



A Union of Professionals

VOL. 34, NO. 3 | SPRING 2015

PUBLIC EMPLOYEE Advocate

THE NATIONAL PUBLICATION OF AFT PUBLIC EMPLOYEES



GETTING TO HIGHER

GROUND

PUBLIC
EMPLOYEES
BAND
TOGETHER
AS ATTACKS
HEAT UP

PAGE 4

Tools you can use

Training offers new skills, campaign for respect [PAGE 2](#)

CGI offers pension

praise Union pension investments having positive impact [PAGE 7](#)

Privatization push

back Standing against plan to privatize SUNY hospitals [PAGE 7](#)

Fighting fast track

AFT members lobby against fast-track legislation [PAGE 7](#)

OUR MISSION

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

RANDI WEINGARTEN
President

LORRETTA JOHNSON
Secretary-Treasurer

MARY CATHRYN RICKER
Executive Vice President

JENNIFER CHANG
Director of Communications Operations

ADRIENNE COLES
DANIEL GURSKY
ANNETTE LICITRA
VIRGINIA MYERS
MIKE ROSE
Contributing Editors

LAURA BAKER
JANE FELLER
SEAN LISHANSKY
Copy Editors

MICHELLE FURMAN
PAMELA WOLFE
Graphic Designers

SHARON WRIGHT
Production Specialist

JENNIFER BERNEY
Production Coordinator

AMY MARTIN DARLING
SHAWNITRA HAWKINS
ALICIA NICK
Production Staff

PUBLIC EMPLOYEE ADVOCATE (ISSN 1552-2601, USPS 011543) is published quarterly by the American Federation of Teachers, 555 New Jersey Ave. N.W., Washington, DC 20001-2079. Phone: 202-879-4400
www.aft.org

Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Public Employee Advocate, 555 New Jersey Ave. N.W., Washington, DC 20001-2079.

MEMBERS: To change your address or subscription, notify your local union treasurer or visit www.aft.org/members.

Letters to the editor may be sent to the address above or to online@aft.org.

PUBLIC EMPLOYEE ADVOCATE is mailed to all AFT public employee members as a benefit of membership. Subscriptions represent \$1.75 of annual dues and are available only as a part of membership.

© 2015 AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS, AFL-CIO



Cover illustration: STEVE KROPP/ILLUSTRATIONSOURCE.COM

Colorado training offers new skills, boost to local campaign for respect

MORE THAN 25 AFT members and staff gathered in Denver in February for a week of intensive training in member organizing and mobilization conducted by the AFT Public Employees division. As part of the program, the participants—who came from public employee affiliates around the country—helped Colorado WINS with its own campaign focused on respect and higher wages for the 31,000 state employees it represents.

The participants took part in classroom-based training in the morning, organized work-site meetings in the afternoon and visited prospective members at home in the evening. In a right-to-work state, Colorado WINS has to put a lot of effort into organizing new members.

“Going out into foreign turf can be very uncertain,” says Renne’t Sarbu, a contract specialist with the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services and an activist in MEA-MFT, the state union federation. “But I found out they have the same issues in Colorado as we do in Montana: low pay, managers who do what they want, no raises, and workers who are expected to do more. We also share the same goals, including strengthening the membership, better contracts and keeping members involved all year long.”

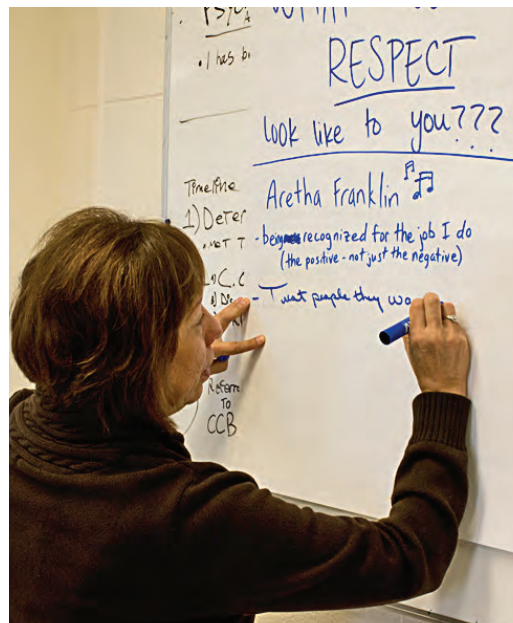
One eye-opening fact about state employees in Colorado: Thousands of them make well under \$15 per hour, which unions and other activists have targeted as a living wage

in the national “Fight for \$15” campaign. In fact, many of them make less than \$10. Among this group are custodians, dietary aides and LPNs.

