iowa.

"In Minnesota, we are proud of our world-class health care systems but know that increased consolidation and out-of-touch, overpaid executives have too often moved us backward in recent years," the statement said.

A 2024 policy brief from health care researcher KFF argued that "a substantial body of evidence shows that consolidation has led to higher prices," noting that the evidence is strongest for hospitals. Higher costs impact families, employers, local governments and public programs like Medicare and Medicaid, KFF reported.

Fewer studies have looked into the impact of cross-market mergers, like the planned Allina-Sutter acquisition, on health care costs, but KFF said those analyses estimated price increases ranging from 6% to 17%, "even though these deals entail hospitals and health systems that are not competing against each other in the same area."

Both the MNA and SEIU called on Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison to ensure transparency throughout the acquisition process, with an eye toward protecting workers and patients – and ensuring Allina's charitable assets benefit local communities, not out-of-state investors.

"We obviously have concerns about what this means for employees, our contracts and our pension plans," SEIU said. "A key issue is ensuring that charitable assets built up by Minnesotans are not diverted out of state or to a small handful of executives for personal enrichment."

"We call on Attorney General Keith Ellison to provide all appropriate inquiry and oversight into this proposed merger and to ensure the interests of Minnesota's workers and patients are protected."

– Michael Moore, UA editor

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Washington County workers threaten strike over staffing, mental health benefits

By Michael Moore
Union Advocate editor

Members of a bargaining unit representing nearly 900 Washington County employees voted in late February to authorize a strike, demanding a new union contract that addresses understaffing and improves their access to mental-health benefits.

Members of Local 517 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) planned to rally outside a Board of Commissioners meeting last month, after overwhelmingly rejecting county administrators' final offer.

The bargaining unit brings together a range of county employees, from social workers and child support officers to workers who handle property records and maintain county facilities.

Local 517's previous contract expired Dec. 31, although its terms remain in effect as talks continue. The two sides were scheduled to meet with a state mediator April 17.

Workers don't want to strike, Local 517 President Benjamin Henry, an eligibility specialist with the county, said. But they do want the county to take their concerns seriously.

"As long as they're willing to meet with us and work in good faith to come to an agreement that works for both sides, we have no intention of calling a strike at this particular time," he said.

But Henry also noted that any work stoppage would cripple the county's ability to deliver services because, as workers have been pointing out at the bargaining table, their departments are already stretched so thin.

"This county has been grinding people to the bone for countless years," Henry said. "They run a skeleton

crew almost everywhere. Even a loss of 40% of the workforce would be devastating."

Burnout on the front line

The union's top two demands – accessible mental health care and better staffing – are related. Backlogs in some offices, Henry said, stretch months longer than state guidelines recommend, leaving staff members to deal with the stress of increasingly frustrated clients and community members.

"It's not a sustainable model," he said.

As their ranks have thinned through attrition, the work many members of the bargaining unit are doing has become more complex. That leads to what Carrie Genereux, a chief steward and Family Services worker for the county, called "secondary trauma."

"A lot of the folks we're working with on a daily basis have experienced some trauma, and the people who are helping are also impacted by that," she said. "It plays a major role in why the focus on mental health is so important right now... Our jobs are hard, and they've always been hard, but it's a different level of hard now."

After the bargaining unit lost three people to suicide in recent years – with another worker attempting suicide and co-workers calling for a wellness check on a fifth – Local 517 came to the bargaining table with a dozen proposals for removing barriers that union members said they encounter in accessing mental health care.

The biggest barrier is out-of-pocket costs, which have increased by as much as 40% in recent years, and

Solidarity Alert!

- Support Washington County workers' petition for a fair contract: tinyurl.com/WCAFCSCME.

workers say their employer-sponsored insurance plans rate among the least affordable for county employees in the region.

"The high-deductible plan is what most of our folks can afford," Henry said. "And for an individual, you're looking at \$3,500 as a deductible before \$1 is covered on anything... people are finding it difficult to spend \$200 to \$250 once or twice a week to meet with a therapist."

'It didn't feel like a negotiation'

In the first mediation session Feb. 2, county administrators leveled up their wage proposal, matching cost-of-living increases extended to two other bargaining units. But the employer brushed aside Local 517's proposals around staffing and mental health, demanding the union bring their proposal to membership for a vote.

"It didn't feel like a negotiation to me," Henry said. "It felt like, you'll take it and you'll like it."

Members voted to reject the offer and, Henry said, sent a message to county administrators that "they are failing to acknowledge that these are significant areas of impact for our members, who are standing up for themselves."

Indeed, Local 517 has seen a surge in interest since the contract campaign began. Genereux said a significant number of workers covered by the bargaining unit have since signed up to join the union.

