

RETIREE



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THE UNITED FEDERATION OF TEACHERS RETIRED TEACHERS CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

Congress watch



In our last newsletter, we noted the issue of “grand bargains.” The last several months have produced some interesting bargains to be sure.

THE FEDERAL BUDGET: THE PUSH FOR A QUICK DEAL

Two news reports this spring detailed the momentum in Congress for a quick joint budget resolution from both the House and Senate:

As reported mid-April in *USA Today*: “The chairmen of the House and Senate budget committees say a final deal is on the horizon....The budget is non-binding and does not have the force of law, but passage of a joint budget resolution is an important marker for the new GOP Congress.”

Well, that is what happened.

As reported in *The New York Times* on April 28, congressional negotiators “on Monday reached a compromise on a joint budget between the House and the Senate, the first common congressional budget in a decade.”

The proposed deal would increase military spending and take aim at President Obama’s signature health care law. It would also cut education and entitlement programs such as Medicare, although congressional negotiators dropped a proposal by Representative Paul D. Ryan, Republican of Wisconsin and a former chairman of the House Budget Committee, to turn Medicare into a largely private

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Message from Tom

BY TOM MURPHY, UFT/RTC CHAPTER LEADER

We are in a grueling fight here in New York State to protect public education against attacks by an antagonistic governor preserving the interests of his hedge fund donors and charter schools.

We prevented the governor from achieving some of his worst proposals in the state budget. But now he and charter school advocates are in a full-bore campaign to raise the cap on charter schools and to pass an education tax credit proposal which is nothing more than a thinly veiled voucher system that would drain taxpayer money from public coffers.

As retiree activists who have seen it all over the decades, we know that this fight for the interests of working people, public education and progressive labor never ends.



Presidential politics! Already?

In years gone by, presidential campaigns seemed to mostly be confined to the calendar year of the actual election.

But the 2016 campaign for the White House is already upon us, and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) is starting to prepare by asking for input from union members like us. As activist retirees, we are not shy about expressing our concerns for ourselves and others.

When you have spent your career looking into the eyes of children, you have a stake in the future. That’s why we as educators and healthcare workers understand so well the critical role that we must play as responsible citizens in building, maintaining and improving the social contract envisioned in the words from our Declaration of Independence – life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

With the AFT planning to interview and evaluate potential candidates as early as this summer, we need to involve ourselves in discussions so that our points of view are considered.

The AFT sent us a supply of postcards with questions about which candidates we would like for the union to interview and which issues are most important to us. We distributed these at our May 12 and June 9 RTC general membership meetings, urging those present to fill them out and send them in.

COUCH POTATO ALERT: For many of us, getting to meetings or traveling long distances to rallies is not an option. But, there are ways that we can still make our voices heard from the comfort of our homes as we enjoy our coffee or tea and muse about our hopes for the presidential election. All you need is your laptop, tablet or other electronic device. To access the information provided on the postcards at our last RTC membership meetings and advocate for your issues

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voucher program.

Under the deal, Congress would use a procedural process known as reconciliation to repeal, or at least to begin to undo, the Affordable Care Act. With reconciliation, the Senate would need only a simple majority vote to push through legislation to repeal the health care law because it would not be subject to a probable Democratic filibuster.

Senator Bernard Sanders, a Vermont Independent who caucuses with the Democrats and is the ranking member of the Budget Committee stated, "The Republican budget moves this country in exactly the wrong direction. This budget is the Robin Hood principle in reverse. It takes from the poor and gives to the rich."

OBAMA BUDGET PROPOSAL: SAYS MEDICARE SHOULD NEGOTIATE DRUG COSTS

Embedded in President Obama's budget request to Congress is a paradox. He proposes a major new initiative to develop drugs tailored to the genetic characteristics of individual patients while expressing deep concern about the costs of such specialty medicines for consumers and for the Medicare program.

The president has asked Congress to let Medicare officials negotiate prices with drug manufacturers — *a practice explicitly forbidden by current law.*

This proposal has the potential to help the more than 40 million people who have prescription drug coverage through Medicare. As the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission told Congress last month, the "use of high-cost drugs poses a big challenge" for the government and for Medicare beneficiaries, who typically pay 25 percent to 33 percent of the cost of specialty drugs.

"It would be unfortunate if we make scientific progress and then price patients out of the drugs we develop through that progress," said Dr. Peter B. Bach, director of the Center for Health Policy and Outcomes at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York.

TRADE DEAL: TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP WOULD IMPACT SENIORS

The proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) pact, which is backed mainly by the president and Republican congressional leaders, poses a threat to seniors. The bill would limit the ability of the federal government to regulate



▲ Florida West Coast Activist Luncheon - retired District Representatives Stewart Cohen (back row L) and Lynne Windebaum (2nd row, R) and the Florida west coast political action committee at a special luncheon honoring their growing regional activism.

▼ Retirees rallying in Chicago for the campaign of Jesus "Chuy" Garcia



Retirees enjoying the Annual Spring Fling in Las Vegas.



