

AFSCME/HENNEPIN COUNTY NEGOTIATIONS  
1ST SESSION, JULY 18, 2005  
OPENING REMARKS  
Steve Marincel, AFSCME Council 5 Business Representative

"It's not business as usual for our Union in contract negotiations this year!"  
Our members are angry and frustrated. They have endured 2 years of zero wage increases while most other local government employees have had either one year or no years of zeros. While quality world class public service has continued to be provided by our members, who are doing more with less, our members' wages have not remained competitive. By the time the current contract expires our members will not have had a raise in 3 years, since January 2003. Many more of our members cannot support themselves on the wages the County currently pays. And they cannot afford health insurance for their families. (None of this should be a surprise to you or anyone else, as the Consumer Price Index has increased by 7% since January 2003 and health insurance increases have been in double digits.)

Add to this the fact that by its actions in giving other employees wage increases in 2004 and 2005, the County has admitted to our members that it had money all along for a wage increase. The County had additional money for wage increases during the last set of contract negotiations, while insisting that it did not. Is it any wonder that the Union's trust of the employer across this bargaining table has been undermined?

That said, we need to get an agreement. We are here to negotiate a fair contract. In the past the Union has worked hard to get a contract. And we're prepared to do so again. In fact we've already been working on these negotiations. Last year we started working on these negotiations by launching a property tax levy campaign, something we will be doing again. This year AFSCME did a lot of heavy lifting at the legislature in partnership with Hennepin County. As a result the County is better off fiscally because of these efforts. And we expect that this will be reflected in the outcome of these negotiations.

As I've said, we're prepared to negotiate a fair contract. What we are not prepared to do is work hard all the way through this process and then accept a poor settlement. Our members care deeply about the people of Hennepin County and the services that they deliver. But in the event we cannot reach agreement on a fair contract we will be organized and ready. We have a more active, involved and informed membership. And we have the backing and all the resources of the much larger 40,000 member AFSCME Council 5, as well as the active support of our national union.

We make a difference in the lives of the people of Hennepin County that we serve. During the term of the current contract, our members and your employees have continued to provide the quality services the citizens of Hennepin County expect. We deserve quality compensation and benefits for the work we do. We demand it!