



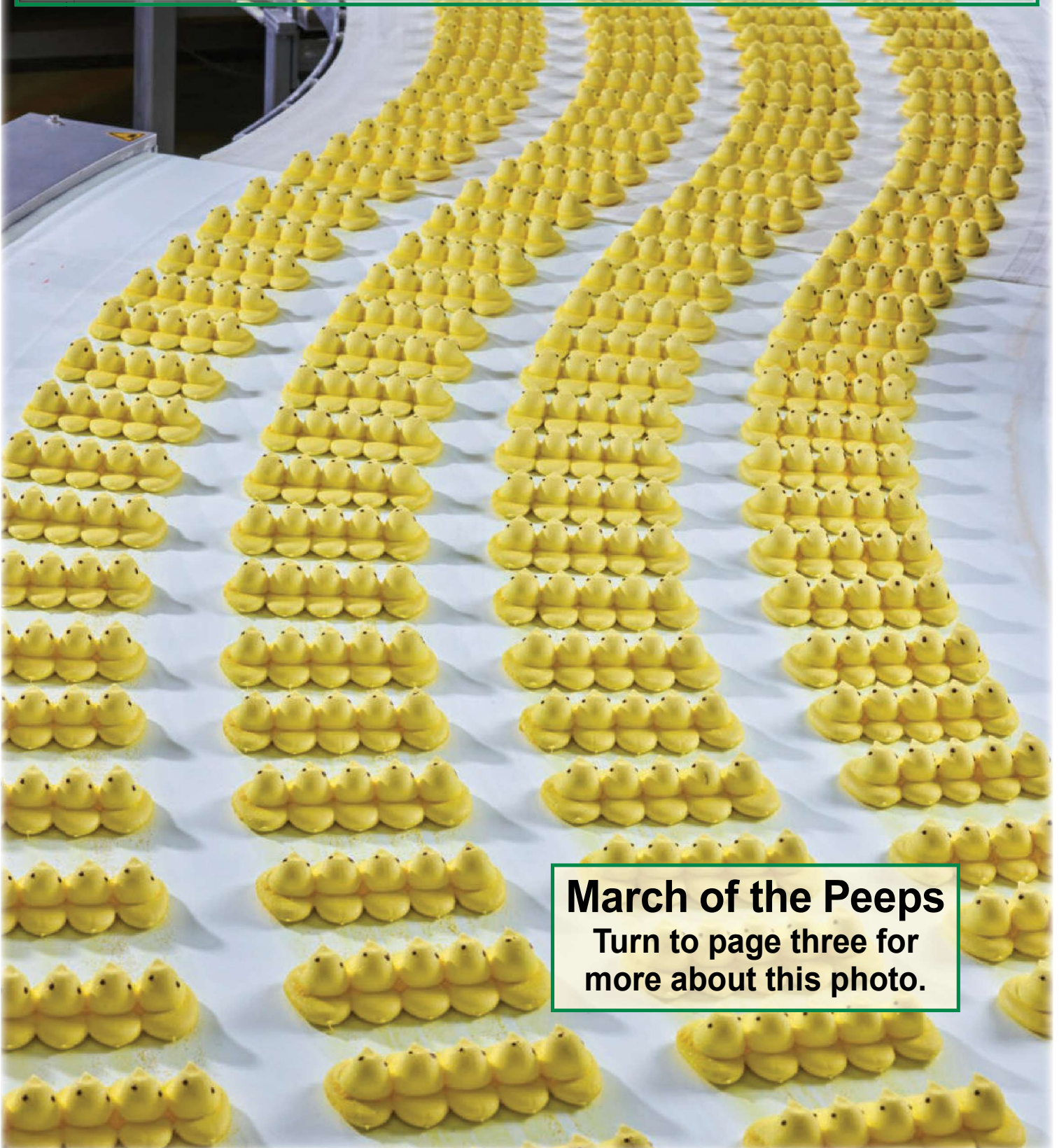
NEWS & VIEWS

LEHIGH VALLEY LABOR COUNCIL, AFL-CIO
"UNIONS JOINING TOGETHER AS ONE"



July 2026

www.lehighvalleyclc.org



March of the Peeps
Turn to page three for
more about this photo.

