



PENFIELD EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
United in Excellence

BROADSIDE

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President's Column

My President's Column this month takes a look at some important issues our union will face in the near future. Much like our weather forecast over February break, there may be some stormy weather on the horizon, but we will not be caught unaware or unprepared.

- You may have heard some rumblings about the statewide referendum on a Constitutional Convention. If this is unfamiliar to you now, I guarantee it won't be in a few months. You will be hearing about this proposal in the mainstream media, through NYSUT bulletins, and in this column. Unlike most issues I write about, the proposed Constitutional Convention affects not just our local union, but all New York State residents.



In a nutshell, on Election Day, November 7, 2017, NYS voters will be asked to decide whether the state should redraft its Constitution. What might seem innocuous enough on the surface is really fraught with some dangerous ramifications. The choice voters make will have far-reaching effects for literally decades to come.

Under our State Constitution, every twenty years the public is asked to vote on whether the state should hold a convention to revise or amend the State Constitution. There are many topics covered in the document. A convention will allow for massive modifications, including a complete "re-write" if the convention delegates so choose. According to NYSUT Vice President Paul Percole, "Delegates to a possible convention can essentially blow up the way of life New Yorkers enjoy and the expectations and priorities each of us have.

Whether it's public education, collective bargaining, our retirement security, environmental protections, spending caps in the budget, or any other issues one cares about, it's all at risk."

These are sobering words, to say the least. Educators will not be the only constituency working hard to reject this proposal, however. Many groups have a vested interest in seeing this proposal defeated, including public and private organized labor, environmentalists, social welfare advocates, fiscal conservatives, and government watchdog groups.

There is an excellent article in this month's *NYSUT United Magazine* that goes into more detail about the referendum. I encourage you to read this month's article as well pieces which will appear subsequently as part of an informational series on this topic. Further information can also be found on the NYSUT website.

- Our VOTE-COPE 2016 campaign is set to begin soon. Each year members are asked to consider a voluntary donation to the VOTE-COPE campaign. These funds allow the union to support political candidates who share our concerns. One particular emphasis of the 2016 campaign will be to defeat the state referendum on the Constitutional Convention. You will be hearing more from your building reps about the VOTE-COPE campaign in the coming weeks.



- In an attempt to engage members in conversations about union concerns, I have been visiting schools and attending PEA meetings. I have received many questions about how we are preparing for our next contract negotiations. It is not a secret that I intend to open our next negotiations as soon as I am allowed according to our contract – January 2017. The fact that our contract was not ratified by an overwhelming majority sends a clear message to everyone. A significant number of people were displeased with the contract and felt it sent the wrong message to incoming faculty as well as those planning to retire. Also, many people felt that their voices were not heard because there was not ample time to meet as a group and discuss the implications of the proposed contract. I cannot change the past, and I cannot guarantee that everyone will be completely satisfied with



the next contract proposal, but I can assure you that I have a plan for moving forward into our next negotiations.

One essential part of that plan is to strengthen our relationship with members of the Board of Education. Make no mistake: It is essential that we do as much as possible to ensure that the BOE is aware of all that we do on behalf of the district's children. We need to share the many ways we support students in both the academic and extra-curricular arenas. To that end, I am going to propose that we begin to schedule time at BOE meetings for a Teacher/Student News segment that helps to highlight the various ways we work with our students. Strengthening our relationship with the BOE and with the district will ultimately strengthen the PEA, as well.



When negotiations actually begin, both sides are bound by law to maintain a certain level of confidentiality, but I intend to inform our members of the scope and progress of the negotiations as much as the law allows. Secrecy breeds fear and mistrust, and I do not want to enter any negotiations process with a pre-conceived notion by our membership that we are “hiding something.” I intend to be present at PEA meetings at each school, and I will provide meaningful negotiations updates. I will also entertain comments, suggestions, and questions from our PEA members. I will keep building reps apprised of any information or updates regarding negotiations so that information can be disseminated in a timely fashion. When necessary, I will personally send out “breaking news bulletins” via private email.



I am starting to collect data now, and I am assembling a data notebook which will catalog all of our pertinent information. I will make sure that there is sufficient data to support our claims. Do not hesitate to contact me with any information you believe will help us build a strong case for our next contract. I will make sure that all our voices are heard.

One exciting item on my agenda is to provide more opportunities for focus-group meetings where all PEA members will be able to share ideas and openly discuss opinions with each other. A recurring complaint I heard regarding our last negotiations process was the lack of time to meet with each other and hear various opinions. I want to make sure that each PEA



member feels that he/she has skin in the game. I want to encourage our members to become actively involved in determining their own future with the new contract.

- It is with regret that I announce Deb Miller-Collins has resigned her position as chairperson of the Nominations Committee. Deb worked tirelessly to ensure the integrity of our PEA elections. While each of us may have only seen a ballot and a ballot box, I can assure you that many hours of work were necessary both prior to and after our election day to make sure our elections were carried out efficiently and professionally.



Linda Williams from the high school has agreed to take on this very important position. Thank you, Linda, for your willingness to assume this union role, and thank you, Deb, for your years of dedicated service to the PEA.

We, as a united PEA, are in a good place right now. We are poised and ready to move forward together to achieve our common goals.



Thank you for your continued efforts on behalf of our students.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

In solidarity,

Bob Young