

The background of the entire page is a close-up, slightly blurred image of the United States flag, showing the stars and stripes in a wavy pattern.

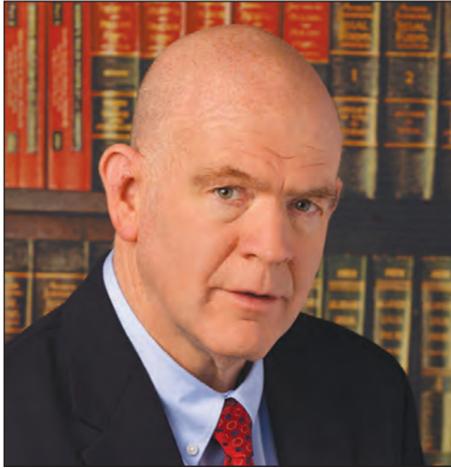
***OPEIU*CONNECT**

Issue 556, Spring 2024

STRONG UNIONS STRONG ECONOMY

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Strengthening worker power through unions is key to a strong economy



Will We Learn the Lessons of History and Protect Our Children?

By Richard Lanigan
President

In 1870 one in five children between 10 and 15 were employed, according to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. By the early 20th century, reformers believed the long-term benefit of educating children outweighed the economic benefits of child labor and fought to eliminate the practice. In 1912, a strike against child labor in the woolen mills of Lawrence, Massachusetts, was the largest strike that had occurred at the time. Finally, after trying to enact laws on a state-by-state basis, federal laws prohibiting child labor were included in the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA). This law protected children from the harsh world of adult work and raised educational standards throughout the U.S. for nearly 90 years.

In the last two years, we have witnessed an erosion of these protections. The New York Times, The Washington Post, U.S. News and World Report and NPR reported violations of child labor laws in the U.S. increased by nearly 300 percent between 2015 and 2022 and 37 percent in the last year. U.S. News and World Report reported 700 violations of minors working in hazardous conditions in 2022. Curiously, as this increase took place, at least 10 states amended or proposed labor laws to allow children under the age of 16 to have easier access to work (U.S. News and World Report, July 11). One state enacted a labor law that directly contradicts the FLSA.

For example, in Arkansas, the governor signed a bill removing the requirement of work certificates and age verification for employees under 16. Iowa extended the hours 14- and 15-year-olds can perform momentary work in a meat freezer (CNN, May 27). Missouri legislators proposed legislation that would roll back child labor law protections. Why would these states challenge the accepted notion that such laws protect a group of people who would be abused without these protections?

According to the Economic Policy Institute, an overwhelming number of underage children going to work are migrants from Latin and Central America. The New York Times recently reported more than 130,000 migrant children arrived in the U.S. without their parents and with no means to support themselves or pursue their education. These children end up in some of the most punishing jobs.

According to The Washington Post (April 23) several think tanks have been developed to weaken federal regulation and child labor laws. One such organization is the Florida-based Foundation for Government Accountability, which has

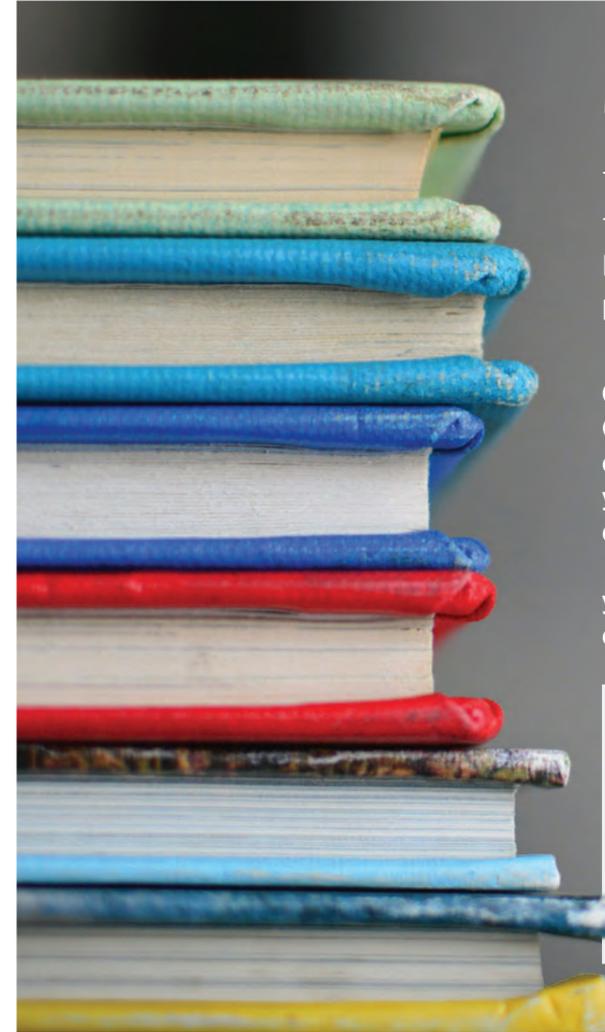
“found remarkable success among Republicans to relax regulations preventing children from working long hours in dangerous conditions.”

As the number of migrant children working in adult jobs increases, the governors of Arkansas, Iowa, Missouri, South Dakota and several other states have also taken a position that strengthening national immigration laws should be a priority.

When it is apparent immigrant children are performing this work, weakening labor laws and making it easier for employers to employ migrant children does not

Making tougher labor laws, with greater accountability, reporting and disclosure requirements, would protect U.S. jobs and child welfare ...

seem consistent with discouraging undocumented people from immigrating into the U.S. and “taking” Americans’ jobs. Making tougher labor laws, with greater accountability, reporting and disclosure requirements, would protect U.S. jobs and child welfare, which would be more in line with the immigration goal.