Amelia Anderson, Puerto Rico Coordinator, with retirees at the annual luncheon in Puerto Rico.



Tom Murphy, RTC Chapter Leader and Donesa Jackson, Orlando Section Coordinator and 2015 NYSUT Retiree of the Year with retirees at the Orlando Activist Luncheon.



drug prices and would restrict competition from generic drugs. Americans already pay the highest prescription drug prices in the world. The agreement also includes a provision to extend the patents for biologics and medical devices, which could keep costs high on these products.

Seniors on fixed incomes, therefore, have a huge stake in this trade deal! As for American workers, as commentator Mark Shields said on the PBS News Hour: The template is the same as that which was used during the banking crisis and recession – protect the businesses and make them whole but let the little guys fend for themselves as best they can!

The legislative path to avoiding substantive debate on the individual pieces of this trade deal is called “fast track.” With the AFT and the entire union movement lobbying intensely to persuade legislators to reject fast track and debate the bill properly, Senate Democrats did oppose the president and voted down granting the president this authority. But the lobbying by the president and TPP supporters continues. As of the writing of this newsletter, Senate Democratic leaders have reportedly reached an agreement with Republicans to allow a separate initial vote on a trade enforcement deal to prevent currency manipulation by our trading partners. We must continue to oppose this trade pact

WHAT THEY CALL ‘ENTITLEMENTS’ ARE BENEFITS WE HAVE PAID FOR

We hear regular calls in Congress for controlling the costs of what they refer to as entitlement programs, including Social Security and Medicare. These are not entitlements. They are benefits for which we and all other Americans pay during our working years.

The basic argument by GOP leaders is that both these programs are going bankrupt, which is not true. The latest twist in the discussions is a proposal by Gov. Christie of New Jersey, a possible presidential contender. He proposes that we raise the age of eligibility for both Social Security and Medicare to 69.

Economist Paul Krugman gave what is probably the best rebuttal to this in his *New York Times* column on April 24:

“...the Social Security Administration issued a report showing that almost all the rise in life expectancy has taken place among the affluent. The bottom half of workers, who are

Chapter Election Reminder

Please refer to the May 7 edition of the *New York Teacher* for the complete notice of our election for chapter officers and delegates to the UFT Delegate Assembly.

Ballots will be mailed on or about June 9. If you have not received your ballot by June 15, please contact the Retired Teachers Chapter at 1-212-780-0127 and a ballot will be sent to you.

Ballots must be received by the American Arbitration Association using the ballot materials sent to you no later than 8 a.m. on Monday, June 29, at which time ballot counting will commence.

Again please refer to your May 7 edition of the *New York Teacher* for all the details. **Every member of the chapter is urged to vote.**

precisely the Americans who rely on Social Security most, have seen their life expectancy at age 65 rise only a bit more than a year since the 1970s. Furthermore, while lawyers and politicians may consider working into their late 60s no hardship, things look somewhat different to ordinary workers, many of whom still have to perform manual labor.

“And while raising the retirement age would impose a great deal of hardship, it would save remarkably little money. In fact, a 2013 report from the Congressional Budget Office found that raising the Medicare age would save almost no money at all. ”

Please share this information with your friends and fellow seniors. The overall pace of new legislation that would affect retirees’ interests – some negatively and some in positive ways – is increasing.

What can each of us do? Write, call or email your congressional representative and express your opinions!

and candidate, simply visit aft.org/election2016.

Please don't be shy. You were never shy in front of your class or in your school or workplace. **Let's speak up and get this presidential campaign rolling!**



What issues are **important to you** in the upcoming presidential election?

As we approach the 2016 presidential election, working families must be well-informed about the issues at stake and involved in letting the candidates know where we stand on those issues. The AFT is committed to researching the candidates' positions, but we also want to hear from you. It's **your union and your voice**.

Visit www.aft.org/election2016 and tell us what issues are most important to you in the upcoming election.

The AFT has a long and proud history of listening to and engaging our members. We are excited about the role our members can play in helping elect a president of the United States who will share our vision of America's future.

If you would rather put something in writing for us to forward to the AFT, just send us a concise note about what issues are important to you in this presidential election and what candidates you would like the AFT to interview. Mail it to: UFT, 52 Broadway, 17th Floor, New York, NY 10004. Attention: Tom Murphy.

Social services available to UFT retirees

Our director of retiree social services for the UFT Welfare Fund, Sasha Greene, LMSW, together with two geriatric social workers are trained to help you effectively with day-to-day life issues, including mental health issues. The services available to us include:

- **Counseling:** Social workers provide confidential, short-term counseling
- **Nationwide hospital stay-in-touch program**
- **Nationwide telephone reassurance program**
- **Referrals to assisted living, nursing homes. etc.**
- **Support groups** on bereavement, Alzheimer's, cancer, stroke, or specialized groups such as for sons or daughters who are caregivers or for parents who have lost a child

If you are interested in any of these services, call 1-212-598-6880 between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. Monday through Friday or write UFTWF Retiree Social Services, 52 Broadway-17th Floor, New York, NY 10004.



UFT RETIREE

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