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Progressives Vowed Driver’s Licenses for the Undocumented.
Then the Suburbs Spoke Up.
The topic is one of the most divisive issues before the State Legislature this year, and Democrats worry it could endanger them politically.

Vivian Wang - The New York Times - June 16, 2019

In the 12 years since fierce backlash forced Gov. Eliot Spitzer to abandon a proposal to offer driver’s licenses to undocumented immigrants, New York has fashioned much of its political identity around a commitment to immigrant issues.

That resolve has become especially apparent during President Trump’s tenure, as Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo and a new Democratic majority in the State Legislature have pardoned undocumented immigrants, granted them access to college scholarships and limited deportable offenses, in an effort to cast the state as Washington’s opposite.

But even as those other measures have sailed through the new Albany, one measure has remained stalled: the newly revived proposal to allow undocumented immigrants to drive.

Despite immigration advocates’ efforts to cast it as both an economic boon and a social justice imperative, the so-called Green Light bill has met persistent opposition from law enforcement and large swaths of the public. Republicans have bought Facebook ads denouncing the effort. Even the National Republican Congressional Committee blasted New York’s bill last week.

The opposition has taken hold in the State Senate, where lawmakers from moderate suburban districts, many of whom won by razor-thin margins last year, hold sway. Those senators have been wary this year of some of the progressive left’s marquee causes, worrying that they might alienate their constituents and possibly damage their re-election chances.

While the State Assembly, which is dominated by city legislators, passed the bill on Wednesday, the Senate had not scheduled the measure for a vote. (Several Democrats in the Assembly voted against it.)

Mr. Cuomo, a Democrat, has declared his support for the idea, saying last month that it was one of his 10 legislative priorities for the remainder of the session. But he also has suggested that he does not expect it to pass before the session is scheduled to end on Wednesday — and one of his staunchest allies has explicitly advised suburban lawmakers not to vote for it.

Immigrant rights advocates and progressive lawmakers said the hesitation suggested the flimsiness of New York’s pro-immigrant rhetoric.

“I’d like to believe that this blue wave also came with the political courage to do the right thing,” Assemblywoman Catalina Cruz, a Democrat from Queens, said. Ms. Cruz, who was formerly undocumented, won her seat last year. She added, “I’d like to believe that immigrant communities are more than just a talking point during elections.”

Twelve other states and Washington, D.C., allow undocumented immigrants to drive. New York has the third largest undocumented population in the country, with an estimated 940,000 people, according to the Migration Policy Institute, a nonprofit group.
The driver’s license debate has roiled several administrations and spanned decades.

Before 2001, New York residents could apply for driver’s licenses regardless of immigration status. But after the Sept. 11 attacks, Gov. George E. Pataki, a Republican, began requiring applicants to have a Social Security number, effectively barring those without legal status.

In 2007, Mr. Spitzer, a Democrat, announced that he would undo that policy — only to meet a ferocious outcry across the country, even among liberals. Opponents at the time included Kirsten Gillibrand, then a member of the House of Representatives; Hillary Clinton, who vacillated on the issue then came out against it; and Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul, then the Erie County clerk. (All three have since reversed their positions.)

Faced with plummeting approval ratings and mutiny from the state’s county clerks, who issue licenses, Mr. Spitzer rescinded his proposal less than two months later.

This year, activists believed their long-fought battle would finally end. But even as Mr. Trump’s immigration policies have activated the Democratic base, opponents have mounted a vigorous — and effective — campaign against the policy. A poll released on Monday by Siena College showed that more than half of New Yorkers surveyed opposed giving licenses to undocumented immigrants.

Senator John J. Flanagan, a Long Island lawmaker who leads the Republican minority, recently said that passing the bill would be a “colossal political mistake” for Democrats. Nick Langworthy, the incoming chairman of the state Republican Party, called the bill a product of the “extreme left” that showed disdain for the rule of law.

County clerks have again denounced the proposal, with some vowing to defy it if it becomes law, and county sheriffs have warned that it would constrain their ability to enforce traffic safety.

The issue is so fraught that even some who publicly support the bill have privately worked to block it. At a fund-raiser earlier this month on Long Island, Mr. Cuomo and Jay Jacobs, the leader of the state Democratic Party, met with five suburban senators and told them that voting for it would be politically perilous, according to two people familiar with the conversation.

Mr. Jacobs, a close ally of Mr. Cuomo, would not comment on that exchange. But he said that several senators as well as Assembly members had asked for his opinion on the issue, and that he had advised them not to heed the demands of the “far left.”

“I think there is a measure of arrogance in forcing people to accept things that they’re not willing to,” Mr. Jacobs said. “Those people, particularly in the city, frankly, who are pushing this, are really shortsighted in my view.”

He added that although he said he supported expanding licenses in theory, he would rather “play the long game” and not risk the Democratic majorities in both chambers.

None of the six Democratic senators from Long Island returned requests for comment.

Robert Mujica, the governor’s budget director, said he was present at the Long Island meeting and denied that the governor had discouraged senators from voting for the proposal.

He acknowledged that they had discussed polling on the issue but said the discussion was limited to why Mr. Cuomo believed expansion had to be done legislatively, as in other states, rather than via executive order. (Some legal experts have suggested that an executive order would work.)
To counter opponents’ arguments, advocates this year have waged a concerted educational campaign, describing how the proposal could reduce hit-and-runs, drive down insurance rates and generate $50 million each year for the state, according to estimates from the left-leaning Fiscal Policy Institute. Assembly staffers distributed talking points and charts to members to help them convince wary constituents.

Senator Luis R. Sepúlveda, one of the bill’s sponsors, said the informational effort was intended to succeed where Mr. Spitzer had failed, by centering arguments with bipartisan appeal rather than focusing on social justice arguments about immigrants’ rights.

Supporters have also emphasized that the bill would not provide a path to citizenship and would not enable licensees to board planes.

“National tensions around immigration are not just far-right-wing Republicans in border states,” said Assemblyman Marcos Crespo of the Bronx, the bill’s other lead sponsor. “I have always tried to be pragmatic about getting things done, and if that means I don’t tout the moral arguments of legislation, then so be it.”

Still, Mr. Sepúlveda said the Legislature faced a clear ethical choice. He criticized his colleagues for what he said were political rather than ideological calculations.

“I have difficulty accepting the fear of losing political positions,” said Mr. Sepúlveda, who also represents the Bronx. “I think it will be a stain on the Senate if the Assembly passes this and the Senate doesn’t.”

There are some signs that the opposition has relented. The Business Council of New York State, an influential group that often aligns with conservatives, recently backed the bill. Cyrus R. Vance Jr., the Manhattan district attorney, announced his support on Tuesday.

And Monday’s Siena poll, though still on balance unfavorable to the bill, showed a drastic increase in approval. The percentage of New Yorkers who support the bill had risen to 41 percent, from 34 percent in a March Siena poll. Forty percent of suburban voters now support the bill — up from only 27 percent three months ago.

Still, some people who would be most affected by the policy said they did not hold any particular expectations for success.

Gloria Jiménez Ortiz, 24, who arrived in upstate New York from Guatemala without documentation five years ago, said she and her husband were driving to buy food last year when they were pulled over. The police officer did not issue any tickets, but because her husband did not have a license, the officer called immigration officials.

Ms. Jiménez was released because she was pregnant, but her husband was detained for 10 months, she said. She gave birth while he was in custody.

Since then, she has felt unsure of New York’s promise of refuge.

“They only protect people with documents,” she said. “But I don’t have anything.”
NEW YORK (AP) — They didn't set out to change history; they weren't the first LGBT Americans to mobilize against bias.

Yet the June 1969 uprising by young gays, lesbians and transgender people in New York City,clashing with police near a bar called the Stonewall Inn, was a vital catalyst in expanding LGBT activism nationwide and abroad. This month's anniversary provides an opportune moment to ask: How has the movement fared over the past 50 years? What unfinished business remains?

From the perspective of veteran activists, the progress has been astounding. In 1969, every state but Illinois outlawed gay sex, psychiatric experts classified homosexuality as a mental disorder, and most gays stayed in the closet for fear of losing jobs and friends.

Today, same-sex marriage is the law of the land in the U.S. and at least 25 other countries. LGBT Americans serve as governors, big-city mayors and members of Congress, and one — Pete Buttigieg — is waging a spirited campaign for president.

Among those looking back with marvel is Stephen Rutsky, 68, a lifelong New Yorker who joined in rioting and protests sparked by a police raid targeted at gay patrons of Stonewall. He engaged in a wide variety of LGBT activism over the ensuing decades.

"Mobs of gays and lesbians were running around angry and confused, but we all knew that something had sparked a change in our world," Rutsky remembers. "We were demanding our freedom and there was nothing that was ever going to stop us from obtaining it."

"We've come a long way, baby," he added. "But lots more to do."

WHAT'S NEXT

High on the to-do list is passage of federal legislation that would provide nationwide nondiscrimination protections for LGBT people. A bill with that goal, the Equality Act, passed the House of Representatives in May with unanimous Democratic backing but appears doomed in the Senate because of Republican opposition. Nationally, 20 mostly Democrat-run states already have laws comparable to the Equality Act — protecting LGBT people from discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations and public services. The other 30 states, where Republicans hold full or partial power, have balked.

The result is a patchwork map in which a majority of states make it legal to be fired, evicted or barred from public facilities because of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Internationally, the struggle for LGBT rights remains daunting in much of the world. Stonewall helped inspire successful activist movements in Western Europe (a major British LGBT-rights group is called Stonewall) and elsewhere.

Earlier this year, the southern African nation of Angola decriminalized same-sex activity and banned discrimination based on sexual orientation. And just last week, the High Court of Botswana rejected laws that meant up to seven years in prison for those convicted of having gay sex, a landmark case for Africa. But gay sex is outlawed in dozens of countries, while Asia and Africa each have only one nation that has legalized same-sex marriage.

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Another battlefront relates to transgender rights. In the U.S., the Trump administration has moved to revoke newly won health care protections for transgender people, restrict their presence in the military, and withdraw federal guidance that trans students should be able to use bathrooms of their choice.

Donald Trump's election "gave all sorts of mouth-breathers permission to spew ignorance, hatred, and stupidity, undoing decades of progress," said Jennifer Boylan, a transgender writer who teaches at Barnard College in New York City. "People who know nothing about trans people and our unique challenges have no qualms weighing in."

Jude Patton, a 78-year-old transgender man from Yuba City, California, marvels at the changes that have unfolded during his life. He grew up in Alton, Illinois, knowing from childhood that he was uncomfortable being viewed as a girl. His parents were supportive, but he says some teachers at his high school were intolerant.

