



COUNTY & CITY

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Summer 2006

NEWS IN BRIEF

AFSCME convention slated for August

Some 4,000 delegates are expected to attend the 37th AFSCME International Convention — always an event that keeps people returning year after year — which will be held in Chicago from August 7 through 11.



Delegates from Council 2 will be among those who will attend.

A hosted welcome reception will be held Sunday, August 6. Among the special events is a PEOPLE Fun Run to be held at 7 a.m. on August 10. Other highlights will be announced later.

Contact your local president or your area staff representative for further information.

Receive news when it happens—by email

To receive fast-breaking Council 2 news, send us your home (not your work) email address.

You will receive notification of events, newsletters and matters of importance to members.

Send your home email address to: c2everett@council2.com or complete the form on www.council2.com.

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Local president Chris Scanlon, left, talks to the media after corrections officer Teresa Benefield, 35, right, was attacked for 20 minutes by an inmate in an elevator.

Union reacts to corrections officer's elevator nightmare

Shortly after an inmate attacked a Thurston County corrections officer for 20 minutes in a jammed courthouse elevator in April, Council 2 sprang into action to provide help and advice.

Members rallied to assist the victim of the attack, Teresa Benefield, who was hospitalized as a result of the incident. They also insisted that county authorities take immediate steps to beef up inadequate security arrangements at the courthouse.

In the wake of the attack, union members met in an emergency session to discuss improvements they have demanded for years be made to the system. They drew up a list of requirements that they passed on to county administrators. Local 618 president Chris Scanlon held a press conference to discuss the issue. He pointed out the attack was an unfortunate example of a point the union had been making for years — that court security arrangements, cut back under budgetary pressures, need to be improved.

Benefield, who also spoke to the media, said, "We've been talking about this for years and years and years. It's the same old broken record."

The union stepped in and provided

support on several fronts.

- AFSCME President Gerald McEntee sent a letter to Benefield offering the International's support. Scanlon later called McEntee to thank him for his help.

- Council 2 President/Executive Director Chris Dugovich traveled to Olympia to meet with cor-

rections staff and to provide his assistance and advice. "Without Chris' support we would not have been able to have had an urgent union meeting and I believe his participation helped in our relationship with county administrators," Scanlon says.

- Staff Representative Brock Logan devoted considerable additional time to provide help where it was needed.

- And Mike Smith, Council 2 staff representative in Spokane, who specializes in corrections issues, flew to Olympia to provide advice and assistance to Local 618.

"They all assisted us in a concerted effort like nothing I have ever seen before," Scanlon adds. "They were all highly supportive."

The combined effort not only reflected the union's support for members, it also led to action to ad-

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Teresa Benefield

Library workers vote no-confidence in director

Workers at the King County Library system have voted overwhelmingly in favor of a vote of no confidence in the system director.

In a mail-in ballot, 92 percent voted in favor of a resolution expressing no confidence in the management and leadership of the director, Bill Ptacek. Nearly 75 percent of those who were mailed ballots responded.

The mail-in ballot followed the passage at the April general membership meeting of a motion to poll all members on the issue of no confidence. Local 1857 represents 518 staff who work at 43 King County libraries.

Members believe that Ptacek has mismanaged the library system to such a degree that the quality of service to the public is deteriorating, relationships with the community are worsening, public support is declining and library workers are unable to perform their duties effectively.

Library workers have expressed disillusionment with Ptacek for some time,

See LIBRARY, Page 4

Pension measures await next session

Disappointing as it is, the State Legislature deferred action on Council 2's priority pension issues, but they are likely to form part of a focus on pension issues in the 2007 session.

The two priority issues are:

- The "Rule-of-90," which would allow anyone whose age plus years of service equal 90 to retire without a penalty, and

- "Gain-sharing," which refers to a benefit for Plans 1 and 3 that was based on extraordinary stock market returns. When the market returns more than 10 percent the extra money is split between the system and Plan I and Plan III employees.

"We will again be working through the Select Committee on Pension Policy," says Council 2 Deputy Director Pat Thompson, "but the key focus should be on the governor's office as well as the House and

See PENSIONS, Page 2

Once again, Sen. Cantwell deserves our support

CHRIS DUGOVICH

While hardly as active as the 2004 presidential election, 2006 is a very important year for politics in Washington State. Leading the ticket is Senator Maria Cantwell, a longtime champion for issues important to public employees and their families and a strong advocate for consumer protection, clean affordable energy and other issues.



Letter from the President

Early this year Council 2 provided an early, enthusiastic endorsement for U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell. On May 13 the Washington State Labor Council followed suit — providing Cantwell with some momentum against a tough challenger with the full backing of the Bush Administration.

