

the 4 WORD

The Voice of Council 4 AFSCME Connecticut

July 2008

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With two swipes of the veto pen, Gov. M. Jodi Rell took the side of big business and big insurance to the detriment of Connecticut's working families. On May 27, she vetoed legislation raising the state's hourly minimum wage to \$8 an hour in 2009 and \$8.25 in 2010. (Connecticut's minimum wage is currently \$7.65.) The bill had easily passed both chambers of the General Assembly.

Rell's cited the weak economy as a major reason for her veto of the minimum wage hike. Surely, management at big corporations like Burger King, Wal-Mart and Six Flags were celebrating her specious reasoning.

A little perspective: Last year, someone making minimum wage could pay for 3 gallons of gas after working one hour. This year, even had Rell signed the bill, the hourly minimum would not even pay for two gallons.

The governor seems unconcerned that since September 1997, the cost of living has risen 26%, while the minimum wage has fallen in real value. According to the Economic Policy Institute, the earnings of minimum wage workers are crucial to their families' well-being, as the average minimum wage worker brings home more than half (54%) of his or her family's weekly earnings.

Having torpedoed a raise for the lowest paid workers, Rell celebrated Friday the 13th (of June) by vetoing HB 5536, An Act Creating the Connecticut Healthcare Partnership. This bill would allow small businesses, municipalities and nonprofits to enter into the state employee health care pool on a voluntary basis -- giving them more choices and reduced costs.

Rell's veto of healthcare pooling was little more than a wink and a nod in the direction of her patrons at the Connecticut Business & Industry Association (CBIA), which is a major health insurance broker. Large insurance companies like Anthem Blue Cross used unfounded scare tactics (such as threatening massive rate increases on the state employee plan) to undermine the bill's prospects of enactment.

But it was a slap in the face to employers like Tom Morrow, Executive Director of the Bristol Community Organization, Inc., a large non-profit enterprise whose premium rates jumped 15% on a high-deductible insurance plan.

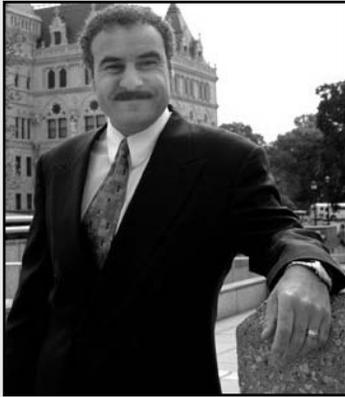
"To come up with \$3,000 out-of-pocket before seeing any benefit is difficult for our employees," Morrow said. "That's why we asked our employees and our board members to urge the governor to support the pooling bill."

Said Council 4 Executive Director Sal Luciano, "Connecticut's economy thrives on small businesses and non-profits who will continue to suffer under the soaring costs of health care."

At press time, the General Assembly was planning a special session to override some of Rell's vetos, including the minimum wage bill. Prospects of overriding her veto of HB 5536 were considered slim to none in part because recently elected Republican Senator Robert Russo (Bridgeport-Trumbull) vowed to support the governor, making an override impossible.

Rell's veto notwithstanding, the campaign for quality, affordable healthcare must, and will, continue.

Ignorance + Indifference = Big Trouble



After seven years of upside-down economic priorities, like tax breaks for millionaires and corporate interests, President Bush has driven us into a recession.

Last month, we learned that the national unemployment rate jumped to 5.5% in May from 5% in April. This is the largest spike in unemployment in a single month since 1986.

In response, the U.S. House of Representatives moved quickly to enact up to 13 weeks of additional unemployment benefits for people who have lost their jobs. The bill was awaiting action in the U.S. Senate as this newsletter went to press.

Consider the context of why this legislation is so important:

Nearly 325,000 Americans have lost jobs since the beginning of the year. Another 49,000 jobs were lost in May (the fifth consecutive month where employers have cut jobs).

The number of long-term unemployed workers is substantially higher than when President Bush last signed legislation to extend benefits for workers who exhausted their state unemployment benefits before finding work.

