National protests prove the power of solidarity

More than 3 million people marched through big cities and small towns across the nation the day after Donald Trump’s inauguration. These unprecedented protests were the largest public actions against a sitting president in the history of the United States. In Illinois, IFT members were among the hundreds of thousands who marched in their communities to show unity and speak out against Trump’s harmful agenda.

The actions focused on different issues, from the protection of reproductive rights to the opposition of dangerous school privatizer Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education, to the President’s Muslim travel ban. Most importantly, the millions of marchers included people who had never been politically active, but now feel compelled to speak out.

Our task is to turn this incredible moment into a successful movement. That will require everyone affected by Trump’s reckless policies – and those who oppose them – to speak out and stand together, just as we do in our unions. We call it solidarity.

We can’t do this only on social media or by signing digital petitions. While those actions matter, our collective effort will be strongest if we take to the streets.

Our ability to defeat Trump’s agenda is directly proportional to the power we amass against him. Together, we can successfully oppose the attitudes and actions that hurt education, workers, and our nation. Let’s get to it.
Last month, a powerful man told a woman to shut up.

It’s happened a thousand times since, but this time was unique because it occurred on the floor of the U.S. Senate.

During debate of Sen. Jeff Sessions’ cabinet nomination, Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) attempted to read a letter written by Coretta Scott King. King had explained why Sessions was unfit to be a federal judge in 1986; Sen. Warren was arguing how he was unfit to serve as Attorney General today. Before she could finish, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) interrupted her, citing a rule that prevents a Senator from suggesting another’s conduct is “unbecoming” of the office.

The Senate voted to bar Warren from speaking again. McConnell explained why.

“She was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless, she persisted,” he said.

Never mind the selective enforcement of the rule or the absurdity that someone can’t speak truthfully about the morals and record of a man nominated to be our country’s chief lawyer and defender of civil rights.

Fellow senators stepped in to finish the letter, speaking up for someone who had been unfairly silenced.

Then, “nevertheless, she persisted” spread like wildfire on social media as a rallying cry for women and others accustomed to this experience.

Does any of this sound familiar?

How many times has someone tried to diminish your opinion? How many times have you spoken up for a colleague who was treated unfairly? How many times has a bad boss, or heck, Governor Rauner, tried to shut us up?

Nevertheless, we persist.

When Bruce Rauner went to central Illinois to talk about how much he cares about the community, Champaign Federation of Teachers President Jen White reminded the media that the Governor vetoed funding for higher education and MAP grants, which harmed her college town and those who call it home.

When Bruce Rauner stopped by her high school to take selfies with students, Belleville Federation of Teachers President Cyndi Oberle-Dahm was waiting with all of her colleagues, wearing “red for ed(ucation)” shirts. She questioned Rauner’s sincerity and forced him to address his failure to enact a state budget.

When Bruce Rauner swung through Rockford to promote school funding, Harlem Federation of Teachers President Brad Sweet pointed out that he talks the talk, but by holding social services hostage to his personal goals, the Governor shows his true colors.

And when the U.S. Senate confirmed GOP mega-donor Betsy DeVos as the next secretary of education, O’Fallon Federation of Teachers President Mike Day spoke out about her support for charter school expansion – and one of her biggest cheerleaders, Bruce Rauner.

The Governor’s folksy campaign tour is just getting started. And don’t forget: he’s good at this. Voters are tired of the chaos (we all are), and he’s out there saying he’s been workin’ hard for us, even though he defunded higher education and threatens to privatize public services and erode retirement security.

Rauner and the legislators he financially threatens will dismiss us, underestimate us, try to shut us up. They’ll warn us – like they did our AFSCME sisters and brothers recently – not to dare take action.