Cantwell's leadership on issues critical to our membership and public employees generally has helped her earn a 92 percent lifetime rating with AFSCME. She has been a consistent champion for pension protection, protecting union jobs at defense installations, and helping local governments with funds for security and the war on drugs.

Not only does helping local government with more federal money help our employers balance their increasing general fund pressures, but also resulted in Cantwell winning early support from law enforcement groups here in Washington State.

The AFL-CIO nationally gives Cantwell an 88 percent lifetime rating. Standouts of her larger record include standing up in opposition to privatizing social security, working to raise the federal minimum wage, protect prevailing wages, and co-sponsorship of the Employee Free Choice Act.

During the last recession, Cantwell passed bills extending unemployment benefits for laid-off Washington workers and brought resources into the state for worker retraining and continuing education.

Serving on the Senate Energy Committee, Cantwell has been dogged in her defense of Washington consumers — from exposing Enron price gouging in Snohomish County to fighting attempts to raise BPA power rates throughout the state. Furthermore, with fuel prices hurting all of us — and our employers — Cantwell has demanded honesty and accountability from an oil industry making record profits while we pay record prices.

The daughter of a longtime county employee, Senator Cantwell truly understands the values and concerns of our families. We have worked with her since she was a member of the Washington State House of Representatives and have always enjoyed a productive relationship with the senator and her staff.

In 2000 we were the first union to endorse Maria, and many of us logged hours in parades and events, staffing phone banks, and going door to door helping her to a narrow victory. This year will be no different: we need to mobilize to help our friend, our senator, win once again.

Visit www.cantwell.com for more information on the campaign and how you can help — or call (206) 217-2006 and talk to the campaign directly.

PENSIONS IN PERIL

Myths & Facts

- MYTH** Public employees receive lavish pensions.
FACT The average PERS benefit is \$14,412 per year. A pension can provide the difference between a comfortable retirement and relying on public assistance.
- MYTH** States and localities can't afford pension costs, which are rising fast.
FACT Pensions are less costly for taxpayers than 401(k)s, which opponents of public employees are pushing. The vast majority of pension benefits are covered by employee contributions and investment earnings. In Washington, for example, investment returns of the Public Employees' Retirement System pay for about 80 percent of retiree pension obligations. The balance comes from employees and taxpayers, with each accounting for approximately 10 percent.
- MYTH** It is better to offer 401(k)-style plans and give workers control of their retirement.
FACT Studies show that the average worker lacks the time and expertise to handle his or her retirement planning well. A pension should be something to count on, not gamble with or worry about.
- MYTH** 401(k) plans get a bigger return and are a better deal than pensions.
FACT Traditional pension plans are professionally managed and invest in real estate and commodities as well as stocks and bonds. Such balanced portfolios — nearly impossible for individuals to set up and manage in 401(k)s — tend to enhance investment returns.
- Matt Scanlan, managing director of Barclays Global Investors, cited in a 2006 Business Week story, points out that 401(k) and other so-called defined-contribution plans tend to under-perform traditional pension ("defined-benefit") plans by 2 percent to 4 percent a year — a difference the magazine says amounts to hundreds of thousands of dollars to an employee over 30 years. Pension plans also charge significantly lower administrative fees.
- MYTH** Compared with pensions, 401(k)s save taxpayers money.
FACT Nebraska recently dropped its 401(k)-style plan for its workers because it found that individuals' investment decisions were unwise, resulting in a waste of taxpayer contributions to those plans. A 2005 study by Standard & Poor's found that — as a result of poor investment practices — a switch by public employers to 401(k) plans might lead to "lower pension contribution costs over the medium term, but could end up with higher public assistance costs in the long term."

Source: March/April 2006 Issue of the AFSCME Public Employee Publication

PENSIONS, from Page 1

Senate leadership."

In addition to these issues, Thompson says he expects major decisions to be taken on the state retirement system generally in the 2007 session. Gov. Chris Gregoire has indicated pensions are a major priority.

"We are very concerned that their first choice will be to repeal 'gain-sharing' and offer nothing in return," Thompson adds.

The system is sound, but the legislature needs to pay close attention to future obligations, Thompson says.

Over the past four years lawmakers skipped \$350 million in recommended payments and fell back \$147 million in "gain-sharing."

The gain-sharing measure still has not been repealed.

Gregoire is preparing a proposal that she can include in the new budget she will unveil later this year. She is hoping that the Legislature will also address pension issues in general in the next session.

