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The Blue Wave Was Built by Working People





Sam Forstag, a smokejumper and former NFFE Local 60 vice president, won election in Montana's 1st Congressional District

A logger, a smokejumper, a machinist and an ironworker were among the union members who won major victories in the 2026 midterm elections. Alongside them, educators, public employees and skilled trades workers secured offices in state legislatures and local government, strengthening workers' voices in decisions that reach into every workplace and household.



Troy Jackson, a logger and longtime union member, is the senator-elect for Maine

Their victories were part of a much larger breakthrough. In its post-election report, the AFL-CIO announced that **639 union members and counting had won elections nationwide**, setting the stage for record union representation in public office next year. From county governments to Congress, working people stepped forward to help make the decisions that shape their livelihoods.

Those victories bring firsthand workplace experience into government. A representative who has worked under a union contract understands what collective bargaining can mean for a family. Someone who has trained apprentices, represented coworkers or fought for safe staffing brings practical knowledge to debates about workforce development, public services and workplace protections.

UNION MEMBERS HEAD TO WASHINGTON

In Maine, fifth-generation logger and longtime union member **Troy Jackson** defeated Susan Collins to win a seat in the U.S. Senate. The former Maine Senate president entered politics after organizing alongside fellow loggers, building a career around the economic struggles of working people. His election sends a representative with deep roots in the labor movement to Washington.

Jackson's victory followed an extensive grassroots labor organizing effort. The Maine AFL-CIO reported that more than 530 union members and community volunteers knocked on 65,000 doors during the final two months of the campaign. Those conversations connected the election to the cost of living, health care and the economic pressures facing Maine families.

Michigan voters elected **Abdul El-Sayed** to the U.S. Senate. The physician and former public health official has belonged to several unions, including AFT, SEIU, the National Writers Union and AAUP. The AFL-CIO identified him among the card-carrying union members whose victories will strengthen workers' representation in the next Congress.

In Montana, smokejumper and former National Federation of Federal Employees Local 60 Vice President **Sam Forstag** won the state's 1st Congressional District. NFFE-IAM celebrated the election of a union leader whose career includes protecting communities from wildfires and representing federal employees. He will

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'Union Members Won Across the Country,' from page 1



Representative Donald Norcross was re-elected in New Jersey. Norcross is a member of IBEW Local 351

bring that experience to congressional decisions about public lands, staffing and services Americans rely on.

In northeast Ohio, **Brian Poindexter**, a member of Ironworkers Local 17, defeated incumbent Max Miller in the 7th Congressional District. A 20-year ironworker and former apprentice training coordinator, Poindexter brings practical knowledge of skilled trades and the training that prepares workers for lasting careers.

Pennsylvania voters elected **Bob Brooks**, a longtime IAFF Local 735 leader and president of the Pennsylvania Professional Fire Fighters Association, to represent the 7th Congressional District. A firefighter for two decades, Brooks built his campaign around public service and working-class representation. IAFF members supported his campaign through phone banks and door knocking in the Lehigh Valley.

In New York, UAW members **Claire Valdez** and **Darializa Avila Chevalier** won the 7th and 13th Congressional Districts, respectively. Valdez's union experience includes bargaining and representing coworkers at Columbia University through Local 2110. Avila Chevalier is a member of Local 2325, the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys. Their victories bring two more voices shaped by workplace organizing to Congress.

California elected pediatrician **Richard Pan**, a member of the Union of American Physicians and Dentists, an AFSCME affiliate, to the 6th Congressional District. His experience caring for patients will inform his work on health care access and the conditions facing health professionals.

Wisconsin voters elected union member and emergency room nurse **Mitchell Berman** to the 1st Congressional District. They also reelected **Mark Pocan**, a longtime IUPAT member, in the 2nd District. Together, those victories give Wisconsin workers representatives with direct experience in union workplaces.

New Jersey voters retained two union voices in Congress by reelecting **Donald Norcross** of IBEW Local 351 and **Analilia Mejia** of SEIU 32BJ. Norcross has served in Congress since 2014; Mejia won a special election earlier this year before securing her November victory.

