



# 1274 NEWSLINE



NORTH SUBURBAN TEACHERS UNION – LOCAL 1274, CFL, IFT/AFT, AFL-CIO

## Illinois Primary Elections Issue

The upcoming Illinois general primary elections on March 20th are crucial. We have a chance to nominate progressive candidates who are pro-education and pro-worker, and who can begin the process of repairing the damage done by the last administration. IFT has endorsed a set of local and state candidates who will stand up for our schools and communities.



### GENERAL PRIMARY ELECTION TUESDAY, MARCH 20

[ift-aft.org/vote/voter-information](http://ift-aft.org/vote/voter-information)

### The IFT Endorsement Process

The IFT employs a thorough and collaborative process of endorsing candidates that is focused on ensuring members have a voice and that endorsement decisions are based on input from the local and regional levels.

The IFT divides the state into 18 regional Political Action Committees (PACs) made up of union activists drawn from both the leadership and the rank-and-file who are committed to the political process and willing to engage with office holders and candidates from the region in which those members live or work. Those regional PAC committees are responsible for making endorsement recommendations to the IFT Executive Board for the Illinois Senate and House candidates.

The PAC regional committees reviewed candidate questionnaires and incumbent voting records on issues related to the IFT's core values -- prepared by the IFT Department of Political Activity -- for all candidates in their respective districts. Each committee chair convened a meeting to interview candidates in contested elections and voted for their endorsement recommendations. Those recommendations were sent to a meeting of all Regional PAC Chairs from across the state on January 27th to finalize the PAC endorsements. Those PAC recommendations were then sent to the IFT's Executive Board for final approval on February 3rd.

Steve Grossman, Local 1274 President, serves as PAC co-chair for Region B, along with Helen Ramirez-O'Dell from CPS. Region B contains District 17 of Illinois House of Representatives and District 8 of Illinois Senate, the districts which represent the greatest number of 1274 members. Local 1274 PAC members include Jane Relihan (Vice President for Support Staff of the NTFSS), and Pankaj Sharma (Membership Engagement Chair for Local 1274). PAC members in Region B ultimately interviewed five candidates for House District 17 and four candidates for Senate District 8 before endorsing Jennifer Gong-Gershowitz and Ram Villivalam (see articles on pages 2 and 4 of this issue).

### IFT Endorses JB Pritzker for Governor

Over the course of twelve months, the IFT Executive Board met multiple times with all the viable candidates for governor. In an unusually long and thorough vetting process, the Board voted to endorse JB Pritzker in the March 20th Democratic primary election. Our own recent poll of Local 1274 members showed a preference for a Pritzker endorsement, and a large majority viewed Pritzker as having the best chance of defeating Rauner in the general election.

Pritzker is running on a pro-union platform, and protecting collective bargaining rights is one of his key issues. He's committed to increasing school



funding and favors a progressive income tax that has the wealthy paying their fair share. According to Pritzker,

*"I look forward to working with IFT members to strengthen public education and services in Illinois and ensure strong neighborhood public schools in all of our communities. I'm proud to support the labor movement and the rights of IFT members to collectively bargain and retire in dignity."*

Besides the IFT, Pritzker has won endorsements from Senator Durbin, Senator Duckworth, the Illinois AFL-CIO, Cook County Democratic Party and 23 statewide Democratic county chairs, and the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 399, among others.

Many members of Local 1274 live in the senate district represented by Daniel Biss. While the Local 1274 has a good relationship with Senator Biss and has supported him in his senate elections, the IFT Executive Board decided that Pritzker is the stronger candidate and better positioned to advance our issues in Springfield. Though Biss has admitted his mistake in sponsoring the infamous pension-killing bill in 2013 that was ultimately declared unconstitutional by the Illinois Supreme Court, IFT members listed protecting pensions as their top priority and many have not forgotten the role Biss played on that contentious issue.

