

## SEIU Local 517M E-Former – May 2012

*New Solutions for Michigan!*



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### Executive Vice President Announces Retirement



After thirty-one years with SEIU Local 517M, including 27 as its Executive Director, **Phil Thompson** has advised the Executive Board that he will be retiring at the end of June. Phil was hired in April, 1981, as a staff representative for the Michigan Society of Highway Engineers and Professional Affiliates—the original bargaining unit for Local 517M. In October of that year, the Society was voted in by the state employee membership to be the exclusive representative for the Scientific and Engineering bargaining unit in state service. **William “Bus” Bigham**, the union’s first Executive Director, along with Phil and other members of the original union executive board, negotiated the very first collective bargaining agreement for our membership. Mr. Bigham died suddenly in the fall of 1985. At that time, union president **John Polasek** (MDOT) asked Phil to be the union’s interim director—which in early 1986, was officially changed by the board to full time Executive Director.

Since 1986, Phil has been SEIU Local 517M’s chief spokesperson for every single state bargaining session—a span of over 25 years. Phil is one of the original “founders” of the Coalition of State Employee Unions. In addition, Phil has been chair of the SEIU International Professional Council, chair of the Council of Scientists and Engineers (CESO), and a long-time member of the SEIU Public Division Executive Board. Phil has also served as President of the SEIU Michigan State Council from 2002 until 2010. Phil currently serves as State Council Treasurer.

In 2000, Phil was first elected to the SEIU International Executive Board at the International union’s Convention in Pittsburgh, and was re-elected in 2004. In 2008, at the International Convention in Puerto Rico, Phil was elected on the President’s slate as one of the International’s Vice Presidents—a position that he currently holds until new elections are held at this year’s Convention in May.

“What an honor it has been for me to serve our membership over these past 30 plus years in so many ways”, stated Phil when he first announced that he would be stepping down from the Executive Director position. “As many of you know, this was originally going to be a part-time staff job so I could return to law school and go hang a shingle somewhere. Through one of those life changing forks in the road, I was afforded the opportunity to serve thousands of members and their families in the best way I know—through contract negotiations, through lobbying efforts, and through dedicated membership services.” Along the way, I had the wonderful opportunity to work with highly dedicated member leadership, and the finest, most qualified union staff members that any organization could hope for-- it has truly become a family.”

## Tax Day Actions in Saginaw

Tax day is a day where most Americans do their duty to their country and pay for the privilege of living in a democracy. But some Americans, the 1% of the population and corporations still haven't grasped the concept that our freedoms and standard of living comes at a price that should be borne by all Americans. In following with other protests nationally, the SEIU Local 517M members in Saginaw protested outside the Saginaw Post Office to call out the 1% for not paying their fair share in taxes. View the press coverage of the protest at:

<http://www.seiu517m.org/2012/04/19/tax-day-actions-in-saginaw/>

## Federal Suit Filed Against Unconstitutional Ban on Payroll Deduction of Dues

SEIU and three other unions representing Michigan school employees filed suit April 4<sup>th</sup> in Michigan's Eastern District federal court challenging the constitutionality of Public Act 53 of 2012, the recently enacted ban on payroll deduction of dues for public school employees only.

The suit asserts that the law violates the First and 14th Amendments of the U.S. Constitution, discriminating against school employees as retribution for political speech and treating school employees differently than other classifications of workers without reason. In March, a federal court in Wisconsin, found that similar restrictions on public workers passed during last year's highly publicized assault on worker rights were unconstitutional.

PA 53 makes it illegal for school districts to bargain language allowing for employees' dues to be paid to their union through payroll deduction – a practice that has been decided at local bargaining tables for decades in Michigan. Where a contract is in place, it allows for the continuation of the practice until the end of the contract. The bill only applies to K-12 public school employees. On Monday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, an Ingham County Circuit judge issued a preliminary injunction on the implementation of this law due to a dispute over the House's granting of "immediate effect" without a roll call vote.

When the Governor signed the bill, he said, "This legislation furthers the goal of good government by promoting greater transparency and ensuring that public resources are used solely for their intended purposes." That explanation is hypocritical at best, however.

