Transportation Forward kicks off campaign here

Legislative bodies too often employ a “kick the can down the road” strategy when it comes to financing an issue. America’s and Minnesota’s critical infrastructure needs are a good example. While the nation’s focus is on Flint, Michigan and their lead-in-the-water crisis that is poisoning children, Minnesota has a drinking and wastewater problem too.

Infrastructure needs are affecting transportation as well. A Transportation Forward coalition, which includes many unions, kicked off a statewide campaign in Duluth Feb. 16 to say it is time to stop kicking the can and the state budget surplus should be used to address transportation needs at all levels. That was a point made by Duluth Mayor Emily Larson.

“Duluth is one of Minnesota’s largest cities and the demands on our transportation system only continue to grow,” said Duluth’s newly elected mayor. “Our local investments in biking and walking routes have made us a national leader that attracts visitors and families year round. But the cost of maintaining and expanding our public transportation options and repairing our roads and bridges continues to grow. With a budget surplus in place, now is the time for the state to pass a long-term transportation package for communities across the state.”

The campaign kickoff was held at the Duluth Transportation Center that was opened just two weeks ago on Michigan Street. Larson said that construction project was indicative of how meeting transportation needs will put people to work. She credited St. Louis County Commissioners for using a new state law to raise funds for transportation needs with a 0.5% sales tax. She said the city is looking for every penny in the city budget to counter the hardships of equitable funding for transportation.

Duluth Transportation Authority General Manager Dennis Jensen, who has been on the job for 37 years, spoke about the high cost of maintaining city buses ravaged by poor roads and the importance of bus connections to jobs and health care. He said access to the bus system has grown more important with millennials, aging baby boomers, and people wanting to ride buses after 11 p.m.

“This building was a godsend because of $6 million in bonding,” Jensen said.

The coalition also has strong representation from groups wanting to expand bicycling and pedestrian travel in the state and to make it safer.

For more information go transportationforwardmn.org

TPP protests mount as new AFL-CIO report shows lack of labor provisions

By Mark Gruenberg

Workers and their allies took their protests against the jobs-destroying pro-corporate Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade pact to a meeting of Asian-Pacific leaders in Tony Palm Springs, Calif., hosted by President Barack Obama (D). But while Obama and the other leaders vowed to continue pushing for the controversial treaty, a key “free trade” supporter, House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., says the pact needs changes but not in worker provisions – before Obama can send it to Capitol Hill.

And the AFL-CIO released a 20-page comprehensive report Feb. 16 on the huge holes in the TPP’s labor provisions (afcio.org/content/download/174525/4153892/file/162_8_TPPLaborRightsReport.pdf).

AFL-CIO Director of International Affairs Cathy Feingold explained the problem: “The consistency plans fall woefully short of ensuring that all 12 TPP countries will be in full compliance with the TPP’s labor standard on Day One of the agreement. Vietnam will get a five-year free pass to deny freedom of association and there is no plan for Mexico at all. This problem would be compounded if countries such as Thailand and Cambodia join the TPP without first affording all of their workers fundamental worker rights and acceptable conditions of work.”

The TPP, which would set trade and other pro-business rules for 12 nations around the rim of the Pacific Ocean, was signed earlier this year. The earliest that legislation implementing it can come to Congress is April 3.

There, the TPP bill – not the pact itself – would be subject to one up-or-down vote in each house of Congress, and after limited debate and no amendments. Ryan says the TPP needs changes to get votes. Otherwise, he told Fox News on Feb. 14, it won’t pass Congress.

The Palm Springs marchers, the AFL-CIO report and 2,600 comments workers filed with the U.S. International Trade Commission, which is analyzing the TPP at Congress’ request, say the pact is so bad it must be scrapped and renegotiated, not just changed.

“Governments should be seeking out ways to lift working standards and protect the environment, not how to pit workers against those standards,” said AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka.

See TPP protests...page 6

Central Body will screen legislative contests April 14

After much discussion at their March 10 regular monthly meeting delegates to the Duluth Central Labor Body voted overwhelmingly to hold screenings April 14 for the Minnesota legislative districts for which they have jurisdiction.

Those races include Duluth’s Senate District 7 and House of Representatives Districts 7A, 7B, and 3B.

This will be an interesting election year as Roger Reinert has stated he will retire as state Senator from District 7. Rep. Erik Simonson of House District 7A, who has carried the Labor-endorsement, has announced for that Senate seat, accounting for two open contests. In addition to Simonson’s move, a number of other candidates have announced in those Senate and House races. Simonson is a member of Fire Fighters Local 101.

Rep. Jennifer Schultz of District 7B and Rep. Mary Murphy of District 3B will seek re-election as incumbent Labor-endorsees. Both are members of Education Minnesota. Murphy is retired as a Duluth school teacher.

The official candidate filing period for candidates this year is Tuesday, May 17 to Tuesday, May 31.

