

# Clarion

NEWSPAPER OF THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS / CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK



MARCH 2017



## FEDERAL Fighting DeVos

The controversial  
ed secretary  
and her agenda  
is ripe for  
resistance.

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## TRUMP AND LABOR

# A SURVIVAL GUIDE

President Donald Trump's nomination of conservative judge Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court raises the near certainty that after his confirmation the Court could quickly overturn a decades-long precedent enabling unions like the PSC

to collect agency shop fees. The aim of the so-called "right-to-work" cases is to destroy the political power of public-sector unions and roll back the economic gains they have made.

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### RETIREMENT

## Medicare Part B

The union has announced important updates on tax refunds for Medicare Part B health coverage payments. Make sure you are informed.

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Students, faculty and union members rally to bring peers caught by Trump's ban home to CUNY – and vow to keep fighting Trump's agenda.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR | WRITE TO: CLARION/PSC, 61 BROADWAY, 15TH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10006. EMAIL: APAUL@PSCMAIL.ORG.

# Don't blame Stein for Trump

● Peter Ranis and K. J. Walters respond, in separate letters (*Clarion*, January/February 2017), to James Dennis Hoff's advocacy of third-party voting (*Clarion*, November/December 2016). They make an important point: the difference between the two major party candidates is real, and electing Hillary Clinton would have provided important openings for progressive transformations and placed us in a far-superior position in the struggles for working-class needs and development going forward.

However, in saying, "Voting for a third party has moral repercussions. It gave us eight years of George W. Bush and now Donald Trump" (Ranis), and, "For giving the presidency to Donald Trump, third-party voters deserve much

of the blame" (Walters), they miss, in my view, a much more central issue. The *tens of millions* of (mostly) white working-class people who voted for their own destruction in the form of Donald Trump are the only real reason for the disaster of the presidential election outcome. Next to that, the votes for Jill Stein and other third-party candidates are insignificant. So are the fine calculations that determined the result in the Electoral College (e.g., 80,000 votes in Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin), or other such "smart" analyses.

If significant sections of the working class and the 99 percent were not blinded by racist nationalism, extreme individualism, hyper-extension of the power of "politicians" and other right-wing

ideologies, we would not even know Donald Trump's name! *This* is the real challenge to left and progressive forces. Blaming third parties, failures on the part of this or that sector in not turning out the vote in sufficient numbers and so forth is a way of sidestepping that challenge. We are all to blame! We do not reach across the "divide" to try to understand and communicate with the Trump electorate, or break sections of that electorate off on particular issues (NAFTA and the TPP might serve as an example).

How many of us watch Fox News? How many of us follow right-wing websites and try to intervene on them? How many of us confront racism by speaking to people infected by racism directly? How many of us try to understand the psychology of

the right, as well as its ideology, in anything other than the most general terms?

This is, I believe, a crucial part of the tasks ahead. It is discomfiting, even possibly dangerous. That's just another clue to its importance.

David Laibman, Brooklyn College and Graduate Center, retiree

## Adjunct parity now

● This letter is in response to the article, "Brooklyn College adjuncts rally for 'pay parity'" in the January/February 2017 issue of *Clarion*.

I was an adjunct for 14 years prior to joining the full-time faculty at CUNY in 2013, so I know well what it's like to teach six classes at three different schools in one semester, to try to devote the energy required to

each of them, to have classes canceled (or added) on a day's notice, to have no health insurance and to earn wages insufficient to provide for my family.

While my PhD is in chemistry, a degree in economics is not required to understand that adjuncts have become the equivalent of outsourced labor to management. So, full-time faculty members, though I cannot comprehend why you would feel this way, even if you are not in favor of equal pay for equal work for our adjunct brothers and sisters, you *must* rally for pay parity *selfishly!*

Until adjuncts receive pay parity (what schools who truly value their part-time faculty refer to and remunerate as "proportionate faculty"), full-time faculty cannot possibly expect to successfully bargain for better pay. Until then, adjunct faculty will simply be too attractive in terms of a shortsighted bottom line – one that is not in the best interests of either students or faculty, regardless of full-time or adjunct status.

Kevin Kolack, Queensborough Community College

## FIGHTING FOR EDUCATION

# DeVos squeaked by, but we can still fight back

By MICHAEL BUSCH

**B**etsy DeVos has been confirmed as education secretary by the US Senate. Her nomination was the most bitterly contested of Donald Trump's cabinet selections and a lightning rod that galvanized public resistance across the country. From New York to Alaska, people flooded the offices of their elected officials with phone calls, emails, petitions, tweets and faxes calling on the Senate to reject DeVos out of hand.

The pressure worked, to an extent: two Republicans defected from their party and voted against the nomination. In the end, though, it wasn't enough. A 50-50 split in the Senate was broken by Vice President Mike Pence, who cast his vote in support of the president's nominee.

## FIRED UP

DeVos may have won the job, but resistance to her cabinet selection is unlikely to fade away. People are fired up. There's general consternation over the fact that DeVos lacks any relevant qualifications for the position. Her failure to demonstrate basic comprehension of fundamental debates in education during Senate confirmation hearings has inspired deep concern, as has her apparent ignorance of the law as it relates to schools.

Perhaps most importantly, Americans across the country are voicing their outrage at her radical policy agenda. This isn't a purely partisan response. Even education reform advocates on the right pressured the Senate to reject her nomination and are speaking out against DeVos' vision for American education. Students physically blocked DeVos from entering a Washington, DC, school. A mere handful

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New York City high school students walked out of classes to protest after hearing that Betsy DeVos had been confirmed as secretary of education.

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Editor: Ari Paul / Associate Editor: Shomial Ahmad / Designer: Margarita Aguilar / Copy Editors: Teri Duerr, Matthew Schlecht

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## Safety watchdogs

● The January/February 2017 issue of *Clarion* carried an important article titled "Union: building decay hurts education," but it failed to mention that for the last 17 years the PSC has had an active group of Environmental Health and Safety Watchdogs who look out for health and safety issues on all campuses. The Watchdogs have semimonthly meetings and encourage members to both report all building issues (heat, cold, mold, infestation, odors, etc.) in writing to their local management and get in touch with their local chapters to look for patterns of failure to do timely maintenance or repairs. The Watchdogs can be reached at hswatchdogs@psccmail.org and the office is staffed part-time by Jean Grassman (Brooklyn College) and Jacqueline Elliot (City Tech). We often tend to get used to difficult working conditions, but indeed the buildings are the air we breathe. As an activist union concerned about all issues in our daily working lives, we have always welcomed people to join the Watchdogs to represent and report on their campuses.

Joan Greenbaum, LaGuardia Community College and The Graduate Center, retiree

Editor's response: *Clarion* profiled the Environmental Health and Safety Watchdogs in the November/December 2016 issue ([www.psc-cuny.org/clarion/december/2016](http://www.psc-cuny.org/clarion/december/2016)).

# Preparing for Trump's labor agenda

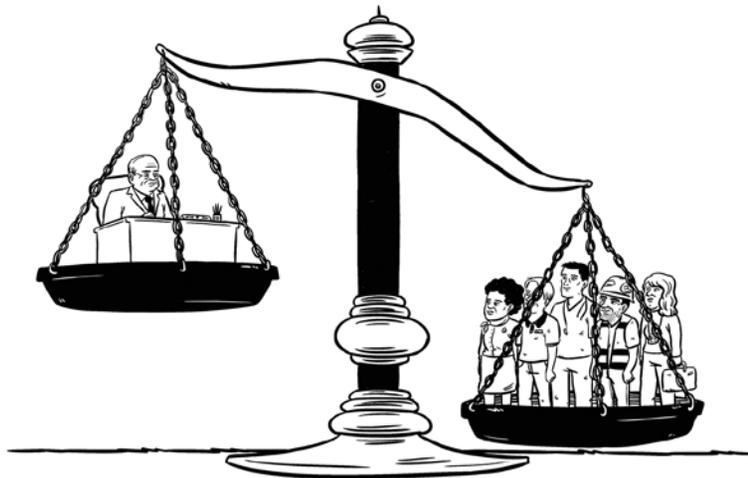
In January 2016, it seemed certain that a conservative majority in the Supreme Court would rule in favor of anti-union plaintiffs in the case of *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association* to invalidate the right of unions to collect agency shop fees from nonmember workers who receive benefits of union representation in their bargaining unit. Anti-union groups argue that disallowing nonmembers to withhold agency fees from public-sector unions is a violation of their First Amendment rights.

## BRIEF REPRIEVE

But the death of Justice Antonin Scalia in February of last year left the court deadlocked on the case, upholding a lower court's decision that public-sector unions had a constitutional right to collect "fair share" payments. But now that President Donald Trump has nominated conservative circuit judge Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court, unions are bracing for another case that could deplete their finances and their ability to serve members.

