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LAS VEGAS (KSNV) — A large strike is in the works for thousands of culinary and bartender union workers employed at casino properties along the Las Vegas Strip and Downtown.

At 10:00 a.m. on Friday, Culinary Union 226 opened up a strike headquarters in response to the lack of Casino resorts agreeing to reach a negotiation deal with a union contract that expired midnight on Thursday.

Caesars Entertainment is the only company that has agreed to negations for a union contract. That report came a couple of hours after the deadline.

There still are 25 properties that have not reached an agreement, so strike preparations are still underway.

MGM Resorts International has 10 properties along the strip where these workers are employed. The company provided a statement to News 3 on Thursday saying they are working on negotiations but did not specify when an agreement would be made.

Last week 25,000 union members voted to authorize a citywide strike and 99% of them voted "yes' Since then, Caesars employees were victorious in getting their contracts and have agreed to not hold the strike at their properties. One Caesars employee tells News 3 after he clocks out, he’ll be picking up a picket sign to stand with the others.

“These are families lives, these are people that need to go to work and get their money and have a secure lifestyle and so if the companies don’t want to do it we’re going to have to go outside and strike to get it done,” said Chad Neanover, a Prep Cook at the Flamingo.

Francisco Rufino Parra is a cook at Paris. He’s been with Caesar’s for 18 years. He said he is happy to continue working, but said it’s important the union sticks together so he will walk the line after work. “Two of my brothers and my sister-in-law work at the Mandalay Bay, and I have to be there.”

But, MGM Resorts hasn’t budged according to the Culinary Union. Their last meeting was Monday. Geoconda Arguello Kline, with Culinary Union, 226 said, “They’re dragging their feet and we’ve been in many negotiations with them.”

The Union did not specify when they will start the strike but if they decide to move on with it, it could be very costly to the industry. In 1984 the Culinary Union went on strike for 67 days costing the casino resorts $100 million dollars. In 2018 that number could be substantially higher.

The union contract that expired covered 50,000 culinary union and bartender union workers at 34 casino resorts including properties owned by MGM Resorts and Caesars Entertainment.

With Caesars’ move about 12,000 employees working for 9 companies now have a new 5-year union contract.

Technology is one sticking point.
Kimberly Ireland said some technology could eliminate jobs in an industry that’s all about service. “I appreciate when we have our guests come back to the hotel and the guests inform us that they appreciate seeing us.” She said she just wants to make sure her job as a Bell Desk Dispatcher at the Mirage, doesn’t disappear. “We are here to stay. This is our city,” she said.

Boyd Gaming released this statement:

Boyd Gaming does not anticipate any issues at the Fremont or Main Street Station at this time. The union’s negotiating team has been focused on talks with Strip operators to this point. Consistent with how negotiations have been handled in prior years, the union is currently focused on reaching agreements with Strip operators before beginning talks with downtown operators. Boyd Gaming has a long-standing, mutually respectful relationship with the Culinary Union. Once negotiations begin, we are confident we will be able to reach an amicable agreement.

MGM Resorts released this statement:

We’ve made good progress in resolving the remaining issues, and we will continue to negotiate to allow these productive talks to continue. We remain dedicated to negotiating a contract that demonstrates our commitment to employees and their families while our Company continues creating good jobs and future opportunities in Las Vegas. We remain confident that we will reach an agreement.
Jerry Wurf - the Man Who Put Public-Employee Unions on the Map

By Peter Dreier - The Prospect - June 3, 2019

The Prospect Editor’s Note: In May, Organized Labor celebrated what would have been the 100th birthday of Jerry Wurf, who turned the American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees (AFSCME) into a powerhouse and a champion of equal rights. Pictured above: then AFSCME President Jerry Wurf sitting next to the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. (AFSCME Photo)

n early 1968, the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. flew to Memphis three times to support African American sanitation workers who had gone on strike not only to protest unsafe conditions, abusive white supervisors, and low wages, but also to gain recognition for their union.

“One day our society will come to respect the sanitation worker if it is to survive,” King said in his March 18 speech to an overflow crowd of 15,000 people at a Memphis church. If Americans don’t offer that respect, King continued, they “are reminding not only Memphis, but … the nation that it is a crime for people to live in this rich country and receive starvation wages.”

On the platform with King that night was Jerry Wurf, president of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the union that, in coalition with the NAACP and local black ministers, had organized the workers and invited King to Memphis.

In his deep, rumbling voice, Wurf, a longtime civil rights activist, talked about the injustices shared by blacks and workers, then turned to King and said, “We know, brother, we’ve been the same places.” When a local black minister rose to speak, he pointed to Wurf and said, “This man’s skin is white. But he is a brother.”

Wurf—born a century ago on May 18, 1919—believed that garbage workers, secretaries, hospital orderlies, emergency medical technicians, child-care providers, highway laborers, office clerks, janitors, social workers, mental-health workers, and food service workers deserved decent pay, health-care benefits, and pensions. They should not have to give up their hopes, or their rights, just because they worked for government.

As AFSCME’s president, Wurf was the labor movement’s most important leader in organizing public employees, who’d been largely unorganized until the 1960s. Through aggressive organizing and skillful bargaining, his union grew from 220,000 members in 1964, when Wurf was elected its president, to over one million members at the time of his death in 1981. Wurf’s union focused on raising living standards for low-paid workers, who were disproportionately African Americans and Latinos.

The upsurge in public-sector unionizing in the 1960s and 1970s resembled the breakthrough of industrial unionism in the 1930s. Membership in public-sector unions, led by AFSCME (which became the nation’s fast-growing union, thanks in part to the publicity from its efforts in Memphis) as well as by the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, grew tenfold between 1955 and 1975, topping four million by the early 1970s and doubling to eight million by 2010. Along with AFT president Albert Shanker, Wurf was a key figure in enabling government employees to win, and exercise, collective-bargaining rights.

This dramatic growth in public-sector unionism occurred at a time when overall union membership was falling. The peak unionization rate was 35 percent during the mid-1950s. It has since plummeted to 10.5 percent. Today, government employees make up almost half (49 percent) of the 14.7 million union members in the United States. More than one-third of government employees are union members, compared with only 6.4 percent of private-sector workers, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
As historian Joseph McCartin observed, “By default, public-sector unions have become the single most effective social force capable of speaking out for a just economy.” Wurf’s pathbreaking success in organizing government workers in the 1960s and 1970s is what has kept the labor movement alive today.

Big business and conservatives understand this reality, which is why they’ve engaged in a persistent effort for several decades to demonize public-sector unions, pass state-level laws to make it harder for government employees to unionize, and file lawsuits designed to undermine unions’ political influence. One such suit culminated in the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2018 Janus v. AFSCME ruling, which made it more difficult for public-sector unions to be funded by all the workers they represent.

Wurf was born to Jewish émigrés from Austria and Hungary. His father was a tailor and textile worker. At the age of four, Wurf developed polio and spent much of his youth in a wheelchair. For the rest of his life, he walked with a limp, but that did not stop him from joining picket lines or protest marches.

As a Depression-era teenager in New York, he joined the Young People’s Socialist League and honed his skills at soapbox oratory, passing out leaflets and debating the fine points of political theory. Wurf briefly attended New York University but dropped out to change the world. Initially, he made change as a cashier at a local cafeteria, hoping to organize his fellow workers into the Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union. In the early 1940s, Wurf was such a persistent and militant organizer that the Yiddish-speaking cafeteria owners he was opposing called him Mal’ach Hamaves, or “angel of death.”

In 1947, Wurf joined the staff of District Council 37, AFSCME’s New York City affiliate, and soon became its director. He inherited a corrupt, do-nothing union with fewer than 1,000 members and transformed it into a potent organizing force. Wurf’s biggest breakthrough came in 1958, when he mounted a successful campaign to persuade New York Mayor Robert Wagner Jr. to issue Executive Order 49, which gave unions the right to organize the city’s employees. By the time he left to become AFSCME’s national president, District 37 had 38,000 members.

Unlike many leaders of national unions at the time, Wurf was anything but the anointed successor to the incumbent president. Indeed, Wurf became president in 1964 by ousting the do-nothing, entrenched incumbent in a closely fought election.

At District 37 and later as AFSCME president, Wurf committed the union not only to organizing African American employees but also to supporting the civil rights struggle. Before Wurf became AFSCME president, the union had separate white and black locals in the South, as did most unions. Wurf changed that practice. He elevated more African American members to leadership within the union and recruited more black and female organizers. In the late 1940s, he was a founder of the New York chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality, a group committed to using civil disobedience to challenge segregation.

The plight of Memphis’s African American sanitation workers posed a major challenge to AFSCME, which had not yet made major progress organizing public employees in the South. On January 31, 1968, 22 black workers were sent home when it began raining. White employees were not sent home. When the rain stopped after an hour or so, the white workers continued to work and were paid for the full day, while the black workers lost a day’s pay. The next day, two sanitation workers, Echol Cole and Robert Walker, were crushed to death by a malfunctioning city garbage truck.

These two incidents epitomized the workers’ long-standing grievances. The Memphis sanitation workers (that is, the men who collected the garbage—all of whom were black) earned an average of about $1.70 per hour—a rate so low that 40 percent of them qualified for welfare. They had almost no health-care benefits, pensions, or vacations. White supervisors called black workers “boy” and would arbitrarily send them home without pay for minor infractions that would be overlooked had they been white.
The workers’ appeal to Memphis’s mayor, Henry Loeb, and the city council to improve their working conditions was summarily rejected.

On February 12, 1,300 black sanitation workers went on strike. They demanded a pay raise, overtime pay, merit promotions without regard to race, and recognition by the city of AFSCME as their bargaining agent. City officials refused to negotiate with the union. In private, Mayor Loeb reportedly told associates, “I’ll never be known as the mayor who signed a contract with a Negro union.”

Local civil rights activists, led by the Reverend James Lawson, saw the strike as a way to mobilize the city’s African American community, which encompassed 40 percent of Memphis’s population but had almost no voice in local politics. Wurf and key AFSCME staffers joined forces with Memphis’s black leaders to organize marches and rallies to publicize the strike. On February 19, AFSCME and NAACP members held an all-night vigil at city hall. The next day, they called for a boycott of downtown merchants.

Wurf was contemptuous of Mayor Loeb’s racism and anti-union hostility, and he figured the best strategy was to outmaneuver him by getting the city council to support the workers. On February 22, more than 700 workers packed a city council hearing to demand a settlement. The next day, Wurf helped orchestrate a mass march from City Hall to Mason Temple (a prominent black church), during which the Memphis police attacked the union members, ministers, and AFSCME leaders indiscriminately, using clubs and mace. Police harassed them and even arrested strike leaders for jaywalking. On March 5, 117 strikers and supporters were arrested for sitting in at City Hall. Six days later, hundreds of students skipped high school to participate in a march led by black ministers.

The protests and the attacks cemented the alliance between the union and the black religious and community leaders, linking the workers’ grievances with the black community’s long-standing anger over police abuse, slum housing, segregated and inadequate schools, and the concentration of blacks in the lowest-paying, dirtiest jobs, according to historian Michael Honey’s definitive study of the Memphis strike, Going Down Jericho Road.

