An Injury to One is an Injury to All!

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Working Parents Act can improve workplace

Even with Republicans now in control of the Minnesota House of Representatives, DFL members are looking to build on their successes of raising the minimum wage and passing the Women’s Economic Security Act when they were in power in 2013 and 2014.

On July 23 DFL House Leader Rep. Paul Thissen of Minneapolis was in Duluth to push the Working Parents Act, legislation that would strengthen Minnesota’s workplace policies, such as earned sick and safe time. He was joined by Rep. Jennifer Schultz at Northern Waters Smokehaus because owner Eric Goerdt already uses family-friendly workplace policies that benefit his employees, his business, and his customers.

“We need workplaces that reflect that our economy has changed,” said Thissen. “I think it was Joe Biden who said we need an economy that puts food on the table, but also one that allows a family to be around that table together.”

Goerdt said raising the minimum wage doesn’t hurt business, it helps them. He employs 40 people at his Canal Park business. Many have been with him a long time because he has created a good work environment. He said his long time customers know his employees well and want to see them be able to own their own homes and participate in the economy.

“If you value your employees you create a good team,” Goerdt said. “It makes my life easier.” His policies like sick time and profit sharing make sense in the food industry he said. No one working in it should have to go to work sick because they can’t afford to lose a day’s wages. He has stated that the last thing a customer at a restaurant needs is someone ill waiting on them. That’s bad for business.

“No one has ever used all their sick time,” Goerdt said.

Mary Tennis has been his manager for 14 years.

AFL-CIO gives nod to single-payer health care in its “Raising Wages” campaign

(PAI)—The AFL-CIO is adding government-run single-payer health care coverage—a key plank of 2016 presidential hopeful and a top cause of at least two outspoken unions—to its “Raising Wages” campaign.

The July 29 decision, by voice vote at the federation’s Executive Council meeting in Silver Spring, Md., is important: Support for the Raising Wages campaign—a comprehensive platform of how to restore the incomes and standards of living of workers and their families—is a key criterion the federation and its unions will use in political endorsements in 2016.

National Nurses United has long pushed single-payer, as have the Steelworkers, among others. Steelworkers President Leo Gerard, a native Canadian, is familiar with single-payer, which Canada has. Democratic presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders is it’s longtime sponsor.

“The AFL-CIO has taken the position that single-payer is a bedrock issue for the labor movement,” National Nurses United Executive Director RoseAnn DeMoro told reporters after the vote. “We asked candidates about single-payer, but Bernie taught us about it.”

The nurses say the Obama administration’s Affordable Care Act leaves one major hole in health care: Controlling costs. That lets insurers, hospitals and big drug companies impose skyrocketing price hikes, leaving even ACA clients unable to pay for health care, NNU says.

But Sanders, Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., is lead sponsor of HR676, the single-payer health care bill there.

The Duluth AFL-CIO Central Labor Body was one of the first labor bodies in the U.S. to endorse HR676. To date 620 labor organizations have endorsed that bill and single-payer Minnesota Congressmen Rick Nolan and Keith Ellison are co-sponsors. In Wisconsin Gwen Moore and Mark Pocan are co-sponsors. Visit http://unionsforsinglepayer.org

Sanders inserted an ACA provison letting states try single-payer—though not by that name—as long as benefits equal those ACA mandated insurers provided.

The current GOP-run Congress is even less likely to enact full single-payer than the then-Democratic-run Congress did in 2010. In one House committee during deliberations then, then-Rep. Dennis Kucinich, D-Ohio, inserted single-payer in one version of the ACA, but his colleagues later quickly dropped it.

Much to celebrate on Medicare and Medicaid’s 50th birthday

(Washington, DC) -- Recognizing the essential role that Medicare has played in helping older Americans live healthier, longer and more financially secure lives, members of the Alliance for Retired Americans pulled out all the stops to host nearly 120 events to celebrate and educate the public about the importance and necessity of the program on its 50th birthday on July 30.

The AFL-CIO, National Nurses United, and Physicians for a National Health Plan in celebrating.

“Fourteen percent of Americans are over the age of 65. Thanks to Medicare, they have a high quality of life in retirement without sacrificing their standard of living or burdening their loved ones with medical bills,” said Richard Fiasta, ARA executive director. “Medicare is a success story. It’s improved and strengthened families, the U.S. health care system and the lives of older Americans and the disabled. We’re encouraging our retiree members to speak out to make sure that it is preserved for future generations.”

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka stated, “Medicare is the nation’s largest and most successful health insurance program, providing quality healthcare and financial security to 50 million Americans in 2014. It is also one of the most financially efficient health care systems in the world. It is essential that Congress works towards making Medicare stronger only 2 percent of program outlays. Baby boomers depend on the continuation and improvement of Medicare and are overwhelmingly opposed to dismantling this program. However, that is exactly what Republicans in Congress want to do.

