

RC 12 General Membership Meeting- Monday, October 23, 2023 Otesaga Hotel Resort

President Stacey Caruso-Sharpe called the meeting to order with the Pledge of Allegiance and NYSUT's Policy Statement. It was followed by a moment of silence for the Israeli Crisis. Stacey stressed the necessity to reach out to anyone in emotional need as challenges of life continue to occur.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT - Stacey Caruso-Sharpe

The upcoming elections include judges, town council members, and mayors. It's important to pay attention to capital projects and area teacher organization suggestions. There are two propositions on the ballots, and it was suggested to vote yes for both. The first proposition makes debt of smaller districts (5%) equal to debt of larger ones (10%). NYSUT suggests that retired members consider running for board of education seats of their school districts. Groups of individuals are getting elected who are for banning books and espousing other challenging issues.

Donating to VOTE-COPE helps NYSUT find individuals to run for school boards and other positions who are educationally minded, support union rights, and encourage pension deductions from paychecks. The current task of Fixing Tier Six is in the forefront of necessary issues to support as well as support for school bus safety and health insurance issues. Before making changes to current Medicare plans, it is important to speak to someone who is knowledgeable about the changes. Once changes are made, individuals may have to pay out of pocket for their selections.

NYSUT is running a campaign to thank favorite educators online. Our union has also been the second largest corporate donor to Breast Cancer Awareness. Our members have done a beautiful job supporting this cause. It was also noted that this was LGBTQ Recognition Month.

VICE-PRESIDENT'S REPORT - Kathlene Lyman

Kathy attended the ED 51-53 Meeting. She received a list from NYSUT of names and addresses of retired individuals.

SECRETARY'S REPORT - Cathy Picciocca

Minutes of the May Regional Conference were placed on the tables for all to read. Maria Pacheco made a motion to accept the minutes as presented. Phyllis Nicolella seconded the motion. The minutes were accepted.

TREASURER'S REPORT - Dolores Talmadge

Due to technical difficulties, the wrong report was printed out. Yearly reports to the IRS will be made by November 1. Dolores wanted everyone to know that free COVID tests are available if needed.

DIRECTOR REPORTS

Vickie McGowan-Horan shared the benefits of using union stickers on vehicles.

Maria Pacheco shared that this was her first time at an RC 12 event. She expressed confusion regarding the different retirement organizations. Stacey explained that RC 12 is the only NYSUT retiree organization..

OUTLOOK/WEBMASTER - Carolyn Darkangelo

The next Outlook will be sent out in November. Carolyn also stressed that anything political needs to go through the President for approval.

ED 51-53 September 23, 2023 Meeting Summary - Jeanne Williams Bennett Retirees

now comprise 38% of NYSUT.

FIX TIER 6 is a major theme for NYSUT this year, and there is something in it for retirees, too. People in Tier 6 have to work until they are 63 years old for no penalty. Even if they have 30 years of teaching at age 55, if they retire, their pension will only be 48% of their final average salary.

The final average salary for Tier 6 is calculated using the last 5 consecutive years.

Let's look at actual dollars using the salary scale from one of our locals:

Assumption: I am 55 and have 30 years of experience and want to retire:

For Tiers I, II, III, IV, my pension will be \$53,212

For Tier V, it will be \$32,816

For Tier 6, it will be \$22,606

For retirees, our COLA (Cost of Living Adjustment) is based upon the first \$18,000 of our pension. The \$18,000 amount has not been raised in over 20 years. Therefore, we do not have a true COLA, and this amount needs to be increased.

State of Health Insurance for NYSUT locals (Jonathan Rubin)

*55% of locals have same coverage for inservice and retired members

*15% of locals have Medicare Advantage plans (formally called Medicare Part C)

*30% of locals do NOT have any retiree coverage at all (or it ends at 65 when the retiree receives Medicare. Some have plans where unused sick days are used to pay for retiree health insurance until depleted.

*Downstate locals are reimbursed for Medicare Part C.

Moms for Liberty

Moms for Liberty is an organized group of anti-education activists pushing book bans and discriminatory policies in our schools. After decades of parents and teachers working as a team to educate children, groups like Moms for Liberty have attempted to break this bond by labeling teachers as the enemy.