Despite the escalating protest, the city establishment dug in its heels, refusing to compromise and demanding that the strikers return to work or risk losing their jobs. The local daily newspaper, The Commercial Appeal, consistently opposed the strikers. “Memphis garbage strikers have turned an illegal walk out into anarchy,” it wrote in one editorial, “and Mayor Henry Loeb is exactly right when he says, ‘We can’t submit to this sort of thing!’”

Mayor Loeb and City Attorney Frank B. Gianotti persuaded a local judge to issue an injunction prohibiting the strike and picketing. The union and its allies refused to end their protests. Wurf and several other AFSCME leaders were cited for contempt, sentenced to ten days in jail, fined $50, and freed pending appeal. Wurf kept the strike going, raising money to help the strikers pay for food and rent.

With tensions rising and no compromise in sight, local ministers and AFSCME invited King to Memphis. His three visits to the city triggered national media attention and catalyzed the rest of the labor movement to expand its support for the strikers. His March 18 speech lifted the strikers’ flagging spirits.

King returned to Memphis on Thursday, March 28, to lead a mass march, but the protest erupted into chaos when some black youths, armed with picket sign sticks intended for the nonviolent march, began smashing windows and looting stores along the march route. The police moved into the crowd with nightsticks, mace, tear-gas, and gunfire, and arrested 280 people. Sixty people were injured. A police officer shot and killed unarmed 16-year-old Larry Payne. The state legislature authorized a 7 p.m. curfew and 4,000 National Guardsmen moved in.
Two weeks later, King came back to Memphis to lead another march, restore the campaign’s nonviolent tactics, and increase the pressure on the mayor and city council. On Wednesday, April 3, King delivered what would turn out to be his last speech, addressing the sanitation workers and other black residents along with white unionists and liberals at the Mason Temple. In his extemporaneous address, King linked the Memphis strike to struggles for justice throughout history.

“The issue is injustice,” King said. “The issue is the refusal of Memphis to be fair and honest in its dealings with its public servants, who happen to be sanitation workers.” He urged his listeners to boycott companies—like Coca-Cola and Wonder Bread—that discriminated against black workers, and called on the audience to take their money out of banks that refused to provide loans to blacks.

The next day, James Earl Ray assassinated King, who was standing on the balcony outside of his room at the Lorraine Motel. At the time, Wurf was in Washington, soliciting funds for the strike from other unions. He learned of King’s assassination when he heard a radio bulletin, and rushed back to Memphis.

On April 8, King’s widow, Coretta Scott King, three of their four children, and dozens of prominent figures—including Wurf; Harry Belafonte; the ministers Ralph Abernathy, Andrew Young, James Lawson, and Jesse Jackson; Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel; Bayard Rustin; and United Auto Workers President Walter Reuther—led a peaceful silent march of 40,000 people through downtown Memphis in tribute to Dr. King and in support of the strike. Local business leaders, tired of the boycott and the downtown demonstrations, urged Mayor Loeb to come to terms with the strikers.

President Lyndon Johnson instructed Undersecretary of Labor James Reynolds to mediate the conflict and settle the strike. With Reynolds’s support, Wurf led the negotiations with city officials to reach an agreement. On April 16, the city council passed a resolution recognizing the union. The 14-month contract included union dues check-off, a grievance procedure, and wage increases of 15 cents per hour. Members of AFSCME Local 1733 approved the agreement unanimously and ended the strike.

“Let us never forget,” Wurf said at the meeting where union members ratified their new contract, “that Martin Luther King, on a mission for us, was killed in this city. He helped bring us this victory.”

The settlement wasn’t only a victory for the sanitation workers. The strike had mobilized the African American community, which subsequently became increasingly involved in local politics and school and jobs issues, and which developed new allies in the white community.

That was part of Wurf’s radical agenda. But his militant support for civil rights, his insistence on organizing unorganized workers, and his opposition to the Vietnam War—along with his abrasive personality—put him at odds with AFL-CIO President George Meany and the leaders of more conservative unions. (On becoming AFSCME’s president in 1964, Wurf discovered that one staff member was really a CIA agent. Wurf immediately terminated the union’s relationship with the agency.) As a member of the AFL-CIO’s executive council and one of its vice presidents, Wurf—who mounted photos of socialist and labor icons Eugene Debs and Norman Thomas on his office wall—was often a dissenting voice on key issues confronting the labor movement. In 1973, one member told Time magazine that the votes of the executive council “usually range from 25 to 1 to 34 to 1, depending on how many other union chiefs are present to vote down Jerry Wurf.”

In October 14, 1973, the opening day of the AFL-CIO’s biennial convention, Wurf authored a blistering column in The Washington Post entitled “Labor’s Battle with Itself,” attacking his fellow union leaders for “fighting each other for the right to represent workers rather than working together to organize the unorganized.”
He proposed that the AFL-CIO, which then had 113 affiliated unions, reorganize itself into 20 or 30 large unions that could focus on organizing a particular industry or sector. The AFL-CIO leaders rejected Wurf’s proposal without much discussion, and it wasn’t until John Sweeney was elected to the Federation’s presidency in 1995 that the AFL-CIO turned its attention to organizing.

Wurf died of a heart attack on December 10, 1981, not long after President Ronald Reagan fired 11,345 unionized air traffic controllers after they struck for better conditions—inaugurating four decades of escalating Republican wars on unions.

Were he still alive, Wurf would surely be apoplectic about these assaults on public employees, but he would also be heartened by the growing militancy of schoolteachers and their unions over the past year, the important role that AFSCME and other government employee unions played in the Democrats’ upsurge in last November’s elections, and public opinion polls revealing that a vast majority of Americans support workers’ right to unionize.

Wurf would also be encouraged by the response of AFSCME and other public-sector unions to the Janus ruling. The mass exodus predicted by conservative and liberal pundits alike has not occurred. “Janus Barely Dents Public-Sector Union Membership,” headlined a February article in The Wall Street Journal. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, public-sector unions’ membership declined by only 49,000—to 7.16 million—in 2018, a loss of less than 1 percent. (Another 1.63 million workers are represented by unions but not dues-paying union members.)

AFSCME—the prime target of the right-wing groups that filed the Janus case—has retained 94 percent of the workers it represents, including those who pay dues and those non-members who pay agency fees. The union prepared for Janus by creating an ambitious program in which 25,000 rank-and-file members have talked to their fellow members—one-on-one—about what the union has accomplished, and what it’s seeking to do. To date, the union has engaged fully one million members in these conversations.

“Workers chose to stick with their union,” according to an AFSCME statement, “suggesting that efforts by the billionaires and corporations behind the Janus v. AFSCME case and the anti-worker majority of the United States Supreme Court to ‘defund and defang’ public service unions have fallen flat.” AFSCME’s success in both retaining members and recruiting new ones not only speaks well of the union’s current leaders, activists, and members, but also reflects the fierce commitment to worker power and social justice that guided the life of Jerry Wurf.
Over the last decade, Albany’s changes to the state Workers’ Compensation system have left disabled workers shortchanged but helped the insurance companies that underwrite the program realize huge profits, according to a white paper from the New School’s Center for New York City Affairs.

“While legislative changes in 2007 and 2017 included some positive measures, for the most part changes significantly lessened the adequacy of worker benefits,” according to the report written by James Parrott and Nicholas Martin. “The unfortunate result is that the focus of workers’ compensation in New York has shifted from fairly compensating injured workers to minimizing employer costs.”

As the actual dollar amount of worker benefits fell by 15 percent from 2014-17, insurance company profits rose 92 percent, according to the report.

Benefits paid to [indemnity benefits] or on behalf of workers [medical costs] were only 55 percent of Workers’ Comp premiums in 2017 and in that year, insurance profits exceeded $1 billion, the researchers found.

Albany’s efforts to keep the costs paid by employers low appeared to have worked, with payouts amounting to just 0.7 percent of total employee compensation.

According to the authors’ data, New York’s $150 minimum weekly benefit is less than half the $339 average for the five-closest neighboring states.

“Despite the fact that New York has the highest statewide average weekly wage, its maximum benefit of $871 in 2018 ranked 29th among all states,” according to Mr. Parrott and Mr. Martin.

Questions Imbalance

“Why do we see record profits for insurance companies and, at the same time, a steady decline in benefits for injured workers?” asked William Turley, president of the Injured Workers’ Bar Association. “I hope that this report will inspire our lawmakers to do more to protect the rights of the most vulnerable segment of our labor force.”

More than 200,000 workers are injured annually in New York State. In 75 percent of those cases, the lost work time was concentrated in low-wage industries.

The New School analysis came as New York State experienced a major spike in deaths on the job, particularly in construction, that are now at their highest level in 20 years. Meanwhile, across the country, on-the-job fatalities have remained flat.

Successful claimants get the maximum of two-thirds of their average wage in the year before their injury, and there is no adjustment for inflation.

“National experts recommend that the wage base be adjusted annually to reflect a worker’s earnings potential rather than the pre-injury wage,” according to the authors.

“This would include periodic wage increases, and promotions workers usually receive over the course of their careers.”
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Across the private sector, warehouses, nursing homes, food-manufacturing locations, hotels, and hospitals have the highest rates of lost-workday injuries, the researchers determined. The retail trade sector had the highest number of injuries that resulted in employees having to take off from work.

In the public sector, workers employed in law enforcement, nursing homes, hospitals and the public schools have a higher probability of experiencing a workplace injury.

“This report sounds the alarm that there is a need for a real look at workers’ compensation in New York following years of eroding benefits, high rates of workplace injuries and fatalities and skyrocketing Workers’ Comp insurance profits,” said Mr. Parrott.

“Getting injured on the job should not push a worker into poverty,” Charlene Obernauer, the executive director of the New York Committee on Safety and Health, said in a statement. “This report shows that the workers' compensation benefit structure is broken and needs to be overhauled for all of New York’s workers.”

"Frances Perkins, who played such a pivotal role in establishing New York's leadership role in workers' compensation benefits a century ago, would be aghast at the situation this report describes," said Patricia Smith, a former New York State Labor Commissioner and currently senior counsel for the National Employment Law Project.

Hector Figueroa, president of 32BJ Service Employees International Union, said, “When workers are safe on the job and adequately compensated if an accident does happen, those workers' families and their entire communities are more stable. That should be the goal for New York.”
American Airlines Mechanics Are Threatening The “Bloodiest, Ugliest Battle” In Labor History
by Western NY Labor Today - June 5, 2019

(NEW YORK CITY) - Mechanics at American Airlines are threatening to Strike if a new contract isn’t negotiated and the Union President has declared that Employees are prepared for the dispute to erupt into “the bloodiest, ugliest battle that the United States Labor Movement ever saw.”

The statement came just one day after the airline sued its Union-represented Workers, claiming that they had engaged in an illegal work slowdown to strengthen their hand at the bargaining table.

American Airlines merged with US Airways in 2013 to become the largest airline in the world. The 31,000 Mechanics who fixed planes for both airlines had existing contracts, but the merger didn’t produce a joint contract. American Airlines Mechanics had contracts with the Transport Workers Union (TWU) and US Airways Mechanics had contracts with the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM).

