



THE CENTRAL NEW YORKER

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WHAT MATTERS MOST: Creating the freedom to thrive

Randi Weingarten, President
American Federation of Teachers

America's once-thriving middle class did not appear out of thin air. Federal economic policy helped seed it: New Deal programs, the GI Bill and the National Labor Relations Act's enabling of union organizing all created conditions for shared prosperity and upward mobility—not for all Americans, to be sure, but for many. Today, the American economy has been described as an hourglass, with extreme wealth at the top, tens of millions of people struggling at the bottom and an ever-narrowing middle class. Our country built a robust middle class once before, and we can do so again.

The clearest line tracking the inversion from upward to downward mobility in the United States is this: As the percentage of workers in unions plummeted, inequality soared.

Many forces have conspired to erode union density—starting 50 years ago with a memo by Lewis Powell, a future U.S. Supreme Court justice. Powell crafted the blueprint for corporate political and economic dominance, which many in corporate America followed to the letter. From the breaking of the air traffic controllers' union in the 80s to Amazon's relentless campaign to defeat the recent union drive in Alabama, powerful forces have crushed workers' power. Today, Americans are twice as likely to have a Costco card as they are to have a union card.

Research by the Economic Policy Institute shows that the erosion of collective bargaining lowered the median hourly wage by 7.9 percent from 1979 to 2017. Millennials generally have lower earnings and wealth, and more student debt, than earlier generations. Working people are now losing about \$200 billion per year because of declining union coverage over the last four decades — with that money redistributed upward, to the rich.

Yet, even with much-reduced union density—34.8 percent of public sector workers, and only 6.3 percent of private sector workers, belong to unions—the union advantage is still plain to see. Union members have greater access to health insurance and paid sick days, and they are paid 11.2 percent more than their nonunion counterparts. The edge in wages is even greater for Black and Hispanic workers represented by a union (13.7 percent more and 20.1 percent more, respectively). Women in unions earn 30 percent more than nonunion women.

Public support for unions is the highest in nearly two decades, and nearly half of nonunionized workers would join a union if given the opportunity. Why don't American workers have more opportunities to join a union? Because many employers want to keep the balance of power in their favor and have used that power to fight union organizing drives and hack away at the worker protections in U.S. labor laws.

That is why the Protecting the Right to Organize Act is so important. Under the PRO Act, employers would no longer be able to retaliate against or fire workers who support union drives, or to engage in endless delays to prevent newly formed unions from reaching their first contract.

Working families need help from the officials we elect to represent us. Decades of anti-government propaganda have stoked Americans' distrust. But President Joe Biden is changing that, launching ambitious programs that provide solutions and support, and proudly declaring: "Help is here."

Biden's core economic strategy is threefold: rescue, jobs, and families. The recently passed American Rescue Plan is a lifeline for millions of Americans and for the country itself. Earlier this year, the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey found that nearly 81 million adults (35 percent) reported it was difficult to cover usual expenses. That figure rises to 41 percent for adults living with children. Some 22 million adults (11 percent) said their household sometimes or often did not have enough to eat, rising to 14 percent in households with children.

The American Rescue Plan will cut child poverty in half, extend aid to the unemployed, increase food benefits, help families pay their bills and keep a roof over their heads, and help states and local communities maintain schools and protect the jobs of people who provide essential services. The plan shows the power of government to be a force for good and to pave the way for a more equitable recovery. Polling shows that Americans—including Republicans — overwhelmingly support the legislation.

Now Congress must pass the American Jobs Plan, which will put millions of Americans to work in well-paying jobs and invest not only in traditional infrastructure, like roads and bridges, but also in clean water, high-speed broadband and infrastructure resilience from the effects of climate change. And Biden's American Families Plan is expected to center on childcare, universal pre-kindergarten, and paid leave to care for family members.

Every person in America deserves the freedom to thrive. That requires family-supporting jobs, rights at work, educational opportunities, a voice in our democracy and pathways to get ahead. A vibrant middle class must not be a thing of the past. This robust economic agenda will help rebuild it for the future.



*At the time of this publication, there is still uncertainty as to rescheduling our in-person meetings.
It is critical that we have your email on file.
Check our website and facebook page for updated info.*



From the President's Desk...

Loretta K. Donlon

This issue of *The Central New Yorker* has a special guest columnist, our national President of the American Federation of Teachers Randi Weingarten. As we read and worry about our strained economy every day, she gives us a history lesson that we all wish will be repeated. Her column appeared in a recent New York Times edition and is printed on the first page of this newsletter.

