



Stepping

UP

American Federation
of State, County and
Municipal Employees,
AFL-CIO

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ONE STRONG, UNITED VOICE FOR MINNESOTA WORKERS



Pension Bill Becomes Law

pages 4 and 5

(Top) AFSCME members and retirees celebrate with Gov. Mark Dayton at the signing of the pension bill, which will ensure dignified retirements for public workers for decades. (Below) Christina St. Germaine of Local 1092 shows off her photo with Dayton after the signing. Members played a crucial role in the bill's passage.



JOURNEY FOR JUSTICE

As the U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments in the anti-worker *Janus v. AFSCME Council 31* case in February, a group of men in designer suits demonstrated outside with a deceptive message.

These men – sent by the billionaires and special interests bankrolling the *Janus* lawsuit – held signs that read “Stand with Workers” while shouting anti-union slogans. No one was fooled.

Workers weren’t fooled, either, when members of this same anti-union group crashed an orientation for new home-care providers.

“They were speaking to the (home-care) providers, telling them that they did not need to pay union dues – that they could put that money back in their pockets, that they could pay themselves and that they would still receive the same benefits, which is a very untrue statement,” says worker Toni Monique Taloa, a member of United Domestic Workers/ AFSCME Local 3930.

Both events were sponsored by the State Policy Network (SPN), an organization of more than 100 anti-union, anti-worker affiliates. Their goal, in their own words, is to “defund and defang” public service unions like AFSCME.

Why? Because when unions are strong, workers have more power over their jobs, working conditions and quality of life. Workers have higher wages, better health care and dignified retirements. We win sick leave, parental leave and vacations. We improve our workplaces and our communities. That all hits the pocketbooks of SPN’s billionaire funders, who want evermore power and money.

Dirty Tricks Are Coming

Soon, you may hear from slick representatives of SPN allies like the Freedom Foundation and the Mackinac Center for Public Policy yourself.

They’re going to try to dupe you and other workers into giving up your rights, and hurting your pay and benefits by dropping your union membership. They need to use these dirty tricks and lies because they know no working person would willingly give up job security or give back union-negotiated pay raises and benefits like health insurance or a pension.

The tactics SPN and its allies use include:

- Mailing you.
- Calling.
- Coming to your house.
- Turning up at your workplace, unannounced and uninvited.

They’ll tell you that if you leave the union, you’ll be giving yourself a raise when, actually, you’ll be hurting your chances for getting one in your next contract.

They’ll try to seem like they’re on your side. The opposite is true.

Unions work based on one simple premise: power in numbers. When more people join together in a union, they have more power to negotiate with management for things like good pay, stable hours, fair treatment and benefits. And because the union is required by law to represent and negotiate on behalf



of all employees equally – members and nonmembers alike – every person who opts to drop out and receive those benefits for free actually weakens their union.

Weaker unions are just what SPN wants. The group of wealthy special interests is spending \$80 million to accomplish its goal. Unions are one of the few remaining checks on the power of corporations and the super-rich, and SPN wants to end that.

Wisconsin Redux

SPN groups want to virtually eliminate collective bargaining, as they did in Wisconsin. Since Gov. Walker signed Act 10 into law, Wisconsin state employees now pay roughly \$400 more per month for health insurance. Teacher compensation has declined by 8.6 percent, says a 2017 report by the Center for American Progress Action Fund.

That’s why SPN is funneling millions into its broad assault on working people. It spreads misinformation on the ground and online. It backs state and local measures designed to curtail workers’ rights. It blocks worker- and community-friendly policies such as paid sick leave and minimum wage increases,

and promotes outsourcing and privatization. SPN aggressively pushes its agenda through the courts through cases like *Janus*.

Violating Your Rights

SPN will invade your privacy to find you.

The Freedom Foundation already has requested home addresses and dates of birth for public workers in Oregon. On the West Coast, they’ve used this information to send minions to the homes of more than 10,000

workers, The Guardian reports. Employees including domestic violence survivors and criminal justice workers have expressed concern for their safety.

“It’s important to protect our union members from invasion of their privacy and from harassment from anti-union groups,” says Jack Stone, an Oregon corrections officer and member of AFSCME Local 405. “It’s vital to secure our personal information to protect ourselves and our families.”