American Airlines has been trying to update the collective bargaining agreement with the TWU-IAM Association (a partnership between the two Unions that developed as a result of the merger), through contract talks since December 2015, with the National Mediations Board (NMB) serving as a Federal Mediator between the two sides - but talks were suspended in April after reaching an impasse.

In addition to issues of pay and benefits, the Union is concerned that the company is potentially looking to outsource thousands of jobs.

In an e-mail to In These Times, Timothy Klima is an Airline Coordinator for the IAM who has been personally involved with the negotiations: “The Employees represented by the TWU-IAM Association want to preserve the work they do, the health care they have and to reach parity in benefits between the two pre-merger workgroups. American Airlines demands to reduce the amount of work performed by their Employees and a corresponding headcount reduction, to eliminate the better health care choices the employees already have and refuses to improve the profit sharing formula that is one of the worst among their peers. In short, the Employees desire to grow with a healthy American Airlines, but at least want to keep what they have coming into the merger.”

On May 20th, American Airlines filed a lawsuit in the Northern District of Texas Federal Court claiming Mechanics purposely slowed down their work in an effort to hinder the company’s day-to-day operations. According to the lawsuit, the Mechanics’ actions have resulted in 650 flight cancellations and more than 1,500 maintenance delays since February.

“The presumption the American people are better served when their government outsources its core functions to private contractors has been disproven time and time again. Delivery of essential government services should not be subject to privatization and is best performed by our experienced Federal Workforce,” Lynch said then.

Connolly and Graves said seniors receiving medicines in the mail, after ordering them on the Internet and residents of rural areas who would be disconnected from the rest of the country, among others, need the six-day mail delivery.

Their Pro-Six-Day Delivery Resolution picked up 258 co-sponsors in the last Congress, even though it, like Lynch’s, was introduced late.
The Union denies that there was ever a purposeful slowdown.

“American Airlines should focus its time and effort to reach contractual agreements with its Employees instead of falsely accusing them of trumped-up job action charges,” Klima said.

“Collective Bargaining Agreements cannot be reached in courtrooms, in the media or by lobbying politicians. The TWU-IAM Association is eager to return to the bargaining table, which is the only arena where our contract disputes can be resolved.”

Vermont Senator and Democratic Presidential Candidate Bernie Sanders also criticized the legal action, tweeting on May 21st: “Instead of recognizing and addressing the concerns of Workers, American Airlines has moved to sue @MachinistsUnion.

Machinists keep passengers safe and on time. My message to American Airlines is simple: Stop the intimidation and bullying!”

On May 21st, during one of the airline’s regular Town Hall Meetings with Employees at New York City’s LaGuardia Airport, TWU President John Samuelsen confronted American Airlines President Robert Isom and told him the Union was prepared to Strike.

“I stand here to tell you - in front of this whole room, in front of everybody, anybody who’s listening - that you’re not going to get what you want,” Samuelsen said. “If this erupts into the bloodiest, ugliest battle that the United States Labor Movement ever saw, that’s what’s going to happen. You’re already profitable enough.”
Less Messaging, More Action
Barbara Madeloni - Labor Notes- June 5, 2019

You’re at a union meeting, brainstorming for a campaign, when a hand shoots up. “What we need is better messaging. Can we get a billboard? Maybe we could make a meme.”

We’ve all been there. Maybe you’ve said it yourself. It seems like common sense that if we can just find the right words and the correct medium, we’ll win over our fellow workers, or the community, or politicians.

I was frustrated daily by this logic when I was president of the Massachusetts Teachers Association, leading the campaign against a ballot question that would allow for more charter schools.

Members wanted a public relations team to come up with exactly the right message—and then to spread the message for them.

Educators didn’t recognize their own power to communicate why they were opposed to more charters. They thought marketers and campaign managers would know the magic words.

IT WASN’T THE BILLBOARD

Even union members who’ve won a strike sometimes give messaging too much credit for their victory.

Of course it’s important to understand the issues we’re fighting for, and to explain them in a way that inspires other working people to join our fight.

United Teachers Los Angeles, for instance, won because teachers showed how their strike mattered to everyone in the city. But it wasn’t their billboards that conveyed this. The union chose profound issues and fostered genuine conversations between educators and the community. We don’t win by being smarter or more clever in how we say things. We win because we build relationships through conversation and then we take action, putting our collective power to use.

As unions braced for the Supreme Court’s Janus decision, which made the whole public sector “right to work,” I was party to lots of discussion among union leaders about how to prevent disaster.

Experts were brought in to lead focus groups and tell us how we should talk to members and the community. Which term polls better—“workers” or “working people”? Is it best to say “union” or “labor movement”?

But I’d wager nothing saved us from a post-Janus apocalypse like the strike wave in the red states. That showed what a union is, better than any slogan could.

And to the degree that union preparation mattered, it was because members talked one on one with their co-workers. The specific words weren’t the point.

TALK TO EACH OTHER

I learned this in a backwards way during the fight against the ballot question in Massachusetts. Members of our union were new to fighting big-money privatizers, and they didn’t trust themselves to talk to voters. They wanted to plant lawn signs and stand out on street corners.
Eventually I accepted that people have to start somewhere. But I learned more than “meet them where they are” when I saw that at those standouts, something important was happening.

Members were talking to each other. They told stories. They shouted for cars to honk in support. They shared the pleasure of being cheered for taking a stand. They felt connected and powerful.

The labor movement grows by bringing people together to first name their world, then plan collective action to change it.

“Naming the world” means much more than messaging. It means identifying the structures of power that oppress us, and what we are fighting for, and how we can win.

We don’t need messaging nearly as much as we need the experience of taking action with others. These experiences change us—so we can go on to change the world.
Republican President Donald Trump ran for office as a champion of American Workers and a friend of Labor Unions, but his administration has systematically favored employers at the expense of Workers.

In recent months, the administration has moved to tighten qualifications for who must be paid the Minimum Wage and who must be paid overtime.

It is asking the Supreme Court to rule that companies can fire Workers on the basis of sexual orientation.

The number of Workplace Safety Inspectors employed by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has fallen to the lowest level in the agency’s half-century of operation.

And as the administration has pulled back from protecting the rights, safety and economic welfare of Workers, it has sought to undermine State Regulators and to prevent Workers from protecting their own interest through collective bargaining.

Trump said during the 2016 campaign that he supported a $10 Federal Minimum Hourly Wage, but since taking office he hasn’t sought any increase in the Minimum Wage, currently $7.25 an hour. Instead, his administration has tried to limit Worker pay.

In April, the Labor Department ruled that Workers for an unidentified cleaning company, and for similar businesses, were contractors rather than Employees and therefore not entitled to be paid a Minimum Wage or overtime or to have the company pay a portion of their Social Security taxes.

The administration has retreated from an Obama-era effort to expand eligibility for overtime pay. Most full-time, salaried Workers who earn less than a Federally-defined ceiling are eligible for overtime.

In the 1970s, more than 60% of Workers qualified, but because Congress failed to adjust the threshold for inflation, the share of eligible Workers fell to 7% by 2016.

The Obama Administration rehabilitated the rule by raising the salary line to roughly $47,500 and by mandating inflation adjustments, but a Federal Judge in Texas blocked implementation, and the Trump Administration declined to defend the rule. Instead, in March it proposed a new threshold of $35,300.

The administration estimates the increase from the current ceiling of about $23,700 would benefit about a million Workers, while the Obama rule would have benefited more than four million.

And the proposed rule does not include automatic inflation adjustments - so the benefits of the increase once again would gradually fade away, in effect delivering a windfall to employers.

The U.S. Labor Department began a program in 2018 allowing employers to report their own violations of Federal Wage Laws and to avoid penalties by paying Workers the money they are owed. The administration has not made a convincing case that clemency for delinquent companies will produce better results than punishing them.
While some employers may be encouraged to acknowledge wrongdoing, others may conclude they can take an interest-free loan by underpaying Workers now - and making amends later.

The program also makes no effort to coordinate with State Regulators to determine whether Workers are entitled to additional compensation under State Law - a likely circumstance given that 29 States require employers to pay a higher Minimum Wage than the Federal standard.

And the administration is siding with employers in a set of cases that the Supreme Court has agreed to hear regarding the rights of Gay and Transgender Workers.

Though the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has said that Federal Law bars discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, the administration has taken the opposite view, arguing that existing protections on the basis of sex do not extend to sexual orientation.

Trump has demonstrated his support for such discrimination by barring Transgender individuals from military service.

The Federal Government has displaced Unions as the primary protector of the rights and safety of American Workers, but Trump is also moving to limit the power of Unions - which still serve millions of Workers - and to limit opportunities for Workers to join or create them.

Last month, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) decided that it did not have jurisdiction over Labor complaints by Uber Drivers, because those Workers are contractors rather than Employees. That decision means the government will not enforce standard protections for Unionization Drives at Uber or other companies with similar business models.
In 2008, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) released new guidance that required any drug company developing treatments for type 2 diabetes (T2D) to evaluate the cardiovascular (CV) safety of those drugs. As these trials began to read out, the data suggested that some of these medicines were not just safe but had CV benefits—with the potential to reduce the risk of CV complications, such as CV death, heart attack, stroke, and hospitalization for heart failure.

Through these cardiovascular outcomes trials (CVOTs), innovative science was delivered—advancing understanding of these medications and flipping the treatment paradigm on its head. Patients and providers could now go beyond A1C management when thinking about treatment options, expanding the treatment model to more holistic care that addresses CV risk. However, despite these advances in clinical science, there continues to be a lack of understanding around the interconnectivity between these diseases and barriers that prevent patients from receiving evidence-based care that follows the most recent research.

To work through these issues, AstraZeneca recently convened a roundtable discussion produced by POLITICO Focus in Washington, D.C. featuring representatives from patient advocacy organizations, congressional staff, AstraZeneca executives, and health care providers ranging from endocrinologists and cardiologists to pharmacists. The discussion sought to identify policies and protocols that are preventing providers from treating patients based on the most recent clinical evidence and identify measures that support earlier, more holistic treatment and prevention.

The American Heart Association (AHA) identifies diabetes as one of the leading manageable risk factors of cardiovascular disease (CVD), noting that “adults with diabetes are two to four times more likely to die from heart disease than adults without diabetes.” T2D may be associated with high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, and lower physical activity, and can put patients at an increased risk of other cardiac complications such as CV death, heart attack, stroke, and hospitalization for heart failure. In fact, according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), heart failure is one of the most common cardiac complications of T2D, with an alarming mortality rate—within 10 years of diagnosis, about 90 percent of people with heart failure will die.

Today, nearly 30 million Americans are living with T2D, and an additional 84 million are at risk according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This incidence of disease has placed a severe strain on the U.S. health care system, and most experts agree the country is facing both a health and economic crisis.