Thinking About Going Back to School?

It is a new year and the perfect time to enhance your professional skills and grow your career with a college degree.

You can reach your higher education goals through **OPEIU’s Discount College Benefit**, which offers significantly discounted tuition rates to OPEIU members and their families. Choose from several participating colleges and more than 150 online degree programs designed to meet your needs, from certificates to associate, bachelor’s and master’s degrees in health care, business, accounting and more.

Your union college benefit discounts tuition up to 50 percent and your federal grant awards still apply, reducing your out-of-pocket costs even further.

Scan the QR code to get started.



Explore the various opportunities available, and complete an inquiry form to be matched to a school and program you are interested in. You will then be connected to support services, which can answer any questions you may have and help guide you through the application and enrollment process.

Apply Now for 2024 OPEIU Scholarships!

Applications are being accepted for the 2024 OPEIU higher education scholarships. All eligible members and their families are encouraged to apply. The deadline is March 29.

Eligibility requirements and applications can be found at opeiu.org under the Member Resources tab, as well as on the OPEIU app, which is available for free download for iPhones on the App Store and for Android devices on Google Play. Or just scan the QR code!



Scholarships of up to \$6,500 are available for OPEIU members and dependents to pursue their education. Scan the QR code to learn more.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Solidarity with WGA Members

On behalf of the Writers Guild of America West, we thank you for your invaluable support during our 148-day strike. This labor action featured broad and deep solidarity from both our members and our allies as we struck against powerful media conglomerates. But each day we were on the picket line, we were never alone. You joined from the very beginning with statements of support and calls for the companies to do the right thing.

You marched with us on picket lines, amplified the voices of writers across the press and social media, donated to our mutual aid funds, organized events and actions and brought food and drinks. You reminded us each day this fight was bigger than us.

The issues we fought for and won in this contract—fair wages, better working conditions and protections against artificial intelligence—affect all workers and communities in the United States and around the world. We are humbled you lifted this strike up and made it part of a larger movement for social and economic justice. It is inspiring to know the movement will be built on these intersections of industries and causes and can only grow stronger.

We thank you so much for standing with us. We will continue to stand with you as we fight for a more just and equitable future together.

Union Now. Union Forever.

In solidarity,

Meredith Stiehm, president
 Michele Mulroney, vice president
 Betsy Thomas, secretary-treasurer
 Writers Guild of America West
 Los Angeles, California

Thanks for Supporting Guide Dogs of America

Guide Dogs of America (GDA) is so grateful for OPEIU's generous contribution. People lead busy lives and have many choices about how to spend their money. We appreciate the time and consideration you took to support our school's mission to furnish highly trained guide and service dogs for people who have no vision or those suffering from PTSD or autism. Support like yours helps to cover a variety of essential expenses including food, equipment, supplies, enrichment, training and veterinary care.

Consider scheduling a guided tour of our campus or attend a guide dog graduation ceremony. Both are heartwarming and memorable occasions! Contact us for volunteer opportunities as well.

Thank you again for enabling GDA to provide trusted companions to those in need with our remarkable dogs. Please stay involved from wherever you are by following us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or TikTok.

With warmest regards,

Russell A. Gittlen
 President
 Guide Dogs of America
 Sylmar, California

Editor's Note: The staff of Guide Dogs of America are members of Local 30 (Region V) in San Diego. If you are interested in supporting the great work of GDA or becoming a volunteer, visit guidedogsofamerica.org for more info.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

On the Cover: A recent report by the U.S. Department of the Treasury confirms what working people have known for decades: strengthening worker power through unions means a stronger economy and increased income equality for all Americans. See the next page for more details and to read the full report.



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Unions Strengthen the Economy, Treasury Department Report Says

The U.S. Department of the Treasury recently released a first-of-its-kind report on the role labor unions play in the economy — and the findings were, unsurprisingly, positive.

The 32-page report, “Labor Unions and the Middle Class,” details how unions reduce income inequality, raise wages for all workers and help unionized working people prepare for retirement. “Strengthening worker power” through unions, the authors said, “could bolster the U.S. economy.”

The report debunks many anti-union talking points using a range of data, detailing how a union contract benefits both individuals and communities.

“Increased unionization has the potential to contribute to the reversal of the stark increase in inequality seen over the last half century,” a summary said. “All in all, the evidence presented in the Treasury’s report challenges the view that worker empowerment holds back economic prosperity.”

“Increased unionization has the potential to contribute to the reversal of the stark increase in inequality seen over the last half century.”

The report indicates unions benefit all demographic groups. “By encouraging egalitarian wage practices, unions serve to reduce race and gender wage gaps,” the summary continued. “And modern unions have broad representation across race and gender. In 2021, Black men had a particularly high union representation rate at 13 percent, as compared to the population average of 10 percent. The diverse demographics of modern union membership mean that the benefits of any policy that strengthens today’s unions would be felt across the population.”

“By encouraging egalitarian wage practices, unions serve to reduce race and gender wage gaps.”

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How the Memphis Sanitation Workers' Strike Changed the Labor Movement

By Kurtis Lee, for The New York Times



OPEIU members join the “I Am a Man” march April 4, 2018, observing the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King was in Memphis on April 3, 1968, supporting the striking sanitation workers and delivering his famous “Mountaintop” speech. Less than a day later, he was assassinated on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel.

The 1968 action led to greater economic mobility for Black workers. Today, union activists are trying to capture some of that spirit.

