

# THE VOICE



Spring 2025



**Members  
defend higher  
education**

**Downstate  
update**

**BUDGET WRAP-UP · POLLINATOR PROTECTION · MEMBERS HONORED**





The Voice is a publication of United University Professions (UUP), bargaining agent for the more than 40,000 academic and professional employees of the State University of New York.

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## 10 Members rally against attacks on higher ed, science, research

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# ... IF YOU CAN KEEP IT

It's mid-June as I write this column, and despite chaos churning daily out of the White House, we still have a republic.

The question now is whether we can continue to meet Ben Franklin's 237-year-old challenge to keep it, even as the Republican-led administration takes a sledgehammer to government agencies, policies, initiatives, programs and norms.

By "a sledgehammer to norms," I mean pulling people off the streets and holding them in immigration detention centers—while ignoring their due process rights. I mean the onslaught on free speech and academic freedom and the unlawful firing of thousands of federal workers in a blatant attempt to break their union—and the Civil Service.

And I'd be remiss if I didn't mention this administration's attack on science, in the form of freezing and cutting billions in research grants—a move that has impacted and impeded research on everything from climate change and vaccines to childhood diseases and dementia.

The list goes on and on. You can read more about threats to higher education and health care in this issue of *The Voice*. Yet, the administration persists in pressing its agenda, including publicly bucking a 9-0 U.S. Supreme Court ruling ordering it to "facilitate" the return of Kilmar Abrego Garcia, a Maryland man who was denied due process rights and erroneously deported to an El Salvador mega-prison by the government in March. After months of threats and refusals, the federal government finally returned him to the U.S. and promptly indicted him on human trafficking charges—which his attorneys called "preposterous."

When protests broke out in parts of Los Angeles in June in defiance of ICE immigration raids, the president—presumably for political gain—sent in the National Guard and the Marines, over the vehement protests of the city's mayor and California Gov. Gavin Newsom, who said state police had the situation well under control.

This is not how things are supposed to work in America. But we all know how and why we're here. For those of us who value our democracy and under-

stand the importance of Franklin's statement, we must ask ourselves: What do we do now?

As president of UUP, I can say that this union will not watch silently as international college students in this country legally are swept away in broad daylight by plainclothes federal agents, loaded into unmarked vans and secretly transported to holding centers hundreds of miles away because they spoke out at an anti-Israel protest or wrote a critical college newspaper op-ed.

Our union will not stand by as this administration bypasses a cowed Congress and haphazardly attempts to find billions to fund a massive tax cut for

**“THE NEW ADMINISTRATION HAS TAKEN A SLEDGEHAMMER TO GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, INITIATIVES, PROGRAMS AND NORMS.”**

the wealthy by enacting sweeping—and possibly unconstitutional—governmental reductions to Medicaid, SNAP and the Affordable Care Act.

So, what do we do? I believe we must fight. We cannot and will not bow to this administration's strategy of fear and chaos.

We reject its attack on diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, its climate change denialism and its attempts to bully universities and colleges into complying with outrageous, politically motivated demands. We reject its assault on freedom of speech, academic freedom, the First Amendment and the Constitution as a whole.

We will challenge its threat to our democracy. To our republic.

The only way to deal with a bully is to stand up and fight, whatever the outcome, because the bully sees all else as weakness. We cannot afford to be quiet. Our democracy is at stake.



**Frederick E. Kowal**  
President, UUP



# Child labor laws are changing across the U.S.

**S**o far, six states have changed their child labor laws in 2025—and not all of the changes are for the better.

Four states introduced measures to expand protections for children and teenagers in the workplace. But two states, Florida and Indiana, rolled back existing protections

Proponents of tightening child labor laws argue that children and teenagers shouldn't be focused on work and need to be protected in the workplace. Critics say that jobs prepare teenagers for life after high school and help them earn more money.

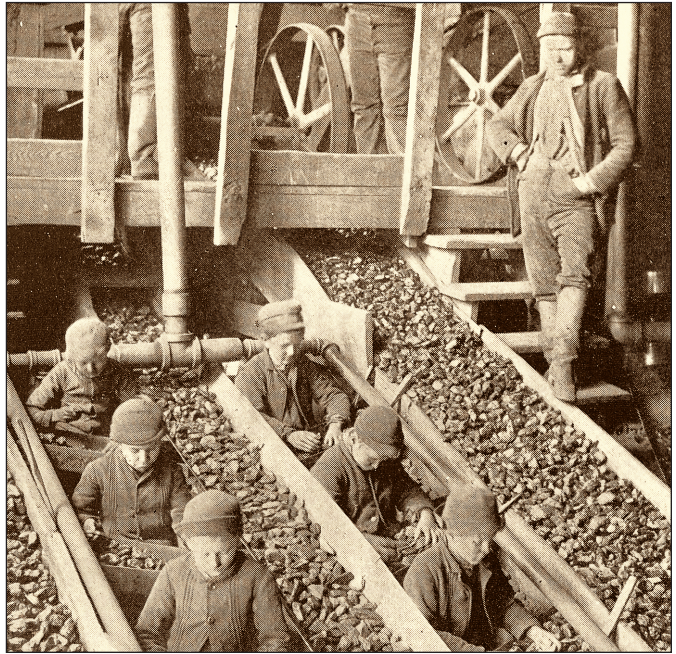
**California:** The state passed a law requiring employers to publish the results of child labor audits online, increasing transparency about how labor policies are being implemented and followed.

**Colorado:** A new law mandates harsher penalties for companies found to violate child labor laws.

***Proponents of tightening child labor laws argue that children and teenagers shouldn't be focused on work and need to be protected in the workplace.***

**Florida:** New bills filed in the Florida state legislature would remove restrictions on the number of hours 16- and 17-year-olds can work. Children ages 14 and 15 who complete their schooling at home or online would also be permitted to work without work hour limitations. The bills have yet to be signed into law.

**Illinois:** The state has updated its 1930 child labor law, issuing new protections for minors working in entertainment or on social media. It also updates how schools issue a work certification for teenagers



seeking a job, by requiring the issuing officer to consider the minor's health, welfare and education when assessing an employment certificate application. The updated work certification rules will also require that a minor's work permit includes their school schedule, and they clarify how work permits can be issued for minors who are homeless or do not have a birth certificate. The updated law also tightens the penalties and reporting requirements for employers in cases involving the injury or death of a minor on the job.

**Indiana:** A new law will remove restrictions on the number of hours 16- and 17-year-olds can work. Children ages 14 and 15 will still be subject to previous limitations on hours worked per day.

**Virginia:** A new law mandates harsher penalties for companies found to violate child labor laws.



Read more about child labor law changes in these five states at [bit.ly/ChildLaborChanges](https://bit.ly/ChildLaborChanges)



Read more about the Florida legislature's bills at [bit.ly/FloridaChildLabor](https://bit.ly/FloridaChildLabor)





## Noem can't strip TSA workers' rights

**T**he union representing Transportation Security Administration (TSA) employees has stopped the administration—for now—from rescinding collective bargaining rights for more than 46,000 TSA workers.

U.S. District Judge Marsha Pechman granted a preliminary injunction June 2 that blocks Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem from ending a contract between the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) and the Department of Homeland Security.

Pechman found that there is a “strong likelihood that the Noem Determination is impermissible retaliation” against the AFGE “for its unwillingness to acquiesce to the Trump Administration’s assault on federal workers.”

The judge said Noem’s order likely violated workers’ due process and that the AFGE would likely succeed in proving it is “arbitrary and capricious.”

“The Noem determination appears to have been undertaken to punish AFGE and its members because AFGE has chosen to push back against the Trump

administration’s attacks to federal employment in the courts,” Pechman wrote.

The AFGE challenged Noem’s decision in a March lawsuit that included AFGE TSA Local 1121, the Communications Workers of America and the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA.

“The preliminary injunction underscores the unconstitutional nature of DHS’s attack on TSA officers’ first amendment rights,” said AFGE National President Everett Kelley.

In a March 7 statement, DHS claimed the union contract has “constrained TSA’s chief mission: to safeguard transportation and keep Americans safe.”

View the DHS preliminary injunction ruling at [bit.ly/DHSinjunction](https://bit.ly/DHSinjunction)



View the AFGE's press statement on the ruling at [bit.ly/DHSterrmination](https://bit.ly/DHSterrmination)



## Ice targets New York farmworker union leaders

**F**ourteen upstate New York farmworkers and union leaders were taken into custody May 2 and targeted for deportation. The raid, carried out by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), seemed to be aimed at a specific group of workers hailing from Mexico and Guatemala.

The workers were year-round employees of Lynn-Ette & Sons Farms in Kent, 65 miles north of New York City. The workers were arrested while on a bus outside Rochester.

Lynn-Ette & Sons Farms has tried for years to keep its workers from unionizing in defiance of New York’s 2019 farm labor law, which enshrined collective bargaining protections for seasonal and year-round farmworkers. The workers arrested by ICE were active in efforts to unionize year-round employees, according to Elizabeth Strater, director of strategic campaigns for



United Farm Workers. One worker, Strater said, spoke publicly in favor of joining UFW.

