

The Public Employee

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Local 1624
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Spring 2010

Reminder of Dues Structure Change

New Dues Rates Become Effective June 1, 2010

In October 2009 AFSCME Local 1624 members adopted a progressive dues structure tied to our members' base pay.

The new dues rate will amount to **1.25%** of our members' gross annual income. Some of our lowest paid current members will see a dues **decrease** as a result of this change.

Because the membership dues amount is capped at \$18 per pay period, **no member** will see an increase in excess of \$2.50 per pay period.

This new structure provides an **affordable** opportunity for employees in the lower pay grades to join and participate in our union.

This progressive dues rate will amount to **one hour's pay per pay period**, based on **26** pay periods.

The dues structure can only be changed by a vote of our membership. AFSCME is a **member-run union**, and these major decisions are made upon a majority vote of AFSCME Local 1624 members.

AFSCME's 2010 Scholarship Program

Please refer to the back of this newsletter to find out how your graduating high school Senior can apply for a \$1,000 scholarship from AFSCME Local 1624.

Local 1624 Welcomes Aboard New Staff



AFSCME Local 1624 would like to welcome aboard our new Staff Representative, **Gabe Kirchner**.

Gabe will be responsible for both organizing and individual member representation.

Gabe hails from Tucson, Arizona, but moved to Austin in early 2009 with his wife Bella (a native Texan). Gabe received his B.A. from the University of Arizona in 2001 and spent three years pursuing a Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of Michigan, where he was introduced to the labor movement.

As a teaching assistant at Michigan, Gabe joined his 1400 members-strong union and quickly became a steward for his department. A year later he was selected to be the organizing chair for the union. His first full-time staff job in the labor movement was as a higher education organizer for the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

In 2005, Gabe was hired as the Wisconsin state political organizer for AFT. For four years, he coordinated the political activities of 52 local unions across the state of Wisconsin, culminating in the election of labor's endorsed candidate, Barack Obama. Most recently, Gabe was the campaign manager for AFSCME member Cliff Brown, who won his primary and will be the next Judge of the 147th District Court.

Gabe is an avid music collector and also enjoys learning languages. Last year, he did a 3 month Spanish immersion in beautiful Guanajuato, Mexico.

City and County News

The City Budget

There has been “talk” of the possibility of a 2.5% wage increase in the 2011 budget.

Although the “news” is encouraging, there are a lot of “ifs” attached. Such as “if” the sales tax revenues stay strong, and “if” the property tax appraisals do not take a nosedive.

What is of concern to us is the implementation of the Phase 2 and 3 Market Studies. We are advocating that these be implemented **before** any wage increase, so the affected employees get the same benefit as those in Phase I, who have already received the market-pay adjustment and would get the “talked-about” 2011 pay increase on top of that previous pay adjustment.

If the 2011 budget will not allow for both the Phase 2 and 3 market adjustments and the 2.5% wage increase, then AFSCME will advocate for the 2.5%. However, when the Phase 2 and 3 market studies are implemented, we will push to have the 2.5% put back on top of any market pay adjustment.

This will keep the pay adjustments fair and equitable across the board.

Perhaps another “if” to the salary increase equation is a recommended **increase** of the City’s **contribution** to the employee **retirement fund**.

A consulting firm hired by the City to suggest possible changes to the pension fund has recommended that the City add an extra **\$9 million** to the fund every year for the next three years. This would bring the City’s contribution rate to 18% by 2013. This rate would be equivalent to the City’s contribution rate for Police and Fire public-safety workers and comparable to other major Texas cities.

More controversial recommendations include increasing the retirement eligibility and vesting requirements, eliminating the current practice of allowing employees to buy extra years towards retirement and establishing a hybrid program that blends a pension plan with a plan similar to a 401(k) plan for future employees. AFSCME will monitor and report future developments.

The County Budget

Overhauling an entire compensation system is a daunting task, but that is exactly the challenge the Travis County Compensation Committee and its AFSCME representatives have undertaken at the request of the Commissioners Court.

Although much work has been accomplished, the final report with recommendations to the Commissioners Court is still some months away.

We did, however, make specific recommendations which will be included in the Planning Budget Office’s preliminary budget:

1. The Committee agrees with Evergreen that pay scales need to be adjusted upward in FY 2011.
2. The pay scale should never be adjusted unless the adjustment is fully funded.
3. Anytime there is an across-the-board pay increase, the pay scale should be adjusted in the same amount.
4. Whatever funding is available in FY 2011 should be provided, even if less than that recommended by the consulting firm, and the pay scale adjusted accordingly.
5. Recommendation that this process would continue for as long as the current system is in place.

