SEPT/OCT NEWSLETTER

WESTERN MA AREA LABOR FEDERATION
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SEA PRESIDENT RILEY HERNANDEZ AT COMMUNITY FORUM ON AI (MTA)

SPRINGFIELD EDUCATORS RESPOND TO AI IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Rebecca Stumbo, Springfield, MA: On September 17, Springfield Education Association members met to discuss their response to the introduction of **Alpha School's AI education program** to some schools in the Springfield Empowerment Zone.

This program, whose results have not been independently reviewed or confirmed, would significantly change the role of educators in the classroom by replacing academic instruction with AI-based learning programs, and the decision was made without the union's knowledge or input.

SEA President **Riley Hernandez** emphasized the rushed and secretive nature of the decision, saying "We [SEA] only heard about it because we submitted a pretty detailed information request to the Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership after we received a tip that Alpha School was now working in Kylie Prep," (Riley Hernandez, via New England Public Media).

Hernandez also said that the union had "sent in a Cease and Desist" to the district to stop them, at least temporarily, from continuing with the implementation of the new program.

Alpha School advertises a school day where students spend two hours on academics, delivered by Alpha School's AI learning platform rather than an educator, supervised by guides who are not teachers. On the issue of educators being replaced by AI and unlicensed guides,

Hernandez said "We believe that degrades the profession [and] disrupts the very important human relationship between teacher and student, and we think that there's so much more to teaching than a student just receiving content from an AI tutor" (via New England Public Media).

Los Angeles and New York City public schools, the two largest public school districts in the

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In this newsletter you can expect:

Mass AFL-CIO Political Endorsements

Baystate Nurses Contract

Report on Union Economic Impact

UMass Union Fights Surveillance

Event Details on P2

UPCOMING AREA LABOR FEDERATION EVENTS

Monthly Delegate & Assembly Meetings

November Delegates Meeting
- Date: Monday, November 9th
- Time: 6:00 - 7:30 pm
- Location: WMALF Office, 640 Page Blvd, Springfield, MA

December Delegates Meeting
- Date: Monday, December 14th
- Time: 6:00 - 7:30 pm
- Location: 241 King St, Suite 103, Northampton, MA

FULL WMALF CALENDAR

Training, Committee & Solidarity Actions

Introductory Stewards Training
- Date: Saturday, December 5th
- Time: 9:30 am to 3:30 pm
- Location: 241 King St, Suite 103, Northampton, MA
- **RSVP required, limited slots**: wmalf.org/edu

Education Committee
- Date: 3rd Monday of Every Month
- Time: 5:30 - 7:00 pm
- Get zoom link: Email jerry.levinsky@gmail.com
- Topics: Plan Education & Training events

Affiliation Committee:
- Date**:** 1st Thursday of Every Month
- Time: 6:00 - 7:00 pm
- RSVP for Zoom link at affcom.wmalf.org
- Topics: Building union participation in the Area Labor Federation

ABOUT THE WESTERN MA AREA LABOR FEDERATION

The **Western Massachusetts Area Labor Federation** is a coalition of more than 60 local unions from across Western Massachusetts dedicated to **building power and a better world for all working people**.

The WMALF brings people together, turns union members out in solidarity with each other's fights, makes political endorsements, gets out the vote, and helps coordinate multiple union campaigns. **We are committed to working together to build grassroots power**, coordinating work on common campaigns, and pooling our resources to maximize the Labor Movement's effectiveness throughout Western Massachusetts.

The Area Labor Federation is governed day-to-day by the E-Board, consisting of our elected President, Treasurer, Secretary, Assembly Presidents, Representatives from each of the eight largest affiliates, and at-large e-board members

Each affiliate is entitled to delegates based on their number of dues-paying members. Delegates have the right to make and vote on proposals and other decisions at the monthly delegates meeting, and elect the E-board.

The **Education Committee** on the ALF organizes our training and political education programs. Other committees can be formed to work on other issues concerning the area labor movement.