The billionaires and CEOs behind the State Policy Network want to take our country back to the days before unions: to the days of low wages, few benefits and workers’ career prospects being held subject to the political whims of whichever party was in power.

“We need to stand together so that we will have strength together,” Taloa says. “When we are under attack by a predator, we need to be in a pack together.”

Working people have power in numbers. The more we stick with our unions, the more power we have to negotiate good pay, benefits and working conditions. If people quit their unions, that power goes away. United we bargain, divided we beg.

By AFSCME International



AFSCME Council 5 is a union of 43,000 workers who advocate for excellence in services for the public, dignity in the workplace, and opportunity and prosperity for all working families.

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(elected September 2016)

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Stepping UP

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AFSCME endorses Erin Murphy for governor

Supporting workers, standing up to billionaires

After an intensive, two-month process to find the candidate who most shares our values, the AFSCME Council 5 Executive Board has endorsed state Rep. Erin Murphy for governor.

The Executive Board – made up of members, elected by members – endorsed Murphy over U.S. Rep. Tim Walz and State Auditor Rebecca Otto as the person with the best plan to win in November.

Murphy won at the DFL State Convention with strong Council 5 backing: 83 delegates and 74 alternates. She also has been endorsed by Gov. Mark Dayton, the Minnesota Nurses Association, SEIU and TakeAction Minnesota.

“Today is the day we’re going to unify our fellow Democrats,” Murphy said at the DFL Convention. Together, Murphy says, Minnesotans can protect health care, labor and a woman’s right to choose; can stop gun violence in schools; and build a kind of politics that improves lives. “Together, we are unstoppable.”

“Erin Murphy has a strong record of supporting workers, our families and our rights,” says AFSCME executive director John P. Westmoreland. “We’re confident Erin will stand up to the billionaires and corporate CEOs trying to take away our freedom to negotiate a fair return on our work and trying to silence the power of workers’ collective voices.”

“Erin believes in public service and knows that workers are the ones who make our cities, counties and state run well and provide our great quality of life here in Minnesota,” says AFSCME Council 5 president Judy Wahlberg. “She will listen to workers and make sure our crucial public services are funded, rather than focus on giving tax breaks to the rich and to big corporations who are trying to take away workers’ rights.”

“The people of AFSCME are working hard every day to build Minnesota’s future,” Murphy says. “To have earned the support of this mighty force is testament to our belief in one another and what we can accomplish when we stand together and fight for working people. To me, as a person of labor,



AFSCME members Bryan Kirsch, Heather Schultz and Jessica Langhorst rally for Murphy at the DFL State Convention.



Murphy is a nurse who serves on the House Health and Human Services Finance Committee, and the Ways and Means Committee. The state representative is former Majority Leader of the Minnesota House. Murphy has deep union roots: She was a lobbyist, organizer and executive director of the Minnesota Nurses Association.

She’ll face off against Walz in the Aug. 14 primary and Attorney General Lori Swanson, who tossed her hat in the ring for governor a day after the DFL Convention.

it is deeply satisfying, and I am ready to fight for all of us,” she says.

AFSCME endorsed Erin after an extensive process of gathering input from members. Council 5 spent two months meeting with union locals across the state to determine what traits and values are most important in a governor; had one-on-one conversations with members; and gave members a chance to meet informally with candidates in small groups in several cities. These conversations informed the candidates’ questionnaire, AFSCME’s legislative priorities this session and the Executive Board’s endorsement.

The winner of the DFL primary will run against either Hennepin County Commissioner Jeff Johnson (the GOP nominee) or former governor Tim Pawlenty.

Pawlenty left Minnesota with a \$6.2 billion deficit, borrowed \$2 billion from our schools and vetoed funding for roads and bridges after the I-35 bridge collapse.

Minnesota outperforms Wisconsin again

A new report shows Minnesota is a better state for working people than Wisconsin.

The Economic Policy Institute compared the two states’ records from 2010 to 2017, following the election of Gov. Mark Dayton and Gov. Scott Walker. The EPI says it picked Minnesota and Wisconsin because of our states’ proximity and widely diverging political policies.