Nevertheless, we will persist.
IFT takes bold steps to fix performance evaluation process

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) reset the federal role in education policy and takes a national step towards fixing No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

But here in Illinois, the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA) must also be changed to fully realize the flexibility, shared accountability, and other benefits of ESSA. That’s why in February, the IFT filed House Bill 3022 (Welch, D-Westchester) and Senate Bill 1740 (Lightford, D-Westchester): identical, bold initiatives* to address the harmful consequences of PERA while preserving what practice and research show is valuable to teaching and learning.

The union’s proposal is intended to bring fairness to the teacher evaluation process and provide more effective feedback to educators and administrators.

Key changes in House Bill 3022 and Senate Bill 1740 are:

1. **Remove student growth as a mandate** for all districts and joint agreements starting in the 2018-19 school year. Student growth could still be used in districts where it is negotiated and agreed to locally.

2. **Require the PERA joint committee to meet at least once per year** for ongoing improvement of evaluation plans.

3. **Focus evaluation on providing differentiated feedback to teachers – rather than ranking and sorting them** – by proposing changes to the current four-rating system.

4. **Require every district to locally bargain an appeals process** for teachers who receive an Ineffective (i.e. Unsatisfactory) rating.

These changes would address concerns expressed by IFT members who have spoken out about their classroom needs and challenges during IFT focus groups and ISBE ESSA public comment periods over the last two years.

**Contact your State Senator and Representative to share stories about how PERA has harmed you, your students, and your school.** Urge them to support HB 3022 and SB 1740.

Please let your legislators know how this legislation will help fix the consequences of PERA and put the focus back on teaching and learning, not testing and paperwork.

* Amendments to the legislation may be filed. Check ift-aft.org/underthedome for the latest information.
IFT offers professional development and
union leadership training designed for you. No matter what job you do or what role you serve in your union, as an IFT member you have access to high-quality, meaningful training to enhance your skills.

All IFT professional development and union leadership training programs are taught by experienced union staff, leaders, and activists – not outside, for-profit vendors – who are familiar with your unique needs and challenges. Classes are held at convenient times and locations around the state to ensure that all members have access. Many programs even provide PD (Professional Development) credits for teachers.

Here’s an overview of IFT training programs available in 2017-18:

**UNION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE (ULI)**

**Union Leadership Institute** (ULI) is the IFT’s flagship training program. Since 1979, ULI has provided thousands of members with professional and union skills enhancement on topics ranging from collective bargaining to Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) to managing stress.

Most ULI courses are conducted over three one-weekend sessions, but one-weekend and one-day sessions are also offered. A one-week summer session is conducted annually, as well. ULI is held at the IFT Robert M. Healey Center in Westmont (ULI North), various downstate and central Illinois locations (Regional ULI), and in Delavan, Wisconsin (ULI Great Lakes).

**2017-18 SCHEDULE**

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<tr>
<td>SPRING ULI</td>
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**WORKSITE LEADER (WSL) TRAINING**

The WSL program is the IFT’s newest offering designed to help union activists serve as effective Worksite Leaders (WSLs) in their school building or workplace. By informing and engaging members, WSLs play a critical role in growing and strengthening their locals and the IFT.

To graduate from the WSL program, participants must complete five brief courses, or modules. The 1-3 hour courses are held in conjunction with the ULI program (North and Regional).

**TO LEARN MORE AND SEE SCHEDULED DATES,**
contact your local president or IFT Field Service Director or visit [ift-aft.org/wsl](http://ift-aft.org/wsl).

**AFT LEAD (LEADERSHIP EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT)**

The IFT partners with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) to offer this program that helps local union and council teams establish strong relationships with their members and the community. Over the course of several collaborative meetings throughout the yearlong program, LEAD teams assess their challenges, determine how to strategically overcome them, and develop an effective action plan. No matter each team’s end goal, team members learn that member engagement and community support is central to success.

**LEARN MORE ABOUT AFT LEAD AND HOW YOUR LOCAL OR COUNCIL CAN PARTICIPATE** by contacting your IFT Field Service Director or calling 630-468-4080.