In his mid-20s, Patton moved to California and completed a surgical transition at a Stanford University clinic in 1973. Ever since, he has been active in advocacy, counseling and health education related to LGBT issues. Now, he says his delight at LGBT gains is tempered by worries over the Trump administration's rollback of trans-friendly protections.

"Every day, I see some other right being taken away," he said. "Historically, the pendulum can swing back again. I hope it gets better."

'AN AMAZING SILVER LINING'

Historians trace the emergence of America's gay rights movements to the 1950s, when the Mattachine Society and a lesbian group, the Daughters of Bilitis, were founded in California.

Government astronomer Frank Kameny, who sued after he was fired for being gay, took his anti-discrimination case to the Supreme Court in 1961 (the justices declined to hear his appeal), and helped stage the first gay rights protest outside the White House in 1965.

In 1966, Mattachine Society members in New York City successfully staged a "sip-in" to protest laws that banned bars from serving alcohol to gays and lesbians. The terms "gay pride" and "gay liberation" emerged.

Much of the activity unfolded out of the national spotlight. But the movement broadened after Stonewall, leading to some high-profile events in the late 1970s.

In 1977, singer Anita Bryant led a victorious campaign to repeal a local ordinance in Florida barring anti-gay discrimination. Activists retaliated with a nationwide boycott of Florida orange juice, a product for which Bryant was a brand spokeswoman.

In 1978, pioneering gay politician Harvey Milk was assassinated along with San Francisco Mayor George Moscone. The next year, activists organized the first national gay rights march on Washington.

The 1980s proved shattering — but also galvanizing — for gay Americans, as an initially mysterious, unnamed disease morphed into the AIDS epidemic. Many thousands of gay men died, including actor Rock Hudson; his death played a major role in raising public awareness of the disease.
Longtime activist Lorri Jean, who has served more than 20 years as CEO of the Los Angeles LGBT Center, remembers AIDS in the 1980s as a "horrific disaster" that killed many of the men close to her.

"Yet it had an amazing silver lining," said Jean, 62. "Suddenly, the most privileged in our community were being impacted as well as the least privileged, and people couldn't hide in the closet anymore. When they got sick, people knew. That galvanized our community in a way that nothing else ever had."

MARRIAGE RIGHTS

By the mid-1990s, the federal government — slow to respond at the start of the epidemic — was deeply engaged in the fight against AIDS, and the number of new cases finally began to decline. Many gay rights organizations and activists shifted their focus to a long-haul campaign to legalize same-sex marriage. Massachusetts became the first state to do so in 2004; the U.S. Supreme Court struck down all state bans in 2015.

Some activists suggest that the push for marriage equality consumed too much of the LGBT rights movement's energy, diverting attention from violence against transgender people and the persistently high HIV infection rate among gay and bisexual black men. Others say the marriage campaign was crucial in changing policy and public attitudes.

"For the government to treat gay people with equal dignity, it had to treat gay people as equal in marriage," said lawyer Roberta Kaplan. "It was an essential, determinative step."

Kaplan is best known for winning a landmark Supreme Court case in 2013 on behalf of Edith Windsor, who was denied an inheritance tax break after the death of her wife. Kaplan and Windsor successfully challenged the Defense of Marriage Act, which barred married same-sex couples from enjoying marriage benefits conferred under federal law. That decision helped lay the legal groundwork for the 2015 ruling that legalized same-sex marriage nationwide.

Born in 1966, Kaplan recalls being in college during the height of the AIDS epidemic, "with men dying by the thousands and a government not seeming to care."

"It's incomprehensible — the change that has been wrought during my lifetime," she said. "If you had told me, when I was in college, that one day I would grow up, get married to a woman, have a kid, be partner in a law firm, and then argue a momentous civil rights case in the Supreme Court, I would have said you were going to too many Grateful Dead concerts."

THE RELIGION QUESTION

Same-sex marriage is among several reasons why, in the post-Stonewall era, the realm of religion has abounded with controversies linked to LGBT rights.

Many denominations — including Reformed Judaism and most mainline Protestant churches — have adopted fully inclusive policies, accepting LGBT people into the clergy and honoring their marriages. But some of the largest denominations — including the Roman Catholic Church, the Southern Baptist Convention and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints — refuse to take those inclusive steps and still consider gay sex immoral.

Gene Robinson, who in 2003 became the first openly gay bishop in the Episcopal Church, says there's a split on LGBT acceptance between many rank-and-file churchgoers and the leaders of the big, conservative denominations.
"The good news is that we have changed the minds and hearts of a majority of religious people across all religious lines," Robinson said. "The bad news is that the people in the pews — many of whom have gay relatives and friends — don't have the power to change policies in churches that are tightly controlled by the hierarchy." Religion plays a key role in current debates over nondiscrimination protections for LGBT people. The Trump administration has aligned with some religious conservatives in arguing that such protections can infringe on the religious beliefs of people who oppose same-sex marriage and transgender rights.

Emilie Kao, a lawyer with the conservative Heritage Foundation, says the Equality Act "imposes sexual ideology on the nation that endangers religious freedom, freedom of speech, and parental rights by punishing those who dissent from political correctness."

These arguments irk activists such as Lorri Jean.

"My biggest concern is the very clever backlash by fundamentalist religious leaders who are trying to suggest they are the victims," Jean said. "But even if they have victories, they'll be short-lived... The vast majority of American people do not believe discrimination against LGBT people is OK."

SLOWLY INTEGRATING

In myriad ways, progress for LGBT Americans has become so commonplace that it attracts little notice, whether it's in local politics, the arts or sports. For example, there are no openly gay men currently competing in North America's four biggest pro sports leagues — but the situation is different at lower levels.

"I look more at college and high school sports ... where we've seen literally countless athletes come out and be totally accepted by their teams," said Cyd Zeigler of the website Outsports. He believes any athlete coming out now in the major leagues would be welcomed by teammates, coaches and fans.

Back in 1984, Ruth Clark joined a lesbian feminist chorus in Chicago called the Artemis Singers — a step she viewed at the time as "a very radical act." Over the decades, the chorus has moved toward the mainstream — performing at universities, churches, museums and a 2013 ceremony at which then-Gov. Pat Quinn signed Illinois' marriage-equality bill.

Clark says that when questions were raised recently about whether the chorus should be allowed to use a Roman Catholic school's auditorium, the group's producer assured the skeptics, "They're just like soccer moms."
NEW YORK – Three jurors on the trial of NXIVM spiritual leader Keith Raniere have vacations set to begin June 24 – plans that could boot them from the case and cause jury deliberations to start all over again. Closing arguments are expected to begin at 9 a.m. Monday.

The panel of eight men and four women is expected to begin deliberations in the trial of the 58-year-old purported self-improvement guru after lawyers on opposing sides deliver their final arguments Monday and Tuesday in U.S. District Court in Brooklyn.

If jurors have not reached a verdict by the end of the day Friday, the panel could be called in to deliberate Saturday, said Senior U.S. District Judge Nicholas Garaufis. He said if there is no verdict by the end of Saturday, he would replace the three jurors who have vacations with three alternate jurors. If that happens, deliberations would have to begin from scratch, he said.

That could potentially put jurors under a time crunch this week to decide the fate of Raniere, known as "Vanguard," who is charged in a seven-count indictment with racketeering, sex trafficking, forced labor and conspiracy.

Federal prosecutors have described Raniere as the leader of a secretive and paranoid cult-like organization whose members used shame, humiliation and cruelty to break the law to attain control, power and sex.

Raniere is accused of operating a secret "master/slave" organization within NXIVM known as The Vow and later Dominus Obsequious Sororium (DOS), Latin for "Lord/Master of the Obedient Female Companions." The clan included only women and Raniere. Women in the group were physically branded and told to submit embarrassing "collateral" to ensure loyalty, testimony has revealed. All other members — from "first-line slaves" who answered directly to Raniere to lower-ranking "slaves" within DOS — were required to give the collateral to ensure their obedience, which included naked photos or false claims implicating their loved ones in sex crimes and in one case, a terrorist.

Former members of DOS have testified that they were lured into DOS under the idea that it was a women's empowerment organization that would be good for them. They testified that they unwittingly became "slaves" and were ordered to produce additional collateral every month and to do whatever their masters asked, which included assignments to seduce and have sex with Raniere.

The "slaves" were paddled, forced to nearly starve by adhering to 500-calorie daily diets and physically branded with Raniere's initials in a painful process performed with a cauterizing pen. Prosecutors and witnesses have said Raniere helped a family move from Mexico to Halfmoon. He ended up having sex with three sisters, according to testimony. One sister was 15 years old at the time, according to testimony. Another sister testified she was allegedly forced to stay in a room on Wilton Court in the Knox Woods apartment complex, where more than two-dozen NXIVM leaders lived, because she showed interest in another man.

Raniere went to trial on May 7 after his five co-defendants pleaded guilty earlier this year. They included NXIVM president Nancy Salzman; her daughter, former high-ranking NXIVM and DOS member Lauren Salzman, who testified against Raniere; television actress and high-ranking NXIVM and DOS member Allison Mack; NXIVM director of operations Clare Bronfman, a Seagram's liquor fortune heiress and former NXIVM bookkeeper Kathy Russell. Testimony revealed all the women had a sexual relationship with Raniere at one point.
On Thursday, Nancy Salzman agreed to forfeit more than $515,000 that investigators seized on March 27, 2018, in a raid on her home on Oregon Trail in Halfmoon. She also forfeited properties in Knox Woods at 7 General's Way, at 8 Hale Drive (Raniere's so-called "executive library"); three of NXIVM's office buildings on New Karner Road in Colonie; First Principles Inc. a Delaware corporation she owned; and a Steinway piano that was in her home.
ALBANY — If New York lawmakers don't approve a commercial market for marijuana in the next three days, they could still sign off on legislation lowering criminal penalties for the drug.

Democratic lawmakers in the Senate and Assembly introduced a proposal late Sunday that would reduce the penalties for possessing marijuana, allow for the expungement of certain criminal convictions and expand the public health law's definition of "smoking" to include marijuana.

The legislation was produced after talks between Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo and the state Legislature on legalizing adult-use of marijuana were "having some trouble," according to a legislative source.

But Cuomo on Monday said that he isn't ready to settle for the decriminalization legislation, adding that he hasn't given up on the legalization of marijuana and establishment of a commercial market.

"I think we should do it all together," Cuomo told WAMC News. "I don't think we should do one component now and then come back and do another component."

The legislative session is scheduled to end Wednesday.

