



Labor Fax

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27th CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION WRAP-UP

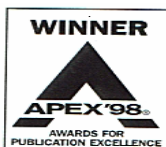
By Charles Wowkanech & Laurel Brennan

The New Jersey State AFL-CIO 27th Constitutional Convention was one of our most successful, productive Conventions to date, all because of your dedication and commitment to our State's Labor Movement. We are humbled by your vote of confidence in our leadership and we vow to continue to make the next four years, a time of change and growth.

The Convention started off with meetings of our Central Labor Council Presidents, Executive Board, and COPE Screening Committee, and these meetings produced a number of ideas, resolutions and Constitutional Amendments for your consideration. Your unanimous support of four amendments to our Constitution will truly take our organization to the next level, and we cannot thank you enough for having the vision to make these improvements possible. Most notably, for the first time in the history of our federation, a Central Labor Council president will represent all state CLC's on our Executive Board.

Your unanimous support of a stable and long-term funding mechanism for the COPE Program will grow our State's pioneering Labor Candidates Program. This long-over due funding solution will go far towards "registering, educating, and mobilizing union members; the Labor Candidates School; recruitment and training of Labor Coordinators; and the massive volunteer recruitment and field programs."

This year's COPE Program has a lot to accomplish, with taking back two Congressional seats in the Third and Seventh districts included in the list of top priorities. Both Congressional candidates, State Senator John Adler and Assemblywomen Linda Stender, pledged to fight for the Employee Free Choice Act in Congress and we responded with a unanimous endorsement of them, along with U.S. Senator Frank R. Lautenberg, and eleven additional Candidates for U.S. House of Representatives.



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Your work at the Convention also paved the way for the New Jersey State AFL-CIO to formally endorse Barack Obama for President of the United States. This year, we have the ability to ignite change at the national level, and elect to office a United States President who will fight for working families in our nation's capitol and redirect our country on to the right path. This will likely prove to be the most important election of our generation!

With the Employee Free Choice Act, healthcare reform, trade policies and the economy at the top of the priority list, and a large focus of the Convention, you also charted the direction of our organization on organizing, green-sector job growth, supporting the troops, member education and training, and political unity, through the passage of sixteen meaningful and progressive resolutions.

We are so appreciative of your work at the 27th Constitutional Convention and all you did to make it a resounding success. Moreover, we can hardly wait to work with you to accomplish the goals set at the Convention.

MINIMUM WAGE ADVISORY COUNCIL SEEKING COMMENT

The New Jersey Minimum Wage Advisory Committee (MVAC) is seeking comment on the adequacy of the minimum wage in the State. The New Jersey State AFL-CIO encourages affiliates concerned with this issue to please submit written testimony to support legislative recommendations to enact legislation implementing an annual cost of living adjustment (COLA), as well as increasing the wage to \$8.50 and adjusting the wage for tipped workers. The Commission will meet in September to examine the testimony and will issue its annual report the following month.

Please submit all written comments, no later than September 7, 2008, to NJMWAC@dol.state.nj.us or via regular mail to the following address: Shelly Friedman, Executive Assistant, Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Office of Labor Standards and Safety Enforcement, P.O. Box 054, Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0054.

For additional information regarding the campaign to increase the minimum wage, please contact our Legislative Affairs Coordinator Eric Richard at (609) 989-8730.

ON THE ROAD

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

...Stood with labor leaders, community representatives, elected officials, and thousands of union members in support of UAW casino workers in Atlantic City.

...Joined other team members of the North Jersey Economic Innovation Alliance (NJEIA) Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) Initiative.

...Conducted the LEAP Spring Train-the-Trainer program for 25 union members representing a variety of unions at Rutgers Labor Center.

...Coordinated a LEAP Workshop for 28 RWDSU/UFCW Local 1100 members laid off from Liberty Hardware Distribution Center in Randolph.

...Held two LEAP Peer Counselor Training programs in Atlantic City for UNITE HERE Local 54 staff.

...Participated in the Essex County Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD) meeting in Fairfield.

...Facilitated the New Jersey State AFL-CIO Retirees Committee Meeting in New Brunswick.