Following that logic, if this was about proper use of "public" funds, why is only one category of public workers – school employees – singled out? Why does this only apply to union dues and not other payroll deductions like United Way contributions, health insurance or pension contributions, or even taxes? All those things should be billed separately to workers under that logic. Why should taxpayer dollars be used by public entities to fund other private operations, like associations for cities, townships, school boards and more?

"Last year's attacks on public workers in Wisconsin were the worst kind of partisan political power grabs and we're thrilled for the workers in that state who've been vindicated through our federal justice system," said **Phil Thompson**, Executive Vice President of SEIU Local 517M. "We're proud to be taking Michigan's version of those attacks to federal court in our state, where we are confident that truth and justice will win over politics and retribution."

## Saginaw Foreclosure Blight Ordinance



On a rainy Tuesday, April 3, 2012, outside a dangerous foreclosed home abandoned by Bank of America, Saginaw citizens and leaders urged the city to become the first in Michigan to hold big banks

accountable by requiring them to maintain foreclosed properties or pay fines.

More than half of the nearly 1,000 foreclosures in Saginaw are bank-owned homes that can sit unattended for months, becoming eyesores, crime magnets and public health hazards. This decline drains city resources and drives down property values, starving the city and schools of much-needed revenue. The citizens group proposes a Saginaw city ordinance that would require all owners of foreclosed on homes, including big banks, to maintain properties in foreclosure or face fines.

“A strong foreclosure maintenance policy will enable our community to hold the vacant building owners – including big banks – accountable for the impact their actions have on our neighborhoods,” said Annie Boensch, a Saginaw City Council member and one of the initial supporters of the policy.

Cities in New York, Illinois, and other states already have similar policies to hold banks accountable for their role in the continuing foreclosure crisis. Saginaw has been one of the hardest-hit areas in the country, with the sixth-highest foreclosure rate. The ordinance would require owners of foreclosed on homes to pay a fee to register foreclosed properties with the city, including contact information, and pay fines if they fail to maintain them.

Saginaw, like other cities, is forced to use precious taxpayer dollars to maintain foreclosed properties when they are neglected. It’s doing so at a time when home values are down and the population is falling, leaving the city with fewer resources to use. A foreclosed home can cost a local government up to nearly \$20,000 a year, experts say. This ordinance would help replace the burden these properties put on local government resources.

## **New Solutions For A Better Saginaw**

By Andy Johnson, Secretary/Treasurer

New Solutions was put together in response to the recent and aggressive attacks on Public Sector employees. SEIU has put an enormous amount of effort into the success of the New Solutions 2.0 plan and I believe that this campaign is the most proactive response that I have ever witnessed in all my years of being in this union. When I heard about the New Solutions report that was prepared and presented by the State Coalition of Unions I was inspired. I read the report and began to actively pursue fashioning a similar plan for the School and Local Government employees. I knew immediately that the New Solutions campaign was exactly what we must do in order to survive the mandated cuts by our Legislators and the Governor’s Economic Vitality Incentive Plan (EVIP). I am proud of the fact that my union has taken the position of being solution finders in direct contrast to the media campaign that paints us as the problem.

The Saginaw City Municipal Chapter Executive Board took the framework of the state employee New Solutions plan and moved forward with creating a plan for the City of Saginaw. We began with sending out surveys to our members. The survey asked for a few specific areas of information. 1. Cost savings ideas for their respective work areas. 2. Solutions on streamlining processes or operations. 3. The last component was any new or creative ways that we could enhance revenue generating for the City of Saginaw. We did not limit our pool of information to just our membership. We engaged the AFSCME management team in our search for best practices and solutions. We met with the Mayor, City Manager, City Council and City of Saginaw Department heads and asked for their support as SEIU set out on this journey to create a better City for the citizens and secure quality services for them well into the future. To date, we have received an overwhelming amount of support and information from everyone with regard to this innovative concept we know as New Solutions.