AFL-CIO Passes Early Organizing Milestone Announces Plans to Unionize Millions More Workers: Union membership grew despite attacks from Trump and anti-worker corporations

June 8 AFL-CIO Press Release

The AFL-CIO announced at its 30th AFL-CIO Constitutional Convention in Minneapolis that it had reached its goal to organize 1 million workers years ahead of schedule, and it rolled out an updated strategy to organize millions more workers.

At its convention in 2022, the nation's largest labor federation set a goal to organize at least 1 million members in 10 years. That goal was surpassed after just three years, thanks to workers organizing in new industries and new geographies, in the private and public sectors; leading historic strikes; and creating a pipeline to the union workforce through apprenticeships. And despite corporate greed and union-busting, broken labor laws that denied their rights and freedoms, and the Trump administration attacks making life less free and more expensive, union representation reached the highest level in 16 years.



Liz Shuler,
President
AFL-CIO

"Working people are facing down and fighting back against every obstacle thrown their way—and they're doing it by coming together and organizing," said Liz Shuler, AFL-CIO president. "Our movement is building a world where every worker who wants a union can join one; where they have a voice on the job to

demand the wages, benefits, protection and dignity they are owed; and where the broken labor law that is rigged for the bosses is a thing of the past. Unions deliver the power to take on corporate greed and the hope for—and path to—a better life. We won't stop until that is the reality for every worker in this country."

At the gathering of its 65 affiliated unions and state and local labor federations, the AFL-CIO announced its goals to:

- ⇒ Bring at least two million more workers into unions by 2032.
- ⇒ Coordinate across the movement to challenge union-busting corporations; drive multi-union, multi-sector organizing campaigns; maximize resources and capacity; and leverage our power as a movement.
- ⇒ Align organizing and political work to make worker organizing a core goal anywhere labor supports candidates, committing that no candidate should receive labor's support unless they are willing to fight for stronger collective bargaining rights and the empowerment of working people.
- ⇒ Expand and develop coordinated local organizing strategies in key geographies, deepen alignment with community organizations, and deliver tangible wins for working people through the joint work of international unions and the AFL-CIO's state and local labor federations.
- ⇒ Redouble support for legislation to reform our broken labor law system on the federal, state and local levels.
- ⇒ Align bargaining demands and contract expirations to amplify the power of collective action, including strikes, at the broadest possible level.

- ⇒ Build on ongoing organizing with a mass training program to invest in all workers who want to organize with the skills, tactics and strategy to get it done.
- ⇒ Invest in campaigns that enable workers to organize outside labor board processes as well, creating pathways around delays and abuse by unscrupulous employers, including supporting federal workers and others without congressionally guaranteed bargaining rights in their efforts to organize, build and maintain power.



Union membership as a percentage of employed, 2025

New York	21.3 %
New Jersey	14.7 %
Maryland	12.7 %
Ohio	11.6 %
Pennsylvania	10.9 %
Delaware	10.4 %
West Virginia	8.5 %

(Credit: Bureau of Labor Statistics, February 18, 2026)

Lehigh Valley Labor Council AFL-CIO www.lehighvalleyclc.org Phone 610-366-1358

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Workers' resolve drives increase in unionization in 2025

Approval rating for unions remains high among workers

by the Economic Policy Institute

In 2025, 16.5 million workers in the United States were represented by a union—an increase of 463,000 from 2024 and the highest number of unionized workers in the U.S. in 16 years.

These 16.5 million unionized workers account for 11.2% of all wage and salary workers, up from 11.1% in 2024. The increase is a departure from prior years' downward trend in union density. It demonstrates working people's desire for greater agency in their workplaces and in shaping the policies that affect their lives. In a time of fear, uncertainty, and hardship, the importance and benefits of unionization are especially clear. Further, this increase occurred despite the nation's broken system of labor law and the most anti-union president in history. It is a testament to working people's resolve and the fact that unions are increasingly viewed favorably and recognized as critical instruments for building a just economy.

