Save Our State Community Conversations

Proposed cuts to the state and federal budget could mean an economic crisis in Maryland in 2012. There have been nearly $7 billion in state budget cuts made over the last five years and some elected officials will push for even deeper cuts in 2012, despite the negative impact it would have on our communities.

Cuts have led to increased unemployment and less attention and care given to those who need it the most. Maryland needs growth and jobs, not more cuts to schools, public services, or health care. We must pursue a balanced approach to provide a solution that keeps our schools great, our quality of life secure, and our jobs here.

This crisis affects every Marylander and every community in the state. What can we do about it? How can we protect Maryland’s children, families in crisis, senior citizens, and public safety? In moments of crisis, either we pull together or fall apart.

Community conversations are being held across the state, from Hagerstown to Salisbury. Please join members of our community in Rockville on January 5 to discuss the challenges we face and the sensible solutions we need to keep moving Maryland forward.

Location: Thomas Farm Community Center
700 Fallsgrove Drive
Rockville, MD
Time: 6:00 p.m.—8:00 p.m.

Visit www.saveourstatemd.org to learn more and RSVP!

Sponsoring organizations:
ACLU-MD Education Reform Project • Advocates for Children and Youth • Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO • AFSCME-MD • AFSCME Council 67 • AFT Maryland • Maryland and DC Alliance of Retired Americans • Maryland Budget and Tax Policy Institute
Maryland Education Coalition • Maryland Nonprofits • Maryland Retired School Personnel Association • Maryland State Conference NAACP • Maryland State Education Association
Progressive Maryland • SEIU Local 500 • SEIU Maryland and DC State Council
UFCW Local 1994 MCGEO
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United Food & Commercial Workers
Local 1994
Municipal & County Government
Employees Organization

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Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Happy Holidays. As we close out 2011 and prepare for the coming year, it’s gratifying to be able to, at long last, report some good news about our negotiated health benefits and some encouraging signs about our current negotiations for new labor agreements which will be effective July 2012.

Health Care Task Force

First of all, the Montgomery County Health Care Task Force established by the County Council last June has adopted recommendations that track closely with Local 1994’s health care platform to contain costs by emphasizing preventive medicine and healthy lifestyles instead of cost shifting, and suggesting some important changes to harmonize the multiple health care plans covering 32,000 Montgomery County agency workers and their families. The Task Force report strengthens your union’s efforts to redirect the health care dialogue toward a sustainable path. The full text of the Task Force report is up on your Local’s website (www.mcgeo.org). Because of the importance of this subject, we will provide updates as necessary to keep you current on activity regarding health benefits. This report could impact the health benefits of Montgomery County Government, Housing Opportunities Commission and Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission bargaining unit members.

Gino Renne, President, UFCW Local 1994 MCGEO
Bargaining

We recently completed bargaining preparations with five separate employers by installing and training bargaining teams for Montgomery County Government, the Housing Opportunities Commission, the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Cumberland City Police and the Montgomery County Sheriffs Department. The teams are made up of a mix of seasoned and new grass-roots leaders, armed with a game plan that should produce positive results for the members of each of those units.

The Economy

There are early indicators that the persistent long economic nightmare that we’ve been living with for almost four years now is subsiding. Nationally, unemployment figures are falling—although, at over 8 percent, they are still too high. Consumers are feeling better about the future and are spending slightly more on goods and services. Like the national economy, Maryland’s economy is also beginning to rebound. Montgomery County has not yet published its budget expectations, but we can safely assume that the projected deficit should be more manageable and less painful than the ones for the last three years.

Multi-year Agreements

We intend to make a strong case for a multi-year agreement with all the employers with whom we are negotiating. Multi-year agreements will enable us to anchor our benefit packages while leaving the option to re-open talks on compensation issues if and when budget conditions stabilize. We want to be responsive to the sentiments we heard from members and from County citizens alike last year that they want to see a more collaborative approach to labor relations. We are encouraged that management is also interested in making a fresh start in the coming year. The County has appointed a new chief negotiator to lead the management side and we have secured agreement with the County to employ “interest based bargaining” which is a much more collaborative model on at least some aspects of the negotiations. If successful we will utilize this process with all employers in the future.

2011 Was a Difficult Year

We’re ending what has been a very difficult year on a positive note. However, like you, I remain disappointed and disturbed about the outcome of our 2011 Montgomery County contract, the efforts by the County Council to undermine our collective bargaining rights and Mr. Leggett’s unprecedented refusal to honor the outcome of our arbitration.

Some of you have asked: What’s the point of negotiating an agreement if the County Executive can toss it out with impunity? I share the frustration implicit in that question, but I submit—even though Mr. Leggett refused to implement the economic provisions of the agreement, and even though the County Council and its then President Valerie Ervin failed to challenge Leggett’s illegal decision—our 2011 contract established important job security provisions that prevented any layoffs of County workers and we significantly reduced the crippling wage and benefit cuts that the County Executive unilaterally included in his FY12 budget. Those, brothers and sisters, were major accomplishments.

It Ain’t Over ’til it’s Over

Furthermore, to quote Yogi Berra: “It ain’t over ’til it’s over.” Your union has the County in court and we intend to stay in court challenging the legality of what Leggett did. Our attorneys tell us that a final decision could take as long as three years. This court challenge has cost the union tens of thousands of dollars—but Leggett’s actions cost each of you personally thousands of dollars over the course of a career. We think that’s a principle worth fighting for and we will do so until justice is served. Additionally, we lodged 10 negotiability appeals related to the 2011 contract with the County’s Labor Relations Administrator and we expect decisions on those challenges at any time.

