

OPEIUCONNECT

Issue 562, Fall 2025



**DEFENDING
WORKERS' RIGHTS**



The Fight for Affordable Health Care Must Also be a Fight for Stronger Unions

By Tyler Turner
President

At the time of this writing, we once again find ourselves amid a government shutdown. As the continuing resolution from March expired Sept. 30, negotiations over budget appropriations to fund the federal government stalled, leaving hundreds of thousands of federal workers either furloughed or working without pay since Oct. 1. While these workers continue to be trampled in what is disguised as “government efficiency,” millions of individuals and families may soon face a terrifying choice.

A critical component of the impasse centers on an extension to the Affordable Care Act (ACA) premium subsidies, which are set to expire for millions of Americans Dec. 31. These subsidies were first expanded under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 and later extended as a part of the Inflation Reduction Act, ensuring individuals and families could access affordable health care during a period of rising inflation. These subsidies allowed some individuals with lower income to access health plans with no premiums. They also expanded eligibility for middle-income earners and capped the premium amount higher earners pay at a smaller percentage of their household income.

More than 24 million people have ACA health insurance. Without an extension, the economic impact on individuals and families will be devastating. Higher premiums will cause people to drop insurance entirely, likely younger and healthier individuals. When that happens insurance companies will raise the cost for remaining covered members, who are more likely to be older and already paying higher premiums. The Kaiser Family Foundation estimates monthly costs could double without a continuation of the expanded subsidies. Insurers in nearly every state have already started

notifying participants of premium hikes, some as high as 50 percent. With open enrollment having started Nov. 1, Americans are facing a tough choice: either pay higher premiums or lose their health coverage.

This looming uncertainty comes at a time when workers in this country are already suffering from inflation, stagnant wages, rising food prices and a lack of affordable housing. Losing access to affordable health care could further strain an already unmanageable financial situation.

Currently, medical debt is the leading cause of bankruptcy in the United States, and this political stalemate highlights how essential the work is that unions do for working people. Accessible and affordable health care is crucial, not only for individuals’ personal well-being but also for their financial security, and the union difference is clear. When workers have dependable health care coverage, they feel more secure, are better equipped to support their families and are less likely to fall into debt from medical bills and unexpected costs.

Researchers from Belmont University found union workers are significantly more likely to have health insurance coverage and pay a lower share of health care expenses than their nonunion counterparts. The take-up rate for medical care benefits, which is the percentage of workers with access to employer-sponsored plans who choose to enroll, is nearly 20 percent higher for union workers. That margin reflects more than just better benefits; it also indicates confidence in the stability of those benefits as health care costs rise. Workers in unions often enjoy more comprehensive health plans, including access to dental, vision and

prescription drug benefits. Many also provide greater access to mental health services, preventative care and wellness programs and domestic partner benefits for both same sex and opposite sex partnerships. On average, union workers pay lower premiums, lower deductibles and fewer out-of-pocket costs.

One interesting, and seemingly obvious, side effect of collectively bargained health coverage is union workers are less likely to contribute to enrollment shifting, which refers to when individuals move from employer-sponsored plans to new government-funded programs. This indicates collective bargaining may result in cost savings for the public sector.

Notably, while Congress is at an impasse regarding the ACA and continuing the expanded tax credits, the American people are not, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. The foundation reports 78 percent of Americans support extending the tax credits, and the support crosses the political spectrum.

We cannot depend on lawmakers in this country to protect the programs supporting working people. Allowing the ACA premium subsidies to expire only widens the gap between workers with strong union contracts and those without. That’s why the fight for affordable health care must also be a fight for stronger unions. Unions remain the most powerful and effective tool workers have to ensure stability and dignity, and not just in the workplace. As we grapple with the effects of this latest government shutdown and the future of health care subsidies remain uncertain, the message is clear: the struggle for fair wages, affordable health care and economic justice are all interconnected.

Pay Gap Not Budging, But Unions Can Help

A new study by a team of international researchers suggests progress on closing the gender wage gap has stalled in recent decades. The best way to close the gap continues to be union membership.

According to the researchers, the pay gap began to narrow in the 1970s, when young men and women entered the workforce being paid similar wages and older workers — who tend to have wider pay gaps, compounded over time — were retiring from the labor force. By the late ’90s and early 2000s, however, the pay gap stopped narrowing as sharply.

“Young men were falling in wage distribution rather than young women going up,” Jaime Arellano-Bover, one of the study’s authors, told CNBC. “Young women have done a tiny bit better between the mid-’70s and mid-’90s, but how much better they have done is very small relative to how much young men have dropped in the wage distribution.”