In the past decade, we’ve seen improvements in clinical guidelines across a multitude of advocacy and professional organizations, outlining the use of several new therapies shown to reduce the risk of CV events, such as CV death, heart attack, stroke, and hospitalization for heart failure. However, these treatments aren’t being deployed early enough for many people with diabetes, and health care providers feel there are roadblocks that prevent them from following the most recent clinical research. The American Diabetes Association (ADA) Economic Cost of Diabetes in the U.S. report found that almost $330 billion is spent annually on diabetes care. So, it’s worth asking why our health care system is failing to improve quality of life, reduce costs, and decrease the number of CV complications for people with diabetes.

In an on-the-record discussion moderated by Barbara Sadick, a member of the Association of Health Care Journalists, the AstraZeneca and POLITICO Focus roundtable participants discussed the growing crisis and identified challenges, roadblocks, and potential solutions for access to better care. The conversation was held under Chatham House rules. It was on the record, but in order to encourage a free and frank conversation, comments were not attributed to individuals. Participants are listed at the end of this report.
The dialogue, outlined in this report, looked at health care providers’ attempts to educate patients, incentives to provide holistic treatment, hurdles to prescribing the right drugs, and socioeconomic issues that prevent patients from receiving the best care. A few common themes emerged throughout the discussion:

- Patient education: Health care providers shared that they aren’t often able to take the time to sit down with their patients and educate them about the cardiovascular risks associated with diabetes. They feel they are not armed with quality resources where they can direct their patients, and they hesitate to introduce evidence-based interventions that aren’t covered by insurers. Because of this, people with diabetes aren’t receiving tailored and optimal treatment that helps manage their medical needs.

Health care provider incentives: Providers also feel the American health care system is largely predicated on fee-for-service care, with incentives aligned to acute care rather than chronic disease management and prevention. This comes at the expense of holistic care that aims to improve long-term outcomes.

- Regulatory and insurance policy hurdles: Many insurance policies include requirements such as “fail first” and complicated “prior authorization” procedures. Providers feel that these policies decelerate access and force patients to try treatments on the formularies before graduating to newer therapies, impacting their ability to implement the treatments that may reduce CV risk.

Patient education

Even though T2D is defined as a metabolic disease, it is an intricate condition that can lead to serious complications and adverse outcomes, including coronary heart disease, heart failure, stroke, kidney failure, eye and nerve damage. And this information needs to be broadly disseminated to people with diabetes, as many believe the best treatment approach is holistic with a focus on prevention.

Yet, many diabetes experts say that patients are often uninformed about the intricacies of their condition, and because of this, they aren’t engaged in the early interventions that can help stave off these serious complications.

Takeaways

At the roundtable, participants discussed how to best gauge a person with diabetes’ level of understanding about their disease and to use that information to educate patients appropriately. “They need to understand what the disease process is,” one physician said. “I can tell you from a private practice standpoint in seeing a huge number of [diabetes patients] over my lifetime, the first question we ask is, ‘Have you been through diabetes education?’ The answer usually is universally no.”

Participants also shared that primary care physicians are the first line of defense for many diabetes patients.

“If you look at where care is taking place for diabetes, probably 85 to 90 percent of it is with primary care. It's not with endocrinologists; it's not with specialists. It's certainly not with cardiologists.”

“Occasionally we keep patients if they are referred to us more for preventative reasons,” said one cardiologist. “But [the] majority of the time [patients are referred to cardiologists] because already something has happened to them. And, the unfortunate truth of that is many of those events could have been prevented.”

Some experts at the table believed that comprehensive education about diabetes and the CV complications it yields should start before the patient is diagnosed with diabetes, once it’s clear that diagnosis is possible or even likely.
“Once you identify someone who has glucose intolerance, much less diabetes, they should be going through diabetes education where they can learn what the disease process is. That's where you have a chance to catch them, not after the fact when we pick them up at the time when they have complications and they’re already having major problems.”

One patient advocate talked about the importance of two-way conversations between providers and patients. A person with diabetes needs to feel comfortable with a provider before they’re willing to open up about the factors that may potentially exacerbate their disease.

“I don't think we're prioritizing that relationship between the provider and the patient. Because if we are, then that creates more opportunities for the person to have that back and forth conversation, ask questions. If they feel more comfortable with that clinician, they may open up and share more information about why they aren't adherent to this treatment, or why it's not doable for them to get to the doctor's office X times per year for a checkup. It starts to uncover a whole slew of different factors that can ultimately make people more adherent to treatment.”

Other experts at the table noted that provider and patient education is more feasible when holistic T2D education is prioritized by the government. Several individuals pointed to the government’s successful anti-smoking campaigns that led to a sharp decline in lung cancer and wondered why a similar campaign hasn’t been launched for patients with diabetes.

“I'm psyched that there's a lot of work in type 1 diabetes, but it feels like half of what you're doing in Congress is focusing on type 1, when 95 percent of the problem is in type 2,” said one participant. “I don't actually feel like there's a lot of momentum [in government] around helping people with type 2.”

One participant pointed out that funding has been earmarked for public education, and it’s now just a matter of honing the messaging.

“The CDC is investing a lot of money at the state level to specifically look at heart disease, diabetes, [and] hypertension. And a lot of those dollars that come from Congress are earmarked specifically around raising awareness through media campaigns [and] social media campaigns. But they're siloed so that diabetes, pre-diabetes, and cardiovascular disease all stand alone. I don't think the folks at the CDC are right now giving the direction to states to say, ‘What we want you to do is to educate patients specifically about this issue.’ So, there's a mechanism, there's funding, there's opportunity there, but that's just not the message that we're hearing right now.”

Health care provider incentives

There’s a reason that this type of patient education is often lacking; many feel the right incentives aren’t in place to enable health care providers to offer the kind of comprehensive education and treatment that can reduce the risk of CVD and other complications.

The U.S. health care system is largely insurance based, and health care providers often shape their treatment procedures on what insurers are willing to pay for. This leads to a focus on short-term fixes at the expense of long-term, comprehensive care.

Takeaways

One physician in the room noted that the reimbursement system creates a barrier to care by paying for individual services instead of outcomes.
“The practice environment and the incentives are not aligned right now to incentivize the primary care doc-
tor—or anybody else for that matter—to put patient outcomes first. If you look at what the performance metrics
and health care system incentives are, it’s to see as many patients as possible within the shortest amount of time
possible.

There’s absolutely no incentive to do it in ways that would actually minimize bad outcomes, including heart
failure, myocardial infarction, stroke, and all the cardiovascular events.”

An alternate system was proposed, one that’s familiar to individuals in the health care space. It proposes that
health care providers are paid based on patient outcomes.

“Why not align incentives in that way and say, ‘If you’re a health care system and you have a small percentage
of your patient population that generates most of the health care costs, if you reduce event rates and improve
outcomes in that patient population, you actually get to benefit from that.’”

In fact, one cardiologist’s employer experimented with a system that was more aligned with producing better,
long-term outcomes. The health care provider launched a cardio-metabolic center that enrolled diabetes patients
with an eye toward comprehensive care.

“We make sure that the diabetes is managed in a way that is going to minimize complications, that their lipids
are managed, that their blood pressure is managed. They talk to a dietician.

We give the patients medications that they need. We actually have people to deal with access specifically, to
make sure that if the patient is eligible for a certain treatment program, they get that program and their drug
costs are minimal.”

And it’s not just misplaced incentives that compromise holistic treatment. Participants noted that it’s also a mes-
saging issue. A cardiologist opined that, because the onset of CVD for people with diabetes is gradual, there’s
no sense of urgency within the health care system to employ early interventions.

“I think there's some complacency with saying, ‘Oh you've got diabetes? Don't worry. You're going to live
around 20, 30 years. It's not a big deal. You're not going to die tomorrow.' So, there's no urgency to treat you,
right? But there should be.”

Regulatory and insurance policy hurdles

Even when health care providers want to optimize for positive, long-term outcomes and the reduction of CV
complications, such as CV death, heart attack, stroke, and hospitalization for heart failure, experts at the round-
table stated that they were stymied from doing so by policies and protocols that favor cost reduction over the
best care.

One way this happens is through policies like “fail first” that require a patient to first try older therapies be-
fore they’re able to be prescribed newer, more innovative drugs that have been shown to reduce the risk of CV
events. Even if a provider believes the newer therapy is appropriate, they’re forced to first prove that another
drug has failed.

Takeaways

Above all else, there needs to be mutual agreement—among patients, providers, and lawmakers—when it
comes to prioritizing the treatment of patients based on scientific evidence within clinical guidelines.
The term ‘nonmedical switching’ and ‘utilization management’ play a large role in people’s ability to get on the right drug at the right time,” said a patient advocate. “That practice goes horribly wrong because you have cases where a patient really should have been on a different medication that they decided on with their prescriber, but the insurance policy created a couple of barriers they would have to go through before they could get to that point. And if you're a patient who is really sick and not in a position to advocate for yourself, it's hard to even know that they have an appeals process where a doctor can contact the insurance company to discuss why a treatment is necessary.”

The same can be said for prior authorization policies that require a therapy to be approved by the insurance company before it can be prescribed. This process can take weeks, forcing a patient to undergo prolonged suffering. It’s also frustrating to the health care providers who must navigate this process. “It just makes it even worse to try to take care of the patient, because many of the physicians just throw up their hands and say, ‘I quit. I'm not willing to deal with this. I know this patient needs to have their LDL [low-density lipoproteins] lowered. I know the drug that I need to give them to lower that LDL. Their insurance company won't allow me to do that without setting aside a huge amount of time trying to get the best drug for that particular patient. And even when I finally get the drug for that patient, it's only good for a year, and the next year I have to go through the same thing again.’”

While these roadblocks are regularly identified, it is the solutions that require more consideration.

“I don't think there's enough attention on moving smaller, less impactful bills,” said one policy expert. "I think most people are focused on… just one large package…and less of the, ‘How do I move the ball forward incrementally?’ I think that's part of the problem.”

Another policy expert pointed to step therapy reform legislation that’s being considered in about two dozen states as one potential solution to the barriers providers face when choosing which medicines would most benefit patients.

“It creates exceptions for common sense scenarios where it doesn't make sense for a patient to have to step through one or two or three treatments to get to the one that they decided upon with their physician or clinician. The legislation requires an insurance plan to have a transparent appeals process that's easily accessible on its website, and there are roughly five different exceptions for which step therapy would be overwritten within 24 to 72 hours.”

Reform legislation on the horizon is one of multiple solutions that do spark optimism when it comes to tackling the problem.

“The thing though is, that the change is coming, when it comes to the way that health care is practiced, that can realign incentives in a way that actually prioritizes complex disease management.‘”[It] certainly looks like Medicare seems to be going in that direction as well, to say ‘We're actually going to, in the next few years, transition at some point from the pay per service, or kind of a volume-based care environment, so the more you do the more you get paid, to an outcomes-based, a value-based care environment, which is not necessarily how much you do, but how much of what you do actually matters in terms of patient outcomes.’” As we continue these solutions-based discussions, participants agreed that solving the problem will involve empowering providers and patients to implement the therapies they believe will produce the best outcomes and encouraging lawmakers to invest in policy changes that promote long-term solutions. The task at hand is to catalyze the action necessary to tackle the problem head-on.