New Directions

As they say: If you do what you have always done, you’ll get what you always got. So, in the coming year, we’re taking some new directions. There may be some risks involved, but I am confident in our leadership team—your officers, staff, stewards and the hundreds of rank and file members who reliably step to the front when they are called on. Together, and with your continued support, 2012 could be a year filled with good news and real progress for you and your family.

In Solidarity,

Gino Renne
President/UFCW International VP
Jurisdictions in the Metro Washington area are bracing for a Wal-Mart invasion. The company is planning to locate six new stores in Washington, D.C.—five of them in the next two years; two in Montgomery County and more in Northern Virginia. Wal-Mart has been operating a store in Germantown for several years, along with four stores in Prince Georges County and another in Frederick. It’s all part of Wal-Mart’s latest business plan to saturate urban markets the way it has come to dominate markets in small town America.

To counteract this invasion, union leaders, community activists and some elected officials in various locations around the country have banded together to develop Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs) that—on their face—would appear to set conditions for approval for Wal-Mart’s entry into their markets with certain concessions.

Legislation establishing a CBA process has been introduced in the Montgomery County Council, but Local 1994 remains skeptical about whether the bill would have the teeth necessary to make Wal-Mart comply.

Until recently, Wal-Mart has made a practice of simply refusing to sign on to these agreements.

“The CBAs in other jurisdictions haven’t worked,” said Local 1994 President Gino Renne. “And I don’t see how Councilmember Ervin’s proposed CBA is any different. There’s no enforceability.”

Local 1994 is convinced that Ervin is playing a shell game with this bill. She hasn’t stated her position on Wal-Mart’s expansion in the county. She’s using the bill as cover.

“She’s waffled on the bill, on her feelings about the Wal-Mart in Aspen Hill, on all of it,” Renne added. “She’s hiding behind political double-speak.”

Scores of CBAs have been established around the country, not all of them aimed at Wal-Mart. Typically, a CBA will stipulate that the company will strive to hire minorities, will establish adequate pay rates, offer health insurance to employees, support community organizations such as youth groups, provide public transportation subsidies, and so on.

In late November, the company apparently broke its longstanding policy by signing on to a CBA developed in Washington, D.C. Although the D.C. agreement sets lofty goals, it also allows substantial wiggle room for Wal-Mart to undermine those goals. The final paragraphs of the agreement, for instance, assert: “Any intentions of comments contained in this document are subject and contingent upon business conditions that will continue to ensure a productive relationship with the city and its residents.”

Montgomery County’s CBA with Wal-Mart is much weaker. It contains no provisions for minority hiring, no provisions for health insurance for its workforce, and no guarantees that the store would pay a living wage for the area. In fact, much of Wal-Mart’s workforce in other areas of the country make so little that they qualify for food stamps and Medicare coverage, which are paid by taxpayers like you and I.

Once Wal-Mart secures all its locations will it continue to honor the promises it made? And, will the coalition or the city that worked to develop the agreement even find a way to enforce broken promises?

Wal-Mart has been an enormous and malignant presence in the U.S. retail world for more than 20 years now. It continues to be one of the largest employers in the nation—accounting for more than $190 billion in groceries in 2009, more than the next three largest chains put together. The effects of Wal-Mart’s huge footprint in the marketplace are devastating—not merely for the negative impact on workers’ wages and working conditions, but also on the characteristics of the U.S. retail industry. Wal-Mart does not abide any competition. Its purpose in selecting sites and targeting markets is to drive out small community or regional chains and small town independent retailers that cannot match Wal-Mart’s prices. One of the proposed locations is across the street from a UFCW Local 400-represented Safeway where the workers have living wages, health insurance and job security. Wal-Mart is responsible for about one-third of all imported merchandise—meaning it is the largest single driver of America’s trade deficit.
Local 1994 Supports Marriage Equality

UFCW Local 1994 MCGEO recently sent a letter to members of the state legislature in support of proposed legislation to allow gay and lesbian couples the right to marry in Maryland.

“Families, no matter their demographics, deserve the right to protect their family interests,” the letter read. “Without the freedom to marry, gay and lesbian couples do not receive the same recognition or protections for their families as other couples.”

The letter, signed by Local 1994 President Gino Renne, pointed out that “civil unions” don’t give the same protections as “marriage.”

“Marriage” is a civil rights issue, not a religious issue, the union letter notes, adding that a state sanctioned marriage gives protections and recognition to spouses – in hospital emergency rooms, funeral homes, and when discussing benefits with employers; while “civil unions” and “domestic partnerships” are not always recognized.

At one time, the State of Maryland refused to allow interracial marriage or to recognize interracial marriages from other states as “legal.” African Americans were treated as second-class citizens. Those restrictions are long gone. Yet Maryland is still forcing the same second class status on gay and lesbian Marylanders by refusing their right to marry.

“It’s time to let our prejudices go. I urge you to support full equality for Maryland’s lesbian and gay couples.”

Local 1994 MCGEO has negotiated domestic partner benefits for its represented workers for many years.

Young Trade Unionists Train for Mobilization, Energizing Young Workers

Young members and staff of UFCW Local 1994 attended a conference for young trade unionists Sept. 29-Oct. 2 in Minneapolis, Minn. Jamele McLaurin, M-NCPPC Steward, and Ivan Downing, Montgomery County Corrections, attended the conference along with Local 1994 Staff Representatives Josh Ardison and Carlos Mellott.

The conference grew out of the Next Up Summit that the AFL-CIO sponsored in 2010, which created the Young Worker Advisory Council (YWAC). The Next Up program and YWAC had four goals:

• Developing a toolkit for young workers to use in starting or leading a young worker group at the local level
• Connecting young workers with opportunities for training and mentoring
• Developing a brand that resonates with young workers
• Identifying new ways to bring young people into the labor movement.

