



# 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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# UNIONS ARE NOT A SPECTATOR SPORT

**UNION  
STRONG!**

New York State  
AFL-CIO

**GET INVOLVED**



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## *The Union Sound*

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## History Corner

by Jennifer Slauson

I recently visited Lindenwald, the home of Martin Van Buren, our 8th president. Van Buren was central to pre-Civil War politics, and while he is not well known today, back then, everyone knew him. His nicknames reveal much about his place in history. "Old Kinderhook" referenced his Dutch hometown of Kinderhook, NY; "The Red Fox" emphasized his cunning and shrewdness in political maneuvering—like a fox, he was seen as sly and clever; and of course, "The Little Magician" highlighted his political skill, strategic mind, and ability to navigate the complexities of party politics and elections. Another nickname, "Martin Van Ruin," was given to him by critics after the Panic of 1837, which led to a severe economic depression during his presidency. Although many blamed Van Buren for the crisis, it was largely a consequence of policies from his predecessor, Andrew Jackson.

My visit got me thinking about Andrew Jackson and populism. Jackson is often seen as a key figure in the rise of populism in early nineteenth-century America, advocating for the "common man" and challenging elites. He used populist rhetoric to build a political movement that appealed to the expanding electorate of white, non-land owning male voters, particularly in the West and South. Jackson opposed the national bank and deeply distrusted entrenched power structures. He is also remembered for the "spoils system," where he replaced government officials with his supporters as a reward (that can't be good for democracy). In eleventh-grade U.S. History, we teach this as "Jacksonian Democracy." Van Buren, Jackson's ally and successor, played a significant role in organizing and institutionalizing Jacksonian populism. Our foxy magician helped create the Democratic Party, which became the vehicle for Jacksonian ideals. And he believed in strong party structures and used them to effectively mobilize populist sentiment.

The whole common man anti-elitism stuff gets me thinking about labor too. The themes of labor, populism, and economic inequality keep bubbling up in American politics. Looking back, today's political/economic landscape looks much like the late nineteenth century. Historically, populist movements have arisen in response to perceived economic injustices and inequalities. Populist leaders then capitalize on the frustration of workers who feel neglected by their politicians and their current economic system that they regard as failing them.

Disaffected groups react in various ways: some pursue economic reform, others adopt xenophobic and racist attitudes, and some do both. The Populist Party emerged in response to the economic hardships faced by farmers and laborers, advocating for reforms such as the free coinage of silver, government regulation of railroads, and other measures to support working-class interests. Why? Because during the late nineteenth-century Robber Baron Era, wealthy industrialists like Carnegie and Rockefeller accumulated vast fortunes by exploiting workers, leading to significant economic inequality and labor unrest. Alongside this growing corporate wealth was a rise in anti-Semitism, anti-immigrant legislation and sentiment, and a resurgence of KKK activities across the nation. Populist sentiment during this time was driven by frustrations over economic inequality and the influence of corporate power, yet few reforms were enacted to address the underlying issues of power, opportunity, and access to wealth. While reforms could have benefited workers, the nationalism and protectionism often used in populist rhetoric—where scapegoating diverts attention from the ruling class's responsibility for economic hardships—created divisions within the labor movement and weakened its advances.

Today, workers are struggling again, making populist voices increasingly appealing (again). Our discontent can be traced to shifts made by the "magicians" and "foxes" in both political parties over the past few decades. During the Reagan Era, the Republican Party moved away from its mid-20th-century focus on fiscal conservatism and limited government. By shifting from supporting labor to favoring an investment-based economy, they positioned themselves as champions of the working class. However, actions such as appointing anti-labor judges and failing to back labor-friendly policies suggest otherwise.

These changes have led to increasing economic inequality, benefiting the wealthy while leaving workers behind. In response, the Republican Party has shifted toward a more populist and nationalist platform, emphasizing issues like immigration, nationalism, and cultural identity—sound familiar? Anti-establishment rhetoric has resonated with voters, particularly economically disaffected individuals in rural and working-class communities who feel left behind by economic changes and are skeptical of established institutions—again, quite familiar. Just like the nineteenth century, what's missing is substantive policy that addresses the underlying issues; instead, we see deregulation and opposition to labor rights. While claiming to look out for the "common man," the Republican Party has consistently

supported policies that favor corporate interests over those of workers. They have opposed measures such as raising the minimum wage, providing paid family leave, and expanding child tax credits, all of which are popular among American working families. Their rhetoric deflects discontent away from the wealthy and corporations, instead directing anger toward minorities, immigrants, and foreign nations, framing them as threats to American jobs and prosperity.

