UUP goes to DC

Members build on new federal support for higher ed in Congress

VACCINATION MYTHS DEBUNKED

CAN YOU GET YOUR STUDENT LOANS FORGIVEN?
Over the summer, my wife and I hit the road on a long-awaited car trip to Montana, a trip that took us to spectacular places and places that were spectacular in their own unique ways.

We drove on interstates and down winding back roads, into towns and villages where we found a bite to eat and a comfortable bed for the night. When we’d stop, we couldn’t help but notice that most people weren’t wearing face masks in places where we wore face masks—and figured most people would be wearing them as well.

In stores, shops, really in most indoor places, mask-wearing was optional at best and openly discouraged at worst. Yes, we got a few strange looks to be sure, but we don’t play around when it comes to COVID. We’re both fully vaccinated; we got our vaccines as soon as we could.

And we traveled in late August, just as Delta variant cases were starting to surge across the country—all the more reason, we figured, to protect yourselves and others by masking up. It was disconcerting and downright disheartening. In so many places across the country, people are not protecting themselves.

Too many people aren’t getting vaccinated for a myriad of reasons, a major contributor to why COVID still lingers large at the start of yet another academic year at SUNY.

COVID is no stranger to UUP. We’ve been dealing with the effects of the pandemic since it first hit New York City in February 2020. Our colleagues at SUNY hospitals in Brooklyn, Stony Brook and Syracuse have been treating COVID patients since those first terrifying days when so little was known about it—except that it killed mercilessly.

These weary healers have given all while the deadly foe. Let’s do this, together.

To the Point

The heroic efforts of our members helped protect all of us and provided us with comfort and hope during a hopeless time. They found themselves on the front lines of the pandemic once again, as cases rise and hospital beds fill with Delta variant patients.

These weary healers have given all while the state they serve snubs them. Former Gov. Cuomo for that just recompense continues.

When vaccines became widely available, UUP undertook an aggressive campaign to encourage our members to get vaccinated as soon as possible. As UUP president, I’ve been outspoken about getting vaccinated. The vaccines are safe, effective, free, widely available and they will protect you and your loved ones. Being vaccinated can save your life.

Working with SUNY has paid off; our joint efforts to vaccinate as many SUNY employees as possible have been incredibly successful. More than 90% of SUNY faculty and staff are vaccinated. And we support SUNY’s vaccination mandate for students.

Getting students vaccinated is the only path back to normalcy, on and off campus.

Still, challenges remain. As this issue of The Voice goes to press, Delta variant cases are starting to drop nationwide, although experts fear a possible resurgence this fall and winter. Too many people are still vaccine hesitant. Others oppose masks. Vaccine misinformation—and outright lies—are everywhere.

Thank you for your great courage and your deep commitment to our students and patients. It is with such courage, commitment and caring that we as a university system, a state, and a nation, will get through the COVID crisis.

We at UUP have done our part to lead the way away from COVID, and I am certain that we will continue to do so. In the meantime, take care. Wear your masks in indoor public settings. If you aren’t vaccinated yet, I implore you to get your shot.

It’s going to take all of us to defeat this tenacious, deadly foe. Let’s do this, together.
JEANNE GALBRAITH AND THE LATE SANDY SPIER

UUP retirees members beloved for their quiet dedication to their union and their communities, are this year’s winners of the Pearl H. Brod Award.

Spier, a former retiree officer at UUP’s Downstate Medical Center Chapter, died last spring just weeks after her Downstate colleagues, Chapter President Rowena Blackman-Stroud and Chapter Secretary Ellen McGUire, nominated her. Spier: An advocate for Downstate

Sandy Spier was known as a highly effective political activist, and especially so earlier in the administration of former Gov. Andrew Cuomo, when UUP realistically worried that the state would try to close Downstate Medical Center. Under Blackman-Stroud’s leadership, the chapter rallied a coalition of community activists and faith leaders, and Spier was deeply involved in that effort. Blackman-Stroud described her as “...a dedicated, passionate advocate for organized labor who has selflessly given of her time to create positive change as a UUP member, and a member of the Downstate Chapter ... she was always advocating for our members.”

A longtime member of the First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn, Spier threw her considerable energies into social justice efforts in the borough, and she worked especially hard to build bridges among diverse religious and cultural groups.

Rita Pearl, Spier’s fellow congregant at First Unitarian, remembered “Sandy’s heartfelt commitment to a better and more equitable world for everyone,” in her nominating letter. Among Spier’s many projects at First Unitarian: organizing the yearly friendship dinner between the congregation and the local Muslim community.

Galbraith: Elections expert, mentor

Joanne Galbraith’s service to UUP has been at both the statewide and chapter levels. At Geneseo, she was an academic delegate and chapter secretary; at Stony Brook HSC, she was an academic delegate, chapter secretary, vice president for academics and an interim chapter president. She served on the statewide UUP Executive Board, and as state-wide secretary for three terms, from 1989 to 1995.

But it was through her continued work after her retirement for the UUP Elections and Credentials Committee—now renewed the Constitution and Governance Committee—that many newer UUP members got to know Galbraith, as a member and then co-chair of Elections and Credentials, a role she shared with David Krch of Cortland, she directed elections at many delegate assemblies and was renowned for her knowledge of election procedures and protocol. Although she and Krch are no longer committee chair, they remain members of Constitution and Governance.

A gifted quilter, Galbraith belongs to a quilting club and one put her creative skills to good use for UUP by donating a quilt to an auction that supported the UUP College Scholarship Fund. The quilt quickly sold.

Galbraith’s colleagues Henry Flax, a Downstate retiree; and former UUP statewide Secretary Eileen Landy nominated her, with supporting statements by Krch and statewide Vice President for Professionals Carolyn Kube. Landy warmly described Galbraith in a nomination letter as a mentor with a sense of humor and vast institutional knowledge of the union. “She was generous with her expertise and always willing to answer questions and explain policies and procedures,” Landy wrote. “Her generosity continued after her retirement; I relied upon her wisdom until I left office in 2017.”

