

Post Employment Health Care Savings Plan

By Molly Malecki

Have you been saving, even hoarding, your sick leave so that when you leave Hennepin County you can give 48% of it to Uncle Sam? If “yes”, you are quite a citizen. Forty-eight percent is what is taken out of your severance pay for taxes when you leave.

Would you like to have your entire severance package tax-free? Would you like to have 100% of it available to you, tax free, to pay for medical expenses?

What is your severance pay? According to article 23 of our contract, it is the unused accumulated sick leave and unused accumulated vacation leave accruing to a permanent employee in good standing, who has completed eight (8) years continuous service with the county, and who has give two weeks written notice of intent to leave the county. Severance pay shall not exceed eight hundred (800) hours.

So an employee who makes \$15.00 an hour and has 700 hours of accumulated leave would get severance pay of \$10,500. But under the current system it would be taxed at 48%, so that employee would actually get a check for \$5,040.

So how can you get your hands on all of **YOUR** money?

You could have it put into a Health Care Savings Plan (HCSP) tax-free.

Quoting from their brochure: the Health Care Savings Plan is an employer-sponsored program that allows employees

to save money, tax-free, to use upon termination of employment to pay for eligible health care expenses.

The brochure goes on to state: Employees will be able to choose among seven different investment options provided by the State Board of Investment. Assets in the account will accumulate tax-free, and since payouts are used for approved health care expenses they will remain tax-free.

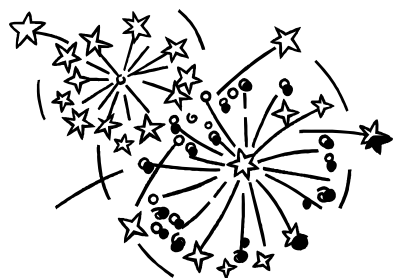
This plan is for anyone terminating employment with the county. It is not just for retirees. The money in the accounts can only be accessed after termination, or if you are collecting a disability benefit from one of the public pension plans, or if you are on a medical leave of six months or longer, or if you are on a leave of absence of one year or longer.

How do we get signed up for this?

“Amounts to be put into the account must be negotiated or agreed to by both the bargaining unit and employer and written into the collective bargaining agreement.” That means that the members of Local 2822 must learn about the various ways that money can be put into the account and then develop a plan that would seem acceptable to the majority of our local, who would then vote on the plan. Once the plan is approved, everyone covered by our contract would be bound to the plan.

Although each local will be making its own decision on what this plan will look like, we will have joint informational meetings with other locals where representatives of HCSP will come and explain

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July Membership Meeting

Wednesday, July 5
7:00 p.m.
Southdale Library

Special order of business:
Election of delegates to the AFL-CIO
Convention and to the
AFSCME International Convention

August Membership Meeting
Wednesday, August 2, 2006
Ridgedale Library

For our members who are
physically challenged,
please let us know if special
accommodations are needed.

FMLA questions answered

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) has helped countless workers take care of their loved ones and themselves without losing their jobs. Check out AFSCME's updated guide to FMLA for all you need to know about your rights and benefits. <http://www.afscme.org/wrkplace/fmla.htm>

(Plan continued from page 1)

things in more detail. (This article is only a thumbnail sketch.) We will have meetings at various work sites, perhaps brown bag lunch type meetings or meetings in the evenings at various locations. After people have become more informed, each local will have meetings to decide how they want to have this work. Then there will be a vote of the full dues paying members.

CNNMoney.com recently reported that “an average couple retiring this year will need \$200,000 to cover their healthcare costs for 20 years in retirement...” This information came from Fidelity Investments. These costs include Medicare Parts B and D, out of pocket costs for prescription drugs, co-payments, coinsurance and deductibles, some preventative care, routine vision and hearing exams and much more.

It seems to make sense to have a head start on paying these expenses by having money in an account to draw from—it’s not likely that you won’t use it. Spouses and eligible dependents can also draw from this account. If you don’t use it all, your designated beneficiaries can then use it.

Julie Yakin: Promoted

Longtime Local 2822 activist, Julie (Axtell) Yakin has been promoted to Service Center Supervisor at the newly opened Midtown Exchange Service Center.

Julie served on several negotiations master teams and table teams. She has also served on the Local 2822 Executive Board. And she was a well-respected steward, who presented a fine image of the union to co-workers, grievants and the employer. She attended many conferences, conventions, and workshops to improve her skills. This local will sorely miss her.