WORKERS WIN IN STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Texas delivered significant victories for union members. **James Talarico**, a member of the Texas State Employees Union, CWA Local 6186, won election to the U.S. Senate. Fellow TSEU member **Gina Hinojosa** won the governor's race, bringing union experience to the state's highest office.

Texas voters also returned **Taylor Rehmet**, a machinist, Air Force veteran and IAM Local 776B leader, to state Senate District 9 for a full term. Rehmet first flipped the historically Republican seat in a special election earlier this year. His November victory secured the seat



Taylor Rehmet, an IAM member, won his race for the State Senate in Texas. Rehmet had previously won that seat in a special election



Linda Hunt, Nevada Culinary Workers Union Local 226

beyond that initial breakthrough.

In Nevada, Culinary Workers Local 226 celebrated the victories of two members and shop stewards: **Linda Hunt**, reelected to the state Assembly, and **Joe Spica**, newly elected to that chamber. Both bring experience representing hospitality workers and organizing alongside coworkers to Carson City.

Ohio's gains extended to the General Assembly. Four union members won election for the first time: **Scott DiMauro** of the Ohio Education Association, **Davida Russell** of the Ohio Association of Public School Employees, **Nicole Sigurdson** of SEIU and **Eugene Miller** of AFT. They will join reelected union members **Sean Brennan** of OEA and **Dan Troy** of SMART.

In North Carolina, SMART member **Lorenza Wilkins** defeated incumbent Allen Chesser to win state House District 25. In Wisconsin, AFSCME Local 1215 member **Ben Gruber**, a conservation warden, won Assembly District 51. Oregon voters reelected **Dacia Grayber**, a firefighter and member of IAFF Local 1660, to House District 28. In Illinois, Chicago Teachers Union member **Karen Zaccor** won reelection to the Chicago Board of Education.

Impressively, New Jersey's AFL-CIO reported 40 wins among its 44 labor candidates. Winners included **Charles Hassler** of IBEW Local 94, elected Salem County commissioner; **Belinda Fontanez** of CWA Local 1036, elected Pemberton mayor; and **Adolfo DiCosmo** of Bricklayers Local 7, elected to Roselle Park Council.

These victories represent just a small sampling of the union members who won



office in this year's midterms. Across the country, working people stepped forward to serve their communities, bringing union experience and a commitment to working families to every level of government.

ORGANIZING MADE THE DIFFERENCE

Behind those candidates stood union volunteers talking with coworkers, calling fellow members and knocking on neighbors' doors. The AFL-CIO described its election program as its largest midterm mobilization, reaching more than 16 million union voters. Its program operated in 35 states, with outreach that included union households whose members had not previously been contacted by a union volunteer.

The results demonstrate why that sustained work matters. Unions build relationships through daily efforts to solve problems, defend coworkers and improve conditions. Election organizing draws on that trust, giving workers an opportunity to discuss how government decisions affect their jobs and families.

The responsibility now is to turn these victories into results: stronger organizing rights, safe workplaces, affordable health care, secure retirements and investment in apprenticeships and public services. Electing union members puts people with relevant experience in positions to act. Continued organizing will help turn that experience into policy and hold elected officials accountable.

Working people helped change the political map. By stepping forward as candidates themselves, they also changed who will be in the room when the next decisions are made.

From the Union Hall to Public Office

Union members know how to organize coworkers, negotiate agreements and stand up for their communities. Candidate training programs help them turn those skills into successful campaigns for public office.

State labor federations are helping lead that work, recruiting members and teaching the practical skills needed to plan campaigns, raise funds, speak publicly, conduct voter outreach, and recruit volunteers.

Minnesota's Union Member Candidate Training Program offers a two-day course for prospective candidates and campaign workers, with instruction from campaign veterans and successful union candidates. The investment is producing results: the Minnesota AFL-CIO reported that 21 program graduates won state and local elections in 2026.