The Pearl H. Brod Award recognizes UUP retirees who have provided outstanding service to their communities, to SUNY and to UUP after retirement.
Mike Lyon and Wes Kennison receive Mitchell Award for decades of service to UUP

More than 60 years of combined activism by two deeply committed labor advocates, and dual nominations for UUP’s highest honor, mean that Mike Lyon and Wes Kennison are both recipients of this year’s Nina Mitchell Award for Distinguished Service to UUP.

Many parts; one strong union

Lyon, of Upstate Medical University, and Kennison, of SUNY Geneseo, are both known for their quiet leadership as chapter officers, statewide activists and stalwart supporters of topics especially close to their hearts—in Lyon’s case, the negotiated Joint Labor-Management Individual Development Awards and the wellbeing of the SUNY academic medical centers; for Kennison, a career of powerful advocacy for SUNY’s part-time employees.

“A union needs role models to remain vibrant and to encourage the next generation of activists,” UUP President Fred Kowal said of the award winners. “Both Mike Lyon and Wes Kennison have consistently demonstrated the all-too-rare art of consensus-building, by devoting their time to connecting different groups within the union. We are a union of full-time and part-time employees, of professionals and academics, and nationally known experts in health care as well as the humanities. Mike and Wes achieved something that’s all too rare: They bridged all of these different groups and helped UUP achieve contracts that represented all.”

Mike Lyon: An advocate for SUNY HSCs

Mike Lyon’s distinguished record of service includes stints as vice president for academics and as chapter president at Upstate; two terms on the UUP Negotiations Team, in 2011 and 2016; and more than a decade of service, which continues still, as chair of his chapter’s Joint Labor-Management Individual Development Awards Committee. His statewide service includes the UUP Executive Board, co-chairing the former Health Sciences Center Concerns, ongoing service on the statewide Grievance Committee and as interim Membership Development Officer from 2015-2016. He was a delegate as an active member and continues as a retiree delegate.

A faculty member at the Upstate Medical Center Department of Otolaryngology and Communication Services for nearly 40 years, Lyon continues to chair Upstate’s Institutional and Animal Care Use Committee, an important compliance committee for federally funded animal research projects.

Outside of his career and work for UUP, Lyon serves as an at-large trustee of the Greater Syracuse Labor Council, which has a proud history in Onondaga and Madison Counties that dates to 1899 and is part of the Central New York Area Labor Foundation of the AFL-CIO. He has used his avid love of cycling to raise money for regional charities.

“From when I first became an academic delegate in the 1990s, Mike has always been there,” Richard Veenstra, the current Upstate Chapter president, wrote in his nomination letter. “The many positions that Michael J. Lyon has held during his decades of service to the Upstate Medical Chapter and UUP statewide leadership are testimony to his dedication to United University Professions.”

Wes Kennison: Landmark achievements for contingent members

Wes Kennison’s advocacy for part-time members dates back more than 25 years, before UUP’s constitution permitted the election of chapter representatives for contingent members.

He was first delegated as a representative on behalf of Geneseo contingents, and he was later elected to that position when the UUP constitution changed to recognize elected representatives for contingents at the chapter level. His advocacy for contingents expanded to the statewide level, and he eventually co-chaired the statewide Part-time Concerns Committee.

As a member of UUP’s 2000 Negotiations Committee as a representative for part-time concerns, the contract that UUP secured in those negotiations granted health insurance to contingent members of the bargaining unit, a landmark achievement that was years ahead of its time in the academic labor movement.

As a member of the UUP Executive Board, Kennison also supported subsequent contract agreements that extended health insurance for qualified part-time members through the summer months, and which also gave a $500 lump-sum bonus to part-time members who had completed eight consecutive semesters of service.

In his nomination letter, Joseph Dolce, the vice president for professionals at the Geneseo Chapter, noted that the lump-sum bonus “…ended management’s longtime refusal to include money for part-timers in the statewide contract, thus helping to remove a major obstacle to later successes in establishing statewide minimum salaries for part-timers.”

Kennison’s community service includes two terms as Geneseo town supervisor, as chair of the board of directors for the SUNY Geneseo InterFaith Center, and as chair of the board of directors of Catholic Charities of Livingston County.

The Nina Mitchell Award would normally be presented in person at the UUP Fall Delegate Assembly. This year’s Fall DA was a one-day virtual event held Friday, Oct. 15, and the award was presented to Lyon and Kennison during the virtual plenary.

“All of us owe a great deal of gratitude to these two outstanding members for their incredible dedication,” Kowal said. “I hope that all UUP members will join me in extending thanks to Mike Lyon and Wes Kennison for their effort in helping to make UUP the richly diverse, wide-reaching and inclusive union that it is today.”

The award is named for the late Nina Mitchell, a beloved substance abuse counselor at the UUP Downstate Medical Center Chapter who died in 1988 and who was known for her belief in the power of mentorship, team building, compassion and community leadership.

The award is typically given to a member who has devoted many years—often decades—of service to UUP at the chapter and statewide levels, as well as service to their community.
FOR DECADES, AND FOR BETTER or worse, UUP built its entire legislative agenda around the state budget. At the beginning of each legislative session, the union eagerly watched for the Executive Budget Proposal, worked hard for the next two months as it awaited the inevitably insufficient funding for SUNY four-year campuses and academic medical centers, and held private meetings with legislative leaders who always pledged to do their best by SUNY. And then, year after year, when it became clear that those efforts had made little difference, UUP picked its words carefully in public statements on the final enacted budget—or said nothing at all.

Something had to change, and as with so many other norms that played out the same way year after year, it was the coronavirus pandemic that finally pushed the “change” button for UUP’s legislative agenda. Earlier this year, and for the first time in its 50-year history, UUP developed a federal legislative agenda, and spent as much time working toward its goals with the New York congressional delegation as it did with state lawmakers.

A new focus on a federal agenda and closer ties with New York state’s congressional delegation are part of a new strategy to yield results.

By Darryl McGrath
Same old state budget; new tactics by UUP

UP followed up the Schumer meeting with outreach to New York members of the House of Representatives who have strong ties to SUNY or who have SUNY campuses in their districts. Since then, UUP has held virtual Town Halls with four Upstate House members: Antonio Delgado, Joe Morelle, Tom Suozzie and Brian Higgins, a former UUP member.

