news&views

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Voting in America: You're Never Too Young – Or Too Old to Know Why It Counts

recent New York Times article discussed the strategy which helped the campaigns of the two winners of the Iowa Presidential caucuses. Each campaign applied lessons of behavioral science to getting out the vote. The campaign team of Republican Ted Cruz sent out mailers warning that a low turnout was expected and indicated that recipients' past voting record was known, graded and would be disclosed to their neighbors.

Although highly touted by some political consultants, this alarmist, neighborhood peer pressure approach was risky because it could have elicited an unintended negative response. Apparently, it worked for Cruz. On the Democratic side, the Clinton campaign used a prepared script for its phone bank that asked voters about their voting plan — the time and way they intended to get to the polling sites — with the intention of encouraging them to commit to voting. The Clinton camp devised its carefully worded script to use phrases that evoked civic responsibility and informed those called that turnout was expected to be high as additional motivation. The campaign strategy worked here too.

Voter turnout is traditionally high for adults 65 and older, and actually rose in the last Presidential election to 71.9% from 70.3% in 2008, despite the surge in voting for President Obama among younger voters. In fact, young adults had the poorest voting record, just 21%, and adults, ages 25 to 64,

Long Island retirees will participate in a voter education session on May 24 at the Knights of Columbus Hall, 1 Morton Street, E. Farmingdale.



voted at only 37%. As for the increase in senior voting, part of it has been attributed to the rise in the number of people who are now in the 65-plus age group, the fastest growing demographic in America.

Indeed, as baby-boomers age and increase in numbers, the senior share of the electorate rose by 6%, while younger voters share declined by the same 6 percent.

There are other noteworthy voter trends as well. For the first time ever, black voters exceeded white voter turnout, 66.2% versus 64.1% in the last presidential election, and voting among Latinos, despite a huge population increase which resulted in more than 2.3 million people being eligible to vote, actually decreased by nearly 2% to only 48%. And women vote 4% more than men, 63.7% versus 59.7% for the age category of below 65,

but after age 65, the reverse is true.

Despite the fact that there are so many examples of people in other nations fighting for the right to freely elect their representatives, here in America — with voter turnout that dropped from 40.9% to 36.3% in 2014 — it is clear that we still have a lot of work to do to educate and motivate more citizens, from all age groups and other demographics, to vote

The Retiree Division, in conjunction with the League of Women Voters, is taking on this formidable challenge. We will be conducting voter education seminars and registration drives in Brooklyn, the Bronx, Long Island and Florida. The goal is to help people better appreciate this hard-fought-for right, basic to American democracy, and to fully understand why every vote counts.



Brooklyn retirees look forward to a voter education seminar on May 20 at the Sheepshead-Nostrand Houses, 2264 Bragg Street, Brooklyn.



Queens retirees' voter education session will take place on March 30 at the South Jamaica Houses, 109-04 160 Street, Jamaica.



A Message From the President

Gregory Floyd

Paid Family Leave – Our Families Matter

attended Governor Cuomo's press conference, in which he was joined by Vice President Joe Biden, to announce the Governor's proposal for a 12-week paid family leave to allow an employee to take off from work to care for a

sick relative or a newborn child.

The Governor said, in an emotional, personal way, that he regretted not taking off to spend more time with his ailing father before he died, noting: "I could have easily taken the time, and didn't. Sadly, there are many workers in New York who don't have that option. If they took off, there might not be a job to return to." The Governor went on to say: "At the end of the day, family matters, intimate relationships matter. And, in this 24/7 world, let this state make a statement about what really matters."

I support this proposal. Paid Family Leave represents what we value as a society. Enabling workers to care for loved ones is not only a true mark of who we are as people, but reveals to the world our priorities as a nation. As for its economic impact, critics have voiced concerns that there may be financial hardships to bear on the part of the employer and possibly the worker, but in my view, the emotional hardship of not being able to take care of a sick family member or a newborn, outweighs that concern.

