



THE UNION SOUND

THE VOICE OF A SOUND UNION



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Rondout Valley Federation of Teachers and School-Related Professionals

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by Jennifer Slauson

The message was clear; our schools are in crisis. This past September, I attended the "Disconnected" conference organized by NYSUT, which brought together educators, policymakers, law enforcement, and mental health professionals to explore the significant impact of cellphones and social media on children, schools, and learning. We all understand that as the ubiquity of digital technology grows, so do the challenges it poses in educational settings. We have all felt the constant presence, how it leads to distractions that detract from the primary mission of schools—education. We are forced to spend valuable time managing devices and the negative behaviors they fuel such as bullying, harassment, participation in dangerous viral challenges, and the general cognitive blunting they cause. The conference underscored the urgency of addressing these issues to preserve the integrity of teaching environments and emphasized the need for policy changes that protect students' mental health and academic success. In fact, just last month, Governor Hochul unveiled a plan to restrict smartphone use in schools statewide to ensure distraction-free learning in New York. [You can read more about her proposal here.](#)



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The Union Sound

Editor-in-Chief:
Robyn McDonough

Assistant Editors:
Jennifer Slauson,
Tara Thibault-Edmonds

President:
Robert McDonough

Contributors:
David Bonington,
Robert McDonough,
Robyn McDonough,
Jennifer Slauson

President's Message

by Robert McDonough

Well, we have made it more than half way through this year together. It's been a long winter, but soon the clocks will spring ahead, and the weather will start to get warmer. As I sit here in my living room on our four-day vacation for Presidents Weekend, I wanted to give you some updates on things going on in our district, state and country.

I don't usually like to get too political, but when it comes to our wallets and pocketbooks, it is an easy stance to take. As you read this, the Trump administration is taking steps to dissolve the U.S. Department of Education. Regardless of whom you voted for and what your private politics are, the cuts being made deeply affect our careers as educators. Federal funding for schools could be cut, making the local property owners bear more of a responsibility for funding public schools. Reduced funding could lead to cuts in our workforce and stunt our potential salary raises in the next round of negotiations. Many of us, as parents, are also wondering what will happen to FAFSA applications, student loans, and grants.

This administration is also going after unions. Separate from our profession as educators, they will also be looking for ways to weaken us as a union. We must stand up and prevent this from happening. The answer to this is not to be alarmed yet do nothing. Rather, the solution lies in the midterm elections in two years. We need to vote for our wallets and our future financial security. We need to elect pro-education, pro-union leaders at all levels of government, regardless of their political party affiliation. Keep paying attention to what is going on in the White House, keep using your NYSUT Mac App to contact your state and national representatives, and keep speaking out for our profession and for the 1st Amendment right for unions to exist.

On the state level, many new initiatives are being spearheaded. From APPR to no cellphones in schools, to the discussion on whether ICE can legally enter our school buildings, there are many things happening to try and safeguard protections for our students. This year at NYSUT's Representative Assembly (RA) in May, the RVF will be sponsoring a resolution on the floor for thousands of union delegates from across the state to vote on. If passed, these annual resolutions give NYSUT

their legislative compass and lobbying objectives for the year. The RVF's resolution is about increasing the living standards of all paraprofessionals across the state. Another resolution that we cosigned is about the educator tax deduction. Right now, as educators we can only write off \$300 of our educator expenses on our taxes. This resolution charges NYSUT with lobbying our state representatives to increase that maximum deduction to \$1000 for educators. I will update you all on the status of these resolutions after the RA this May.

Finally on the local level, our Board of Education here in Rondout presented their preliminary budget presentation at their last public meeting. Their current proposal does not include any cuts to our staff. However, we do have approximately a \$4 million gap to close. Our Board of Education has signaled that they want to use the fund balance to backfill this hole, rather than cut positions. This works for this year, however considering the uncertainty with our funding from the Department of Education, future years are uncertain. I have discussed the tax cap with Board President Chris Schoonmaker, and I again advocated to go to the full 2% tax cap. He understood my position, and we will see what the full Board decides to do as this budget process plays out.

