



A Special Report From President Owley



Candice Owley, President

These are interesting and challenging times for our country and for our union. I want to take a moment to talk about where I see our union headed over the next year. In addition, in a few weeks we will have a general membership meeting, so **this letter includes important information** regarding changes to our Constitution that will be up for a vote at the **May 5th meeting**.

Future of Healthcare— It's Personal, not Partisan

Since the national election, the issue of healthcare has been on the front burner. While President Trump ran on a platform of reducing health costs for workers and expanding coverage, what happened instead was a plan submitted by the Republican majority that did the exact opposite—eliminated coverage for millions, ended protection against pre-existing conditions (like diabetes), and would have increased, not decreased, costs. The plan, called the American Health Care Act (AHCA), was so bad that every group, from the far right conservatives to moderate Republicans, opposed the bill. It was also opposed by the American Hospital Association, Catholic Health Association, Rural Health Association, AMA, American Nurses Association, AARP, unions including our national AFT, and dozens of other groups and individuals.

There is no question that our healthcare system needs change. It is unaffordable, even for some of our union members and their families. Drug costs are through the roof, and health systems are driven by corporate profits rather than care for the community. Healthcare costs are still the major cause of family bankruptcy. After weeks of not only opposition from dozens of organizations but, also outrage from citizens across the country, the plan was put on hold. What is important to know, however, is that we

are hearing everyday that there will be more attempts to make changes—none of which are positive. Not only are there threats to insurance, but also to state Medicaid programs (Badgercare), and even Medicare (program for those 65 or with disabilities). The changes to Medicaid could have a devastating impact on Wisconsin hospitals, especially in rural areas such as Cumberland and Antigo. Because Medicaid also is the major payer for long term care, reductions will put the elderly of our communities at risk.

Our union has long stood for **quality healthcare as a right and not a privilege**. Our union executive board at the state and national levels have made it a **top priority** to fight against any policy or legislative changes that will make our healthcare system worse and, at the same time, fight to improve upon the system we have. We believe now is the time to fight for affordable prescription drugs, for programs to deal with the opioid epidemic, to take on medical debt, and to strengthen and expand the Medicare program—reducing the age of Medicare to 55, as a start.

The fight for quality healthcare as a right is one we cannot win alone but, fortunately, we have many partners in this battle for the health of our community. Not only is our national union fully engaged; but, in addition, at a state level, we have decided to join with other groups and individuals that share our desire for a just health system.

Creating a New Organization in Coordination with Progressive Community Groups, Doctors & Other Professionals

For many years, we have worked closely with the largest consumer group in our state, **Citizen Action of Wisconsin**. Citizen Action has been a leader for decades in the fight for a just society including the right to healthcare, education, economic justice, immigrant rights, voter rights and other critical issues. In the beginning of this year, we created a new partnership with Citizen Action—a **Healthcare Cooperative**. This is a new and novel approach to bringing together healthcare workers and the community into a new organization with a full time organizer dedicated to the struggle of protecting and improving our healthcare system in Wisconsin.

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New Organization... *from page 1*

The Healthcare Co-op will be funded by donations of at least 250 individuals who will pay a monthly contribution of approximately \$20. Those that make the financial commitment will be members of the Co-op, and will guide the work of the organizer. I am excited to report that, in addition to our union, an organization of progressive doctors has joined in this effort, as have other professionals and activists who want to take action to fight for quality healthcare. We now have over 80 individuals who have pledged to be members of our Co-op and are about to hire a full time organizer. I invite any member interested and willing to be active in the new Healthcare Co-op to contact Jamie Lucas by email at jucas@wfnhp.org or by phone at 720-621-3689.

New Ways of Communicating— the *WFNHP Pulse*

For a number of years we have struggled to find the best way to keep you, the member, informed of the work and activity of your union. We know our newsletters may not be read, but yet are costly, so not the best use of members' dues. This year we have decided to stop our print publications and instead use electronic means of communication. We have created an electronic newsletter, the *WFNHP Pulse*, that will be sent out every two weeks. One major problem is this publication will be sent to personal emails, not work emails, so we will be working to get everyone's email address updated. If you have not yet seen the *WFNHP Pulse* electronic newsletter, it means we do not have your email. So, please take a moment to update your email address. You can email the information to: info@wfnhp.org or call Amy at 414-475-6065. We are trying not to add to your electronic mail, so it is a relatively short email and will only be sent out every two weeks.

Occasionally some of our chapters may have newsletters or bulletins—especially during contract bargaining—that will either be handed out at work, or mailed to members' homes.

In addition to the *WFNHP Pulse*, we have a **Facebook Page** www.facebook.com/wfnhp and a **Website** www.wfnhp.org. We are now working to make sure each bargaining unit has their own area on the Website which will eventually include contracts, names and contacts of officers, and current news such as grievance wins or negotiation updates. Many of our bargaining units will also have their own private 'Facebook Group' to help with more rapid communication.

Many members have asked how they can get more involved in the campaign for quality healthcare or protection of fair working conditions. For those willing to “**take action**” such as contacting politicians or attending rallies, we will be sending out separate emails to those who would like to receive our activist emails. If you'd like to become part of our e-Activist network, please email us at info@wfnhp.org indicating you'd like to receive our “**Take Action**” emails. Those joining the Healthcare Co-op will automatically get information specific to the campaign for a just healthcare system.

