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Retiree Organizer

A NEWSLETTER FOR NYSUT'S RETIREE LEADERS

Celebrating decades of American social justice



Medicare turns 50: Mobile to fight privatization

Since 1965, Medicare has been our most successful health insurance program for Americans in retirement. It provides retirees with the ability to get annual health care screenings, see a doctor and obtain prescription drugs. NYSUT and its national affiliates have led the charge to celebrate Medicare's 50th birthday. The anniversary presents opportunities to educate members about this earned benefit and to mobilize them against recent congressional attempts to end Medicare's health coverage guarantees. It is also an opportunity to reach out and ensure our message of strengthening and defending Medicare is heard.

In recent years, the U.S. House of Representatives has voted to adopt the Paul Ryan Budget that would drastically cut Medicare benefits, privatize the program and raise the age at which recipients will qualify to collect their benefits. NYSUT will confront our elected representatives and Medicare's polit-

ical foes everywhere they turn. Here's what we are doing.

Action Plan:

2015 NYSUT "Protect Income Security" petition: We will deliver thousands of signatures to congressional offices that support us or are undecided on Paul Ryan's U.S. House budget.

Action Plan in collaboration with the National Alliance for Retired Americans:

- Congressional office visits
- New York Medicare birthday celebrations, rallies, concerts and marches. These events included a celebration and concert featuring Peter Yarrow, of



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The
**Retiree
 Organizer**

is published periodically for NYSUT's retiree leaders. Locals, chapters and retiree councils may reprint all *Organizer* content.

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Opening Pandora's Box?

New York state constitutional convention vote

A recent Siena Poll asked voters if they would support a constitutional convention. Sixty-nine percent said yes, a marked increase from the 58 percent in 2010.

"A constitutional convention could be problematic for union members," said NYSUT Vice President Paul Pecorale. "We need to organize now around this issue. I encourage all to read and be familiar with the 'Pandora's Box' piece below."

Pandora's Box – Get the facts about a Constitutional Convention

Under the New York State Constitution (Article 19, §2), every 20 years the people of the Empire State are asked a seemingly simple ballot question; "*Shall there be a convention to revise the constitution and amend same?*" These twelve simple words that will appear on the top of the ballot on Nov. 7, 2017, will have a huge impact on not just NYSUT members, but every citizen of the state.



NYSUT VP
 Paul Pecorale

From teachers and school staff, to the children who will be entering pre-K the very next year, all of us will have a stake in the outcome of this important

vote.

This document is designed to help you better understand the convention and amendment process, why it is important to you as a NYSUT member and what steps we will need to take as a union to protect our rights.

Constitutional Convention vs. Constitutional Amendments; What's the difference?

The state constitution can be amended in two ways. The first way to enact changes to the constitution is through the passage of individual bills by two separately elected state Legislatures (Article 19, §1). Bills such as this propose specific amendment questions,

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RECENT AND UPCOMING EVENTS

Retiree Advisory Committee... Sept. 17	RC 13.....Oct. 15
Retiree Contiguous ED 51-53 (At-Large) Meeting...Oct. 6-7	RC 14-16.....Oct. 16
	RC 9 (CVCR & SAD)...Oct. 19
	RC 5 & 6.....Oct. 27
NYSUT Regional Conferences	
RC 9 (Jeff-Lewis & FSNUR)Oct.14	

Medicare turns 50 ... Continued from page 1

Peter, Paul and Mary, in the Capital District, a march and parade in the Syracuse/Central New York region and a celebration and demonstration in New York City. Each of these events took place on July 30th commemorating the 50th anniversary of Medicare.