The screenings will be conducted at 6:00 p.m. in the Duluth Labor Temple’s Wellstone Hall prior to the 7:00 p.m. regular monthly meeting of the Central Body.

Screenings are open to any affiliated union member but only delegates from affiliated unions will be allowed to vote on a possible Labor-endorsement, which will occur at the monthly meeting. Unions can send a list of their delegates on their letterhead.

The number of delegates a union can have is based on how many members they pay per capita taxes on to the North East Area Labor Council. Unions must be in good standing and no more than two months in arrears in their payments.

Here is the breakdown of members to delegates:

- 50 members or less = 2 delegates;
- 51 to 100 members = 3 delegates;
- 101 to 200 members = 4 delegates;
- 201 to 400 members = 5 delegates;
- 401 to 700 members = 6 delegates;
- 701 to 1,100 members = 7 delegates; and,
- one additional delegate for each additional 500 members or any fraction thereof above 1,100.

Congress should be seeking ways to lift working standards and protect the environment, not how to pit workers against those standards,” said AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka.

See TPP protests...page 6
Fight back! Attend your political party’s precinct caucus Tuesday, March 1

If you’ve felt left behind as Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Nevada, the corporate media, oh, and the candidates, have been getting all the attention in this year’s presidential election, you can jump in on Tuesday, March 1 at 7:00 p.m. in your neighborhood and be a national player too. That’s when the Democratic Farmer Labor Party and the Republican Party of Minnesota will hold their precinct caucuses.

MNA to host single payer health forum

Do you find yourself being worried and frustrated by your health insurance premium, copay, and deductible increases? Have you watched your wages stagnant and been used to cover health insurance costs? Do you know someone who has struggled to pay hospital bills or someone who has filed bankruptcy from medical bills? Do you know someone who is putting off seeing a doctor?

This is the reality of health care for too many Americans. The Minnesota Nurses Association, an AFL-CIO affiliate that represents 20,000 dedicated Registered Nurses and other healthcare professionals in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa, thinks Minnesota can do better than that. MNA Executive Director Rose Roach and Geri Katz, their Single Payer Specialist, will present a forum in Duluth on why our current health care system isn’t good enough, what single payer is, and why we need it.

MNA’s “Single Payer Healthcare for All” forum will be Thursday March 10, 6:30 p.m. in Wellstone Hall of the Duluth Labor Temple, 2002 London Road prior to the Central Labor Body meeting.

MNA is hardly alone in their push for a government run single payer program. Recently the nation’s largest federal workers union, the American Federation of Government Employees, became the 22nd union to join the call. They are all behind HR 676, the single payer bill introduced every Congress by Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich. His “Medicare for All” bill has gone nowhere and is likely to go unheard in this GOP-dominated Congress.

MNA is an affiliate of National Nurses United which has endorsed Bernie Sanders for President in large part because he is a single payer advocate and carries Conyers’ bill in the U.S. Senate.

AFGE has endorsed Hillary Clinton, who has criticized Sanders’ single-payer plan. She said he would dismantle the Affordable Care Act and its protections and the present health care system. But AFGE Vice President Arnold Scott who submitted the single payer resolution said “We deserve better” than our present system.

“It doesn’t have to be this way. Firefighters don’t ask us to pay before they save our families from burning houses. They just proceed to do the right thing. Health care is just as important as fire protection...Lives are at stake and all of us should have the best care that this wealthy nation has the ability to provide. Our tax dollars subsidize the research, the medical schools, and the hospitals. Unions led the way in other industrialized countries to assure universal coverage with good care through a form of single payer,” the resolution states.

The resolution says HR 676 would eliminate private insurers and their high overhead costs, rationing of care, high co-pays and deductibles and denial of care. HR 676 “will restore our right to choose our physicians and free us from insurance company interference in medical decisions.

You can find out more at your precinct caucus. Minnesota’s Secretary of State’s site caucusfinder.sos.state.mn.us/ has all the information you need. Minnesota Secretary of State Steve Simon has a lot more information on caucuses at http://www.sos.state.mn.us/ and you can find your caucus here.

Save the date: April 13, 2016

Get out your calendars and mobile devices to save your dance card for the FREE 2016 Workers’ Compensation Seminar brought to you by Falsani, Balmer, Peterson, Quinn & Beyer law firm. The always educational, informative, and entertaining event this year is Wednesday, April 13 at Duluth’s Holiday Inn – Great Lakes Ballroom, 200 West Superior St., Duluth. Call 218-726-4775 to reserve your spot.

NEALC JOB POSTING

The North East Area Labor Council (NEALC) has a job opening for a field coordinator/organizer position. This open position would work out of the Duluth Labor Temple office. Jason Motts has a similar NEALC position on the Iron Range.

NEALC is the AFL-CIO umbrella organization for all labor unions in Pine, Itasca, Carlton, St. Louis, Lake, Cook, and Koochiching counties.