New Jersey's Labor Candidates Program combines training with mentoring and campaign support. Its Joseph V. Egan Labor Candidates School marked its 30th year in 2026, preparing members through instruction in election law, campaign strategy, communications and organizing. First-time candidates participating in the federation's program must graduate from the school. New Jersey reported 40 victories among its 44 labor candidates this election.

Other programs are building similar opportunities. **Indiana's AFL-CIO Path-to-Power program** recruits union candidates, requires a two-day candidate school and coordinates support with local labor bodies. The **Oregon Labor Candidate School** offers six monthly classes for union members, former members and labor allies in Oregon and Washington. **Maine's AFL-CIO Worker Candidate Training** teaches campaign planning, door knocking, message development and volunteer organizing.

These programs help workers see public service as an achievable next step. A shop steward, apprentice instructor, nurse or classroom teacher already brings valuable leadership experience. Training helps members build on that foundation and navigate the unfamiliar demands of a campaign.

For members considering a run for school board, city council, the legislature or another office, a local union or state labor federation is a good place to start. Working people have the experience their communities need. Candidate training helps them put it to work in government.

Why Workers Trust Unions

Union approval has returned to levels last seen in the 1960s while millions of workers who want representation still lack a clear path to organize

Americans disagree about nearly everything in politics. They increasingly agree about unions.

Gallup's 2026 Labor Day polling found that 71 percent of Americans approve of labor unions, matching the recent high reached in 2022. Approval has remained between 67 and 71 percent for six consecutive years, a level last sustained in the 1950s and early 1960s. A record 47 percent now want unions to have greater influence.

A separate national survey conducted for the AFL-CIO found that 52 percent of working people trust labor unions, 32 percent trusted the Democratic Party and 26 percent trusted the Republican Party. Among workers ages 18 to 30, union trust rose to 61 percent, compared with 28 percent for Democrats and 22 percent for Republicans.

Those numbers reflect a practical judgment about where workers can build power. A union operates where people earn the money that supports their families. Its value appears in a wage scale, a health plan, a safer shift, a grievance resolved or a contract that prevents arbitrary treatment. Political promises can feel distant. A union contract changes the rules at work.

WHO WANTS A UNION

Young workers show the greatest demand for representation. Fifty-seven percent of nonunion workers ages 18 to 30 told the AFL-CIO they would join a union at their most recent workplace if given the option, a 10-point increase from the previous year. Two-thirds said unions are needed more today than in the past. Among young workers of color, that figure reached 81 percent.

The demand extends across generations and industries. Recent research cited by the Economic Policy Institute found that 43 percent of nonunion workers would vote to unionize if they had the opportunity, representing roughly 56 million people. The Bureau of Labor Statistics counted 16.5 million workers covered by union contracts in 2025. That gap shows how many workers want representation and have been unable to secure it.

WHY WORKERS WANT UNIONS

The reasons begin with the household budget. In the AFL-CIO survey, 78 percent of employed workers worried about making ends meet and 82 percent worried about retirement. Two-thirds said unions help workers afford the cost of living. Respondents chose greater union membership as a path to higher wages more often than electing candidates from either party.

Navigator Research found that better pay was the most appealing feature of union membership across party lines. Workers also pointed to better health care and paid leave, job security and stronger retirement plans. Federal earnings data reinforce that view: union members working full time earned a median $1,404 a week in 2025, compared with $1,174 for nonunion workers. The Bureau of Labor Statistics cautions that occupation, industry and other factors account for part of that difference.

Members elect leaders, set bargaining priorities, vote on agreements and enforce the contract. People who disagree about politics can still stand together over staffing, safety, overtime, subcontracting and health insurance. That direct connection to daily life helps explain why trust in unions crosses party lines.

Turning approval into growth. Public support has surged while union membership remains low. In 2025, 14.7 million workers were union members, equal to 10 percent of wage and salary workers. Another 1.8 million were covered by union contracts. Organizing remains difficult, but the labor movement has a large audience that already believes in what unions do.

Growth starts with one-on-one conversations. Members are the labor movement's most credible messengers because they can explain what the contract has meant in their own lives. Locals can train stewards and activists to listen for workplace concerns and ask for a specific commitment: join the union, attend a meeting, help with an issue campaign or introduce an organizer to a nonunion worker.

