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International Labor Officials Visit AFSCME's Rhode Island Council 94

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MAKING FRIENDS – A group of international labor officials visited Rhode Island Council 94 as part of an educational tour sponsored by the U.S. State Department. Most are shown here with Ken DeLorenzo, executive director of Council 94 (fifth from right, in back) and J. Michael Downey, president of Council 94 and Local 528 (third from right, wearing a light blue shirt). Photo Credit: Susan Petersen

A dozen international labor leaders, touring the United States to study organized labor at the invitation of the State Department, paid a visit this week to [AFSCME Council 94](#) in Rhode Island. The council is [the state's largest public employee union](#).

"I was very proud to be part of their tour," says J. Michael Downey, president of Council 94 and Local 528. He, along with other Council 94 and AFSCME International officials, answered the group's questions about the union's structure, operation and struggles for worker rights.

Asked about Council 94's [political activism](#), Downey described how members participate in phone banks, door-knocking and other get-out-the-vote efforts to

"elect people who have respect for workers."

Raed I.A. Sadeq, executive and programs director for the [Democracy and Workers' Rights Center](#) in Ramallah, Palestinian Territories, says the purpose of the tour (Aug. 21 through Sept. 11) was to learn "how organized labor is doing in the U.S." Before it began, he observed, "We thought that trade unions in the U.S. might be different in their struggle for social justice. Now, we see that their struggle in the U.S. – and in your union – is similar to the struggle of workers all over the world."

Sadeq says he was particularly happy to learn from AFSCME's Rhode Island council that there is a "powerful trade union movement" within the state.

The U.S. organized labor tour was arranged through the [International Visitor Leadership Program](#), the State Department's professional exchange program. According to its [website](#), the program "seeks to build mutual understanding between the U.S. and other nations through carefully designed short-term visits to the U.S. for current and emerging foreign leaders."

In addition to the Palestinian Territories, the international participants in the tour came from Afghanistan, Laos, Nigeria, Portugal, Romania and other regions.