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Adams' fiscal plan will face labor test

Just 1.25 percent is budgeted for raises

BY RICHARD KHAVKINE
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Mayor Eric Adams' preliminary budget, released last week, reflects some tough choices. It includes funding cuts in early childhood education and for libraries, for CUNY and for city several departments, including the Human Resource Administration and those that oversee homeless services and youth and community development.

The mayor, though, said the tentative, \$102.7 billion spending plan, about \$1.3 billion shy of this year's revised budget, is not so much an austerity plan as one that spends more wisely.

"This budget protects funding for the essential services that continue to keep the city safe and clean, drive equity and affordability, and keep us on the path to prosperity," he said in his budget presentation Jan. 12.

It's those very services, nearly all performed by city workers, that will be front and center as collective agreements begin to run their course and administration officials sit with municipal unions in the coming weeks and months. Those negotiations will pose severe tests for city labor officials as they seek to balance needed fiscal discipline with the debt, in the form of salary and benefit increases, owed to city workers, many of whom toiled along empty streets as the pandemic ravaged the city and, in some cases, desolated their ranks for a number of weeks at least.

The city has so far budgeted funds to cover 1.25 percent annual wage increases, a figure that Ad-

ams, speaking at the New York State Financial Control Board in September, called "the beginning, not an ending." But, he added then, while the city is "committed to paying fair wages, we will not make deals that the city cannot afford."

Still, an analysis of the spending plan by the non-partisan, nonprofit Citizens Budget Commission nonetheless expects the next round of labor contracts to "likely exceed the funds set aside."

Annual raises of 3 percent would run \$800 million in the first year, but would increase threefold, to \$2.5 billion annually, starting in the third year, according to the analysis, done by the CBC's vice president for research, Ana Champeny, and published the day before Adams released the spending plan.

The budget plan notes that reserves to meet collective bargaining obligations nearly triple from the current \$1.38 billion to \$3.87 billion in 2027, but those reserves include applicable pattern funding for a few unsettled contracts, including with the 24,000-member Police Benevolent Association, whose most recent deal expired more than five years ago.

That union, which has argued that a pattern-conforming agreement would not be sufficient since it would leave city cops far behind their colleagues with the State Police and Metropolitan Transportation Authority P.D. alongside whom they sometimes work, has been in arbitration with the city over a new deal for more than a year.

City labor officials are now also in negotiations with DC 37, the city's largest municipal union, whose contract for 80,000 workers expired 19 months ago.

Eventual deals — and how well they are accepted by the rank and



Michael Appleton/Mayoral Photography Office

Mayor Eric Adams visited the Spring Street Sanitation Garage last June to announce the opening of enrollment for the sanitation worker civil service exam. The contract with the city's sanitation workers is among those expiring later this year, and the president of their union, Harry Nespoli, has been adamant that his members deserve healthy pay increases given their role during the pandemic.

file — could go a long way to suggesting whether negotiations with other collective bargaining units will be fractious and prolonged or cordial and punctual.

Asked how his administration would approach negotiations with union officials who will be quick to remind city negotiators how workers stayed on the job during the height of the pandemic, the mayor

kept his cards close.

Garrido skeptical

"I understand the sacrifice of being a civil servant because I think if you do an analysis of the mayors over the years, I'm probably one of the only modern day mayors that was a civil servant," Adams, who retired as a NYPD captain in 2006,

said during the press briefing that followed his budget address. "When we talk about health care, that's my health care. When you talk about pension, that's my pension. When we talk about the commitment of being a civil servant, that's who I was. And so I know what they do

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Courtesy Simon Davis-Cohen/32BJ SEIU

Union cleaners of Twitter's offices in Chelsea protested outside of their former offices Jan. 10. The workers, including Lucy Calderon, were laid off in December. Twitter terminated the contract with Flagship Facility Services, which employed the cleaners, Dec. 19, leaving the 12 cleaners jobless and without the health care benefits that they had previously won with the help of their union 32BJ SEIU.

Twitter terminates union cleaners

Fired just before Christmas, the workers pledge to 'keep fighting'

BY DUNCAN FREEMAN
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Lucy Calderon was preparing for her family's Christmas celebration Dec. 19 when she got notice that, effective immediately, she would no longer be employed at her \$31-an-hour union job cleaning Twitter's headquarters in Chelsea.

Calderon had clocked out from her shift just four hours before she received the notice that Twitter had ended its contract with Flagship Facility Services, the contractor that employed Calderon and her colleagues.

"It was very shocking ... we had been working there for many

years," she said this week. The 12 cleaners went public about their firing on Jan. 10, and held a protest outside of Twitter's West 17th Street offices that afternoon.

Calderon had worked at Twitter since 2017 and has been working as a cleaner since 1998. A single mother, she is the family's sole breadwinner supporting herself and her daughter, both of whom have chronic asthma.

The cleaners have been unionized with 32 BJ SEIU for seven years and had won robust wages and health care benefits in previous contracts. Those benefits are now at risk. "I have to take medication every day for my health and I have to care for my daughter," Calderon said. "It's really, really bad, I'm still trying to figure out my next steps with my leagues."

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'Historic' nurses' strike ends

Tentative deals include staffing, salary gains, recruitment effort

BY CRYSTAL LEWIS
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Nurses at Montefiore Medical Center and Mount Sinai Hospital ended a three-day strike Jan. 12 after reaching tentative contract agreements that include 19-percent raises and provisions to enforce safe staffing ratios.

The nurses returned to patients' bedsides soon afterward, the New York State Nurses Association said. The union reached a tentative deal with Montefiore around 3 a.m.; the agreement with Mount Sinai followed shortly after.

"NYSNA nurses are exhausted, we are excited and we are victorious," the union's president, Nancy Hagens, said during a press conference later that afternoon. "The last three days on the picket lines have been historic and inspiring."

The Montefiore agreement includes 19.2-percent compounded raises, creates a new nurse-student partnership program to recruit local Bronx residents

into nursing, and improves staffing ratios in the emergency department. The hospital has committed to renovating the emergency room to stop the use of hallway beds. The deal also establishes financial penalties that will be paid to nurses working in units that are out of compliance with safe-staffing ratios.

"We came to these bargaining sessions with great respect for our nurses and with proposals that reflect their priorities in terms of wages, benefits, safety, and staffing," said Philip Ozuah, Montefiore's president and CEO. "We are grateful for the dedication and commitment of our nurses who have served through very challenging circumstances over the past several years."

The pact with Mount Sinai includes 7-percent, 6-percent and 5-percent raises over three years, following the pattern set by NYSNA's deal with New York-Presbyterian. It also creates new staffing ratios in all units and new language to enforce safe-staffing.

Mount Sinai Health System called the tentative deal "fair and responsible."

"We are pleased that The Mount Sinai Hospital

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'Excluded' workers launch benefits campaign

Seek budget item to make 750,000 eligible for unemployment

BY DUNCAN FREEMAN
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Hundreds of workers and organizers have launched an effort to expand New York's unemployment insurance benefits to cover the hundreds of thousands of workers currently excluded from federal protections.

