Goodbye No Child Left Behind, hello Every Student Succeeds Act

In December, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), legislation that reauthorizes the policy formerly known as No Child Left Behind. The Senate and House previously approved the measure with overwhelming bipartisan majorities.

While imperfect, ESSA is a long overdue reset of the federal role in education policy and a huge national step forward.

“Nothing is perfect, and ESSA is no exception,” said IFT President Dan Montgomery. “But there is a lot to like about this measure. Overall, it will bring us closer to letting states, local districts, and educators focus on students and their success, and to ending the harmful testing obsession that parents and educators alike have repeatedly rejected because it has drained the joy from teaching and learning.”

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten called ESSA a “paradigm shift” that does two very key things.

“It maintains the historic commitment to level the playing field for disadvantaged kids, and it stops the testing insanity, which has reduced schooling to a test score and instead enables states to re-envision accountability systems that are far more about what kids need to know and be able to do and will give educators the latitude to be able to make a difference in kids’ lives.”

continued on page 4
As I write this in the new year, I gulp at the challenges of 2016. Our billionaire governor holds the state hostage to his obsessive agenda; we have no budget to fund the basic services a government provides – a safety net for the neediest, education, health care, infrastructure, public safety. It’s fair to genuinely ask if our governor even believes in those things.

But the year also brings opportunity: important elections, an AFT convention on our 100th anniversary, an IFT convention, and more.

We can shame the governor, but our real solution is work. We must redouble our efforts to win the hearts and minds of a public who don’t pay as much attention to these issues as we do.

In 1977, a conservative Supreme Court unanimously decided that such fees pose no constitutional problem. It’s been upheld many times since. And despite what some say, we can’t – and don’t – charge fee payers for political work.

Governor Bruce Rauner has filed an amicus brief with the Supreme Court, and let’s just say it’s not to strengthen the rights of working people. He claims that public employee unions are to blame for state fiscal woes, including the pension debt! Illinois legislators in his own party don’t even believe this scurrilous lie.

Rauner and other ultra-conservatives say this is all about “free speech.” That’s ridiculous. They’re simply trying to crush one of the last remaining vestiges of power that regular people have – the ability to assemble freely as a collective to advocate for the betterment of their workplaces and lives.

We must redouble our efforts to win the hearts and minds of a public who don’t pay as much attention to these issues as we do.

And the Supreme Court must decide on basic rights of working people to collectively advocate for themselves and others. And that’s what I write to you about today.

The case is Friedrichs v. California Teachers, in which some anti-union groups found a teacher plaintiff to be the face of a lawsuit filed by far-right special interests.

What's at stake? As you know, no one is ever forced to join a union, but for decades courts have held that unions can charge non-members a fee for representing them in the workplace, since we are legally bound to do so. These fair share fees ensure that even non-members pay for the services that yield benefits and protections to everyone.

In 1980, about a third of workers in the United States and Canada were in unions. Today, Canada remains at a healthy 30%, but the U.S. is down to a shocking 11% (and only 6% in the private sector).

This isn’t the result of globalization (as Canada proves). It is the result of endeavor. We need laws like Canada’s that make it easier to unionize and a national ethos that values labor over capital, as Lincoln taught us.

That’s an effort each one of us has to take on. It is NOT something “the union” can do. We will win if you – yes, you! – commit to at least one concrete action this year. This can be as simple as a frank talk with a colleague about the union or helping them to register and vote. We will win if we stop just talking about it, but shift into action.

In solidarity,

Dan

E-mail Dan
What role will you play?
Send me an email at emaildan@ift-aft.org and let me know. I look forward to the year ahead with you.
IFT, Great Lakes region leaders work to build union power

IFT local and council presidents gathered in Oak Brook last November to meet with AFT President Randi Weingarten and other union leaders from the Great Lakes states at a first-ever regional meeting to discuss strengthening our union.

Members are the union’s power, so much like the IFT Presidents’ Conference held last spring, the AFT event entitled “All In!” focused on effective ways to help members mobilize in the wake of challenges facing workers.

IFT leaders President Dan Montgomery, Executive Vice President Karen GJ Lewis, and Secretary-Treasurer Marcia Campbell were among those who attended the gathering of activists from AFT-affiliated unions in the Midwest.

“We are stronger together, and we must stand together to reclaim the promise of America,” President Weingarten told participants.

That event was inspired by the AFT’s renewed commitment to building power during 2016, the union’s 100th anniversary year.

PSRP, public employees “Power Up!” at IFT conference

About 200 members from around the state came together at the 2015 IFT PSRP/Public Employee Conference in Oak Brook in October to get motivated and educated to address their unique workplace challenges and the attacks on all union members.

