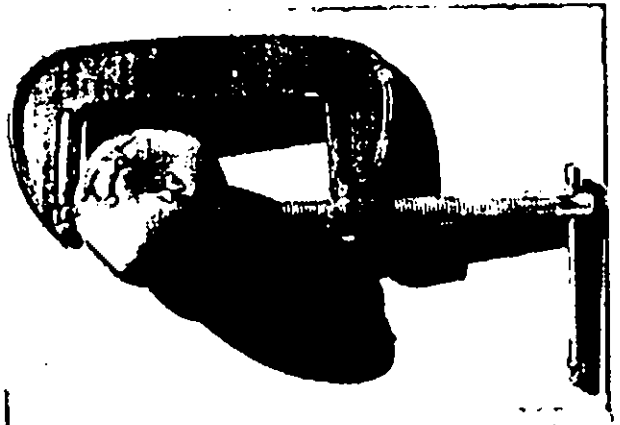
Schools and Public Employees

UNDER ATTACK

Talking Points



Executive Budget Puts Squeeze to Education

Cuts in State Aid to Schools

Threat: The Governor has proposed a $1.5 billion (7.3%) cut in state aid to schools.

Impact: This cut would reduce state aid to a level less than it was in 2008-09. Just last year, schools eliminated about 10,000 positions due to budget cuts. Even more personnel cuts will mean larger classes and fewer programs. Some schools may not be able to offer all the required courses.

Response: Schools are a SPECIAL interest. Cutting school budgets is a recipe for disaster. Public schools are being pushed for better test results while funding is being cut. School staffing is already at bare-bones levels in many districts. More layoffs mean more community members out of work.

Property Tax Cap

Threat: A state property tax cap threatens to limit communities to a maximum increase of 2% or the rate of inflation, whichever is lower.

Impact: State aid cuts will be much more severe if districts to not have another source of funding to compensate. Those urban & small rural schools most dependent on state aid will be hit hardest. State aid cuts will mean *smaller* school budgets, not just budget freezes, if property taxes are capped.

Response: A property tax cap only works if the State makes up for the lost funding, but the State is ready to reduce its funding of schools for the third straight year. At the same time, the Governor is proposing state aid cuts and a property tax cap, he is also proposing to reduce taxes on those with the highest incomes.

Salary Freeze

Threat: Municipalities and school boards have endorsed the idea of a statewide salary freeze for all public employees, just as the Governor has promised a freeze on state employees.

Impact: NYS would have to pass legislation to negate collective bargaining agreements, a move which we believe is unconstitutional. If enacted a salary freeze would make public service even less attractive and would have lifetime impact on public employees' earnings and retirement security.

Response: Teachers and other public employees are not the enemy. Their services are essential to the community, and they are not overpaid in salary or benefits. The burden of schools and other public services needs to be shared more fairly, relying less on property tax and more on fair share taxes from higher earners.

Pension Reform

Threat: Municipalities and school boa claim that public employee pensions are "t rich" and simply unaffordable. They employees need to contribute more (e.g. every year) and pensions should be replaced defined contribution plans like 401(k)s.

Impact: Reducing the benefits is another v of reducing the attraction of difficult jo Defined contribution plans are a great way Wall Street to make money while shifting financial risks to working people.

Response: Like health insurance, retirem security should be there for all commun members. Public employee pensions are "rich." With a few exceptions that make news, most retired public employees rece modest pensions as one of the key rewards a career of public service. Pension costs employers have averaged a little more than for the last 15 years—less than the cost of soc security. For many of those years the cost v even less. Pensions are the most economi way of providing retirement security.

Tenure

Threat: Some are calling for an end to teacl tenure, characterizing it as "a guarantee lifetime employment."

Impact: An end to tenure puts great power the hands of administrators and school boa to dismiss teachers for reasons that may political or financial.

Response: Tenure is not a guarantee of j security; it is a guarantee of due process. requires evidence and a fair hearing, rig that all employees should have. An end tenure could put teachers at the mercy administrators and school boards wh motives and skills have often been suspect the past when deciding who should be fired.

Health Insurance

Threat: Municipalities and school boards insist that public employees must pay a minimum amount for their health insurance. They want NYS to pass legislation to establish a minimum share for public employees.

Impact: Ignoring the fact that very many public employees already pay substantial amounts for health insurance, this is another effort to reduce one of the key benefits that allows public employees to accept relatively low paying jobs.

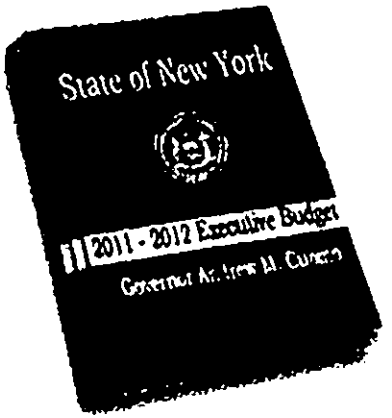
Response: Again, public employees are not overpaid in salary or benefits. Communities and legislators should be fighting to see that all community members have decent and affordable health insurance.

"Triborough" Amendment

Threat: Municipalities and school boards want to eliminate the section of the Taylor Law that protects the provisions of an expired contract until a new contract is ratified. They say Triborough makes it too easy to negotiate increases in salaries and benefits.

Impact: Repeal of Triborough will give employers an unfair advantage. They will be able to cut salary and benefits when a contract expires while employees will not be able to withhold their work because public employee strikes are illegal.

Response: Employers will have an unfair advantage because only they will have the legal right to create a crisis situation. Triborough was adopted to level the playing field, and it succeeded. Employers could no longer provoke strikes, and strikes became very rare.



Seniority

Threat: Municipalities and school boards are calling for an end to tying layoffs to seniority. They argue that many "young" and "energetic" employees are more valuable than veteran employees. These critics say "merit" should dictate which employees to layoff.

Impact: Many veteran public employees are paid higher salaries because of their years of service—a system devised long ago to compensate for low starting salaries. Once free from requirements to lay off senior employees last, employees will discover that older, higher paid staff members will inexplicably have less "merit" than they did before.

Response: Veteran employees bring experience and efficiency as well as energy. Financial pressures are always a challenge for public employers even in relatively good times. Ending layoff by seniority will inevitably lead to thinly veiled age discrimination and discrimination against those with higher salaries.

Subcontracting

Threat: Municipalities and school boa seek greater freedom to subcontract servic Under the Taylor Law, they are required negotiate with their unions before they subcontract work performed by uni members. Employers claim t "privatization" will provide savings.

Impact: Public employees will inevitably l jobs to private contractors who pay e lower wages and salaries. Because priv contractors are in business to make a pro they will depress wages even furth Community income will decrease. Lo wages mean lower quality job applicants, a privatization reduces public control o those employees and services.

Response: Unionized workers have a l history of providing higher skills, bet service, and more loyalty. Private contract despite their claims, are ill-prepared provide many of the services provided municipalities and schools.

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