



# UPDATE

American Federation of Teachers Local 604, AFL-CIO

[www.aftlocal604.org](http://www.aftlocal604.org)

December/January 2022-23

## 2022 Elections: mission accomplished!

By AFT Local 604 President, Bill Briggs

Nationwide, the pundits and news media outlets were wrong about the November elections; there was no great red wave or red tsunami like so many predicted. Yes, as this article is being written, there are still some questions as to who will control the House and Senate, but the outlook is not as bad as many thought it would be as Democrats outperformed expectations.

Before the election, inflation was believed to be the drive for voters. However, exit polls showed that right up there was the abortion ruling by the Supreme Court and saving our Democracy. In Illinois and AFT Local 604, we had three priorities: passing the Workers' Rights Amendment, electing Mary Kay O'Brien to the Supreme Court, and reelecting JB Pritzker and Juliana Stratton as Governor and Lieutenant Governor.

Not only did all three campaigns go the way we had hoped, but so did most of our other endorsements. On the state level, Kwame Raoul, Attorney General; Susana Mendoza, Comptroller; Michael Frerichs, Treasurer; and Alexi Giannoulias, Secretary of State; all won.

And it did not stop there. Tammy Duckworth was reelected Senator. Our U.S. House-endorsed candidates also were victorious. 2<sup>nd</sup> District Robin Kelly, 10<sup>th</sup> District Brad Schneider, 11<sup>th</sup> District Bill Foster, and 14<sup>th</sup> District Lauren Underwood.

All six endorsed candidates for the Illinois State Senate won: Michael Hastings, Sue Rezin, Patrick Joyce, Linda Holmes, Rachel Ventura, and Meg Loughran Cappel.

In the race for Illinois House, eight of our nine endorsed candidates came out on top: Janet Yang Rohr, 41<sup>st</sup>; Lance Yednock, 76<sup>th</sup>; Anthony DeLuca, 80<sup>th</sup>; Stephanie Kifowit, 84<sup>th</sup>; Dagmara 'Dee' Avelar, 85<sup>th</sup>; Larry Walsh, Jr., 86<sup>th</sup>;

Harry Benton, 97<sup>th</sup>; and Natalie Manley, 98<sup>th</sup>.

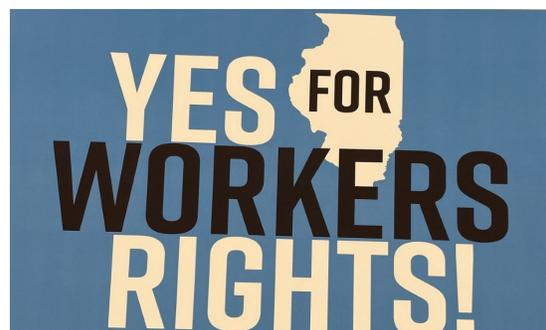
All in all, not a bad night for union activists.



Justice Mary Kay O'Brien



Governor JB Pritzker and Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton



WE Voted YES!!

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By Bill Briggs

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By James Ridge, attorney at law



*The message is clear from voters*  
**Democracy is worth saving**

If the most recent elections are any indication of the current climate in the country, voters are tired of the negativity and lies coming from the Grand Old Party. What is also evident is that yard signs don't matter, polls are almost always wrong, and we do care about free and fair elections.

History says that this should have been a red wave, but there was barely a trickle. The Democrats kept the Senate and might, actually, gain a seat after the runoff election in Georgia. What many believed would be a 40+ cushion in the House for the GOP, came down to just a few seats.

What followed Nov. 8 almost to a T was Republicans in major races who supported the Big Lie from Donald Trump, lost. Six candidates he pushed for Governor are looking for other positions.

Maybe the biggest surprise was the turnout by Gen Z, born between 1997 through 2012, which has been a force the last three cycles. Some states realized the impact this group could have. Part of the voter suppression, not surprisingly, was in Texas where county officials, representing Texas A & M, closed on-campus early voting site.