Colorado’s economy has improved, along with the national economic recovery, but raises for state employees have continued to lag, says Colorado WINS Executive Director Tim Markham. “The state is losing employees to the private sector. We need to step up and recognize the value of our public workers at correctional facilities, veterans’ homes, transportation facilities and centers for the developmentally disabled across the state. Their work matters to all of us, and it should be rewarded fairly.”

For white-collar workers, the issue of respect focuses less on salary and more on things like professionalism, flexibility, trust and overtime pay. Participants at the training were divided into teams that targeted both blue- and white-collar employees. By week’s end, the participants had attempted contacts with more than 700 Colorado state employees through the home visits and work-site meetings.

Sarbu says the training was among the best she has ever attended and now back home in Montana, she’s already using some of what she learned. One strategy she found especially useful was charting and mapping. “It’s a great tool to visually see where the weak areas and strong areas are.”



Colorado WINS member Mary Peña, left, during a classroom session. The union also has used a number of infographics, like the one below, in its campaign for respect and higher wages.

EXPECT RESPECT 

More than 3000 classified state employees make \$15/hr or less.

They are people you interact with every day

Custodians, accountants, technicians, client care aids, dining services workers, childcare workers, security guards, IT professionals, admin support

When state employees have a voice, Colorado WINS



Unions strengthen communities and economies

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

“YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND that the soul of your community is at stake.”

That’s what Stephanie Kellnhauser, an AFT member in Wisconsin, says. In March, Gov. Scott Walker broke a campaign promise and made Wisconsin the 25th so-called right-to-work state. And indeed, both the soul of her community and the strength of its economy are at stake.

We know that workers in right-to-work states make about \$1,500 less per year than workers in states with collective bargaining. When wages are lower, workers leave the state, depressing job creation, and there’s a sizable economic loss to the state. Marquette University economist Abdur Chowdhury estimates the impact of right-to-work legislation on Wisconsin will be “a net loss of direct and indirect income of at least \$5.8 billion annually.”

On the other hand, we know that when unions are strong, so are communities and economies. When unions were at their peak, more workers—upward of 50 percent—were in the middle class. More workers had a real voice. Conversely, a decline in union membership—spurred on by trickle-down economics, ideological attacks and globalization—is directly linked to the rise in income inequality.

At a time when only the wealthiest 10 percent have grown wealthier as a result of the gains in productivity, workers, more than ever, need a voice on the job. Collective bargaining can lift all boats, union and nonunion alike. And when the right to collectively bargain is taken away, those boats start to sink.

Look at wages. In the heyday of the American labor movement, non-managerial workers’ wages went up 75 percent. As unions have been on the decline, these workers have only seen a 4 percent bump. Still, even today, union workers earn 28 percent more than nonunion workers. We know from our own research that, for state employees, collective

bargaining can make a 30 percent difference in terms of salaries.

When two-thirds of our economic activity is driven by consumer spending, it’s critical that working families have more money in their pockets to spend. But politicians like Walker, Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner and others don’t seem interested in putting money into the pockets of working families. They seem interested instead in attacking unions, so the only meaningful voice in politics would be their donors and funders—not working families.

Those attacks are not limited to the statehouse. The plaintiffs in *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association* are trying to get the U.S. Supreme Court to challenge the long-standing practice, known as fair share, which ensures that all the workers we represent share the cost of negotiations, contract enforcement and other services the union provides.