The PSC, like many unions, realizes that the time frame to protect itself is short – anti-union outfits have filed several dozen cases like *Friedrichs* in the federal courts. Some observers say that once Gorsuch is confirmed, a new case on

## 'Stick to the union'



Susie Cagle

agency shop fees could be heard and decided within a year. That's why the PSC is planning *now* to organize members to fight harder and recommit to the union. Labor will have to play a vital role in fighting all aspects of the Trump agenda, as PSC President Barbara Bowen says here:

### Dear PSC Members,

In the first 30 days of President Donald Trump's administration, we have seen the selection of a secretary of education who knows nothing about public schools; an ex-

ecutive order against immigration that led to the detention of several CUNY students and one PSC member; the resignation of the national security adviser; and scores of reckless actions on domestic and foreign policy. This is not a moment that can be normalized.

The PSC includes members with a wide range of political views, but I believe we will all agree that the agenda being advanced by President Trump and his supporters is dangerous for us, our students, our future and our planet. Unions could play a defining

role in the current political moment.

Here is an update on how the PSC leadership has begun organizing in resistance to the Trump agenda and what each of us can do. We are lucky to be organized and to have a union – it's up to us to use it.

### 1. We can prevent the destruction of our union and preserve the PSC's progressive economic and political power.

The single most important thing we can do right now as PSC members is recommit ourselves to sticking to the union. Anti-union activists celebrated Trump's nomination of a new Supreme Court justice, confident that a conservative court would now rule in their favor in *Janus v. AFSCME*, a case designed to strip unions of their members, their treasuries and their power. If *Janus v. AFSCME* is successful, unions like ours could be forced to represent and negotiate contracts for "free riders" – people who receive all the union's benefits, salary increases and protections, but who expect others to pay for them.

Why is this case so high on the agenda of Trump's supporters? Because it could decimate the funding of public sector unions, and with that our ability to wage contract campaigns, challenge employers, and protect our members. The his-

toric gains in working-class and middle-class salaries won by unions could be unraveled; the progressive voting base of unions could be destroyed; the force of organized labor could receive a deathblow. Organized labor, for all its inadequacies, remains the biggest organized political force in the country for working people. Trump and his far-right supporters want it on its knees.

How do we fight back? We may not be able to stop an anti-union Supreme Court decision, but we can make sure that our own union remains strong, maybe even stronger than before.

## Making sure our union remains strong

### RECOMMIT NOW

Starting now, the PSC is launching a #StickingtotheUnion campaign, asking every member to make a public commitment – a full year before the expected decision – to continue paying dues and maintaining the power of the union. We will need the economic power of the union more than ever as the fight for public funds and health care intensifies. We will need the political power of the union as public higher education, immigration laws and free speech come under attack.

Take the first step right now: sign up on our website to pledge your

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# PSC delegates endorse de Blasio

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

After vigorous discussion, members of the PSC Delegate Assembly overwhelmingly endorsed Mayor Bill de Blasio for reelection on January 26. The DA voted on the endorsement at the recommendation of the union's Executive Council and Legislation Committee.

"Mayor de Blasio came into office promising to fight for universal pre-K, expand the paid sick leave law to cover thousands more workers, and raise the minimum wage for all city employees and contractors. He did that. He has also, with less public attention, increased funding for the City University of New York," said PSC President Barbara Bowen in a statement.

She added, "There is still more to be done, and we will work with Mayor de Blasio to advance a progressive agenda for New York."

## SUPPORT FOR CUNY

The mayor has increased the city's funding for CUNY every year since taking office in 2014. After meeting with PSC leaders during his first campaign for mayor, de Blasio changed his position on CUNY and promised to increase CUNY funding by \$150 million over four years. With this year's budget proposal, he is on track to

## Union: a positive and progressive first term



Mayor's office

The PSC endorsed Bill de Blasio, in large part due to his advocacy for CUNY funding and for education overall, as well as a progressive record on labor rights.

keep that promise. The city has also expanded CUNY's nationally celebrated Accelerated Study in

Associate Program (ASAP), which has tripled graduation rates for participating community college

students. With a commitment of tens of millions of dollars from the city under de Blasio's tenure, the

program will be able to serve 25,000 students annually. In the summer of 2014, de Blasio played a key role in finalizing the city's support for adding eligible CUNY adjuncts to the NYC Health Benefits Program – the first addition of a major category of public employees in decades. Due to underfunding by CUNY, the previous adjunct health insurance plan faced an existential threat until PSC pressure led to cooperation with and, eventually, advocacy by CUNY management for additional funding from New York State. With funding from the state and critical support from the mayor, eligible adjuncts were shifted to the city's health plan and ensured long-term stability.

## AGAINST TRUMP

Since President Donald Trump, who ran on an anti-immigrant platform, took office, de Blasio has reaffirmed New York City's status as a "sanctuary city" – a policy that means that local police will not detain undocumented immigrants on the federal government's behalf for violating immigration law and committing minor offenses – even after President Trump issued an executive order in late January to punish sanctuary cities.

De Blasio spoke out against the

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# Union-won refund on Medicare Part B

By CLARION STAFF

If you retired from a full-time position at CUNY and have retiree health insurance coverage from the City of New York, you may be eligible to receive reimbursement for the monthly premium you pay for Medicare Part B. It could save you more than \$1,200 a year – or twice that amount if your spouse or domestic partner also meets eligibility requirements.

Medicare Part B is the part of Medicare that covers doctors' visits, outpatient care and other services not covered by Medicare Part A, which covers hospitalization. In most cases, the Medicare B premium is deducted from your Social Security check.

For 2016 filings, the standard monthly Part B premium amount is \$121.80, however most retirees will continue to pay the same standard Part B premium amount paid in 2015, which was \$104.90. If your modified adjusted gross income, as reported on your IRS tax return from two years ago, is above a certain amount, you will have to pay more. The threshold is \$85,000 if filing an individual tax return, or \$170,000 on a joint return.

Medicare beneficiaries with incomes above these thresholds must pay progressively higher Part B premiums above the standard monthly amount. This additional premium, above the standard monthly rate, is known as the Income Related Monthly Adjustment Amount (IRMAA). If you are subject to these additional IRMAA payments, the amount can change each year depending on your income.

## GETTING SIGNED UP

Reimbursement of your Part B premium is processed by the New York City Health Benefits Program and you won't receive reimbursement unless you have submitted notice of your eligibility. You do not need to submit an annual request to receive reimbursement for the standard monthly premium; once you are signed up you will continue to receive this basic reimbursement each year. Retirees in the Teachers' Retirement System (TRS) with NYC health coverage must write to the NYC Office of Labor Relations (see "Claim your reimbursement"), while retirees in TIAA (CUNY's Optional Retirement Program (ORP)) must send a form to CUNY University Benefits Office.

If you pay more than the standard monthly premium because of IRMAA, you can also be reimbursed for the additional amount. However, you must apply annually for the IRMAA reimbursement by completing a separate application and submitting it to the NYC Office of Labor Relations (see "Claim your Reimbursement").

## UNION ACTION

Reimbursement of your Medicare Part B premiums is a benefit that was won through union action. Municipal unions first won reimbursement at the bargaining table in 1966, but a succession of mayors pled pov-

## Important information for retirees



Jud Gutteau

erty and paid only a portion of the premium. In 2001, the city paid just 70 percent, which was then \$384. The return to 100 percent reimbursement was won through "old-fashioned politicking" by the New York City labor movement, says Irwin Yellowitz, a labor historian and former chair of the PSC Retirees Chapter.

By 2000, "it had been an issue that was out there for a very long time," Yellowitz said. The reimbursement meant more and more to people, especially lower-paid city workers, as premiums rose steadily. "The argument that the city couldn't afford it didn't wash anymore," he said.

New York City unions, including the PSC, the UFT and AFSCME District Council 37, helped mobilize retirees and other members to send postcards, meet with City Council members and testify before the council on the issue. In 2001, the City Council passed a measure reinstating the full reimbursement and overrode then-mayor Rudy Giuliani's veto of the bill. But Giuliani sued to block implementation and the measure remained tied up in court. In 2002, union efforts finally bore fruit: with Giuliani out of office, the city agreed to drop its suit.

## CLAIM YOUR REIMBURSEMENT

The initial eligibility determination process for requesting reimbursement of the monthly standard premium for Medicare Part B is different for members of the NYC Teachers' Retirement System and for members of TIAA. In both cases, you must provide a copy of your and/or your eligible dependents' Medicare card(s), which must be signed and must indicate the effective dates of your enrollment in both Parts A and B. (Be sure to send a copy, not the original.)

If you are receiving your pension check from TRS you must contact the NYC Health Benefits Program in writing, advising them of your Medicare Part B eligibility. Your letter must include copies of any relevant Medicare cards and birth dates for yourself and spouse or domestic

partner; your retirement date, pension number and pension system; the name of your health plan; and the name of your union welfare fund (the PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund). You must send your letter to:

NYC Office of Labor Relations  
Health Benefits Program  
40 Rector Street, 3rd Floor  
New York, NY 10006  
Attn: Medicare Unit

Participants in NYCERS (the NYC Employees' Retirement System) or BERS (Board of Education Retirement System) should also send their letters and copies of Medicare cards to this address.

