



THE UNION SOUND

THE VOICE OF A SOUND UNION



Jan./Feb. 2023

Rondout Valley Federation of Teachers and School-Related Professionals

Volume 47, Issue 3

**JOIN US FOR AN EVENING
OF SOLIDARITY
(AND POPCORN!)**




NYSUT: The First 50 Years
The story of one of America's most powerful labor unions.

NYSUT FILM SCREENING
MONDAY, MARCH 13 AT 5PM
ROSENDALE THEATRE, 408 MAIN ST.
FREE AND OPEN TO ALL NYSUT MEMBERS

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER YOUR ATTENDANCE](#)

ORGANIZED AND SPONSORED BY
ULSTER COUNTY UNION LOCAL PRESIDENTS
FOLLOWED BY A Q&A WITH ANDY PALLOTTA AND MELINDA PERSON




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The Union Sound

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President's Message

by Robert McDonough

THE STATE OF OUR UNION

I would like to talk about the history of our RVF family as well as the history of NYSUT, our state affiliate union. I am very proud of some recent actions taken by your RVF Executive Committee, which is made up of all your elected union representatives, including your building and unit reps and your RVF officers. For the first time in the history of the RVF, we are sponsoring resolutions on the floor of NYSUT's annual Representative Assembly (RA). In fact, the RVF is sponsoring not one, not two, but *eight* resolutions. In the five decades since our union was created, we have never sponsored a single resolution on the floor of the RA.

Those of you that signed up for the March 13th NYSUT film screening at Rosendale Theatre will get to learn about our state union's history, and I am confident that you will find it very informative and interesting. Our local union, the RVF, was created around the same time as NYSUT. With over 750 public school districts in New York, the RA has thousands of delegates representing unions from across the state. The number of delegates each union gets is based on its size: one delegate for every 100 members. The RVF has three delegates because we have approximately 340 members. It can be quite intimidating at the conference for our three delegates because they will be surrounded by thousands of delegates from all over New York. Other very large unions like UFT in New York City and the Buffalo Teachers Federation have hundreds of delegates representing their local unions. These enormous unions usually steal the show and the majority of resolutions are initiated by their delegates. As they often vote together as a block or caucus, they very easily drown out the voices of the smaller unions with less delegates, like us. But not this year! This year, in front of roughly 4,000 delegates, the RVF will have our name represented on the huge screen as a sponsor of the eight different resolutions everyone will vote on.

The RA is about three days long. This year, it is at the end of April in Albany. Resolutions passed on the floor of the RA give NYSUT its legislative and lobbying charge for the coming year; their direction on what they need to lobby state and federal legislators for. The RA works similarly to Congress, in that sub committees are created to review all resolutions. They are then voted on in committee. Some resolutions never make it out of committee and the ones that do, are brought to the full floor of the RA where the

thousands of delegates vote on these resolutions. In a NYSUT election year like this year, the RA is also where the delegates vote for the NYSUT officers and leadership.

The eight resolutions that your RVF will be sponsoring this year are: creating union leadership mentoring programs, maintaining and defending academic freedom, school safety for all, funding the SUNY public hospitals, educator safety within our schools, safe staffing in special education classes, fixing tier 6, and fixing FMLA so that more of our members are eligible for this family leave. Currently, if someone doesn't work at least 1250 hours in the year before needing a leave, they are ineligible. We are looking for NYSUT to lobby for lowering that 1250-hour threshold to help more of our RVF members when they need it the most.

Kim McEvoy, our RVF Treasurer, brought these resolutions to me and asked if we could sponsor them. As president, I am required to bring RA resolutions to our Executive Committee for approval. I put these resolutions on our agenda and your elected representatives voted unanimously to approve our sponsorship of them.

So this April, your three elected RA delegates (myself, Tara Thibault-Edmonds, and Kim McEvoy) will be on the floor of the RA to vote on all the resolutions brought before us. This year will be very different from other years for us, however, as we will get to see our small local union of only 340 members sponsor eight different resolutions. Our small union, nestled in the rural valley of Rondout, will receive state-wide recognition and the thousands of delegates from all over the state will go home at the end of that weekend knowing where Rondout Valley is and who the RVF is. Our small union with only three delegates will make a very loud statement across the state for the first time ever, and I am so proud of this. I would like to thank Kim McEvoy for bringing these resolutions to me and for asking me to have the RVF sponsor them. I would also like to thank the RVF Executive Committee for unanimously passing these sponsorships. And lastly, I want to thank all of you. Working beside each of you every day and watching the amazing things you do for our students and community gives me the fuel to help drive this union forward. I look forward to seeing some of you at the March 13th film screening where we can all learn more about our history together. I also look forward to the RVF's future as we begin to leave our mark on New York State. As of February 2023, I am happy to report that the state of our union is strong and getting stronger.

