

# FIRST LOCAL NEWS

Published by United Auto Workers Local 249—Kansas City, Missouri

March 2022



The looming danger to rural schools | p 11

Local 249's Jason Starr named Man of the Year | p 6

Non-Profit  
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Jefferson City, MO  
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International Union United Auto,  
Aerospace and Agricultural Workers Local 249  
8040 NE 69 Highway  
Pleasant Valley, MO 64068  
9:00 AM CDT

Joseph Barajas, left, from Local 249's Member to Member Committee took part in the launch of a communicator recruitment drive in the Truck Trim Department Feb. 18. Photo by Don Lehman.



UAW Region 4 Asst. Director Brad Dutcher, center, met with Local 249 leaders Jim Fisher, left, and Jason Starr. Kansas City based Region 4 servicing Reps Todd Hillyard and Travis Ramsey also attended. Dutcher also toured production lines at KCAP Feb. 8. Photo by Don Lehman.



Jay Bosler, chair of Local 249's CAP Committee, was named Labor Liaison at the Clay County Democrats Winterfest luncheon by former State Rep. Jon Carpenter, who now serves on the Clay County Commission. Photo by Don Lehman.



Sherry Duffett, the wife of retired Local 249 millwright Larry Duffett, was recognized by the Clay County Democratic Central Committee for her work with the True Blue Award which was presented by Mo. State Sen. Lauren Arthur. Photo by Don Lehman.

## First Local News

Published monthly with combined issues in December-January and June-July by UAW Local 249. Free to members and retirees of UAW Local 249. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the UAW or Local 249. Member of the Local Union Communication Association (LUCA).

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Reporters Cecelia Davis, Erica Eckart, Chrissy Kline and Gwen Starkey  
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### UAW Local 249

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### Officers of Local 249

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The Regular Membership Meeting of United Automobile Workers Amalgamated Local Union 249 is held on the third Sunday of each month at 2:00 p.m. in the local union hall, 8040 NE 69 Highway, Pleasant Valley, Mo. The Executive Board Meeting is held at 1:00 p.m. prior to the Regular Membership Meeting.

### UAW-Ford Joint Programs

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Child Care Referrals 866-327-7952

UNICARE Life Insurance 1-800-843-8184

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Ford A,X,& Z Plan 1-800-348-7709

www.fordvehicleprograms.com

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## GOP moves to make it impossible to pass ballot initiatives

*By Mo. State Rep. Robert Sauls*

**V**irtually all measures placed on the ballot via initiative petition would fail – even one that somehow achieved 100 percent voter support – under a proposed constitutional amendment backed by Republicans that won preliminary House approval on a voice vote on Feb. 16. A second vote is required to send the measure to the Senate.

As has always been the practice in Missouri, a ballot measure currently must win a simple majority of the votes cast to pass. House Joint Resolution 70 would drastically bump the threshold for proposals put on the ballot by the initiative process to a simple majority of all registered voters, even those who didn't participate in the election.

Based on the nearly 4.34 million registered Missouri voters in 2020, an initiative measure would need about 2.17 million “yes” votes for passage under HJR 70. With the exception of elections with unusually high turnout, that figure typically is comparable to – and often more than – the total number of votes cast in most statewide elections.

For example, 83.7 percent of Missouri voters in 2010 supported ratifying Amendment 3 to constitutionally prohibit the General Assembly from imposing sales taxes on real estate transactions. That measure received the highest percentage of “yes” votes of any measure placed on the ballot via the initiative since the current Missouri Constitution was ratified in 1945.

Under the standard set by HJR 70, however, even though Amendment 3 received about 1.59 million “yes” votes out of a total 1.9 million cast, it would have failed. That's because with nearly 4.14 million registered Missouri voters at the time, ratification would have

required almost 2.07 million votes – 167,198 more than the total cast for Amendment 3.

Although HJR 70 would establish an impossibly high threshold for initiative measures, those placed on the ballot by the General Assembly would still need just a simple majority of the votes cast. If HJR 70 is approved by both legislative chambers, it would go on Nov. 8 statewide ballot.

### Redistricting

Lawmakers had hoped to have passed a bill redrawing Missouri's eight congressional districts by now. However, a small group of hardline conservative senators have stalled the process for weeks over their insistence on an extreme partisan gerrymander that they claim would produce a congressional delegation of seven Republicans and one Democrat. Mainstream Republicans say the proposal pushed by the hardliners instead could allow Democrats to win more congressional seats by diluting GOP voting strength in some currently safe Republican districts.

The redistricting bill pending in the Senate would maintain the decade-long status quo of six safe Republican districts and two safe Democratic districts. The Republican-controlled House of Representatives has already approved the measure,

## Labor News From the World Wide Web

# The Picket Line

## Protest calls for safer conditions at Illinois Amazon warehouse after worker deaths

**L**abor activists and faith leaders from across the Midwest gathered [Jan. 27] at the site of a deadly Amazon warehouse collapse to call for safer working conditions.

The rally came a little more than a month after six people died in the warehouse when it collapsed after being hit by a tornado.

“We said that we would be back. We would not rest until we get answers, until families get closure,” said the Rev. Darryl Gray, social justice commissioner for the Progressive National Baptist Convention.

He explained to the crowd how faith leaders and labor organizers are concerned about Amazon's working conditions and how those may have contributed to what happened in Edwardsville.

“Amazon has not acknowledged its role in this tragedy,” Gray said. “It's not enough to say that in our building codes, our safety trainings, our emergency procedures that we just did enough.” — *St. Louis Public Radio*

## Baristas at 2 Kansas City-area Starbucks locations plan to unionize

**B**aristas at two Kansas City-area Starbucks locations announced plans to unionize Jan. 31.

“We just want a better say in what happens at our store specifically since we are the ones that understand it,” Addy Wright, a Starbucks employee, said.

