Congress watch

BY TOM MURPHY, UFT/RTC CHAPTER LEADER

As we await the shoe to drop from the Janus Supreme Court case, our union has spent the two years since the court rejected the similar Friedrichs case preparing for all the potentially crippling policy actions the bad guys could throw at us. We know that requiring all those in a collective bargaining unit to pay their fair share of the cost of negotiating a collective bargaining agreement is the right thing to do. They benefit from that negotiated contract. They should contribute to its cost. (By the way, a retiree member called me to object to the use of the term “freeloader” in one of my prior columns. He maintained that there are many contributing factors as to why some members, while still pro-union become disgruntled. I respectfully acknowledged his point and will leave it to readers to figure out the best description of those who choose this course of action. Perhaps invective is poor salesmanship.)

This agency fee payment/fair share policy for non-members was affirmed by the 1977 Supreme Court decision in Abood v. Detroit Board of Education, the very court that is now considering an argument to overturn that traditional labor doctrine. One could hope that since conservative justices tend to uphold long established practices, those so inclined would affirm those practices and reject Mark Janus’ argument. But given the current ideological climate and makeup of this Court, we can expect the worst. And we have been preparing for it.

The best antidote for ongoing anti-union venom is member engagement. The UFT has launched a door-knocking campaign to connect with our members as the best way to prepare for the Court decision that could deprive public employee unions their decades long legal right to dues’ check-off. This outreach could be the tonic that will spare the body politic from such attacks against progressive labor, its hard won achievements, and defend the social contract that has benefited our entire society.

The following represents some excerpts touching on the purpose of the campaign and on some of the messaging used in the one-on-one conversations with members. Retirees are in a somewhat different circumstance than our in-service colleagues. Our shared history and earned benefits enjoyed in our retirement have a different draw for us. We are immune to the problem, just as retirees are in a somewhat different circumstance than our in-service colleagues. Our shared history and our professional and economic benefits. If we retirees want to protect what we have worked for throughout our careers, we should enthusiastically join in promoting this message in every way we can.

Sincerely,

Tom Murphy
UFT Retired Teachers, Chapter Leader

Message from Tom

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IRMAA/MEDICARE PART B

Thanks to UFT/NYSUT political action, the state budget once again spared state cuts to IRMAA. While it would not have immediately or directly affected us, it would have been a precedent that the city could have tried to follow.

The governor’s proposal to scale back health care benefits for retired state workers didn’t survive negotiations with the legislature. The plan would have generated long-term savings by capping the reimbursements for Medicare Part B premiums. The legislature alsoixed an idea to eliminate certain reimbursements for higher earning retirees.

2018 RETIRED TEACHERS CHAPTER ELECTIONS

The ballots and candidates’ statements will be mailed on or about May 15, 2018. The deadline for the receipt of ballots at the American Arbitration Association, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271 is 8 a.m. on Thursday, June 7, 2018. The ballots will be counted on this day as well.

A retired member who does not receive a ballot should call the Retired Teachers Chapter office at 212-780-0127.

If circumstances require a change of any dates, adequate notice will be given in the New York Teacher.

MURPHY continued from page 1

Here is the gist of the campaign:
UFT and NYSUT are resolved to conduct internal campaigns to increase union membership and enlist current members to make a public commitment to remain dues-paying union members so that we emerge from this year with deepened member adhesion and greater capacity to advocate collectively for the public good.

One of the strongest predictors of member retention is whether someone from the union has reached out to grass-root, rank-and-file members.

The union’s goal therefore is to have one-on-one conversations with every in-service UFT member that include:
1. Speaking to the member about the importance of paid parental leave. The issue should be tied back to union value — this is your union.
2. Having a conversation with the member about the importance of paying dues and the implications of the Janus case, and asking them to symbolically re-commit to the union.
3. Listening empathetically. Perhaps crucial to the member discussions is the question: Why do we pay union dues?

The list of benefits is long, personal and professional-coverage extensive. The UFT website and the New York Teacher have supported the door-knocking campaign by focusing on union benefits intensively over the past few months. A series of member “testimonials” have told stories of the many and different ways the UFT has supported

CONGRESS continued from page 1

think again.

To enumerate just a few of the benefits because we are part of a strong public-sector union:

Health care city negotiations took place post-1965 following Medicare’s passage;

Reimbursement of your Part B Medicare and IRMAA payments, legislation won through lobbying in City Council;

Eyeglasses, hearing aids, and dental benefits through the UFT Welfare Fund, per capita funding for retirees negotiated with New York City.

A member-weakened UFT and member-weakened public-sector unions in New York City could fall victim to a negative political climate, such as exists on the national stage right now. Think Giuliani. Think Bloomberg. These guys were not union stalwarts, except when it served their political interests. When you look at politicians, you need to separate the wheat from the chaff of their political views.

On April 12, at UFT headquarters, in the presence of many public-sector, private sector and building trades union representatives, including many of our own retirees, Cuomo signed a law that the Democrats and Republicans of New York enacted to enhance our vitality and vibrancy as a union in the face of a potentially negative Janus decision from the U.S. Supreme Court. That law:

• Is the codification of certain responsibilities of public sector employers to unions pertaining to enrolling and maintaining union membership rolls. The law, for example, allows union representatives to meet with new employees during work hours to talk about the benefits of enrolling,

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RTC member Robert Berger wrote to The Chief in March regarding the Janus case. His letter appears below:

Et Tu, Janus?
To the Editor:
“The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones (Julius Caesar, Act 3, Scene2).” Mark these words well as you deliberate, Judge Gorsuch. For Janus is an honorable man.

ROBERT BERGER

CTQ

Retiree Albert Moldoff, who is a former Chapter Chair and Delegate, just celebrated his 100th birthday on March 28. He taught at P.S. 184 and P.S. 144, both in Manhattan.

However, his proudest moment was when a photograph of him leading the picket line in front of P.S. 144 during the 1975 strike was featured on the front page of The New York Times. Mr. Moldoff now lives in Boynton Beach, Florida. A Proclamation signed by UFT President Michael Mulgrew was sent to Mr. Moldoff to commemorate this happy event.

Helen Steinlein taught in a variety of schools in Queens until she retired from William Cullen Bryant High School in 1973. She just celebrated her 101st birthday on Jan. 22. Mrs. Steinlein graduated from Hunter College and then got her master’s degree from City College in an era when very few women went that far in higher education. She was married for 57 years to Leo until his death. Mrs. Steinlein was a swimmer well into her 90s and has a daughter, Jean. A proclamation was sent to her to celebrate this milestone.

CELEBRATIONS

Patricia Murphy, RTC Chapter Leader along with union members and leaders at UFT headquarters watch Gov. Andrew Cuomo sign into legislation a new law that gives a boost to New York’s strong public-sector union.

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