



Your Union Newsletter

JULY - AUGUST, 2014

IN THIS ISSUE:

- [President's Corner](#)
- [GEF 1 Building Fire](#)
- [Every Vote Matters](#)
- [Harris vs. Quinn](#)
- [Several Reasons to Vote this November](#)
- [Citizen Koch](#)
- [Union Begins with "U" – Calendar of Events](#)

President's Corner

Submitted by Greg Georg

On May 8, 2014, the 28 custodians and grounds crew employees at UW Superior received notices that they are at risk of layoff. This action results from the desire of management to outsource these positions. The University is using money as an issue for the need to contract out this work, but at the same time, the UW System has created at least one new highly paid position and given Chancellors and Vice Chancellors a 12% pay increase.

Custodians and Groundskeepers are not highly paid employees. A Custodian with almost 15 years of service has an hourly wage rate of \$12.53. These employees have duties and perform work beyond what one might think about as the typical duties of a custodian. Many are required to have special skills and/or certifications for their jobs. They are also dedicated members of the campus community.

Members of AFSCME, AFT, and other labor organizations in the Superior area are working together to educate not only those on campus, but also residents of the greater Twin Ports area, about the value of the services provided by the Custodians and Groundskeepers. They are doing this through letters and other contacts with area media, petitions, attending city council and county board meetings, holding rallies, and more.

On Saturday, July 26th, a rally will be held at noon in Superior to support the jobs of the Custodians and Groundskeepers at UW Superior. If you live in the area, or happen to be visiting the area at that time, I encourage you to attend. More information should be available on the WSEU web site, www.wseu-24.org, as the date approaches. You can also support them by signing onto a moveon.org petition at: http://petitions.moveon.org/sign/stop-uw-superior-outsourcing?source=c.em.mt&r_by=10810237

GEF 1 Building Fire

Submitted by Sue Handrich-Herr

In the wee hours of the morning of Friday, May 16, 2014 a fire broke out in the GEF 1 building in downtown Madison that houses approximately 1,000 State employees. No one was in the building at the time. At about 1:50am a passerby

reported hearing the building's alarms. It wasn't until nearly 4:00am that fire fighters located the source of the smoke and flames on the fourth floor.

The damage that resulted from the fire was rather extensive. By the time the crews arrived on the scene, smoke had already been circulated throughout the building through the ventilation system, which is part of the reason the source of the fire took so long to locate. The building also does not have a sprinkler system which probably added to the damage. It was built prior to the requirement for sprinkler systems was imposed. The building has been closed since, and will remain closed until sometime mid to late August. During that time, all of the furniture in the building will be removed and either cleaned or replaced. The furniture in the lower floors had minor smoke damage and will likely be cleaned. Initial reports indicated that the furniture on the fourth floor is a complete loss, in some cases melted, and must be replaced. The cause of the fire was determined to be an unspecified electrical fault or failure.

Despite agency's pre-planning for Continuity of Operations (COOP) during such events, many employees learned about the fire from the morning news. Some did not learn about it until they arrived at the office.

The building houses the Dept. of Workforce Development (DWD) and Dept. of Children and Families (DCF) staff. It also has parking on the lower levels used by staff from those agencies and others, including the Legislature.

The approximately 1,000 staff that occupy the building have been scattered to temporary space in facilities all around Madison, or working from home. Critical management and staff were the first priority to relocate, many of which were up and running by the following Monday or Tuesday. Because of that quick response, neither agency had any significant gap in services to their customers. There was a reported delay on new workers' compensation claims in the first week after the fire. Placement of all remaining staff took, in some cases, weeks. And many of the temporary locations are less than ideal.

While there have been several inconveniences that resulted from the fire, staff have adjusted for the most part, and are able to continue working. And when they all return to the building, will have some interesting stories to share with each other.

Every Vote Matters

Submitted by Sue Handrich-Herr

Four months from now will be the next mid-term elections. Mid-term elections have a significant impact in Wisconsin. In the mid-terms, Wisconsinites will vote on every Assembly seat, half of the State Senate seats, and the Governor.