“We can't nurture the human spirit on the clock as long as we're underpaid and undertrained. We can't inspire our neighborhood while our partners struggle to afford living there. We can't make customer connections unless we feel safe around our customers.” — *KSHB*

## Lockout of almost 300 Collins Aerospace workers in Troy continues

**T**he lockout of unionized workers from Collins Aerospace's Troy plant continues with no word as to when contract negotiations might resume, Joe Konicki, president of United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 128, said Feb. 23.

“It's going as good as it can,” Konicki said. “We're still locked out — wanting to work, willing to work, wanting to get back in there and wanting to sit back down and negotiate something.”

As of early Wednesday, Konicki said he had not heard from the company. But he said workers are faring well.

“They're good,” he said. “The community has been good. They (locked-out workers) have been overfed on the picket lines by random individuals just saying, ‘I like what you're doing.’” — *Dayton Daily News*

## Amazon warehouse workers prepare for historic union vote

**O**ver 6,000 workers at Amazon's mammoth Bessemer, Alabama, facility are headed for a revote on whether they want to join the 60,000-member Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union.

The ballots went out on February 4 and will be counted by March 25. Once again, Amazon is waging an aggressive anti-union campaign, despite the November 2021 ruling from the National Labor Relations Board that ordered a new election due to the company's violations during the previous election process.

— *Economic Policy Institute*

# Are profits or wages driving inflation?

**Josh Bivens, Economic Policy Institute**

If you're following debates over inflation, you've probably read contradictory things in recent weeks about the relationship between it and whether it is workers (labor) or their bosses (capital) who will be able to protect their incomes from rising prices.

For example, some well-known economists have mocked the idea that inflation is related to corporate profiteering. Yet some of the world's most influential policymakers have expressed concern that inflation could spark an outbreak of excessive wage growth. One of these policymakers essentially pled with workers to moderate their wage demands in coming months in the name of slowing inflation. Finally, a Nobel Prize-winning economist claimed not only that inflation has nothing to do with the distributional conflict between labor and capital, but that even raising the specter of this will make it harder for policymakers to tamp inflation back down.

So what is the real story about profits, wages, and inflation? Simply put, while changes in the relative bargaining power of labor versus capital are not the root cause of the inflationary shock in 2021, this relative bargaining power will crucially determine whether or not inflation sustains momentum throughout 2022 and requires more sharply contractionary macroeconomic policy to slow.

In turn, policy efforts (like, for example, transformative reform to labor law or ramping up anti-trust enforcement) to change the relative bargaining position of labor vis-à-vis capital would be highly desirable for lots of reasons—but they wouldn't take effect quickly enough to be relevant to the current inflationary episode. Jawboning from policymakers is unlikely to stop any incipient wage-price spiral—but jawboning only workers and not capital owners to stand down in the distributive conflict is particularly perverse.

Just about everybody agrees that the simple timing of the inflationary shock of 2021 argues against it being driven by distributive conflict—whether that's corporate profiteering or opportunistic wage demands from workers in suddenly tight labor markets. This timing makes it similarly obvious that the inflationary shock was driven by the rapid reopening of economic sectors that were almost completely shuttered for a period by COVID, along with supply-side distortions remaining as the pandemic continues to roil

around the world.

But everybody also agrees that how initial inflationary shocks propagate throughout the economy is hugely context-dependent. For example, in the early 1970s before the oil price shocks, gasoline consumption was well under 4% of consumption expenditures. Given this, the 200% increase in gas prices between 1972 and 1979 should have directly boosted inflation by 8% spread over seven years, or just over 1% per year. Yet inflation in those years accelerated much more than this, by about an average of 4–5% per year. The large initial inflationary shock was propagated by a specific economic context of the 1970s—including far more balanced bargaining power between labor and capital than exists now.

This more balanced bargaining power meant that workers could translate expectations of higher prices into effective demands for higher nominal wages in response. At the same time, firms that expected higher wages in the future could also protect profit margins from these higher wages by raising prices. The more balanced labor market of the 1970s was not the only driver of that inflationary episode, but it was highly significant.

Relative to the situation in the 1970s, the 2021 inflationary shock is playing out in a context of highly unbalanced bargaining power between

labor and capital. If that changes going into 2022 and workers are able to begin translating any expectations of longer-run price inflation into excessively fast nominal wage growth, then—and really, only then—the inflationary shock could be amplified.

This is not just the view of the ignorant lay public, as Robert Shiller claims in his recent op-ed. Both Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen (also a former Fed chair) see it this way.

Recently Powell confirmed that whether or not the inflationary shock of 2021 starts getting amplified in the labor market is of prime concern to him and others at the Federal Reserve, saying, "We are attentive to the risks that persistent real wage growth in excess of productivity could put upward pressure on inflation."

Another central banker, Andrew Bailey of the Bank of England, has taken this analysis of inflation being potentially amplified by distributive conflict to its logical (to too many central bankers anyhow) policy conclusion, asking British workers to show restraint in asking for wage increases in response to price inflation.

Somehow, the Bailey comments have received less blowback among elite economists than an effort to highlight that corporate profits have been the clear winner from inflationary pressures so far. There has been mockery of this effort by some leading economists, with a repeated claim that its proponents are arguing that fatter profit margins are the driver of inflationary pressures rather than a propagator. But the view linking corporate profi-

teering to inflation is just the mirror image of the Bailey view—it is a frank acknowledgement that how inflation plays out in 2022 will largely depend on the relative bargaining position of labor and capital. The only difference is that the Bailey view argues that it is workers who must bear the burden of the inflationary shock, whereas the anti-profiteering view argues that firms should bear it through thinner profit margins.