Yet the Bush administration says extending unemployment benefits would mean workers would just end up lollygagging about, watching TV and not looking for work. This is what the president's veto threat (also called a Statement of Administration Policy) said:

"Increasing and extending unemployment insurance benefits when unemployment is this low would be unprecedented and counterproductive because it would reduce the incentive for workers to find new employment."

Bush's infinite capacity for indifference to the struggles of ordinary Americans should no longer surprise us. Whether his indifference is the child of intolerance or simple ignorance is unknown and unimportant. Our economy cannot afford George Bush's princely whims.

Enough is enough. Seven years of upside-down economic priorities have left us with a slowing economy, loss of jobs, and an ever-worsening mortgage crisis at a time when the cost of healthcare, food, electricity and gas continues to rise.

It's going to take a lot to get our country back on track.

Quite frankly, it's going to take more than extending unemployment benefits for the increasing number of Americans who have lost their jobs.

We need a Congress that will stand up for working people.

We need a president who sees, as we do, the beginning of an economic meltdown in this country that has people scared, anxious and concerned in a way they haven't been in a long time.

We need a president who understands why we are so tired of oil companies earning record breaking profits while people struggle to commute to work.

We need a president who knows that extending unemployment insurance is a sound economic investment in people.

There's no doubt in my mind Barack Obama can be such a president. But we've got to get him elected first.

Only then can we banish indifference and ignorance from the White House.

In solidarity,

Sal Luciano

Sal Luciano
Executive Director

Letter to the Editor: Pension Article on Target

Peter Thor's article "Fighting Those 401(k) Blues (4-Word, May 2008)" was on right on target. These plans and their promotion are nothing more than another attack on worker's standard of living. I agree that only unions will be able to reverse their proliferation.

But our defense must go way beyond just defending our defined benefit plans, it must include a call for national retirement system like many other countries have. We have the beginnings of such a system already, social security. However as it is currently run the benefits paid out by themselves do not provide a very good standard of living for retirees.

We must fight for a national pension system that is not dependent on where one works. It should be a national system into which all employers and employees contribute payments. Only when we have such a system will we be able to guarantee all workers a comfortable retirement.

*Blair F. Bertaccini, Local 269
Waterbury, CT*

Corrections:

The May issue of the *4-Word* incorrectly identified New Britain Housing Authority workers as members of Local 818. They are members of Local 1186.

Also, a story on the NP-4 arbitration hearings misspelled the name of Local 387's Reggie Cummings.

The *4-Word* apologizes for the errors.

Hamden Cafeteria Workers Stop Unhealthy HSAs



Seated, left to right: Shari McDermott, Nancy Barr and Alexis Hoyesen. Standing, left to right: Margaret Grava, Carol Levarek and Donald Sevas.

Hamden school cafeteria workers (Local 1303-275 of Council 4) stood up for quality, affordable healthcare coverage when they put the brakes on their employer's attempt to unilaterally implement a high-cost, low-benefit Health Savings Account (HSA) in place of a traditional managed care plan.

The nearly 30 cafeteria workers are employed by Whitson's, a private food service company based in Long Island. As soon as the company forced them to use a high deductible health plan with a health savings account, members realized immediately they were in for trouble.

They had a \$3000 annual deductible. Whitson's funded half of the deductible or \$125 per month, causing tremendous out-of-pocket expenses for doctor's visits and prescription drugs. Adding insult to injury, employees found that the employer hadn't always credited their HSA account.

"When we had an HSA, I put off going to the doctor completely," said cafeteria worker Margaret Grava. "I just couldn't afford it."

Added Shari McDermott, who's worked more than 20 years in the system: "You shouldn't have to delay seeing a doctor or getting a prescription because you can't afford it."

However, Council 4 and the local union fought back. Staff Representative Donald Sevas filed a grievance against Whitson's over the switch in healthcare plans.

Council 4 also retained the services of insurance consultant Carol Levarek as an expert witness when the case went to arbitration.

Just before the arbitration hearing began, Whitson's agreed to drop the HSA and negotiate with Council 4 over the return to a managed care plan as part of a new collective bargaining agreement.

