

THE VOICE



Spring 2026



Aiming for an on-time contract

Getting ahead of AI

UUP wins new law to protect jobs

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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HERE'S TO U(UP)

I'd like to take this opportunity to say thank you.

At the 2026 Spring Delegate Assembly, I was unanimously reelected as UUP's president. Even though I ran unopposed, I did not—and would not—take my successful candidacy for granted.

I consider it an honor to serve as president of this distinguished union. This is my fourth term, and my determination and my primary goal are to do the best job I can every day to serve you, the members of this union.

I promise to protect the important work we do each day to power SUNY—including keeping a close eye on how AI will impact our work. As you'll read in this issue of *The Voice*, UUP was instrumental in getting lawmakers to amend the state's LOADinG (Legislative Oversight of Automated Decision-making in Government) Act to bar the state from replacing government employees—like us—with AI innovations.

I promise to send you the best possible contract for ratification. Our UUP Negotiations Team, led by Chief Negotiator Bret Benjamin, has been at the bargaining table since February—the earliest start for negotiations in a long time. I'm confident we'll be able to bring you a strong on-time contract with fair salary increases, job safety and security protections, superior affordable health benefits and advancements that build on gains in our last two contracts.

You can get more details about the negotiations process by going to the Members Only section of UUP's website, at <https://uupunion.org/myuup/MembersOnly/>.

I can't promise that we'll secure state funding to wipe out multimillion-dollar deficits at SUNY Buffalo State University, SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, SUNY Fredonia and SUNY Potsdam. But I can promise you that I will push as hard as I can for it.

As I write this, the state budget is still being negotiated and we don't know the state aid total for SUNY. The SUNY Board of Trustees, which decides the percentages of state funding allotted to each campus, will announce the breakdown of how much each campus will get shortly after the budget is approved.

Once it's in place, we'll turn our attention to the

trustees and press them to use this money to eradicate the deficits at these campuses. If they don't, our campuses will be forced to continue cutting programs and jobs.

Given the financial crisis we may well experience related to the New York state budget next year and the year after—due to the president's One Big Ugly Bill—our campuses and our work could be jeopardized if the trustees don't do the right thing.

We're asking for a reset. The campuses didn't cause these deficits; deep Great Recession-era cuts and more than a decade of flat funding by the Cuomo administration have left our campuses with this debt.

And know this: As a UUP member, you are in a union that will always have your back. Yes, times are tough; we live in a country run by a wannabe despot

“ Know this: As a UUP member, you are in a union that will always have your back. ”

who is more interested in starting wars and building ballrooms than working to make life in America better for working families.

We, the people, have the power to say no to the epidemic of corruption in Washington, D.C. We flexed our collective strength at No Kings 3 in March and again on May Day. It's easy to get discouraged watching the Trump regime run roughshod over the Constitution and use the Department of Justice to serve retribution upon Trump's enemies.

But as British singer/songwriter and political activist Billy Bragg sings, “There is power in a union.” There is indeed.

And as president of UUP, I will do everything I can to bring that power to bear.

I promise. Together, we will do great things for ourselves, our students and our communities.



Frederick E. Kowal
President, UUP

UUP member freed from immigration detention

UUP continues to follow the immigration case of member Alcibiades “Alex” Lazaro Ramirez González following his arrest in October when he and his husband, CSEA member Yanier “Yan” Vázquez Hildago arrived at an immigration hearing in October.

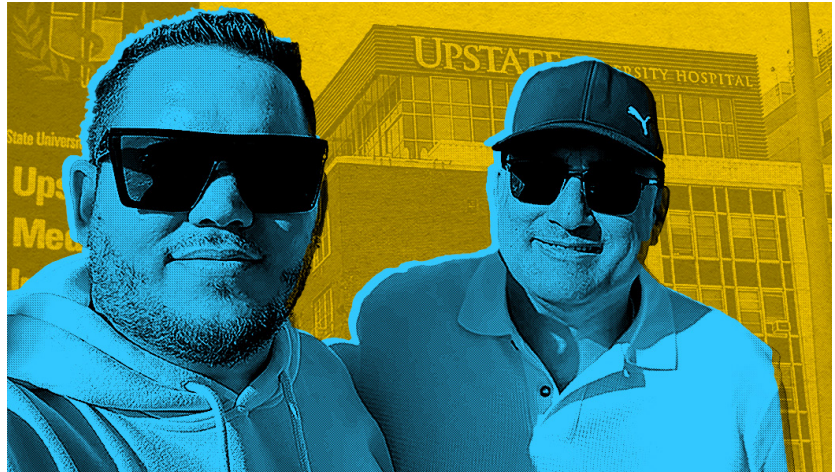
Ramirez González and Vázquez Hildago, born in Cuba, work at SUNY Upstate Medical University in the environmental services department.

The men were held at the Batavia Federal Detention Center for more than three months. At hearings in January, separate immigration judges ordered them to be deported to Ecuador, with the Ecuadoran government allowing for the U.S. to send immigrants to Ecuador.

Ramirez and Vázquez appealed their rulings; they were granted bond and released in mid-February while their appeals are under review. Ramirez was ordered to wear an ankle bracelet. They have both returned to work.

Sparked by Upstate Chapter President Mindy Heath, UUP and CSEA held rallies in Syracuse in November 2025 to support the men and encouraged members to donate to a GoFundMe page set up on their behalf for legal expenses.

“Alex and Yan were following the rules, moving lawfully through the federal immigration system with the goal of one day being allowed to stay and live in America,” UUP President Frederick Kowal said in a statement in February. “We were—and continue to



be—appalled that they were detained by ICE, which is why we’ve spoken out so forcefully in their defense.”

The men gave a February 20 press conference thanking the many people who helped them and shared their appreciation again in a March 5 letter to the editor published in the Syracuse Post-Standard.

Heath was honored at the 2026 NYSUT Representative Assembly in May for all she’s done to help Ramirez González and Vázquez Hildago. NYSUT created a film chronicling her advocacy, which was shown at the RA.

» Visit bit.ly/AlexYanGoFundMe



» View the film at bit.ly/HeathHonored



Amazon revels in anti-union activities

Ever wonder where all that revenue that Amazon earns is going?

Well, at least in the last year, Amazon spent a large chunk—\$26 million, to be exact—on anti-union consulting companies, and that sum is the largest such expenditure by a U.S. employer to ever be reported in a single year.

That information comes from mandatory filings with the U.S. Department of Labor under the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act of 1959, which requires companies to report their union-busting expenditures.

Many of Amazon’s periodic payments for these services averaged more than \$56,000 each, and that’s more than the average annual income of an Amazon warehouse worker.



Amazon workers have been trying for years to organize and get a contract with the company. The Teamsters and the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union are among the unions that have tried to break into the Amazon anti-union fortress.

Employees at a New York City Amazon fulfillment center formed their own union, the Amazon Labor Union, and they voted to join it in 2022. Amazon refuses to bargain with the union—which has since affiliated with the Teamsters—and is fighting the formation of the union at the National Labor Relations Board and in federal court.

» Read more at bit.ly/UnionBustingAmazon



UUP joins compact for contract strategy

UUP supports the Amherst Compact, a first-ever agreement by leaders of more than 50 unions to coordinate bargaining priorities that raise the floor for workers of all job categories across the most-densely unionized region of the country for higher education.

Higher ed unions from Maine to Pennsylvania are part of the Amherst Compact, which comes as UUP and three Rutgers University unions—Rutgers AAUP-AFT, AAUP-BHSNJ (American Association of University Professors – Biomedical and Health Sciences of New Jersey) and the Rutgers Adjunct Faculty Union—are negotiating new contracts. The UUP Negotiations Team and state representatives have been working on a new agreement since February; the contract runs through July 1.

“By standing together, higher education unions can use their collective power to push for gains that wouldn’t have been possible otherwise,” said UUP President Fred Kowal. “A regional bargaining strategy can help raise the standards of employment for unions out there negotiating new agreements. UUP believes in working together with our union colleagues to help each other realize the best possible agreements we can negotiate for our members.”

“As UUP is at the bargaining table right now, it’s great to know that higher ed unions across the Northeast are working in collaboration to set new standards for bargaining demands,” said UUP Chief Negotiator Bret Benjamin.

» Read more at bit.ly/AmherstCompact



State labor department honors Frances Perkins

The New York State Department of Labor has renamed its Albany headquarters in honor of Frances Perkins, the U.S. secretary of labor under President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the first woman to hold a cabinet position in the United States.