Jack Walker is a union man. He drives a garbage truck in Memphis, where his route can take him barreling past shotgun-style houses along the Mississippi River and down the narrow alleyways near the Lorraine Motel, where the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. He is aware, always, of how his union protections are tied to Dr. King’s death and that of another man: his father.

Robert Walker, Mr. Walker’s father, was also a sanitation worker. On Feb. 1, 1968, he was collecting garbage when sheets of rain started pouring down. He and his colleague Echol Cole took shelter in the compactor of their truck. When a compressing piston malfunctioned, the two men were crushed. The city had no intention to pay death benefits, offering Robert Walker’s widow only \$500 for funeral expenses, “if you need it,” as the official letter put it. She had five children, including Jack, and was pregnant with a sixth.

The tragedy was a culmination of slow-burning indignities for Black sanitation workers in Memphis. They earned

low wages to lug heavy, open tubs of refuse to their trucks. Rotting garbage seeped onto their skin and clothes. Their white colleagues, who were often drivers, showered at the depot at the end of their shifts. But the Black collectors were forced to ride the bus or walk home in their dank clothes covered in flecks of trash and maggots.

Fed up, they called a strike. Roughly 1,300 sanitation workers began marching through the streets of Memphis. They carried signs that read “I Am a Man,” with the “Am” underlined. The strike stretched on for weeks. Even as trash began to accumulate on city streets, Memphis’s mayor wouldn’t entertain the strikers’ demands, instead sending in police officers with clubs and mace to break up marches.

The strikers’ mission and bravery spoke to Dr. King, who had embarked on a new economic justice effort, the Poor People’s Campaign. He came to Memphis in March and again in April, when, at a local church, he

gave an impassioned speech that would turn out to be his last.

Two weeks after Dr. King was assassinated on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel, the Memphis City Council voted to recognize the sanitation workers’ union, promising higher wages to the largely Black workforce.

“It was a first step in getting them on their feet financially,” said Lee Saunders, the current president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. “It was a huge deal.”

The strike in Memphis more than five decades ago “inspired a surge of organizing and strikes, not unlike what we see today,” said William P. Jones, a history professor at the University of Minnesota who has written on race and class.

Today’s resurgence in labor activism cuts across a broad range of industries. There have been recent labor fights at, among other places, rail yards,

What the Black sanitation workers in Memphis demonstrated was that, by joining a union and withholding their labor, even people in the lowest-paying, hardest jobs could “transform those jobs into reliable vehicles for economic mobility.”

schools, hospitals, hotels, Hollywood studios and Starbucks stores. And the issues on the bargaining table include traditional demands, like higher wages and better staffing levels, as well as protections against replacement by artificial intelligence. Unions have had remarkable success in recent months, including securing a big pay raise for Las Vegas hospitality workers who merely threatened a strike.

What the Black sanitation workers in Memphis demonstrated was that, by joining a union and withholding their labor, even people in the lowest-paying, hardest jobs could “transform those jobs into reliable vehicles for economic mobility,” Dr. Jones said. And that, he added, led “to a rapid expansion of public-sector unions in the 1970s and 1980s and the emergence of African Americans as the most heavily unionized sector of the American workforce.”

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‘Great Strides Have Been Made’

Today, Black workers have the highest union membership rate of any racial or ethnic group. Even so, Black union workers make less than their white counterparts — \$1,022 a week on average compared with \$1,246 for white workers, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.



Three of the Memphis sanitation workers who participated in the historic 1968 strike are guests at an OPEIU conference May 21, 2011, in Memphis. From left are Herbert Parson, with his wife Margaret, Alvin Turner and Baxter Leach, with his daughter Sharon. The three men, along with five other surviving members of the strike, were inducted into the Labor Hall of Fame at a ceremony at the White House April 29, 2011, for their participation in the iconic campaign in civil and labor rights history, which paved the way for greater union membership among Black Americans.

Gary Hoover, a professor of economics at Tulane University, said that the gap probably stemmed from the fact that Black workers get fewer opportunities for promotions. Still, Dr. Hoover said, Black Americans have gravitated toward union jobs because they offer better protections than nonunion jobs. “You’re looking for job security,” he said, “and some form of protection from discrimination.”

Those protections are harder to come by now. The union membership rate of U.S. workers was 10.1 percent in 2022, a big drop from 20.1 percent in 1983, when the federal government first began compiling comparable data. That decrease was driven, in part, by the decline of manufacturing in

this country and the spread of factories to states, largely in the South, that prohibited unions from forcing workers to pay dues. Voters in Tennessee passed an amendment last year to enshrine such a ban in the state’s Constitution.

Labor activists around the country are trying to stave off further decline and establish unions in new industries. Throughout the first 10 months of this year, 492,300 workers have gone on strike — more than three times as many workers as in the same period last year, according to a labor action tracker from Cornell University. Picket lines are on the nightly news, including one in September in the Detroit area where President Biden joined members of the United Automobile Workers union.

There have been significant victories in recent months. Nearly 75,000 Kaiser Permanente health care workers went on strike nationwide, securing large pay increases, including a \$25-an-hour minimum wage in California. In September, after a monthslong strike, the Writers Guild of America agreed to a 12.5 percent pay increase over a three-year contract and, two months later, SAG-AFTRA, the actors’ union, got a 7 percent raise in the first year of its contract. Perhaps most notably, the U.A.W. held an innovative strike against the Big 3 automakers that led to a 25 percent wage increase over the next four and half years.