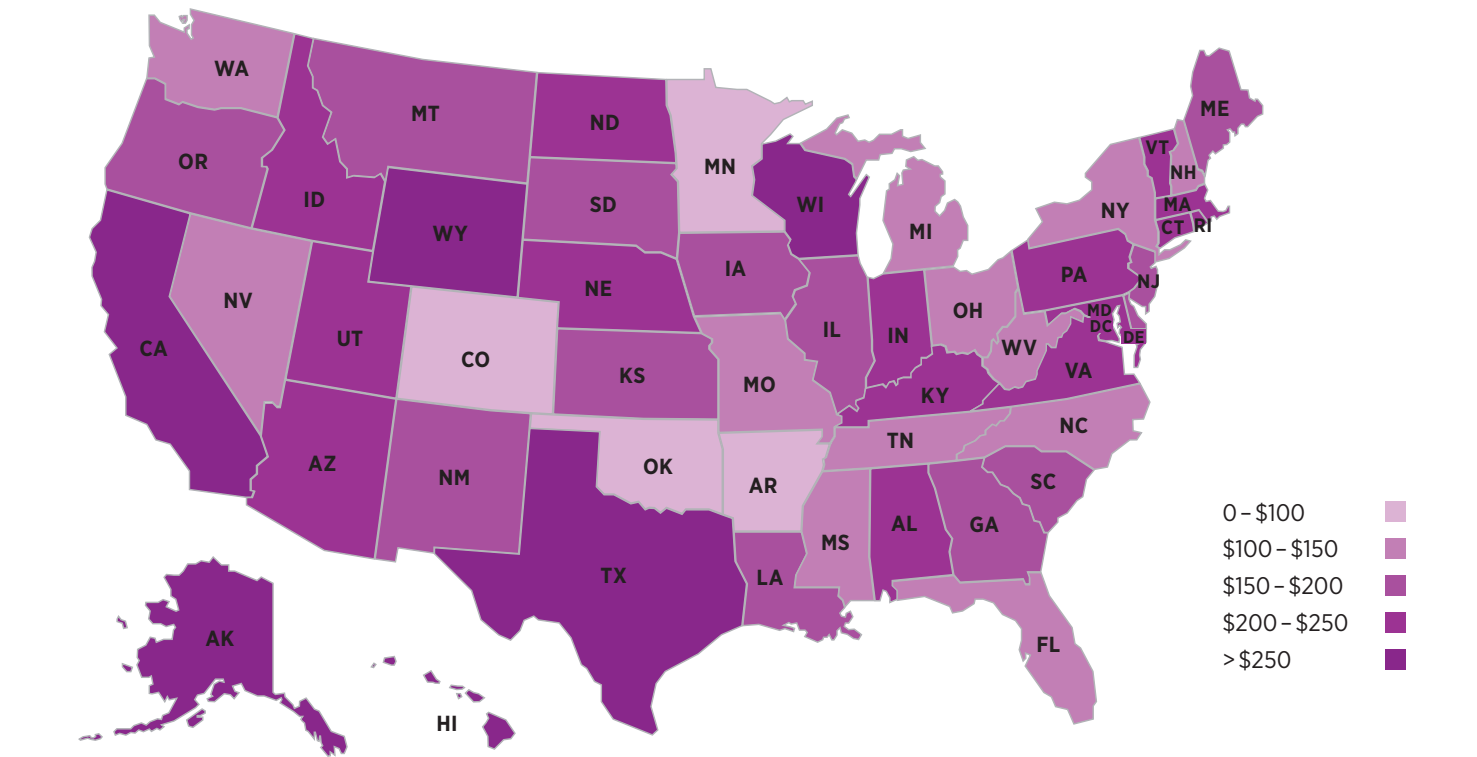
The study’s authors analyzed data from the United States, Italy, Canada and the United Kingdom. In the U.S. women earn just 84 cents for every dollar paid to men, according to a recent National Women’s Law Center report. That’s just four cents higher than they earned in 2002.

One way to continue narrowing the pay gap between men and women is to ensure working women have access to union membership. The Institute for Women’s Policy Research notes the pay gap between union women and union men, who earn more than their nonunion counterparts, was 89 cents on the dollar. In every state, union women earn more than nonunion women doing the same job. [See accompanying chart.]

To finally close the gender pay gap once and for all, we can and must focus on ensuring working women are paid what they deserve through the power of a union contract.

In every state, union women earn more than nonunion women doing the same job.

The Union Wage Advantage for Women



Notes: Data on earnings are median weekly earnings for full-time wage and salary workers aged 16 and older and are three-year (2017–2019) averages. Earnings are in 2019 dollars and are not controlled for age, level of education or industry.
Source: Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR) analysis of data from the 2017 to 2019 Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Groups (Version 2.5).
Reprinted with permission from the IWPR. This map originally appeared in IWPR’s 2021 report “Stranger Together: Union Membership Boosts Women’s Earnings and Economic Security.”