“The House and Senate budget resolutions both propose beginning a privatization process. They would turn Medicare into a voucher program, raising costs for seniors and funneling billions of dollars into the coffers of insurance companies and hospital chains. Paul Ryan’s proposal to raise the Medicare eligibility age to 67 is waiting in the wings. Raising the eligibility age would cost state and local governments billions of dollars and would bankrupt many Taft-Hartley healthcare trust funds.”

Leading Republican presidential candidates have all signaled that they want to cut and/or change the fundamental nature of this earned benefit.

The NNU Registered Nurses celebrated Medicare’s 50th with a DC rally featuring Senator Bernie Sanders, who like NNU, is an outspoken advocate for a Medicare for All single payer government health plan, like the one in bill HR676, that he and Rep. John Conyers of Michigan have been pushing for years.

Physicians for a National Health Program held a national call-in day on July 30 to urge lawmakers to become co-sponsors of HR 676. You can call your representative at the Capitol Switchboard number, 202-224-3121.
Central Body screenings Thurs., August 13

Well, at least the screening for City Council District 2 looks easy. Labor endorsed incumbent Joel Sipress is unopposed to fill out the last two years of his term, which he won in a special election.

Other than that one bring some refreshment to attend the Duluth AFL-CIO Central Labor Body screenings of candidates for this fall’s local elections Thursday, Aug. 13 in Wellstone Hall of the Duluth Labor Temple, 2002 London Road starting at 5:30 P.M.

Filings are closed with lots of candidates for the Duluth elections to be contested: 
• Mayor’s race has 8;
• City Council At Large 4 for 2 open seats;
• City Council Dist. 5 has 4;
• School Board At Large 3;
• School Board Dist. 2 has 3.

That means all those races will be involved in Tuesday, Sept. 15’s Primary Election.

And then you still have Sipress’ District 2, Council District 1 and 3 with two candidates each for open seats, and School Board District 2 with two candidates for an open seat.

That’s nine contests with only two of them having the incumbent running. There will be a lot of candidates trying to impress labor delegates at the screening. Many of the open seats are being vacated by incumbents who carried the Labor Endorsement so the city council and school board elections will be very important for working families.

All affiliated local unions’ members are invited to COPE (Committee On Political Education) candidate screenings.

COPE recommendations for endorsements will be considered by Duluth Central Labor Body delegates only at the monthly meeting immediately following the screenings. It takes a two-thirds vote of delegates present for a candidate to gain an endorsement.

State workshop to address open shop laws

The Minnesota AFL-CIO has scheduled a two day conference to prepare unions for any possible open shop environment they may encounter in the future. They don’t have to look far for an example with Wisconsin their neighbor to the east, where all unions are in the crosshairs.

Right to work laws target private sector unions and are being pushed in all states, including at the city and county government levels in some.

Public sector unions are waiting to see how the U.S. Supreme Court views a challenge on their collective bargaining rights in Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association. That case seeks to overturn Abood v. Detroit Board of Education which allows public sector unions to collect fair share fees from non-members to cover costs for representing them.

The workshop will teach practices of successful open-shop/right to work unions, and provide tools to prepare local union’s next steps in the battles that are sure to come.

The workshop is Thursday and Friday, Sept. 10-11, at the Minnesota Nurses Association, 345 Randolph Ave., #200, St. Paul. Cost is $125/attendee. For more information contact Todd Dahlstrom tdahlstrom @mnafcio.org or 651-652-9004 or 651-227-0013.

Marsnik presents Iron Range labor history Aug. 20 at Depot

In the last issue of Labor World an article by Education Minnesota’s Kieren Steinhoff addressed Biwabik native Megan Marsnik’s debut novel “Under Ground,” which the Star Tribune has been serializing. The novel is about the Iron Range and union organizing in the mines.

Marsnik will be the presenter at the St. Louis County Historical Society’s “Lunch with the History People” on Thursday, August 20, noon – 1 PM, in the Underground on the first floor of the Depot, 506 West Michigan Street, Duluth.

Her lecture, “Immigrant Labor Uprisings in Northern Minnesota,” is derived from research for her novel “Under Ground” and the 1916 miners’ strike on the Iron Range. Her talk will review the role women played in the labor movement. Marsnik frequently presents on the significance of women in local and national labor history. She will also read passages from her book and highlight actual events and people who provided inspiration for her writing.

There will be limited theater-style seating (no tables), but feel free to bring your own bag lunch. Seating is first-come, first-served (no reservations). Admittance to this event is free to the public. ARCO coffee is provided.