Gen Z issues, according to Jack Lobel an opinion contributor to *USA Today*, was "a burning planet, abortion restrictions, and weapons of war in schools."

With all that we have been through, an election cycle that was never ending, Covid, inflation, and a rising crime problem that no one seems to have a solution, I wanted my column before the holiday break to be more positive and upbeat.

And then it happened. Paul Pelosi was brutally attacked in his home by a madman looking to do harm to Paul's wife, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi.

Under normal circumstances, the reaction to what happened to the 82-year-old husband, father, and grandfather would have been universal, shock and sadness, but not in the age of Donald Trump.

Why Trump? All one must do is survey the lies he has told since he lost the election to Joe Biden. Over 300 candidates were election deniers even though no evidence existed to that tall tale. Trump has encouraged violence. Think not, look at what he said to the Proud Boys and others before the Jan. 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection. Basically, come to Washington, "it's going to be wild." I could go on, but there is no need. Anyone with an open mind, knows the reality.

This time, though, the response was even more depressing. Take for instance, Virginia governor Glenn Youngkin, a rising star in the GOP. His first response to the Paul Pelosi attack was, "There's no room for violence anywhere, but we're going to send her back to be with him in California." The attack was a little over one week before the election. Eventually, he did send a note to Nancy saying he was sorry. How big of him.

Contrast his response to what then minor-leader Nancy Pelosi said when GOP congressman Steve Scalise was shot. "This morning, the U.S. Congress suffered a despicable and cowardly attack. My thoughts and

prayers are with Whip Steve Scalise and the others wounded, Capitol Police and staff, and their families. We are profoundly grateful for the heroism of the Capitol Police, whose bravery under fire undoubtedly saved countless lives. On days like today, there are no Democrats or Republicans, only Americans united in our hopes and prayers for the wounded."

Or how about the dynamic duo from Arizona, Kari Lake, running for governor, and congressman Andy Biggs. At a GOP rally election night, Biggs commented, "Nancy is losing the gavel, but she is finding the hammer...what, too soon?"

Not to be outdone, Lake commented, "Nancy Pelosi, well, she's got protection when she's in D.C. — apparently her house doesn't have a lot of protection."

And let's not forget the Trump family. Junior shared an image on social media that he thought would be funny: a hammer and a pair of underwear with the words "Got my Paul Pelosi Halloween costume ready?"

Are we finished, yet? Hell no. The world's richest man, Elon Musk had over 100,000 likes after he shared an article claiming the attack was an altercation resulting from a drunken sexual encounter with a male prostitute before he deleted it.

I could go on, but there is no need. Yes, most Republicans said the attack was terrible and did not condone it. But the leader of the Republican Party, Donald Trump, has created such a cesspool of lies and conspiracy theories that nothing surprises me from the Right.

And remember soon after the Trump defeat in 2019, members of the Wolverine Watchmen, a militia group, attempted to kidnap Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer. Thirteen people were charged in an alleged domestic terrorism plot to kidnap Michigan Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, federal and state officials announced.

In November, Michigan voters spoke, too. Not only did they reelect Whitmer, but also, they kept the Democratic Secretary of State and Attorney General in office. But the support did not stop there. For the first time in four decades, the state house and senate are controlled by Democrats.

So, the voters have spoken. They do not want MAGA in charge, in most cases. With control of the House, I am sure the GOP will act on their pre-election agenda: inflation, high gas prices, and crime. Although they offered no solutions, this was their battle cry.

But it is apparent they did not learn a lesson. Kevin McCarthy, who hopes to be speaker but does not have the votes so far and other leaders, said their agenda would be to investigate Hunter Biden, investigate Nancy Pelosi and the Justice Department for how they went after the insurrectionists from Jan. 6, and impeach Joe Biden, among other worn-out ideas.