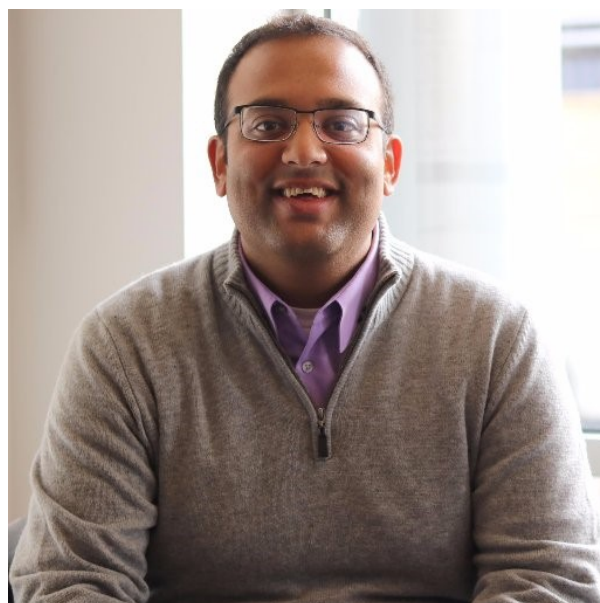
## IFT Endorses Ram Villivalam for 8th District Illinois Senate

Ram Villivalam would be the first Asian American elected to the Illinois State Senate, and is running for election in a district that has the highest number of Asian Americans in Illinois. The IFT PAC Committee considers Ram Villivalam to be a very strong candidate for the 8th District. Villivalam is the son of Indian immigrants who came to the U.S. in the seventies to seek a better life for their children. Raised on the Northwest side, he graduated from Lincoln Park High School and earned his

Bachelor's Degree in Political Science from George Washington University. Villivalam currently works as a consultant for SEIU Healthcare Illinois & Indiana, where he advocates on behalf of more than 90,000 care providers and hospital workers. He also serves on the Board of the Gun Violence Prevention PAC and as President of the Indo-American Democratic Organization. Previously, Villivalam served as the Outreach Director for U.S. Congressman Brad Schneider.

Villivalam is committed to issues that speak for working and middle class Americans. His platform includes increasing the minimum wage, ensuring the wealthy pay their fair share, moving towards universal healthcare, fixing our unjust immigration system, protecting the rights of women and minorities, working to reduce gun violence in our communities, and investing in a clean energy future.

His opponent, incumbent Democratic Senator Ira Silverstein, has recently been the subject of a harassment probe by the General Assembly's watchdog, which cleared him of sexual harassment but rebuked him as behaving "in a manner unbecoming of a legislator." It should be noted that sexual harassment allegations against Silverstein did not factor into the endorsement decision in the 8th senate district. The IFT PAC Committee had serious reservations about incumbent Silverstein, especially his vote in last spring's legislative session in favor of legislation that once again would have unconstitutionally slashed our pension benefits. Local 1274 President Steve Grossman made several attempts during that process to contact Silverstein to register our opposition to the bill. Silverstein did not return his calls or emails, even after the vote.



## From the President: Why We Must Engage Politically

Politics can be a dirty business, especially in partisan times such as these. As such, there may be some who question their union's political activism. For example, in the recent survey seeking member input on the gubernatorial primary election, one member commented:

*"I hate that the IFT involves themselves with politics ...I am appalled at this entire survey. It is wrong!"*

Though that member is in the minority, with a vast majority of IFT members approving of our political involvement, his or her concerns deserve to be addressed. With close to 100,000 members representing a diverse array of backgrounds and interests, there is certain to be some disagreement among our ranks on various political matters. No group of any size can be expected to walk lock-step on all issues.

But regardless of our degree of consensus, it is imperative that we engage in the political process. Our system of representative democracy is designed to have elected officials act on behalf of their constituents. In that regard we need to bring our positions, beliefs, values, and concerns to those legislators so that they know where we stand. Let's face it, if we do not participate politically, those on the other side of our issues surely will, and where will that leave us but out in the cold.