“Great strides have been made,” said Martin Luther King III, Dr. King’s elder son. Mr. King, 66, who often marches in solidarity with union members, said that the labor movement felt more energized over the past year than at any other moment in his lifetime.

Dr. Jones noted that “most of the big gains have come in sectors where unions are well established and have the legal protections to strike and win concessions,” like the automobile industry and Hollywood. Early successes unionizing Amazon workers have stalled. And workers in industries like ride-sharing or food service have had a harder time winning union recognition. “In that respect,” he said, “workers at Starbucks or Uber are fighting for the same rights to decent wages, working conditions and union representation that the Memphis sanitation workers demanded in 1968.”

‘Those Brothers Went Through a Lot’

On a recent morning, dozens of garbage trucks rumbled along a road past the iron gates of a sanitation building on the southern

end of Memphis. The air was thick and rancid. Most trucks were operated by a driver and a collector, who hops out of the truck at each stop and hoists the debris from the cans into the compactor. Their shifts start at 7 a.m., sometimes stretching for 12 hours.

Memphis has embraced its place in civil rights and labor history. Images of Black sanitation workers holding the iconic “I Am a Man” sign are plastered on plaques and murals across the city. In 2017, city officials gave \$70,000 grants to more than a dozen workers who were part of the union in 1968. The mayor praised their “courage and resolve.”

A lot has improved, Mr. Walker said, since his father’s time. Back then, most Black men in the department could work only as trash collectors, not drivers; today, Mr. Walker is a driver. But sanitation work in Memphis is still dangerous. In interviews, some city sanitation workers described persistent safety concerns, such as coming into contact with carcasses of rabid dogs and acid splatter from batteries. Patricia Moore, 52, who worked at a private sanitation company, Republic Services, was killed in March when she was crushed beneath a truck at a landfill in Memphis. She had worked for the company for 30 years.

After the accident, workers with Teamsters Local 667, which represents Republic employees, walked off the job and initiated a nine-day strike, eventually getting a new five-year contract with pay increases of up to 28 percent an hour over the span of the agreement. It also included additional funding for safety equipment and gear.

For city sanitation workers, pay remains an issue. Marquize Cast, 40, joined the sanitation department as a driver in 2009. He grew up hearing stories about the 1968 strike from his grandmother, and working as a sanitation worker gives him a sense of pride, he said.

“Those brothers went through a lot,” he remembered thinking.

But with two children and mounting bills, his pay — he began at around \$14 an hour and now

makes around \$21 — wasn’t enough. A few years after he started at the sanitation department, he took a second job as a night janitor at an elementary school.

Mr. Cast spoke about the brotherhood he felt with fellow sanitation workers — sharing laughter and meals, swapping shifts to help one another out. But he has seen co-workers leave for nonunion jobs with better pay at FedEx, which has its headquarters in the city, and at large warehouses stocked with freight at the Memphis International Airport.

“Great strides have been made,” said Martin Luther King III, Dr. King’s elder son. Mr. King, 66, who often marches in solidarity with union members, said that the labor movement felt more energized over the past year than at any other moment in his lifetime.

“Mentally and physically, the job can break you down,” he said about working in sanitation.

The same has been true for Mr. Walker. The repetitive motion of getting in and out of the truck for 40 years has worn on his joints. Sometimes he wonders if the city really appreciates the work of people like him.

On a recent afternoon, Mr. Walker sat outside Local 1733’s main offices. Nearby, a plaque attached to a lamppost read “1968 Strikers Lane” — a small reminder, like so many others in this city, of the father taken from him when he was a boy.

Mr. Walker looked in the direction of the plaque. He thought about his father, “a strong, healthy man,” he said, “who just wanted to provide for his family.”

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[See original article here.](#)

Steward Spotlight Communication is Vital for a Strong Union



By *Diana Fonseca*
Grill Cook and Steward
Lackland Air Force Base
Industrial Technical Professional
Employees Union (ITPEU)/OPEIU
Local 4873 (Region III)

As one of two stewards representing more than 800 members at Lackland Air Force Base, I have learned firsthand how important the simple act of communication can be.

In my shop, information sharing is a critical component of my work as a steward. Knowing the details of our contract—or knowing where to look to find the information a member needs—has proven invaluable in my day-to-day work as it helps me quickly handle a member’s concern or question.

During new employee orientation, we make sure to take the time to speak with new hires. Though we only have a few minutes, we provide a printed copy of the contract, ensure they know how to get in touch and summarize their rights as a union member. This initial contact, as soon as possible, is critical to creating the trustful relationship a steward needs to do their job and advocate for members effectively.

Being an **active listener**, taking notes and following up with members as soon as possible has also helped me build my skills as a steward in my workplace during the past five years. Even if I do not know the answer to a question, I can later refer to the specifics of their situation when I get in touch with our union representative.

By prioritizing open communication, we have been able to grow our ranks and address workplace concerns in a timely manner. Stewards are the first line of defense for members. It is important to create a culture of transparency and trust, so stewards can advocate as effectively as possible for our members.

Being An Active Listener

It is important to develop the skills of an active listener and let people know they are being heard. If someone does not feel they are being heard, even if you are listening, it is very difficult to have an effective conversation.

Show people you are listening by maintaining eye contact, nodding when appropriate, repeating back some of what you heard and asking good questions.

Being an active listener is essential to being an effective union steward who best represents their co-workers.

‘Hear Us Roar: Ready for 2024,’ Say Labor Union Women Preparing for November Elections

OPEIU members joined hundreds of labor members and leaders from unions throughout the country to prepare for the 2024 elections at the 22nd Biennial Convention of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), held recently in Minneapolis, with the theme “Hear Us Roar: Ready for 2024.”