This is a market-driven structural pay scale adjustment as opposed to just a general wage increase.

It is important that employees’ pay rates are linked to these structural pay scale adjustments to prevent the continual creation of “green-circled” employees (those employees being paid less than the minimum of their pay grade).

This is an issue that AFSCME has championed over the past several years.

As your voice in this process, AFSCME will continue to advocate for your best interests in the creation of this new compensation system.

We believe this will enable Travis County to recruit, motivate and retain the quality of employees needed to deliver the vital services that Travis County residents rely upon.

Primary Election Results

In the March Primary Election, Travis County residents elected 15 AFSCME members to public office! City and County employees win when we are able to elect our members to important positions, and that is why we participate in the endorsement process through the AFL-CIO Central Labor Council.

AFSCME Members Who Won Their March 2010 Primary Races

Travis County Commissioners Court

County Judge: Sam Biscoe
Precinct 2: Sarah Eckhardt

District Courts

147th District Court: Cliff Brown
261st District Court: Lora Livingston
299th District Court: Karen Sage
331st District Court: David Crain

Travis County Justices of the Peace

Precinct 4: Raul Gonzalez
Precinct 5: Herb Evans

County Courts

County Court at Law #2: Eric Shepperd
County Court at Law #3: John Lipscombe
County Court at Law #4: Mike Denton
County Court at Law #5: Nancy Hohengarten

Probate Court

Guy Herman

County Clerk

Dana DeBeauvoir

District Clerk

Amalia Rodriguez-Mendoza

Keep in mind that, although it was a successful primary election, many of these members will have opponents in the November General Election. It is important that AFSCME members continue to be active in supporting these candidates. Please visit our website for election updates.

Health Care Bill

AFSCME's priorities during the health care debate were to **ensure public employees** had continued **affordable and quality health care** plans that expanded coverage and controlled costs. AFSCME was a critical voice in the development of those parts of the plan that affected public employees most. As a result, the new health care legislation takes a big step toward protecting and securing AFSCME's goals for public employees.

While most of us will not see any changes to our current health care coverage, we will enjoy the following immediate improvements that are mandated by the legislation to start in September 2010:

- **No maximum limits on coverage**
- **Dependent coverage up to age 26**
- **No exclusion on pre-existing conditions for children under 19 (no pre-existing exclusions for anyone starting in 2014)**
- **Coverage cannot be rescinded**

As important as securing those mandates were, the biggest battle we fought was on the **excise tax** or the so called "**Cadillac tax**", which would have unfairly taxed public employees' health care benefits. Over the years we have sacrificed monetarily to sustain our health care benefits, and we were not willing to give back or be penalized for what we have earned and sacrificed. AFSCME is proud to have secured an **exemption of that tax for all public employees** until at least 2018 (In fact, this exemption was considered such an important victory for the workers that it has now been broadened to include everyone).

The new health care legislation, with its many components, is very complicated and will take years to fully implement. As always, AFSCME will remain vigilant during the entire implementation process, ensuring public employees' interests are protected and respected. This legislation is not perfect, but moves us far closer toward our goal of having the quality and affordable healthcare benefits we all deserve. You can find additional information on the National Health Care Bill at the following link:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/Issues/health-Care>



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AFSCME's 2010 Scholarship Program

ATTENTION AFSCME PARENTS OF GRADUATING SENIORS



AFSCME's 2010 scholarship applications are now available. Three \$1,000 scholarships will be awarded to graduating high school Seniors of active AFSCME Local 1624 members. Applicants must enroll in a University, College, Junior College or Trade School in the 2010 Fall semester.

Please visit AFSCME Local 1624's website at www.afscme1624.org to download an application packet. Applications are also available for pickup at our office, or call us at 477-5544 to have one mailed or faxed to you.

- The **deadline** to turn in all applications is **Friday, May 21st.**
- AFSCME's Scholarship Committee will review applications and will **conduct interviews** of all eligible applicants on **Thursday, May 27th.**

This is just one of the many benefits of AFSCME membership. For a complete list of AFSCME Advantage money-saving programs, please visit our website at www.afscme1624.org.