

The St. Paul Union Advocate

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

June-July 2026

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AFSCME members, patients, clergy and other supporters join the Minnesota Nurses Associations "Red Alert" rally to save Hennepin County Medical Center from financial collapse. Union Advocate photo

A LIFELINE FOR HCMC

Union members lead successful lobbying campaign to save Minnesota's safety-net hospital

After months of rallying in the streets and politicking at the Capitol, union members who work at Hennepin County Medical Center cheered a bipartisan deal announced May 13 to provide the hospital with up to \$700 million in state funding over the next five years.

Gov. Tim Walz and leaders of the House and Senate expected the measure to pass before the Legislature adjourned May 18.

Union leaders called the influx of funds sub-

stantial enough to stabilize Minnesota's busiest Level I trauma center, which serves patients across the state and region.

Jeremy Olson-Ehlert, an officer of the Minnesota Nurses Association who works at HCMC, praised lawmakers for taking to heart the hospital's critical role in the state's health-care system. And he credited union members for delivering that message.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 10)

Labor calls boycott of REI's anniversary sales event

By Michael Moore
Union Advocate editor

Over 70,000 REI Co-op members had pledged to boycott the outdoors retailer's anniversary sale May 15-25 in a show of solidarity with workers at 11 unionized stores across the country, including one in Maple Grove.

REI Union members voted in March to authorize a boycott of the co-op's largest event of the year and immediately began appealing to shoppers for support. (Take the boycott pledge online at boycottrei.org.)

Workers say the boycott is a response to REI's decision in February to declare bargaining at an impasse and implement the economic terms of its last, best and final offer, which over 98% of union members voted down in January.

The imposed terms cut benefits, starting wages and raises for many union members. The REI Union's bargaining team, which brings together members of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) and six United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) locals, have called the move union-busting – and illegal.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 12)



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

AFL-CIO Convention to bring over 1,500 union delegates to Twin Cities in June

By Michael Moore
Union Advocate editor

Union members and labor activists from across the U.S. will gather in the Twin Cities this month for the 30th AFL-CIO Constitutional Convention, the American labor movement's biggest event.

The nation's largest labor federation expects between 1,500 and 2,000 delegates and guests to attend the four-day affair, which kicks off June 7 at the Minneapolis Convention Center.

Delegates from the AFL-CIO's 65 affiliated unions and from state and local labor councils come together at conventions to set the federation's policy and programmatic platform, elect AFL-CIO leadership and chart the future of the labor movement.

The convention also will feature prominent guest speakers and expert panelists to discuss the most pressing issues facing working people today. The theme for the 2026 convention is "With You, It's Better in a Union."

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 14)



Go Figure

50.7%

Share of full-time U.S. workers who earned a living wage in 2025, per a comparison of payroll and county-specific cost-of-living data, down 5.1 points since 2021

43.7%

Women workers who earned a living wage last year

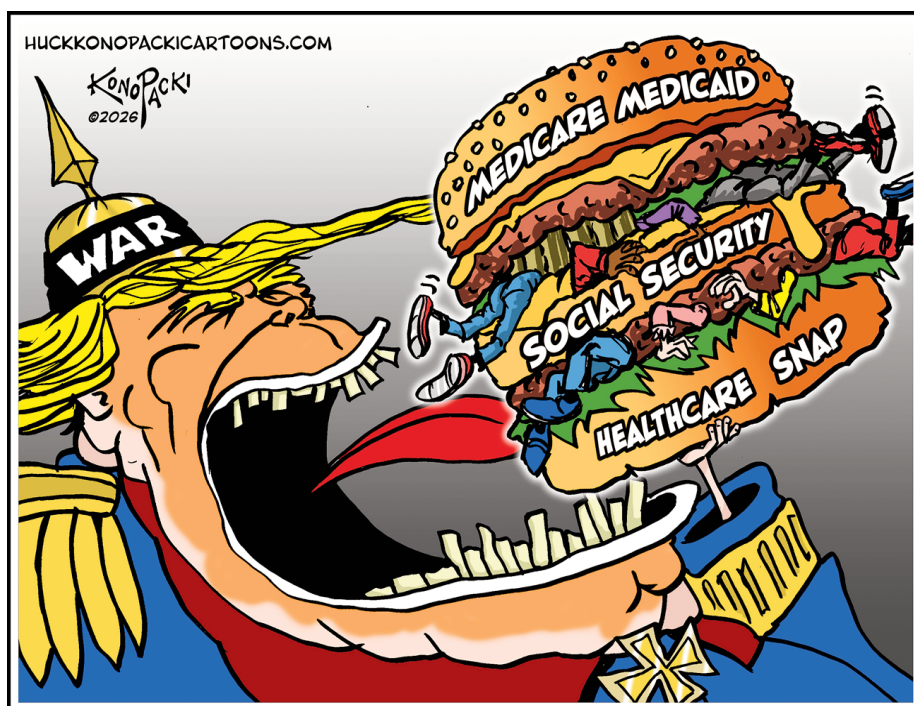
31.2%

Black workers who earned a living wage

29.4%

Gen Z workers who earned a living wage

Source: Dayforce, "Earning Enough"



Labor Voices: Dave Kamper & Joe Fast

May Day then and now: The ongoing fight for workers' rights

May 1 was International Workers' Day. Also known as "May Day," its origins trace back to 1856 in Australia, where workers organized a day of stoppages and celebrations to demand an eight-hour workday. However, May 1 didn't become a widespread international day for labor until after the infamous Haymarket Affair of 1886.

Workers in Chicago, including many immigrants, went on strike on May 1 to demand the eight-hour workday. At least four strikers were killed while picketing the McCormick Harvester factory, at that point the largest factory in the world. A large rally was held on May 4 to protest violence against peaceful picketers. As police moved to disperse the crowd, someone threw a bomb that killed seven officers. Police fired back indiscriminately, wounding and killing an undetermined number of workers.

What followed was a sweeping crackdown: police raids, the arrests of hundreds of men and women, and the indictment of eight people – five of whom were German immigrants. The partisan judge Joseph E. Gary conducted the trial where all 12 jurors acknowledged prejudice against the defendants. All defendants were convicted with no evidence and seven were sentenced to death; four were hanged, one died by suicide, and two had their sentences commuted. The trial is widely considered a miscarriage of justice.