"If we're not taken care of, we can't take care of the community," she said. "Our members want to make sure we are staffed appropriately and we are able to manage our own lives in a way that allows us to do our jobs and show up and serve this community."

Two years into negotiations, clinicians say Allina must address key demands or they'll strike

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

"We've been negotiating for two years now, and we've gotten some really important things that will help sustain us over time and preserve patient care," urgent care doctor Dain Meyer said. "But we need more."

Specifically, clinicians are demanding Allina do more when it comes to key factors driving burnout in their ranks, West St. Paul family doctor Cora Walsh said.

"Allina has not engaged in bargaining the work hours expected of a full-time physician, or on our proposal on increasing the amount of sick and vacation time allotted to full-time physicians," Walsh said. "These are critical issues for the sustainability of primary care. We can't afford greater clinician burnout."

Provider pay remains a sticking point in negotiations, too.

Compensation was not a primary motivator in the clinicians' organizing drive, but many of Allina's economic proposals since bargaining began, union members say, would amount to a pay cut for some in the bargaining unit.

Matt Hoffman, a family doctor in the Vadnais Heights clinic, said Allina improved its offer after the union held a one-day strike last November. But the employer's latest proposal would still be a step back for pediatricians, nurse practitioners and physicians' assistants, he said.

Allina's tax filings, meanwhile, show no indication that top executives are moving backward when it comes to compensation, with annual increases of 20% or more. CEO Lisa Shannon's compensation increased from \$3 million in 2023 to \$4 million in 2024.

Primary care providers' demands are modest in comparison, Hoffman said.

"Our hope is not to need to go on another strike," Hoffman said. "We need Allina to come together with



Allina primary-care providers picketed outside the West St. Paul clinic during a one-day strike Nov. 5. file photo

us and find a way to support primary and urgent care, so we can provide the best possible care to our patients."

The two sides have held more than 50 bargaining sessions since February 2024. Primary-care providers voted to form their union in October 2023, creating the largest private-sector bargaining unit of its kind in the U.S.

Providers' one-day strike across Allina's clinics and urgent cares Nov. 5 was a success, according to union negotiators, who cited higher-than-anticipated partici-

pation on three picket lines across the metro area.

At the bargaining table since then, providers have secured tentative agreements that will create a labor-management committee to address systemic issues that could arise in a clinical setting, as well as language ensuring clinicians have a voice in determining the amount of time to devote to specific patient visits.

"We're proud that our members are brave enough to publicly stand together and tell Allina that we have a better vision for what primary care and urgent care need to look like," Hoffman said.

Know a senior scrambling for scholarships this spring? Check out these union offerings

Graduating seniors on track to attend college or technical school next fall are encouraged to check out scholarship opportunities available through the labor community.

Many local unions, statewide councils and international unions award scholarships to their members' dependents. Other scholarships are more broadly available to union families.

Washington County scholarship

The Washington County Labor Assembly has renewed its \$500 scholarship for union families this year.

Application information is available for download at stpaulunions.org/scholarship. The deadline to apply is June 1.

The Washington County Labor Assembly Union Member Scholarship has four eligibility requirements. Applicants must:

- Be a union member, dependent or spouse of a

union member whose local union is affiliated with the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation, AFL-CIO.

- Be a resident of Washington County, or a minor or adult of a parent or legal guardian that is a resident of Washington County.

- Have a passing grade at completion of the academic term.

- Attend an accredited institution.

Winners will be selected by lottery by representatives of the Washington County assembly.

Minnesota AFL-CIO scholarships

The state's largest labor federation, the Minnesota AFL-CIO, awards five \$1,000 scholarships to high-school graduates each year. Eligibility requirements are similar to the Washington County assembly's, but open to union families statewide. Also, recipients must attend a post-secondary school in Minnesota.

Four scholarships – presented as the David K. Roe Scholarship and the Hubert H. Humphrey Memorial Award – are reserved for students applying to colleges or universities, while the Donald Pilla Memorial Award offers a \$1,000 scholarship to students applying to vocational/technical schools.

Application materials are available at mnaflcio.org/scholarships-awards. The deadline to apply is May 1.

Nellie Stone Johnson Scholarship

Minnesota's labor community has long supported the Nellie Stone Johnson Scholarship Fund, which offers renewable awards of up to \$2,500 to students of color pursuing two- or four-year degrees in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system.

Both full- and part-time students may apply. All applicants must be either a union member or the spouse, child or grandchild of a union member.

Find application information at nelliestone.org. The deadline to apply is June 1.