The ALF is funded by a per-capita payment by affiliate unions. The work of the ALF would not be possible without this funding. **If you are a member of an unaffiliated union and want to join the fight, contact us to get involved!**

Current Leadership

President: Ethel Everett (SEIU 509)
Treasurer: Tina Simmerman (SEIU 509)
Secretary: Clare Hammonds (MSP-MTA)
PV President: Riley Hernandez (SEA-MTA)
HFA President: Ruth Jennison (MSP-MTA)
Berksh. President: Sarah Roberts (MNA)
Large Affiliate Representatives: Ian Kelly (UFCW 1459), Ada Taveras (SEIU 1199), Michael Przybylek (SEA-MTA), Patrick Burke (UAW Local 2322), Thomas Burns (AFSCME 1776)
At-Large Board Members: Jeff Jones (UFCW Local 1459), Myra Badillo (MNA), Tom Power (UNITE-HERE NEJB), Sofia Cardenas (UAW Local 2322)
Alliance of Retired Americans: Jon Weissman (NALC 46)

PELLEGRINI, SEELEY, RYAN & BLAKESLEY AWARDS SCHOLARSHIPS TO AREA LABOR UNION FAMILIES

(Springfield, MA) Three area students recently were each awarded a $1,000.00 Gerard L. Pellegrini Scholarship to advance their education by the law firm that bears his name.

"This scholarship gives our firm an opportunity to honor both the legacy of Gerard L. Pellegrini and the important role organized labor continues to play in our community," said Charlie Casartello, Managing Partner of Pellegrini, Seeley, Ryan & Blakesley. "For 50 years, Gerry dedicated his career to protecting the rights of workers and advocating for those who were injured on the job. That commitment remains an important part of who we are as a firm today. We are proud to carry his legacy forward by supporting union families and the next generation through this scholarship," Casartello added.

Winners of this year's awards are: Kaitlynn Goulette of Westfield, Brittney Hrdlicka of East Longmeadow, and Julia Preston of Longmeadow.

The Gerard L. Pellegrini Scholarship is an award that goes to a member of a local union affiliated with the Western MA Labor Federation or their spouses or dependents. Applicants were asked to submit their high school or college transcripts, written recommendations, a recital of their community service activities and an essay detailing the importance of the Labor Movement to their family.

Pellegrini, Seeley, Ryan and Blakesley is a law firm of more than fifteen lawyers who devote their practice to protecting the rights of injured persons.

SEA FIGHTS BACK AGAINST AI IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

(Continued from Front Cover) country, have put temporary moratoria on student AI use in place. Parents, educators, students, and community allies have raised concerns about the growing role of AI in education, including the collection of large amounts of personal student information, which is central to the "personalization" of the Alpha School platform. Springfield educators and students deserve better than to be guinea pigs in the schemes of out-of-state billionaires' business plans.

Although the district has put the partnership on hold for this year, nothing is stopping them from continuing with this program in the future. SEA are looking for support from parents and other members of the community, and are hosted a community forum for teachers, parents, students, and community members on Wednesday, 10/14 from 6 to 8 PM at Mt. Zion Baptist Church/Dunbar Community Center. **Stay tuned for more ways to support educators as they fight back.**

MASS AFL-CIO ENDORSEMENTS FOR NOV. ELECTIONS

Statewide & Federal Elections:

- **Maura Healey** - Governor
- **Kim Driscoll** - Lt. Governor
- **Andrea Campbell** - Attorney General
- **Bill Galvin** - Secretary of State
- **Deb Goldberg** - State Treasurer
- **Ed Markey** - U.S. Senate
- **Richie Neal** - Congress: MA-01

Statewide Ballot Questions:

- **Yes on 2:** Collective Bargaining for Public Defenders
- No on 3: All-party Primaries
- Yes on 4: Same-day Voter Registration
- No on 5: State Revenue Cap

State Rep & Senate Races (W. Mass):

- Jacob Oliveira - State Senate: Hampden, Hampshire & Worcester
- Adam Gomez - State Senate: Hampden
- Paul Mark - State Senate: Berkshire, Hampden, Franklin & Hampshire
- Tom Hendrickson - 3rd Hampden
- Pat Duffy - 5th Hampden
- Shirley Arriaga - 8th Hampden
- Orlando Ramos - 9th Hampden
- Lindsay Sabadosa - 1st Hampshire
- Lora Wondolowski - 1st Franklin

AFL-CIO endorsements are made by the State COPE Committee, which includes representatives of Unions, CLCs, and ALFs.