Similarly, the embrace of neoliberal economic policies in the 1990s marked a significant shift for the Democratic Party. Under the Clinton administration this included deregulation of financial markets and telecommunications, support for free trade agreements like NAFTA, and welfare reform. These policies were seen as favoring globalization and market-driven approaches, which had mixed results for American workers. While some sectors benefited from increased trade, many manufacturing jobs were lost to offshoring, leading to economic dislocation for blue-collar workers. The Democrat Party did not effectively counter the outsourcing of jobs or provide sufficient support for workers displaced by global trade. Instead people were told everyone needs to go to college

if they wanted to enjoy economic mobility. As educators, we've seen how that worked out. While the party has recognized these issues, their policies have often been insufficient or too moderate to make a significant difference. And again, this strategy distracts from the economic policies that favor the wealthy and maintain the status quo.

Basically, regardless of the time period, populist politics rely on a divisive "Us vs. Them" or "Me First" narrative, which is antithetical to democratic principles that put all of us first. Unions actively confront this divisive narrative. But what's really at stake is much deeper—it's about who has the power and how they wield it. Will it be used to build a fair and just society, or to entrench the interests of a few at the expense of the many?

The challenge is to get beyond the surface-level disagreements and finger pointing, and start talking about the fundamental issues of power, democracy, and economic justice. Perhaps this is a moment, now, where these old alliances and ideas are unraveling, and there's space to build something new. But it's going to take a lot of work and a lot of organizing to get there.

## Wellness Update

by Colleen Vitti

If you haven't heard of MVP's awesome Gia app, I want to share my firsthand account using this app in case any of you might want to give it a try. My saga begins in early August when I fell off my bike and tumbled down a steep hillside of poison ivy. It was Day 1 of our drive out west, and my husband and I decided to stop in the Delaware Water Gap for a quick bike ride. Well, despite a bad fall, I remained unscathed – but by the time I arrived in Wyoming, the poison ivy rash covered my body. I didn't particularly want to waste precious vacation days in an urgent care facility, so I opened the Gia app, uploaded my video of the insidious rash, and *voila* . . . a doctor called me within twenty minutes. When this NY doctor learned about my cowboy country whereabouts, she told me she wasn't licensed to prescribe in Wyoming, but she would turn my case over to another doctor who could. This new doctor called me within five minutes, and I had a prescription ready for pickup at the local pharmacy within

fifteen minutes. It was that simple! If you find yourself in a situation where you need medical care and want to skip the hassle and added cost of urgent care, then Gia just might be for you.

[Download the Gia by MVP® Mobile App today!](#)





## **2024-2025 RVF Executive Committee**

### **Officers**

RVF President	Rob McDonough (HS)
RVF 1st Vice President	Dorothy Mayone (KES)
RVF 2nd Vice President	Felice DiGennaro (MES & KES)
RVF 3rd Vice President	Tara Thibault-Edmonds (HS)
RVF Treasurer	Kim McEvoy (DO)
RVF Secretary	Melissa Frumentti (KES)

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KES Building Representative	Michele Pauley
MES Building Representative	Jean Burgher
Intermediate Building Representative	Jill Grasso
Junior High Building Representative	Peter Colomer
HS Building Representatives	Jennifer Slauson Joann Redmond
Clerical Unit Representative	Diana Bracklow (MES)
Paraprofessional Unit Representatives	Elementary - Melissa Feinberg (MES) Main Campus - Cyndi Murphy (HS)
Teacher Unit Representatives	Andrew Gillis (IS) Renee Balestra (HS) Kim Strauss (KES) Colleen Vitti (JH) Jocelin McNally (MES)



### Appointed Representatives

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Political Action Coordinator	Kim McEvoy
Retiree Committee Member	
The Union Sound Staff	Robyn McDonough (Editor-in-Chief) Jennifer Slauson (Assistant Editor) Tara Edmonds (Formatting Editor)

### Elected Representatives to State Organizations

NYSUT RA Delegate	Kim McEvoy (2023-2026) Tara Edmonds (2022-2025) Robyn McDonough (2024-2027)
NYSUT RA Alternate	Rob McDonough (2024-2025)
TRS Delegate and Alternate	Stephanie Peacock and Tara Edmonds (2023-2025)

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**Celebrate SRP Recognition Day Nov. 19, 2024!**

**nysut**

Celebrate SRP Recognition Day annually on the third Tuesday in November.  
 For more info and resources, visit [nysut.org/srp](https://nysut.org/srp)



### New York State School-Related Professionals Recognition Day

#### *History*

The celebration of School-Related Professionals Recognition Day is the direct result of a resolution submitted by more than a dozen local unions at the 2002 NYSUT Representative Assembly. Resolution 48 "School-Related Personnel — Employee Recognition Day" was approved.

Years of advocacy by the NYSUT Legislative Department were rewarded with SRP Recognition Day signed on a yearly basis. The bill creating a permanent School-Related Professionals Recognition Day was signed into law in 2007. School-Related Professionals Recognition Day shall be celebrated on the third Tuesday of November, often during American Education Week.

NYSUT urges every school district to use this day to celebrate and honor the work of all School-Related Professionals — inside and outside the classroom.



