



# NEW DIRECTIONS

## The Newsletter of Local 768

Health Services Employees, Local 768, District Council 37, AFSCME, AFL-CIO  
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### President's Message

## Inequality the True Enemy

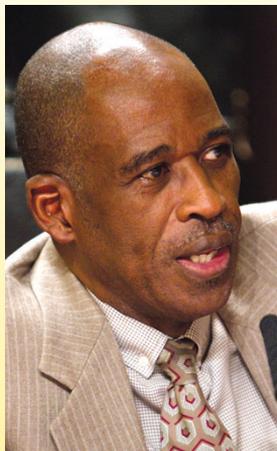
**L**AST month's lack of a decision by the US Supreme Court in the Friedrichs case – a case that threatened the entire unionized public sector – was more like a stay of execution for our labor movement than a victory. Our union is just one of many that is under attack – an attack that stands to get much worse if the fundamental problem in our society – inequality of wealth and opportunity – is not addressed.

It sounds upside down, but the less working people earn and are able to salt away in pensions and health benefits, the more they can be preyed upon by politicians who urge them to attack public sector workers on the ground that we have too much and they have too little. The other side of the argument – that the top one-tenth of one percent owns almost as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent and that the one percent have to pay their fair share – is the story that few politicians have the courage to make their own.

In order for us to have a chance to fight back effectively – to mobilize ourselves, our families, our friends, and the politicians who depend on our campaign contributions – we have to, at the very least, first acknowledge that we are union members, and secondly,

rise to the task ahead by becoming Shop Stewards and supporting the Stewards who are working to make our working conditions better at every facility where we work.

When I was first elected as President of Local 768, we had 780 non-members – “agency fee payers” in Local 768 – HHC and DOHMH employees who we represented, but who had not yet signed green union enrollment cards. We began a systematic effort to enroll those members because we knew that, should a case like Friedrichs be decided against our interests, those members would drop off the rolls and we would not longer receive the “agency fee.”



Thanks to DC 37 today, we have just 190 agency fee payers – a reduction of 75% from the original number. On the way to getting these cards signed we also found many members who were not enrolled in our Health and Security Plan, and weren't getting the prescription, drug, and optical benefits that union membership affords.

While we still received the fee regardless of whether the card was signed, the significance of enrollment goes deeper than that. It speaks to a commitment that we must share to

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– the working class that powers the civil service system.

We must be strong to preserve what we have, including our pensions, which are being diminished year by year with the introduction of new legislation. Tier VI erodes benefits which members who joined earlier enjoyed, and there will be a Tier VII unless we organize effectively

against it. We are making gains at Local 768 on salaries, benefits, and in legislation to protect our members on the job. But those gains are less than what they could be if everyone would take the union cause – which is their own cause – to heart and get more involved.

— **Fitz Reid,**

*President, Local 768*