



WILLIAM BRENNAN INSTITUTE FOR

# LABOR STUDIES

## From the director

It's an honor to serve as the new director of the William Brennan Institute for Labor Studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Our mission is to provide relevant and timely education for Nebraska wage earners, union leaders, labor organizations and citizens to help attain the American Dream for all.

The labor movement has played an integral role throughout my life.

I grew up in a union household in Omaha, the youngest of four boys. Our father was a mail carrier and a member of the National Association of Letter Carriers for 43 years. My mother was a public-school teacher and a member of the Omaha Education Association. Mom and Dad worked hard and played by the rules in the hope that one day my brothers and me would have a better life than their own.

The union wages and benefits from my parents' careers provided me with a wonderful education that allowed me to earn a master's degree in Public Administration and bachelor's degree in Political Science from UNO. For the past 15 years, I've addressed labor and human resources issues for the City of Omaha. Since 2012, I've served as an elected member of the Metropolitan Utilities District (MUD) Board of Directors in Omaha. I'm proud to be a member of the UNO Chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the faculty union.

This newsletter is one of many exciting efforts I hope will increase the level of public awareness for the Institute and its many initiatives such as the creation of a social media platform to reach new audiences. In addition to continuing to offer courses in person, we will use technology to educate more people through E-learning modules (asynchronous learning). We'll also sponsor fun interactive events, from conferences to podcasts and film nights, to shine the light on the important contributions of organized labor in our nation's history.

I look forward to charting the new course for the William Brennan Institute for Labor Studies.

In Solidarity,  
Jim



*Jim Begley, director of the William Brennan Institute of Labor Studies*

# Labor leader William Brennan leaves legacy of public service

Miranda McCord

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*William Brennan presents to an audience*

Born and raised in South Omaha, William E. Brennan was known for his sense of humor and advocacy for union workers. Brennan, who died in 1979, lived a full life in his 57 years as a family man with his wife, Marilyn, and eight children.

Those who called him a friend remember him for his loyalty and love for his country. Brennan served as a B-24 pilot during World War II. After the war he attended Creighton University but later dropped out, saying he found elevator construction work more interesting than finishing college.

The late State Sen. John DeCamp, often Brennan's adversary, was quoted in his obituary, "Bill Brennan was

dedicated...he was the epitome of what organized labor should be in its efforts to improve working conditions for all people."

A lifelong Omahan and baseball fanatic, Brennan often joked, "that the only thing that kept me out of the major leagues was his lack of talent." Despite this, Brennan used his passion for baseball to serve his community by coaching baseball in the Catholic Youth Organization.

In 1948, Brennan joined his first worker's union and by 1965, he became Local 28, business representative and began his rise as a labor leader. Brennan won a seat in the Nebraska unicameral in 1976. He

spent his time specializing in labor legislation and advocating for Nebraska's workers. He was a member for advisory boards for the University of Nebraska- Lincoln, UNO and the Nebraska Employment Security Council. He also served on the board of directors the Nebraska Red Cross, the Nebraska Economic Council, United Community Services and the Nebraska U.S. Savings Bonds.

"The working people of Nebraska, whether they belonged to labor unions or whether they worked on farms or in executive suites," DeCamp is quoted, "today lost the best friend, the most compassionate law maker anyone could have imagined."

# Nebraska State AFL-CIO president weighs in on William Brennan Institute's impact

Jordan Speckmann



**Sue Martin, Secretary Treasurer of  
AFL-CIO**

**S**ue Martin is a pioneer. Now, in her second term, she's the first woman president and secretary-treasurer for Nebraska State American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). She previously worked with the Nebraska Department of Education.

Within her role with the AFL-CIO, she leads 23,000 members across the state. Martin dedicates her work to supporting and improving the lives of all working people and their families. The Nebraska State AFL-CIO provides legislative and political education to help local unions and secure social equity in Nebraska by giving the people a voice.

Martin says the AFL-CIO's most important mission contributes information and opportunities to make people's voices heard by their elected officials.

"We give working families greater power to shape their economic well-being by mobilizing working people for social and economic justice, preferred treatment on the job and for pro-worker government policies," Martin says. The AFL-CIO offers meetings throughout the year to educate union workers about how the legislation will affect them.

I knew that Nebraska was unique in the fact that we had a program available to help educate not only our members, but the public on the labor movement, and I wanted to serve to help create this learning experience for those people."

Martin has seen the ups and downs of the labor movement. However, the state's AFL-CIO has been on the upswing.

During the 1980s, organized union membership began to decline. As such, the Nebraska State AFL-CIO and the WBILS

**"Thanks to the education that union workers received from this exceptional program, and the bottom line is, a well-paid, informed workforce is not only good for our unions, but it's also good for our state."**

Martin found out about the William Brennan Institute for Labor Studies (WBILS) through union members taking their education courses. Since then, the federation has partnered with WBILS to present many educational opportunities.

"William Brennan Institute had asked me to serve on the labor advisory committee," Martin says. "I was super excited to do this because as a leader in the labor movement,

partnered to provide critical education and informational needs about the value organized labor brings to working families.

With the popularity of unionism on the rise, Martin encourages people to join and engage in their activities.

"I think the biggest part of the William Brennan Institute is it provides that background on labor history," Martin says. "It

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has a real impact on the quality of life for union members.”

Martin says most union leaders are in elected positions and expected to be the go-to person on labor issues. The WBILS gives out the knowledge needed to lead effectively.

