

# SFTR NEWSBEAT

Sewanhaka Federation of Teachers Retired

## From Tom Cook:

SFTR Political Action Chair

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### Grandfather Clause? Don't Be Conned

At this point in time, two of “*the three men in the room*” who have dominated NYS politics have been found guilty on various counts of **corruption**. **Sheldon Silver**, former Speaker of the Assembly, and **Dean Skelos**, former Senate Majority Leader, in all probability will be spending many, many years in a federal penitentiary, perhaps in adjoining cells. Many New Yorkers might conclude that their convictions is evidence that state politics are broken. However, I would suggest that it is evidence that federalism works. Article IV, Section 4 of the U.S. Constitution states “*The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government...*” U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara has seen to it that if New Yorkers have been unable to safeguard their representative government from some corrupt leaders, then the federal government is ready and willing to do so.

Unfortunately, there are those who are using these convictions as evidence that NY’s political system is so broken that the only solution is a state constitutional convention, and they will join with others to see that it happens. By now you may have heard that there is a very real possibility of a NYS Constitutional Convention, or “*Con Con*.” “***Shall there be a convention to revise the constitution and amend same?***” will appear on the top of the ballot on November 7, 2017.

**Now the better answer is to vote NO and rely on the less extreme, tried and true method of the amendment process.** That process enacts changes to the constitution

through the passage of individual bills by two separately elected state Legislatures before they are placed on a ballot. Lawmakers and voters have more time to make well considered changes, and only a few at time, in our state's blueprint for government.

### **It's a slower process, but less likely to produce harmful effects.**

However, if our fellow citizens are persuaded to vote yes, then anything can happen. Delegates can include sitting members of the state Legislature, political party leaders or other office holders. All are allowed to hold both their elected office and a position as a delegate, collecting both salaries! These people can't get it right as legislators and we are expected to believe they'll do better in a constitutional convention? Not bloody likely! They will be pressured by every interest group with deep pockets. The changes that arise out of it may well "throw the baby out with the bath water."

Here are some things at stake:

- **Rights to workers compensation**
- **Rights to union membership and collective bargaining**
- **The right to a free public education**
- **Prohibitions against direct government aid to educational institutions that have any religious affiliation**
- **The right to a pension for public employees**

all this and more will be in jeopardy.

One last small detail.....

**Public employee pensions are protected by the current constitution**, but if you change the constitution, all bets are off! You'll be told "*We won't eliminate or even diminish your pension because you will be 'grandfathered.'*" "*We'll just focus on current in-service teachers.*" They will appeal to your self interest in the hope that you will sell out in-service educators. Next, they will persuade voters of the need to place a modest tax on your pension income. Of course a small tax will never, ever be increased, any more than co-payments in your health plan would ever increase. Yeah, right.

### **Don't believe the promises of a grandfather clause.**

**It's a con, just like the Con Con.**

In unity, Tom Cook

## **Making Strides Against Breast Cancer** By Maddy Maffetore

Yea us! We raised over \$2,500 for the American Cancer Society's commitment to eliminate breast cancer. Again kudos to Barbara Mavro and Donna Martin for soliciting and collecting the contributions with me. A special thanks to all those whose generosity made it possible for us to reach a new high to submit to NYSUT's campaign to find a cure for this horrible disease.

## Target Reading / Our 17th Year

By Julia O'Keeffe

Target Reading volunteers have been reading at two elementary schools once a month this year. Just as in the past the children are delighted to hear wonderful stories and our readers are rewarded as they see the amused looks on the children's shining faces. We are only reading at two schools so that fewer volunteers are needed. There is always a need for back-up readers, if you are interested call me at 718-465-0228. I hope you had a wonderful holiday season.

### Target Reading Schedule 2016:

**Garden City Park:** 1:20 PM : January 12, 2016: June 4, 2016,

**Washington Street School:** 2:00 PM : March 8, 2016: Grade 2  
March 30, 2016: Grade 5

(Remember to arrive 15 minutes early to choose materials and organize. Also on March 30 we participate in Read Across America celebrating Dr Seuss.)

## Give To VOTE COPE

By Maddy Maffetore and NYSUT

After reading the **NEWSBEAT** articles regarding the attacks on our earned benefits, I hope you are scared enough to donate to VOTE COPE, your political action fund. All across America, well-funded extremists and right wing politicians are opening new fronts in their war on retirees. A tsunami of attacks on pensions, Medicare, and Social Security washes across the country, and the tidal wave is headed toward New York State. Scary? YES

If the US Supreme Court rules against a union's ability to collect dues via agency fees (Friedrich's v. California), that will break the union. Who do you think negotiates for retirees? The union does. For every 100 members, SFTR has a seat on SFT Executive Board. Scary? YES

If a 2016 vote elects to convene a Constitutional Convention in 2017, our pensions may be in jeopardy. Scary? YES

In an earlier edition of **NEWSBEAT** I indicated that you could contribute through pension deduction or a yearly check. Either way will indicate that you understand the importance of political action and the vital role it plays in your quality of life as a retiree. Please use the VOTE COPE form recently delivered to you and send it to NYSUT.