Full Time Executive Director

For decades our union has been led by a full time, paid president, me. One reason we were able to do this is because many years ago I agreed to leave my job as a nurse and become the chief negotiator for all of our contracts. In addition, I managed the office operations and provided labor relations support and training for our leaders. In recent years, it became clear that it was time for the president to join with the rest of the elected leaders in the role of policy setting and creating the vision and direction of the union; but, to no longer function in the role of administrator and contract negotiator. As a result, the Executive Board decided that as of 2017, for the first time in decades, we would create and fill a newly created position of Executive Director. This decision was easy in large part because we had an excellent candidate, our lead organizer, Jamie Lucas. Jamie was appointed to the Executive Director position effective 1/1/2017, and every day it is more and more clear that this was the right decision. Jamie has been negotiating all contracts since last fall, and recently finished a first contract with a new national healthcare corporation, with a 100% contract ratification by the members. With the appointment of the Executive Director, I am transitioning into the role of voluntary president, focused on setting policy and direction for the union; and, working in close partnership with Jamie, as we define our new roles.



Jamie Lucas

Uniting and Strengthening Our Union

In 2015, our leaders made a decision to create a new, consolidated structure by unifying all of our bargaining units into one local with a new number—Local 5000. This proposal was unanimously adopted at the founding meeting of Local 5000 in October 2015. Following

that decision, members of each separate bargaining unit had to vote to accept or reject the new structure. I am excited to report that as of March 2017, 100% of the separate units completed the transition into the new, unified structure when the members of the VA unit voted to merge into Local 5000. This is exciting, because it means all of our members whether in Cumberland, Antigo, Burlington or Milwaukee, have all now joined together for strength and solidarity. Now the presidents of our bargaining units (*there are 11*) are on the Local Executive Board, along with seven at-large officers.

The Executive Board now meets at least four times a year, and twice a year (May and October) a meeting is held for the entire membership. At those meetings we are setting policy, discussing challenges, making plans, and striving for the best way to meet our vision and values of fighting for a just society, including quality affordable healthcare for all, plus decent conditions for all workers, but with focus on those in the healthcare industry.

May 5th Membership Meeting

On Friday, May 5th, from 5-9pm we will be holding our Spring General Membership/Dinner Meeting. At that meeting we will have our Citizen Action partner make a presentation on the current struggle around our healthcare system changes (what we are resisting and what we are fighting for), as well as answer questions about our new Healthcare Co-op. In addition, we will be announcing our Healthcare Champion awards, and hearing updates from our Chapter Presidents, Local President, and Treasurer. As has become our tradition, there will also be dozens and dozens of door prizes donated by our chapter-leaders and staff. At this meeting, we will also be voting to make some changes to our Constitution, and vote on three members to serve on the fall Election Committee, and an endorsement for President of the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO. The following are the proposed changes to the Constitution, along with the reasons for the changes.

Amendments to the Constitution

The following amendments are proposed by the Executive Board as changes to the Constitution:

Article IV—Election of Officers & Delegates

Section 3. Add: and delegates to local Labor Councils.

The purpose of this amendment is to add language regarding the election of Labor Council delegates, which was inadvertently excluded when the new Constitution was adopted in 2015.

Article X—Revenues

Section 3. Delete this section which requires \$1.00 of members' monthly dues be set aside in a Political Action Fund.

This section is recommended to be deleted retro-actively to 1/1/2017. The money has been held in a separate line item of the budget and will be transferred to general operations, pending the outcome of this vote. The reasons for the recommended change are: first, the money is needed for operations; and, second, with the changes in the state law regarding rules for using union dues for contributions to candidates, it is not administratively feasible to handle the reporting related to this fund. Moving forward, all political donations will have to be voluntary contributions separate from dues, with separate recordkeeping.

Only members in good standing can vote. You must be present to vote—no absentee ballots.

When We Stand Together—We Win

In closing, let me say our union is not only surviving—but thriving. Often it is said adversity builds strength, and that is true for us. Even with the passage of the state law allowing members to stop dues, even though they must still be represented, the fact is that less than 5% have moved to end their payroll deduction. What that tells me is that you, the members, understand that to have any voice, any justice at work, you must stand united; and, part of that solidarity is making sure you have the resources to bargain, arbitrate, stand up to politicians, and generally have each others' backs.

We have a great set of chapter leaders and solid contracts in all of our private sector units, plus the VA chapter. We still believe that our public employees in the counties, cities and school districts deserve the same right—the right to a contract. But, until that time when we can change the state law, we will continue the fight for worker justice and know that, even without a contract, a union means you are not alone.



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You're invited!



**WFNHP-Local 5000's
Spring Annual Dinner/Membership Meeting**

Friday, May 5th, 2017

5:00 PM – 9:00 PM

**WFNHP Union Office – 1st floor hall
9620 W. Greenfield Ave., West Allis**

- ❖ Taco Bar & other festive treats
- ❖ Union Business/Annual Report
- ❖ Margaritas, Beer & Soda
- ❖ Guest Speakers & Door Prizes

R.S.V.P. no later than Monday, May 1st, 2017

Please RSVP to your Union Steward/Rep or call the Union Office 414-475-6065 x10