We congratulate Julie and wish her the best as a supervisor. She will, no doubt, put many of the skill she learned from the union to the advantage of her employees as a supervisor.

Editor’s note: Once again, we see that being involved in the Union is not an impediment to progress at Hennepin County. We feel that it is actually an asset.

Leadership Conference

By Molly Malecki

Three members of the Local 2822 Executive Board, Molly Malecki, Jennifer McNair, and Neg Lor, attended the Council 5 Leadership Conference in Arden Hills on June 16 and 17th. The focus of the conference was “Politics 2006: It’s About Better Contracts and Job Security”. As public employees we must stay focused on the fact that we elect our employers—from the top, the federal level (see article an human services cuts), to the county and city levels.

The first day’s activities included meeting AFSCME’s United States senate endorsed candidate, Amy Klobuchar and AFSCME’s gubernatorial endorsed candidate, Mike Hatch. There was a presentation by Eric Lehto, Organizing Director and Candace Lund, a Council 5 Executive Board Member, on the state of organized labor and the need for organizing new members.

We broke into separate legislative districts to discuss the “targeted” campaigns in our own areas. Although every campaign in the state is important, certain ones have been targeted for the Council 5 legislative money and efforts because of their needing more work to win. Some of our friendly legislators do not have competition, so there is not a need to expend resources there.

The main issue on working for candidates is their attitude or record on supporting workers. This is not a matter of what party candidates belong to, but how they have performed for us—public employees and workers in general. As Council 5 Executive Director says, “It is not about Republicrats or Democins.”

Council 5’s political goals for 2006 are:

- **10% of members signed up for PEOPLE (our local’s goal is 39 new cards)**
- **90% of members registered to vote**
- **70% turn out of members to vote (same as in presidential election)**
- **75% support our endorsed candidates**
- **3% actively working for candidates**

- **2% taking off work on election day and working on the election.**

There were also presentations on the new member orientation packet and presentations on voter registration and PEOPLE check off. We also discussed how to recruit new activists.

21st Century Initiative

On the second day, Saturday, we were presented with the draft of the AFSCME International 21st Century Initiative. Since the last International Convention in 2004 the union has been working on a proposal that will grow the union to be a powerful force for working people in the United States. This will be formally presented, discussed and voted on at the convention in Chicago in August.

The cause for this initiative is that “anti-worker politicians and corporate privateers have increased their power and their efforts to take money from working families to line their own pockets.” We have a quote from Grover Norquist, Americans for Tax Reform, Advisor to President Bush: “My goal is to cut government in half in 25 years, to get it down to the size where we can drown it in a bathtub.” And we have the ever-encouraging quote from Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor of California: “We don’t want to feed the monster. We want to feed the private sector and starve the public sector.”

Much more information will be coming to our members about this initiative, and as we hear about it we should remember the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle. And so we must straighten our backs and work for our freedom. A man can’t ride you unless your back is bent.”

For detailed information about the initiative go to the website at www.powertofight.org.



Restore federal cuts to Human Services

The following is from the presentation to the County Board on June 15 by John Thorson from the Council 5 Legislative/Political Action Department. John is assigned to local government and lobbies the legislature regarding county and city concerns.

These comments are in response to the budget cuts, made at the federal level that will mean a loss of \$22.1 million to Hennepin County Human Services Public Health Department. It is also an initial request that the County Board be prepared to set a maximum levy on August 29th to help restore these funds. At this writing the proposed cuts to the Human Services Public Health Department are 241 full time equivalents (FTE's). It is naïve to think that these cuts will be to social workers only. Support staff also must be concerned about this issue.

- I am here today on behalf of AFSCME Council 5 to ask you to restore the federal cuts to human services. AFSCME members are on the frontline delivering vital life services to some of our state's most vulnerable citizens.
- Congress has slashed Minnesota human services by \$90 million. Hennepin County will lose at least \$22.1 million.
- It was irresponsible for Congress to lay this problem in your lap.
- State legislators also failed us when they didn't restore the federal cuts, despite our partnership to pass the legislation.
- People who preach family values voted to abandon children. People who preach fiscal responsibility voted to cut services that save taxpayers money.
- Without state support, we face severe service cuts and layoffs. The alternative for counties is to raise property taxes. I'm here today to ask you to make that wise investment.
- You now have the opportunity to prevent Congress's budget knife from wounding at-risk children, abused adults, the mentally ill, and developmentally disabled.
- The federal cuts are pound-foolish. Our services are designed to keep

clients out of more expensive care. It's shortsighted to cut services that save taxpayers money.