Other things happening at the local level include meeting soon to create next year's calendar. A few years ago in the Calendar Committee, I advocated for us to have one less emergency closing day to extend our traditional three-day Presidents weekend to four days. We have done this for two years now, and I plan on keeping this into the future. This year especially, with spring break still six weeks away, this four-day mid-winter break was just what we all needed. On another note, the state releases their APPR teacher evaluation guidelines in April. Once those guidelines are released, we will be meeting with the district to create our future evaluation system. Other than that, things have been going well between labor and management. I meet with the superintendent every two weeks and Dr. Spadaro and I have been working well together to solve problems as they arise.

I hope you all enjoyed your four-day mid-winter vacation and I look forward to updating you all on next year's calendar as well as APPR discussions once those occur. For now, let's all buckle down and try to make it through these next six weeks to spring break. Take care of each other and yourselves.

History Corner

by Jennifer Slauson

SNOW DAY STRIKES: A LESSON IN SOLIDARITY

Recently I took my son skiing—granted, I do not ski, I was in the lodge. There is no need for me to strap two slippery planks to my feet, point downhill and hope for the best. Some find the cold, the speed, and the risk of breaking your body exhilarating, but for me it seems like a lot of effort just to get cold and tired. I'll pass on the expensive lift tickets, the gear, and the snow-laden chaos. A cozy fire and a cup of coffee sounds way better. While I sat in the warm shelter of the lodge, I overheard two employees talking about the ski patrol strike in Utah. It piqued my interest, so with coffee in one hand and full service bars on my phone, I decided to carve into the latest news. Here's what I found...



Unionized ski patrollers at Utah's Park City Mountain Resort have emerged victorious after a twelve-day strike over the holiday season. The strike, which highlighted the challenges of living and working in the high-cost mountain resort towns of the Rockies, resulted in a new agreement with Vail Resorts that included significant pay raises and improved benefits.

The patrollers, represented by the United Mountain Workers, stood firm in their demand for fair compensation, citing the need to retain experienced workers in a profession that requires advanced medical training and specialized skills. Ski patrollers are responsible for maintaining safety at ski resorts by monitoring terrain, responding to accidents, hauling hurt skiers downhill and reducing avalanche risk. Entry-level patrollers now earn \$23 an hour, up from \$21, while experienced patrollers and snow safety specialists saw larger increases (current pay scale tops out after five years on the job). The modest wage increase and Vail's refusal to compensate its workers fairly was striking given the companies \$1.22 billion in gross profits last year. In addition, the contract ensures wage parity across Vail's 35 U.S. resorts, including local favorites Hunter and Stowe.

Beyond pay, the union secured two weeks of paid parental leave, expanded worker parking, and vanpool services for commuting employees—all critical in a region where affordable housing is scarce. These gains came only after ten months of negotiations and six unfair labor practice charges against Vail—underscoring the union's persistence in the face of corporate resistance.

Ripple effects were felt beyond Park City. Ski patrollers from other resorts demonstrated in solidarity, and local businesses rallied, raising over \$300,000 to help support those on strike. Skiers joined in, too—knowing fewer ski patrol workers means fewer open trails and longer lines—chanting “Pay your workers!” while waiting for lifts.

For those of us not on the slopes, the Park City strike offers a powerful lesson in collective action. It demonstrates how unity, persistence, and community support can lead to meaningful change, even against a corporate giant.

https://www.reddit.com/r/UTsnow/comments/1bnhq88/park_city_ski_patrol_is_on_practice_strike/?rdt=57585

Financial Update

by David Bonington, CFP®
Stacey Braun Associates, Inc.

HOLD ON TO YOUR HAT!

