



# COUNTY & CITY

# EMPLOYEE

Vol. 24 No. 4

<http://www.council2.com>

Winter 2009

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Legislative Weekend slated for January

Council 2's popular Legislative Weekend will be held from January 28 through 30 in Olympia.

Held every year, the Legislative Weekend provides Council 2 members the opportunity to see the legislative process in action, to meet representatives in person and to hear their views on the issues of the day.

Members who wish to attend should contact Council 2 at 800-775-6418.

### Venue for presidents' conference is a hit

When nearly 100 Council 2 local presidents and their guests met for their annual get-together in late October,

they enjoyed and learned from presentations by Council 2's General Counsel



Audrey Eide, who spoke on legal issues in your local union, Deputy Director Pat Thompson, who outlined Initiative 1033 (see report alongside), and AFSCME International's Debra Kidney who spoke on how to run your local union.

The presidents also spoke highly of the venue, Campbell's Resort in Chelan, and Council 2 is planning to hold next year's conference at the same place.

## INSIDE

### November election highlights

— Page 3

### Library employees want to join union

— Page 4

### 15 jobs saved in Spokane County

— Page 3



Christine Kahikina of Local 2084-SC, King County Juvenile Court, directs a motorist's attention to a flier outlining the adverse economic impacts of Initiative 1033.

## How we helped defeat I-1033

Council 2 members played a leading role in helping defeat anti-tax activist Tim Eyman's latest initiative, 1033, which was on the November ballot.

Members voluntarily operated telephone banks, distributed fliers and even took to the streets to dissuade citizens from voting for the measure, which would have capped revenue flowing into the main accounts of city, county and state government, thereby effectively locking today's recession-pinched budgets into place forever.

Council 2 also formed part of a broad coalition of labor, business, health care and education that opposed the initiative. Labor was the single largest source of financing.

Also joining the coalition against the measure was Microsoft founder Bill Gates, who added \$3 million to the pot. "Under normal circumstances,

### Election highlights: Page 3

these people would not agree that the sun will come up tomorrow, but they all shared the belief that this initiative was bad for Washington State," says Council 2 Deputy Director Pat Thompson.

When the votes were counted, it was clear their efforts were a resounding success. About 60 percent voted against Initiative 1003.

"This was a major defeat not only for the initiative, but also for Eyman," Thompson adds. "Although it is too early to announce the end of Tim Eyman — that likely will be dependent on his major financier, Michael Dunmire — his name now evokes a negative reaction from most voters. It will be difficult for him to sell his approach in the future."



Mark Farrell (above) and Michael West (right) distribute fliers opposing I-1033. Both are members of Local 2084-SC.



## Cost-saving agreements are saving workers' jobs

With counties and cities across the state facing significant budget shortfalls for next year, Council 2's main emphasis continues to be on saving jobs.

The strategy is largely proving successful.

Although some layoffs have taken place, the number would have been a lot worse had the union not entered into cost-saving agreements with management.

The situation differs from city to city and county to county.

In some cases, furloughs can be negotiated so that jobs are saved. In other cases, however, the number of furloughs would need to be so high that other means are sought to maintain jobs — for example, possibly postponing cost-of-living adjustments.

Reports in this issue of *County and City Employee* outline some of those dilemmas and record the steps being taken to solve them in the most favorable way possible for union members.

"In all cases Council 2 staff, working in conjunction with local presidents and negotiating committees, are placing the highest priority on people," says Council 2 President/Executive Director Chris Dugovich. "We know what it is like to lose your job and we want to avoid it as far as possible.

"Our members are, of course, our number one priority and we will fight for them in every way we can."

• See reports on Page 2.

## Inflation index defies history

For as long as most people can remember, the inflation index on which bargaining agreements are based has risen each year by anywhere from 2 to 5 percent, meaning that employees with cost-of-living allowances (COLAs) in their contracts would see an increase by that amount in their pay checks the following year.

This year, however, as with so much in the economy, it is different.