Freedom of Information workshop

Public Record Media (PRM) will host a Freedom of Information (FOI) workshop at the Duluth Public Library, 520 W. Superior Street, Monday, August 17 from 6:30 pm–8:00 pm.

FOI laws make government data - including city budgets, arrest information, and more - available to anyone. PRM’s workshop will explain how people can use FOI – including the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act - to obtain government records. Rich Neumeister, a long-time public record requester and open government advocate, will present the workshop. Duluth resident Ann Redell will also discuss her own experiences obtaining government data, using techniques learned at a previous PRM workshop.

PRM is a Minnesota-based non-profit organization that conducts public record-centered publication, legal work, and education. More information is at www.publicrecordmedia.org.

WHAT’S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?

Corporations park $1.5 trillion abroad to avoid US taxes, even as corporate tax rates in the US are the lowest in 70 years.

Then they fight for even lower taxes, and against raising the minimum wage.

Then they pay their workers so little they rely on food stamps, Medicaid and housing assistance, which we pay for through OUR taxes.

Thanks to Robert Reich & Evergreen Digest

I.U.O.E. Local 70
Monthly Arrowhead Regional Meeting
Tuesday, Aug. 11, 2015, 5:00 P.M. Duluth Labor Center, Hall B
Dave Monsour, Business Manager, (651) 646-4566

I.B.E.W. 31 & 242 Retirees’ Luncheon
Tuesday, Aug. 25
1:00 p.m. VIP Pizza
1201 Tower
Members & Their Guests Welcome!
 Doesn't it make your heart sing to know that minimum wage workers in Minnesota got an automatic raise last Saturday? Well, most of them did except for those working for small companies or the teenagers that are working. For most of them that got a pay raise it must feel like manna from heaven, something they may have gone a long time waiting for without receiving. Many may be surprised to see the increase when they get their next pay check. Hope someone tells them to thank the DFL Party members in the Minnesota House because the boss won’t.

It’s good to be on this island called Minnesota in the Midwest. Cities and states on America’s east and west coasts are doing well for minimum wage workers but the Gopher State is the only one in the Heartland that seems to care. State is the only one in the

9 reasons to celebrate $9/hr

By Ben Horowitz, Minnesota Budget Project

Minnesota’s minimum wage increased to $9.00 Saturday (Aug 1) for large employers (and $7.25 for youths and small employers) thanks to legislation passed in April 2014. Next year, the wage will increase again, to $9.50 for large employers and $7.75 for small employers and youth. This eventual climb up to $9.50 is predicted to cause roughly 325,000 Minnesotans to see their income improve. It’s good news for everyone else, too, because it will also strengthen our economy. We came up with a range of reasons to celebrate the minimum wage increase for every day:

1) A minimum wage increase is important for the Minnesotans who are more likely to be paid at or near the minimum wage, like women…2)…people of color…3)…people with disabilities…4)… and Greater Minnesotans. Raising the minimum wage will help address the fact that employers likely pay less for the jobs disproportionately filled by women, people of color, adults with disabilities and in Greater Minnesota.

2) A higher minimum wage is linked to higher earnings. This sounds redundant, but is worth pointing out. Low-income workers in states with minimum wage increases saw their earnings grow by 1.6 percent in 2014, compared to just 0.3 percent in states that did not increase their minimum wage.

3) The minimum wage needs to increase to ensure that more families can make ends meet. Minnesota’s Department of Employment and Economic Development studies the cost of basic needs budget in every county in Minnesota (http://mn.gov/deed/data/data-tools/col/). Depending on their age and where they live, a single adult working full time with no children would need to earn between $9.56 (Pennington County) and $13.07 (Isanti County) ($10.43 for St. Louis County) just to put a roof over their head and food in their fridge. This increase brings us one step closer to ensuring that a full day’s work at the very least covers a full day’s needs.

4) The increase will help wages catch up with inflation. Because of increases in the cost of living, the federal minimum wage currently buys less than it did in 1968.

5) The increase will help lots of children, too. According to a report by the JOBS NOW Coalition, roughly one out of every ten children in Minnesota had a parent who would be helped by the minimum wage increase.

6) Minnesotans earning higher wages will spend more in our local economies. The JOBS NOW study also estimated that a similar minimum wage proposal to the one that passed would generate a $472 million increase in Minnesotans’ spending power.

Beginning in 2018, the minimum wage will be automatically increased to keep up with inflation. Combined with the increases from last year, this year, and next year, our higher minimum wage will improve the lives of hundreds of thousands of Minnesotans who struggle to meet their basic needs despite working.

NY fast food workers expected to get $15/hr

By Kenneth Quinnell, AFL-CIO Blog

A national movement for a higher minimum wage, increased dignity, and a better quality of life looks like it’s going to pay off for the New York fast-food workers who launched the whole thing.