INSIDE



On our cover: OPEIU members throughout the country took to the streets this Labor Day to pay tribute to America’s working people. They marched together in a display of solidarity and strength, protesting corporate attacks on workers’ rights. See pg. 10 cover story, *Workers Over Billionaires: OPEIU Members Take to the Streets to Defend Workers’ Rights.*

OPEIU CONNECT

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Stewards Are Key to Building a Stronger Bargaining Unit



By Bill French
Rental Office Facilitator
Plymouth Housing
Local 8 (Region VI)
Seattle, Washington

To lead effectively you must serve the people you are leading. That’s the mentality I bring every day to my work as a union steward.

Stewards have a few clear-cut responsibilities: being there for grievance hearings, helping colleagues exert their **Weingarten Rights** and playing a role in the bargaining process. That focused view of a steward’s responsibilities, however, keeps power on the table at a time when working people desperately need to realize and wield their power. Rather than just being there for my colleagues’ worst days, I’ve made a point to be present for their best days, as well. I make myself available as often as I can and manage several lines of communication with my colleagues, including email, encrypted group chats and smaller working groups. Doing so has gone a long way to building trust, soft power and a sense of community within our shop, which I am confident will translate to a stronger bargaining position during our upcoming contract negotiations.

At Plymouth Housing, where I’ve worked for nearly three years as a rental office facilitator, our 300 members are spread out across 12 buildings supported by four stewards, including myself. Everyone in my shop was drawn to work at Plymouth Housing, a Seattle-based nonprofit that helps our homeless neighbors transition into housing, because we all share a deep commitment to social and economic justice. Through the power of our union we’re able to use that same commitment to bargain for better wages, benefits and working conditions— things that make the lives of our staff and our clients better.

Our union contract serves as both a sword and a shield. As stewards, it is our job to defend our collective bargaining agreements, but that defense can come in a multitude of ways. Stewardship is not all about conflict. Collecting and disseminating information, providing logistical support and educating our co-workers on the ins and outs of our contract are all valuable skills every steward team needs to be successful. The only prerequisite for being a steward is a willingness to serve, defend and build with your co-workers for a brighter future.

Trade unionism is a fermenting ground for the exact kind of change the world needs. We exist at a time and place within our country’s history where we desperately need a strong, revived union movement. Being a steward in your workplace is one of the most accessible and effective ways you can help instigate change and play a role in building a stronger labor movement that helps all working people, union and nonunion alike.



Stay Connected!

Keep up on news you can use about your union, including info about free membership benefits, such as scholarships, student debt reduction and identity theft protection.

DON’T MISS OUT!
Sign up to receive texts from OPEIU.
Text **OPEIU** to 844-240-4114.

Message and data rates may apply. You can cancel your participation in the OPEIU SMS at any time. To unsubscribe, text “STOP” to 844-240-4114. After you send the message “STOP,” OPEIU will reply with a message to confirm you have been unsubscribed. After you opt out, you will no longer receive text messages from OPEIU.

Know Your Weingarten Rights

You have the right to union representation any time you face a meeting or discussion with management that could lead to discipline. Your employer usually has no obligation to inform you of your right to have a union representative present. **You must ask for your rights!** Your employer must give you time to contact a union representative and allow the representative to be present at the meeting.

Clip and carry in your wallet

To invoke your Weingarten Rights, you can say:

“If this discussion could in any way lead to my being disciplined or terminated, or affect my personal working conditions, I respectfully request my union representative, officer or steward be present at the meeting. Without representation, I choose not to answer any questions.”

Congrats to OPEIU Scholarship Winners

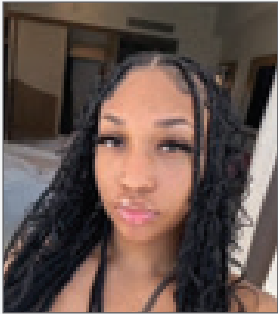
Congratulations to recipients of the 2025 OPEIU Scholarships. OPEIU awards numerous scholarships annually to further the education of members and their families. Everyone is encouraged to apply. Applications for the 2026 scholarships will be available in January at opeiu.org by clicking the Member Resources tab.

Higher education scholarship opportunities include the Howard Coughlin Memorial Scholarship — available to OPEIU members, associate members and dependents — and the John Kelly Labor Studies Scholarship, available to members and associate members pursuing a degree in labor studies, industrial relations or union leadership and administration.