Decriminalization of marijuana is the reason most Democratic lawmakers support legislation that would create a commercial framework for marijuana. They maintain that the state's previous attempt to decriminalize marijuana in 1977 resulted in minority communities still being disproportionately targeted by law enforcement.

"In other words, in New York, possessing small amounts of marijuana is largely decriminalized for people who are white, and vastly more likely to be criminalized for people who are black or Latino," a memorandum that accompanies the legislation states. "The consequences of New York's inequitable decriminalization are severe."

The memo adds the legislation would address "the disparate racial and ethnic impact that existing law has had by more fairly decriminalizing possession of small amounts of marijuana."

If enacted, it would no longer be a crime simply to possess a small amount of marijuana that is "burning or open to public view."

One of the sticking points with negotiations over legalization involves the authority local communities have to approve commercial ventures. Cuomo said Monday that there is disagreement on how municipalities would be allowed to participate in the program, including the method for opting out of it.

The New York Association of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Providers said Monday that decriminalization is preferable to legalization, which they describe as the endorsement of a "state-sanctioned recreational drug industry."

"Should adult-use legalization move forward, any final agreement must dedicate at least 25 percent of sales and licensing revenues to state and non-profit entities for public awareness and education campaigns and for the certain increase in the need for prevention, treatment, and recovery services," ASAP Executive Director John Coppola said in a statement.

The decriminalization legislation is sponsored by Sen. Jamaal Bailey and Assemblywoman Crystal Peoples-Stokes.
ALBANY — New York is on the verge of adopting one of the nation's most aggressive plans to combat climate change.

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo told WAMC News on Monday morning that he expects the Legislature to pass measures before the end of the legislative session on Wednesday that will codify ambitious restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions in New York by 2050.

The agreement between state lawmakers and the governor's office began taking shape on Sunday night, with details still trickling out on Monday.

"We need to see the final deal to understand what we're talking about here, but it has the potential ... to be the strongest deal in the country," Nature Conservancy in New York Policy Director Jessica Ottney Mahar said.

The final deal is expected to put New York on the path of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in 2050 by 85 percent from recorded levels in 1990. The latest version of the legislation also proposes mandates on energy providers to increase their use of renewable energy sources, with a goal to reach 70 percent of the targeted rate by 2030.

The state has previously taken steps to combat climate change with an array of environmental and energy standards, but those efforts have largely consisted of administrative actions by the Cuomo administration.

"New York passing a climate change bill is really important because it's going to codify all of these ambitious goals and actually strengthen them," Ottney Mahar said.

The legislation that is taking shape is also more appealing to the business community in New York.

Business Council of New York State Director of Government Affairs Darren Suarez said the latest version of the proposal represents "significant improvement" from the original version, but he is reserving judgement until the text of the final deal is available.

Last week, the group was vehemently opposed to the version of the Climate and Community Protection Act that lawmakers were considering. That proposal required the state to have zero emissions of greenhouse gases from all sources by 2050.

Suarez is particularly encouraged by the legislation's inclusion of the business community in a council that will help steer the state toward its emissions goals, which will affect nearly all aspects of life in New York.

The hurdle for the legislation, which passed the Assembly multiple times in recent years, has been allocation of the state's clean energy funding, according to the governor.
ALBANY — So much to do and so little time.

With just three days left in the legislative session, Gov. Cuomo and state lawmakers have reached agreements on a host of big ticket items — including climate change legislation and sexual harassment — but questions remain about pot, prevailing wage and paid surrogacy.

Cuomo said Monday that he’s happily hammered out deals with lawmakers over the weekend that will lead to redefining sexual harassment, ending the so-called “gay panic” defense and doing away with the statute of limitations for second and third-degree rape cases.

“We go through stages of the legislative process and you advocate aggressively for everything you can and I feel very good about my advocacy efforts after Memorial Day basically,” the governor told WAMC. “We communicated to the entire state the pressing issues and I think we’re making phenomenal progress.”

The Democrat-led Senate also announced Monday they will vote on legislation granting driver’s licenses to undocumented immigrants. Cuomo, who previously said he would sign the bill, expressed last minute reservations about the measure and has asked the state’s solicitor general to review whether it would enable the federal government to access information about non-citizens.

“You create a driver’s license for undocumented people, you just have to make sure you do it in a way that the feds don’t come in the next day and access that database with the exact opposite intention,” Cuomo said. The Assembly already passed the bill last week.

Several amended bills were introduced over the weekend, making them eligible for a vote by the end of session on Wednesday.

A new version of a bill that would broaden the definition of sexual harassment from “severe or pervasive,” which Cuomo supports, and a bill that would not legalize recreational pot, but instead decriminalize it further were both introduced.

The governor shot down the idea of a separate measure decriminalizing cannabis separately.

“I think we should do it all together,” he said. “I don’t think we should do one component now and then come back and do another component. Let’s just do it. We’ve talked about it, let’s make the hard decisions and let’s make them now.”

An amended version of the Climate Change and Community Protection Act, which lawmakers made a priority even though the governor expressed doubts about the bill, was unveiled. Agreements were also reached on extending the state’s minority and women owned business program, expanding labor rights for farm workers and a bill that would legalize e-bikes and scooters.

The governor said he’s pleased with where things stand at the end of the session despite the uncertain fate of other items like legalizing marijuana and paid surrogacy and a measure that would require higher wages at state-funded projects remaining up in the air.
Cuomo spent recent weeks daring the Senate to pass progressive measures as they negotiated a rent reform package without him.

He has also been lobbying lawmakers to take up measures predominantly related to the rights of women and the LGBTQ community, while taking grief for not using his political weight to help push for recreational marijuana or the so-called “Green Light” bill that would allow non-citizens to get driver’s licenses.

A measure legalizing paid surrogacy, in which a woman is compensated for carrying a child for another couple or individual, has yet to pass the Assembly amid pushback over the consequences on poorer women and legal issues.

Sources said there are also several sticking points with the pot bill as Cuomo and lawmakers attempt to reach a deal.

The bill, which would allow marijuana to be legally grown, sold and used for recreational purposes, differs from what Cuomo pitched earlier in the year on one major issue: it would expunge the records of those previously convicted of possessing small amounts of marijuana, rather than seal them as the governor has suggested.

The bill, sponsored by Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes (D-Buffalo) and Sen. Liz Krueger (D-Manhattan), also calls for a fifty-fifty split between the state Education Department and grants to fund programs serving communities that were disparately affected by current marijuana laws.

Cuomo’s original plan would give his administration control over much of how the estimated $130 million a year in tax revenue would be spent.

The governor said Monday that discrepancies have arisen over whether to allow local municipalities to opt-in or opt-out of the program.

“The main issue there is how much the state mandates,” he said. "This an issue that divides the state regionally and also generationally in some ways.

“I think there’s a balance we have to achieve here, but I don’t think we can roughshod over local governments, nor should we,” Cuomo added.
New York, NY — At a packed ceremony at New York’s Sheraton Hotel, 1199SEIU President George Gresham and his leadership team were sworn in to serve another three-year term. President Gresham, his Executive Board and more than 4,000 delegates represent the union’s 450,000 members. He first won election to the presidency in 2007. Maria Castaneda was elected to continue as Secretary-Treasurer. She also has served in this capacity since 2007.

The leadership team has committed itself to drive the critically important issue of healthcare not just for union members, but for the American people as well. George Gresham says the leaders of the union are ready to face the challenges that come with a presidential election next year.

“I want to thank my sisters and brothers in 1199SEIU for their faith in our union, and in our dedicated leadership team,” said President George Gresham.

“As we move forward, our concerns will focus, as they always have, on quality, affordable care for all Americans. Much of the polling over the past year shows the public is extremely concerned about the future of healthcare for themselves and their families.

We will not sit idly by while some elected officials try to strip tens of thousands of hardworking Americans of the healthcare they deserve. Our caregivers know the healthcare system from a frontline perspective, and we will continue fighting to make sure their voices are heard.”

Maria Castaneda is the highest-ranking Asian American in the labor movement. She is passionate about climate change, and plans to continue her advocacy work on behalf of the environment, and all workers at 1199SEIU. She says the delegates are a very special part of the union.

“My thanks to the union membership and staff for their continuing faith in me. Our 1199 delegates are the heart and soul of the union.

"They are the leaders in our workplace and communities advocating for quality healthcare, good jobs, social justice and a healthy planet. They also are an important point of contact for our members in the shops, problem solving, making sure workers are treated fairly, and helping negotiate and enforce strong contracts. As the healthcare industry evolves, our delegates make sure our jobs and standards aren’t threatened by unscrupulous bosses.”

1199SEIU members were joined at the ceremony by New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, Rev. Jesse Jackson, and many other dignitaries.
The UAW Calls For Comprehensive Changes To U.S. Labor Laws & NLRB Rules After Tennessee Volkswagen Plant Organizing Loss
The UAW News - June 20, 2019

(CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE) - The United Auto Workers (UAW) is calling on Congress to take a comprehensive look at the country’s Labor Laws and National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) Rules that made it almost impossible for Volkswagen Workers to form a Union.

Last week, Workers at VW’s Tennessee Plant voted against Unionizing by a margin of a mere 57 votes. UAW Officials pointed a finger at the company and their Republican Allies, who did their best to talk the Non-represented Workers into not voting for Union Representation (Read the June 15th Labor News Report, Headlined: By A Margin Of Just 57 Votes, The UAW Loses Its Second Attempt To Unionize Tennessee’s VW Plant - Election Underscores The Fact Of How Hard It Is For Unions To Organize In The South).

“VW Workers ‘endured a system where even when they voted, the company refused to bargain,’” UAW Spokesman Brian Rothenberg said. “Clearly Volkswagen ‘was able to delay bargaining’ with maintenance ‘and ultimately this vote among all’ Production and Maintenance Workers ‘through legal games until they could undermine the vote.’ Our Labor Laws are ‘broken.’ Workers ‘should not have to endure threats and intimidation in order to obtain the right to collectively bargain.’ The law ‘doesn’t serve’ Workers, ‘it caters to clever lawyers who are able to manipulate’ the NLRB process.”

UAW Organizing Director Tracy Romero said she was “proud” of the Chattanooga Volkswagen Workers in the face of the fear they endured: “(VW) ‘ran a brutal campaign of fear and misinformation.’ ‘Fear’ of the ‘loss’ of the plant, ‘fear’ of their participation in the Union effort, ‘fear through misinformation’ about the UAW, ‘fear’ about current benefits in contract negotiations. Over a period of nine weeks - an ‘unprecedented length of time due to legal gamesmanship’ - Volkswagen ‘was able to break the will of enough Workers to destroy their majority.’”