“We are concerned at the appearance of targeting publicly pro-union worker leaders,” said Strater.

— Kate Morano, staff writer

To read the Intercept article on ICE targeting pro-union worker leaders in New York go to

[bit.ly/ICEtargetsNYfarmworker](https://bit.ly/ICEtargetsNYfarmworker)





# As employers shift toward increased child care, UUP backs greater access

By Kate Morano

A recent report on employer-sponsored child care indicates that although only 12% of employers provide this benefit, doing so reaps positive rewards for employers in terms of reduced employee absences, greater productivity and greater employee retention.

The Boston Consulting Group, a public-policy research organization; and Moms First, a national advocacy organization for mothers in the United States—and especially working mothers—released the report, titled “The Employee Benefit that Pays for Itself,” in March.

UUP has long advocated for increased access to child care for its members and for working families in

**“UUP has long advocated for increased access to child care for its members and for working families in New York.”**

New York, and the union has worked with the state to dramatically increase access to paid parental and family leave opportunities as a contractual benefit for members.

Child care can be incredibly expensive. Child Care Aware of America’s 2024 annual report found that the cost of placing two children in child care is on average 25% more than the typical rent in every state in the U.S. The cost of child care exceeded the annual typical mortgage payment in 45 states, plus the District of Columbia.

Now, several states are taking action to fix this problem. One of the more popular models is called Tri-Share, implemented by the state of Michigan in 2021.

In this model, employers, the state and employees each pay a third of the cost of child care, lowering the average cost for families by almost \$500 per month.

New York has no such system in place, but it does offer various programs to encourage employer-sponsored child care, like Dependent Care Advantage Accounts. Employees, including UUP-represented SUNY employees, can set aside pre-tax dollars in an account to be used for child care or adult day care, and employers will also set aside up to \$800 toward those expenses depending on income.

The new state budget will also provide financial help for parents through New York’s largest-ever child tax credit increase. The expansion will nearly double the tax credit, to \$943. The new rules mean that a family of four with a toddler, a school-age child and an income of up to \$110,000 would receive a \$1,500 annual credit. That’s an increase of nearly \$1,000 over the previous program.

UUP members are also now entitled through their contract with the state to access New York’s laws allowing paid family leave and paid parental leave. UUP members can access those benefits consecutively.

In addition, the new state budget includes a \$100 million Child Care Construction fund to build new child care sites and repair existing sites. That final amount was a reduction from the \$110 million that Gov. Kathy Hochul originally included in her Executive Budget proposal in January.

SUNY offers on-site child care at 46 campuses across the state, 20 of which are home to UUP members. Approximately 4,500 slots were available across those 46 campuses in the 2022-2023 academic year, providing child care to students, faculty, staff and local community members.

Beginning last year, New York state also now requires all public and private employers to provide up to 20 hours of paid time for pre-natal medical appointments, a move backed by Gov. Hochul.

Read more about recent research into and advocacy for affordable child care at  
[bit.ly/ChildCareAwareReports](https://bit.ly/ChildCareAwareReports)  
[bit.ly/ChildcarePays](https://bit.ly/ChildcarePays), [momsfirst.us](https://momsfirst.us)



Read more about family leave and work-life services for UUP members  
[bit.ly/UUPFamilyLeaveGuide](https://bit.ly/UUPFamilyLeaveGuide)





**UUP MEMBERS HAVE HAD MORE THAN  
\$15.1 MILLION  
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[UUPINFO.ORG/CALENDAR/](https://uupinfo.org/calendar/)



# UUP leaders recognized at RA

*Kowal, Abrahams-Nichols honored for Downstate, pandemic responses*

**U**UP's statewide affiliate, NYSUT, honored UUP President Fred Kowal and UUP Downstate Chapter President Redetha Abrahams-Nichols at the NYSUT 2025 Representative Assembly in Rochester May 3. Kowal was named Higher Education Member of the Year; Abrahams-Nichols, the Healthcare Professional of the Year.

Kowal has led UUP since 2013. He has seen the union through the coronavirus pandemic and has fought for, and gained, better funding for SUNY following years of flat or decreased funding and program cuts at several campuses. He is credited with bringing UUP into a national spotlight as the country's largest higher education union, by forming coalitions with like-minded unions and environmental groups in New York and across the country, and through his work

with NYSUT, the New York State AFL-CIO and, at a national level, the AFT, the NEA and the AFL-CIO.

Together with Abrahams-Nichols, Kowal has steered UUP's latest effort to save SUNY Downstate University Hospital, following SUNY's announcement 17 months ago of a plan to close the hospital. Abrahams-Nichols is a statewide Executive Board member and a member of the UUP Negotiations Team. She was a mentee of the beloved longtime Downstate Chapter President Rowena Blackman-Stroud, who died in December 2022.

In her three years as Downstate Chapter president, Abrahams-Nichols has continued Blackman-Stroud's legacy of activism and leadership in the Central Brooklyn community. She has emerged as a leader who has carved out her own identity in a time of crisis.



PHOTO: CHRIS SUTORIUS/NYSUT

Fred Kowal



PHOTO: EL-WISE NOISSETTE/NYSUT

Redetha Abrahams-Nichols





**Celebrating service:** UUP statewide officers congratulate Wishnia Award winners Pamela Malone, third from left, and Bekkie Bryan, fourth from left. Joining the winners are, from left, UUP President Fred Kowal, MDO Patrick Romain, VPA Alissa Karl, VPP Carolyn Kube, and Secretary-Treasurer Jeri O'Bryan-Losee.

## Malone, Bryan receive Wishnia Award for activism, statewide outreach

**T**wo UUP leaders whose shared activism reaches from their chapters out into their communities and then circles the state are also sharing this year's Judith Wishnia Advocacy Award.

Pamela Malone of the UUP Empire State Chapter and Bekkie Bryan of the UUP Cortland Chapter received the Wishnia award at the UUP Spring 2025 Delegate Assembly, April 4-5 at the Desmond Hotel in Albany. They co-chair UUP's statewide Outreach Committee.

The Wishnia Award honors Stony Brook Chapter member Judy Wishnia a trailblazing activist, and recognizes members who have rendered exceptional service to UUP; the labor movement; and equity and humanity. Malone and Bryan have been leaders in their chapters and communities, UUP delegates and statewide Executive Board members.

Bryan chairs the Cortland Democratic Committee and is active in the Cortland County chapter of Indivisible, the pro-democracy and political advocacy organization. The SUNY Cortland Institute for Civic Engagement selected her for its Leadership in Civic Engagement Award in 2021.

Malone is serving on her fourth UUP Negotiations Team. She stepped down as her chapter president June 1 and previously served as vice president for professionals. She is on the NYSUT Board of Directors, a past NYSUT PAC Coordinator and has served as secretary of the Saratoga Labor Council.

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***The Wishnia Award honors Judy Wishnia of the Stony Brook Chapter, a beloved and trailblazing activist.***

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Beyond their formal roles in UUP, Malone and Bryan are known for their up-front activism in rallies and marches for their union and in support of progressive causes in their communities. As Kowal said in introducing them at the DA for their award, "If there is a protest or rally for the labor movement, a chance to encourage civic engagement or an opportunity to help increase voter turnout, you will almost certainly see Pamela and Bekkie on the front lines."







# fighting for our life

**Confronting once-unthinkable restrictions on  
higher ed, research, free speech and health care**

**By Darryl McGrath**

**F**aculty and students are terrified of being detained without due process for exercising their right to free speech.

Universities are in fear of crippling funding cuts if they don't comply with the federal government's demands on instructional content and policies.

Public health care programs are being axed to fund tax cuts for the rich.

Educational and cultural programs are being gutted because they don't meet the approval of new demands on how history should be taught.

These are the changes that Americans confront in the United States in 2025. More upheaval is on the way, as the Republican-led Congress debates what safety-net programs to slash so that tax cuts for the rich can become permanent.

This means that Medicaid, food stamps and programs that address addiction services and mental health needs may face devastating cuts—and some of those treatment service funds have already disappeared in New York.

The Congressional Budget Office projects that the tax bill Congress is considering—and as of this writing, the Republican-led House has approved—would find at least \$625 billion in savings through reductions in Medicaid. By some estimates, that figure could be more than \$800 billion. All to fund tax cuts that would largely benefit the richest Americans. Sixteen million people could lose health insurance coverage—many of them on Medicaid and covered under the Affordable Care Act—if those changes are signed into law.

Many of the assaults on academic freedom and free speech, on services for the neediest Americans, have been instituted by the administration with no regard for Congressional authority, the separation of powers or checks and balances. Congressional Republicans, through their complacency and allegiance to—or fear of—the administration, have allowed much of this to occur without raising objection.

But UUP, along with an ever-growing, nationwide coalition of Americans who disagree with the administration's agenda, is pushing back against these threats.

See page 13 for ways to take action.