A workers-rights advocate, Perkins was also the longest-serving U.S. labor secretary.

Gov. Kathy Hochul signed an executive order April 10—which would have been Perkins’ birthday—that named the headquarters the New York State Department of Labor Frances Perkins Building.

Perkins’ life is documented at the Frances Perkins Center in Newcastle, Maine, the site of her family’s former homestead and the place that served as a restorative retreat for Perkins.

As is recounted in the timeline of her life on the website of the Frances Perkins Center, the future

secretary of labor was a witness to the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City on March 25, 1911. Perkins happened to be having tea with friends near the scene of the fire; alerted by the sound of fire engines, she ran to the building and witnessed trapped workers—most of them young women—jumping to their deaths to escape the flames.

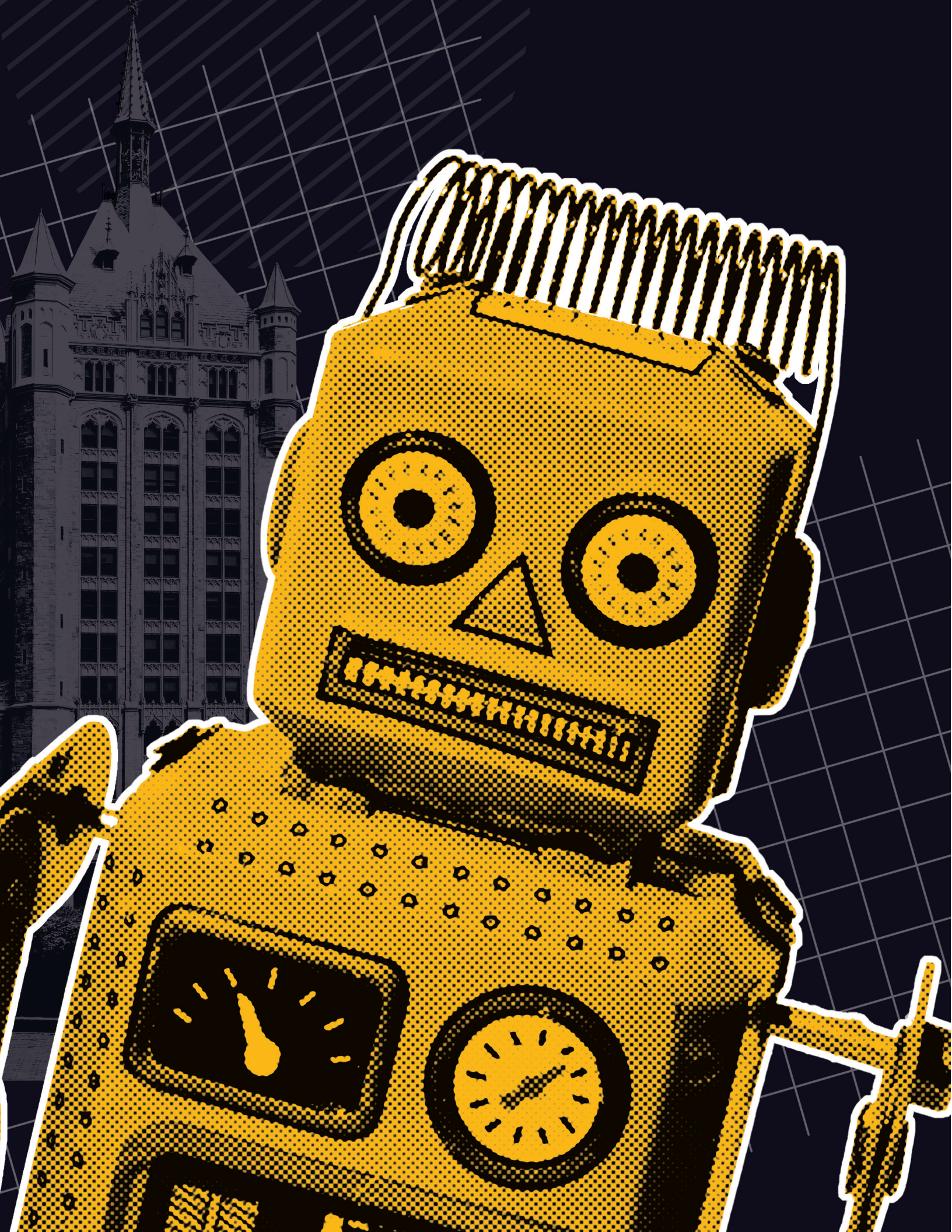
Perkins had a role in the creation of the Social Security Act—which established unemployment insurance—and also the Fair Labor Standards Act, which established the minimum wage, overtime pay and child labor restrictions.

» Visit the Francis Perkins Center at francesperkinscenter.org



» NYS Dept of Labor official page bit.ly/PerkinsNYS





getting ahead of AI

**New law
protects
UUP jobs**

By Leigh Hornbeck

UUP achieved a major win in February when Gov. Kathy Hochul signed an updated version of a law that provides labor protections from artificial intelligence for employees of SUNY, other state agencies and other public employees in New York.

The Legislative Oversight of Automated Decision-making in Government (LOADinG) Act, initially passed and signed by Gov. Hochul in 2024, requires human decision-making and supervision whenever AI tools are used and prohibits state agencies from replacing people with AI, transferring duties to AI or reducing employees' non-overtime hours, wages or benefits in favor of an AI agent or platforms.

UUP introduced and stewarded amendments to the law during the 2025 legislative session to include not only the bargaining unit represented by UUP, but CUNY, workers in K-12 school districts and municipal workers. Our allies in labor joined us in support of the expanded bill.

The result was a stronger, more comprehensive law. The LOADinG Act expires in 2028. UUP will work to make sure the law is extended, and that none of its protections are lost while looking for openings to extend it to meet the ongoing needs of workers as we face new forms of automation.

The new law provides that use of AI by SUNY shall not:

- Affect existing collective bargaining rights or representation
- Result in an employee's discharge, displacement or loss of position; this includes partial displacement such as a reduction in the hours of non-overtime work, wages or employment benefits; and
- Permit the transfer of duties and functions currently performed by UUP members to an AI system
- Alter the rights, benefits or privileges of SUNY employees, including but not limited to terms and conditions of employment, civil service status and collective bargaining unit membership status

“UUP initiated and has won significant labor protections for New York public employees when AI is used in our workplaces,” said Alissa Karl, UUP’s statewide vice president for academics. “Governor

Hochul and the Legislature came through and supported the real workers who make our state run by ensuring that our jobs, hours and rights can’t be replaced by AI systems. Our work continues now to make sure that members know about these labor protections to sure they are enforced. We’re also gearing up for continued legislative advocacy.”

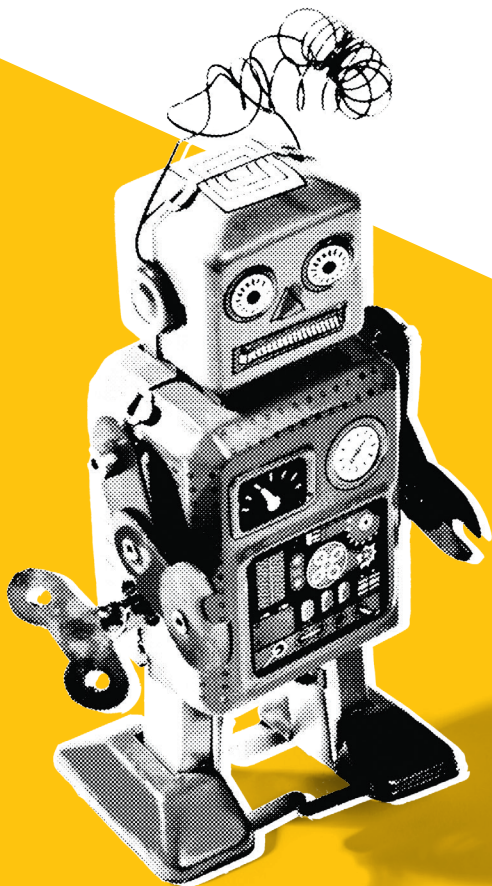
In a letter to membership in January, UUP President Fred Kowal urged members to contact their chapter or labor relations specialist about actions or incidents by campus administration that might infringe upon the rights described in the law.