- I want to appeal to your checkbook. Our social workers save taxpayers money. Their services are designed to keep clients out of more expensive care. We call it "placement prevention" for children, vulnerable adults and the developmentally disabled. For example:
 - We save money by teaching parents healthy parenting skills so they can be reunited with their kids. The alternative may be foster care, which costs about \$12,000 a year.
 - Similarly, if we can help a developmentally disabled adult avoid placement in a residential treatment facility, that saves at least \$150,000 a year.
 - For every dollar invested in child support enforcement, there's a \$5.00 return to families that would otherwise require public assistance.
 - Two thirds of the county's case management budget goes to outsourced (contracted out) services. Only on third is spent on county social workers.
 - The Labor movement is the best anti-poverty program in our nation. A person with a good job and health benefits won't need the county's safety net. If cuts are necessary, it's good business to save the good jobs and cut the poor jobs.
 - Raise the levy. Restore the cuts. Bring the work in house. Save money by saving the good jobs.

Vacation donation requests

We have three requests for vacation donations this month. One is for Sharon Young who works at the Maple Grove Service Center, another is for Mert Zentner who works in Human Resources. And we have a request for a member of Local 552, Probation and Parole, Mary Pat Meier.

These individuals have used all of their vacation and sick leave and are requesting our help to see them through their illnesses and injuries. We are allowed to donate as little as one hour of our vacation time to other employees who are in need of time. If each of us would donate a minimum of one hour it would help them until they can come back to work.

The way to make vacation donations is very simple and only takes a few minutes. On the Hennepin County Intranet site, click Employee Services, Forms, Human Resources Forms, under Vacation Donation Authorization click see interactive version, click Vacation Waiver Donation and Authorization form, enter your I-Notes sign on, fill out form. When you click "Select Recipient" enter the name. Sign and submit.

The details of how Vacation Donations work are listed at the end of the page.

Upcoming summer events

Hennepin County AFSCME Picnic: Sunday, July 23, at North Mississippi Park from 2:00 to 5:00. See flyer for details. This is sponsored by the Hennepin County Policy Committee which includes all AFSCME Locals in Hennepin County. Bring your family and have some fun.

AFSCME International Convention: August 7 – 11 in Chicago. The Executive Board is recommending sending five delegates. The business of this convention will be to set the direction of AFSCME in this century. The focus will be on growing the union. If the union does not have a plan to grow, it will die, as it has in other unions that have not planned for the future. Delegates will be elected at the **WEDNESDAY**, July 5 membership meeting at Southdale Library.

Minnesota AFL-CIO Convention: August 7 – 9 in St. Paul. The Executive Board is recommending sending seven delegates. The business of this convention will be to elect the president and other officers and to plan the future of the Minnesota AFL-CIO. There will be many changes to be discussed as several "Change to Win" unions have left the AFL-CIO. Delegates will be elected at the **WEDNESDAY**, July 5 membership meeting at the Southdale Library.

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Bulletin Board

The New Voice deadline is July 5. Articles will be accepted up to and including the day of the monthly Membership Meeting for inclusion in the following month's newsletter. Send your written contributions to Molly Malecki or Lynn Stetler.

Visit Local 2822 Website

<http://www.afscme2822.org>





Help us remember your co-workers with a card. Let us know to send a sympathy card, get well or congratulations. We will send a card, hand-made by E-board member Lynn Stetler.

Contact Heather Clark, our Good and Welfare Coordinator at 952-847-8523 or by e-mail: hclark@hclib.org. The request should include the name of the member, the reason for the request and home address, if possible."

With Delta Access, you can find out about your Delta coverage without even opening your mouth. Delta Access
651-406-5900 or 1-800-862-6042.
Always refer to your group number 538.

Council 5 Contact person:
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New to Hennepin County?

If you haven't been approached by a union representative yet, please fill out this form and send to our membership secretary.

To sign up as a full union member or for Delta Dental Insurance, or to get answers to questions about AFSCME and membership benefits, please fill out this coupon and send to:

Bridgette Walker
Jail, Mail Code 905

Name _____

Job Title _____

Work Location _____

Mailcode _____

Phone _____

I'm especially interested in:

I want to sign up as a full member.