“I think what we need is an impetus to try to increase the urgency and understanding that this is a disease that affects you, affects the economy. It affects every single person.”
For Workers -Are Fewer OSHA Safety Inspectors
‘Putting Workers At Risk?’
By IBEW News via Western NY Labor - June 7, 2019

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) - A new study of U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration data since 2016 suggests that record-keeping sleight of hand is masking a significant drop in major cases arising from inspections and the costly penalties that help deter employers from cutting corners.

On the surface, OSHA reports a similar number of inspections in recent years, says Researcher Deborah Berkowitz, formerly a Senior Policy Adviser at OSHA who now directs the Worker Health and Safety Program at the National Employment Law Center in Washington, D.C.

“But digging just a bit beneath the surface, it becomes clear that this is a false narrative and that the agency is prioritizing quantity over quality, in an effort to disguise what is really going on,” Berkowitz writes.

What’s going on in large part is that the ranks of OSHA Inspectors, officially called Compliance Officers, are at a historic low.

“OSHA’s inspection resources are so limited that it would take the agency more than one hundred and fifty years to visit every workplace under its jurisdiction just once,” Berkowitz said.

In 2010, according to the report, OSHA had 1,016 Inspectors, virtually the same number it had three decades earlier.

By 2016, the agency was down to 952 inspectors. By January 1st, 2019, it had dropped to 875.

Labor Secretary Alexander Acosta told a House Appropriations Subcommittee in early April that OSHA hired 76 new inspectors in 2018, but none were hired earlier in the Trump Administration and the Employees training now can’t conduct field investigations on their own for three years.

Meanwhile, attrition continues. “They are deep in the hole of hiring, and the vacancies are sitting there,” Berkowitz told the IBEW. “They have also changed how hiring is done, and that has slowed the process down.”

Overall, Workplace Fatalities fell slightly in 2017, the most recent data available from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), but at 5,147 deaths, the tally was still the second-highest tally in nine years.

BLS numbers are always larger than OSHA’s, as they cover more industries and include Work-Related Vehicle Fatalities.

Federal OSHA is responsible for most construction and general industry worksites in 29 States. Others have State-based programs.

Last year’s BLS statistics won’t be published until December, but OSHA data for 2018 show that it investigated 921 fatalities and catastrophes, a classification for incidents that hospitalize three or more workers. That’s 10% more than in 2017 and the highest number in a decade. Yet, the agency is conducting fewer of the inspections crucial to preventing deaths, injuries and illnesses on the job.
ALBANY, N.Y. (WRGB) - A vote for paid sick leave in Albany County was defeated by the Legislature Monday night 21 to 17.

Many small business owners are applauding the decision, saying it would be yet another burden on them, coming on the heels of the minimum wage increase.

They also argued that it would make Albany County less competitive by causing current small businesses to move elsewhere in the Capital Region like Troy or Schenectady, and prevent new businesses from coming to Albany.

Many said they aren't against paid sick time in general, but say it's an issue that should be voted on at the state level, not county by county.

"The time-consuming efforts to draft this law, a political statement, in search of a problem nonexistent, is astounding at the local level. This is a state policy at best, possibly a federal policy," said a representative of the state Business Council.

On the other hand, supporters of the law say it's not about policy or regulations, its about human rights, health and well-being, and compassion.

They say they won't stop fighting for thousands of workers in Albany County who lack even just one paid sick day.

"It's not someone's right to vote yes or no on human rights! Human rights are human rights," one man said.

"People are far more than budget lines and ledger entries! We are the fabric of this and every community," a woman added.

Albany County would have become the third in the state to pass paid sick leave, after New York City and Westchester County.
A spotlight on Staten Island
The borough is having a moment – culturally, economically and politically.
John Lentz - City and State New York - June 10, 2019

Staten Island is having a moment. “Saturday Night Live” features two cast members – Pete Davidson and Colin Jost – who are widely known for their Staten Island roots, and Davidson is currently filming a movie in the borough.

An FX mockumentary about modern-day vampires – “What We Do in the Shadows” – is set in Staten Island, as were two recent reality shows, CNBC’s “Staten Island Hustle” and MTV’s “Made in Staten Island.”

Even Wu-Tang Clan, the venerable Staten Island hip-hop group, has a new documentary on Showtime.

Pop culture aside, there are other signs that the borough is bustling. Local elected officials are touting flashy new retail options, like the long-awaited Empire Outlets on the St. George waterfront.

The Staten Island Advance is wondering whether the borough now has too many restaurants. Even the failed bid to build a massive Ferris wheel on the island might be revived.

Politically, too, the borough is abuzz. In this week’s cover story, we put a spotlight on first-term Rep. Max Rose, who notched an impressive election victory last fall – and may face an even tougher contest in 2020.

And we are rolling out our annual Staten Island Power 100 list, which, in addition to Rose, has some new names to know.
Florida lawmakers in 2018 included a provision in a massive omnibus education bill that requires unions representing school district employees be de-certified as collective bargaining units if less than 50 percent of its “instructional personnel” don’t pay dues.

As a right-to-work state, Florida forbids requiring employees to join organized labor organizations, or pay dues, in order to be represented by unions in bargaining with school districts and the state.

Supporters of House Bill 7055 – overwhelmingly Republican in the GOP-controlled legislature – said teachers unions were representing school district employees in collective bargaining negotiations by default, even when fewer than half those eligible were not dues-paying members.

Led by House Speaker Richard Corcoran, R-Land O’Lakes, now state Education Commissioner, proponents maintained teachers unions were more engaged in their own pursuits than in the interests of paying and non-paying members.

HB 7055 requires teacher unions to document the percentage of dues-paying members within the ranks of those they represent. Those that failed to garner dues-paying membership of at least 50 percent of “instructional personnel” would be de-certified as collective bargaining units by the state’s Public Employees Relations Commission [PERC].

To regain status as a collective bargaining unit, the union would have to submit a re-certification petition that includes “interest cards” from at least 30 percent of employees and conduct an election in which a majority agree the union can represent them.

One independent teachers union with less than 50 percent of their “instructional personnel members” listed as dues-paying has been decertified by PERC and another could be under the new law.

The Jefferson County Education Association [JCEA] was de-certified because it failed to file any information after the Florida Board of Education mandated it be operated by Somerset Academy, a nonprofit charter school company, as part of a five-year “turnaround plan” for the “failing” district.

Santa Rosa Professional Educators [SRPE] had its certification revoked after it reported only 644 of 2,055 district “instructional” employees were due-paying members.

The union, however, has submitted “interest cards” from 690 employees – exceeding the 30 percent threshold – and hopes to be re-certified, SRPE Executive Director Anna Neese told The Center Square.

“We are applying for recertification. It will go for a vote,” Neese said Monday. “This is something that [teachers’ unions] will have to do every year, across the state, wherever [dues-paying membership] is below 50 percent.”

SRPE attorney Michael Hargraves explained the statute requires if dues-paying “instructional employees” membership falls below 50 percent of all employees represented by a bargaining unit, it must apply for re-certification, which includes a vote in which members and non-members in a district agree the union can represent them.
NEW YORK, N.Y.—Service workers at two financial-district luxury-condominium buildings went on strike June 10, after almost two years of trying to get their first union contract.

They plan to stay out “till we get a contract,” said Naim Likovic, night-shift concierge at the Setai Wall Street at 40 Broad St., as about 15 workers and supporters picketed on the sidewalk, chanting “two years, too long.”

The nine workers at the Setai and another eight at Be@William at 90 William St. joined 32BJ SEIU in 2017 and demanded a contract, but the boards of both buildings have so far refused to agree to one. At Be@William, the board has insisted that it wants to shop around for health-insurance plans each year rather than put the workers into 32BJ’s health plan, says porter Miguel Rodriguez.

Under their current plan, says concierge Jason Clifton, “guys have been dropped” and didn’t know it “until they go to the doctor and find out they don’t have insurance.”

Workers have received only one pay increase in the 10 years he’s worked there, he adds, and the building’s management won’t match their contributions to their 401(k) plans.

Perry Heidecker, an attorney representing the condo in its negotiations with 32BJ, said that another session is scheduled for July 10, so it would not be appropriate for him to comment on “substantive issues” with talks pending. At the Setai, “the last time we got a raise was more than four years ago,” says morning-shift concierge Rauddy Sanchez. They finally got health insurance last year, two years after it was first promised, says Likovic, who adds that he had to pay $750 a year in tax penalties for not having coverage while he was waiting.

Workers there make $20.25 an hour, says concierge Jorge Rodriguez. The industry-standard wage at union buildings, according to 32BJ, is $24.90, and some workers at the two buildings on strike make as little as $18.

Meanwhile, apartments currently for sale at Be@William are advertised from $700,000 to $2.45 million. The 113-unit building’s Web site touts its Be@Spot SkyLounge’s “sleek, glass-walled rooftop setting.”

The Setai, a block south of the New York Stock Exchange, advertises its “un paralleled residential experience with exceptional hotel-quality services” and its “Zen lobby, which is meant to provide residents and visitors with a calming feeling.” The about 160 apartments in the building are worth an average of $1.1 million, according to 32BJ.

“They spend money on luxury stuff,” says Likovic. “They’re not taking care of the workers.” These buildings can certainly afford it,” says a 32BJ staffer on the picket line.

State Sen. Brian Benjamin (D-Manhattan) who joined the picketers, is sponsoring a bill that would require service workers at “high-end” buildings that receive the state’s Cooperative and Condominium Tax Abatement to pay “prevailing wage” and benefits, as is mandated for buildings that get the 421-a tax break for new construction. “If you get state subsidies and support, workers in your building should be able to have a decent life,” he told LaborPress.

The bill is still in committee in both houses of the Legislature, but Benjamin, the son of a 32BJ member, says he wants to get it passed this year. The union estimates that it would cover more than 2,000 door persons, cleaners, and maintenance persons who work at condos and coops that receive millions of dollars in benefits from the abatement, “but fail to provide decent jobs.”
NEW YORK, N.Y.— New York State’s legislative leaders announced June 11 that they had reached agreement on an omnibus bill they said would “give New Yorkers the strongest tenant protections in history.”

The bill would greatly strengthen protections for tenants in the roughly 1 million apartments covered by the state’s rent-stabilization system, more than half of whom make less than $50,000 a year. It would also let local governments outside New York City and Westchester, Nassau, and Rockland counties opt into rent stabilization, which they are currently barred from doing. But it does not include a measure that would have expanded tenant protections to almost all the state’s rental housing, prohibiting landlords from evicting tenants without a specific “good cause” such as not paying their rent.

“For too long, power has been tilted in favor of landlords, and these measures finally restore equity and extend protections to tenants across the state,” Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie said in a statement announcing the final version of the bill June 11. “These reforms will pass both legislative houses, and we are hopeful that the Governor will sign them into law.”

A spokesperson for Heastie said both houses are scheduled to vote on the bill June 14.