Howard Coughlin Memorial Scholarship: Full-Time Winners



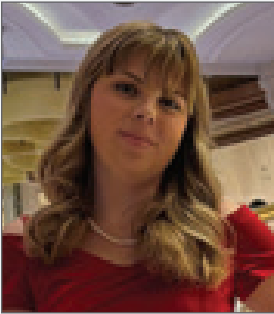
Thomas Bienkowski
DAG 110
Region I



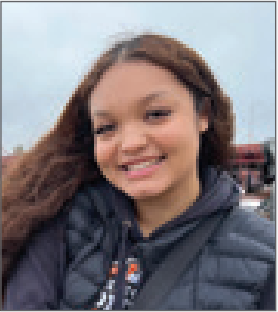
Zatia Wilson
Local 32
Region II



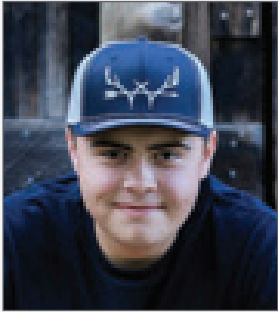
Vegas Burnett
Local 100
Region III



Abigail Middleton
Local 108
Region IV



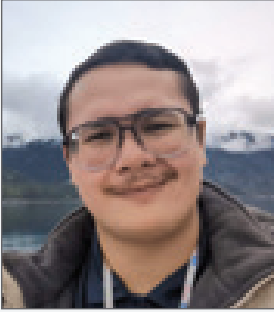
Abigail Quino
Local 29
Region V



Tucker Johnson
Local 11
Region VI



Shruthi Ilavarasan
Local 39
Region VII



Dylan Tupper
Local 50
Region VIII

Howard Coughlin Memorial Scholarship: Part-Time Winners



Antonio Feliciano
Local 6
Region II



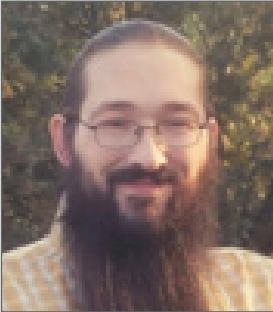
Casey Shires
Local 102
Region III



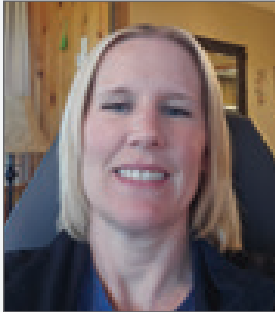
Rosenda Hernandez
Local 251
Region IV



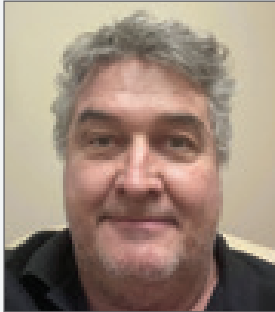
Gabriela Mendoza
Local 30
Region V



Caleb Wiswell
Local 8
Region VI

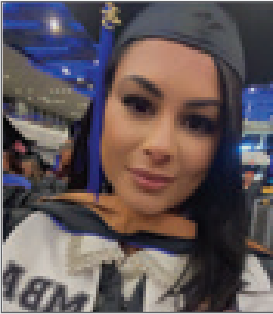


Tianna Drake
Local 12
Region VII



Robert Rose
Local 50
Region VIII

John Kelly Labor Studies Scholarship Winner



Wendy Guzman
Local 153
Region II



Scan the QR code
or visit opeiu.org for
more information.

OPEIU Family Members Awarded 2025 Union Plus Scholarships

Three OPEIU family members have been awarded 2025 Union Plus Scholarships recognizing their academic achievements and commitment to the values of organized labor. All three were awarded \$1,000 scholarships to help them pursue their higher education goals.



Kianah Asoluka

Kianah Asoluka of East Orange, New Jersey, whose mother, Hellena De Large, is a member of Local 32 (Region II), is a radiography major at Essex County College. Asoluka plans to obtain MRI certification after completing her degree. Her goal is to begin an imaging and pain management practice serving students who may not be able to afford treatment. “Kianah is an exceptional individual who consistently demonstrates a strong work ethic, intellectual curiosity and a deep commitment to her academic and personal goals,” said Rodney E. Jenkins, who has advised Asoluka since her days at Columbia High School and currently is her volunteer coordinator at Nassan’s Place, a nonprofit organization that assists Essex County families affected by autism. “She possesses the intelligence, drive and character to significantly impact the world.”

Job security, economic stability, workplace safety, community engagement and social justice advocacy are among the reasons Asoluka said she is thankful for OPEIU, of which her mother has been a member since 2012. “OPEIU also negotiates for better benefits, including health insurance, retirement plans, paid leave and other perks that enhance the quality of life,” she said. “With better financial resources from union jobs, families may

afford higher education opportunities for their children, contributing to upward mobility across generations.”