"This was an important victory because HSAs create administrative work for the employees and force them to pay large amounts out of pocket for health care when the funds aren't in the savings account," Sevas said. "Our experience in Hamden showed HSAs keep employees from getting care."

Hamden cafeteria workers were delighted with the outcome and praised the work of Sevas and Levarek. But they also saw a deeper and more troubling dynamic at work.

"Working people like us are facing a crisis in healthcare. We have to choose between paying their bills and seeing a doctor," said bargaining unit President Alexis Hoyesen. "We don't need gimmicks like health savings account to fix our broken system. We need quality, affordable care for everyone."

Norwalk Local 2405 Members Sign 'No Confidence' Petition



Milt Giddiens, President of Council 4 Local 2405 in Norwalk speaks to the media after union members presented Mayor Richard Moccia with a petition of no-confidence in the leadership of Norwalk Public Works Supervisor Harold Alvord. Nearly 100 workers signed the petition in protest of abusive treatment and poor decision-making by management. "Signing a petition is a simple act but a courageous one. Every person who signed this petition knows that the director has two choices - retaliate or rejuvenate." Moccia agreed to meet with Local 2405 leadership to hear their concerns.

Fed Report Finds Health Savings Accounts Benefit Wealthy Americans

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that health savings accounts are functioning more as a tax shelter for wealthy enrollees than as a solution to the problems of spiraling health care costs and lack of coverage facing average Americans.

The recently released report found that for non-elderly adults in 2005, the average income for tax filers using HSAs was \$139,000, compared with \$57,000 for all other filers.

"This report provides further evidence that we need to reexamine whether this is the right way to use the Government's resources to address our health care needs," noted Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA) who, along with Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA), requested the GAO study.

Click www.gao.gov/new.items/d08474r.pdf for the full text.

In New Haven, Workers Say 'NO!' to Aramark



About 200 protesters – members of Council 4 and their supporters – recently demanded at a rally that the New Haven public school system stop contracting out food service and facility maintenance work.

School administrators later agreed not to renew the food service contract that privateer Aramark held through August. The company, which provided services to the school district for the past 12 years, still holds a separate maintenance contract that remains in effect – and has cost city taxpayers millions.

Council 4 members want the city to bring maintenance work in-house.



“We don’t need an overpaid middle man to lead us down the path of destruction,” says Robert Montuori, president of Local 287, which represents about 200 New Haven school custodians.

Addressing an enthusiastic throng of protesters gathered at City Hall, AFSCME International President Gerald W. McEntee (pictured above) was equally blunt: “We want to tell the aldermen and the mayor that it is their job to fire Aramark and get them out of town.”

Council 4 represents more than 1,400 New Haven city and board of education employees, including public school custodians, paraprofessionals and security guards.

Photos courtesy of Stan Godlewski.

Workers Memorial Day 2008

Council 4 members and staff took time out on April 28 to recognize Workers Memorial Day. The ceremony in front of the Council 4 Workers Memorial Monument featured a moving tribute to Kathy Baker of Local 1186 (City of New Britain), who died on the job last November.

Every year on April 28 – the anniversary of the 1970 enactment of Occupational Safety and Health Act – the AFL-CIO and its affiliated unions remember all workers who have



Jim Baker of Local 1186 (City of New Britain) remembers his wife Kathryn, also an 1186 member; who died on the job last November.

killed, injured or made ill on the job.

“Kathy was an active and involved union member, who served as Secretary and then as Vice President of Local 1186,” said her husband Jim, who works for the city Water Department and is also a member of Local 1186. “She is sadly missed by everyone who knew her.”

In addition to Kathy Baker, who worked as an administrative assistant for the city of New Britain, Council 4 added to its memorial monument the names of Anthony Calabrese (Local 3145, American Red Cross), Dalzenia Henry (Local 1303-66, Hamden Children’s Center) and Tom Turner (Local 1303-051, Montville Public Works), all of whom died on the job since Workers Memorial Day 2007.