Interested parties should submit their resume and cover letter via email or hard copy with NEALC President Alan Netland as soon as possible.

His email address is alan@nealc.org.

His mailing address is NEALC, Room 99, 2002 London Road, Duluth, MN 55812.
No AFL-CIO endorsement for president coming soon
By AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka

The AFL-CIO is committed to a Raising Wages agenda, and to using that agenda to drive our politics.

Our Executive Council will discuss the 2016 election cycle during its Winter Meeting (Feb. 17–20), but no presidential endorsement will be made. From the very start of the presidential contest, we have been clear that we have an endorsement process in place, and that we will continue to follow that process in accordance with our Constitution.

Most importantly, we will further elevate the Raising Wages agenda and hold all politicians accountable to it.

We also continue to encourage affiliated unions to pursue their own deliberations with their members and come to their own endorsement decisions, if any, through open and rigorous debate. Many unions have endorsed a candidate, and many have not.

Our country is engaged in a vigorous national debate about our next president, and we look forward to a robust discussion of the issues at our Council meeting.

Appreciates Sanders’ refusal of corporate campaign cash
Editor

I appreciated your column on Bernie Sanders’ rally at the DECC. I enjoyed the afternoon there very much and felt uplifted by the experience. It was heartening to see all the enthusiastic young people in attendance.

I believe that corporate cash in our political system is a huge issue, really the issue that all others are tied to. I always think of the late Molly Ivins’ saying, “you gotta dance with them that brung ya.” In her populist Texan manner, she was telling us that politicians don’t bite the hand that feeds them. Former president Jimmy Carter has even said that we have a system of legalized bribery. Yes, unions also contribute, but it is a relative pittance compared to corporate and oligarchic cash. We cannot compete in the existing system. If you told me that we can eliminate corporate cash only by also giving up union contributions, I’d take that deal. We could have a system of public financing coupled with small individual contributions. We could “buy” politicians with our votes. Bernie is proving that it is not necessary to chase big money.

When corporations or oligarchs make a political contribution, it is a calculated investment, and a significant return is expected on that investment. As the saying goes, our political system isn’t broken, it’s “fixed.”

Will Stenberg, BMW, Retired

On This Day In History: February 20, 1792; President George Washington established the United States Post Office

He did so by signing the Postal Service Act. Prior to the Revolutionary War, there were very few official standards when it came to mail delivery. Some people hired couriers, or asked friends to deliver letters for them. Taverns served as informal mail-gathering centers. The British government established the post of postmaster general in 1707, but that task was managed from Britain, and it didn’t have too much practical effect on how the mail was handled in the colonies. Benjamin Franklin was named postmaster general in 1737, but was fired and sent back to America after he abused the power of his office to spy for the colonies.

A printer named William Goddard brought the original plans for a formal American postal service before the Continental Congress in 1774. Goddard published a newspaper, the Pennsylvania Chronicle, and he wanted to make sure that it would be delivered to his readers. His paper supported American independence, and postal agents working for the British crown constantly undermined his delivery efforts. He decided to draw up plans for an independent colonial post. Benjamin Franklin backed Goddard’s plan, and Franklin was named the first Postmaster General when the new U.S. government began operations in 1775. Franklin held the position for about year, during which time he established overnight mail delivery between New York and Philadelphia, and standardized delivery rates.

The Postal Service Act guaranteed a free press and the inexpensive delivery of newspapers. It also made it illegal for postal officials to open private mail, and laid the legislative groundwork for Congress to expand the Post Office as the nation grew. It established 75 regional postal offices and 2,400 miles of postal routes, and it set the framework that the U.S. Postal Service still operates within today.

~From Garrison Keillor’s The Writer’s Almanac
UWS Outsourcing Part 2: Did taxpayers save money on privatized jobs?

By Phil Anderson
AFT-WI Retired

Did outsourcing the custodians and groundkeepers at the University of Wisconsin Superior save the university money? Are taxpayers better off? As discussed in a prior article, any savings most likely came from the contractor paying less in wages and benefits. Cost reduction came on the backs of the workers and the Superior, WI economy has been hurt. Was it all worth it?

Doescontracting out jobs save money?

Critics of outsourcing government activities say often there are no actual cost savings to taxpayers. Many studies have shown contracting out ultimately costs more. But-and-switch low initial bids that escalate, costs of lower quality work, costs of work not covered by the contract, contract monitoring and administration, contractor overhead and profit all add up. There are many cases in Wisconsin and across the nation where outsourcing did not save taxpayers money.

One Wisconsin example involves outsourcing Department of Transportation engineers. A Legislative Audit Bureau report in 2009 concluded that the DOT could have saved $1.2 million by doing more of its engineering work internally. A more recent internal report says DOT can save $5.6 million annually by adding 180 in-house engineering and technical staff instead of outsourcing.

At the national level, a Project on Government Oversight report says the federal government pays 83% more for contractors than in house employees. Federal government employees were less expensive than contractors in 33 of 35 occupations reviewed.