Paraprofessional and school-related personnel (PSRPs) who work in K-12 schools, community colleges, and universities joined with their state employee union brothers and sisters to attend informative workshops and presentations at this year’s event under the theme of “Power Up!”

Keynote speakers during the two-day event included IFT President Dan Montgomery, who thanked IFT PSRPs and public employees for their continued activism, updated members on the budget impasse in Springfield, and explained how Governor Rauner continues to hold the state hostage in his effort to eliminate worker rights.

“We’re facing real challenges here in Illinois and nationally with the upcoming decision in the critical Friedrichs labor case now that will be heard in the U.S. Supreme Court in 2016,” Montgomery said. “PSRPs, state employees, and all IFT members have to fight like never before to rise to these challenges and win because the American middle class is at stake. If we “power up” together, I know we will succeed.”
This wouldn’t have happened without the advocacy of IFT members, who were among the many thousands of educators, parents, and concerned community members who contacted U.S. House and Senate lawmakers to urge support for this critical legislation. Your activism made the difference.

ESSA makes it clear that the policies of No Child Left Behind, waivers, and Race to the Top should be abandoned, not replicated. By maintaining funding for the students who need it most, ESSA discourages state support for private school vouchers, portability, and other divisive policies. And by requiring transparency and accountability for charter schools, it suggests that these unproven policies should not be pursued.

What does this mean here in Illinois?
Educators, school districts, and students in our state won’t feel the impact of ESSA overnight. Though many onerous, prescriptive requirements of No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, School Improvement Grants, and the ESEA waiver process are now obsolete, state laws passed to comply with them remain. This is notably true in the area of teacher evaluations, which are required to be tied to student growth measures under Illinois’ PERA (Performance Evaluation Reform Act) law. Changes in state law are now required to fully realize the greater flexibility in accountability systems provided under ESSA.

But by leveling the playing field and removing obstacles tied to federal funding, ESSA enhances the opportunities to explore legislative initiatives in Illinois that allow local flexibility, promote shared accountability, and are sensitive to teacher, student, and district needs.

We must use this national momentum to affect change in Illinois. There is still much work to be done to fully empower IFT members to meet students’ needs and protect the teaching profession, and our union is fully prepared to do that work during the upcoming session of the Illinois General Assembly. The IFT will remain vigilant and member-driven in efforts to introduce and advocate for the changes needed to benefit educators, students, and communities under ESSA.

Eight key ESSA takeaways

ESSA paves the way for a public education system in Illinois and other states that is more focused on teaching and learning by removing many existing federal obstacles and giving states greater control and flexibility.

Some key ESSA provisions include:

1. The current targeted Title I funding formula is maintained.
2. States will be provided funds to audit their testing policies to decrease unnecessary tests.
3. States will control their own teacher evaluation systems. Federal funds will not be tied to federal teacher evaluation requirements.
4. Within parameters, each state will set its own accountability system that does not have to follow a rigid “adequate yearly progress” construct.
5. States will set their own content standards and aligned assessments.
6. Collective bargaining protections are expanded.
7. Certification for paraprofessionals is maintained.
8. Charter schools are required to be more accountable and transparent.

Read More
Read more about the purpose of ESSA from AFT President Randi Weingarten at aft.org/blog/randi/real-purpose-essa.
Members of the Libertyville-Vernon Hills Council of IFT Local 504 put their values into action with a community program that helps students and showcases their commitment to kids. Since 2010, council leaders and members have conducted a study night each semester to help the district’s high school students prepare for final exams.

Council President Dennis Duffy said the program started because members were looking for a way to demonstrate their professionalism to the community in the midst of attacks on teachers at the state and national levels.

“We thought about what brought us all together as teachers, parents, and administrators, and of course it was our students,” Duffy said. “Then we focused on what we could do to help them, and this was the result.”

The study night has become a district tradition. Union members volunteer to help students from the districts’ two high schools prepare for final exams and provide them with snacks. The union partners with local libraries which provide the space, tables and chairs, and assistance for students looking for last minute review materials.

“Too many of our students struggle to pay for their post-secondary education, and many are leaving our state to attend more affordable schools,” said UPI President John Miller. “Our students and our state are suffering as a consequence, and our coalition is fighting to change that.”

The postcard and petition drives are just first steps in their efforts, and they’ve already been hugely successful. More than 17,000 postcards have been distributed and expected to be hand-delivered to the state Capitol in the coming weeks, according to Miller.