They portray themselves as a "grassroots" movement that is focused on protecting students. However, they are actually part of a nationwide network with ties to other extreme and political groups including the Proud Boys, the Three Percenters, the Heritage Foundation, and the Koch network. Their tactics involve slandering teachers on social media and in public, mischaracterizing proven pedagogy, and grandstanding at school board meetings. Moms for Liberty is a misnomer. They are anti-educator and anti-union. Moms for Liberty are in New York State so all of us need to be aware of this group. We need to combat Moms for Liberty. Where they won seats in elections, it was because no one ran against them. Five of the seven of the most important Congressional races in the country are here in New York State.

We need to increase our Vote Cope contributions. Currently, only 17% of retirees donate to Vote Cope. The average donation is \$8. On the tables are pension deduction forms and a fact sheet regarding VOTE COPE. One of the statistics is that 60 NYSUT members were elected or reelected to school boards. Maybe you would like to consider running! See Stacey if you are interested as she is a member of her local school board.

NYSUT RETIREE SERVICES CONSULTANT - Sheryl Baker-Delano

Fix Tier Six will be a multi year mission and has a website FixTierSix.org

Sheryl shared that one third of NYSUT members are retirees. In the past, Tier Three was fixed with Tier Four. Approaching new legislators gets the attention needed to help this challenge. It is also suggested to up contributions to VOTE-COPE to \$6 a month.

The NYSUT Legal Plan costs \$50 a year where members can have wills and POA developed for free. Elder care riders are available along with trusts for homes.

Being a member of NYSUT provides discounts for cars. Everyone is invited to update personal information. Union for Life flyers are available on tables. There are no dues for retirement. Everyone is encouraged to work with local unions and work together.

Michael Rowan, Staff Director for the NYSUT Capital Region, spoke about the value of retirees in the 2024 election year.

SOCIAL COMMITTEE

NYC trip March 27 - Broadway show *Harmony* - Contact (518-366-4545) Kathlene Lyman

June 10-14 Cape Cod, Massachusetts, including Hyannis, Plymouth, Boston \$849 per person, single \$1,108

September 16-19 Newport, Rhode Island \$729 Double Occupancy, single \$968

Wendy Wilson asked if members would be interested in Pirates of Penzance at Glimmerglass next summer. More information will be found on the RC 12 website <https://rc12.ny.aft.org/>

STATEWIDE SENIOR ACTION - Kathlene Lyman

The Annual Convention was in September, and some of our members attended. A forum and organizing meeting will be held on November 2, 3:30-7:30. The New York State Health Act and Crisis of Long-term Care Forum. For more information contact StateWide Senior Action at 518-436-1006.

NEW YORK STATE ALLIANCE FOR RETIRED AMERICANS

The Capital District Chapter is holding an important meeting and conversation with U.S. Rep. Paul Tonko on Monday, October 30, at 10AM at NYSUT Headquarters.

NYSARA Biennial Convention - May 18, 2023 NYSUT Headquarters - Jeanne Williams-Bennett

NYSARA - New York State Alliance for Retired Americans

Keynote speaker Lisa Cutler, ARA Director of Communications. Lisa was the communications director and press secretary for Senators John Glenn (Ohio) and Harris Wolford (Pennsylvania), as well as Energy Secretary Bill Richardson and Labor Secretary Robert Reich. Effective Political Communication in descending order:

- A.) Face to face meetings make the most difference. Meeting in Washington, DC is #1, followed by a State Office meeting, A district office meeting is effective but a little less effective than the other two.
- B.) Send a letter - 60%
- C.) Phone calls - 57% from district - don't call legislators out of your district
- D.) Emails - somewhat less effective. The first email you send is very influential; the second is somewhat influential.
- E.) Op-eds in a local and national newspaper 20% - 49%
- F.) Letters to editor of local newspapers 15% - 46%
- G.) Social media has dropped to the bottom of the list. These comments often don't reach politicians

*Nationalized issues are the hardest to influence (ex. House GOP budget)

*Close election/Tough district - often politicians are more responsive to constituent advocacy

*Local concerns outweigh party positions - ex SALT deduction (allows taxpayers to deduct state and local taxes from their federal income tax form.