Given that inflation so far has been near-entirely associated with historically high profit margins rather than real wage growth running far above productivity, it seems like asking employers to stand down first in the distributive conflict actually makes more sense (even if it likely wouldn't be all that effective).

Some have claimed that the anti-profiteering view is actively harmful, as higher profit margins are a useful market signal that resources need to be deployed to specific sectors seeing a supply-demand imbalance. This strikes me as true only if we think the COVID-distorted shares of consumer spending will persist permanently—that U.S. consumers will never return to face-to-face services and will continue to plough historically large shares of their income into durable goods. Since I don't think that's true, I'm not particularly worried that jawboning corporations to accept thinner profit margins in coming months will impede the U.S. recovery.

An analogy is price-gouging after natural disasters. Nobody thinks it's fair or useful for stores to charge desperate people \$15 for a bottle of water after hurricanes. It's obviously not fair and is illegal in many states, and it's not useful because nobody thinks the potable water shortage right after a hurricane is permanent and requires the incentive of higher prices to move a huge amount of new resources into providing it.

But while pressuring corporations into accepting thinner profit margins certainly wouldn't harm recovery and could in theory reduce some inflationary pressure going forward, it is also likely to be ineffective in the near term to stem this pressure.

The current unbalanced bargaining positions of capital and labor took a long time and concerted pro-corporate policy efforts to develop, and it will take a long time and equally concerted pro-labor policy efforts to rebalance.





Cecelia Davis, left to right, Hattie Joyce, Joseph Barajas, Zachary Pridgen, George Sharp, Brandon Maddock, committeeman Rick Coleman, Local 249 President Jason Starr, Erica Eckart, chair of the Member to Member Committee, Tom Low, Naoyanna Andrews, Austin McFarland, Bobbie Anderson, Chrissy Kline took part in a drive to recruit communicators in the plant Feb. 21. Photo by Don Lehman.

## M2M Committee launches communicator drive

**By Chrissy Kline**

**O**n the weekend of Feb. 18, a parade of committee members could be seen pouring through the aisles of the Truck Trim shop over the C-Crew weekend. This was the kick-off weekend for the communicator drive for the Member to Member Committee, and when deciding where to start first, President Jason Starr wanted to visit his old stomping grounds to get started.

"A strong Member to Member network with dedicated communicators can be a powerful tool as a committeeman, something I learned in my own shop, and know that if that can be expanded into shops all across the plant it can only strengthen our membership and local," Starr said.

The Member to Member Committee will serve as the central hub for communication within the local, like spokes on a wheel they will strengthen the union and provide support from the core leadership to each individual member serving as the outside of the wheel. It serves to

answer the who, what, where, when, why, and how of communicating important information to our members. It also gives us feedback on the opinions and outlook on issues that our members may have.

Rick Coleman, the current district committeeman for the area, helped identify communicators while the Member to Member Committee and chairperson Erica Eckart engaged members with informative flyers and surveys while they worked. "I'm really excited about this opportunity and can't wait to see how all this ties together," Coleman said during the event.

For many new members of the committee, this was their first time working together as a group for the local. "I love the way the committee was able to come together and accomplish what at first seemed like a very big task. I'm so proud of the overall enthusiasm and willingness to take the steps to attack our first big project together as a team," Eckart said.

Over the course of the weekend committee members and new communicators passed out several flyers and conducted surveys to get a better understanding of how members prefer to communicate, their levels of participation, the types of events that they want to see more of, and then a verbal survey of local agreement questions was performed during the wrap-up.

"I had a lot of great conversations on the floor with people that were eager to help us come up with ways to better serve our local," Eckart

said. "There was a lot of energy and excitement each day when we came to the floor and that was awesome to see."

The objective of the Member to Member program is to establish a network of communication within our local that enables us to transmit information effectively and accurately from the source to our members.

This information could be anything from an invitation to an event by another committee, a bulletin from the president, chairman and Bargaining Committee on current plant issues, a flyer on contractual issues, or a leaflet on upcoming events.

The next stop for the Member to Member Committee is going to be on the Transit side of the plant. As this program is expanded, if you are interested in becoming a communicator in your area, contact your district committeeperson and let them know.



Local 249 President Jason Starr, left, was named Man of the Year by the Clay County Democratic Party at the party's Winterfest Celebration at Harrah's on February 26. The award was presented by Missouri State House Rep. Mark Ellebracht who represents Liberty in the State Legislature. Photo by Don Lehman.

## Local 249's Jason Starr named Man of the Year

By Pat Hayes

**L**ocal 249 President Jason Starr was named Man of the Year Feb. 26 by the Clay County Democratic Central Committee at the party's Winterfest Celebration at Harrah's Hotel in North Kansas City. The award was presented by Mo. State Rep. Mark Ellebracht who represents Liberty in the Legislature.

The crucial role in promoting working class policies, candidates and elected officials was reflected in other awards presented at the meeting, as well. Jay Bosler, chair of Local 249's CAP Committee, was named Labor Liaison by former State Rep. Jon Carpenter, who now serves on the Clay County Commission. CAP is the union's worksite political-legislative action arm.

CAP supports candidates who support and fight for working people. The CAP committee assists in voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives, dollar drives, letter writing campaigns, and publicizing the issues and positions of public officials.

Sherry Duffett, the wife of retired Local 249 millwright Larry Duffett, was recognized for her work with the True Blue Award which was presented by Mo. State Sen. Lauren Arthur, who represents Clay County in the Legislature.

Local 31 President Clarence Brown also attended the event.

Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas, who delivered the keynote address, gave a shout out to the contributions of Local 249 activists for their hard work in supporting working class candidates and community service.