The way we fight back is to stand together, ensuring we have our unions. And as Stephanie Kellnhauser reminds us, we aren’t just in this fight to save ourselves. We’re not building power for power’s sake. It’s about leveraging that power for children, families and communities.

We know collective bargaining is the vehicle that allows us to champion fairness, democracy and opportunity in the workplace. It allows us to advance solutions to create and maintain high-quality public education, healthcare and public services and to unite the people we represent and the people we serve. Some call it bargaining for the public good. I call it the future of America’s labor movement.

The souls of our communities, our union, our economy and our nation are at stake. Power never yields willingly. In order to build it, we must organize. We must mobilize. We must fight back. We must fight forward to a better future for all working people.



TIM ENGLEMAN/FICKR.COM

We know **collective bargaining** is the vehicle that allows us to champion **fairness, democracy and opportunity** in the workplace.



GETTING TO HIGHER GROUND

ATTACKS on Wisconsin public employees continue to make national headlines, but the threats aren't limited to this state alone. From Maryland to Kansas, AFT members and their unions are fighting a full slate of legislation and executive actions that would make a bad situation even worse for the workforce: efforts to erode negotiated pay increases, to institute reckless tax cuts that shortchange vital public work, and to silence public employees' ability to speak out against these and other dangers to good government.

It's one of the most mean-spirited environments that public employees have faced in years, and unions aren't taking it lying down. Across the country, members and activists are rising to the challenge and taking their case directly to lawmakers, the courts and the community.

"Governors and state policymakers have a clear choice," AFT President Randi Weingarten recently wrote. "Push ideological policies to break the backs of unions, further disempower workers, have their deficit grow, have workers' wages sink, and have their state ranked at the bottom for business and economic climate; [or] strengthen unions and workers' rights, invest in public education and infrastructure, and create more good jobs."

In Maryland, a bogus "bonus"

Gov. Larry Hogan inaugurated his term by engaging with public employees in ways that throw dialogue and constructive action under the bus. The GOP governor is trying to portray a 2 percent salary increase—one that was negotiated and finalized last year by public employee unions and the state—as nothing more than a one-shot "bonus." And Hogan has unilaterally moved to impose a voluntary separation program that essentially would cut jobs, drain talent from pub-

lic service and cost taxpayers dearly.

The AFT-affiliated Maryland Professional Employees Council is responding to these threats with decisive alternatives and aggressive outreach. The union, in concert with other labor groups, has developed a proposal for early retirement incentives that could save Maryland almost 10 times more than the governor's plan—in just the first year. The union alternative keeps incentives where they belong: focused on employees nearing the end of their careers rather than on those who are relatively new to public service. In recent weeks, MPEC has been

Lisa Banks, left, Maria Mathias and Bill Marker are speaking out against Gov. Larry Hogan's punitive proposals for Maryland state employees.



"Governors and state policymakers have a clear choice: push ideological policies to break the backs of unions, further disempower workers, have their deficit grow, have workers' wages sink, and have their state ranked at the bottom for business and economic climate; or strengthen unions and workers' rights, invest and create more good jobs."

—RANDI WEINGARTEN,
AFT president

STEVE KROPP/ILLUSTRATIONSOURCE.COM

MICHAEL CAMPBELL

pressing its alternative through postcard campaigns and “lobby-night” visits to state legislators that draw participation from busloads of leaders and activists.

The savings that would accrue under labor’s alternative proposal for retirement incentives would make it unnecessary for Hogan to cut the pay increases that were negotiated in the collective bargaining agreement with the unions, MPEC President Maria Mathias says. State workers already have absorbed more than \$1 billion in sacrifices to help balance the budget, she stresses, and “the governor and legislators do not have a mandate to balance the budget with state employees’ salaries and benefits.”

Hogan is offering the “easiest, quickest, down-and-dirty approach” to incentives, says Lisa Levy, a property assessor in Baltimore County and secretary of the MPEC’s executive board. The governor’s strategy will lead to permanently unfilled positions and a public service brain drain that almost certainly will hamper departments that generate revenue for Maryland, she warns.