One of the most important pieces to this complex puzzle is the support of the tax paying citizens of this great City. On April 5th we held a town hall meeting to introduce the "New Solutions for the City of Saginaw Initiative" to the community and its leaders. We had members from UAW, NAACP, Saginaw Neighborhood Association, A. Phillip Randolph Institute, Parishioners on Patrol and the general public in attendance. We laid out each component of New Solutions for the City of Saginaw Initiative and received everyone's support.

Currently, the Saginaw City Municipal Chapter members are working with researchers from the SEIU International staff to develop ways to implement each component of the plan. In addition to this work, all of the components are being shared with appropriate administrative staff for input and viability recommendations. There are components of the plan that City staff has begun to implement. The "buy in" from everyone we have shared the plan with is giving us hope that our New Solutions Initiative for the City of Saginaw will make a difference in the community we serve. These steps and more are needed to ensure we have a sustainable future for this great City. We believe in this community and the people that work, raise a family and build a life within these City limits.

The New Solutions Initiative for the City of Saginaw has been a total SEIU team effort. The Saginaw City Municipal Chapter planted the seeds but without constant feeding and watering by everyone mentioned throughout this message we would not be where we are today. SEIU staff, both in Michigan and Washington D.C. have performed in an exemplary manner. Our very own **Marianne Woods**, SEIU International staffers **Arvid Muller** and **Jack Schutzius** have given us valuable insights and ideas and provided top-notch research. SEIU New Solutions 2.0 Campaign Director **Maralyn O'Brien** and Community organizer **Chad Young** provided us with leadership, experience and knowledge that again proved to be above and beyond the call of duty.

We affectionately call the New Solutions 2.0 campaign the "Lost Timers" program. My words on paper cannot do justice to these foot soldiers. This crew was comprised of all SEIU 517M



members, active and retirees. It has been an honor and a privilege to work side by side every day with this amazing group of people. On our lost timers team we have two City of Saginaw retirees **Raquel Charboneau** and **Azola Williams**. We have two members from Human Support Services **Amy Davis-Comstock** and **Roderick Pritchett**. Rounding out the group is **Ernie Ahmad** from Saginaw Mental Health, **Brittney Young** from Head Start and **Cheryl Merrill** from Saginaw Public Schools. These people worked together on a daily basis with a common vision and goals and at the end of the day they

became family. (Pictured L-R: Back row: Roderick Pritchett, Chad Young, Azola Williams, Andy Johnson, Front row: Brittney Young, Raquel Charboneau, Cheryl Merrill, Amy Davis-Comstock)

Our hope is that all of SEIU continues to support the concept of New Solutions. The forecast for our great state is still under a cloud of uncertainty however, we must continue to cast a vision filled with hope through this initiative and strive to improve operations and cut costs. The Saginaw City Municipal Chapter and the City of Saginaw have agreed to the concept of New Solutions and have made it a mandatory topic of discussion in Labor Management Committee meetings. Our hope is all members and employers agree to the concept of New Solutions. Not only to create a thriving community for our residents but also to continue to fight the good fight for our members and their jobs. We do not want to see our membership merely survive or get by. We want them to have a great deal of pride in workmanship in what they have done in accomplishing this great task of committing to a new and improved City.

## Legislative Update

By Paul Henry, Legal Extern

The current legislature is attempting to systematically silence the Michigan worker's voice. The legislature is proposing (and successfully passing) legislation to try to silence your voice in the workplace, to eliminate union jobs, and to take away your hard-earned retirement benefits. This legislature has introduced over 60 bills in an attempt to destroy labor. This is a brief overview of just a few pieces of this legislation with a particular focus on public school employees. Full details on each bill can be obtained by clicking on the Bill numbers.

**Public Act No. 53** —Passed 3/16/2012 - This legislation forbids “. . . a public school employer's use of public school resources to assist a labor organization in collecting dues or service fees from wages of public school employees. . .” This legislation focuses only on the public school employee unions. By law, the Union is required to represent everyone in the unit, whether or not their dues have been paid. If the Union receives less funding but is still required to provide the same representation to everyone, it will be unable to operate as effectively which will then impair your voice in the workplace. If your voice is allowed to be silenced, what will happen to your wages and healthcare? On a larger scale, what will this do to your community?