The new jobless insurance program, which advocates are calling the Unemployment Bridge Program, would cover undocumented immigrants, self-employed workers such as freelancers, vendors and some domestic workers as well as people reentering the labor force following their release from prison or jail.

Members of the Fund Excluded Workers coalition, made up of local labor organizations as well as community and immigrant advocacy groups, accompanied by elected officials, rallied near the South Street Seaport last week as part of a statewide effort to pressure Governor Kathy Hochul to include \$500 million in next year's budget to expand unemployment insurance for the workers.

Advocates intend for the Unemployment Bridge Program to build on the initial excluded worker's fund, which the FEW coalition helped push through in 2021. That fund, which is now depleted, focused mainly on providing support for undocumented immigrants. The workers have expanded their coalition, and their demands, so that freelancers, self-employed workers and former inmates would be included in the assistance as well.

Assembly Member Karines Reyes, who introduced the budget proposal, told the crowd at the Jan. 11 rally that the program would cover "every single person in New York State that is a non-traditional employee."

"We're fighting for a permanent solution for our workforce," Reyes continued, "and they will not touch this if we don't get it in the budget, so we need to make sure that we are turning up the heat."

State Senator Jessica Ramos, the item's sponsor in that chamber, said the effort would be "a three-month long fight."

"We want this in the budget April 1st," she said. "We want the Unemployment Bridge Program on the desk of Governor Hochul."

'Terms of life and death'

The unemployment bridge program would provide \$1,200 a month, the average state rate for unemploy-



Duncan Freeman/The Chief

A coalition of labor, immigrant and local community groups, along with elected officials, rallied on the East River waterfront last week to in support of a state-sponsored program that would offer unemployment insurance to about 750,000 workers not covered by federal benefits. The \$500 million Unemployment Bridge Program would provide unemployment to undocumented immigrants, freelancers and recently incarcerated people.

ment insurance, for 30,000 qualifying workers. Those eligible for the assistance under this program must make less than the state's median income, which is currently \$56,000.

Recently released inmates and prisoners re-entering the labor force would also be eligible. The unemployment rate for most groups eligible for the unemployment bridge program hovers around 6 percent, but 70 percent of workers recently released from prison are without jobs.

All told, around 750,000 New Yorkers could be eligible for the benefits, according to estimates from the Immigration Research Initiative,

though the \$500 million is only enough to fund the first year of the program, and will only be able to cover a fraction of those ultimately eligible for the program if unemployment worsens.

"These are terms of life and death," Andrés Garcia, co-executive director of the Staten Island Immigrant Center told The Chief following the rally. "It's the fear of wondering whether you are going to be able to keep your home or not," he continued. "It's the difference between knowing that you're going to be able to feed your kids even if you do happen to go through a job loss, which so many New Yorkers did

during the pandemic but weren't able to get any support regardless."

Would help freelancers

The 180,000 eligible freelancers for the Bridge program include artists, photographers, writers, audio producers, street vendors and some taxi drivers which represents the largest group of eligible workers that wasn't covered by the initial excluded workers' fund.

Eric Thurm, an organizer with the Freelance Solidarity Project, said at the rally that his organization was elated to join the fight to create "a basic safety net for people who are too often left out of the conversation and denied some of the already limited benefits and respect we get."

Thurm, also a campaign coordinator for the National Writers Union, said that "a lot of our bosses and some politicians try and claim that freelancers are not really workers, but not only do we perform many of the same tasks once done by salaried employees, we're the people left holding the bag when companies cut corners, and we do

that work with even fewer protections than salaried employees."

Hochul has yet to comment on the effort. During her State of the State address earlier this month, the governor signaled her support for linking an increase in the state's minimum wage to inflation increases, for which Ramos and several of the groups rallying last week have also advocated.

In December, however, Hochul vetoed the Freelance Isn't Free Act, which would have given freelancers protections from wage theft by mandating that employers provide contracts and ensured that the state would help workers recoup unpaid wages.

"We need to do the structural work of matching our state's unemployment system to the realities of the labor force," Ramos said in a statement. "The Unemployment Bridge Project is an update that aims to create a 21st-century safety net to match our 21st-century workforce."

The Fund Excluded Workers coalition will hold several similar events in Long Island and in upstate New York this week.

'We need to do the structural work of matching our state's unemployment system to the realities of the labor force.'

— State Senator Jessica Ramos

BUDGET: Labor negotiations will be test for mayor's spending plan

Continued from Page 1

and we're going to be as fair and fiscally responsible as possible."

But Henry Garrido, District Council 37's executive director, suggested that "it's going to be really hard" for the city to negotiate a contract "that is fair for the workers who have sacrificed so much and deserve an award of gratitude not just by words but at the bargaining table."

But neither is he convinced that the city's budget woes are as pronounced as those reflected in the budget or that the city can't make good, even very good, for workers who imperiled themselves and their families while working through the pandemic's darkest days.

"Every year that I've been here, even before I was head of the union, it's been anticipated the city would end with a deficit" but instead concluded with a surplus, Garrido said in an interview the day after the tentative budget's release.

For evidence, for instance, he pointed to increased property-tax revenue forecasts and said that other income streams, such as from the

city's expanded speed-camera program, have exceeded expectations. "So, I am encouraged to see that the reality has been slightly different than the projection," he said.

In any case, Garrido, alluding to the mayor's stated support for civil servants, said, "if you care about an issue ... you want to make sure that issue is funded."

And carving out fair contracts is also essential if city services are going to function like they need to, he argued. But the increasing number of vacancies, which he attributed in some part to low salaries, in municipal departments is compromising that mission.

The city, he said, is being out-recruited by the private sector, where even fast-food and other retailers are offering starting wages eclipsing those offered by the city. "It's going to be hard to recruit from that," he said.

"There's a cause and effect, a whole ecosystem where ultimately services are going to be hurt," he said. "It's not just about headcount reduction, but about what that reduction might mean."

In a report released the same day as the budget plan, the city's Office of Management and Budget noted that not hiring for just over 4,300 vacant positions this fiscal year, as outlined by the mayor's "Vacancy Reduction Initiative" saved \$181 million. Not hiring for a similar number of vacancies in the upcoming fiscal year will save \$350 million, the OMB said.

Lander: Budget 'meanders'

Vacancies across city agencies already number about 23,000, the OMB report noted. There were just over 21,000 as of last August, State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli's office reported in November.

The initiative, announced in November, mandated that all city agencies, except those with uniformed and pedagogical titles and those that support mayoral priorities, would have to cut the number

of vacancies they could fill by 50 percent. The OMB's summary said the initiative "promotes efficiency, generates annual savings, and has no impact on service delivery or health and safety."

But, much like Garrido, City Comptroller Brad Lander said the personnel cuts could also prove harmful. "The Mayor appropriately asked agencies to find savings opportunities, yet sweeping cuts to vacant positions may come at the cost of hiring in mission-critical functions" Lander said in a statement on the mayor's plan. "Responsible budgeting for NYC's future does not mean cutting services that New Yorkers rely on."

Lander, referencing the "New New York" roadmap released by Adams and Governor Kathy Hochul in May that envisioned vibrancy and growth, said the mayor's spending plan, "rather than making investments upstream as that plan

envisioned ... meanders with little direction."