“CLUW is on the forefront of fostering the development of women labor leaders to protect the rights and interests of working women and their families,” said Lisa Blake, president of Local 42 (Region VII), an International vice president and a vice president on the CLUW Executive Board.

“OPEIU supports CLUW’s efforts, and, as we ‘roar in ’24,’ I was proud to represent OPEIU at the CLUW convention,” Blake said. “Women leaders representing all national and international unions were present, and power was in the room. The runway for women is longer due to the membership of CLUW.”

CLUW is a nonpartisan organization within the labor movement and America’s only national organization for union women. Since its founding in 1974, the group has sought to unify all union women to find ways the labor movement can address the many challenges facing working women and their families. CLUW members are on the front line in the fight for equal pay, job security, contraceptive equity, child and elder care, affordable health care, safe workplaces free from violence and harassment and more.

OPEIU is one of more than 70 unions comprising CLUW’s membership. To learn more, visit cluwo.org.



Local 2 member and CLUW D.C. Chapter President Chelsea Bland, left, and Local 42 President and International Vice President Lisa Blake, right, with CLUW President Elise Bryant at the convention. Blake also serves as a vice president on the CLUW Executive Board.

Code for America Contract Sets Industry Standard

Code for America Workers United (CWU) ratified its first collective bargaining agreement at Code for America, setting a new standard in worker protections and benefits for the tech industry. The unit, which organized October 2021 with OPEIU's Tech Workers Union Local 1010 (Region II), negotiated across-the-board wage increases and additional paid family and medical leave, as well as new benefits such as adoption and fertility support and gender-affirming care.

The contract also breaks new ground by expanding worker protections to include safeguards against discrimination and intrusive monitoring, limiting the use of contracted and temporary workers in favor of full-time employees and establishing a neutral arbitration process to resolve disputes between the union and management. With this contract, CWU members improve working conditions at Code for America and set new labor standards for civic tech and the entire tech industry.

Staff at Code for America, who build and use technology to improve government and the social safety net, began forming a union in fall 2020 with the goal of improving working conditions to increase retention and ensure the sustainability of the organization. CWU accomplished these goals with a contract creating more job security and giving workers a voice in the direction of the organization's work. Most importantly, the contract helps ensure Code for America will continue to meet its goal of improving the delivery of government services to the people who need them most.

"Members of CWU work tirelessly to help improve the social safety net for everyone; this contract is a safety net for us," said Matt Bernius, a principal researcher at Code for America for four years and a member of the bargaining committee. "We are excited about what we won in this contract, and I am also proud we were able to hardcode Code for America's values into the contract."

CWU members stood together in solidarity through a lengthy and often challenging negotiating process. Together, they held the organization accountable to its stated values, and set a standard at the organization for what it means when workers have a seat at the table.

"I am so proud of my fellow union members and how hard we fought for this first contract," said Tanya Grinblat, an associate director of development at Code for America since 2020 and a member of the bargaining committee.

Learn more about OPEIU's Tech Workers Union Local 1010 at techworkersunion-1010.org.



Members of Code for America Workers United ratify their first contract.

Young Adult Shelter Staff Organize with Local 8



Omar Cuevas Vega, left, a Local 8 apprentice organizer, and Rose King, an organizing committee member, at the vote count conducted by the National Labor Relations Board.

Case managers, volunteer supervisors and guest service specialists at ROOTS Young Adult Shelter voted recently to unionize with Local 8 (Region VI).

The group of nonprofit workers organized to address needs similarly faced by nonprofit workers across the country: improving working conditions, increasing transparency and having a seat at the table on decisions impacting their mission-based work.

"Unionizing is the only way to increase worker autonomy and ensure full transparency, accountability and equity," said Tabatha Kojima, a volunteer supervisor at the organization. "Ultimately, we are unionizing for our guests. They deserve staff who aren't experiencing chronic burnout, financial distress and compassion fatigue."

The shelter provides a range of services to young adults aged 18-25 in Seattle experiencing housing instability, including emergency overnight shelter, hot meals, showers and laundry, as well as on-site case management and referral to other support and transitional services.



Staff members at the International Rescue Committee.

"This victory is not just for us but for the broader IRC community of staff who strive for justice and equity. We are hopeful our organizing success will serve as a model to all 29 IRC locations across the U.S. to join in forming a union with OPEIU."

IRC Staff Vote to Join Local 277

Staff at the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Dallas joined together as the IRC Workers Unite and voted to join Local 277 (Region IV) over wage and safety concerns.

Workers at the nonprofit provide emergency aid and long-term support to refugees across the world. Operating in 40 countries and 29 cities in the United States, the IRC is headed by David Miliband, former United Kingdom foreign secretary. His salary of \$1 million stands in stark contrast to the average wage of IRC workers in Dallas, who earn about \$40,000 per year.

This pay gap, along with safety concerns, prompted workers to begin organizing in the so-called "right-to-work" state. "This victory would not have been possible without the collective efforts, determination and solidarity of the dedicated staff of IRC," said Tyler Turner, president and business manager of the Texas-based Local 277 and an International vice president. "The IRC Workers Unite's successful unionization marks a significant step forward in securing the rights, dignity and fair treatment of all staff."

The unit of approximately 90 full- and part-time staffers is the first group of IRC staff to unionize in the U.S. "This victory is not just for us but for the broader IRC community of staff who strive for justice and equity," said an IRC Workers Unite statement on their victory. "We are hopeful our organizing success will serve as a model to all 29 IRC locations across the U.S. to join in forming a union with OPEIU."

