



# NETWORK

A PUBLICATION OF THE WISCONSIN FEDERATION OF NURSES & HEALTH PROFESSIONALS, AFT, AFL-CIO



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# President's Podium

by Candice Owley, R.N.

## She Is Still President

The first thing I need to say is, I AM NOT RETIRED. What happened and was reported in the last newsletter is the fact that, after many years, I decided not to run for president of Local 5001 which is the umbrella local for St. Francis Hospital, Dynacare Labs and Milwaukee County. This was an unpaid position, with primarily a coordinator role. I am still the WFNHP president which is a paid position and, as such, I will still bargain contracts, handle labor relations and political issues for our locals and supervise the office operations. I also intend to run again for office in May of 2015, so plan to be in my position for at least two and one-half years until Spring of 2017. I am also again elected to be a vice president of our national union and the chairperson of our national healthcare division, with 120,000 members—the second largest RN union in the country. So, let's be clear, I am not going anywhere, unless I am defeated for office in May 2015. I have, however, cut back my schedule and my salary, but primarily to help our union save money, not because there is less work.

## Elections Have Consequences

As we finish the year, I want to reflect on some very significant challenges our union is facing. I have said often that elections have consequences and, unfortunately for our union and working families, this time they are not good.

The newly elected super conservative majority at the state has announced that they will hold a vote in January to pass a bill to make it illegal to require all members to pay their fair share of dues to cover costs of collective bargaining. Workers may refuse to pay even though they must, by law, have the same rights, representation and benefits of those members that pay. There is only one real reason for this legislation, and that is to dramatically weaken private sector unions, and to hopefully and eventually end up with no unions in our state. This is a very bleak future to have a day where there are no unions left in our country. What is interesting is that even Governor Walker has said he is not supportive of dealing with this issue at this time and that it is a distraction of the real work that is needed to create jobs and rebuild the economy.

The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, a generally conservative paper, even had an editorial saying this legislation is bad for our state. So, why is this happening? The reason is crystal clear. Even the paper reported that a conservative group called, the Americans for Prosperity, established by the extremely wealthy businessmen, the



Koch brothers from Kansas, have made it their priority and they put millions into this last election. Some might say it is outrageous for these out of town millionaires to be making demands of our Wisconsin legislators, and they would be right. These out of state CEO's don't care about us here in Wisconsin, and are doing nothing to help working families. Their agenda includes moving jobs overseas, cutting workplace safety laws and moving more full time jobs to part time and temporary positions.

Some have even suggested that unions that supported the current Republicans may be excluded from this law, which is just clear political pay back and is completely unfair. The truth is those unions have not even asked for this exclusion. So, the suggestion is clearly just another attempt to divide the working people of our state.

What is the impact in states that have passed these laws? Lower wages, fewer unions, weaker workplace safety rules, with workplace death rates 51% and higher.

I could go on listing all the negative impacts of these types of laws, but what is critical to remember is that this law is wrong for Wisconsin; and, we plan to do all we can to stop this from happening. In the next few weeks we will be asking you, the members, to join in the campaign to let those in Madison who listen more to out of state millionaires that they need to pay attention and do the right things for Wisconsin's working families.

## Ferguson and Beyond

I want to close with a final thought on all the unrest we have seen in major cities, including Milwaukee, over the recent deaths of unarmed African Americans at the hands of white police officers. Let me make it clear that I have the greatest admiration for policemen and I know they have a dangerous and difficult job. I even have cops in my family, but something is terribly wrong with our criminal justice system; and, these recent killings, including the one in Milwaukee, have just exposed a very long history of unequal justice, and all the pain and suffering that are an extension of that inequality.

*continued on page 3*

## President... *from page 2*

The passion that has spilled over into so many streets is about much more than these recent deaths. It is about a system of injustice that has existed for decades. My own son recently wrote about a time 20 years ago in his childhood in Milwaukee when one of his African American teenage friends was gunned down in our neighborhood. My son was so moved by all that is happening that he even made the effort to find the decades old news article that confirmed the boy was unarmed and killed by a white policeman, and no inquest was held, even though the Mayor and Alderman called for an investigation and a change in policies at community meetings. So many young men have died, and still, 20 years later the same discussion takes place.