The mayor, anticipating the tenor of that critique, called it unduly pessimistic, and noted that there were still 23,000 open positions, many for what he termed "critical roles," for which the city would be hiring. "In this budget, we are limiting spending," Adams said.

He rejected the notion that the city would be squeezing its workforce.

"It's not more with less... We have to do better than what we have," he said during the press briefing. "We believe there were real savings, and we see that and I think that it is unfair to say that every day, civil servants have not been producing a quality product and they're going to continue to do so."

How much it costs the city to keep those assurances will come in for significant tests in the coming weeks and months.

Oral history of Rikers Island shines light on city failures

BY JEFF ROWE

How do blades get in? The same way drugs, phones and weapons infiltrate — visitors, incoming inmates and friendly guards. Gangs often emerge as the governance inside.

Rats, mice and roaches infest the place. The smells of vomit, body odor, urine and feces are pervasive. Medical care is uneven at best.

The mentally ill — estimated to be 40 percent of the jail population — suffer the most, preyed on by the stronger inmates and often relegated to solitary confinement.

"Rikers: An Oral History," by Graham Rayman and former Chief reporter Reuben Blau (Random House), presents the experiences of inmates, staff, lawyers

and groups who work with those incarcerated at Rikers. Some held there plead guilty, even if they are innocent, just to get out of the nightmare, said Soffiyah Elijah, executive director of the Alliance of Families for Justice.

Staff, up to and including wardens, offer some of the most compelling critiques.

A corrections officer — the authors say those staffers hate the term "guard" — said he beat an inmate for an hour, including flushing the toilet while holding the inmate's head in the bowl — all because the inmate "disrespected" him.

At 425 pages, the sheer number of voices in the book sometimes become repetitive and the speakers sometimes are incoherent. Nonetheless, the assembly of testimony presents a powerful portrait

of a failed institution. The city had said it plans to close the facility by 2027.

Will the book foster some original thinking on what to do with people arrested, awaiting trial, unable to raise bail, serving sentences for relatively minor crimes or convicted of serious crimes and not yet transferred to state prison?

Political will certainly seems missing in action.

Perhaps the most telling conclusion, and call to action, comes early on in the book: No one comes out of Rikers better than they entered.

"You internalize the dehumanization (and) that's how you treat other people," said Eddie Rosario, who spent part of 1990 at Rikers. "You're never the same person again."



Michael Appleton/Mayoral Photography Office

Mayor Eric Adams led the Jan. 1, 2022, roll call at the 103rd NYPD Precinct in Queens. Administration officials are in arbitration with the 24,000-member Police Benevolent Association regarding a new contract. With most of the city's collective bargaining agreements expired or expiring, the newest deals — and how well they are accepted by the rank and file — will go a long way to suggesting whether city negotiations with other unions will be fractious and prolonged or cordial and punctual.

Educators accused of bogus vax proof back in classrooms

Judge: DOE skirted contract's disciplinary requirements

BY CRYSTAL LEWIS
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Thirty city public school employees accused last spring of submitting fraudulent Covid vaccine cards received return-to-service letters Jan. 11 after a state Supreme Court judge ordered that they must be allowed back in the classroom.

The educators, who are tenured and were named in a lawsuit seeking their reinstatement, are among the 82 Department of Education employees who were placed on leave without pay last April for allegedly failing to comply with the vaccine mandate established for city schools employees in the fall of 2021.

The United Federation of Teachers argued that the city violated its collective bargaining agreement by disciplining its members without first holding due process hearings. An arbitrator agreed, ruling last June that the DOE did not have the right to place the accused educators on unpaid leave without first allowing them to appeal.

UFT: DOE 'had no authority'

The DOE sent a memo to the staffers informing them that they would start being paid again once school started in September, but that they would not return to the classroom. A lawsuit naming 30 of the educators sought their reinstatement to their previous classroom positions, as well as back pay. The teachers argued in the suit that their placement in a reassignment center — better known as a "rubber room" — without first having a disciplinary hearing was "capricious and arbitrary."

Brooklyn Supreme Court Justice Gina Abadi agreed, stating in her Dec. 30 decision that the DOE "cannot skirt the disciplinary requirements by claiming that petitioners failed to meet a condition of em-

ployment in failing or refusing to be vaccinated."

She acknowledged that the courts have permitted city employees to be fired or placed on unpaid leave for failing to meet Covid vaccine mandates without first facing due process hearings. "However, this matter does not involve a situation where petitioners' failure or refusal to comply with the vaccine mandate order is at issue. Instead, petitioners maintain that they have, in fact, complied with the mandate and that the allegations are false," Abadi concluded.

The judge also prohibited the DOE from further placing employees in reassignment centers or on unpaid leave without first holding due process hearings and ordered that the workers receive back pay.

Their union applauded the decision. "The UFT's position is that the DOE had no authority to place members on unpaid leave based on unproven allegations," a spokesperson for the union said.

The 30 educators named in the lawsuit were able to return to the classroom last week, the UFT said in an email. "We are continuing to work with the Department of Education on the return to service for other affected UFT members," the union said.

A city Law Department spokesperson told the New York Post, which first reported the decision, that it was reviewing "this disappointing decision and considering our options."

The 82 educators reportedly obtained fake vaccination cards from Wild Child Pediatric Healthcare in Amityville, Long Island, where the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office alleged that two nurses made \$1.5 million selling thousands of phony vaccine cards.

The Special Commissioner of Investigation for the New York City School District provided the DOE with a list of employees who were "implicated" in a "fraudulent vaccination operation" probe, according to the decision. The investigation is ongoing.

Plumbers' union says DOB is lax on gas inspections

Local 1 files suit, claims department OKs work by unlicensed laborers

BY RICHARD KHAVKINE
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The city Department of Buildings is jeopardizing residents' safety by condoning the installation of gas lines by unlicensed plumbers and other workers, a lawsuit by the plumbers union is alleging.

Plumbers Local 1's action says that the union has been alerting the DOB to "substantial and troubling evidence of wholesale non-compliance" with city laws. The union also claims to have possible evidence of laborers' forged licenses and other sham records.

The suit, filed in Manhattan Supreme Court last month, alleges that the DOB "willfully refuses to enforce gas and welder qualification requirements that ensure that only the most well-trained, competent welders perform dangerous gas pipe welding and installation" in city buildings. Some of those requirements were enacted following deadly gas explosions in Harlem in 2014 and in the East Village in 2015.

A city statute enacted in 2020 mandates that gas work must be performed by or directly supervised by persons who hold proper licenses and have requisite qualifications. The suit contends that the DOB has "demonstrated hostility" to the qualification requirements and has not enforced them.

'We're not detectives'

The Article 78 proceeding contends that the DOB has approved hundreds of gas authorization requests without documentation that qualified and certified welders performed the work.

The department "also routinely approves gas requests when its own records conclusively demonstrate that the welder identified as having performed the work does not possess a legally required gas qualification or appropriate welder's certification," the suit says.