Kim's Corner

by Kim McEvoy

Peer Support Line:

Life sometimes can be challenging, but being a NYSUT and RVF union member can help. The Peer Support Line is a new, no-cost service provided through NYSUT Member Benefits. This confidential helpline, staffed by trained in-service and retired individuals, can provide answers, resources and empathetic support when you need it most. For more information or to speak with someone at the Peer Support Line, call toll-free: 1-844-444-0152.

Financial Counseling:

Have you used the free Financial Counseling Services provided to you through the RVF Employees Benefit Trust? Stacey Braun Associates, Inc. will assist you with financial goals either in person or through Zoom. They do not sell anything and are invested in helping you now and in the future. Please call them for your confidential appointment at 1-888-949-1925.

Other NYSUT Member Benefits:

Are you shopping for a car, need home energy services such as propane or oil, going skiing, taking a flight, or going to a theme park? The discounts that NYSUT offers are amazing, but you have to log on to see for yourself! Just go to www.nysut.org and create an account if you do not already have one. Guess what? They also have an app which you can download to your cell phone so all the discounts are always at your fingertips. I saved an incredible amount of money utilizing these benefits, and you can, too.

As a member of the Rondout Valley Federation of Teachers and School-Related Professionals, you are also a member of NYSUT and our affiliates, which are the NEA (National Education Association) and AFT (American Federation of Teachers). This is where the RVF started. If you need some assistance with any of the things mentioned above, please let me know.

Dates to Remember:

- Health insurance buyout forms are due by April 1 each year with notices going out in March.
- Open enrollment for health insurance is in June of each year for a July 1 start date.
- Flex Plan forms are due by the first Friday of June each year.
- Salary Escrow changes/enrollment is due by mid-August to begin in September.
- Open enrollment for Dental/Vision is in September for an October 1 start date.

Political Action:

This past year has been filled with political action. Last July, as the statewide-elected delegate for the NEA, I voted on resolutions with many others from across the country. The long hours on Zoom calls allowed me to have my voice heard. The remaining days of July and August, when not working at the district office, were full of dedicating evenings, Fridays, and even some weekends serving as both your RVF Political Action Coordinator and NYSUT's SRP Political Action Coordinator. One of my roles was to interview candidates who were seeking endorsements from NYSUT. We looked at voting records, signed onto bills and worked what seemed like nonstop hours. This work continues today, but it is important work that must be done. I also found myself speaking on the convention floor at the AFL-CIO conference with many other union brothers and sisters in attendance.

Once the endorsement process was complete, and recommendations were made, NYSUT's Board of Directors and Officers voted. The next step in the process included phone banking, participating in labor walks, and writing postcards. These tasks are vital, and help ensure we do not lose funding for public education, resulting in layoffs like we have seen in the past. During those trying times, school-related professionals were mostly the first ones to be cut. I would like to thank several of my union sisters who took the time to make phone calls and showed up for labor walks beside me, because it does matter. Many of our SRPs have second and third jobs, but they all know and saw what can happen if we don't advocate and make our voices heard. The many SRPs and teachers I saw on election night made the world of difference, and I want to say THANK YOU!

I want to be clear that although sometimes I, our local, and NYSUT may not agree on everything that the candidates we endorse stand for, it is important that we represent each other and our students by supporting the schools where we work or live. And by the way, we don't always agree with our significant others 100% of the time, but we still support them.

Lastly, I am proud to say that the RVF has, for the first time, sponsored many resolutions going to the Representative Assembly to be voted on by a few thousand people on the convention floor at the end of April. I will have the honor, along with our RVF RA Delegates, Tara Thibault-Edmonds and Rob McDonough, to support us all. We are sponsoring the following resolutions (among many others): FMLA for SRPs, fixing tier 6, safe staffing, union leadership mentoring, academic freedom, educator safety, and supporting SUNY Hospitals. You can read more in the upcoming issue of *NYSUT United*.

Our fight will continue, and I am proud to be part of a union that cares.