“A lot has changed in our state since I started my career, so understanding our contracts and how to defend them is more critical than ever. There is no better place to learn that than from experienced union staff and activists here at ULI.”

George Rosa, Elgin Community College Faculty Association, Local 3791
IFT offers professional development and union leadership training designed for you.

**IFT MEMBER AMBASSADOR TRAINING**

Are you ready to share your personal story to help fight back against the threats facing our professions and unions? **Become an IFT Member Ambassador!**

Launched in 2015 by the IFT Department of Communications, the Ambassador Program helps IFT members learn how to better communicate with their neighbors, colleagues, and the media. During a one-weekend, hands-on training, IFT Member Ambassadors learn a variety of skills, including developing a clear and persuasive message, using social media best practices, working with the media, and much more. Members in all job categories are urged to participate, but availability is limited and approval of the local/council president is required.

**SCHEDULE**

The next IFT Member Ambassador Program will be held in conjunction with ULI North on February 10-11, 2018.

**TO LEARN MORE**, contact Jennifer Hill at jhill@ift-aft.org or call 630-468-4080.

**CUSTOM TRAINING AND ASSISTANCE**

Interested in running for local school board? Would your local benefit from social media training? Would you like to better understand teacher evaluation processes or current legislation?

Whatever your training need, IFT staff are available to provide personalized assistance to help you meet goals or overcome challenges.

The American Federation of Teachers also offers many training opportunities for members in every job category. **LEARN MORE AT www.aft.org.**

**“Worksite Leader training helped me see how important it is to establish one-on-one connections with coworkers. I hope to eventually pursue additional leadership positions and serve on committees in my local; I have so many new ideas now and have been strengthened by becoming a WSL graduate.”**

Terri Berg, Peoria Federation of Support Staff, Local 6099
The 2017 class of IFT LEADers.

New class of LEADers gets to work

IFT leaders from diverse locals and councils gathered for the first time in February to start shifting into action for 2017 and beyond. The teams from around the state are the newest class of participants in the AFT Leadership Education and Development (LEAD) program, which has been engaging members to strengthen our union since 2014.

“‘We want to empower our members by having a plan in place to share information so we’re all on the same page and can mobilize effectively when it matters most.’”

- Lisa Stanley, Co-President of the Park Forest Teachers Federation Council of AFT Local 604

2017 LEAD participants include: Cook County College Teachers Union, Local 1600; Dupo Federation of Teachers, Local 1732; Esperanza Community Services Employees Union, Local 6436; Kankakee Federation of Teachers Council of AFT Local 604; Park Forest Teachers Federation Council of AFT Local 604; and Wolf Branch Association of Teachers, Local 6117.

“The LEAD program has given our council an opportunity to take a step back and really look at where we are and where we need to be,” said Patricia Mosley, Co-President, Park Forest Teachers Federation Council of AFT Local 604. That is exactly what AFT LEAD is designed to do. By helping union leaders assess where their locals and councils stand, they can better determine their goals and work on plans to achieve them.

At the initial session, the teams began developing 12-18 month campaigns to accomplish their objectives.

With help from LEAD, the Park Forest Council plans to increase its member engagement leading up to contract negotiations later this year. The Council has already begun sharing more information with worksite leaders, who are having one-on-one conversations with members in their buildings.

“These are conversation Hobo as we head into contract negotiations,” said Co-President Lisa Stanley. “We want to empower our members by having a plan in place to share information so we’re all on the same page and can mobilize effectively when it matters most.”

Previous teams have successfully increased member engagement, developed powerful relationships with community groups, and much more thanks to LEAD participation. Their strategic efforts continue to strengthen their locals and councils, as well as benefit their communities.