The bill would close the loopholes in rent regulations the state imposed in the 1990s, which are estimated to have caused the loss of more than 300,000 rent-stabilized apartments. It would repeal the 1997 law that allows landlords to deregulate vacant apartments once the rent gets high enough—currently about $2,775 a month. It would make “preferential rents,” rents below the legal maximum, last as long as the tenant stays in the apartment, so they don’t get hit with a $500 increase when their lease expires. It also would repeal the extra 20% increase allowed on vacant apartments since 1997, and prohibit both the state and local governments from granting rent increases based on how long the tenant had lived in the apartment or how low their rent was.

“Housing Justice for All is proud to stand with the State Legislature as it takes meaningful steps forward to end tenant harassment, displacement, destabilization, and rising rents,” Cea Weaver, campaign director of the Upstate Downstate Housing Alliance, which had advocated a nine-bill “universal rent control” package, said in the Stewart-Cousins/Heastie statement. “This bill is affirmation of the statewide movement that we are building together, and we look forward to working with the Senate and the Assembly, in the years to come, until every renter, from Brooklyn to Buffalo, can live free from the fear of displacement.”

The Alliance’s more than 75 members include DC 37 AFSCME, 1199SEIU, and United Auto Workers Local 2320, which represents Legal Services staff. In May, they were among the 12 unions whose leaders, including state AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento, endorsed the package. “Our members—tenants—need protection from unfair and unreasonable rent increases, from unsafe conditions, and from retaliation,” they wrote, adding that the nine bills would expand protections “for nearly 5 million unregulated tenants across the state.”

The real-estate industry, however, was able to stave off the measures it considered most objectionable, including the “good cause” eviction bill. Sponsored by state Sen. Julia Salazar (D-Brooklyn), it would have extended some state protections to tenants in buildings built after rent stabilization was enacted in 1974, smaller than the six-apartment minimum for rent stabilization, or outside its geographical limits. The bill agreed on will also not reregulate the apartments taken out of rent stabilization under the 1997 vacancy-decontrol law.

Landlords also strongly opposed repealing the provisions in the rent-stabilization law that allow permanent rent increases for renovating individual apartments and for building-wide “major capital improvements,” commonly called MCI's.
Landlords’ main argument for preserving those increases was that they have a right to a return on their investment in upgrading their buildings. Some nonunion contractors, working with the real-estate lobby, staged protests saying repeal would cost them jobs. Tenant groups’ argument for repeal was that both types of increases create an incentive to push tenants out, with a common scenario being the landlord fraudulently inflating the cost of the work on a vacant apartment to claim a bigger increase, and the construction being done in a way intended to encourage the remaining rent-stabilized tenants to leave.

The Senate majority had endorsed both good-cause eviction and MCI repeal, while the Assembly did not include good-cause eviction in the eight-bill package Heastie presented in April.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo opposed repeal of renovation increases, blaming the Senate for delays in renewing the rent-stabilization laws and implying that Democrats from upstate and Long Island who backed the full “universal rent control” package would have trouble in the next election.

The governor said last week that he would sign whatever the Legislature passes, however.

Other provisions in the bill would reduce the maximum increases for the about 22,000 remaining rent-controlled apartments from 7.5% a year to parallel the lower hikes permitted by local rent guidelines boards. It would also limit increases in trailer parks to 3-6% a year unless the landlord can prove hardship. That is an issue in upstate areas, where private-equity funds have been buying up mobile-home communities.

It also contains several measures intended to beef up the state’s notoriously weak enforcement against illegal rent overcharges. It would extend the statute of limitations on them from four years to six or more “as reasonably necessary,” and mandate that the state housing agency submit an annual report on what it’s doing to enforce the law. It would require that 25% of applications for MCIs be inspected and audited.

Other provisions would give tenants facing eviction, including those in unregulated units, more time to find a lawyer or come up with back rent, and bar the use of “tenant blacklists,” court-record databases of those who have sued their landlord for repairs or gone on rent strike long enough to get an eviction notice for nonpayment.

A subtle but crucial change is that the bill would also make rent regulations permanent, instead of having to be renewed every four to eight years. That need for renewal was what enabled Senate Republicans and then-Gov. George Pataki to enact loopholes like vacancy decontrol in 1997 and 2003, by threatening to let the law expire if the Assembly didn’t agree to those changes.

“None of these historic new tenant protections would be possible without the fact that New York finally has a united Democratic legislature,” Stewart-Cousins and Heastie said.

The Assembly passed measures to repeal vacancy decontrol, the 20% vacancy bonus, and other elements of the 1997 law several times over the past decade, but they never made it out of committee in the Republican-controlled Senate.

That obstacle was cleared away in last year’s elections. In September, six of the eight members of the Independent Democratic Conference, Democratic senators who allied with Republicans to ensure their control of committee chairs and which bills get to the floor, were unseated in primaries by candidates running on pro-tenant platforms. In November, Democrats won a 39-24 majority in the Senate, giving them control of the state’s upper house for the first time since 1966.
“PERC has not issued the order to decertify,” Hargraves said. “Under the statute, what happens is you have the opportunity to file a petition to recertify. Decertification does not occur until the commission issues an order to decertify. That has not happened as yet. What we are in the process of doing is a renewal of our certification application and we believe we are going to be successful.”

Morgan Shields, legal counsel and director of Workers for Opportunity with the Mackinac Center for Public Policy in Midland, Mich., said Florida’s HB 7055 is part of a nationwide “workers’ voting rights trend.”

“People are learning even when they get out of the union, even when a majority are not in the union, the unions are still representing them,” she told The Center Square.

According to a study by James Sherk, former research fellow at The Heritage Foundation, the vast majority of union members have never voted for which union would represent them.

Only 7 percent of private sector union members were employed when their workplace was organized. The other 93 percent “inherited” their unions, Sherk writes.

While Florida’s teachers unions are public employee collective bargaining units – and represent all district workers, not just teachers – the pattern is similar.

Those days are over in Florida, Shields said.

“I think, overall, when people have a choice, they’ll choose” how they want to be represented, she said. “This is the first year it is happening in Florida.”

Similar laws are in place in Missouri, Iowa and Wisconsin, allowing all public employees – not just school district workers – the right to periodically vote to determine which union would provide the best representation, she said.

The Florida Education Association [FEA], which represents more than 140,000 pre K-12 teachers, higher education faculty and educational staff professionals – but not the independent SRPE’s members – filed a lawsuit last June against PERC challenging HB 7055 as a “union-busting” measure that unfairly “targets” teachers.

FEA Chief of Staff Martin Powell told The Center Square “the primary aspect of the suit is equal protection under the law. Ultimately, HB 7055 singled out ‘units of instructional personnel,’” which is unconstitutional under educational and labor law.

The lawsuit also alleges HB 7055 violates the state’s single-subject law by including union certification in a massive omnibus bill that includes provisions that don’t have “much of relationship to each other.”

Powell said he expects a summary judgment in the lawsuit, filed in Leon County Civil Court, this summer.
Brooklyn, NY – Good murder mysteries ultimately keep you guessing “whodunit?” Tim Sheard’s Lenny Moss murder mysteries ultimately keep you guessing “whodunit?” — and “how will workers secure a collective-bargaining-agreement that guarantees area standard wages and benefits plus a dignified retirement?”

“There are some people who will read my books because they like mysteries or they like medical stories, maybe they work in the health field,” the author, organizer and Hard Ball Press publisher says over a coffee on Cortelyou Road. “By drawing them in as a mystery reader or a medical story reader they say, ‘Wait a minute! There’s a struggle; there’s a union story in there!’ It’s my way of drawing in people from outside the sphere of the Labor Movement.”

“One Foot In The Grave” is, in fact, Sheard’s eighth Lenny Moss mystery and finds the tenacious service worker valiantly trying to help organize hospital staffers simultaneously caught in the grips of a nasty outbreak of Zika virus and a vengeful madman who’ll kill anyone who dares get in his way. (Sheard’s killer comes across as a chilling mix of Hannibal Lecter and The Joker).

“There is an underlying structure to a mystery story,” Sheard explains. “The first is the crime with the question: Will my protagonist uncover the culprit? But I also like to include a labor struggle because Lenny Moss is a shop steward. And then I usually also have at least one medical condition; a patient to follow through the book. Usually, there are three interwoven stories that go together to form the novel.”

From the outset, publishers interested in Lenny Moss, were, nevertheless, also leery about a protagonist who worked as a janitor and pressed Sheard to give his unofficial detective a professional sheen — like a doctor. But the Brooklyn author would not hear of it.

“I said no, I want my protagonist to be a good, blue collar, working class guy,” Sheard recalls.

For Sheard, Lenny Moss’ identity is vital because stories are vital — and enormously powerful.

“When you read a story you walk in the shoes of the character,” he says. “You feel the character’s pain; you laugh when they say something funny; you’re excited when they win. A story can really build empathy between the reader and the character. And when the character represents unions then it can really build solidarity with the Labor Movement — people can really feel the pressure, feel the pain — feel the hope that the characters do as they struggle for their union.”

Union solidarity is something Sheard thought a lot about when penning Lenny Moss’ latest adventure. In “One Foot In The Grave,” efforts to unionize the staff of James Madison Hospital comes in response to management’s careless disregard for the safety of all workers but is stymied when some bristle at the idea of organizing with “non-professionals.”

It’s a phenomenon Sheard sees played out in real life, notably within the healthcare industry.

“There’s been a rise of professional unions in healthcare, which is good; it’s good that you’re unionizing the pharmacists and the nurses,” Sheard says. “But when workers are divided in any business or institution, it means you are weaker. You’re weaker when you’re fighting alone; you’re stronger when you’re together.”

Fifty years ago, nearly a third of American workers belonged to a union — and books, movies, art and theater, played a huge part in inspiring worker solidarity and the success of the American Labor Movement.
“A lot of the union halls had dances; they had music; they had readings; they had artwork,” Sheard explains. “But nowadays, unions are kind of under the gun. They’re really under a lot of pressure. It’s hard for them to put together the ‘Bread & Roses’ festivals that they used to do. I think it would be a great thing if they did it again because it builds more solidarity within the union when you’re doing more than handling the business aspect. When you’re bringing people into the union hall for dances, for music and recitals — that builds love for the union.”

Those days may or may not ever return — but in the meantime, there is Lenny Moss to intrigue and inspire.

“A lot of young people today don’t know what a labor union does; they don’t know the history of labor unions,” Sheard says. “But, if you can get them to read a story…if you can get them to do that… then you can inform them.”

Pick up a copy of the Lenny Moss mysteries: http://hardballpress.com/lenny-moss-mysteries.html
by Press Associates Union News Service - June 13, 2019

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) - Three non-binding Pro-Worker, Pro-Postal Service measures - one endorsing continued six-day delivery and two others banning U.S. Postal Service (USPS) privatization, have gained majority - and bipartisan - support on Capitol Hill, the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) Union has announced.

HR 33, by U.S. Representative Stephen Lynch (Democrat-Massachusetts) who is an Ironworker, bans privatization. It now has 251 sponsors in the 435-member Democratic-run House. That’s more than the number of Democrats there. SR 99, by U.S. Senator Gary Peters (Democrat-Michigan) also bans privatization and now has 52 Senators backing it, though Democrats and Independents control only 47 of the 100 U.S. Senate seats. The third measure, HR 54, by U.S. Representatives Gerry Connolly (Democrat-Virginia) and Sam Graves (Republican-Missouri), to keep six-day delivery, also has 251 backers, NALC Officials said.