Four years earlier, 2010, over half of the eligible voters in Wisconsin stayed home, and overnight Wisconsin was turned in a very different direction. A traditionally purple state turned decidedly red. With that lopsided shift in power, came a decidedly partisan agenda that, for all intents and purposes, ripped this state in two.

Fifty years of progress, wiped out in under four. Unions busted. Public workers vilified. Funding cut for public education to funnel off to private, for-profit schools. Tax breaks handed out to business while cuts were made to subsidies for the working poor and unemployed. Out-of-state mining companies allowed to plunder our resources and not be held accountable for the damages. Local government authority diminished.

But the biggest injustice of all, was them rigging the system to remain in power with a series of laws that could only be considered Jim Crow version 2.0.

The Legislature used high priced lawyers, secrecy agreements, and technology to gerrymander the district maps to favor their party for at least the next ten years. And they passed numerous laws making it harder for eligible citizens to cast their vote.

The first was a voter ID law, which allowed only a restrictive list of IDs to be used for identification purposes at the polls. Estimates in court testimony claimed that over 300,000 of Wisconsin's eligible voters do not have the required forms of

ID and would be disenfranchised by the law. That number is about three times the number of votes by which the 2010 Governor's race and 2012 Governor's recall were won.

Multiple lawsuits were filed against the law both in Wisconsin and Federal courts, and the law has been on hold pending the outcome. The recent ruling by a Federal judge that it violates both the US Constitution and the Voting Rights Act, should be the final nail in the coffin on this law. The Legislature has stated there is not sufficient time to craft a new law that will address the courts concerns prior to the November elections. So, at least for now, there is a reprieve.

But several more laws have been passed that affect polling practices, absentee voting, and early voting hours. They are designed to slow down the voting process so lines will be longer, and to restrict the amount of time available for voting, all intended to disqualify or prevent people from voting.

A recent Senate Bill SB324, reduces early voting hours down to just two weeks, Monday – Friday between 8:00am – 7:00pm, with no weekends. For voters across Wisconsin, but particularly in larger cities, this could mean the difference between being able to vote or not. It was passed and signed the same day as Senate Bill SB655 which expands the amount of time that lobbyists may make contributions directly to candidates, and increases how much they may contribute without having to report it.

The November election is an opportunity to stabilize the ship and get it back on course. And the only way to overcome all of the obstacles to voting that have been put in our path is to make sure the people of this state understand the new rules and turn out to vote. That needs to be our mission for the next four months. To get the most current voting regulations see the Government Accountability Board site: <https://myvote.wi.gov/>

Spread the word to everyone you know, because Wisconsin can't afford four more years of this.

Harris vs. Quinn

Submitted by Sue Handrich-Herr

Largely overshadowed by the US Supreme Court's June 30th ruling allowing Hobby Lobby to impose their religious beliefs on their employee's health insurance, the Court also decided another case, Harris vs. Quinn. The suit was filed on behalf of home health care workers in Illinois that were suing because they disagreed that they should be compelled to pay union dues to a union that they did not wish to join. The suit was brought by Harris and some other home care providers and bank rolled by the National "Right to Work" Committee (NTRWC) Legal Defense Foundation.

The Court ruled in favor of Harris, that the workers did not have to pay union dues if they chose not to. But the ruling could have been far worse for public sector unions. The distinction the Court made in the case is that the home health care workers were not fully public employees, thereby preserving, for now, public sector fair share dues collection. Although the ruling all but invited further challenges in court.

The fact that the Supreme Court had the opportunity to deal the death blow to public sector unions and refrained is significant. There is speculation that unions have an unlikely ally on the court in Justice Scalia, who may be unwilling to overturn the foundation of nearly 40 years of labor law.

For the moment, the damage is limited to a small group. But both public and private unions must be watchful. These are national groups with significant financial backing that are strategically bringing cases up through the court system to challenge that foundation.

Some good reads on the story:

<http://www.politico.com/story/2014/06/supreme-court-harris-v-quinn-ruling-108428.html>

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/06/30/supreme-court-unions_n_5533211.html

Several Reasons to Vote this November

Submitted by Sue Handrich-Herr

If the opportunity of picking a new Governor does not have Wisconsinites fired up about voting this November, there are other reasons that should, particularly in Dane, Milwaukee, Eau Claire and Kenosha counties.

