



PEC Connection

Official Publication of the New York State Public Employee Conference, Inc.



Words from the Top

This is the start of my fifth year as Chairman of the New York State Public Employee Conference. It is a position I am honored and proud to hold.

PEC was formed in 1977 with 13 participating unions and today, our membership has grown to 50 unions. To the leaders of these unions, I say thank you for supporting our Conference. You have helped to make it stronger and I acknowledge the terrific job you do representing the members of your own unions.

This morning we have distributed our legislative agenda for the year 2005. We know that in any legislative session, not all of our bills will be adopted, and hopefully, not all will be passed over. We remain confident that in every case, the Legislators will view our concerns with careful attention and serious thought. We also ask that you consider the impact of all legislative proposals upon the public employees before passing on them. In light of the fiscal problems facing the City and the State, we do not want to see budgets balanced on the backs of the public employee. We are very much concerned about the health benefits our active and retired members currently receive, as well as the current pension benefits. We do not want to see any of these benefits placed in jeopardy.

Our members have earned their benefits through hard work, negotiations and legislation. These valuable benefits should not be looked upon lightly or changed to lessen benefits. It's often easy to forget the contributions that public employees make to the City and State day in and day out.

The legislative proposals described in our booklet were developed and unanimously approved by all unions represented in the Conference. Over the years, the State Legislature has shown great concern and compassion for all public employees. In the coming months, we will be seeking Legislators' support for our legislative program. I'm looking forward to working with all unions in our Conference to see successful passage of our bills into law.

Gov Vetoes 9/11 Presumptive Disability Bill for Second Time

For the second time, Governor Pataki has unfortunately vetoed the 9/11 Presumptive Disability Bill that would afford protection to the public employees who responded heroically to the World Trade Center attack.

"It is unfortunate and I am very disheartened to see that for the second time, our 9/11 disability bill was vetoed. I wish to thank all the legislators in the Senate and Assembly for passing the 9/11 disability bill in your Houses," said Peter Meringolo, PEC Chairman.

Meringolo said he has spoken with Bill Howard in the Governor's office to open up a new line of communication regarding the bill and to see if it can be restructured. However, Meringolo said he will not water down the bill any further, as was the consensus of the PEC membership.

"The Mayor of New York City once again weighed in very heavily with the Governor in stopping this bill," Meringolo told the Conference.

"Once again, the Mayor waited until the end to voice his concerns despite the fact that I had requested many meetings with him to go over the bill.

"I find Mayor Bloomberg's attitude on this important legislation to be a disgrace and a major disservice to the public servants of our great

City and State. I believe that no matter what version of the 9/11 bill we submit, Mayor Bloomberg will continue to use his influence to stop it."

Meringolo told the crowd of more than 150 gathered at the PEC Annual Breakfast that he keeps "hearing the words in political speeches and at funerals of police and firefigh-

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**— Peter Meringolo
PEC Chairman**

9/11 Presumptive Disability Bill

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ers that we will never forget 9/11. Let the truth be known that until we have a bill that addresses the health issues that may occur in the years to come to our public employees, than in fact, we have forgotten them.”

Meringolo said that all Mayor Bloomberg talks about in regards to this bill is the cost. Yet, what is the cost put on the life of a public employee?

Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver agreed.

“Let me begin by saying how disappointed I am by the Governor’s decision to veto the Presumptive Disability Bill. Considering what we know about the air quality in lower Manhattan following the 9/11 attacks. Considering that our first responders raced into Ground Zero with little regard for their own health and safety to carry out that massive rescue effort. You would think that it would behoove a grateful State and a grateful Nation to provide adequate compensation for our courageous first responders should they end up with respiratory problems or cancers that may have resulted from their exposure to Ground Zero.

“For the Governor to veto this bill, for him to begrudge our First Responders this benefit when he knows that many are already suffering from their exposure, is a slap in the face to



this Conference and further evidence of how out of touch he and his administration have become,” Silver said. “I promise you, we will re-pass this bill. We will redouble our efforts and with your commitment, we will make this legislation the law of the State.” ♦



Assembly Speaker Silver Addresses Conference

Says Working Families Carry a Heavy Burden

NYS Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver was one of many governmental leaders who addressed the PEC Conference last week in Albany. He kicked off his presentation by telling working families that they carry a heavy load that begins with the President and Congress turning a blind eye to the health problems of those first responders who inhaled toxins while working at Ground Zero.