"It's time we recognized essential workers – the ones who did the real work during the pandemic – teachers,

bus drivers, nurses, city water and sanitation workers, and yes, autoworkers for keeping the country running," Lucas said. "They deserve our respect."

In accepting the Man of the Year Award, Starr thanked his family for supporting him when he had to spend long hours away, working nights and weekends, on behalf of Local 249 members, Region 4 Midwest CAP and the working class as a whole.

As chair of the UAW's Midwest States CAP, Starr plays a key role in identifying and supporting candidates and elected officials who will champion worker rights at the local, state and national level.

"We aren't interested in party labels," says Starr. "The UAW is working to turn around decades of attacks on working families. We will work with anyone – Democrat, Republican or Independent – who will stand shoulder to shoulder with us in the battle

to defend worker rights, raise living standards for all workers and preserve on the job safety."

Lucas Kunce and Scott Sifton, both candidates running for U.S. Senate in the Democratic primary election to be held Aug. 2, spoke at the Winterfest luncheon.

Kunce is a Marine veteran, Missourian, and Democrat running for U.S. Senate. His platform calls for investment "here in the heartland, through a Marshall Plan for the Midwest to rebuild forgotten communities, create the next generation of energy jobs, and bring power back to American workers."

Sifton served as a member of the Missouri Senate for the 1st district from 2013 to 2021. In the Senate, he led a record 40-hour filibuster of an amendment attacking marriage equality. He also fought to ban lobbyist gifts to legislators, expand Medicaid and protect victims of rape, domestic violence and sexual abuse.

# Local 249 MC delivers roses for widows

By Cecelia Davis

**M**issing someone you truly love in this day of age is very common. Whether it's being stuck in quarantine or your spouse taking a small business trip in hope to return home as soon as they can. You generally have a known time when you will see them again or you can simply just shoot them a text or give them a call but what if that call was never answered and now, you're not able to physically see and feel them. Missing someone turns into a whole new meaning. Time stands still and you find yourself feeling...Alone.

The transition in grief is an ever-changing act of emotions and nothing truly helps ease the pain, especially during the holidays but on February 11, the Motorcycle Committee had somehow found a slight solution to temporarily tackle any sadness for people who had lost their spouses sometime in their lives by creating an event called, Roses for Widows.

Roses for Widows consists of UAW 249 volunteers passing out more than 360 roses and chocolates that were made in the USA to widows and widowers within our community. They gathered early, on a beautiful sunny day to organize this heartfelt gesture completed with a lovely note that simply states that you are not alone on this Valentine holiday and to remind them that they are loved.

The union members worked diligently from sunup to sundown to spread the warmth of our local affection. Not a face was left without a smile and hearts overflowing with love. The chairman of the Motorcycle Committee, Joshua Curtis, had commented that, "The event is about blessing those who have been forgotten since their spouse has passed away. We gladly try and make their day, week, possibly year, a little better."

They traveled a 100-mile radius from the Ford plant, hitting three major nursing homes and then they went for a list of names that they had on file from the previous years. As a group they gathered all the addresses and ventured out to the widows and widower's work or home location to personally hand off their roses to them. If the recipients were not home, the committee was sure to leave the heartfelt gifts at the door so they would have something to come home to.

Not only did our union spread the love within our community, but they also presented the gifts to our in-house members like Shirley Mata, "It is a blessing. When you lose your husband, you are lonely and believe you are alone. Getting a rose the first year after delivering all the roses, I thought it was a beautiful surprise. It

is wonderful each year."

This is the Motorcycle Committee's 4th year of doing this event and it just keeps getting bigger and better. Joshua Curtis continued to state that, "This is probably my favorite event, you almost have to wear sunglasses to hide the tears because when you hear a widow say things like, "he has been gone for 27 years, and we were married on Valentine's Day and since he passed no one has ever thought about me until now. God bless you and your group at Local 249 for making this time of the year, that is depressing, a reason to smile and to think back on all our good times we had." Seeing the smiles and heart felt love and appreciation on the receiving end of the roses have brought smiles and tears of joy. It's nice knowing they



Local 249's Motorcycle Committee surprised area widows on Valentines Day by delivering roses. Photo by Don Lehman.

are not forgotten."

In hopes to triple the number of roses and love next year, the Motorcycle Committee is hoping to gather even more members to volunteer some time to reach even more widows' hearts within our community so they

can know that they are truly not alone and that Local 249 will continue to love them throughout the years. If you want to be a part of this simple act of love for next year, contact Joshua Curtis, the chairman of the Motorcycle Committee directly or our local union hall.

## Tell the Postal Service to build new vehicles union

By Ray Curry

**I**n response to the United States Postal Service's decision, Wednesday, to finalize the Next Generation Delivery Vehicle contract with Oshkosh Defense amid widespread concern over the contract's environmental and community impact, including potential infractions of national environmental standards, UAW President Ray Curry issued the following statement:

"Modernizing the Postal Service fleet must both deliver significant investments in green, electric vehicles and create good, union jobs. USPS's unilateral decision Wednesday to formalize its NGDV production without addressing serious concerns raised by the UAW, environmental advocates, the EPA and the White House is a troubling move that fails to live up to the needs of our next generation and flies in the face of the National Environmental Policy Act.

"The UAW submitted comments on the USPS Environmental Impact Study spotlighting the serious inadequacies with the review, including the out-right failure of the study to consider the impact of where and how the vehicles are produced. Barreling

this contract through a flawed process is not how we deliver Next Generation vehicles.

"USPS can still determine the impact of its Next Generation vehicle contract on the environment by working with Oshkosh Defense to support good union jobs and utilize existing facilities in Wisconsin, where union workers have been building high-quality vehicles for government for decades. Workers and the environment are relying on USPS and the Biden Administration to take every possible step to ensure public dollars protect our next generation."