If you are receiving your pension check from TIAA, you must complete an application that is available on the CUNY website and submit it to CUNY's University Benefits Office. The application is online at [tinyurl.com/Medicare-Part-B-application](http://tinyurl.com/Medicare-Part-B-application). Send the completed form, plus copies of your retiree health insurance card and your Medicare card (and Medicare card of your spouse or domestic partner), to the address below. Your Medicare card(s) must be signed and must indicate the effective dates of enrollment in both Parts A and B. Send these documents to:

CUNY  
University Benefits Office  
555 W. 57th Street, 11th Floor  
New York, NY 10019

TIAA members should make sure to follow this procedure; it is the only way to ensure that you will receive your Part B reimbursement.

## DON'T DELAY

If you are Medicare eligible, upon retirement, you should apply for Medicare Parts A and B, then you should sign up for reimbursement immediately upon receipt of your or your dependent's Medicare card (which must indicate enrollment in Part B). For reimbursement of this monthly standard premium, you will only need to sign up once. But be sure to notify the agency to which you

originally applied (either the NYC Office of Labor Relations or CUNY University Benefits Office) of any address or status changes to avoid delays in receiving your reimbursement check.

Please note that if you will receive NYC health coverage in retirement, you may apply to receive reimbursement for Medicare Part B payments for your spouse or domestic partner even if you yourself are not yet Medicare Part B eligible.

## REIMBURSEMENT FOR IRMAA

Reimbursement for the standard premium payments are generally sent out in June of the year after those Part B payments were made. Reimbursements for IRMAA payments are processed later, usually the following June. For example, reimbursement for standard Part B premium payments made in 2016 would be sent out in June 2017, while IRMAA reimbursements for 2016 would be sent out in June 2018. Effective June 2016, if you

are currently receiving your pension check from TRS through Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT) or direct deposit, your reimbursement will be deposited directly into your bank account. If you don't have EFT or direct deposit, you will receive a check in the mail in June. If you are receiving a pension check from TIAA, you will continue to receive a check. At this time EFT or direct deposit for Part B premium reimbursement is not available to retirees who are members of TIAA.

Currently, the NYC Health Benefits Program is working on IRMAA reimbursements for calendar years 2015, 2014 and 2013. You must fill out the appropriate form to apply for reimbursement of IRMAA payments depending on the year you are claiming (available online at [tinyurl.com/IRMAA-reimbursement](http://tinyurl.com/IRMAA-reimbursement)). The reimbursement form for 2016 payments should be available there by June 2017. Remember that to receive reimbursement for IRMAA payments, you must apply annually and submit the appropriate supporting documents.

Retirees who have a major life-changing event and whose income has decreased can request a reduction in their IRMAA payments by completing a Medicare IRMAA Life-Changing Event form or scheduling an interview with their local Social Security office. (People who are newly retired are often overcharged for these premiums, when Social Security looks back at the prior year's income.)

For further information, contact the NYC Health Benefits Program at 212-513-0470 or the University Benefits Office at 646-664-3350.

**Moved? New number or email? Let us know. Go to [www.psc-cuny.org](http://www.psc-cuny.org) and click the "Update Membership" button at bottom of the page. Or call the union's membership office at 212-354-1252.**

**A Message from the Professional Staff Congress:**

**SAVE THE DATE!**

**Junior Faculty Professional Development Day  
How to Survive and Thrive at CUNY**

**Friday, March 31, 2017**

**Noon – 5 pm**

**PSC Union Hall: 61 Broadway, 16th Floor**

The challenges newly hired faculty face can be daunting, but you don't have to face them alone. There is still space available at the PSC's Junior Faculty Development Day on Friday, March 31, from noon - 5 pm. It's an afternoon of workshops and presentations from department chairs, tenured faculty and union officers organized to help you navigate the tenure process and utilize the resources available at CUNY to support your scholarship. The union is here for you.

*Lunch and refreshments will be provided.*

To RSVP or to ask questions, contact Deirdre Brill, PSC organizing director, via email: [dbrill@pscmail.org](mailto:dbrill@pscmail.org) or phone: 212-354-1252.

# Fighting for safe drinking water at SPS

By ARI PAUL

Starting last May, adjunct professor of human relations at the School of Professional Studies (SPS) Susan Fountain heard that some of her colleagues had been feeling sick.

Unbeknownst to her, a staff member in her building at 119 West 31st Street had reported to the administration that there was discolored water coming from the water dispensers. The administration conducted some tests on the water system and told some administrative workers not to drink the water in the building. But, the administration failed to tell faculty members and students.

When Graduate Center PSC chapter chair Luke Elliott-Negri found out about the failure to notify instructors and students, he

## A resistant administration

was “furious,” Fountain recalled. After he “raised holy hell” with the administration, the landlord put up signs telling everyone to drink only bottled water.

### Continuing the fight around this issue

Over the summer, the PSC chapter demanded to know what the results of the tests were. “I wanted to know what I was drinking in May,” said Fountain, who had feared that the potential problems with the water had contributed to other members’ health issues. “There were other people in the building who had symptoms,” she added.

The chapter pushed for a labor-management meeting, which happened on December 16, after two

tests on the water had taken place. “I said, ‘enough is enough,’” Fountain recalled. “We put around a petition and three of us got 62 people to sign it, saying, ‘We urge you to obtain and complete water tests done in May.’”

Days later, the chapter received the results, which showed that there were extremely high levels of copper in two rooms in the building, 30 times the action level of the Environmental Protection Agency. “That’s a lot of copper,” Fountain said.

### BRINGING LEVELS DOWN

Since the December meeting, the administration produced tests from August showing the copper amount had gone down to acceptable EPA levels.



Susan Fountain and her SPS coworkers have survived on bottled water.

The chapter then continued to press for more testing. And after a meeting on January 24 with the administration, members insisted on one more test before the landlord removed bottled water from the building. But, the chapter was told the landlord wouldn’t do this for cost reasons and that the metal lev-

els were below EPA action levels.

The chapter is continuing the fight around this issue, and as Fountain noted, it has greatly helped to organize the chapter.

“It’s really something people have coalesced around,” she said. “This has really raised the PSC’s profile at SPS.”

# CLIP, Start members: full-time status

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

For CUNY Language Immersion Program (CLIP) and CUNY Start instructors, work has always been more than a part-time job. Now, thanks to the latest PSC contract settlement, they are no longer paid on an hourly, part-time basis. They are full-time instructors.

Nora Fussner, a CUNY Start teacher who is in the classroom five days a week, said that being compensated as part-time workers was an “insult” to the work instructors do.

“I’m in the classroom 25 hours a week and that doesn’t include grading and lesson-planning,” said Fussner, who teaches at Kingsborough Community College. “Being full-time is acknowledging that this is not a part-time job.”

### ONE-YEAR APPOINTMENTS

This February, because of the new PSC-CUNY contract, more than 150 teachers in CLIP and CUNY Start were converted from the hourly continuing education teacher title to full-time CUNY Start Instructor and CLIP Instructor. Instructors now receive one-year appointments, have a salary schedule with annual step increases, are paid biweekly over the entire year and are assured that their health insurance and Welfare Fund benefits will continue even when the programs are not in session.

Getting paid over the summer for Fussner is a “huge” win. “I don’t have to sock away a portion of each paycheck to save for those weeks that I won’t get paid,” she said.

Both programs provide vital skills development for CUNY students before they enroll in academic courses. CLIP, an intensive English as a sec-

## Now have year-round benefits



Caryn Davis, a CLIP instructor, teaches a class at New York City College of Technology.

ond language program, focuses on improving students’ reading, writing, communication and analytical skills. CUNY Start is offered to students who have not passed one or more sections of CUNY assessment tests, so classes focus on improving reading, writing and math skills. Classes generally meet five days a week and teachers have been pushing for full-time status for years. Finally, they have prevailed.

Anthony Prato, a CLIP instructor at Queensborough Community College, is happy that their persistence paid off.

“It means a lot because many of us worked really hard to accomplish this,” said Prato, who was a part of the CLIP-Start Alliance, a PSC committee that worked to draw attention to teachers’ issues.

Both programs have quietly prepared students to succeed academically, and, with the current

chancellor’s emphasis on improving graduation rates and shortening the time to graduation, their work has become more important than ever. The CLIP program has existed since the mid-1990s, and PSC has sought to win improvements in their salaries and benefits since 2002, as the program expanded. The Start program has existed since 2009 and has been expanding rapidly since then.

Ellen Balleisen, a former CLIP teacher and now director of CLIP and CUNY Start at Bronx Community College, says the achievement of full-time status for these instructors is “massive.” “This is a very substantial improvement,” said Balleisen, who was active in securing improvements for teachers for more than a decade. “It’s worth more than all the previous improvements combined.” Balleisen, who taught for CLIP from 1997 to 2011, has seen many of her former students

go on and work for CUNY, including an admissions officer at City College and an adjunct at Bronx Community College.

### MORE TIME WITH STUDENTS

For Caryn Davis, who has been teaching with CLIP for 10 years, the yearlong, full-time appointment means she will not always be required to teach during the summer program, but will not suffer a suspension in her benefits – and that is a welcome opportunity. Teachers can use the time for professional development, she said. With some security in place, Davis looks forward to putting time into her classroom for her and her students. A typical class for her at New York City College of Technology includes around 25 students.

“Every single class is always multilevel. I’ve become skilled at teaching this way,” Davis said. “The environment is language-rich – all the time.”