Moments have grown in recent years for not only increasing the minimum wage, but for making the wage closer to one that workers can support their families on, and the state of New York is set to join the wave. Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) directed the state’s acting commissioner of labor to appoint a panel to consider the issue, and the panel has recommended that the state raise the wage for fast-food workers to $15 per hour in chains that have more than 30 outlets. The acting commissioner still must approve the changes, but he is widely expected to do so. When he does, 70% of New Yorkers who currently work for the minimum wage will see a raise.

Bill Lipton, state director for the Working Families Party, applauded the change, one he’s championed for many years: “There’s clearly a new standard for the minimum wage, and it’s actually a living wage for the first time in many, many decades.”

New York joins a chorus of state and local voices that have decided to act on raising the minimum wage, while national Republicans continue to obstruct improvements.

New York will join cities like Los Angeles, Seattle, San Francisco and Washington, D.C., as having passed or proposed a $15 per hour minimum wage. More than one dozen cities have raised their minimum wage higher than the national law in recent years.

New York State AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento said the change can be a springboard to broader changes: “This is just the beginning. The labor movement remains committed to making sure today’s action sets the stage for all other low-wage workers moving forward.”
The Minnesota State Building Trades Council’s 69th Annual Convention was held in Duluth July 30, 31 and there was much area unionists couldn’t wait to know how and why northeast Minnesota is doing so well in union construction.

Members of the Duluth and Iron Range Building Trades Councils were joined in promoting the region by many elected officials that addressed over 200 delegates and over 70 guests.

Craig Olson, Duluth Trades Council President and Secretary-Treasurer of the Minnesota State Building Trades Council, called the convention “half cent sales tax dedicated to fund road and bridge work” as Commissioner Ken Peterson of the Superior National Forest spoke as “the largest recycling project in America” because it is using the infrastructure from a mid-1950s taconite plant.

He said every nickel of the half cent tax, about $13 million a year, will go for road and bridge work.

“With the leadership we have in the Building Trades in our county it makes our job pretty easy,” Nelson said.

Commissioner Tom Rukavina spoke to the Polymet project as “the largest recycling project in America” because it is using the infrastructure from a mid-1950s taconite plant.

“And it will add two million manhours in construction,” Rukavina said. “And we know how to do mining right in Minnesota – we’ve been doing it for 132 years, including in the Superior National Forest since Teddy Roosevelt.”

“State Rep. Eric Simonson said when he became President of Duluth’s Fire Fighters Local 101, he immediately went to work to re-establish good relations with other local unions and the Building Trades.

“To succeed it couldn’t be ‘what can you do for us’ anymore. It had to be ‘Now what can we do for all of us,’” Simonson said. Working together brought working for candidates that will work for labor and in 2012 it resulted in him getting elected to the State House of Representatives, something he didn’t think would happen.

Mike Sundin, a member of Painters & Allied Trades Local 106, was also elected to the House that year.

“We stand together in this area and that’s why we’re one of the strongest union areas in the nation,” Sundin told his fellow delegates. Showing his union card he said, “I got elected because of this.”

Sundin and Simonson went from being elected when their DFL controlled every facet of state government, to being in the minority in the House in two years.

“We need to get the labor influence back in the legislature,” Sundin said. “I wouldn’t move to Wisconsin but we also can’t allow the Wisconsin influence to move into Minnesota.”

Olson told delegates to continue to recruit members to run for office.

He said the partnership between the Building Trades and elected officials has another great ally in Duluth Chamber of Commerce President David Ross, who has worked with for 20 years.

“When we stand together with the Chamber we don’t lose,” said Olson.

Ross told delegates he and his siblings were raised on union wages.

“I’m the proud son of a card carrying union Bricklayer who served 29 years as business manager of his union,” Ross said of his father, Jim.

Ross said many people were surprised when CNBC recently rated Minnesota as the best state for business because it has a strong history of being a labor and union friendly state.

“We didn’t realize what can happen when business and labor works together,” Ross said. “We can show the nation.” One of the first things he would point to is $2.2 billion of construction in Duluth in the past ten years.

Simonson told delegates later, “The Duluth Chamber of Commerce is not the Minnesota State Building Trades Council.”

Statewide, some 130,000 people are employed on $6.7 billion worth of construction projects, reported Commissioner Ken Peterson of the Dept. of Labor and Industry.

Employment in construction has increased by 42,000 since Governor Mark Dayton took office in 2011, he noted.

Assistant Commissioner Jessica Looman said, “We now have 10,000 apprentices in the state of Minnesota. We’re back where we were pre-recession.” Of those, 41.9% are women or people of color, she said.

