

SEIU Local 517M E-Former – November 2015 Edition

Lead, Unite, Fight – Win For the 99%!

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State Employees Reach Tentative Agreements!

The Human Services Support, Scientific & Engineering, and Technical bargaining units covering almost 3,500 state employees, represented by SEIU Local 517M, reached a tentative agreement for a three-year contract on Tuesday, October 13, 2015.

“We have reached a tentative agreement with the State of Michigan on behalf of our membership and will be working over the next few weeks to inform our members of the tentative agreement for ratification,” said **Liza Estlund Olson**, Director of SEIU Local 517M.

“We want to thank the men and women who served on the bargaining teams,” stated SEIU Local 517M President **George Heath**. “It is a difficult job and we appreciate their efforts working on behalf of their fellow members.”

A series of membership meetings to discuss the tentative contracts have been scheduled and are available by clicking here:

Fight for \$15 National Day of Action is November 10th

The next Fight for \$15 National Day of Action will be November 10th in metro-Detroit. This fight is about fast food workers AND child care workers, health care workers Adjunct Professors on college campuses and about our own 517M members who don't make \$15. This movement is about ending the devaluing of half of the work force in Michigan. THAT IS CORRECT – half of all jobs in Michigan pay less than \$15. Jobs that provide care to our most vulnerable our children, our seniors and those with disabilities. They work hard for Michigan family's and deserve to be

paid a living wage. JOIN US to demand a better economic future for everyone in Michigan by demanding \$15 and a union for those who don't have it.

Contact Amy Davis-Comstock at adavis-comstock@seiu517m.org if you want to stand up and Fight for \$15 in Michigan.

Local President Heath Meets with Senator Stabenow



On October 13th 517M President **George Heath** joined other labor leaders receiving a Congressional update from senior U.S. Senator **Debbie Stabenow**. Points of discussion included the Affordable Care Act (ACA) Cadillac tax, the continued downgrading of service by the US Post Office, lack of health care workers-particularly RN's to meet the increased need and the potential shut down of the federal government (which thankfully hasn't happened). President Heath addressed the issue of federal legislation that would require inspections of public works projects i.e.: highways, bridges, dams etc. be done by public employees. It was an interesting and informative exchange with robust participation by all attending. We would like to thank Senator Stabenow for scheduling time on a regular basis to meet with leaders from 517M and others about issues

important to us.

George Heath Privatization Op-Ed

This October 15, 2015, Detroit News Op-Ed is a continuation of the work being done by our Outsourcing Committee. It is signed by our SEIU Local 517M President George Heath and is another example of what happens when government work is cut to the point of being ineffective or privatized with little or no oversight.

Fix Drilling Royalty Collection Issues

In July, Michigan's auditor general released a report showing that the Michigan Department of Natural Resources has a problem collecting all of the revenue owed from oil and gas companies through exploration leases on state land, leading to a decrease in desperately needed revenue for our state. With a lease auction happening this month, we can and must do better and the auditor general points us in the right direction.

The auditor general found that the state lacks a process to ensure we receive proper royalties from oil companies for drilling. Sadly, this recommendation was also made in 1998 and we still haven't made the right types of changes to capture all of our revenue that is owed by these corporations. The audit calls for more in-house reviews — exactly the type of work a dedicated state worker should be performing to ensure accountability and transparency.

However, the most recent audit found that this is not happening because of a push to outsource more public work. The report shows that the employee hired to conduct the reviews has been given the task of outsourcing the in-house reviews instead of actually performing them. According to the audit, this employee was hired to monitor the payments owed by big gas companies and to figure out how to apply the same process to smaller oil producers. Instead,

the audit shows that the staff person had "dedicated time to other duties" — those duties include outsourcing the work to vendors instead of performing them in-house, as suggested.

This is a matter of priorities for the DNR. The hiring of more dedicated state employees to perform in-house audits will more than pay for itself by finally — after nearly two decades of suggestions from the auditor general — ensuring that the state is paid all of its oil and gas royalties owed by energy companies. This is something that can and should be done internally by state employees who are accountable to the public.

The DNR's monitoring of oil and gas revenues is not the only issue of a state department failing to take action and fix problems exposed by audits. As reported last month, in general, numerous departments have failed to fix problems despite seeing the same issues raised for decades. This is a problem that correlates with the call for smaller and smaller government. When we continually shrink the size of our public works departments, we can't as easily address reoccurring problems — even small ones.

We must reverse the trends of cutting vital tools that help us govern smartly and stop the outsourcing of essential services without proper oversight. We can't afford to have more Aramark-style failures without clear accountability.

George Heath is president of SEIU Local 517M.

Water Donations for Flint Community Schools

A significant number of children were tested with high levels of lead poisoning during the recent ongoing water crisis in Flint. Three of the Flint Community Schools had the highest number of children with exposure to high levels of lead.



The City of Detroit unit chapter Vice-President, **Marlena Mathis** joined in with other city employees and organized a water drive. SEIU 517M's AFRAM chapter donated to this cause along with others and Marlena was able to collect 189 cases of water within a week of beginning the campaign. Marlena and her son helped deliver the water to the Flint schools. We applaud Marlena for her leadership in helping a community that was not her own during a crisis. She is a great example of leading by doing and not waiting to be asked. Thank you Marlena Mathis.