Moreover, a worried worker is often not a fully productive

worker. Workers who come to the job feeling satisfied that they were able to do their part and contribute to the well-being of a loved one give rise to workers better able to perform their job. In fact, the sense of family loyalty and personal satisfaction that Paid Family Leave helps support can also have an added benefit of extending those feelings to a job that values the same traits.

While the details of the Governor's proposal are still being worked on, if passed by the State Legislature, New York State Paid Family Leave will join New York City's sick leave laws which provide municipal workers with six weeks of paid leave, in addition to private sector workers, with up to five days of employer-paid sick leave in businesses where there are 5 or more employees.

Clearly, we have to stop thinking of family leave time as an individual matter, largely left to women and, instead, as both a shared responsibility and benefit among men and women, employers and employees, young adults and older adults.

For its part, New York has always been viewed as a national leader, setting standards in many areas, including gay rights and women's rights. Once New York establishes Paid Family Leave, other states will follow, thereby helping to answer the question asked by so many political pundits in this presidential election season: what kind of people are we? The answer, reaffirmed: we're a nation where compassionate care is in our hearts and in our laws.



Retired Members Have Lived the Union's History

By Nancy B. True, Director, Retiree Division

ral history can be defined and experienced in different ways. Often the term is used to refer to formal accounts of the past by acknowledged tradition bearers. At other times it is described as informal conversation

amongst family members and co-workers about past experiences at home and on the job. And sometimes, oral history is captured though recorded interviews with individuals who have lived the experiences and are willing to share their memories. This is what the Teamsters Local 237 Oral History Project has been doing for the past 20 years.

Throughout history most people have learned about the past through the spoken word. For generations, informal historians have preserved others first-hand accounts of the past. Among the most notable efforts to collect oral accounts of the past in our country are the thousands of life histories recorded by the Federal Writers Project, an agency of President Roosevelt's New Deal. During the late 1930's and early 1940's, these life histories were used in an attempt to document the experiences of ordinary

people coping with the hardships of The Great Depression.

At Local 237, we too have a history in need of preservation. Our history is not written in books. The history of our union resides in the heads and the hearts (and sometimes the closets) of those who have been a part of it. The day-to-day experiences on the job provide a history that is from the heart. This history captures the beauty of the ordinary as well as collective struggles to achieve a better quality of life through union membership.

Local 237 retirees are the historians who can share and preserve the great history of our union with younger working members. The stories of people like Daniel Siciliano, who participated in union actions (in his case, the 1971 Bridge Strike), or others like Hercules Cornish, who described the joy of being able to afford a Dr. Brown celery soda and corned beef sandwich on payday, or like Jose Melendez who proudly keeps his NYCHA uniform neatly pressed long after retirement. The stories of brothers, like Anibal, Miguel and Victor Matos, who are active in the Retiree Division, just as they were active union members while working. Harry Bernstein shared his memories about how the attorneys became Teamsters.

Oral history provides a rich portrayal of the past and, in some instances, the only "record" of past events. Since 2015, the Teamsters Oral History project has expanded to include interviews in Puerto Rico, capturing not only life histories on the job, but also the experiences of the Puerto Rican diaspora in civil service employment. Professor Nestor Murray-Irizarry of Casa Paoli in Ponce, has been conducting interviews on our behalf. In 2016, Erika Gottfried, retired archivist from the NYU Wagner Labor Archives, will be interviewing retirees in the NYC metropolitan area.

I hope that you will join with us in preserving the great history of our union for generations to come. If you would like to be a part of the project, give me a call at the Retiree Division. As I approach my 30th anniversary with Local 237, it is probably about time that I share my own experiences on the job! I look forward to hearing from you.

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Different Months On Similar Roads

bruary is Black History Month. March is Women's History Month. Does that mean that it takes an entire month to tell the history of African-Americans? And how about women with a slightly longer month? In fact, one month is not really enough to fully acknowledge and understand the challenges and accomplishments of either.

Perhaps more important is the link between the struggles of repressed groups in our country and the people who come together to fight for justice. For blacks and women, the pathways to equality, whether from the back of the bus or through the glass ceiling, are mirror reflections and sometimes intertwined. Both involved courageous people, with a pioneering spirit, willing to make personal sacrifices which often resulted in physical and emotional trauma, in order to right a wrong for the good of many. While we pause to remember them in history, their actions were very much about the future.