Many in our community have lost hope and patience. Justice delayed is justice denied. We must use the passion of this time to search for real changes in our policing, including the courts. We are a country of laws; therefore, we will have to accept the decisions of the grand juries, but we do not have to go quietly into the night. We can still join in peaceful protest and keep up the pressure to bring about the change we all know is needed.

I am also proud to say that our national union president, Randi Weingarten, chose to march with Rabbis in New York after the decision on the Eric Gardner case and went to jail in an act of civil disobedience, because she is committed, not just making a statement; but, to actually making change and not letting the lives of so many, young black men be lost in vain.

We can only hope that these deaths like the 12-year old with a fake gun killed in two seconds, will make us all come together to say enough is enough. Twenty years ago nothing happened; but, now we demand change and justice, because that is who we are, or at least who we should be in this land of freedom and opportunity.

*If you would like to receive regular electronic updates from president Owley, please email [cowley@wfnhp.org](mailto:cowley@wfnhp.org) and you will be added to the list to receive the Owley Update, which comes out every few weeks.*

## Moving Forward Together

*by Jamie Lucas, Lead Organizer*

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With the final results of the latest election and our endorsed candidate, Mary Burke, losing her bid to become Governor, we are left to regroup and refocus our efforts on making Wisconsin a fair place to live and work. We have all witnessed the fact that elections have consequences, and this election is no different. In this case, many of the people who re-elected Scott Walker are the same people who voted for Wisconsin to get a raise and better healthcare.

Voters overwhelmingly passed advisory referendums on raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour, which would give thousands of our hardworking brothers, sisters, fathers, and mothers a better quality of life; and, accepting federal funding for Medicaid, which would allow Wisconsin to expand its BadgerCare program to cover thousands more of our neighbors who are struggling to make ends meet, as well as save the state millions of dollars over the upcoming years.

Seventy-three percent of voters statewide agreed that Wisconsin should accept the federal funds for BadgerCare. Sixty-seven percent of voters statewide voted to raise the minimum wage. In the past, Wisconsin's legislators embraced reason and acted to pass legislation that improved the quality of life for those who elected them to their positions. Recently, hyper-partisan rhetoric has taken center stage in the Capitol. It should be clear to this crop of policymakers that it's time to raise the minimum wage and expand access to affordable healthcare. These are real steps that can be taken to get Wisconsin back on track, but we cannot just sit back and trust that these actions will be taken.

WFNHP will continue to work with our allies across the state to ensure that politicians heed the advice of the people who put them into office. Already, in Milwaukee, we have participated in a community debriefing of the elections with a focus on moving forward together to organize our workplaces and neighborhoods to turn these advisory referendums into binding legislation that will tangibly improve the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. We must adapt to the fact that merely casting a ballot is no longer enough to make your voice heard through the static of special interests and campaign donations.

Did you vote "Yes" on either of these referendums? Are you passionate about fair wages and accessible, affordable healthcare? Contact me at [jlucas@wfnhp.org](mailto:jlucas@wfnhp.org) or 414-475-6065 extension 20, and let's work together to make sure the voice of the people is heard.

# Making Strides at VA

by Jamie Lucas, Lead Organizer

What an exciting time to be an RN at the Milwaukee VA! With newly elected officers, new stewards, progress at the bargaining table—and even a visit from AFT president Randi Weingarten—there's been a lot going on.

## New Union Leaders

A new generation of leadership has emerged after the past couple years of union growth and development. There is currently a nice blend of experienced union leaders and fresh faces eager to fight for positive change.

The new Executive Council for Local 5032 is: Ethel Davenport, Nursing Education, president; Nancy Kotajarvi, Primary Care, vice president; Roy Gerber, Spinal Cord Injury, treasurer; Linda Radmann, Acute Medical/Surgical Inpatient, secretary; and, Kim Cannon, Home Telehealth, chief steward.

On November 17<sup>th</sup>, 11 VA RN's attended a training by the University of Wisconsin Extension-School for Workers, at the WFNHP office, to learn how to better enforce the union contract, ensure that all rules and regulations in the hospital are followed and enforced fairly, and to advocate and empower their co-workers. It was an inspirational and educational day for everyone in attendance that will allow us to strengthen our union.

## Bargaining Update/ULP Victory

Bargaining for a new contract has proven to be a lengthy process. The current contract was negotiated in 1992, and a lot has changed since then, both inside and outside the VA. Negotiations began last year. The bargaining team is gearing up to move into the new year with considerable momentum at its back, but with lots of hard work still to be done.