Gov. Dayton focused on progressive policies such as raising the minimum wage, boosting public investment in infrastructure and education, strengthening safety net programs and labor standards, and taxing the wealthy.

Walker cut taxes for businesses and the rich, privatized services, weakened unions and cut funding for everything from schools to aid to the poor.

The result?

SCOTT WALKER'S TEA PARTY
WISCONSIN

- Household income growth: 5.1%
- Poverty rate: 10.7%
- Job growth since 2010: 7.9%
- Economic growth since 2010: 10.1%
- Union density: 8.3%
- USA Today's 20th "Best Run State"



MARK DAYTON'S PROGRESSIVE
MINNESOTA

- Household income growth: 7.2%
- Poverty rate: 8.7%
- Job growth since 2010: 11%
- Economic growth since 2010: 12.8%
- Union density: 15.2%
- USA Today's #1 "Best Run State"



- Median household income grew more here.
- Minnesotans are more likely to have insurance.
- Minnesota reduced child poverty and overall poverty, while the poverty rate increased under Walker. By 2016, Wisconsin’s poverty rate was 11.8 percent – where Minnesota’s was back in 2011, at the height of the Great Recession.
- Long-term unemployment is twice as high in Wisconsin.
- Union membership in Wisconsin fell to 8.3 percent.

“In some cases, it is possible to draw a straight line between a particular choice or set of policy choices and the effect it had on the state’s economy and the welfare of its residents,” the report concludes.

- Minnesota has had stronger job growth than Wisconsin since December 2010, 11 percent compared to 7.9 percent.
- Wages grew faster here than in Wisconsin.
- The gender wage gap narrowed more here.

The EPI cites Wisconsin’s Act 10, Walker’s bill that decimated unions’ collective bargaining rights and decreased membership among numerous decisions that stalled economic growth and employment.



Pension bill passes unanimously

A bill to stabilize and protect public pensions for decades to come was signed into law in a packed Capitol Rotunda May 31.

More than 300 state workers and retirees crowded into the Rotunda to watch as Gov. Dayton signed the bill with a flourish, announcing, “That’s the last bill I’ll sign as governor of Minnesota, and what a great one to end on.”

The historic pension reform will immediately save \$3.4 billion and fully fund our public pension systems within 30 years. It covers more than 500,000 state workers and retirees. The bill passed the Senate and House unanimously.

The pension bill is the result of three years of hard work by lawmakers and stakeholders, including workers, retirees and unions. AFSCME Council 5 and our allies in the Public Employee Pension Coalition, which represents more than 25 public sector unions, retiree groups and affiliated organizations, supported the measure.

AFSCME members attended every pension commission meeting and legislative hearing, phone banked and met with legislators to preserve strong pensions.

“They know they’re going to have a pension today, they’re going to have a pension tomorrow,” Dayton said. “I’m very, very happy we can find that security for all of you.”

The sustainability plan:

- Increases employer and employee contributions.



(Top) Gov. Dayton celebrates the signing of the pension bill with workers and lawmakers who helped make it happen. (Right) AFSCME political organizer Laura Askelin and Executive Board member Jen Guertin watch anxiously as the state Senate votes.



- Includes new state funding.
- Reduces the interest rate on money refunded to employees who leave.
- Repeals automatic COLA triggers that had occurred when certain funding levels were reached.
- Postpones the start of COLAs to full retirement age.
- Reduces the assumed rate of return from 8 percent to 7.5 percent.

Additional state funding was critical to the plan’s success. It will help address the state’s past shortfall in making the full Actuarial Determined Contribution needed for 100 percent funding.

Dayton thanked the House and Senate for their unanimous vote, singling out Sen. Julie Rosen and Rep. Tim O’Driscoll, who co-authored the legislation and shepherded it through the legislative process.

“This is truly an historic day,” Rosen said, adding that

the measure improves security for retirees and the state’s financial stability. “Sometimes in this building we just want to focus on the negatives and how different we are, but this was such a collaborative issue and so very important for the state.”

The reforms will reassure bond rating agencies, who had started to make note of the state’s unfunded pension liability, endangering future bond rates for the state, cities and school districts.