I would also like to remember two NYSUT activists who we lost recently, Phillip DelloStritto and William Scott.

Phil was a long time Director on the RC7 Board of Directors and never missed a meeting even though he had to drive from Auburn in Central New York's every changing weather. Beside his union work throughout his career in the Auburn School District, he was a professional photographer who could tell us he had shot weddings in most of the places we booked for luncheons. His stories, talent, and smile will be missed, but our RC 7 Logo, which he designed, will be a reminder of him for years to come.

Bill was the current president of the Syracuse Teachers Association and his unexpected death in late April shocked all of NYSUT. Bill had served in many positions in STA before becoming president - including faculty rep, Vice-President, NYSUT delegate, and negotiator. Most recently, he was elected to a statewide office at the 2020 NYSUT Representative Assembly. He represented Election Districts 7 and 8, the Central New York counties serviced by the Syracuse and Utica regional offices, as an At-Large Director.

Both men were remembered at the recent 2021 Representative Assembly which was conducted on Zoom with delegates from the 700 + locals that make up the New York State United Teachers. May they continue to guide and inspire us as we continue our union work.

IMPORTANT RC 7 ANNOUNCEMENTS

- The deadline for submission for one of RC 7's scholarships has been extended to May 31, 2012. Go to RC 7's webpage for more info or contact Lilli Rastegar at misslili13@hotmail.com.
- The minutes and video recording of RC 7's March meeting are posted on RC 7's webpage. Go to <http://www.nysutretireecouncil7.org/>
- RC 7's webpage has other important information on CNY ARA meetings. Contact Bill Spreter at wspreter@gmail.com for more info.

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NYSUT Retiree Council 7

NYSUT, AFT, NEA, AFL-CIO

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Loretta Donlon, ED 51 Director

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As a NYSUT retiree from a school in *Cayuga and Onondaga Counties*, you became a part of Retiree Council (RC) 7 of NYSUT. Through this group and your local chapter (if your local has one), you can stay informed and active as a union member and ensure your benefits are protected in retirement.

NYSUT has one of the most active and successful union retiree programs in the country. The NYSUT Retiree Services Program, part of Program Services, was established by NYSUT to help its retirees organize and to act as a service provider for those retiree groups. You can find additional information at NYSUT.org or this link: <https://www.nysut.org/members/retirees>

Is your information up-to-date with NYSUT?

If you have a new address, phone number, or email address, please contact Anne Marie Voutsinas, Retiree Services Consultant at AnneMarie.Voutsinas@nysut.org or leave a message @ 315-431-4040 ext. 40.

Join Us on **Tuesday, June 15, 2021** for our RC 7 ZOOM Meeting and Program
Meeting begins at 1:00 PM with a brief update of RC7's activities.
"Celebrating 100 Years of NYSTRS"
will be presented immediately following with
David P. Keefe, Retiree Trustee and Board President
Thomas K. Lee, Executive Director and Chief Investment Officer

This year marks the 100th year of the New York State Teachers' Retirement Systems. Among the best funded public pension systems in the country, NYSTRS has served the membership well in meeting their mission of providing retirement security for its membership. The featured speakers will discuss the history of the system which will include the asset allocation and investment strategies that have served the NYSTRS well for several years. They will also comment on the System's perspective on the hot topic of fossil fuel investment/divestment. There will be time for questions and answers with the speakers. Information for retirees who belong to the ERS pension system will also be shared – including ways to connect and ask questions.

To attend, simply send an email to Lilli Rastegar at misslilli13@hotmail.com with **RC 7 June meeting** in the subject line. You will receive a confirmation email with the zoom link. This seminar is open to all members of RC7 and the members of their household. Link will only be shared to email addresses of registered NYSUT members.

It's Time to Send in Your Participation Fee!

Participation fees are now being collected for 2021 – 2022.

Active membership in Retiree Council 7 is open to every NYSUT retiree of any NYSUT represented group in Election District 7. ED 7 is comprised of all units in Cayuga and Onondaga counties. Active members are those who have paid RC 7's participation fee of \$10 per year and, if required by the local, payment of local retiree fees. **Associate membership** is open to the spouses of active members.