UUP is using a reporting form on the UUP website to collect reports about different applications in use on various campuses to help flag any conflicts with the LOADinG Act. The information will be used to help UUP both enforce the current law and to press for ever-stronger protections for public employees as AI becomes more prevalent in our workplaces. (See box on facing page for the QR code.)

A patchwork of laws

There are no federal laws that regulate the use of AI in the workplace. Individual state legislatures have passed numerous laws, but New York’s LOADinG Act is the only one to date that speaks directly and broadly to job protections.

In 2025, a law went into effect in California that protects individuals’ digital likeness. It was written to stop employers from using someone’s voice or likeness to create AI-generated replicas — for example, if an actor filmed a commercial and then their likeness was manipulated to promote various other products without the actor giving permission or receiving compensation.



Read the AFL-CIO’s “Principles to Protect Workers” on protections for collective bargaining, safeguarding data and civil rights.

[Click HERE](#)

The law was a response to pressure by the Screen Actors Guild — American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA), which went on strike in 2023 in part because of rising concerns about the use of AI. Also last year, the Illinois Legislature passed a bill amending the Public Community College Act allowing only faculty to teach courses, not AI. The law, which became effective Jan. 1, 2026, doesn't include four-year schools.

Unions taking note

Also in October 2025, the AFL-CIO published "Principles to Protect Workers," calling for broader

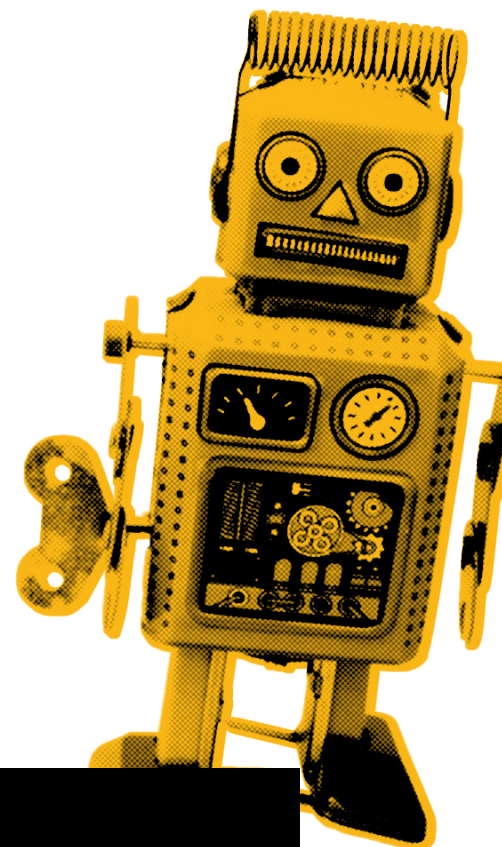
Chief Negotiator Bret Benjamin. At the time The Voice went to press, UUP was addressing AI at the negotiations table with the state.

"I want to protect the work of our bargaining unit by ensuring that experts with degrees, training and work experience make decisions, not a chatbot or algorithm—we need to affirm the importance of expertise, especially in higher education," Benjamin said. "It's a deep union principle: Unions always fight to expand the agency of their workers. We should be making final decisions because we're the ones whose life and work are the most affected."

"It's a deep union principle: Unions always fight to expand the agency of their workers. We're the ones whose life and work are the most affected."

opportunities for collective bargaining, guardrails to make sure workers are informed about data collected by their employers and how it's being used; strong copyright protection; accountability for AI applications; best practices for government use of AI and protection of workers' civil rights.

In the months before UUP began contract negotiations with the state, members of the UUP Negotiating Team surveyed members and visited campuses. AI came up again and again, said UUP



Members are the eyes and ears of the union

UUP is collecting reports about different AI applications in use on campuses. Members are urged to fill out an AI reporting form on the UUP website if they hear that management has expressed interest in or has begun using an AI or Generative AI tool on their campus.

[Click HERE](#)



BUFFALO RALLY

Buffalo State University has a \$16 million deficit, the direct result of years of underfunding by the state that go back to the Cuomo era. A small campus that delivers an exceptional education with a focus on field experience for students, Buffalo State holds a special place in its home city.



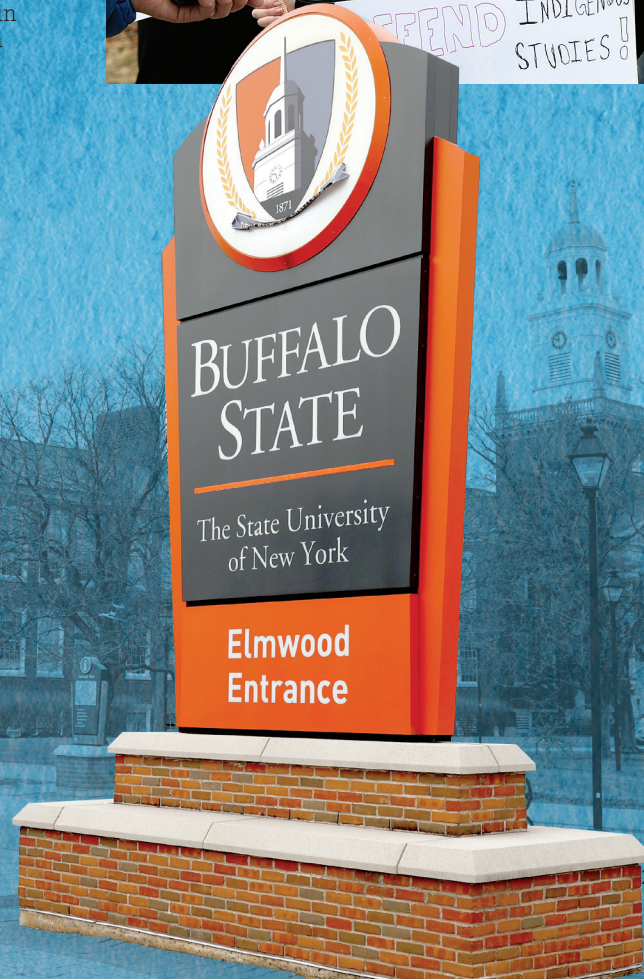
UUP leaders and members, regional unions and Buffalo State students turned out by the hundreds March 10 for a rally to support the campus and to demand that SUNY direct operating funds to Buffalo State and erase this crippling deficit. Speaking to that demand was (left) Lisa Marie Anselmi, the UUP Buffalo State Chapter president.

Joining the rally were former UUP statewide VPP Tom Tucker, center of photo at top right; UUP VPA Alissa Karl, right; and, bottom left, Buffalo State Chapter member and delegate Nicole Scaccia; and, bottom right, Cynthia Fasla, Buffalo State Chapter VPP and delegate.





UUP President Fred Kowal, above, pointed out that the \$16 million that Buffalo State needs is a pittance against the state's overall \$266 billion budget. "What we want, what we demand, is public funding for a public university," Kowal said. Students and members turned out in force for their campus, including Buffalo State member Melanie Mayberry, far right in top right photo; and, in photo to the right, Anthropology students Michaylla Dow, left, and QinDi Gerwitz-Dunn, right.



SUNY FUNDS DELAYED BY BUDGET IMPASSE

UUP working to improve budget outlook for campuses

At the time *The Voice* went to press, the state budget was nearly a month past the April 1 deadline. Every day beyond that deadline means a delay of desperately needed funds for SUNY campuses. UUP members worked hard through the budget season to advocate not only for their campuses, but for all the issues important to UUP that are outlined in the 2026 Legislative Agenda. Among those priorities: state support for

“While I appreciate [a \$49.3 million] investment, it does not go far enough to address the untenable financial situation of most SUNY campuses.”

— UUP President Fred Kowal

campuses and SUNY hospitals and the expansion of the Educational Opportunity Program.

The Executive Budget proposal provided a net increase of \$49.3 million in operating aid to SUNY.

“While I appreciate this investment, it does not

go far enough to address the untenable financial situation of most SUNY campuses,” Kowal told lawmakers during a February budget hearing.

The Senate made no change to Gov. Kathy Hochul’s recommendation, and the Assembly proposed an additional \$22.3 million over the governor’s recommendation, bringing the Assembly proposal to an increase of \$71.6 million. Neither the Executive or the Assembly proposals come close to the UUP request for an additional \$141.8 million, with a request that \$41.8 million of that go to four campuses that face severe budget deficits.