Strong internal organizing provides the foundation. Locals should maintain accurate workplace maps, reach every new hire, build steward networks across departments and shifts, and organize around issues members choose. Bargaining surveys, worksite meetings and contract action teams give members ownership of negotiations and help turn a settlement into a shared victory.

Leadership development matters just as much. Members grow into activists when they receive real responsibility such as welcoming new hires, communicating with a shift, leading a meeting, researching an issue or serving on a committee. Survey data suggests that young workers and workers of color are especially interested in unions. Bringing them into leadership early will strengthen the movement for decades.

Internal strength should produce external leads. Members know people working for nonunion contractors, competing employers and nearby facilities. Every local needs a simple, confidential way to connect those workers with an organizer. Contract gains, safety victories and successful grievances can then become organizing stories told by the members who won them.

TRUST BUILT THROUGH ACTION

AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler put the choice plainly in her 2026 State of the Unions address: "So how do we build a better one [labor movement]? The answer is growing the power workers have—joining together, building our numbers so we can demand more."

Workers already trust unions more than either political party, and tens of millions say they would vote for representation. Union leaders can turn that support into lasting power by organizing in every represented workplace, developing members as leaders and opening new doors for workers who are ready to join the labor movement.

Workers Are Writing the Rules for AI

The AFL-CIO is drafting AI legislation it hopes the next Congress will pass, President Liz Shuler told Semafor in October. Meanwhile, union members are already winning enforceable protections on the job.

In Las Vegas, Culinary Workers Union Local 226 and Bartenders Union Local 165 won contracts requiring advance notice before employers introduce new technology, including AI and robotics. Affected workers may receive retraining or seek another position. If technology eliminates a job, workers can receive $2,000 in severance for every year of service.

These agreements provide practical protections: notice, time to prepare, a path to another job and financial support if that job disappears. As Culinary Secretary-Treasurer Ted Pappageorge put it, workers need language covering "technology that we don't even know is coming."

Employers already use automated systems to monitor workers, evaluate performance, generate content and recommend staffing decisions. Each use raises a basic question: Will workers have a say in decisions that reshape their jobs?

The Federation's legislative effort builds on the AFL-CIO's Workers First Initiative on AI, released in October 2025, which calls for bargaining rights, transparency, training, human review and safeguards for workers' creative work and likeness. Shuler told Semafor the proposal would address worker protections, privacy, data protections and economic impacts.

Workers deserve notice and bargaining rights when technology changes their jobs. People must remain accountable for employment decisions, and workers need a way to challenge them.

FROM PRINCIPLES TO CONTRACTS

Writers and performers have won some of the best-known AI protections. The Writers Guild of America's 2023 agreement established that AI is not a writer and AI-generated output is not literary material under the contract. Studios cannot use an AI-generated screenplay to classify a writer's assignment as a lower-paid rewrite. Employers cannot require writers to use AI and must disclose AI-generated material.

The 2026 WGA agreement retained those protections and added notice requirements when companies license scripts or productions for training commercial generative AI systems. The Guild can request discussions about those licenses, including compensation for writers.



SAG-AFTRA's agreements protect performers against unauthorized digital replicas of their voices and likenesses. Producers generally must obtain informed consent, describe the intended use and provide compensation. Different projects or materially different uses generally require new consent.

The union's 2025 commercials contract added compensation requirements for replica-generated performances and prohibits using performers' data to train AI without union consent. Its video game agreement added disclosure and consent protections, including the ability to suspend consent for generating new material during a strike.

Behind the scenes, IATSE's 2024 Hollywood Basic Agreement keeps AI-assigned work covered by the union contract. Employees cannot be required to write prompts that displace another covered worker. The agreement also provides training mechanisms, recurring employer meetings and bargaining over most effects of AI.

Requests to scan employees must appear in separate, clear documents. Consent cannot be a condition of employment, and the union must receive proposed consent forms before workers do. These protections keep consequential decisions from being buried in routine hiring paperwork.