The share of nonunion workers who would like to have a union at their workplace far exceeds the share who are actually unionized. In 2025, 11.2% of workers were covered by a union contract. Recent survey data show that 43% of nonunion workers would vote to unionize their workplace if given the opportunity. That is up substantially from previous decades; surveys in 1977 and 1994 found that fewer than one-third (27% and 31%, respectively) of nonunion workers said they would vote to unionize if they could. There were 130.2 million wage and salary workers in 2025 who were not represented by a union; 43% of that is 56 million. In other words, more than 50 million workers in 2025 wanted union representation but were unable to get it.

For more information, visit www.epi.org



The frontpage

The Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum is currently showcasing "Made in America; The Industrial Photography of Christopher Payne." The exhibition presents more than seventy large-format photographs captured by Payne over a decade-long photographic journey.

Included in the exhibit is "Peeps Marshmallow Chicks cooling on a conveyor belt before packaging, 2023." These sugary treats are made at Just Born Candies, Bethlehem by members of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers, (BCTGM) #6. Union workers produce enough Peeps in one year to circle the earth twice. The candies have remained the number one non-chocolate brand at Easter for more than twenty years.

Payne's photography brings the object, the machine and the hand together. His pictures highlight the timelessness of manufacturing. "My photographs are a celebration of the making of things," he said. "They are also a celebration of teamwork and community, revealing how people of varying ages and skill levels come together to work toward a common goal."

The exhibition celebrates the 250th anniversary of America's Independence and draws attention to the nation's factories as sites of human ingenuity and innovation. The showing runs until September 27, 2026 at the Cooper Hewitt, in New York.

For more information, visit www.cooperhewitt.org



Lifetime Labor Record of Lehigh Valley's House members

House member/Party	Years served	Legislative scorecard on labor issues as a percentage
Charlie Dent (R)	(2005-2018)	23%
Susan Wild (D)	(2018-2025)	97
Ryan Mackenzie (R)	(2025-)	8

Mackenzie's voting record suggests that he will consistently vote against labor while in Congress.

(Credit: AFL-CIO, www.afl-cio.org)

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"I can't let another moment pass without talking about Donald Trump. . . .

"Donald Trump is not only dangerous, he's blatantly dishonest. A recent study showed he tells a whopper every five minutes. Don't believe a thing he says. He pretends to love our cause, but he's a fraud. . . .

"He wants us to believe he will stand with working people and defend unions when he spent his entire life trying to cheat us and destroy us. . . . Trump only cares about one thing: himself. If you took the words, 'I, me and myself' out of his vocabulary, he'd be speechless.

"Donald Trump is profoundly unfit to be president. That's why on November 8, 2016, working people are going to turn the tables, and fire him."

Richard Trumka, AFL-CIO president, at the Alaska AFL-CIO Convention, August 25, 2016.



Committee on Political Education 2026 Election recommendations

At the June 17 General membership meeting, Lehigh Valley Labor Council delegates made the following recommendations to the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO for the November 3, 2026 mid-term elections.

Bob Brooks	US House PA-7 th District
Nick Miller	PA state Senate 14 th District
Mark Pinsley	PA state Senate 16 th District
Lisa Boscola	PA state Senate 18 th District
Ce-Ce Gerlach	PA state House 22 nd District
Meriam Sabih	PA state House 131 st District
Michael Schlossberg	PA state House 132 nd District
Jeanne McNeill	PA state House 133 rd District
Peter Schweyer	PA state House 134 th District
Steve Samuelson	PA state House 135 th District
Robert Freeman	PA state House 136 th District
Jeff Warren	PA state House 137 th District
Jared Bitting	PA state House 138 th District
Deirdre Kamber Todd	PA state House 183 rd District
Rachel Cuevas	PA state House 187 th District



Unwavering perseverance

Local labor leaders overcame challenges to establish a monument honoring workers who died on the job. A brief history of the Lehigh Valley Workers' Memorial Day monument.