Local 538’s Dave McCue Successfully Leads Push for New Law Helping Blind Workers

Persistence paid off for Local 538 member David McCue, a state clerical employee who is legally blind.



Dave McCue

McCue worked with Council 4 staff during the 2008 legislative session to win passage of a law allowing blind or physically disabled state or quasi-public employees to use accumulated paid sick leave time for guide dog training.

McCue began pursuing legislation last fall when his employer, the Department of Administrative Services, forbid him the use of accumulated sick time for training with Hannah and instead forced him to use vacation time.

After Council 4 secured a stipulated agreement restoring McCue’s vacation time, he began a grassroots legislative campaign leading to the creation of Public Act 08-4, which allows for the use of accumulated sick time when undergoing guide dog training

“I am not finished or stopping here. I want to take this to the federal level so that every one across America will be able to use it,” McCue said.

Council 4 Salutes School Nurses

Council 4 marked National School Nurse Day on Wednesday, May 7, recognizing the contributions that school nurses make in caring for our children.

Council 4 represents nearly 400 public school nurses throughout the state.

“We’re proud of our work and we’re deeply committed to the hundreds of students who pass through our offices,” said Amy Wargo, President of Local 1303-183, representing school nurses employed by the Town of Orange. “We help maintain health and safety so children have the best environment in which to learn.”



Amity/Orange school nurses and their students: Standing from left, Amy Wargo, Kathleen Malone, Eydie Lefebvre, MaryLou Giordano, Ronnie Puleo and Karen Verrinder.

In recent years, the duties of school nurses have expanded, putting them on the front line of delivering health care directly to kids.

School nurses are often the first point of contact for sick or disabled or

impaired children. Staff shortages usually mean the nurses themselves cannot take a sick day or find time to eat.

“Our jobs are increasingly challenging and not without stress, but we love working with children,” said Local 1303-316 President Eydie Lefebvre, whose local represents school nurses under the Amity Board of Education. “That’s why we’re here.”

Hartford School Employees Fight ‘Cruel’ Pink Slips



Ivan Vizarden of Council 4 Local 566 is interviewed by Channel 3 prior to the June 17 Hartford Board of Education meeting. Vizarden and 30 other custodians were sent termination notices in the mail. Married and a father of three, the 26-year-old Vizarden is a custodian at Hartford Public High School. “I take a lot of pride in my work. I attended this school. This is very hard on me and my family,” he told the media. Local 566 has been holding regular demonstrations prior to the Hartford Board of Education meetings, with members also addressing Board members and urging them to restore services that are being slashed as part of budget cutbacks.

Middletown Local 466 Remembers Colleague



Local 466 (City of Middletown) paid tribute to co-worker and union member Judy Lisitano during a ceremony in her honor at Middletown High School May 9. Lisitano, who worked in the high school cafeteria for more than 20 years, passed away last year. Workers, friends and family attended the ceremony and saw the unveiling of a plaque donated by Local 466 in Lisitano’s memory. Pictured, from left, are Local 466 Officers Tami McAuliffe; Leslie Spatola; Linda Salafia; Steve Champagne and Judy Kudrak.

Plainfield WPCA Workers Pleased With New Contract



Members of Local 1303-164, representing the Plainfield Water Pollution Control Authority, are pleased with a new collective bargaining agreement that takes them through June 30, 2017. The agreement includes wage increases averaging more than 3.25% annually and minimizes health insurance premium sharing. Pictured front, left to right: Jay Young, Marty Babcock, Roger Matteau, Becky Hewitt and Lisa Collamore. Back, left to right: Council 4 Staff Representative and Local Spokesman Alan Marshall, Mike Hurley and Jeff Young.

**FOR THE LATEST
HAPPENINGS CHECK
WWW.COUNCIL4.ORG**

Region 13 School Cafeteria Workers Vote to Join Council 4

Striving to improve the quality of their jobs and the services they provide to school children, Region 13 (Durham, Middlefield and Rockfall) cafeteria workers voted 12-to-3 to join Council 4 in a union representation election May 8.