**SB 938** —Introduced 9/14/2012 - This legislation seeks to expand what Public Act No. 53 began. This legislation would prevent all public employers from assisting in the collection of union dues. The legislature is attempting to spread the infection it created when it passed Public Act No. 53. This would affect state, county, and city employees in the same way that Public Act No. 53 is affecting public school employees. This is a blatant attempt by the legislature to try to break the Unions and take away your voice in the workplace. Why else would this legislation focus directly on labor but refrain from stopping any other organization from receiving an automatic deduction?

**SB 1040**—Introduced 3/22/2012 - This legislation seeks to revise the Michigan Public School Employee Retirement System (MPERS) by making drastic changes to your pension and healthcare. This forty page bill seeks to “fix” the financial problems MPERS is facing by taking away what you have already earned. The legislation would seek to impose several changes. One of the biggest changes is to your pension. Employees hired before July 1, 2010 would basically have three different pension choices. Pay more to get the pension you were promised (a 1.5% multiplier), pay the same you have been paying to receive less pension (you would only get a 1.25% multiplier), or freeze the pension amount you have earned and move to a 401k for your future years of service.

This legislation also would require you to pay more for retiree healthcare. To be eligible for retiree healthcare you will be required to work until at least age 60. For employees hired after July 1, 2012, you will no longer be entitled to any healthcare coverage. Instead, you would be given a 401k (to gamble your healthcare benefits on the stock market). For current and future retirees, your healthcare costs would increase from 10% to 20%; if you are retired and on a fixed income, you would be asked to pay more for the same healthcare. Every change they are seeking to implement puts less money in your pocket. You will have spent your entire career being promised that you will receive benefits. With cuts like these, how long will it be before they decide any pension is too expensive? Do they really feel that it is fair to cut your benefits to a point where you will be forced to get another job after you retire?

**HB 4306**—Introduced 2/22/11 - This legislation would *force* public schools to privatize their non-instructional positions. This would affect the food service, custodial, and transportation workers. Again, this legislature is attempting to destroy your voice by trying to remove your Union. Having a Union allows workers' to have a voice in the workplace, to be able to collectively bargain a

living wage and healthcare. Without a Union, what will happen to your job? What will happen to your voice?

**What can you do?** - The challenge has been made. This legislature thinks that it has us on the ropes; that we have no fight left in us. It's time to show them what we are made of; it is time to rise to the occasion. November 6<sup>th</sup> is a date that is looming far on the horizon. This is our chance to keep our voice strong. The proposed ballot initiative would amend the Michigan Constitution to permanently protect your voice in the workplace. Even though we have a long hard road ahead of us, we can win this and show the legislature once and for all that we cannot be silenced, that when we combine our voices, we cannot be stopped. Contact Cheryl Bollinger at [cbollinger@seiu517m.org](mailto:cbollinger@seiu517m.org) if you are interested in getting petitions to place this constitutional amendment on the November ballot.

## Idea of Shared Sacrifice Finally Starting to be Considered in Legislature

A series of bills was introduced on April 20, 2012, by State Representatives **Ken Goike** (R-Ray Twp.) and **Andrea LaFontaine** (R-Columbus Twp.) dealing with retirement benefit changes for current and future members of the Legislative Retirement System.

"We have been taking difficult steps to reform the retirement systems that are funded by hard-working taxpayers and reduce our debt," said LaFontaine. "Leaving out the legislative retirement system, though it is smaller than other state retirement systems, makes no sense. This is about finding every possible way to spend less and not create more debt for future generations."

The bills would, among other things: eliminate the 4 percent cost of living increase that current retired lawmakers receive; require active legislators pay 5 percent of their salary into the Health Insurance Fund; require current and future retirees to pay 20 percent of their health insurance premium; and a provision allowing members of the general public to sit on the Legislative Retirement Board.

## MDOT Schedule II Update

As you know, we are challenging the employer's action on two fronts. First, the grievance filed over the Department altering/reverting reimbursement to the 1986 rates and secondly, the Unfair Labor Practice charge for not bargaining in good faith. Both of these will include all MDOT Technicians.

The grievance has progressed through Step 2 of the grievance process and is being scheduled for recommendation by the Technical Unit Grievance Committee for arbitration.