According to an affidavit by a paralegal, a DOB chief admitted that the department does not



Courtesy FDNY

A two-alarm explosion a year ago on Fox Street in the Bronx attributed to leaking gas killed one person and injured several, including five NYPD officers. The blast, which leveled a three-story home and led to the demolition of four other buildings, has been cited in a suit by the plumbers union alleging that the Department of Buildings is lax in enforcing gas-work mandates.

check whether contractors performing gas work submit required documentation. "We're not detectives," the chief told the paralegal.

According to the DOB, it is up to licensed master plumbers to ensure that workers are properly qualified.

"The safety of our fellow New Yorkers is our highest priority, which is why New York City has among the most stringent gas safety requirements anywhere in the Country. DOB only issues permits for gas-related work to Licensed Master Plumbers. These plumbers are legally responsible to ensure that the permitted gas work is performed by themselves or by qualified individuals under their direct and continued supervision," Andrew Rudansky, a DOB spokesperson, said in a statement.

"New and modified gas piping work undergoes inspections and pressure testing in the presence of a DOB inspector prior to gas service being authorized," he added.

The suit argues that the department's disregard of city law and of its own rules and regulations have "created a public safety time bomb." Without implicating the DOB, it cites gas-related explosions that destroyed residential buildings in the Bronx and Brooklyn since December 2021 that have injured residents and first

responders. One of those, which leveled a three-story home and led to the demolition of four others, killed a 79-year-old resident.

Among the buildings where the union contends unqualified workers recently performed gas work are the Ritz-Carlton New York, NoMad, on West 28th Street; an all-girls school on the Upper East Side; and large residential towers, including a 35-story luxury development under construction in Murray Hill. The department's disinclination to enforce rules about who does gas welding work and its de facto OK of what the suit calls "rogue contractors" penalizes Local 1's "highly trained and competent members," the suit goes on to say.

Plumbers Local 1's Trade Education Fund operates a training center in Queens, jointly managed with the Association of Contracting Plumbers of the City of New York. It conducts a five-year apprenticeship program, as well as journeyman training and certification courses, and several DOB-approved certification trainings.

According to the union, a gas pipe welder employed by a union contractor is paid a wage and benefit package worth about \$114 an hour while a non-union welder is paid about \$60 with no benefits.



Michael Appleton/Mayoral Photography Office

A Brooklyn Supreme Court justice ruled that the Department of Education violated the due process protections of 30 tenured educators accused of submitting fake proof of Covid vaccination. The educators, who were placed on unpaid leave last spring then returned to the DOE payroll in September, received memos Jan. 11 allowing their return to the classroom, according to the United Federation of Teachers.

TWITTER: Cleaners fired

Continued from Page 1

medication and paying my doctors." Twitter, bought in October by billionaire business magnate Elon Musk, alerted Flagship of the termination of their service in a short letter that said nothing about future cleaning plans and contained no information about replacing the workers. "We regret to inform you that Twitter has decided to terminate NYC Janitorial services," the letter to Flagship says, "effective immediately December 19th, 2022."

The offices, between Seventh and Eighth avenues, house just Twitter. The company's bird logo adorns the front entrance.

Pattern of layoffs

All of the cleaners at Twitter's headquarters in San Francisco were terminated on Dec. 2 without warning and the following week they too protested outside of the offices. Musk was at the time living at the offices and had demanded that many other employees do the same and work late into the night.

After the firings, San Francisco City Attorney David Chiu said he would investigate whether the layoffs were illegal, given a city law that mandates employees retain workers for at least 90 days when switching contractors. "Elon Musk has had a long history of flouting labor laws," Chiu told local media outlets.

A similar law exists in New York City though it is unclear if Twitter broke the law, and neither 32BJ nor the city have taken any legal action as of yet. It's also unknown if Twitter has hired a new contractor to clean the Chelsea office.

Since he completed his takeover of the social media giant in October, Musk, one of the richest people in the world, has fired more than 50 percent of Twitter's staff, most of whom held high-earning corporate and tech positions.

Neither Twitter nor Flagship Facility Services responded to requests for comment. Flagship employs workers in many different industries including culinary, janitorial and maintenance work.

"Twitter's decision to cancel the cleaning contract for its NYC office has upended the lives of these dedicated cleaners, many of whom have worked at this location since Twitter moved in seven years ago. NYC's essential cleaners have done too much for this city to be treated like this," Denis Johnston, 32BJ SEIU's executive vice president, said in a statement.

"They put their lives on the line to keep workers and the public safe throughout the pandemic and are essential to the city's economic recovery in the aftermath of the pandemic," Johnston said. "These union members and their families now face extreme hardship because of the loss of their good paying jobs with quality health insurance."

Calderon said that prior to her termination, several Twitter employees approached her during a shift and told her how much they appreciate her work and how they hoped she could keep working there. Calderon and her colleagues aren't giving up on working in Twitter's office though. "we're going to keep fighting until we get our jobs back," she said.

"We're here," she said. "And we're going to try to get our jobs and our health care back."

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COMMENTARY

A federal receiver in disguise

BY MARC BULLARO

A year ago Louis Molina came to the New York City Department of Correction as the commissioner and friend of the correction unions.

In published letters to The Chief, I celebrated Molina's appointment and lauded him as the personification of hope for correction officers and detainees.

However, his focus quickly changed to self-preservation and replacing uniformed bosses with civilians. In July, he replaced two uniformed chiefs with civilian deputy commissioners. The move did not reduce detainee violence or deaths; in fact, 2022 ended with more of each, making it one of the most violent and deadliest years for the incarcerated in city custody in decades.

Molina is now planning to hire five civilian "facility supervisors" to replace the uniformed wardens. This is in violation of the New York City Administrative Code section 9-117-b-1, which requires DOC wardens to be promoted from within the uniformed ranks. However, the DOC asked U.S. District Court Chief Judge Laura Taylor Swain, who oversees the 2016

Nunez consent judgment addressing violence inside Rikers, to issue a court order for the hiring. That order was issued in December and supercedes the administrative code provision.

In addition, deputy wardens who historically have headed the programs discipline in each facility have been removed and replaced with captains. I speculate civilians will eventually replace the captains. A federal monitor's report has recommended replacing deputy wardens, assistant deputy wardens and captains with civilians from outside the agency, arguing that DOC supervisors lack the "robust supervision" necessary to gain compliance with the Nunez consent judgment.

I assert this civilianization is being done for two reasons, first to appease the federal monitor Steve Martin, who has lambasted DOC's uniformed force in his reports to the U.S. District Court, and secondly to avoid a federal receivership by simply doing the things a receiver would do, that is, civilianize and disregard collective bargaining agreements.

Martin is making Molina offers he can't refuse.

As a result, Molina has become the de facto federal receiver and secured his job for now. Next, I speculate he will attempt to take away the contractual unlimited sick leave negotiated by the uniformed force. I believe Molina is delivering a significant blow to the unions.

Moreover, he will not solve the major problems in city jails. In 2022, with an incarcerated population of 6,000, there were about 500 slashings and 19 detainee deaths, among them six suicides. In 2009, under the leadership of then-Commissioner Martin Horn, with an incarcerated population of about 13,000, more than double that of 2022, there were 21 slashings and 18 detainee deaths with zero suicides.