**We can stop these attacks from coming to New York State because we have VOTE COPE. I implore you to support it as if your future depends on it, because it does.  
Scary? YES, YES, YES**

## A New Look at Cixi – The Last Dowager Empress

For historians, there is no more powerful aphrodisiac than an exciting topic buoyed by a raft of unexploited sources, raising the prospect of a revisionist look at an important figure or even an entire era. There are few leaders in modern Chinese history more layered with prejudice begging to be stripped away than Cixi, the dowager empress who ruled China for almost half a century until her death in 1908. For decades, she was condescendingly referred to in the West as “the Old Buddha,” the “She Dragon,” the usurper of a throne “over whose disintegration she presided.”

In her biography of Cixi, Jung Chang’s extensive use of new Chinese sources makes a strong case for a reappraisal. Although there have been many histories, diaries and documentary collections of Cixi’s historical era published in Chinese, far fewer studies have appeared in English. Since none have made use of a full range of sources in both languages, there has been no truly authoritative account of Cixi’s rule. Her story is both important and evocative.

Cynthia Woodhouse will present these new findings with a PowerPoint presentation on March 8 following the regularly scheduled meeting.

Please join us for this exciting presentation. It will begin promptly at 12:00 noon and refreshments will be served.

*“Although I have heard much about Queen Victoria, I do not think her life was half so interesting and eventful as mine.”*

*-Empress Dowager Cixi*

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## Special Guests Attend SFTR Luncheon

On October 20, 2015 thirty five of us gathered at Uncle Bacala’s for a wonderful luncheon. The company was great and the food was delicious. We had a number of special guests including SFT President Rosanne Mamo, RC18 President Barbara Keilty, and NYSUT Nassau Director and former SFT President Matt Jacobs.

Barbara Keilty presented NYSUT awards to Frank McHugh and Karla Adasse for their work on our newsletter. The common theme in each of their talks was the negative implications of a NYS Constitutional Convention. NYSUT will be working hard to spread the word that a “NO” vote is very much in our interest when the Question arises on the November 7, 2017 ballot. Anna Zurawinsky also spoke about the necessity of all of us to remind our elected officials to safeguard the earned benefits that define our quality of retired life.

If you missed our luncheon in 2015, we hope to see you October 2016. You will enjoy seeing former colleagues and perhaps a friend or two that you have not seen in some time. The afternoon was a great success.

## Safe - We Are Not !!!!

By Anna Zurawinsky

Let us not forget that Public Education Unions were organized to protect our teachers from those who were bent on exploiting them. When I was first hired:

- There were NO caps on class size
- There were NO limits to the number of classes per day
- There were NO caps on requirements to attend extracurricular activities
- There were NO negotiated agreements for salaries
- And to make matters worse teacher evaluations were subjected to the whims of the Board of Education and Administrators

In the late fifties, Public Education Unions became a strong force because of activists who put themselves out there to endure strikes, prison, and the contempt of government. Finally after much duress and persecution, teachers and retirees have been able to enjoy the fruits of their labors. Since School administrators must negotiate with Public Education Unions salaries have improved, fair working conditions are mandated, health care is provided, and retirees' rights are protected.

But now there are anti-union and anti-public education groups at work who have lots of money to negatively affect our livelihoods and economic future. These groups want to destroy our guaranteed pension in New York, privatize Social Security, and eliminate both Medicare and employer provided health benefits for retirees. You may ask how?

On the federal level, the Friedrichs case which is being heard by the Supreme Court is an attack on unionism. The Friedrichs case which was initiated by "right to work groups" seeks to eliminate agency fees. If they are successful it would be the beginning of the end for public unions. Current and future retirees will be affected because all negotiated health benefits would be null and void if there is no longer a union.

On the state level if allowed a Constitutional Convention could empower Governor Cuomo to reform our pensions by dropping the word "**guaranteed**" from the clause in the current Constitution. He could also levy a state tax on our pensions. There will be NO grandfathering for retirees. All will feel the wrath of our governor.

All across America well funded, aggressive radical extremists are attacking public retirees. What can we do to preserve our unions that provided your pensions and health benefits? What can we do to protect our public schools and teachers from greedy wall street monsters? We must educate our retirees about the aforementioned dangers, contribute to vote COPE a NYSUT Political Action Fund, our future depends on it.

***Remember as a retiree you must continue to fight for what is essential to your well-being or you may not survive.***

## **“SFTR Higher Education Grant**

By Norma Busching

The members of the SFTR continue to take an interest in the welfare of the students in our district. In the spring of 2015, **“The Sewanhaka Federation of Teacher Retirees Grant for Higher Education”** was created to reward students who have demonstrated: **“a marked academic improvement in the last few years of high school.”**

The Guidance Department in each of the district’s schools selected a winner. The Grant Committee interviewed the winners and selected the district winner. The District winner and each of the finalists received grant. The awards were presented by the committee members at the students’ senior awards assemblies. Marie Cannava, Frank McHugh, Joan Natalie, Glenn Nielsen and Sophia SuzziValle served on the Grant Committee chaired by Norma Busching. SFTR plans to give these grants on an annual basis.

