



March-April 2008

Have you heard about that "5% Solution"?

by Mary Austin

AFSCME Council 5 together with AFSCME International sponsored a Health Care Reform Conference February 22-23, 2008 in Bloomington, Minnesota. Most of this article comes from information they provided to attendees. Council 5 will be posting powerpoints/information from the conference on their website so everyone can benefit from the information. AFSCME Council 5 website is afscmemn.org. They said they would include a calculator so each of us can determine what percentage of our household income is going towards health care and now is a great time since we're all preparing to file our income tax forms.

AFSCME International rolled out a new attempt to make our health care affordable. This change will not happen at the bargaining table. The more people talk about health care and affordability, the more likely we'll find a real solution. The "5% Solution" is a philosophy; we need to define it. The government has determined that "affordability" in relation to housing is equal to 30% of a household's income. Why are some of us paying close to 20% of our income just for our health care (premiums and out of pocket expenses)?

AFSCME's greatest asset is its members. The health care industry's greatest asset is all the money they collect from us. The health care industry undermines our fight for affordable health care with millions of dollars spent on ads depicting fearful mythical situations. Let's start recognizing them for what they are.

Myth 1. "We will have no choice of doctor, health plan or clinic."

Truth: **We** define the availability; most of us are already very limited in our choices.

Myth 2. "We will lower our quality of care."

Truth: Are you happy with your level of care now? Statistics show that 45% of American patients do not receive the recommended care due to cost or limited insurance.

Myth 3. "Long waiting lines will result."

Truth: Right now many of us forego health care entirely because we can't afford it; what line is longer than that.

Myth 4. "It will promote unhealthy lifestyles."

Truth: The reality is that doctors will have incentives to help us achieve our goals rather than punishing us for our "bad" behavior.

Myth 5. "Big Brother."

Truth: At this beginning of the discussion, the government is envisioned only as a watchdog who has the power to force CEOs to do the right thing for their customers.

Myth 6. "Government is wasteful and creates red tape."

Truth: We are all public employees at this University, do you see yourself as lazy and inefficient in your job? Compare administrative costs between Medicare, about 3%, and the For-profits at up to 26%. Count yourself lucky, in Minnesota, our For-profits are only wasting about 10-15%.

Myth 7. "Competition reduces costs."

Truth: We are living/struggling in a competitive world. The only thing that is competitive is how low our wages can stay. Let's redefine competition to include efficiency and positive outcomes rather than how much the CEO gains financially.

Myth 8. "Less research and innovation will happen."

Truth: Working at a public research institute, we know that most of our money comes from the government. Private industries do not invest to the degree that the government does even though they have more money to spend and more of everything to gain. For-profits continue to invest in their CEOs rather than in research and development.

Myth 9. "Frivolous lawsuits will abound."

Truth: Doctors will be given time to do their job correctly and therefore if they amputate the wrong body piece, they deserve a hefty lawsuit.

Myth 10. "Coverage will be wasted on illegal immigrants."

Truth: We need to define who's covered under this plan. We could make a separate fund to cover 'visitors' to the country/state. If we think of our society as compassionate and caring, we should NEVER deny ANYONE the medical care they need.

I hear some of these myths on the radio already, mostly aimed at senior citizens right now. We need to be talking about these myths and possible ways to counteract them now because just like in 1993, the For-profits will throw all their resources to creating fear. Anger is a better response, anger motivates you; fear demoralizes you and leaves you hopeless. Change is hard but most of us are one accident or illness away from bankruptcy due to our healthcare system.

Talk to everyone you know about the need to make health care affordable to all. We should be angry about the state of health care in Minnesota and in the United States. **We can take control away from the For-profit corporations if we work together.** This is a great issue to get angry about and to stay angry about.

The Local is accepting names of people who are willing to go the AFSCME Day on the Hill on April 1 and 2...contact the local office for more information if you are interested.

AFSCME Day on the Hill, April 1st and 2nd

Lately you may have seen e-mails going out from the Office of Human Resource or your department about AFSCME Day on the Hill and wondered what it is. Day on the Hill is a lobbying day for AFSCME Council 5 Members from all over the state including U of M AFSCME Members. For Day on the Hill, AFSCME Members converge at the MN State Capitol and meet with our respective legislators to discuss issues of vital importance to us as public employees. Whether it is a budgetary issue or a piece of legislation it is important for us to let our Representatives know how these issues would affect us as AFSCME members.

During our recent "challenges" with the University Administration, it was made abundantly clear to us just how important it was to have a good working relationship with our Representatives. Despite the expressions of support by individual Legislators and their efforts at convincing the Bruininks Administration of the error of its ways, we were unable to achieve our ultimate goal of a good contract for our members. As a result, the AFSCME U of M Locals have made building our legislative power and presence at the Capitol a major goal for our members. Since we need your help in building that power, we STRONGLY encourage as many of our members who are interested in attending Day on the Hill, April 1st and 2nd, to sign-up by March 17th. Union Leave with Pay for April 2nd is being granted by the University so you won't lose any time from work. All we ask is a \$15 dollar contribution for each day you attend to cover the cost of lunch and supplies.