**Here is an overview of how the federal government's attacks on higher education and health have hit higher education and public health in New York state...**

**Capping of indirect costs for NIH grant-funded research at 15%**

The Trump administration placed a 15% reimbursement cap on indirect costs of NIH grant-funded research. A federal judge has permanently barred NIH from limiting medical research funding, but the administration will likely appeal the decision.

New York is the second-leading recipient of NIH funding, and could lose \$850 million in NIH grants, affecting 250 campuses. Members have been doing vital NIH-funded research into many serious diseases.

**Freezing of federal grants for ideological reasons**

The administration froze federal grants for research into marginalized populations and climate change. Many research projects are in chaos. A federal judge has temporarily blocked the freeze of as much as \$3 trillion in federal grants and loans already approved by Congress. However, new NIH guidelines would ban university grant funding that pertains to inclusivity or is perceived to be antisemitic.

**Cuts to the National Science Foundation**

The NSF has cancelled more than 1,700 research grants, all of them with some type of diversity, equity and inclusion link. The foundation also plans to cap indirect research costs at 15 percent of the amount of active grants. In late May, New York and 15 other states sued the administration to block the cuts.

**Elimination of DEI language and programs**

An executive order called for the removal of language about diversity, equity and inclusion on higher ed websites, and the U.S. Department of Education has threatened to withhold funding from campuses that retain such references. The NYS Education Department resoundingly rejected these orders and retained descriptions of prohibited programs and policies on SUNY's webpage.

**Executive order denouncing "gender ideology extremism"**

The president issued an executive order requiring the United States to recognize two sexes, male and female; the order rescinds guidance documents that support LGBTQ+ students.

**Crackdown on free speech**

The administration has come down hard on free speech, especially written and spoken statements that support pro-Palestinian protests or criticize Israel. The administration has used antisemitism as an excuse to detain individuals—including U.S. citizens and international students here legally—without due process.

Nearly three dozen SUNY students had their visas cancelled without explanation. Although those visas have been restored, their lives have been severely disrupted and threats to their legal status still loom.

In June, the president ordered the National Guard and hundreds of U.S. Marines to Los Angeles—without the approval and over the objections of California Gov. Gavin Newsom—after mostly peaceful protests in downtown Los Angeles to oppose and block ICE immigration raids there. Newsom sued, calling the deployments a massive overreach and an assault on First Amendment rights and democracy. On June 11, the president said that protesters at his June 14 military parade in Washington, D.C. would be met with "very big force."

**Forcing compliance by withholding federal funds from campuses**

The administration has threatened to withhold billions from colleges and universities that refuse to accede to its onerous demands. So far, only elite universities, like Harvard, Columbia and Cornell, have been targeted.

**Department of Education announces investigation of 60 campuses for alleged antisemitism**

In March, the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights released a list of 60 colleges—including Binghamton University and Purchase College—facing potential enforcement for failing to address the administration's antisemitism accusations.

### Administration guts DOE

The federal government fired over 1,300 Department of Education employees as part of an executive order calling for the department's abolition and moving core services to other agencies. The nation's \$1.6 trillion student loan portfolio will move to the Small Business Administration.

### Termination of teacher training grants

In a 5-4 vote, the U.S. Supreme Court allowed the administration to freeze \$65 million in teacher training grants. These programs were targeted over accusations that they promote inclusivity policies. The state is now party to a lawsuit that claims this funding cutoff could harm New York.

### Cuts to the Department of Health and Human Services

The federal Department of Health and Human Services has been cut by 20,000 workers, nearly 25% of its staff. The Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, housed within HHS, are losing at least 20% of their staff. Minority health offices throughout HHS have been closed, which will likely exacerbate health disparities across the nation.

### Congressional budget proposal to cut Medicaid by \$880 billion over 10 years

Congressional Republicans have approved a bill to make tax cuts for the ultra-rich permanent. Those tax cuts are possible because of massive cuts to Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act, and other programs and services that help low-income Americans. New York could lose \$10 billion to \$20 billion if this bill becomes law.

Medicaid serves about seven million New Yorkers



and helps keep safety-net hospitals such as SUNY Downstate University Hospital running.

### Congressional proposals to cut the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Congressional Republicans are also considering steep cuts to SNAP—as much as \$230 billion over 10 years—to pay for tax cuts. Cuts to SNAP could be detrimental to SUNY students, many of whom struggle to obtain adequate food.

### Abrupt termination of federal grants for health and mental health

Federal grants for numerous public health programs slated to continue through September abruptly stopped without explanation. In New York, the grants totaled nearly \$370 million and covered virus surveillance, outbreak response and infection prevention in hospitals and nursing homes, among other efforts. State services treating addiction and mental health needs will likely lose \$67 million.



## Take action

Scan the QR code at right to send e-letters to Congress and sign up for rallies and other events



Be a UUP Rapid Responder! Scan the QR code at right or go to [bit.ly/UUPRapidResponders](https://bit.ly/UUPRapidResponders) to sign up receive notifications for calls to action





# The fight for diversity, equity and inclusion

**SUNY, UUP stand firmly in support of inclusivity**

**By Leigh Hornbeck**

**T**he daily actions of the current administration are unpredictable, but its intent to dismantle programs and policies designed to strengthen and promote diversity, equity and inclusion is clear.

To the administration and its advisors, those words—“diversity, equity and inclusion”—are expressions of “wokeism” to be excised and defunded. The question for faculty and staff in higher education who value inclusivity is how to react.

SUNY’s offices and staff devoted to diversity, equity and inclusion seem intact, despite federal threats against their funding if they don’t dismantle inclusivity programs. SUNY scientists whose research topics include the words “diversity,” “equity,” “inclusion,” “LGBTQ+” and “minority” have seen National Institutes of Health grants frozen because

of a presidential executive order that has since been blocked in federal court.

## **Concern and commitment**

Ekow King has the suddenly taboo words in his title as the Assistant to the Vice President of Student Affairs for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at the University at Albany. Friends made worried calls to him when the new administration began issuing executive orders attacking DEI and academic freedom.

“I do not feel unsafe because I’m in New York and we’re pushing back as a state,” King, an Albany Chapter member, said. “I’m concerned about my colleagues in red states who are getting fired. I’m proud of the words in my title, but I’m interested in the work I’m doing, not the title.”

In his spring address, UAlbany President Havidán Rodríguez described inclusivity as a core value of UAlbany.

“In challenging times like these, the public mission of higher education is not just more important, it is the light by which we will find a path forward for our



Ekow King, Assistant to the Vice President for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Division of Student Affairs at the University at Albany, said he is proud of the work he does and of UAlbany's commitment to the principles of DEI despite derision from the federal government.

democracy," Rodríguez said. "UAlbany is not retreating from our mission or our values."

### **UUP: Inclusiveness is essential**

UUP values diversity, equity and inclusion, and expects SUNY to do the same.

In an April 24 statement, UUP President Fred Kowal; PSC/CUNY President James Davis; and Roberta Elins, a NYSUT director representing SUNY community colleges, called on SUNY Chancellor John King Jr. and CUNY Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez to state "preemptively and unequivocally" that SUNY and CUNY will fight government attempts to undermine academic freedom and shared governance on their campuses.

The labor leaders also criticized King for not signing a letter by the American Association of Colleges and Universities and the American Academy of Arts & Sciences that challenged federal "overreach and political interference" in higher education. King signed the letter shortly after being called upon to do so.

UUP member Lisa Marie Anselmi, Buffalo State University's Anthropology chair, heads UUP's state-wide committee on diversity, equity and inclusion committee along with Darleyne Mayers, senior staff associate at SUNY Farmingdale. Anselmi uses the words, not the acronym, whenever possible. As she puts it, articulating the words challenges those who oppose the principles, as in "What part don't you like?"

At the UUP Spring 2025 Delegate Assembly, An-

selmi wore a T-shirt that proclaimed "You're Probably DEI Too" and listed DEI beneficiaries, including military families, first-generation college students, religious minorities and gig workers.

The work to create a fair, just environment for all is not new. Similar activism led to ramps allowing wheelchair access to sidewalks; job protection during maternity leave; tuition assistance for WWII veterans, and then more activism for Black and brown veterans excluded from GI Bill opportunities. Federal money has provided rural broadband access, and it is largely federal money that supports rural hospitals. All of this, Anselmi notes, aims to provide a diverse group of Americans — not just the rich, white, able-bodied or urban — with equal access to the American dream.

The backlash, racism and hatred are not new, either.

"We have to keep calling people out," Anselmi said. "Somehow, we have to remind people diversity, equity and inclusion benefits them, too."

So UUP can be expected to closely watch SUNY's responses in these tough times, given that so many programs and policies at SUNY are built on recognizing the diversity that makes a great public university even greater. Those efforts include the opportunity programs and support for gender equity issues.

Continue watching the UUP website and the UUPConnect newsletter for updates on this important issue.



# what to do when they come for you

## Important information for international faculty, students

*As word circulates about threats by the federal government against international students and faculty, it's good to know how to respond if you encounter federal immigration officials.*

### Alert to UUP members

**U**UP has received reports of non-U.S. citizen members being interrogated by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement about their academic research.