Members of the Libertyville-Vernon Hills Council of IFT Local 504 put their values into action with a community program that helps students and showcases their commitment to kids. Since 2010, council leaders and members have conducted a study night each semester to help the district’s high school students prepare for final exams.
IFT PAC process gives members a voice

Advocating for you is the IFT’s #1 priority. A critical way the union does that is by working to elect legislators in Springfield and Washington, D.C., who are committed to standing up for the best interests of our members, our professions, and those we serve.

The IFT has worked diligently over the years to develop and fine-tune a statewide Political Action Committee (PAC) process that gives every member a voice. That democratic process was utilized again recently to determine the union’s candidate endorsements for the Primary Election on March 15, 2016.

In all areas of the state, regional PAC committee meetings were held to determine candidates’ positions on key issues and whether or not they deserve our support. Meetings were open to all IFT members. The committees use voting records, position papers, questionnaires, and other information before making recommendations to endorse candidates in their local areas. A 60 percent or better voting record on IFT issues is the minimum threshold for endorsement.

Once regional endorsement recommendations were made, the statewide PAC committee convened to finalize a list of statewide endorsements for consideration by the IFT’s elected Executive Board.

The complete list of board approved endorsements for the Primary Election is on the next page and available at ift-aft.org.

Your vote is your voice. Be sure to cast your ballot on March 15 for candidates who support the middle class, your workplace rights, and your ability to advocate for the students and citizens you serve.

Learn More
Visit ift-aft.org/legislative for details about the IFT’s political action process and helpful voter information.

Election 2016 will be another critical one for education, public services, and workers across the country, and it starts with the Illinois Primary on March 15, 2016. Be sure your voice is heard by registering to vote now!


If you need to register, there are two easy options:

1. **REGISTER ONLINE.** Use the Online Voter Application at https://ova.elections.il.gov/. (You may also use this site to update your name and address on your existing voter registration.)

2. **REGISTER IN PERSON.** Visit your local election authority, driver’s license facility or register in person on Election Day at your local polling place. (Proper identification will be required.)
# IFT supports candidates who support you

The Illinois Federation of Teachers is committed to supporting candidates for public office who are willing to work with our union and our members to provide the best public services possible. The candidates endorsed by the union may not always support 100 percent of the IFT’s legislative and political priorities, but share our key goals.

The IFT undergoes a thorough, multi-step process to research candidates and determine who deserves your consideration at the ballot box.

The Illinois Primary Election will be held on March 15, 2016. Please consider the candidates listed here when you cast your vote.

Additional endorsements will be released in advance of the November General Election.

## U.S. House of Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CANDIDATE</th>
<th>DISTRICT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bobby Rush</td>
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<td>Robin Kelly</td>
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<td>Daniel Lipinski</td>
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<td>Mike Quigley</td>
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<td>Danny Davis</td>
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<td>Bill Foster</td>
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<td>Charles Baricevic</td>
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<td>Cheri Bustos</td>
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## Illinois House of Representatives

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<td>Omar Aquino</td>
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<td>Patricia Van Pelt</td>
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<td>Michael Hastings</td>
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<td>Cristina Castro</td>
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<td>Sam McCann</td>
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## Illinois Senate

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<td>Cynthia Soto</td>
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<td>Juliana Stratton</td>
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<td>Sonya Harper</td>
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<td>Emanuel “Chris” Welch</td>
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<td>John D’Amico</td>
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<td>Michael J. Madigan</td>
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<td>Jhatayn “Jay” Travis</td>
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<td>Thaddeus Jones</td>
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<td>Jaime Andrade</td>
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<td>Litesa Wallace</td>
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<td>John Curtis</td>
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<tr>
<td>James Acklin</td>
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## State Comptroller

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<tr>
<td>Susana Mendoza</td>
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## Appellate Court

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<td>Eileen O’Neil Burke</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bertina Lampkin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brad Bleyer</td>
<td>5 (Stewart)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jo Beth Weber</td>
<td>5 (Wexstten)</td>
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Visit [ift-aft.org/legislative/endorsements](http://ift-aft.org/legislative/endorsements) for a complete list of IFT-endorsed candidates.
Governor Rauner is attacking everyday men and women and misleading the public about the unions that give us a collective voice. It’s time we tell #TheWholeStory.

This special section on ift-aft.org and social media is a place to tell the real-life stories of educators and other public servants who go above and beyond for our kids and communities.

Check out the excerpts below from IFT President Dan Montgomery who recently fired back at a Chicago Tribune editorial - “Because Illinois has to grow more taxpayers. That’s why.”