by Ron Ennis, Editor
Lehigh Valley Labor Council

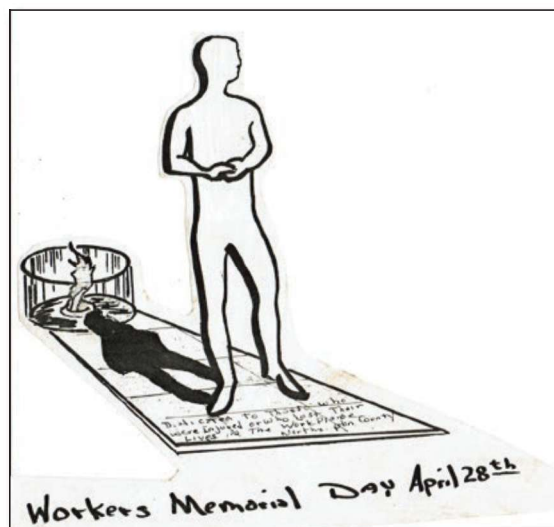
On April 26, local labor activists, workers and family survivors held their annual Lehigh Valley Workers' Memorial Day (WMD) ceremony. Some have gathered around the WMD monument at the Bethlehem Rose Gardens every year since 1991 to remember a friend, coworker or relative who died as a result of a jobsite injury or disease.

For thirty-five years, the Rose Gardens has served as a fitting place to honor fallen workers. However, the serene seven and one-half acre park at Union Blvd. and Eighth Ave. in Bethlehem was not local labor leaders' initial choice for the monument. They originally envisioned a different site and a different statue that would allude to the tragedy of workers dying on the job, while simultaneously having an uplifting quality. The transformation of their vision into the imposing eight-foot tall, 2,500-pound WMD statue that now stands nestled among dozens of rose bushes, serves as a testament to their perseverance and dedication. Despite facing challenges that threatened to derail the project, the realization of this memorial underscores the unwavering commitment to honor those who lost their lives while at work. It also serves as a benchmark for future labor leaders to remember the ultimate sacrifice paid by thousands of local workers who died in a workplace tragedy. The monument's journey from concept to reality, therefore, is more than just a story about a statue.

During his eight-year presidency, Ronald Reagan led an assault on the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the federal agency responsible for the enforcement of safe and healthy working conditions. He cut staffing levels, stopped research projects and appointed an OSHA administrator who opposed the stated mission of the agency. When Reagan left office in 1989, estimated workplace fatalities reached as high as 11,000 deaths annually. The AFL-CIO hoped that newly-elected President George H.W. Bush would resuscitate OSHA and renew its historic obligation to workplace safety that Reagan sought to kill. To aid in OSHA's revival, the national labor federation scheduled its first nationwide WMD observance on April 28, 1989. The date had historic significance: April 28 marked the day when OSHA began its enforcement in 1971.

Amid the AFL-CIO's push to establish April 28 as WMD, developments closer to home undoubtedly spurred interest in creating a local memorial to workplace fatalities. "Steel deaths raise questions on plant safety," declared the January 7, 1990 *Allentown Morning Call* on its front page. The news article reported that sixteen workers died in accidents at Bethlehem Steel's local mill from January 1980 to October 1988, a fatality count that ranked as one of the highest in any U.S. steel plant in the 1980s. According to the *Morning Call*, a local union official questioned why the South Bethlehem plant had such a poor record.

"I'd like to say it's poor housekeeping or too much overtime, but I can't prove that," said Pete DePietro, president of United Steel Workers #2600. "It's really rough. If I could link it to any one condition, then I think we could solve our safety problem."



First concept for the Workers' Memorial Day monument.

Designed by Joe Wilfinger and Howard Brisch, the 5½-foot, tubular stainless-steel figurine, with a "black steel shadow on a 7-foot by 3-foot granite slab, stood in front of a fully enclosed eternal flame in the background. Labor leaders eventually discarded the concept, but they kept the inscription, "Dedicated to those injured or killed in the workplace," for the Rose Gardens monument.