LEAD participants don’t go it alone. They receive support and resources from IFT and AFT as they work towards their goals. The LEAD teams will meet again several times throughout the year to check in on progress and plan next steps.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT AFT LEAD AND HOW YOUR LOCAL OR COUNCIL CAN PARTICIPATE, contact Sharon Teefey at steefey@ift-aft.org or Cathy Mannen at cmannen@ift-aft.org.

We want to empower our members by having a plan in place to share information so we’re all on the same page and can mobilize effectively when it matters most.”
St. Clair County Locals band together for ballot initiative

Several IFT locals in St. Clair County have joined forces with school and community allies in the upcoming election to fight for schools and public programs.

- Belleville District 118 Building Administrative Assistants, Local 6351
- Belleville High School Federation of Teachers, Local 434
- High Mount Federation of Teachers, Local 2175
- Pontiac-William Holliday Federation of Teachers, Local 181
- Shiloh Education Association, Local 4755
- Shiloh Federation of Support Personnel, Local 6425

The locals, along with area school superintendents, law enforcement groups, and others recently came together in the “Yes for Safety, Yes for Kids, Yes for Our Future” Committee to help pass two critical tax referenda that will appear on the April 4 ballot.

If passed, each proposal would increase some sales taxes by just one percent, but provide more than $22 million to help fund school facility improvements and $22 million to enhance public safety programs.

Funds derived from each tax would be distributed among numerous St. Clair County communities.

“Like so many areas around the state, our schools and public programs need additional resources,” said Richard Hodson, Belleville High School Federation of Teachers, Local 434, President. “By working together in this coalition, we’re sending voters a unified message about the importance of these tax referenda to all our communities. We’re hoping for a successful outcome that benefits kids and makes us all safer.”

Happy Anniversary to IFT Locals and Councils!

Congratulations to these local unions celebrating milestone years of membership with the IFT in 2017.

50 YEARS
- Dupo Federation of Teachers and Paraprofessionals, Local 1732
- Illinois Valley Community College Federation of Teachers, Local 1810
- Pontiac William Holliday Federation of Teachers, Local 1811

25 YEARS
- Parkland College Professional Support Staff Association, Local 4776
- Astoria Federation of Teachers, Local 4778
- Nashville Education Association, Local 4797
- Kishwaukee Council of Support Staff, Local 4801
- Staunton Federation of Teachers, Local 4818

10 YEARS
- Hamilton County Federation of School Related Personnel, Local 6377

Learn More

To learn more about this initiative, visit facebook.com/yesforourfuture.

SpeakUp

Have a milestone coming up? Contact jhill@ift-aft.org.
Local 6099’s main food pantry at Richwoods High School has already provided food and hygiene products for 200 needy students.

Peoria Federation of Support Staff creates food pantry for needy students

When this large local committed to engaging more members as part of the AFT LEAD program (see page 6 for details), they didn’t realize how impactful their efforts would be.

Last fall, Local 6099 established the "Roundtable Project," a food pantry for needy students at Peoria Richwoods High School. Union members went into churches and businesses and solicited donations from friends and neighbors to build up initial supplies. The union also partnered with the District 150 Foundation to help coordinate monetary donations, which were provided to the local for use in the pantry. To receive needed items, students confidentially request them from school staff.

The project quickly became successful and grew dramatically: in addition to the main pantry, 16 mini-pantries are now open in district schools. Thanks to members’ efforts to promote the program, other unions and community groups have become major donors, and the pantries now stock everything from soup to deodorant to socks and underwear. Since last August, nearly 200 needy students have been served, and the project continues to grow.

“Our members’ roles in the Peoria Public Schools gives us unique insight into the needs of our students, but we never imagined how far-reaching this project would be,” said Terri Berg, Local 6099 member. “The smiles and the happiness we are bringing to these students with just a toothbrush or deodorant is amazing. It has a huge positive impact on their families too.

“Our members are becoming more and more involved with the union, and getting the community involved has helped us develop strong relationships. We know that working together, we are making a difference in this community. That’s a win for us all.”