The meetings came at a good time, as UUP is now pressing for funding for SUNY to be included in The American Families Plan, which is the service part of The American Rescue Plan through Congress. That bill was President Biden’s first major legislation, and it set the tone for the permanent solution to SUNY’s chronic underfunding, higher education is a one-time special situation, not a permanent solution to SUNY’s chronic underfunding, did not have the results we expected. Our congression- al delegation, however, understands that public higher ed is the key to rebuilding New York for the long haul, not just in the aftermath of this crisis.

That new focus on federal connections started with direct contact between UUP President Fred Kowal and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer as Schumer worked late last fall on The American Rescue Plan through Congress. That bill was President Biden’s first major legislation, and it set the tone for the country’s gradual economic recovery from the pandemic. The bill included a massive infusion of cash for higher education, including $915 million for SUNY.

Shortly after the Schumer meeting, the state released its final enacted budget. Although SUNY got some gains, including a plan to close the TAP gap in campus budgets and more money for SUNY’s opportunity programs, the hospitals were left with their limited resources into areas that used to benefit from the state funding.

Kowal plans for UUP advocacy at the federal level to focus on three areas that could help the hospitals: maternal mortality “is an issue that just stuns me — our state health care infrastructure in New York state, and New York’s number-one industry is health care. It’s amazing that in New York City and Upstate New York there are health care deserts.”

Money to train new doctors

Regarding advocacy for medical education, UUP has picked a good time to address the approximately $250 million a year that SUNY spends subsidizing its four medical schools, Kowal noted. In late 2020, Congress passed its first increase to the Medicare graduate medical education program in almost 25 years. Medicare pays for part of the medical school training at teaching hospitals, and this expansion will create 1,000 new Medicare-supported graduate medical education slots for doctors continuing specialized training as residents.

In the new political climate, UUP is part of a multistate coalition of higher education unions advocating for the initiative. Public four-year colleges and universities could see a drop in enrollment due to increased competition with tuition-free community colleges—an unintended but realistic possibility. “I think that’s where this provision falls short,” Higgins said. “The last thing anyone wants to do here is hurt four-year colleges and universities.” Hospital programs in line for federal help

But even if the American Families Plan aid comes through, it would still leave the SUNY hospitals in need of help that they clearly will not get from the state.

Kowal sees another path to helping the hospitals, given that the Biden administration has clearly demonstrated that it wants to expand health care services to Americans. The federal government is unlikely to replace the direct state operating funding for the SUNY hospitals that stopped three years ago, so Kowal plans to advocate for federal funding for programs that the Biden administration has already indicated it will support, and which could directly benefit the hospitals. If the hospitals can get additional federal funding for new or existing programs, that would allow them to steer their limited resources into areas that used to benefit from the state funding.

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Watch the UUP website for updates on the union’s federal advocacy.

— UUP Director of Media and Publications Mike Lisi contributed to this story.
Heather Shalhoub didn’t believe what she saw, so she logged out and back into her student loan account, just to be sure.

But there it was: a big, round, black zero where her $84,000 federal student loan balance was supposed to be. Her balance was zero. Her loan had been forgiven.

“It was well after 11 p.m. and I received a letter from the U.S. Department of Education telling me that my federal student loan was forgiven,” Shalhoub said. “I was in shock. I opened the letter, I just stared at it. I didn’t trust it, I thought it was a scam. And when I saw the zero, I didn’t trust it. I thought it was a scam. And when I saw the zero balance, I just stared at it. I didn’t trust it. I thought it was a scam. And when I saw the zero balance, I freaked out.”

After waking up her roommate and a friend on the West Coast to share the good news, Shalhoub celebrated. “I kinda danced it out.”

She was among the first UUP members to become a certified clinic trainer and has trained more than a dozen trainers since then—including Pamela Malone, an Executive Board member and Empire State College Chapter president.

“What we’re really finding is there is lots of emotion attached to their debt,” said O’Byrne-Losee. “They’ve been made to feel guilty for holding debt for trying to better themselves through higher education. It’s a very emotional piece that I try to alleviate that.”

To do that, O’Byrne-Losee tells her own story; a first-generation college graduate, O’Byrne-Losee carries significant student debt. Using what she’s learned and what she’s taught, she’s planning to file for federal debt forgiveness once she reaches her 10-year public service anniversary.

“There’s no shame in student debt,” said O’Byrne-Losee. “We talk about that during (the sessions) and we’re here to help you through the process. You are not alone.

Financial freedom

That’s how Kate Spaulding, an ESC Chapter member and adjunct instructor at Empire State College’s Harry Van Arsdale Jr. School for Labor Studies, felt after attending a UUP debt clinic.

“It was another thing I didn’t feel comfortable talking about with other people,” she said. “I felt ashamed.”

After earning her undergraduate and master’s degree, Spaulding found herself saddled with $163,000 in loans—$110,000 in loans and an extra $50,000 or so in interest. Not one dime of the $46,000 she paid on her loan went to paying off principal.

“It was like an albatross that hung around my neck and impacted every single decision I made,” Spaulding said. “I’d never even look for a private sector job because I wanted to get rid of the debt. When I got a raise, my loan would go up, so the raise would be negated.”

“I really took the wind out of my sails because other things, like my rent, would go up and I never felt like I could get ahead,” she said.

After attending a UUP student debt workshop, Spaulding put her new knowledge to use; she kept a meticulous spreadsheet, found a Google student loan group that provided support and paid her exact loan payment on time each month. After submitting her paperwork, she was relentless, calling federal loan representatives to find out where things were at with her loan application.

Spaulding, who said her parents co-signed for her student loans, said “The worst thing is that you confirm that you don’t qualify for (loan forgiveness) and they don’t believe it’s possible because there’s so much misleading information out there.”

“It was so discouraging to look at that and realize that after years of paying off my loan, I hadn’t even started paying back my principal!”

And it was even harder to get loans forgiven for public service during the Trump Administration; O’Byrne-Losee said loan administrators would routinely reject loan forgiveness applications but would not disclose the reasons why the applications were rejected.

Fortunately, under the Biden Administration, the federal government has been more forthcoming and easier to work with when it comes to loan forgiveness.