Nina Jelena Gavrilovic of Shelby Township, Michigan, whose mother, Ivana Janic, RN, was a member of Local 40 (Region VII) when the scholarships were awarded, was in dual enrollment classes at Macomb Community College as a high school student at Utica High School and has continued pursuing an associate degree in nursing at the college. She plans to transfer to the University of Detroit Mercy to earn bachelor’s and master’s degrees in the field.

Gavrilovic was inspired at a young age by her mother. She is particularly interested in pediatrics, obstetrics and neonatal intensive care. “My mother shares stories from the hospital, and her passion for helping others left a lasting impact on me,” she said. “I decided to pursue nursing to make a similar difference in people’s lives. Nursing is the perfect way to combine my passion for health care and my love of working with kids.”

Elizabeth A. Igrisan leads Gavrilovic’s church youth small group, which partnered with Detroit’s LifeBUILDERS in July 2022 to support beautification projects in and around the Regent Park neighborhood. “Nina is incredibly aware of those around her, being sensitive and empathetic to their needs and personalities, demonstrating tremendous maturity for her age,” Igrisan said, calling Gavrilovic a natural leader. “Her attributes of resilience, faithfulness and empathy affirm her desire to pursue an education and career in nursing. She deeply enjoys helping others, thrives under difficult circumstances and seeks a purpose-filled life.”



Nina Jelena Gavrilovic



Logan Aikue Smith

Logan Aikue Smith of Honolulu, whose mother, Ean Smith, RN, is a member of the Hawai’i Nurses’ Association (HNA)/OPEIU Local 50 (Region VIII), majors in architecture at Montana State University (MSU) in Bozeman with plans to pursue a master’s degree at MSU when he graduates. His goal is to one day own his own architectural practice where he can create sustainable and environmentally friendly design “to benefit the community and create impact on the lives of others,” he said.

Smith appreciates that his mother’s union membership made this scholarship possible. “When I found out I was awarded a Union Plus scholarship, I was ecstatic and emotional,” Smith said. “It felt really good to know my effort and achievements could be seen, make a difference and have an impact on my education.”

He also recognizes the many other benefits of union membership, seeing his mother’s union as a protection from unfair discrimination and mistreatment for her and their family. “I am glad my mom, as well as all of the other parents, guardians and individuals out there have the chance to be part of a union and support the common good, for the benefits and protection of themselves, their families and children,” Smith said.

Smith has been a demonstrated leader throughout his school years and in his extracurricular activities, even earning the rank of Eagle Scout with the Scouts of America. “Logan is a take-charge type of person and an outstanding individual of high integrity, reliability and unwavering dedication,” said Grant Tokumi, his troop leader.

Union Plus, founded by the AFL-CIO in 1986, uses the collective buying power of America’s nearly 15 million union members to deliver top-quality benefits and services at competitive prices to working families. In addition to the scholarships, benefits include financial services and money-saving programs that provide exclusive everyday discounts on wireless service, travel and more.

UNION SCHOLARSHIPS



Start your application today!

Union Plus Scholarships help union families with the cost of college, with scholarship awards ranging from \$500 to \$4,000.



Learn more at unionplus.org

Workers Over Billionaires: OPEIU Members Take to the Streets to Defend Workers’ Rights

In a powerful display of solidarity and union pride, OPEIU members joined millions of working people throughout the country at parades and rallies this Labor Day to honor those who work for a living. They sent the message loud and clear: OPEIU members will stand shoulder to shoulder against all attacks on working families by billionaires and corporations who prioritize profits over their employees.



Local 6 members march in Boston’s First Labor Day Parade.



Local 8 members in Seattle join union siblings from the MLK Labor Council.



Left photo, Local 30 members join the San Diego Labor Day parade, while others, right photo, attend the Arizona AFL-CIO Labor Day Breakfast.



Local 40 members march in the Detroit Labor Day Parade, where Local 40 President and OPEIU Vice President Dina Carlisle, RN, right photo, addressed the crowd about the need for safe staffing legislation to protect nurses and patients.



Local 153 members march up Fifth Avenue in the New York City Labor Day Parade.



President Tyler Turner speaks at the Tarrant County Labor Fest in Texas.



Local 12
HealthPartners
Please Treat
Us With RESPECT!

FAIR
WORK
Deserves
FAIR
PAY!

LIVING
WITHOUT A
LIVING
WAGE

Dignity,
Respect,
\$
in our
CHECK!

UNIT
Strong

Contract Victories

HealthPartners Staff Secure 14 Percent Wage Increases

More than 1,000 members of Local 12 (Region VII) employed at HealthPartners, a nonprofit health care provider and health insurance company based in Minnesota, have ratified a new union contract with wage increases averaging 14 percent over the life of the contract.