Of the 800 participants, the diverse group consisted of about 300 attendees who were not members of a labor union. This included youth activists from the A. Philip Randolph Institute, Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, Jobs With Justice and student groups such as the Student Labor Action Project, just to name a few.

“I was amazed at the scope of the program,” said McClaurin. “There were union people from South Africa, South America and just about every U.S. state. It’s great to know that you can be a part of something so vast.”

The program of the summit was also very diverse, with workshops such as: How Unions and Immigrants Are Fighting Together for Workers’ Rights, Art and Activism, and Power Analysis: Know Your Target. Another exciting aspect of the summit was the “Un-Conference” which gave participants the opportunity to hold their own workshops. The “Un-Conference” breakouts allowed for frank and honest discussions about topics like racism and homophobia in the workplace and the issues that young union members often have in their locals.

Ardison and Mellott leafleted the conference with a flyer educating the attendees about Council President Valerie Ervin’s anti-union actions.

“We realized that many of the participants could be instrumental in supporting our efforts to educate the public about Councilmember Ervin’s anti-union behaviors,” said Ardison. “If she has wider political aspirations, our friends in the YWAC could help us.”
Save Our State: A Coalition of Concerned Maryland Organizations

After the last legislative session in Maryland gutted many of the programs designed to protect Maryland’s most vulnerable residents, a coalition of concerned organizations got together to create “Save Our State.” There have been nearly $7 billion in state budget cuts made over the last five years and the 2012 proposed budget could cut even more.

Cuts have led to increased unemployment and less attention and care given to those who need it the most. Any gains Maryland has seen in private sector employment are more than offset by cuts in the public sector.

Save Our State’s goal is to focus on growth and jobs, not more cuts to schools, public services, or health care.

“We must pursue a balanced approach to provide a solution that keeps our schools great, our quality of life secure, and our jobs here.”

— Sue Esty, assistant director of AFSCME Maryland

Montgomery’s Public Employee Unions Urge Council to Renew Energy Tax

The Montgomery County Education Association, SEIU Local 500 and the Montgomery County Association of Administrators and Principals have joined forces with Local 1994, FOP Lodge 35, and the IAFF Local 1664 to urge the Council to extend the energy tax. In a letter to new Council President Roger Berliner, the Unions asked the Council to re-affirm the current energy tax rates and to extend the rates without a “sunset provision.”

The Unions plan to continue working together on mutual concerns, especially in the area of revenue enhancements for Montgomery County.
Cumberland City Bargaining to Start in January

The Cumberland City Police Department will start bargaining for its next contract after the New Year, when the city officially appoints its new city administrator.

The union bargaining team consists of Doug Menapace, MCGEO VP Bob Lehman and Cumberland City police officers Bob Martin, Jeremy Hedrick, Korey Rounds and Andy Linthicum. The team will review bargaining surveys and formulate its proposals based on the membership’s priorities. The Union’s focus will be to level the playing field with respect to health benefit copays while protecting benefit levels as well as reinstating wage increases which have been suspended for the last few years due to budget challenges.

UFCW Local 1994 MCGEO Members Reenact Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire Trial With Local High School Debate Team

The 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire was one of the most devastating and deadly workplace fires in U.S. History, killing 146 mostly immigrant women. Prince Georges Memorial Library System Bowie Branch head of adult programming and UFCW Local 1994 member Doug Adolphsen recently directed the mock trial of factory owners Max Blanck and Isaac Harris with the help of the debate team at Montrose Christian school and local fire officials.

The students played the role of the prosecutors and defense team as well as acting as some of the witnesses during the trial. Adolphsen played the role of Max Blanck. PGCMLS employee and Local 1994 member Sue Smithers played the role of Frances Perkins – a witness to the event who later became the Secretary of Labor under Franklin Roosevelt. Local 1994 Field Representative Josh Ardison played the role of Samuel Gompers, then head of the American Federation of Labor. The roles of fire investigators were played by members of the Prince George’s County Fire Department. A number of other PGCMLS employees and Local 1994 members participated. The jury was picked by lottery from the audience. PGCMLS Shop Steward Eileen Taddonio and New Carrollton branch employee Arlene Talley also performed.

Montrose Christian School students acted as witnesses during the mock trial.

The judge, portrayed by former Prince George’s County Circuit Court Judge William D. Missouri, admonished Samuel Gompers (Ardison) for “proselytizing” on the stand. Gompers (Ardison) had declared loudly, “If these women had a contract, had the right to bargain their wages and working conditions, this would not have happened!”

Also, the Fire Chief was almost held in contempt for calling Max Blanck a liar while he was testifying. Frances Perkins called the event “life changing,” she was so moved by it, evidenced in her later work at the U.S. Department of Labor.

Defense won their case—NOT GUILTY, based purely on the law at that time...

Adolphsen has put on four such mock trials over the years with Montrose’s debate team coach Douglas Kump. In 2009, they reenacted the trial of abolitionist John Brown.

Several Arbitrations in the Works

Members from the Sheriff’s Department have been engaged in a battle with the Department over their Reduction in Force (RIF) rights. All other County Government employees have the right to seek any open position in the government in case of a RIF, while the Sheriff’s Dept. restricts their employees to seeking new jobs only in the judicial branch. This severely limits their ability to compete for a wider pool of possible vacancies during a RIF situation.