Romero indicated that the UAW intends to ask for the help of VW Labor Leaders in Europe to help protect Chattanooga Workers from any retaliation: “Chattanooga Workers ‘deserve the right to vote and deserve the right to be treated fairly and we will hold (VW) to that.’”

While political interference and Right-Wing Group expenditures did contribute to the loss, Rothenberg said the current state of American Labor Laws particularly made the Volkswagen effort difficult: “Here you have Maintenance Workers who voted for a contract and Volkswagen ‘just refused to follow the law and bargain.’ They ‘insisted’ maintenance and production ‘vote together.’ So, three years later maintenance and production ask to vote and VW ‘stands in their way’. This is a ‘system designed to benefit corporate lawyers - not protect’ Worker Rights.”

By law, VW Workers will have to wait one year before seeking another election.

“Ultimately this ‘has always been about Chattanooga Workers who are the only VW Workers in the world without a Union,’” Chattanooga UAW Local 42 Chairman Steve Cochran said. “If people ‘wonder why’ the Middle Class ‘is disappearing in this country, it’s because it is nearly impossible’ for Workers ‘to get access to’ collective bargaining.”
Meet America’s ‘Most Powerful’ Cannabis Union - The United Food & Commercial Workers Union
‘Is Now A Major Force’ In Marijuana Politics
Josh Marcus - Rolling Stone - June 20, 2019

No one knows more about the complicated alliance between Unions and the Cannabis Industry than Dale Sky Jones, the Chancellor of Oakland’s Oaksterdam University, a Marijuana Trade School.

In 2010, major Unions were just starting to throw their weight behind weed in California as part of Prop 19, a ballot initiative for recreational marijuana.

Jones - who calls herself “Patient Zero,” says an Organizer for the United Food & Commercial Workers (UFCW) International Union walked into the campaign office for Prop 19, a campaign Oaksterdam’s founder spearheaded, and said:

“You’re not just a bunch of tree-hugging, crystal-gripping hippies carrying signs. You actually have a statewide campaign on the ballot.”

Oaksterdam agreed to Unionize and UFCW helped get Prop 19 backers into meetings with decision-makers in Sacramento.

“We ‘got real all of a sudden,’” Jones says.

But the alliance didn’t last.

All the clout in California didn’t stop Federal Authorities from raiding Oaksterdam in 2012 and the leading UFCW Weed Organizer was indicted in 2015 for bribery and extortion.

As the school rebuilt, Jones offered to bring in the Union again, but Oaksterdam Workers declined - they were skeptical the UFCW could deliver.

Some of that skepticism remains.

Across the country, the Cannabis Industry is weighing whether to join forces with the UFCW, now the most influential Union in cannabis, which represents more than 10,000 Marijuana Workers in 14 states.

The UFCW has negotiated contracts with major operators like MedMen, helped legitimize the movement for cautious politicians and hammered out Pro-Worker Provisions in multiple state legislatures - but, as the UFCW’s influence grows, so does its list of critics, who say the Union sometimes works against the goals of the larger cannabis movement.

In 2007, long before most other big Unions were interested, the UFCW began courting Weed Workers in California, cannabis’s biggest and most important battleground State.

Back then, long before full legalization, working conditions varied wildly behind “Redwood Curtain,” far from the eyes of courts and Labor regulations.
There were beloved mom-and-pop operations where Employees had personal chefs and massage therapists, and could earn a year’s wages from three months of trimming.

There were also LED-lit nightmares where Employees were paid in product, worked at gunpoint and Female Employees were sexually harassed or trafficked.

“We looked at the Cannabis Industry and said the Union ‘could use its political power to bring forward the good players out of the Black Market, and bring some credibility and establish a legitimate industry,’” says Jim Araby of Northern California’s UFCW Local 5.

Other UFCW Locals followed suit, hoping they could use marijuana to create good jobs and business ownership instead of prisoners.

“Our members live in communities that have been ‘disproportionately affected by the War on Drugs,’” says Nikki Kateman from Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Workers (RWDSU) Union/UFCW Local 338, which works in New York State. “We want to ‘right the wrongs’ our Members ‘have experienced.’”
Unionists Running For Public Office: Rochester & Genesee Valley Area AFL-CIO Labor Federation President Dan Maloney Faces June 25th Primary As A Write-In Candidate In His Campaign For The Monroe County Legislature

Tom Campbell - Western NY Labor Today - June 21, 2019

(GREECE, NEW YORK) – Simply put, after years of watching and dealing with what he describes as “cronyism, nepotism, ‘pay-to-play’ politics and Anti-Union” business dealings - as well as having encouraged so many others in the local Labor Movement to get involved and run for public office, Rochester & Genesee Valley AFL-CIO Area Labor Federation President Dan Maloney decided to put his money where his mouth was.

And now, this Tuesday (June 25th), Maloney - who also serves as President of United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 1097 in Rochester, will be a write-in candidate on the Independence Party Line in the June Primary Election as he looks to move forward into the November Election for the Sixth District Seat on the Monroe County Legislature.

“This is an ‘uphill’ battle (having to be a write-in candidate), ‘but it is worth it and it is important Labor gets involved,’” Maloney told WNYLaborToday.com. “(Labor Candidates) ‘have to run and take over seats (held by Republican and Anti-Union incumbents) so we don’t have to fight fights like we’ve done with the (U.S. Supreme Court) Janus ruling.’ ‘It seems (every decision, like doling out taxpayer dollars to fund a project) always comes back to the business community.’ (Organized Labor) ‘can help change that.’”

Urged by Democratic Monroe County Executive Candidate Adam Bello to run for the Sixth District Seat in an effort to help flip the Republican-controlled Legislature (the GOP has a 16-13 margin, Maloney said), the Democratic Party-endorsed Maloney is running against three-term incumbent Republican Fred Ancello. Maloney’s also been endorsed by the Working Families Party (WFP) and has secured the Libertarian Line, while receiving a waterfall of endorsements from a variety of Labor Unions and Organizations across the Rochester Region.

While he said he did not receive a “fair endorsement” process from the Independence Party, Maloney was able to get enough signatures to be a write-in candidate for a district that encompasses all of the Rochester Suburb of Greece, which leans “slightly Democratic.”

“There are (500) Independent households in Greece and ‘I’ve knocked on every door,’ meeting with voters or leaving a palm card with my information. ‘It’s the first time there has ever been an Independence Party Primary in Greece’ - and ‘believe it or not, there was only one person who I interacted with who said they would never vote for a Democrat because of all that’s happening in Washington (D.C.),’” Maloney tells Your On-Line Labor Newspaper.

The nearly 57-year-old Maloney has served as President of the Rochester & Genesee Valley Area Labor Federation, whose affiliated Member Unions combine to represent more than 100,000 Members across the region, for the past five years. In addition, he is President of UAW Local 1097, which represents 900 Workers at the General Motors Company’s Rochester Products Division - a position he’s held since 2006.

On his campaign’s Facebook Page (www.facebook.com/danmaloneyLD/), Maloney posted the following: I spent the majority of my career striving to improve the lives of Working People, as an elected Union President and as a community volunteer.
My experience in contract negotiations and my work in community service prepared me well for elected public office. I have worked at General Motors for 35 years as a Machine Operator and as a Journeyman Machine Repair Technician. Now it is time to move from fixing broken machines and move to repair our broken county government. My wife, Robin, and I have been married for 37 years and raised four children here in Greece. We want our grandchildren to have good educational and job opportunities, so as they grow, they can stay here in the community we love.

I have been an outspoken advocate for Green Energy Jobs to sustain long-term economic development here in Monroe County. I am currently working with elected officials at the Federal and State level to land infrastructure investments and manufacturing job incentives for hydrogen fuel cell technologies to create a rising economic tide. This Made in Monroe County Technology should be the key to job and income growth for our region for many years to come.

If we elect the same people in county government, we will get the same results: job loss; economic decline; increasing poverty rates; and population exodus. We can turn this around and rebuild our economy and clean up our environment. We can build a sustainable future for our families. It will be my pleasure to continue to build a coalition between elected office holders, the business community, Labor and community groups to secure a bright economic future for Monroe County. That is why I am running for office, and with your support, we'll get the job done.

 Asked to elaborate, Maloney told WNYLaborToday.com: ‘I’ve ‘seen what has been going on (within the Monroe County Legislature) - the cronyism and nepotism, the pay to play, a multi-million-dollar Anti-Union law firm that was given taxpayer dollars to move from downtown out to the suburbs with no job creation in return.’ It’s ‘all a waste of tax dollars.’ I look at their Staffs and ‘they’re bloated.’ (Legislators) oversee a ($1.2 billion) budget ‘under one-party rule.’ They ‘crow about their flat tax rate, but if I look at my tax bill, I pay more.’ ‘They don’t tell you that (property) assessments are being raised.’ ‘There is a lot of wastefulness.’ ‘We need to break everything down to see where the money is going.’’

This is not Maloney’s first run for public office. In 2009, he ran for the Supervisor of Greece’s office. He lost a close race, falling by just under 400 votes. In this current run for the Monroe County Legislature, that experience, he believes, will “benefit” him.

But his decision to run is underscored by the Rochester & Genesee Valley Area Labor Federation’s recent efforts to start a candidate school for interested Union Leaders and Members, which is helping groom those within Organized Labor for many more campaigns on many levels.

“We are ‘doing just that,’” Maloney said. “We ‘need people who know about Labor issues hitting the floor running.’ ‘We are encouraging our Members to run - and, who am I to refuse?’”

But back to Tuesday’s primary, Maloney will be walking Greece’s neighborhoods, knocking on doors and talking to Independents across the district.

“We’ll be asking them to ‘take that extra step,’ he said. “To take my palm card in with them, ‘because if they are even one letter off (his name), it doesn’t count.’”
To secure pro-worker legislation, hold politicians' feet to the fire
Unions should draw up a Contract for the American Worker and make it clear they will only support candidates who endorse it

Steven Greenhouse - The Guardian - June 21, 2019

Donald Trump will no doubt tell the world he deserves to be re-elected because the economy is “the best ever.” Never mind that nearly 40% of Americans say they can’t afford to pay an unexpected $400 bill, and that nearly one in four Americans skipped some form of needed medical care last year because they couldn't afford it. (These findings are from a new Federal Reserve report).

Trump is correct when he boasts that the jobless rate has fallen to its lowest level in 50 years and that real wages are finally rising, but workers are not getting close to the average $4,000 raise he promised they’d receive as result of the $1tn corporate tax cut. There is no denying the economy is doing well, partly because Trump has spurred the “animal spirits” of business, to borrow John Maynard Keynes’ phrase. But many of the ways Trump has spurred those spirits could hurt the nation for decades to come.