Technical Unit Election Results

The following nominations were received for the positions on the Technical Unit Board of Directors. There were no contested races so the following members will take office November 1, 2015:

- CHAPTER 1: President - **Terry Bartyk**
- CHAPTER 2: No nominations received
- CHAPTER 3: President – **Steve Ludwick**
- CHAPTER 4: President - **Nate Maddern**
- CHAPTER 5: President – **Ken Holifield** (Pending Board Appointment)
- CHAPTER 6: President – **Steve Gasser**
- CHAPTER 7: President – **Robert Smrek**

CHAPTER 8: President – **Diane Adams**, Vice President – **Caryn Pirochta**

CHAPTER 9: President – **Leni Steiner Zehender**

CHAPTER 10: President – **Channing Page**

CHAPTER 11: No nominations received

CHAPTER 12: President – **Donna Huntzinger**

CHAPTER 13: President – **Rod Jackson**

CHAPTER 14: President – **Mike Hughes**

Officers Sworn In at Flint School Unit



On October 20, 2015, the SEIU 517M Paraprofessional unit of the Flint Schools had a chapter meeting. Director **Liza Estlund Olson** was on hand to swear in the chapter officers and talked to the chapter about the “Talk Back To Your Union” campaign, our legislative fight in Lansing, and how we build a stronger Union. Leaders from L-R are: Liza Estlund Olson, **Stephanie Abrams**, **Jan Martin**, **Chapter President Brenda Greene**, **Howard Grigsby**, **Laura Balknight**.

Redistricting Town Hall Meetings

The League of Women Voters of Michigan has been hosting Town Hall Meetings across the state of Michigan this fall to educate voters on the importance of redistricting. There are several dates in November for members to take advantage of. The events are free and open to the public. All are welcome.

To view the dates and locations, [Click here](#)

Member Profile – Michelle Kusnier

Michelle Kusnier is a Food Inspector for the Food and Dairy Division of the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. As a state worker, Michelle deals with the responsibilities of her job while at the same time trying to deal with the ever-changing role of state employees.

“I love my job and I look forward to it everyday. There is no better job than this job,” says Michelle when asked about what she does.

Food Inspectors cover retail food establishments (grocery, party stores, liquor stores, etc.), wholesalers and food processing centers as well as warehouses, farmers’ markets and fairs such as county fairs. While the health department inspects food for immediate consumption, Food Inspectors, like Michelle, make sure the food we buy off the shelf is safe.



“We’re responsible for making sure that food is safe for purchase. For instance, if there is a fire in an establishment, then we make sure the establishment is safe to serve food before they are able to reopen. We have standardized inspections that cover things like hand washing, storage, sanitation, proper temperature,

prep by workers and we check that employees can demonstrate food safety knowledge that they know how to keep food safe," Michelle explained about the work done by food inspectors.

Michelle's attitude is positive despite the challenges she faces on the job. Food Inspectors are responsible for 300 to 450 establishments and each must be inspected in a timely fashion. But it's not the work that can make for the toughest days. Michelle doesn't sit behind a desk. Rather, she works out of her car – traveling from inspection to inspection – and sometimes people see her state seal and accuse her of wasting their tax dollars.

On one such occasion, Michelle quickly ran into a Target to use the restroom and was approached by a man who accused her of shopping on government time. Another time, Michelle was on a conference call in her car in a parking lot and a woman was upset that she was "playing on her phone" instead of working. As many state workers know, it's moments like these that add undue extra stress to the important work we do.

"My car is my office because taxpayers need us in the field. With nearly 350 facilities to cover, I'm constantly out and about and I have to find a place to use the restroom," explained Michelle. "But, sometimes I worry that people will not or do not understand the struggles that we face to do the job we do."

But the average person and our elected officials should understand how important the work is for all of us. Food Inspectors make sure that the food we buy is safe for our consumption. This keeps us safe and ensures that Michigan's agricultural products are truly 'Pure Michigan' and trusted around the world.

"I feel like I help people and that makes me feel good to know that the work I do is so important to ensure safe food. I wouldn't trade it for anything."

2016 SEIU Local 517M Calendars Are Now Available

Click on the link to download the state employee or school and local government 2016 calendars.

State Employee Calendar: <http://www.seiu517m.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/40/files/2015/10/2016calendarstate.pdf>

School and Local Government Calendar: <http://www.seiu517m.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/40/files/2015/10/2016calendarslg.pdf>

October Text Contest Winners

Congratulations to the winners of the October E-Former text contest. The five winners chosen at random were:

Antonia Brown
Matthew Galbraith
Stephanie Grabowski

Dawn Miller
Stacie Percell

November Text Contest

Our monthly text contest allows five winners to receive \$20 gift cards. **To enter, text "517M" to 30644 to take a quiz about the E-Former.**

This month's question: What is **Michelle Kusnier's** job title?

- a) Agriculture Inspector
- b) Health Inspector
- c) Dairy Inspector
- d) Food Inspector

Text the correct answer to enter the contest. The contest is an opt-in contest, meaning that we will only text you if you would like to participate.

Calendar of Upcoming Union Events for November, 2015

November 3: Chapter 6 Meeting – Bay City

November 5: Chapter 9 Meeting – Lansing

November 10: Chapter 18 Meeting – East Lansing

November 10: Chapter 3 Meeting – Cadillac

November 10: Fight for \$15 National Day of Action

November 12: Technical Unit Board Meeting

November 17: Chapter 20 Meeting – Warren

November 18: Scientific and Engineering Unit Member Education Program: *What Do Unions Do?*

November 19: HSS Unit Board Meeting

November 19: Chapters 11, 13, 14, 26 combined meeting

For more information on the above events, consult our on-line calendar at:

<http://www.seiu517m.org/events/month/>

The monthly subscription for the E-Former is included in your membership dues payment and is intended for members in good standing of SEIU Local 517M.



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