But in the current political climate, politicians must claim they are cutting government. The cost does not matter as long as they can claim fewer public employees. Fewer public employees is assumed to mean lower costs to taxpayers. But is this actually the case? Is UWS another example of faith based outsourcing?

Intangible costs

Determining cost savings is much more complicated than simple arithmetic. Many costs are intangible and hard to quantify. Critics of outsourcing say employee dedication and connection to organizational goals are important to the overall quality of work. Happy employees care and are willing to go beyond the job description to achieve the best service to customers. Because dedication cannot be easily measured it is not factored in as a cost. Reduced quality of the work can be a problem. Contractors make money by cutting corners and reducing costs. The contract janitorial industry typically has 2-300% employee turnover rates. It is a highly competitive, low margin industry. The potential for lower quality of work is another hard to measure cost.

Loss of direct control is another intangible. Even though the UWS Request For Proposal (RFP) contains many provisions and procedures addressing this issue, UWS management are not in direct control of contract employees. Clauses in the contract that ensure the contractor or contract employees can impact the university financially and through negative publicity. These costs are difficult to measure and are not factored into public statements on budget savings.

Cost overruns, contract monitoring and paper shuffling can add up to 25% to the outsourcing contracts. The UWS cost for bids with a 100% price did not save money. Many UW staff are involved both in Superior and Madison. All this has to be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis. There are costs to outsourcing. Only time will tell if these intangibles mattered.

Actual costs

Getting those real numbers is a challenge. This author spent several months seeking answers to two basic questions:

What is the final total cost of the contract? What is the history of cost changes in the work in-house? Ultimately the help of State Senator Janet Bewley of District 25 (D-Asland) and Representative Beth Meyers of District 74 (D-Bayfield) were needed to get this information.

UW says the “total estimate annual contract value” for the winning contractor is $975,994.40. This is with the University continuing to own all equipment. UW-Superior estimates the projected savings annually as $212,315.94. The contract is for five years total with an estimated cost of $4.8 million and a savings of $1.06 million. Historically, spending was $1.18 million annually or $5.9 million over five years. It is interesting that over time the publicly stated “savings” keep getting smaller. In earlier press reports UW claimed they would save $500,000 per year. This indicates a need for an outside audit to provide definitive numbers.

It is also interesting that in the email to Senator Bewley UW-Superior admits that the savings came from reduced labor costs. UW stated, “The cost savings is coming from a reduction in labor costs, both through the quantity of people used in this service and the labor and benefit rates.”

Other contract issues further muddy the waters. The original Request for Proposal (RFP) states that the contractor would be responsible for providing their own equipment and supplies. The final contract allows the contractor to use $1.4 million of UWS owned equipment and supplies. The RFP lists UW owned equipment and supplies. It values janitorial equipment at $310,000, grounds equipment at $1,062,758 and supplies at $59,343.

Is this subsidy to the contractor being paid for by a reduction in the contract price? In addition, UW is paying a fee of $113,385 per year to the contractor to “manage” the use and maintenance of these resources. It is not clear how this cost is factored into the total contract price.

The bottom line is that a professional audit is needed to accurately determine if the taxpayer has benefited from outsourcing. The Legislative Audit Bureau or an organization with the needed expertise and resources needs to do a complete audit.

Putting it all in perspective

UWS says it will save $212,000 each year by outsourcing. Accepting this figure, what does this mean to the taxpayer and the community?

Wisconsin IDEA says that the university exists for “improving peoples lives beyond the classroom.” UWS generates approximately $41.2 million in annual spending and income for Superior and Douglas County, and is responsible for sustaining about 785 full and part-time jobs (minus 27) for the local economy. It is a major contributor to the local economy.

In addition many north-west Wisconsin residents have earned degrees and increased their education because of UWS. Many of these people may not have had the resources to go to school elsewhere. Many working, non-traditional students have been helped through night and weekend classes. The University Extension has helped many individuals, farmers, and small business owners. UWS is a major asset to the region.

Given these facts what is the magnitude of the “savings” from outsourcing? UWS has an annual budget of about $74 million. Reducing that by $212,000 represents less than 0.02% savings. UWS has a budget shortfall of $4.5 million. If the 107,000 people in the six northwestern Wisconsin counties passed the hat, they could solve that problem with $42 per person. If everyone in the state pitched in, it would cost 79 cents. If UWS does save $212,000 by outsourcing, that is a $1.98 tax break for each person in the six counties.

Statewide everyone saves 4 cents! Is this too much to pay for the educational benefits and the economic boost provided by the UW Superior campus?