Since 2014, the uniformed force has been demoralized, demonized, debased and forced to endure a modern day form of pillory as a result of the public scorn and condemnation by former DOC commissioners, City Council members, fringe politicians and the federal monitor who, I submit, has lost all credibility with the uniformed force and does not represent the United States District Court well. By repeatedly scapegoat-



Courtesy of NYC Department of Correction

Department of Correction Commissioner Louis Molina

ing and gaslighting the uniformed force, Martin has alienated the majority of the agency. If the court wants to appear fair in its administration of justice, the monitor must be replaced by someone that is objective and unbiased toward the uniformed force. Civilianizing uniformed positions is what Martin

wants and what a receiver would do. Yet, it will not reduce gang violence, will not prevent detainee suicides or overdoses, and will not make the jails safer.

It is the deus ex machina that secures the multi-million dollar payday for Martin and his monitoring team. Further, pursuing civil-

ianization and disregarding collective bargaining agreements allows Louis Molina to remain the de facto federal receiver, masquerading as the commissioner.

Bullaro is a retired assistant deputy warden with the New York City Correction Department

'Which side are you on?'

DEAR COUNCIL SPEAKER ADRIENNE ADAMS,

In recent emails with your office I was told that you were looking forward to listening to the debate about whether or not to amend Administrative Code 12-126, which, if passed, would permit the city to bill retirees for some of their health insurance.

I was told that despite all the months of emails and phone calls from your constituents (both in-district and citywide), after all the press coverage of the huge community opposition to amending the code, after all the pressure and spin from Mayor Eric Adams and the Municipal Labor Committee, that you were still undecided; that you were looking forward to learning from all of the stakeholders at the Civil Service and Labor Committee's public hearing on Jan. 9, and that you would use that event to inform your decision.

And, you suggested that I take the opportunity to attend the hearing so that my voice might be heard among all the others, to help you reach a decision. That was a good suggestion, so I attended the hearing — for all 11 hours — and was happy to see that you were there also.

So, did you learn anything on Monday? Did you listen to the testimony of the hundreds of retirees and active municipal employees who came to the hearing? Have you read any of the hundreds, if not thousands, of written testimonies that were submitted online? Did you hear the overwhelming number of pleas, from your most vulnerable and engaged constituents, to leave 12-126 alone?

Did you hear the current and former union presidents who oppose the well-connected "boys club" of MLC leadership?

Did you listen to PSC-CUNY President James Davis, and to the panel of CUNY professors who made a clear and concise analysis of the harmful consequences of amending 12-126? Did you listen to their suggestions about the short-term ways to find health benefit savings while long-term solutions are sought?

Did you listen to the brilliant, retired civil servants



Emil Cohen/NYC Council Media Unit

City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams during the Jan. 9 hearing of the Council's Civil Service and Labor Committee.

from city government who shared their expertise and insights about the fear-mongering and disinformation tactics that are being used by the Office of Labor Relations and the MLC to force the City Council into a box?

Did you listen to the testimony of Wendell Potter, recovering Big Insurance VP, who told you about the deceitful, rapacious, tactics of profiteering insurance companies who market their products, with lies, to improve their bottom line?

Did you hear the deflections, delays, obfuscations, and excuses of the OLR lawyers who were asked to provide the Aetna contract to you?

Did you hear the compelling personal stories of the old, the poor and the infirm municipal retirees who told you that — forget about money — what they cannot afford to lose is the power of the law, stripped from their hands, and placed into those of a few self-interested union bosses and politicians? "Those people" aren't afraid of change, as the patronizing lawyers from OLR would have you believe. "Those people" are not a small group of confused malcontents who need to be saved from themselves (as Henry Garrido, Michael Mulgrew, Harry Nespoli & Co. spin the debate). No, "those

people" are us.

The only rump group of confused malcontents around here is the elite MLC boys club (Mulgrew, Garrido, Nespoli et al).

Here's a question: When are we going to stop pretending that this is about choice? "Choice" is the red herring that our gaslighting mayor, some of our gaslighting union presidents, and the soulless lawyers from OLR are using to obscure what this issue is all about: Cutting employee health care to save money on the backs of its workers, and to save the asses of a boys club of incredibly incompetent (or worse) union presidents who entered into the crappiest bargain of the century with their 2018 agreement — an agreement which funds city workers' wage increases with cuts to their health benefits, now and forever. We must break that cycle.

I know it's tough. None of us know how this will play out. It's not pointless, but it's beside the point to engage in exercises about what will happen after a convoluted series of hypothetical worst-case scenarios occur. The fact is, the city and the MLC are on exactly the same page. The mayor may very well try to strip away all but one health plan. With 12-126 intact, let him try! The MLC and OLR may very well decide to do the exact same thing!

But health benefits for NYC municipal employees are a legally bound subject of collective bargaining. Neither the OLR or MLC can act without the other, but neither wants

to take the blame for the fallout that implementing their disastrous Medicare Advantage policy would surely incur. That's why they want the City Council to amend 12-126. It gives them cover. And it would give them the ability to make future health benefit changes without restraint in law.

Don't fall for it. You fell for the mayor's hollow assurances when you voted with him to cut public school budgets. Please don't be fooled again.

I actually think that it will be politically impossible for Mulgrew, Garrido, Nespoli et al to let the mayor unilaterally switch retirees' healthcare to a single plan, as long as 12-126 remains in place!

That is the lie they are hiding behind now, because they don't have the cover of avoiding blame that amending 12-126 would provide them. In the cold light of day, with 12-126 intact, they can't be seen, in the eyes of their membership, to be complicit with OLR in screwing the entire city workforce.

So which is it? You told me you were waiting to hear from the stakeholders before you make a decision. Now you have heard.

Which side are you on?

Sincerely,
Bennett Fischer,
Retired teacher (2018), UFT
retiree advocate

WORK RULES by Barbara Smaller



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'Choice' is the red herring being used to obscure what this issue is all about: Cutting employee health care to save money on the backs of workers.

COMMENTARY

Deli man becomes House speaker

BY VINCENT SCALA

After 15 ballots and near fisticuffs on the floor of the House, Deli Man Kevin McCarthy won the Speakership. His “win,” such as it was, didn’t come without cost or consequence for his party or for the country. Of course, it goes without saying that the Senate and the White House won’t go along with any of the nonsensical, stupid, juvenile bills the Mega MAGA Caucus passes. We shouldn’t be surprised if the House passes a bill to criminalize abortion from the moment of conception (if not earlier if one of them can figure out a way to criminalize the procedure before pregnancy).

We won’t be surprised if the “fiscally responsible” Congress members try to abolish the IRS (why enforce tax laws? It’s so much easier to rail against critical race theory). They’ll subpoena Jill Biden.

I hope the readers saw the way Congressman Andy Biggs (an all-around lunatic but actually quite mainstream in today’s GOP) indicated that “Dr.” Jill (he put quotes around her title; someone has to tell the gentleman from Arizona that a Ph.D. does in fact make someone a doctor) has been compromised. There will be the inevitable subpoena of Dr. Anthony Fauci (presumably no quotes there) for his handling of Covid early on.

I look forward to Fauci (now retired) humiliating the committee when he hopefully gives them a piece of his mind. There will be investigations into the FBI, the CIA and the IRS. There will be hearings at the border where the theatrics will be off the charts.