Council 5 legislative director Julie Bleyhl said the bill assures public workers they’ll have secure and dignified retirements.

“The pension bill represents shared sacrifice by everyone, including the state, the employer, employees and retirees,” Bleyhl said. “By working together and pulling together, we have ensured that public pensions will stay stable for decades to come. We have ensured that our government fulfills its promise to public employees.”



Legislative session brings wins, poison pills

Thanks to AFSCME members who were a strong, green presence at the Capitol, we won some major victories and halted bad bills. Members showed up in huge numbers, met with lawmakers and phone banked. Because of your efforts, public worker pensions are protected and so is the state's General Fund. Members blocked anti-worker bills that sought to make it harder to get state contracts approved, to weaken unions and to diminish state workers' health coverage.



and to corporations than the working and middle class. Under the Republican plan, some corporations would pay no income tax.

Those corporate tax breaks came on top of the GOP 40 percent federal tax cut for corporations and last year's GOP permanent freeze on property taxes for Minnesota businesses.

The GOP plan required budget surpluses to go toward tax cuts, not improving or adequately funding public services.

By contrast, Dayton's plan gave tax cuts to 2 million working families, expanded the Working Family Tax Credit and created a new credit for lower and middle-income families. His plan eliminated a tax break for the wealthiest 1,000 estates. None of those measures made the GOP bill.

Dayton vetoed the Republican bill May 16 and again May 23, when the GOP reintroduced the same tax plan with what seemed to be additional emergency school funding. But it wasn't new money – Republican leaders took money from community education programs like preschool, GED classes and youth football.

ATTEMPTS SPENDING BILL

Gov. Dayton vetoed the omnibus spending bill because it contained many harmful provisions. It was 990 pages long and introduced just 2.5 hours before a final vote in the Legislature. Dayton had repeatedly said he would not sign a bill that reduced funding for state agencies. Yet the GOP House and Senate sent him a bill that did just that. The bill would have:

- Reduced funding for the Attorney General, State Auditor, Department of Revenue, Department of Human Rights and several others
- Cut several public programs in DHS, including General Assistance, MFIP Child Care Assistance, MN Supplemental Aid, Housing Support and Northstar Care for Children
- Zeroed out the Health Care Access Fund
- Prohibited MNsure from bearing risk, so people on the exchange wouldn't have the possibility of getting MinnesotaCare

DEFEATED POISON PILLS

HF 2924 (R-O'Neill)/SF 3056 (R-Benson): Tried to split health coverage from state contracts and require separate submission to a legislative committee.

HF 2926 (R-Garofalo)/SF 3540 (R-Miller): Would specify how the Legislature ratifies collective bargaining agreements.

HF 3518 (R-O'Neill)/SF 3555 (R-Benson): Would tie raises for state civil service workers to performance.

HF 3723 (R-Drazkowski)/SF 3387 (R-Koran): The bill would ban public employers from using payroll deduction if union dues fund political activities. (Workers already can opt out of membership and pay only the cost of representation.)

SF 3392 (R-Chamberlain)/HF 3543 (R-Davids): Would make cuts to MNsure and prevent people from choosing MinnesotaCare.

SF 3754 (R-Kiffmeyer)/HF 4296 (R-Drazkowski): Would put the *Janus* decision in statute.



(Top) Correctional officers swarm the state Capitol to push for safe workplaces and secure pensions. Photo/Eric Jacobson.

(Left) Council 5 members and workers thank lawmakers for passing the pension bill.

that amount. Dayton signed a package with \$825 million in general obligation bonds, though he expressed concern that underfunding projects now will cost a lot more later. The bonding bill includes these AFSCME priorities:

Asset preservation

- University of Minnesota, \$45 million (\$205 million less than the Governor's proposal)

- Minnesota State colleges system, \$45 million
- DNR, \$26.5 million
- DHS, \$10 million (compared to the department's deferred maintenance needs of more than \$130 million)

Corrections

- Asset preservation, \$20 million
- St. Cloud plumbing and ventilation upgrade, \$16 million
- Moose Lake control room renovations, \$1.95 million
- *Not included in the final bonding bill:*
 - Lino Lakes bed expansion, \$5.2 million
 - Willow River bed expansion, \$1.7 million
 - St. Cloud interior fence, phase two, \$2.7 million