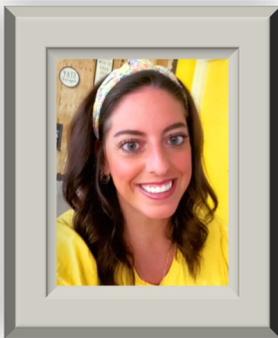
As Bette Davis once said in the movie *All About Eve*, "Fasten your seatbelts; it's going to be a bumpy night!" I think we can change the last part to "it's going to be a bumpy two years!"

## Someone you should know

# Renee Calabrese and Kim Crowe

*Council presidents and 604 Vice Presidents selected for IFT internship*

At the start of the current school year, Local 604's Renee Calabrese, Valley View, and Kim Crowe, Joliet Junior College, began an internship with the IFT, two of only five selected. The internship introduces members interested in IFT field work that includes negotiations, grievance handling, political work, and issues-based organizing. This program gives the interns the opportunity to spend a school year doing "hands-on" union work outside their own council.



**Renee:** I would want them to know just how much I care and how hard I work on their behalf. I pride myself in my work ethic and commitment to the work I do. There is not one day that I am not problem solving, supporting, or working for my council.

**Kim:** Being a union leader can be very rewarding, however it does not come without its challenges and is not for the faint of heart. It can be very time consuming being a union leader, and it can be challenging balancing union work along with my work responsibilities. I am always advocating for our members making sure their rights are protected. This is done by doing research, meeting with administration, serving on committees, attending various union trainings, and by doing this internship.



Nicholas Christen, Direct of Field and Organizing for the IFT, said, "We were happy to offer the internships to these two accomplished council leaders and have been impressed with their work in the internship so far." Both are assigned to Local 604 field service directors Dan Mercer and Katie Kollross, but they are also working with all staff to get a better understanding of the different types of councils represented.

### What moved you to seek a leadership role in your Union?

**Renee:** I became interested in our council pretty early on in my teaching career. After 5 years of teaching, I became a building representative for our council, then ran for secretary, then VP, and then President of our council. I am currently in my third term as President and have been involved with our council for 11 out of my 16 years in education. I am a big advocate for making things easy on staff, problem solving, and supporting teachers and staff. I felt as if staff always felt they could come to me to be their voice prior to taking these leadership roles, and I found comfort and joy in that.

**Kim:** I was the employee who always had a copy of the contract on hand. Every time a question or situation would come up, I would pull the contract out to see if there was language about it. Since we were a new bargaining unit at the time, I always felt the importance of making sure my colleagues knew about the contract and where to find it. I enjoyed all the benefits in our contract, however; I was always curious if we could get more. Wanting to know more about the negotiations process led me to seek a leadership role.

### What eye-opening experiences have you had since becoming a union leader, this IFT internship?

**Renee:** I believe this internship has allowed me to see things from multiple lenses. It's shown me the importance of patience, being well versed in all things union, and the power that collaboration can bring to better bargaining sessions.

**Kim:** Since becoming a union leader, it is always eye-opening to see how many times contractual language is violated. This is why it is so important to talk to your union leaders to make sure they are aware of potential contractual language violations. I am always surprised when members contact our union months after an issue started occurring.

### What would you want our membership to know about the work you do?

### What are your goals related to this internship?

**Renee:** My goals going into this internship was to learn and have new experiences that would help me develop as a leader and to possibly see if there were other avenues for me to pursue within our organization.

**Kim:** My goals are to learn as much as I can regarding all aspects of union work. From different styles of negotiations, labor law, grievances, arbitrations and organizing. I want to take these skills learned from this internship and apply them to my own council so I can represent my members to the fullest extent possible.

### Why did you want to participate in this program?

**Renee:** I wanted to see many different perspectives of the union, to get to know and see other leaders in action, to view how other councils bargain, and the importance of our role in the political campaigns and elections.

**Kim:** I was excited to be a part of this program to learn from various AFT 604 Field Service Directors and see how everyone handles situations differently. Seeing this inside approach is very beneficial to bring back to my own council. Seeing things from the inside also improves my abilities to serve many councils serving as an AFT 604 Vice President.