Bill Marker, an attorney with the state department of assessment and taxation, calls the governor’s voluntary separation program “a blunt instrument” that is sending a clear message to the workforce on how the administration plans to attack the state’s deficit: “We’re going to squeeze it out of public employees, who will be doing the same work with fewer people.”

When it comes to these attacks, MPEC members point out that their fight is the community’s fight as well. Hogan’s efforts to short-circuit negotiated raises for public employees is a plan that will ripple through the neighborhoods where public employees live and work, says MPEC building steward Lisa Banks. Like many public employees, Banks consistently supports local projects and nonprofits that are trying to strengthen Maryland communities and expand its middle class. But Hogan’s pay plan would “drastically impact my material contribution to the community at large and will affect my ability to continue my contributions.”

Kansas distractions, divisions

Gov. Sam Brownback is doubling down when it comes to attacks on the public sector, advancing a divisive agenda that distracts from the real challenges in Kansas—problems stemming from the governor’s brand of trickle-down economics, an “experiment” that has punched a nearly \$300 million hole

in the state budget.

Brownback and his allies in the GOP-controlled Legislature are pushing bills to eliminate due process and other rights that protect public employees when they speak out for quality services. Brownback is also working to prohibit public employees from bargaining anything beyond minimum wages and salaries while backing efforts to outsource services for the elderly, children, and the sick and disabled.

“These punitive new laws would only accelerate the current race to the bottom for jobs, working conditions, and wages in our state,” says AFT Kansas President Lisa Ochs. She stresses that the raft of regulations and bills share one common thread: They are all diversions from reckless policies that have turned Kansas and its productive workforce into the region’s weak sister when it comes to growing jobs and the economy—policies that have left the state with a projected deficit of almost \$600 million in the next fiscal year while generating an average annual windfall of \$20,000 for taxpayers who make up the state’s wealthiest 1 percent.

AFT members refused to be cowed by the governor’s tactics and refuse to be driven off message when it comes to talking about policies that compromise services and working conditions in the public sector. That was made clear at a state Senate hearing in March, where members urged lawmakers to reject legislation that would eliminate due process and deny public employees a chance to voice their ideas and concerns.

“It is vitally important that frontline staff have a voice in their working conditions,” says Laura Calhoun, who has worked in the state department of corrections for more than 18 years. “The past year has been one where Kansas correctional facilities have seen many inmate-on-officer attacks. Those of us who do these jobs, who put our safety on the line every single day, deserve input into our working conditions.

“We deserve the right to let management know what makes us vulnerable in the workplace, what unnecessary dangers exist that could be corrected,” Calhoun says. “If you deny us these rights, you are telling us—in no uncertain terms—that our lives and safety do not matter to this Legislature.”

Gloves off in Illinois

There has been no pretense of cooperation in Illinois, where Gov. Bruce Rauner in

Continued on page 6

‘Our budget is cut to the bone’

PUBLIC EMPLOYEES IN KANSAS are facing a serious crisis when it comes to the state budget and state economy. Gov. Sam Brownback and his allies in the Legislature have crafted bills that gut vital services and compromise working conditions for employees. Juanita Beck, who has been a state employee since 2010, is seeing firsthand the results of these destructive policies.



“Bargaining rights are fundamental to who we are.”

Juanita Beck says Kansas lawmakers have forgotten about their infrastructure.

ROY INMAN

“We are facing a severe shortage of staff,” says Beck. In addition to the shortage of correctional officers, there is inadequate training and a lack of proper equipment. On any given day, there are three officers in a unit of 200-plus inmates, and those officers are being asked to buy their own safety equipment, such as stab-proof vests.

“It all adds up to a dangerous situation,” continues Beck. “Our budget is cut to the bone. Officers are burned out and stressed. We can’t replace our staffing pool because there is no incentive to stay. It’s a huge quagmire.

“It used to be that public employees could work and care for their families and retire with a decent pension,” says Beck. “But it’s not that way anymore. It’s as if the state legislators have forgotten their infrastructure.”