A constant benefit of the job, Davis said, is teaching motivated students. Davis recalled the effort of one of her students: an Iraqi immigrant, who worked 50 hours a week at a deli and also attended CLIP classes. Davis said the student would write his essays during work breaks and he would always submit them on time, often-times taking on extra assignments. Once he enrolled in college, he was soon taking honors classes and working as a math tutor. Taking a class with a CLIP instructor is an intensive experience.

Carol Guasti, a CLIP instructor at New York City College of Technology, works rigorously on improving

her students’ critical thinking and communication skills. Students in her class write 10 compositions that go through several drafts.

“The difference between the first essay and the last essay can sometimes be astonishing,” Guasti said.

Students come to understand the links between ideas, recognizing how to build arguments, and when analyzing story, they can see how parts of a story link together and how character is developed. A major goal for Guasti is to transform her students from “passive recipients” of knowledge to “active learners.”

In addition to teaching reading and writing skills, CLIP and CUNY Start instructors hone skills that will help students survive in rigorous academic environments.

### TEACHING BASIC SKILLS

“Every semester I am astounded by how basic study skills – keeping papers organized, completing assignments, asking questions if

### Getting paid over the summer is a win.

confused, remaining awake and alert in class, taking notes, the list could go on and on – are foreign to so many students,” said Heidi Fischer, a CLIP instructor at City Tech, in an email.

“If [students] leave our program knowing how to learn, knowing how to compensate for their individual challenges, knowing how to persist through ambiguity, I know that they will eventually succeed.” For Fischer, one of the hardest parts of her job before the contract gain was the lack of guaranteed work over the course of an academic year, and she’s happy to put that worry in the past.

“My class is currently studying the plight of migrant farm workers, and while obviously not as dire as their situation, the fundamental issue of job security is sadly similar,” Fischer said. “Or, I should say, ‘was.’”

# Critical month for the state budget

By ARI PAUL

Professors having to carry around chalk in their pockets. Students dragging in spare chairs from other classrooms so they have a place to sit for their class. A shortage of full-time faculty and poverty pay for part-time instructors.

These are the scenes of how austerity funding has hurt CUNY. PSC President Barbara Bowen described this disrepair before a group of State Assembly members gathered for a meeting on February 10. "We've all lived it," she said.

## DROP IN FULL-TIME FACULTY

Bowen said that over the years not only has enrollment throughout the CUNY system been rising but the number of full-time instructors has also fallen. She compounded those issues with the constant poverty many students have to live with while struggling to pay tuition, get to class on time and hold down jobs just to get by. For example, Bowen noted that PSC members at Hostos Community College reported that students were going without meals in order to save money – some instructors reported sharing their lunches with students.

## PSC pushes for full funding at CUNY

The message the PSC had for lawmakers was that the main goal for the PSC in Albany is to achieve full funding for CUNY's

budget, which as *Clarion* previously reported, would include enough funding for 1,000 new full-time faculty lines and an adjunct pay raise

to \$7,000 per course.

The union recognizes that the governor's proposal for free tuition for some full-time students

indicates that there is widespread political interest in making public higher education a policy priority.

The union, therefore, believes that there is political will for full funding, which the union believes is of critical importance to making the governor's tuition proposal a reality, Bowen said.

"Let's not lose this opportunity," Bowen said.

## FACING FEDERAL CUTS

The union has already testified before a state legislative panel on the governor's proposed funding for CUNY, and the union will be making several lobbying trips to Albany over the next month.

The union believes there are enough potential revenue streams to achieve full funding for CUNY. The complication, said First Vice President Michael Fabricant, is dealing with the consequences of cuts at the federal level by the Trump administration. As Fabricant said, cuts to Medicaid or the Affordable Care Act would force the governor to rework the budget he has put forth. Still, Fabricant was optimistic about what the union could achieve.

"It could be grim," he said, "but it's a chance for the state to shine."



State Assembly Member Jo Anne Simon spoke about the needs of disabled students at CUNY.

## ACT LOCALLY

# At district level, members can fight for a progressive Albany

By SUSAN KANG

A few days before the spring semester at CUNY started, I woke up to surprising news: my state senator, Jose Peralta, left the mainline Democratic caucus at the New York State Senate and formally joined the Independent Democratic Conference, or the IDC. I didn't know much about the IDC, but I did know that it caucused with Senate Republicans. This was a few days after President Donald Trump's inauguration and the historical women's marches around the country (and globe). Just the day before, I had brought my 3-and-a-half-year-old and 8-month-old sons to a protest outside of Democratic senators Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand's offices in Midtown Manhattan, in the rain, to urge them to vote against Betsy DeVos, our new secretary of education. We were just beginning to mount our resistance campaign against the national Trump agenda and now it appeared that we had to fight it much closer to home.

My neighbors and I began a phone and email campaign, demanding that Senator Peralta hold an open public forum to discuss

his decision. His staff stated that no such public meeting was planned, so we constantly urged our neighbors to call and make similar demands. Finally, after a lot of pushing (including an attempt by the senator to ask if I could host a meeting at my own apartment with some of his critics – an offer I immediately refused), the senator agreed to hold a meeting, but he did not publicize this through any of the usual channels, such as his social media, his official Senate web page, or through the email list where he communicates occasionally to constituents. Instead, his staff personally called those who had requested the meeting.

## COMMUNITY RESPONSE

As a result, the community had to build for the meeting with only three days' notice. No less than four Facebook events were created, and the event was shared through various social media channels. I created a flyer (with input from neighbors), and this flyer was posted all over the neighborhood (with help from some PSC members).

The event, which occurred on February 3 at 6:00 pm, was standing room only before it even began. By the time my husband arrived at 6:10 pm, there was a huge line of people around the block. Inside, Peralta attempted to explain the intricacies of State Senate politics, no easy task considering the volatile nature of the power struggles between Democrats and Republicans.

Because of creative districting, the Senate has historically maintained razor-thin majorities for one side or another, and there are 32 Democrats and 31 Republicans in the Senate (although Simcha Felder of Brooklyn caucuses with the Republicans). Senator Peralta blamed Senator Felder for shifting the political balance throughout the evening, although there was no discussion about how Democrats were going to win him back. The IDC now has eight members, strongly solidifying the Republican majority in the Senate. In return, IDC members get choice benefits, such as committee chair appointments, and IDC leader Jeff Klein of the Bronx gets to be the fourth of the "three men in a room" who largely decide New York state policies and outcomes.

Republican control of the upper house of the Legislature is no small matter. State Republicans have introduced bills to penalize the city for refusing to turn over personal immigration information gathered via IDNYC and have refused to allow a sanctuary bill, which passed the State Assembly, from leaving committee (although the Republicans did support the union's maintenance-of-effort bill).

## OUR FIGHT

PSC members as constituents, but also as residents of New York State, have the right and obligation to demand more from our state officials. There is a saying "all good things die in the Senate" and these good things include the DREAM Act, LGBT protections, criminal justice reform, much needed funding for K-12, voting reforms (such as early voting and automatic voter registration), a New York Single Payer act, campaign finance reform and adequate funding for CUNY.

I urge PSC members, no matter where you live, to demand that your Democratic lawmakers, no matter who they are, form a united progressive front in the state government, our front line in the fight against Trump's agenda.

*Susan Kang is an associate professor of political science at John Jay College.*

## We have the right to demand more

## PSC ACTION

# Tax justice in Albany is required to fund CUNY

By ALEX VITALE

*Editors Note: Nearly a dozen PSC members – as well as activists from groups like Citizen Action, VOCAL-NY, the New York State Council of Churches, a Stronger Economy for All and New York Communities for Change – came together for a revenue-focused day of action at the New York State Capitol on February 7, as lawmakers met to discuss taxation and the budget. The timing wasn't accidental: the activists successfully disrupted the hearing in order to demand expansion of the millionaires' tax, an end to the tax loophole for carried interest and an end to corporate welfare programs.*

Such a plan, activists said, would add \$8 billion into the state budget, which could be used for K-12 schools and public universities. "This was a major presence for a redistributive agenda," said PSC First Vice President Michael Fabricant.

So far, Governor Andrew Cuomo has signaled that he supports extending the millionaires' tax, and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie has proposed a higher tax rate on the wealthy. However, the Republican-controlled Senate has yet to support the extension.

PSC delegate and officer Alex Vitale was among the group protesting for new taxes of the wealthiest New Yorkers to fully fund public higher education:

This spring, the so-called "millionaires' tax" is set to expire in Albany. The loss of that tax, which creates a higher tax bracket for those with incomes over a million dollars, would leave a \$3 billion to \$4 billion hole in the state budget that even Governor Andrew Cuomo admits would be devastating. Such an event would

trigger significant cuts to a variety of social services and undoubtedly to CUNY.

Some have claimed that taxing the rich will cause them to leave, but there is little empirical evidence to support this. In past research, relative tax rates play a marginal decision in where high earners live. Access to jobs and quality of life concerns rank much higher. In fact, according to the Fiscal Policy Institute, during the time the tax has been in place the number of New Yorkers reporting incomes over \$1 million has increased 33 percent from 35,802 in 2010 to 47,440 in 2014.