### **Here are the awards for this year:**

**Yvens Pasteur** from Elmont Memorial High School was the district winner who received \$500 and a plaque.

A grant of \$100 and a plaque was awarded to each of the following:

- **Elyssa Felix** from Floral Park Memorial High School
- **Ashley Chiauzzi** from H. Frank Carey High School
- **Alexandra Rasch** from New Hyde Park Memorial High School
- **Donovan Downer** from Sewanhaka High School

## **FYI**

### **Advance Directives:**

In NYS there are three types of advance directives that will speak for you when you are no longer able to speak for yourself.

- Health Care Proxy lets you appoint a health care agent to make health care decisions for you.
- A Living Will allows you to leave written instructions that explain your health care wishes especially about end of life.
- Do Not Resuscitate Order only lets you express your wish to do without CPR an emergency treatment to start your heart and lungs if breathing stops.

## **NYSUT Regional Conference Report**

By Marlene Natale

On November 19<sup>th</sup> the SFTR once again was well represented at the NYSUT Regional conference for Retiree council from Nassau and Suffolk at the Watermill in Smithtown. This was the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. Marlene Natale, Leslie Fields, Tony Katkowski, Maddy Maffetore, Anna Zurawinsky, Norma Busching, and Tom Cook enjoyed speakers, breakout sessions and food that made this a successful conference.

The speakers included Paul Pecorale NYSUT Vice-President who discussed the importance of stopping the NYS constitutional convention from occurring. This will take the efforts of all in-service teachers as well as our retirees to prevent our current tenure and retirement benefits from being changed. In addition, Barry Kaufmann NYSARA President discussed keeping retirees informed of legislative issues.

A highlight was the Mini Symposium of Education with: Assemblyman Ed Ra,

Patchochogue-Medford Superintendent Dr. Michael J. Hynes, Beth Warnken Patchogue-Medford's Union President, Jeanette Deutermann who began the Opt-Out movement, Matt Jacobs NYSUT Staff Director, Nassau Regional Office and Peter Verdon NYSUT Staff Director, Suffolk Regional Office. We owe a great deal to these speakers for working tirelessly to not only rid New York State of this draconian curriculum but protect us by insisting that the evaluations become detached from the abusive testing that is now in our State.

The breakout workshops were Long Term Care and Elder Law/Estate Planning, Medicare and Retiree Health Insurance, Pension Update and Aging in Happiness. Once again each of these workshops was informative.

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### **Opt-Out**

By Marlene Natale

The drive for opting children out of high stakes tests continues. We have discovered that the earlier the children opt-out the more it benefits the children. In those schools that have refused the test early, the easier it is for teachers to teach a more civilized curriculum.

Teachers ARE NOT encouraged to speak out within their district of employment but ARE encouraged to opt their children out as well as speak out in their home districts. We have tenure and are allowed under the first amendment free speech. For those who read that this is moving in the right direction, you are correct. But, until the laws are changed and professional educators are in charge again we must continue to be activists.

### Sad News!!!

We Regret to inform you that since our last issue two of our members have passed away.

**Mildred Ackerley** was a pioneer member of the SFTR. She developed our "Membership Directory" and she also coordinated our trips to Belmont Race Track. Mildred's family has requested that donations be sent to either of the following.

The Adelphi Scholarship For Mildred Ackerley '55 in Mathematics

Adelphi University  
Office of Levermore Hall, Room 207  
One South Avenue,  
Garden, City NY 11530 Attn:Rory Schaffer Walsh

**Marion Brzozowski** was one of our pioneer members who actively coordinated many events. The family has requested that donations be directed to the Alzheimer Foundation.

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS 2016

### Communications Group Meetings\*

Tues: 10:00 AM: SFT Office: Jan 12, March 8, April 12, May 17, June 7

### NYSUT RC18 Meetings\*

Mon: 10:00 AM: March 21, April 18, May 16, June 20  
North Bellmore Public Library (Newbridge Road and Bellmore Avenue)

\*All members are welcome

### Target Reading

**Garden City Park School:** 1:20 PM (arrive 1:00PM) : June 7

**Washington Street School:** 2:00

March 8 (Grade 2) : March 30 (Grade 5 ) Diffendoofer play

### SFTR Events

March 8 CiXi see page 4,  
Theater/Dine Out, Aquarium/Boat Ride, Sagamore Hill Trip  
Dates TBA

**Anna Zurawinsky, Maddy Maffetore: SFTR Reps**  
**Karla Adasse: Newsbeat Editor**  
**Contributors: Norma Busching, Tom Cook, Leslie Fields,**  
**Maddy Maffetore, Marlene Natale, Julia O'Keefe,**  
**Cynthia Woodhouse, Anna Zurawinsky**  
Special thanks to Helen Zurawinsky  
Letters welcome e-mail: [KarlaFSA@aol.com](mailto:KarlaFSA@aol.com)  
Log onto: [www.sft-nea.org](http://www.sft-nea.org)









