

THE AFSCME AGENDA:

FREEDOM & OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

AFSCME members provide the vital services that make America happen. We never quit maintaining our roads, caring for the sick and elderly, educating young children and keeping our communities safe. Public service workers don't do these things to get rich. We do it to make our communities safe, healthy and strong. We believe that our work provides our communities with a source of stability and certainty in uncertain times and allows every American to have a free and fair shot at the American Dream.

That freedom means more than simply making a good living; it's also about having time to take a loved one to the doctor, attend a parent-teacher conference and retire with dignity. But for decades, working people have been falling behind. Today, despite being more productive than ever, we are working longer hours for less money and fewer benefits. And despite promising to make things better, politicians seem obsessed with making things worse – most recently by trying to take away our health care and other vital public services we need.

It is no accident that working people are struggling and that our communities are suffering. Some corporate CEOs have used their massive fortunes to rig the economic rules to benefit the wealthy and the powerful at the expense of everyone else. They have refused to fully fund schools, road repairs and public hospitals. They want to privatize Social Security and Medicare. They have demanded tax cuts while taking away health care from millions of working people. These corporate CEOs and special interests are stacking the Supreme Court to further rig the rules in their favor by taking away the freedom of working people to join together in strong unions to negotiate a fair return on their work.

Public service workers are fighting back with an agenda that protects freedom and opportunity for all. Together we will stand up for our values: protecting Social Security, guaranteeing high-quality health care and paid time off to care for our loved ones, winning a living wage for union members and non-union Americans alike. We will fight at the negotiation table, at the ballot box, and in the halls of government to ensure that every working American has the freedom and opportunity their families deserve.

GOOD JOBS FOR ALL

These days, most Americans find themselves working harder and harder, but still struggling to keep up with the rising cost of basics, let alone getting ahead or saving for the future. That's because our economic rules have been rigged against working people for decades. To combat this trend, AFSCME supports policies that include expanding collective bargaining rights and establishing a living wage, a right to paid sick and family leave and equal pay for women.

- **Expanding collective bargaining rights.** We should make it easier for people to join together in unions to improve wages, benefits and working conditions. On average, union members earn higher wages and are more likely to have employer-provided health care, pensions and benefits such as paid sick and family leave. AFSCME supports policies that would allow working people to be better compensated for their work and productivity, including:

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- **Ensuring the right to form a union.** Workers know that there are significant benefits to belonging to a union. Wages for unionized employees are 13 percent higher and unionized workers are 28 percent more likely to have employer-provided health insurance, as well as 53 percent more likely to have an employer-provided pension¹. That is why surveys indicate that the majority of workers would vote to form a union if they had the chance. But the playing field for union organization is not level. Corporations rig the rules and run dishonest and threatening intimidation campaigns against Americans who seek to join together. AFSCME supports the right of all workers to form a union when a majority wants one. Employers should face real penalties when they violate labor laws and employ illegal intimidation tactics.
- **Improving pay to keep the best public service workers on the job.** Numerous studies have demonstrated that state, county and municipal employees earn less than private sector workers — especially in “right-to-work” states where anti-union politicians have undermined the bargaining power of public employees. Nonetheless, anti-worker politicians and their allies — ranging from wealthy, anti-government zealots to greedy employers that want to hold down wages for all employees — continue to attack the pay and benefits earned by the public employees who serve our communities. AFSCME’s professional staff and hard-working members will never stop working to ensure that public servants are provided fair pay and benefits.
- **Protecting collective bargaining.** Although collective bargaining rights for private sector employees are protected by federal law, there is no similar federal protection for public employees. In many states, public sector workers do not have full bargaining rights. AFSCME supports efforts to extend the right to organize and collectively bargain to all public workers.
- **Establishing a living wage.** No one who works for a living should live in poverty. Yet, as CEO pay continues to skyrocket, more Americans than ever are working in jobs that provide low pay and minimal benefits. More than half of Americans earn less than \$15 an hour and millions of children with working parents are growing up in poverty. AFSCME supports policies that would allow anyone who works for a living to adequately support themselves and their families, including:
 - **Increasing the minimum wage.** Because the federal minimum wage is not automatically adjusted for inflation — it’s been \$7.25 since 2009 — its value falls over time. Today’s low-wage workers earn less than previous generations, even though they are more educated. AFSCME supports increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, which will lift tens of millions of working Americans and their families out of poverty, and allow them to share in the prosperity they help create.
 - **Strengthening overtime protections.** Today, too many employers force their employees to work 50, 60 or even 70 hours per week, yet only pay them for 40 hours. AFSCME supports efforts to expand the protection of overtime laws, ensuring that workers are compensated and provided relief from grueling schedules.