And though the Union did not say so, six-day delivery has an even more powerful advocate: The House Appropriations Subcommittee, which helps dole out Federal funds to provide free mail for the blind. The panel’s general Government Money Bill, approved during the first week of June, uses that money to also order USPS to keep six-day delivery.

“Thanks to the hard work of Letter Carriers nationwide who made this possible,” NALC tweeted after Connolly, Graves and Lynch reported their House measures’ results.

NALC, the Rural Letter Carriers and the Mail Handlers, a Laborers Sector are also campaigning for all three resolutions.

But don’t stop there, NALC added: “The NALC encourages all Letter Carriers to check on the NALC Member App and on nalc.org to see whether their representative is already a co-sponsor of HR 33, HR 54,” two companion measures to them, “and also whether their senators are co-sponsors of SR 99, before reaching out and asking for their support. Thank you!”

The Republican Trump Administration, led by ideologues in the Office of Management and Budget adamantly pushes privatization.

Corporate interests who want to get their hands on the USPS’s revenues and kill a competitor - without providing nationwide service - egg it on.

But Congress doesn’t.

When Lynch introduced a similar Privatization Ban Resolution late in the Republican-run 115th Congress, he quickly picked up 209 backers - including 40 Republicans.

The resolution, Lynch said then, “Reflects strong opposition by both Democrats and Republicans to misguided efforts by the Trump Administration to privatize an agency that Americans consistently rank as their most trusted government institution.” “More than 500,000 clerks, Letter Carriers, Mail Handlers and Supervisors help deliver the mail to over 157 million residential and business customers six days a week nationwide,” he added, endorsing that delivery schedule too.
“More than 500,000 clerks, Letter Carriers, Mail Handlers and Supervisors help deliver the mail to over 157 million residential and business customers six days a week nationwide,” he added, endorsing that delivery schedule too.

“The presumption the American people are better served when their government outsources its core functions to private contractors has been disproven time and time again. Delivery of essential government services should not be subject to privatization and is best performed by our experienced Federal Workforce,” Lynch said then.

Connolly and Graves said seniors receiving medicines in the mail, after ordering them on the Internet and residents of rural areas who would be disconnected from the rest of the country, among others, need the six-day mail delivery.

Their Pro-Six-Day Delivery Resolution picked up 258 co-sponsors in the last Congress, even though it, like Lynch’s, was introduced late.

“Time and again Congress has shown it would not support cutting mail delivery from six to five days, and for good reason,” said Connolly when he unveiled HRes54 earlier this year. “Eliminating year a critical competitive advantage like Saturday mail delivery would kick off a vicious cycle of increasing volume reductions, service standard degradation and customer alienation. It would be foolish for the administration to re-litigate this debate.”
According to a leading World Trade Center medical expert, there could be as many as 20,000 more cancers as a consequence of exposures to the contaminants that were released by the collapse of the Twin Towers and fires that burned for months after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. She also said more than 50 percent of the Firefighters who logged time at the site have a "persistent respiratory condition."

Those disclosures were made by Dr. Jacqueline Moline, director of the Northwell Health Queens World Trade Center Health Program at the June 11 House committee hearing in Washington D.C. on reauthorizing the 9/11 Victims Compensation Fund.

The WTC Health Program previously confirmed that there had been almost 12,000 WTC-related cancers among the first-responder community and those who lived, worked or attended school south of Houston St. from Sept. 11, 2001 through the clean-up that was officially completed in May 2002.

Dr. Moline told the House panel that the WTC Health Program had seen an exponential increase in numerous cancers and that “soon the day will come when there are more people that died of WTC-related diseases after 9/11 than perished that horrible day [2,973].”

Some of the most-common cancers documented include prostate, lung, breast [both female and male], and thyroid.

Responding to follow-up questions from U.S. Rep. Jerry Nadler, who chairs the House Judiciary Committee, Dr. Moline said that cancers were only part of the WTC health fallout. “We are going to see folks with lung diseases that require lung transplants,” she said. “There already have been a number of individuals in the World Trade Center Health Programs that have required lung transplants from the glass and the concrete and everything else that caused a reaction in the lungs.”

55,000 Afflicted

Dr. Moline told the panel that 55,000 individuals “have been certified for at least one WTC-related health condition.” According to the WTC Health Program, more than 35,000 individuals suffer from two or more certified conditions.

“Over 50 percent of the firefighters who worked at the WTC have developed a persistent respiratory condition,” Dr. Moline said.

In addition to 90,000 first responders and close to 400,000 survivors who lived or worked south of Houston Street, she expressed concern for the close-to 20,000 public-school students who were sent back to 29 Department of Education facilities in the WTC hot zone after then-U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Christie Todd Whitman said the air in lower Manhattan was safe to breathe less than a week after 9/11.

The WTC health data and projections will figure in the expected debate over reauthorizing the 9/11 VCF, which has been an economic lifeline for thousands of first-responders and survivors facing long-term disability and premature death from their exposure to 150 different contaminants in the air of lower Manhattan.
Light GOP Senate Support

Advocates for the VCF’s renewal report they have 300 House members, including 70 Republicans, signed on as co-sponsors. In the Republican-controlled Senate, progress has been slower, with just 38 of the 100 members on board, including seven Republicans. The measure was voted out of committee June 12 and sent to the full House.

The hearing was a "mark-up" session for the House committee on legislation that calls for reauthorizing the 9/11 VCF until 2090. Without congressional action, the fund will close on Dec. 18, 2020.

The VCF has been overwhelmed by an exponential jump in claims from both the first-responder and survivor communities. As a consequence, the fund’s Special Master, Rupa Bhattacharyya, announced in February that it would have to cut awards by 50 to 70 percent, depending on when they were filed. The fund had already committed $5 billion-plus of its $7.3-billion congressional appropriation and was faced with more new claims than it resolved in the five years since Congress re-authorized it. Ms. Bhattacharyya testified that her agency's officials estimated it would cost an additional $12 billion to satisfy the claims they projected to receive by the end of next year.

Worried About Deficit

Rep. Mike Johnson of Louisiana, the ranking Republican at the hearing, expressed concern that the reauthorizing legislation “creates an unlimited authorization for appropriations for the fund and extends it until the year 2090…and right now we have a $22-trillion Federal debt, and that’s just the thing that keeps us up at night. It makes us have to address these issues as responsibly as possible.”

He continued, “Our objective, of course, is fairness to all, and by all I mean all Americans including first-responders nationwide who heeded the call of service to the smoldering remains of terrorist attacks but also through the dense wildfire smoke of California and the wreckage following a Kansas tornado and the floods in Louisiana and all the other disasters and tragedies everywhere.” Mr. Johnson's equating the nation’s obligation to first-responders handling natural disasters with those who responded to the 9/11 terrorist attack drew a sharp retort from former late-night talk-show host Jon Stewart.

'Not a New York Issue'

“When we talk about price [for renewal of the VCF], the attacks on 9/11 have been used by our government to justify all manner of policy and spending to the tune of trillions of dollars,” he said. “I am awfully tired of hearing that 9/11 is a New York issue. Al Qaeda did not shout ‘death to Tribeca.’ They attacked America and these men and women, and their response to it brought our country back. It is what gave a reeling nation a solid foundation to stand back upon to remind us why this country is great, of why this country is worth fighting for.”

In addition to Mr. Stewart, whose comments blasting the majority of subcommittee members who were absent from the hearing went viral, lawmakers heard from retired FDNY Lieut. Michael O'Connell; retired NYPD Detective Luis Alvarez; Anesta Maria St. Rose Henry, the widow of Candidus Henry, a 9/11 responder from Laborers Local 79, and Lila Nordstrom, a former student at Stuyvesant High School and WTC survivor advocate.

Congressman Nadler, who represents lower Manhattan, reminded his colleagues that he was one of the few elected officials who publicly challenged Ms. Whitman’s upbeat assessment of lower Manhattan’s air quality at the time she made it. And while he placed the ultimate blame on the terrorists for the death and destruction wrought by the attack, he said in light of the EPA pronouncements at the time, “the Federal Government has a very heavy responsibility for what happened.”
Three days after the 9/11 attack, it was the former New Jersey Governor who told reporters that “the good news continues to be that air samples we have taken have all been at levels that cause us no concern.”

Whitman's Remorse

Ms. Whitman’s reassurance and EPA’s press releases created a justification for reopening the Wall Street area on the Monday after 9/11. In subsequent comments made in 2016 to the Guardian newspaper, she said she was “very sorry that people are dying, and if the EPA and I in any way contributed to that, I’m sorry. We did the very best we could at the time with the knowledge we had.”

Two years after 9/11, an investigation by the EPA Inspector General found that the agency “did not have sufficient data and analyses to make such a blanket statement,” because “air monitoring data was lacking for several pollutants of concern.”

The OIG also revealed that it was President George W. Bush’s White House Council on Environmental Quality that heavily edited the EPA press releases “to add reassuring statements and delete cautionary ones.”

Despite the fact that samples taken indicated asbestos levels in lower Manhattan were between double and triple EPA’s limit, the CEQ described the readings as just “slightly above” the limit, the EPA IG found.

White House Propaganda?

And when the EPA Inspector General's officials tried to determine who had actually written the press releases, they “were unable to identify any EPA official who claimed ownership” because investigators were told by the EPA Chief of Staff that “final approval came from the White House.”

“She also told us that other considerations, such as the desire to reopen Wall Street and national security concerns, were considered when preparing EPA’s early press releases,” according to the agency's Inspector General.
Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed legislation removing non-medical exemptions from school vaccination requirements for children.

The U.S. is currently experiencing the worst outbreak of measles in more than 25 years, with outbreaks in pockets of New York primarily driving the crisis.

As a result of non-medical vaccination exemptions, many communities across New York have low rates of vaccination, and those unvaccinated children can often attend school where they may spread the disease to other unvaccinated students.

The governor and lawmakers hope this new law will help protect the public amid this ongoing outbreak.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, sustaining a high vaccination rate among school children is vital to the prevention of disease outbreaks, including the reestablishment of diseases that have been largely eradicated in the United States, such as measles.

According to state data from 2013-2014, there are at least 285 schools in New York with an immunization rate below 85%, including 170 schools below 70 percent, far below the CDC’s goal of at least a 95 percent vaccination rate to maintain herd immunity.

The bill (S.2994A/A.2371), sponsored by Senator Brad Hoylman and Assembly Member Jeffrey Dinowitz, would repeal exemptions currently found in the law for children whose parents have non-medical objections to immunizations.

“The science is crystal clear: Vaccines are safe, effective and the best way to keep our children safe. This administration has taken aggressive action to contain the measles outbreak, but given its scale, additional steps are needed to end this public health crisis,” Governor Cuomo said. “While I understand and respect freedom of religion, our first job is to protect the public health and by signing this measure into law, we will help prevent further transmissions and stop this outbreak right in its tracks.”