ENFORCEMENT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

Journalists at POLITICO and E&E News demonstrate why contract enforcement matters. Their Guild, part of Washington-Baltimore News Guild Local 32035, negotiated 60 days for bargaining before management introduces AI that materially and substantially affects members' duties. AI used for newsgathering must also meet newsroom ethical standards and involve human oversight.

When management introduced two AI-powered editorial products without honoring those safeguards, the union filed a grievance. In November 2025, an arbitrator found that POLITICO violated both provisions. In May 2026, management agreed to shut down the tools.

The NewsGuild-CWA reports that its bargaining units have ratified 58 contracts governing AI in newsrooms nationwide.

Effective protections reflect each occupation's risks. Hospitality workers need retraining, transfer rights and severance. Journalists need accuracy standards and human oversight. Performers need control over their identities. Technicians need protection for bargaining-unit work.

Together, these gains establish a common agenda: advance notice, access to information, limits on surveillance, protection against automated discipline, specific consent, fair compensation and paid training. Grievance and arbitration procedures give those rights force.

Union members are writing AI protections into contracts. The AFL-CIO is working to put protections into federal law. Both efforts advance the same demand: workers must have the power to shape how AI changes their jobs.



UNION-MADE FOR YOUR HOLIDAY TABLE

Look for these quality products, produced by union members, when preparing your holiday meals and celebrations.

SET THE TABLE

- All-Clad cookware
- Anchor Hocking
- Bennington Potters
- Clauss knives
- CorningWare
- Cutco knives
- Fiestaware
- GE appliances
- Homer Laughlin China
- Libbey glassware
- Pyrex
- Regal Ware pots and pans

FRESH WHOLE TURKEY

- Butterball
- Foster Farms

HAM

- Appleton Farms ham
- Butterball ham
- Cook's ham
- Farmland original pit ham
- Tyson ham

STUFFING

- Manischewitz
- Stroehmann Bakeries' products
- Bunny Bread

VEGETABLES

- Andy Boy
- Birds Eye
- Mann's
- Muranaka Farm
- Del Monte canned green beans/corn

CRANBERRIES & SAUCE

- Dole
- Ocean Spray

POTATOES

- Betty Crocker specialty potatoes
- Dole Fresh Idaho Potatoes
- Mann's Culinary Cuts Sweet Potatoes

BREAD

- Aunt Millie's breads
- Pillsbury Crescent Rolls
- Stroehmann Bakeries' products
- Bunny Bread

PIE

- Banquet fruit pies
- Entenmann's
- Marie Callender's
- Pillsbury pie crust
- Sara Lee

PIE FILLING & MORE

- Del Monte fresh apples
- Food Club 100% Pure Pumpkin
- Kroger Bakery Fresh Goodness Pumpkin Pie
- Mott's Applesauce

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AFL-CIO NATIONAL BOYCOTTS

NOV-DEC 2026



COFFEE SHOPS

SUBMITTED BY
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

» **Starbucks** — Corporate stand-alone stores only

COMMUNICATIONS

SUBMITTED BY
Communications Workers of America (CWA)

» T-Mobile

EVENT CENTERS

SUBMITTED BY UNITE HERE!

» Montgomery County Conference Center — Bethesda, Maryland (Note the boycott extends only to the Conference Center)

FOOD

SUBMITTED BY
Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union (BCTGM)

» Mondelez International snack foods (those made in Mexico)

HOTELS

SUBMITTED BY UNITE HERE!

Support workers at these hotels by boycotting the following properties:

ALASKA:

» Hilton Anchorage
» Marriott Anchorage Downtown
» Homewood Suites by Hilton Anchorage
» Hampton Inn Anchorage
» Hilton Garden Inn Anchorage

CALIFORNIA:

» Hilton Long Beach
» Hyatt Centric Fisherman's Wharf — San Francisco
» Hilton Los Angeles Airport
» Terranea Resort — Rancho Palos Verdes
» Hyatt Regency Santa Clara
» Four Seasons Beverly Hills — Los Angeles
» Langham Huntington — Pasadena
» Hyatt Regency Sacramento
» Le Meridien — San Francisco
» Crowne Plaza Los Angeles International Airport
» Hotel Bel Air — Los Angeles

LEGAL

SUBMITTED BY
American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees

» Gleason, Dunn, Walsh & O'Shea
» McDonald, Lamond, Canzoneri and Hickernell

OTHER

SUBMITTED BY Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC)

» Reynolds American, Inc., Vuse e-cigarettes

RESTAURANTS

SUBMITTED BY UNITE HERE!