Contract bargaining is expected to begin soon.

Alameda County Community Food Bank Votes to Unionize with Local 29, Citing Pay Inequities, Safety Concerns

Staff at the Alameda County Community Food Bank (ACCFB) in the Bay Area voted to form a union with Local 29 (Region V). Their union, Alameda County Community Food Bank United, represents approximately 90 full- and part-time employees at the nonprofit food bank.

Many workers at the food bank — the second to unionize with Local 29, following the San Francisco-Marin Food Bank in 2020 — make below-living wages.

“Some staff access our own pantry,” said Aila Dinglasan, a program coordinator at the food bank, in an interview with the San Francisco Chronicle. “We are all focused and unified in our mission in ending hunger, so we are advocating for ourselves” by unionizing, she said.

ACCFB staff are facing many of the same issues that have inspired other Bay Area food bank workers to organize, said Sarah Holtz, an organizer at Local 29. Addressing pay inequities, differentials between front- and back-of-house staff and workplace safety concerns are all priorities at the bargaining table, Holtz said.



New Local 29 members employed at the Alameda County Community Food Bank.

LightHouse Workers Win Union with Local 29



From left, Jeff Carlson, a social worker, Divina Carlson, a braille teaching specialist, and Sheri Albers, a community outreach specialist, are among the staff at LightHouse who organized with Local 29.

Staff of the LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired, a San Francisco-based nonprofit providing education, training, advocacy and community for blind and low-vision individuals in California, voted overwhelmingly to unionize with Local 29 in the Bay Area (Region V). Their union includes almost 90 staff at five locations across Northern California.

Workers at the nonprofit went public with their organizing drive in September, requesting voluntary recognition of their union. When management refused, the staff continued to organize in advance of their National Labor Relations Board election.

“[Management] speaks with a collective voice,” said Frank Welte, a senior accessible media and braille specialist who has worked at the nonprofit for 12 years. “By organizing, we balanced that power so the relationship would be less noble-to-serf and more colleague-to-colleague.”

“I thought [unionizing] would provide a better voice for the employees at the LightHouse, providing things like more rationality in the pay structure, grievance procedures and some sort of accountability with management we hadn’t had as much of before,” said Jeff Buckwalter, an access technology specialist who has worked at the nonprofit for eight years.

Bargaining is expected to begin soon.

Reed College Housing Advisors Win Election with Local 11



Students at Reed College show their support for housing advisors' unionization efforts.

Housing advisors (HAs) at Reed College, a liberal arts college in Portland, Oregon, are among the latest student workers to come together in union with OPEIU, voting 36-2 to join Local 11 (Region VI).

Forty-four housing advisors join the Vancouver, Washington-based local. In early 2023, the college implemented numerous changes to housing advisors' job descriptions, requiring more work at later hours and mandating attendance at an on-campus training over the summer with just a week's notice.

Reed College only offers housing to HAs during the semester, leaving many unhoused between semesters. “It adds another layer of stress as they have to meet academic requirements while facing housing insecurities,” said Pedro Olguin, an organizer at Local 11. Additionally, students must re-apply each year for their positions, he said, which adds additional pressures to student workers who were employed the previous year.

At college campuses throughout the country, student workers are forming unions with OPEIU to address a variety of workplace concerns, including unpredictable scheduling, low or no pay and unequal application of the rules.

“I think we are unionizing because we understand the need for collective action to make change in all areas of our lives, including work,” said Eli Rall, a sophomore housing advisor at Reed.

“I see unionizing, and I think many of my peers do as well, as an already established way to shift power away from the few, isolated people who have little or nothing to do with our everyday lives, into our own hands,” they said. “Instead of them making decisions for us, we can decide for ourselves what is best for us and what we are willing to do.”

Bargaining is expected to begin soon.

Rosalee Agas-Yuu, RN, Elected Local 50 President in December



Rosalee Agas-Yuu, RN

Rosalee Agas-Yuu, RN, was elected president of the Hawai'i Nurses' Association (HNA)/OPEIU Local 50 (Region VIII) in December.

Agas-Yuu said her experiences as a critical care nurse on a neonatal-pediatric transport team have taught her to adapt to situations, work with diverse types of personalities and administer nursing care during various complex life-threatening events. Contract negotiations at Kapi'olani Medical Center in 2002 ignited her interest in the union and, over the years, she has served as steward and participated in various committees to add to her experience as an active union member.