The wage increases, totaling \$1.25 per hour in year one and \$1 per hour in each of the final two years of the contract, raise the floor for the lowest-paid employees at the company. The contract also features several other bargaining unit priorities, including a more reasonable procedure for calling in sick and continued high-quality health care coverage. Importantly, the unit successfully fought back against management's proposal to create a two-tier system that would have negatively impacted employees' health care.

"It was an honor and a joy to be part of a team where we were learning so much about each other and how we work and strategizing for the best possible outcome," said Paula Moyer, a clinic assistant at HealthPartners and union steward who served on the bargaining committee.

HealthPartners staff bargained for five months following the expiration of their previous contract. Local 12 held rallies at 31 locations, significantly increased contract action team (CAT) attendance and filed multiple unfair labor practice charges during the course of bargaining, all of which contributed to securing a beneficial contract.

"When you think about all these office workers in all these businesses, they put on their best face and work to make everybody else happy when they are trying to figure out how to make it to the next paycheck. Underneath all that sweetness is something dead serious — we're trying to figure out how to live," Moyer said.

"It's the best contract we've ever had," she concluded, "but there's still more to be done."

"We couldn't have gotten it without the members being as engaged and active in the process as they were," said Kelsie Morgan, a Local 12 representative. "We had a huge turnout to [CAT] meetings, and had tons of volunteers to be strike captains. This is something we haven't seen in more than a generation."



Local 12 members fighting for a fair contract that protects their health insurance and seniority rights conduct an informational picket at HealthPartners' headquarters in Bloomington, Minnesota, Nov. 26, 2024.



The 5Point Credit Union bargaining committee members are Local 66 Trustees Jazmine Valcin, standing, left, and Ashley Norma, seated, and Vice President Cedric Cormier.

5Point Credit Union Staff Unanimously Ratify New Contract

Staff at 5Point Credit Union, based in southeast Texas, unanimously ratified a new three-year contract. 5Point staff are members of Local 66 (Region IV) in Groves, Texas.

In addition to improved pay raises — 3.6 percent in year one, 3.7 percent in year two and 3.8 percent in year three — the contract includes several enhancements improving working conditions and benefits for approximately 130 members across several locations in the region.

The contract improves new employee onboarding, provides better mental health leave provisions, delivers improvements to personal day policies and solidifies the inclusion of newly created roles into their union.

"Leadership was very united and so was the membership," said Patt Gibbs, OPEIU senior representative. "The members were united in supporting their team and listening to them. Union leaders deserve credit for doing an outstanding job of keeping members informed about bargaining."

City of Vancouver Workers Ink New Contract, Winning Back Benefits

City of Vancouver, Washington, workers organized with Local 11 (Region VI), ratified a new contract nearly five months after their previous contract expired.

The contract, ratified in May and effective through 2026, covers 175 city workers, including accountants, construction inspectors, parking enforcement officers and customer service representatives. The contract was ratified with more than 90 percent of voters in favor.

In the previous contract, workers were responsible for about 20 percent of the cost of their health care premiums. In the new contract, workers are now responsible for just 5 percent of the cost. The new contract also reintroduces double-time pay for working on holidays, a benefit that was reduced to time-and-a-half in previous contracts.

"I've always been told that when you lose a benefit, you'll never get it back," said Dani Story, a customer service representative. "This negotiation was a historical win for us, fixing a lot of the language in our neglected contract."

The contract provides every employee with a signing bonus equal to 1.25 percent of their annual base salary and a 3 percent cost-of-living raise immediately. Workers will receive another 3 percent raise Jan. 1. Other improvements include a \$1 per hour premium for employees who use a second language other than English to do their jobs, a 5 percent premium for police service technicians and police records employees who are asked to train new staff, and a 50-50 cost share for city parking fees for any employee who works 40 hours per week at City Hall.

The contract gains were possible due to Local 11's formation of a contract action team (CAT) consisting of members who helped guide the strategy of the campaign and kept their fellow members informed throughout the bargaining process. By gathering signatures from more than 75 percent of the unit and organizing a night of action, where members testified in a public forum, they were able to pressure the city to meet their demands and bargain a fair contract, which was overwhelmingly approved by the membership.

"This is the most impressive improvement in contract language I've seen since joining the city," said T. Michelson, a Local 11 member who has worked for the city for almost a decade. "It's a powerful reminder that when union members step up, communicate and actively engage, meaningful progress on wages, benefits and working conditions is possible."



Local 11 members join other union members of AFSCME Local 307 and Teamsters Local 58 at a City of Vancouver council forum during their contract fight.

Student Workers Secure Their Union Contracts!

Smith College Dining Workers Ratify First Contract with Local 153

Following a 66-1 vote to unionize in February 2024, student dining workers at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, ratified their first union contract this summer. The students are represented by Local 153 (Region II) in New York.