High Mount Federation of Teachers speaks out in the media

This local of 32 teachers near St. Louis wanted to voice their serious concerns about the nomination of billionaire charter school advocate Betsy DeVos for Secretary of Education, so they tried a new strategy.

Around the AROS Day of Action in January (see page 9), Local 2175 President Stephanie Bontemps decided to write a letter to the editor of their local newspaper.

“Many of our members believe that DeVos was specifically selected by our new president to dismantle our public education system, so we wanted to send a strong public statement to both our parents and our community about our opposition to his nominee,” said Bontemps.

The local had been hesitant to approach the media in the past, but they embraced the effort and discovered it was both empowering and effective. The letter appeared in the Belleville News-Democrat, and Bontemps said she felt supported by her members “more than ever before.”
Recent changes to their healthcare program inspired this local to get creative and mobilize members by implementing a 10-minute meeting campaign.

**Worksite leaders in 13 school buildings began having one-on-one conversations and conducting very brief, laser-focused meetings** with members in January to discuss questions about changes to incentives in their wellness program and talk about how they’re impacting members.

More than 98 percent of Local 540 members participate in the program, which began as a union initiative to reduce district costs without sacrificing member benefits.

Local 540 President Brad Sweet says the ongoing conversations are already doing what they were meant to do – engage members. They’ve even attracted fair share members who haven’t participated in the local before.

“We’re at the beginning of this initiative and conducting member surveys to assess the impact it’s been having, but we see it’s making a difference,” Sweet said. “Our next goal is to start an ‘HFT Cares’ initiative, beginning with community food drives. We’re determined to keep the positive momentum going by trying new things and pushing forward.”

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Local 540 President Brad Sweet says the ongoing conversations are already doing what they were meant to do – engage members. They’ve even attracted fair share members who hadn’t participated in the local before.

The day before Donald Trump took office and immediately after Betsy DeVos attended a disturbing confirmation hearing, IFT members joined with parents, students, and community partners on a Day of Action to stand against the Trump-DeVos agenda and call for high-quality neighborhood public schools.

“DeVos is going to create a greater system of haves and have-nots,” IFT First Vice President Mike Day told a St. Louis news station. “Kids who can go to private schools with vouchers and kids who can make it into a charter school on one hand, but students who don’t have that ability and kids with special needs are going to be left in public schools that have dwindling resources year by year.”

Locals held walk-ins, rallies, press conferences, and other events to highlight educational needs in their communities and reject DeVos’ scheme to divert taxpayer funding for public schools to private charters and vouchers. Other events focused on ensuring student safety in schools and campuses under Trump, who dramatically increased deportations and declared a Muslim travel ban immediately upon taking office.

Other participating IFT locals included the High Mount Federation of Teachers, Local 2175 (see page 8), and the Madison Federation of Teachers, Local 763.

The January Day of Action was the latest in a series of national events held in February, May, and October of 2016 coordinated with the Alliance to Reclaim our Schools (AROS). Last fall, more than 2,000 schools in 238 communities nationwide conducted AROS events, and those numbers continue to grow.
All because we don’t have a state budget.

**November 2014:** Governor Rauner elected.

**January 2015:** Rauner takes office. Temporary income tax increase enacted during Quinn administration partially expires.

“Crisis creates opportunity. Crisis creates leverage to change … and we’ve got to use that leverage of the crisis to force structural change.”

- Governor Bruce Rauner, Chicago Tribune, April 6, 2015

**June 30, 2015:** FY15 ends with state budget deficit of $1.618 billion.

Governor Rauner’s FY16 budget projected a $6.6 billion deficit by June 30, 2016. He proposed to eliminate that deficit with phony **savings based on reforms that were never enacted or ruled unconstitutional.**

Governor Rauner’s FY17 budget again projected a $6.6 billion deficit. He proposed to solve this with $2.6 billion in cuts and $3.5 billion of “working together or executive management.”