## THE TRUMP EFFECT

The need for this tax has only increased under the new Trump administration. Elimination or restructuring of the Affordable Care Act could cost the state up to \$3 billion. In addition, there is a risk that Congress may move to end the tax exemption for local and state income taxes, placing additional pressure on middle-class New Yorkers. Finally, Trump's threats against so-called "sanctuary cities" could create additional financial challenges – he has said he would withhold federal funds from municipalities that don't comply with his agenda on undocumented immigrants.

The millionaires' tax was last set to expire during the height of the Occupy Wall Street movement. Activists in New York and nationally hounded the governor, demanding that he reinstate it. Despite his repeated pledges to let it expire, Governor Cuomo responded to public pressure and renewed it, although in a weaker form. This time



PSC members and other activists disrupted legislative proceedings in Albany to demand that the rich pay their fair share.

around, pressure is needed to expand the tax. Over the last 40 years, New York has seen an explosion of very high incomes and the rise of the billionaire class isn't reflected in the state's tax policy.

## A STARVED STATE

Decades of tax cutting, combined with failure to create new higher tax brackets, means that the state has had less revenue to work with and the burden on the middle class has increased.

In February, a coalition of community groups including Citizen Action of New York, New York Communities for Change, Make the Road New York, VOCAL-NY and the CUNY Rising alliance (of which the PSC

is a member) went to Albany to begin putting pressure on the state government to institute a tax policy that ensures the rich pay their fair share.

In a series of actions, activists repeatedly interrupted a joint Assembly and Senate budget hearing on tax policy chaired by Democrat Herman Farrell of Manhattan, who tried to block the protest, but stopped short of requesting arrests.

As protests against the Trump administration mount, it's important to remember that we face austerity budget pressures here in New York. We must remain focused on the immediate threat that it presents to our members, CUNY and our students.

Alex Vitale is an associate professor of sociology at Brooklyn College and the PSC vice president for senior colleges.

## Albany must tax the 'billionaire class'

## PSC endorses Bill de Blasio

Continued from page 3

order, saying at a January 26 press conference, "The stroke of a pen in Washington does not change the people of New York City or our values...The executive order will not change how we enforce the law in New York City, or how we do business on behalf of the people, all 8.5 million New Yorkers. This is a city of immigrants – we always have been for almost 400 years. This is our fundamental nature."

Among de Blasio's other first-term accomplishments is providing free full-day pre-K to every four-year-old in the city, expanding the city's paid sick leave by requiring businesses with five or more employees to comply with the law, and pledging to raise the hourly minimum wage for all city government and contract employees to \$15 an hour by the end of 2018.

## VOICING CONCERNS

A few PSC delegates raised questions about the union's support of the Democratic Party and about whether de Blasio had remained true to the progressive agenda he promised. Critics cited the modest financial settlements of union contracts during his term, the mayor's track record on affordable housing, and – above all – his adherence to the "broken windows" approach to policing, which critics say unfairly target communities of color.

Several delegates spoke about the impact of policing policies on CUNY stu-

dents. When the vote was taken, however, delegates overwhelmingly supported the endorsement of de Blasio. PSC officers pledged to work with the mayor for a second term to provide even greater support for CUNY, still desperately short of public funding.

## THE RACE AHEAD

In the Democratic primaries, de Blasio may face several challengers, although no major opponents have yet declared candidacy. One who has declared is state senator and former city council member Tony Avella. Although Avella is a Democrat, he is a member of the Senate's Independent Democratic Conference, which works with Republicans and has enabled Republican control of the State Senate.

Prominent among the contenders in the Republican primary is Paul Massey, a real estate executive who has outpaced de Blasio's fundraising in the past six months, according to a January 17 article in *The New York Times*.

PSC was the first public sector union to endorse de Blasio in his first campaign for mayor in 2013. The PSC joins many other major unions endorsing de Blasio for his 2017 reelection bid, including the UFT, District Council 37, UNITE HERE Local 100, Service Employees International Union/32BJ, Associated Musicians of New York Local 802 and others.



## Fighting for immigrants

The PSC has now hosted several meetings with union activists and students about how to make CUNY a sanctuary campus. "Given the really horrifying events of the last few weeks," said PSC organizing director Deirdre Brill, "it's becoming increasingly important that we move forward quickly implementing plans to help educate, protect and empower students and workers at CUNY."

# PSC members reflect on underfunding

By CLARION STAFF

You don't need to look hard to find evidence of disrepair and defunding on CUNY campuses. Leaky ceilings, rodent problems and classrooms that are too hot or too cold are just some of the many instances that cause health and safety hazards CUNY-wide. Repairs are often done in haphazard ways, as not enough funding is secured to properly complete many repairs. At the same time, CUNY faculty and staff make do with less. They buy paper, toner and chalk for their classrooms. They are under constant pressure to teach more students, and spend additional working hours in order to provide the individual attention that they believe their CUNY students deserve. "The disrepair of the buildings sends a clear message to the students," PSC President Barbara Bowen told the City Council's Higher Education Committee in January. "When a student walks into a room and sees a bucket with a mop holding up the ceiling, it says to the students: 'You don't matter.' It says, 'You do not deserve a priority environment.'"

In this article, PSC members and chapter chairs share how continued defunding of CUNY has affected the buildings that students learn in and the conditions that faculty and staff work in.

## James Davis

PSC Chapter Chair  
Brooklyn College

The most common yet most easily overlooked way in which faculty rise to the occasion to support students, thus absorbing the impact of defunding, is by taking more and more students into their classes. The financial imperative to offer fewer sections and the robust increases in student enrollment meet at the doorway to our classrooms.

Requests for "overtallies" (admission of students above the enrollment limit), requests from

## Anecdotes of austerity



Christine Li told the City Council about disrepair at City College in January.

deans to offer "jumbo" courses or otherwise pack students into a class, trips down a hallway to borrow chairs from a neighboring room – these are regular occurrences at Brooklyn College.

Faculty care deeply about their students' educational progress and their classroom experience. If they have many more students than usual, the temptation is for instructors to assign less work: fewer or shorter papers and fewer exams or assessments that are standardized for quick turnaround. But that's not in the students' interest. Instead, instructors absorb the brunt of the impact of defunding by staying up later at night to read the extra papers or to write the necessary comments. They remain longer on email and in their office

hours to make sure their students' needs are met.

## Christine Li

Professor, Department of  
Biology  
The City College of New York

There are vermin problems; one professor mentioned that he couldn't understand why students were doing "the wave" and jumping up in his classroom, until he realized that they were avoiding mice running across their feet.

## Lizette Colón

PSC Chapter Chair  
Hostos Community College

A young man, whom I'll call "X," is a natural talent, plays the piano

like an angel and has a childlike spirit. He would play the piano in our college's atrium, often staying on campus very late. Once I got to know him better, he confided in me that he preferred to stay at the college until closing time to avoid going home. His family is not supportive of his academic pursuits and he's under constant pressure to leave home. He would stay at college late, and eat at campus events. He told me that hunger hurts.

He applied to the music program at City College but was not accepted. In their letter to X, City College encouraged him to take private lessons. Once an adjunct who had taught X in his first keyboard class found out that he was not accepted at City College's music program, she generously provided X with free private lessons. Even though X is no longer a student at Hostos, faculty members arranged with the security director to allow X to have access to the school's piano. He plays the piano there, and faculty members have also shared many a lunch and dinner with X.

## Cindy Bink

Director of Counseling  
New York City College of  
Technology

Some employees place garbage bags over their desks at night because flooding has often damaged student documents. Employees worry about breathing in mold spores because their offices have been flooded so often. A foul stench on a lower-level floor reoccurs every time it rains. In one office, a plastic ceiling tile was designed to collect brown water from a permanent leak that could not be repaired.

## Vince DiGirolamo

PSC Chapter Chair  
Baruch College

You don't have to look far to see the everyday effects of underfunding at Baruch College. I know a professor who supplies the department with

paper towels from Costco at his own expense. Other faculty members have advanced their graders and teaching assistants rent money. Those with children in other colleges use their children's resources to gain access to databases available at other university libraries but not at CUNY.

## Geoff Kurtz

PSC Chapter Chair  
Borough of Manhattan  
Community College

PSC members in our chapter have taken note of varying levels of disrepair on our campus. It's common at BMCC to have three to five faculty members in an office, which makes confidential conversations with students impossible. It's not like classroom conditions are any better. There are a few broken student desks in many classrooms, and even when they're not broken, the classroom desks are uncomfortable and have too little desk space for a book and notebook. The "professor chair" in many classrooms is broken, and no high stools or lecterns are available. Even though we have a stringent restriction on how much printing we can do, we still run out of copier paper before the end of the Spring semester. Many of us have dealt with wires hanging from open ceiling panels. The physical layout of the library is very disjointed; it's a patchwork of spaces and badly needs an overall renovation.

## Robert Farrell

PSC Chapter Chair  
Lehman College

Facilities and buildings and grounds teams at Lehman College do their best to keep the campus in as good as shape as possible. But the absence of a dedicated minor repair fund and understaffing has led to inevitable states of disrepair. A planned fix of a crumbling, high-traffic pedestrian bridge on campus had to be scrapped due to lack of funds. Americans with Disabilities Act compliance work has remained incomplete for years in our main academic event space. Filthy ceiling tiles in many parts of the campus are slated to be replaced, but there's no completion date due to inadequate funding. Classrooms and office spaces are locked and unused while the college awaits money to renovate the outmoded spaces. And despite a front-page investigative article in *The New York Times* in May of last year, serious leaks in the college's library have yet to be repaired.