A country of 330 million with several thousand people trying to get in, while not a disaster to any sane person will be treated as if it were an invasion by the Axis pow-



Courtesy of U.S. Representative Kevin McCarthy

U.S. Representative Kevin McCarthy shortly after the November midterms.

ers during World War II. This and more that we can’t even imagine right now. I could mention the economic catastrophe when the House can’t pass an increase in the debt ceiling without getting help from Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries and the Democrats. Are Marjorie Taylor Greene and other representatives who are holding McCarthy’s speakership hostage going to take that one sitting down? I’ll go out on a limb and bet NO.

Why then is this great news for the Democrats specifically and the left generally? It’s great news because for the next two years, the American people will see first hand what happens when a gang of absolute lunatics take over the asylum. The gang of 20-plus who have castrated McCarthy and hold his speakership

in their hands every single day to the point where he will be speaker in name only (albeit with one hell of a nice office) will almost on a daily basis show the critical American voters (young people, people of color, Hispanics, suburban women and virtually everyone else) what they are all about.

Biden and the Democrats need a foil and now they’ve got one, and a gift from the heavens at that. Biden will make reasonable proposals with respect to student loans, prescription drug pricing, taxes, jobs, manufacturing, clean energy, voting rights, immigration reform, infrastructure and the like and the MAGA Caucus will be moving to toss parents in jail when they’re dealing with a trans child. The contrast will be just about that stark.

Let’s not forget something in this whole calculation. Kevin McCarthy, who opened and ran a Bakersfield deli while in his early 20s, is not a chess player; he’s barely a checkers player. He knows how to raise money and knows how to please his caucus with various goodies but he isn’t strategic. Over four or five days earlier this month, he succumbed to every single demand of the 20 rabid animals who were denying him the post he so coveted.

He did it by simply capitulating to their demands. One he accepted was that any single one of them could move to “vacate the Chair.” This means one of his members could move to terminate his speakership. If he doesn’t kowtow and permit them to impeach Biden, imprison Jill, outlaw abortion, refuse to increase the debt ceiling or any other manner of insanity, he will face a challenge and those same 20 will deny him the 218 votes he needs.

This is the man who forfeited his first chance at the speakership when he stupidly admitted on national TV that the Benghazi hearings were all theater and performance and designed to hurt Hillary Clinton’s chances.

Admittedly, we all knew that but he said it out loud which is a no-no when you’re trying to show that you give a rat’s ass about Benghazi. That little “faux pas” cost him the job for more than seven years. How do we think he’ll handle all of this going forward?

Let’s sit, get our popcorn and watch it all unfold. All I can say is that warning against the “inmates running the asylum” isn’t as good as when they take over. The American people will have a front row seat and they’ll reach their own conclusions. Who knows? Maybe the Deli Man will surprise us.

Ha. Just kidding.



Tax Strategies

By Barry Lisak

Take care when choosing your tax preparer

IF YOU PAY SOMEONE to prepare your tax return, the IRS urges you to choose that preparer wisely. Taxpayers are legally responsible for what’s on their tax return even if it is prepared by someone else. Currently, New York State has no licensing laws for tax preparers; anyone can “hang out a shingle” and set up shop as a tax preparer. Most return-preparers are professional, honest and provide excellent service to their clients. Here are a few points to keep in mind when choosing someone.

- **Referrals.** Ask everyone you can think of: family, friends, co-workers, business owners and financial advisors. Also, it will help to ask someone who has a similar income-tax situation to yours.

- **Check the preparer’s qualifications.** Ask if the preparer is affiliated with a professional organization that provides its members with continuing education and holds them to a code of ethics. Every year, tax attorneys, CPAs and IRS-enrolled agents (EAs), are mandated to complete continuing-education credits on the new income tax laws. Only these professionals can represent taxpayers before the IRS in all tax matters. Attorneys and CPAs are licensed by state agencies, while EAs are regulated by the federal government.

- **Check on the preparer’s history.** Check with the Better Business Bureau to see if the preparer has a questionable history and check for any disciplinary actions and licensure status through the state boards of accountancy for certified public accountants, the state bar associations for attorneys, and the IRS Office of Professional Responsibility for enrolled agents.

- **Find out about their fees.** Prices for tax preparation will vary depending on how complex your tax return is. Some professionals charge by the hour or by the number of forms to be completed, or even a flat fee for all work. Run, don’t walk, away from preparers who base their fees on a percentage of your refund.

- **Accessible.** Will your tax preparer be there for you in July when you get a letter from the IRS? If you’re not sure, you’d better look for another one. A reputable tax professional will be readily available year-round to provide assistance.

- **Provide all records.** Most reputable preparers will request to see your records and receipts and will ask you multiple questions to determine your tax situation. If handling a complex tax situation, you should find a tax accountant who specializes in your situation.

- **Never sign a blank return.** Avoid tax-preparers that ask you to sign a blank tax form.

- **Review the return before signing.** Before you sign your tax return, review it and ask questions. Make sure you understand everything and are comfortable with the accuracy of the return before you sign it. Also, the preparer must also give you a copy of the return.

- **Preparer signature and PTIN.** All paid preparers must sign the return and include their Preparer Tax Identification Number (PTIN) as required by law. Although the preparer signs the return, the taxpayer is responsible for the accuracy of every item on the return.

Barry Lisak is an IRS enrolled agent specializing in personal and small business taxes for 30 years. Any questions can be directed to him at 516-829-7283, or mrbarrytax@aol.com.

The invisible working class

BY ROBERT OVETZ

Try as you might, it is nearly impossible to hear a politician of either major party talk about the working class. They all seem to prefer the term “middle class.” While Democrats are especially keen to “expand the middle class,” it’s not clear who would be joining it because the working class doesn’t seem to exist.

Take President Joe Biden’s speech in a semiconductor factory last December. “When we grow it that way, the poor have a shot, the middle class do well, and the wealthy do very well,” he said. There was no mention of the workers at the plant or anywhere.

Democrats prefer to replace workers with the “poor” as if to be a worker is to somehow be a failure. Doing this makes being a worker just about how much you get paid.

Disappearing the working class and replacing it with the middle class furthers the myth that we are not workers. The fact is that anyone who sells their labor for a wage or salary is a worker.

Anyone who sells their labor to survive and does not command or profit from someone else’s labor is a worker who belongs to the working class, not the middle class. I am a worker because as a precarious untenured professor I sell my labor and have little control over my work other than what I teach about.

While some might want to call me middle class, I am part of the working class. My father, who survived the Holocaust and entered the U.S. as an undocumented immigrant, was a house painter and my mother worked as an administrative staff for the federal government.

What makes me part of the working class is not that I was born into a working class family but that I too must sell my labor to survive and do not control or profit from the labor of others.

Although I have a Ph.D. and earn above the median income for the U.S., I am essentially an overeducated academic worker.

I am middle income, not middle class.

The supposedly “disappearing middle class” actually does not exist. What is disappearing is not the middle class but workers making a middle income.

Sociologists popularized the term middle class during the Cold War to direct attention away from the issue of class.