The consumer price index for the Seattle-Tacoma area, the CPI-W — on which a number of contracts are based — actually fell from July 1, 2008 to June 30, 2009 by 0.7 percent.

"It has affected a number of Council 2 contracts that are based on the June-to-June formula," says Council 2 Director of

See INDEX, Page 4

# Insurance trust increases benefits

**CHRIS DUGOVICH**

The Washington State Council of County and City Employees, AFSCME, AFL-CIO offers a most cost-effective service to its members, but it seems to be well hidden.

The State Council operates a non-profit insurance trust through the trusteeship of its three elected officers — Vice-President

Ron Fredin, Secretary-Treasurer Kathleen Etheredge and I. The trust offers, on a group basis, 10 dental plans, two vision plans, two long-term disability plans and five levels of term life insurance.

The trust, created in the late 60s, was, and still is, intended to provide the best benefits to members on a bargaining unit basis at the lowest possible cost. Naturally, more participants in the plan will reduce the cost — giving all participants the greatest benefit for their dollars.

Unlike other insurance benefits plans, our trust has been able to enhance benefits for 2009. Last January all of our Plans covered 100 percent of the cost of preventive care (exams, cleaning, and so on). In 2010 the increase on our Dental Plan is 1.7 percent.

## Dental

Our 10 dental plans offer benefit options to match your employer's ability to pay. With the exception of Plan 10, our payments per individual procedure are a set amount with frequent upgrades. Plan 10 pays benefits on a usual, reasonable and customary basis rather than a scheduled payment.

In addition to the 100 percent preventive care this plan pays 80 percent for basic services, 5 percent for major services and 50 percent of orthodontia up to \$2,000. These benefits would be paid no matter the actual cost, up to a \$2,000 calendar-year maximum.

## Vision

Vision insurance is provided through the Northwest Benefit Network. It covers exams, glasses and an amount toward contacts.

The trust offers two plans at \$15.90 and \$18.75 per month. The benefits themselves are provided through an extensive list of optometrists and opticians throughout the state.

## Disability

Long-term disability insurance is one benefit that really has not yet come to the forefront, although it's extremely important. Generally, this coverage kicks in for an illness or injury that keeps you from the ability to work. It's salary insurance!

Although the State's Labor and Industries Insurance offers you coverage for an on-the-job injury, the trust's disability insurance augments this coverage and will pay in many instances when the state plan will not.

It also would cover you for either an illness or injury off the job. The trust offers two plans. Plan I requires a 90-day and Plan II a 180-day waiting



*Letter from the President*

See PRESIDENT, Page 3

## Agreements save 15 jobs in Spokane County — so far...

When Spokane County officials announced they were facing an \$11 million budget shortfall for 2010, employees shuddered. They knew that the shortfall, which demanded cuts of around 11 percent in most departments, could affect their jobs.

They knew, too, that one size would not fit all; groups in each department would have to make their own decisions in attempting to reach agreements with management and so avoid layoffs.

"There is a lot of variance among departments," explains Staff Representative Gordon Smith. "Some could absorb the cuts without a loss of jobs, some would face having one or two jobs at risk, others stand to lose as many as 30 jobs. So we are engaged with each union in exploring the possibility of layoffs and how they can be avoided."

So far four groups, all within Local 1553 — building and planning, auditors and treasurers — have reached agreements for 2010, saving a total of 15 jobs, Smith says.

"We are still in negotiations on other groups in Local 1553 as well as in another five locals."

To help each group make informed choices, Council 2 staffers identified questions that they should address in reaching their decisions.

- Have we obtained budget numbers from the county that are verifiable and believable?

- What are the implications of doing nothing and staying with the

bargaining agreements that are in place for 2010?

- Will the county confirm that any concessions made would be temporary and would apply only to 2010, after which matters would return to "normal"?

- Do we have the assurance that, if concessions are made, a definite number of jobs will be saved?

- Are middle and upper management prepared to share the pain? (If they step up to the plate employees are more likely to do so as well.)