But we have fought back. Lehman received more than half of a recent (and wholly inadequate) \$20 million capital allocation to CUNY to complete the long-stalled construction of a new nursing building, housed for decades in a more-than-30-year-old "temporary" structure. This was no doubt in large part the result of our chapter's outspokenness on the topic at Board of Trustees and City Council meetings over the past year and our successful #ReclaimOurSchools campaign.



PSC Chapter Chair James Davis, left, said that Brooklyn College faculty members have been forced to do more with less.

# CUNY student leads stand against travel ban

By **BRANDON JORDAN**

## A national issue hits CUNY

President Donald Trump's executive order barring travelers and refugees from entering the country inspired action among many Americans, including City Tech undergraduate Hercules Reid.

Reid, City Tech Student Government Association (SGA) president and University Student Senate's (USS) vice chair for legislative affairs, heard about the case of Saira Rafiee, an Iranian student at the Graduate Center, the day after the order, which barred nationals from seven Muslim-majority countries, including Iran, from entering the United States. Rafiee was detained before boarding a New York-bound flight in the United Arab Emirates and forced to return to Iran.

### GETTING STARTED

"At that point, I didn't know what to do, because it was a federal situation and I'm just a city government president on a local level," Reid told *Clarion*.

When faced with the challenge, Reid decided to make some calls. First, he spoke with CUNY Board of Trustees member Una Clarke, who suggested writing a letter to Chancellor James Milliken. Reid wrote the letter that day and sent it.

He later spoke with Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams,



Hercules Reid, right, rallied with PSC members outside the Brooklyn federal courthouse to demand Saira Rafiee's admission to the United States.

who called a January 30 press conference, for which Reid began preparing an official statement with the help of Fernando Araujo, USS executive director.

Reid spoke at the press conference along with Adams and other CUNY students and activists, including PSC President Barbara

Bowen. Reid also participated in efforts to help those affected by the ban, including emailing CUNY Citizenship Now! and working with lawyers at CUNY CLEAR (Creating Law Enforcement Accountability and Responsibility), a project of the CUNY School of Law.

On February 4, Reid traveled to

Boston with City Tech SGA Vice President Amanda Marmol to greet Rafiee's arrival following a Massachusetts district court's temporary stay of the ban. Marmol said it was an "emotional feeling" not only seeing the CUNY student, but also "watching the families waiting anxiously outside of US Customs with us for their loved ones to come out of the door."

Reid said the executive order could potentially impact about 120 CUNY students, adding that he knew of at least three who were immediately affected abroad.

"There was one, [Rafiee], from the Graduate Center, one from Kingsborough [Community College] and one from City College. Recently, the City College individual, [who is] Yemeni, returned safely. I have yet to get an update on the [KCC] student," he said.

Reid also signed a letter that Daniel Dornbaum, Baruch College's student government president, wrote, as Reid noted, to "make a stand against Donald Trump." Thirteen other CUNY undergraduate leaders also added their names to the document urging Trump to withdraw the order.

Reid told *Clarion* that he took initiative despite being told to wait until there was "more information."

"Most people were concerned that I didn't have more information to actually help, but I didn't let that deter

me from knowing that I had a part to play," he said.

Reid, more accustomed to dealing with local city issues such as tuition increases, stepped "out of his comfort zone" to tackle the federal issue.

**'Pick up that flag and fight again.'**

"As someone new to politics in a sense, I felt overwhelmed at some of the junctures," he said, adding that it was after the press conference that other students and officials began to realize "the power of action."

As this paper went to press, Trump vowed to present a revised version of the ban.

### GOING FORWARD

Reid said he would "definitely pick up that flag and fight again" if any CUNY student was wronged, but did not want to overwhelm himself.

"Not saying I wouldn't do it, but it's a commitment. I am committed to the students who elected me, but there are so many different fights right now. We're fighting for tuition to not go up, we're fighting for the MTA to give us a discount, we're fighting for so many different things for the students," Reid said.

Reid said he felt proud of the students at CUNY. Reid found it "meaningful" that Rafiee loved

Continued on page 12

## FEELING THE BAN

# Denied entry: a lesson for the future

By **SAIRA RAFIEE**

Since the election of Donald Trump, we have been constantly bombarded with terrible news. I myself cannot help checking news websites every half an hour, and we are all awaiting and preparing ourselves for the worst, for a catastrophe. And no matter how thrilled we are to see so many protests and demonstrations being held against this wave of irrationality, our anxiety is most of the time accompanied with a sense of helplessness, of powerlessness, of defenselessness.

### UNION SUPPORT

I was relieved of these senses for a short period when I, as one of the direct victims of the policies of the new administration, felt the support of a union and a community behind me. Since the minute I told my friends and colleagues at the CUNY Graduate Center that I had been banned from coming back to the United States after being in my home country of Iran, I was inundated with emails of solidarity, and I was witness to the inexhaustible efforts to oppose this ban by the students and professors of CUNY and the members of PSC, to whom I am truly grateful. I must confess that I was not very optimistic about the results of their efforts at first, but it came as a relief to know that this was not my problem alone and to know that I am a member of a community that has my back, and more importantly, recognizes

the political nature of such a problem and tries to engage with it through collective action that stays true to the notion of "union."

This is the positive aspect of the current situation, if one could speak to anything "positive" with regard to the disaster we are facing. After decades of the rule of triumphant neoliberalism, after years of obsession with market-ridden "exploration of the self," "individual" liberty, "freedom of choice" and "diversity in lifestyles" in the absence of politics, politics is back in the streets. This is not an identity politics that focuses on difference and is incapable of realizing the ties between the particularity of distinct identities and the universal conditions of society and their relations with other social groups; a viewpoint the fallacy of which is accentuated when it is translated into the identitarianism of the right. The emerging politics are based on the recognition that the freedom of workers, of women, of undocumented immigrants, of members of the LGBT community, of Muslims and of people of color is tied to the freedom of each and every individual, that individual freedom is not possible without recognizing the "we" in "I."

This moment should not be fetishized, however. The sense of powerlessness in the face of the many irrational policies that have been implemented in the past few weeks and

what is yet to come testifies to the inadequacy of such protests, however glamorous they have been. We need to recognize the danger in order to fight it. Getting rid of this administration through impeachment or any other way is not the solution to the real dangers we are facing. The army of xenophobes, white supremacists, Islamophobes, racists, homophobes and misogynists who have taken office are insignificant when compared to the bigger danger that is a frustrated society that might cling to any hand reached out to it. What matters is to understand how we got here, how to fight the deep-rooted structures of inequality and discrimination that have been at work for decades and which different administrations, in the absence of real public participation in politics, have just intensified. If we don't want to get caught by surprise once again, we need to reflect on these issues.

### ACADEMIC DISSENT

But why was surprise the most common reaction to the election results, even among academics, in the first place? Aren't social and political scientists supposed to be aware of such trends within society? The unexpectedness of Trump's victory by the academia is a sign of its straying from its responsibility; if long ago set aside even its original conservative aim of maintaining

the stability of society, let alone the more radical ideal of seeking a more rationally organized and just society. This is a sign that it has almost totally given up the critical reflection upon what society "is" and what it "ought to be" in the name of a professionalization that only serves particular interests that are necessarily at odds with the well-being of the 99 percent. This should be a moment of self-reflection for academia, whose ties with the society has been cut through its neoliberalization.

This self-reflection could be our first step in the long fight we have ahead. In order to overcome our feeling of powerlessness and defenselessness, we need to not only build an organized resistance bloc that is capable of enforcing its will and not just defending itself in the face of current assaults, but also pursue more progressive goals. And it seems that the most important force that would be capable of all these is exactly what Noam Chomsky calls a "militant labor movement." It is time for us to get more organized, to defend the right of unionization for all workers, to try to make this emerging sense of solidarity permanent; a true solidarity that is based on the recognition of the "we" in "I."

*Saira Rafiee is a political science doctoral student and PSC member at the Graduate Center. She was denied entry to the United States during the Trump administration's travel ban, until it was blocked by federal courts.*

## Self-reflection could be our first step

# Retirees fight for social safety net

By ARI PAUL

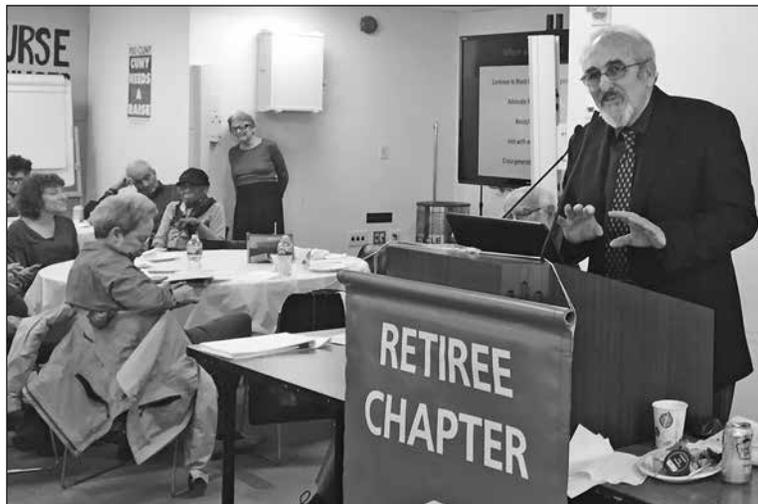
The PSC retirees chapter and its newly formed social safety net working group are asking members under the age of 65 to join their campaign to defend the social safety net – Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act (ACA) are already under threats of cuts by the Republican-led congress.