Take Maya Angelou's story. This legendary poet, playwright and civil rights activist worked along with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. She was also the first poet since Robert Frost at the 1961 inauguration of John Kennedy, to recite her poem, "On the Pulse of Morning," at the inauguration of Bill Clinton in 1993.

But Maya's journey for justice as an African-American and a woman, which was acknowledged by President Obama when he bestowed upon her the nation's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, had a troubling start. She was a rape victim as a young child, after which she refused to speak for five years. Her philosophy behind how she persevered, which helped pave the way for others to beat back their oppressors, is perhaps best summed up in her poem "And Still I Rise":

You may write me down in history With your bitter, twisted lies, You may trod on me in the very dirt But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Then there's Claudette Colvin. In 1955, nine months before Rosa Parks refused to sit in the back of the bus in Montgomery, Alabama, 15-year old Claudette Colvin refused to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery and was arrested. Colvin, now a 76-year old Bronx resident, said: "History had me glued to the seat. I just couldn't move. I wasn't breaking the law. I just wanted white people that was passengers on that bus to know that there was this one little Negro girl who wasn't going to yield to that injustice."

Colvin, despite her efforts, never became the face of the movement, and speculates that Parks, an adult secretary for the NAACP, was considered a better image of the civil rights struggle. Locally, Colvin was ridiculed as "that girl on the bus," and eventually moved to the Bronx to escape what she termed "all the do's and don'ts" in which you "couldn't step out of your boundaries."

As for New York, she observed: "You were segregated. But, they didn't have the signs up."

Colvin acknowledges the role of unions in helping improve her life. A union member working in a nursing home for 36 years, she said: "I know that the union was important. That's why I'm able to get my little pension and Social Security."

February, March, or any time of the year, it is important to recognize the struggles and applaud the accomplishments, big and small, of massive movements, or just one teenage girl, that brings us closer to the America we want for our grandchildren.

Retirees Celebrate the Holidays

HOLIDAY PARTY – The annual retiree holiday party was held on December 18, featuring great music and food. A terrific time was had by all. Retiree Division Director Nancy True and retiree Joseph Hayes joined retirees on the dance floor. Teamsters Local 237 President Gregory Floyd stopped by the festivities, pictured with retiree Veronica Davis.







New York State Constitutional Convention – Things You Need To Know

By Patricia Stryker

Recording Secretary, Board of Directors, Teamsters Local 237

On Tuesday, November 7, 2017, you, the voter, will see on the ballot a question to be answered "Yes or No." You will be asked whether the state should hold a Constitutional Convention. Your vote should be a resounding "No."

Under the State Constitution, every 20 years the people are asked a seemingly innocuous ballot question: "Shall there be a convention to revise the Constitution and amend same?" It's an option, but it's not the only way to update the Constitution.

If in 2017, people voted for holding the convention, delegates would be elected at the next general election — in November, 2018. The following April, delegates would meet in Albany for an unspecified period of time until they agree on recommendations that would put to the voters for another referendum no sooner than six week later.

Why should you vote "No"? What's at stake? Currently under our Constitution, these are the following provisions:

Public employees:

- Diminishment of pensions prohibited
- Civil Service Protection
- Veterans' Preference

All workers:

- Workers Compensation and Worksite Safety
- Care of the needy (Includes Unemployment)
- Right to organize and collectively bargain

Building Trades:

• Public Works & Prevailing Rate

There is another option available to make changes to the Constitution. It can be changed legislatively by our elected representatives in Albany by two separately elected state legislatures. If passed, the bill or bills would appear on the following November ballot as a referendum. This method had been used successfully since 1894. This method works.

The climate in the country, including New York State, is not very worker friendly. Unfortunately, we have seen the rights of workers diminished and in certain states taken away completely. We must work together to educate each other about why we cannot risk destroying the state's charter document by having a constitutional convention that could bring changes that adversely affect workers.