Transportation, \$544 million

Veterans Affairs

- Asset preservation, \$9 million (short \$4 million of what's needed)
- New Bemidji Veterans Home, \$12.4 million
- New Montevideo Veterans Home, \$9.4 million
- New Preston Veterans Home, \$10.2 million

TAXES

Gov. Dayton twice vetoed the GOP omnibus tax bill, which would have given big tax cuts to corporations, and bigger tax cuts to the wealthy

WINS

APPLETON PRISON

AFSCME members from the Department of Corrections testified against Rep. Tim Miller's efforts to reopen the Prairie State Correctional Facility owned by the infamous private prison company CoreCivic (aka CCA). The expensive plan went nowhere.

TRANSPORTATION

AFSCME members fought back a deceptive constitutional amendment that would have funded transportation by taking money from pre-K, E-12 education, higher education, nursing homes, health care and other state programs in the General Fund. The amendment ignored maintenance, inspection and design costs for new and existing roads and bridges. Council 5 made it clear the state needs a new, dedicated source of revenue for all modes of transportation, and to fund maintenance of existing infrastructure before building massive new projects.

BONDING

Gov. Dayton asked for \$1.5 billion worth of bonding for public works across the state, while the GOP-led House and Senate pushed for half

On the front line: Tales from fighting Minnesota's opioid epidemic

The opioid crisis and its devastating impact on individuals, families and communities are frequent topics in the news today. All too often, we hear of another star, a local teen or a soccer dad who has overdosed on prescription drugs like oxycodone, Dilaudid and fentanyl or the illegal drug, heroin.

What's less well known is the role AFSCME members play every day, helping to fight this crisis. Council 5 members are involved at every step of the battle, from working with addicted moms and their babies, to providing drug counseling, to dispatching ambulances for overdoses, to serving as probation officers. Workers say it can be distressing, but when they're acting to save people from overdoses or helping them fight addiction, they say it's also incredibly fulfilling.

The drug treatment counselors

Patricia Hediger was working at a methadone clinic a few years ago, waiting and waiting for a patient to arrive, when a cab came speeding up.

The taxi driver jumped out, saying he could not wake the patient up. She was inside the cab, unconscious.

"She was blue already," Hediger said. "It appeared she had shot up in the cab. We called 911, we did CPR, but we couldn't revive her. She died on the scene."

With nearly 40 years of experience between them, licensed alcohol and drug counselors Patricia "Pat" Hediger and Lori Zobel have too many stories like this. The AFSCME Local 2474 members work with people admitted to the 500-bed HCMC (now Hennepin Healthcare), including the emergency department and acute psychiatric services. They help patients try to change their lifestyle and thinking patterns, and discover their motivation to be sober.

"Both Lori and I have seen a lot," Hediger says. "One minute we can be thinking everything is going great, I got so many people into treatment, and then you may have somebody who overdosed and had to be intubated and went into cardiac arrest and passed away."

Zobel has lost clients who got sober in treatment or jail, started using as soon as they got out, and fatally overdosed because they didn't have any tolerance built up.

Hediger has seen people in the throes of addiction sell their bodies, rent out their kids or steal to afford their habit. Counseling people through addiction takes an emotional toll.

"I used to take everything home with me," Zobel



Pat Hediger and Lori Zobel

says. "With women who had kids, I wanted to take their kids home with me. I realized I'm not going to last if I don't figure this out. I just keep in mind all of the good things that happen and remember that the bad things that happen aren't because of me, it's because of choices people made long before I came along."

The path into addiction varies. Young people may experiment with drugs or try to numb physical or emotional pain. Adults may have taken pain pills for surgery, then find their medication is no longer handling the job because their tolerance has increased. They can't get new prescriptions, so they go onto the streets. If they can't find or afford prescription painkillers there, they may turn to heroin.

"These are professionals," Zobel says. "They've got families. And pretty soon, before you know it, it all comes to an end. Their tolerance continues to

increase. They're using more. They're draining their bank accounts. They're stealing from work. They're losing their jobs. They're losing their families. It all kind of snowballs."