In the aftermath, socialists and unionists worldwide began marking May 1st as a day of international worker solidarity. However, in 1894, U.S. President Grover Cleveland – looking to make peace with labor prior to the midterm elections after more than 30 workers were killed during the Pullman Strike – established Labor Day in early September. He did this explicitly to avoid associating it with May Day and the labor unrest it represented. In 1955, at the height of the Cold War, President Eisenhower proclaimed May 1 "Loyalty Day" instead of "May Day" in response to the holiday's popularity in communist countries.

Now 140 years after Haymarket, workers are still fighting for higher pay, better working conditions and a voice on the job. In recent decades, policymakers have done little to stem the relentless tide of anti-union actions by employers, conservative governments and a hostile Supreme Court. As workers' rights have been eroded, the share of unionized workers fell from over 30% in the 1950s to just 11.2% in 2025. Fewer workers were involved in major strikes or work stop-

"Now 140 years after Haymarket, workers are still fighting for higher pay, better working conditions and a voice on the job."

pages in 2025 (307,000) than during the Haymarket year of 1886 (610,000).

Nonetheless, there are clear signs of momentum in the labor movement. The post-pandemic period has brought a notable resurgence in labor's popularity and organizing activity. Polling shows 68% of Americans now approve of labor unions, levels not seen since the 1960s. Unions are also more highly regarded among young people. Further, 43% of Americans want unions to have more influence in the country, a record high.

Indeed, while the Trump administration has taken a decidedly hostile approach to unions and made labor organizing more difficult, union representation in the U.S. increased by 463,000 in 2025. More workers were represented by a union than at any point in the past 16 years, a sign that workers see unions as a means of resisting authoritarianism.

The time is ripe for policymakers to support workers' struggles for dignity and respect. Key policies such as passing the Protecting the Right to Organize Act, ensuring workers can reach a first contract, expanding collective bargaining rights and eliminating anti-union "right-to-work" laws can help workers organize their workplaces. Beyond improving the lives of their members, unions have spillover effects that benefit whole communities and democracy.

This May Day, workers and their unions across the country held thousands of events, encouraging participants to join an economic blackout and "demand a nation that puts workers over billionaires." Just as workers around the world came together to demand fair hours and wages after the events of 1886, we can hope the workers of the future will find inspiration from May Day 2026.

– Dave Kamper is a senior state policy strategist with the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) who lives in Minnesota. He is the author of "Who's Got the Power? The Resurgence of American Unions," published last October by The New Press. Joe Fast is a research assistant with EPI.

Letters

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The Union Advocate

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Unions stick with efforts keep ICE out of schools, healthcare

In the federal court system and at the Capitol in St. Paul, Minnesota unions have been leading the fight to keep federal immigration agents out of schools, healthcare facilities and other sensitive locations in the wake of Operation Metro Surge.

Despite setbacks on both fronts last month, activists remained undeterred.

Responding to federal agents' violent and aggressive tactics during the state's three-month occupation, DFL state senators passed a package of bills May 11 aimed at restricting access to hospitals, schools and childcare centers, barring agents unless they have a judicial warrant.

Union members joined non-union workers, parents and immigrant-rights advocates in lobbying intensely – and emotionally – in support of the legislation, but it failed to gain traction in the House, where DFLers and Republicans share control.

During a Capitol press conference, south Minneapolis mother Anna Stahlmann recalled the day last January that armed agents detained a “beloved staff member” at her 2-year-old son’s childcare facility.

“In front of children. In front of parents. No identification. No judicial warrant. Just force,” Stahlmann said. “No child should be exposed to that kind of trauma, violence and danger in the place they are supposed to feel safest. And yet without this legislation that is exactly the reality we are living in.”

Meanwhile, a federal judge formally declined to issue a preliminary injunction

barring immigration enforcement at Minnesota public schools. But plaintiffs behind the lawsuit, including the statewide educators’ union, Education Minnesota, pledged to keep fighting.

U.S. District Judge Laura M. Provinzino ruled May 6 against the plaintiffs’ request for immediate relief, but not on the overall merits of the lawsuit. Education Minnesota and two public school districts, Duluth and Fridley, filed the suit against Department of Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin and other agency officials in February.

The lawsuit challenges procedural guidance issued by the DHS on the first day of President Trump’s second term. It rescinded language discouraging immigration enforcement in “sensitive locations” like schools and places of worship, which had been the agency’s approach since 1993.

Instead, DHS instructed federal immigration agents to use their own discretion and “a healthy dose of common sense” in determining where to conduct enforcement operations.

Education Minnesota and the other plaintiffs claim that, in abruptly changing its guidance on Day 1 of Trump’s second term, Homeland Security leaders violated the federal Administrative Procedure Act, which requires agencies to follow a rule-making process and allow time for public notice and comment.

Although she did not rule on the merits of that argument, Provinzino said the argument for a preliminary injunction, which would have halted immigration

enforcement near sensitive areas while the lawsuit proceeds, fell short.

“The 2025 Guidance, in short, did not change DHS’s ability or authority to engage in enforcement activity at or near protected areas,” the judge wrote in her ruling. “What has changed, evidently, is DHS’s willingness – not its authority – to conduct immigration enforcement activity at or near protected areas like schools. But such immigration enforcement has always been subject to DHS’s judgment and discretion ...”

Education Minnesota and its co-plaintiffs issued a statement vowing to continue their fight:

“For decades, our schools have been recognized as places where students can learn and grow without fear. The Trump-Vance administration’s decision to allow immigration enforcement at and around schools has disrupted classrooms, driven families away and created an environment of fear that no child should have to endure.

“While the court declined to immediately stop that activity, this is not the end of our fight. We brought this case because every student deserves access to education in a safe and stable environment, and we will continue fighting to restore those protections and ensure that schools remain places of learning, not fear.”

Plaintiffs are receiving legal representation in the case courtesy of Democracy Forward, Zimmerman Reed LLP, Nilan Johnson Lewis PA and The Law Office of Kevin C. Riach.

– Michael Moore, UA editor

Labor to march in Twin Cities Pride Parade

The Minnesota AFL-CIO is sponsoring a marching unit in the Twin Cities Pride Parade on Saturday, June 28, and the state’s largest labor federation invites members of its affiliate unions to join the annual celebration of equity for all. To participate, RSVP at aflcio.mn/pride26.

The parade starts at 11 a.m. and proceeds along Hennepin Avenue, from Third to Spruce. Organizers had not yet determined specific meetup times and locations at press time, but the Minnesota AFL-CIO will send details to registered participants.

