

WCCFT *Union* NEWS

Monthly Newsletter of The Westchester Community College Federation of Teachers

April 2004

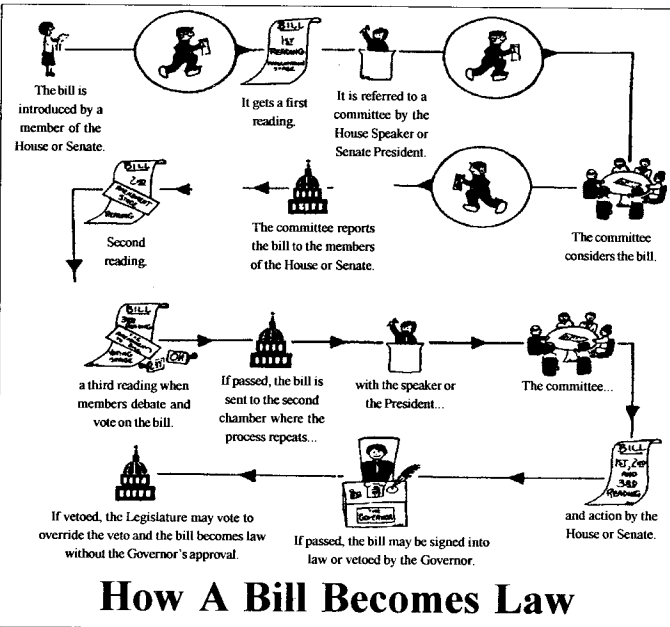
LEGISLATION 2004: Budgets, Benefits and Workers' Compensation Reform

by Carolyn DiLeo

On February 23 and 24 and again on March 8 and 9, almost 800 representatives of all levels of education in New York State called on their hometown legislators to protect the state's community colleges, the SUNY and CUNY systems from serious funding deficits which threaten the future of public higher education.

Their target was this year's proposed state budget which includes a cut of 5% (\$115) in base aid to community colleges, bringing the state's contribution per full time equivalency (FTE) to a record low of 29.2%, far short of the statutory requirement of 40%. This is down from 37.2% in the 1990-91 budget and reflects a continuing decline in the state's commitment to adequate financing of this vital sector of public higher education, the two-year colleges.

The budget also failed to fund a program approved by the Legislature in 1999-2000 to begin to address the shortage of full-time faculty. It also cut, again, the reimbursement for rental aid, an absolute necessity for facility-strapped colleges, such as Westchester Community College, which depend on rented space to accommodate increasing numbers of students, especially in satellite campuses. Nor does the proposed budget provide any additional funding for tech-



How A Bill Becomes Law

nology, without which community colleges will not be able to fulfill their mission to educate and train employees of local businesses and industries and to prepare students to be competitive in a tight labor market.

Overall, since 1990, SUNY community colleges in New York have lost funding in equipment challenge grants, structural unemployment retraining programs, youth internship programs, non-credit community services, non-credit vocational courses, part-time student needs programs, core operations support, rental aid, contract courses and supplement aid for business, technical and disadvantages.

Advocates for higher education have recommended that the proposed 2004-2005 Executive Budget

should:

- 1) restore funding and increase base aid by \$225 per FTE
- 2) restore the categorical program for full-time faculty initiative
- 3) restore cuts in rental aid
- 4) increase funding for technology
- 5) enact legislation to require five-year strategic plans that establish qualitative academic goals and assessments
- 6) oppose proposals which would direct public funds to private colleges or universities until or unless the public sector is adequately funded.

The State AFL-CIO is also pushing two important pieces of labor legislation: 1) a minimum wage bill and 2) a workers' compensation reform bill.

A statewide effort to increase the minimum wage, called the "515 Is Not Enough" campaign, has the support of State Senator Nick Spano (R). This bill, which has died for the past two years in the Senate Labor Committee, would increase the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.75. For an average week of 40 hours, the current minimum wage of \$5.15 works out to \$10,700 per year, which is substantially below the poverty line of \$17,650 per year for a family of four.

The workers' compensation reform bill (A9736/S6135), sponsored by Senator Guy Velella (R-Bronx, Westchester) and Assembly member Susan V. John (D-Monroe), proposes to raise the rate of weekly compensation from \$400 (the absolute lowest in the country) to \$594 over the next three years. The weekly rate has not been increased since 1992 and it is the lowest of all 50 states.