If you are not a United States citizen and plan to leave the country, please be prepared to potentially answer politically motivated questions by law enforcement upon your return.

If you are questioned you should answer calmly and truthfully — it is not advisable to lie or become hostile with an immigration enforcement officer. It is also advisable to have your immigration attorney's information readily available as well as the contact information for your Congressman should you be detained following any questioning.

Please also report any such incidents to UUP as your union is advocating at all levels to stop this targeted harassment of higher education faculty and professionals.

### FURTHER INFORMATION:

**AFT's suggested protocols** for encounters with immigration agents on or near campus:  
[bit.ly/ICEonCampus](http://bit.ly/ICEonCampus)



**Information on the rights of green card holders** and international students in the U.S.:  
[bit.ly/GreenCardHolders](http://bit.ly/GreenCardHolders)

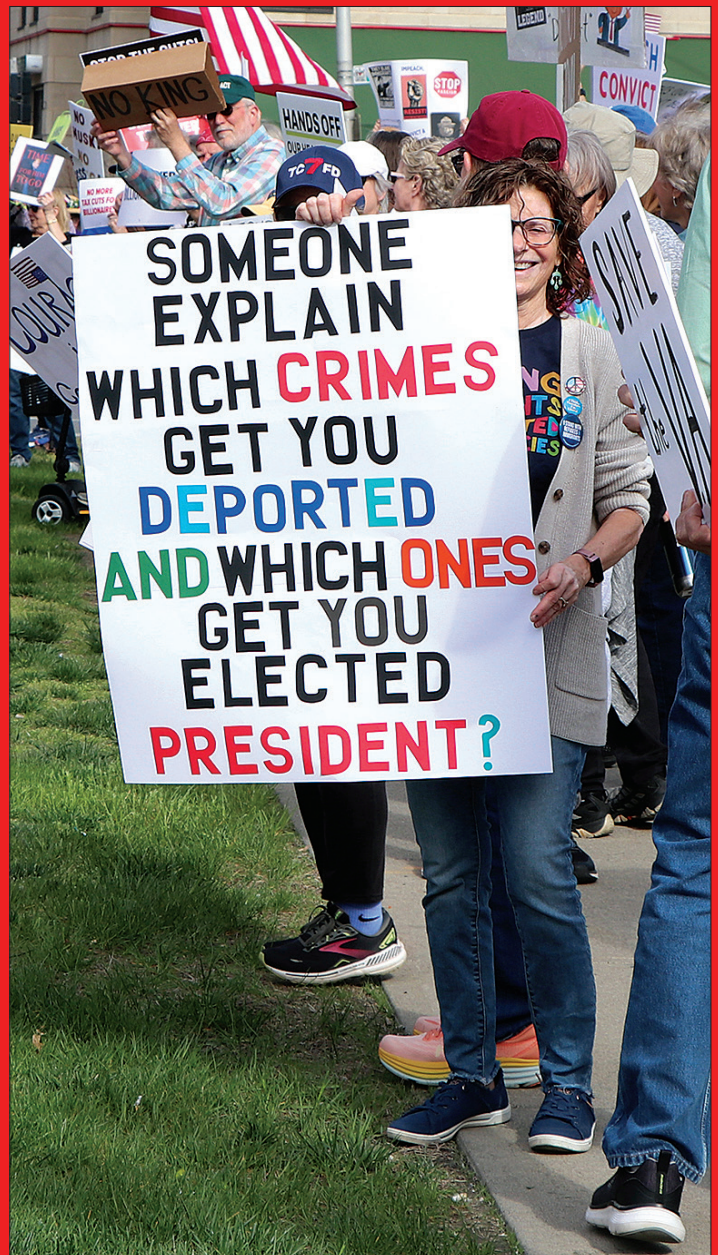


**If ICE agents appear on your campus:**  
Call campus security. You may also contact your UUP Chapter President at  
[bit.ly/MyUUPchapter](http://bit.ly/MyUUPchapter)



**For a searchable directory of immigration lawyers** go to the Immigration Advocates Network at  
[bit.ly/ImmigrationAdvocates](http://bit.ly/ImmigrationAdvocates)





## Immigrant registration requirements have expanded and enforcement has increased

A rule expanding the scope of the Alien Registration Act of 1940 went into effect April 11. Previously, the law required most non-citizens who stay in the U.S. for more than 30 days to register with the government.

Now, all non-U.S. citizens older than 14 must register and be fingerprinted if they haven't completed the processes through a visa application or other immigration process. Parents and legal guardians must ensure their non-citizen children under age 14 are registered. A recent presiden-

tial executive order ratchets up enforcement.

All non-citizens over the age of 18 must always carry proof of registration. Failure to register or carry proof can result in fines of up to \$5,000, jail time or both.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services also introduced a new registration form, available at [my.uscis.gov](https://my.uscis.gov).

Read more about the requirements at [bit.ly/NewRegistrationRequirement](https://bit.ly/NewRegistrationRequirement) or scan QR codes at right.





# UUP JOINS THE PROTEST LINES

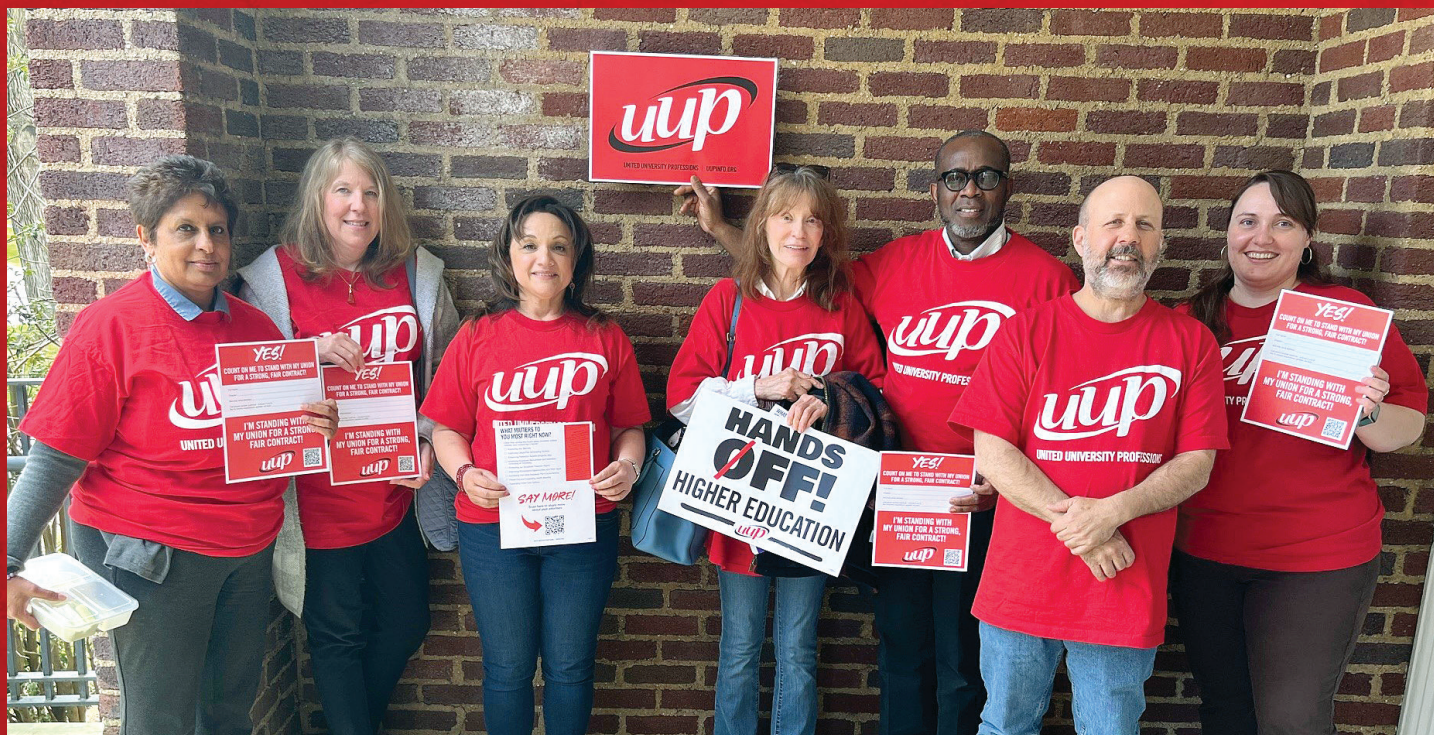
**T**here hasn't yet been one massive shutdown-the-country protest against the lawless excesses of the federal administration. Instead, there's been one huge protest released in increments, at regular intervals every few weeks, throughout the country.

The energy and outrage fueling this movement shows no signs of abating. UUP has been there for each and every one of these protest days in New York so far.

The coalitions keep springing up and bringing on board unions, social-justice organizations, pro-democracy groups. The names of the organizers may change—Hands Off!, 50501 (which stands for 50 protests, 50 states, one movement), No Kings—but the message stays the same: Protect democracy, due process, the Constitution and the First Amendment—for everyone, including those who are in the United States but were not born in the United States.



