



Labor Fax

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THE SHORTEST MONTH?

By Charles Wowkanech & Laurel Brennan

This month started with an announcement by Governor Codey that he would not seek the Democratic Party's nomination for Governor. This decision clears the path for Senator Jon Corzine to run in the November 2005 general election. Governor Codey has committed his entire career to the people of New Jersey and is to be commended for all that he has accomplished.

The past several weeks have seen us spending a tremendous amount of time at the Statehouse making sure our member's voices are being heard on important legislative issues. Just this week bills were passed by the full Senate and the Assembly Labor Committee to increase the state's minimum wage to \$7.15 an hour. We look forward to seeing this bill through the Assembly and right to Governor Codey's desk.

Through the New Jersey State AFL-CIO member committees we will continue to initiate, monitor and track bills, and make sure that members of both the Assembly and Senate keep working towards improving the quality of life for New Jersey's working families.

With key pieces of legislation still awaiting action, the state budget is facing a \$4 billion deficit and the prospect of a Constitutional Convention on the horizon, it is critical that the New Jersey labor movement continue to stand together and make our united voices and message of solidarity heard by New Jersey's lawmakers.

Finally, throughout February, recognized as Black History Month, we also keep the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. alive, remembering that his struggle to bring fair wages, better working conditions, improved education, and a better way of life for all is what we are still fighting for today. Together, in his honor, working in solidarity, we will create a world where all of us will be judged "not by the color of our skin but by the content of our character."



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SENATE VOTES TO INCREASE MINIMUM WAGE

S-2065 (Sweeney/Vitale/Codey) was approved by the Senate on 2/14/05 by a vote of 26-10-4. Voting in favor of the bill were all Democrats present as well as Republicans Allen, Asselta, Gormley, Inverso and Littell. The bill "phases-in" a minimum wage increase to \$7.15 over two years. To see how your Senator voted, please visit www.njafICIO.org. The Senate Labor Committee passed the bill on 1/24/05 with a bipartisan 5-0 vote.

AND IN THIS CORNER...

Furthermore, the Assembly Labor Committee voted along party lines to release the Assembly version of the Minimum Wage increase (A-3781: Sires). Voting in favor were Chairman Joe Egan (D-17), Vice Chairman Jeff Van Drew (D-1), Assemblywoman Sheila Oliver (D-34), Assemblyman Mike Panter (D-12) and Assemblyman Fred Scalera (D-34). Voting against the bill were Assemblyman Guy Gregg (R-24) and Assemblyman Mike Doherty (R-23). The bill now awaits a vote by the full Assembly.

THE FIGHT'S NOT OVER!

The minimum wage bill is expected to be voted on by the full Assembly as early as March. Before this vote, however, we anticipate that opponents of the measure will aggressively mobilize their resources to persuade the Assembly to not act on the bill or "water it down" via amendments. One such proposal is to amend the bill on the floor to incorporate a "training wage" below the minimum wage for certain employees. The Senate companion does not include this provision, although the "training wage" amendment was offered by Senator Walter Kavanaugh (R-16), but rejected. If accepted, it will set a bad precedent and open the door to creating different wage levels, all below the minimum wage, based upon the requests of certain employers, and will certainly lead to future requests for industry based exemptions. The NJ State AFL-CIO is opposed to this amendment. We encourage affiliates concerned with this provision to contact their Assembly representatives to reject this amendment if offered.

HEALTH WE CAN AFFORD

The New Jersey State AFL-CIO testified in favor of several pieces of legislation heard by the Assembly Financial Institutions and Insurance Committee and the Senate State Government Committee on Monday, February 7. Among the bills were measures requiring the extension of health benefits coverage to certain dependents up to the age of 30 (A-3759: Cohen) and a requirement that any party bidding on or performing a State contract to provide employee health care benefits to their workers (S-2048: Doria). For more information on these bills visit www.njafICIO.org.

- NJ State AFL-CIO: The Voice for Working Families in New Jersey -

ON THE ROAD

Officers and Staff of the New Jersey State AFL-CIO:

...conducted strike assistance training and advocacy for IBEW System Council U-3 Strikers at Rutgers Labor Center and IBEW Local 400.