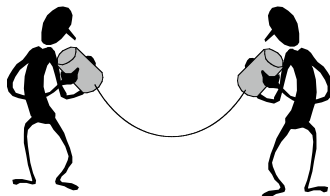
Remember, we are public employees and we want to have an impact on the budget priorities passed by the Legislature. We are also University employees and we want to be able to influence the selection and approval of Regents, four of whom will be selected in 2009. If we want to build our power as University AFSCME Members, then AFSCME Day on the Hill is a great first step in that journey. If you have any questions or want to sign-up for AFSCME Day on the Hill, please contact either our President Barb Bezat at union@afscme3937.org OR 612-379-3933 or JasonIversen3937@yahoo.com or 612-624-6368 before March 17th.

CATS!

What are CATs? No, not the musical by Andrew Lloyd Webber. A CAT is a member of our Campus Action Team. Many of you have already been doing CAT-work already by posting literature, attending meetings or talking to co-workers, but we wanted to support and formalize our activists into a strong, thriving joint network of techs and clericals.

We want to recruit members who are already activists as well as members who want to get involved in our unions here on campus. Our goal is to have CATs in each department, building and campus of this University. To reach that goal, we want to have a total of 250 CATs or one CAT for every ten members in the Technical and Clerical locals. Thus far we have recruited almost 100 CATs and have held two CAT orientation meetings, but we still need you as a member.

We are going to plan monthly meetings around campus for CATs and plan to offer further training sessions for interested members. If you are interested, have questions about being a CAT or about signing-up for union-related training, contact Jason Iversen at JasonIversen3937@yahoo.com or call 612-624-6368.



Officer Elections

As you might have noticed from the flier in our newsletter, our Local is having Officer elections in April. **All** of the elected positions are open for nominations. We especially need nominations for the Executive Board representatives for the East Bank, Medical Area and Out-state representatives, since we currently have vacancies. We also need nominations for the Officer position of Local Secretary.

Speaking from experience, becoming an officer really opens your eyes up to an entirely new world and offers a lot of great opportunities to make a difference. Since our local is democratically run, we need the ideas and energy of new Officers and Executive Board members to renew and strengthen our Local.

If you are at all interested or have any questions regarding what the duties for an Officer or Executive Board member are, please call our Local office at 612-379-3933 or contact JasonIversen3937@yahoo.com or 612-624-6368.

Know your rights!!! Prepare Yourself/Protect Yourself -- Call a steward!

You are entitled to a fair and objective investigation.

You have the right to have a steward with you at the meeting(s).

You are entitled to privately confer with a steward before making any statements or answering any question in the meeting.

You have the right to question any of management's evidence or proof of misconduct, including witnesses.

You are entitled to present your side of the situation.

We've heard recently from a number of co-workers who have been called into meetings with their supervisors or others. Sometimes, these meetings are a surprise, and sometimes you aren't even told why you've been asked to meet with him/her! **If this happens, call an immediate halt to the meeting by insisting a shop steward be present.**

You have a right to representation in certain situations at work. All employees are entitled to prior notice of what constitutes misconduct. There must be substantial evidence or proof of misconduct to justify any discipline. Work rules are to be fair, reasonable, and work-related. Rules, orders, and penalties must be equally applied to all employees in the unit. The progressive disciplinary steps outlined in the contract must be followed. Employees may challenge contractual violations, including disciplinary-related ones, through the grievance process. You have the right to your union's assistance. Use it and call a union steward!

What is a steward?

A steward is a volunteer member who is educated on the contract and about union issues. Our stewards provide representation when employees need assistance. When your co-workers are acting on your behalf as stewards, they are on equal footing with management because of the steward's special recognition stated in our contract. Use your steward as a resource.

If you have questions about work rules, a workplace situation or union activities consult with your union steward. If she/he doesn't know the answer, they will find it for you. The strength of any union depends on having a large, active, and educated membership. Stewards play a key role in achieving all these goals. As the number of educated members grows, so does the amount of influence we can exert on the University in order to effect positive change.

Contact your local union whenever you have a question or problem involving your workplace. Don't put your job, your reputation, or your peace of mind on the line. For more information consult the steward list on the web and visit the resources page of our web site.
<http://www.afscme3937.org/resources.shtml>

Benefits feedback

In a week or so, employees will be asked by the Benefits Advisory Committee to provide feedback on their healthcare systems and RxAmerica. Please do so! This is your opportunity to let the committee know of problems (or things you like) that can be worked on in the coming negotiation process with the vendors. Because of your comments about RxAmerica, improvements were made and concerns were worked on. I will again field the RxAmerica questions. Comments can be sent to: bacrx@umn.edu

Jody Ebert, Benefits Advisory Committee rep. for AFSCME

Health and Safety Survey Update

Our last newsletter included a survey addressing Health and Safety concerns. I've received a few responses - some recounting successes, some indicating a need for further communication and perhaps a problem-solving meeting. I'll be making contact with people as soon as I can. If you feel your situation is urgent, call me or call a steward!