- Birthday card delivery to congressional offices of champions of Medicare and those who are against Paul Ryan's U.S. House budget

Materials NYSUT, the National Alliance for Retired Americans and the Medicare Rights Center will produce or distribute:

- Flier, *What is the Difference between Original Medicare and Medicare Advantage?* (Written by the Medicare Rights Center)
- Flier, *Baby Boomers Need More Help with Medicare Enrollment* (Written by Joe Baker, president, Medicare Rights Center)

- Flier, *Consult the Medicare Experts, Call the Medicare Counselor Hotline* (Operated by the Medicare Rights Center)
- Standardized publicity materials for events and rallies
- Sample press materials; media advisories, news releases, Op-Eds
- Articles and video resources through the Kaiser Family Foundation <http://kff.org/generations-medicare-at-50-years/>
- Letters to the Editor, Op-Eds and stories on how Medicare benefits our members (Medicare Turns 50 website where you can share your story at: www.Medicare50th.org)

For additional Medicare and Medicaid 50th Anniversary resources, visit the Kaiser Family Foundation's website at www.kff.org and the Medicare Rights Center at www.medicarerights.org.



50 YEARS



80 YEARS



Happy Anniversary!
Celebrating Decades of Social Justice Legislation

50th Anniversaries

Elementary & Secondary Education Act

April 11, 1965

Medicare

July 30, 1965

Medicaid

July 30, 1965

Voting Rights Act

August 6, 1965

Additional Social Justice Anniversaries of Note

80th Anniversary Social Security Act

August 14, 1935

25th Anniversary Americans with Disabilities Act

July 26, 1990

which then appear on the November ballot. Most recently this process was undertaken in 2013, when several constitutional amendments ranging from the expansion of casino gaming in New York state to the sale of specific tracts of land within the constitutionally protected Adirondack Park were voted on by the people. All but one, increasing the mandatory retirement age for state judges, was passed and became part of the state constitution. This process has been used 200 times since the last major constitutional revision in 1894.

The second process for amending the New York State Constitution involves holding a constitutional convention (Article 19, §2). The question of whether to undertake this endeavor must go before the voters every 20 years and allows for much wider modifications of the constitution than the single amendment process; including a full rewrite of the document. If the voters approve holding the convention, three delegates per state Senate District and fifteen at-large delegates are elected at the next scheduled general election. These delegates can include sitting members of the state Legislature, political party leaders or other office holders. The convention meets in Albany the following April for an unspecified duration, deliberates and then publishes its

suggested amendments. The proposed changes are then submitted to the voters, either individually or as a group, with another public referendum vote no sooner than six weeks after the adjournment of the convention. This process has been used nine times (1777, 1801, 1821, 1846, 1867, 1894, 1915, 1938 and 1967) to undertake major re-writes of the state



constitution. Some of these conventions succeeded with voters accepting the suggested changes, while other convention recommendations were soundly rejected by the voters as was the case in 1967.

Why is this important to me as a NYSUT member? What's at stake?

There are a lot of reasons why this issue is important to you, your families and the people you serve. First, the constitution establishes a basic organizational structure for state government. If changes are made that give too much power

to one branch, for example say the executive, then our system of self-governance will be upended.

Second, the constitution establishes the fundamental rights you enjoy as a citizen of New York state and as a public employee. Some of these include:

- Guaranteeing the right to a free public education (Article 11, §1);
- Prohibiting reductions in public pension benefits (Article 5, §7);
- Rights to workers compensation (Article 1, §18);
- Rights to be a member of a union and bargain collectively (Article 1, §17), and
- Requiring that the state provide for social welfare needs (Article 27, §1).

Third, the constitution sets the most important policy goals for the people of New York state, and thus, has an impact on every other law currently in place and on future statutes yet to come. For example, the 1967 convention was specially convened by an act of the Legislature a decade after the 20 year scheduled referendum was voted down in 1957. Following the 1967 convention, voters rejected the proposed changes which included proposed repeal to the "Blaine Amendment" which prohibits the use of state monies to be

used to assist religious schools. Had this repeal not been rejected by the voters, public education would look very different here in New York.

How do I help and who else will be with us?