The following day, another front-page *Morning Call* headline declared "To families of those who die at work, OSHA fines a joke." The news article reported that since 1980 OSHA had fined Bethlehem Steel's local plant \$70,650 for safety violations, yet company officials paid only \$28,355 in penalties, a sixty percent reduction. Their successful strategy at negotiating reductions, the *Morning Call* wrote, represented a practice increasingly common among businesses fined by the federal safety agency. The penalty reductions offered further evidence of Reagan's pro-business interests over working-class Americans, and the news article's exposé on Bethlehem Steel and OSHA undoubtedly caught the attention of DePietro.

DePietro, who also served as president of the Northampton County Labor Council, told the *Morning Call* a week later that his council's agenda for 1990 included honoring workers injured or killed on the job. "A focus on the April 28 Workers' Memorial Day will be of utmost importance," he said. "We want to try to make Workers' Memorial Day a day that every citizen recognizes." He added that the council planned to coordinate with the AFL-CIO and hold a ceremony "with a focus on those men and women injured or killed in Lehigh Valley workplaces."

DePietro immediately reached out to Bethlehem Mayor Ken Smith, Easton Mayor Salvatore J. Panto, Jr. and county Executive Gerald E. Seyfried for their support in establishing a memorial in Northampton County. "Please become part of a committee to make this (WMD) memorial a reality," he wrote to them on February 2, 1990, encouraging their attendance in Mayor Smith's office on February 13. Neighboring Lehigh County had its own labor council and had other ideas for a WMD tribute. The two labor councils merged in 2000, renaming the new organization as the Lehigh Valley Labor Council.

Other Northampton County Labor Council delegates, including Gail Meyer, Eastern District Council of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, helped DePietro gain the labor and community support needed. DePietro also reached across the labor-management divide and welcomed Bethlehem Steel Corp. official James Bradney to join the effort.



Top: Northampton County Labor Council's Gail Meyer addressed the crowd at the first Workers Memorial Day (WMD) ceremony in Northampton County on April 28, 1990. Roughly one hundred people gathered at the Steel Workers' Van Bittner Hall, 53 East Lehigh St., Bethlehem. Their attempt to erect a memorial at the site met opposition from the Bethlehem City Center Authority, a municipal agency that owned the land. The man on the far left is unknown, but behind Meyer (from left to right) is William Werkheiser, John Werkheiser, PA state Sen. Jeanette Reibman, Northampton County Executive Gerald Seyfried, and PA state Rep. Bob Freeman.

Below: Meanwhile, the Lehigh County Labor Council held its first WMD ceremony at the Allentown Labor Temple Bldg. 124-126 North Sixth St., Allentown. About fifty people attended.

The Lehigh County Labor Council and the Lehigh Valley Building Trades joined the Northampton County Labor Council in June 1990 to fundraiser for a monument, and the three labor groups agreed the following month to locate it in the Bethlehem Rose Gardens in West Bethlehem.



By the end of February 1990, a WMD committee formed with County Executive Seyfried, Northampton County Labor Council delegates and representatives from Bethlehem and Easton. DePietro explained to the *Morning Call* that labor council delegates hoped "to get permission to erect the memorial on a grassy strip just south of the United Steel Workers hall along West Lehigh Street." He expressed optimism that "within a year the memorial will be built."

DePietro based his optimism on several factors. Bethlehem Mayor Smith and city council supported the memorial and its location on the proposed site. The city had also previously approved two other nearby memorials, the Japanese Tea House aside the city library and the Philip Fahy Memorial in honor of a police officer fatally gunned down in 1969. Finally, local enthusiasm for the project swelled, which DePietro acknowledged at a March 15 meeting as he possessed a list of 238 workplace fatalities in Northampton County.

The WMD committee presented their plans for a memorial to Bethlehem City Council on April 3. According to the *Bethlehem Globe-Times*, the monument called for a 5½-foot, tubular stainless-steel figurine, with a "black steel shadow on a 7-foot by 3-foot granite slab, with a fully enclosed eternal flame in the background. The slab would bear the inscription, 'Dedicated to those injured or killed in the workplace.'" DePietro told the *Globe-Times* that he hoped city council would approve the proposal in time for a groundbreaking ceremony on April 28.