Racial justice virtual workshop May 27

In 2025, the Minnesota AFL-CIO hosted a series of racial justice forums across Minnesota. Now, the federation is organizing 30-minute virtual workshop May 27 open to union members anywhere in the state.

The workshop includes a history section to explore connections between the civil rights and labor movements, and an exercise to help participants explore and interrupt oppressive ideas in their workplaces and unions.

The virtual workshop will begin at 6 p.m. Learn more and register online at mnaflcio.org/events.

IUPAT charity golf tourney July 28

Registration is open for Painters and Allied Trades District Council 82’s PATCH Day Golf Fundraiser, scheduled July 28 at Bunker Hills Golf Course in Coon Rapids.

The four-person best ball event, in its 23rd year, raises funds for the PATCH Foundation, IUPAT’s non-profit organization. Founded in 2001, PATCH supports organizations that provide educational and medical services to children, both locally and nationally.

For registration or sponsorship information, contact Brittany Hanson at 651-379-9667.

LES Leadership Program accepting applications

The University of Minnesota’s Labor Education Service (LES) is accepting applications for the 2026-27 Minnesota Union Leadership Program (MULP), an innovative educational series designed to address the most critical issues facing working people in the state.

Designed for members of unions and worker centers, the MULP includes six sessions scheduled over eight months. Learn more and find application materials at z.umn.edu/MULPapplication.

A May Day picket turned TA celebration



Kieran Knutson, president of Communications Workers (CWA) Local 7250, speaks during a rally outside the AT&T Mobility store on Ford Parkway in St. Paul. The union, which represents workers in nationwide bargaining with AT&T, had planned to picket for a fair contract on May Day. But those plans changed when CWA announced a tentative agreement on a four-year contract – with wage increases totaling 14.75% – the last week of April. Instead, local activists held a celebration of solidarity. Speakers highlighted ongoing campaigns, offered support for immigrant workers and demanded an end to the war in Iran. Union Advocate photo

Poll shows workers trust unions to deliver AI guardrails

The AFL-CIO released new polling last month that found overwhelming support for union protections against job losses and invasions of privacy caused by artificial intelligence (AI).

The nation's largest labor federation called the report, which draws on surveys, polling and focus groups, the most in-depth study to date of workers' attitudes toward AI.

It found broad-based support for the AFL-CIO's Workers First Initiative on AI, a set of guiding principles, released by the federation earlier this year, for the development and implementation of AI that ensures workers reap the benefits of the technology.

In polling, more than 9 in 10 respondents supported most of the initiative's guardrails, including requirements for training, transparency and accountability. And workers said they trusted unions - more than either political party - to protect their jobs and privacy.

"The vast majority of America's workers agree on how to move forward on AI and who they trust to do it, and it's not Democrats, Republicans, Big Tech, or their employers - it's the labor movement," AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler said. "We're at the most important fork in the road our economy has faced in the last 100 years, and workers are united in our power."

While AI's impact will be felt across the economy, workers in Minnesota are especially at risk, according to a report

issued last year by the Minnesota-based North Star Policy Action think tank. It ranked Minnesota 10th nationally and second in the Midwest for vulnerability to AI, with 500 17% of the workforce - at "high risk" of having their job altered by the emerging technology.

Those impacts could be positive for workers, researchers stressed, but only if workers have a voice in the process.

The AFL-CIO polling suggests workers are ready to assert that voice - through unions. Unions were the only institution with net positive trust (+26) on the issue, scoring higher than both political parties and employers as the institution most likely to protect workers from AI harms.

Worker survey results included in the report found support for every worker protection outlined in the federation's Workers First Initiative on AI, with 7 of 10 respondents or better agreeing that transparency, human oversight and worker voice are key in AI implementation.

Meanwhile, just 7% of survey respondents who are currently working say their employer has disclosed how or when AI is monitoring their work, and 94% say workers should know if AI is being used to monitor their work.

The findings suggest an opportunity for unions to mobilize workers around AI-related issues during contract, organizing and lobbying campaigns.

Some unions already have seized on

the issue of AI, most notably the Writers Guild. In negotiations with entertainment studios in 2023, the union won language that allows them to use AI as a tool for script writing, but protects against the use of fully AI-generated scripts.

Closer to home, nearly 2,000 members of SEIU Healthcare Minnesota and Iowa who work at HealthPartners settled a contract earlier this year that established a new labor-management committee, focused on the impact of AI on both patient care and workers.

That's the kind of action North Star's report last year recommended Minnesota unions start taking, whether it's organizing new workers susceptible to AI's impacts or bargaining to protect their current members.

There's a role for lawmakers to play, too, North Star Policy researcher Aaron Rosenthal, author of the AI report, told Minnesota lawmakers during a House Labor Committee hearing earlier this year. Rosenthal encouraged action to protect workers against the "three D's of AI risk:" digital surveillance, decision-making (in employment matters) and displacement.

"We are, I think, on the precipice of a 21st century industrial revolution, and we are, as a state, woefully unprepared to meet the moment," he said.

At press time, the Legislature appeared poised to adjourn without taking action to protect workers from AI,

Eight provisions of the AFL-CIO's Workers First Initiative on AI

1. Strengthen labor rights and broaden opportunities for collective bargaining
2. Advance guardrails against harmful uses of AI in the workplace
3. Support and promote copyright and intellectual property protections
4. Develop a worker-centered workforce development and training system
5. Institutionalize worker voice within AI research and development
6. Require transparency and accountability in AI applications
7. Model best practices for AI use with government procurement
8. Protect workers' civil rights and uphold democratic integrity

although Gov. Tim Walz did sign into law a bipartisan measure targeting so-called "nudification" technology.

Notably, the Trump administration has sought to block states from regulating AI on their own. An executive order issued in December instructs the attorney general to seek to overturn state laws that fail to advance the "United States' global AI dominance."

- Michael Moore, UA editor

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Devante Boyd is a food runner and member of Local 17's bargaining team. Union Advocate photo

Having bolstered ranks, Target Field hospitality workers vote to authorize strike in push for \$20 minimum wage

Feeling strength in numbers, concessions and other hospitality workers at Target Field voted last month to authorize their bargaining team to call a strike if necessary.

The workers' union, UNITE HERE Local 17, announced results of the vote May 4. Of members who participated, 81% voted to authorize the strike.