“The Department is limiting the mobility of these dedicated men and women,” said Doug Menapace, Local 1994’s field service coordinator. “They deserve the same flexibility as other government employees, especially when it comes to a life-altering situation like a RIF.”
Senseless Tax Policies

Does it make sense to roll back Maryland’s corporate tax rate from 8.25 percent by a quarter percent while the economy is still struggling? And to continue to roll it back for several years until it levels out at six percent? That’s what State Senator Edward Kasemeyer, Chairman of the Senate’s Budget and Tax Committee, is proposing in the next state legislative session and, no, it doesn’t make any sense.

Kasemeyer suggests the rollback will make Maryland more attractive to businesses. Maryland is plenty attractive in its own right. According to the 2010 Census, Maryland is the wealthiest state in the nation and in personal per capita income, it ranks fourth. An annual ranking by financial research firm Phoenix Marketing International cites Maryland as the home to the most millionaires per capita in the nation.

A local blogger, Todd Eberly, put it well when he said Maryland was a place “where millionaires play and the working class pay.”

He’s right. His blog The Freestater (http://freestaterblog.blogspot.com) pointed out that there are approximately 173,000 millionaire households in Maryland. Yet the legislature is still exploring another round of more regressive tax policies.

I don’t understand why these supposedly “progressive” legislators keep proposing rollbacks to make Maryland more attractive to business. It just isn’t necessary. Not only that, it’s dangerous to the vital public services that keep Maryland attractive to its residents and keep our middle class strong.

Even Governor O’Malley is throwing his support behind two or three major tax proposals that will hit Maryland’s working families hard. Maryland residents will likely face another hike in gas taxes, along with recent increases in toll rates. Additionally, we will probably see proposals to raise the “flush” tax, car titling and registration fees, and auto emissions testing fees in the next legislature.

The prevailing thinking is that the legislature will not support an increase in the income tax for the 173,000 millionaire households for fear of driving them out of the state! That argument has as much validity as those who shill for millionaires and corporations by saying that you can’t raise taxes on the so-called “job creators.” Where are the jobs?

Let me suggest that these folks aren’t going to leave Maryland when we’ve got the strongest public schools in the nation, proximity to the Nation’s Capitol that can’t be rivaled and access to a host of other beautiful amenities. However, they will leave if we continue to erode the public service and social service networks that serve citizens in the “99¼” who live well below the millionaire standard of living.

What we need to do is make Maryland better for small businesses and working families. We need to serve the underserved. We need to save our services by implementing progressive tax policies. We’ve all heard about Warren Buffett and his willingness to pay more of his income in taxes. I can guarantee that many of Maryland’s millionaires are willing to pay more. We wouldn’t have such a saturation of people who identify themselves as “liberal” in polls if they weren’t at least a little bit public spirited and empathetic to the concepts of democracy, fairness and a more equitable distribution of wealth.

Keeping the Dream Act Alive

The Dream Act, which was passed by both houses of the Maryland legislature in April, was about to become law when an anti-immigrant “advocacy” group called Help Save Maryland, working with Republican lawmakers, launched an online campaign to try to prevent it from being implemented. The drive garnered more than 100,000 electronic signatures, resulting in the suspension of the law until a statewide public referendum can be held next year.

Local 1994, along with Casa de Maryland and other immigrant supporters, is working to remove the roadblocks to implementing the law.

“We care about this bill because it helps Maryland kids,” said Dream Act supporter Kim Propeack of Casa de Maryland. “We believe in education—the roots of an informed community, a better compensated workforce, and a great societal equalizer.”

“Our schools are better when everyone has a fighting chance, our communities are safer when everyone has a fighting chance, our economy thrives for everyone when all have a chance to advance,” Propeack added.

Under the Maryland DREAM Act, students can attend a state college or university at in state tuition rates as long as their families can prove that they have paid Maryland income taxes, the students themselves are registered for the draft, and that the students qualify for college admission to college. Students who are not citizens would remain ineligible for public scholarships and loans under the Act.

Local 1994 Executive Director Bob Stewart points out that, despite the hurdles these students face, they thrive. “These Maryland kids are in school with our kids, worship at our churches, and play on sports teams with us. They are our neighbors and friends.”

Stewart also predicts that, if the far right is successful with this campaign, there will be no limit to what they will put up for a ballot referendum. “Today it is the MD DREAM Act, tomorrow it may be employee pensions. The petitioners of this campaign have already committed that if they are successful with this, they will put one progressive issue up to a vote every year,” Stewart said.
Local 1994 Requests Audit of M-NCPPC Health Care Trust Fund

Local 1994 is asking for an audit of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission after M-NCPPC representatives came to the union in September demanding that the union make changes to the healthcare plan. M-NCPPC claimed that the health care trust fund is $7.5 million in the hole and that changes were needed immediately to avoid disaster. The Commission insisted on recouping the deficit by shifting the costs onto the backs of Local 1994 members.

The Commission gave the union 48 hours to agree to changes. Their demands weren’t detailed, nor had the Commission ever approached the union before about possible problems with the fund. Regardless, a $7.5 million deficit represents one fourth of the entire health care trust fund of $30 million.

After the Union tried to communicate with the commissioners regarding the irrational demands, Commissioners met behind closed doors to discuss how to proceed. Not only did the Commissioners hide their discussion from the public, they posted police outside the meeting to keep the public away from the meeting.

Local 1994 is refusing to be bullied by the Commission. The union wrote to Maryland State Delegates Tom Hucker and Aisha Braveboy to request an audit of the fund.

In letters to the commissioners, the union requested clarification on the supposed deficit and questioned the need for such urgency when details were sketchy. In one letter, the union pointed out that at a September 6th meeting of the County’s multi-agency health care task force, the deficit wasn’t mentioned. M-NCPPC’s report to the task force didn’t show any sense of urgency about the fund nor reference shortfalls at all.

When the Commission initially approached the union, M-NCPPC’s executive director claimed that the plan for shifting health care costs is not subject to bargaining.