Those campuses and their respective budget deficits are: ESF, \$8.3 million; Buffalo State, \$16 million; Fredonia, \$11 million; Potsdam, \$6.5 million.

UUP has repeatedly noted that the four campuses have operating deficits through no fault of their own; the deficits can be traced back to the strife of the coronavirus pandemic and years of underfunding during the Cuomo era. UUP has also noted that these deficits are a small fraction of the overall state budget and could easily be resolved if the chancellor and the trustees chose to do so by allotting increased state funding to the campuses.

Watch the UUP Connect newsletter for information on funding for SUNY when the final enacted budget is released.



Above: Assemblymember Jonathan Rivera, left, of the 149th Assembly District in the Buffalo area, stopped by to speak to Western New York UUP members during UUP's March 17 Advocacy Day in Albany. Speaking with Rivera were Jude Jayatilleke, Buffalo State Chapter MDO; and Lisa Marie Anselmi, Buffalo State Chapter president.

Left: Sen. Toby Ann Stavisky, Senate higher ed chair, makes an emphatic point to UUP President Fred Kowal before budget testimony started Feb. 24.

Below: Bekkie Bryan, left, of Cortland and Pamela Malone of Empire State—co-chairs of the statewide Outreach Committee—tell members during Advocacy Day about the power of the VOTE-COPE political action fund.



UUP goals that could change lives

Several UUP budget requests focus on students, communities

UUP's annual Legislative Agenda is a compilation of the goals that define the union's mission.

Chief among those goals: UUP's commitment to its members by advocating for a fully funded, affordable education at SUNY. The better off that SUNY is, the more secure its individual campuses are, with strong faculty-to-student ratios, excellent student support services and the opportunity for a valuable, well-rounded education in both rural regions and urban centers.

Around these basics, UUP also strives to honor its commitment to social justice by advocating for pro-

“UUP advocates for stronger support for these four programs that focus on high-needs students.”

grams at SUNY that help the most disadvantaged students and, by extension, the communities from which they come.

“The purpose of a public university is to provide an affordable, excellent education,” UUP President Fred Kowal said, in explaining why the union—which does not represent students—still focuses on programs that support them. “The reason that UUP has the reputation and standing that it does is because we support social justice, upward mobility and equity for everyone. If you combine an affordable public education with a commitment to social justice, you get what you see in our legislative agenda: a strong focus on helping those with the greatest need. It is a mission for this union.”

This is why UUP advocates for stronger support of four programs that focus on high-needs students. Three of these programs are already funded; the fourth has yet to be established.

Educational Opportunity Program

UUP considers EOP the gold standard of opportunity programs, the one that reaches the most students and has proven results. EOP is designed to help students who demonstrate strong potential to succeed in college, but who also need financial and academic support. The program works: EOP students have better first-year retention rates and college completion rates than other SUNY students. The Executive Budget proposal cut \$2.6 million from the EOP budget. UUP asked for a \$20 million increase to the EOP budget, which has never been funded at a level to cover all the qualified applicants. According to SUNY, EOP enrollment has increased by 20% over the past three years while program funding has only increased by 3%; expenses are projected to exceed revenue this year and in future years.

As of this writing it was unknown how much funding EOP got in the new budget. (To read more about EOP, see the link on Page 15.)

The Pre-Medical Opportunity Program

SUNY started the Pre-Medical Opportunity Program in 2021 based on UUP's proposal for a pipeline to medical school for underserved students. The program operates at the SUNY academic medical centers as well as the SUNY College of Optometry in New York City. Students have access to clinical, laboratory and research experiences and preparation for the Medical College Admission Test.

Statistics support the need for more doctors in New York, greater pathways to medical school and

greater representation of underserved populations among medical students. A 2025 report by Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli found that 16 rural counties had severe shortages of primary care, pediatric and ob/gyn doctors; as well shortages of dentists, mental health professionals, physician assistants and nurse practitioners. A 2025 report by the Association of American Medical Colleges found that the number of Black men in medical school increased only fractionally since 1978, from 542 to 552, and that the number of applicants who were the first in their family to attend college declined from 15.4% in 2021 to 13.8% in 2025.

The governor's Executive Budget recommended a \$1 million operating budget for the Pre-Medical Opportunity Program. UUP asked the state to fund the program at \$5 million. The amount in the final enacted budget was unknown as of this writing.

Read more about health care professional shortages and medical school enrollment trends below.

Educational Opportunity Centers

Founded 60 years ago, Educational Opportunity Centers work with low-income nontraditional and returning students. Students can complete high school, prepare to enter college or get career training through free access to EOCs.

The governor's Executive Budget recommended \$72.6 million for the Educational Opportunity Centers and the Advanced Technology Training and Information Networking labs that help students learn digital skills. UUP asked for a funding increase of \$5 million for EOCs. The amount in the final enacted budget was unknown as of this writing. (See link below for more on EOCs.)

Mental Health Educational Opportunity Program

In May 2022, a teenager walked into a Buffalo grocery store and opened fire with a gun, killing

10 people.

The gunman selected the Tops grocery store in Buffalo's East Side neighborhood because he thought he would find mostly Black people in the store to shoot. That massacre shocked the city and reverberated through UUP's three Buffalo chapters, where members live near the targeted store and shop in the neighborhood.

After the shooting, UUP organized a forum on the need for more mental health services for communities of color in the wake of racist incidents such as

“If you combine an affordable public education with a commitment to social justice, you get what you see in our legislative agenda: a strong focus on helping those with the greatest need.”

— UUP President Fred Kowal

the Tops shooting and because of a long history of institutional racism in the United States. Panelists at that forum recounted the terrible aftermath of the shooting on the community, noting that children described being afraid to leave their homes.

In 2023, UUP issued a call for the state to fund the creation of a Mental Health Educational Opportunity Program at SUNY that would be a pipeline to train mental health counselors from underserved communities. UUP is still asking the state to create that program, and the union has renewed that call in this year's budget advocacy.

Although SUNY began in 2024 to offer a pre-professional opportunity program to students pursuing degrees in mental health or engineering, UUP wants to see this program enacted in statute with dedicated recurring funding. UUP is asking for the passage of companion bills that would do this—S.2046 (Webb)/A.3607 (Kelles)—and for the state to provide \$5 million to start the Mental Health EOP.



FURTHER READING

[More about the Educational Opportunity Program](#)



[Health care professional shortages and medical school enrollment trends](#)



[Little improvement for enrollment of Black men in medical school](#)



[Read more about the Pre-Medical Opportunity Program](#)



[More about Educational Opportunity Centers](#)



NO KINGS MARCH 28



NO KINGS

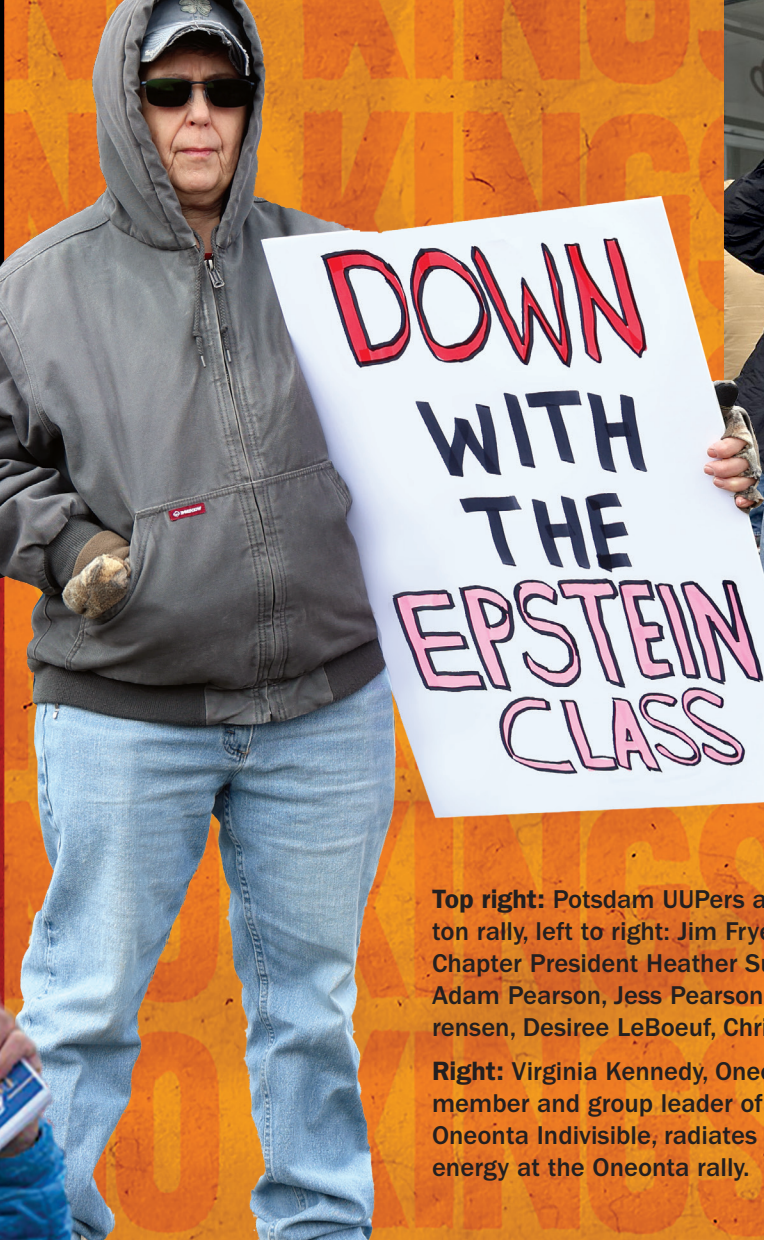
Once again, hundreds of UUP members took to the streets for No Kings, the nationwide coalition of pro-democracy groups, social-justice advocates and labor that has organized three national protests since the 2025 inauguration of the federal regime.