The Tribune asserted that legislators should capitulate to the Governor’s harmful “turnaround” demands because Illinoisans are fleeing the state due to high taxes. They also denounced our union for daring to criticize Rauner’s State of the State address, even though in it the Governor did little more than offer a laundry list of toxic education reforms and didn’t make a single mention of the irreparable harm he is causing to social services and higher education by refusing to give up his fanatical political agenda against unions.

IFT President Dan Montgomery responded with a data-driven op-ed.

Rauner is no friend to working families

Here are a few excerpts of what he had to say:

“In a Thursday editorial, the Chicago Tribune Editorial Board called out the organization I lead - the Illinois Federation of Teachers - for criticizing Gov. Bruce Rauner’s State of the State address. The editorial seemed to argue that we should simply go along with the governor because the taxpayers who provide schools with more money are leaving Illinois for other states due to our taxes.

A look at the facts dispels the governor’s (and the Tribune’s) claim.

First, consider that Illinois has among the lowest individual income tax rates of any state with a regressive, flat tax.

Consider, also, the findings of a recent report from the Illinois Economic Policy Institute.

IEPI found that in 2013 the average Illinois household paid less state income tax than those in Indiana and Wisconsin. Moreover, once the temporary tax rates receded in Illinois, taxes paid as a share of household income fell below Iowa and Kansas as well.

That means that a single, childless worker earning $50,000 a year pays $505 more in state income taxes in Iowa than in Illinois.

The lowest-earning 20 percent of Illinois taxpayers paid more than 13 percent of their income in state and local taxes, while the top 1 percent of taxpayers paid only 4.6 percent of their income. That’s right. The poorest Illinoisans - those who can least afford it - paid three times as much of their income as the richest Illinoisans, according to IEPI.”

Montgomery said that while our union agrees education is key to a strong economy, we reject the Governor’s divisive reform tactics that are forcing Illinois students and higher education institutions to suffer while Rauner holds them hostage to his political agenda.

The fact is, the Governor’s self-created, nearly eight-month budget impasse is causing needless pain and won’t help our state. He concluded:

“...Going this long without a state budget and inflicting irreparable harm to working families will not strengthen Illinois’ economy or “grow more taxpayers”....

Read the full version online at ift-aft.org/thewholestory.

More Information

Tell #TheWholeStory! Send your story to jhll@ift-aft.org.
You know that our union has a positive impact on our own lives and professions, but you may not realize how the gains and protections provided by the union benefit non-union workers and our communities, too. This article is the last of the three-part series entitled “Why IFT?” designed to help you understand why the union is important to us ALL.

**LOBBYING AND POLITICAL ACTION**

**Why is the IFT involved in politics?**

It’s a fair question to ask, and the answer is simple. Elected officials on your local school board, in the state legislature, and in Washington D.C., make the funding and policy decisions that affect you and those you serve.

Through our political involvement and legislative advocacy, time and again the IFT and our members have won major victories that benefit kids and communities, from protecting class size limits to fighting for pension benefits for public workers to winning card check authorization to organize new unions.

**What does the IFT advocate for?**

As your union, the IFT supports public policies that protect and enhance effective public services and promote high-quality public schools. The IFT also advocates for policies that protect not only our members’ professions and workplace rights, but the rights of all working people.

Every year, billions of dollars are spent to manipulate political decisions and public opinion in an effort to weaken the voices of everyday men and women. These wrong-minded attempts pose very real threats to our communities, so the IFT also works to oppose any proposals that would weaken or eliminate collective bargaining rights, privatize public services, defund public education, and otherwise harm the communities in which we live and work.

**How does the IFT do that?**

Through the IFT’s Department of Political Activities, our experienced team supports legislative policy and political objectives at the state and national levels. That mission is carried out through an aggressive, organized program of lobbying, advocacy, and year-round legislative monitoring.

Member advocacy is the key to our effectiveness. That’s why the IFT also empowers you and your local union to make your voice heard on key issues by keeping you informed about proposals and activity in Springfield and Washington D.C., that would impact you.

The IFT ensures that you have a say in the candidates who receive the union’s support in critical elections. Through a thorough, well-developed Political Action Committee (PAC) process, every IFT member can have a voice in the candidates who receive our union’s endorsement in state and national elections.

Since critical decisions that impact your community are often made locally, the IFT also assists local unions in school board elections, referendum campaigns, and more to ensure locals have the support and resources needed to influence local policy and key races.

Learn More

To learn more about IFT and local successes and how the union’s legislative efforts help members and communities visit ift-aft.org/whyIFT.
A decade ago, inspired by the birth of my daughter Maci and a keynote address at the IFT Leadership Conference about restoring the American dream, I wrote about my dreams of a better future - a future secured by the tireless fight of the labor movement.