“Unilateral changes in the pay and benefits of our represented members are a violation of the collective bargaining agreement,” wrote Local 1994 President Gino Renne, in one of his communications with the Commission. “This is bad faith bargaining.”

Renne pointed out that the men and women employed by the Commission are among the lowest wage workers in all of the county agencies, in both Montgomery and Prince Georges’ Counties. They’ve endured days of furloughs. They’ve also watched their workloads grow dramatically as positions go unfilled and others are eliminated.

“One of our members faced termination for putting the wrong type of gas in a weed whacker,” pointed out Local 1994 Field Representative Josh Ardison. “Yet they can’t account for millions and nobody is going to be blamed? What kind of accountability is that?”

Local 1994’s health care consultant has done a cursory study of the M-NCPPC health plan and has told the union that it may be ‘riddled with wasteful spending’. Local 1994 is asking for an audit of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission after M-NCPPC representatives came to the union in September demanding that the union make changes to the healthcare plan. M-NCPPC claimed that the health care trust fund is $7.5 million in the hole and that changes were needed immediately to avoid disaster. The Commission insisted on recouping the deficit by shifting the costs onto the backs of Local 1994 members.

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Shift Differential Arbitration

In Corrections, two arbitrations are still pending. The Shift Differential that employees used to enjoy prior to the implementation of the DOCR’s new payroll system and the job matrix that is also in doubt. Employees all over the County have been affected by the shift differential problems but employees in Corrections and Security seem especially affected.
The protest that began as Occupy Wall Street has now bloomed into a mass movement spanning more than 300 cities nationwide. Tens of thousands of people have taken to the streets to protest corporate greed and demand good jobs now.

The movement is spreading like wildfire, with Americans standing up for economic justice across the nation. This is a movement started by ordinary Americans, fed-up with the growing inequality in this country - people who simply want good jobs and a shot at the American Dream. The UFCW shares that vision for America.

The people ‘occupying’ cities across the country are workers, students, and the unemployed. They are our friends and relatives, our neighbors and co-workers. They are fighting for the same things we are: good jobs, fairness, and an end to corporate greed and attacks on workers. And it’s part of a larger movement, one that started earlier this year as workers fought back against corporate greed and right-wing politicians in Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, and across the nation.

In Wisconsin, hundreds of thousands of workers and outraged community members stormed the capitol in Madison after anti-worker politicians rammed through legislation attacking the rights of workers. In Ohio, over 1.3 million signatures were gathered to repeal Ohio’s SB 5. Corporate America has launched an unprecedented attack on our jobs and our rights, but the other 99% aren’t just rolling over.

So exactly what do we – the 99% – have to be so angry about? To begin with: worker productivity has been rising over the past decade, but wages have remained stagnant while the cost of health care has skyrocketed, leaving the average American struggling to make ends meet. Meanwhile, the gap between the richest 1% and the rest of us has gotten even wider.

What we have seen over the past few weeks is more and more ordinary Americans standing up and demanding their share of the success that’s being hoarded by the wealthiest 1% of the country. UFCW has been encouraging its members and local unions to join Occupy actions in their communities. We are proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with these brave Americans as they fight to make America a better, more just nation for all ages.”

Who are you gonna call?
Got an organizing lead? Someone you know—a neighbor, friend or relative—stuck in a rut on a non-union job? Call Local 1994 Organizing Coordinator Amy Millar (301) 977-2447, or e-mail: amillar@mcgeo.org. Give us the particulars and we’ll follow up.

Call Local 1994 today! 1-800-948-0654
A Different Way to Negotiate: Interest-Based Bargaining

Last year the Legett Administration engaged very little in the way of substantial negotiations. The negotiations primarily consisted of handing paper back and forth between the County negotiators and the Union. There was little interest on the County’s side to even listen to our proposals. This year, Montgomery County’s new chief negotiator came to us and proposed we try interest-based bargaining. We knew that something needed to be different this year, so we agreed.

Commissioner Bill McFadden from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS) trained us and the county in the process. We will be using a “modified version” of interest-based bargaining for our Montgomery County bargaining. For the Maryland-National Capitol Park and Planning Commission, the Housing Opportunities Commission and Cumberland City, we are engaging in traditional bargaining.

Interest-based bargaining is supposed to be more flexible than traditional bargaining. We won’t lock into predetermined issues and bargaining positions. We start with identifying problems and our interests underlying the problems, along with the interests of management. We look for mutual ground. We look for mutual goals. We try to work within our commonalities.

After interests are identified, the parties need to work together cooperatively to try to figure out the best ways to meet those interests. We’ll brainstorm all the options anyone can think of without criticizing or dismissing anything initially. Both sides will come up with ideas for meeting interests and needs. The goal is a win-win outcome, giving each side as much of their interests as possible, and enough, at a minimum that each side sees the outcome as a win, rather than a loss.

Not all areas of the contract will lend themselves to this process. Among the possible topics that do fit, however, are the issues related to chronically ill employees who lose pay after using all their sick leave.

Union Interest: to protect the income of employees.
Employer Interest: to retain loyal and long-term employees.

Possible Solutions:

- Employees may donate some of their personal accumulated sick leave to the chronically ill employees.
- The employer may provide short term disability insurance.
- They may set up a sick leave bank.
- Employees may borrow sick leave in advance of earning it.
- Employees may receive half pay while on leave beyond accumulated sick leave.

This is just an example of one topic that could be explored in the interest based process. Others might be workplace security, health and wellness programs, conflict resolution steps, mediation for grievances, performance rating systems, even reviewing work processes. We will definitely address the classification process and Labor/Management Relations Committee groups in interest based bargaining.