1 <http://www.epi.org/publication/benefits-of-collective-bargaining/>

2 <https://www.afscme.org/news/press-room/press-releases/2017/afscme-pres-lee-saunders-on-new-hampshire-right-to-work-vote>

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- **Maintaining prevailing wages.** Prevailing wage laws — which set minimum compensation levels for government-funded projects — reduce poverty, protect local hiring and result in higher-quality work. AFSCME opposes efforts to weaken or eliminate these laws at the local, state or federal level.
- **Bringing undocumented workers out of the shadows.** More than 11 million undocumented workers face exploitation from unscrupulous employers, driving down wages and worsening working conditions for all working people. Bringing these workers out of the shadows will lift up all working families. AFSCME supports legislation to protect DREAMERS from deportation, as well as comprehensive immigration reform that keeps families together and includes a path to citizenship for everyone who works hard and plays by the rules.
- **Establishing a right to paid sick and family leave.** For millions of working Americans, taking time off to recover from an illness or to care for a sick family member means losing a pay check — perhaps even losing their job. Too many new parents in our country are forced to choose between caring for their newborn children and keeping their jobs. Paid sick and family leave is essential for the health and financial security of American families, and AFSCME supports federal legislation to ensure that every working American is allowed to earn these benefits.
- **Ensuring access to quality, affordable child care.** Growing inequality and completely inadequate government support have created a crisis in child care. Without adequate public financing, many child care centers that serve low- and middle-income families lack the resources to provide safe facilities or offer the wages necessary to attract well-qualified staff. In addition to helping organized child care workers on the ground receive fair pay and more resources, AFSCME supports state and federal legislative proposals that cap child care expenses for low- and middle-income families and increase the resources provided to child care facilities to ensure that they are able to provide quality care.
- **Reducing student debt.** As college costs have skyrocketed, millions of Americans have become burdened with student loan debt. For others, attending college is simply out of reach. The problem has become especially acute in recent years, as states have not restored funding cut made during the recession. In addition to developing a free college program for AFSCME members and their families, AFSCME supports legislative efforts to restore funding to higher education, as well as proposals to reduce borrowing and attendance costs for low- and middle-income students.
- **Demanding equal pay.** As a result of gender and race discrimination, women and minorities are paid significantly less than white men doing the same work. The pay gap is especially harmful for minority women, who are often subject to multiple forms of discrimination. On average, black women are paid just \$0.67 for every \$1 earned by white men, even after accounting for education, experience and other factors. AFSCME fought to secure passage of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act and continues to support legislative and regulatory efforts at the local, state and federal level to address the wage gap.

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HEALTH CARE FOR ALL

Health care is a right, not a privilege. But political attacks and corporate greed continue to create rising costs that eat up the paychecks of working families and put high-quality health care out of reach for millions more.

- **Protecting and strengthening the Affordable Care Act.** More than 19 million people have gained health insurance coverage under the Affordable Care Act (also known as Obamacare). The legislation also eliminated out-of-pocket costs for many preventive services, closed the Medicare “doughnut hole” that required seniors to pay the full cost of medications, and prohibited insurers from denying coverage based on a person’s medical history. AFSCME is fighting to protect and strengthen this critical legislation.
 - **Fully implementing the Affordable Care Act Medicaid expansion.** One of the primary ways that the Affordable Care Act expanded health care coverage was through expansion of the Medicaid program. More than 10 million Americans have gained Medicaid coverage in the 32 states and the District of Columbia that have implemented the changes. Tragically, elected officials in 18 states refused to participate in the expansion, despite generous federal funding, depriving millions of Americans of health insurance. AFSCME is working in state houses across the country to persuade elected officials to accept the Medicaid expansion.
 - **Fighting back against efforts to repeal and sabotage the Affordable Care Act.** Despite the demonstrated benefits of the Affordable Care Act, many elected officials are more concerned with playing politics than working to improve the legislation. AFSCME opposed the recent misguided efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act and replace the legislation with inadequate and ill-considered proposals. Now that the repeal effort has been defeated, AFSCME is pushing back against the White House's efforts to sabotage the Affordable Care Act, a cynical effort that is endangering American lives for political gain.
 - **Repealing the excise tax on health plans.** Known as the “Cadillac Tax,” the Affordable Care Act includes a 40 percent tax on employee health benefits above set amounts. Although the provision was initially pitched as targeting only luxury plans, independent experts estimate that 80 percent of employers would hit the threshold within five years, creating a huge incentive for employers to cut benefits and shift costs onto workers, increasing insurance co-pays, deductibles and other out-of-pocket medical expenses. While bipartisan recognition of the tax’s flaws led to the passage of legislation delaying the tax until 2020, AFSCME supports a full repeal of the provision in order to protect American families from significant health care cost increases.
- **Protecting and strengthening Medicare.** Working people pay into Medicare throughout their careers — contributing to the program from every paycheck — and have a right to quality, affordable health care when they retire or if they become permanently disabled. Medicare provides health insurance to more than 50 million Americans and AFSCME is working to protect and strengthen the program for Medicare recipients of today and tomorrow.

