

Retiree VOICE

SPRING / SUMMER 2026

A Newsletter for Retired UFCW Officers, Employees and Members



UFCW RETIREES PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE THIS ELECTION YEAR

UFCW retirees have always played a critical role in elections—and this year is no exception.

Many of you have stayed actively engaged with your locals and helped to get out the vote in past elections. You continue to set an example for future generations by defending the interests of our members by contacting elected officials, donating money, and most importantly, voting.

As the midterm elections approach, I encourage you to continue reaching out to family members, friends and neighbors and encourage them to exercise their right to vote. I also encourage you to spread the word about the [UFCW Votes website](#), a one-stop-shop for all the information you and your family need to make sure you're registered and ready to vote.

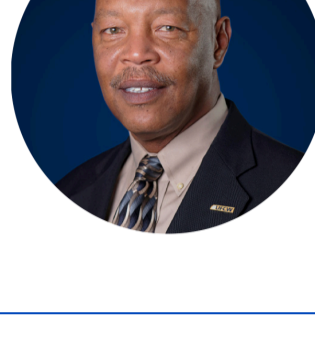
By preparing for the midterms early, we can build a unified effort that lifts up our members, strengthens our communities, and advances the rights of working people everywhere.

In this issue, you'll find information about some of our first-ever organizing and bargaining wins since the last issue of *Retiree Voice*, as well as a spotlight on one of the UFCW's retirees. The Voluntary Assignment of Pension Benefits form for the UFCW International Active Ballot Club is available [here](#).

Thank you for your leadership, commitment, and everything you do to make our union stronger.

Sincerely,

Milton Jones,
President, UFCW International



CHAIR'S CHATTER BY JIM LOWTHERS



“Together, we can build momentum for the midterm elections, increase turn out on election day, and elect lawmakers who will make the needs of working people a priority.”

The midterm elections are promising to be one of the most important events of our lifetime.

In just over a year, this administration has cut the federal workforce by more than 300,000 jobs and issued an executive order stripping union protections from over one million federal employees — one of the most aggressive attacks on organized labor in modern U.S. history.

Key institutions that protect workers are being weakened. The National Labor Relations Board is being reshaped in ways that could make it harder to organize. Mediators who help workers and employers reach fair agreements have been dismissed. Worker safety protections are at risk of being rolled back.

At the same time, critical programs like food assistance and Medicaid have been slashed. These programs not only support families in need, but also sustain jobs for our members in grocery stores, meatpacking plants, food processing facilities, and health care institutions across the country.

Meanwhile, billions of dollars are being redirected toward expanded border enforcement, detention operations and foreign wars.

Voting rights are also being dismantled. Under this administration, the Supreme Court stripped away one of the last remaining protections against racially rigged electoral maps. For decades, Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act ensured that Black, Latino, and other voters of color could elect leaders who reflected them. Now, that representation is in grave danger.

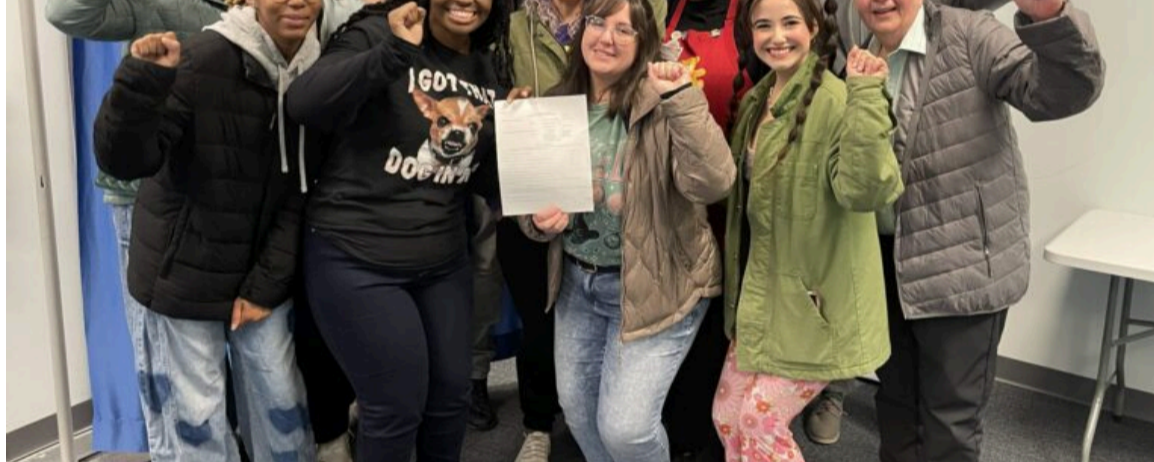
UFCW retirees are well aware that our strength at the bargaining table is tied to our strength at the ballot box. Every vote matters—and that's why it's critical to start preparing for election day now.

I encourage all retirees to continue to work with their locals to get out the vote for pro-union and pro-worker candidates. Together, we can build momentum for the midterm elections, increase turn out on election day, and elect lawmakers who will make the needs of working people a priority.

To stay connected with other UFCW retirees, you're welcome to join the Facebook group for UFCW retired staff [here](#).

The list of UFCW brothers and sisters who have passed on in the last six months is available [here](#).

BUILDING WORKER POWER



The UFCW has continued to celebrate first ever organizing wins and first contracts since the last issue of *Retiree Voice*.

In January, more than 80 workers at eight Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams locations in Columbus, Ohio, voted to join UFCW Local 1059. This organizing win marks the first ice cream shop unit to be organized by UFCW Local 1059. These workers joined our union because they wanted better wages and benefits and a voice in the workplace.