Though Trump once promised to eliminate the entire $20tn-plus federal debt, he has caused the annual federal budget deficit to soar toward $1tn, a move that has goosed economic growth though far less than Trump said it would. Trump has also spurred business by scrapping or rolling back environmental regulations, moves that will worsen global warming, foul our air and water and disfigure our lands and coastlines. The Trump administration has also delighted business by weakening worker protections: reducing safeguards for 401(k)s, making it harder to unionize and obtain health coverage, rolling back plans to expand overtime pay, making it tougher for Uber drivers and other gig workers to receive benefits.

The jobless rate was a very good 4.7% when Trump was inaugurated, having declined from a peak of 10% under Barack Obama. One might say Trump was inaugurated when the economy was on third base and he thought he’d hit a triple. Thankfully, the economic expansion that began under Obama continued after Trump took office, and the jobless rate has since fallen to 3.6%. This means a 1.1% drop under Trump, compared with the 5.3% point drop under Obama. (Because of the recession Obama inherited, the jobless rate climbed from 7.8% to 10% during his first year in office). Job growth under Trump has averaged 193,000 per month, lower than the 217,000 average in Obama’s second term.

While Trump tells workers in swing states like Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin he deserves re-election, it’s not clear he has truly done much except ride economic expansion that began under Obama. Trump’s helter-skelter tariffs, trade feuds and trade wars have angered allies and made a lot of noise but they haven’t done much for American workers. They’ve aided some industries, while hurting others.

As the 2020 campaign heats up, there will be a big debate over whether Trump has been good or bad for America’s workers. But there’s a surefire way to determine whether Trump or any candidate is good for such voters. The nation’s unions and other worker groups should draw up a Contract for the American Worker and make it clear they will only endorse candidates, Republican or Democratic, who endorse such a deal.

Such a “Contract” could call for:

A $15 federal minimum wage by 2024 (with an option for lower-wage states to opt out until 2027).

Paid parental leave for 12 weeks – paid by employers and not by siphoning money from social security accounts, as some have proposed. The US is among a tiny group of nations that don’t guarantee paid maternity leave. The only others are Papua New Guinea, Suriname and a few Pacific islands. More than 100 countries have laws requiring at least 14 weeks’ such leave.
Paid sick leave (at least five days per year): The US and South Korea are the only countries among 34 industrial nations that don’t guarantee paid leave for personal illness. (In the US, over half of workers in the bottom fourth of wage earners don’t receive paid sick leave.)

Paid vacation: a minimum of two weeks after a year on the job and three weeks after five. The US is the only industrial nation not to require paid vacation. The European Union requires at least four weeks in its 28 member nations.

Universal health coverage: This would guarantee that no workers or their families would find themselves unable to afford care.

Free community college: Economic mobility in the US is now lower than in many European nations. Free community college would go far to increase opportunity and mobility for non-wealthy families. (Some politicians have also called for free four-year state university.)

Lifelong training credits: Too many workers who have lost their jobs in their 40s, 50s and 60s feel ill-equipped for the job market. With so much churn in the labor force it’s vital to ensure smart, targeted and free retraining for all unemployed workers, whether 22, 42 or 62. This would increase overall productivity.

Many worker advocates will complain that these proposals are too modest and fall below Europe’s standards. They should be considered a much-needed first step. At the same time, corporate executives will scream that this Contract for the American Worker includes too many “expensive” and onerous “employer mandates”. They’ll order their lobbyists to target lawmakers and pressure them to shut this down.

For too long, largely because of the disproportionate power of business, workers in the wealthiest nation have gone without many basic protections. This proposed contract would aim to end what I call “America’s anti-worker exceptionalism”.

Whoever candidates back this Contract for the American Worker can trumpet themselves as true friends of workers. Those who don’t will need to explain to voters why American workers deserve less than workers in other advanced industrial nations.

Steven Greenhouse is a journalist and author who writes about labor and the workplace. His new book, Beaten Down, Worked Up: The Past, Present, and Future of American Labor, will be published this August.
Why Workers Need A Union: An Interview With Former Brooklyn Academy of Music Video Editor & Motion Designer Kaitlyn Chandler: “Without A Union, Nothing Is Really Promised”

Meghan Day - Jacobin Magazine - June 21, 2019

(NEW YORK CITY) - The Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) was founded in 1861 and has been continuously showcasing the performing arts at its location in New York City’s Fort Greene neighborhood since 1908. The institution has long been a leader in avant-garde cultural production, fostering radical artists from Philip Glass to Merce Cunningham.

But now, BAM may be about to do something else radical: Unionize.

However, the executive staff at BAM is pushing back.

In documents shared with Jacobin, they assured Workers that “we will do everything we can to make sure you have the information to make your own decision about the future relationship you want to see between BAM and their Employees” - and then presented only the scariest “facts” about Unionization they could find.

For example, they emphasized that you can - theoretically - be fired for not paying Union Dues.

Of course, in a Non-Unionized workplace, including BAM, you can already be fired for nearly any reason that management decides.

Jacobin’s Meagan Day spoke with Kaitlyn Chandler, a Video Editor and Motion Designer who has worked a BAM for three-and-a-half years, about why BAM Workers want to join United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 2110:

MD: What is BAM’s mission? KC: BAM is an institution dedicated to bringing avant-garde art and ideas to Brooklyn. What we know today as BAM came into its own in the 1980s with our past President and Artistic Director Harvey Lichtenstein. When you work here, that history is all around you.

MD: And how do BAM Workers factor into that mission? KC: BAM works because we do. I’ve never met a more talented, smart, and kind group of people. And we all believe in the mission. Whenever you tell people where you work, they immediately say: ‘Oh my god I love BAM,’ and that fills you with a sense of pride and joy. I’m very proud of the place I work.

MD: What does your job consist of? KC: I make the trailers for BAM shows, archive at least one performance of each BAM show and I make animated trailers for BAM festivals. Basically, if there’s moving pixels, I and the rest of the video team probably have a hand in it.

MD: How many people are you trying to bring into the new Union? KC: It’s between 160 and 180 right now. Stagehands and some construction and security are already Unionized. Our Union would represent White-Collar Administrative and Retail Workers.
MD: I spoke to a MoMA (Museum of Modern Art) Worker recently who told me the same thing about her and her Co-Workers all being proud of where they work, but she also added: ‘You can’t eat prestige.’ So why do you and your Co-Workers need a Union? KC: Past presidents of BAM have said: ‘It’s not a job, it’s a crusade.’ But it is a job. For ten years or longer, Workers at BAM have only seen a loss of benefits. We lost the matching 401k; our pension plan now means that newer Employees get less. Full-time jobs are being replaced and BAM increasingly relies on part-time, insecure jobs that pay minimum wage or just slightly above. Meanwhile, some full-time jobs don’t even get benefits or paid time off. So we’ve only lost, and we haven’t gained anything. Starting a Union is an effort to sustain what we have now and possibly get even more. And we think that BAM can really benefit if the Workers are treated more fairly.
NEW YORK, NY – George Miranda, President of Teamsters Joint Council 16, had the following statement on the signing of the “Green Light” law, which will reopen access to driver’s licenses to all New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status. Joint Council 16 represents 120,000 workers in and around New York City.

“The New York Teamsters thank the Assembly, Senate, and Governor for protecting our immigrant families by enacting the Green Light law. Our elected officials acted, and it will not longer be a crime for these workers to drive their kids to school or to the doctor.

“In much of New York State, you need a car to do the basics of life, and this new law will ensure that all residents can access driver’s licenses, regardless of immigration status.

This is a union issue and will open opportunities for our members. We are proud to be a sanctuary union and give our full support to expanding the rights of our most vulnerable residents.”
Rochester-area unions ramp up First Book giveaways to inspire summer reading
Liza Frenette - NYSUT Communications - June 25, 2019

This is the kind of community outreach that will have a long shelf life: giving books to children. A truckload of 42,000 books from First Book Inc. and NYSUT has been delivered to western New York, where union members put books in the hands of students and will continue to give them away all summer to children and families at festivals, galas, street fairs, and canal days.

Near Rochester, Webster Teachers Association members will be handing out books at the annual Webster summer kickoff bash at the local recreation center this Saturday.

The teachers association took delivery of 16,000 books during spring and delivered hundreds of them to each building with the help of teachers, administrators, board members and School-Related Professionals.

WTA union members also took boxes of books to the Golisano’s Children Hospital in Rochester to brighten the spirits of sick and terminally ill children, said President Christopher Wojtas.

At a much-heralded book giveaway in Fairport, 5,000 books were handed out to students and families during Fairport Canal Days by the Fairport Educators Association and Monroe BOCES United Professionals, union leader Andy Jordan said.

“It was a huge success,” said Jordan, co-president of the Monroe BOCES UP. “We received personal thanks from the mayor and village board, and one board member told us ‘this is the best thing to ever happen to canal days.’ There were lots of happy smiles.”

It was a big bump from the 1,500 books members gave out last year. This year’s stock of 10,000 new books was culled from First Book and donations from members and retirees, and will be shared throughout the summer at different community events by volunteer educators from both unions.

“We are more than just an association of educators, we are members of our community who never miss an opportunity to teach and help families realize the very best for their children,” FEA President Sue Casement said.

New York State United Teachers works with First Book Inc., a non-profit organization in partnership with the American Federation of Teachers, to provide books at low-to-no cost to New York schools and programs serving low-income families and children in need.

“Providing for our students in need is a social justice union value,” said Philippe Abraham, NYSUT secretary-treasurer.

“We’re so proud of the efforts of our members to make sure every child has a book for summer reading and book to call their own.”

In neighboring Greece, First Book is making its first appearance. The 1,100-member TA serves students in multiple Title I schools, qualifying them for the contemporary and classic titles provided by First Book. GTA president Brian Ebertz and Vice President Allen Firlit said they are excited about plans to distribute the book titles to students through open houses, ice cream socials, on buses, and at events held for students transitioning to their next level of school.
They have paired with local firefighter and police unions to create a summer reading kickoff event that will be held at a local Barnes & Noble. The TA will also be restocking school libraries with some of the titles.

The local leaders said union members would also be creating book bags for new school registrants.

“Our excitement to get additional books into the hands of our students cannot be understated,” the pair said. “Whenever a student opens a new book a new world opens in their mind.”
New York, NY – The head of the union representing flight attendants in the U.S. isn’t buying the idea that organized labor doesn’t support the Green New Deal.