...Delivered Chemical Security Awareness and Preparedness training to Equistar Chemicals, Deltech Resins, Contract Filling, and Seidler Chemicals.

...Trained students at Monroe Township High School and North Brunswick Township High School on safety awareness.

...Facilitated forklift training, bloodborne pathogens training and CPR certification for Lorco Petroleum Services, ShopRite, and W. R. Grace.

...Conducted a one-day Safety and Health Training Day for the staff of Midland Adult School.

...Provided refresher training in PPE, Bloodborne Pathogens, Chemical Safety and MSDSs to Newark Watershed Conservation & Development Corporation.

Upcoming Events

August 16-17, 2008	Annual Labor Candidates School New Brunswick, NJ
September 3, 2008	Public Employees Committee Meeting Trenton, NJ
September 10, 2008	New Jersey State AFL-CIO Retiree Committee Meeting New Brunswick, NJ
October 7-8, 2008	New Jersey State AFL-CIO Legislative Conference Atlantic City, NJ

For more information on any events listed, please check our online calendar at www.njafclcio.org.

RETIRES FORUM A SUCCESS

The New Jersey State AFL-CIO Retirees Annual Legislative Forum, "It's the Economy, Seniors!", was held May 20, 2008, at UAW Region 9 in Edison and was moderated by Secretary-Treasurer Laurel Brennan. 165 enthusiastic union retiree activists heard the AFL-CIO Chief Economist, Ron Blackwell, give a brilliant assessment of the current economy and what needs to be done. Attendees also heard presentations on Social Security, Medicare, and Healthcare, from NJ Assemblywoman Linda Greenstein and Melissa Lewis, from the Middlesex County Department on Aging, as well as remarks from Monmouth/Ocean CLC President Wyatt Earp and Middlesex CLC President Joe Jennings.

2008 SUMMER RECESS LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY

Six months into the 2008 / 2009 Legislative Session, Governor Corzine and the Legislature have taken action on several significant labor issues. With elections quickly approaching next year, we are providing you with the votes of our elected officials on important labor issues that have passed both houses of the Legislature. Below is a brief summary of each. The roll call votes on each of the following three issues can be found by visiting: http://www.njafclcio.org/pages/current_legislation/.

School Construction:

A-2873 / S-1457 (Coutinho/Rice), supported by the New Jersey State AFL-CIO, which allocates \$3.9 billion for school construction, passed the Senate narrowly by a vote of 21-18, mostly along party lines. All Democrats voted yes, except Senators Jeff Van Drew (D-1) and John Adler (D-3), who voted against the bill. All Republicans present voted against the bill. The bill passed the Assembly 42-36, also mostly along party lines, with all Democrats voting yes, except Assembly members Albano (D-1), Barnes (D-17), Diegnan (D-18), Milam (D-1), Stender (D-22) and Wisniewski (D-19) who voted no. All Republicans voted against the bill, except Assemblymen John Amodeo (R-2) and Vince Polistine (R-2), who abstained. It is anticipated that Governor Corzine will soon sign the bill into law.

The New Jersey State AFL-CIO thanks those legislators who supported this important legislation that will allow for the construction of modern educational facilities for our children, as well as providing an important economic stimulus for our state in regard to job creation.

Public Employee Benefits:

The legislature acted on S-1962 / A-2818 (Buono / Sweeney / Roberts), opposed by the New Jersey State AFL-CIO, which makes various changes to public employee health insurance and pension plans, including increasing the retirement age from 60 to 62 and eliminating Lincoln's Holiday and changing eligibility thresholds for pension and health insurance for part-time workers. The legislation passed the Senate by a vote of 31-8-1, with mixed support from Democrats and with all Republicans supporting, except Sen. Bill Baroni

2008 SUMMER RECESS LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY (Continued)

(R-14), who voted no. The bill also passed the Assembly by a vote of 52-13-14-1, also with Democrats split on the issue, and with all Republicans present voting yes, except Assemblymen Amodeo (R-2), Polistina (R-2), Merkt (R-25) and Rooney (R-39) who voted no.