UUP President Fred Kowal, above right, here at an Albany protest, joins one of many May Day events held around the state May 1, 2025, as thousands of New Yorkers protested attacks on higher ed and scientific research. Chapters all over the state, including Fredonia, below, joined the effort.







Rallies and protests started almost immediately after the new federal administration took office, and they haven't let up since then. Actions spanned the length and breadth of the state, sometimes in bitter cold and heavy rain. UUP members took part in actions in Albany (top and lower left) and Buffalo (bottom right and center left) and dozens of communities elsewhere in the state.





# A strong Budget for SUNY

**Major funding increases come as higher ed faces federal cutbacks, criticisms**

By Darryl McGrath

**A** year's worth of relentless advocacy by UUP members paid off with a state budget for SUNY that helps address decades of underfunding, and also comes at a time when public universities need strong state support in the face of a hostile federal administration.

UUP thanked Gov. Kathy Hochul and the state Legislature for sending a strong message to New Yorkers and federal education officials that public higher education is a priceless investment.

The support is across the board, with \$114 million in additional state aid for the four-year campuses and \$450 million in capital funding to build a new emergency department and annex at Upstate University Hospital in Syracuse. That hospital has seen its role as a Level 1 Trauma Center become even more important in its 17-county region, as smaller community hospitals reduce services.

## **Money to help Downstate**

Downstate University Hospital will get \$750 million in capital funding. In her June 5 media release, Gov. Hochul directed SUNY to use anticipated \$50 million annual capital allocations for Downstate over the next seven years to bring the state's investment in SUNY to over \$1 billion.

"We thank Gov. Hochul, Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie and state legislators for delivering a strong budget for SUNY," Kowal said. "The governor has said she believes in a stronger, better SUNY Downstate and we believe she's shown her commitment to this vital public teaching hospital by including important capital funding for Downstate in the budget."

### **Budget reflects a need for unity**

Higher education has been under attack in Washington, D.C., with threats against both public and private universities if they do not comply with demands to eliminate language, academic programs and policies deemed unacceptable by the federal administration. Kowal decried the U.S. Department of Education's March announcement that it is investigating 60 campuses on allegations of antisemitism and discrimination. That list includes two UUP-represented campuses: Binghamton University and SUNY Purchase.

All the more reason for UUP to stay strong. With

**The support is across the board, with \$114 million in additional state aid for the four-year campuses and \$450 million in funding to build a new emergency department at Upstate University Hospital.**

SUNY facing such grave challenges, with so many families in New York facing increased costs of living; with the cutbacks of many federally funded aid programs that have affected food pantries, mental health services and so many other needs, Kowal is urging members to focus on their students, patients and campus communities and to prepare for the upcoming contract negotiations. (See Page 32.)

"Our members showed their strength during the budget process, and they will continue to do that," Kowal said. "We will all need to be stronger than ever, given the challenges we face with this administration, so now is the time that everyone who cares about SUNY must sustain this good budget going forward. I'm confident that we all can and will do that. Now, let's get to work to continue this momentum."



UUP members work with all lawmakers who recognize that affordable public higher education helps New York's economy. Here, during a state advocacy day, Sen. Anthony Palumbo of the 1st Senate District in Suffolk County met with UUP members, L to R: Darleyne Mayers of Farmingdale, statewide Executive Board member; VPP Carolyn Kube; Bruce Kube, Stony Brook HSC Chapter president; and Yolanda Drakkir, Farmingdale Chapter president.



# SUNY Budget

**UUP celebrates budget gains  
and gears up to sustain the  
momentum for SUNY funding**



## » Gains

- **SUNY operating aid:** gets an increase of \$114M additional for state-operated campuses.
- **Downstate Health Sciences University** operating aid gets an additional \$100 M
- **Critical maintenance** capital funding for four-year campuses: \$550 M additional
- **SUNY hospitals capital funding:** \$150 M additional (\$50 M each)
- **Downstate University Hospital capital funding:** \$750 M in capital funding
- **Upstate Medical University ER modernization:** \$450 M
- **New full-time faculty hires** get \$53 M additional
- **Hospital debt service:** The enacted budget covers the debt service costs - \$55.7 M
- **EOP:** \$1.9 M cut in the Executive Proposal is restored, with an additional \$647 K in the final enacted budget
- **Medical EOP:** Receives \$1 M in funding
- **TAP:** \$6.9 M increase
- **Mental health services:** Final budget restores \$1 M cut





## SPEAKING UP FOR SUNY

UUP members demonstrated spirited advocacy for SUNY during the legislative session, and helped achieve a strong budget.

Making the rounds were, **top** (L to R): Jeremy Howard, William Schultze and Earl Packard, all from Alfred, with state Sen. Siela Bynoe of the 6th District on Long Island, joined by Ziya Arnavut and Gurmukh Singh of Fredonia. **Right:** Empire State Chapter members Dan McCrea, Aley O'Mara, Emma Bowman and Marcy Veno outside the office of Assemblymember Carrie Woerner of the 113th District in Saratoga, Warren and Washington counties. **Below:** Potsdam and Canton members meet with Assemblymember Billy Jones, whose 115th District includes Plattsburgh, Lake Placid, Saranac Lake and the surrounding regions. L to R: Heather Sullivan-Catlin and Kevin Smith of Potsdam, Stephanie Petkovsek of Canton, Jones, Jaimin Weets and Kara Jefts of Plattsburgh.





# Shining a light in the world through a love of vision

By Kate Morano

## *Optometry member enthralled by the miracle of sight*

**D**r. Mitchell Dul is an optometrist and researcher at SUNY's College of Optometry in Manhattan. His primary research interest is in glaucoma, an eye condition causing damage to the optic nerve that leads to vision loss and blindness.

He has served as principal investigator for studies for imaging software now used around the world. He earned his Doctor of Optometry degree from the Pennsylvania College of Optometry and worked at the VA Hudson Valley Healthcare System before coming to SUNY in 1999.

### **How did you get into optometry?**

My interest in optometry began all the way back in high school when I saw my father begin to have difficulty enjoying his passions—reading and playing music. Consequently, I focused my undergraduate education on the study of sensation and perception which naturally drew me to the clinical application of this science. My personal experience with wearing glasses didn't happen until I was already in clinical practice. I reached the age when my arms were becoming too short for me to read, the experience familiar to many people when the natural focusable lens inside of our eye becomes less flexible and can no longer focus on small objects close-up. I was testing myself for presbyopia when I discovered I was also nearsighted. Now I wear progressive wear progressive addition lenses to give me some level of clarity at most distances.



**Dr. Mitchell Dul**  
SUNY College of Optometry





My mentor as an undergraduate was Susan Petry, who had a background in psychophysics and sensation and perception, and I've just found that to be such a fascinating melding of science and human experience. We're able to quantify how many lamberts, or units of light, might reach your eye, but it's a different experience for everyone. A certain amount of light strikes your retina and you respond to it and that equivalent amount of light strikes my retina and I don't see it.

We scan the environment around us with our sensory systems and stream it to our central processing unit in our brain, all while we're moving through space and through time, and we take all of that data and stream it into a percept that defines the way in which we experience the world. I just couldn't not be attracted to that.

Optometry for me was the clinical version of that experimental pathway. I was influenced by another person in psychophysics doing work in taste, and I was doing taste research as well, so I asked her for advice and she said that it's more of a challenge to get grant money and sustain yourself unless your research had some clinical application. So, I went back to my first love, which was vision.

## What are you researching now?

I've been working with my distinguished friend and colleague, Jose-Manuel Alonso [Distinguished Professor in Biological and Vision Sciences at SUNY Optometry] for many years. He was coming up with some very exciting and novel ideas about the asymmetries, the differences in the way in which we perceive darker versus lighter images, or dark contrasts compared to lighter contrasts. I saw the opportunity to apply that knowledge to a clinical environment. If we do indeed have asymmetries between these pathways, do we have a means to measure them outside of the laboratory?

It's one thing to have electrodes placed into the visual cortex of an animal, but in the real world, how do we find this infoxday, we want to apply this laboratory knowledge into a real world setting that can have an impact on a patient's health and well-being.

At the same time, we know that there's this explosion in the prevalence of nearsightedness in the world, and we know that this on-and-off asymmetry, these pathways from the eye to the visual cortex in the brain, they play an important role in eye development, specifically eye length, which leads to nearsightedness. In my mind, we needed a clinical tool to measure that, particularly at that critical period where nearsightedness develops and that's during childhood, between the ages of 10 and 17.

“OPTOMETRY FOR ME WAS THE CLINICAL VERSION OF THAT EXPERIMENTAL PATHWAY.”



SUNY College of Optometry

We found that in adult patients with nearsightedness, the more nearsighted the patient is, the greater the asymmetry in the on-and-off visual pathway, and we measure this with a device that we patented. So now our newest line of research, which I'm doing with a former graduate student of mine, is to look at subjects in that critical period in childhood using this technology we've developed.