Hope You Had a Pleasant Valentine's Day!

Remember what the novelist Marcel Proust wrote:

Let us be grateful to people who make us happy, they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.

RETIREE NEWS & VIEWS

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Filing For Bankruptcy – Is It Right For You?

By Kenneth Perry, Esq.,Deputy Director
Local 237 Legal Services Plan

ncreasingly, Americans over the age of 65 are getting into trouble with debt and turning to the bankruptcy courts for relief. For many, the cause is lingering pre-retirement debt. For others, it is the consequence of helping their



adult children who themselves are in financial distress. Whatever the reason, seniors are the fastest growing demographic of bankruptcy filers, according to a 2010 report by University of

Michigan Law School professor John Pottow.

There is a prevailing belief in our society that people should always pay off their debts. But for many, trying to pay off all of their debts can be a hardship, if not outright impossible. Many are struggling with large credit card bills and monthly debt that exceeds their retirement income. For debt-laden retirees who are burdened by credit card debt, personal loans and medical bills, filing for bankruptcy may be the better choice.

Rather than drawing down retirement assets, bankruptcy may make the most financial sense for these individuals — even if they are homeowners. Retirees can avoid losing their homes in bankruptcy by using what's called a "homestead exemption." "Homestead" means the house or apartment that is

your primary residence. The homestead exemption is intended to protect the equity of your home in a bankruptcy. (Equity is the value of a property minus the mortgage balance still owed on it.) The amount of the homestead exemption varies by state. For example, in New York, the homestead exemption is \$165,550 for an individual and \$331,100 for a married couple, if both are filing for bankruptcy together.

Another benefit of bankruptcy is that retirement accounts like pensions, 401ks and IRAs are exempt, which means that creditors can't touch those assets in a bankruptcy.

There are two types of bankruptcy for individuals and couples: Chapter 7 and Chapter 13. With Chapter 7 bankruptcy, bankruptcy filers can discharge all of their debts right away, but filers with a lot of assets may have to surrender some of their property. Because many assets are protected from bankruptcy by exemptions, most debtors do not have to surrender any property in a Chapter 7 bankruptcy. Chapter 13 bankruptcy requires bankruptcy filers to pay back at least a part of their debt over time (3 to 5 years), but are not required to sell any property.

In order to file Chapter 7 bankruptcy, every bankruptcy filer needs to pass a means test, and if the filer's income is too high, he or she may not qualify for a Chapter 7; he or she will instead have to file a Chapter 13. However, retirees have an advantage. Social Security benefits do not count toward income for the bankruptcy means test, so most retirees can easily qualify for a Chapter 7 bankruptcy.

Bankruptcy is not the right choice for everyone, and everyone should consult an attorney before making any decisions. You should call the attorneys at the Legal Services Plan with any questions or concerns you may have, 212-924-1220.

On a personal note...

Congratulations to retiree, **Joseph Hayes**, a 30-year veteran Hospital Police Sergeant at Coney Island Hospital on the birth of his 5th great grandchild, Leighyanna Simmonds, born in November to Joseph's daughter, Tyteyana Hayes.

Happy 60th Anniversary to **James and Everlyn Wragg**. James is a retired NYCHA worker. They have four children, six grandchildren and one great grandchild. Among the congratulatory cards received was one from President Obama and the First Lady, who wrote: "We are inspired by your remarkable partnership."

Condolences to the family of **Ralph Pelo**. Ralph was a charter member of Teamsters Local 237 and held various titles in NYCHA before retiring as an administrative superintendent. He leaves behind his loving wife Annette, son John and sisters Dora and Violet.

Condolences to the family of **Samuel Rosa**, a retired maintenance worker at Manhattanville Houses. Samuel was married to Luz Rosa, a retired superintendent secretary at Rangel Houses, for 45 years. His brother is retiree Raymond Limbert.

The Retiree Division mourns the death of **Lea Vela**, retired institutional seamstress and longtime Retiree Division part-time office assistant. She was a ray of sunshine for all who came into her sphere. The unofficial "jefa" of the Retiree Division, she was beloved by all.