Government does need be as efficient as possible and as cost saving as possible but budget cutting can also be counter productive. We may be better off taxing ourselves to have quality education and good jobs. Penny wise but dollar foolish budget cuts hurt us all.
Teamsters continue their fight for all multi-employer pension plan retirees

By Barb Kucera, editor, www.workdayminnesota.org

MINNEAPOLIS – The proposed plan to rescue the Central States Pension Plan would be devastating for tens of thousands of Teamster retirees, cutting pensions by as much as 65 percent, speakers warned Feb. 9 at a public forum here.

More than 700 Teamster retirees, active members and family members packed the Great Hall at Coffman Memorial Union on the University of Minnesota’s Minneapolis campus to relay their concerns to Kenneth Feinberg, the Treasury Department appointee who is overseeing the rescue plan review process.

“We did nothing wrong,” said Ken Petersen, who worked 30 years as a long-haul truck driver. “We put in our time and we earned our pensions.”

Under the plan, Petersen would lose $15,000 a year — half of his pension, he said. He was among dozens of speakers who described how the proposed cuts would ravage their retirement security. No one spoke in favor of it during the 90-minute forum.

Some 400,000 active and retired workers are covered by the Central States Pension, a multi-employer fund that is facing financial problems. The fund is backed by the federal Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation, but the PBGC lacks the resources to pay full benefits if the fund were to be declared insolvent.

In 2014, Minnesota Congressman John Kline and California Congressman George Miller crafted the Multi-employer Pension Reform Act, which was passed as part of a larger spending bill. It allows trustees of private sector multi-employer plans to cut retirees’ pensions.

In September, the Central States Pension trustees, who include representatives of both the union and employers, filed an application with the Treasury Department for a rescue plan including cuts to pensions. At year end 2014, the Fund had assets of $17.8 billion with a liability for promised benefits of $35 billion, the trustees said.

Teamsters officials originally backed proposals to cut the Central States Plan, but have backed off after hearing from members. Earlier this month, Teamsters President James Hoffa urged Congress to step in.

Feinberg, who has presided over several public forums on the plan, appeared sympathetic to the concerns expressed by the retirees.

“I am listening very careful-ly to what you and other retirees are telling me all across the United States,” he told the crowd. He is scheduled to issue a finding this spring on the viability of the rescue plan.

A busload of active and retired Teamsters attended the forum from Duluth, where they have had on-going discussions about the plan.

“The Treasury Department needs to investigate this plan and find an alternative solution,” said Rod Alstead, Secretary-Treasurer of Teamsters Local 346 in Duluth.

Several speakers said the federal government needs to shore up the PBGC so it can fulfill its role as a safety net for pension plans.

Congressman Rick Nolan, who represents northeastern Minnesota, has called on the executive director of the Central States Pension Fund to appear before Congress with more details on the benefit reduction plan.

“Big corporations that get into financial trouble should not be permitted to take their problems and failures out on employee pensions — especially while executives collect tens of millions of dollars in golden parachutes,” Nolan said. “These pension cuts are shameless, un-American and unbelievable. We’re going to leave no stone unturned to prevent them.”

Alstead, Liimatainen make appeal to VP Joe Biden

In a Feb. 10 letter to Vice President Joe Biden, Teamsters Local 346 Secretary-Treasurer Rod Alstead and retiree Sherman Liimatainen, who was a leader in that local for 24 years, appealed to the “friend and ally of American workers” to help 10 million participants in multi-employer pension plans that are in trouble.

Liimatainen, who leads the Duluth Committee to Protect Pensions, and Alstead, who has been a Teamsters #346 leader for 18 years, wrote there is nothing they regret more about their careers as drivers than the Teamster officials originally appealed to the “friend and ally of American workers” to help 10 million participants in multi-employer pension plans that are in trouble.

Liimatainen called on Congress to increase revenues to the PBGC, which was created in 1974 to “protect employee pensions – especially while executives collect tens of millions of dollars in golden parachutes.”

He told Feinberg that not only are the CSPF trustees and managers guilty of doing a poor job of administering the plan, but Wall Street and the federal government also didn’t do their jobs. The Teamsters were under a consent decree with the federal government overseeing all their activities for 24 years.

The Secretary of Labor chairs the PBGC Board and the secretaries of Treasury and Commerce are the other board members, SOL Thomas Perez has proven to be a great friend of workers.

In ending Liimatainen said “We are here to call on members of Congress and the Secretaries of Labor and Treasury to avert this tragic ending.”

Liimatainen said Monday that he feels efforts to save the CSPF pension plan are “making progress” and he had a very good feeling about Feinberg’s assessment of the crisis.

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Minnesota's elected officials appear to finally have broken through to President Obama on how bad the nation is being hit by steel dumping in the U.S. by China and other nations that are subsidizing their industries while American mining and steel making are laying off workers and shutting down plants. The situation has gotten so bad that many businesses that are vendors to those industries are also laying off.

Congressman Rick Nolan, who represents Minnesota's Iron Range where 2,000 workers are laid off, many now without even unemployment insurance, was joined in Washington DC by Governor Mark Dayton this week and they continued their push for the workers and the industry.