“We’re proud of the work we do and we care about the kids we serve,” said cafeteria employee Gail Foreman, who works at Cuginchaug High School. “Having a union will bring us dignity, respect and continuity on the job.”

Council 4 staff and the workers are now preparing to negotiate a first contract with the administration.



Region 13 school cafeteria workers said “Union Yes!” when they voted resoundingly to join Council 4.

Bridgeport Local 1522: Save Our School Services



Local 1522 Executive Board member Jermaine Kenney is joined by daughters Lauryn, age 8, and Chantel, age 13, at a rally before the Bridgeport Board of Education meeting in June.

Local 1522 members like Kenney are speaking out against school budget cuts targeted to direct services such as special education, math, library and early childhood education. “Proposed cuts will decimate the quality of education for Bridgeport’s students,” said Local 1522 President Anna Montalvo, whose union represents city and board of education workers, along with the Bridgeport Health Care Center, where Kenney works, and the Aquarion Water Treatment facility.

Stonington Custodians Halt Privatization in New Agreement



Stonington school custodians are celebrating a new four-year collective bargaining agreement that does more than improve their economic standing – it reflects a successful grassroots campaign to stop privatization in its tracks.

Last November, the members of Council 4 Local 1303-170 were disturbed by a local news article reporting that the school administration had begun to explore outsourcing custodial services to a private company, even soliciting information from a Tennessee-based privateer.

“We believe in the Council 4 slogan that privatization equals corruption,” said Local President Manuel Santiago. “We felt that hiring an outside company would only hurt the kids and erode the quality of our schools.”

Management’s goal, according to Council 4 Staff Representative Tricia Cardin, was to incorporate the right to privatize as part of negotiations for a successor agreement to the one that expired in 2007.

School custodians mobilized. They signed a petition against privatization, attended Board of Education meetings and made a persuasive economic argument to keep work in-house.

The school board eventually backed off the privatization proposal as negotiations for the new contract moved forward. The end result was a four-year agreement that includes general wage increases and other economic enhancements – along with the establishment of a new labor-management committee that will review custodial operations to ensure efficiency.

“We went from facing the possibility of privatization to having labor and management work together to improve services,” Santiago said. “That’s how it should be.”

Privatization EQUALS Corruption

Council 4 Veterans Picnic Lifts Spirits, Delivers New Furniture

“This is a great day. Every day should be like this.” Those words, spoken by Marine veteran Nate Dillon, beautifully captured the spirit of 5th annual Council 4 Veterans Picnic, which took place Memorial Day weekend under at the State Veterans Home in Rocky Hill.

Bathed by a warm sun, veterans and their families enjoyed a fantastic barbeque feast prepared by Council 4 members and staff. And union members had an opportunity to break bread with state veterans and hear their stories.

Thanks to the fundraising that went on behind the scenes prior to the picnic, veterans at the Rocky Hill facility were able to enjoy more than 40 pieces of custom-made outdoor furniture, such as rocking chairs, park benches and picnic tables.

Kloter Farms in Ellington built the furniture, which was subsidized by the Council 4 Veterans Fund. “The furniture is beautiful,” said army veteran Ray Covington. “We really appreciate what [Council 4] has done for us.”

Since its inception in 2004, the Council 4 Veterans Picnic has raised approximately \$250,000 to improve the quality of life for state veterans.



Seated from left: veterans Francis Usher and Martin Gibej; Ryan Cloukey of Kloter Farms; and veterans James Marhevlic and Ray Covington. Standing, from left: Tom LaPlante, Ron Bahler and Ryan Luginbuhl of Kloter Farms.



Carla Fontanez of Local 1522, far left, and Sara Theriault of Local 318 were among the many Council 4 volunteers preparing and serving food to the veterans such as Vernon Miller and Yolanda Cruz.

Those funds have been used to purchase flat screen televisions, the renovation of ball fields, new gymnasium flooring and cardiovascular equipment and a new computer lab with 15 desktop system.

“We want to thank everyone who participated in this wonderful event, particularly the veterans who have served our country and our state,” said Mark Blumenthal of Local 566, chair of the union’s Veterans Picnic Committee. “We can’t wait to get started on the 2009 picnic.”

