

Report from the 2013 NYSUT Representative Assembly

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This year the WCCFT was allotted five delegates to NYSUT's Representative Assembly. Five of us -- Paul Robinson, Carol Passariello, Marilyn Merker, Kathleen Collins, and myself -- travelled to Washington, DC, for the event. I attended the Local President's Conference, held prior to the main event on April 10 and 11, and all of us attended the RA from the 11th to the 13th.

Each year NYSUT locals sponsor resolutions to be voted on at the RA. The resolutions are made available well in advance of the event, and are divided among committees which meet early in the RA schedule to recommend approval, amendment, or disapproval to the main body. Each delegate may serve on one committee, and when the committees finish their work the resolutions are voted on by the roughly 2000 delegates.

Besides deciding on the resolutions, delegates hear speeches on current issues facing education. This year's speakers included the presidents of both the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association (our two national parent unions), the leaders of NYSUT, and Senator Chuck Schumer. For the second year in a row, state Education Chancellor John King made a presentation followed by questions and comments from the floor.

As he did last year, King tried to defend the State's imposition of new standardized tests (this time to assess the Common Core Curriculum Standards). As last year, he had to confront a gathering of concerned, angry, articulate and well-prepared teachers, upset about how the testing and the manner it was implemented has impacted their classrooms, their profession, and their students. We were proud of the way our K-12 colleagues handled themselves in this discussion!

The interchange with the Chancellor formed a backdrop to a new announcement by NYSUT's leadership: a rally against the ever-increasing standardized testing has been called for **Saturday, June 8, in Albany**. For those of us in higher education, this comes at a time when many of our colleagues will be unavailable, but the WCCFT will nevertheless publicize the event and get a delegation of our members to attend.

What follows are some of other specific issues addressed at the RA:

Local Presidents' Conference

1. Congressman Tim Bishop spoke, noting that he is fighting the attempt to gut the NLRB. He also spoke of the Justice for Farmworkers Campaign an effort to pass NYS legislation granting farmworkers equal labor rights and protections
2. NYSUT legal staff discussed:

- a. the NYS tax cap law, which is being fought legally on constitutional grounds.
 - b. limits on our off-duty speech: publicizing statements such as via Facebook can be grounds for employer discipline.
 - c. Attempts in the legislature to eliminate the Triborough Amendment (which guarantees the survival of public sector union contracts if they expire prior to bargaining new ones).
3. The Higher Education session discussed:
- a. The sequestration cuts will affect many higher ed programs like TRIO, Work-study, Gear-up, etc. These will have a large impact if Congress does not come up with a fix before the 2013-14 school year.
 - b. The Affordable Care Act: The AFT has been proposing to the Treasury Department (for 18 months!) that the recognized “Carnegie unit” be used to calculate adjunct working hours: two hours out of class for every hour in class. There has been some pushback from adjuncts who do **not** need health coverage and are concerned that their hours will be cut. Colleges are suggesting one hour out for every hour in class. It is not clear if the Treasury Department will require each college to make public its formula, though it must be defensible as “reasonable”. The AFT has said the union should be at the table when the formula is worked out. Also, limits on workload are a mandatory subject of bargaining.
 - c. Reports on NYS fiscal issues: Higher Ed funding is flat in the new budget for the next four years (despite the \$150 per FTE restoration to community college funding). The legislature also restored \$28 million in funding for SUNY hospitals but Gov. Cuomo says that amount should come out of the faculty’s contract (UUP).
 - d. SUNY issues: SUNY is required to develop a new remediation program by July 2014 and come up with a definition of “college readiness”. Community colleges will get additional funding based on student success in career-related programs. The “seamless transfer” and “Open SUNY” issues will be discussed at the ED 39 meeting at WCC. A conference call on these issues will be arranged prior to that.

Some resolutions of interest from the RA itself (all of those below except item 2 (d) were approved

- 1. Higher Ed resolutions:
 - a. Opposition to the privatization plan for SUNY downstate med center
 - b. Opposition to Cuomo’s plan to base Community College funding on “student success in the economy”
 - c. Call for improved counseling services, training, and violence prevention programs, and no increase in police presence, as a way of making campuses safer

- d. Support for a “Fair Funding Plan” which would include the 40% state share that is legally mandated for community colleges
 - e. Opposition to SUNY resource allocation plans which take funds away from liberal arts colleges and direct them towards research institutions
2. Some other resolutions of interest (out of a total of 65 considered!):
- a. Support for the Power Act (protecting rights of immigrant workers)
 - b. Support for a NYSUT plan to improve conditions of its LGBT members
 - c. Ensure that the Common Core tests given in 2012-13 not be used to evaluate students or teachers
 - d. Review and improve the new teacher evaluation system so it recognizes the role teachers have in evaluating their peers and put more emphasis on teacher preparation and training
 - e. Protect the Triborough Amendment
 - f. Lobby to ensure that Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid are kept economically sound in a way that minimizes challenges to beneficiaries
 - g. A resolution asking for clear regulations about affordable health care for part-time employees was referred to NYSUT’s Board of Directors. (This is an option when the RA thinks that a resolution needs further study.)
 - h. Protection for defined-benefit pension plans (like NYSRS)
 - i. Support for efforts to preserve the USPS
3. Other items to report:
- a. Rally on Saturday, June 8, in Albany for an end to the emphasis on more and more standardized testing and fairer funding for education
 - b. A 50th anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington is being planned for this August
 - c. NYSUT is still raising funds for Sandy-related disaster relief
 - d. NYSUT is involved in the Labor-Religion Coalition for farmworker justice in NYS