They also had the help of White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough, a native Minnesotan who toured the Iron Range in December.

"As we pointed out, this crisis isn't simply parochial to the Range. It threatens our national security, our economy, and the millions of good paying jobs these industries support," Nolan said. "As promised, Denis reported his findings to the President, and we will soon see some results."

Nolan said the Obama Administration is finalizing a plan of action to address massive illegal steel dumping that has cost an estimated 12,000 American workers their jobs.

"Specifics of the plan will be revealed over the coming weeks," Nolan said, "and I will continue working closely with Denis - a self-described convert to our cause - and his team to help make sure these steps are swift, bold and effective."

Obama said it is no secret that China has not acted fairly and that he will soon sign a bill that will give his agencies more tools to stop steel dumping. He said he will boost funding and empower a number of people working on the issue for his administration.

While this is another "it's about time" moment for laid off mining and steelworkers, cases such as these always take a lot of time. The USW, who have brought most of the illegal dumping cases to the federal government's attention, have often stated that the damage has been done before they get anyone's attention in Washington DC.

They've got their attention, but Nolan said it will still be weeks before a plan's in place.

He said there are some good things that have happened in dumping cases. The U.S., led largely by the USW, have won 157 International Trade Commission cases against steel and China and other nations.

"Tough new preliminary tariffs (taxes) are already in place on foreign cold-rolled steel, hot-rolled steel and corrosion-resistant steel," Nolan said. "The American Trade Enforcement Act - for which I was an original cosponsor - is now law, and includes important improvements in antidumping and countervailing duty laws for the first time in 20 years."

Nolan said he is building support for his legislation to impose a five-year moratorium on all foreign steel imports to give those industries time to recover.

**TPP protests growing louder as AFL-CIO**

"A number of important labor recommendations were wholly ignored," the fed said. "Those proposals that were not wholly ignored were included in a weakened form that would undermine their effectiveness."

The report notes the trade pact's labor rights sections lack enforcement teeth or deadlines and treat complaints about labor rights far differently than the TPP treats corporate complaints about interference with potential profits.

"The TPP contains different dispute settlement mechanisms for foreign investors and working people," it says. "Foreign investors can bring cases against TPP parties on their own, without having to petition their government to do so. Working people must petition their governments, and then engage in years-long campaigns to attempt to move the cases through the arduous process." And secret trade courts handle the corporate complaints, it notes.

"TPP bargainers" – trade ministers – can "create effective dispute settlement mechanisms when they want to. Thus, failure to equalize the dispute settlement procedures available to workers was purposeful," the report says.

It also notes that while the TPP requires its 12 member nations to set minimum labor standards, it leaves the standards up to them, rather than requiring them to obey international criteria on such things as the minimum wage and the right to organize.

"The TPP explicitly provides these (labor) obligations will be satisfied 'as determined by each country,'" the pact's 19th article says. "As a result, a TPP country can set a minimum wage of a penny an hour, or allow shifts of 20 hours per day with no overtime pay, or require workers to provide their own safety gear and yet be fully compliant with (TPP)."

TPP is also vague on employment discrimination and does not address labor rights violations and repression in Mexico, Chile, Peru, Brunei and Vietnam, as well as anti-worker practices elsewhere, such as misclassification of workers in New Zealand.

"As it currently stands, the TPP fails workers," the report declares. "The AFL-CIO and global labor movement stand in opposition to the agreement. To be effective at creating shared prosperity and inclusive growth, the TPP must be renegotiated to include protections for workers, as well as the environment and other public interest issues, that are as strong as all other protections in the agreement -- including those for investors."

"Other chapters must be renegotiated to include rules that promote rather than inhibit progressive economic policies that correct market failures, ensure adequate government investment in infrastructure and human development, and provide certainty for workers, not just global businesses," the report concludes.

Communications Workers member Kristin Brody of Chicago called TPP "the same model that resulted in the loss of 3.4 million jobs after NAFTA, which now makes it almost impossible for me to buy American-made goods to support our economy and our workers here at home. It's clearly all about businesses making money and ravaging the environment."
You can make a difference in your retirement by giving and volunteering

Which part of supporting your community through United Way is most important to you?

If you’re like a lot of people, your gut reaction is to help those in immediate crisis. It’s hard to imagine not wanting to offer support to someone who has lost their home, lost their job, or has stumbled into some other seemingly hopeless situation.

But you also want to invest in prevention. If our area youth are getting the support of mentors, progressive after-school programs, and nutritious food to learn and grow, their chances of falling into dire crisis are reduced. With United Way, you can address both immediate and long-term needs.

Giving to United Way is also efficient. One gift provides so much! Just a few examples of what your gift provides includes: food and shelter, financial counseling, job training, safety, resources through AFL-CIO Community Services, and volunteer opportunities for groups and individuals.

And giving is easy—even in retirement. Head of the Lakes United Way’s online giving options let you select regular donations, a lot like the payroll deductions you’re used to seeing.

