

NYSUT LEADER

A NEWSLETTER FOR LOCAL LEADERS

Closing in on April 1, signs of budget progress

As observers noted state budget negotiators might come close to meeting the April 1 deadline, it's apparent grassroots action, letters and rallies are having an impact.

The fact Gov. Paterson decided to forego his proposed "nuisance" taxes — using federal stimulus money to cover that revenue — is a sign that serious negotiations are under way and that state leaders are listening to the public.

Polls clearly show people did not support the taxes on things like sugared sodas. But the polls did show people support increasing personal income taxes on the wealthy.

A big part of the public pressure comes in the form of NYSUT-backed letter campaigns, rallies all over the state and lobby days that have brought hundreds to Albany to share stories of the impact of state budget decisions in their communities.



UFT activists gather in Albany for lobby day.

It is crucial to urge members to keep sending NYSUT e-letters from the Action Center at www.nysut.org to state representatives.

Following up on the higher ed and then the UFT lobby day on St. Patrick's Day, March 24 is this year's second NYSUT Committee of 100.

Hot issues for the volunteer lobbyists-for-a-day will include the fight to

restore funding to the state's 132 teacher centers. Leaders and members can keep up the momentum from the lobby day by sending faxes and letters from the NYSUT Web site. Proposed cuts to higher education also will be challenged by union activists at the Capitol. The message is that the cuts would harm students, damage the public system and hurt the state's economy — long and short term.

Of course, the grassroots lobbyists also will be advocating Fair Share Tax Reform. A recent NYSUT poll indicated that 79 percent of voters, regardless of income level, support the surcharge. And nearly half the respondents making more than \$250,000 a year were willing to pay more taxes to support public schools. Check out this Working Families video on the tax issue: www.youtube.com/watch?v=43oygP5X8F4

Call the Hot Line as Tier 5 heats up

NYSUT leaders and activists are urging local leaders to ask members to call the AFL-CIO Legislative Hot Line at 877-255-9417 and tell elected officials to oppose the Tier 5 retirement plan. The NYSUT Web site, www.nysut.org, has an action letter members can send with a few clicks.

Union legislative analysts say the Tier 5 proposal will require greater contributions from middle-class families over a longer period of time in exchange for diminished retirement eligibility and inferior retirement benefits. They say these changes will not save taxpayers a single dime over the near term and will provide only marginal savings over the longer term.

More specifically, this legislation

would increase employee contributions; increase vesting from five to 10 years; increase minimum age for retirement to 62; and reduce the final average salary pension factor from 2 percent to 1.66 percent.

The plan would severely hamper the ability of public schools, colleges and universities to attract and retain quality educators, analysts said.

Join retirement systems now

The Teacher-Members on the state TRS board advise part-time members — if they have not done it already — to sign up for the pension system now as a Tier 4 member. If Tier 5 were included as a part of the budget bill, it could soon be too late.

Union weighs in on Obama proposals

NYSUT President Dick Iannuzzi and AFT President Randi Weingarten laid out the union's position on merit pay in response to President Barack Obama's address on education to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

In an article from an editorial board meeting with the *Jamestown Post Journal*, Iannuzzi was cited saying Obama's proposal to reward teachers for improved student achievement is intriguing, but only if the extra money is distributed at a schoolwide level and not to individual teachers.

To see the entire article, which also addresses national standards and charter schools, go to the Leader access area of www.nysut.org. You'll also find a link to AFT President Weingarten's comments from the *Chicago Sun-Times*.

New COBRA subsidy available for laid-off workers

As part of the federal stimulus, workers laid off from Sept. 1, 2008, through Dec. 31, 2009, will be eligible for a 65 percent federal subsidy of their COBRA premium. They are entitled to the subsidy for up to nine months or until they are eligible for coverage under another employer's plan or Medicare.

For more on this from the Department of Labor, go to www.dol.gov/ebsa/COBRA.html. This item from Segal Company, a benefits consultant, provides further discussion: www.segalco.com/uploads/9b156b028b0bd867a1bb2e025d4d268b.pdf.

March 25 deadline for health care forum

NYSUT's Professional Issues Forum on Health Care will be held May 2 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Albany. The registration deadline is March 25. Conference and registration materials are available at www.nysut.org. Options include online registration or downloading forms for return by mail. For information, contact Marianne Perry in Program Services at 800-342-9810, ext. 6297.

Editors: Benefits article mailed

Local editors should have received the fourth installment of the NYSUT Member Benefits' 2008-09 "Help for Newsletter Editors" program, which was an ad about the endorsed discount plans.