History Corner

by Jennifer Slauson

STOP TALKING

Over the past few years, there has been an unrelenting succession of educational gag orders sponsored by lawmakers across the country. Through laws and executive actions, states censor and suppress viewpoints that do not uphold American mythology or procrustean patriotism and restrict how teachers can discuss race, gender, sexual identity, and American history in their classrooms. You can find all of these [restrictions here](#). The “divisive concepts” that are the focus of much of this proposed legislation have their origins in a Trump-era [executive order](#) (which was revoked upon Biden taking office), that defined divisive concepts such as race and sex stereotyping and banned certain types of diversity training in federal agencies, the Armed Forces, and by government contractors. While dog whistles had been blowing for several years, it was the murder of George Floyd, the eruption of protest that followed, and teachers introducing new lessons that turned attention to police brutality, racism, and bias that unleashed a swarm of conservative commentators and think tanks to push the administration into issuing the executive order. Since then, 193 educational gag-order bills have been introduced in state legislatures. Nineteen K-12 specific laws have been passed in fifteen states (that’s over 1/3 of states), leaving 122 million people living, teaching, and learning in gag-order states.

You have seen the headlines: “DeSantis signs ‘Don’t Say Gay’ bill,” “School Board in Tennessee bans teaching of Holocaust novel *Maus*,” “Georgia Gov. Kemp signs bill into law that limits discussions about race in classrooms,” “Black lawmakers walk out as Mississippi Senate passes legislation described as a critical race theory bill”—it’s everywhere. Just recently in the Republican rebuttal to Biden’s State of the Union address, newly-elected Arkansas Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders boasted how “upon taking office just a few weeks ago, I signed executive orders to ban CRT, racism and indoctrination in our schools, and eliminate the use of the derogatory term ‘LatinX’ in our government.” In Texas, a school administrator warned teachers they would have to [include “opposing” views on the Holocaust](#) in their classrooms. I believe that the Nazis were bad, I say that. Teachers in our junior high school are starting to read *Night* with their students. I wonder how they would have complied if they were teaching it in Texas.

While issues of race, class, and gender probably do not frequently arise in most classroom discussions, teachers of



social studies and English are tasked almost daily with explaining the complexities and hard truths of the human condition and its histories. At the high school level, we teach the rise of Hitler, we explain where his racist ideas came from, how they duped the population, controlled the media narrative, and painfully we teach what happened as a result. We do the same for slavery, suffrage, civil rights, and other genocides, recognized or not. We teach *Brown*, *Loving*, *Obergefell*, and *Roe*. There are no national history or civics standards in the United States. The New York State framework for social studies includes these horrors of mankind, thankfully. Radical legislation like the bills mentioned earlier denies divisions that have and continue to exist in our society and presumes that if we sugarcoat, simplify, or hide young people from uncomfortable conversations around these issues, such divisions will miraculously disappear and absolve the collective us from having to face history’s ripples. Like how if you don’t talk about sex, teens won’t get STDs or get pregnant.

In addition, we teach about our government and its founding documents; “all men created equal,” and “Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech.” Ironically, for years many conservative lawmakers and talking heads on TV have been in an uproar over wokeness and lack of freedom of speech on college campuses, and yet now these same people are advancing legislation that directly attacks freedom of expression at both the K-12 level and in higher education. There are currently seven states with higher ed gag orders in place.

On February 1st, coinciding with Black History Month, the College Board released its official course framework for AP African American Studies. The course has been under development for over ten years and the collective sigh of “It’s about 🤒 time...” was palpable. Sixty schools across the country have been piloting the APAAS course this year, with hundreds more slated to begin next school year, and all schools will be able to offer the course by 2024/25. But as you can imagine, some are not celebrating. After heavy criticism from Florida Governor DeSantis, who said that the curriculum was not historically accurate and violated state law that regulates how race-related issues are taught in public schools, and considering the slew of similar pending legislation across the country, the College Board revised its curriculum. The CB says that the changes made were not political; that they were made before DeSantis’ speech. But it still smells political: reportedly, they had been hearing from pilot school principals that they are concerned they’ll be in violation (like DeSantis said) and that some of the content was too dense or too controversial for the scope of the course. To appease the right (and ensure the CB continues to earn bank from said states), they purged the names of many Black writers and scholars associated with critical race theory (Crenshaw, Davis), the Black queer experience (Baldwin, Cohen), and Black feminism (hooks, Lorde, Walker), and ushered out some politically fraught topics, like prison industrial complex, Black Lives Matter, intersectionality, and the debate over reparations. Their reduction also makes offering the course less “controversial” by curtailing its content around 1980—a

stopping point that allows us to celebrate the feel-good progress and achievements of the Civil Rights Movement, but also one which happens to coincide with a time when black intellectualism and contemporary theorists/scholarship begins to gain greater recognition in academia as well as the moment when the war on drugs and its destructive repercussions begins to expand. It won’t be taught, and won’t be on the test—but these individuals and their ideas are everywhere in real life. There is no hiding from history.