NEW ECONOMIC POLICY INSTITUTE REPORT REVEALS HOW TRIPLING UNION MEMBERSHIP WOULD TRANSFORM THE U.S. ECONOMY

First-of-its-kind analysis measures how expanding union membership would boost wages, lower inequality, and benefit communities and democracy.

A major new Economic Policy Institute report examines what the U.S. stands to gain if current union membership tripled to 30%—restoring it to 1950s levels, when union strength delivered rising wages for working people, narrowing racial wage gaps, and a thriving middle class. The report also shares a policy roadmap to boost union membership, including offering two bold new proposals that could expand the benefits of collective bargaining.

The report estimates that tripling union membership would:

- **Deliver a 14.5% raise for the median worker**—amounting to more than $7,700 annually, or nearly $270,000 over a 35-year career. These life-changing increases would benefit union and nonunion workers alike.
- **Shift $1.2 trillion to workers annually**. This would reverse one-third of the increase in inequality experienced since 1979.
- **Raise wages in every state**. Annual wage increases would range from $1,900 to $10,600, according to the report's state-by-state breakdowns.
- **Significantly narrow racial wage gaps**. Because unions tend to boost wages more for Black and Hispanic workers than for white workers, tripling union membership would close racial wage gaps by more than one-third.
- **Boost the number of people with health insurance**. Since unions increase other forms of compensation, like health insurance benefits, the number of nonelderly people without health insurance would fall by about 25%.
- **Strengthen communities**. States with high union density invest more in public education, have higher unemployment insurance recipiency rates, and have all adopted Medicaid expansion.
- **Protect democracy**. Unions boost voter turnout, equip workers with civic skills, and actively defend voting rights. States with high union density have passed far fewer voter restriction bills than low-density states.

While tripling union membership is an ambitious goal, it is fully consistent with workers' own demand for unions. Survey data show that tens of millions of workers would vote to unionize if given the opportunity.

"Tripling union membership is not a nostalgic pipe dream. It is exactly what workers want, and federal and state policymakers have a clear roadmap to make it happen," said Heidi Shierholz, president of EPI. "Collective bargaining is the most effective tool for workers to raise their wages and secure a fair share of economic growth. If policymakers are serious about tackling affordability problems, expanding union membership and collective bargaining should be at the center of their agenda."

Tripling union membership will require comprehensive policy reform that weaves together tested approaches with bold new ideas. The report unveils two new policy proposals designed to grow collective bargaining and union density—built to work alongside the federal labor law reform bills already on the table: the PRO Act and the Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act.

- **Guaranteed annual raises for newly unionized workers.** A mandatory cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) would provide a meaningful guardrail for workers whose first contract bargaining ends up in arbitration. For the typical worker, a 3% COLA means roughly $2,000 extra a year.
- **Default collective bargaining when CEO-to-worker pay ratios exceed 100:1.** Declining unionization and the stratospheric rise in CEO pay are deeply connected. Strengthening the bargaining power of workers in severely imbalanced companies would enable them to capture a larger share of the wealth their work creates.

States should also act by repealing so-called "right-to-work" laws and ensuring collective bargaining rights for all public-sector workers, which alone would increase union density nationally from 9.9% to 14.4%. Beyond removing these barriers, states can extend collective bargaining rights to other workers currently excluded from federal law and extend unemployment insurance eligibility to workers on strike, among other reforms.

"In an economy that has been rigged against working people for decades, unions serve as a counterweight to corporate power—reducing inequality and building the kind of middle class that underpins a strong and inclusive economy," said Robert Reich—professor, writer, and former U.S. Secretary of Labor—in the foreword of the report. "This report shines a light on what we stand to win if we rebuild union power."

"Across the country, working people are hurting. Rent keeps going up, paychecks aren't stretching as far, and everything from groceries to electric bills is too expensive. But we know—and as this new report shows—that it's better in a union. Unions change lives for workers, their families, and their communities. They're how we rebalance our economy, shift wealth back to working people, and provide hope for a better life. And working people aren't waiting or putting up with the broken status quo—they're organizing and coming together to push back against union-busting bosses and anti-union politicians. The AFL-CIO and our 65 affiliated unions will never stop fighting alongside them for the future we all deserve," said Liz Shuler, president of the AFL-CIO.