The instruction memo and ad also appear in PDF format for downloading in the Member Benefits Toolkit included in the password-protected Leader Access area of NYSUT's Web site, www.nysut.org. Locals that reprint the ad in their March or April membership newsletter and send a copy of the newsletter to Member Benefits will receive a \$100 reimbursement. For more information, call Member Benefits at 800-626-8101 or e-mail benefits@nysutmail.org.

Mailings scheduled in April

Members not yet participating in the Member Benefits-endorsed auto insurance program will receive information from MetLife Auto & Home. It describes many discounts in addition to a 12 percent savings with special group rates for NYSUT members. In-service members up to age 65 who have existing Member Benefits-endorsed term life insurance coverage, either purchased voluntarily or provided by their local association, benefit fund or employer, will receive information about the endorsed WrapPlan. This universal life insurance policy wraps around existing term life coverage to help offset decreases in or loss of term life insurance.

Tisch elected chancellor of Regents

Long-time Regent Merryl H. Tisch was elected chancellor of the Board of Regents last week. NYSUT leaders applauded the move, saying she has impressed educators with her strong advocacy for what children need to succeed. Read more about NYSUT's reaction to her election at www.nysut.org.

Use your ACCESS today

NYSUT's public messaging on the state budget is online at www.nysut.org/budget. Anyone can see that. If you receive the NYSUT Leader, you can go to the password-protected Leader Access area of www.nysut.org, which includes a Budget Advocacy Toolkit and much more.

To get this exclusive access, click on Leader Access on the left side of the home page at www.nysut.org. Plug in your membership identification number — found on your membership card — create a password and you will be able to get to this material geared to your union work.

Mailing to group plan purchasers in April

Any local association, benefit fund or employer that has purchased a NYSUT Member Benefits Trust-endorsed group benefit plan will receive a mailing from Member Benefits asking for assistance in material distribution. Federal law mandates the distribution of Member Benefits' Privacy Notice and Summary Plan Description to all participants covered under any Member Benefits-endorsed program, whether it be an individual voluntary program or a group-provided program. Sample materials will be in the mailing.

The Privacy Notice, SPD and Summaries of Material Modifications have been provided to NYSUT members and agency fee payers via *New York Teacher*, and those who opt out of receiving the paper receive these documents in the mail. However, all participants in group-provided plans may not be NYSUT members, which is why assistance is requested from plan purchasers to distribute these materials to non-members who are covered under any group plan and to new employees who are not covered by a NYSUT local association bargaining agreement.

Member Benefits wants to make this process as painless as possible. If purchasers prefer, they may provide Member Benefits with names and addresses of covered employees who are not members or agency fee payers, and Member Benefits will mail the SPD, SMMs and Privacy Notice directly to these individuals.

Compliance with these federal mandates requires this to be an annual process. Questions should be addressed to Member Benefits' Privacy Official, Betsy Porter, at 800-626-8101, ext. 1247.

Annual summary of material modifications

The March 19 issue of *New York Teacher* includes the annual NYSUT Member Benefits Trust Summary of Material Modifications. The SMM provides updates to the Summary Plan Description of 2006 and SMMs of 2007 and 2008. The SPD contains information about every benefit program endorsed by Member Benefits. Members who opt out of receiving the paper receive a copy of the SMM in the mail.

NYSUT LEADER

A NEWSLETTER FOR LOCAL LEADERS

NYSUT Leader is published biweekly September through June by New York State United Teachers at 800 Troy-Schenectady Road, Latham, NY 12110-2455. Telephone (518) 213-8000 and (800) 342-8810. Editor: Ned R. Hoskin. Co-editor: Leslie Duncan-Fotrell. Design/Layout: Jon Richard Flemming. Editorial support: Amanda Boespflug, Julie Malec. Mailed to NYSUT local presidents and newsletter editors, board members, committee members, convention delegates, and staff. Local unions may reprint all materials. Please credit the "NYSUT Leader." Available via e-mail on request to bthomas@nysutmail.org. Affiliated with AFT • NEA • AFL-CIO. Member, International Labor Communications Association, AFT Communications Network, Education Press Association of America.

Richard C. Iannuzzi
President

Alan B. Lubin
Executive Vice President

Maria Neira
Vice President

Kathleen M. Donahue
Vice President

Lee Cutler
Secretary-Treasurer

NYSUT® is a federally registered service mark of New York State United Teachers.



AFTCN