Now, Gov. Brownback and his fellow GOP lawmakers are trying to take away the union rights of Kansas public employees by proposing legislation that allows these employees to bargain only over minimum salaries and wages. The workplace rights that enable them to speak out for high-quality education, health-care, and public services could be taken away.

“Our collective bargaining agreement was made to protect the rights of the employer and the workers,” Beck notes. “Without it, everything is one-sided. Our bargaining rights are fundamental to who we are.”



STEVE KROPP/ILLUSTRATIONSOURCE.COM

GETTING TO HIGHER GROUND

Continued from page 5

February signed an executive order blocking thousands of state employees from paying “fair share.” These are the fees that cover the collective bargaining and contract enforcement services that employees receive whether they are union members or not. Rauner also filed suit in federal court to have fair-share provisions declared unconstitutional.

When the state comptroller and state attorney general refused to implement this blatant abuse of power, Rauner responded by directing agencies to withhold an amount equal to fair share until the controversy is settled. On March 5, AFT affiliates in Illinois joined the state AFL-CIO and more than two dozen other unions—representing more than 40,000 state employees—to file suit in circuit court to invalidate Rauner’s action, charging that it violates state law and multiple collective bargaining agreements. The unions also filed a motion to dismiss Rauner’s federal suit.

Rauner also is pressuring the Legislature to put unions in the crosshairs by backing so-called right-to-work zones around the state. And he is calling for an unconstitu-

tional gutting of public employee pensions, and advocating for budget cuts that would eliminate the social service net for foster children, the homeless, developmentally disabled, and mentally ill. He continues to attack the wages and fundamental rights of middle class families, while doling out significant raises to top aides and lucrative contracts to consultants.

The executive board of the Illinois Federation of Public Employees has developed “a plan that is being implemented to counter these acts of injustice,” says Thomas Kosowski, president of the AFT affiliate. “Educating our membership on the issues now facing us has been a positive force behind the uniting of our fee payers and fully paid members.”

“The men and women who do the real work of state government are first responders, nurses, caregivers and corrections officers. They plow snow, protect children, care for veterans and do many other tough, essential jobs that benefit all Illinois residents,” says Illinois AFL-CIO President Michael T. Carrigan. “Gov. Rauner’s political obsession with stripping their rights and driving down their wages demeans their service, hurts the middle class and is blatantly illegal.”



What issues are **important to you** in the upcoming presidential election?

As we approach the 2016 presidential election, working families must be well-informed about the issues at stake and involved in letting the candidates know where we stand on those issues. The AFT is committed to researching the candidates' positions, but we also want to hear from you. **It's your union and your voice.**

Visit www.aft.org/election2016 and tell us what issues are most important to you in the upcoming election.

The AFT has a long and proud history of listening to and engaging our members. We are excited about the role our members can play in helping elect a president of the United States who will share our vision of America's future.



AFT President Randi Weingarten at the Clinton Global Initiative winter meeting in New York City.

CLINTON INITIATIVE PRAISES UNION PENSION INVESTMENTS

AFT President Randi Weingarten had a chance to brag a little about the positive impact that union pension fund investments are having on rebuilding the nation's infrastructure. She also discussed the AFT's work in areas such as career and technical education and rewriting the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, at the winter meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative in New York City. Weingarten was part of a powerful lineup of leaders from business, philanthropy and global organizations in a Feb. 10 plenary

session that looked at the future of initiatives to meet a variety of challenges around the world. President Bill Clinton, who moderated the session, recognized Weingarten at the end of the session for her work with CGI and a variety of other unions to direct some of the \$2 trillion of union pension assets into investments that upgrade our nation's infrastructure and create good jobs. To date, Weingarten reported, \$14 billion in union pension funds has been invested in infrastructure projects that have created up to 140,000 jobs.

ILLINOIS GOVERNOR ATTACKS UNIONS

The Illinois Federation of Teachers calls Gov. Bruce Rauner's Feb. 9 executive order blocking thousands of state employees from paying fair share fees a "blatant abuse of power." Illinois has "big financial problems, and the new governor's ideological and illegal attacks on working families aren't the way to solve them," says IFT President Daniel Montgomery, who is an AFT vice presi-

dent. Rauner also announced he has filed suit in federal court to have fair share provisions declared unconstitutional. Fair share fees are payments required of individuals who receive the pay and other contractual benefits negotiated by the union but who choose not to join. "Gov. Rauner's first actions have been brazen, out-of-touch attacks on the middle class and the unions that give them a collective voice," Montgomery says.