“I don’t really buy the argument that there’re unions that are against it,” Sara Nelson, international president of the Association of Flight Attendants [AFA] recently told LaborPress. “I certainly know that there are consultants that are paid by the fossil fuel industries and oil who also have union clients that try to promote this idea that unions are against this.”

To be sure, the Green New Deal has garnered strong support within the House of Labor. Earlier this month, Service Employees International Union [SEIU] became the first national union to endorse the green house gas-busting resolution.

“If you look, for example, at the AFL-CIO convention held in 2017, there’s a climate resolution that was passed that acknowledges that climate change is real, that this is something that we have to tackle, and that we can create an infrastructure that actually will build millions of jobs and that any policy for dealing with climate change needs to be rooted in labor rights and promoting good union jobs —that sounds an awful like the Green New Deal,” Nelson said.

Nevertheless, labor is widely viewed as being divided over the Green New Deal. In March, the AFL-CIO Energy Committee criticized the Green New Deal charging that it is not “rooted in an engineering-based approach and makes promises that are not achievable or realistic.”

Nelson, however, maintains that “a lot of assessments are made based on soundbites, and 144 characters.”

“Any union organizer can tell you that it takes multiple conversations in the workplace to move people to a place of recognizing what’s at stake, being able to define what they’re wiling to fight for, and sharing a common bond in that fight,” she said.

According to the union leader, one of the biggest challenges actually surrounding the Green New Deal is “just to get people to take an actual look what’s in it, rather than be dissuaded by political commentary around it.”

“If we can give people the freedom to be able to have those conversations and we can do that in the workplace and unions can do that within the union halls, we can move this conversation,” Nelson said. “Even unions that have been identified or stamped with being opposed to the Green New Deal, there are local unions, locals within those unions that have worked hard [supporting it].”

Retiring United Steelworkers leader Leo Gerard, meanwhile, recently told LaborPress that his members are “not going to back a just transition from $30- to $12-an-hour,” and that the switch to renewable energy will still require at least some level of mining.

“We need to get away from the emotional and put our thinking caps on,” Gerard said. “What we need to do, is sit down and talk about those things we can agree on.”

Nelson says those who have heard the term “just transition” before have every right to be skeptical because they’ve never seen a truly “just transition” in their communities.
“If we want people to actually take us seriously — that we mean what we say when we talk about these principles and they must be included in any policy moving forward — then we have to take action now that helps them understand that we’re serious,” Nelson said.

An example of that commitment, according to Nelson, is her union’s support of safeguarding the longterm viability of mineworker pensions and healthcare.

“First and foremost,” Nelson said, “we have a principle that we hold within our union that we hold dearly…and that is that we leave no one behind — and we’re not going to do that with our nation’s mineworkers. But our members are also interested in taking action on this because allowing their pensions to default has a potential impact of harming other retirement security for the rest of us.”

Ultimately, Nelson said Green New Deal advocates must take steps to show communities that have been hurt by a transitioning economy so far, that transitioning away from fossil fuels is about “participating in a process that is serious about addressing their needs.”

“And we can’t do that,” Nelson said, “unless we can show them something concrete — that we mean what we say.”
Just In Case You Missed This One: Massachusetts House Passes Bill ‘Expanding’ Union Rights In Public Workplaces - Lets Public Sector Unions Charge Non-Members Fees For Representing Them In Grievances

Shira Schoenberg - MassLive.com - June 25, 2019

After The Bills Passed 155-To-1, State Representative Paul Brodeur, Who Also Serves As Chairman Of The Joint Committee On Labor And Workforce Development, Said: “It ‘Stands For The Fundamental Premise That You Can’t Get Something For Nothing.’”

(BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS) - The Massachusetts House has passed a Bill that would let Public Sector Unions charge Non-Members fees for representing them in grievances.

“It ‘prevents’ hard-working, dues-paying (Union) Members ‘from footing the bill’ for an Employee ‘who does not share in the obligation to meet those costs by paying any money into the Union,’” said State Representative Paul Brodeur (Democrat-Melrose), who also serves as Chairman of the Joint Committee on Labor and Workforce Development.

“It ‘stands for the fundamental premise that you can’t get something for nothing.’”

The Bill, H.3854, passed 155-to-1. It would also give Unions other rights aimed at strengthening their presence in the workplace.

The Bill is a response to the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2018 decision in Janus vs. AFSCME, which ruled Government Workers cannot be forced to pay Union Dues.

Until the Janus decision, Government Workers whose workplaces were Unionized did not have to join the Union, but did have to pay “Fair Share” or “Agency” Fees to account for the fact that all Workers benefit from the contract negotiated by the Union.

The House Bill, which has unified support from the State’s Unions, would let Unions charge Non-Members “reasonable costs” for representing them in a grievance or arbitration proceeding.

While Unions would still be required to negotiate contracts on behalf of all Employees of that workplace, they would be allowed to offer other “legal, economic or job-related services or benefits” to Union Members only.

Unions would also be granted certain rights, including the right to meet with Members at their job site during the workday to discuss complaints and grievances, to conduct Union meetings at the office during lunch breaks or non-work hours, to meet with all new hires within 10 days and to use a public agency’s e-mail system for Union business.

“The Janus case was a ‘major change to the landscape’ of State Collective Bargaining Laws and ‘we just think it’s important to in light of that change to update’ our State Collective Bargaining Laws to ‘ensure that Unions can continue to effectively represent the workers we represent,’” said John Drinkwater, the Legislative Director of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO.
Many Unions already have some of these rights through their Collective Bargaining Agreements, but this would codify them and ensure no employer can ban the practices.

The Bill would also give Unions access to all Employees’ personal contact information, including their home address, personal phone numbers and work and personal email addresses.

The Bill does not make that contact information a public record, so other organizations will not have access to it.

The Bill now goes to the Senate for consideration.
Robert Bruno, a professor of labor and employment relations at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, told the Chicago Sun-Times if now former state worker Mark Janus and his allies thought “this decision would lead to seriously damaging public-sector unions, that doesn’t seem to have occurred.”

WASHINGTON — On June 27, 2018, the Supreme Court delivered what seemed a potential death knell to public-sector unions in the landmark Illinois Janus v AFSCME Council 31 case.

A year later, the government worker unions in Illinois are doing OK.

With the election in November of the Democratic pro-labor Gov. J.B. Pritzker, who trounced the anti-government union, former GOP Gov. Bruce Rauner, public-sector unions have enhanced clout. Union membership has ticked up. The Janus decision is responsible for union revenue loss but not enough to so far make a dramatic difference.

Robert Bruno, a professor of labor and employment relations at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, told the Chicago Sun-Times if now former state worker Mark Janus and his allies thought that in Illinois, “this decision would lead to seriously damaging public-sector unions, that doesn’t seem to have occurred.”

In a 5-4 decision — with the conservative justices prevailing over the liberals — the court said under First Amendment protections, public workers who do not want to join a union —but are still represented by a union — do not have to pay a fee for the coverage.

Rauner started the case on Feb. 9, 2015, shortly after taking office. One of his crusades was weakening the power of the Democratic-allied public-sector unions in Illinois.

After a lower court ruled Rauner did not have standing, the lawsuit was amended.

Janus, who was a child support specialist in the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services who lives in Springfield, became the plaintiff.

Janus’ legal team was led by The Liberty Justice Center, affiliated with the Illinois Policy Institute, a conservative activist organization, partnering with the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation in Virginia.

Shortly after the ruling, Janus, 66, quit his state of Illinois job and today works for The Liberty Justice Center as a roving ambassador to spread the word to workers about “Janus Rights.”

He was in Washington earlier this month to mark the one-year anniversary. “Because of the decision, you do not have to be a member of a union in order to work in the public sector,” Janus said. Government workers “have the freedom to make their own choice. My job is just to go out and let these people know they do have a choice,” he said.

Bruno, who has been studying the impact of the Janus ruling, said, on the whole in Illinois, there has only been a “small drop” in total revenues to the labor organizations because of the loss of fees from non-union member workers.
The unions “lost some of those fee payers but they’ve also converted a number of those fee payers into members and there hasn’t been an exodus of any significance of members,” Bruno said.

The unions don’t make public precise numbers regarding revenues from dues and fee payers pre- and post-Janus.

Roberta Lynch, executive director of AFSCME Council 31, told the Sun-Times, in the wake of Janus, “We’ve weathered it very well actually, and much better than anybody — and probably including me — actually anticipated that we would.”

AFSCME Council 31 has about 55,000 members. The Janus decision ended the flow of fees from about 6,000 fee payers. Balancing this revenue loss: Since April 2019, the union added 1,100 dues-paying members with about 800 more memberships pending.

The Chicago Teachers Union added members in the wake of the Janus decision, from 24,361 to 24,991. The CTU estimated fee payers totaled only a few hundred. “We’ve held our own and raised the number of full dues-paying members,” said CTU communications director Chris Geovanis.

SEIU Local 73 has added about 2,000 members since last spring. Current membership is at 27,000. There were about 5,000 fee payers before Janus.

SEIU Local 73 President Dian Palmer said, Janus “was an attempt by anti-worker extremists to weaken unions, but in the case of SEIU Local 73, it didn’t work. In response to the extremist attacks on collective bargaining, members mobilized like never before.”

Jen Hill, the media director for the Illinois Federation of Teachers, said “less than one percent of our membership chose to opt out. But overall, we’ve gained, thanks to organizing new groups and engaging with those who were previously “fair share.”

The fight is not over.

The Liberty Justice Center and the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation filed a Janus “follow-up” lawsuit in federal court in Chicago on May 1 against AFSCME Council 31. Seeking to be a class action, a judge is being asked to order a refund of fees paid from May 1, 2017, to June 27, 2018, plus interest.

Said Patrick Hughes, the Liberty Justice Center president, “We are committed to the full implementation of the Janus decision and will continue to litigate here in Illinois and across the country.”
One year after the Supreme Court dealt government employee unions a severe financial blow, the country’s biggest public employee unions remain surprisingly flush.

In its June 2018 ruling in Janus v. American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, the high court shut off a crucial source of revenue for unions that represent government workers: mandatory fees collected from union nonmembers to cover their share of collective bargaining costs.

As Janus’ one-year anniversary approaches, a POLITICO review of 10 large public-employee unions indicates they lost a combined 309,612 fee payers in 2018. But paradoxically, all but one reported more money at the end of 2018. And collectively, the 10 unions reported a gain of 132,312 members.

“In talking to folks, my perception is that there has been good news, that membership has not been falling off dramatically,” said Sharon Block, a former Obama Labor Department official who now runs the Labor and Worklife Program at Harvard Law School.