The Building Trades face the challenge of a wave of retirements by skilled trades workers, of whom the vast majority are white men.

State Building Trades President Harry Melander said the future construction workforce will depend heavily on “new Americans and women.”

The trades council is expanding its outreach to these workers, he said, adding “We need a full throttle effort in recruitment to begin to build a new generation of union members.”

He said he is “cautiously optimistic” about passage of a $1 billion bonding bill in the 2016 legislative session.

Workday Minnesota’s Barb Kucera contributed to this story.

Minnesota State Building Trades President Harry Melander, left, and retiring Duluth Mayor Don Ness listen as Craig Olson, State Trades Secretary-Treasurer, reads a plaque he presented to Ness for his years of support.

All work and no play makes jack, but that’s no fun. These wives, staff members, and friends are some of the group the Minnesota State Building Trades Council treated to a Vista Queen charter ride July 30 during the council’s convention in Duluth.
Judge upholds NLRB union election rules

By Mark Gruenberg
PAI Staff Writer

A federal district judge in D.C. has upheld the National Labor Relations Board’s new union election rules, tossing out big business lobbies’ challenges. So has another in West Texas, dismissing a complaint from the Associated Builders and Contractors, another anti-worker lobby.

In her July 30 decision, U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson dismissed and denounced the U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s case against NLRB. Chamber allies included the National Association of Manufacturers, and the National Retail Federation – whose members employ millions of the most-exploited workers in the U.S.

Judge Jackson said the Chamber and its acolytes used selective quotes for their complaint, and that it didn’t add constitutionally.

AFL-CIO Counsel Lynn Rhinehart cheered the ruling. When the board issued the rules late last year, over business screams, federation President Richard Trumka applauded them, even though they do not eliminate all the flaws and labor-law-breaking business engages in during organizing drives.

But the rules helped reduce the time available to businesses and their right wing allies and union-busting “consultants” and law firms to illegally intimidate, spy on, harass and fire workers for exercising their rights. The rules also consolidated all challenges to voters and election units into one post-election hearing, when needed.

“Far every judge to consider a challenge to the rules has rejected the challenge and found the rules are legal and within the NLRB’s authority,” Rhinehart stated. “We think this shows the rules are reasonable, well-supported, and well within the NLRB’s authority. There have been hundreds of petitions processed under the new rules. From what we hear, the process has gone smoothly and the rules have helped reduce unnecessary litigation and delay. We hope the courts will continue to reject legal challenges to the rules so they can remain in effect.”

The chamber and its allies “mount a broad attack on the rule as a whole, claiming it ‘makes sweeping changes to the election process’ and that it ‘sharply curtails employers’ statutory, due process, and constitutional rights,” Judge Jackson wrote. “But these dramatic pronouncements are predicated on mischaracterizations of what the final rule actually provides and the disregard of provisions that contradict plaintiffs’ (the Chamber’s) narrative. Claims that the regulation contravenes” labor law “are largely based upon statutory language or legislative history that has been excerpted or paraphrased in a misleading fashion. Ultimately, the statutory and constitutional challenges do not withstand close inspection.”

Racial, economic justice commission created

Last week the AFL-CIO Commission on Racial and Economic Justice held its first meeting. It was an opportunity to gather the diverse group of labor leaders of the AFL-CIO Executive Council as well as academic advisors together to map out a plan for a series of internal conversations around the role of race in unions, workplaces and broader communities and economic lives.

In addition, the recent activism of the Black Lives Matter movement has created a national and global conversation about the insidious role that racism plays in the lives of black people.

Since the death of Trayvon Martin the AFL-CIO has worked to open a constructive dialogue around the role of race. This has included a speech by AFL-CIO President Trumka in Ferguson (youtube.com/watch?v=ny8loBhqmhc) and a discussion among local labor leaders in the wake of Michael Brown’s death.

In addition the AFL-CIO is working with affiliates, constituency groups and community partners to educate workers and analyze the way racism weakens the collective power of all working people and harms both people of color and white workers.

Over the next months the AFL-CIO will identify practices within local labor bodies that build solidarity among white members and members of color, and expose practices that undermine or obstruct solidarity and constructive relationships. The commission hopes to expand AFL-CIO work to address the challenges faced by all communities of color including new immigrants who face discrimination and hate on the job, and are also more likely to get trapped in the criminal justice system.

Falsani in Super Lawyers Top 100

Bob Falsani has been included in the list of The Top 100 Minnesota Super Lawyers for 2015 by the Minnesota Journal of Law & Politics. Drawn from seventy different areas of practice, The Top 100 are selected by a statewide peer review process. Significantly less than one percent of Minnesota lawyers receive such an honor.