“Stem all of this, we just need free college,” said O’Byrne-Losee. “What’s one or two hours out of your life?” Shalhoub asked. “The worst thing is that you confirm that you don’t qualify for (loan forgiveness) and the best thing is that you learn that you do.”
The vaccines were developed so fast — how could they possibly be safe, if they were developed and approved and into people’s arms in less than a year?

**DR. PHILIP GLICK:** The vaccine technology had been in development for over a decade. The apparent fast tracking of the mRNA vaccines was also in part due to various phases of the clinical development [human trials and manufacturing] being done in parallel rather than as a series. This unique approach was taken because of the urgency of the pandemic and the capital advance the industry put into the vaccines. The clinical trials were only granted after tens of thousands of doses were given to human volunteers, and safety and efficacy data were analyzed. Still, the long-term data for safety and efficacy are still being studied from millions of doses given to get final FDA approval; this is expected by Labor Day or sooner.

**KATIE ANDERSON:** The FDA approved the Pfizer vaccine Aug 23, after Dr. Gllick submitted his answers.

**DR. STEPHEN THOMAS and DR. KATIE ANDERSON:** These vaccines were not fast tracked; in fact, mRNA vaccine technology had been in development for more than 30 years, with clinical trials for multiple infectious diseases occurring over the past 10 years (for influenza, HIV, Zika, and Ebola viruses). These vaccines were adapted for SARS-CoV-2, given their proven track record of being safe and effective in humans. These vaccines were adapted for SARS-CoV-2, given their proven track record of being safe and effective in humans. These vaccines were adapted for SARS-CoV-2, given their proven track record of being safe and effective in humans.

**SHARON NACHMAN:** During a typical vaccine development process, it’s not the time in the lab that takes the most time. It’s the time to enroll the participants, and then the time it takes for enough of them to be exposed to the virus or bacteria and then get sick, and then the time it takes to have the data analyzed.

**With COVID, everyone stopped what they were doing and devoted 24/7 to making sure the vaccine moved out of the lab and into vials. Then, enrollment of 40,000 people took only four weeks (for each vaccine studied). With other vaccines it typically takes up to a year to get that number of people volunteering to join a study. And with so much COVID around, many people who were on the study were exposed, allowing us to be able to count all of the cases and show that the vaccine protected many people from the virus and that the placebo (the-no vaccine arm) did not.

Then, again, everyone worked 24/7 to make sure that all the data at each of the hundreds of sites involved uploaded their data and it was analyzed and written up and sent to the FDA. Why is that? Because it was a public health emergency, with people by the thousands in the U.S. alone dying each day due to this infection. The FDA took weeks, not months (the usual time to read all of the information, and talked about it in public and shared all of the data and slides with everyone to watch, and granted it emergency use authorization.

**DR. PHILIP GLICK:** Analysis of safety and efficacy data in pregnant women or women who may want to become pregnant in the future suggests there are no reasons not to get vaccinated. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecology (ACOG) states: ACOG recommends that all eligible persons, including pregnant and nursing individuals, receive a COVID-19 vaccine or vaccine series. ACOG recommends vaccination for all eligible people who may consider future pregnancy. ACOG recommends vaccination for all eligible persons, including pregnant and nursing individuals, receive a COVID-19 vaccine or vaccine series. ACOG recommends vaccination for all eligible people who may consider future pregnancy.

**DR. STEPHEN THOMAS and DR. KATIE ANDERSON:** A big problem throughout the COVID pandemic has been the ramping up of misinformation on social media. There is a false myth widely circulating that the COVID vaccine is associated with infertility. In fact, with long-standing ties to anti-vaccination groups wishing to delay approval of the Pfizer vaccine in expectation that the vaccine could cause the body to make antibodies that could attack the placenta and cause issues with pregnancy loss. This ‘theory’ was picked up by anti-vaccination blogs and spread quickly on social media.

To be clear, there is no evidence that the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines cause any issues with infertility or pregnancy. There are several reasons that we can be reassured about this:

• The spike protein and any proteins in the vaccine that may cause antibodies may lock onto both the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the placenta.

• Further, millions of people in the United States have been infected with COVID to date and we have not observed an increase in pregnancy loss or issues with fertility following natural infection. The immune responses generated after ‘getting COVID’ and getting vaccinated are, by design, similar, so this is reassuring.

• Next, the FDA requires vaccine manufacturers to perform studies of reproductive toxicity and pregnancy outcomes and they have reported no adverse effects in animal studies.

• Finally, while pregnant women were excluded from the vaccine trials (as is typical), some women did become pregnant following vaccination and they have not reported adverse outcomes.

**DR. SHARON NACHMAN:** There is no truth to any of these myths concerning the vaccine and fertility. Let’s talk about these one at a time.

**A:** The vaccine lasts about six hours in your body, it is known as messenger RNA, also called mRNA. Your body makes mRNA all the time and has many processes to read the message and then destroy it. When the mRNA enters your cells, it starts on its own path of destruction, and it’s gone in a flash. Your cell then reads the message and, like when you read letters, to understand a sentence, it makes a protein.

**B:** We have (unfortunately) too much data now that shows that the COVID infection itself interferes with fertility in both men and women. Decreased sperm counts and lack of ovulation are common side effects on COVID infection, similar to many serious viral illnesses. On the good news side, we have excellent data from the CDC database of thousands of women who did take the vaccine and either got pregnant or took it while pregnant and showed no difference in fertility, and no difference in the outcome of the baby or mom related to the vaccine.

**Q:** I’ve just learned that I’m pregnant. My best friend tells me that 75% of pregnant women who get the vaccine delivered first trimester miscarriage. How could this possibly be safe for my baby and me?

**DR. PHILIP GLICK:** False! See the above answer and reference.

**DR. STEPHEN THOMAS and DR. KATIE ANDERSON:** As above, there are multiple sources of strong evidence that should be reassuring that the vaccines do no increase pregnancy loss or infertility. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), our national medical authority on matters related to pregnancy and fertility, recommends that pregnant women receive the COVID-19 vaccine. This is based upon the vaccines’ safety for use in pregnant women, as well clear evidence that pregnant women are at increased risk of severe COVID-19 disease. We would strongly recommend that you got vaccinated as soon as possible; in addition to protecting you, the antibodies generated by the vaccines will pass to your baby and protect it in the womb. Remember that you will not be fully protected until 3-6 weeks after your first dose, and you should continue to take precautions to protect yourself from infection in the meantime.

