A Long Year of Challenges

CWA Local 6355’s Missouri Public Workers have never experienced a year filled with as many challenges as 2013

In the past, we’ve been forced to take on an administration that was trying to restructure the services we provide in ways that threatened the jobs of hundreds of our members.

In the past, we’ve been forced to take on a state legislature that wanted to slash the operating budgets for our employers.

In the past, we’ve been forced to fight an administration that wanted to bar tens of thousands of previously eligible citizens from participation in the programs we work to administer.

In the past, we’ve been forced to fight to protect our basic rights to have a union from a legislature that wanted to take them away.

In 2013, we had to take on all of those fights at once. Leaders in the General Assembly made passing anti-union legislation among their highest priorities. The Senate and House settled on a misleadingly labeled “paycheck protection” bill as their vehicle to add Missouri to the sad parade of states, started by Wisconsin, that have passed legislation severely restricting workers’ rights. SB29, the “paycheck protection” legislation passed by the House and Senate would have meant the end of CWA Missouri Public Workers as a functional organization.

Our members mobilized as never before and we defeated SB29 in October when the Senate failed to override Governor Nixon’s veto of the bill. CWA was instrumental in securing the margin for victory, but it took a broad coalition of organizations to win this struggle.

But the trouble didn’t stop with SB29. The General Assembly also passed a bill that threatened the jobs of thousands of state workers and tens of thousands of school district employees called HB253. This bill, written by and for a tiny lobby of very politically connected super-rich investors, would have starved the state of the revenue we rely on to fund every social service in this state. Passing the bill was the proudest achievement of Speaker of the House Tim Jones. Working in a broad coalition of faith groups, community organizations, and other labor groups, CWA Missouri Public Workers persuaded Governor Nixon to veto the bill and secured votes from enough legislators to make sure that the veto would be sustained.

But, our monumental challenges weren’t limited to a hostile legislature. CWA Missouri Public Workers had to take on an administration determined to cut the number of jobs in the Family Support Division. FSD administrators also wanted to kick more than 50,000 people out of their programs. We haven’t won all we have to win in that fight, but we have made progress. There’s a theme emerging here, and that theme is that when CWA members take a leading role in coalitions aimed at building social progress, CWA can win.

SIGN THE BUDGET PETITION

Show your support of the pay raise and other budgetary concerns by signing the petition to Governor Nixon. Missouri must make public employees and their services a priority, for the sake of our state. Petitions will be circulating offices.

If you would like to start one at your office call (800)575-6355 today!
We all know that we are in the fight of our lives in beating back the attacks on our union and the work our members perform. We have to fight the administrator’s at our agencies who are always looking for ways to cut the bottom line - and that usually means something bad for us. We have to fight a legislature that holds as an article of faith that state workers are underworked and overpaid.

It has been a hard lesson for CWA Missouri Public Workers Union members to learn: even though the people who depend on the agencies we work for are being treated monstrously badly by our agency administrators and even though we are straining under truly devastating work loads, injustice doesn’t correct itself.

So, CWA members have been building a movement. Just focusing on only one of our major campaigns, the fight to save the Family Support Division, the list of allies CWA has brought into the effort to save jobs and access to public services is tremendous: the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, Centers on Independent Living, Grass Roots Organizing, NAACP, Legal Services of Eastern Missouri, Kansas City Salvation Army, Paraquad, Missouri Association for Social Welfare, reStart of Kansas City, Missourians Organizing for Reform and Empowerment, Missouri Jobs with Justice, St John’s Episcopal Church, and Young Activists United of St Louis.

We’ve been displaying the growing strength of this movement in ways increasingly hard for the administration to ignore. Hundreds of members of the public have attended public meetings where CWA’s concerns about FSD reorganization were main topics for discussion. We have made some substantial progress: our organizing has frightened FSD administration enough to back off of their plan to outsource all of the cases handled by FSD to rural offices and the process that people will be interviewed for and hired for promotional opportunities has been made more fair.
MO State Employees’ Pension Plan in Good Hands

By: Laura Jackson, Cass County

First, let me thank each of you that voted for me to be your union representative on the Board of Trustees. My four year term will expire in December 2014 and my hope is that the newly elected active state employee for 2015 will be another union rep since our primary focus is truly for the benefit of all state employees. It has been an interesting few years as a board member with not having a background in finances. I have to say that the MOSERS staff took extra time to provide me and other new board members with the basics of finance and investments in order to help us make sound decisions about the direction the staff would need to take to keep the pension plan going in the right direction, unlike the direction so many other government pension funds around the country have gone with regard to significant losses in funding.

MOSERS has received several awards that recognize the exceptional work that has been done over the past few years that has caused our fund to stand out among its peers. These awards include the recent Lifetime Achievement award bestowed upon the Executive Director, Gary Findley who has been at the helm of MOSERS since 1994, by the esteemed Money Management Letter. Gary has cultivated a working environment that is conducive to excellence among his staff which is proven by the many accolades the pension fund has received over the past several years by various outside entities despite the recent economic downturn.