Millions of people have joined No Kings rallies nationally and internationally in June 2025, October 2025 and on March 28, 2026.

Below: UUP President Fred Kowal, left, spoke from the stage at the March 28 rally in Oneonta, joined by (from left) Oneonta members Anthony Nichols, retiree member Bill Simons and member Ethan Fox.

Right: Buffalo Center Chapter member Ryan Taughrin, a candidate for the 143rd Assembly District, stands up for higher ed at the Williamsville rally.





Top right: Potsdam UUPers at the Canton rally, left to right: Jim Fryer, Potsdam Chapter President Heather Sullivan-Catlin, Adam Pearson, Jess Pearson, Anna Sorensen, Desiree LeBoeuf, Christa Haifley.

Right: Virginia Kennedy, Oneonta Chapter member and group leader of Cooperstown Oneonta Indivisible, radiates onstage energy at the Oneonta rally.



Left: Kathleen Kielar, Buffalo Center Chapter president, at a rally in Williamsville.

Above: Morrisville members show their UUP pride. From left: Stephanie Lawhorne, Alex Rendina inside the frog costume and Morrisville Chapter President Stephen Hinkle.

Negotiations team aiming for on-time agreement

UUP contract negotiations with the state are proceeding apace, and the union remains confident that talks will lead to a strong agreement that may be completed before the existing contract expires July 1.

“We entered these talks extremely well prepared and with the mindset that we wanted to move forward deliberately but forcefully, and always with the goal of reaching a timely agreement,” UUP Chief Negotiator Bret Benjamin said. “I think

nation’s largest and most comprehensive higher ed union at a Feb. 4 virtual meeting attended by more than 800 members. “When we go to the table,” he said, “we represent the needs of our members first and foremost, but we also help set the standards for the higher education labor movement nationwide.”

Benjamin echoed this sentiment.

“Although we were targeted in our demands, we believe the full package of UUP proposals represents a transformative vision of higher education,” he said.

In addition to wages and health benefits—areas where UUP always fights for the best possible contractual guarantees—the union’s priorities include expanding job security, establishing AI labor protections, improving career opportunities for professionals and enhancing due-process protections.

“While there are still many issues unsettled and significant disagreement on key topics that will have to be overcome before we reach agreement,” Benjamin said in late April, “important progress has been made on a range of priority issues.”

See Page 19 for how members can make a difference in moving the negotiations process along.

“When we go to the table, we represent the needs of our members first and foremost, but we also help set the standards for the higher education labor movement nationwide.”

our approach set a positive tone for our meetings with the state, and at the nearly four-month mark, I’m happy to report good progress.”

UUP began negotiations on Feb. 4, in what was the earliest start to negotiations in memory and possibly in the union’s 53-year history.

The union relied more heavily on virtual meetings with members ahead of the opening of negotiations, as well as a negotiations survey that garnered more than 13,000 responses. For now, the mood of the UUP Negotiations Team remains optimistic.

A compelling reason to act

“My goal is to get the best possible contract,” Kowal told more than 900 members in a May 5 virtual meeting. “Yes, ideally before the Legislature leaves town, but if it’s not the best we can get I will not sign. It has to be good. I’m optimistic.”

Kowal stressed UUP’s responsibility as the

Cortland colleagues and Negotiations Team members Jaelyn Pittsley, left, an executive board member and former chapter president; with Jen Drake, Cortland Chapter VPP, gearing up for the opening of negotiations February 4.





UUP ASKS MEMBERS to amplify priority demands and secure an on-time deal. Members can visit UUP's negotiations webpage, at uupinfo.org/negotiations, to take seven steps for a strong contract.



Only UUP members can vote to ratify the contract. Click [HERE](#) or scan the QR code below to become a UUP member.



A COLLECTIVE VOICE: UUP RALLIES & EVENTS

Bitter temperatures at the January 23 ICE Out rally in Albany reminded UUP members of what Minneapolis residents endured for weeks during an inhumane crackdown on immigration in that city between December 2025 and February 2026. The ICE occupation resulted in the shooting deaths by ICE agents of two U.S. citizens as they peacefully observed ICE tactics, and the detention of an estimated 3,000 to possibly 3,800 immigrants—most of whom had no criminal record and more than 100 of whom had either legal status or were seeking asylum.



Inset, far left: U.S. Representative Paul Tonko lambasted ICE at the rally.

Below: Among the UUP members in attendance, from left: Albany Chapter President Paul Stasi, and, with succinct messages for ICE, Chief Negotiator Bret Benjamin and statewide Secretary-Treasurer Jeri O'Bryan-Losee.

Above: Empire State Chapter VPP Emma Bowman has one simple piece of advice for the federal regime.





Speaking up for workers, higher ed and a fair contract

AFT President Randi Weingarten (above) at a May 1 May Day rally in Albany with, from left, UUP President Fred Kowal, statewide VPA Alissa Karl and Secretary-Treasurer Jeri O'Bryan-Losee.

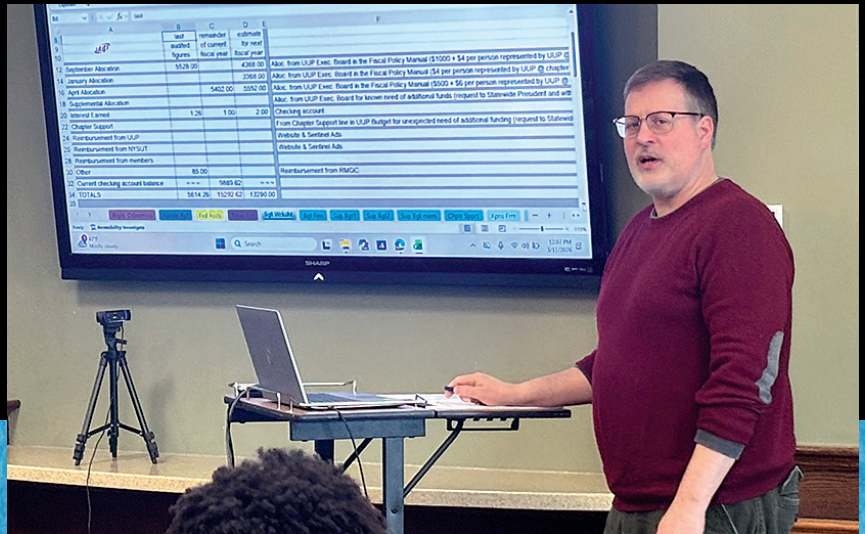
Right, Natalie Baker of the Downstate Chapter at the NYSUT RA May 1 with the UUP delegation.

Bottom right: Plattsburgh members rally April 29 for a fair contract, and bottom left, UUP President Fred Kowal gives a rousing message to students on the state Capitol's Million Dollar Staircase during Higher Education Action Day, Feb. 25.