Smith College student dining workers.

The three-year contract includes wage increases, guaranteed breaks, paid training and safety protections — all priorities that spurred student workers at the private college to begin organizing for a union in fall 2023. The contract covers 350 student workers in the college's dining halls.

“This first contract sends a powerful message to student workers across the nation [that] organizing works, and with solidarity and skilled representation, lasting change is possible,” said the union, United Smith Student Workers (USSW), in a statement to The Shoestring, an independent publication covering Western Mass.

“This process has shown me that my co-workers and I can take steps to change what we’re getting paid and the way we’re treated at work,” said Raia Gutman, a bargaining committee member and senior at the college, to The Shoestring. “It’s inspiring to see that change happen.”

Shortly after student dining workers won their union in February 2024, they were joined by the college’s library workers, who voted unanimously a month later to form a union with Local 153. Bargaining for their first contract is ongoing.

Reed College Housing Advisors Ratify First Contract with Local 11

Student housing advisors (HAs) at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, ratified their first union contract May 20, days before their union planned to picket the college’s graduation. Ninety-five percent of the unit voted to ratify the agreement.

The unit of 44 HAs negotiated a two-year contract that addresses many of the priorities that spurred them to vote for a union with Local 11 (Region VI) in October 2023. Thanks to their union contract, HAs will now be paid for mandatory training taking place each year before the fall semester, increasing compensation by about \$1,300.

Housing advisors, who are often known as resident assistants at other colleges, plan social events, mediate dorm disputes and address safety concerns for student residents at the private college. In exchange, HAs receive an annual stipend covering most of the costs of housing and meal plans throughout the academic year.

Under the contract, HAs can now opt out of the meal plan and still receive the full stipend — estimated to be worth about \$8,050 during the 2025-26 school year — providing much-needed flexibility for members.

Housing advisors at Reed began organizing after the college increased workloads, in the form of extra security rounds, without extra pay.

“Having housing is a big reason why I am an HA, but we still get charged for housing like every other student who lives on campus,” said Eli Rall, a senior at Reed College and a member of the union’s bargaining team, in a Local 11 press release.

“With our new contract, I can opt out of the school’s meal plan and pocket the money to eat wherever I want. This win is something that helps compensate me for the added rounds that I now have to do throughout the year,” Rall said.

Other highlights include: automatic rehiring between academic years; guaranteed housing over winter break; just cause protections to ensure student workers aren’t fired without cause; and the establishment of a labor-management committee, which will meet twice a semester and once over the summer, giving HAs a bigger say in decisions impacting their jobs. Local 11 President Karyn Morrison served as lead negotiator.

“The contract is hugely important for us, as a union, for the future,” said Howard Bell, executive officer and secretary-treasurer of Local 11. “These students will graduate, go on to get careers and will have that organizing skill set and the tools needed to organize in the future.”

Bell pointed to student worker contracts negotiated by Local 153 in New York as model contracts Local 11 consulted while negotiating with Reed. “Now those groups can use our contract as a model,” he said.



Housing advisors at Reed College hold a rally in October 2024.

‘U is for Union:’ Nonprofit Behind Sesame Street Organizes

Artists, fundraisers, early childhood experts and other staff voted 55-19 to form a union with Local 153 (Region II) in New York in the midst of layoffs and fiscal uncertainty.

In December 2024, HBO announced its major distribution agreement with Sesame Street — the long-running children’s show — was coming to an end. President Donald Trump then pulled federal funding from the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS).

Facing uncertainty from the funding cuts, more than 200 workers at Sesame Workshop, the parent company of Sesame Street, announced their intent to form a union with Local 153 March 4, requesting voluntary recognition. The next day, Sesame management announced more than 100 layoffs, blaming funding woes.

Sesame Workshop, a nonprofit organization creating educational media and resources for children globally, deployed many of the tactics faced by workers seeking to organize: anti-union emails, delaying negotiations over who should be included in the bargaining unit and eventually filing last-minute challenges to workers’ right to vote. Despite the setback, workers voted in May to form a union with Local 153.

Media outlets across the country covered the Sesame Workers Union win, including The Nation, The Guardian, NPR, Teen Vogue, Slate Magazine and others.

“Workers at Sesame are deeply committed to doing things that are kind and fair,” said Phoebe Gilpin, a senior director of formal learning at the Workshop, to The Nation. “These are the same values that bring Sesame into so many people’s homes. And we weren’t seeing consistency in that in our workplace itself.”

Federal funding for the program still hangs in the balance, but financial pressures on the nonprofit were lessened when Sesame Workshop announced in May it had found a new distribution partner, Netflix, for its program.

“The reasons we organized were not specifically about these layoffs, but these layoffs really revealed the importance of the organizing,” Gilpin said to The Nation.