Early on in negotiations, the VA's management representatives at the bargaining table refused to bargain four of our proposals. In turn, we filed an Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) charge with the Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA) because we alleged that management refused to bargain in good faith by refusing to bargain the four proposals.

After the ULP was filed, VA management finally agreed to bargain in good faith with WFNHP. The four proposals are now back on the table, and we're eager to bargain these proposals and secure a strong, fair contract for every RN in the hospital.



L-R, Jamie Lucas, WFNHP lead organizer, Roy Gerber, RN, VA Local 5032 treasurer, Candice Owley, WFNHP president, Ethel Davenport, RN, VA Local 5032 president & Randi Weingarten, AFT president.

## Presidential Visit

National AFT president, Randi Weingarten, came to Milwaukee in October, and she took some time to visit with local leaders and members while she was here. President Weingarten met with a room full of WFNHP members to discuss what they face every day at work and how this local's progress and vision aligns with AFT's national vision. Among the issues discussed were staffing, building an atmosphere of respect for all RN's, and the continued fight to ensure nurses of all backgrounds and cultures are offered the same opportunity and respect in the hospital.

The visit concluded with a tour of the brand new Spinal Cord Injury building on the VA campus. The new treatment center offers state of the art technologies and amenities, including adaptive sports equipment and an apartment unit designed to assist veterans in the adjustment to living at home, to treat veterans and veterans' family members with spinal cord injuries. President Weingarten got a real taste of what our members do and face every day and pledged her support in our efforts at the VA.

# WFNHP Members Made A Difference in 2014



Sandy Muesegades, Public Health Nurse, & longtime union leader from Local 5011 recognized for 43 years of dedicated service to the citizens of Sheboygan County.

Whether it was fighting for safe staffing & quality care, or educating the community on the importance of voting to accept federal funding to expand BadgerCare & raise the minimum wage, WFNHP members stood together to fight for issues that affected their patients, the community & Wisconsin's working families.



# Bargaining Update

## One Year Agreement in the Northwoods



Local 5033 Bargaining Team: L-R, Nancy Stimac, RN, Calla Gelhausen, RN, & president, Eileen Mercer, RN.

### Local 5033 Ratifies One-year Contract

RN's and professionals working at Langlade Hospital in Antigo continued the pattern of negotiating one-year agreements. The current contract began on 7/1/2014 and will expire on 6/30/2015. For the second one-year contract employee raises were very modest. The hospital expressed concern about financial status due to changes in reimbursement laws, so the members agreed for one more year to the **1% raise** and slight increase in shift differentials. The hospital's finances are being reviewed by our national research team, and it is likely that the union members will be demanding better raises in the next contract. Other than wages, the main focus of this year's negotiations was language clarification.

### 15-Year Rotation

For years there has been confusion over the language restricting rotation over 15 years. After a lengthy discussion, we believe this confusion has finally been resolved. Another major issue was the fact that a number of employees in the ED have been wanting to get full time positions and, in fact, have for years been working full time while being held in a part time position. It was agreed to review the past work hours in the ED and, as a result, full time positions were offered to four ED nurses that had a history of working full time.

### Work Rules and Tattoos

It was agreed that the hospital can set reasonable work rules, but those rules must apply equally to all workers. Concerns had been reported that the rule regarding tattoos was not equally applied, and that women workers were more often approached and told to cover their tattoos and others were not. Of special concern was different treatment of male versus female staff.

Management stated very clearly that everyone will be equally treated including men and women. The union reps made it clear that, if the different treatment continued, then grievances would be filed.

### Managers Doing Union Work

It was agreed supervisors could do bargaining unit work, but only if the union members did not want the hours. It was also clarified that supervisors have no union seniority, therefore, cannot use their seniority to get schedules before union members. The hospital attorney made it very clear that bargaining unit members cannot be "overstepped in any way" by supervisors.

### Dynacare Members Agree to Six-Month Contract Extension

On Tuesday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, members of the Dynacare Chapter of Local 5001 ratified a six-month extension of their current contract through June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Due to remaining uncertainty by both sides concerning the Froedtert Hospital and Lab Corp negotiations over Froedtert taking over complete ownership of the lab, it was felt an extension of the current contract served both sides well, until the lab takeover negotiations reach a conclusion; and, there is a better idea where the lab stands, as far as what their workload and staffing will look like.