The very concept of class, whether you sell your labor, now means how much you make and even where you live, how much education you have and other characteristics we call “culture” such as how we speak, dress and behave. This is what is called “social class.”



Adam Schultz/The White House

President Joe Biden following his Labor Day remarks at Milwaukee’s Laborfest.

This subtle shift means class is no longer about capitalism but rather about income, identity, wealth, house and behavior.

Instead of class being decided by whether you sell your labor or profit from someone else’s — the most important feature of capitalism — class became just one of many types of oppression, one no more important than another.

It’s no wonder then that the working class has become blurred with the poor. Since nobody wants to be poor, it is assumed that nobody wants to be in the working class.

During my lifetime, my fellow members of the working class don’t think of themselves as part of the working class because it has come to mean failure. Since working class means you are poor everyone is suddenly middle class or hopes to join it.

That’s how we became a supposed “middle class society.”

While everyone is in the middle class, no one is in the ruling class either.

Those who own and run the economic system like a dictatorship have become “entrepreneurs,” “rich” or “elites” like the main character of the new TV show “we-crashed.” We are daily inundated with relentless myths and propaganda that any one of us can join them although very few do.

Every semester I ask my students what class they are in now and where they expect to be 10 years

after they graduate from college. Nearly all of them say virtually the same thing.

Almost no one thinks they are in the working class now, although most of them earn very low wages. Nearly all of them are somewhere in the middle class, whether the “lower” or “upper” middle class.

Far more students see themselves as rising up either within the middle class or to the “upper class.” Very few expect to fall out of the middle class into the “lower class.”

The youthful expectation of upward class mobility is contradicted by the stark reality that our wages and conditions of life have been getting worse with each passing generation. While my parents owned two houses during their lifetime, I can never afford one.

Like my students, we divide ourselves by our social class while missing the shared experience of being in the working class. The differences we see between us obscure the commonality — we are all workers who must sell our labor for different wages.

We each learn to see ourselves as disconnected individuals whose current predicament is our own or our family’s making. Our situation is never the fault of the system of capitalism in which profits are produced by the exploitation of our labor.

In the same speech, Biden assured us that “The middle class built the country, and unions built

the middle class.” Apparently, being in a union also means we somehow stop being a worker.

We should be asking why the “friends of labor” will try so hard to avoid using the words “worker” and “working class” and reduce unions to just a tool for turning workers into members of the middle class.

Rather than equating “working class” with failure, we can instead embrace how we are all interconnected by having to work to survive. Our connection through work is our source of power — to stop working by striking and bring the economy to a halt until things change.

Some make less or more money for their work because of unequal levels of power and status that are used to divide us by race, sex, gender, age, criminal record and other differences.

Celebrating these differences alone will not help us overcome how they are used to divide and weaken us. We need to begin with the reality that we are all differently woven together by the essential fact that we live in a capitalist society that forces us to work to survive.

That is why we are working class.

Robert Ovetz is editor of “Workers’ Inquiry and Global Class Struggle,” the author of “When Workers Shot Back” and of the new book, “We the Elites: Why the US Constitution Serves the Few.” Follow him at @OvetzRobert.

Even as New York nurses return to work, more strikes could follow elsewhere

BY AMANDA SEITZ

Even as 7,000 nurses return to work at two of New York's busiest hospitals after a three-day strike, colleagues around the country say it's just a matter of time before frontline workers at other hospitals begin walking the picket line.

Problems are mounting at hospitals across the nation as they try to deal with widespread staffing shortages, overworked nurses beaten down by the pandemic and a busted pipeline of new nurses.

That's led to nurses juggling dangerously high caseloads, said Michelle Collins, dean at the college of nursing and health at Loyola University New Orleans.

"There's no place that's immune from what's happening with the nursing shortage," Collins said. "It's everywhere."

Union leaders say the tentative contract agreement ending the strike by nurses at Mount Sinai Hospital and Montefiore Medical Center, each privately owned, non-profit hospitals that hold over 1,000 beds in New York City, will relieve chronic short staffing and boost pay by 19 percent over three years.

The walkout, which ended Jan. 12, was just the latest dispute between nurses and their employers.

Last year, six unions representing a total of 32,000 nurses launched strikes outside of hospital systems around the country, according to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics. Those strikes represented about a quarter of all the major strikes in the U.S. last year, an increase from the year before.

Describing hospital environ-

ments where nurses are unable to take breaks because they are assigned too many patients — some of whom are pleading for care from frontline workers — the president of the American Nurses Association, Dr. Jennifer Mensik Kennedy, said some nurses may think their only option is to strike.

"Nurses don't feel like their voices have been heard with this exact topic," she told The Associated Press last week. "Nurses are now feeling like they need to strike. That could continue."

In California, nurse unions at two hospitals are likely to strike this year when their contract expires, said Peter Sidhu, the executive vice president of United Nurses Associations of California/Union of Health Care Professionals. Sidhu, who fields objections from nurses across the state who say their caseloads are unsafe, has received 7,000 such complaints in Los Angeles County hospitals since December. He said objections have at least doubled since before the pandemic began.

"What I've seen is that in areas where we've traditionally had good staffing, even they are getting bombarded with patients and a lack of resources," Sidhu said.

Shortages nationwide

Nurse shortages were plaguing some hospitals years before Covid hit, and signs of a crisis loomed, with a large swath of the workforce nearing retirement age.

A policy brief from the Department of Health and Human Services last year found that over half of nurses were over the age of 50, a

'Nurses don't feel like their voices have been heard.'

— **Dr. Jennifer Mensik Kennedy,**
PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN NURSES ASSOCIATION

much higher percentage compared with the overall U.S. labor workforce, where only a quarter of people are 55 or older.

Aspiring nurses are lining up to replace those retirees but even that silver lining has hit a snag, with widespread faculty shortages at nursing colleges. In 2021, nearly 92,000 qualified nursing school applicants were denied entry into a program, largely because of a shortage of educators, according to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing.

The American Nurses Association asked Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra to declare the nursing shortage a national crisis in late 2021.

"Nurses have remained steadfast on the front lines since the beginning of the pandemic, while overcoming challenges, risks to their personal health and safety such as limited personal protective equipment and the physical, emotional and mental health burden of the COVID-19 virus," the association's president at the time wrote in a letter to the secretary.

Becerra hasn't declared a crisis but has met with association and other health care leaders to discuss

the shortage.

"Nurses are an essential part of our nation's health care system," Becerra said in a statement Friday to The Associated Press. "Supporting nurses and other frontline health professionals providing care in our communities is critical to improving our nation's health and wellbeing."

The federal agency has pumped more money into its National Health Service Corps program, which covers student tuition for health workers who serve in high-need communities. Since 2019, the program has nearly doubled the number of nurses and nurse faculty it sponsors.

"This has been an ongoing issue for a while," Mensik Kennedy said last week. "We really need to work collaboratively with Congress and our health care system to address these issues. Nurses can't solve these issues by ourselves."

The number of nurses working in the profession is starting to rebound to pre-pandemic levels, said Dave Auerbach, the director of research at the Massachusetts Health Policy Commission.

But hospitals, especially, are still struggling to lure those nurses back to working in their wards, he noted.