OPEIU received the 2025 Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award from the Jobs with Justice Education Fund for its organizing efforts at Sesame Workshop. “Our union and this award is a testament to the impact that can be made when we care for our community, address our needs, and uplift and support one another to become smarter, stronger and kinder together,” Sarah Beck-Hill, a senior manager at Sesame Workshop, noted.



Sesame Workshop employees rally at the organization’s headquarters in New York City after asking the employer to voluntarily recognize their union.

Allegheny Reproductive Health Center Staff Join Local 98



Allegheny Reproductive Health Center (ARHC) Union organizing committee members on their election day are, left to right, back row, Wren Thompson, Monet Murphy, Katherine Yoho, Noah Thompson, Ben Nigrosh, Colby Bell, front row, Raven Kirksey and Emily Quinn.

Workers at the Allegheny Reproductive Health Center (ARHC) voted 9-1 to join Local 98 (Region VII) in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Members of the ARHC Union provide critical support to patients and providers at the medical center, including lab work, clerical duties and assisting patients before, during and after operations. The health center, based in Pittsburgh, has offered reproductive health services since 1975.

The idea of a union was planted after the Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization decision, a 2022 Supreme Court ruling that eliminated the constitutional right to an abortion, overruling Roe v. Wade and Planned Parenthood v. Casey. The Dobbs ruling increased the center’s patient load, as patients from anti-abortion states flocked to Pittsburgh to receive reproductive care, according to Local 98. Earlier this year, ARHC instituted new policy changes, cut workers’ hours and eliminated a staff role with an expectation that staff would pick up the slack despite no changes in pay.

“We do lifesaving medical work,” said Noah Thompson, who has been an observation technician at the center for nearly five years and served on the union’s organizing committee before joining the bargaining committee. “We want to make sure we can focus on our patients getting the safe and stable care they deserve, not bogged down with miscellaneous tasks.”

Bargaining, which began in August, continues amid additional layoffs.

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LCLAA Convention: Only Unity Can Stop Attacks on Workers

Only mass unity can successfully fight corporate and governmental attacks on Latino workers, delegates to the convention of the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA) declared.

LCLAA, the AFL-CIO constituency group representing 2 million Latino union members, came out of its National Membership Convention this summer in Atlanta determined to fight constantly for that goal.

“We addressed the urgent issue of illegal racial profiling and inhuman treatment of immigrants by United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in our communities,” said Local 174 (Region V) President and Business Manager and OPEIU Vice President Lupe Valles, who is a LCLAA executive board member. “There were many resolutions passed in support of humanity in the detention facilities and protection for Latino workers. I was pleased to be able to facilitate workshops that dealt with building an inclusive union.” Valles serves on LCLAA’s Women’s, Constitution and LGBTQIA+ committees, each of which plays a significant role in charting policy for the organization.

LCLAA President Evelyn DeJesus told delegates the whole country is facing “a moment of urgency,” saying “our rights are in danger, our dignity is being challenged, but we say ‘when they come for one, they come for all of us!’

“Building bridges, protecting our legacy, breaking barriers — that’s not just a slogan, but our mission, our movement, our collective determination to strengthen the labor movement across the country,” DeJesus continued.

Latin American workers are a large and growing segment of both the AFL-CIO and the U.S. workforce overall. They’re now the largest group of people of color in the U.S. And they’re one of the most exploited, by both the administration and greedy — and often racist — corporate bosses, LCLAA noted during the convention. Wage figures, revealing unequal pay for equal work, tell the story: Latinos finish last.

To put action behind the words, the convention provided a platform for solutions through workshops, panels and strategy sessions focused on defending workers’ rights, protecting immigrant communities, advancing equity and justice and empowering Latino leadership.

“As a representative of OPEIU, it is important we continue to stand in solidarity with Latino workers who are part of our workforce,” Valles said.

“While many of us may be privileged to have been born in the U.S., there are those who have come to the U.S. for a better life and are a big part of the labor workforce. Today it is Latino communities under attack. Next it will be the rest of us if we don’t stand with them as workers. If we don’t stand with them and they are gone, who will stand with us when they come for the rest of the labor union workforce?”

Press Associates Union News Service contributed to this reporting.



OPEIU representatives to the LCLAA National Membership Convention in Atlanta are, left to right, Local 8 Organizer Omar Cuevas Vega, OPEIU Vice President and Local 174 President and Business Manager Lupe Valles and Secretary-Treasurer Richard Rosen, Local 153 Executive Board Member and Shop Steward Danette Torres, Local 8 Executive Board member Yesenia Colvin and Organizer Nallely Flores.

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Happy Holidays from OPEIU

OPEIU wishes you and your family the
happiest of holidays, and all the best for
a healthy and prosperous new year!

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