The unions’ financial and membership gains are especially striking given that Janus was, for government employee unions, a double-edged sword.

In addition to taking away fair-share fees, the Supreme Court took away much of the reason for government employees to remain union members. That’s because Janus enabled a government worker, simply by quitting the union, to enjoy the benefits of union representation without having to pay for them. Many anticipated Janus would prompt government workers to quit unions in droves, driving down those unions’ revenues even further.
That fear wasn’t misplaced. A state-by-state analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics data on the percentage of government employees represented by labor unions, broken down by Barry Hirsch of Georgia State University and David Macpherson of Trinity University, indicates that public unions’ reach among state employees has receded somewhat since Janus.

Before Janus, 22 states and the District of Columbia allowed unions to collect agency fees from nonmembers. In those states, the percentage of public employees represented by a union — union members and nonmembers — dropped 1.1 percentage points, to 52.8 percent in 2018, down from 53.9 percent in 2017. The percentage of public employees in those states who were union members dropped 1 percentage point, to 49.7 percent in 2018, down from 50.7 percent in 2017. In total, public unions in those states lost union coverage for 115,625 employees.

By comparison, the 28 states that barred public employee fair-share fees prior to the ruling showed no change during that period in the percentage of public sector employees represented by a union, and a tiny (0.1 percentage point) bump in union membership.

Four of the 10 large public employee unions surveyed by POLITICO — the Service Employees International Union, the United Food and Commercial Workers, Laborers' International Union of North America and the United Automobile Workers — also represent many private-sector workers, who were unaffected by Janus. So it’s hard to judge whether Janus caused that group’s combined loss of about 59,000 members in 2018 (in addition to losing more than 100,000 agency-fee payers).

*Note: Figures for AFT are based on self-reports between June 2018 and February 2019.*
Because the 10 surveyed unions haven’t yet reported to the Labor Department membership numbers for 2019, POLITICO can gauge Janus’ effects on them only during the first six to eight months the ruling was in effect; significant attrition may yet occur in 2019 and the years that follow.

Even so, available evidence indicates public employee unions are weathering Janus surprisingly well.

The nation’s single largest public employee union, the 3 million-member National Education Association, has not yet filed with the Labor Department and did not provide POLITICO specific data. But in an interview, NEA President Lily Eskelsen García said the union took in more money than last year by persuading fee payers to become full members.

“We sit here today having budgeted for what we thought might be the worst-case scenario — of a drop of a couple hundred thousand members — and we are up several thousand,” García said.

The 1.3 million-member AFSCME, which describes itself as the nation’s largest public "services" employee union — and was the defendant in Janus — gained nearly 28,000 members in 2018 (even as it lost more than 110,000 agency-fee payers). The 1.7 million-member American Federation of Teachers, another public employee giant, is not required to file with the Labor Department until later this year. But it told POLITICO it gained more than 17,000 members in the eight months that followed Janus, even as it lost nearly 85,000 agency-fee payers.

More surprising still, eight of the nine large unions that have filed full-year 2018 data with the Labor Department reported financial gains in 2018 totaling a combined $379,384,917. The one exception — the American Federation of Government Employees, which represents federal workers — couldn’t plausibly attribute its reported financial losses to Janus because, even before the ruling, AFGE was barred from collecting fair-share fees.

The financial gains extended even to the four government-employee unions included in POLITICO's survey that lost members in 2018 (plus those 100,000-plus agency-fee payers). SEIU, which in 2018 lost more than a thousand members (and nearly 99,000 agency-fee payers) reported a 15 percent gain in assets.

How did public employee unions end up with more money and in most cases with more members after a Supreme Court ruling that was expected to eviscerate both?

The answer appears to be preemptive organizing. “Unions were really prepared because, sadly, the outcome was really predictable,” Block said.

Some of the unions raised dues. AFSCME, which has raised its minimum monthly dues an average 25 cents over each of the past 10 years, bumped its minimum monthly dues by 50 cents in 2018, to $18.40, according to its filings with DOL.

The United Food and Commercial Workers — one of the four surveyed unions that lost members in 2018 but still posted financial gains — raised its minimum monthly dues that year by $1, to $16.04. It was the first dues increase for the union since 2013, according to its filings with DOL.

Other unions planned budget cuts. The NEA said in June 2018 it was preparing to cut $28 million from its budget and would reduce its staff. AFSCME, in addition to bumping dues higher than in previous years, continued a trend of reduced political spending. In 2018, the union shelled out $53.1 million for political activities, compared to $55.3 million in 2016 and $64.6 million in 2014, according to DOL filings.
Labor leaders started arming themselves years ago as conservative foundations and right-to-work groups backed lawsuits to eliminate agency-fee payers. The rationale behind these lawsuits was that fair-share fees were compelled political speech that violated union nonmembers’ First Amendment rights. Public employee unions were already barred from using fair-share fees to pay for political activities; the fees could be used only to pay for collective bargaining. But the lawsuits argued that even collective bargaining constituted political speech when performed by a union that represented government employees.

One of the most promising lawsuits, first filed in 2013, was Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association. Bankrolled in large part by the Bradley Foundation, the case was argued before the Supreme Court in January 2016. Unions braced themselves for a loss after Justice Antonin Scalia, the only Republican appointee deemed a possible ally, indicated in his questions that he would likely vote against fair-share fees.

In response, unions began persuading non-union members to become full-time members and organizing workplaces that didn’t have a union at all.

“We knew which Supreme Court justices would be with us and which ones would not be with us, and lo and behold we were right,” said Garcia, the NEA president. “We didn’t just sit back and put our feet up.”

Scalia's death in February 2016 brought unions a reprieve by deadlocking the high court 4-4 on Friedrichs, leaving in place a lower court’s ruling upholding fair-share fees. But the election of President Donald Trump signaled the status quo wouldn’t last long.

Conservative legal groups paint a more sinister portrait of public employee unions' pre-Janus preparations, arguing they were underhanded — and perhaps illegal. Since Janus, conservative organizations have filed lawsuits accusing unions of everything from imposing impossibly small disenrollment windows to deceiving workers into signing paperwork that made them union members.

“The Janus decision sits inside a set of other attacks that extremists in the right wing have been inflicting on working people and their organizations for decades,” SEIU President Mary Kay Henry told POLITICO.

The Fairness Center, a Pennsylvania-based conservative nonprofit, filed a lawsuit against SEIU on behalf of a public employee in Lehigh County, Pa., who said he was barred from leaving his union save for a 15-day window before the expiration of the collective bargaining agreement.

“Part of the story here is that maybe the numbers don’t reflect reality — that there are actually a number of people kept from leaving their unions,” said David Osborne, the Fairness Center president. “Unions have also asked people to sign forms with the union that say people agree to stay with the union for a long period of time, and even if they choose to leave a union they still have to pay union dues.”

But SEIU’s Henry said Janus offered a perfect foil for the larger war organized labor is facing.

“Janus was seized on by us and other parts of the labor movement as an opportunity to re-educate and activate our members in a much bigger fight that we’re all committed to having,” she said.

The National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation asked the Supreme Court to compel SEIU to return $32 million in fees to home-care workers in Illinois, challenging a state law that permits home care workers for Medicaid recipients to unionize. (The Trump administration recently issued a rule barring states from the practice.) Conservative groups are also pursuing a broader case to require unions to refund bargaining fees collected before the Janus ruling.
Meanwhile, conservative groups are urging workers to leave unions. The Freedom Foundation, a conservative nonprofit active in the Pacific Northwest, said its “multifaceted” campaign to “educate” employees prompted 45,000 government employees to leave their unions in Washington, Oregon and California.

“People don’t know [about the ruling],” said Ashley Varner, a Freedom Foundation spokesperson. “They’re not being told at work, they’re certainly not being told by their government union reps, so we have to find more ways to reach people.”

Unions are asking some state legislatures to come to their aid. Last month, Democratic Washington Gov. Jay Inslee signed a bill preempting conservative groups’ efforts to force the return of fair-share fees. In April, Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed a bill banning local governments from adopting right-to-work laws.

Before the Supreme Court even ruled in Janus, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed legislation saying unions need not provide full benefits to workers who aren’t members.

“It is the union movement that drives the Democratic Party,” Cuomo said upon signing the bill. “And that’s why they want to weaken the union movement.”
NY Legislature Passes Labor Rights For Farmworkers
Steve Wishnia - Labor Press - June 27, 2019

ALBANY, N.Y.—Farmworkers in New York State will get basic labor rights they’ve been denied since the 1930s, under a bill the Legislature passed earlier this month on June 19.

The Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act, passed 94-54 in the Assembly and 40-22 in the state Senate, will give the state’s estimated 80,000 to 100,000 farm laborers the right to organize unions and bargain collectively. It will require employers to pay them time-and-a-half for overtime if they work more than 60 hours in a week, give them one day a week off, and let them refuse to work overtime. It will also make farmworkers eligible for workers’ compensation and unemployment benefits.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo has endorsed the bill in principle and is expected to sign it.

United Farm Workers President Teresa Romero, in a statement June 19, called the measure “a big step forward, offering prospects for improving the lives of agricultural workers in the state.”

“Today is the culmination of a decades-long fight centered upon one simple premise: that farmworkers deserve fairness, equality and justice,” said state AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento. “Farmworkers are finally getting basic labor rights.”

American farmworkers were excluded from New Deal-era federal labor laws such as the National Labor Relations Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act as part of a compromise to win support from Southern members of Congress, who objected to legislation that would increase costs for their region’s agriculture and grant political and economic rights to its substantially Afro-American workforce. New York law prohibited farmworkers from forming unions until this May, when a state appeals court ruled that unconstitutional.

The bill’s lead Senate sponsor, Labor Committee chair Jessica Ramos (D-Queens), called the ban on farmworkers unionizing “a remnant of Jim Crow-era laws.”

Agriculture trade organizations and upstate Republican legislators opposed the bill, saying it would be too costly for struggling farmers, that strikes during harvest season would be crippling, and that seven-day workweeks are crucial during the harvest. “This bill will devastate the rural upstate economy,” Assemblymember Chris Tague (R-C-Schoharie), who owned a dairy farm for five years, told the Auburn Citizen. “This bill will kill agriculture in rural upstate New York.”

As a compromise, legislators agreed to start overtime pay after 60 hours a week instead of 40 hours. A three-member wage board, consisting of an AFL-CIO representative, a New York Farm Bureau official, and a third member appointed by the state labor commissioner, will study whether overtime should be phased in after 40 hours. Republicans wanted the state agriculture commissioner included on the board.