"The withdrawal from opiates can be really painful," she adds. "People will do whatever they need to do and use whatever they need to use to relieve them from that pain."

Treatment is not easy. Treatment is work, a tool rather than a cure-all, Hediger says. She tells patients she'll help them and walk

alongside them, but they're the ones who will actually do the work: They have to want to be sober.

"One person may get it on their first or second attempt, another person may have to go 15, 16 times," she says. "My belief is there is no such thing as them having too much treatment or too many attempts. Never stop trying."

As difficult as their job can be, both women say that above all, it's rewarding.

Hediger has a plaque on her office wall filled with words like empathy, encouragement, listening and hope. A patient and her sister gave that to Pat as a thank you gift for saving the patient's life. She told Pat those words represent everything the counselor meant to her.

"When people tell me you saved my life, I say, 'No, you saved your life. I was just there to be able to watch you. You gave me the privilege of watching that happen,'" Zobel says.

Calling 911

When someone calls 911, all too often they're calling because someone has overdosed.

"Most opioid-related calls start off with 'So-and-so is not breathing, they're having an overdose, get somebody here now,'" says St. Louis County 911 dispatcher Ryan Stauber, a Local 66 steward and negotiator. "That's where our job really picks up."

Stauber and his co-workers cover the biggest geographic county east of the Mississippi, bigger than Rhode Island and Connecticut combined.

Trying to get a location can be challenging when the caller is under the influence, and distracted and horrified by seeing their friend OD. During a recent call, all the caller could do was repeatedly yell the name of the woman who had overdosed.

"Sometimes you're giving CPR instructions because there's literally nothing else you can do," Stauber says. "You know in the back of your mind someone's got to get there with Narcan (a medication that can reverse an opioid overdose). That's what will save a life."



He says St. Louis County, which includes Duluth, is experiencing an increase in overdoses and in people cutting drugs with fentanyl, making

them even more dangerous. Opioid addiction is so powerful, he took calls about someone overdosing twice during a single shift. There's been a corresponding rise in bizarre calls, people who exhibit odd behavior and who flee from police and medical attention.

Addiction affects everyone, he says.

"We've had 65-year-old women overdose. We've had young adults overdose. It doesn't exactly follow any sort of income distribution or race. It literally affects

everyone in the city. We've had people who leave behind families."

Those are the calls Stauber finds most difficult: the people who die and leave behind children or pets, or even had children in the house when they overdosed.

"If you go through life listening to people die on a regular basis, I'm sure it will have some effect on me," he says, adding that there are in-house and law enforcement support groups that can help workers. "As a dispatcher, you learn to remove yourself as much as you can from those situations or it will eat at you."

Unless a call makes the news, dispatchers don't typically know what happens. Stauber likens dispatch to chapter two in a book: "We get the conflict, we don't get any of the resolution."

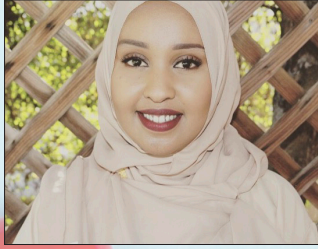
He says it feels good to do work that is so essential.

"The public service job we do is rewarding in its own right," Stauber says. "You get to hear those rare calls where someone gives birth on the way to the hospital or comes back to life if they've been drowning and were able to be resuscitated. It's those rare wins that remind you it's worth it."



The first line of defense

Hennepin Health will be rolling out a new program in response to the opioid crisis, and community health specialists like Hudo Ahmed play a key role.



Ahmed helps people on the special needs health care plan figure out what they can do to stay healthy, schedules appointments,

informs them about benefits and connects them to resources like housing and social services.

As part of the new program, Hudo also will call clients when they get a prescription for an opioid. The Local 34 member will ask if they know why a medication was prescribed and what opiates are. She says patients can find doctors' offices too intimidating to ask questions. So workers like her will encourage clients to talk to their doctors and ask about alternatives to opioids like acupuncture, physical therapy, gym membership or other medications. The idea is to provide information

before addiction can start.