Falsani has published over 60 articles on workers’ compensation and personal injury litigation and lectures extensively on the two subjects. He is certified as a Civil Trial specialist by the National Board of Trial Attorneys.

The only lawyer in the State of Minnesota peer-selected as a member of the American Board of Trial Advocacy (civil jury expertise), he is also a fellow in the College of Workers’ Compensation Lawyers.

In 2009 Falsani received the Minnesota Association for Justice’s highest honor: The Lifetime Achievement Award.

This is the twenty third year that Falsani has been named a Minnesota Super Lawyer.

Founded in 1975, Falsani, Balmer, Peterson, Quinn & Beyer has an extensive practice in personal injury, workers’ comp and Social Security disability in both Minnesota and Wisconsin. The firm has received the Volunteer Law Firm of the Year award from the Northeastern Minnesota Volunteer Attorney Program four times in the past eight years.

And the firm will once again buy, and serve, the hot buttered corn on the cob at the Duluth AFL-CIO Central Labor Body Labor Day Picnic this year!
While Hillary Clinton occasionally gives some lip service to the problem of extreme inequality, Bernie Sanders is the only candidate really hammering away at it. He has even blasted the orthodoxy of economic growth for its own sake, saying according to (July 13’s) Washington Post that unless economic spoils can be redistributed to make more Americans’ lives better, all the growth will go to the top 1% anyway, so who needs it? Sanders might know his history, but the rest of the candidates could use a little primer.

The United States was not always the most powerful nation on Earth. It was only with the end of World War II, with the rest of the developed world in smoldering ruins, that America emerged as the free world’s leader. This coincided with the expansion of the U.S. middle class. With the other war combatants trying to recover from the destruction of the war, America became the supermarket, hardware store and auto dealership to the world. Markets for American products abound and opportunity was everywhere for American workers of all economic means to get ahead. America had a virtual monopoly on rebuilding the world. Combined with the G.I. Bill of 1944, which provided money for returning veterans to go to college, and government loans to buy houses and start businesses, the middle class in America boomed, as did American power, wealth and prestige. Between 1946 and 1973, productivity in America grew by 104 percent. Unions led the way in assuring wages for workers grew by an equal amount.

The 1970s, however, brought a screeching halt to the expansion of the American middle class. The Arab oil embargo in 1973 marked the end of cheap oil and the beginning of the middle-class decline. The Iranian Revolution in 1979, with more resultant oil instability, combined with the rise of Ronald Reagan's conservative revolution at home, accelerated the long and painful contraction of the middle class. Cuts in corporate taxes, stagnant worker wage growth, the right-wing war on unions, and corporate outsourcing of work overseas greased the wheels of the middle-class decline and the upper-class elevation. Cuts in taxes on the wealthy, under the guise of trickle-down economics, have resulted in lower government revenue and cuts to all kinds of services. All of which has led to today, an era of national and international inequality unparalleled since the days of the Roaring ’20s.

There are 35 astounding facts about inequality that will fry your brain.

1. In 1981 percent of American counties, the median income, about $55,000, is less than it was in 1970. This is despite the fact that the economy has grown 83 percent in the past quarter-century and corporate profits have doubled. American workers produce twice the amount of goods and services as 25 years ago, but get less of the pie.

2. The amount of money that was given out in bonuses on Wall Street last year is twice the amount all minimum-wage workers earned in the country combined.

3. The wealthiest 85 people on the planet have more money than the poorest 3.5 billion people combined.

4. The average wealth of an American adult is in the range of $250,000-$300,000. But that average number includes incomprehensively wealthy people like Bill Gates. Imagine 10 people in a bar. When Bill Gates walks in, the average wealth in the bar increases unbelievably, but that number doesn’t make the other 10 people in the bar richer. The median per adult number is only about $39,000, placing the U.S. about 27th among the world’s nations, behind Australia, most of Europe and even small countries like New Zealand, Ireland and Kuwait.

5. Italians, Belgians and Japanese citizens are wealthier than Americans.

6. The poorest half of the Earth's population owns 1% of the Earth's wealth. The richest 1% of the Earth's population owns 46% of the Earth's wealth.

7. More locally, the poorest half of the US owns 2.5% of the country's wealth. The top 1% owns 35% of it.

8. Inequality is a worldwide problem. In the UK, doctors no longer occupy a place in the top 1% of income earners, London plays host to the largest congregation of Russian millionaires outside of Moscow, and also houses more ultra-rich people (defined as owning more than $30 million in assets outside of their home) than anywhere else on Earth.

9. The slice of the national income pie going to the wealthiest 1% of Americans has doubled since 1979.

10. The 1% also takes home 20% of the income. This figure is the most since the 1920s era of laissez-faire government (under Republicans Warren Harding, Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover).