“That is a start since New York farm workers have no overtime protections now,” the UFW’s Romero said. California enacted a law in 2016 that will pay farmworkers overtime after eight hours a day or 40 hours a week in 2023, phased in over a four-year period that began last January.

Another compromise is that the bill prohibits farmworkers from striking. In exchange, employers will be required to recognize unions by card check, if a majority of workers sign union cards, instead of waiting for a vote. Employers will have to remain neutral during union-organizing campaigns, and disputes will be settled by arbitration.
“We are disappointed that the right to strike was not included in the bill, and we will continue to fight to expand the rights of farmworkers,” Rebecca Fuentes, lead organizer with the Workers’ Center of Central New York, an organizing group for nonunion workers. “However, we’re encouraged about the new legal protections that have been so long in coming.” Center member Crispin Hernandez, a former dairy worker, was a plaintiff in the suit that won farmworkers the right to strike.

The bill’s Assembly sponsor, Queens Democrat Catherine Nolan, had introduced similar measures over the past 20 years, with the Assembly passing them three times.
New York, NY – Members of District Council 16 of the Cement and Concrete Workers and allied supporters briefly shutdown midtown traffic this week, in an ongoing protest against so-called “open shop” development.

Angry trade unionists fed up with the race to the bottom that so-called “open shop” development creates — broke off their noisy demonstration outside the CIM Group’s E. 55th Street offices on Wednesday afternoon and strode into the nearby intersection at Madison Avenue shortly before 4 p.m.

Cops monitored the temporary blockade but did not make any arrests. Trade unionists were, instead, allowed to leave the intersection after a few minutes and reassemble in front of CIM Group offices at 540 Madison Ave.

CIM is an LA-based private equity outfit that has become a major player in NYC’s real estate market in recent years, developing the record-setting 1,395-foot condominium tower at 432 Park Avenue and neighborhood-busting Two Bridges development on the Chinatown waterfront.

Trade unionists have spent months urging CIM to quit hiring nonunion contractors who, in addition to undercutting middle class wages and benefits, have a history of wage theft and worker fatalities.

Back in January, Council Member Stephen Levin [D-District 33], called the massive CIM Group development going up at 85 Jay Street in Brooklyn a “major concern” and a source of “fairly frequent” complaints from neighbors.

Melissa Shetler, political director for Metallic Latherers and Reinforcing Ironworkers Local 46, said that, indeed, the safety record of CIM’s contractors should be troubling and concerning for local residents.”

“This is not the type of development or the type of contractor that we should be allowing in New York City,” Shetler told LaborPress. “The exploitation of vulnerable workers is something that we’re supposed to be standing up against.”

On Wednesday, Mike Arena, District Council 16 organizer told LaborPress that all the rallies and demonstrations are beginning to have an impact.

“I think it’s gonna work; he said. “We’ve got to keep our foot on the pedal; we can’t stop now.”
Andrew Pallotta: One Year Post Janus, Unions Still Standing Strong
Andrew Pallotta - WAMC Northeast Public Radio - June 28, 2019

One year ago this month, the U.S. Supreme Court rendered its decision in a long-awaited case called Janus v. AFSCME.

It was supposed to be a major win for anti-union forces that have fought for decades to weaken the protections labor unions provide for working families.

The Court ruled that people in public sector unions — teachers, fire fighters, police officers and municipal workers — could keep enjoying the benefits of a union contract, but stop paying union dues. Many predicted the end of the labor movement. After all, bargaining contracts costs money. If enough members decided to stop paying their dues, unions would die.

But they were wrong.

I am proud to report that, one year later, we’re still here. And we are stronger and more united that ever before.

While the Janus decision was disappointing, it wasn’t a shock. We had been following the case for some time. We knew the danger it posed. But more importantly, we knew it was a good opportunity to do what unionists do best: get organized.

For the past few years — through the NYSUT Member Organizing Institute —our members have gone door-to-door highlighting the value of union membership.

These trained volunteers meet individually with fellow NYSUT members, in their homes, to discuss why strong unions are important to fighting for good jobs — jobs that provide a decent wage and benefits, a voice for employees in the workplace and a secure retirement.

They talk about how NYSUT goes to bat for them at the state level, holding politicians accountable when important issues need attention, and keeping the pressure on until they make changes.

And they talk about our advocacy on behalf of New York State students — because the working conditions of educators are also the learning conditions of students.

It’s working. Despite a coordinated effort to convince people to leave their union, across the state we have actually seen an increase in the number of NYSUT members.

Our members know that when unions are weaker, salaries go down … benefits evaporate … jobs disappear … and the economy stagnates — not just for union members, but for the entire community.

They know what happened in states like Wisconsin, Michigan and Indiana when the unions fell. According to research from the Illinois Economic Policy Institute, those men and women now earn 8 percent less annually, compared to unionized workers in neighboring states.

Our members know, and they aren’t about to let that happen here.

The activists, who formed NYSUT almost 50 years ago, put down strong roots. As I like to say, “I am standing in the shade of trees that I did not plant.”
But standing in the shade doesn’t mean resting on our laurels. We’re actively planning for the future of NYSUT.

Our newest initiative, “Next Generation NYSUT” focuses on our newest members. It will provide them the professional support they need to grow and thrive. It will help them confront the crippling student debt crisis that affects too many of our members. And yes, it will educate them about the work of the union.

In today’s climate of corporate greed and shrinking salaries and benefits, working people need the protections offered by strong unions now more than ever. We’re committed to ensuring that unions are around for generations to come.

I guess you could say that we’re planting a few trees of our own. Because chances are, in the years to come, those future NYSUT members will need a bit of shade too.
‘Yet Another Reason Why’ Workers ‘Need’ A Union: Non-Union Ramp & Cargo Workers At Miami International Airport And At Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport Go On Strike To Protest ‘Unsafe’ Working Conditions
by The Miami Herald vis Western NY Labor - June 30, 2019

(MIAMI, FLORIDA) – Non-Unionized Ramp and Cargo Workers at Miami International Airport (MIA) who service Delta and American Airlines went on strike late last week to urge their employer, Eulen America, to improve working conditions.

Workers for Eulen describe the current conditions as “unbearable:” Breakless shifts on the overheated tarmac; Broken equipment held together with makeshift ties; No paid vacation or sick days; and Retaliation from management for speaking out.

The striking Workers are not Unionized.

“One of us came from difficult countries, we came in search of the American dream,” said Esteban Barrios, 61, who has serviced Delta Airlines as a Eulen Employee for three years. “It’s turned into a nightmare.”

Eulen has previously said the Workers’ claims are false. Delta Airlines contracts Eulen to provide ramp services. American contracts Eulen to provide cargo screening services.

The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is currently conducting an investigation of Eulen at MIA, an agency spokesperson has confirmed.

The property workers union 32BJ Service Employees International Union SEIU estimates that dozens of Workers are participating in the Strike at both MIA and Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport.

The director of the Miami-Dade Aviation Department, Lester Sola, said in a statement that his department continues to monitor the situation to ensure Workers have “proper equipment, facilities, and compensation opportunities.” “We have met several times with Eulen and they have provided us documents and a plan of action that, if implemented, should address the concerns of the Employees,” Sola said in the statement.

The county provided Eulen’s Action Plan - signed by CEO Xavier Rabell - to The Miami Herald.

The document says Eulen will buy new trucks by August 2019 and post bulletins about the grievance process in break rooms.

The plan says that the existing equipment is “fully serviceable and safe to operate” and that the company has spent more than $200,000 on equipment like belt loaders and air conditioners in the last nine months.

However, the plan does not address shift scheduling and paid time off.

“While we cannot alter the unfair allegations that have transpired, Eulen has taken and will continue to take active steps to ensure that its Employees work in a safe and healthy environment and will continue to strive to offer high-quality Services to its Clients, while serving as one of the largest companies at MIA,” Rabell wrote in the action plan.
The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) is praising the introduction of the Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act (H.R. 3463 and S. 1970), which would safeguard Public Sector Workers’ right to a seat at the table by setting a minimum nationwide standard of Collective Bargaining Rights that states must provide.

The Bill was introduced in the House of Representatives by Pennsylvania Representative Matt Cartwright and in the U.S. Senate by Hawaii Senator Mazie Hirono.

Among other Pro-Worker Provisions, the Bill strives to give Public Sector Workers the same basic rights and freedoms enjoyed by Workers in the Private Sector.

The legislation will ensure the dedicated Public Employees working every day to improve their communities have Collective Bargaining Rights, including the rights to:

Join together in a Union selected by a majority of Employees; Collectively bargain over wages, hours and terms and conditions of employment; Access Dispute Resolution Mechanisms (such as mediation or arbitration); Use Voluntary Payroll Deduction for Union Dues; Engage in other concerted activities related to collective bargaining and mutual aid; Not have their Union be subject to rigged recertification elections; and Sue in court to enforce their Labor Rights.

The introduction of the Bill is the latest attempt to unrig a system that favors the wealthy over Working People, AFSCME Representatives said, and it marks another big step forward in the growing political and grassroots momentum behind Unions after years of attacks on Workers from Right-Wing Special Interests and politicians.

“America’s Workers ‘have withstood attack after attack on their right to organize.’ With ‘renewed energy they are organizing in unions to reclaim their power,’” AFSCME President Lee Saunders said. “This legislation ‘is about defending the freedom of’ Public Sector Employees ‘to form and join’ Unions ‘if they choose to do so.’ Public Service Workers ‘show up every day to make our communities healthier, safer and stronger.’ ‘It’s time for’ elected officials ‘to show up for them and give them the respect and voice on the job they deserve to negotiate for themselves and their communities.’”

Across the country, Behavioral Health Workers, Emergency Medical Technicians, Teachers and more are demanding Unions because of the value and protections they provide for Workers.

Union Members earn higher wages and are more likely to have employer-provided health care, pensions and benefits - such as paid sick and family leave.

Unions also set standards that benefit all Workers, Union and Non-Union alike.

For Women and People of Color, Unions provide the best vehicle to combat discrimination in the workplace and address the unjust racial and gender pay gap.
African-American Union Members earn 19% more - and Latino Union Workers 28% more – than their Non-Union counterparts.

In some sectors the difference is even greater.

Women who are Members of a Union earn 21% more than their Non-Union counterparts.

The introduction of the Bill follows recent news from Nevada, where 20,000 state Employees won the freedom to collectively bargain for wages and improvements on the job - such as workplace safety.

The Nevada Collective Bargaining Bill, which was signed into law on June 12th by Governor Steve Sisolak, is the largest statewide expansion of collective bargaining for State Workers in 16 years anywhere in the country.