Working together, WBILS and the AFL-CIO created a community of union workers to

gain the knowledge and expertise they need to benefit industries, Martin explains. The work that William Brennan does is vital to AFL-CIO and all union workers across Nebraska.

“I can’t begin to tell you how valuable the institute is to the labor movement in Nebraska,” Martin says. “This program has provided hundreds if not thousands of people information on

the labor movement. Thanks to the education that union workers received from this exceptional program, and the bottom line is, a well-paid, informed workforce is not only good for our unions, but it’s also good for our state.”

## WBILS holds Nebraska Works! Conference

Sam Sperry

The annual Nebraska Works! Conference will cover all the ins and outs Nebraska’s labor market and explore ways to expand the boundaries of democracy.

The conference, sponsored by the William Brennan Institute for Labor Studies, takes place on Friday, April 8, at 8 a.m. at the Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center.

Scott Hunzeker, labor market information director at the Nebraska Department of Labor, will give overview Nebraska’s current labor market.

Dr. Dustin White, Assistant professor of economics in the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) College of Business Administration, will moderate a panel discussion on labor and wage shortages in Nebraska.

Panelist Sue Martin is the first

woman to serve as president and treasurer of the Nebraska State AFL-CIO. She works with WBILS to help promote education about unions in U.S.

Catherine Lang, also a panelist, serves as state director of the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) and the assistant dean of the UNO College of Business Administration. She leads the statewide outreach for NBDC to drive economic growth in Nebraska.

Dr. Meagan Van Gelder, academic program coordinator for the UNO School of Public Administration, will discuss UNO’s Next Generation Service Partnership and the need to train students across various sectors, including labor and business.

Gelder will also moderate a panel discussion with local union leaders and business



contractors. Topics will feature the value of apprenticeship programs and the importance of collaboration between the labor and business sectors.

The conference will conclude with a presentation from Nebraska State Sen. Mike McDonnell- District 5.

McDonnell is the president of the Omaha Federation of Labor and a former WBILS labor educator.

# Institute offers programs for labor advocacy

## **Grievance Handling: The Basics**

This seminar teaches the proper grievance investigation techniques needed to represent workers with grievances.

## **Preparation for Collective Bargaining**

This course increases the effectiveness of union committees in collective bargaining through such topics as legal framework, negotiation strategy and tactics.

## **Management Rights and the Continuing Duty to Bargain Under the National Labor Relations Act**

For union advocates at all levels, this seminar highlights how to use the offices of NLRB to win management rights disputes.

## **How to Effectively “Talk Union”**

This class explores how to effectively define unions and their necessity to the labor force. Employees learn to collectively bargain with employers to increase fairness and justice in the workplace.

## **Common Sense Economics**

This course discusses the economy and how political decisions influence the community’s bargaining table.

## **Labor History**

This history course examines the working and living conditions that gave rise to unions and how union workers faced opposition.

## **Leadership Training**

This course aims to increase the effectiveness of union leadership by learning basic management skills.

## **Making Committees Work**

This course teaches the appointed committee chairs and members how to make their meetings more productive.

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## **Preparing a Grievance to go to Arbitration**

In this course, the steward learns to understand how the arbitration process works and what is needed to succeed.

## **Developing Union Leadership Skills**

This one-day workshop teaches skills to strengthen the union through improved personal effectiveness.

## **Increasing Your Local Union’s Political Effectiveness**

This seminar provides insights to the importance of political involvement, critical to raising levels of fairness and justice in the workplace.

## **Increasing Political Effectiveness**

In this course, union officials learn strategies for educating members in political activities.

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# Institute offers programs for labor advocacy

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## Solidarity Building and Internal Organizing

This course provides the reasons behind member apathy and how union leadership can proactively increase involvement.

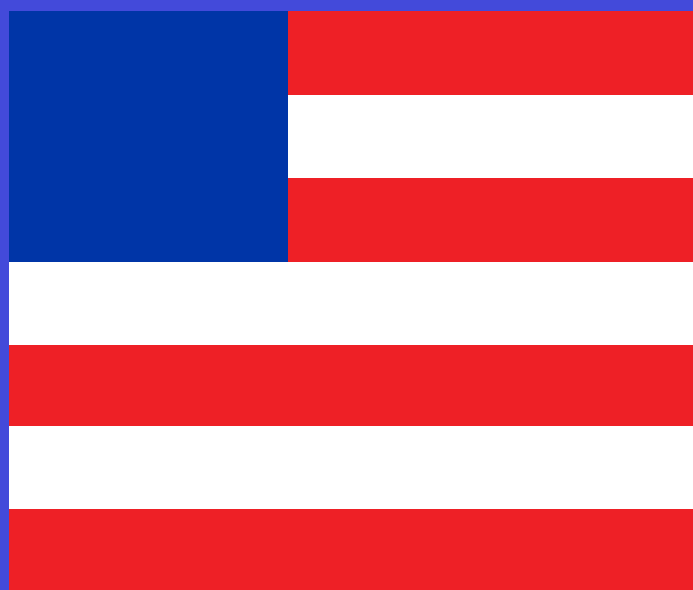
## Strategic Planning for Executive Boards

This intensive workshop informs officials on how to realistically assess where they are now and what they expect to accomplish during their term of office.

## Steward Training

This training demonstrates how stewards are the backbone of any local union.

**For more information, contact Director Jim Begley at [jamesbegley@unomaha.edu](mailto:jamesbegley@unomaha.edu)**



## Where to find us:



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