Local 17 represents about 500 workers at the Twins' stadium who are employed by Delaware North Company. That's nearly double the size of units that bargained previous contracts, as Local 17 succeeded last fall in organizing 200 new members who work in the facility's premium restaurants.

With the stadium unionized "wall to wall," Local 17 members are looking to make significant gains in their new contract. Their top demand is a \$20 minimum wage this year, paired with significant annual raises in the future.

Devante Boyd, who runs food from concession stations to seats at Target Field, said he earns about \$16 per hour now. He voted to strike to "prevent Delaware North from taking advantage of me and let them know that I am willing to advocate for my value."

Workers also want job security, citing the stadium's increased reliance on nonprofit volunteers to staff its concession stands. "We're trying to keep people working and prevent those nonprofits from eroding more into our union spaces," Local 17 organizer Theo Bilski said.

Members are fighting for a path to health care, too, with proposals that would create a partnership with other arenas in the Twin Cities to pool worker benefits.

Local 17's previous contract with Delaware North expired in January, but it remains in place as negotiations continue.

Boyd, who serves on the bargaining team, said workers don't want to strike, but they will if the employer fails to take them seriously at the table.

"We all have one thing in common, and that's that if not for us, then Delaware North does not succeed," Boyd said. "We're making sure that the customers have a great experience.

"I like my job. I don't want to have to leave because I can't afford to work here."

- Michael Moore, UA editor

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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
June 23rd & July 28th, 6 p.m.
To register for the Zoom meeting,
email cnocerini@stpaulunions.org

Dakota County Assembly
June 11th & July 9th, 7 p.m.
Dakota County United Educators,
6950 West 146th St., Apple Valley

Ramsey County Assembly
June 23rd & July 28th, 6 p.m.
Saint Paul Labor Center,
353 7th Street West

Washington County Assembly
June 24th & July 22nd, 6 p.m.
Washington County Gov't Center,
Stillwater



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State investigation into construction firms leads to \$1.28 million wage recovery

By Max Nesterak

minnesotareformer.com

Two construction subcontractors agreed to pay \$1.28 million in back wages and damages to 26 workers to settle the largest wage theft case ever brought by the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry.

The settlements come years after state labor investigators began looking into the allegations of wage theft – first reported by the Reformer in 2022 – at the sprawling mixed-use development called Viking Lakes. The billionaire Wilf family, owners of the Minnesota Vikings, built the development around the team's Eagan headquarters.

It's a rare victory for state regulators and workers over the pervasive problems of wage theft and misclassification in the construction industry, which is estimated to affect nearly 1 in 4 workers in Minnesota while robbing state coffers of millions in unpaid taxes each year.

"This is a big win for workers across the construction industry," said Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry Commissioner Nicole Blissenbach at a news conference April 27.

Advantage Construction, owned by Chris Amiot, will pay workers \$1.24 million in back wages over the next 18 months, and Property Maintenance & Construction, owned by Leo Pimentel, will pay \$1,500 in damages to each of the 26 workers. Civil penalties of \$26,000 for



Labor Commissioner Nicole Blissenbach discusses the department's largest wage recovery ever. Union Advocate photo

each company will be waived after three years if they're not found to have committed more violations.

Emails to the companies seeking comment were not immediately returned.

Although workers will be made whole, the case's success is blunted by time: The violations date back to 2019, and years of inflation have eroded the real value of the lost wages. The state also

waived virtually all damages after initially seeking \$1.2 million in damages in addition to \$1.2 million in back wages in its lawsuit filed in 2023.

Blissenbach said the delay is driven by the complexity of wage theft cases and resistance from contractors. Attorney General Keith Ellison sued Pimentel for obstructing the investigation, alleging he refused to turn over documents and instructed workers to lie to investigators.

After the investigation began at Viking Lakes, it expanded to include wage and hour violations by the two subcontractors at 18 other apartment projects that were built by some of the state's largest developers, including Roers Companies, Doran and Dominionium.

In response to a request for comment, Amiot denied committing any violations. He said the workers were not directly employed by his company and his company was only considered a joint employer because of "unauthorized and previously unknown actions" by one of its project managers, with whom Advantage has since terminated their relationship.

He said the company chose to settle to "avoid the continued burden, cost, and distractions of further litigation."

"Advantage will continue to take steps to vet its subcontractors and work with subcontractors who are fully and timely paying their workers so that Advantage can focus on delivering excellent service and work for its customers," he said.

Emails to Pimentel and his attorney were not immediately returned.

The workers came forward with assistance from the carpenters' union, the Northern Midwest Regional Council of Carpenters, which has a stake in preventing wages from being eroded by bad actors in the industry.

The workers came forward with assistance from the carpenters' union, the Northern Midwest Regional Council of Carpenters, which has a stake in preventing wages from being eroded by bad actors in the industry.

"We are marketing apprenticeships and careers in the trades as debt-free paths to the middle class. We can't afford to let the greed of some developers and some contractors turn these skilled jobs into an exploited underground economy," said Burt Johnson, an attorney for the union.

Johnson said the workers persisted in their claims despite facing threats and retaliation.

Wage theft in construction is pervasive in no small part because many non-unionized workers are undocumented and may be fearful to take legal action to recover lost wages.

The Biden administration expanded deportation protections for workers who were victims, or witnesses, of labor violations in an effort to crack down on exploitative employers who put law-abiding contractors at a disadvantage.

As the Trump administration pushes for mass deportation, workers without legal status are even less likely to report abuses even if they have work permits and pending visa applications, for fear of getting caught in the dragnet.

Blissenbach said Operation Metro Surge made it harder for labor regulators to maintain connections with exploited workers and fears it will have a chilling effect.

"Our ability to successfully enforce Minnesota laws relies on workers who come forward to share their experiences and assert their rights," she said.

None of the developers were liable for the wage violations by their subcontractors. Under a new law passed in 2023 — and not applicable in this case — general contractors may be ordered to pay subcontracted workers their back wages and then could take legal action to recover it from the subcontractor.

The law aims to address the byzantine subcontracting arrangements in construction that make enforcement difficult and shield large developers from being accountable for labor abuses they profit from.

MV Ventures, the Vikings' development arm, denied being aware of wage violations, saying in a statement in 2023 that the state's findings were "disturbing" and "indicate a deliberate effort by these subcontractors to deceive both their employees and the multiple developers who led these Twin Cities projects."