“Jeni's is an institution here in Columbus — many of us who grew up here have memories of visiting with friends and family,” said Luka Bastin-Howes, who is a team lead at one of the Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams stores in Columbus. “Starting a union at Jeni's feels like an important moment for our city. I love working at Jeni's and our work brings tremendous value to the company that should be reflected in a union contract. I'm looking forward to working with management to bargain a contract that cements Jeni's as a great place to work and makes Columbus stronger.”

Also in January, workers at the Build-A-Bear Workshop in St. Louis, Mo., voted unanimously to join UFCW Local 655 for a better life. This organizing win marks the first Build-A-Bear Workshop in the country to unionize. The workers joined UFCW Local 655 because they were concerned about workplace safety, store culture, insurance costs, and scheduled raises and wanted a voice in the workplace.

“We love Build-A-Bear more than anyone, and that has been used against us for too long,” said Lucy Acevedo, a former Build-A-Bear Workshop assistant workshop manager who was unfairly terminated for taking part in the organizing campaign a day before the election. “We knew if we didn't stand up and speak out for our rights then no one would. We cannot in good conscience allow Build-A-Bear to continue to take advantage of the amazing people who run each workshop.”

In February, about 45 workers at Marklighter Brewing Co. locations in Cambridge, Mass., voted to join UFCW Local 1445—marking the first brewery in the state of Massachusetts. These workers joined our union because they were concerned about insufficient wages and benefits and wanted a voice in the workplace.

“We're excited to have won our union, and now we're all looking forward to sitting down and bargaining our first contract,” said Ryan McFarland, a lead bartender at the Broadway Lamplighter location. “Lamplighter brings people together to enjoy each other's company over a good beer, and with a union contract, we'll continue to deliver the welcoming atmosphere and quality that makes us special. I'm proud to work in a place where all of the staff — from production and kitchen, to the front of house and sales team, to the people who clean every morning — have a seat at the table.”

In March, members of UFCW Local 99 who work at Bookmans Entertainment Exchange in Tucson and Flagstaff, Ariz., ratified their first union contract.

The three-year contract includes guaranteed wage increases and department premiums; paid holidays and vacation; a 401(k) plan with employer match; the establishment of an employee safety committee; and a progressive discipline and grievance procedure.

“I feel hopeful for the future, excitement, and I'm so proud of my co-workers,” said Tony Taurman, an electronics buyer at Bookmans Flagstaff. “It seems today that people are expected to go about life without their community, but in starting a union I learned that you don't have to. And in fact, we can't. We have to stand together if we want to change things for the better.”

In April, over 1,000 members of UFCW Local 1518 employed as Uber drivers in Victoria, British Columbia, ratified their first union contract.

Victoria Uber drivers made history when they joined UFCW Local 1518 in July of 2025, as Victoria became the first Canadian city where app-based workers have successfully unionized to demand better protections and rights. Now, with a ratified contract, the unionized Uber drivers have secured core workplace protections, including improved health and safety measures, fair dispute processes, and improved pay and wellness benefits.

The four-year contract includes signing and quarterly bonuses, annual increases for what drivers receive when customers incur fees for wait time, cancellations, and out-of-region rides, a wellness fund for sick time or extended benefits, improved health and safety, and more. The dispute resolution process has been formalized with mandated time limits, and drivers will have the ability to resolve issues related to pay, suspension, ratings, and deactivations.

“This agreement is irrefutable proof that when workers unite in solidarity with a common goal, great results can be achieved,” said Uber driver and bargaining committee member Gilberto Talero Almanza. “This contract enables all Uber drivers in Victoria to continue contributing to society while ensuring they have respect and dignity at work.”

UFCW RETIREE SPOTLIGHT



Local 99 Member Don Martinez

“Being in the union provides a sense of community and feels like being part of a winning team.”

UFCW Local 99 member Don Martinez recently retired from his union job at Safeway store #1983 in Tucson, Ariz. He was a member of UFCW Local 99 for 43 years, and first joined our union while working at a Low Cost/Arden-Mayfair store from 1977 to 1981.

While reflecting on his career, he emphasized the value of union representation.

“What I liked the most about being in the union was that I felt protected,” he said. “I felt like I counted as someone and that the union had my back, but not only me, for all my co-workers, too. Being in the union provides a sense of community and feels like being part of a winning team. It may sound a little corny to say, but whenever I saw Local 99 staff in the store, they always made me feel represented. It felt like family visiting our stores.”

“What I would tell others about belonging to the union is that the union fights for and represents us,” he added. “The union fights for higher wages, great benefits, better working conditions, and ensures that we get our breaks. Health insurance was and still is an important benefit of being a union member. Another real, big benefit of being a union member is our seniority protection.”

Congratulations, Don Martinez, on your well-earned retirement and thank you for your years of service at Safeway!

UFCW International Union Pension Plan for Employees Authorization

VOLUNTARY ASSIGNMENT OF PENSION BENEFITS

All retired UFCW members are eligible to join the Active Ballot Club (ABC), the UFCW's political action committee through the voluntary assignment of pension benefits. The ABC helps mobilize UFCW members to advocate for the issues that make their lives better. From getting union members out to vote to lobbying for worker-friendly legislation to supporting elected leaders who will represent the interests of working people—every dollar helps to ensure that the laws passed at all levels of government help hard-working families enjoy more economic stability.

The Voluntary Assignment of Pension Benefits form for the UFCW International Active Ballot Club is available at the link below.

[Contribute Here](#)

America's Food and Retail Union

