

PRESS RELEASES BY BALCONY MEMBERS SINCE 1/19/09

CSEA



Jan. 21, 2009

CSEA President Says Workplace Violence Prevention Rule Will Save Lives If Enforced

ALBANY - "This rule will have a profound impact on the working lives of thousands of public employees and it will save lives," CSEA President Danny Donohue told state Department of Labor officials today about a proposed DOL rule that would require public employers to put in place workplace violence prevention programs to protect their workers.

At a public hearing on the proposed rule before it takes effect, the union leader said the rule will build upon the Worksite Security Act of 2006, which CSEA spearheaded and which provides safer workplaces for New York's public employees.

But the union leader warned DOL inspectors to remain vigilant to ensure employers comply with the law.

"We see minimum staffing levels broken every day, supervisors circumventing established procedures and other policies outright ignored," Donohue said. "Just because an employer has a nice looking program on paper does not necessarily mean it's being practiced."

Donohue also stressed that employers would benefit from worker input when developing their workplace violence prevention programs.

"Workers know what the problems are, they know where the problems are and, for the most part, they know how to fix them," Donohue said. "We want to be part of the solution. It's our necks on the line."

Always at the forefront in the fight for worker safety, CSEA played a leading role in enacting New York's Public Employee Safety and Health Act in 1980. The union intensified its fight for safer work sites in 1992 after a disgruntled client murdered four CSEA members employed at the Schuyler County Department of Social Services at their workplace. CSEA's leadership and persistence led to New York's historic Worksite Security Act, which became law in 2006. The law requires public employers with more than 20 employees to assess potential workplace violence risks and take appropriate measures to reduce those risks.

National statistics strongly support the need for protection against worksite violence. The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health reports the following:

- **Violence is a substantial contributor to death and injury on the job. NIOSH data indicates that homicide has become the second leading cause of occupational injury death, exceeded only by motor vehicle-related deaths.**
- **Homicide is the leading cause of death for women in the workplace and the third leading cause of death on the job for men.**
- **Government workers make up 18 percent of the U.S. work force, but 31 percent of the victims of workplace violence.**

<http://www.csealocal1000.org/press.php>

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General Contractors Association



Albany Press Conference a Success

01.23.2009

The GCA joined with other business, civic, labor and environmental groups at the Empire State Transportation Alliance press conference in Albany on January 13th. The coalition announced its Keep New York Moving Campaign calling on more state funding for transportation and infrastructure. ESTA members also met with state legislators, urging them to adopt the recommendations of the Ravitch Commission.

Denise Richardson was quoted in the press release saying, “Even with the investments of the last several years, the transit system is still relying on portions of infrastructure that have been in place for the last 80 years. We need to ask where we would be today had previous generations of leaders not had the foresight to invest in the transit system, and we are still are paying the price for those generations of leaders who did not maintain that investment. We are faced with a clear choice: are we the leaders that will make the investment to maintain jobs and create a 21st century transit system or are we the leaders that will skirt responsibility and put New York City’s future as an economic powerhouse at risk?”

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GCA Member Saves the Day



01.23.2009

Crews from Weeks Marine, worked all day and into the night on January 17th to rig and lift the US Airways airplane from the Hudson River. The Vice President of Weeks Heavy Lift, Tom Weeks, said that the heavy lift crane which brought the submerged plane out of the icy waters is the largest rotating crane on a barge on the US East Coast.

Weeks pointed out that the toughest part of the job was accomplished by the six man hard hat dive crew, which had to attach the rigging in the icy Hudson River. "Our divers rigged the slings around the plane," Weeks said. "The divers had a really tough time with no footing and no leverage. The conditions were terrible."

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Construction Industry Conference



01.23.2009

On February 4, the New York State Department of Transportation, in conjunction with the Empire State Development Corporation and the Port Authority, are having a construction industry conference to publicize contracting opportunities for the agencies' upcoming capital programs. The program will include a discussion of projects that are part of the planned economic stimulus legislation. The conference is designed to address issues to foster the creation of additional opportunities for disadvantaged businesses and minority and women-owned businesses. If your company has an MBE outreach coordinator, the GCA urges you to send them to this conference, as the agenda includes several workshops that are designed to elicit suggestions as to how the agencies' MWBE programs may be improved. The conference will be held at the Jacob Javits Convention Center from 9:00am to 4:30pm. The GCA is a co-sponsor of this event. There is no charge to attend. At the conclusion of the day's events, there will be a reception attended by the Governor. This will be a key opportunity for GCA members to meet Governor Paterson and to express your company's opinion about the Ravitch recommendations and the economic stimulus legislation. For conference agenda and registration information, please visit the NYS DOT website at <https://www.nysdot.gov>

<http://www.gcany.com/>

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New York State AFL-CIO



January 22, 2008

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**NEW YORK STATE AFL-CIO RESPONDS TO STATE DEPARTMENT OF
LABOR'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF RISE IN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE**

(President Hughes Calls for Legislation to Increase Unemployment Insurance Benefits)

(Increase Seen as an Economic Stimulant)

In response to the New York State Department of Labor's announcement today that the state's unemployment rate has risen to 7.0%, New York State AFL-CIO President Denis Hughes issued the following statement:

"The unemployment figures released today are simply staggering. Looking at the numbers, one thing is painfully clear: The time for action is now.