**DR. SHARON NACHMAN:** This is a complete untruth

To learn more about open-access information as well as other countries that are performing their own clinical trials of COVID vaccines, all data for each paper is submitted and peer-reviewed by people who have to claim up front if they have a conflict of interest. So, the adverse-event profiles and illness reports pretty closely match what has been reported to the CDC and FDA. And both of those groups share open meeting forums where anyone can and does ask questions. So, while it is important to ask questions, it’s also important to listen to the answers, especially across the different countries and see how they match up.

Q | I don’t trust the U.S. Food and Drug Administration or the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to tell the American public the truth about potential concerns or dangerous complications from the vaccine. I’ve heard that both are deliberately withholding information that would reflect badly on the vaccines. Who’s safeguarding these agencies and making sure they give us factual and full information?  

A | DR. PHILIP GLICK: The FDA is led by the Commissioner of Food and Drugs, appointed by the president with the advice and consent of the Senate. The commissioner reports to the Secretary of Health and Human Services. The Food and Drug Administration is responsible for protecting the public health by ensuring the safety, efficacy, and security of human and veterinary drugs, biologic products, and medical devices; and by ensuring the safety of our nation’s food supply, supplements, and products that emit radiation. When a scientific, technical, or policy consideration and guide them in their decision-making. There is also open access to numerous data sets of vaccine safety, which are populated directly by the general public. Finally, the data which goes to the FDA committees is publicly available and searchable.

A | DR. SHARON NACHMAN: I’m sorry that you feel that you cannot trust the CDC and FDA. However, there are the mistakes of open access information as well as other countries that are performing their own clinical trials of COVID vaccines. All data for each paper is submitted and peer-reviewed by people who have to claim up front if they have a conflict of interest. So, the adverse-event profiles and illness reports pretty closely match what has been reported to the CDC and FDA. And both of those groups share open meeting forums where anyone can and does ask questions. So, while it is important to ask questions, it’s also important to listen to the answers, especially across the different countries and see how they match up.

A colleague got the vaccine and was horribly ill for several days—he had a swollen arm, he ran a fever, and he said he felt like he had a bad case of the flu. I’m afraid this could happen to me.

A | DR. PHILIP GLICK: Mild, transient and self-limited side effects can occur, such as any vaccine, including COVID vaccines. They include: pain, redness or swelling at the injection site, or arm, and can also include systemic symptoms such as: fatigue, headache, muscle pain, chills, fever and/or nausea. Allergic reactions, anaphylaxis, have been reported, but usually occur immediately after injection. If you have had a previous allergic reaction to a drug or vaccine, tell your doctor or other vaccine provider, so any required care will be available.

A | DR. STEPHEN THOMAS and DR. KATIE ANDER-SON: There are known potential adverse reactions to the vaccines, which include mild to moderate headache and fatigue in 4-6 out of 10 people after their second dose. Some people will have mild to moderate fevers. These symptoms start soon after vaccination and end soon after they start. It is good to know that there may be these brief reactions, and to plan accordingly (for example as possible, you may wish to schedule your second dose prior to a day off from work, but this is not necessary). It is clear that the risk of the severe outcome with COVID-19, with 4.3 million deaths currently reported worldwide, far outweighs any potential adverse reactions of the vaccines. These vaccines are safe and highly effective, and they are a powerful tool to protect ourselves and our loved ones against COVID-19.

A | DR. SHARON NACHMAN: It is possible, and important to understand what it means. This response tells you that his immune system revved up and he made protective antibodies to the virus. It’s great news because it means he is now protected. And among all the people who did have this type of response, few have reported getting COVID for many months. These immune responses are short-lived and Tylenol helps to curb them. They typically last 24-48 hours.

Karl, Kube elected to three-year terms

Karl and Kube were each elected to three-year terms, beginning Aug. 1. Because they ran unopposed, UUP’s statewide Executive Board voted to allow O’Bryan-Losee to cast a single ballot July 30 to elect Karl and Kube.

Karl takes over for longtime Vice President for Academics Jamie Dangler, who retired after more than three decades as a union activist—serving nearly a decade as statewide VPA.

Kube replaces Vice President for Professionals Tom Tucker, who chose not to run for another three-year term after serving nearly 5 years as VPP.

We will certainly miss the hard work and determination that Jamie and Tom brought to their jobs, day in and day out,” said UUP President Fred Kowal. “They served our union with distinction and honor. We very much appreciate their more than two decades of service.

“At the same time, we welcome Alissa and Carolyn, two dedicated, energetic individuals who believe in unions and the positive things unions can accomplish,” Kowal said. “They care about our members and they won’t be shy when it comes to standing up for them.”

No stranger to union service

For Karl, becoming statewide VPA is the next step in his career in activism—and it’s an opportunity she’s excited about.

“I think that if you want a great, strong, effective union, you get involved,” she said. “This is really the time to be hands on, to look ahead and see what might be coming, and do everything we can as a union to be strong in that change.”

An associate professor of English at SUNY Brockport, Karl was Brockport Chapter president for 2019-2021 and an Executive Board member from 2020 to 2021; she left the Executive Board mid-term to become statewide VPA. She was a Brockport Chapter delegate as well.

Kube said she hopes to bring recognition to UUP members who are professionals for the great work they do—sometimes in the most challenging of circumstances.

“Especially with the pandemic, a lot of our professionals felt very much in the background and unrecognized for their contributions to keep the university functioning,” she said. “One of the things I want to do is to bring awareness to what our professionals do and how they are a vital part of our hospitals and our university.”

Kube has been active in UUP for more than 20 years; she served nearly three terms as Stony Brook HSC Chapter president and was elected to the statewide Executive Board in 2011. Kube is a B.A. ’94 Negotiations Team member, and she was instrumental in helping to negotiate new contracts between the state of New York and UUP. She also co-chaired the statewide Outreach and Communication Team.