We're getting some very good data as a consequence. The kids have adapted to the technology and we think we're on to something.

## Have the Trump administration's funding cuts impacted your research?

I'm very fortunate in that my grant funding is diversified. I have support from industry, unrestricted grant support that can keep the lab going. I also have foundation grants that are independent of federal grants.

I never intended it as a rainy-day fund, but I've been able to stay operational and I'm very fortunate for that. This could have been very, very different, and I know that my support will go beyond what I've been doing at present to help the lab in areas that would have normally been covered by federal grants.

It's so disruptive and it's so poorly planned and there was no time for us to react. I don't know the logic behind that. I'd be hard-pressed to believe that anyone with any understanding of what

researchers are doing would have said this was a good strategy to roll this out.

It's one thing to have a policy, but it's just as important to have a viable procedure to implement it and this was not viable.



# pollinator protection

**Turning pavement and  
manicured lawns into  
habitat beneficial for birds,  
insects, native plants**

**By Brian Obach**

*co-chair of UUP's Environmental Advocacy and Issues Committee  
with contributions by EAIC co-chair Sue Fassler  
and EAIC member Jack Tessier*

**F**aculty, students and facilities staff on several SUNY campuses are protecting ecosystems by restoring pollinator habitat.

These efforts are getting results, as native plants proliferate, bee species become more numerous and national organizations that track the restoration of pollinator habitat take note.

Ecosystems are composed of a diversity of species interacting in ways that allow each species to survive and thrive. Ecosystems in many places today have been disrupted by human activity such as paving, construction, light pollution and industrial agriculture. SUNY campuses are not immune to these disruptions, which have resulted in a decline in ecological diversity.

Pollination is central to the functioning of many ecosystems. Birds and insects gather nectar and pollen from plants. In so doing, they spread pollen, which is needed for the

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**Facing page:** At SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, the Restoration Science Center is heading an effort by faculty, staff and student volunteers to convert a turf grass lawn in front of the campus administrative building into a pollinator meadow. *Photos by SUNY ESF.*







generation of seeds to grow new plants. Thus, native plants require native insects and birds to carry out the important work of pollination.

Several SUNY campuses are seeking to reestablish natural ecosystems by converting areas previously dominated by monocultures of mowed grass or even pavement into ecologically diverse pollinator meadows that provide habitat for a vast array of plants and animals.

### Increased bees at ESF

Since 2022, ESF has completed 18 projects to improve pollinator habitat at its Syracuse campus. These projects, totaling 15,480 square feet, are part of the College's Bee Campus USA activities. Work done to improve pollinator habitat has led to a total of 68 different bee species being identified on the six-acre urban campus.

One project added about 200 plants from 35 species designed for bloom turnover, deer resistance and taxonomic diversity. Leaf litter in this garden remains in place throughout winter and stems are not cut until spring. It has also been certified as a national monarch waystation through Monarch Watch ([monarch-watch.org](http://monarch-watch.org)) and it is registered as habitat on Homegrown National Park ([homegrownnationalpark.org](http://homegrownnationalpark.org)).

Another project converted a large expanse of lawn in front of the main campus administration building into a wildflower meadow. This project was led by ESF's Restoration Science Center.

### New Paltz: From mowed fields to pollinator havens

At SUNY New Paltz a team of faculty and facilities staff launched the Pollinator Habitat Plan, a

biodiversity initiative that included plans to expand pollinator habitat across the campus. Through the initiative, the faculty and staff identified native trees, shrubs and flowers, and targeted non-native species for replacement. Since the development of the Pollinator Habitat Plan in 2019, vast swaths of the campus have been converted from mowed fields to pollinator meadows rich in native species that bloom in succession from spring to fall.

### Delhi students spread the pollinator message

Students at SUNY Delhi have expanded the effort beyond the college campus. In 2023, students designed and installed a pollinator garden for 4-H Camp Shankitunk, providing pollinator habitat and educational opportunities for campers. In 2024, students designed a pollinator garden for Hanford Mills Museum in East Meredith, just east of Oneonta. Both projects were advanced study projects offering education and service learning opportunities for students while enriching biodiversity and bringing benefits to community groups.

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UUP's Environmental Issues and Advocacy Committee identifies, creates, and advocates for policies and programs that support sustainability and environmental/social restoration on SUNY campuses.

Do you want to share a sustainability highlight from your campus with UUP membership? If so, email **Jack Tessier** ([tessiejt@delhi.edu](mailto:tessiejt@delhi.edu)). If you would like to get involved with UUP's environmental work, please contact committee co-chairs **Sue Fassler** ([scfassle@gmail.com](mailto:scfassle@gmail.com)) or **Brian Obach** ([brianobach@gmail.com](mailto:brianobach@gmail.com))

**Below:** SUNY ESF students doing volunteer gardening as part of the Bee Campus program, through which campuses and cities pledge to protect wild pollinators and their habitat. The flowering plants in the foreground are anise hyssop, *Agastache foeniculum*, which attracts bees, butterflies and hummingbirds.







# CHAPTER PRESIDENTS



United University Professions' elected Chapter Presidents are there to work for their members. If you've got an issue or comment, feel free to reach out to them.



**ALBANY**  
Paul Stasi



**ALFRED**  
William Schultze



**BINGHAMTON**  
Brendan McGovern



**BROCKPORT**  
Susan Orr



**BUFFALO CENTER**  
Kathleen Kielar



**BUFFALO HSC**  
James Lichtenthal



**BUFFALO STATE**  
Lisa Marie Anselmi



**CANTON**  
Stephanie Petkovsek



**COBLESKILL**  
William Tusang



**CORTLAND**  
Justin Neretich



**DELHI**  
Kelly Keck



**DOWNSTATE**  
Redetha  
Abrahams-Nichols



**EMPIRE STATE**  
Jason Russell



**ESF**  
Matthew Smith



**FARMINGDALE**  
Yolanda Drakkir



**FREDONIA**  
Christopher Taverna



**GENESEO**  
Alan Witt



**MARITIME**  
Roland Aragon



**MORRISVILLE**  
Stephen Hinkle



**NEW PALTZ**  
Beth Wilson



**OLD WESTBURY**  
Annessa Babic



**ONEONTA**  
Shirley Clark



**OPTOMETRY**  
Saquan Herring



**OSWEGO**  
Frank Byrne



**PLATTSBURGH**  
Michelle Toth



**SUNY POLY**  
Kathleen Rourke



**POTSDAM**  
Heather  
Sullivan-Catlin



**PURCHASE**  
Joseph Germani



**STONY BROOK**  
Louise Melious



**STONY BROOK HSC**  
Bruce Kube



**SYSTEM ADMINISTRATION**  
Michael Walker



**UPSTATE**  
Mindy Heath



# Downstate to remain open

*Eighteen months of relentless advocacy by UUP members have saved Downstate University Hospital in Brooklyn*

**G**ov. Kathy Hochul announced June 5 that the hospital will receive more than \$1 billion in capital funding that will be used to renovate the hospital and enhance inpatient services. In a June 5 media statement, the governor said that she will review recommendations for the hospital's future submitted by the Downstate Community Advisory Board, a panel she created a year ago and charged with the mission of listening to the Central Brooklyn community and reporting back with a suggested plan to sustain Downstate for the long term.

UUP thanked the governor and the Legislature for their support and noted the contributions of community members and the labor movement in saving the hospital.

"Eighteen months ago, the future of Brooklyn's SUNY Downstate University Hospital was murky and its prospects bleak," UUP President Fred Kowal said in a statement in response to the governor's announcement. "We thank Gov. Kathy Hochul and the state Legislature for understanding the importance of Downstate University Hospital to the Brooklyn community and for taking action to secure the hospital's future."