### Background:

The United States Postal Service (USPS) awarded Oshkosh Defense a multibillion-dollar contract to

build up to 165,000 "next generation delivery vehicles" (NGDVs) over ten-years, despite Oshkosh Defense's claims that they were not seeking the contract. Soon after, UAW Local 578 workers in Oshkosh started creating prototype parts and tools, preparing to build the vehicles in Oshkosh and celebrating the new work. But instead of doing the work in Oshkosh, the company announced the NGDV contract would be produced in a new facility in another state, continuing its run of disinvesting in Oshkosh communities.

Alarmed by the company's falling investments in Oshkosh, UAW Local 578 leaders are raising their voices to demand Oshkosh Defense deliver more good-paying, union jobs: circulating a petition signed by the majority of the workforce, testifying to the USPS Board of Governors in Washington, D.C., penning local op-eds, and earning the support of local leaders including Wisconsin Senator Tammy Baldwin, State Assembly members, and the Oshkosh Common Council.



Local 249 member Austin McFarland learned how to stand up for himself and his fellow union members after listening to the Local's podcast. Photo by Don Lehman.

## Austin McFarland: UAW fury, passion, desire

By Erica Eckart

In this month's member profile, we would like to highlight Austin McFarland. Austin has been a member of local 249 since 2015. He is a proud union activist and currently serves on the Member to Member Committee. Austin has been involved for about a year with plans to continue his loyalty to represent and serve the membership.

Austin was at work one day listening to the Solidarity Academy podcast, which if you haven't heard, is a podcast hosted by Local 249's Education Committee.

It had been a long frustrating day of watching temps and utilities get taken advantage of by management and he realized that people were afraid to stand up for themselves when it came to management.

Frustration fueled by the unfair treatment of his coworkers, and the empowerment he received by listening to the podcast led Austin to decide it was time to do his part and get involved. Eager to begin, he sent persistent emails to local President Jason Starr and landed himself a place on the Member to Member Committee.

Since joining, Austin has remained active with not only his own committee but others as well. Austin never misses a chance to participate in anything that strengthens our ability to be a successful organization.

He believes in our brotherhood and is willing to put forth his efforts wherever they are needed whether in the plant or in our community. Austin has attended education classes, strike lines, engaged in support for Local 249's humanitarian responses and has been a staunch activist on behalf of our local community issues pertaining but not limited to raising minimum wage, the fight against the so called "right to work", the KC Tenants activist group and so much more.

"I was working one day and started listening to the podcast," said Austin.

"I was getting paid while listening to the leadership and committee members speak and teach me how to be a powerful union member and stand up for myself and others," said McFarland.

"It filled me with a fury, a passion and a desire to fight harder than I've ever fought before. I want to live up to what union membership really means. I want to be the change that I want to see because there's a difference between thinking or talking about it and being about it," he said.

"If you are in the factory working at a union shop, you are the union, it's up to you to be a leader whether you're participating on a committee across the street at the hall or not. You don't have to be on a committee to be a part of our union, it's up to every single one of us to carry that weight together. As soon as you put your weight down and start pointing across the street you become more of the problem instead of being part of the solution and that's what people don't understand."

"Working with Austin has been very rewarding personally," says Jason

Starr, president of Local 249. "Watching him take ownership of his membership and embrace his role as an active UAW member has been impressive. He brings so much energy and passion and is willing to take on any challenge to build the power of our union. This is the spirit of unionism that we are working so hard to identify to secure the future of our great local".

Austin had some great advice for those thinking about getting involved... "go for it!" says Austin, "Don't question it, try it. When I started, I thought it was going to be mentally stressful, or tiring especially after working in the plant all day, I didn't know if it would be for me or not, but it's been incredibly rewarding. Don't get me wrong, it's hard work sometimes but it's incredibly worth it and not even a fraction of the effort our local deserves".

On behalf of Local 249, we would like to thank Austin for his passions and efforts. For more information on how you can get involved with a standing committee, visit the Local 249 app to apply online.

# Supply chain issues continue to affect KCAP

By Jim Fisher

**A**s we enter March, our plant continues to see weekly schedule adjustments due to the current supply chain issues. So far this year the Truck System has been hit with 11 total shifts being cancelled. At the time of this article there have been five cancelled shifts on A Crew, three shifts cancelled on both B and C Crew. In addition to the down weeks, our members in the Truck System have seen reduced production schedules on some of the weeks that they have worked.

Unfortunately, there is a strong likelihood that these trends will continue into the second quarter. The Transit System has increased their operating pattern from a 5x10 hour schedule to a 5x11 hour schedule.

Of course, this is subject to the availability of parts. Transit entered February with over 10,000 Battery Electric Vans in the order system. When you take into account the high order bank for Transit and the very low dealer supplies for F-150s all indications are that when Ford does get the supply chains under control, this will be a very busy facility. Until that happens, production schedules will continue to adjust on a weekly basis, and we will continue to inform the membership as fast as we have confirmation from the company.

There have been several rumors posted about production schedules. We advise you to get your official information from KCAP or Local 249 Leadership only.

I have heard a lot of questions about the Fitness Center at KCAP. The Fitness Center until 2019 was controlled locally using funds from a program called the Local Nickel. This account gave joint control to Local 249 leadership and the HR Department at KCAP to invest in things that help both hourly and salary staff at KCAP. During the restructuring programs at all facilities lost this program. It is now controlled by a joint venture out of Detroit.

Before 2019, there were several large investments made in the Fitness Center including a building expansion, new equipment, new TVs, and new fans. In 2020, our Fitness Center was closed due to the COVID Return to Work Playbook. In December of last year, we received permission to begin the process of reopening the center in February.