One member reports success in convincing the department to switch from the old standard needles and syringes to the new safety needles for drawing blood. Good job! That action alone cuts down on a huge amount of hazardous opportunities. Members have had some success with ergonomic concerns but I hope they recognized the hazard and had it corrected BEFORE an injury was suffered.

While there are indeed established practices and procedures addressing exposure to asbestos and other construction issues, those practices and procedures can easily be ignored. Be vigilant if construction is scheduled for your area. Inquire as to whether a FM/CPPM project manager has been assigned and ask for the person's name. A review of the work area needs to be completed prior to any work beginning. Problems occur when departments think they can save money by doing it all themselves without the expertise of the specialists.

Other workers reported problems that seem to get resolved, but the new procedures fall to the wayside and the problems resurface. All the equipment we use to do our jobs should be safe and meet OSHA standards. If your job requires you to climb a step ladder/ladder, it must meet safety standards.

Smells, whether from chemicals used during cleaning, construction or from mold growth, accumulate in poorly ventilated areas and we know there are many of those around campus. Often one person is more sensitive to a certain range of smells than others and can call for help addressing the issue before it becomes a major problem.

I did not put a "return by" date on the survey. Use it any time or just contact me directly if you have any questions about health and safety at the University of Minnesota because time changes everything.

Keep yourself safe!

Mary Austin / Steward / 612-626-9462 / Austi006@umn.edu

Scholarships

The Minnesota AFL-CIO is proud to award its scholarship to five graduating high school seniors who are union members or the dependents of union members and to award two Martin Duffy Adult Learner tuition scholarships to Minnesota union members who are affiliated with the Minnesota AFL-CIO. The scholarship application deadline for both scholarships is April 30, 2008. For union members who wish to develop their leadership skills, two Labor Leadership grants (the Tobey Lapakko grant for women, and the Charles McKenna grant for men) will also be awarded. Applications will be reviewed at the May 27 meeting of the Minnesota AFL-CIO Community Services Committee.

Application and information forms available at the Minnesota AFL-CIO web site at www.mnaflcio.org. For questions, call the Minnesota AFL-CIO at 651-227-7647 or 1-800-652-9004. In addition, for questions about the Martin Duffy Adult Learner Scholarship, contact Joyce Hegstrom at Labor Education Service, U of M, 612-624-5020.

AFSCME Council 5 is also proud to award its scholarships including Richard Patterson Scholarship, the Robert Norberg scholarship, and the Clarence Moss scholarship. Check the web site for eligibility, application procedures, and deadlines at: <http://afscmemn.org/resources/scholarships/index.php>

These are wonderful opportunities to get financial help for advanced education.

Congratulations, Mel, on your retirement

After more than 31 years of dedicated service, Mel Chapin will be retiring from the University of Minnesota. He started working as a Principal Laboratory Machinist in the Mechanical Engineering Department and will be finishing his career as the Foreman of the Mechanical Engineering Student Shop. Mel was a union member and supported from the very beginning of our days back in the later 1980's. Mel's last day of work at the University was Monday, March 3rd. We wish you all the best!

Member reporters wanted!

At our Fall Council 5 convention, we passed a resolution aimed at getting more information from Locals around the state. The Council is looking for volunteer members to pass on news items and information about our Local, and contribute these to the Council 5 website, due to be redesigned and launched in early May. If you are interested, get in touch with the Local office (612-379-3933) or send an e-mail to: union@afscme3937.org

Job postings at Council 5

There are 2 openings for Field Representatives (Business agents) in Council 5. These positions are based out of the Duluth office. If you are interested in looking at these openings, there is additional information available on the Council web at: <http://afscmemn.org/>

FREE!!!

One computer monitor: ViewSonic model E771 14"

The Local union has upgraded its equipment and we hate to recycle something that someone else could use. If you're interested in the monitor, get in touch with the local office (612-379-3933) or union@afscme3937.org and we'll arrange to be here for you to pick it up! (Plus, you save us the \$\$ of recycling!)

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(vacant)

Crookston

(vacant)

ADDRESS CORRECTIONS NEEDED

We need your help to maintain an accurate list of member names and addresses. If you know of a U of Mn Technical Worker who is not receiving *Tech Talk* please tell us. Call 612-379-3933 or send an e-mail to: union@afscme3937.org with any corrections (send both old and new addresses.)

Thank you!

HAVE YOU SIGNED YOUR MEMBERSHIP CARD YET?

This union is run by employees of the University of Minnesota who, like yourself, have thought about the changes they would like to see in their workplaces. This union needs your support if we are going to put these changes into effect. Please take time to make sure you have signed and returned a membership card.

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