THANKS FOR SHARING

Photos from UUP members



A shared commitment to the work ahead: The work of the union starts with chapter meetings. These meetings give members a chance to connect with their colleagues, with chapter and statewide leaders and to show solidarity with UUP and contract negotiations.

Above: Oneonta Chapter acting treasurer Michael McAvoy presents a review of the chapter's finances, at that chapter's March 11 meeting. "By the time the budget came up for approval, members weren't just voting on a spreadsheet; they were unanimously endorsing a shared commitment to the work ahead," Chapter President Shirley Clark noted.

Left: More than 75 members attended the Old Westbury Chapter meeting and solidarity rally March 12, where members discussed contract talks, general morale on campus and recent wins for the chapter. Chapter President Annessa Babic announced a first-ever coffee with the campus human resources department to discuss concerns.

Below, left: Five new Albany Chapter members are ready to support contract negotiations after David Banks, the chapter officer for contingents, signed up these English graduate students. Proud new members are, from left, Julian Mostachetti, Sof Voet (in blue shirt), Shaw Patton (in black T-shirt), Tayla Straub, second from right; and Annie Zimmerman, far right. They are with UUP member Erica Fretwell, front row, far left, an associate professor of English.

Below, right: Albany Chapter President Paul Stasi, left, and statewide MDO Patrick Romain—who is also the chapter VPP—at a March 11 membership meeting.




Got some photos from a recent chapter event? Photos of your chapter members volunteering in the community? We'd love to see them and feature them here. Please email photos to Voice Managing Editor Darryl McGrath at dmcgrath@uupmail.org. We will select photos to showcase in Thanks for Sharing.



Top: Old Westbury members proudly show off their new chapter T-shirts. **Center:** UUP Organizer David Grant, left, speaks at the Oneonta Chapter's March chapter meeting. Listening intently are, facing, Alayna Vender Veer and Matthew Unangst. **Bottom:** Albany Chapter members show support for UUP's contract negotiations with the state. Bret Benjamin of the Albany Chapter (not pictured) is UUP's chief negotiator.

The power of claiming your own way of speaking

Binghamton speech-therapy pathologist knows what it's like to stutter and draws on his experience to help others find confident voices



Cody Dew knew as a child that there was something different about the way he spoke, so he learned to hide the fact that he sometimes struggled to say the words he wanted to use.

He would switch in mid-sentence from a word he sensed would cause him to stutter, to one he could say more easily. Or he would “play dumb,” as he put it, and hope that his puzzled expression would convey, “Sorry, I didn’t catch that.”

That would prompt the person speaking to him to repeat themselves, and Dew would use the extra time to frame an answer.

He was always trying to conceal the fact that he found it difficult to speak fluently, even though it would be years before he realized that his speech difficulty was not the anxiety disorder that doctors first thought it was.

Dew was a child who stuttered, and he became an adolescent and a young adult who stuttered before an expert offered him help that changed his life. Now, that expert is one of Dew’s colleagues, and Dew is an assistant professor of speech pathology at Binghamton University who shows others how to let go of the exhausting effort to compensate that is second nature for many people who stutter.

“In growing up, I always knew I was anxious because I’d feel, ‘My words get stuck,’” recalled Dew, now 30. “I think I got so good at concealing it.”

Concealing a stutter takes effort

As a researcher and clinician who works with people who stutter, Dew—a UUP Binghamton Chapter member—knows his clients often do all the things he used to do. They pause, switch words, act as though

«« **Cody Dew**
Binghamton University

they misunderstood a question to buy time.

Stuttering can influence people's choices. Dew and his mentor and colleague, Binghamton Chapter member Rodney Gabel, collaborated on a 2024 study of the biases that can steer people who stutter into careers perceived as "appropriate" because those careers don't require frequent talking. Dew recently explained their findings in the nationally syndicated radio show, *The Academic Minute*.

Gabel is the speech-language pathologist who suggested an intensive speech-therapy program to Dew when he became Dew's undergraduate academic advisor at the University of Toledo. A professor of speech-language pathology, Gabel also founded the Di-

vision of Speech and Language Pathology at Binghamton's Decker College of Nursing and Health Sciences.

they do on their own to deal with stuttering. Learning that you can't stop stuttering, but you can gain confidence about communicating with a stutter, is often a source of relief to new clients in speech therapy.

Sometimes, new clients have the counterintuitive result of stuttering more in the early stages of speech therapy, because they stop avoiding the need to speak. This happened to Dew.

"I thought I would go into this program and I would not stutter," he recalled. "I left that first day stuttering more. Stuttering isn't caused by anxiety; my brain's wired differently. That

“The most important thing I learned was that we can't control that we stutter, but we can control how.”



vision of Speech and Language Pathology at Binghamton's Decker College of Nursing and Health Sciences.

Gabel said it's extremely rewarding to see a former student develop into a colleague. He remembers Dew first talking to him about his interest in speech-language pathology. By then, Dew realized he was a person who stuttered; what he didn't yet know were effective ways he could deal with that.

"I basically said to him, 'You came to the right place, because I'm a person who stutters,'" Gabel recalled. He would eventually advise Dew in his doctoral research and hire him at Binghamton, a step in their professional collaboration that "closes the loop," Gabel said.

Letting go of coping devices

Stuttering is a neurophysiological disorder—as Dew puts in it, the brain is wired differently in people who stutter. More boys than girls stutter, and more boys than girls stutter beyond childhood. There's also a genetic component: About 5% of children will stutter and about 80% of them will spontaneously stop stuttering.

People who stutter can often speak fluently if singing or performing. That's because everyday speech comes from the left side of the brain, and the speech used in recitation and performance comes from the right side of the brain. There's a long list of famous performers whose audiences don't realize they stutter.

The treatment is individualized and focuses on helping people who stutter let go of the many things

was laid out very clearly on Day 1. I

think the most important thing I learned was that we can't control that we stutter, but we can control how we stutter."

Dew has come a long way from the little boy who avoided speaking. Now, as he helps clients face situations where they may stutter, he also helps them focus on whether they accomplished their goal. He recalled a client who avoided placing an order at a coffee shop, where she had a line of people behind her and a staff member at the register in front of her. With the help of speech therapy and exposure therapy—facing the situation she avoided—the client eventually did place an order at the counter. To her frustration, she still stuttered when she did it.

That's when Dew asked: Did you get what you ordered? She did, and he told her she succeeded.

"The goal is to make stuttering easier," Dew said. "The goal is not to stop it, because you can't stop it. The thing I hope for most of my clients is not to view stuttering as 'bad' and not view fluency as 'good,' but to consider whether you accomplished your goal."

Hear Dew's Academic Minute segment: [Click HERE](#)



UUP: NEXT GEN

Members inspire, motivate future unionists

By Leigh Hornbeck

Unions have always been a presence in Tom Tucker's life. His mom was a school teacher, his father was a laborer, he had a grandfather who was a Teamster and a grandmother who worked for the phone company. The union was a constant in family life — meetings, weddings at the union hall, walking in parades on Labor Day.

"It's not like you think about it much as a kid, but unions were there, and when I got old enough to work, I went to my IATSE Local and got a job as a stagehand. While my friends were flipping burgers, I was making decent money. I worked my way through college," Tucker said, referencing the International Alliance of Theatrical State Employees.

Later, Tucker, now 68, joined UUP as an employee at the University at Buffalo.

Growing up union also shaped Tucker's point of view. He became an adult who would fight for the underdog.

Across the state and 18 years younger, Casey Slocum grew up in Broome County. Her father was a salesman and her mother was a nurse's aide. Neither had the opportunity to join a union. Slocum's first exposure to a union was as an adult when she worked for Sodexo, the food services vendor at Binghamton University. Slocum was a manager, so she wasn't eligible to join the union. In 2018 she moved into a job as Print Shop Coordinator in the

university's communications and marketing department where she was eventually approached by a UUP member about joining the union.

"He invited me to sit in on a meeting to see if it was for me," Slocum said. "I was shocked by how much the union did that I thought was the university." Slocum, 49, started going to UUP meetings in 2022. She learned that she had a voice and that she didn't have to accept what she was told. That knowledge and the solidarity she discovered as a UUP member gave her confidence,

which helped her in her search for a different position when she felt she hit a plateau in her job and wanted a new challenge. She found a role she loves as a space planning assistant in the Binghamton University Office of Course Building and Academic Space Management.

She was elected to the Professional Staff Senate and joined the Binghamton UUP Chapter's environment committee. Along the way, Slocum realized she wasn't the only one on a journey.