Maci will soon turn 10, and in those years I’ve learned one thing. Dreams aren’t enough.

In the last decade, we have witnessed a systematic approach to dismantle organized labor in the United States.

We should not be surprised that the effort has been focused on public sector unions like our own AFT, as well as the NEA, AFSCME, and SEIU. In 2006, then-AFT President Ed McElroy said that we existed on an island of privilege, and unless we stood strong, united, and agitated to assist others, we would not survive.

The economic collapse in 2008 provided the perfect opportunity to test that theory and drive a wedge between public and private sector workers. Since then, we have endured an assault on our wages, benefits, and rights in the workplace that has left us feeling beaten to the point of giving up.

We could pack our bags and walk away, but is that the future we want to leave to our children? Is that the legacy left to us by Mother Jones, A. Philip Randolph, George Meany, John L. Lewis, and other pioneers who were jailed and fired to secure the rights we all have today?

I know it isn’t the legacy I want to leave to my daughter. But we can change it. We belong to a movement that fights for what is right. Consider this song, and remember.

“There is power in a factory (democracy), power in the land
Power in the hands of a worker
But it all amounts to nothing if together we don’t stand
There is power in a Union”
- Billy Bragg, 1986

The power of the union lies in us all. It does not come from the AFT, IFT, or even our local unions, but from each member standing together and raising one, undeniable voice. It is our unity that gives us power.

Together we can take on the fights ahead and make 2016 a defining year. This year, the U.S. Supreme Court will rule in the Friedrichs case (see page 2), which is designed to limit unions’ ability to fight for workplace justice. We will elect a president who will determine the makeup of our highest court for a generation. And here in Illinois, we will continue to face a governor hell-bent on taking away workers’ rights.

I can’t help but recall this verse as I think about our battle with Governor Rauner.

“Is there aught we hold in common with the greedy parasite
Who would lash us into serfdom and would crush us with his might
Is there anything left to us but to organize and fight? For...
The union makes us strong”
- Ralph Chaplin, 1915

No matter our personal politics, each of us should be concerned about the issues we face because the future of the American middle class is at stake. But when we tackle problems together, there is nothing we can’t accomplish. It will take all of us united, engaged, and agitated. To prevail, we must fight harder than ever before. Then we will ensure that my daughter and future generations will grow up knowing those dreams were met with actions, not just words. That can be the legacy we pass on to our children.

Solidarity forever.
Rendy Hahn has been making a difference in the workplace for more than 20 years as a PSRP and member of the Secretarial Council of the Cahokia Federation of Teachers, Local 1272. Now she’s also been recognized for her commitment to the union by being named the Southwestern Illinois Central Labor Council (SWICLC) 2015 Labor Woman of the Year. The SWICLC represents 85 locals with about 16,000 members in St. Clair and Monroe counties.

Hahn joins an impressive list of other IFT women who have received the award, including IFT Secretary-Treasurer Marcia Campbell (2007), and Sharon Crockett, IFT Vice President and Local 1220 President (2008).

SWICLC President Bill Thurston said, “We are pleased to give Rendy Hahn our Labor Woman of the Year Award for her extensive work training fellow unionists. Her efforts have been invaluable in strengthening the union movement in Southwestern Illinois and beyond.”

Hahn began training several years ago when an IFT staff member encouraged her to conduct workshops for fellow support staff. With her training partner, IFT member Connie McKenna of Local 1811, Hahn jumped into the role and never looked back. She has presented a wide variety of trainings at IFT and AFT conferences and regional workshops on topics ranging from behavior management to workplace safety to bullying. She has participated in the National Council of Occupation Safety and Health conference and has even conducted work safety training for students.

She has also been an active leader as the Vice President (and former President) of her council and a member of Local 1272’s IFT LEAD (Leadership Education and Development) Team, working to develop strong community partnerships and raise money for local projects.

Hahn plans to retire in June, but won’t leave the union behind. In her award acceptance speech, she proudly told fellow unionists that she will stay involved at every level. “Though we deal in different spheres, we all have something in common - striving for a better future. I’m so glad to be able to do my small part,” Hahn said.
UPCOMING EVENTS

PRIMARY ELECTION
MARCH 15, 2016

UNION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE
SPRING SESSION
April 25-26
RMH Center, Westmont

For complete course descriptions and to register, visit ift-aft.org/ULI

SAVE THE DATE
IFT CONVENTION
October 14-16
St. Louis, MO

VOTE FOR CANDIDATES WHO SUPPORT YOU ON MARCH 15

The IFT is committed to supporting candidates for public office who are willing to work with our union and our members to provide the best public services possible.