

UNION OPENING REMARKS

AFSCME Council 5 Locals 34, 552, 1719, 2822, 2864,
2938 (Legal Unit)

Joint AFSCME/Hennepin Negotiations

July 30, 2007

Hennepin has a State and National reputation as an excellent full service County. This excellence is created every day. What makes this happen? It's the employees, our members, who work for Hennepin County. They produce the highest quality work possible and they do it as efficiently as the laws and rules they must operate under allow. How do they do it? We all know. There is no more skilled and dedicated workforce anywhere.

Our members operate a first class County. This is in spite of the fact that when comparing Hennepin with other Minnesota counties, Hennepin has more of the same problems, more serious problems, and more different kinds of problems for its employees to contend with. Unfortunately, our members' compensation is not first rate. Wages do not reflect the higher level of quality and efficiency at which our members are required to perform. And the health benefits they receive continue to take more and more money out of their pockets.

In recent times Hennepin County has invested heavily in the County's infrastructure, whether it is buildings (e.g. new and remodeled libraries), computer resources, roads, public transportation or things like radio communications for law enforcement. (In addition it has recently chosen to

invest County raised special tax dollars in a new baseball stadium.) Referring to the infrastructure, the County has been able to do this investing at lower cost because of the County's AAA bond rating. We want to respectfully remind you that if the County wishes to maintain its AAA Bond rating as we have so often heard across this bargaining table and on the 24th floor of the Government Center, then the County's leaders need to recognize that it is the high quality and efficient work that it's employees perform day in and day out that ultimately makes the current AAA bond rating possible.

The County is now at a crossroads. As our AFSCME brothers and sisters stated in State contract negotiations this year, it's our time. It is time for the County to heavily invest in the greatest asset the County possesses, our members, and your employees. Our members did their part with the zero general wage increase in the previous contract and their ongoing work to do more and more with less and less, i.e. an ever expanding workload and often a shrinking number of employees to do it, resulting in more stress for the remaining employees. It's time for you, the County, to show your employees by how you compensate them that you truly recognize that your employees are first rate.

A full service county made excellent is what the County is. We want a fair wage and an affordable health benefit that reflects the County's excellence and our excellence as employees represented by our Union, AFSCME.