The Legislature has agreed to set aside \$350 million toward next biennium's pension obligation, now

Members urged to call governor

It is critical that Council 2 members contact Gov. Christine Gregoire and ask her to support the Rule-of-90, says Council 2 Deputy Director Pat Thompson.

"Without pressure and lots of it, we will lose this opportunity. It is up to us," he says.

Contact Gregoire at 1-800-562-6000 (360-902-4111) or www.governor.wa.gov/contact/govemail.htm.

The message: Support the "Rule-of-90."

estimated at \$600 million.

The state budget office has estimated the deficit will grow to more than \$700 million in the next two years, so the amount set aside will help lawmakers in their effort to try to keep current.

New members added in four regions across the state

Sixty-three join Council 2

Thirty-two crew chiefs and supervisors who work for the **City of Seattle** are to become members of the union after more than 70 percent signed affiliation cards. Agreement that the employees will become Council 2 members was reached on May 3.

The new members work in several City divisions, including the Public Utilities Division of Drainage and Waste Water, the Division of Solid Waste, the Transportation Department and the Parks Department.

A dispute over the description of the bargaining unit has temporarily held up the official certification, but the dispute will not prevent the workers from being represented by Council 2.

The new members will become a separate Local of supervisors. A local number is yet to be determined.

Six employees of the **Washington State University Cooperative Extension's Human Services division** have become members of Council 2.

All the employees, who were previously not represented by any labor organization, signed cards agreeing to become affiliated with the union.

They will join Local 1811-CA, which represents general Snohomish County government employees.

Five investigators in the **Spokane County Public Defenders' Office** have joined Council 2.

Previously unrepresented by any labor union, they have been absorbed into Local 1553, the Spokane County Courthouse local, which represents a wide variety of positions. The local numbers about 500 members.

Also new to Local 1553 are seven **Spokane County District Court** adult probation officers. They, too, were not previously represented and have become members of Council 2.

Elections were unnecessary in both cases. Not only were the decisions by the investigators and the probation officers unanimous, but the county also voluntarily recognized them.

Thirteen **Island County Juvenile Detention Officers** became part of the existing Local 1845, which represents the Island County Courthouse, in February.

The County agreed to voluntarily recognize the officers as part of the existing bargaining unit.

CORRECTIONS, from Page 1

dress the ongoing problems the attack had highlighted.

As a result, Thurston County commissioners approved hundreds of thousands of dollars in court security improvements, some of which the union had been suggesting for several years.

In addition, the commissioners, who had consulted only with corrections administration in the past, moved to involve the union staff and all county administrators in future decisions involving all aspects of jail procedures, including staffing analysis.

Scanlon says the union wants to work closely with administrators on improving the jail. He believes the system allows inmates with serious offenses to be placed in medium or minimum security because the most secure unit does not contain enough beds.

The inmate, identified as Carl Vance, 62, attacked Benefield while she was escorting him to a court hearing on the afternoon of March 31. Vance, classified a maximum security prisoner, hit the emergency button on the elevator with his bound hands, causing it to stop between floors. He lunged at Benefield, trying to get her gun away from her. As they fell, Vance pinned her to the floor and grabbed for the gun, secured in its holster.

Benefield screamed and fought for 20 minutes, shifting her weight to keep the firearm pinned beneath her and prevent Vance from reaching it. She hit and kicked him, inflicting considerable bodily harm on him.

Vance eventually pulled the gun free and stood up in the elevator. "I thought I'd be dead," Benefield told The Olympian.

At that time officers were able to pry open the elevator door. They tackled Vance and seized the gun, moments before what Benefield thought would be certain death. "They literally dragged me out of there and that was the greatest feeling in the world," she told The Olympian.

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Spokane Local 1135 celebrates its 50th anniversary

Members of Local 1135 in Spokane County this year are celebrating their 50th anniversary since becoming organized.

When the local was first formed under AFSCME in 1956 it consisted of about 15 mechanics in the county shop who were part of the road maintenance department. The local became part of Council 2 in July 1958.

Today the local consists of some 130 members of the county road crew.

The local recently presented a plaque to Glenn Spear, 81, who is the only living charter member. He was among a handful of shop workers who first organized the road department employees.

He says he was instrumental in convincing employees to join AFSCME rather than forming an "association."

He says the main reason they organized were six-day work weeks, no overtime pay, no sick leave and

being at-will employees. Every time a new county commissioner was elected many employees would be fired (for no good reason) and replaced by workers the new commissioner preferred, reports Staff Representative Gordon Smith.

Members are planning to commemorate the anniversary by printing special one-of-a-kind T-shirts during the summer. No word yet on what the words on the T-shirts will say.