Letters to the editor still work - they are read by editors and reporters, two groups that most elected officials care about.

Morning "clips" an email prepared by staff members with links to every mention of the elected official in the media.

What do editors look for?

Focus on one topic. If you have two topics, write a second letter.

Be clear and concise - approximately 200 words or less to make your point Be yourself - Unless you are a policy wonk, don't try to write like one.

Review and follow the submission guidelines.

Lisa gave us an example: (You might want to keep this letter in mind, considering the House proposals to cut Social Security and Medicare.)

Does Congresswoman _____ think that we retirees are rich? Doesn't she realize that we use our Social Security benefits to pay for things like food and prescription drugs?

Lastly, how to write an op-ed:

Op-Eds are short essays (usually 500 - 700 words) - they run opposite a newspaper's own editorials.

They allow the author to lay out an argument for or against an issue. Op-Eds DO get the attention of politicians Timing is critical! It is important to make a single point well. An example that Lisa used was to tell the readers why they should care. At the end of every few paragraphs, ask out loud, "So what? Who cares?" Will your suggestions make people healthier or more secure?

An example of a statement is: To be sure, Social Security needs to be strengthened, but not by cutting benefits or raising the retirement age. We can raise the cap on earnings. It's important to sign up for Monday Alerts at the following link: <https://nystate.retiredamericans.org/contact-us/email-sign-up/>

NEW PRESIDENT OF NYSUT - Melinda Persons

Melinda brought an energetic presentation to our membership. She began by stating that the conditions in public schools are challenging. Public Schools Unite Us is an important slogan to use.

-\$30,000,000 has been set aside for the Empire State Teacher Residency Program. Matching funds will be provided for local districts to create one- or two-year residency programs for graduate-level teacher candidates. Funded programs will involve SUNY, CUNY and private colleges partnering with public school districts to provide reduced or free tuition for teaching candidates, including books and fees, mentoring, and a stipend to cover living expenses.

-Workplace Violence Protection Act supports school staff, workplace violence, and protections. Videos can be found on youtube nysut workplace violence and protection videos.

-When schools opened this September, some classrooms were too hot to learn. 88 degree classrooms were recorded.

-State receivership laws need support. <https://www.nysut.org/news/2023/october/giffen-receivership> Supporting Proposition 1 will help this challenge.

-Swatting calls are traumatizing students on a regular basis. Unfortunately, most of these calls come from outside our country.

- In 2024, there is a new deal for higher education to help State Colleges, SUNY, CUNY, and underfunding.

- APPR still has to be decided through individual school districts.

- Fix Tier Six is necessary since 30 years identifies a career.

- The United States Surgeon General believes we need to protect the younger population and their use of cellphones in schools. There are numerous risks involved regarding social media.

- It is suggested to vote YES for Proposition 1 that will help smaller cities and their debt limit. Amsterdam and Johnstown are included with these school districts. Proposition 2 deals with sewer systems.
- It's unfortunate that some of the public does not trust public schools. Attempts are being made to weaken educational unions. The attempt to divide educators and parents is apparent. Bottom line there seems to be an effort by some to privatize public education. In four states(KY, TN, AR, FL) payroll deduction for teachers' union dues has been lost. Florida has lost 30% of their members due to this action. Four states are awarding universal vouchers. Competition in cyber charters is happening. Artificial Intelligence is being used to tutor children.
- There are three things we can do to help public education
 1. Everyone is invited to use the Action Team to help Fix Tier Six!
 2. Engage in your community's effort to educate attacks on public education.
 3. Pay attention to all political races. Individuals against public education are winning uncontested positions.

REGIONAL STAFF DIRECTOR - Michael Rowan

Mike stressed the importance that the need for a union is a life decision. Freedom Foundation is a union buster foundation. They attempt to entice our members to resign from our union. He reported that NYSUT continues to help support negotiations with little currently going on with health benefits.

Lunch was enjoyed by all and it was followed by a presentation by NYSUT and Many Threads One Fabric series Sticks and Stones: Understanding Implicit Bias and Stereotypes.

Respectfully submitted,
Cathy Picciocca
RC 12 Secretary