BAYSTATE FRANKLIN WORKERS WIN NEW CONTRACT

9/29/26, Greenfield Mass, *From Mass Nurses Association*

Registered nurses at Baystate Franklin Medical Center (BFMC), represented by the Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA), reached a tentative contract agreement with Baystate Health on September 28. Baystate moved on key issues as nurses were on the verge of issuing notice for a 14-day strike.

"This is an enormous victory for patients, nurses and the Franklin County community," said **Suzanne Love**, an Emergency Department RN and Co-Chair of the MNA Bargaining Committee. "We stayed united and persisted over several months of a coordinated community campaign because our patients need safe staffing. In the end, Baystate moved toward us and we reached an agreement because nurses and our community supporters refused to give up."

Highlights of the tentative agreement include:

- **Emergency Department and Mental Health Unit staffing**: Additional staffing in both units to address patient safety concerns.
- **Health insurance**: Contractual protections addressing nurses' concerns about affordability.
- **Mandatory on call**: Compensation for surgical services nurses required to remain available for emergencies.
- **Medical-surgical staffing**: Improved RN staffing language for medical-surgical units.
- **Competitive wages**: In the first year of the contract, nurses will get an average of a 6.2% raise and 13% over the life of the agreement, which expires on 12/31/28. These increases will support RN recruitment and retention and help ensure safe patient care.

The tentative agreement follows months of internal and community organizing by BFMC nurses. In April, nurses voted 98.2% to authorize a potential strike. In June, they voted 98% to reject Baystate's "best and final" offer.

More than 700 community members signed a petition supporting BFMC nurses, and the Greenfield City Council unanimously approved a resolution backing their fight for a fair contract and safe patient care. Additionally, hundreds of community and union members filled out and sent postcards to the Baystate Health Board of Trustees. The campaign received tremendous support from many other unions, as well as from elected officials.

"Baystate Franklin nurses came together to make this agreement possible through our solidarity and the support of our community," said Marissa Potter, RN and Co-Chair of the MNA Bargaining Committee. "We are incredibly proud to have stood up and fought when safe patient care was on the line. Baystate Health made the right move by agreeing to a fair contract, avoiding a strike, and making an important investment in nurses and patients."



WMALF RALLY FOR NURSES, SEPT. 28TH



USA AND SUPPORTERS RALLY ON AUGUST 18TH

"KRONOS IS NO PICNIC!" USA ORGANIZES AGAINST STAFF SURVEILLANCE

University Staff Association, which represents Clerical, Technical, and Administrative employees at UMass Amherst, has been organizing against implementation of Kronos, inefficient and invasive time tracking and employee surveillance software. On August 18th, they rallied with supporters during the employer's "Lunch on the Lawn" event. This article was originally published in the USA August Newsletter:

A huge contingent of USA members turned out to stand up to management alongside our allies in PSU, MSP, AFSCME, GEO, PRO, and others at Lunch on the Lawn on August 18th. **Organizers stopped counting at over 120 rally participants!** This action was a major opportunity to directly speak truth to power – many decision makers such as Brian Harrington (Director of Labor Relations), Sheri Nesheim (Vice Chancellor and Chief Human Resources Officer), Susan Weldon (Senior Director of Human Resources), and other members of the administration watched on from the crowd. Chancellor Javier Reyes was noticeably absent from the staff appreciation picnic.

In the middle of a speech, Brian Harrington and Jeff Hescock (Executive Director of Environmental Health & Safety) approached speakers at the rally and asked them to proceed without megaphones citing a new, repressive campus land-use policy on amplified sound. Undeterred, you and your coworkers delivered the petition and marched on. Turning up the music and taking away our megaphones can't drown out the collective voice of over 120 workers on this campus! (Click on the image to watch a video of the action. Follow us on Instagram and Facebook for the latest news!)

Within 48 hours, the UMass President's Office contacted the USA grievance officer to schedule a hearing date for the Kronos step 4 grievance weeks earlier than contractually required as they had until October 14th to schedule it. By showing up and demonstrating our collective power at Lunch on the Lawn, management got scared. This is a significant victory!