The Unfair Labor Practice charge is being scheduled for mediation with the Civil Service Employee Relations Board.

## Retiree Update

By Mary Charley, Retiree Liaison

The Retirement Tax Planning PowerPoint was provided as handout for the March 22, 2012 Retiree's meeting. The presentation was conducted by the following three Hantz Group employees: **Kirsten Soltis** and **John Soltis**, Financial Consultants and **Bruce Meyers**, Tax Planning

Specialist. If you have any questions regarding the PowerPoint, please contact them directly at 517-381-2381. You can view the presentation at: <http://www.seiu517m.org/files/2012/04/2012-Tax-Planning-and-Retirement.pdf>

## SEIU Local 517M Union Officer Election

Be on the lookout for an email that will explain the electronic voting process for the 2012 SEIU Local 517M Union Officers Election. The voting period starts on May 7<sup>th</sup> and runs until May 29<sup>th</sup>.

## Executive Vice President Wins Press Award



SEIU Local 517M Executive Vice President **Phil Thompson** was presented with the 2012 Michigan Labor Press Award at their spring conference on April 28, 2012 at the Shanty Creek Resort. The award is presented every year to an individual who has contributed to the growth of the labor movement by promoting union communication.

"Union strength is generated through union communication with the membership and with the public" said Thompson. "I am a believer in a strong membership communication system."

Phil was the Editor of the SEIU Local 517M newsletter "The Professional" for many years early in his career with the Local.

## Anonymous Letter to the Editor

*When Mary Kay Henry was first elected, we started hearing about "SEIU is going to be a member driven Union," I thought.....okay, another special of the day...then I heard her speak of her vision of how SEIU could make a difference, how SEIU should lead our country in a movement. A movement to return the American dream to its citizens. A place where if you work hard you are rewarded and be able to make a better life for both yourself and your family. This is the American dream I grew up expecting. This is the America I believe our founding fathers intended.*

*For far too long, SEIU and most of organized labor have followed the same business model of the labor unions of the 1940's and 1950's, while the employers of the United States (and the World) changed and evolved.*

*I believe what is missing in organized labor is the member connection. The majority of members pay dues because it is a condition of employment, not because they have any real connection to, or belief in, collective bargaining or any other founding principle of organized labor. So many unions are reduced to grievance mills, churning out grievance after grievance, arbitrations and law suits.....There is no change. There is no growth. There is no spirit. In these atmospheres, there is no reason for the majority of the members to belong. No connection. This must change or organized labor will cease to exist.*

*Looking at the labor and political market today, I see a glimpse of what it must have been like in the Americas of the 1920's. The era of sweatshops, lumber, mining and railroad barons. The era of the very rich and the very poor. Think about it. The industries have changed, but the*

*economics are hard to dispute. Our oil, telecommunications and financial industries are constantly churning out record profits, while the average American is in fear of losing what little they have. Raises, what little are seen are offset by increased healthcare costs. Organized labor is a place to start a change. A change to bring us back to the Americans dream.*

*Recently, our Technical unit president **George Heath**, sent out an e-mail asking for member involvement. I am asking the same. Just my 2 cents.....*

## Save the Date!



The annual SEIU Local 517M golf outing will be held on Thursday, August 2, 2012 at the Wheatfield Valley Golf Course in Williamston. More information to follow.

## Habitat For Humanity Week

A few years ago, SEIU organized a Habitat for Humanity week where members across the state joined together to volunteer for the organization and worked on building homes. Everyone who attended had a very positive experience and most wanted to do it again. We would like to plan another event during the week of June 18<sup>th</sup>. State employees can use their negotiated school/community leave day to attend. Members are needed around the state to be the local contact person to coordinate with Habitat for Humanity. Please contact Cindy Mason at [cmason@seiu517m.org](mailto:cmason@seiu517m.org) if you want to be involved in this community service.

## Scientific and Engineering Unit Transfer List

Scientific and Engineering Unit Transfer List sign up is during the month of May. Sign up forms are available from Human Resources. Click [here](#) to review Article 13, Transfers for more information.