## IN THE CROSSHAIRS

“Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, the Affordable Care Act and other safety net programs are in the crosshairs of the 115th Congress. Given the louder and louder drumbeat of cutbacks and privatization, we need PSC members – in service and retiree – to make phone calls to their representatives in both the US Senate and House of Representatives,” the chapter said in a dispatch to members.

The chapter is setting up face-to-face meetings with congressional district officers in the New York

## Congressional outreach



Syracuse University Professor Eric Kingson said unionists should fight to protect and expand the safety net.

City area. Members interested in joining these visits should email [safetynet@pscmail.org](mailto:safetynet@pscmail.org), and include the name of their congressional representative.

To lend support, members can also reach out to congress members by phone.

“Go to [psc-cuny.org/SafetyNet-Campaign](http://psc-cuny.org/SafetyNet-Campaign). There you will find sug-

gested phone scripts as well as links to talking points, resources and a site to identify who represents you in Congress,” the chapter said. “To call your members of Congress, dial the US Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121. An operator will connect you directly to your congressperson’s office. When we call, we are asking each congressional office to make a commitment not to cut or privatize. We need feedback on these commitments.”

The campaign kicked off at a standing-room-only chapter meeting on February 6, in which Syracuse University professor of social work and one-time congressional candidate Eric Kingson spoke about the importance of fighting to protect the social safety net that was established after the Great Depression.

Noting that federal social safety net programs reduce New York state’s poverty levels by 50 percent, Kingson said that the Republican position of attacking these programs as “too expensive” was “an

insulting wedge strategy” that pits younger voters against older voters.

He warned that the Republicans would insist on privatizing many of these programs, or in the case of Social Security, raising the eligibility age.

**‘These guys are robbing us,’ Kingson said.**

“All of these cuts are going to pull money out of communities,” Kingson said. “These guys are robbing us.”

Ultimately, he said, not only was there enough taxable wealth in the country to keep these programs, but such a campaign to protect the social safety net should be a catalyst for a bigger movement to expand these programs.

## MEDICARE FOR ALL

On Medicare, for example, Kingson saw a potential for not just a health care program for senior citizens, but a real universal health care plan.

“I’d like to see the eligibility age go down first to 62, then to 0,” he said.

## CLIMATE JUSTICE

# All out for April 29 march for the environment

By TOM ANGOTTI

President Donald Trump has surrounded himself with fossil fuel advocates and climate change deniers. He wants to crush the pipeline resisters, roll back the progress in clean energy made during the Obama administration and drop US support for the Paris climate agreement.

But the White House will continue to face resistance to its agenda. Yet another mass demonstration on April 29 will bring together the diverse opposition to Trump’s climate agenda, this time under the banner of climate justice. The People’s Climate Movement is inviting everyone to join the resistance and help build on the momentum sparked by the women’s marches in January.

## ALL MEMBERS WELCOME

The PSC Environmental Justice Working Group, which formed last year, encourages all members to sign up and join the April 29 march. The recently formed committee supports CUNY’s clean energy and community solar efforts, as well as the many campus-based initiatives that elevate environmental justice issues through teaching, activism and the building of community alliances. Educators, both as teachers and as union members, have a particular responsibility to spread knowledge about the science and politics behind public debates, while incorporating our union’s foundational commitment to social



PSC members marched in the last climate justice action in 2014.

justice. The PSC working group is part of a nationwide discussion around the proposal for a labor convergence on climate.

The People’s Climate Platform ([peoplesclimate.org](http://peoplesclimate.org)) is the foundation for the April 29 March for Jobs, Justice and the Planet. It follows the first People’s Climate March in 2014 that brought over 400,000 people

to New York City, joined by many more in other cities around the world. The PSC contingent at the 2014 march was the largest of any labor group. The mobilizations helped create pressure that led to the signing of the Paris climate agreement in 2016, an accord in which governments, including the United States, made commitments to

reduce their carbon emissions to prevent warming above the 1.5 degree centigrade threshold that scientists say will lead to irreversible and damaging consequences. President Trump has opposed the Paris agreement and, with his typical swagger, claims he can negotiate “a better deal” for the United States.

The People’s Climate Platform broadly appeals to “all of our movements,” including labor and community, and calls for “good jobs, justice for communities and clean energy.” An essential element in the organizing is the leadership of “frontline communities.” These are largely low-income communities of color that have typically been ignored by the mainstream environmental movement, even though they are among the first to experience the negative consequences of climate-induced warming and sea-level rise, and they often lack the public and private resources to bounce back.

## A GLOBAL ISSUE

The focus on environmental justice acknowledges that climate change is a global and profound crisis that affects everyone. It threatens all of humanity as well as many other species on Earth. But as global investors drag their feet and hedge their bets by dabbling in clean energy while sustaining their long-term investments in fossil fuels, it is too easy to be lulled into complacency. Too many have put undue faith in what Pope Francis, in his encyclical on climate change, calls “technological fixes.” Those who have the privilege of living in exclusive and protected enclaves too easily succumb to a false optimism while downplaying resistance to President Trump and the league of climate change deniers behind him.

For information about the People’s Climate Movement in New York, contact [newyork.peoplesclimate.org](http://newyork.peoplesclimate.org). For the PSC Environmental Justice Working Group, contact co-chair Darren Kwong at [darren.k.kwong@gmail.com](mailto:darren.k.kwong@gmail.com).

*Tom Angotti is a professor of urban policy and planning at Hunter College and the Graduate Center.*

## A platform for ‘all of our movements’

# DeVos – we can still fight back

Continued from page 2

of activists scared her away. The message was clear: she's vulnerable even to modest protest.

Continued opposition to DeVos spells trouble for the Trump administration. The combination of her inexperience, incompetence and the unusually high level of disapproval she provokes offers the perfect ingredients for dealing Trump an embarrassing defeat down the road – perhaps sooner than you think.

While DeVos may be singularly unqualified for her new position, she isn't entirely without precedent. Consider the case of Cathie Black. In late 2010, Black – formerly chairwoman of Hearst Magazines – was appointed chancellor of the New City Department of Education by then-Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

Like DeVos, Black summoned a fierce storm of opposition. Her credentials were nowhere in evidence, she lacked a basic understanding of the issues and mechanics of public education, and she performed terribly in public. These shortcomings quickly inspired resistance from parents, teachers and her own department, which made things so contentious that she didn't survive her first one hundred days on the job.

The brief history of Black's time at New York City's Department of Education offers lessons for those looking to continue the fight against DeVos. The first is this: inexperience matters. From the start, Black's lack of qualifications portended calamity. She had never taught and, having spent her entire career in private publishing, boasted no experience in education or public administration.

## BACK IN BLACK

Possessing none of the requirements for the job, Black embarrassingly had to request a special waiver from New York State overriding the rules governing the appointment of chancellor, and was appointed a special adviser to help manage her portfolio of responsibility and decision making. It was a disaster.

Black's incompetence took a heavy toll on her department. Aides and advisers spent time and energy trying to get their chief up to speed on basic elements of the job, compensating for her inability to function effectively, and protecting her from the public spotlight. In a particularly embarrassing incident, Black was asked a question about charter schools at an open meeting with school officials.

According to *The New York Times*, "As she leaned forward to answer, the general counsel at the Education Department nearly pushed her aside as he seized the microphone and replied on her behalf." More generally, morale dipped to astonishing lows. Within a few months of her appointment, nearly half of the city's top education officials had resigned their posts.

While the response to DeVos may not be as dramatic, her presence in Washington will have negative effects. Former Assistant Secretary of Education Diane Ravitch, currently research professor of education at New York University and a leading historian of education, believes that DeVos won't find a welcoming home at the Department of Education.

"Having worked in the Department of Education in the 1990s," Ravitch told me, "I can tell you that they regard political appointees as the hired help – here today, gone tomorrow. They will put their heads down and do what they have to do. But they will do it without enthusiasm and without respect for a dilettante with so little knowledge of the department and its programs."

DeVos' team will also be forced to devote

considerable time to making sure she understands the broad contours of education policy and law beyond her department and its programs. DeVos shocked observers during confirmation hearings last month with the apparent depths of her ignorance of the field. When Senator Al Franken pressed DeVos to explain her position on the value of testing as a tool for measuring proficiency or growth, she stumbled in response.

"I think," she said, "if I'm understanding your question correctly around proficiency, I would also correlate it to competency and mastery, so that each student is measured according to the advancement they're making in each subject area."