At the chapter level, Kube served as a Stony Brook HSC Chapter president representative, as well as part-time concerns officer and vice president of professionals.

A University of Buffalo graduate, Kube worked as a medical technologist at Stony Brook University Hospital for 32 years. In 2017, she earned her master’s degree in Human Resources Management with a concentration in labor relations and organizational change at Stony Brook University.

Karl holds a BA in English from George Washington University; an MA in English from the University of Manchester, and has written in English Language and Literature at the University of Washington at Seattle.

A voice for professionals
The information gathered from the regional meetings, Town Hall events and chapter visits will help the Team and the Negotiations Committee draft the union’s contract proposals.

The Committee—made up of one member from each chapter and an additional academic part-timer and professional part-timer—is constitutionally charged with preparing proposals for negotiations and submitting the tentative agreement to the membership for ratification.

“This is one of the most demanding and important volunteer positions in our union, and I am grateful to each and every one of them for their willingness to serve,” Kowal said. •
UUP supports Fossil Free Future rally in Albany

UUP members joined hundreds of other environmental advocates from around the state on Friday, Aug. 6, in Albany’s West Capitol Park to call for the New York State Teachers Retirement System to divest from fossil fuel stocks.

With UUP as a co-sponsor, the youth-led “Fossil Free Education, Fossil Free Future” rally was organized by New York Youth Climate Leaders, and featured remarks from area legislators and environmental activists.

UUP has publicly called on the TRS to divest of all fossil fuel-related investments.

Though the legislature passed the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act in 2019, any comprehensive environmental action has stalled awaiting the 22-member Climate Action Council’s recommendations. No further ambitious climate bills have been passed since then.

“We cannot allow the legislature to hide behind the CLCPA, claiming that they cannot pass additional climate legislation until the Climate Action Council releases its recommendations,” said UUP President Fred Kowal. “These excuses are merely delay tactics, and they threaten the livelihoods of our generation and future generations. Additionally, with an estimated $4.5 billion invested in the fossil fuel industry, NYSTRS is doing their investors and the planet a disservice by continuing to invest in fossil fuels.”

UUP has also made specific calls for the SUNY Retirement System to begin divesting from fossil fuel stocks. Last January, more than 300 delegates to UUP’s 2021 Winter Delegate Assembly passed a resolution demanding that SUNY pressure Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association of America to divest from such stocks. In June, SUNY Chancellor Jim Malatras announced plans to divesting from fossil fuel stocks. Last January, more than 300 delegates to UUP’s 2021 Winter Delegate Assembly passed a resolution demanding that SUNY pressure Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association of America to divest from such stocks. In June, SUNY Chancellor Jim Malatras announced plans to divest from these fossil fuel-related investments.

The inaction of the New York State Legislature on climate this session was an absolute disgrace,” said Caitlyn Carpenter, a student at Mamaroneck High School and UUP statewide Secretary-Treasurer Jeri O’Bryan-Losee.

“Seeing the determination of the young advocates gives me hope for the future,” said UUP statewide Vice President for Professionals Carolyn Kube was also present.

“Scabby’s here to stay

Long live Scabby The Rat.

The giant inflatable rodent, which has loomed over labor protests across the country for nearly three decades, will be part of labor protests for decades to come now that the National Labor Relations Board has dismissed a case to bar unions from displaying the protest icon in certain circumstances.

Under the Trump Administration, NLRB general counsel Peter Robb—who, according to a July 21 Bloomberg Law story (https://bit.ly/2XnuTJU), had a personal vendetta against Scabby and what the giant rat represent—ed—wanted to stop unions from using Scabby and similar inflatables in protests at businesses that don’t employ the union’s workers.

In a 3-1 ruling, the NLRB said the use of Scabby—a fanged rat with red eyes and a scarred belly—was protected under the First Amendment. Courts have long held that the use of inflatable rats by unions at labor protests were constitutional, so long as they aren’t used to block job site entrances and exits.

Scabby takes his name from “scab,” the term labor unions use for strikebreakers. The rubber rodents were first used in 1990 by members of the Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers, who wanted to make an unmistakable statement at their protests.

Since then, Scabby and his pals, an inflatable “corporate fat cat”—a large cat in a suit and tie holding a bag of money in one hand and a small laborer in the other—and the “greedy pig,” usually depicted in a vest with money stuffed in his pockets, have been common sights on union picket lines and protests across the U.S. They can be between 6 feet and 25 feet in height.

Read the NLRB’s ruling at https://aboutblaw.com/YJx.

— Mike Lisi

Help rebuild the historic Mullany house

A Jeep plowed into the back of the Troy home of 19th century union organizer Kate Mullany last No- vember, causing heavy damage to the National His- toric Site and ruining much of the restoration work that has taken nearly three decades to accom- plish. The three-story red brick row house is being rebuilt—and your donations will help.

Mullany, an Irish laundress, organized and led the 300-mem- ber Collar Laundry Unions in 1864. The women fought for better wages and health and safety mea- sures in this extremely dangerous job, which involved the use of boiling water, bleach and sulfuric acid.

The Nov. 11 crash nearly collapsed the second floor. The site is temporarily closed. The restoration was nearly complete before the accident.

Renovations to the house have cost about $500,000—covered mostly by grants. Much of the renovation work was done by members of the Capital Region Union Laborers and Construction Trades Council, who donated their time and expertise to the cause.

The Mullany House, located on the New York State Women’s Heritage Trail, is owned and operated by the non-profit American Labor Stud- ies Center. The house is a National Historic Landmark. To donate to the restoration effort, make out your tax-deductible check to the Ameri- can Labor Studies Center and mail it to: Slocum and DeAngelus, Accountants, 974 Albany Shaker Road, Latham, NY 12110

Go to www.katemullanynhs.org to find out more about the Kate Mullany National Historic Site.

— Mark Hempstead

UUP members march for the environment

Secretary-Treasurer Jeri O’Bryan-Losee (left) and Vice President for Professionals Carolyn Kube (far right) participated in a youth-led rally on Aug. 6 to demand action on climate change.