"The work we as community health specialists are doing is a big part of that first line of defense against the opioid epidemic," Hudo says. "By actually talking and engaging directly with the members, especially in the beginning when they first start taking opioid medications, we're making sure they are truly informed. Information is powerful. Once people know, they can start making different decisions."

"One of my favorite parts of my job is connecting with my members, giving them information they were not aware of and seeing it click."

The probation officer

Tina Wood is wracking her brain for an opioid addiction success story.

The Hennepin County probation officer is sure there must be some, but what's going through her brain are all the people who ended up in prison, who overdosed, whose parents have called her, terrified their child would die.

"We're just seeing the destruction," says Wood, who's worked in probation for 18 years. "We're seeing a lot of people sitting in jail. We're trying to keep them alive. If treatment isn't working, that's our next best bet. But they're going to get out."

Wood tells the story of a man on probation who was found passed out in his car on the side of a city street, motor still running, a needle in his arm. He'd overdosed before. He ended up in prison.

His mother called Wood, yelling and irate. His sister called to thank her.

"We provide a service nobody wants," says Wood, the co-chief steward of Local 552. "We are trying to be your change agent, but at the same time, we have to hold people accountable. The little successes we have, we hold onto. I know at the end of the day, I've done the right thing. You can be mad at me that I put your son in jail. I'm not going to let him die."

In her 18 years doing probation, Wood says she's always seen heroin and opioid addiction, but not like this. Everything is stronger and more addictive. Fentanyl is so potent, it can kill people on the first use. "You don't know what hit is going to kill someone," she says.



Frantic calls from parents, siblings and significant others have become all too common in this era of opioid addiction.

"Sometimes they're terrified they don't know where their kid is. Sometimes they find a syringe or pill that puts them on high alert. I recently had a mom call and say, 'Please lock my daughter up. If you don't, I'm afraid she's going to die.'"

There is a big societal cost. People in the throes of addiction may commit robberies or burglaries to get money for drugs. The child protection, public health and social work systems get involved. So does law enforcement, public defenders and prosecutors. Cases clog up the court system.

Probation officers try to address addiction and get

people into treatment right away. Then they tackle jobs, mental health and education.

But despite all of these interventions, some people just can't stop using. Wood has had clients overdose and die, and others end up back in jail or even in prison.

"That's part of the emotional challenge of working in this field," she says. "We do a good job of leaning on each other. We've all had situations like that. We know how hard it is to keep going on with your work when you've lost someone, when you've seen the potential and seen what that person's life could have looked like."

Wood thinks growing awareness of opiate addiction is starting to curtail doctors' prescribing of opioids. But that alone isn't enough.

She says we need longer-term treatment for this level of addiction and to build a wrap-around support system that includes substance abuse treatment, mental health care, employment opportunities and affordable housing for offenders.

"These are convictions based solely on drug abuse," she says. "The system, I think we have a long ways to go to figure out how best to handle these cases, but I think we're doing the best we can with what we have available."

She says the people who do make it are incredible. So are the probation officers and other workers who help them.

Helping moms and babies

When a pregnant woman who's using or suspected of using opioids comes to Hennepin Healthcare, inpatient social worker Liz Foltz springs into action.

"It's very sad when you see a mom coming in and you can see her actively going through withdrawal," says Foltz, who works with mothers and babies after delivery in the Birth Center and Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.

"The social worker's role is to try to provide encouragement and support. 100 percent of the moms I meet with really love their babies. They want a healthy life for their babies and want to do the right thing. It's just so, so hard for some of these moms to get sober."

The AFSCME Local 2474 member is part of a team of workers that surrounds the mothers and newborns with care during various phases of pregnancy and birth. That team can include addiction treatment, child protection, other social workers and medical professionals from Hennepin Healthcare, Hennepin County's Project Child and other agencies.

"Think of a mom who has just delivered a baby and leaves," Foltz says. "They're leaving to go use again. We've had it happen as soon as a couple of hours



after delivery, and we don't hear from those moms again, which is very sad when you think about the strength of the addiction. It's so powerful the mom is going to leave her baby at the hospital.

"We see both ends of the spectrum, moms who give up and moms who say no, this is really hard but I'm going to do it. You have a different perspective when you meet the women who are using and hear their stories and see their faces and see their pain. You have a greater understanding of the humanity behind this horrible epidemic."