But labor advocates and unionized contractors say developers have good reason to suspect wage theft will occur when accepting unrealistically low bids from subcontractors with a history of violations.

Crossroads Construction CEO Katie Kunshier said disreputable contractors can shave 40% or more off their bids by shorting workers, making it impossible for unionized companies like hers to compete on price.

"That's not competition. That's employment fraud," she said at the news conference. Her company lost bids to Advantage Construction on more than one of the 19 projects where violations occurred.

"It doesn't only hurt workers. Employment fraud hurts honest businesses and even Minnesota taxpayers," she said. "These enforcement actions support a level playing field."

The 19 projects where state regulators say wage theft happened include sites in Richfield, Woodbury, Eagan, St. Paul, Maple Grove, Hugo, Roseville, Eden Prairie, Bloomington, Rochester, Blaine, West St. Paul, Annandale, Medina, Minneapolis, Big Lake and Sherburn.

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*From the members of
St. Paul Plumbers
Local #34*



County Attorney: roofing subcontractor pocketed workers' comp premiums on St. Paul housing job

The Ramsey County Attorney's Office last month filed a complaint alleging a non-union roofing subcontractor committed insurance fraud on the McDonough Homes project in St. Paul, marking the second round of charges stemming from improvements to the public housing site.

County Attorney John Choi's office charged Brian Ramos, owner Limanis Remodeling and Exteriors, with two felony counts. The complain alleges Ramos evaded over \$172,000 in workers' compensation premiums that Limanis owed for its work on a \$1.5 million dollar project to replace the McDonough Homes roof in 2025.

The complaint alleges Ramos used a "high degree of planning and sophistication" in attempting to pocket the funds Limanis owed in workers' compensation premiums.

"Ramos purposefully failed to report the amount of payroll he paid Limanis employees and avoided significant workers' compensation insurance premiums as a result," the complaint says.

In felony charges stemming from an earlier phase of the project, Choi's office alleged that three owners of Bayvista Incorporated, another roofing subcontractor, committed multiple counts of wage theft, insurance fraud and tax evasion for work in 2024.

According to the charges, Bayvista procured a contract to provide labor for roofing and gutter improvements at the North End apartment complex, owned by the St. Paul Public Housing Agency, but the company cheated its workers out of over \$200,000 in combined wages for their work.

Rather than paying prevailing wages of about \$68 per hour for roofers and \$84 for gutter installation, as required on the publicly funded project, Bayvista allegedly paid workers between \$120 to \$200 per day in cash.

Both Limanis and Bayvista provided work on the McDonough Homes project as subcontractors of the Marge Magnuson Construction Company.

Ramos was scheduled to make his first appearance in Ramsey County District Court on May 22.

Choi's office partnered with the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, the St. Paul Police Department and the Minnesota Department of Revenue on the investigation.

- Union Advocate staff

Women Building Success awards ceremony June 4

Women Building Success will hold its annual awards ceremony June 4, recognizing success of women in Minnesota's union construction trades.

The Minnesota organization, founded in 2017, closed nominations in May, but invites tradeswomen and supporters to contact their unions about joining the awards ceremony, from 4:30 to 8 p.m. at Kellerman's Event Center in White Bear Lake.

Awards will be presented in four categories: Apprentice of the Year, Journeyworker of the Year, Tradeswomen in Leadership, and Women's Advocate of the Year.

Learn more at womenbuildingsuccess.org.

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Members of the Air Force Junior ROTC program at Johnson High School present the colors at the start of Building Trades unions' Workers Memorial Day event.

A REMEMBRANCE, THEN A CALL TO ACTION

At Workers Memorial Day ceremony, speakers implore drivers to slow down in work zones

By Michael Moore
Union Advocate editor

The Building Trades' Workers Memorial Day ceremony on the Capitol grounds in St. Paul this year came with an impassioned plea from labor leaders and state officials for drivers to use caution when passing through road-construction zones.

Unions mark Workers Memorial Day on April 28 of each year, pausing to remember those who have died as a result of workplace injuries or illnesses – and to recommit their organizations to advancing workplace safety.

The St. Paul and Minneapolis Building Trades councils hold their observance in the Workers Memorial Garden. The ceremony features a color guard, choir, a bagpiper and white crosses bearing the names of fallen tradespeople, which are later draped in black sash.

This year, two crosses carried the names of workers killed in separate incidents last September while working in suburban road-construction zones. Both Pierre Mack, a former member of LIUNA Local 563, and Adam Smith of the Operating Engineers union were under 30 when they died.

Their deaths prompted the Minnesota Department of Transportation to call for a safety stand down last fall, and MnDOT Commissioner Nancy Daubenberger said the agency has worked to strengthen its “safety culture” since the back-to-back tragedies.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 9)



Minnesota Building and Construction Trades Council President Dan McConnell drapes a black sash over the cross bearing former Laborers Local 563 member Pierre Mack's name. Mack was one of two tradespeople killed in separate accidents on state-highway work zones last September.

Union Advocate photos

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8)

But drivers need to do their part, too, Gov. Tim Walz said.

He offered the families gathered sympathies on behalf of all Minnesotans, whom he urged to “continue to do everything we can to make sure that ... we don’t have sons and brothers and sisters and moms who are recognized on this day for simply trying to do their jobs.”

Walz added: “You’re doing the work that makes all of our lives safer by building those roads, by building those construction projects. Each and every one of us benefits, but the risks go to those workers on the jobsite.”

Also remembered at the ceremony were John Jungmann of Sheet Metal Workers Local 10 and Richard Carmichael of Heat and Frost Insulators Local 34, who died as a result of workplace illnesses.

Mack’s older brother Glen Polk was among several of the former Laborer’s friends and family members who attended the ceremony. Polk said his brother was “genuine, kind and a guy with a good head on his shoulders,” who was on his way to a successful career – and had begun talking about buying a home.

Dan McConnell, president of the Minnesota State Building and Construction Trades Council, said the ceremony serves as a reminder that “behind every name we read is a life, a family and a future that should have been.”

“That’s something that those of us in the industry can understand in a way that few others can,” McConnell added. “It’s not just a loss. When you’re on the jobsite and this happens, and in the moments after it happens, it’s the confusion, it’s the frantic effort to help, and it’s the devastating realization that nothing more can be done. And then there is silence.”

McConnell also described the “sunken” feeling that can overwhelm families and co-workers in the wake of tragedy.