Thankfully, there have not been any state-level actions or bills in New York to limit how teachers can discuss racism and sexism, or what materials can or cannot be used. Here at Rondout, the RVF Executive Committee recently voted to sponsor a resolution at the RA this spring in support of maintaining and defending academic freedom. We are asking NYSUT to “vigorously defend the rights of free expression and academic freedom for both students and educators in PK-12 and higher education” and “to work with our national affiliates in education and labor to support the freedom of all educators and professionals across the country to teach their curriculum and to determine the books and literature used to support that curriculum.” I feel fortunate to live in a state that values professional integrity and is not threatened by teachers who provide students with the lessons and resources they need to become responsible citizens in our democratic society, where the promises of America are still being realized. And I am proud to be part of a union that stands up for and lives up to these ideals.



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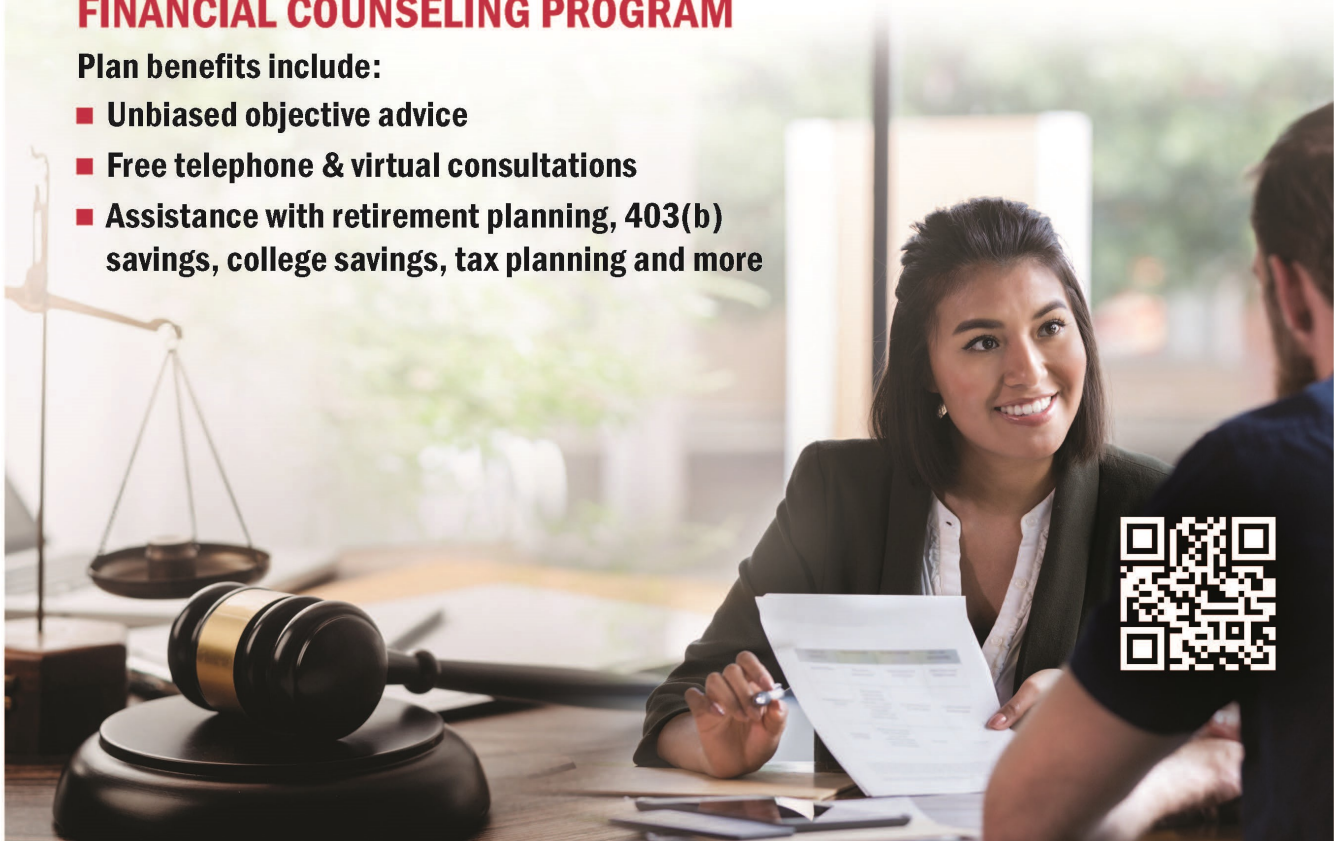
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