Unveiling of the WMD model, January 30, 1991. At a ceremony hosted by the Brotherhood of Electrical Workers #1600, Trexlertown, sculptor Zenos Frudakis unveiled his WMD model from sketches reviewed by local labor leaders, including (left to right) Northampton County Labor Council President Pete DePietro, Lehigh Valley Building Trades President James Filyac, Lehigh County Labor Council President Frances Polgar, and James Bradney, Bethlehem Steel's director of Human Resources.

As expected, city officials backed the WMD proposal but a local preservation advocate raised objections at the meeting. The president of the Bethlehem Historic District Association said that "committees don't design artwork," and argued that, because the memorial would stand in a high-visibility area, the city should hire an artist to design the memorial. The design also had to meet the approval of the city's Board of Historical and Architectural Review because the memorial would be located in the city's historic district.

(continued next page)

Mayor Smith countered that the Northampton County Labor Council only wanted approval of the memorial's concept. City councilman Jack Lawrence wanted a hands-off approach to the project. "In the union's minds, they know what they want," he explained. It's not up to council." He elaborated that the city would be walking a "slippery slope" if it dictated what type of memorial should be installed. City council President James Delgrosso referred the WMD proposal to Charles Brown, the director of the city's Parks and Public Property Committee, for review. Brown approved the project.

A few days later, the WMD project faced another obstacle. The proposed site for the memorial was owned by the Bethlehem City Center Authority, a bond-financing agency formed in the 1960s to finance the construction of Bethlehem's City Hall and library complex at 10 East Church St. The authority had rejected the proposal, reported the April 12 *Globe-Times*, because "approving the plan could set a precedent for other groups to request memorials elsewhere on the site."

DePietro had good reason to be disappointed, and it wasn't solely because he saw it as a setback to the city's blue-collar heritage. According to the *Globe-Times*, the steelworkers had donated the tract of land proposed for the WMD statue to Bethlehem when the city began construction of its City Hall and library complex in 1967. Bethlehem City Center Authority conceded that fact, but its members confessed to being "unfamiliar with the settlement reached when the property was donated." The authority expressed its endorsement of a WMD project, but suggested its advocates find another site.

DePietro grew frustrated. He and his fellow labor delegates had considered other locations for the memorial, but they proved unsuitable. Some were not in a high-visibility area. One location involved placing the monument on the local steelworker headquarters' property, but the WMD committee opposed that option as it would result in an exclusive identification of the memorial with the union. DePietro had repeatedly described the memorial as dedicated to all workers, non-union or union, who died on the job. In an April 13 editorial, the *Globe-Times* editor rebuked the City Center Authority. "In the interest of fairness, and to honor the many workers who built this region, and who have prospered and suffered with the Lehigh Valley over the years, the authority should reconsider its vote in time for April 28 – Workers Memorial Day."



Workers Memorial Day, April 28, 1991 at the Bethlehem Rose Gardens. About 350 people, including Pete DePietro (far left), applauded the unveiling of the WMD statue. Bill George, President of the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO, (far right in the white hat and coat), helped Frances Polgar, Lehigh County Labor Council, remove the blue tarp. Speakers took turns reciting the names of the 614 known workers who had died on the job.

Another obstacle followed, throwing more confusion over the WMD project. The state's Sunshine Law required legal advertising for a publicly-held government meeting. The Bethlehem City Center Authority had violated the law when they rejected the WMD project because they failed to advertise the meeting. Both the *Morning Call* and *Globe-Times* reported on April 19 that Bethlehem City Council voted unanimously urging the authority to properly advertise another meeting and hold another vote on the project. "I don't want this thing fought out in the newspaper; that's what's happening now," said one authority board member.

While awaiting word whether Bethlehem City Center Authority would re-schedule another vote, DePietro and the Northampton County Labor Council held its first WMD ceremony on April 28 outside Van Bittner Hall, the local steelworkers' headquarters at 53 East Lehigh St., Bethlehem. According to the *Easton Express*, a small bell rang out 305 times for each known fatality recited during the ceremony, while one hundred people surrounded the proposed WMD statue designed by Joe Wilfinger and Howard Brisch. The Lehigh County Labor Council also held a WMD ceremony in front of the Allentown Labor Temple Bldg., headquarters of the council, at 124 North Sixth St., Allentown. Roughly fifty people attended the event officiated by council president Robert Kohler.