And what are the core issues that are the central focus of the union's political advocacy? **Workers' rights, public education, and the elements of a fair economy necessary for supporting both.** We realize that the positions taken by the union may not perfectly align with the views of all of our members, especially when it comes to endorsing candidates. That is because each individual's political decisions is based on a constellation of issues viewed through the lens of their own unique backgrounds and experiences. Some complain that the union typically endorses Democratic candidates; indeed polling tells us that 25-30% of IFT members tend to vote Republican. But our endorsements are purely based on where candidates stand on our core issues - when Republican candidates support those issues we are happy to support them in return.

Most of our members not only accept our political involvement, they count on it. In a recent scientific survey, 70% of IFT members stated that the IFT should make political endorsements, 63% of undecided voters said they look to their union's endorsements to help them make more informed decisions, and 83% said that they would be more likely to vote for IFT endorsed candidates. And, as is detailed elsewhere in this issue, the IFT takes that endorsement process seriously; we do our homework and we take our members' interests and opinions into consideration throughout.

Those survey results demonstrate that our members recognize that the union serves as an effective voice in the political process by establishing relationships with lawmakers that many individual members do not have the time or access to ac-

complish on their own. In addition, the union develops an expertise on issues to help inform legislators and hold them accountable. In that regard you can

count on your union to be an effective advocate for the policies, legislation, and political candidates that support our positions on the issues that are fundamental to the work we do.

**"Let's face it, if we do not participate politically, those on the other side of our issues surely will, and where will that leave us but out in the cold."**

In solidarity,




### *Union Elections: May 8th*

#### **Local 1274:**

**Officers:** President, Vice President, Treasurer  
(Candidates must submit a petition with at least 15 local member signatures to the union office by April 6th)

**Delegates to AFT 2018 Convention:**  
Pittsburgh: July 13-16

#### **Councils:**

**Officers:** Look for postings from your school council.

## IFT Endorses Jennifer Gong-Gershowitz for 17th District Illinois House

Jennifer Gong-Gershowitz is running for the seat vacated by Rep. Laura Fine, who is running for the Illinois Senate seat vacated by Daniel Biss as he runs for governor. A granddaughter of Chinese immigrants who faced discrimination and deportation, Gong-Gershowitz is director of the immigration practice at Highland Park-Highwood Legal Aid Clinic, a practice that she built to give others the same opportunities as her grandparents.

Gong-Gershowitz grew up and attended public schools in Oak Park. She earned her undergraduate degree in Journalism from Indiana University, and holds a law degree from Loyola University School of Law as well as a Master in International Human Rights Law from Northwestern University Pritzker School of Law. Protecting public pensions is an important issue to Gong-Gershowitz, as her father is a retired Illinois teacher. She believes the state needs to make full pension payments every year.

One of her priorities is making sure organizations that represent teachers and public employees have a seat at the table when it comes to decisions that impact their livelihood and pension security. Gong-Gershowitz has promised to work with the IFT and advocacy groups to ensure that teachers and schools have the resources they need to provide a world-class education for every child in the state.



## JOIN THE RALLY TO FIGHT BACK

Saturday, February 24 (12:00 to 2:00)  
Daley Center Plaza

**Gov. Rauner and the Trump administration have a case before the Supreme Court called Janus v. AFSCME that threatens our right to unionize.**

**Join thousands of working people and allies to stand up for our freedoms and demand an end to a system that's rigged against us.**



# WORKING PEOPLE'S DAY OF ACTION

02.24.18

### 1274 Newsline

Produced and published by the North Suburban Teachers Union Local 1274 – IFT/AFT, AFL-CIO

9933 N. Lawler, Suite 222  
Skokie, IL 60077  
847-673-1274, nstu.org

#### Officers

Steve Grossman, President  
Fred Schlessinger, Vice President  
Robyn Caplan, Treasurer  
Jane Relihan, Administrative Assistant

#### Field Service Directors

Lenny Nieves  
Cameron Sweeney

#### Retiree Chair

Jacki Naughton

#### Newsline Editor

Sherry Jo Baehr  
sj.baehr@gmail.com