UUP Administrative & Field Services Assistant Kenya Coleman—a member of Communications Workers of America Local 1141—stands by a sign supporting the Momentive Performance Materi- als picket line in 2016. Inflatable such as the “Greedy Pig” behind her have been found protected as free speech

LABOR NOTES

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### Touch-screen test helps children reach for school

A $385,000 grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation will help a research team led by Buffalo Center Chapter member Claire Cameron develop an updated version of an assessment used to measure skills that small children need for success in school.

Cameron developed the original form of the assessment, known as the Head-Toes-Knees-Shoulders assessment. It’s a five-minute game that helps gauge the ability of children ages four to eight to pay attention, remember rules and control impulses. In the original form of the assessment, children are asked to follow commands such as, “Touch your head.” Cameron has also conducted research that indicates the assessment also measures aptitude for math and literacy skills.

The grant will help the researchers develop updated versions of Head-Toes-Knees-Shoulders that rely on augmented reality and mobile games and which can be used in regular classrooms by teachers. Using the grant, researchers will test two forms of the new version: one which will be an augmented reality game, and the other a tablet-based game that requires children to answer recorded audio prompts by tapping the image of a bear on the screen instead of their own body. The hope is that these updated versions will help teachers determine if young children are ready to progress in school; other a tablet-based game that requires children to answer recorded audio prompts by tapping the image of a bear on the screen instead of their own body. The hope is that these updated versions will help teachers determine if young children are ready to progress in school.

### Giving back, one bunch of asparagus at a time

Olivia Hoffman and Samantha Legere wanted to donate their time to a community cause, so when the System Administration Chapter members saw that Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Albany was seeking volunteers to help with a pop-up food pantry in Schenectady, they didn’t hesitate. They were in.

Dressed in blue jeans, sneakers, bright red UUP t-shirts and black UPF face masks, the women joined nearly 70 other volunteers who walked from table to table to fill boxes of food—everything from frozen pasta and raisins to fresh green bell peppers and bunches of asparagus—in the parking lot of Schenectady’s Crosstown Plaza on a cloudy mid-September morning.

“Food insecurity is a huge problem and this is one way we can help,” said Hoffman. “I had been looking for a way to give back,” Legere said. “We saw this opportunity and here we are.”

As Hoffman, Legere and the other volunteers packed the food boxes, drivers in a long line of cars that trailed out of the plaza and wound down nearby Watt Street waited patiently to pick up their food.

Some 700 boxes of food would be given out that day, which would feed more than 2,000 people, said Sister Betsy Van Deusen, director of community partnerships for Catholic Charities. From January to June, Catholic Charities has given away 122,000 boxes of food to 38,000 households, she said.

“Food is one of the pots that needs to be filled,” said Van Deusen. “Some people may not need the food, but by having it, it will allow them to spend their money on other things, like a mortgage or rent.”

No one is turned away and no qualifications need be met to accept donations through the organization’s “CC Move” food distribution program.

“We don’t know their stories,” she said. “Our job is to give away the food.”

That’s why Hoffman and Legere were there.

“Looking at all the cars here for food, you can see how important this is to do,” Legere said. “This is real.”
Punitive tests, evaluations and teacher-bashing made their conviction even stronger. “Certainly, everyone has been affected, but no one has been affected more than our young children,” Day said. "No one wants a better teacher ed program than the people working in teacher ed,” Houston-Wilson said.

The “Great Public Schools” grants range from $2,025 to $1,200, and although the grant proposals vary in scope and design, they all have one aim: to help prepare potential teachers turn an interest into a career path, with a special focus on recruiting future teachers from underrepresented communities; and to help prepare a new generation of educators for several specialties that have a desperate shortage of teachers.

“I do think that people are seeing a greater need among K-12 students—their academic needs, their socio-psychic needs,” said UUP member Ajay Das, an associate professor at Empire State College who chairs the education division and coordinates the special education programs for the New York City/Long Island region of ESC. The program has recently expanded its offerings in special education, for which there is an extreme shortage of teachers.

“Certainly, everyone has been affected, but no one has been affected more than our young children,” Das said. “For people who considered teaching, this has made their conviction even stronger.”

Punitive tests, evaluations and teacher-bashing All of the grants aim to attract a new generation of teachers. Undergraduate and graduate student teacher education programs in New York have seen a 53% decline in enrollment since the 2009-10 school year, a change that reflects similar decreases in many other parts of the country. The reasons are many, and in New York, NYSUT, UUP and the Professional Staff Congress/CUNY joined forces in a long, fraught but ultimately successful effort to reduce or eliminate state policies that the unions say have adversely affected the decline in the number of teachers and the decline in the number of students enrolling in teacher education programs.

In New York, school districts reduced their teacher staffs during the Great Recession of 2008-2015, which sent the message that teaching was no longer the sound profession it historically had been. Former Gov. David Paterson also pushed through drastic changes in state education policy that heavily weighted student test scores in teachers’ job performance. NYSUT eventually succeeded in getting the state to dramatically reduce the use of students’ standardized test scores in teacher evaluations, and the state has suspended the annual performance review of teachers during the coronavirus pandemic.

Then, in 2013, the state announced that the controversial testing assessment known as the Educator Teacher Performance Assessment, or edTPA, would soon be required in New York for teacher certification. (See related story on page 25.) The test was so poorly designed, and the scoring so arbitrary, that several teacher education faculty members who held doctorates and were knowledgeable experts in their field, including some UUP members, said they had been unable to pass a practice version of the edTPA. At the same time, the New York State Board of Regents under the leadership of former Regents Chancellor Merryl Tisch publicly questioned the value of SUNY’s teacher education programs and threatened to push for closing some of them.

UUP and NYSUT in turn pushed back. Both unions said the decline in teacher education enrollment was a creation of New York state designed to achieve one goal: the reduction or elimination of teacher education programs that maintained rigorous and field-tested teacher education programs in New York. NYSUT’s president, Richard R.shtml

The state eventually made several concessions to its original rigid adherence to the edTPA, including an alternate path to certification for those who did not pass the edTPA but whose score is within two points of passing. New York never fully embraced the edTPA, and thus, most candidates for teacher certification still must pass it. Now, the Teacher Education Committee will be closely watching the state’s next step with the edTPA. The passage of time during the pause—which could bring more obstacles and delays during the pandemic, could also mean that memories of the problems with the assessment could shift, Merritt said. After all, it’s been more than a decade since the edTPA was introduced.