11. The super rich 0.1% of America, such as Jamie Dimon, CEO of JP Morgan, take home a whopping 6% of the national income, earning around $23 million a year. Compare that to the average $30,000 a year earned by the bottom 90 percent of America.

12. The top 1% of America owns 50% of investment assets (stocks, bonds, mutual funds). The poorest half of America owns just .5% of the investments.

13. The poorest Americans do come out ahead in one statistic: the bottom 90% of America owns 73% of the debt.

14. Tax rates for the middle class have remained essentially unchanged since 1960. Tax rates on the highest earning Americans have plunged from an almost 70% tax rate in 1945 down to around 35% today. Corporate tax rates have dropped from 30 percent in the 1950s to under 10 percent today.

15. Since 1990, CEO compensation has increased by 300%. Corporate profits have doubled. The average worker's salary has increased 4%. Adjusted for inflation, the minimum wage has actually decreased.

16. CEOs in 1965 earned about 24 times the amount of the average worker. In 1980 they earned 42 times as much. Today, CEOs earn 325 times the average worker.

17. Wages, as a percent of the overall economy, have dropped to an historic low.

18. In a study of 34 developed countries, the United States had the second highest level of income inequality, ahead of only Chile.

19. Young people in the U.S. are getting poorer. The median wealth of people under 35 has dropped 68% since 1984. The median wealth of older Americans has increased 42%.

20. The average white American's median wealth is 20 times higher ($113,000) than the average African American ($5,600) and 18 times the Hispanic American ($6,300).

21. America’s highest income inequality is located in the states surrounding Wall Street (New York City) and the oil-rich states.

22. Since 1979, high school dropouts have seen median weekly income drop by 22 percent. Ethnically, the highest dropout rates are among Hispanic and African American children.

23. In 1970, a woman earned about 60% of the amount a man earned. In 2005 a woman earned about 80% of what a man earned. Since 2005, there has been no change in that figure. African-American women earn just 64% of what a white male earns, and Hispanic women just 56%.

24. Over 20 percent of all American children live below the poverty line. This rate is higher than almost all other developed countries.

25. Union membership in the US is at an all-time low, about 11% of the workforce. In 1978, 40 percent of blue-collar workers were unionized. With that declining influence has come a concurrent decline in the real value of the minimum wage.

See Income inequality...page 7

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A National Partnership for Women & Families fact sheet on Minnesota’s workforce explores the impact of more than 947,000 workers not being able to earn a single paid sick day. It focuses on the individuals and industries most affected, including children, restaurant workers and low-wage workers.

“The nation’s failure to establish a paid sick days standard is harming people in Minnesota and across the country,” said Debra L. Ness, president of the Partnership. “It is absolutely unacceptable that so many hardworking people and their families risk grave financial hardship if they get the flu, strep throat or another common illness because they cannot earn basic paid sick days, even after years at their jobs.”

24 jurisdictions in the U.S. have, or will soon have, laws that guarantee workers the right to earn paid sick time. Minnesota is not one of them but a campaign has started. St. Louis County and the Duluth area have among the lowest percentage of workers with paid sick time in Minnesota.

Fact sheets for states can be found at nationalpartnership.org/issues/work-family/paid-sick-days-map.html

According to the new fact sheet:

- Nearly 190,000 people in Minnesota work in restaurants – an industry in which, nationally, 90 percent of workers cannot earn paid sick days;
- The largest industry in Minnesota is health care and social assistance. Nationally, more than one-quarter of workers in that industry cannot earn paid sick time;
- Overall, 22.2 percent of Minnesota jobs are considered low wage, and few low-wage jobs allow workers to earn paid sick days; and
- Nearly 950,000 children in Minnesota live in families in which all parents work, but parents with paid sick days often cannot use them to care for children.

Nationally, more than 43 million private sector workers – nearly 40% of the workforce – cannot earn paid sick days. The number is largely unchanged in recent years, despite a growing body of evidence that shows paid sick days benefit families, businesses and economies; and 85% of voters saying they want employers to provide paid sick time. The fact sheet concludes that the Healthy Families Act, which would establish a national paid sick days standard of seven paid sick days per year, should be a high priority for Congress.

“Access to paid sick days should not depend on where someone lives or what job they hold. The Healthy Families Act is a common sense proposal that has been tested in states and cities across the country. It is long past time for Congress to make its passage a priority.”

More information can be found at PaidSickDays.org.

### Income inequality facts...from page 6

26. Four hundred Americans have more wealth, $2 trillion, than half of all Americans combined. That is approximately the GDP of Russia.

27. In 1946, a child born into poverty had about a 50 percent chance of scaling the income ladder into the middle class. In 1980, the chances were 40 percent. A child born today has about a 33 percent chance.