Minutes of the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation

MARCH 11, 2026

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, Gale, Guertin, Hoerth, Luneburg, Markham-Kocurek, Michelson, Mullin, Peterson, Sansom, Schmidt, Seath, Strom, VanDassor and Varco. Excused were Engeldorf, Gibbons, Hunt, Madden, Roth, Ryan, Slattery, Tastad-Damer and Vanderport. 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 Bernadine Engeldorf, Secretary-Treasurer, and Perry Schmidt, Vice President.

GUEST SPEAKERS

Hunter Lipinski and Rebecca Mertes, AFA-CWA, spoke to the delegation about the organizing campaign at Delta Airlines. Flight attendants are still fighting to organize a union. If you fly on Delta please support and encourage the flight attendants to sign a union-authorization card.

MINUTES

M/S/C TO APPROVE MINUTES OF JANUARY 14 AND FEBRUARY 11, 2026, AS PUBLISHED IN THE UNION ADVOCATE NEWSPAPER AFTER THE ACTING SECRETARY-TREASURER NOTES THERE ARE NO ADDITIONS OR CHANGES CALLED

FOR.

COMMITTEE ON POLITICAL EDUCATION (COPE) MINUTES MARCH 11, 2026

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

Items to come before this committee included:

- The Dakota County Labor Assembly supports the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation recommending that the Minnesota AFL-CIO grant labor endorsement to Paul Cummings, Senate District 53, and Christos Jensen, House District 52A.

M/S/C TO RECOMMEND TO THE DELEGATE BODY TO SUPPORT THE SAINT PAUL REGIONAL LABOR FEDERATION RECOMMENDATIONS THAT THE MINNESOTA AFL-CIO GRANT LABOR ENDORSEMENT TO PAUL CUMINGS, SENATE DISTRICT 53 AND CHRISTOS JENSEN, HOUSE DISTRICT 52A.

- President Peterson updated the committee on the Minnesota AFL-CIO Legislative Agenda, legislative updates and local screening updates.

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

EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES MARCH 11, 2026

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 thanked everyone who came out for Day Out for Democracy on President's Day.
 - The 2025 George Meany-Lane Kirkland Human Rights Award, presented by the AFL-CIO, recognized Belarus Trade Unionists and the

Minnesota Labor movement.

- The third No King's Day rally will occur on March 28, 2026.

- M/S/C TO PURCHASE A TABLE AT A COST OF \$870 TO THE 39TH ANNUAL NELLIE STONE JOHNSON SCHOLARSHIP DINNER.

- M/S/C TO MAKE A \$500 CONTRIBUTION TO THE MINNESOTA STATE RETIREE'S 21ST ANNUAL FUNDRAISER.

- ORGANIZING UPDATES/CAMPAIGNS: Representatives of AFSCME and SEIU Healthcare Minnesota and Iowa shared updates.

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

REPORT OF THE TREASURER

Acting Secretary-Treasurer Sansom reported on the financial status of the Federation as of February 2026. The report was accepted as read.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

President Peterson thanked everyone for what they have been doing to support our communities. She discussed the next No King's Day on March 28, 2026; Labor will march together from Harriet Island to the rally at the State Capitol. The Minnesota Legislature is in session.

STAFF REPORTS

Colleen Nocerini, Political Organizer, talked about opportunities to participate in candidate screenings.

REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

- The Chisago County Labor 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. Upcoming screenings have been discussed. Anyone interested in participating, please contact the RLF with your email information. The Washington County Labor Assembly Scholarship will continue in 2026. Meetings are on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 6 p.m.

- Martin Hoerth reported on behalf of the Ramsey County Labor Assembly. Its meetings are on the



RLF retirees to meet April 15

The Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation Retirees will meet April 15 at noon at the Saint Paul Labor Center, 353 West 7th St.

The meeting agenda may include nominations or elections to serve as president, vice president, secretary, treasurer and trustee of the organization, which is affiliated with the Minnesota State Retiree Council, AFL-CIO.

Meetings are open to retired members of unions affiliated with the SPRLF. Retirees interested in learning more about the group are always welcome to attend.

The group regularly meets on the third Wednesday of each month.

Contact Tom Edwards at edwardsapwu2@aol.com for more information, or if you have interest in serving as an officer of the organization.

fourth Tuesday of the month at 6 p.m.

- Connie Beissel reported on behalf of the Dakota County Labor Assembly, which met on Monday, March 2, and screened seven candidates for three seats and recommended endorsement for two seats. The next meeting will include discussion of the Worker's Memorial Day gathering on April 28 at 6 p.m. Bill Moore will be saying the prayer, the Labor Chorus will be singing, and there will be buglers playing taps to bring awareness to safer working conditions. Meetings are on the second Thursday of the month at 7 p.m.

NEW BUSINESS

President Peterson called for a floor vote to recommend that the MN AFL-CIO grant Labor Endorsement to

Paul Cummings, Senate District 53, and Christos Jensen, House District 52A.