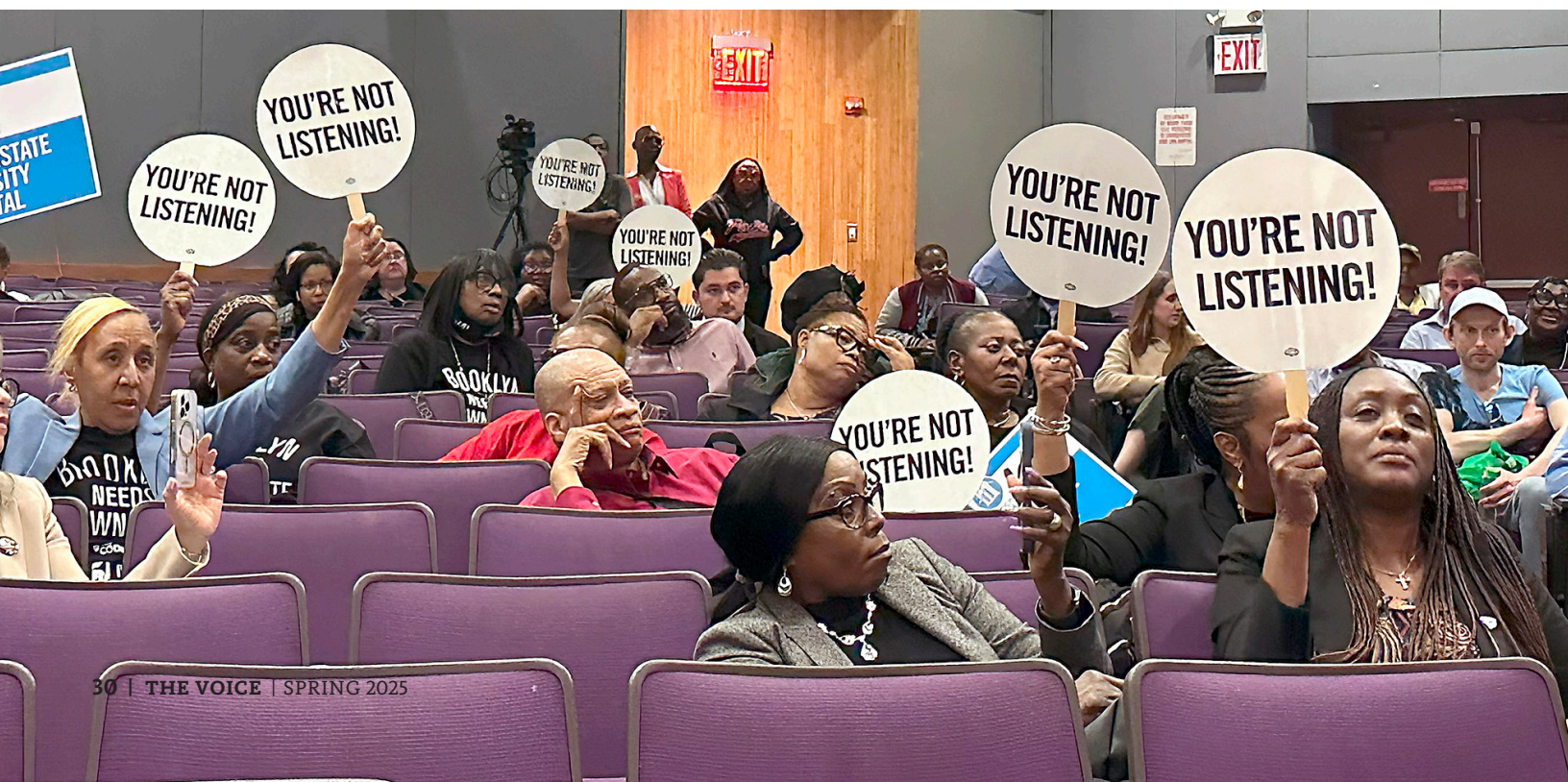
UUP responded immediately to the January 2024

announcement by SUNY Chancellor John King Jr. that Downstate would close. Within hours of that announcement, UUP was organizing its members at the hospital, residents and community leaders in a vocal and all-out public effort to save the hospital.

A local community action group, Brooklyn for Downstate, quickly formed. The UUP Downstate Chapter, led by Redetha Abrahams-Nichols, started a sustained campaign of marches and rallies to call attention to the hospital's plight. UUP's statewide leaders, joined by lawmakers and national social-justice advocates, staged a daylong rally in February 2024 that closed a street in front of the hospital and drew a crowd of thousands.

UUP has been fighting for Downstate's future since 2007, when the state-created Berger Commission recommended privatizing SUNY's public teaching hospitals. In 2012, the commission issued a plan to shut down Downstate University Hospital; a community coalition led by UUP and late Downstate Chapter President Rowena Blackman-Stroud spent two years fighting to save the hospital before the commission's plan was defeated.

Watch the UUP website, the UUP membership magazine *The Voice* and the UUP digital weekly newsletter, *Connect*, for updates on the hospital.





# THE LONG FIGHT TO SAVE DOWNSTATE



UUP has been fighting for Downstate's future since 2007, when the state-created Berger Commission recommended privatizing SUNY's public teaching hospitals. In 2012, the commission announced plans to close or privatize Downstate University Hospital. Led by late Downstate Chapter President Rowena Blackman-Stroud, UUP held dozens of rallies in Brooklyn and Albany to protest the closure plan, which was defeated in 2014. When SUNY tried to close the hospital in 2024, thousands of community members protested at a huge outdoor rally in February.



# UUP's Negotiations Team ready for challenges that await

**U**P Negotiations Teams have sought new contracts at many tough times over the years: during national financial crises; threatened layoffs and closures; and the coronavirus pandemic. But the team UUP has just announced faces a time like no other.

The good news is: The Negotiations Team for the 2026-2030 contract with the state is more than equal to the challenge, and it is ready and eager to begin its work, as UUP President Fred Kowal and the newly named Chief Negotiator Bret Benjamin made clear in their announcement of the team.

## A range of backgrounds, experiences

Kowal introduced the team at the UUP Spring Delegate Assembly, April 4-5 at the Desmond Hotel in Albany. The 15 members represent the full range of the campuses and UUP membership. Some members have served on multiple Negotiations Teams and bring valuable institutional memory to their current service. Others are serving for the first time, with a perspective on what their colleagues who are new to union membership will want and need in an agreement.

"We have put together this time a team to have as much diversity as possible, and also to have an experienced team," Kowal told the delegates. "It is our intention to get to the table early and get the best possible contract, in what could be a very, very difficult negotiations."

That difficulty is fueled by the national upheaval created by the federal administration, which has largely dismantled federal agencies that provide key services and information to New Yorkers and the state government. The result: an atmosphere of uncertainty about how much federal money will flow into the state budget. At the same time, the president's declared war on the global economy has upended the stock market, creating additional uncertainty about rising costs from high tariffs

## A good starting point, and challenges ahead

Benjamin served as Chief Negotiator for the current contract, which expires June 30, 2026, and was renowned for its effort to address longstanding financial inequities among different job categories for UUP members. That contract saw unprecedented

pay raises for the lowest-paid members, as well as generous parental leave benefits and other terms and conditions of employment designed to help working parents.

In his remarks to the delegates, Benjamin urged that chapter leaders encourage their members to sign up for the UUP Members Only portal on the UUP website, where information about the negotiations will be posted. Members can access that portal and find instructions on how to create an account with a password at [bit.ly/UUPMembersOnly](https://bit.ly/UUPMembersOnly) or scan the QR code on the facing page.

"I think in the last contract one of the things we did really well was explain what we did and why we did it," Benjamin said. The team will be soliciting input from members as it prepares to sit down with the state.

UUP has reasons to believe that the upcoming round of contract negotiations with the state may begin earlier than usual, Benjamin noted.

"UUP may circulate a negotiations survey to members as soon as this summer, looking to get feedback

**“WE HAVE PUT TOGETHER THIS TIME A TEAM TO HAVE AS MUCH DIVERSITY AS POSSIBLE, AND ALSO TO HAVE AN EXPERIENCED TEAM.”**

on the contractual questions that matter most to our members," Benjamin said after the announcement at the DA. "We know that this is not ideal since many of our academics are not on obligation over the summer, but we do not want to miss out on an opportunity to get to the table as soon as possible. As always, we will make every effort to ensure that all members have a voice in shaping UUP bargaining priorities. Please be on the lookout for a negotiations survey as well as for negotiations forums over the summer and early fall."

Benjamin also stressed the importance of unity among the members in advocating even for parts of the contract that have nothing to do with their work at SUNY, but which will have major effects on colleagues in different jobs at other campuses. A unified front is key to the success of a contract, he noted.

"It is only through this solidarity that we can move this forward," Benjamin said.



# NEGOTIATIONS TEAM



**BRET BENJAMIN**  
University at Albany  
Academic  
Chair



**REDETHA  
ABRAHAMS-NICHOLS**  
Downstate  
Professional



**SOLOMON AYO**  
Farmingdale  
Professional



**ABIGAIL COOKE**  
Buffalo Center  
Academic



**JENNIFER DRAKE**  
Cortland  
Professional



**MIKE GREEN**  
SUNY Poly  
Academic



**MINDY HEATH**  
Upstate Medical  
Professional



**ALISSA KARL**  
Brockport  
statewide VP for  
Academics



**CAROLYN KUBE**  
Stony Brook HSC  
statewide VP for  
Professionals



**AARON MAJOR**  
Albany  
Academic



**PAMELA MALONE**  
Empire State  
Professional



**BRENDAN  
MCGOVERN**  
Binghamton  
Professional



**STEPHANIE  
PETKOVSEK**  
Canton  
Academic



**JACLYN  
PITTSLEY**  
Cortland  
Academic



**BILL TUSANG**  
Cobleskill  
Academic



## KEEP UP TO DATE ON NEGOTIATIONS

Members are encouraged to sign up for the UUP Members Only portal on the UUP website, where information about the negotiations will be posted.

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# UUP members lauded

## *Honors recognize activism, child advocacy, faculty governance*

**T**his is shaping up to be the year to honor UUP members for their dedication to unionism and commitment to their jobs and their communities.

Upstate Medical University Chapter President Rich Veenstra's activism with UUP and in his community helped him win the Greater Syracuse Labor Council's 2025 Activist of the Year award.