Advancements since I have been on the board include a one percent contribution of pay towards the deferred compensation plan for new employees, of which they can “opt-out” after the automatic enrollment period begins. Nevertheless, higher percentages of employees remain in the “auto enrollment” than do those who choose to opt-out. Automatic percentage increases for all employees participating in the deferred compensation program is now also available in an effort to keep contributions at a level that should keep the employee’s own retirement fund moving forward over time rather than staying at a pace of $25 to 50 per month over many, many years. The MOSERS deferred compensation plan was recently recognized as an innovator among pension plans and adding these types of components must have helped them achieve national recognition.

In addition, enhancements to online information and enrollment have been completed to allow for more individualized data than can be provided in the generalized pre-retirement seminars.

I can say without any compunction that decisions about sound investments, exceptional services for active members and retirees, along with concerted education efforts are held in the highest regard by MOSERS staff and by the board of trustees. We remain focused on being able to deliver on the promise of providing a “guaranteed” benefit payment to state employees who have spend their life’s work providing services for and to the citizens of the State of Missouri.

Editor’s Note: CWA will fight to keep politicians and Wall Street investors hands out of our members pensions. If you are interested in succeeding Laura as a MOSERS trustee, contact the union office.
CWA Local 6355 Member Profile

Q: Why did you decide to join CWA Local 6355?
A: I joined the union because of the verbal abuse I and other workers were facing from a member of management. I joined the union to fight back against this kind of abuse. The more union members that are at each facility the more power they have to fight against things that are wrong. There is strength in numbers.

Q: Why did you decide to join COPE?
A: I decided to join COPE because it makes me more politically active. COPE helps the union to back the political candidates that support the union and their needs, which in turn meets the union members’ needs.

Q: What has being a union member taught you?
A: Being a member has taught me that there really is strength in numbers. As a member you can stand up for yourself and other members who are being targeted or retaliated against at work. Being in the union gives you a voice about your working conditions.

Q: What is the best memory you have from being active with your union?
A: My best memory was the first time I won Step III hearing. Overall though the best memory is the fact that I can help my fellow co-workers to achieve their goals of making a better work environment. A lot of issues can be settled in house if you are a union member. In the union, you have support, you are not in there by yourself. Being a union member makes a huge difference because half the time, managers do not know the policies, but we do and the union makes sure our voice is being heard.

Q: What would you like to say to your union brothers and sisters all across the state?
A: I would like to tell my union brothers and sisters to unite, stay strong and don’t ever give up. Make sure to communicate with each other so that you can back each other up. Do your homework and your research when you are fighting back. Always support each other and depend on each other to progress forward.

Q: What interests you outside of work? Do you have any hobbies or similar interests?
A: I really like to read a lot. I am a curious person, so I like to do research on things that catch my interest. I enjoy finding answers to questions that no one can answer for me.

Monthly Membership Meetings

St. Louis: First Thursday of the month at 6:00 pm
CWA Union office at 5585 Pershing Ave; St. Louis, MO 63112

Kansas City: Fourth Wednesday of the month at 6:00 pm
CWA Union office at 6320 Manchester; Kansas City, MO 64133

If you are interested in setting up a meeting in your area, contact (800)575-6355.
Cutting Food Stamp Eligibility:
A Coward’s Way of Solving the Staffing Crisis

CWA members, working in a coalition with other labor organizations, social justice groups, faith leaders and student organizations succeeded in October in getting Governor Nixon to override FSD Director Alyson Campbell’s plan to kick 50,000 low income adults off of the food stamp program.

Any CWA member who has been paying attention to our fight to save Family Support Division knows the real reason Campbell was pushing for this cut: FSD is some 400 eligibility specialists and office support assistants short of the level of need to adequately process the caseload FSD is attempting to service. Instead of having the courage to tell the General Assembly that the agency needs more staff to handle the workload, FSD administration thought that they had an easy out by kicking 50,000 people off the program.

The people who would be kicked off of the program are folks like St Louis area bicycle delivery small business owner Andy Heaslet (pictured above). Andy knows CWA Local 6355 through his involvement with the Missouri Jobs with Justice Coalition. Here’s what he had to say recently about how the SNAP program helped him when he was trying to get his business off its feet:

“I think it’s important for me to share that I was on food stamps for some time and they were truly invaluable. There were months where I was weeks late on rent, had to pay late fees on credit card bills, and struggled to pay the people working for me. But I always knew I could have a healthy meal, which was often the brightest point of any given day while struggling to balance so many other things in my life. I am truly grateful for that assistance and I think it's safe to say that my life would be radically different without them. Thank you America and thank you to the Department of Social Services employees who helped me.”

CWA members know that our elected officials have got their priorities backwards. Instead of worrying about how young entrepreneurs will be able to make successful businesses, our legislators are spending their time trying to make billionaires like Rex Sinquefeld happy enough to keep writing campaign contribution checks by cutting taxes on giant corporations. As long as the General Assembly is making its priority to comfort the comfortable, public employees and the people we serve are going to suffer. And as long as the people who are supposed to lead FSD refuse to advocate for the agency’s needs with the General Assembly, CWA will keep fighting.