In January, a team from Detroit came in for inspection of the Fitness Center, and due to new COVID requirements on ventilation the Fitness Center failed its audit. The Fitness Center will now be undergoing a ventilation upgrade at a cost of well over \$200,000. This project is expected to be com-

pleted between July and October of this year. From our point of view this was not soon enough.

The local leadership met with the joint venture team from Detroit and asked for additional options for our members until repairs to the Center could be completed. We are the first plant to reach an agreement with an off-site facility for our members to use while upgrades are completed. Local 249 active members have all been approved for a 5-month membership from February 28 to July 28 to The Foundation, a 24 hour gym, at no cost to the members. The Foundation is located at 9521 N.E. 79th Street, Kansas City, Missouri 64158. Their phone number is (816) 280-2910. It is located just 2.5 miles from the plant.

To obtain a membership you will either need to contact our ESSP Representative Kenny Alexander at (816) 459-1226 or come by the union hall for the paperwork. The Foundation is a locally owned facility that offers a wide range of work out equipment from free weights, treadmills, and a sauna. For an additional charge they also offer day care options and tanning beds.

We have also received questions about whether our Fitness Center will



Local 249 Bargaining Chair Jim Fisher reports on the KCAP plant production schedule at the February membership meeting. Photo by Don Lehman.

open with the staff that worked there before COVID. At this time the joint venture team has stated there is no plan to return them. Instead, they have stated that members will need to use their I.D. badges to enter the facility. During the audit in January our ESSP Representative, KCAP plant manager, KCAP HR director, and myself all met with them and expressed the benefits of having the training staff for the Fitness Center returned. However, as of now it appears that the joint venture team is still refusing to return them.

On March 2, Ford Motor Company announced that they will be restruc-

turing the company into two internal entities. "Ford Blue" will design and manufacture Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) Vehicles, and "Ford E" will design and manufacture Battery Electric Vehicles (BEV). Ford's internal restructuring will have no impact on the Collective Bargaining Agreement with the UAW. The company has confirmed that our members will continue to perform the work required in both entities and profit sharing will be based on the total North American profits generated by both entities. All aspects of our agreement will remain intact.

## In Memoriam

Thomas Aikmus January 2, 2022

Rafael Araiza September 25, 2021

Charles Ault January 17, 2022

Harold Barton January 3, 2022

James Bowman November 2, 2021

Jon Brake December 18, 2021

Eddie Brand January 13, 2022

John Brown January 29, 2022

Juan Camacho November 29, 2021

Gary Campbell October 4, 2021

Gary Class November 6, 2021

Randolph Cobbins December 7, 2021

Richard Conrad September 27, 2021

Michael Cox January 1, 2022

Terry Curry February 8, 2022

Noel Curtis September 28, 2021

Donald Disalvo November 4, 2021

James Doll February 11, 2022

Michael Eagleson December 10, 2021

Terry Eaton January 5, 2022

Larry Engler December 9, 2021

Kevin Erdelen September 22, 2021

Frank Flowers January 17, 2022

Nathan Goring October 1, 2021

Ivyl Guillen December 19, 2021

Donald Harrison January 24, 2022

Alyce Hutchison February 1, 2022

Frank Jones December 15, 2021

Leonard Joyner Jr December 13, 2021

Donald Kempf November 20, 2021

Vane Long October 1, 2021

Tyrone Martin January 30, 2022

Malord Mayo November 23, 2021

Tyra McCoy December 25, 2021

Dean McDaniel February 14, 2022

Robert Morey September 24, 2021

James Morgan October 21, 2021

Robert Moyer December 15, 2021

James Owen December 9, 2021

Paul Reyes December 28, 2021

Alfred Santellan October 20, 2021

Steven Sebright January 25, 2022

Debra Shelton February 1, 2022

Kenneth Stock January 11, 2022

Michaela Surls February 1, 2022

In loving memory of the Local 249 members we lost

# No room for weakness

By Jason Starr

In the halls of Jefferson City there lurks a pervasive threat to our democracy. It has been there for far too long, creeping around in the shadows and we must shine a light on it to expose it for what it is, to give it a name and banish it from our state capitol. This entity is a threat to our very voice as working people, constantly working to undermine democracy. It is weakness.

This weakness has allowed so many legislative attacks on the working class to go unanswered. It has prevented us from sparking the necessary outrage to mobilize and organize our members and the working class to build a defense against those seeking to steal away our democracy and liberties.

We have always worked hard to keep our members informed about what is going on in Jeff City, but the current attacks taking place there are not just aimed at our Union and our way of life. They are outrageous and are directly designed to strip away democracy and take away any power the working class still wields to combat these corporate attacks.

On Feb. 24, the Missouri House of Representatives granted first-round approval to a proposed constitutional amendment, raising the requirements to amend the Missouri Constitution through the ballot initiative petition process to an unattainable level. It marked the second time in as many weeks that the chamber endorsed corporate legislation to strip citizens of the right to enact legislation independently of the General Assembly when they fail to represent the will of the people.

Currently, multiple bills have been proposed to restrict the voice of Missourians and restrict our constitutionally protected right to use the ballot initiative process. House Joint Resolution 71, sponsored by House Republican Bishop Davidson, House Joint Resolution 91 sponsored by House

Republican J. Eggleston, House Bill 2079 sponsored by Republican John Simmons are all attacks on the ballot initiative process. HJR 79 sponsored by Republican Mike Henderson is especially offensive as it would amend the Missouri Constitution to require a "two-thirds supermajority" to pass a constitutional amendment. This would mean that every ballot initiative including the repeal of "right to work", Medicaid expansion, and the minimum wages increases that Missouri voters overwhelmingly approved in 2018 would not have met these requirements.