Downstate Chapter President Redetha Abrahams-Nichols was honored by the Brooklyn Children's Society of SUNY Downstate for her commitment to Brooklyn's Downstate University Hospital, where she works.

Three retirees were also recognized for their union service. Cortland Chapter member Jo Schaffer and Buffalo Center Chapter member Tom Tucker received lifetime achievement awards while Downstate Chapter retiree member Henry Flax was cited for his long service to the SUNY University Faculty Senate.

### **Veenstra named activist of the year**

Upstate Medical University Chapter President Rich Veenstra is the Greater Syracuse Labor Council's 2025 Activist of the Year.

Phil Cleary, NYSUT Regional PAC Coordinator, nominated Veenstra, writing: "Despite his many duties serving UUP as the Upstate Chapter President, he always finds the time to attend every rally happening and shows up for every Get Out the Vote rally in campaign time. He never draws attention to himself but is always there in solidarity with our union family."

In addition to his role as chapter president, Veenstra serves as UUP Region 4 (CNY) political coordinator. Veenstra began working at Upstate Medical University in 1986 and serves as a professor in the Pharmacology Department.

Veenstra has been a UUP member and UUP academic delegate for decades. He began his executive service as Upstate chapter vice president for academics in 2013 before

becoming chapter president in 2019. He has served on numerous UUP statewide committees, including the Academic Medical Programs Committee.

He served on the UUP Statewide Executive Board from 2017 to 2022.



### **Abrahams-Nichols wins dedication award**

Downstate Chapter President Redetha Abrahams-Nichols, who has helped lead the union's battle to save Downstate University Hospital, was honored by the Brooklyn Children's Society of SUNY Downstate at its annual gala in April.

Abrahams-Nichols won the organization's 2025 Society Award, given for her commitment to the Central Brooklyn public teaching hospital and to preserving pediatric medical services. The society works to enrich the lives of children through support of projects and programs at SUNY Downstate that enhance the health of children in the community.

A member of UUP's Executive Board and Negotiations Team, Abrahams-Nichols has been at the center of UUP's fight to save jobs and services at the hospital, while pushing for a revitalized hospital with an upgraded emergency room and inpatient services.

Abrahams-Nichols is a steering board member of Brooklyn for Downstate, a community organization pushing to revitalize the Central Brooklyn hospital. She is the assistant director of nursing in Downstate's Emergency Department.





## Flax gets high honor from Faculty Senate

Downstate Chapter retiree Henry Flax, a longtime member of SUNY's University Faculty Senate, was honored as a Carl P. Wiezalis University Faculty Senate Fellow at the Senate's 200th Plenary in April at SUNY Oneonta.

The award, the Senate's highest honor, is given to a SUNY academic or professional staff member who has made "extraordinary and distinguished contributions to the area of faculty governance" over the span of 10 years or longer.



**Henry Flax**

Flax has served on the Faculty Senate since 2012. He became the Senate's parliamentarian in 2019 and is a member of the body's Governance Committee. He was an Executive Committee member from 2013 through 2015, and again from 2019 to the present.

He has a long history as a UUP activist. Flax is vice chair of the statewide Constitution and Governance Committee and has served on nearly a dozen UUP statewide committees, including the Membership, Technology Issues, Disability Rights and the Labor and Higher Education committees. He is also a statewide UUP delegate to NYSUT and the AFT.

## State Senate honors Schaffer

Jo Schaffer, a former UUP statewide Membership Development Officer and longtime UUP retiree member, received the New York State Senate Commendation Award for her many years of union activism at a March 29 ceremony.

Schaffer died June 16 following a long illness.

The award, presented by Sen. Lea Webb, a UUP supporter, is the highest civilian honor the Senate can bestow.



**Jo Schaffer**

"Jo Schaffer is living proof that advocacy has no age limit," said Webb, who was a UUP Binghamton Chapter member before winning her Senate seat in 2023. Webb describes herself as "UUP for life" and has been a close friend of UUP in the Senate.

A founding member of the Cortland Arts Council and longtime educator at SUNY

Cortland, Schaffer has served as a statewide Executive Board member, Cortland Chapter president, UUP Retiree Membership chair and Cortland Chapter officer for retirees.

She is a recipient of UUP's Nina Mitchell Award for Distinguished Service and the Pearl H. Brod Outstanding Retiree Award.

## Lifetime achievement award for Tucker

Tom Tucker, whose union activism started in college and led him to leadership positions with UUP and the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE), is the recipient of the Western New York Area Labor Federation's lifetime achievement award.

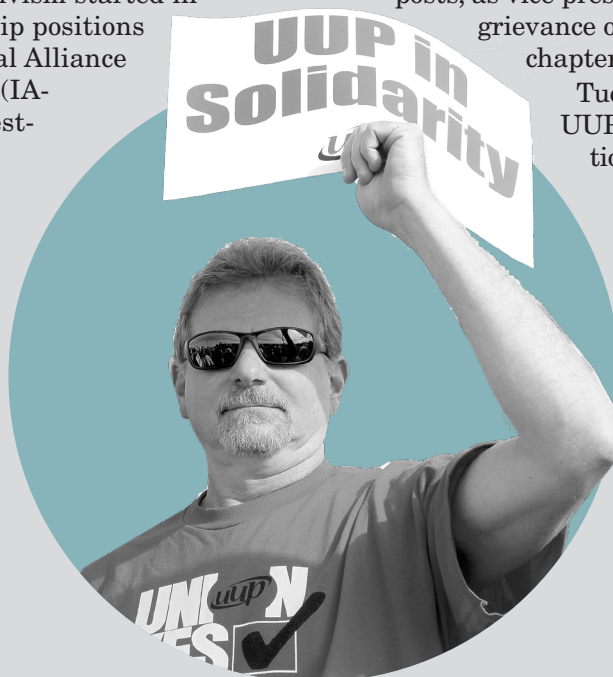
He received the award at the organization's 2025 Labor Awards Dinner in May.

Tucker's long history with organized labor started as a college student when he signed an IATSE Local 10 union card. He joined UUP in 1994 and became active at his campus, Buffalo Center. Tucker held several chapter

posts, as vice president for professionals and grievance officer before his election as chapter president.

Tucker was active statewide for UUP, serving as a UUP Negotiations Team member, co-chair of the Outreach Committee, and former statewide VOTE/COPE coordinator. He was elected as statewide vice president for professionals in 2017 and remained in the post until he retired in 2021.

Tucker was also active with IATSE. He served as Local 10 vice president and president, before stepping down from union leadership in late 2024.





## » MEMBER BENEFITS

# UUP member benefits offers soothing options

» **Beyond Med** is offered through UUP's Member Services Trust and provides discounts on medical services. Beyond Med fills health coverage gaps through reduced rates on elective services such as weight loss medication, menopausal health and LASIK surgery.

Members in New York City, on Long Island and in the Hudson Valley can save on additional services. Beyond Med is a monthly service; there is a fee. UUP members can get 30 days free; call UUP's Members Services Trust for a promo code and more information.

*Visit <https://bit.ly/BeyondMedUUP> to register*

» **AFT's Trauma Counseling Program** provides up to 21 free therapy sessions to members dealing with trauma from incidents like assault, domestic violence and mass shootings; or being bullied, harassed or threatened on the job. Participation is confidential. Members can talk virtually with an AFT program counselor or have AFT pay for sessions with a private therapist.

*To register visit [www.aft.org/benefits/trauma](http://www.aft.org/benefits/trauma)*

» **Psych Hub**, co-founded by licensed therapist and mental health advocate Marjorie Morrison and former Congressman Patrick J. Kennedy, is committed to empowering people and organizations to create a better approach to mental health for themselves and others through evidence-based training and educational resources.

In addition to educating people about mental health, Psych Hub offers free continuing education programs to UUP members with active licenses for social work, clinical psychologist, psychiatrist and behavioral health specialists. Sign up for the Psych Hub newsletter at <https://psychhub.com/newsletter-sign-up>

*To sign up visit <https://bit.ly/PsychHubUUP>*

» **Yoga** is offered through a virtual class for UUP members as a voluntary benefit. Classes are offered Tuesdays at 6 a.m. and Thursdays at 6:30 p.m. The fee is \$12 per class. Questions? Send an email to [truthyoga@icloud.com](mailto:truthyoga@icloud.com).

*To register visit [www.true-yoga-healing.com](http://www.true-yoga-healing.com)*

» **Mid-Island Mortgage Corp.** can help UUP members save thousands of dollars in lender fees and closing costs on their mortgages. Mid-Island Mortgage offers a mortgage readiness program that advises first-time home buyers the best way to maximize their savings for a down payment.

*Visit <http://uupinfo.org/benefits/pdf/MidIsland.pdf>*

» **Cambridge Credit Counseling Corp.** can help members eliminate the major stress of credit card debt. If you have credit card debt, Cambridge Credit Counseling can help you lower your interest rates and monthly payments and eliminate your debt, often in less than two years.

*Visit [www.cambridge-credit.org/uup/](http://www.cambridge-credit.org/uup/)*