Some highlights of this extension include, all health insurance costs and coverage remaining the same through the extension. This applies to co-pays and deductibles, as well as the employee contribution. The employee contribution remains at the reduced rate that members pay as part of the settlement over a grievance filed early in 2014 concerning Dynacare raising the employee contribution nearly 40%, while their contract stated it could be raised only 7%.

Other highlights are a \$600 lump sum, good faith bonus which all employees will receive with their last check this year on December 18<sup>th</sup>. This bonus is in lieu of a raise for the six-month extension, but it was agreed any raise negotiated at the end of the contract extension above this \$600 payment will be retroactive to 1/1/15. Additionally, a side letter of agreement was added to be in force during this extension that states that any layoffs during this six-month period will result in management and the union negotiating a severance package for any affected employees. The members felt they will be in a better position to negotiate the full contract with Froedtert Hospital once the takeover is complete, and they settle into their new life as a fully owned subsidiary of Froedtert.

## Bargaining... *from page 6*

### St. Francis Chapters Restructure for Greater Strength & Ratify New Two-Year Contract With \$10.10 Minimum Wage & Up to 6% Raise

#### Restructured for Strength and Unity

Workers in the technical and service jobs at St. Francis Hospital for years have functioned as two separate groups with two sets of officers and separate contracts. As it became time to bargain new contracts this Fall, the leaders of the two groups reached the decision that there was little distinction between the employees in the two groups or in the two contracts. For example, the HUC's were in the service unit, but the HUC/PCA's were in the technical unit. It made perfect sense to combine the two groups into one chapter with one set of officers, and to also combine the two contracts into one. Although the two groups had worked together well over the years, the new consolidation has resulted in a much greater sense of unity and strength. Jaci Ranft stepped up to be the president of the new chapter, with Connie Smith taking over as chief steward, and Vanessa Jones as the secretary. In addition to the top officers, there are eight steward positions for the new, larger chapter. The RN chapter will continue as a separate chapter with a separate contract.

#### New Two-Year Contract

In October, the new Service/Tech Chapter and the existing RN Chapter ratified new two-year contracts. One highlight of the Service/Tech contract was establishing \$10.10 as the minimum rate of pay for any bargaining unit employee with three years of service. It was also agreed that all of the dietary employees would receive two uniforms, as a result of the new uniform requirement.

Both chapters were pleased to be able to keep the premium pay in place, which provides time and one-half when working two hours past a scheduled shift, back to when the shift began. This provision basically provides for daily overtime, a policy that had been eliminated not only in the rest of the Wheaton system, but throughout the state years ago. Once again, the union team stopped the plan to expand mandatory call as part of daily staffing on patient care units. This is a widespread practice in many hospitals and is really just another name for mandatory overtime.

Other wins included: 2.8%-3% raise in July 2015 and 2016; increase of \$.25/hour in the second year of the



*Local 5001 St. Francis bargaining team members are all smiles after the ballots are counted at ratification: Members present, from L-R include, Donna Marie Harrer, Diane Walter, Jennine Easley, Ann Homsey, Mary O'Toole, Connie Smith, Elaine Tombari, Candice Owley, Jaci Ranft, Mike Walker & Judy Langoehr*

contract for the flat rate and pool employees; new \$1/hour differential for MRT/Stroke RN's and an increase to \$1/hour charge pay for Respiratory Therapists.

#### Positive Patient Experience a Top Concern

The other major area of discussion and change was about quality care and patient satisfaction. The members agreed to continue to have patient satisfaction considered as part of the annual pay system, but how it would be measured was changed; and, a new team with members appointed by both the union and the hospital will be established to focus on how to improve the patient experience at the hospital. Both union and hospital leaders believe it is critical to have the satisfaction experience and scores for St. Francis Hospital be the highest in the Milwaukee area. It was well understood that these scores are now published for the public to see, and it would be great to see St. Francis at the top of the list.

#### New Champions Needed

The other decision made by the two chapters was to place a high focus on recruiting and training worksite representatives that would not only be knowledgeable about the contract, but also true champions of the rights of members. Outreach efforts will be conducted over the next few months to find these champions. If any St. Francis member would like more information about how to become a champion, call Candice Owley at 414-899-7070 or send an email to [cowley@wfnhp.org](mailto:cowley@wfnhp.org).

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