RIGHT: Glenn Spear, center, the only living charter member of Local 1135, holds a plaque presented to him by local members. With him are, left, Tim Wink, Local 1135 recording secretary and the local's historian, and Jim Spilker, Local 1135 trustee and Regional Labor Council representative.



HELPING HANDS

Local president and wife devote vacation to helping Katrina victims

When Pete and Loretta Seybert watched the drama of hurricane Katrina unfold on their television sets last year, they wondered what they could do to help.

They called the American Red Cross, explaining that Pete — president of Local 1845-I, Island County, and a volunteer firefighter with District 5 on Whidbey Island — and his wife, Loretta, are volunteer emergency medical technicians. The organization suggested they undergo required additional training and put them on a fast track to give assistance to the hurricane-ravaged area of New Orleans.

By December they were ready to go. Pete decided to devote his vacation to the project and Loretta, an occupational therapist who works with children with disabilities up to age 3, set aside her



Loretta and Pete Seybert with a friend they met while delivering food and supplies to hurricane victims in New Orleans.

'We would go back in a heartbeat.'

scheduled time off to join him.

They left on December 13 and for the next three weeks each drove an emergency recovery vehicle (ERV) through the streets of New Orleans from Kenner, a suburb where the ERV staging area, the kitchen and supplies were located.

Each morning they would load blankets, dry snacks and 500 to 600 hot meals from the staging area run by volunteers from Southern Baptist churches and deliver them throughout the day to needy residents in New Orleans neighborhoods to which they were assigned.

Pete delivered to the Broadmoore section and Loretta to the Upper 9th Ward section of New Orleans.

"We worked from 7 a.m. to 7 or 8 p.m., announcing our arrival in an area with the loudspeakers with which the ERVs were equipped," says Pete.

"Each of us had one or two volun-

teers who would deliver the goods from the truck to the residents."

They bypassed areas close to restaurants as they did not want to undercut their business.

Loretta says she was surprised at how much need there was in the area even though they were there a couple of months after the hurricane struck the city.

"Many of the residents still did not have running water and gas," she explains.

"The utility companies were still working hard to get them up and running. People were unable to cook hot meals and avoided drinking the tap water even when it was available."

The Seyberts say the experience was really rewarding and they would go

back in a heartbeat. In fact, Pete adds, they hated to leave the neighborhoods in which they were working.

They became friendly with the residents and with the other volunteers from around the country and still keep in touch with them.

A highlight was Christmas Day when the community gave them gifts, including Mardi Gras beads, and the children drew thank-you cards for them to show their appreciation.

"We came back on New Year's Eve feeling they were among the most wonderful people we had met," says Loretta.

Clearly the people of New Orleans, thought the same of them, too.



LIBRARY, from Page 1

but recent moves have led them to take stronger action. They understand that the library system is under pressure from budgetary constraints, but they say they believe he has made poor choices that have led services to decline and have not resulted in cost savings.

"They believe that the director gets an idea, runs with it, moves on and does not ever stop to evaluate the short-term or even the long-term effects of what his actions have meant," says Council 2 Staff Representative Diana Prenguber. "They want to offer patrons services that reflect a gold standard, but are increasingly frustrated that management moves prevent them from doing so. They believe the gold standard is turning to brass."

The staff complaints cover several issues, but among the major ones is the move in the last year to cluster all libraries, Local president Susan Veltfort explains.

Clustering involves the reorganization of the library system so that two, three or more are grouped under a single manager. Instead of serving only one library, workers rotate

'They believe the gold standard is turning to brass'

among all the libraries in the cluster.

Library staff believes that the way in which clustering has been managed has caused it to fail as an effective way to operate and has contributed to the deteriorating quality of library service to the public.

Library patrons and staff are overwhelmingly opposed to clustering, Veltfort says.

"Schedules are drawn up without consultation with the staff, forcing some to commute long distances and others to have to work adverse and inefficient shifts," she says,

"For example, some who have never worked on Sundays and don't wish to do so are now being forced to do so, while others who want to work Sundays are not able to do so and so lose out on the premium pay they had been receiving."

Some involved in the clusters have had five different schedules in a year, workers say. In addition, the character of the libraries has become impersonal and less friendly as the staff is different each time a patron visits a library.

"The director and board offer no justification for this program that is tearing apart the neighborhood character of our libraries short of value and general 'budget issues' reasons; nor will the board members meet with us about this issue," a letter from a Local member to a King County Council member says.

Another issue involves the way in which expensive technology is selected without sufficient review and implemented before being thoroughly tested.