That’s not to say we don’t have other priorities that might be most effectively addressed in more traditional bargaining when negotiations get underway. Our top priority is to recover some of what we lost when austerity was the word of the day. We also need to sustain and lock up job security. We have not lost a single member to a mandatory layoff. And we must continue that record. For members who question the value of collective bargaining, let’s be clear: We’re at 100 percent in the area of job security. If you didn’t have the ability to engage in bargaining on workforce reductions, you wouldn’t see this happening.

We’re going to wholeheartedly pursue securing multi-year agreements. Single year agreements require us to be constantly in bargaining. Multi-year agreements will allow us to focus on working for you in other areas. It will use fewer of the county’s resources. It will just give us all a chance to breathe and focus our resources on other representational areas.
Montgomery County Health Care Task Force:
Taking on Health Care Costs in a Positive Way

Experience of Health Care Task Force Demonstrates How Management and Unions Can Work Together

Health care—costs, quality and coverage—like the weather, is something everyone talks about but no one seems to do anything about it…until now.

Last summer, in a move that almost no one seemed to notice, the Montgomery County Council created a “Task Force on Employee Wellness and Consolidation of Agency Group Insurance Plans.” The Council set two targets for the Task Force to address: (1) Employee wellness and disease prevention programs, and (2) Consolidation of plan design and administration. Each area was addressed by a subcommittee.

In a series of weekly meetings that stretched from July 1 through November 29, Task Force members on the Wellness subcommittee reviewed options for implementing wellness and disease management programs. They also examined the experience of other jurisdictions in improving employee health and heading off illnesses to produce positive results such as reduced absenteeism and increased productivity, focused on health care claims and chronic disease, and analyzed the costs of managing chronic diseases which were found, as a general rule, to be responsible for more than 80 percent of the expenditures of health care dollars.

A second subcommittee—The Consolidation subcommittee—looked into ways to control or reduce costs, and improve the management and delivery of health benefits through coordination in purchasing to achieve economies of scale, shared information and unified bidding procedures to compare vendor offerings, improve efficiencies and communications.

“The Council deserves credit for setting this process in motion,” said Local 1994 President Gino Renne, “and the members of the Task Force deserve credit for an excellent job.”

Renne hailed the recommendations as the first-ever recognition of the need to emphasize wellness. “For more than a decade now, Local 1994 has tried to negotiate this point at the bargaining table but government has refused to adopt the concept. We have long maintained that you cannot get control of health care costs unless and until you deal with employee wellness. We have tried to persuade the County to adopt incentives encouraging healthier lifestyles to reduce chronic disease and health education, which will, in turn, cut costs. Cost shifting is not a remedy,” he said.

In several sections of the report, the Task Force noted the important role that collective bargaining serves in sustaining and delivering health benefits.

“The collective bargaining process has been an influential element in the development of the current system of health care benefits,” the report declared.

Renne said Local 1994 wanted to see a more aggressive approach toward coordination and consolidation of administration of plans. Nevertheless, Renne said, the Union is optimistic that the momentum created by the Task Force will continue over time to keep a focus on wellness programs, administrative costs and coordination issues.

“Our Union intends to use the volumes of information and knowledge that was developed in this process and continuously work to improve the quality of plans provided to our members while we attack unnecessary costs, waste and inefficiency,” Renne said.

Local 1994 members can access the full text of the report of the Task Force on Employee Wellness and Consolidation of Agency Group Insurance Programs through the Local 1994 website (www.mcgeo.org).

An extensive examination of how Montgomery County provides health care benefits for 32,000 employees in each of its agencies and bi-county organizations has resulted in a series of recommendations to be considered by the County Council in 2012. In all, County health care programs serve 100,000 people when retirees and dependents are included.

The work product of the Health Care Task Force—25 individuals from management, unions representing County workers, and individuals selected as “public” participants—contains four basic recommendations enumerated in the final Task Force report, issued on December 2, 2011. Those recommendations include:

- Collection and analysis of data on health care claims among the 100,000 employees, retirees and dependents covered by health insurance plans sponsored by County agencies.
- Development and promotion of a workplace culture that values wellness and encourages partnering among employees, employers and health care providers to improve health outcomes.
- Implementation of wellness and disease management programs based on best practices, to include outcome measures related to better management of chronic conditions.
- Recognition that there are no simple solutions to bending the health care cost curve downward; and that improvements will take time, may require upfront investment and will likely be incremental.
Secretary-Treasurer’s Report

Workplace Stresses Straining Relationships

by Yvette Cuffie

About once a month, we see one of those awful newspaper or television accounts of a worker who “just goes off” on the job, pulls a gun or multiple guns and starts shooting up the workplace. It could be in a warehouse or an insurance office, or even in a government building.

Those shootings and attacks are the extreme situations, but there are also a large number of less explosive incidents that flare up when stress and pressure become too much for an individual to bear. Subtle warning signs might be tears or emotional outbursts, uncharacteristic, moody behavior. A troubled worker will often blow up around folks who don’t have any idea that the troubled worker is having a problem with someone else in the office. Those are the warning signals that we need to heed before bigger tragedies happen.

In today’s workplace, each of us is constantly being asked to do more with less. And, no matter what, all of us come as a package. When things are not right at work, we usually drag those problems home with us, and vice versa.

Most of the worst incidents follow a pattern: the worker is chastised, disciplined or counseled by a supervisor, or bullied and teased by co-workers. He (or sometimes she) leaves the office, gets the weapon or weapons and returns to blow folks away. If we examine these incidents closely, we typically find that there were warning signs months or even years before, but for any number of reasons no one took note.