We wish you well as you find your place in retirement! As you consider your reasons for supporting your community, remember United Way. Both giving and volunteering will add joy and satisfaction to the retirement you’ve worked hard to achieve.

And remember the name for our area United Way is the Head of the Lakes United Way, which covers the North Shore, Greater Duluth, Superior-Douglas County and Ashland-Bayfield County.

Go to hlunitedway.org to find giving and volunteer opportunities or call AFL-CIO Community Services Director, Rachel Loeffler-Kemp at 218-726-4775.

MINNESOTA holds steady at 14.2% union rate, Wisconsin drops from 11.7% to 8.3%

By Barb Kucera
Workday Minnesota

Minnesota’s union membership rate held steady at 14.2 percent of the workforce in 2015 with 363,000 working Minnesotans belonging to a union. The Bureau of Labor Statistics’ annual survey of union membership also showed the national rate holding steady at 11.1 percent.

While membership rates slightly increased in North and South Dakota and slightly decreased in Iowa, union membership in Wisconsin plummeted from 11.7 to 8.3 percent as Governor Scott Walker continued attacks on collective bargaining.

“It shouldn’t surprise anyone that Minnesota has both a higher unionization rate, higher median income and a better workplace safety record than any of our neighbors,” said Minnesota AFL-CIO President Bill McCarthy. “Higher union density means a higher standard of living for all working people.”

Bureau of Labor Statistics data shows people represented by unions earn higher wages, have quality, affordable healthcare and can look forward to a more secure retirement. Additionally, unions significantly reduce wage inequalities. Women represented by unions earn an average of $212 more per week than non-union women.

Working people of color particularly benefit from union representation. Latino and African-American workers earn 23.1 percent and 17.3 percent more respectively when they are represented by a union.

U.S. Labor Secretary Thomas Perez, in a statement issued Jan. 28 with the 2015 membership numbers, said “strong unions empower all working people, putting upward pressure on wages and labor standards throughout the economy. After all, you don’t need a union card to have benefited from the advent of the weekend.

“So we all have skin in the game when unions are threatened and collective bargaining rights come under attack,” he added. “When a larger percentage of workers belong to unions, the middle class grows and thrives.”

As unions have shrunk, wages have dropped or stagnated for many jobs and many people have been pushed down the ladder of economic opportunity.

Union membership is strongest in the Northeast, particularly Minnesota, the Great Lakes and the Pacific Coast, and lowest in the South, as the BLS data shows.

Public workers are five times more likely to be unionized (35.2 percent) than private-sector workers (6.7 percent), with teachers and public safety workers leading the way. Public and private densities changed little from 2014. The public sector added 23,000 unionists, to 7,241 million last year, slightly fewer than the 7,554 million private-sector unionists.

The BLS data was released the same day that Gallup ranked Minnesota with the highest job creation index in the nation.

“At some point, Minnesota’s labor movement is committed to ensuring these new jobs are family-sustaining jobs,” noted McCarthy.

This article includes information from Press Associates Union News Service.

MINNESOTA top 5 of best run states

Minnesota Management and Budget (MMB) announced that Minnesota has a fifth-straight forecasted budget surplus, created by Minnesota’s growing economy. With the lowest unemployment rate in 14 years, the largest budget reserve in state history, and a $1.9 billion budget surplus, Minnesota is doing better, much better than it was before.

On top of all that, Minnesota was named one of the five best-run states in the country by 24/7 Wall Street:

5th – Minnesota is ranked the 5th-best run state in the nation
8th – At 3.7%, Minnesota’s unemployment rate is the 8th-lowest in the nation
10th – Minnesota’s median household income ($61,481) is the 10th-highest in the nation

Here is what you need to know about Minnesota’s economy:

$1.87 billion – Minnesota’s projected state budget surplus
5 times – This is the 5th-straight forecasted surplus under the Governor’s tenure
$1.9 billion – At $1.9 billion, Minnesota has the largest budget reserve in state history
14 years – At 3.7%, the state’s unemployment rate is as low as it has been in 14 years
190,500 – The number of new jobs added since January 2011
#1 – Minnesota is CNBC’s “Best State for Business”

When Gov. Mark Dayton took office in 2011, he promised to increase funding for E-12 education every year and he has delivered on that promise. Those investments, and the state’s continued commitment to educational improvement, contribute to Minnesota’s overall success.

According to 24/7 Wall Street: “Higher spending may partially explain the higher educational attainment among state residents, which in turn contributed to Minnesota’s high ranking. After Alaska, Minnesota is home to the highest share of adults with a high school diploma. Additionally, 34.3% of adults in the state have a bachelor’s degree, higher than the national rate of 30.1%.”