The New Jersey State AFL-CIO would like to thank legislators that voted against this bill because we believe that a reduction of benefits should only be negotiated in the context of the collective bargaining process, which ended approximately one year ago.

Paid Family Leave:

We are proud that New Jersey has become the third state in the nation to pass Paid Family Leave Legislation. This is a much needed and long overdue policy for New Jersey's working families and we hope that other state's, and eventually the federal government, will pursue and enact this pro-family policy.

In the Senate, all Democrats voted in support of the bill, except Senators Turner and Gill, who voted against it, and Sen. Rice, who did not vote. All Republicans present voted against the bill, except Sen. Baroni, who voted in support.

In the Assembly, the bill was also passed mostly along party lines. All Democrats present voted yes, except Assemblyman Milam who voted no, and Assemblywoman Joan Voss, who abstained. All Republicans voted no, except Assemblyman John Amodeo and Assemblyman Ron Dancer, who voted in favor, and Assemblyman Malone, who abstained.

The New Jersey State AFL-CIO would like to thank Governor Corzine who signed the bill into law on May 2, 2008, for his long time advocacy, as well as Senate President Codey and Speaker Roberts for posting this legislation. We also would like to thank all the legislators that voted in favor of this bill, as well as the lead sponsors, Senators Steve Sweeney and Barbara Buono, Assemblyman Nelson Albano, Assemblywoman Sheila Oliver, Linda Greenstein, and Assemblyman Wayne DeAngelo.

Other Labor Issues:**Workers' Compensation Administrative Reform Legislation:**

Due to a series of articles run in the Star-Ledger in April criticizing the efficiency of the state's workers' compensation system, a Senate Labor Committee hearing was held on the subject. Senator Sarlo introduced a package of six bills – all focused on administrative reforms, which passed both houses of the Legislature with broad bi-partisan support. The New Jersey State AFL-CIO supported the legislative package. A brief description of the more significant bills can be viewed by visiting: <http://www.njafclcio.org/pages/legislation>.

Early Retirement Legislation:

On June 24, 2008, Governor Corzine signed an Early Retirement Incentive (ERI) program into law for certain full-time employees of State government. The New Jersey State AFL-CIO was neutral on this legislation and did not lobby for or against it. Employees of Local Government or Local Educational employers are not eligible. The ERI requires that an eligible employees must retire as of August 1, 2008, and submit an application no later than July 15, 2008, and meet additional criteria. For details on the law, please visit: <http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/pensions/stateeri2008.htm>

Universal Health Care:

Senator Joe Vitale is seeking to achieve universal health care for all residents via a two phase legislative process. The first phase (S-1557), which has passed both houses with broad bi-partisan support, seeks to extend health care coverage by expanding the NJ Family Care Program to more low income parents, mandating that all children in the State have health care coverage either through public programs or private coverage; and adopting various reform measures to the individual and small employer insurance markets to increase the affordability of, and stabilize enrollment in, health benefit plans for individuals and small businesses.

Although the New Jersey State AFL-CIO strongly supports the concept of this legislation, we remained neutral because the "phase 1" legislation establishes the groundwork for the "phase 2" legislation, which we have concerns with and for which details have not been provided. The main concern with the "phase 2" legislation is two fold. First and foremost, there is no shared responsibility – in regard to employees and employers, to pay for mandated health insurance. Even the Massachusetts version of Universal Health Care, which required all residents to be insured by July 2007, required some employer responsibility - businesses with 11 or more full-time employees that do not offer health insurance must pay an annual "fair share" assessment of \$295 per employee. And businesses must arrange to allow workers to pay health insurance premiums with pre-tax dollars.

The current New Jersey proposal has no requirements on employers, but allows the "pre-tax" payment. Second, due to the failure to have any employer requirements, there is a concern that employers that currently provide coverage will stop doing so to reduce costs, and simply shed this obligation to the state program. An initial study of the Massachusetts program, released in June 2008, shows that this hasn't occurred, although health care experts believe the single year assessment does not rely on enough data to be accurate and continues to have concerns of the likelihood of employers dropping coverage. The Massachusetts law also isn't yet fully implemented, and several factors may affect employer coverage in the future. The "phase 2" legislation has not yet been introduced.