Please mail membership form with your \$10.00 check payable to **NYSUT RC 7 to:**

RC 7 Membership Chair NYSUT Regional Office
 4983 Brittonfield Pkwy E. Syracuse, NY 13057

Retiree Council 7 Membership Form 2021 - 2022

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Phone _____
 Email _____
 District retired from _____
 Position _____

We Remember ...



Bill Scott
 STA President,
 Syracuse

West Genesee

Alice Davern
 Richard (Red) Flaherty
 Joanne Gifford
 Jean Marie Whelan

OCM BOCES

Gayle Lawler
 John Ott +OCC

Liverpool

Carol Carr
 Helen Duda
 Alexander Pregnar
 Clement Terino, Jr.
 Jane Woods



Phil DelloStritto
 RC 7 Director,
 Auburn

East Syracuse-Minoa

Regina Beck
 William Butler
 Mark Garvey
 Mary Kinsella
 Marianne MacDonald
 John Salmonsén
 Sharon Schalle

Jordan Elbridge

Barbara Corbett
 Delores May

Lafayette

Lynn Estes

North Syracuse

John Kopf
 Rosemary Mastroleo
 Michael Port
 Karen Seymour
 Marguerite Shaffer
 Ann Stiner
 Virginia Weston

Fayetteville-Manlius

Richard Johnson

Fabius-Pompey

Edwin Bobbette

Westhill

Anita Fini
 Kathleen Tompkins

Port Byron

Anthony Scro

Marcellus

Margaret McNally

Syracuse

M. JoAnne Burgan
 Eleanor Canino
 Margaret Celano
 William Cloonan
 Kathleen Dwyer
 Diallo Elliott
 Catherine Flynn
 Abraham Gabriel
 Josephine Gillette
 Jacquelyn Griffin
 Maureen Hewitt
 Walter Hynnyk
 Pasquale (Patsy) Leo
 David W. Lochner
 Mary Lou McCloskey
 Donna Millard
 Helene Nesterowicz
 Mary Kay Sakran
 William Scott
 Virginia Stamey
 Concetta Tuori
 Rose Vallet
 Patricia Waelder
 Gloria Williams
 Charles Wink

VOTE-COPE and Your Political Action Saved the Day!

Bill Spreter, RC 7 2nd Vice President

Because of the pandemic the state of New York was facing a disaster. We were #5 in unemployment nationwide during the pandemic. We were #2 in COVID deaths. We were #1 in economic inequality. And, we lost some \$62 billion in revenue. A crisis in education funding loomed.

That disaster was averted because of NYSUT's VOTE-COPE and political action. We elected a state senate and assembly that actually raised revenue from the wealthiest New Yorkers and corporations. In addition, Vote/Cope funded our leadership at the Federal level to pass the American Rescue Plan that delivered \$100 billion to the state of New York. The only way that happens is through political action backed by VOTE-COPE dollars from our members.

Think about this. The Governor, who has enormous power to set the state budget, was ready to cut funding for schools. Layoffs and cuts to programs would have occurred. Because of our VOTE-COPE dollars and political action we prevented this. We elected a veto proof Assembly and Senate. The Governor's hands were tied. And, what did we get for our work?

- a \$3 billion increase in K-12 aid
- a \$1.4 billion increase in Foundation Aid over the next three years at least a 2% increase for every district in the state
- a \$105 million full day pre-k funding to 210 districts.

Remember, too, that we managed a \$14.4 million increase in community college base aid, an increase of \$1 billion in capital aid for SUNY and CUNY, and provisions to protect retirees' health care. Moreover, VOTE-COPE has more work to do to fight for tenure improvements, APPR, testing, workplace safety during the pandemic, and improving pensions. And, VOTE-COPE funds may be used to support a school budget and/or candidates for the Board.

Property Tax breaks and Personal Income Tax breaks were included in the budget. NYSUT has advocated for a Circuit Breaker Property Tax break for homeowners. This year, the legislature included a modest proposal that gives a \$250-\$350 break for homeowners who qualify. Moreover, a small Personal Income Tax break is added for the middle class.

There is nothing that is on our list that our members would not want. That's why contributions of \$5, \$10, \$20 per paycheck are so necessary. That minor sacrifice of funds could mean your job, your pension, your health and safety. That is worth it!

Give now to maintain the progress we have made.



nysut
A Union of Professionals

It is important that we receive the original form so we can accurately credit your contribution.

Please keep a copy for your records.

VOTE-COPE is the New York State United Teachers' political action fund.
Contributions or gifts to VOTE-COPE are not deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purposes.