28. Despite massive tax cuts, corporations have not created new jobs in America. The job creators have been small new businesses that have not enjoyed the same huge tax breaks.

29. More than half of the members of the United States Congress, where laws are passed deciding how millionaires are bailed out, are millionaires.

30. Twenty five of the largest corporations in America in 2010 paid their CEOs more money than they paid in taxes that year.

31. In the first decade of the 21st century, the U.S. borrowed $1 trillion in order to give tax cuts to households earning over $250,000.

32. In 1970, there were five registered lobbyists working on behalf of wealthy corporations for one of the 535 members of Congress. Today there are 22 lobbyists per congressperson.

33. In 1962, the 1% household median wealth was 125 times the average median wealth. In 2010 the divide was 288 times.

34. During the Great Recession, the average wealth of the 1% dropped about 16 percent. Meanwhile the wealth of the 99% dropped 47 percent.

35. Between 1979 and 2007, the wages of the top 1% rose 10 times more than the bottom 90 percent.
The 2016 presidential election is 16 months in the future but supporters of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders aren’t waiting to build momentum. They started work in earnest July 29 with an estimated 100,000 supporters attended more than 3,500 organizing meetings in all fifty states across the U.S.

There were eight of those meetings in northeast Minnesota. One at the Reef Bar in the Duluth Labor Temple organized by retired Operating Engineer Local 49’s Mike Kuitu had over 70 people in attendance.

“It’s about time we have a president that listens to just regular folks like a retired heavy equipment operator,” Kuitu told the gathering.

Rep. Mike Sundin told everyone to turn off their TVs and quit waiting for CNN to tell them who to support. “Start reading about Bernie Sanders,” Sundin said.

There were plenty of printouts of Sanders’ “Why I am running” speech at the meeting. City Councilor Sharla Gardner said Sanders’ honesty and message are always the same no matter where he is. “He lives on his senate salary and Social Security,” Gardner said. “He can’t be bought. He’s one of us.” She takes exception to the media portrayal of his message as being “radical.”

“It’s simple basic truths with social and economic justice,” she told the gathering.

City Councilor Joel Sipress was impressed with the number of savvy political veterans in the room “who know how to win campaigns.” He said next March 1 Minnesota will have precinct caucuses and everyone needs to drag a friend and family member to them to support Sanders so he can win Minnesota.

“He’s a truth teller, he’s clear on the issues, he can’t be bought or co-opted, and he still has the skill to get things done,” Sipress said. “That’s just like Paul Wellstone.”

Sipress said many of his opponents have tried to say that Sanders is “just a talker.” “Bernie Sanders has done more for working people than all the other candidates combined,” Sipress said.

At about 6:30 Sanders addressed all those meetings in a livestream and made quick work of stating why he’s running. His basic message was “This country belongs to all of us, not just a few billionaires.”

He said a President Bernie Sanders can’t solve the problems in America by himself. The only way to take on the Koch brothers is with a strong grassroots political revolution by millions because the Kochs control the media Sanders said. His revolution got jump-started July 29 with the meetings. In the Reef volunteer sign-up forms were handed out and being filled out.

Kuitu told everyone to talk up Sanders with everyone they can and urge them to look for duluthforbernie and duluthstandsforbernesanders Facebook pages and join the revolution.

Sanders campaign says he has already received a half million donations from individuals, which far outdistances any other presidential candidate.

On July 30, the 50th anniversary of Medicare and Medicaid, National Nurses United had Sanders as their featured speaker at their Washington DC rally. Sanders and NNU, the union of Registered Nurses, are both for a single payer Medicare for all national health care program.

Retired Operating Engineer Mike Kuitu, left, waits in the wings as he hosts a “house party” at the Reef Bar for Senator Bernie Sanders 2016 presidential campaign. Rep. Mike Sundin, right, addresses over 70 people who showed up to hear the message and volunteer. City councilors Joel Sipress and Sharla Gardner wait for their turn to speak.

Retired Operating Engineer Mike Kuitu, left, waits in the wings as he hosts a “house party” at the Reef Bar for Senator Bernie Sanders 2016 presidential campaign. Rep. Mike Sundin, right, addresses over 70 people who showed up to hear the message and volunteer. City councilors Joel Sipress and Sharla Gardner wait for their turn to speak.

Carpenters Local 361 apprentices and volunteers are building the Dairyland Outdoor Veterans Retreat 35 miles south of Superior. They hung the sign from trees at the jobsite. They will return this month to finish the first 30 x 74 foot building along with Sheet Metal Workers Local 10 members. The building committee is looking for more volunteers with many other skills. You can find out more including how to get involved at www.dovr.org (Submitted photos by Stephanie Askin and 361 Apprentice Coordinator Matt Campanario)