...provided LEAP dislocated worker assistance to SEIU Local 1199 members being dislocated from their jobs at MediCenter and Pathmark.

...attended UAW 595 planning meeting for proposed plant closing of the GM plant in Linden.

...presented testimony to Assembly Financial Institutions and Insurance, Health and Human Services, Labor, and Military and Veteran's Affairs Committees on legislation important to New Jersey's working families.

SECURING OUR FUTURES

The New Jersey State AFL-CIO participated in a press conference hosted by Citizen Action earlier this week to publicly oppose plans by President Bush to privatize social security. In a prepared press release, New Jersey State AFL-CIO President Charles Wowkanech discredited claims from the White House that social security is on the brink of disaster and encouraged members of New Jersey's Congressional delegation to explore other options to guarantee social security benefits for current recipients as well as for baby boomers nearing retirement and young workers who are just beginning to pay into the system. Congressmen Rob Andrews (D-1), Rush Holt (D-12) and Donald Payne (D-10) participated in this press conference along with New Jersey State Senator Barbara Buono (D-18) and Assemblymembers Linda Greenstein (D-14) and Michael Panter (D-12).

STATE BUDGET LOOMS

With a \$4 billion projected deficit for the 2006 state budget, the media is reporting that a vast array of new revenue proposals are being considered. Included are some that would potentially adversely affect workers. Included are proposals to privatize toll roads and tap the Unemployment Insurance Fund via transfers to the general fund or via bonding. The New Jersey State AFL-CIO opposes these proposals. Also being considered is a tax on 401(k) retirement accounts. With social security under attack at the federal level and employer pension contributions lagging or being completely eliminated, this proposal could further jeopardize retirement security. Acting Governor Codey's budget speech is scheduled for March. The New Jersey State AFL-CIO is looking forward to working with the Administration during the legislative budget session to insure that a balance budget is attained without adversely effecting working families.

LITERACY TRAINING GRANTS

The New Jersey Department of Labor is offering Literacy Training grants to unions throughout New Jersey. These grants are designed to help union members, and other workers, with basic mathematics, reading comprehension, basic computer literacy, English proficiency and work readiness skills. For more information contact John Bicsko, Employment and Training Coordinator at 609-989-8730.

Upcoming Events

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| March 3-4, 2005 | Apprenticeship Conference Atlantic City |
| March 9, 2005 | Retiree's Committee Rutgers Labor Education Center |
| March 12, 2005 | School Board/Non-Partisan Labor Candidates Seminar Trenton |
| March 18, 2005 | OSHEP Workshop Emergency Response Planning Rutgers labor Education Center |
| March 18-19, 2005 | WILD Conference Rutgers Labor Education Center |
| April 28, 2005 | Workers' Memorial Day Commemoration |

PROPERTY TAX CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

On January 13, 2005 the Assembly State Government Committee held a public meeting to discuss A-5269 (Roberts/Greenstein), a bill which authorizes a State constitutional convention. The New Jersey State AFL-CIO testified in committee and stressed the importance of reforming New Jersey's regressive property tax system. We also raised concerns regarding a proposal to give Convention delegates the authority to review expenditures made by the State, many of which are mandated under law and court order. A Convention with such parameters could potentially have a devastating effect on the status of public employees and the New Jersey State AFL-CIO is opposed to this concept. Various other recommendations regarding the delegate selection process were also made to protect the interests of our membership. To read our current position, please visit www.njafclcio.org.

GIVE US THE COUNT

Governor Dick Codey signed A-1727 (Thompson/Weinberg) on January 24, 2005. This bill requires hospitals and nursing homes to compile and provide staffing information to members of the public.

IBEW SYSTEM COUNCIL U-3 STRIKE UPDATE

1350 members of IBEW System Council U-3 have been on strike against Jersey Central Power and Light and its parent company, FirstEnergy, for 12 weeks. The NJ State AFL-CIO and the Community Services Department continues to assist the Council, including strike assistance training, member advocacy, and food banking activities. We urge all affiliates to support our brothers and sisters through a contribution to the SCU-3 IBEW Strike Fund, which can be sent to Ron Rittenhouse, 540 Marshall Street, Phillipsburg, NJ 08865.