If you grew up in New York City and are nearing retirement age, you might recall seeing signs with this recommendation all over town. (If you are not yet near retirement age, or didn't grow up in New York, play along for a moment and take my word for it.) The signs dated back to an earlier time, maybe years between 1920-1960, when most of the men, ladies, and even schoolboys of Gotham wore hats. Most have been removed since (to be sure, the hats as well as the signs!).

In really hazardous zones, like the subway, signs were everywhere—trying to protect everything from a newsboy's cap to a man's fedora to a lady's finest from being lost to the press of air from an approaching train or the vacuum behind a departing one.

At a young age, my grandparents took me on a Staten Island Ferry ride. Signs were posted in the terminal and on the boat. Just minutes after setting out, a boy of maybe the age of ten standing near us had only time to cry out, "My hat!" as a cruel gust lifted it and tossed it into New York Harbor. (P.S. The ferry didn't stop.)

For a time, "Hold On To Your Hat" was used as a general expression of advice and caution for a variety of "roller coaster" situations—but I haven't heard it in quite some time, and I bet you haven't either.

So why bring it up now? Winds of change may blow strongly in 2025 on a number of financial fronts, including one with significant implications: federal income tax rates! Current

rates and brackets were set by 2017 legislation—but with a "sunset" feature that causes them to expire this December. If Congress does nothing we go back to the previous arrangement, but it's likely Congress will act. It may extend or only tweak today's structure, or it might do something else entirely. We just don't know.

And that is the point! If you are nearing retirement, you are approaching a phase of life where Social Security will supplement a pension with additional, federally taxable income (although this, too, might possibly change). Required Minimum Distributions from pre-tax Retirement Accounts will later generate even more taxable income. And yet the rates of tax which will be levied upon all this money aren't yet known.

The post-2025 landscape should be visible in a few months, and will help educators of all ages plan ahead—or even take precautionary action in late 2025 if it's advisable. Before it gets too late into 2025, a meeting with a Stacey Braun planner might help you evaluate your income sources and investments in the context of potential or actual tax changes by roughing out an "If A, Then B" or "Now, due to X, you might consider Y" type of game plan.

Remember, it's not only your hat you want to hold on to—it's your wealth, too! If you are caught off-guard by a nasty, tax-driven gust, the ferry won't stop.

Free, confidential Telephone or Zoom sessions with a Stacey Braun planner can be arranged by calling 1-888-949-1925.

No financial products are sold and there is no sales pressure.



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available
to all NYSUT
members and
their loved ones.**

Enjoy these benefits

NYSUT Member Benefits strongly believes in the importance of making quality benefits easily accessible to the NYSUT membership. You may be interested in the following options:

FOR FREE!

1. Premium Calm Subscription:

All in-service and retiree members receive unlimited free access to the popular Calm app's full library of sleep, meditation, and relaxation content. Members can add up to five dependents (age 16 or older) to receive their own premium Calm subscription.

2. Peer Support Line:

Whether you're facing a specific stressful situation or would just like to speak with a supportive voice, this confidential helpline is free to all NYSUT members and their families. Call toll-free 844-444-0152 to connect with a peer.

3. AD&D Insurance Benefit/ Travel Assistance Services:

All in-service and retiree members are automatically provided with a \$5,000 accidental death & dismemberment insurance benefit, along with free travel assistance services from AXA Assistance.

4. New Member Life Insurance:

All new members are eligible to receive a free term life insurance policy providing coverage for up to \$25,000 for one year, guaranteed renewable at the end of the year.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS:

Member Appreciation Event is back!

NYSUT Member Benefits is excited to announce that Member Appreciation Event will be held this March! This celebration will feature prizes donated by Member Benefits and our endorsed program providers. To be eligible to win, you must be a participant in our MAP Alert email service.

If you're not already a MAP Alert participant, simply scan the QR code, visit memberbenefits.nysut.org, or call 800-626-8101 to sign up. You'll then receive weekly updates about endorsed benefits, information about new programs, and be able to take part in special prize drawings such as Member Appreciation Event.

SCAN ME



MEMBER
BENEFITS
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Working to Benefit You
January/February 2025