Let me be very direct! These weak corporate Republicans are not interested in representing the interests of the working class. They are attracted to the power and influence of corporate money and the promises of personal gain and are willing to support legislation that they know will hurt their own districts to benefit their own careers. They secretly meet with outside organizations like the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) that carefully craft legislation to promote the interests of Corporations regardless of the consequences for the people they are supposed to represent.

We can and should be disgusted at these corporate Republicans and their blatant willingness to violate our democratic values and silence our voices in any way possible, but the truth is, that is just what they are being paid to do even if it is reprehensible.

We must also be outraged at the



Local 249 President Jason Starr speaks to members in Truck Trim Feb. 18 during the Member to Member Communicator Drive. Photo by Chrissy Kline

weakness of too many Democrats and common-sense Republicans that remain silent and lack the courage to stand openly against these attacks. They have failed to stoke the fires of outrage, to fan the flames of righteous indignation of the working class, to build a class-conscious movement to mobilize a collective counterattack to the well-funded corporate threat to our State. We must continue to expose these fraudulent bills for what they are: thinly veiled attempts to undermine the will and rights of the poor and middle working-class Missourians.

Local 249 members, who worked tirelessly to defeat the Corporate Republican's "right to work" law, will remember that this dangerous – undemocratic – law was overturned by an overwhelming vote of the people after it was put on the ballot through the initiative process. The ability to exert the will of the people in that manner is what is now in jeopardy.

The working class must drop party titles, stop looking at legislation as being Democrat or Republican and begin examining these bills from the lens of the working class. We need to call out our representatives, no matter what side of the aisle they are on, and demand they fight for us and the values that represent the will of the people. We elect them, not the other way around.

By looking at each individual piece of legislation and asking ourselves, "Who is crafting this bill? Why? Who benefits from what it contains?" we

can then begin to see the true purpose behind them and who is truly fighting on our behalf.

It is easy to see why so many members of the working class gravitate towards the Republican narrative and the false strength they project. It is easy to be swayed by talking points that resonate with strength and power, but when the bills they propose are brought to light it only takes a glance to see who they really work for, and it is not us. They are bought and paid for by greedy corporations with selfish motivations.

We know the strength of our voice when we come together collectively, because "Missouri appears to be a national leader in overturning voter initiatives, according to Gregory Magarian, a professor of law at Washington University in St. Louis and an expert on constitutional law. This shows why Republicans fear our voice as working people and why they are working so hard to undermine that voice."

It is time to push out the weakness that has surrounded us for too long and start demanding representation and justice at every level of our democracy. Educate ourselves by going to the Missouri Ethics Commission website and viewing the public records of monies donated to politicians or to the Missouri House and Senate pages to view the bills being sponsored. It can be daunting at first, but it doesn't take long to see who has our interests at heart and more importantly who we need to vote out of office.

## Clay County audit uncovers waste, secrecy and other abuses

The Missouri Auditor Nicole Galloway's audit of Clay County describes how former commissioners wasted public resources and cloaked those activities in layers of secrecy.

Galloway laid criticism at the feet of former commissioners Luann Ridgeway and Gene Owen, both of whom left office at the end of 2020.

"Our audit revealed that two former commissioners made significant decisions involving taxpayer funds while actively limiting the ability of taxpayers to know why or how these decisions were made," she said.

The audit rated the former Clay County Commission's performance as "poor," the lowest possible designation.

"So the results of this audit should make the previous commissioners and their overpaid cronies ashamed," said Megan Thompson, a current commissioner who took Ridgeway's seat on the commission. — KCUR

# The looming danger to rural schools

By Jessica Piper

I am a born and bred rural woman. I am a subsistence farmer raising hogs and chickens in Northwest Missouri in a town of less than 500 people. I live in an old farmhouse on a few acres on the Iowa border between corn and bean fields. I was also an American Literature teacher for sixteen years and my children are all products of rural schools. Our youngest daughter is still in school. Her class, the entire fourth grade, consists of 16 children.

I am scared for the future of Missouri public schools. public schools in rural Missouri.

The Missouri GOP supermajority has been defunding our public schools for over a decade, but the last five years have been at breakneck speed. Missouri is 49th in the nation for educational funding. The state only supplies 32% of the funding schools need to open their doors, turn on the lights, and pay teachers. The rest of the funding comes from property taxes which sets up an incredibly inequitable system in which children access better-funded schools according to their zip code. But, there is even worse news.

One in five Missouri schools is on a 4-day week due to the lack of funding. 20% of schools in our state lose an average of 85 academic hours per year even with an extended day. This short week can also be a nightmare for folks trying to find daycare one day per week, especially hitting women hard. Several Missouri mothers are forced to work around the day off as childcare is not easy to find in our small communities.

This 4-day schedule has now turned into a recruiting tool for keeping teachers in rural schools. Missouri ranks 45th in teacher pay and we are losing our best teachers to border states with higher salaries. My own son, a Special Education teacher, finished his teaching degree at Northwest Missouri State University and then crossed the state line into Iowa where teachers start anywhere from 8K-12K higher than in Missouri. He is Missouri proud but couldn't afford to pay his rent on a Missouri teacher's salary.

We are at a tipping point.

Missouri Republican legislators have promised to defund public education even further. They passed a voucher scheme in 2021 that will basically allow Missourians to pay their taxes directly to private schools. There are also several Missouri legislators talking about "school choice". That is a misnomer--there is no choice in rural Missouri or anywhere except the cities and some suburbs. School choice implies that a school will open in my town of 480 people. That is not likely, and we are just left with defunded

The public tax money previously allocated for public schools is now available to charter and private schools who are not accountable to the same standards that public schools must achieve. These schools do not have to employ certified teachers, they are not responsible for following individualized education programs, and do not have to accept disabled children. They do not have to teach state standards and often do not have to take end of year benchmarks to show student proficiency. These schools often do not have elected boards, but instead answer to investors. These schools often profit from our children.