Statistics on violence-related workplace deaths and injuries are difficult to come by. OSHA estimates that workplace rage incidents caused around 3,000 workplace deaths between 2006 and 2010.

The most notorious are worker-on-worker, but there are also incidents where health care professionals are attacked by patients or of domestic violence committed at a spouse’s workplace. Those of us who deal directly with the public are often the target of frustration and anger that can easily escalate into physical violence. The point is that many of us are vulnerable to sudden violence at work.

Regardless of the source of a physical threat—whether it comes from attacks by others, disease or accidents—the employer is ultimately responsible for maintaining a safe and healthy workplace. At the same time, you and your co-workers have an intermediate duty to yourselves and to each other to be aware of the kinds of situations that can lead to eruptions of violence and to take steps to avoid such situations.

Here at Local 1994, we have noticed an uptick in reports of friction on the job that seem to track right along with the stress of added workloads and budget cuts. Assessing blame for the source of the stress is less important than taking steps to reduce or eliminate it. In a few cases, the Union has been able to work with supervisory staff and union members to head off trouble—interviewing the workers on the job, assessing the causes of negativity and, once we know the circumstances, helping to develop resolutions.

Life and health are precious above all. Regardless of the crush of deadlines and fiscal pressures, we all need to take the time to show our fellow members, co-workers, and supervisors that we understand and appreciate them all—even when we disagree. A little understanding and kindness goes a long way. Try it. You’ll like it.

Workplace Safety Training

Local 1994 is training 20 shop stewards in workplace safety in January. The training will be conducted by Sharon Simon from the National Labor College.
Welcome New Field Representatives


Nuccio has experience working with SEIU and the Amalgamated Transit Union. He also worked for the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO during the 2008 elections to turn out labor voters. He graduated from Saint Mary’s College in southern Maryland with a degree in Political Science.

As teaching assistant at the University of Delaware, Yeagley worked with CWA Local 1104’s Education Division to attempt to unionize her co-workers. Yeagley has also worked as a community organizer at a national non-profit. She minored in Spanish in college and has a psychology degree from Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Council Sues Board of Elections Over Police Referendum

The Montgomery County Police were successful in gathering enough signatures to place effects bargaining on the 2012 ballot but the County is suing the Board of Elections over the validity of the signatures on the petition. The Council had stripped effects bargaining rights from the police in July. Effects bargaining allowed the FOP to negotiate with police management over management decisions that would have an effect on their work.

Councilmembers claimed that the police collecting the signatures misrepresented the petition to the signees and quickly hired a $225 per hour lawyer to fight the petition.

“This is a waste of taxpayer money, pure and simple,” said Local 1994 President Gino Renne. “The ballot referendum will be straightforward and the voters of Montgomery County can decide for themselves whether to restore the bargaining rights that the council stripped away.”

Members Complain About Edison Park Building Renovation

A large number of Local 1994 members, employees of the Dept. of Transportation, are complaining of illnesses after Montgomery County moved them into the new home of the County’s Public Safety headquarters before completing renovations on the building. The building needed extensive renovation to properly house the various public safety departments, but the County still moved hundreds of employees to the building before the renovation was completed.

In a letter to the County, Local 1994 President Gino Renne asked that the County reassign the workers to another building while the renovations were underway.

“I am extremely concerned to learn that the county has placed a large number of our members in harm’s way by assigning them to work in a building currently undergoing massive renovations,” wrote Renne. “We have received an unprecedented number of complaints, from concerns about asbestos abatement, inordinate amounts of dust at their work stations, having to step around building materials, excessive noise, to toxic roofing tar vapors. There has been no shortage of workplace illnesses as a result as well.”

The union has met with risk management specialists and requested air quality studies. The risk management specialist concluded that the air quality was within acceptable guidelines, but the Union is still concerned for its members’ health.

“When does it stop?” Renne asked. “Our members should have never been placed in this environment until after the entire renovation was completed.”
Members of Local 1994’s various bargaining teams participated in training in November. The training was conducted by the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service and led by FMCS Commissioner Bill McFadden.

Montgomery County’s bargaining team members:
- Gilberto Zelaya
- Diana Ward
- Mike McCullough
- James Rowe
- Mike Shubert
- Raymun Lee
- Mark Terry
- Kermit Leibensperger
- Craig Ferguson
- Denise Bruskin-Gambrell
- Jody Menick
- Barbara Pinnock
- Mike Marx
- Bob Lehman
- Harold Scheid

Alternates to Montgomery County’s team:
- Quinton Strange
- Kimberly Chatman
- Egon Lawrence
- Mark Myrick
- Tina Shubert
- Nelvin Ransome
- Shri Gondhalekar
- Kristine Fessenden
- Sue Cohen
- Patricia Vogel
- Heidi Wallace
- Dianne Betsey
- Mike Trigiani
- John Smoak
- Sean Collins
- Tony Thomas
- Mike Mattingly
- Christian Modispatcher
- Lois Kinder

Montgomery County Committee members are:
- Conor Toole
- Jamie Lopez
- Katrina Hood
- Robert Curry
- Sam Breckenridge
- Stephanie Baker
- Terri Miller
- Tony Thomas
- Wright Jolly

Members of the HOC bargaining team:
- Lecia Stein
- Sal Danmugawa
- Silvia Zaldivar
- Christopher Smith
- Paulette Kee-Dudley
- Alethia Cooper
- Lorenzo Rivero

The primary members of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning team are:
- Marjorie Brown
- Bobby Walker
- Aaron Crawford
- Jamel McLaurin

M-NCPPC alternate members:
- Brian Souders
- Patrick Moran
- Patricia Steck
- Darryl Washington
- Stevie “G” Harrell
UFCW International Union Endorses Obama in 2012

“The 1.3 million members of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union are ready to fight for the future of our country and to stand with leaders who will stand up for working families. President Barack Obama is that leader,” said UFCW President Joseph T. Hansen, in a prepared statement.