WASHINGTON, DC:

» **STARR restaurants:** The Occidental, Osteria Mozza and Le Diplomate
» **Knightsbridge Restaurant Group:** Modena, Bombay Club and Rasika

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES LOCATIONS ONLY:

» PX Tacos/Java House
» Starbucks, Elite Management Franchisee
» Jimmy John's, Clarke Williams Franchisee
» CHA Street Food

RETAIL

SUBMITTED BY
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)

» Target — Do not shop at Target for back-to-school and other school-related supplies.

When some labor disputes with businesses cannot be resolved, the AFL-CIO supports its affiliates by endorsing their boycotts. A boycott is an act of solidarity by voluntarily abstaining from the purchase or use of a product or service.

POLICY GUIDELINE FOR ENDORSEMENT OF AFFILIATES' BOYCOTTS

The AFL-CIO Executive Council has developed policy guidelines that regulate how the federation endorses boycotts undertaken by its affiliates. To get AFL-CIO sanction, boycotts should be directed at primary employers.

THE GUIDELINES INCLUDE THESE PROVISIONS:

All requests to the national AFL-CIO for endorsement must be made by a national or international union.

Any affiliated union with a contract in force with the same primary employer will be contacted by the AFL-CIO to determine whether there is an objection to the federation's endorsement.

Affiliates will be asked to provide the AFL-CIO with background information on the dispute in a confidential information survey. Prior to endorsement of the boycott, the executive officers, or their designees, will meet with the national union's officers, or their designees, to discuss the union's strategic plan and timetable for the boycott, or other appropriate tactics, and to discuss the federation's role.

The national or international union initiating the boycott is primarily responsible for all boycott activities; the AFL-CIO will provide supplemental support.

Boycotts will be carried on the AFL-CIO national boycott list for a period of one year, and the endorsement will expire automatically at the end of that time. National and international unions may request one-year extensions of the listings for actions where an organizing or bargaining campaign is actively in place.

(These guidelines were adopted by the AFL-CIO Executive Council in April 2011.)

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By Rich Kline, *President, UL&STD*

Election Ends with Promise Of Hard Work to Correct Abuses



The results of the mid-term elections offer hope for better times and greater justice. But achieving these outcomes will require hard work. Achieving economic justice for workers means ensuring unimpeded access to union representation, passing the PRO Act, and raising the minimum wage for the millions who've worked too long for too little.

Union members have earned these improvements. Labor's grassroots effort in this election, which helped achieve this wildly successful victory, deserves no less.

The new Congress should send as much pro-worker legislation as possible to President Trump's desk, where he can sign or veto it—at the risk of harming his party and his legacy. In addition to the PROAct, Congress should include measures to curb corruption, improve Medicare and Medicaid, secure Social Security, and restore Affordable Care Act subsidies.

The ongoing conflict with Iran has made life more difficult for Americans, driving up fuel costs and raising food and electricity prices, among other hardships. Congress must address the conflict by using its authority to end war funding. The Union Label supports policies that strengthen American manufacturing, shipping, infrastructure, and transportation.

We also support Buy American legislation that directs the federal government to invest taxpayer dollars here in the United States.

The public seeks a return to a just society built on a strong moral foundation. Congress can pass legislation and present it to the president. If he vetoes it, Congress may override the veto if members of his party choose to support what the public demands. If not, the president and his allies may face growing voter disapproval.

This election was just the first step in a long journey toward a more just nation—one that puts every citizen on an equal footing. Hard work and a broad appeal to all Americans who seek change from the Trump administration's unfair, self-enriching, and economically harmful policies can help build a stronger nation.