Her 14-year-old daughter, Abby, was watching every step she took toward becoming an outspoken advocate for workers. It wasn't long before

Abby started coming to chapter meetings. When Slocum was elected as a chapter delegate to UUP's Delegate Assembly, she learned Abby could attend, too.

"She has strong opinions and she's empathetic," Slocum said. "She likes to help people, and she watches the news, which I didn't when I was 14. She knows what's going on and she wants to have a say in it."

Mother and daughter's first DA was in September 2024. Photographs from the weekend show the enthusiasm and optimism supporters of Vice President Kamala Harris were feeling about Harris' presi-



Above: Former statewide VPP Tom Tucker, above, grew up in a union household but realizes that familiarity with the labor movement is more rare these days. Now, he's a mentor to young members of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE).

dential race. Abby joined a march from the Albany Hilton to the Capitol. She also sat through the DA plenary sessions and took notes. She learned the lyrics to “Solidarity Forever”—which delegates sing at every DA—and attended the annual trivia contest with her mom.

“It was cool to see people fighting for the same things,” Abby said. “I thought unions were groups of people who went to protests. Now I know [being in a union means] fighting for workers and without unions there would be fewer protections for workers and lower wages.”

Abby has attended even more DAs since the fall of 2024, including the Spring 2026 DA. Meanwhile, she’s become known among the Binghamton Chapter members. Slocum said she’s noticed Abby become more confident in general. The union is something she talks about with her friends.

Union numbers shrink

The difference between Tucker and Slocum’s exposure to unions has to do with upbringing, location and time frame. Born in 1957 in Buffalo, a city known for its union strength, Tucker’s formative years closely followed labor’s strongest years in the U.S. Union membership as a percentage of total employment peaked at around 35% in the 1950s after a steady increase from the 1880s. In recent years, the total has hovered around 10%, including both private and public sectors. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 6% of private-sector workers were unionized in 2025. That percentage is more than five times higher among public-sector workers, around 33%.

Changing labor laws and the types of jobs available have caused the drop in union membership. Domestic manufacturing was a big driver of membership in the mid-20th century, but it fell off as those jobs disappeared both because of improvements in technology and companies moving manufacturing overseas. Right-to-work legislation ended automatic membership and gutted union rolls. The last few decades have also seen the rise of service jobs — small workplaces where turnover is high and the opportunities for organizing and solidarity are lower.

Even as membership hasn’t made sig-

nificant gains, the news stories and publicity around the struggle to organize at both Amazon and Starbucks have led to higher approval rates for unions. Since Gallup first began asking Americans what we thought of labor unions in 1936, the highest point was in 1953 when the approval rating was 75%. It dropped to 48% in 2009 and then rebounded to above 60% since 2017.

In August 2025, a Gallup poll showed 68% of American adults approve of labor unions. It was the fifth consecutive year approval has been in the 67% to 71% range, which coincides with organizing efforts at Starbucks, Amazon, REI, Volkswagen, Trader Joe’s and other popular companies. The campaigns have won public sympathy even when the union’s gains have been small in most cases. Starbucks and Amazon have refused to negotiate with the unions.

Morgan Provo, 20, a student at the University at Buffalo, works at the Elmwood Avenue Starbucks in Buffalo, the first of the corporate-owned stores to have a union after the employees approved it in



Right: Binghamton member Casey Slocum with her daughter, Abby, at the March 28 No Kings rally in Binghamton. Slocum has encouraged Abby to attend chapter meetings and delegate assemblies as a way of teaching her about union values.

December 2021. They advocated for better staffing, training and pay.

“Every day we have two or three people on when it should be four during rushes and we can’t catch up,” Provo said. “We’re told the menu is going to be shorter but they added new recipes instead.”

Provo works a second job at a hotel. She lives on UB’s campus.

Provo and some of her Starbucks coworkers were recently on strike. They spent the time picketing and visiting other Starbucks stores to convince baristas to join their union, Starbucks Workers United. The company has met with workers but the union has filed over 90 unfair labor practice charges claiming Starbucks has failed to bargain in good faith.

To deter workers from unionizing, the company offers full online tuition at Arizona State University toward a bachelor’s degree and provides health insurance for its employees—but employees must work at

machine breaks—they say, “Way to go, Brian!”

New tactics

Tom Tucker’s 50 years of union activism have allowed him to see major changes in the movement and how organizing techniques have changed. Gone are the days when certain unions strong-armed people into signing a union card. Gone, too, (thanks to *Janus*) are the days when unions could count on dues from employees who became members automatically when they started work. That’s been a blessing in disguise, Tucker said, because it has forced union leaders to go out and talk to membership. He also praised UUP’s decision to create a political action committee, the Higher Ed Action Fund.

“People see the value of politics when it comes time to compel a venue to play by the rules,” Tucker said. Tucker also watched IATSE change its approach, from hoarding work to inviting young people into apprenticeships to teach them the job. These days, the union sends people to leadership training. Negotiations are a slog in the theater world; management at each venue has its own contract with the union, Tucker said.

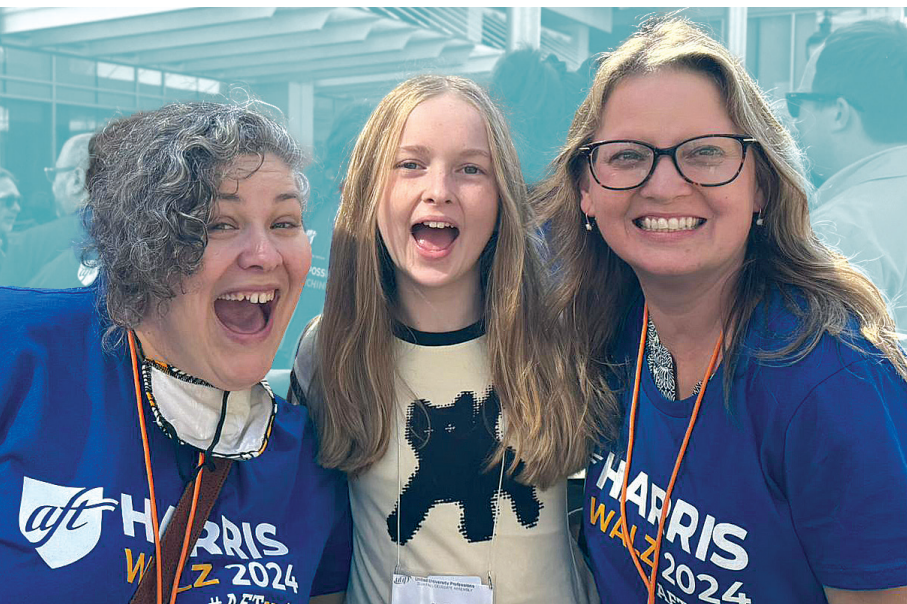
Tucker joined UUP in the early 1990s. One of his first jobs was working on the crew building the University at Buffalo’s Center for the Arts. Tucker and the workers alongside him worked 80 hours a week to meet the deadline for opening the venue. They were told they would have a chance to take their accumulated comp time, but management kept pushing back the date. Then, management told them the comp time was going to expire.

Tucker and his coworkers didn’t have permanent appointments and they were afraid they would lose their jobs if they pushed the issue. Still, they went to their union rep to see if UUP could help. The chapter president and the grievance officer took the issue to management.

They didn’t their comp time back on that job, but as a result of the union’s intervention, management stopped the tactic of repeatedly pushing back the date on the use of comp time in subsequent situations.

Grateful for the support, Tucker became a leader in his chapter and in UUP statewide. He was elected statewide vice president for professionals in 2017. After his term ended in 2021, Tucker returned to IATSE and served as president for three years. He retired in 2024. Instead of handing in his union card, he stayed on at the request of the local to serve as a labor consultant. He is a mentor to younger unionists.

“I vowed not to be the old guy who wouldn’t get out of the way,” Tucker said. “The kids today have a different way of doing things. I’m just a guide so they don’t get discouraged.”



Abby Benning, center, at her first DA in the fall of 2024 with her mom, Casey Slocum, right, and Binghamton Chapter member Courtney Ignari, left.

least 20 hours to qualify for those benefits. Provo said she asks to work at least 15 hours, but typically she’s only on the schedule for 12 hours; she’s rarely scheduled for 20 hours.