With the loss of even more funding, our small, rural schools are in danger of consolidating or even closing. When communities lose their schools, they lose their mascot and their teams. Children lose their teachers and can be bused for over an hour to reach their new school miles away. In the loss of rural schools, comes the loss of the economic epicenter of small towns.

Public schools are often the biggest employer in small towns.. School consolidations devastate small towns. In my town, the school is one of the



Jessica Piper is a rural mom fighting to save public schools in Missouri. She is running for the State House in District 1.

largest employers. Community members who work for the school district receive a paycheck and health insurance through the school, while disadvantaged children are fed through the school year through the free lunch program. School closures can damage small businesses and decrease property value. Our main streets often die with the loss of a local schools. When schools consolidate or close, our communities may never recover.

We must demand that Missouri legislators fully-fund public education. We can't continue on this path without damaging our children and Missouri's future. Defunding education is a purposeful act and it has to stop. Our children deserve more.

Jessica Piper is a rural mom, teacher, and progressive Democrat running for State Representative in HD1-Atchison, Holt, Nodaway, and Worthcounties.

## Rep. Crystal Quade and Sen. Doug Beck file bills to reimburse public schools for cost of Attorney Gen. Schmitt's frivolous lawsuits

Rep. Crystal Quade and Sen. Doug Beck filed legislation Jan. 26 to provide reimbursement to local public school districts for legal expenses incurred defending against frivolous lawsuits filed by the Missouri Attorney General Eric Schmitt.

The legislation is modeled on a similar bill filed by state Senator Doug Beck.

"Local public school budgets are already stretched thin because the pandemic," Quade said. "They shouldn't have to foot the bill for Eric Schmitt's shameful campaign stunts."

In recent days, Schmitt, a Republican candidate for U.S. Senate, has sued 45 public school districts across Missouri over their mask mandates for students, faculty and staff. Schmitt's lawsuits, which cite scant legal author-

ity in support of his position, come just as many Missouri schools have been forced to shut down due to coronavirus outbreaks.

State Sen. Doug Beck, D-Affton, pre-filed similar legislation, Senate Bill 922, in December.

"The attorney general is abusing the powers his office to stop schools from keeping kids and teachers safe," Beck said. "I am in disbelief we are even having this conversation. He is even suing the St. Louis County Special School District, which educates some

of our most vulnerable children. This has got to stop."



Rep. Crystal Quade filed a bill to reimburse schools for the cost of frivolous lawsuits by AG Eric Schmitt.



Members of Local 249's Veterans Committee presented a \$500 donation from Local 249 to the Kansas City Veterans Administration Hospital Feb. 14 to provide coffee and undergarments for patients there. Committee members Dave Grant, Hans Beebe, David Cox, Demetrius Camp, Nathan Chrisman, Tracie Chrisman, Robert Hernandez, Lou Davidson, Diane Bell, Regina Anderson, Michael Herrod, Zach Pridgen and Kory Barber took part in the presentation. Photo by Don Lehman.

## Local 249 aids hospitalized veterans

**By Pat Hayes**

**M**embers of Local 249's Veteran's Committee presented a \$500 check from the union to the Kansas City Veterans Administration Volunteer Services Feb. 14 to provide coffee and undergarments to patients there.

Committee members Dave Grant, Hans Beebe, David Cox, Demetrius Camp, Nathan Chrisman, Tracie Chrisman, Robert Hernandez, Lou Davidson, Diane Bell, Regina Anderson, Michael Herrod, Zach Pridgen and Kory Barber took part in the presentation.

This is the tenth year the Local has donated to the Veterans Hospital on Valentines Day.

This year, due to COVID restrictions, committee members were unable to visit their fellow veterans personally in their rooms as part of the presentation.

Veterans Committee Chair Dave Grant leads a committee of 15 members, five of whom served in combat. Several members of the committee are volunteers who did not serve, but have relatives who are veterans.

Grant, who served in the U.S. Army for 20 years, including combat tours in Kosovo and the first Gulf War, hopes to increase the size of the committee to 20 members in coming months.

"I'm especially proud," says Grant, "that many of our committee members who work in the Transit System came out for the presentation even though

they were on layoff that week."

Kansas City VA Medical Center serves veterans in the greater Kansas City area in its main medical center on Linwood Ave. and six community-based outpatient clinics.

"In March, our committee is making a donation on behalf of the local to Dark Horse Lodge, a combat veterans retreat, in Tennessee," says Grant.

Darkhorse Lodge is a non-profit retreat for combat veterans of all branches to come to relax, fish on Kentucky Lake and communicate with others who have walked in their boots.

Once completed, the Lodge will comprise five guest cabins with five bedrooms, each room named for one of the 25 men lost from the Marine Corps' Darkhorse unit.

Local 249's Veterans Committee

represents the interest of all active and retired UAW Veterans and their families. The committee is dedicated to advocating for the political and social concerns of veterans.

The committee is active year round supporting veterans. Local 249 was an early and key supporter of the Veterans Community Project which built 49 tiny houses for homeless veterans at 89th and Troost. The committee also provides volunteers to staff annual veterans stand downs to aid homeless veterans and places wreaths on the graves of veterans on Nov. 11 — Veterans Day.

"Local 249's Veterans Committee is a great example of the social service work in the Kansas City area that members of all our committees provide," says Local 249 President Jason Starr.