On **September 10 from 3:00 to 4:00 pm**, USA will present this grievance, and we're planning to pack the hearing room with stewards, members with testimonials, and others who are directly impacted.

We've already shown the administration that we are organized, powerful, and capable of mobilizing. **If the UMass administration doesn't implement Kronos by the beginning of the fall semester, you and your coworkers have successfully fought them off from the original timeline they claimed.** However, this fight has only revealed that the administration is trying to sneak Kronos into more departments and onto more individuals. Please report any instances of management offering workers rewards for using Kronos to the USA office.

Let's keep fighting and demand that they bring their Kronos proposal to main table bargaining next summer. **Only through our collective power which requires the participation of every USA member can we prevent further Kronos implementation, now and in the future!**

DEERE WORKERS REFUSE EXTENSION (CONT. FROM BACK)

"The company is gonna look out for the shareholders and people who invest in the company more than the workers," he added. "It comes down to the worker is always the expendable asset. That's why a lot of us just don't think that they're doing us a favor by offering this extension. That's like where the mindset is at Harvester. We don't forget."

Josh Saunders, a steward at Harvester, said before the vote, "I would say it was initially very split between yes, no, and on the fence. And the more discussion has gone on and there's been lots of great points for and against, I feel like more people are leaning towards no."

Why no? "It would be a lot the same as why we voted no and ended up on strike in '21," Saunders said. "We want a bigger piece of the pie. Deere puts out billions of dollars in profits every year, and they balk at paying us a little bit more. They do billions of dollars of stock buybacks. We're the ones that make the money for the company, and then they're giving it to someone who doesn't work here."

Deere has stepped up its outsourcing, including to Mexico. Matt from the Davenport, Iowa, plant (who asked to use his first name only) pointed out that a longer contract would mean more time for the company to move work unhindered: "After signing our latest contract we have witnessed an increase in outsourcing work to countries with a vulnerable workforce that is taken advantage of," he told *Labor Notes*. "Giving up the expiration date reduces our time line in securing language to protect our jobs."

PAY FOR STABILITY

The union's Region 4 director, Brandon Campbell, who covers the Deere locals, said the company's proposal could have held advantages for members. "The market is in a downturn, and that will continue into next year," he said, "especially with the uncertainty of the current presidential administration. Companies love stability; they'll pay a few extra bucks to have stability, and they can certainly afford a few extra bucks.

"I don't know if 2027 is going to be a great time to be at the table with them. Trump is going to be in office still. That's not good for UAW working people, after our president [Shawn Fain] wore proudly a 'Trump is a scab' shirt. And I did the same. It's not necessarily a good time to get into that fight with that company." A two-year extension would have pushed expiration to fall 2029.

Former Deere worker Sara Yenzer dug into company finances and wrote on Facebook:

"What pisses me off about it. Deere says they need this extension for "certainty" and "stability" because of economic volatility. Fine. Except in June, the same month this whole thing kicked off, Deere raised their full-year guidance [what they tell Wall Street about how they expect to do this year] and announced a new stock buyback program [link added]. Analysts read that as Deere signaling they're confident enough in their cash generation to commit more capital to shareholders. That doesn't sound like a company *bracing for volatility* to me."

Lucas DeSpain, assistant director of Region 4 and now running (with Fain, Campbell, and Dickerson) for director on the United UAW slate, replied approvingly, "Sara Yenzer is a hammer and this math is nails." Deere forecast a fiscal 2026 net income of $4.5 to $5 billion.

On August 21, Fain called the offer "insulting" and urged members to vote 'no,' calling out Deere's huge profits, its CEO's salary, and the layoffs of 1,600 Deere workers. He accused Deere of whipsawing large locals against smaller ones whose work has been outsourced and urged solidarity as "our only path to security."

WHOSE DOWNTURN?

Dickerson questioned Deere's finances and its concern for workers, writing, "We see the same industry conditions Deere sees. We also see Deere's corporate ledger. We see shareholders enjoying the 'continuity' of collecting the rewards of our members' hard work. The people who build the products have earned just as much of a voice in deciding what comes next as the people collecting the dividends."