“Add to that the fact that New Yorkers work so hard and generate so much wealth that as taxpayers we end up subsidizing the public services provided by other states, even while some of our own go without.

“Our first responders: the three FDNY firefighters who gave their lives in the line of duty on Sunday, January 23. The law enforcement officers who do the actual work that makes New York the safest ‘Big City’ in the nation. All of our first responders — whatever their assignments — are so dedicated, so courageous, so capable of doing more with less and less. That our President, our Congress, and perhaps even our own Governor, act as if they believe that federal homeland security funds — money that by all rights should come to New York — is better utilized protecting those critical dude ranches and sagebrush flats out in Wyoming,” Silver said.

The Speaker went on to say that if the Governor could get just a 5 percent increase in federal Medicaid dollars, New York would receive an additional \$3 billion more each year.

“With \$3 billion more each year, the Mayor wouldn’t need to close fire houses to balance his budget. He could give the NYPD and all of our municipal unions the fair and equitable contracts you deserve. With our fair share of federal dollars, this Governor could stop dragging his feet and give our school children the educational resources they are owed.

“He could forget about privatizing public roads and services, and instead reward New York’s public employees with lower taxes and a higher quality of life. He forgets whose



shoulders he is standing on — YOURS! Without you, the crime rate increases, buildings burn to the ground, the trains run late, dangerous inmates are left unguarded. How long do you think any elected officeholder would survive in that kind of an environment?”

Speaker Silver pointed to many of the successes PEC has had in getting bills through the Assembly and signed into law:

- ▶ Heart Presumption for City Sanitation workers and for the peace officers of the Unified Court System
- ▶ Upgrading accidental disability and death benefits for the City’s EMTs
- ▶ 20-year pension for DA Investigators
- ▶ Extended lung disability presumption for firefighters
- ▶ NYPD pension credit for previous EMT service
- ▶ Child care leave pension credit for Correction Officers
- ▶ Ensuring that the survivors of retired City Police Officers who returned to active duty after 9/11 and who later died in the line of duty are eligible for “line of duty” accidental death benefits

“However this year unfolds, remember that my doors are always open to you. The doors of my Assembly Majority colleagues are always open to you. We know how important our public employees are to our State and we will continue to do our best to prove it. Let’s keep our partnership strong. Thank you for coming here to speak up for our hardworking public employees.” ♦



Conference Lays Out Legislative Agenda for Leaders

While bringing members of the Public Employee Conference together in Albany to show that there is strength in numbers was one of the goals of the Annual Legislative Breakfast, the main objective was to lay out the 2005 PEC Legislative Agenda for State Senators and Assemblymembers.

More than a dozen Legislators from across party lines came to meet with union leaders, show their support for working families and hear first hand about PEC's goals and objectives for 2005.

Some of the Legislators in attendance were Senators Dean Skelos and Cesar Trunzo, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, and Assemblymembers Peter Abbate (Chair, Committee on Governmental Employees), Susan John (Chair, Committee on Labor), Patricia Acampora, Ryan Karben, xxxxxxxxxxxx, xxxxxxxxxxxx and xxxxxxxxxxxx.

This year's agenda includes (see booklet for detailed descriptions):

ON-GOING INITIATIVES

- Pension Systems Protection
- Early Retirement Without Reduction of Service
- Make Workers' Compensation Work
- Benefit Improvements for Survivors of Workers Killed in Line of Duty
- Ensure Safe Work Environment
- Progressive Methods of Taxation
- Extenders

ISSUES UNDER STUDY

- State Budget Implications
- Legislation that will Provide Criminal Sanctions Against Anyone Assaulting Public Employees During Their Performance of Duties
- Deferred Retirement Option Plans (DROP)
- Health Care Reforms

ISSUES OPPOSED

- Legislative Attempts to Undermine Collective Bargaining and the Existing Binding Arbitration Process
- Term Limits for Legislators
- Residency Requirement for Public Employees
- Inappropriate Consolidation of Services
- Privatization

ISSUES SUPPORTED

- 9/11 Presumptive Disability
- Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA)
- Pension Re-openers
- Ensuring Safe Nursing Staffing
- Military Buyback for Veterans
- Permanent Agency Shop
- Independent Hearing Officer
- Tier Equity
- Permanent Heart Bill
- Revision of Taylor Law
- Statewide Variable Supplements Fund



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