**'Doing nothing could have consequences, which includes a loss of jobs'**

— Staff Representative Gordon Smith

- Will management try to save money in every way possible before they consider laying off people?

Union members in each department need to answer these questions for their own members, Smith says. He adds that every union is under a contract negotiated through 2010, but doing nothing and staying with the contracts could have consequences, which includes a loss of jobs.

In considering alternatives in

## ...and 20 jobs are saved in the City of Spokane

Employees of the City of Spokane feared that more than 28 of their number would lose their jobs to budget cuts next year, but an agreement reached in mid-November with the city not only avoids layoffs, but also excludes furloughs.

"We achieved savings through cancelling contract benefits and deferring cost-of-living allowances which gave the city the savings they were looking for in 2010 as well as 2011, which is expected to be as bad as next year," explains Staff Representative Mike Smith.

"Hopefully, we are set up for two years of not having to go through this again."

About 1,100 members of Local 270 in almost all

city departments are affected by the new agreement.

"The agreement was put together by Joe Cavanaugh, president of Local 270," Smith says. "He and his fellow negotiating committee members did a fantastic job."

Smith says the agreement was advantageous for the city as well as for the union. "We just extended the contract for a year and rolled some of our cost-of-living adjustments down the road a bit and gave the city more than the savings it was looking for."

City management was collaborative in every way, Smith adds. "They were committed to treating the employees fairly and with respect."

## Grays Harbor workers to take voluntary furloughs

Facing a \$3 million budget shortfall — worse than that of last year — Grays Harbor County commissioners proposed earlier this year that, to cut costs, Council 2 county employees give up their cost-of-living adjustments for 2010, give up step increases, reduce the county's contribution to dependent medical by \$162 a month and take one furlough day a month.

"That represented an enormous amount of takeaways," explains Council 2 Staff Representative Kathy Brown.

Council 2 bargaining units in Local 275 took the proposal to their

members. "Absolutely not," members said. "We're not going back to 1990 compensation packages."

In order to find a better solution, local leaders representing the 264 members of Local 275 and Brown held several meetings with the county commissioners.

"We ran the numbers and discussed ideas," Brown says. "After several meetings, we ended up with a memorandum of understanding in which our members could voluntarily take furlough days next year to avoid layoffs and/or could contribute toward dependent medical premiums. Wages will

not be adjusted."

The agreements differ from department to department, Brown adds. "For example the courthouse and public services agreements allow for layoffs and in some departments furloughs will not work."

The county is tentatively looking at a total of 12 layoffs, some of which will be in the courthouse and public service bargaining units, Brown adds.

Union members will also work with the state in the state-run shared-work program, which aids workers financially, to lessen the impact of the furlough days.



# NOVEMBER ELECTION HIGHLIGHTS

✓ **Constantine wins in last-minute swing**

Dow Constantine, supported by Council 2, won the position of King County executive with a vote of almost 60 percent as voters swung to his side in the closing week of the election. Voters realized that his opponent, Susan Hutchinson, did not have the experience to lead the county during these tough economic times and, by electing Constantine, who had served as a council member, they sought a degree of stability in county government.

✓ **Local scores big on endorsements**

The City of Kirkland Local 1837 went 4-4 on their endorsements for Kirkland City Council. Can't ask for better than that.

The Local also supported the annexation of three areas in unincorporated King County — Kingsgate, Finn Hill and North Juanita — which will greatly expand the city boundaries and add a large number of residents to the city base. At last report, the result of the election was too close to call.

✓ **Libraries relieved by tax boost**

Libraries throughout the Sno-Isle Library System will not have to cut their hours — or their staff. A property-tax increase to provide additional funding to the library was approved by about 52 percent of voters.

✓ **Endorsed mayors win in Vancouver and Tacoma**

A campaign, enthusiastically supported by members of the City of Vancouver Local 307-VC, to replace long-term incumbent Vancouver mayor Royce Pollard was successful, with Tim Leavitt winning the position by about 7 percentage points. It was one of the closest, most expensive, and most contentious elections in the city's recent history.