Hoylman, the Senate sponsor of the bill said, “Today, New York is sending a strong message to people across our state that vaccines are safe and effective. We’re putting science ahead of misinformation about vaccines and standing up for the rights of immuno-compromised children and adults, pregnant women and infants who can’t be vaccinated through no fault of their own.

Dinowitz, the Assembly sponsor, said, “I am incredibly proud that science has won with the passage of this bill. We should be taking medical advice from medical professionals, not strangers on the Internet spreading pseudo-science misinformation. This will not be the end of our efforts to combat the ongoing measles outbreak, but it is an important step. I hope that we can move forward from here, with level heads, and work together to protect the health of New Yorkers – particularly those with compromised immune systems and those who are too young to be vaccinated.”

Although the state can claim high immunization rates overall, preventable diseases like measles remain a public health threat when administrative loopholes allow children to go unvaccinated, carrying the potential to harm communities—and especially our most vulnerable residents—throughout the state.
Statewide, 96 percent of school-age children have been inoculated against measles, mumps and rubella, with the “MMR” vaccine, but a measles outbreak continues to affect communities in several parts of the state where the rate is lower. New York State currently allows both medical and religious exemptions to the MMR and other vaccines for students attending school.

Since October 1, 2018, the Department of Health has worked with local officials to launch an unprecedented public health response to the current measles outbreak—the largest in New York State since 1991.

School and daycare exclusions issued by the Department of Health have proven effective in ensuring parents get their children vaccinated with MMR. The Department of Health’s ongoing efforts, including messaging about the importance of vaccinations in several languages, have resulted in a drastic uptick in vaccinations. Since the measles outbreak began last fall, more than 49,000 doses of the MMR vaccination have been administered in Rockland, Orange and Westchester Counties.
Presidential candidate and New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio can once again say something that President Donald Trump can’t: he’s passed an on-time budget.

De Blasio and New York City Council Speaker Corey Johnson officially reached an informal deal on the city’s $92.8 billion operating budget Friday afternoon. The pair celebrated in the traditional way – by shaking hands at a press conference in the City Hall rotunda, surrounded by dozens of City Council members. Here are the highlights.

Council claims wins

The New York City Council got some of its biggest wishes into the final deal like funding for more than 200 new social workers in public schools, a $33 million increase for libraries, a $43 million increase for city parks and a $40 million budget line for outreach ahead of the 2020 U.S. census. There was also a promise to increase pay for preschool teachers who don’t work in Department of Education facilities, but details are thin, since a deal will be worked out in union negotiations. Ditto on a future deal to increase pay for public defenders.

This budget will also be the first to fund some big initiatives that were already announced and agreed upon. There will be $25 million devoted to NYC Care, the mayor’s new initiative to enroll uninsured New Yorkers into the city’s health care plan. There will be $60 million to begin the process of retrofitting large buildings to make them more energy efficient, part of New York City’s so-called Green New Deal. And the city will devote $250,000 to directly funding abortion care, a relatively small line item that will reportedly make New York the first city to allocate money specifically to abortions.

Johnson was glowing during the budget announcement, his second as speaker, and both he and de Blasio played up their partnership. “I really appreciate the hard-fought, good-faith negotiations that have taken place over the last few months,” Johnson said.

But restraint was the topic of the day

Unlike in Albany, where the first year of united Democratic government unleashed a long list of major progressive wins in the state budget, this year’s city budget is a relatively simple affair. There weren’t any new big-ticket items, and the biggest single new initiative announced Friday was about saving – the city will be adding about $250 million to the reserve funds, which at nearly $6 billion in total, are said to be at their highest level in city history.

Echoing his comments on fiscal restraint from the city’s preliminary and executive budget announcements earlier this year, de Blasio said a focus of the budget was “fairness,” but also “realism about the challenges we face: in our economy, in other levels of government.”

The biggest cuts, de Blasio said, came from Albany, which have forced the city to spend more than could be covered by the city’s ever-increasing revenues. This budget was de Blasio’s first that required specific cuts from agencies, under a so-called Program to Eliminate the Gap, or PEG.

One of the most noteworthy cuts was the $20 million to Thrive NYC, the mental health initiative headed by de Blasio’s wife, Chirlane McCray, which has been criticized by the City Council and New York City Comptroller Scott Stringer for its big budget and lack of clear results.
Biggest budget ever

As de Blasio explained, with more than a hint of pride, New York City has the fourth-largest government budget in the entire country, following just the federal government and the states of New York and California. At $92.8 billion, the city’s budget is larger than the state of Florida’s $91 billion budget, despite the state having a population well over double New York City’s.

This year’s budget is also $23 billion more that the last budget under former Mayor Michael Bloomberg, in 2013, but that’s not necessarily a sign of de Blasio’s runaway spending. The city is required by law to have a balanced budget, and revenue has exploded in the last decade, thanks in part to a thriving economy. “You’re seeing the budget grow because the economy has grown,” de Blasio said.

Coming in on time

Unlike in Washington or Albany, where budgets have often been passed right at or even after the deadline, the Democrats in City Hall rarely have trouble reaching an on-time agreement. Sure enough, the June 14th deal came more than two weeks ahead of the June 30 deadline. De Blasio was similarly early last year, reaching an agreement on June 11, but this year, the mayor may have had extra incentive to reach a timely deal: his presidential campaign. De Blasio this week officially qualified for the first debate among the Democratic candidates, and will have to be in Miami June 26. But de Blasio was mum on his plans for this weekend, not telling reporters Friday afternoon whether he planned to campaign in an early primary state – something he’s been making a habit since before he announced his campaign last month.

De Blasio’s ambitions are an easy target for stakeholders who didn’t get what they asked for, like Human Services Council Executive Director Allison Sesso, who was hoping for more funding for nonprofit service providers that contract with the city. "Perhaps if these nonprofits operated in Des Moines," Sesso said in an emailed statement, “our mayor would have paid closer attention to their plight."
ALBANY — State lawmakers and Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo have spent the past five months checking off items on a long-stalled liberal to-do list, and are showing no signs of slowing down for the final days of the legislative session.

In preparation for the three remaining days of work at the Capitol, the weekend was busy with negotiations, vote-wrangling and last-minute tweaks for the unfinished agenda, which includes marijuana legalization, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, stricter sexual harassment standards, making driver's licenses available to undocumented immigrants, and expanded limousine safety measures.

"This year we have passed more impactful progressive legislation than any time in modern political history, but as we enter the last week of session, we must not rest on our laurels," Cuomo said in a statement Friday evening after signing legislation enacting sweeping new tenant protections.

Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins predicted on Friday that there would be a "very good end to a wonderful session."

She also left the door open to the Assembly and Senate striking their own deals on big-ticket items, which in years past were contingent on agreement between the Legislature and governor.

"The legislature is a separate branch. It's an equal branch, so it's really our responsibility to come to an agreement," Stewart-Cousins said. "At times we are working together ... and there are some issues that the governor obviously has opinions on and weighs in."

While legislation legalizing recreational marijuana has been declared dead multiple times in recent weeks, talks are still ongoing to find a path forward that legislators and the governor's office can agree on.

Sen. Liz Krueger, a Manhattan Democrat pushing the issue, said Friday that Democrats are "near a finish line we can cross."

There is also new life for legislative efforts to address climate change with drastic reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Two legislative sources said the Assembly and Senate had reached a consensus Sunday on a proposal that they would pursue by Wednesday if negotiations with the governor's office weren't successful.

Cuomo, who suggested earlier this month that the goals of the legislation are a "political placebo," said Friday that he is working to find a "common position" with lawmakers.

Sen. Neil Breslin, a Bethlehem Democrat, said it's possible that some of the outstanding issues could be pushed through in a wide-reaching omnibus bill, a common end-of-session tactic — commonly known as a "big ugly" — that often makes compromises more palatable as multiple measures are lumped into one vote.

"There will be some 'ugly,'" Breslin said. "It may not be as big as a 'big ugly.'"

Legislation enabling undocumented immigrants to apply for driver's licenses, which already passed the Assembly, will likely have to stand on its own merits, according to Sen. Luis Sepulveda, a Bronx Democrat championing the issue.
Democratic senators from Long Island and the Hudson Valley have been reluctant to embrace the measure, in part, because of a fear of political retribution next year. But Sepulveda was encouraged by his conference's recent private discussions. "I can't say we have the votes yet," Sepulveda said Friday. "The leader is doing the counting. ... I certainly feel better today than I did 24 hours ago."

Two legislative sources, familiar with the vote tally in the Senate, said Sunday the legislation was likely to pass the chamber this week.

If any agreements are bundled together, Breslin said it might include controversial language that would increase the rate of wages paid to workers on construction projects that receive government incentives.

The proposal, which is opposed by the business community and pushed by labor unions, has been the subject of constant behind-the-scenes talks to find a balance the Democratic majority in the Senate can accept.

"They're inching along, and they're going to have something," Breslin said of the efforts to expand so-called prevailing wage laws. These negotiations include legislative leaders and the governor's office, according to multiple sources.

Hope of a legislative alignment with the governor to approve internet sports betting is more definitively dead, according to Sen. Joseph Addabbo, a Queens Democrat who has been pushing for its approval.

"There is no longer a three-way discussion," Addabbo said Friday. "This is passing in the Senate, this is passing in the Assembly, and let the governor make a decision."

Cuomo said last month that mobile sports wagering was "possible," but his administration has consistently maintained that the state Constitution only allows it at the upstate casinos.

The Assembly hasn't committed to approving the expansion, but Addabbo said he is "hopeful" they'll act and is "very confident" of Senate action. "I'm the eternal optimist," he said, noting the millions in missed state revenue with only a limited rollout coming this summer, when sports gambling in casinos is expected to begin.

There is also broad agreement between the Legislature and Cuomo on expanding the statute of limitations on rape cases and toughening the legal definition of sexual harassment in the workplace.

On Saturday, the Assembly and Senate agreed to the details on legislation that would end the "gay panic" defense, according to a legislative source. If enacted, the discovery of a victim's gender or sexual orientation could no longer be used as a defense for murder.

Lawmakers are unlikely to take up any proposals to curtail the recently enacted changes to the state's bail laws, which were overhauled during the budget process as part of sweeping reforms to the criminal justice system. They included requirements to speed up trials and hasten the pre-trial discovery process.

District attorneys have criticized the measures, claiming the lawmakers approved the changes without careful consideration and that in some instances the new requirements may endanger the public, impede investigations and expose witnesses to potential retribution.

It's possible that steps could be taken to build on the collection of electoral reforms that were approved in January, such as the adoption of early voting. Legislation was introduced Sunday that represented a legislative deal on automatically enrolling eligible New Yorkers to vote.
Advocates who championed the Child Victims Act, which became law in January after numerous failed attempts, got a positive sign Sunday in their push to require schools to teach "good touch/bad touch" awareness to children.

The measure, which already passed the Senate, was put on a committee agenda for Monday in the Assembly, where it has been held up all year.

The Assembly is scheduled to return to work at noon on Monday, and the Senate is supposed to be in session at 1 p.m. Democratic lawmakers in both houses will meet privately beforehand to discuss the progress made during the weekend.