Governor Rauner’s FY18 budget projects a $7.2 billion deficit, which he proposes to solve with $2.4 billion in cuts/reduced spending and $4.6 billion of projected “grand bargain” savings that would result from a deal that the Governor himself killed after applauding its promise.

“We are looking at hundreds of millions of dollars in late interest payment penalties. That’s money that’s never going to be invested in health care, or early childhood development or in higher ed. It’s really criminal that we are burning taxpayer dollars because of this personal pet project fight that the governor has.”

- Comptroller Susana Mendoza, Chicago Tribune, January 29, 2017

**A BETTER WAY: PUT MIDDLE-CLASS FAMILIES AHEAD OF BILLIONAIRES.**

Instead of asking Illinois’ wealthiest to pay their fair share, Rauner has overseen huge cuts to public services.

Rauner’s personal income has tripled to $188 million since he became Governor, and the tax cuts he campaigned on have personally saved him millions.

**Governor Rauner should do his job and present a balanced budget.**

Closing corporate loopholes and enacting a Millionaire’s Tax would generate more funding for our classrooms. And, Illinois should have a fair tax, where people earning higher incomes pay more than those earning less.

All budget documents are available online through the Governor’s Office of Management and Budget (GOMB).
Like most IFT members, Julie Goff-Rietgraf has a full plate. In addition to being an active unionist in the Oglesby Public Schools #125 Council of AFT Local 604, she teaches junior high school, coaches volleyball and cheerleading, and is a mom of three. But when students and schools in her LaSalle County community began to suffer under a misguided school board, she committed to step up and serve.

“In the six years that my family has lived in Tonica, there have been four administrative changes,” Goff-Rietgraf said. “While some were most certainly better than others, last school year was an eye opener! It took its toll on the Board of Education, and it ripped into this small, close-knit community.

“A lot of my friends and neighbors were talking about sending their kids to private schools, or selling their homes and leaving. That is when it became very real for me. I was not going to let poor judgement on the school board harm our kids and divide our community,” she added.

Goff-Rietgraf began attending school board meetings and asking questions. She urged others to do the same, explaining that just like in the union, there is power in numbers.

When a vacancy on the Tonica CCSD #79 School Board opened last fall, she jumped at the chance to make a difference by filling the partial term. Now she’s running unopposed for her first full term in the April 4 consolidated election.

“I feel very comfortable in this role now, and I come with a lot of knowledge about how a school should and needs to run,” she said. “With my experience, I can help keep this school board heading in the right direction.”

She encourages other union members to do the same. “In our jobs, we make a difference every day for our students,” she said. “We all have the responsibility to do that in our communities, too.”

A lot of friends and neighbors were talking about sending their kids to private schools, or selling their homes and leaving. That is when it became very real for me.

“IT’s easy to become complacent and go along with changes, even when we don’t agree with them. Too often we wait for someone else to do something about it,” said Goff-Rietgraf. “But we have to advocate for our kids and communities. If we don’t, who will?”

Though it’s challenging to find the time to serve, as an educator and parent, Goff-Rietgraf says she couldn’t sit by and watch as education programs were eliminated and staff turnover increased.

By serving on the school board, she is making a tangible, positive impact on the lives of kids, educators, and parents in her community. Things are already beginning to turn around in Tonica, and Goff-Rietgraf has found that public service suits her.

“Ready To Run?”
Call 1-800-752-2175 to learn how IFT can help you run for local school board.
UPCOMING EVENTS

UNION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE
SPRING SESSION
April 22-23, 2017
IFT Headquarters, Westmont

GREAT LAKES ULI
June 25-29, 2017
Lake Lawn Lodge Resort
Delavan, Wisconsin

WORKSITE LEADER TRAINING
Visit WWW.IFT-AFT.ORG/WSL to view
course dates by region.

CONSOLIDATED ELECTION
APRIL 4
DON’T FORGET TO VOTE!