With no word on re-scheduling another vote, the Northampton County Labor Council hired Allentown attorney Aaron Matte "to study jurisdictional and legal questions" surrounding the Bethlehem's City Center Authority's rejection of the WMD project. The authority scheduled a revote for May 17, responding to mounting pressure from the mayor, city council and the labor council. One authority member felt "unjustly criticized" since the initial vote, according to the *Morning Call*, and told the newspaper that "the labor council has the mayor, council and the media on its side." The authority upheld its monument ban during the revote, a decision that could not be overturned because of its charter established in the 1960s. DePietro shared his frustrations with reporter Dan Hartzell after the meeting. "We'll have to get our heads together and reassess the situation."

Meanwhile, the Lehigh County Labor Council had watched their neighboring council's struggle with increasing interest. Council delegates approved co-sponsoring the WMD project with their Northampton County brothers and sisters at their June 29 general membership meeting. "I feel with a combined effort we can do a much more impressive and bigger and better tribute," said Frances Polgar, executive vice-president of the Lehigh County Labor Council to the *Globe-Times*. Meyer, chairwoman of the memorial committee, agreed. "Many, many businesses span the two-county area. . . . A Lehigh Valley Workers memorial is definitely the proper thing to do." The Lehigh Valley Building Trades, an affiliation of local construction unions, also pledged their support.

The joint project gained further steam when area newspapers reported on July 20 that the labor organizations turned to the Bethlehem Rose Gardens at Union Blvd. and Eighth Ave. as a memorial site. Located in West Bethlehem, the Rose Gardens also resided in Lehigh County because the city's boundaries extend over two counties. It is "a good central location," Meyer said to the *Globe-Times* describing the gardens as a place "where people could park if they wanted to stop and visit the memorial and also a nice grassy area where people visit on a regular basis."

The *Morning Call* reported that the WMD committee had also scrapped the memorial's original design and commissioned two sculptors, Ben Marcune of Bethlehem and Zenos Frudakis, of Philadelphia. Within days, the project had support from both Lehigh and Northampton county officials. Mayors from the area's three major cities, the Whitehall Township Executive and

the two county executives met in Easton and pledged their assistance. "Lehigh, Northampton officials support workers memorial," declared a July 26 *Morning Call* headline.

The WMD committee held a breakfast fundraiser at the Holiday Inn, Routes 512 and 22 on September 12. Roughly one hundred representatives of labor unions, government and Lehigh Valley companies offered financial support for the project, with a goal to raise at least \$125,000. Money raised in excess of the monument's cost would be put in the newly-created Lehigh Valley Workers' Memorial Trust Fund to provide scholarships for children who lost a parent to a workplace accident, reported the *Globe-Times*. "The most important thing is to take care of the survivors," DePietro said. We need to "help the children of the deceased."

Frudakis estimated a cost of \$45,000 for the WMD statue, yet paying for the project proved easier than originally expected. In addition to the generosity from local unions and area officials, Bethlehem Steel announced it would donate as much as \$40,000 to the project. "This memorial can serve as a constant reminder that our jobs aren't complete until we return home safely," said Walter F. Williams, steel company CEO, to the *Easton Express* on October 2. A month later, Harrisburg also contributed to the project. "A plaque in the ground is not sufficient to recognize the workers of the Lehigh Valley," said state Sen. Jeanette Reibman to the *Globe-Times* on November 2. "The state legislature has access to legislative initiative grants for worthwhile projects, and this \$10,000 will be used for such a project." By early 1991, fundraising for the project totaled \$98,000.

Frudakis unveiled a model of the WMD statue at a reception hosted by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers #1600, in Trexlertown on January 30, 1991. Frudakis told the *Morning Call* that the WMD committee selected the final concept from several sketches he made. "We wanted it to be general enough so people could project their own feelings into it." Frudakis explained why this project felt especially gratifying. He told the *Express* that when his father emigrated from Greece, he held a job in an ore mine in the western United States. A device accidentally exploded, causing his father to lose an eye and all his teeth.