### What have you learned so far during the internship? Have there been any challenges?

**Renee:** I have learned just how important relationship building is with council leaders and the vital role that our organization plays in supporting candidates who are supporters of education and labor. Some challenges, that I have witnessed, are when council leaders don't take direction or advice from Field Staff and how to navigate those challenges while at the bargaining table.

**Kim:** I have learned traditional bargaining, bringing new positions into a current council, campaigning and its importance and organizing just to name a few. There is so much to learn during this internship with so many varying aspects of field service work. The biggest challenge with the internship is managing my time wisely and staying organized.

Continued on page 5

# Your rights under the Workers' Compensation Act

by James M. Ridge, attorney at law

## Personal Injury and Workers' Compensation Settlements are Tax-Free



According to recent statistics, about 95% of lawsuits are settled before going to trial in the United States. In Illinois, the percentage jumps to 98%. This means that just about 1 in 50 cases will be resolved in court. As such, settlement is the most common way to be compensated for a personal injury or workers' compensation case. When you get a settlement check, you may be wondering if you will have to pay taxes on the amount. Good news: In Illinois, a personal injury settlement or workers' compensation case is not subject to State or Federal taxes.

Personal injury and Workers' Compensation settlement proceeds are tax-free because the award is not considered gross income. The law sees it as compensation for a loss. When a personal injury or workers' compensation settlement compensates someone for physical injuries and other losses, their settlement is not taxable because it is not recognized as earned income. Even if a portion of the settlement reimburses you for medical bills related to the treatment of your injury, this portion of the settlement would also be tax-free. In general, the following awards are not taxed:

- Compensation for physical injury or physical sickness
- Compensation for pain and suffering and/or disfigurement (AKA non-economic damages)

- Compensation for emotional distress due to physical injury or sickness
- Compensation for medical expenses

Generally, the only award that is taxable is an award for punitive damages. Punitive damages are intended to punish the defendant for willful, wanton, or reckless actions, such as driving under the influence or selling a dangerous product.

If you were injured at work or as a result of someone else's negligence call **Ridge & Downes**. Our attorneys understand what you're going through, and we're here to guide you and your family through this difficult time. Contact us today for a free consultation at **(312) 372-8282**.



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## Educator Recognition 2022-23 National Engineering Teacher of the Year

Congratulations to Corey Duzan for being named 2022-23 National Engineering Teacher of the Year by Project Lead The Way! He works at Lockport High School in Lockport District 205, where he teaches Introduction to Engineering Design, STEM Exploration, and Digital Pathways.

Taken from ISBE'S Weekly Message Newsletter

*Congratulations!*



**Corey Duzan**

2022-23 National Engineering  
Teacher of the Year

Lockport Township High School District 205

isbe.net



## A BIG Congratulations going out to Corey who is an AFT Local 604 member!

### AFT Local 604 Retirees Visit Starved Rock

By Anita Schluter

**Below:** Seventeen retirees attended the trip to Starved Rock State Park on Tuesday, October 4th. Those attending enjoyed a delicious meal at the lodge followed by a narrated boat and trolley ride which included the history of the park. A special thanks to Jurate Pezze and Jan Benson who planned the outing.



## Continued from page 3... Someone you should know

So far, I have been part of a few different council's negotiations. I need to really plan my week ahead of time as there are several times, I will go from negotiations at one council and straight into a meeting with another council.

### What do you find to be the most rewarding aspect of Union leadership?

**Renee:** I find the most rewarding aspect of my role is the conversations I have with my members and being able to bring action to their wants/needs. Knowing that I am able to work daily to strive to make things better in some way for teachers and staff is tremendously rewarding for me. I always strive to make others happy, and this role certainly allows me that opportunity. I also find the work I do with district leaders very rewarding, too. The fact that we all can collaborate on tough issues or problem solve to make things better in our district for students and staff is also very rewarding for me.