- Tacoma's new mayor, Marilyn Strickland, was endorsed by Council 2.

✓ **Fagan fails**

Mike Fagan, who for years has helped run Tim Eyman's anti-tax ballot measures, failed spectacularly in a bid to gain a seat on the Spokane City Council, garnering little more than 37 percent of the vote. His major financial backer was Michael Dunmire, a resident of Woodinville in Western Washington, who also underwrites Eyman's initiatives.



**PRESIDENT, from Page 2**

period after injury or illness.  
The programs are extremely competitively priced at \$32 per member per month (90-day) and \$25 per member per month (180-day).

**Life/AD&D insurance**

The trust's newest program is group term life and accidental death and dismemberment insurance.  
In reviewing our collective bargaining agreements across the state, we noticed many employers offer little in life insurance.

We offer five levels of coverage from \$10,000 to \$100,000. The premiums range from \$4.20 to \$42 per member per month.

**How does my local participate?**

Two ways!  
The first is to make your choice of the coverages as a proposal during your next set of contract negotiations and gain the agreement of the employer to pay the premium.

Additionally, by a simple majority vote of your local membership you can participate in the plan. Keep in mind that all members of your local must participate whether or not they voted for the plan, and you will need to gain your employer's agreement to deduct the premium from your pay.

If your local is interested in pursuing these coverages or you need additional information, ask your Staff Representative or call Council 2.

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**COUNTY AND CITY EMPLOYEE**  
 Official publication of the Washington State Council of County and City Employees



WASHINGTON STATE  
COUNCIL OF COUNTY AND CITY EMPLOYEES  
AFSCME AFL-CIO

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Published quarterly

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**AFSCME**  
IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

# Sno-Isle library employees seek to join union

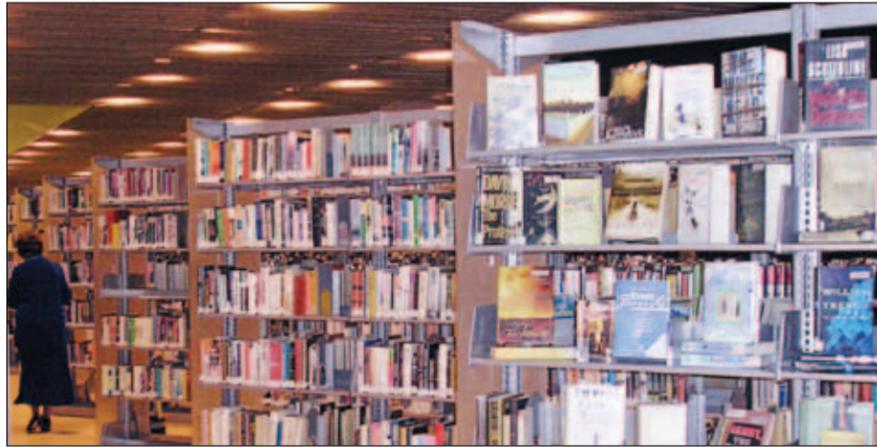
An election in which some 350 Sno-Isle library employees will choose whether to join the Council 2 ranks is being held up by a dispute over who is eligible to join the union.

The largest group in dispute is that of 60 "substitute" employees. Council 2 wants to include them in the unit seeking to join the union. The library administration wants them to be excluded.

Another 30 employees are in dispute, bringing to 90 the number of disputed positions.

A "pre-election conference" attended by the Sno-Isle Library Administration, Council 2 and members of the Public Employment Relations Commission (PERC) was held on November 12 to determine whether agreement could be reached on the make-up of the bargaining unit to be included in the union election. Agreement was not reached. As a result, a formal hearing is set for January 26 and 27, 2010.

The dispute over the eligibility of employees is not the only hurdle being faced by library staff who want to join Council 2.



**Books fill the shelves at the Seattle Public Library, where employees have been members of Council 2 for decades.**

"The Sno-Isle Library Administration is running an unprecedented campaign to dissuade the employees from joining Council 2," says Director of Organizing Bill Keenan.