“President Obama has stood up for the jobless, the uninsured, the middle class taxpayer, Medicare recipients, working women, and for accountability from Wall Street.”

He said UFCW members are “ready to mobilize” in support of Obama’s re-election and “to elect more leaders who will stand with him in Congress and statehouses across the country.”

UFCW Local 1994 Endorses State Senator Rob Garagiola in 6th Congressional District Race

UFCW Local 1994 has joined with other labor unions in the area in endorsing Sen. Rob Garagiola in his run for the 6th Congressional District seat. Garagiola is running for Rep. Roscoe Bartlett’s seat. Redistricting has left Bartlett, a Republican, more vulnerable.

“Del. Gariagola has a good record of supporting a strong middle class and strong family-supporting jobs,” said Local 1994 President Gino Renne. “We’re confident he will continue his good work in Congress.”

Gariagola points to his working class background while campaigning.

“I’ve worked minimum wage jobs, waited tables and unloaded trucks all through high school, college and law school. I understand hard work and how hard it is to raise a family when you are living paycheck-to-paycheck. My wife Cindy is a public school teacher and we both appreciate the important role unions play in protecting the families they represent,” Garagiola said.

At a time of unprecedented onslaughts and attacks against unions and working families across the country, Rob Garagiola led the fight on a whole range of issues that protect workers including creating an Equal Pay Commission, strengthening the Labor Relations Board, and safeguarding workers compensation.

Local 1994 Endorses Donna Edwards for Reelection

Local 1994 is endorsing Congresswoman Donna F. Edwards in her bid for reelection in Maryland’s 4th Congressional District. Edwards is a long-time proponent of establishing a living wage and a proven and outspoken supporter of the Employee Free Choice Act, a bill that she cosponsored in Congress.

Edwards voted to protect American workers by opposing recent trade agreements, and instead supported the Trade Adjustment Assistance Act, which offers retraining opportunities, health insurance assistance, and other crucial support to U.S. workers who lose their jobs due to the negative effects of international trade.

“In Donna, we have a representative who will stand up for the 99 percent,” said Local 1994 President Ginor Renne. “She has proven herself a consistent, tenacious fighter for working men and women in Maryland.”

Edwards supported workers’ rights by voting to oppose Republican legislation that seeks to severely restrict the authority of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) so it can no longer direct an employer or company to restore or reinstate work that has been unlawfully transferred, outsourced, or subcontracted away from workers in retaliation for exercising their rights, such as organizing a union.

Edwards is a staunch advocate to protect Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid from fundamental changes that would result in reductions to benefits.
BUY ONE - SEND ONE:
FOR EACH ITEM YOU BUY, #OCCUPYSUPPLY WILL DONATE THE SAME ITEM TO AN OCCUPIER IN NEED

HTTP://SHOP.OCCUPY-SUPPLY.COM

WHAT IS THE OCCUPY SUPPLY FUND?
The Occupy Supply fund is a volunteer project of the Firedoglake Membership program. Our goal is to supply the Occupy protests with the essential goods they need to continue their important work throughout winter and beyond. The Occupy Supply fund puts our values to work, sourcing only high-quality regional goods produced by workers earning fair wages and benefits.

100% of donations to our fund go to purchasing and distributing these goods. No trans-global supply chains, nothing made in sweatshops. Everything union-made whenever possible -- and all of it's manufactured in the United States of America.

Visit our new online store at http://shop.occupy-supply.com, where each item you purchase is matched with a donation of an identical item to an occupier in need.

You may also give directly at http://occupy-supply.com

http://occupy-supply.com  |  http://shop.occupy-supply.com
Remarks for Good and Welfare

James Lynch

James Edward Lynch, a longtime member of Local 1994 before he was promoted, died October 18, 2011. He worked at the Department of Transportation in Montgomery County. He left behind four children and his wife Deborah.

“I’ll always remember Jim for his fairness, honesty, and no nonsense attitude,” said Local 1994 Secretary-Treasurer Yvette Cuffie. “He was respected by both his colleagues and the employees that he supervised.”

He was the kind of leader who would reach out to his employees before they made a fatal mistake offering insight and advice. He was kind, reasonable and prudent when interacting with all—labor and management alike.

His memorial service confirmed the fact that his many positive attributes transcended his work life. One should want to live the kind of life that will change the world—a life that will leave a bit of your influence behind. Mr. Lynch lived that kind of life.

A good legacy would be to live a life where one is missed though they are gone but because of how they lived they are remembered and celebrated. There is no greater legacy than that and Mr. Lynch succeeded at that.

In Memoriam

The members, officers and staff of UFCW Local 1994 MCGEO extend our sympathies to Executive Assistant to the President Michelle Weis in memory of her father, John Hammill, who died on September 11, 2011. He is survived by his spouse, Carol Hammill of Sykesville, daughter Michelle and three grandchildren.

To Field Representative Josh Ardison on the death of his father, Robert Ardison, of Bozman, MD, who died on February 10, 2011. Survivors include six grandchildren, Josh and his three siblings.

To Field Representative David Blackwell on the death of his mother, Agnes G. Blackwell on August 6, 2011. She is survived by 14 children, 17 grandchildren and three great grandchildren.

Marriages

Congratulations to two Local 1994 staff members on their recent marriages. Local 1994 Administrative Assistant Shae Wilson married on August 6, 2011 and Field Representative/Organizer Josh Ardison was married August 12, 2011. Feel free to stop by the UFCW Local 1994 Facebook page to wish them well.