

Legislative Director Report – Kevin Palmer Fall - 2019

Fundraisers -

Friday September 27 - I attended a fundraiser for Illinois State Senator Omar Aquino (2nd District). Omar is the newly elected Chair of the Labor Committee and a great ally of education. I was able to speak to Omar for quite a while and he is interested in meeting to discuss union issues as a part of his new leadership role. Also attending was U.S. Representative “Chuy” Garcia (4th Congressional District) who is actually my Congressman, who I was able to speak to and thank him for his support for labor and education issues. Other Illinois representatives attending were Jaime Andrade (40th District) and Luis Arroyo (3rd District), both of whom I was able to speak to and thank them for their support. IFT President Dan Montgomery was there as well so it was nice to see IFT so represented.

Wednesday October 16 - I attended a fundraiser for Progressive Caucus Treasurer Alderman Andre Vasquez. Alderman Vasquez is a reliable ally of education and active in Chicago Teachers Union organizing. I was able to spend a good deal of time talking to the alderman about the impending strike, at that time, and his support for Chicago Teachers. Also attending was Greg Harris, 13th District and Majority Leader in the Illinois House General Assembly. Representative Harris was very receptive to joining us in November when we go down to lobby on behalf of our Local.

Thursday October 17 – I attended a fundraiser for Representative Sarah Feigenholtz, 12th District. I have corresponded with Sarah on numerous occasions but was able to finally connect with her. Sarah was an early ally of education when teachers had few advocates in the General Assembly. Representative Feigenholtz is in a contested primary but deserves our support as a strong teacher/education ally. Also attending was Representative Kelly Cassidy, 14th District and Representative Ann Williams, 11th District. Ann and I are planning on meeting in November when I will be in Springfield for Fall Lobbying Days.

Legislative Breakfast –

September 28 - I attended the Fourteenth Annual 571 Legislative Breakfast in Oakbrook. IFT Secretary-Treasurer and Local 571 President, Jane Russell is always gracious enough to invite Local 1211. The format was a question-and-answer session with U.S. Congressmen “Chuy” Garcia (4th Congressional District) and Sean Casten (6th Congressional District) where the two Representatives discussed relevant issues regarding education and funding. Another session was held then with Illinois State Senators Terra Costa Howard (48th District) and Laura Ellman (21st District). The focus of questioning for the two Illinois State Senators focused on local and state education and funding issues, especially dealing with the Fair Tax referendum coming next year.

Conference - Access, Technology, Turnout: Enacting Voting Reform in Illinois – Friday October 18

Hosted by Reform for Illinois, National Vote at Home Institute, and the League of Women Voters, the conference focused on what voting data looks like currently and methods that either were implemented in other states, namely Colorado, or are methods that are currently being considered to improve voter turnout.

Jim Allen, Director of Communication, Chicago Board of Elections presented voting data for Chicago, Cook County, and Collar Counties as to what voter turnout has been in the past few elections. With that data, additional speakers from groups promoting increased voting in minority/underserved areas talked about outreach to those particular communities – African American, Asian, Hispanic/Latino/Latinx. Rudy Garret, Chicago Votes addressed the increased efforts to improve voting amongst African Americans. Justin Valas, Asian Americans Advancing Justice Chicago addressed the language barriers and the language varieties among Asian American voters and the challenge of improving their voting numbers. And most impressive were Angelica Magana, Voto Latino Chicago and Veronica Gloria, Spanish Community Center Joliet who spoke of their successes in increasing voting amongst Hispanic/Latin/Latinx voters in both the city and collar counties and how they have seen a phenomenal increase in elected officials from those communities.

In the afternoon sessions, a panel of presenters talked about effective methods to increase voter turnout. The main focus was on Vote at Home (VAH), Money in Politics, and Corruption Prevention and Oversight. The Vote at Home movement, evidenced by Oregon which has 100% Vote at Home with mail-in ballots that are sent out weeks before the election, giving voters time to research the candidates and time to complete the ballot on their own, at their own pace. The argument in favor of voting at home also focuses on the security issue with paper ballots not prey to hacking or system failures. With machines used at most a dozen times before they are antiquated, the savings could be tremendous. Several options were discussed such as ballots are mailed with postage paid return envelopes for the convenience of all voters, local drop-off locations, and staffed vote centers. In 2018, states that implemented the VAH saw over a 10% higher turnout than the national average. Another method that was discussed was giving voters the option of voting via their mobile devices. While the technology for mobile security has improved greatly, this is still an area that worries many since it may be possible to hack an electronic receiving system such as with current electronic voting that is conducted in polling locations.

The Illinois Federation of Teachers Convention – October 18 – 20The IFT convention kicked off on Friday with two breakout sessions of our choice. I chose to attend Political Activism: Stepping up in 2020 and Say Fairness: How to talk about the Fair Tax. Both of these dovetailed

since our mission in 2020 is not only to elect/reelect labor allies to pass the Fair Tax to stabilize funding for education in Illinois.

The General Session on Saturday began with IFT President Dan Montgomery and Secretary-Treasurer Jane Russell addressing the delegates on the state of the union as well as procedures for the weekend. Part of the morning session was the election/reelection of the IFT Vice Presidents, including our own John Braglia, as well as the election of Stacy Davis Gates as the Executive Vice President, replacing outgoing Executive VP Karen Lewis, former President of the Chicago Teachers Union Local 1 (CTU). A video tribute to Karen Lewis was presented to the convention later, as well as Karen addressing the delegates in a heartwarming appreciation for her time as a union leader and an inspiration for the revival of the labor movement in Chicagoland. Illinois JB Pritzker addressed the convention, welcomed warmly as a true ally for labor an education in Illinois. The governor outlined his and the General Assembly's successes this Spring/Summer in passing numerous pieces of legislation as well as a balanced budget that have put Illinois on a much more stable path compared to the previous four years under our former anti-union/anti-education governor. The afternoon ended with the discussion and passage of a number of resolutions presented to the delegates for our amending/revising and approval.

Sunday started with breakout sessions, which I attended both parts I and II of Fair Tax: What is it, Why do we need it and How do get it? The General Session on Sunday began with a series of speakers – AFL-CIO Illinois President Michael Carrigan, Illinois Education Association (IEA) President Kathi Griffin, Illinois Representative Mary Edly-Allen, 51st District, a member of the IFT who was elected in 2018 with strong IFT support, and AFT President, Randi Weingarten who gave remarks remotely. The convention ended with the completion of the discussion and passage of a number of resolutions presented to the delegates for our amending/revising and approval.

The Girl Talk - Celina Villanueva and Delia Ramirez – Illinois State Legislators

The 2018 election saw an increase in the Illinois General Assembly of Hispanic/Latino/Latinx representatives. Two of those are Celina Villanueva, 21st House District and Delia Ramirez, 4th House District participated in the monthly Girl Talk held at The Hideout in Chicago. The format is for those invited to discuss their presence in positions of leadership as women. Delia and Celina are in their 30s and have strong backgrounds in social activism and leadership in their communities. Celina was a social activist in Little Village on the near south side of Chicago and Delia was active in community outreach, serving on several organizations boards in the Humboldt Park area. It was great to hear and then later speak to both in a setting apart from the typical political or fundraising setting where I engage elected officials.