"With the unemployment rate now at 7.0% and climbing, an immediate increase in unemployment insurance benefits is necessary, not only to help those without a job, but to stimulate an economy in desperate need of a jolt.

"Studies have shown that every dollar in unemployment benefits generates a \$1.64 increase in economic activity. People who are unemployed spend their unemployment benefits almost immediately, to buy groceries, purchase household necessities and pay the rent. Their unemployment dollars are quickly dispersed back into the local economy, and help to sustain local businesses, and increase the tax coffers of local governments throughout our state.

"Those tax dollars go to support police protection in Buffalo, fire fighters in Syracuse, sanitation pick-up in Rochester, hospital care in the capital district and better schools in New York City and throughout this state.

"The unemployment benefit has not been increased since 1998, and the current maximum benefit of \$405 per week is far insufficient for working families to make ends meet if they lose their job.

"If we do not act now and pass a benefit increase, and a corresponding increase in the unemployment insurance premium, the state will be forced to borrow money from the federal government in order to shore up an already underfunded UI Trust Fund. Delaying this process will cost the state even more because additional dollars will have to be borrowed as the Trust Fund becomes further depleted.

"The New York State AFL-CIO will work with both houses of the legislature, and the

Governor for quick passage of this important legislation.”

As noted, the unemployment benefit has not been increased since 1998. The maximum benefit is currently only \$405 per week. The New York State AFL-CIO calls for the following to be part of unemployment insurance legislation:

- **Increasing the weekly benefit to 50% of the average weekly wage, which is \$1,141.17 according to the latest statistics released by the New York State Dept. of Labor.**
- **Indexing the benefit for periodic increases, which will allow for reliable benefit increases to address inflation, health care and other cost of living increases.**
- **Shore up the Unemployment Trust Fund. Filing for extended benefits have increased dramatically. This is placing additional strains on an already underfunded UI system..**

Some numbers:

- **Today, the maximum benefit rate is 35% of the New York State average weekly wage.**
- **New York’s maximum benefit ranks 25th among all states.**
- **The purchasing power of \$405 has declined by over 20% since 2000, to only \$327 in current dollars as we entered 2008.**
- **The benefits paid to low-wage workers do not meet poverty thresholds set by the U.S. Census Bureau.**

<http://www.nysaflcio.org/>

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New York State United Teachers



Union calls on lawmakers to resist cuts to education, health care, and revive economy with new revenues

New York Teacher - January 20, 2009

NYSUT is waging a concerted campaign in response to the state's fiscal crisis and the Executive Budget proposal, holding regional meetings of union leaders, near round-the-clock discussions with lawmakers and scheduling a special, accelerated one-day Committee of 100 lobby day.

With the state facing a more than \$15-billion deficit in wake of the Wall Street meltdown, Gov. David Paterson's budget proposal calls for deep cuts to K-12 school aid, hospitals and health services and would slash aid for the State and City University systems, including community colleges.

"We fully understand the gravity of the state's fiscal crisis and respect the governor's efforts to put together a budget in these very difficult economic times," NYSUT President Dick Iannuzzi said.

"However, this spending proposal raises deep concerns about the adverse impact it would have on public schools, higher education and health care. We cannot cut our way out of this economic slump," Iannuzzi said.

Instead, state lawmakers must call on leaders in Washington to pony up New York's fair share of federal stimulus money, NYSUT Executive Vice President Alan Lubin said.

A plan to increase revenue also must include asking the wealthiest New Yorkers to pay their fair share by increasing the state's personal income tax on high-income taxpayers.

Under Paterson's proposal, aid to schools would be cut by \$2.5 billion, when factoring the \$1.9 billion allocation the state is required to pay schools under terms of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit.

The proposed \$20.7 billion education package would represent a 12 percent reduction from the amount promised under the state's formula to address inequities highlighted in the CFE court decision.