**Kim:** There are many rewarding aspects of being part of union leadership. Being a union leader is not just about protecting your members union rights and ensuring the union contract is followed. You become your members friend, confidant and sometimes just a listening ear. Getting that phone call or email thanking you for listening and being there or hearing that they finally received their promotion, an upgrade, or an in-range increase that you fought for during negotiations can be very rewarding. Hearing about the successes of my members and them achieving their goals can be the most rewarding to me.

AFT Local 604 Members getting the word out about the Workers Right Amendments...

Thank you to ALL who helped in any form!

Right: Lt to Rt

Leah Kind, IMSA  
council secretary

Becky Roireau, East  
Aurora council  
president.



Left: Lt to Rt

Exie Harding, Adam Harding, Local 604 field service director, Leah Kind, IMSA council secretary, Becky Roireau, East Aurora council president, Christy Harding, East Aurora member and the littlest "member in waiting," MB Harding!



# School board elections could be crazy

By AFT Local 604 President, Bill Briggs

Most of us have not recovered from the barrage of political ads the last few months. We need a break, but reality has set in. School board elections are just around the corner, and the crazies have already emerged.

Although the election is months away, April 4, 2023, the window for candidates to file is very short, Dec. 12-19. The final day to file write-in candidates' names is Feb. 2.

According to the Chicago Tribune, Oct. 13, conservative political action groups have a new target: local school boards. "Their aim is to gain control of more school systems and push back against what they see as a liberal tide in public education classrooms, libraries, sports fields, and even building plans," according to Collin Binkley and Julie Carr Smyth.

Some of our councils have already experienced a lack of respect for school board members by the public both at board meetings and in social media. A lot of this backlash was because of Covid and districts following state-mandated rules, like masking. As a result, finding candidates may become more difficult.

Last December in Michigan, a community member chided the school board for allowing litter boxes in bathrooms for students who identify as furries, "an enthusiast for animal characters with human characteristics, in particular a person who dresses up in costume as such a character or uses one as an avatar online," according to Oxford Languages.

As off the wall as this comment might seem, the accusation with no support has caught on in districts throughout the South where the push to go back to more traditional values is growing.

For those who watch the news, this push to change the make-up of school boards does not come as a surprise as some parents or community members push to ban or remove what they call offensive books from the libraries. Some books included in this list include *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Of Mice and Men*, *The Bluest Eye*, *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Color Purple*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *The Great Gatsby*.

In addition, they are upset with the teaching of race or sexuality, especially when it comes to LGBTQ+ students.

PBS's Fresh Air interviewed researcher Jeffrey Sachs in February. He reported that 35 states have introduced 137 bills that limit what schools can teach with regard to race, American History, politics, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

He said one proposed law in South Carolina prohibits "teachers from discussing any topic that creates discomfort, guilt, or anguish on the basis of political belief."

In New Hampshire, a conservative mom's group is offering a bounty of \$500, according to Sachs, "to catch teachers who

break a state law prohibiting certain teachings about racism and sexism."

So, what can our councils do?

We need to become more proactive in the recruitment of individuals willing to stand up for public education. Survey your members and talk to community leaders, such as pastors, parents, or perhaps other educators, to identify individuals who might be interested in running for the school board.

When you have narrowed down the list, interview the prospective candidates with questions pertinent to public education to see if they align with your council's vision for the district. AFT Local 604 is more than willing to help with these questions or your initial survey.

Once you have decided to support a candidate, Local 604 has COPE funds available to help finance the campaign with letters to members, yard signs, and mailers. Reach out to your field service director to help with the financial support.

However, if membership has concerns of backlash for supporting a candidate, Local 604 can manage this side of the campaign.

We are in this together to help all of our councils have school boards working with us and the common goal for the best educational opportunities in all of our districts.



# 2022 IFT Convention in St. Louis



AFT Local 604 delegates and staff: **Front row:** Adam Harding, Bill Briggs, Marybeth Scott, & Darlene Mercer.