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With Scalia's passing, Labor says Senate needs to do its duty to fill seat

Friedrichs case now has a better chance of a pro-union ruling

WASHINGTON (PAI) — The Amalgamated Transit Union and the AFL-CIO are demanding the Republican-run U.S. Senate do its duty and hold confirmation hearings and a vote on whomever President Barack Obama (D) nominates to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Whether the solons will listen is debatable. Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Kent., says Obama should leave the decision on who will replace Justice Antonin Scalia to the next president. But Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, chair of the Judiciary Committee — which will hold the hearings — is less dogmatic. He'll wait to see who Obama nominates.

Union leaders said McConnell can't pick and choose which presidential election, including this year's, determines when to fill a Supreme Court vacancy.

"Sen. McConnell and the GOP presidential candidates are politicizing Scalia's passing and disgracing our Constitution," said ATU President Larry Hanley. "They have it backwards. The American people took a presidential vote in 2012 and McConnell and his cohorts can't pick which election counts" when it comes to having a president pick High Court nominees.

"Working people will not tolerate their partisan attempt to nullify President Obama's constitutional right to appoint a successor to Justice Scalia. We will not let that stand. We call on the Senate to fulfill their constitutional responsibility and give Obama's nominee a fair and timely hearing," Hanley concluded.

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka agreed. He called McConnell's plan "appalling," adding "the Supreme Court is not a game and the Constitution is not a toy. "Republican leaders in and out of the Senate must act as U.S. leaders, regardless of party affiliation. The American people do not want them to politicize such a vital responsibility. They want them to carry out their constitutional duty to their country," he said.

Scalia, 79, died Feb. 13. As the intellectual leader of the court's conservative bloc, his death leaves the fate of a number of key cases up in the air.

One is Friedrichs vs California Teachers Association, which justices heard in January. The case, brought by the virulently anti-worker anti-union right wing National Right to Work Committee — and nine dissident teachers it recruited — challenges public worker unions' right to collect "agency fees" from non-members.

It's the top labor case this year.

If the right wing wins Friedrichs, overturning more than 40 years of law, all state and local government bodies, from school boards on up, would become "right to work" fiefdoms. "Free riders" — workers who take union services without paying for them — would proliferate. In January, the court seemed to be weighted 5-4 for Friedrichs and RTW, with Scalia in the five.

With Scalia's passing and only eight justices voting, a 4 to 4 split is expected in Friedrichs and probably other significant cases. In the case of a tie vote, the decision that was made by the court that a case was appealed from remain in place. In Friedrichs it could result in a win for unions which is how the lower court ruled.

Besides the Scalia vacancy, Obama or his successor could nominate, and send to the Senate, other Supreme Court hopefuls. Three other justices are at least 77 years old.

Supreme Court puts Clean Power Plan on legality hold

On February 9, the U.S. Supreme Court, on a seldom used emergency order and 5-4 vote, granted a stay that temporarily halts the implementation of President Obama’s Clean Power Plan while legal challenges to the rule are decided by the courts.

The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, other unions, 27 states, and several utilities have filed suit to prevent implementation of the new federal regulations that had gone into effect Oct. 23 designed to reduce carbon pollution from power plants nationwide.

In 2015, the Environmental Protection Agency came out with the Clean Power Plan, which requires states to draw up plans for reducing emissions of carbon dioxide (CO2) by 32% by 2030.

The justices, like IBEW, apparently have doubts about the EPA's legal standing to implement the policy. Justices said EPA’s carbon emission guidelines for power plants must be put on hold until a decision comes this summer from the appeals court.

"Human-caused climate change is real, and a real threat, but focusing on power generation in isolation – leaving out industry, agriculture, and transportation – ignores three quarters of the problem," IBEW President Lonnie R. Stephenson says. “Everyone will benefit from an effective response so everyone should share in the cost.”

More than 200-coal fired power plants have been shut down in the past five years and shutting down more will cripple the economy because an equal baseload power conversion to natural gas and solar generation doesn’t exist.

"The future of the federal plan remains unclear, Governor Dayton, along with 16 other governors across the U.S., has pledged to move ahead with the plan no matter what happens to the federal plan. The Governors' Accord for a New Energy Future was signed by on February 16.

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency is holding public listening sessions to discuss what Minnesota needs to do to develop an implementation plan to comply with the Clean Power Plan. Concerned parties are encouraged to attend and voice an opinion. A meeting was held in Duluth Tuesday after this issue went to press. Additional meetings are scheduled March 2 in St. Paul (Wellstone Center, 179 Robie St E), March 8 in Minneapolis (Minneapolis Urban League, 2100 Plymouth Ave N), and March 9 in Rochester (Centerstone Plaza Hotel, 401 6th St SW).

All listening sessions will follow the same schedule: 5:30 - 6:30pm: Open house and a chance to speak one-on-one with MPCA staff.

6:30-8:30pm: A brief presentation, followed by an opportunity for people to voice their interests and ask questions.

MPCA staff will also be available for follow-up questions after the meeting.

More information from MPCA is at pca.state.mn.us/air/what-can-you-do