Go to www.council4.org to view a photo gallery of the picnic.

Shifting Gears: Real Money-Saving Steps

This summer, there are numerous no- or low-cost steps you can take to combat rising gas prices and save wear and tear on your car:

Stay within posted speed limits. The faster you drive, the more fuel you use. For example, driving at 65 mph, rather than 55 mph, increases fuel consumption by 20%.

Use overdrive gears. Your car’s engine speed decreases when you use overdrive. This reduces both fuel consumption and engine wear.

Use cruise control. Using cruise control on highway trips can help you maintain a constant speed and, in most cases, reduce your fuel consumption.

Anticipate driving situations. Avoiding unnecessary braking and acceleration can improve your fuel economy by 5 to 10%. So don’t tailgate!

Avoid unnecessary idling. Turn off the engine if you anticipate a lengthy wait. Unnecessary idling wastes fuel, costs you money and pollutes the air.

Combine errands. Several short trips taken from a cold start can use twice as much fuel as one trip covering the same distance when the engine is warm.

Remove excess weight from the trunk. An extra 100 pounds in the trunk reduces a typical car’s fuel economy by one to two percent.

Maintain your car. Keep your engine tuned. Studies have shown that a poorly tuned engine can increase fuel consumption by as much as 10 to 20%.

Keep your tires properly inflated and aligned. Tires that are under-inflated cause fuel consumption to increase by 6%.

Change your oil. Clean oil reduces wear caused by friction between moving parts and removes harmful substances from the engine.

Check and replace air filters regularly. Replacing a dirty air filter improves fuel economy and protects your car’s engine.

To learn more, go to www.fueleconomy.gov

Summer Book Reading

As summer approaches, here are a few books that would be worthwhile reading for anyone with an interest in the labor movement and the struggles of American workers, whether in today's economy or in America's past.



The Big Squeeze: Tough Times for the American Worker. New York Times labor reporter Steven Greenhouse gives readers a behind-the-scenes view into the lives of American workers being squeezed by low wages, disappearing benefits and a lack of job security.

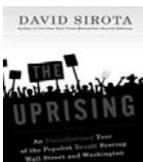
Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign. Noted labor historian and University of Washington-Tacoma Professor Michael K. Honey tells the story of the 1968 AFSCME sanitation workers strike in Memphis. Honey analyzes a strike that was a defining moment for our union and the modern labor and civil rights movements.



Black Men Built the Capitol: Discovering African-American History in and Around Washington, D.C. Associated Press labor reporter Jesse Holland tells the forgotten story of how African Americans helped build some of our most important national landmarks, including the U.S. Capitol, the White House and the Lincoln Memorial.



The Uprising: An Unauthorized Tour of the Populist Revolt Scaring Wall Street and Washington. Growing public discontent is creating a new populist political movement, as local grassroots groups are more openly tackling community problems. Author David Sirota looks at these "uprisings" and where they might lead.



Don't forget: Whatever your reading pleasure, shop at Powells.com, the nation's premier unionized online bookstore.

In Memoriam: Chuck Masud

Charles R. "Chuck" Masud, former President of both Council 4 and Local 269, died June 5, 2008 in Milford. He was 83.



*Chuck Masud.
(Photo courtesy of
Carol Carney.)*

Masud was employed as a field representative for the Connecticut Department of Labor (DOL). He left his mark on Council 4 and Local 269, which represents state employees in the DOL, Department of Veteran Affairs and Workers Compensation Commission Rehabilitation Services.

"Chuck was deeply committed to our union and to all workers," said Local 269 President Carol Carney, who succeeded Masud. "The bottom line for him was helping people, watching out for his members and defending their rights."

Masud was a highly decorated retired Navy Senior Chief Machinist Mate having served in World War II, Korea, the Philippines and the Vietnam Era.

Our condolences go out to Brother Masud's wife Doris and this three children. Memorial contributions may be made to the Saint Jude Children's Research Hospital, 332 Lauderdale Street, Memphis, TN 33105.

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