Instead of kicking people off of vital social services that make a “radical difference” in their lives, it’s up to us to force the administration and legislature to support the services we provide, not slash them.

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Building a National Movement for Workers’ Rights

By: Alfreda Whittier, St. Louis County

Recently I travelled with lead organizer, Mark Esters, and two fellow union members, Natasha Pickens and Holly Roe to Dallas, Texas in an effort to support Joe Montemayor lead organizer for the Texas State Employees Union (TSEU) and to visit Texas Health and Human Services.

My first trip was quite an experience. I was delighted to represent CWA and TSEU. Knowing what our goals were, we successfully sign up 15 new union members in Denton and Terrell Texas state hospital. To sign up these new members, we hosted a cookout as an appreciation for current and new union members. Diligently working to support TSEU, our days started early and ended late with hours starting as early as 4am until 12am. The work schedule was to target each shift, and we worked it! Our day started with greeting employees and handing out flyers to support our efforts. Tired and sometimes frustrated, the time and effort was very rewarding as we reached our goal. Ending with new members who were very kind people and willing to make a change, two days ending with 15 new union members and great deal well of fed employees.

Last we visited a Texas Health and Human Services resource center. Upon arrival, we met with Keith Stenson, a TSEU member. Mr. Stenson gave us a tour of the facility and explained the new system of operations. Since 2010, Denton Health and Senior Services has developed a new computer system and method of assisting clients which is similar to Alyson Campbell’s reorganization plan for Missouri, a very interesting process. At this office, the clerical workers are the frontline workers assisting with gathering and processing client’s information for caseworkers. In addition, the resource center has an area where clients are to apply for their benefits via computer if needed, drop off information and speak to a worker for assistance if needed. Next, we were given a tour of the building. Behind closed doors are the caseworkers. Some caseworkers work in an office and others work in cubicle. Caseworkers and clerical staff utilize two computer monitors because of the new computer system giving them access to multiple tasks.

Although waking up at the crack of dawn and working late hours was tiring, it was worth the time and effort to support fellow union members in making a difference in their future. Working with Missouri and Texas union members was encouraging, proving that as an employee, no matter where one’s place of employment is, as a worker, standing up for your rights spans nationwide. And visiting Texas Health and Senior Services gave some insights on what may be the future for the State of Missouri Social Services offices.
CWA Local 6355 activists and leaders from every agency and every part of Missouri came together Columbus Day weekend in Jefferson City to chart the course of our union for the next two years.

The assembled delegates reviewed the unprecedented challenges Local 6355 beat back and survived in 2013. Although pleased at the leadership CWA Local 6355 showed in beating back massive attacks on workers’ rights and public services, General Assembly delegates committed the union to do more than play defense for the next two years.

CWA will employ a strategy of building majorities in DSS, DHSS and Parkway worksites and in expanding membership in our foster care organizing campaign to harness the power of public workers to improve conditions for ourselves and those we serve.

At the same time, we will take a leading role in building a movement of individuals and organizations dedicated to the restoration of democracy and social justice in the United States. We will “think globally and act locally,” as we fight to:

- Lower case load sizes for state workers
- Fully fund 100% of the state’s obligations to support local school districts
- Increase base pay for state workers with extreme position turnover
- Push for within grade salary advancements for state employees
- Protect and expand the right to organize and bargain collectively
- Expand access to basic health care

Delegates also heard from CWA District 6 Vice President Claude Cummings and Missouri Association for Social Welfare Executive Director Jeanette Mott Oxford on the important role Local 6355 has to play as part of a national and statewide movement for workers rights and public services.

CWA 6355 activists committed to a vigorous time frame for mobilization and organizing actions over the course of the next year. For a copy of the General Assembly resolution or mobilization plan, contact the union office at (800)575-6355.
# APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

**NAME:** __________________________________________________________________________________

**ADDRESS:** _______________________________________________________________________________

**CITY/STATE/ZIP:** ________________________________________________________________________

**PHONE (HOME):** ________________________________ **PHONE (WORK):** ________________________

**JOB CLASSIFICATION:** _________________________ **DIVISION:** _______________________________

**WORK LOCATION (ADDRESS):** __________________________ **COUNTY:** ______________________

**EMAIL:** _________________________________________________________________________________

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## AUTHORIZATION FOR EMPLOYEE ORGANIZATION DEDUCTION

I hereby, voluntarily, authorize and direct the State of Missouri, to deduct from my pay each month, beginning with the receipt of this authorization, regular monthly dues as certified by the Secretary Treasurer of the Communications Workers of America, equaling 2 hours pay per month (equivalent to 1.15% of base pay).

I further direct the State to forward all sums deducted to the Secretary-Treasurer of the Communications Workers of America. It is understood that the State assumes no responsibility in connection with this authorization except that of forwarding monies to the Secretary-Treasurer of the Union. Withdrawals will be processed once a year on December 15th.

**DATED:** _________________, 20___ **SIGNATURE OF EMPLOYEE** _______________________________

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**SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER**

**DATE OF HIRE**

**NAME OF CO-WORKER WHO ASKED YOU TO JOIN**

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