Unacceptable cuts

Other proposals in the governor's budget include:

- **Freezing Foundation Aid - funds for the neediest students - at the current level and extending the full phase-in of the aid from four to eight years;**
- **Reducing formula-based aids for 2009-10 by \$1.1 billion under a one-time Deficit Reduction Assessment, leaving individual districts with cuts ranging from 3 percent to 13 percent;**
- **Freezing funding to the state's Universal Pre-Kindergarten program at the current level and delaying the full phase-in of the program to 2014-15;**
- **Eliminating funds for teacher centers and the state Mentor-Teacher Intern Program (see related story);**
- **Reducing by 50 percent a special state grant for the troubled Roosevelt School District;**
- **Instituting a \$188 million cost shift to school districts for pre-school special ed, making districts responsible for a 15 percent share of those costs by reducing the state and county shares;**
- **Eliminating the STAR rebate program that provides school property tax relief;**
- **Creating a new tier (Tier 5) of pension benefits for newly hired state and local government workers, including educators, that would increase the retirement age from 55 to 62, require employees to contribute to the pension fund beyond their 10th year of service and raise the vesting period from 5 to 10 years. Adding a new tier would not generate any immediate savings for the state during the economic crisis, union leaders said; and**
- **Cutting additional aid to the State and City University systems, which have already been forced to absorb \$277 million in cuts this year.**

The budget proposal, if passed by the Legislature, would cut community college aid in the current year by 10 percent and continue those cuts for 2009-10. The proposal would raise undergraduate tuition by 14 percent at SUNY and 15 percent at CUNY. Funding, meanwhile, to SUNY hospitals would be slashed by \$24 million.

Lubin said the proposed cuts, coupled with the planned reduction in community college aid, would erode access to affordable higher education at a time when New York's working families are most in need

"The proposed higher-ed cuts are not only misguided, but would create dangerous holes in a safety net that New Yorkers rely on more than ever in tough economic times," Lubin said.

One welcome development is the governor's proposed use of SUNY reserves to protect student access and faculty lines.

However, union leaders remain concerned about proposals to re-open state contracts to seek wage freezes and a lag in state paychecks, two proposals that would affect state workers including members of United University Professions, the NYSUT affiliate at SUNY.

Revenue boosters

Union leaders stress that the state cannot cut its way out of an economic crisis, saying the governor and lawmakers must focus on ways to enhance revenue - particularly through a more progressive income tax that would impose a temporary surcharge on the wealthiest New Yorkers.

A study by the Fiscal Policy Institute estimates such a proposal, backed strongly by NYSUT, could generate between \$2 billion and \$7 billion in revenue.

A recent poll by Quinnipiac University found New York voters overwhelmingly support the surcharge plan, with 80 percent supporting a personal tax increase on those earning more than \$1 million annually, while 73 percent support a tax increase on those earning more than \$500,000 per year.

NYSUT is working with New York's congressional delegation to push for additional state aid in a federal economic stimulus package expected early this year. U.S.

Sen. Charles Schumer recently proposed a plan to include education aid in the stimulus package being negotiated in Washington. If Congress agrees, this could infuse more than \$6 billion into New York's treasury.

Union takes action

While NYSUT leaders are in ongoing discussions with lawmakers, local leaders are meeting with the union's legislative staff to stay abreast of budget developments and to give feedback to NYSUT about what's happening in different communities.

"We agree with the governor that the road ahead will be difficult, but how New York recovers from this crisis depends on the route it chooses," Iannuzzi said.

"Maintaining New York's investment in public education and health care is the best way to get the state's economy moving forward again."

- Matt Smith and Clarisse Butler Banks

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NYSUT's recommendations for cost savings, revenues



As part of an effort to help the state close its budget deficit, NYSUT is promoting recommendations to save money, raise revenue and preserve services. They include:

- **Imposing a temporary income-tax surcharge on wealthiest New Yorkers (\$2 billion to \$7 billion)**
- **Urging our congressional representatives to secure funding under a federal stimulus package**
- **Tapping the state's Tax Stabilization Fund, known more commonly as the "Rainy Day Fund" (\$1.2 billion)**
- **Closing loopholes in the state's bottle bill (\$200 million)**
- **Reducing outsourcing of state work (\$100 million), and bulk purchasing of prescription drugs (\$100 million) Why wealthiest New Yorkers should pay fair share**

New York state has cut its top personal income tax rate by more than 50 percent over the last 30 years - from 15.375 percent to 6.85 percent. This means a household earning \$50,000 and a household earning \$500,000 are being taxed at the same percentage. Tax cuts enacted since 1994 are reducing state revenues by more than \$16 billion annually.

"Restructuring the state income tax would actually reduce the tax burden for lower-income and middle-class families while ensuring everyone pays their fair share," said Executive Vice President Alan Lubin.

http://www.nysut.org/cps/rde/xchg/nysut/hs.xsl/budget_11943.htm