All four of these Wisconsin counties have advisory referenda on the November ballot asking residents if they support raising the minimum wage to \$10.10. While state law prohibits local government units from adopting such policies, the counties can be on record declaring the citizens support it. That puts pressure on the State Legislature to act.

Why \$10.10. Back in February, frustrated with Congress' complete unwillingness to take action on anything, President Obama signed an Executive Order declaring that all federal contractors must be paid a minimum of \$10.10. He further went on to mandate that that wage be increased annually by the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/02/12/executive-order-minimum-wage-contractors>

And there are still more reasons for Milwaukee voters to come out this mid-term election. Milwaukee County has a total of 4 referenda on their ballot.

Aside from the Minimum Wage referendum, there will be a Move to Amend referendum calling for a Constitutional amendment to overturn the Citizens United decision, which allowed for limitless campaign spending by artificial entities in elections. The referendum states that corporations and unions are not people and that money is not speech, allowing for regulation of campaign contributions. Several states have already called for an amendment, but the Wisconsin Legislature is dragging their feet. About 60 Wisconsin communities have already passed similar referendums or have them on the ballot in upcoming elections. The more that pass, the more pressure it will put on the Wisconsin Legislature to act.

The third referendum on the Milwaukee County ballot is to encourage the Wisconsin Legislature to accept the expansion of BadgerCare, Wisconsin's Medicaid program. Governor Walker turned down the expansion of Medicaid which was supposed to go hand-in-hand with the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The expansion allowed people up to 200% of the poverty level to be covered by Medicaid. Wisconsin already covered those people, so as a result of rejecting it, Governor Walker essentially kicked 92,000 people off of BadgerCare forcing them to purchase their own insurance on the ACA marketplace. Not so easy to do at that income level.

The last referendum is to change the role of the Milwaukee County Executive, a position that some on the board feel holds too much power.

If you live in any of these counties, or even if you don't, you are encouraged to support these efforts. Most of these can have a statewide impact for the better. Given that mid-term elections tend to draw less than half of the voting population in Wisconsin, we need to do better than that. Please share this information with friends and family in those counties. And if you can find the opportunity, help in those communities as the election draws closer getting people to vote.

Citizen Koch

Submitted by Sue Handrich-Herr

By now, most people in America have heard the names David and Charles Koch. But not everyone knows how Machiavellian they can be. Citizen Koch is a documentary about their enormous influence over politics and business in America. The majority of the movie revolves around their involvement in lifting Scott Walker into the Governor's seat, carrying him during the uprising, and shielding him through the recall. The footage included some infamous scenes like the secret recording of his conversation with Diane Hendricks from ABC Supply about his intention to "divide and conquer" the unions, and his prank telephone call where he thought he was talking to David Koch. But it also includes

unseen footage that will give you a glimpse of the view from the eyes of a Tea Party patriot. My thoughts during a few scenes were, “Did they just say that on camera?”

To prove just how much influence the Koch Brothers have in this country, they nearly prevented this documentary from being made. The documentary was supposed to be funded by PBS. But PBS reneged when David Koch threatened to discontinue funding PBS. Thanks to several small donors, they were able to complete the film despite Koch’s attempts to kill it.

It is a must see for anyone that lived the experience. And it’s worth your support, if for no better reason than to prove the Koch’s can’t control everything.

For information on where it is playing, or to order a copy: <http://watch.citizenkoch.com/>

Union Begins with “U” – Calendar of Events

Know of any labor friendly events in your community that you would like to share with other members? Please email the details and links to: wpec-communication@aft-wisconsin.org

August 23, 2014 Executive Council Meeting 8:30am-12:30pm, AFT-W Building

September 1, 2014 [SCFL Laborfest '14, 12:00-5:30pm](#), Madison Labor Temple

Have an article or story of interest you’d like to see in the newsletter? We welcome submissions. Please review the [Standards and Guidelines](#) to ensure your submitted article meets those guidelines. Submissions can be made via email: wpec-communication@aft-wisconsin.org.