UUP PUSHES BACK AGAINST EFFORTS TO PRIVATIZE SUNY HOSPITALS

United University Professions President Frederick Kowal weighed in against New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's budget, testifying at a joint legislative budget hearing that it "continues a trend of the state's disinvestment in public higher education." Of particular concern to UUP and other public employee unions is the budget's weakening support for SUNY's public hospitals. "Once again," Kowal said, "the governor is attempting to privatize our SUNY hospitals

by allowing corporations to own and operate these facilities."

WALKER SIGNS RIGHT-TO-WORK BILL

Gov. Scott Walker's signing of a so-called right-to-work bill in Wisconsin on March 9 is just the latest example of his willingness to do anything to tear down workers, AFT President Randi Weingarten says. "During his campaign for governor, Scott Walker promised not to amp up his attacks on workers," she says. "But when he decided to run for president, he kicked that commitment to the curb. ..." In a two-week period, he "compared working people to ISIS, celebrated President Reagan's bust of the air traffic controller strike as a 'significant foreign policy decision,' and ... signed into law a bill that will drive down wages, destroy good jobs and break the backs of unions. By his actions and statements, Walker has revealed that his plan to win the Republican nomination is a willingness to say and do anything to attack and tear down workers. It's cynical and sad, and will ultimately fail."

Fighting fast track

AFT leaders sign letter opposing 'fast-track' trade deals

AFT PRESIDENT Randi Weingarten and Secretary-Treasurer Lorretta Johnson are among the leaders of 60 unions, from across the economic spectrum, who signed a letter to Congress expressing opposition to fast-track authority, which is used to advance unfair trade deals.

"Fast-track trade deals mean fewer jobs, lower wages and a declining middle class," the letter says. "Fast track has been used since the Nixon administration to advance deals, like NAFTA, that are sold to the American people as job creation measures. But these deals, written largely by and for the world's largest corporations, don't create jobs. Their main purpose isn't even related to trade; it's to enshrine rules that make it easier for firms to invest overseas and increase corporate influence over the global economy."

The letter demonstrates the unity among workers who have jobs that are directly affected by bad trade deals, and those whose jobs are indirectly affected. It is part of a comprehensive campaign by the AFL-CIO, its affiliates and its allies against fast-track authority. The campaign included a lobby day on March 4, where union members from more than 20 states came to Washington, D.C., to lobby members to stop fast track.

AFT members were among the nearly 500 activists who met with legislators and their staff. Among them was Susan Vincent, a retired United Federation of Teachers member now living in Florida, who expressed concern for her former students. "I taught in East Harlem.

Our goal as teachers was to make sure that the children graduated and went to college," said Vincent. "We told them their ticket to a better life was education, but so many jobs are going overseas. Those job losses hurt the middle class. Who are we as a nation without a strong working and middle class?"

AFT members Anthony Ciatto, George Cauffield, Susan Vincent and Dennis Bayle traveled to Washington, D.C., in March to lobby their lawmakers to vote against fast-track authority.



MICHAEL CAMPBELL

SPACE FOR
ADDRESS LABEL



Here's one more thing
Union families can share.

Save with AT&T Wireless and Union Plus. Just because you're union, you can save 15% on select wireless service from AT&T, the only national wireless provider that's union—like you. You can save whether you're already an AT&T customer, or switching to all-union AT&T. Plus, if you use a Union Plus Credit Card on qualifying purchases, you're eligible for up to \$250 in rebates. For union members, this is an easy call.



A Union of Professionals

AFT +
Member Benefits

Save the Union Way at UnionPlus.org/AFTATT

All program plans for new and existing customers may require a new two-year contract. This offer cannot be combined with any other discounts. Qualifying monthly data plan required.