Responding to the company's argument about a current market downturn, Tim Cummings told *Labor Notes*, "The ag market is so unpredictable. Global markets, commodity prices, right now we're in the middle of global uncertainty that has affected a lot of things. We might have a good year this year, a bad year next year, or multiple-year cycles, a decade of good, five years of bad."

Jake Lane, recently elected to the union's Agricultural Implement Council, pointed out that Deere is projected to make close to $17 million in profits in 2024-26. He had urged members to vote no, build a contract campaign for fall 2027, and brew momentum for May Day 2028.

Luis Feliz Leon contributed to this story.

DEERE WORKERS REJECT CONTRACT EXTENSION: WE'LL MEET YOU AT THE TABLE IN 2027

By Jane Slaughter (re-published from Labor Notes)

The agricultural machinery maker John Deere tested the mettle of the United Auto Workers this summer, probing for softness as the union heads into a leadership election. Voting 'no' on August 23, members essentially told Deere to stick it.

Deere had hoped to extend its six-year contract to eight years. The existing pact for 10,000 workers at nine Midwestern plants will expire October 31, 2027—six months before the union's deals with the Big 3 automakers are up on May 1, 2028.

Jake Lane, education chair at UAW Local 450 in Des Moines, Iowa, told Labor Notes, "People are glad it was voted down. They see the quarterly profits. They see the promises to pay out shareholders through buyback."

In 2021, Deere workers struck for 34 days, gaining national press. They voted down two offers before winning a 20 percent pay boost over six years, COLA, and three lump sums. Lane said, "Everybody is still pretty proud of our strike."

Another veteran of that winning battle said the company was "mad as f*ck about the 2021 strike still."

"They're trying to feel how unstable the union is when it comes to who wants what out of a contract," said Pete Schaefer, from the Harvester Works in East Moline, Illinois. "They're definitely up to something. The majority of us here understand that."

Deere's extension would have been largely status quo: continue the contract's remaining annual 4 percent raises, pay a $3,000 signing bonus, and move a 3 percent lump sum scheduled for this fall to fall 2028. Health insurance would continue unchanged.

Deere builds tractors, combines, cotton pickers, and other high-ticket farm equipment. Its sales are tied to agricultural corporations' ability to buy. With its proposal, the company claimed to have workers' interests at heart. Citing "lower commodity prices, higher interest rates and market volatility" that are reducing demand, Deere argued that a contract extension would "protect what our employees already have."

FLOORED AS THE NEXT GUY

After weeks of a lack of shared information that frustrated rank-and-file members, the UAW International and the Deere Council, made up of local union leaders, told Deere its unilateral offer was a nonstarter and demanded bargaining instead. Deere initially contacted the UAW Agricultural Implements Department on June 10, right before the union's convention.

On July 6, local union officers met with the UAW VP in charge of the Agricultural Implements Department, Laura Dickerson, and heard the news. Local 838 President Tim Cummings in Waterloo, Iowa, publicized Deere's proposal to his members online, writing, "I was just as floored as the next guy."

On July 29 the union's Deere Council resolved to make a counteroffer. Dickerson's July 31 statement pointed out, "John Deere is asking to change a collective bargaining agreement that both sides already negotiated and signed. When a company comes back to rewrite the deal, it is asking for something. That is bargaining. Deere does not get to ask the union for a favor while acting like the rules of bargaining suddenly do not apply."

The union's counteroffer was substantially richer than Deere's: 5 percent pay raises instead of 4 percent, two 3 percent lump sums instead of one, roll the cost-of-living adjustment into the base wage off of which everything else is calculated, a $2,000 contribution to retirement accounts for each year of service, and, perhaps most irksome to the company, "no more work or product will be outsourced." Riffing off Deere's purported concern for workers, Dickerson added, "This would provide the stability John Deere values for its customers and employees."

Deere claimed the UAW's proposal would cost an extra half-billion dollars and rejected it out of hand, reminding the union of the rule it had tried to lay down at the outset: its offer was the only thing on the table.

'WE DON'T FORGET'

Schaefer remembered, "My first contract that I had with the company being 2008, they laid off a lot of us, knowing that they had a high volume of orders coming in. So it's hard to trust them after we went through that.

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