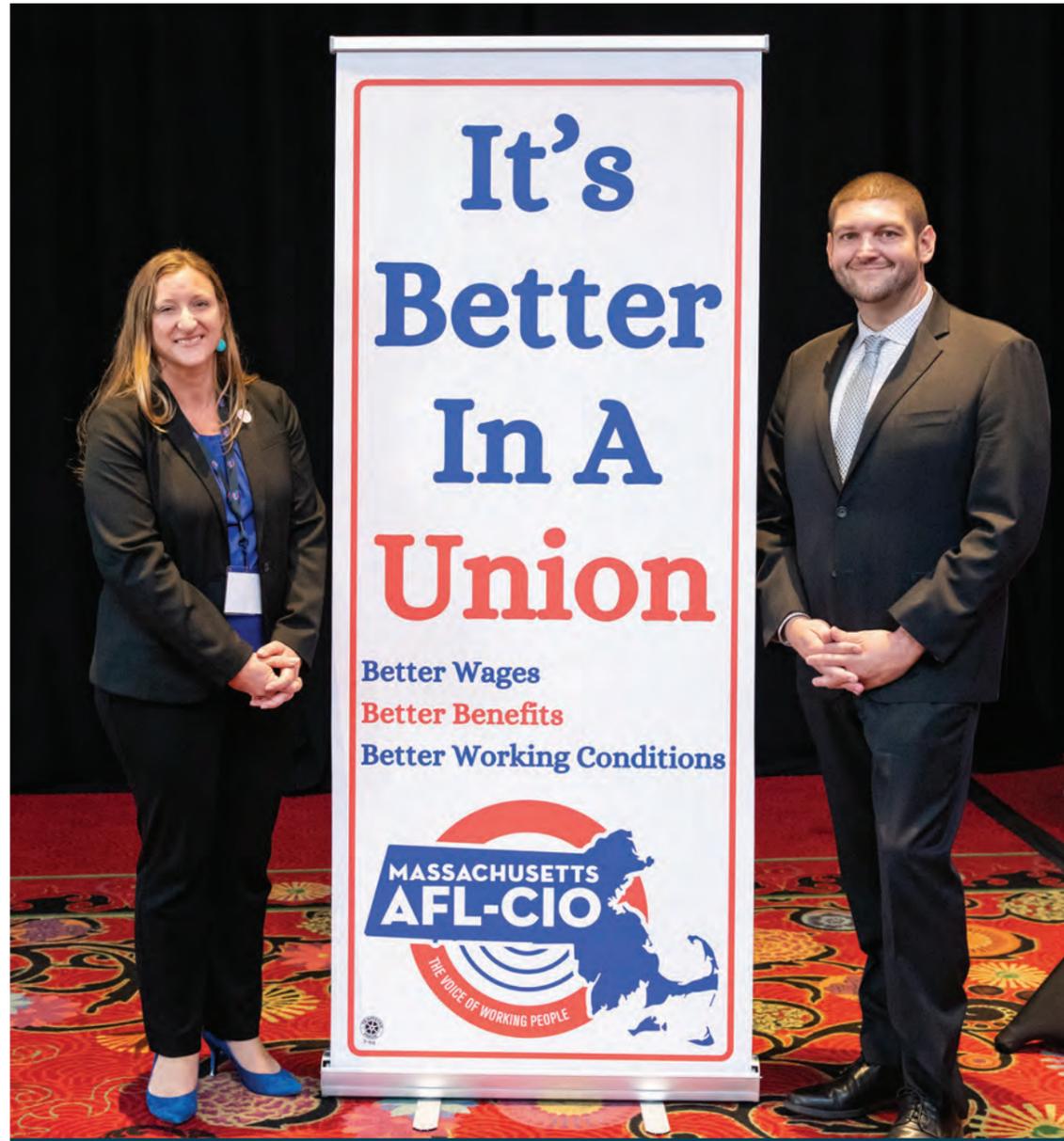
When serving as a Local 50 vice president, she learned the bigger responsibilities of managing day-to-day union business and applied her strengths as a nurse to her role as a union officer. In June, she was elected a vice president on the OPEIU Executive Board “to represent her members and ensure their voices are heard on the national level,” Agas-Yuu said.

As president, she plans to continue to find ways to increase the local's efficiency and build a stronger local by improving communication, educating and empowering her members in each health care facility.

Also elected to Local 50 leadership were Vice President Joan Craft, RN, Secretary Cheryl Lynn Miller, RN, and Treasurer Paulette Vasu, RN.

Local 6 Members Take Helm at Massachusetts AFL-CIO

Three current and former members of Local 6 (Region II) were elected to lead the Massachusetts AFL-CIO at the state federation’s biennial convention in October.



Chrissy Lynch and Kevin Brousseau at the Massachusetts AFL-CIO Convention in October.

President Chrissy Lynch and Secretary-Treasurer Kevin Brousseau now lead the Bay State’s labor movement with a focus on new organizing and working collaboratively with unions in the state.

Chrissy Lynch, president, focused on ‘creating an economy that works for working people’

Lynch is the first woman to serve as president of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO. Prior to this role, she was a Local 6 member as a staffer at the state federation, serving 15 years in a range of political, legislative and public affairs roles. Previously, she was director of operations for the Greater Boston Building Trades Unions, where she helped run programs advancing equity, inclusion and community standards in the construction industry.

Now responsible for helping the state’s 800-plus local unions collaborate and strategize together, Lynch is focused on “creating an economy that actually works for working people and not just the wealthy and well-connected,” she said.

On issues like green jobs, artificial intelligence and worker misclassification, the state federation plays a crucial role in bringing together different unions throughout Massachusetts to pressure local and state lawmakers to enact pro-worker legislation.

“Our agenda is very broad, which reflects the fact we have a huge group of affiliated unions,” Lynch said. “We try to support our community allies and their fights,” from combating wage theft to stopping evictions.

Kevin Brousseau, secretary-treasurer, ‘leveling the playing field’

A former Local 6 member while on staff at the AFL-CIO, Brousseau now serves as secretary-treasurer alongside Lynch. As a fourth-generation union member, finding a job that wedded unions and politics together was a “dream job,” he said.

As the state federation’s second-in-command, Brousseau is deeply focused on “leveling the playing field for people working hard and fighting for the next generation” through the power of the state AFL-CIO.

“One of our major initiatives this year is a statewide power-mapping project,” Brousseau said. Mapping major employers, logging which unions have contracts there, noting when contracts expire

and identifying unorganized groups of workers, he said, will help unions expand their leverage at the bargaining table.

“It makes it harder for the employer to pick apart different locals within a shop,” he said of the strategic approach.