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- **Opposing misguided proposals to cut Medicare or shift additional costs to struggling families.** Instead of working to reduce the cost of health care, many politicians are content to shift the burden onto the backs of working families. AFSCME opposes proposals to raise the Medicare eligibility age from 65, “means-test” the program (which means increasing Medicare premiums for middle-income families), or raise the Medicare eligibility age. These proposals will only increase costs for families without actually addressing the problem of high health care costs. AFSCME supports efforts to address the issue of high health care costs, including through reform of prescription drug policy to help rein in out-of-control drug costs.
- **Fighting proposals to end guaranteed coverage.** One of the greatest benefits of Medicare is that it provides guaranteed health coverage. Unfortunately, some elected officials are working to convert Medicare to a voucher program (also called “premium support”). Instead of guaranteed coverage, beneficiaries would receive a voucher to buy health insurance. If the vouchers are insufficient for older Americans living on fixed incomes, or if they don’t keep pace with the rising cost of health insurance, millions of Americans could lose health insurance coverage. AFSCME opposes any effort to end Medicare’s guaranteed coverage.
- **Maintaining federal Medicaid funding.** One in five Americans get health insurance through Medicaid. Half of all Medicaid recipients are children, seniors, Americans with disabilities and pregnant mothers. Millions of other low-income Americans whose employers do not offer insurance rely on this program for access to health care services, including home care and nursing home care for our most vulnerable. Under the current system, states and the federal government each pay a fixed share of the cost for the Medicaid program. However, some elected officials are proposing to change this system to one where the federal government pays a fixed amount — if costs rise, states would need to shoulder all the costs or cut benefits. AFSCME opposes this harmful proposal, which would wreak havoc on state budgets and endanger health care for millions of Americans.
- **Reducing prescription drug prices.** As the only advanced country that does not regulate prescription drug prices, it’s no surprise that Americans pay the highest prices in the world. American families often pay several times as much as those in other countries for the same prescriptions. In recent years, drug companies have spent more on share buybacks and dividends — an extraordinary \$465 billion from 2006 through 2015 — than research and development, making it clear that high prices are about generating wealth for shareholders, not paying for the development of new treatments. AFSCME supports the passage of legislation to authorize the federal government to negotiate drug prices on behalf of all Americans, require drugs developed with government funding to be sold at fair prices, and prohibit drug companies from engaging in abusive practices such as blocking generic drugs from coming to market.

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RETIREMENT SECURITY FOR ALL

Americans need more retirement security, not less. Anybody who works hard their entire life should look forward to retiring with dignity. But when it comes to retirement security, too many retirees are stuck in a race to the bottom as 401(k) plans have replaced guaranteed pensions. AFSCME supports policies that break this spiral, including promoting well-funded pensions, consumer protections to protect against high-fee Wall Street 401(k) retirement funds and protecting and expanding Social Security.

- **Expanding and fully funding defined-benefit pension plans.** Unlike 401(k) accounts, which are often inadequate and quickly depleted, pensions provide workers with consistent income throughout retirement. Pensions also frequently include additional benefits, such as disability, death and survivor benefits, and cost-of-living adjustments. Funded through employee and employer contributions and professionally managed, pensions are also the most cost-effective option for taxpayers. AFSCME supports efforts to ensure that all working Americans have access to defined-benefit pension systems.
- **Protecting and expanding Social Security.** Funded through the payroll contributions deducted from every paycheck, Social Security has consistently paid the benefits earned by working Americans for more than 75 years. Contrary to the claims of opponents, Social Security retirement benefits are modest — averaging just \$1,360 a month — and the program is not in financial crisis. AFSCME supports eliminating the Social Security “tax cap” that allows billionaires to pay the same amount into the Social Security Trust Fund as middle-class Americans. These revenues should be used to improve the long-term solvency of Social Security and modernize the program to address benefit issues for caregivers, widows and widowers, low-income workers and public employees with pensions.
- **Establishing consumer protections to protect retirement funds.** Until recently, many financial advisers were not legally required to act in their clients’ best interests. Many Americans trying to save for retirement were steered into high-fee investments that provided lower returns for them, but higher commissions for the adviser. This type of bad investment advice cost Americans an estimated \$17 billion annually. AFSCME supports the “fiduciary rule,” which requires advisers to work in the best interest of their clients, and opposes any attempts to weaken this critical protection.
- **Ensuring access to affordable long-term care.** Long-term care is not paid for by Medicare, and private insurance plans for disability and long-term care are simply unavailable, unaffordable or inadequate. With no other option, many seniors are forced to spend down their life savings, becoming impoverished before they qualify for services through Medicaid. Additionally, low pay has also created a shortage of well-trained direct care workers. AFSCME supports efforts to address both prongs of this crisis. Whether through a new national social insurance program or other options, we must provide all Americans access to affordable long-term care. We must also expand the pool of direct-care workers by fighting for respect on the job and fair pay.