## Financial Update

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

### (FINANCIAL) TIMES, THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'

I'm not thrilled to admit this, but the calendar doesn't lie: I recently went to a multi-class reunion with attendees who graduated from high school 50 and as many as 60 years ago. Yes, it took a bit of effort to attend, but being at the low end of the age range gave me just enough courage.

It was actually great to see people and see what they did and were still doing with their lives. Conversations were ranging, and reminiscing topics included novelties, objects, and events unique to earlier times (pranks played on classmates, tie-dyed shirts, pet rocks, TV sitcoms, sports moments, and the like).

One of the topics was music. In one serious discussion, people talked about how certain musicians chronicled both the times they lived in as well as change – and not only the change around them, but the change they introduced. Whether the songwriter was Pete Seeger, John Lennon, Bob Dylan (yes, I borrowed from Bob to fashion this title), Janis Joplin, Richie Havens, or Marvin Gaye, a message of the moment and of its time was being memorialized.

Afterwards, I wondered whether and how some things I pay attention to for a living – broadly speaking, financial markets and investing principles – have changed over the years. Certainly, in this time of multi-channel, light-speed communication there is a blizzard of information to be received, sifted, and processed by any active investor. Bond and stock prices react immediately, often forcefully, to almost

any news. Although this was always the case, things seemed to change more slowly while I was growing up. In these times, upswings and (more scarily, those downturns) seem more sudden and unpredictable – and more unnerving and anxiety-producing than ever.

Even if this is not a new environment, it can often feel like one – and this is true about far more topics than investing. Toss in some other complicated or weighty things – IRS rules and regulations, debt management, insurance needs, pension and social security decisions, retirement account asset allocation, and so forth – and one's financial picture can begin to blur and, from a how-to-sort-all-this-out standpoint, maybe start to feel overwhelming.

But whether (like the songwriters above) it is change you want to keep up with or change you want to initiate and make, remember that you have up to six (6) hours of annual benefit time with a Certified Financial Planner® from Stacey Braun Associates, Inc. Any of the financial topics mentioned here, or any others, can be discussed and reviewed in these sessions. Planners can offer information about changing financial landscapes and provide ideas and guidance on how to take advantage of opportunities that change often creates.

As I did in attending the reunion, summon your courage and make an appointment!

**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.**

## Buy Union-Made for Thanksgiving

### Turkey and Ham

- Appleton Farms
- Butterball
- Cook's
- Farmland
- Foster Farms
- Hormel
- Tyson

### Stuffing and Bread

- Aunt Millie's
- Manischewitz
- Pillsbury
- Stroehe

### Vegetables and Fruit

- Andy Boy
- Betty Crocker
- Potatoes
- Birds Eye
- Del Monte
- Dole
- Eurofresh
- Mann's
- Muranaka Farm
- Ocean Spray

### Pie and Filling

- Banquet Fruit Pies
- Del Monte Fresh Apples
- Entenmann's
- Food Club Canned Pumpkin
- Kroger Brand Pumpkin Puree
- Marie Callender's
- Sara Lee

### Cookware and Cutlery

- Anchor Hocking
- Bennington Pottery
- Clauss Knives
- CorningWare
- Cutco Knives
- Fiesta
- Homer Laughlin China
- Libbey Glassware
- Pyrex

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# LIFE INSURANCE: *Crucial for protecting your loved ones*



Life insurance is a topic many people find confusing, complicated, and uncomfortable to think about. It is undoubtedly one of the most vital types of insurance products you can purchase, though. Whether you're looking into your first policy or to upgrade existing coverage, it's important to determine how much life insurance you need and which type is right for you.

One key fact about life insurance you may not be aware of is premiums are likely to be less expensive if you purchase it earlier in life. For those of you who currently have policies, what you purchased 10 years ago, five years ago, or even last year may not be enough to replace your income and all you provide for your family. And if you are part of the 30% of Americans who don't have any life insurance at all,\* you could be putting your family at great financial risk.

There are a variety of options to consider when it comes to life insurance, including:

- 1. Term Life** – this product pays a benefit in the event of the death of the insured during a specific timeframe but offers no cash value.
- 2. Level Term Life** – this insurance is similar to term life but is normally for a set period of time such as 10, 15, or 20 years; it also offers no cash value.
- 3. Universal Life** – this option offers a way to protect your family while building tax-deferred cash value; policyholders can usually access a portion of the balance without impacting the guaranteed death benefit.

\* Source: USA Today - <https://www.usatoday.com/money/blueprint/life-insurance/life-insurance-statistics>

NYSUT Member Benefits endorses a number of competitive life insurance programs (those listed to the left and others) available to NYSUT members and their spouse/certified domestic partner. Many of these plans offer reduced rates not available to the general public along with additional convenience and savings opportunities through payroll or pension deduction.

Learn more about Member Benefits-endorsed life insurance programs by scanning the QR code, visiting [memberbenefits.nysut.org](https://memberbenefits.nysut.org), or calling 800-626-8101.



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