In addition to the benefit increase, the new bill would mean major changes in other areas of workers' compensation coverage, such as the right to file a personal injury lawsuit instead of a workers' compensation claim, the assessment of attorney fees against an insurer or employer who unsuccessfully denies a claim, and the right of a union to veto the employer's choice of an insurance carrier.


WCCFT NEWS

A Monthly Newsletter of

 Local 2431 American Federation of Teachers (AFL-CIO)
 Affiliated with New York State United Teachers

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Calendar of Events
Monthly Meetings:
First Wednesday, 12:00, SCI102
Apr. 7, 2004

 Union Election
 Review of Constitution
 PAC Report

Apr. 19-23, 2004

 NYSUT State-wide Teach-in
 on the USA PATRIOT Act

May 5, 2004

 Health and Safety Seminar and
 Committee Meetings

*"Political
 action means
 keeping our
 issues and
 our message
 always in the
 consciousness
 of
 politicians."*


President's Message

Louder Than Words

By Anne D'Orazio



April is Political Action Month for the WCCFT. We will be focusing on 1) legislative agendas regarding state and county budgets, 2) our local political action efforts and the Union's position on joining NYSUT's political action committee, and 3) VOTE-COPE. Let me take these topics one at a time.

Legislative Agendas

The WCCFT has a direct interest in state legislation. We are immediately affected by bills which propose early retirement incentives, increase in workers' compensation rates, changes in Medicare benefits, and plans for the privatization of education. We suffer in direct proportion to reductions in state and county budgets, cuts in base aid per FTE, elimination of rental reimbursement, stagnant funding of technology, and the erosion of full-time faculty lines. When we expend time and money every year just to restore cuts, when both higher education and K-12 battle against overall shrinking resources, we take precious energy and financial reserves away from our classrooms. And we never move forward because we're too busy keeping ourselves and our students from going backwards.

Political Action

As far as political action is concerned, we have not been idle on the local level. We are frequent visitors to the County Board of Legislators (especially recently, making sure the contract is where it should be for speedy approval). We attend both Democratic and Republican events to keep our issues and our message always in the consciousness of politicians.

This takes money and, by law, we cannot use Union dues to fund political work. A year ago we asked for separate contributions to our political action committee. So far, 56 fac-

ulty members have responded. That represents approximately one-fourth of full-timers. There is no reason that 25% of the union membership should be shouldering the costs of a political action program that benefits 100% of the union membership. When will that remaining three-fourths step forward to contribute their fair share?

If anyone doubts the necessity of maintaining a high political profile in an era of dwindling resources and aggressive disregard for public education, he or she should spend one day lobbying in Albany and witness the competing interests making demands on state and county revenue.

Vote-COPE

Every other SUNY community college and all the CUNY community colleges affiliated with NYSUT belong to the political action arm of that organization, VOTE-COPE (which stands for Voice Of Teachers for Education-Committee On Political Education).

VOTE-COPE was born when two large state teachers' unions, New York State Teachers Association and United Federation of Teachers, merged to form the New York State United Teachers in the early 1970s. It has grown in strength and political influence over the past 30 years and last year raised more than \$3,000,000 to use in political campaigns, lobbying efforts and legislative receptions.

It might seem that sending more than half of all collected PAC monies to Albany is a disproportionate investment in our parent organization at the expense of our own local needs. This would assess inaccurately, it seems to me, the amount of assistance we are given by NYSUT's continual behind-the-scenes political work and the very visible brochures and handouts NYSUT produces to help us understand individual pieces of legislation and the meaning of budget changes and cuts.

We will be opening a dialogue on all these political concerns at the April general membership meeting. Plan on attending that meeting to make your views known. And become a part of our political presence in Albany and White Plains by joining the WCCFT PAC with a payroll deduction or one-time payment.

Meet the Westchester County Board of Legislators



by Joanna Peters, Coordinator, Academic Support Center

The Westchester County Board of Legislators is the policy-making body of the County and plays a vital role in the success of Westchester Community College: It approves the College budget and the Union Collective Bargain-

ing Agreement. The Board is composed of 17 legislators, currently comprising 11 Democrats and 6 Republicans. The new Board Chair as of January 2004 is Bill Ryan, who represents White Plains. The Democratic majority leader is Clinton Young of Mt. Vernon; the

majority whip is Andrea Stewart-Cousins of Yonkers. On the other side of the aisle, George Oros of Cortlandt was recently chosen minority leader by the Republican caucus, and will be aided by Ursula LaMotte, the minority whip. Several committees are of particu-

lar interest for the college: Budget and Appropriations, chaired by Michael Kaplowitz of Somers; Labor, headed by George Latimer of Rye; and Education, led by Bernice Spreckman of Yonkers.