“No one wants a better teacher ed program than the people working in teacher ed,” Houston-Wilson said. “I’m not sure people will realize the edTPA was a burden,” she said.

New leadership, new challenges Two UUP members with long experience in teacher education are newly named as leaders of UUP’s statewide Teacher Education Committee, just as the state again confronts the certification test that started the committee’s original effort: the edTPA.

Brookpark Chapter member Cathy Houston-Wilson is committee chair and New Paltz Chapter member Amanda Merritt is assistant chair. They follow newly retired statewide Vice President for Academics Jamie Danger, who had led the committee since its original inception as a statewide UUP task force that formed in response to New York’s 2014 mandate of the edTPA for teacher certification.

Both new leaders said that Danger’s expertise—she co-chaired a statewide task force appointed by the New York State Board of Regents in 2016—put UUP into the national spotlight of a debate about the best way to prepare new teachers to enter the classroom. The committee’s position always has been, and remains, that teaching, which works in the field should have a strong voice in that debate.

“No one wants a better teacher ed program than the people working in teacher ed,” Houston-Wilson said.

Strong backgrounds; strong advocates Houston-Wilson and Merritt are well prepared to meet the challenges of their new positions. Merritt is a UUP member and activist in the New Paltz chapter who serves as the chapter grievance officer. She’s been involved in UUP’s efforts for teacher education since the beginning of that effort. At New Paltz, she’s assistant to the dean of education and director of the Curriculum Materials Center, a resource center that holds lesson plans and textbooks, and other guides to help teacher candidates prepare for student teaching and field work.

The edTPA—the acronym stands for “Educative Teacher Performance Assessment”—is one of many aspects of public education in New York that has been underwritten by the pandemic. The state suspended the edTPA as a certification requirement in the spring of 2020, and extended that pause through the summer of 2022, because the assessment hinges on teacher candidates submitting videos of their classroom interactions with students—an impossible task to accomplish with so many schools operating either fully or partially through distance learning as the coronaviruss continued to disrupt in-person schooling. Teacher candidates during this pandemic took an older test that is mostly multiple-choice, with one essay question.

UUP a leader in edTPA reform Danger aligned a statewide and even national reputation as an expert on teacher education programs in New York with the state’s efforts to overhaul the edTPA, which, opponents said, had serious design flaws from the time that teacher education programs began using it in New York in 2014. The committee devoted much of its time to changing how the edTPA was weighted in the overall certification process. Danger forged alliances with several key members of the New York State Board of Regents, some of whom eventually became advocates for changing the edTPA. She also was a visible advocate for public higher education in other states who followed UUP’s efforts to challenge the widely used edTPA.

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“No one wants a better teacher ed program than the people working in teacher ed,” Houston-Wilson said. “I’m not sure people will realize the edTPA was a burden,” she said.

GPA cutoff still a concern Another area for the Teacher Education Committee to watch: legislative efforts to overturn a state law that requires a minimum 3.0 grade point average for applicants to graduate-level teacher education programs in New York. UUP members in teacher education programs have said for years that the law can block an otherwise gifted teacher from attaining the degree that is required to remain in the profession.

“Another area for the Teacher Education Committee to watch: legislative efforts to overturn the mandate, noting that the law permits teacher education...
Continued from page 24

standards in an era of fast-track teacher certification through other, less stringent pathways endorsed by the state.

At one point, New York permitted charter schools to develop their own certification policies without any requirement that the teachers they approved meet the state certification standards. The same standards that graduates of public and private teacher education programs had to meet. A state court eventually threw out that double standard following a lawsuit by NYSUT.

Changing the demographics

The grants that the SUNY teacher education programs just received reflect an awareness of the past fraught decade, as well as the realization that public perceptions of teachers have improved during the pandemic, given the number of parents who had children at home for virtual learning while juggling their own jobs. All the grant proposals focus on attracting new teachers to the profession, most of them include outreach to underrepresented demographics—with new teachers to the profession, most of them included interest area youth in teaching, with a special focus on attracting potential teachers from underrepresented communities. SUNY members Kathy Doody, an associate professor of exceptional education, and art education faculty Candace Masters, who chairs the Buffalo State Art & Design Department—Mary Wolf and Alice Pennisi developed the two grant proposals.

“We’re excited,” Doody said. “We feel it’s really important to expand our recruitment efforts. Our PreK-12 students are very diverse, and our teachers don’t represent our students. We just felt there was much work to do to recruit teachers of color, teachers who are bilingual.”

The need is real, she said. The city of Lackawanna, for example, just south of Buffalo, has a large population of Arabic-speaking residents. She gets weekly calls from districts asking if she can refer any certified special education teachers to them. Given the need, Doody said, the grant will help get the word out that teaching is a noble profession, and a rewarding profession.

“The teacher’s role has never been more important,” she said. •

NEW LEADERSHIP

Continued from page 25

graduates programs to make an exception on the minimum GPA requirement. UUP created this scholarship for undergraduate students who have a cumulative grade-point average of at least 3.75. UUP created this award in 1987 to honor its members’ commitments to academic excellence, the life of the mind and the promotion of social justice.

The scholarships especially honor the legacy of three late UUP members who exemplified the ideals of the labor movement and social justice or who worked tirelessly to sustain the scholarship fund. They are:

Eugene Link, a SUNY Plattsburgh professor emeritus remembered for a pioneering approach to his discipline, in which he initiated courses on African American history, women’s history and the history of the labor movement years before many campuses offered these topics.

Robert Gerber, a SUNY Oswego associate professor of history and dedicated, longtime member of UUP whose late wife, Kathleen, made several generous contributions to the scholarship fund in his memory.

Gertrude Butera, an associate professor emeritus of business administration at SUNY Alfred whose tireless fundraising helped the scholarship reach a great public university.

The UUP College Scholarship Fund Undergraduate Scholarship is a one-time scholarship of $5,000 for undergraduate students who have a cumulative grade-point average of at least 3.75. UUP created this award in 1987 to honor its members’ commitments to academic excellence, the life of the mind and the promotion of social justice.

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New leadership

Continued from page 25

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