M/S/C TO RECOMMEND LABOR ENDORSEMENT OF PAUL CUMINGS, SENATE DISTRICT 53, AND CHRISTOS JENSEN, HOUSE DISTRICT 52A, TO THE MN AFL-CIO.

GOOD AND WELFARE

The annual Minnesota AFL-CIO Retiree Fundraiser is being held on May 16, 2026.

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

Submitted by,
MARY SANSON
Acting Secretary-Treasurer

Frost in the fold: PWHL Players Association joins AFL-CIO family

The Professional Women’s Hockey League Players Association announced last month that it would formally affiliate with the AFL-CIO, joining the nation’s largest labor federation.

The PWHLPA represents 184 professional hockey players across eight PWHL teams, including the two-time defending champion Minnesota Frost, based in St. Paul.

The announcement came just days after 61 PWHLPA members competed in the Milan Cortina Winter Olympics, including members of the gold and silver medal-winning U.S. and Canadian teams.

The union’s affiliation with the AFL-CIO comes as interest in women’s hockey – and women’s sports in general – is seeing historic growth in the U.S., with athletes driving record ticket sales.

Malaika Underwood, executive director of the PWHLPA, said her members “know there is power in a union,” having settled their first collective bargaining agreement with the league before its first official game on Jan. 1, 2024.

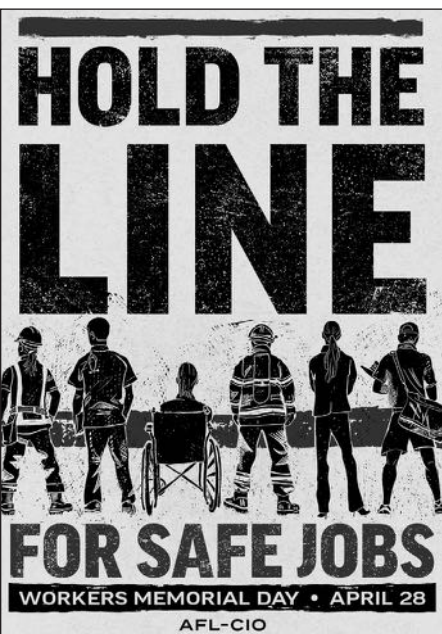
Players also know the power of solidarity, Underwood said.

“We look forward to continuing the fight for the rights, fair pay, and the safety of our members as part of this historic labor federation, and to standing alongside our fellow unions to ensure all workers, including PWHL players, are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve,” she said.

The PWHLPA becomes the 10th professional sports union to join the AFL-CIO Sports Council, and the move increases the AFL-CIO’s total membership to 65 independent unions.

AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler called continued success of the Sports Council, established in 2022, a milestone in the fight for equity in women’s sports and fair treatment of all athlete workers.

“When women athletes come together as workers, they don’t only elevate their own leagues – they also raise the bar across all of women’s sports,” Shuler said. “The players of the PWHL have been no exception, and I am thrilled to welcome the Players Association into our federation.”



Join a Workers Memorial Day event April 28

At Workers Memorial Day observances across the nation April 28, labor organizations will honor workers who died as a result of work-related injuries or illnesses, and rededicate themselves to fighting for safety on the job.

Locally, the Dakota County Labor Assembly will hold its Workers Memorial Day Observance at 6 p.m. at Lebanon Cemetery in Apple Valley. (Find any weather-related updates to the event at stpaulunions.org/events.)

Twin Cities Building Trades unions traditionally hold a midday ceremony at the Workers Memorial Garden on the Capitol grounds in St. Paul. Details will be posted at stpaulunions.org/events when finalized.

U of M’s Labor Education Service offers Community Classes on general strikes, more


Upcoming Community Classes from the University of Minnesota’s Labor Education Service (LES) will explore general strikes and how unions can support undocumented workers.

LES tailors its Community Classes to busy activists looking to sharpen their skills or study new topics. Registration is open, with full information available at z.umn.edu/LESCommunityClasses.

Scheduled to meet online May 12, A History of General Strikes in the United States will consider the origins of the general strike, how the concept is “woven into the fabric of U.S. labor history” and some of their outcomes.

Sanctuary Unions will meet online June 11. Sanctuary unions commit to providing protection and support to immigrant union members – and in some cases, to immigrants in the broader community. The sanctuary union movement began in the early days of the first Trump administration, but it grew exponentially in Minnesota during Operation Metro Surge, as a labor-led strategy for resistance, mutual aid and community defense.

The LES course will examine the history of the sanctuary union movement and discuss the strategies and tactics used to organize them.




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Thursday, May 7 | Sun Ray Lanes

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