"Well, that's growth. That's not proficiency," Franken shot back.

Later in the same hearing, a testy exchange with Senator Tim Kaine revealed DeVos' flimsy grasp on other important issues, as well. When questioned about

While much of the blame can be chalked up to Black's abrasive personality, the lesson with respect to DeVos is clear: the more she's out in public, the more opportunities there are for things to go wrong. And DeVos will be out in public quite a bit. During confirmation hearings and afterwards, a number of public officials and union leaders invited DeVos to visit local school districts and convene public discussions on issues like the role of guns in schools.

## FACING QUESTIONS

To be sure, DeVos will avoid encounters where questions concerning her competency can be resurrected and reengaged. But she will be forced to undertake a major damage control campaign across the country, reassuring school leaders, parents and teachers of her best intentions and plans for the future. And she'll need to do so without embarrassing herself or provoking more dissent.



Student protesters denounced the Trump education agenda in downtown Manhattan.

federal law pertaining to students with disabilities, DeVos tossed a word salad that both avoided the issue directly and suggested confusion about the extent of states' rights. The short time allotted to each senator for questions – just five minutes – prevented Kaine from digging in further.

But Senator Maggie Hassan returned to the point shortly thereafter, and pressed DeVos to clarify her position. "Were you unaware when I just asked you about the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) that it was a federal law?" Hassan asked at one point. "I may have confused it," DeVos replied meekly.

These sorts of episodes ought to terrify DeVos' handlers, and with good reason. Consider Black again. Her brief stint in the Bloomberg administration was defined by routine PR debacles that ultimately destroyed her tenure as chancellor and threatened the mayor's popularity.

## NON-STOP OUTRAGE

Black's reckless public performances ensured nonstop outrage. For example, she blamed overcrowding in classrooms on parents, asking, "Could we just have some birth control for a while?" She compared her role as chancellor to the title character in William Styron's *Sophie's Choice*, who had to make horrible decisions in Auschwitz. And she antagonized already angry parents at a public meeting on school closures with mocking imitations of their booing and protests.

## Cathie Black: a mini-DeVos, defeated

states that robustly fund expanding school choice programs.

DeVos' ability to realize Trump's vision, however, or any other, will necessarily be constrained as secretary of education. "Because control of education rests largely with state governments," notes Pedro Noguera, Peter L. Agnew Professor of Education at New York University and a leading expert on school policy, "the damage that can be done by the Trump administration will, in all likelihood, be limited."

That said, Noguera "wouldn't underestimate the harm that can be wrought. Public education is under attack in states like Indiana, Kansas and most of the South (with the notable exception of Texas), because of governors who have been generally hostile to urban school districts and teacher unions. With an ally like DeVos in Washington," Noguera told me, "these states will be under no pressure to address the inequality in learning opportunities that are pervasive throughout the United States."

The possible ramifications of DeVos' tenure could extend well beyond school choice. As Noguera points out, "The federal role in education may be limited but is very important. The federal government must monitor civil rights statutes particularly related to special education, the education of non-English speakers and racial integration."

"The danger with appointing someone with so little knowledge and experience like DeVos," Noguera argues, "is that they will not know how to provide leadership on these critical issues. Because her primary concern has been expanding choice, she may very well focus entirely on these issues at the expense of others."

That is, if she survives her first several months in office. DeVos will have a difficult time, as she tours the country, explaining to those hardest hit by her policy prescriptions – families in poor urban school districts and rural areas – how school choice of any kind will help their kids. These conversations could have direct effects on Trump's ability to govern. Rural voters, the base of the president's popularity, are also among the most dependent Americans on public education.

If she is unable to credibly justify the sharpening contradictions that school choice presents to families without any choice but public schools, support will dwindle. And thanks to the widespread opposition activated by her nomination, DeVos – suddenly a high-profile cabinet member – could become another serious liability to the White House.

## A TAXING AFFAIR

The nomination process was immensely taxing for the Republicans. Stiff public and political resistance to DeVos forced them to go to the mat for a candidate that no one really wanted or thinks is qualified for the job, and they did so in unprecedented ways. Pence's tie-breaking vote marks the first time in American history a vice president had to intervene to ensure a cabinet vote for their party.

The vote is embarrassing in other ways, too. DeVos is a simple case of pay for play. This bald-faced corruption offered another source of constituent outrage across the country and is unlikely to be forgotten in the midterm elections. For some political vulnerable senators, this is just two short years away.

What's more, there's little to suggest that Trump would robustly defend DeVos if her tenure proves cumbersome. While the president appears tight with her brother Erik Prince, founder of the Blackwater mercenary group that came to prominence during the Iraq War, he seems less interested in DeVos. As he signed the nomination papers for pro-

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## 15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

# Getting a fully funded CUNY

The final days of the state budget process are quickly approaching. This month, it's imperative that all PSC members and retirees call their assembly members and state senators, demanding a CUNY budget that would create 1,000 new faculty hires, raise adjunct pay to \$7,000 per course and address

the chronic underfunding of CUNY.

Call or write your representatives in Albany and demand the extension of the millionaires' tax and other taxes on the state's wealthiest to ensure that public higher education is affordable and well funded.

Professional Staff Congress/CUNY  
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# PSC protests new ICE raids

PSC members joined other activists across the nation in February to protest the detention of Daniel Ramirez Medina, a 23-year-old Mexican immigrant and father of one, by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Seattle. He had been covered under the Obama administration's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. The PSC is continuing to organize with students to ensure that CUNY remains a sanctuary campus.

# 'Stick to the union' campaign

Continued from page 3

own recommitment to paying full dues and your willingness talk to three other members about doing the same. Our goal is to prevent the loss of a single member. I believe that we can do it.

2. We can become rapid responders and sign up to receive email alerts from the union about resistance to immigration raids, emergency demonstrations and other actions. More than 1,000 PSC members responded to our call to join the Women's March on Janu-

ary 21, and hundreds more have signed petitions, called Congress and turned out for demonstrations against the immigration ban. Something is changing both locally and nationally; sign up with the union to receive rapid response alerts.

3. We can intensify the pressure on CUNY to create safe spaces for all students, faculty and staff, and we can participate in bystander or "upstander" training to prevent racist, anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic, Islamophobic or other assaults –

which have increased dramatically since the Trump election. Read the PSC's call for CUNY to become a sanctuary university and get involved in sanctuary campaigns on your campus.

4. We can raise our commitment to be active in the PSC campaigns for increased CUNY funding and a fair contract. Repeal of the Affordable Care Act would blow an enormous hole in the state budget, leading to billions of dollars in reductions. CUNY funding would almost certainly suffer. This year

# DeVos – fight back

Continued from page 11

posed cabinet members on his first day in office, Trump spoke kind words about each.

When he got to DeVos, Trump said, "Ah, Betsy. Education, right?" For her part, DeVos has only recently come to embrace Trump, having called him an "interloper" during the primary and saying that he did "not represent the Republican Party."

The secretary of education is traditionally one of the more anonymous members of any president's cabinet. Trump's education secretary is suddenly one of the most unpopular people in America. Her vulnerabilities will become his, and open an exposed target of attack for the opposition.

Indeed, just because DeVos has been confirmed as secretary of

education doesn't mean she'll be there for long. As the example of Black demonstrates, the combination of inexperience, incompetence, plummeting popularity and political pressure can force education officials to exit office early.

The fact that parents, teachers and activists across the country continue mobilizing against DeVos suggests that the new secretary of education faces a long road ahead. Or perhaps it will be short. If anyone approximates a historical echo of Cathie Black, it's Betsy DeVos.

Michael Busch is an adjunct lecturer of political science and international studies at City College. A version of this article was originally published at Warscapes.

# CUNY student travel ban

Continued from page 9

CUNY partially because of its students rallying to bring her home.

"For her to say, 'I love what CUNY did for me' is priceless," he said.

"Hercules was already a lively and intellectually curious student activist, part of an exceptional student government this year," said PSC President Barbara Bowen. "But when he heard about the detention of a CUNY student, he found his political voice. He was fearless. He refused to accept that a college student government leader was powerless to intervene in a national issue. And he did it by orga-

nizing other students and those with political power. When we arrived at the press conference in Brooklyn, we were met with a phalanx of national press; I counted more than 35 video cameras. But Hercules was unfazed. He delivered a passionate speech about students' support for a fellow CUNY student, and then he was there at Logan Airport on the tense day when we did not yet know whether Saira would make it into the country. It will be a long time before I forget the text message he sent me about the power of students' arms ready to unfold Saira and welcome her home."

may be our best chance to win new funding – before any cuts are made and while the governor has focused his attention on the Excelsior Scholarship proposal. Join us throughout the spring as we press the city for funding to allow us more time with students, and be ready to join the campaign for the next contract as it develops in coming months.

5. We can be part of national and international labor mobilizations. On May 1, the PSC will call for other universities and unions to join us for

a dedicated day of protest, teach-ins and other actions.

We have an amazing union membership; we cannot fail to act. Details on several of the initiatives will follow during the next few weeks, but we can all take one action now: pledge to be part of our #StickingtotheUnion campaign on our website. In this fight, every member counts.

In solidarity,  
Barbara Bowen  
President, PSC/CUNY