After receiving the completed WMD monument, union members from Carpenters #600 and Operating Engineers #542 finished installing it the Rose Gardens on April 27. "The bronze sculpture, a worker inside a circle pushing upward, has a universal quality," wrote *Morning Call* reporter Ron Devlin, in a front-page article the following day. "In a sense, it's as if the figure were shaping the Earth. Work, an elemental aspect of our being, is defining the world."

On April 28, 1991, about 350 people attended the first WMD event at the Bethlehem Rose Gardens. Speakers, twenty-seven in all, took turns reciting the names of 614 workers who perished in local workplaces, and a bell rang as each name was called out, transforming the ceremony into a mass graveside service. Local news accounts the following day suggested a great satisfaction among those who had persevered for a workers' memorial after more than a year of challenges.

Some of those who led the effort to establish a local memorial to workplace tragedies, such as Pete DePietro and Frances Polgar, have passed away. Yet their unwavering perseverance continues to inspire the current WMD committee, led by John Werkheiser. The committee conducts the annual WMD ceremony every April, has recorded nearly two hundred Lehigh Valley workplace fatalities since 1991, and annually publishes a book listing thousands of local deaths, some dating back to before the Civil War. The history of the WMD monument is more than just a story about a statue.



Mr. DOGE hits the jackpot

Elon Musk, who fired thousands of federal workers at Trump's Dept. of Government Efficiency, becomes world's first trillionaire

by Ron Ennis, Editor
Lehigh Valley Labor Council



It should have surprised no one when news media outlets announced in mid-June that Elon Musk had become the world's first trillionaire. He had stood as the world's richest person with a net worth around \$185 billion in January

2021 when he had surpassed Amazon founder Jeff Bezos. In the ensuing five-and-a-half year period, his fortune more than quintupled, culminating on June 12 when investors bought shares of his SpaceX's initial public offering, propelling his net worth past the \$1 trillion mark.

Right-wing media quickly defended Musk's otherworldly wealth, claiming he is a misunderstood humanitarian unlike the robber barons that ruled America's Gilded Age. "The idea that he is some Rockefeller mogul," said Johnny "Joey" Jones, a commentator on *The Fox Channel's* Big Weekend Show on June 13, "is not who he is at all." That is historically inaccurate as John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, Charles M. Schwab and other CEOs of that era also argued that they used their wealth to benefit the public, including the funding of philanthropic projects.

Other right-wing pundits claimed that Musk is a great boss who has made many of his employees rich. "Workers . . . receive stock options, which has allowed them to share in the company's success," declared a *Journal* editorial on June 13, adding that "union leaders and progressives" are wrong to think that "billionaires get rich by exploiting workers." Yet, Musk has a history of clashing with workers at companies he owns including Tesla, SpaceX and X (Twitter) Corp. The National Labor Relations Board had twenty-four investigations into his practices as of January 2025, and he championed the firing of thousands of federal employees while directing Donald Trump's Department of Government Efficiency.

Perhaps these pundits make these claims because they can't comprehend the size of a \$1 trillion fortune. Musk could spend \$1 million a day before running out of money 2,740 years later. But this is not just about enormous wealth; it is also about power.

Elon Musk funneled \$278 million into Trump's 2024 presidential efforts, while 100 of the nation's richest families spent \$2.6 billion during the campaign. He and his billionaire friends fund dark money groups and super PACs, pushing their anti-consumer, anti-worker agenda through backchannels and private deals, while turning elections into auctions, and candidates into clients.

Several states and municipalities have considered implementing a wealth tax. Even Lehigh County officials have considered a wealth tax. "I think in this country we should tax billionaires (but) we need to really be very smart and strategic about what a wealth tax at the local level could look like," said Lehigh County Executive Josh Siegel, according to the May 14 *WFMZ-TV* 69 post.

As Musk soars past the trillion dollar mark, the subject of a billionaire wealth tax is long overdue.



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Executive Board @ 7:00 PM – Delegate meeting @ 7:30 PM

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(One block east of the Whitehall Township Police Department)

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