The voters rejected the last required call for a constitutional convention in 1997, but the rejection was not by accident. Many groups worked together to convince voters that holding a convention was not in the best interest of the people of the state. Some of these included:

- Public and private organized labor;
- Environmentalists and con-

servationists who did not want to see the repeal of the “forever wild” provisions that protect environmentally sensitive areas;

- Advocates for public education at all levels;
- Social welfare advocates who will seek to maintain the requirement that New York state provide for the underprivileged;
- Fiscal conservatives who wanted to keep existing state debt limits in place; and
- Some government watchdog groups who just didn't want to “spend the millions of dollars to hold a party in Albany!”

All of these groups, and more, will need to work together again in 2017 to make sure voters understand just what could happen if we open up the state constitution to drastic changes through a convention.

Since 2017 is an “off” election year for the state Legislature as well as an “off” election year for presidential voting, we will need to concentrate our efforts on this important issue. So, get involved with your local, stay active with the political process starting today, get informed on the important issues surrounding a constitutional convention and be ready to work come 2017.

Meet new NYSUT Retiree Services Consultant Tracy Beatty, RC 1-3 & 44



NYSUT Retiree Services Consultant Tracy Beatty

Tracy Beatty graduated from Buffalo State College with a Bachelor of Science in French education and then received her master's degree from the University of Buffalo.

She was a French teacher for 33 years at Grand Island High School and during those years took students on many trips to France and Europe.

Beatty was active in her local union, Grand Island Teachers

Association, from the minute she received tenure. She worked her way up the ranks from building delegate to vice president to ultimately serving as president for 12 years of the GITA until her retirement in June 2014.

Because she knew she still wanted to be active in her union, Beatty attended her first retiree council meeting the month after retiring.

Beatty loves retirement. She loves to travel with Shawn, her husband of 25 years. She also loves to read and meet with her retiree friends for lunch. The best thing she likes about retirement is that she can do what

she wants when she wants.

Beatty accepted the position of Retiree Services Consultant for the Western New York Regional Office in March and is enjoying it very much. She feels that the union is going to be needed more than ever to support the rights of public school educators and just because she is retired doesn't mean she can't continue to fight the fight. She believes retirees are vibrant members who can still make a difference. And that, she says, is what she plans to do in her new position as retiree services consultant.

Barry Kaufmann elected NYSARA president

Barry Kaufmann was elected president of the 440,000 member New York State Alliance for Retired Americans at its biannual meeting on May 13 to replace long time Executive Director and President Dennis Tracey.

Kaufmann started his career in 1973 as a member of NYSUT's Poughkeepsie Public School Teachers' Association teaching health education to high school students in the city of Poughkeepsie. Throughout his teaching career he held many union positions including building representative, grievance chair from 1994 to 1999 and president from 1999 through his retirement in 2007. Kaufmann served on both the NYSUT and AFT policy councils, served as a vice president of the NYSUT Unity Caucus and chaired the Civil and Human Rights and Educational



Barry Kaufmann and NYSUT VP Paul Pecorale

Issues committees at the annual NYSUT Representative Assembly.

After 34 years in education, Kaufmann retired from teaching and went to work for the New York State AFL-CIO as executive assistant to President Dennis Hughes. In that position he implemented changes in governance of the Area Labor Federations and Central Labor Councils and of training and guidance in the strategic plan-

ning process that all local and regional labor organizations completed on an annual basis. During this time, Kaufmann had the opportunity to work with many statewide union leaders including secretary/treasurer of the NYS AFL-CIO, Terrence Melvin, (formerly the presidential assistant to CSEA President Danny Donohue).

Kaufmann retired from the NYS AFL-CIO in 2011 and has served as the treasurer of the Capital District Chapter of NYSARA. He volunteers for the Captain Youth and Family Services as a family development mentor for families in generational and situational poverty and does tax preparation for clients in the volunteer income tax assistance/tax counseling for the elderly program.

The value of union membership

By Karen E. Magee

***Editor's Note:** The following is a transcript of NYSUT President Karen E. Magee's WAMC commentary, which aired July 24.*

Driving on the Thruway recently, I saw a bumper sticker that made me smile.

The bumper sticker read: "Labor Unions: The folks who brought you the weekend, child labor laws, overtime, minimum

wage, pension security ... and more."