"I appreciate the terrific job the teachers at Westchester Community College are doing to educate County residents of all ages. From young people taking their initial steps in higher education to retirees who appreciate the value of life-long learning—all benefit from WCC's fine faculty."

--Bill Ryan



"The Community College represents a bridge for those individuals who are trying to get to a better life. It benefits people who are trying to learn new skills, people who are immigrants and are learning about a new country, and we have an obligation to help them achieve their goals."

--George Latimer

"I commend the WCC teachers for their extraordinary success in reaching out to all residents of Westchester County. You have met the growing need for academic instruction and job training with commitment and with concern for your students. I look forward to our continued joint efforts to offer the people of Westchester a brighter future."

--Clinton Young



"It is in large part through the hard work of the faculty that Westchester Community College has earned the title, 'The Gem of the County.' I am particularly supportive of the expansion into satellite campuses by the College and its faculty, which has made a key contribution to extending the opportunity for education to the County."

--George Oros



Political Action Can Be Fun

By Sheldon Malev, Behavioral & Social Sciences Department

The words "political action" for many faculty may conjure up images of angry picketers on a protest line, strong letters to government officials or "Letters to the Editor." They might also evoke thoughts of the "ultimate" job action or even a strike.

However, political action need not be seen in a negative context. Much of it is actually quite positive, proactive, and pleasant. Perhaps the most pleasant political action involves representation of union members at a reception for a candidate for public office, as a show

of support for that individual. These events typically involve a breakfast, brunch, luncheon or dinner in return for a financial contribution to that candidate's campaign.

It is important for union members to attend these functions for several rea-

sons, not just to offer financial support, which is of course very important for the candidate. It is also an opportunity to share valuable information and to help shape policies that can have a positive impact for the livelihood and working con-

(See "Action" Pg. 4)

Action

(Cont. from Pg. 3)

ditions of faculty. It is one of those rare opportunities where Union members can speak directly to government officials and/or candidates and discuss matters that otherwise would be difficult to discuss at a public meeting. Similarly, it allows us to hear in a very candid way what officials might find it difficult to speak about at a public meeting.

Another important aspect of attendance at fund-raisers or receptions is the opportunity to meet and speak with government officials or candidates other than the one for whom the event is scheduled. Numerous influential friends, colleagues, government officials, and politicians are also present at these functions, in addition to representatives of other unions. We can gain valuable information and forge valuable bonds with such individuals and organizations. It is a unique and valuable opportunity for communication.

While our Union, the WCCFT, has funds for such events, it is not always possible for members of the

Executive Committee or PAC to attend all of them. For this reason, there is from time to time an opportunity for other members to attend as a representative of our Union. This could be *you* if you let Anne and Don know that you might be interested.

On February 18th, I was fortunate enough to be able to fill in for Don Weigand, who was unable to attend an evening reception for Tom Abinanti, at Antun's in Elmsford. Tom is the newly designated Chairperson of the Westchester County Board of Legislators "Environmental Committee," replacing Legislator Michael Kaplowitz, who has been a good friend of WCC and frequent visitor. (The WCC Faculty Senate Environmental Committee has worked together with the County Environmental Committee under the leadership of Michael Kaplowitz.)

This event was hosted by NY State Comptroller Alan Hevesi, who had campaigned for Tom Abinanti in the past. Interestingly, I knew both of these gentlemen for many years. I had worked with Tom and campaigned with him for several years when I was on the Executive Com-



From left-right: Alan Hevesi, New York State Comptroller; Thomas J. Abinanti, Westchester County Legislator, 12th District; Prof. Sheldon Malev

mittee of the Greenburgh Town Democratic Committee. I grew up in the same community (Forest Hills) as Alan Hevesi. We both attended Forest Hills High School and Queens College. He was in one of the same classes with me at QC, "Contemporary Civilization" or "CC" as it was referred to back then. I remember Alan as a truly brilliant student and an even greater basketball player. Everyone who attended either of those schools remembers Alan Hevesi as one of the most outstanding players, if not the "star" of both the FHHS

and QC Basketball Teams. At that time, he could most likely have played for a professional team. I always thought of Alan Hevesi whenever I heard or read anything about Senator Bill Bradley. I think that both of them do, in fact, have a lot in common.

It was indeed exciting to spend some time again with Alan and Tom at this reception and I am grateful for having been given the opportunity to do so. You might catch a glimpse of that excitement in my eyes in the photo that was taken of us there.



WCCFT

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