*To contribute through pension deduction, please complete the bottom section.
If you wish to make a direct contribution by check, please use this middle section.*

Return the form to your local VOTE-COPE volunteer:

If you prefer, or if there is no name and address listed above, you may mail your form directly to:

**VOTE-COPE
P.O. Box 295
Canajoharie, NY 13317-0295**

VOTE-COPE Pension Deduction Authorization Card

The undersigned authorizes the New York State Teachers' Retirement System (NYSTRS) or the New York State Employees' Retirement System (NYSERS) to deduct from each of my regular defined-benefit pension payments the sum of \$10, \$5 or Other \$____ (per month) and to forward that amount to VOTE-COPE, c/o NYSUT, 800 Troy-Schenectady Road, Latham, NY 12110. I understand that this monthly amount will continue to be deducted until revoked by me in writing.

Such guidelines are merely suggestions. NYSUT members are free to contribute more or less than the guidelines suggest, and NYSUT will not disadvantage anyone by reason of the amount of their contribution or decision not to contribute. Contributing to VOTE-COPE is voluntary, and NYSUT members may refuse to contribute to VOTE-COPE without reprisal. Contributing to VOTE-COPE is not a condition of membership in any labor organization. VOTE-COPE may use the money it receives to make political contributions and expenditures in connection with federal, state and local elections.

I expressly acknowledge and understand that the deduction, as specified above, be withheld monthly and that NYSUT will transmit this authorization to the appropriate retirement system. I hereby certify to NYSTRS and NYSERS that I am a member of NYSUT, an employee organization entitled to receive union deduction payments as provided by law.

Name _____ Pension # _____ www.nysut.org/votecope
 Phone # _____ Date _____
 Signature _____
 Local from which you retired _____

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Contributions or gifts to VOTE-COPE are not deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purposes.

Is your information up-to-date with NYSUT?
 If you have a new address, phone number, or email address, please contact Anne Marie Voutsinas, Retiree Services Consultant at AnneMarie.Voutsinas@nysut.org or leave a message @ 315-431-4040 ext. 40.

Not sure where to start with your summer to-do list?

Whether it's assisting NYSUT members with everyday essentials, important choices about insurance needs, or making prudent decisions about financial and legal concerns, NYSUT Member Benefits can help.



Scan the QR code below to learn more about the following endorsed programs and services.

Saving you money: MB Discounts & Deals

With the Member Benefits Discounts & Deals program, NYSUT members can save up to 50% at more than 700,000 merchants nationwide (including thousands throughout New York State). Save on groceries and food delivery; restaurant dine-in or takeout; gasoline, oil changes and vehicle maintenance; clothing and shoes; and much more. You can even request that your favorite merchant join the network.

Saving you money: Every \$\$\$ counts

Whether your summer plans include home renovations, replacing or upgrading appliances, getting a new car, stocking up for the return to school, or even just hanging out and enjoying some time off, Member Benefits has a variety of endorsed programs -- Purchasing Power, Buyer's Edge Inc., Office Depot/OfficeMax, Bose, Powell's Books -- that might be able to minimize the impact on your wallet and maximize your enjoyment of the all-too-fleeting summer months.



Protecting your family: Insuring yourself and your family

Member Benefits endorses a number of competitive insurance programs that are available to NYSUT members. These include auto/home/renters, life, disability, long term care, dental, vision, and even pet insurance. Some of these programs are also available to or cover spouses/domestic partners of members, dependent children, dependent parents, and grandparents. Most offer payroll & pension deduction as payment options.

Planning for the future: Have a plan for wherever life takes you

It's never too early or too late to make a plan. Just starting a career or looking at retirement? Beginning to pay off loans or building a nest egg? Looking to buy a new home or refinance the one you're in? Welcoming a new child or adopting? Now would be a good time to look into the ways to put a plan in place or make adjustments to your existing one. Explore the Member Benefits Financial Learning Center for assistance; while you're there, check out our Legal Service Plan and Financial Counseling Program.

NYSUT Member Benefits offers dozens of programs and services that are available to NYSUT members and their families, including the following options:



To learn more about Member Benefits-endorsed programs & services, visit memberbenefits.nysut.org, call 800-626-8101 or scan the QR code above.

For information about contractual endorsement arrangements with providers of endorsed programs, please contact NYSUT Member Benefits.

May/June '21