The amount of time Foltz spends working with

mothers with drug use and addiction issues keeps climbing. It can be anywhere from 10 percent to 75 percent of her day.

When a mom wants to get clean, Foltz makes sure she sees her baby and affirms she's making a hard but great decision to get sober for her newborn. An addicted mom may feel she can't celebrate her baby's birth, so Foltz tries to help her do so.

"You do some of the same things you do with any mom, talk about how beautiful their baby is, make sure they have the basic items like a car seat, clothes and diapers," Foltz says. "The hardest thing is when moms are so sad and devastated that their addiction has hurt their baby. Or having to put a baby on a hold and tell a mom their baby is not going to go home with them because of their drug use."

Foltz says the job is rarely feel-good. She keeps coming back every day because she can make a difference.

"If we can try to change something for these women or have a positive outcome for this pregnancy or maybe next pregnancy, it gives you hope things will be different."



Retirees United Celebrates 5 Years of Action



“It’s important to look out for retirees, for our pensions and our health care,” Atkins says. “It’s important that we stay active and have a presence because we have a face, we have members. And it’s important for our legislators to know that we vote.”

Retirees United is a rich source of companionship and entertainment for its members, too. Meetings are paired with lunches, coffee and special speakers. Members take outings like boat rides.

“You guys really are leading the way,” AFSCME International retiree field manager Ben Hodapp said at the Retirees United Convention in May. “You did a lot to make sure you’re a fighting force for retirees and all Americans.”

Council 5 Retirees United is turning five, marking a half-decade of volunteering in communities, helping elect worker-friendly candidates and serving as fierce pension watchdogs.

In just five years, the group’s built its membership to 2,770 retirees in six chapters across the state.

Yet chapter president Jeff Birttnen says that to him, the anniversary means they’re just getting started.

“We’ve been learning about what we can do and how strong we are and can be so that looking forward, we can add to that and become a force in conjunction with Council 5, to make sure that we elect the proper people to protect our pensions, Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid,” Birttnen says.

“I see us as a second family, my AFSCME family,” says Judie Atkins, president of the East Metro Subchapter. “We all feel that. We have built that because we work together. There’s just so many things we have done.”

Retirees United members are frequent volunteers at local food shelves, the Letter Carriers’ Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive and Fare for All, which supplies reasonably priced food to the public. The retirees have turned T-shirts into food bags, and made blankets as part of a Council 5 drive to benefit domestic violence survivors at Safe Haven in Duluth.

“We like to volunteer and make things better,” Atkins says. “We all have a sense of helping and giving back. It gives us a purpose.”

As pension watchdogs, they’ve had representatives at every Legislative Commission on Pensions and Retirement hearing and at each successive step in the House and Senate.

The retirees phone bank around pensions and other AFSCME issues. They make calls and door knock to elect worker- and retiree-friendly lawmakers at all levels of government.



(Clockwise from top): Retirees Gloria Alt and Ron Krueger share a light moment; Judie Atkins, Jeanette Burfeind and Gloria Alt volunteer at a Stillwater food bank; Jeff Birttnen, Mary Benner and Ron Krueger join the crowd on the podium as Gov. Dayton signs the pension bill; Retirees United gathers at its annual convention.



The retirees have been part of AFSCME history and will help shape our future, too, said Council 5 executive director John P. Westmoreland.

Many of the retirees were around in the early 1970s, when the Minnesota Public Employment Labor

Relations Act (PELRA) became law, officially giving public workers the right to collectively bargain. AFSCME Local 66 turns 100 next year, and AFSCME itself formed in 1932.

“It’s an honor and privilege to stand here before you,” Westmoreland said. “I am a benefactor of



what you all did. We have to defend this. We’re standing on your shoulders. We recognize that, and we recognize your value.”

Council 5 president Judy Wahlberg thanked retirees for all they do, and said she’ll be among them soon. She retired May 31 from her job, and will stay on at the Council until a new president is elected.

“I’m happy to join you guys, if the smile on my face isn’t enough to tell you that,” Wahlberg said with a laugh.

Learn more about Retirees United and join at: <https://www.ac5ru.org/>.