Gov. Tim Walz offers condolences to the mother of Pierre Mack after the Building Trades unions’ Workers Memorial Day ceremony. Walz called on Minnesota drivers to use caution in work zones and protect workers “simply trying to do their jobs.”

Union Advocate photo

“There’s the emptiness of the chair at the break table,” he said. “There’s the reminder that hits you like a gut punch when you come across the tools and the boots that they left behind – and the thought in the back of your mind that that could have been me.”

Workplace hazards kill approximately 140,000 workers each year in the U.S., according to the AFL-CIO’s “Death on the Job” report, released each year in advance of Workers Memorial Day. That’s more than 380 worker deaths each day.

The report also documented how the Trump

administration has cut funding and staffing from the agencies that protect workers and hold employers accountable for safe working conditions.

Now more than ever, unions must keep their guard up for safety, said Dean Gale of the St. Paul Building and Construction Trades Council, leading a prayer during the ceremony.

“We must make that commitment to protect the living by learning from the past,” Gale said. “Our remembrance must lead us to commitment, to vigilance and to change.”



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Scandal-plagued Chavez-DeRemer out as Trump's Labor secretary

By Don McIntosh

Northwest Labor Press editor

Lori Chavez-DeRemer lasted all of 12 months as U.S. labor secretary. A White House spokesperson announced her departure April 20 after months of scandal over alleged drinking on the job, inappropriate sexual conduct and misuse of public funds.

Chavez-DeRemer is a Republican Congresswoman from Oregon who lost re-election in 2024 after serving one term. Her appointment as labor secretary was recommended to Donald Trump's second presidential administration by Teamsters President Sean O'Brien and his friend Markwayne Mullin, the Republican senator from Oklahoma who is now Trump's secretary of homeland security. O'Brien had earned the president's favor because the Teamsters remained neutral during the election and because he spoke at the 2024 Republican convention and praised Trump as "one tough SOB."

In her February 2025 Senate confirmation hearing, Chavez-DeRemer renounced her previous cosponsorship of the pro-union PRO Act. Still, her installation the following month was seen by some as a potential bridge between the Trump administration and organized labor.

The labor secretary, a cabinet position, is in charge of a broad array of worker protection agencies that enforce wage and hour and health and safety laws and oversee workers compensation and apprenticeship programs. But Chavez-DeRemer never seemed that interested in the policy details. When Trump's special representative Elon Musk canceled programs in her department, she played the part of the administration loyalist.

Ten months into the job, on Jan. 9, the conservative tabloid The New York Post published the first in a series of

damning accounts about Chavez-DeRemer's conduct and the office culture she installed at the top of Labor Department. The accounts were leaked from an ongoing investigation by the department's inspector general. (Inspectors general are independent nonpartisan officials within government agencies who investigate fraud, waste, and abuse.)

Salacious allegations

According to allegations reported by the Post over the next three months, Chavez-DeRemer had an extramarital affair with a subordinate (bodyguard Brian Sloan). She maintained a stash of champagne, bourbon, and Kahlua in her office and drank during the work day. She committed "travel fraud" by directing her chief of staff Jihun Han and deputy chief of staff Rebecca Wright to "make up" official trips to destinations where she could spend time with family or friends on the taxpayers' dime. She was rarely in the office, and visited 37 states on more than 50 official trips. After speaking for an hour at an official function, she'd spend the rest of the time on personal business. On one of the official trips, a month into the job, Chavez-DeRemer took subordinates to Angels PDX, a Southeast Portland strip club.

The Post pointed out that Chavez-DeRemer had earlier showed a taste for expensive travel during her failed 2024 campaign for reelection to Congress, spending over \$56,000 of campaign funds on luxury hotels and resorts in Miami, Utah, Arizona, Wisconsin, and elsewhere and \$4,345 on limo and chauffeur services.

Chavez-DeRemer also allegedly had aides do personal errands like cleaning out her closets and bringing her bottles of wine.

A family affair

The shenanigans extended beyond Chavez-DeRemer to her family.

Husband Shawn DeRemer was banned from the Labor Department headquarters after he was accused of inappropriately touching at least two female staffers, though DC police, Federal Protective Service, and a federal prosecutor all declined to pursue charges.

The Post also reported that Chavez-DeRemer told female staffers to "pay attention" to her husband and her father, retired Teamster Richard Chavez. Texts reviewed by the New York Times showed that the elder Chavez communicated with young female members of his daughter's staff and asked a staffer to keep his text message private.

Han and Wright had both worked for Chavez-DeRemer when she was in Congress. Han, a Republican political operative, managed her campaigns for state representative and her 2022 run for Congress. Both Han and Wright were accused of belittling and bullying staffers, and were placed on administrative leave Jan. 12 allegedly for exerting improper influence over junior staff during the inspector general's investigation. On March 2 they resigned under pressure from the White House.

Sloan, the bodyguard, was also placed on leave and later resigned. A fourth staffer — Director of Advance Melissa Robey — was fired after she turned in vouchers for excessive travel-related expenditures on vehicles and hotel stays.

Defiant to the end

Chavez-DeRemer's exit was announced in a post on X.com April 20 by White House spokesperson Steven Cheung.

"Labor Secretary Lori Chavez-DeRemer will be leaving the Administration to take a position in the private sector," he wrote, adding, "she has done a phenomenal job."

In her own X post that day, Chavez-DeRemer said the allegations against

her, her family, and her team had been "peddled by high-ranked deep state actors who have been coordinating with the one-sided news media."

"While my time serving in the Administration comes to a conclusion," she wrote in a post from another account, "it doesn't mean I will stop fighting for American workers."

Having served just a year, spent mostly on the road, Chavez-DeRemer didn't stay in the job long enough to make an impact. But under her watch, Labor Department action didn't sound much like fighting for American workers. Last year the department started the process to undo agency rules that employers see as costly and burdensome.

One rule slated for elimination requires that workers employed by home care agencies be paid at least the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour and be eligible for overtime pay. Another "burdensome" rule requires seat belts when agricultural employers provide transportation to workers. Chavez-DeRemer also supported the elimination of Job Corps and the Labor Department's Women's Bureau, which promotes the welfare of wage-earning women through education and outreach. Chavez-DeRemer's work remains unfinished: Congress hasn't yet agreed to defund those agencies.