Provo said 25 baristas work at the Elmwood Avenue Starbucks store and nearly all of them are in the union. Being in a union builds a sense of togetherness, and it feels good to be part of something, even when working conditions haven’t changed. She said she and her coworkers make jokes about Starbucks CEO, Brian Niccol, who said he supported baristas and negotiating with the union when he was hired in 2024. Provo said she hasn’t seen evidence he meant it and she and her coworkers feel tired and frustrated. When something goes wrong — the milk order is late, or a

SPRING DA:

ELECTIONS, CONTRACT TALKS AND NEW CHALLENGES

UUP delegates unanimously reelected President Fred Kowal to a fourth term, setting him on track to become the longest-serving leader of the nation's largest higher education union.

Kowal ran unopposed and was elected by acclamation, with UUP Secretary-Treasurer Jeri O'Bryan-Losee casting one symbolic vote. Kowal was first elected in 2013. Only William Scheuerman, UUP president from 1993 to 2007, has served longer. The election of Kowal and other statewide leaders took place April 25, during the 2026 Spring Delegate Assembly in Albany.

Delegates also elected two statewide officers—O'Bryan-Losee and Membership Development Office Patrick Romain—by acclamation as unopposed candidates.

Elected as at-large academic executive board members were Bret Benjamin (Albany), who is also the UUP chief negotiator in the ongoing contract talks with the state; Samuel Marquez (Downstate); Bekkie Bryan (Cortland); and Matthew Smith (ESF). Elected as at-large professional executive board members were Redetha Abrahams-Nichols (Downstate); Mindy Heath (Upstate Medical University) and Brendan McGovern (Binghamton). Pamela Malone (Empire State) was elected

» UUP President Fred Kowal declared UUP to be strong and steadfast, but he also warned that the fallout of the federal regime's often unconstitutional and costly actions could hit higher education, the labor movement and New Yorkers by next year.

as a specialized executive board member.

Union strength, with a warning

Kowal declined to deliver remarks supporting his nomination, but his address during the plenary on Friday, April 24, set out his goals and projections for the union's near future.

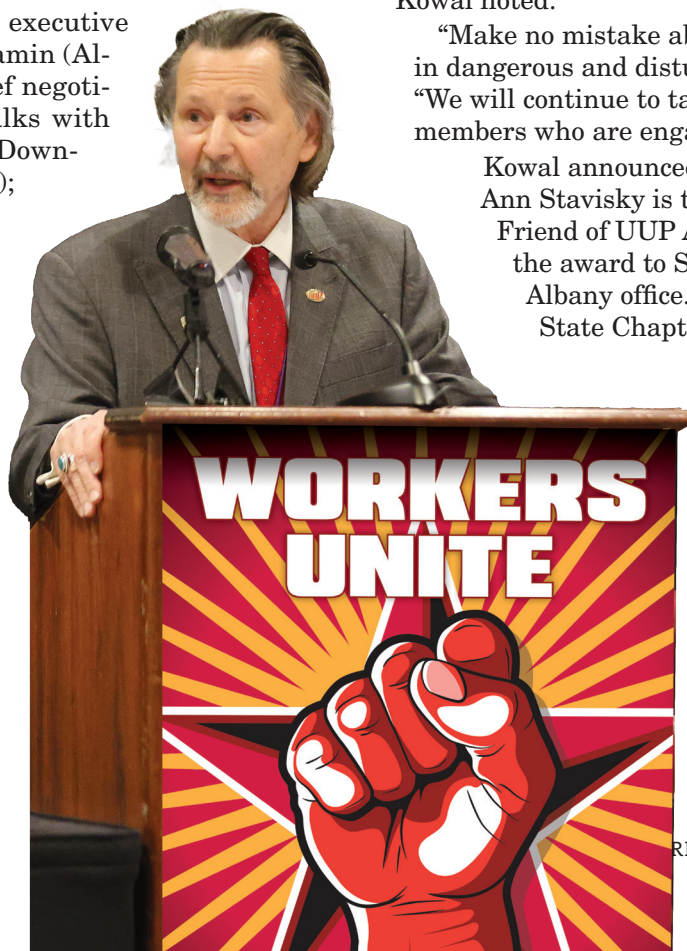
The state of the union is, in Kowal's words, "damned strong," but he also warned delegates of challenges to come. He cited the exorbitant costs of the federal regime's illegal war against Iran—which could very likely mean funding cuts for domestic programs—and the deadly actions of Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers.

An Upstate Medical University Chapter member, Alcibiades "Alex" Lazaro Ramirez González, is fighting deportation after his arrest and detention by ICE last year, and the chilling effect of the federal crack-down on immigration is felt throughout SUNY, Kowal noted.

"Make no mistake about it: We are living in dangerous and disturbing times," he said. "We will continue to take steps and to support members who are engaged in resistance."

Kowal announced that state Sen. Toby Ann Stavisky is the recipient of the 2026 Friend of UUP Award; Kowal presented the award to Stavisky May 12 in her Albany office. Also, longtime Buffalo State Chapter and statewide leader

Fred Floss received the Judith Wishnia Award. Floss served as UUP acting president from November 2007 to February 2008. The Wishnia award, named for UUP activist and member Judy Wishnia, recognizes UUP members





who have rendered exceptional union service and advocated tirelessly for UUP, labor, equity and humanity.

Also at the DA, delegates overwhelmingly approved the UUP budget, and they heard an update on the fast-paced negotiations for a new contract with the state. The union is on track to achieve the first on-time agreement in memory, Benjamin told the gathering. He urged members to continue speaking up for an on-time contract, and to learn about seven steps that chapters and individual members can take to help UUP negotiators win a strong contract. (See QR Code below.)

Resolutions

Delegates approved resolutions defending the integrity of higher education against authoritarian assaults; opposing the incursion of artificial intelligence companies into higher education; opposing U.S. militarization nationally and globally; endorsing the Amherst Compact on unified goals in contract negotiations and calling for labor unions to end partnerships with Open AI.



Left, from bottom: Longtime New Paltz Chapter President Beth Wilson with Fred Kowal after he honored her service as a chapter and statewide activist and leader. **Center left:** Friends, colleagues, leaders, from left: NYSUT Secretary-Treasurer and former UUP statewide VPP Philippe Abraham, former statewide MDO Edison Bond and statewide MDO Patrick Romain. **Top:** Statewide VPP Carolyn Kube, left, and VPA Alissa Karl deliver their reports during the plenary.

*Keep up on negotiations,
and find ways you can
make a difference*

[Click HERE](#)





Democracy in action and a show of strength for a fair contract at the UUP Spring 2026 Delegate Assembly, April 24-25 in Albany. Top left: Farmingdale Chapter President Yolanda Drakkir speaking during the plenary; top right, Secretary-Treasurer Jeri O'Bryan-Losee casts a ballot during executive board elections; center, Chief Negotiator Bret Benjamin updates delegates on contract negotiations; and enthused members at the DA stand in support of a fair contract.

Delegates also approved several resolutions introduced on the floor, including one in support of New Paltz member Anthony Dandridge following his nonrenewal.

Additional resolutions from the floor memorialized Richard Tyler, a beloved Oneonta Chapter activist, treasurer and delegate; Eloise Briere, a longtime Albany Chapter member and former chapter assistant vice president for academics; William Herbert, executive director of the National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions at Hunter College; and Dennis Selzner, a former NYSUT labor relations specialist known for his years of service to UUP members.



» MEMBER BENEFITS

New for members: Life insurance with “Living Benefits”

UUP active members now have a way to prepare for the unexpected, through a life insurance policy that offers long-term care protection to help support your loved ones if you develop a chronic condition or a terminal illness diagnosis.

This benefit is available through UUP’s Member Services Trust.

This life insurance policy will provide benefits to you during your lifetime, with financial support when it is most needed. The plan provides up to \$150,000 in living benefits.

These benefits are available for working members, their spouses and children. Features include:

- Chronic condition support to help with ongoing care and daily expenses
- Help with financial needs after the diagnosis of a terminal illness

- Tax-deferred cash value accumulation
- An increase in your death benefit in the future without evidence of insurability
- Coverage can continue during periods of unemployment
- Option for paid-up coverage for life with continue tax-deferred cash value growth
- Portable coverage to keep through job changes and retirement

UUP active members are guaranteed of acceptance for the policy with no medical questions, exams or blood tests required.



For more information,
call 888-213-8498
or click [HERE](#).