**Middle row:** Kim Crowe, Therese Skwarczynski, Katie Kollross, Sandra Williams, Renee Calabrese, Kristen Ryan, Linda Santillo, Christy Harding & Beth Anderson. **Back row:** Tony Floriani, Jared Ploger, Michael Hancock, Dan Mercer, Vicki Goebel, Vicki Morris and Jason LaBroschian

During the convention, the Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT) convened over 500 union delegates from across Illinois, who voted unanimously to re-elect President **Dan Montgomery**, Executive Vice President and Chicago Teachers Union President **Stacy Davis Gates**, and elect Secretary-Treasurer and Local 434 President **Cyndi Oberle-Dahm**. Earlier this year, former Secretary-Treasurer **Jane Russell** announced her retirement from the IFT after five decades of union work. She was awarded the Margaret Blackshere Women in Union Leadership Award for her dedication and contributions to the labor movement.

Over the three days, 500 delegates debated and passed resolutions on a variety of issues – from preventing mass shootings, stopping the privatization of public services, reaffirming commitment to equity and antiracism work, and preventing homelessness, foreclosures, and evictions. A special resolution was passed for Chicago Teachers Union retiree, 104-year-old Beatrice “Bea” Lumpkin, who was in attendance and has been part of the labor movement for nearly 90 years. She continues to maintain her activism in critical work with the Chicago Teachers Union and supporting youth activists.

On Saturday, our union delegates heard from speakers which included, March for Our Lives founder and Parkland School shooting survivor David Hogg and fellow activist Trevon Bosley, Illinois House Speaker Emanuel “Chris” Welch, American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, and Illinois Governor JB Pritzker. (IFT website)

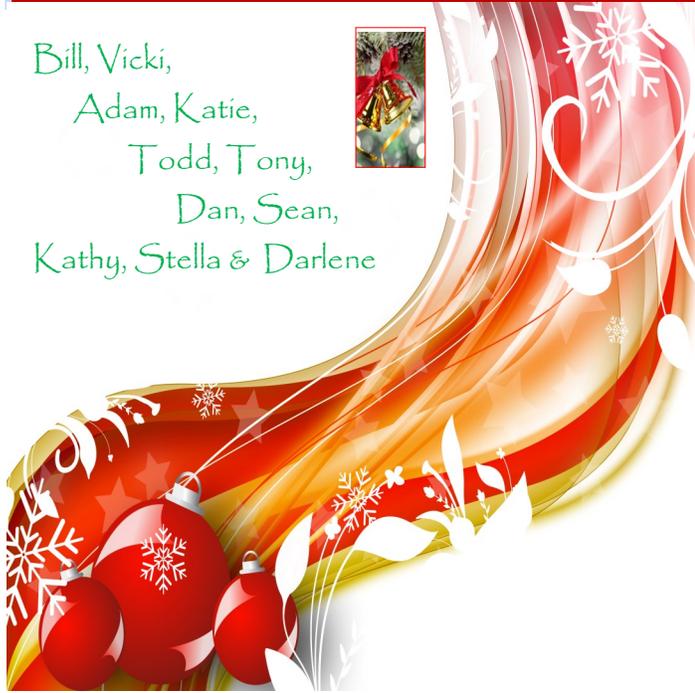


**Jared Ploger**, Valley View teacher and Local 604 delegate, rises to address Resolution No. 20, School Districts are not Banks. The resolution addresses wealthy school districts that have Cash on Hand in excess of 180 days. In some cases, like Lincoln Elementary School District 156 in Calumet City, one of the poorest districts in Cook County, has a balance of 445 days while struggling to fill teaching positions.



Happy Holidays to All of you as well as  
your Families from  
All of Us at AFT Local 604

Bill, Vicki,  
Adam, Katie,  
Todd, Tony,  
Dan, Sean,  
Kathy, Stella & Darlene



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Spring Valley member and former Council President, Amanda Pellegrini, (center) on Lance Yednock's campaign literature.

**UPDATE**



IFT/AFT, AFL-CIO

American Federation of Teachers Local 604  
[www.aftlocal604.org](http://www.aftlocal604.org)

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