Now that she's out, the Labor Department is being led by Deputy Labor Secretary Keith Sonderling, a former employer-side labor lawyer from Florida who in Trump's first term served as head of the Wage and Hour division and as a member of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

- The Northwest Labor Press is an independent, union-supported newspaper serving Oregon and southwest Washington. It publishes online at nwlaborpress.org.

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Unions to lawmakers: HCMC's collapse would bring 'devastating consequences'

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

"Nurses have spent this legislative session making it clear what HCMC means for patients and communities across Minnesota," Olson-Ehlert said. "This funding stabilizes the hospital and protects access to care. Lawmakers acted at a critical moment, and this must be the foundation for a long-term solution that reflects this hospital's role as a statewide asset."

HCMC is part of the Hennepin Healthcare system, which employs over 8,000 workers. The workforce is heavily unionized and includes members of MNA, the Committee of Interns and Residents (SEIU), the Minnesota Newspaper and Communications Guild-CWA and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

HCMC union members were a near-constant presence at the Capitol during the 2026 legislative session, as lawmakers debated different proposals to prevent the hospital from financial collapse.

Workers also held vigils and rallies to enlist public support for saving HCMC.

MNA's parent union, National Nurses United, brought its "Red Alert" bus tour to downtown Minneapolis on April 30. The tour aims to put a spotlight on the impact of recent federal cuts to Medicaid and health insurance subsidies, part of the Trump administration's tax cut and spending law, that are straining hospitals like HCMC.

In 2023, 48% of HCMC patients were on Medicaid, and HCMC provides more than \$100 million per year in uncompensated care - about 20% of all uncompensated care in Minnesota.

Allowing HCMC to fail would have meant more Minnesotans slip through the cracks of an already broken health-care system, AFSCME Local 2474 President Sara Franck, a Hennepin Healthcare dental assistant, said. Local 2474 and AFSCME Local 977 represent more than 3,000 HCMC workers combined.

"Our fight to save HCMC was about protecting a lifeline for our patients regardless of their income, insurance status, zip code or background," she



MNA President Chris Rubesch speaks during the National Nurses United's "Red Alert" bus tour stop at HCMC.

said. "HCMC is where Minnesotans go during some of the hardest and most tragic moments of their lives, and our union members deeply understood that allowing these services to collapse would have devastating consequences for families across our state, and that was an unacceptable reality."

Local 977 President Kitsune Tara, a patient services coordinator at HCMC, said the agreement "proves what is possible when workers, patients, community members, Minnesota's labor movement and lawmakers come together to put people before politics."

While the prospect of new state funding would protect immediate access to patient care, the coalition pledged to continue seeking long-term solutions - and hospitals facing similar challenges across Minnesota.

"This keeps care in place for Minnesotans who depend on this hospital," MNA member Janell Johnson Thiele said. "We must continue to seek permanent funding solutions."



A critical part of the state's healthcare system, HCMC does not turn patients away because they are uninsured or underinsured. The hospital provides about 20% of all uncompensated care in Minnesota, and nearly 25% of the patients it serves come from outside Hennepin County. Union Advocate photos

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Over 70,000 REI co-op members pledge to boycott outdoors retailer's annual sale

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Jacob Lish, a sales specialist at the Maple Grove store who represents UFCW Local 663 on the nationwide bargaining team, noted that REI implemented only the punitive economic terms of its final offer, not tentative agreements reached earlier in talks that introduced new rights for union workers.

"It's really important for us that REI hears that its members don't support the union-busting they've been trying to do this whole time," Lish said.

Union members are hoping the anniversary-event boycott delivers just that message.

In addition to members who have taken the boycott pledge, the nation's largest labor federation, the AFL-CIO, has endorsed the boycott, adding REI to its "do-not-buy" list.

"Their bottom (line) is what they care about at the bargaining table," Lish said "Even our most modest asks are too expensive; they tell us they can't afford it."

"So by asking members to withhold their money for those 15 days, we think, is really going to impact REI - and hopefully drive them back to the table to reach an agreement with us."

'Within inches'

Union negotiators say they were "within inches" of a tentative agreement with REI before talks broke down.



Workers at the Maple Grove REI, members of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 663, went on strike in fall 2023.

photo courtesy UFCW Local 663

Management, they say, refused to guarantee union members wages on the same level as their non-union peers - a poison pill designed to thwart future union organizing.

More recently, REI has demanded

union members accept non-disparagement language in their contracts that would prohibit speaking out publicly against the company.

"REI has refused to offer us a fair contract, despite our willingness to compromise, and instead has insisted on provisions that would prevent more workers from joining the REI Union and that would ban us from speaking out," Alex Pollitt, a worker at the REI in Bellingham, Wash., said in a statement. "Their anti-union stance is deeply incompatible with the values REI claims to profess."

Organizing continues

In June 2023, REI workers in Maple Grove voted 22-4 in favor of joining UFCW Local 663. After the vote, workers said they looked forward to winning a contract that addressed the rising cost of living, ensured consistent and adequate hours and improved staffing in their store.

Maple Grove was the seventh REI location to unionize. Organizing has continued, with workers at a twelfth store, in San Diego, scheduled to vote in a union election May 27-28.

Despite its reputation as a progressive-friendly retailer, REI has dug deep into the union-avoidance playbook since workers in New York unionized the first store in March 2022.

But the approach has not gone unnoticed by the co-op's members.

When the REI union campaigned last year to elect two labor-friendly environmental leaders to the co-op's board of directors, REI refused to put either on the ballot. The union then encouraged members to vote "no" on the co-op executives' hand-picked candidates, who were running unopposed in the board election.

REI UNION
Maple Grove

Who else is on the boycott list?

- Others on the AFL-CIO's "do-not-buy" list include T-Mobile, hotels on both coasts, and Nabisco snacks made in Mexico.
- Find a full list at unionlabel.org.

It worked, as over 115,000 members responded to the union's appeal.

Two months later, REI agreed to establish a national bargaining structure with the union to settle contracts at its unionized stores - and to provide wage increases and bonuses that it had withheld from workers for the previous three years.

Now, REI members are being asked to deliver a similar message to executives by boycotting their co-op's anniversary sale.

"We know REI really values themselves as a member co-op, or at least they say they do," Lish said. "And we already know members support our goal of having some rights in the workplace and basic dignity as workers."

"With that really broad support from the membership, we think this boycott is going to be the most effective way to drive the response we are looking for."