Among the allegations is that the union will take control of employees.

"Fear not, the union will never take control," says a memorandum drawn up by the Sno-Isle Employees Union Organizing Committee.

"When we succeed in our election we will, however, form our own Sno-Isle employees Local Union, with our own elected officers (who are Sno-Isle employees) and our own by-laws.

"We are the union and, yes, for the first time in our history we will have a real voice, working with management on all matters concerning our wages, benefits and conditions of employment."

Keenan points out that Council 2 represents almost all the major library systems in Washington State. A recent affiliate is the Timberland Library Employees Association, with more than 300 employees.

"In the vicinity of the Sno-Isle Library System, we represent the Skagit County Library System, the Bellingham Library System, the Everett Library System, the Seattle Public Library and the King County Library System."

## Local reaches out to those in need



**ON AUGUST 15, 2009, Local 792CH held a yard/parking lot sale to benefit FISH, a Kittitas food bank. Union members participated, raising \$459 for FISH and also donated a television set that will be used to educate the food bank's clients on nutrition.**

**Habitat for Humanity also benefited from brand new home building items and a local church benefited from a large amount of good quality clothing to give to those in need.**

**"All in all, it was a great weekend — Kittitas county employees helping Kittitas county residents in need," says Local 792CH President Paula Hiatt. In the photograph are union members and FISH coordinators. Hiatt (center) is holding the check for the amount raised.**



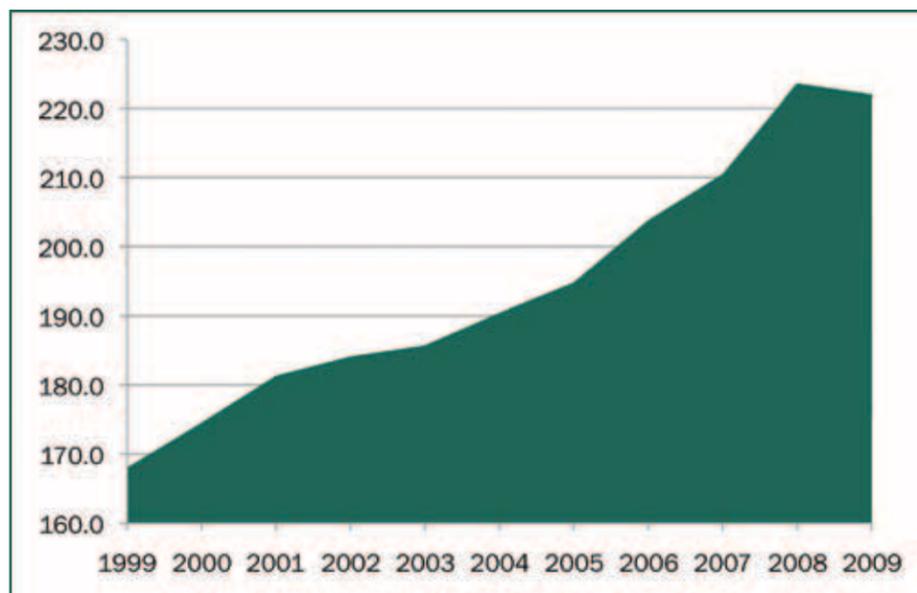
### INDEX, from Page 1

Organizing Bill Keenan.

Because many of the bargaining agreements are tied to the index, a drop into negative territory raises new concerns about those provisions, Keenan says.

"But, because of this change, for the first time many of the new agreements we are negotiating, or have negotiated, contain provisions stipulating that, if the CPI goes below zero we will maintain the current wage," he adds.

**Right: The annual Seattle-Tacoma inflation index for wage earners, known as the CPI-W, at June 30 each year over the past 10 years, showing the dip it took from July 1, 2008 to June 2009.**



**'For the first time, we are stipulating that if the CPI falls below zero we will maintain the current wage!'**