The point of that bumper sticker is to remind us that strong unions helped secure many of the rights we take for granted. The 40-hour work week, the minimum wage, family leave, health insurance and other cornerstones of the middle class all bear the union label.

Statistics bear out the benefits of union membership. Where unions are flourishing, workers'

salaries are higher; more workers have health insurance; and more benefit from stable, traditional pension plans.

In addition to the many economic benefits, belonging to a union gives workers a voice on the job. Collectively, they can bargain for better and safer working conditions, and speak out — without fear of retribution — against unfairness and injustice in the workplace.

In public education, for example, educators — and their

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unions — have been the leading voice for fair and equitable school funding and against the tyranny of over-testing.

And, of course, we shouldn't forget that unions, throughout history, have always been at the forefront of social change. Unions marched with Dr. Martin Luther King in the fight for civil rights in the 1960s. Today, unions are a leading voice for marriage equality, voting rights and, in the "Fight for 15" — fair wages for fast-food workers and others in our service economy.

Despite all this good, union rights are under attack like never before.

The U.S. Supreme Court recently agreed to hear a case — *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association* — in which some individuals insist they are entitled to the benefits of a unionized workplace without having to pay their fair share for those benefits.

In *Friedrichs*, the plaintiffs argue that California school districts are violating the First Amendment rights of teachers by agreeing that all teachers who are represented by the union must pay their "fair share" costs. The plaintiffs say the First Amendment gives them the right not to belong to a union, and not to pay anything to a union they oppose

even though, by law, the union must represent them.

This would require the Supreme Court to overturn established law.

For decades, the Court has supported this principle of "fair share." It means that since unions are obligated to represent all the workers in a unionized workplace, it's reasonable that all the workers should share in the costs of union rep-



resentation, such as collective bargaining and contract administration.

The court has allowed one exception: Those who oppose a union's political speech — perhaps its endorsement of candidates or money that goes to election campaigns — can

declare themselves "fee-payers." That means they pay the union "fair share" fees for the cost of union representation, but are not required to contribute money for political activities.

In other words ... a compromise.

When the Supreme Court ultimately rules, probably sometime next year, I am hopeful the majority affirms that "fair share" remains the best compromise between the duty of unions to represent all workers

and the First Amendment rights of those who oppose unions in their workplace.

I'm even more confident, however, that, no matter what the ruling, workers will continue to see the value in belonging to a union. In this era of income inequality and outsized CEO salaries, working people increasingly see that unions give them a voice in the workplace and, over the years, have helped win many of the rights they enjoy today.

They understand that, without strong unions in our polarized political environment, those rights listed on the bumper sticker — like the weekend, and overtime pay, and the 40-hour work week — can vanish in a flash.

ID Watchdog: Identity theft protection for NYSUT retirees

NYSUT Member Benefits is excited to announce that its newest endorsed program — ID Watchdog — is now available to NYSUT retirees and their families. This Member Benefits Corporation-endorsed program offers protection against the ever growing threat of identity and credit theft.

According to Javelin Strategy & Research, an estimated 13.1 million Americans fall victim to identity theft each year. These individuals are hit with approximately \$7,000 in fraudulent charges per person and spend about 330 hours each trying to recover from the effects of identity theft. And with online thieves getting more and more sophisticated, protecting your identity and credit has never been more important.



ID Watchdog (founded in 2005 as a theft protection service) uses proprietary monitoring technology and guarantees members that their identity will be restored at no additional cost if it is ever compromised; the company was recently recognized by the Consumer Federation of America as one of the most valuable identity theft protection services available.

This service alerts members as soon as new or updated information associated with their identity is detected —

allowing them to catch fraudulent activity immediately. NYSUT members can purchase either individual or spouse/family coverage through ID Watchdog, allowing them to protect their loved ones against online thieves as well.

For more information about ID Watchdog, call toll-free 866-513-0823 or visit memberbenefits.nysut.org.

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

Agency fee payers to NYSUT are eligible to participate in NYSUT Member Benefits-endorsed programs.