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Workers picket outside The Estates at St. Louis Park on Day 1 of SEIU Healthcare Minnesota and Iowa's three-day strike at five Twin Cities nursing homes in April. At top-right, Juanita Campbell said workers' pay doesn't match the heavy client load at The Estates, where she has worked for 23 years. Union Advocate photos

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TWIN CITIES MUSICIANS UNION 30-31

SEIU members strike at five Twin Cities nursing homes, accuse employers of disrespect in wage talks

By Michael Moore
 Union Advocate editor

Picket lines went up at 7 a.m. April 20 outside five Twin Cities nursing homes, as about 300 union members launched a 72-hour strike for fair wages and respect.

The bargaining units, represented by SEIU Healthcare Minnesota and Iowa, are in limited negotiations with the employers, under to a wage-reopener clause in their contract. But management has shown no interest in bargaining, union officers say.

“The employer came in with only one number, 2%, and walked out,” Executive Vice President Rasha Ahmad Sharif said during a press conference outside The Estates of St. Louis Park. “That was their last, best and final offer - immediately.”

The union has filed charges of bad-faith bargaining with the National Labor Relations Board.

On the picket line, union members said they felt stung by the employers' decision to pay high-priced replacement workers from out of state rather than settle a fair wage increase with the workers who provide daily care to their residents.

“We get low pay and heavy, heavy, client (loads),” Juanita Campbell, a licensed practical nurse with 23 years of experience at the St. Louis Park facility, said. “And we don't have enough staff. They don't respect us.”

In addition to St. Louis Park, Estates workers are on strike at Roseville, Fridley and Excelsior locations. Union members at Cerenity Senior Care at Humboldt in St. Paul were also on strike.

Striking workers also rallied at the Capitol on Day 2 of the strike, before returning to their sites for picketing on the final day.

While employers in the nursing-home industry pinch pennies at the bargaining table, many are also bankrolling two lawsuits seeking to disband the state's new Nursing Home Workforce Standards Board.

“It is frustrating that (employers) seem unwilling to support us while we care for residents,” Jared Mitiga, a registered nurse at St. Louis Park, said. “It felt like they slammed the door shut before we could even get started. It's especially frustrating that they claim they can't give wage increases when the industry is spending money on all this other stuff.”



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AFL-CIO Convention will spotlight strength, solidarity of Minnesota labor movement

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

But organizers also intend to shine a spotlight on Minnesota's labor movement - from its rich history and recent legislative accomplishments to local union organizing and, of course, unions' response to Operation Metro Surge over the winter.

Even though the AFL-CIO landed on Minneapolis as the 2026 site over a year ago, Minnesota's pro-labor identity was a key factor in the decision, according to Michael Gillis, AFL-CIO field communications specialist.

"Minneapolis is hosting the convention because Minneapolis is a union

town," Gillis said. "St. Paul is a union town. Minnesota is a union state. There's a great labor history and tradition."

On Day 1 of the convention, Minnesota's labor movement will be honored as one of two recipients of the 2025 Meany-Kirkland Human Rights Award, which celebrates the most powerful examples of solidarity in action from across the world.

Alex Pretti, one of two observers shot and killed by federal agents during the federal occupation, was a nurse at the VA Hospital in Minneapolis and member of the American Federation of

Government Employees, an AFL-CIO affiliate.

Minnesota's labor movement shares the 2025 award with the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (BKDP). The honorees will receive their awards during a dinner reception June 7.

The federation's executive board announced winners of the award in March. Its announcement cited Minnesota union activists' "courage and commitment to fighting for democratic rights" during the violent surge of federal immigration enforcement that began in December.

The convention is only open to cre-

denialed delegates. But local union members who are not be delegates can serve as volunteers at the event.

There also is a public action in the works. The AFL-CIO is keeping details under wraps, but the 1,500-plus union delegates will show solidarity with a local labor campaign at some point during the four-day event.

"We certainly plan to celebrate the labor movement of Minnesota in a big way," Gillis said.

To get news and action alerts from the convention, go to aflcio.org and click to follow the federation's social media accounts.



Bowlers from AFSCME Local 1842 mug for a photo during Labor Bowl 2026. Find more team photos at stpaulunions.org



High-scorers in the second shift, Ron Laumeyer and Tess Darmer, show their trophies, hand crafted by Brian Beedle.



The salamander - a centerpiece of the Insulators union's logo - features prominently on Local 34's bowling shirts.



Members of the Minnesota Nurses Association's team stay on brand in red feather boas and sunglasses.



East Metro union retirees meet monthly on third Wednesday

The Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation Retirees will meet June 17 and July 15 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 always welcome to attend.

The group regularly meets on the third Wednesday of each month. Meetings typically feature a guest speaker and a light lunch.

For more information on the retirees group, contact Tom Edwards at edwardsapwu2@aol.com.

Endorsement Notice

The Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation may consider recommendations for granting labor endorsement in state legislative and local races at its delegates' meetings June 10 and July 8.

For more information on political endorsements, call the federation at 651-222-3787.

Notice of SPRLF nominations

The Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation will hold nominations this summer for the following executive positions:

- Two trustees.
- The federation's contingent of Geographical Representatives to the Minnesota AFL-CIO Executive Board.

The nominating process and timing of potential elections will be specified at stpaulunions.org. For more information, call 651-222-3787.

Bowling fundraiser supports St. Paul unions' nonprofit

The labor community raised over \$30,000 for the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation's nonprofit arm, the St. Paul Labor Studies and Resource Center (LSRC), at Labor Bowl last month.

As part of the AFL-CIO Community Services program, the St. Paul LSRC connects union members and their families to community resources during layoffs, work stoppages and other times of financial stress. The LSRC also provides direct financial assistance to union members through its Emergency Fund.

Labor Bowl marked its 15th anniversary as a fundraiser for the LSRC this year. Held May 7 at Sun Ray Lanes in St.

Paul, the event featured raffles, drawings and prizes for high- and low-scorers across three shifts.

High scorers were Chris Peltier (LIUNA Local 563) and Jessica Harwath (Bakery Workers Local 22) in the first shift; Ron Laumeyer (Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1005) and Tess Darmer (Painters Local 61) in the second; and Laumeyer (again!) and D Rojas (Carpenters Local 322) in the third.

The St. Paul LSRC and the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation thank the bowlers, sponsors and volunteers, as well as Sun Ray Lanes, for making the 15th Annual Labor Bowl a success!

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