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QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICES FOR ALL

Public service isn't just a job, it's a calling. Unfortunately, even as AFSCME members are working to improve our communities, special interests are lobbying to rob our neighborhoods of the resources needed for quality public services. In order to support the fully-funded, quality public services our communities need, AFSCME supports:

- **Keeping taxpayers in control of public services, not for-profit corporations.** At all levels of government — local, state and federal — reckless privatization schemes that erode accountability and transparency have let corporations take control of public services from taxpayers, enriching the wealthiest at the expense of our communities. Time and again, privatization schemes have led to increased costs for taxpayers, lower-quality public services, the elimination of middle-class jobs and corruption scandals. AFSCME will never stop fighting to protect public services from corporations whose only goal is to maximize short-term profits and to hold accountable elected officials who promote the privatization of public resources. Privatization schemes are costly and unfair to the dedicated public service workers who put their communities first.
- **Closing corporate tax loopholes.** In recent years, as corporate profits have climbed to record highs, multinational corporations have become increasingly aggressive in their efforts to abuse loopholes and avoid paying their fair share of taxes. Between the utilization of tax havens (shifting profits on paper to low-tax countries to dodge U.S. taxes) and the abuse of other loopholes, corporations avoid paying hundreds of billions in U.S. taxes each year. AFSCME supports legislative efforts to make highly profitable multinational corporations pay their fair share by closing corporate tax loopholes.
- **Ensuring wealthy Americans pay their fair share.** In recent decades, the United States has become an increasingly unequal country. Our country becomes wealthier each year, but nearly all the gains are going to those at the top. In addition to addressing inequality directly by raising wages for regular Americans, we must ensure that the wealthiest Americans are contributing their fair share. AFSCME opposes tax reform proposals that would dramatically cut taxes for the wealthiest Americans, and supports increasing the top marginal federal tax rate for the exceptionally wealthy, ending the preferential treatment of income from capital gains and improving enforcement of tax laws that are routinely abused and evaded by the wealthy. AFSCME also supports efforts to address regressive taxation at the state and local level, where low-income Americans often pay the most as a percentage of their income.
- **Fully funding vital public services.** We must ensure that our elected officials spend our tax dollars to help working families and invest in our communities. AFSCME supports state and federal investments in essential public services — such as education, public health, law enforcement, public transportation, social services and environmental protection — and eliminating the arbitrary federal budget caps that have prevented us from investing in critical priorities.
- **Rebuilding America's infrastructure.** After decades of underfunding, urban and rural communities are struggling with unsafe roads and bridges, deteriorating levees and dams, contaminated drinking water and crumbling school buildings. Rebuilding our infrastructure will create good-paying jobs and boost our economy —especially in rural areas that have suffered from underinvestment. AFSCME supports the passage of federal legislation providing the resources necessary to rebuild our infrastructure.

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DEMOCRACY FOR ALL

Labor rights are civil rights. From Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s march with striking sanitation workers in 1968 to AFSCME's involvement in today's civil rights movement, AFSCME is committed to policies that end the poisonous influence of billionaires and corporate special interests in our political system, make it easier – not harder – to vote, promote social justice and combat discrimination.

- **Ending the era of "corporations are people."** Large corporations and the richest Americans dominate our political discourse, using their wealth to drown out the voices of working Americans and advance an agenda that protects their interests. AFSCME supports legislation requiring the disclosure to shareholders of corporate political payments; overturning the Supreme Court decisions in *Citizens United* and *McCutcheon*, which have further enabled the wealthy to dominate political discourse; and increasing disclosure requirements for "dark money" organizations.
- **Defending every American's sacred right to vote.** There is nothing more fundamental to who we are as Americans than our right to cast a vote. Yet, we find that basic freedom is under relentless attack from political opportunists and the Supreme Court.³ Across the country, elected officials are working to maintain power by passing voter-suppression laws, and the Supreme Court's decision in *Shelby County* eliminated critical protections provided by the Voting Rights Act. AFSCME opposes these cynical efforts and actions and supports efforts to protect and expand voting rights, including the expansion of early voting and automatic voter registration.
- **Combating discrimination at work and in our communities.** Throughout our history, AFSCME has been a leader in the civil rights movement, working to prevent discrimination in the workplace and in our communities. AFSCME has fought for the enactment of state and federal laws that prohibit discrimination based on race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, pregnancy, age and other factors. AFSCME will continue to fight for the enactment of these protections and to ensure that they are vigorously enforced.

³ <https://www.afscme.org/news/press-room/press-releases/2013/afscme-pres-lee-saunders-on-the-supreme-court-decision-to-gut-the-voting-rights-act>