Patrick Sullivan, vice president, ‘first step is showing up’

Recently hired as a Local 6 business agent, Patrick Sullivan represents OPEIU as a vice president of the state labor federation. A longtime unionist with family roots in the Boston labor movement, Sullivan’s advice for union members looking to get more involved is clear: “Show up,” he said.

“The first step is probably the hardest step,” Sullivan said. “But showing up and coming back helps you learn something new every time. Listening to the issues and meeting people is how our movement grows.

“From the local level to leadership,” he continued, “the first step is showing up.”

Sullivan fills the position at the state federation left vacant by the passing of George Noel, a longtime Local 6 business manager and executive board member.



Patrick Sullivan

Notice to Employees Subject to Union Security Clauses

This notice is for all private sector workers in the United States working under an OPEIU contract containing a valid union security clause. Union security clauses require an employee to pay dues or other fees to a union as a condition of employment. The dues or fees amount you pay to OPEIU supports the costs of negotiating your contract and the broad range of activities we engage in to support you, your family and your co-workers.

Nonmembers may file objections to funding union expenditures that are not germane to collective bargaining, contract administration or grievance adjustment (“chargeable expenditures”) and instead pay what is known as an agency fee. Examples of chargeable expenditures include: the costs of negotiations with employers; contract administration expenses; communication with employers regarding work-related issues; handling employees’ work-related problems through the grievance and arbitration procedure; and union administration. Examples of nonchargeable expenditures include: expenses made for community services; expenses for political purposes; the costs of certain affiliation fees; and expenses for benefits available only to members and their families.

Note: The International Union’s J.B. Moss Voice of the Electorate (VOTE) fund is an independent, segregated fund that receives voluntary donations and contributes to political candidates who support the needs of working men and women. No money received from dues or fees goes to the VOTE fund. Accordingly, the VOTE fund is not considered in the calculation of the percentage of expenditures that is spent on nonchargeable expenses.

But if you choose not to join the union or if you resign your membership, and in either case file objections, the many rights and opportunities available to OPEIU members will not be available to you. For example, you will give up your ability to:

- Vote on terms of your contract;
- Participate in strike votes;
- Participate in the development of contract proposals;
- Nominate, vote for, or serve as an officer of your local union or the International Union;
- Nominate, vote for or serve as a delegate to the International Convention; and

- Enjoy discounts and other benefits available only to members, including eligibility for OPEIU scholarships for you and your family.

Should you decide to give up all these rights and benefits and submit objections in accordance with the below procedure, you will receive a rebate of a portion of your dues or equivalent payments based on nonchargeable expenditures. In the past, approximately 34-40 percent of the International Union’s expenditures have gone toward these activities. The percentages of local union expenditures on nonchargeable activities have generally been higher.

As you consider whether to object, you should remember that the most important right you have at work is the right to be represented by a union. When workers negotiate together through the union and speak with one voice, they win higher wages and better benefits and achieve greater respect and dignity on the job than workers who do not have workplace representation. There is strength in numbers. The stronger your union is, the better your contract will be.

Objections Procedure

Individuals who choose to file objections must submit them in writing to the Office and Professional Employees International Union, 80 8th Ave., Suite 205, New York, NY 10011, Attention: Mary Mahoney, Secretary-Treasurer. Objections should include the objector’s name, home address, employer and local union number.

Objections must be postmarked during the month of June. New hires who choose not to join the union may also submit their objections postmarked within thirty (30) days of being compelled to pay dues or fees to the union or within thirty (30) days of the new hire’s receipt of a new employee letter from a local union. Newly resigned members may also submit their objections postmarked within thirty (30) days from receipt by the union of the resigning member’s letter of resignation. All objections will be deemed continuing in nature unless or until the employee requests a change in status. Timely submitted objections will be effective on the first day of the month following the month in which the objections were received by the union.

Challenge Procedure

An objector may challenge the International Union’s and/or the local union’s classification or calculation of expenditures before a neutral

arbitrator appointed by the American Arbitration Association pursuant to its Rules for Impartial Determination of Union Fees. Challenges may be coordinated or consolidated before a single arbitrator.

Objectors must submit written notification of any intended challenge to Mary Mahoney, Secretary-Treasurer, Office and Professional Employees International Union, 80 8th Ave., Suite 205, New York, NY 10011. Notifications must be received by the Secretary-Treasurer within thirty (30) days of the challenger’s receipt of a letter from the local union informing the challenger of the amount of the rebate, the basis for the calculation and the internal procedure for filing a challenge. That challenge should specify which classification and/or calculations of the International Union and/or local union are being challenged.

The union(s) shall bear the burden of justifying their classifications and calculations. If a hearing at which the parties or witnesses may be present is held by the arbitrator, it will be held at a location most convenient to the largest number of involved challengers. The cost of any arbitration proceeding will be paid for by the unions. Challengers, however, will not be reimbursed for lost time and will have to pay for their own travel expenses and the fees, costs and expenses of any persons they involve in the proceedings.

When a written challenge is received from an objector, the local union will place an amount equal to the challenged portion of the fee into an interest-bearing escrow account. It shall remain in that account until the appointed arbitrator issues a decision. Should the decision lower the percentage of chargeable expenditures to the challenger(s), the appropriate portion of the escrowed fees, plus the interest earned by that portion while in the escrow account, will be refunded. All objectors in each local union affected by the decision of the arbitrator will be responsible for the adjusted fee amount determined by the arbitrator. If the arbitrator approves all or part of the unions’ classifications and/or calculations, the escrowed money and interest allocable to that part of the fee will revert to the union(s).

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— union member



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