"That sounds like more of an issue of the attractiveness of the working conditions of the jobs," Auerbach said. "Some of it is outside of the control of the hospitals in those jobs."

Sidhu left his job as an ICU nurse last year when a third COVID surge struck, after being among the first to volunteer for the COVID unit when the pandemic hit.

He's noticed a cultural shift in the profession. Fewer nurses want to work 12-hour shifts, multiple days a week. Many are taking jobs at clinics, where weekend or overnight shifts aren't required. Others have moved to jobs in telehealth, working from the comfort of their home.

Some are simply burnt out from working in a hospital.

"Prior to the pandemic, I knew every once and a while, I'm going to have a bad night," Sidhu said. "Now, every time you walk into the facility, you're not just worried about what patients you're going to have — now you have four (patients) and you know you're not going to have resources."

Still, strong interest in the profession led Loyola University New Orleans to start an accelerated program this year aimed at second-career students who already have a bachelor's degree.

April Hamilton, a 55-year-old food writer, cooking teacher and mother from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, will walk into her first class when that new nursing program starts Tuesday.

She's read the headlines about staffing shortages and stressful working conditions in hospitals. She's also seen the tough work nurses do firsthand: Four years ago, she was in the hospital around-the-clock when her daughter spent 40 days in the intensive care unit, recovering from a fall that resulted in an amputated hand and 20 surgeries.

"Witnessing my daughter's miracle fuels me," Hamilton said. "I'm ready. I want to be part of the solution."

NURSES: 'Historic' strike ends

Continued from Page 1

reached a tentative agreement with NYSNA, and the strike is over. To our incredible Mount Sinai team: thank you for your unwavering dedication to world-class patient care," the hospital said in a statement.

Deals 'set a standard'

Staff at Montefiore and Mount Sinai Hospital will begin voting on whether to ratify the contracts next week, according to Hagans. NYSNA also reached a tentative agreement with Wyckoff Heights Medical Center, withdrawing a 10-day strike notice. The union is still in negotiations with Interfaith Medical Center and Long Island Jewish Medical Center.

More than 3,500 nurses at Mon-

tefiore's three Bronx hospitals and 3,625 nurses at Mount Sinai Hospital on the Upper East Side walked off the job Jan. 9 after bargaining stalled. Temporary nurses hired to fill in for the striking nurses and nursing managers described chaotic conditions inside Montefiore and Mount Sinai facilities during the three-day picket.

Governor Kathy Hochul, who previously called for a binding arbitration in order to avoid a strike, congratulated the nurses on the deal.

"My team and I have been working around the clock to bring all sides together. I'm proud this agreement delivers good wages and benefits to our frontline heroes and ensures patients will receive top-notch care," she said in a statement posted to social media.

Negotiating contracts that established safe-staffing and included policies to enforce staffing ratios was the primary objective for the union. Hagans believed the deals "set a standard for safe-staffing, for respect and for quality care for all."

Labor unions, as well as elected officials including Public Advocate Jumaane Williams, State Senator Robert Jackson and City Council Member Lynn Schulman, who chairs the Council's Health Committee, came out to support hundreds of nurses picketing outside of each hospital.

"We are so grateful for the outpouring we have received from New York and from all over the world. Because the struggle here in New York City is the same struggle that nurses and patients face everywhere," Hagans said.



Courtesy of the New York State Nurses Association

Nurses picketed outside of Montefiore Medical Center Jan. 10. The New York State Nurses Association Thursday morning reached tentative contract agreements with Montefiore and Mount Sinai Hospitals that provided raises and improved staffing ratios, three days after 7,000 nurses at the facilities went on strike.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

NATION

Layoffs weaken organizing

Efforts to unionize big tech companies are getting tripped up by layoffs. Personnel cuts at Amazon, Coinbase and Facebook's parent company, Meta, and dozens of other tech outfits are stalling unionizing endeavors of white-collar workers and imperiling recent labor gains, Bloomberg Law reported this week. Almost 100,000 people have been let go at about 500 tech companies since October, according to statistics from the public database Layoffs.fyi cited by Bloomberg. And Amazon earlier this month said the tech retailing giant would trim 18,000 jobs. Salesforce, the San Francisco cloud-based software company, and Vimeo, the New York-city based video hosting, sharing, and services platform, said they would cut 10 percent and 11 percent of their staffs, respectively. Meta said late last year slash about 13 percent of its workforce, or about 11,000 jobs. The wave of layoffs in Silicon Valley and elsewhere are dark clouds in what just a few months ago was a sunny outlook for unions that have poured resources and efforts into organizing big tech. The job trims come as a global recession, however mild, appears a near certainty. "That tends to work very strongly against union organizing," Susan Schurman, a labor studies professor at Rutgers University, told Bloomberg. "People are afraid that if they get involved in an organizing campaign they will be terminated. The fact that it's protected does not matter."

— R.K.

NATION

Food workers feed lobbyists

For years, restaurant workers have been helping to fund the National Restaurant Association, an organization that lobbies the federal government against raising the minimum wage, without even knowing it, a New York Times report released this week revealed. Most food service workers are required to complete a \$15 course in basic food safety from a company named ServSafe that, The Times found, has for at least 15 years funneled the revenue made from the trainings directly to the Restaurant Association. Since 2010, more than 3.6 million workers have participated in the training, which equates to about \$25 million, money that's found its way into the pockets of restaurant lobbyists in Washington D.C. "I'm sitting up here working hard, paying this money so that I can work this job, so that I can provide for my family," Mysheka Ronquillo, a cook in California, told The Times. "And I'm giving y'all money so y'all can go against me?" The vast majority of ServSafe's trainings take place in states where the classes are mandatory for most restaurant workers: Texas, California, Illinois and Florida. The course is available in all 50 states, however, and Nick Eastwood, who runs a competitor of the company, told The Times that ServSafe has more than 70 percent of the market share. Michelle Korsmo president of the NRA said in a statement to The Times that "The association's advocacy work keeps restaurants open; it keeps workers employed, it finds pathways for worker opportunity, and it keeps our communities healthy." Advocates to raise the minimum wage are now advising restaurant workers to use other programs besides ServSafe, "We'll be telling them to use any possible alternatives," Saru Jayaraman from One Fair Wage told the paper.

— D.F.

ILLINOIS

University faculty strike

Faculty at the University of Illinois Chicago went on strike Jan. 17 following nine months of contract negotiations. The faculty members' union, UIC United Faculty, announced the strike after a 12-hour bargaining session Monday failed to secure a tentative agreement. The union is seeking raises, improved job security and increased mental-health resources for students. "The campus is thriving, but many faculty are not," Nicole Nguyen, an associate professor of criminology, law and justice and a member of the union's bargaining team, said in a statement. "We have spent the past three years scrambling to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, and our whole community — students and faculty — are exhausted. Management needs to invest in resources that strengthen our entire community." The university has offered raises of 17 percent over four years, the Chicago Sun-Times reported. But in a statement, the union cited record enrollment numbers and "more than a billion dollars in unrestricted reserve funds" as proof that the university can afford to provide substantial pay increases. "I think ultimately our campus and the UIC system is going to have to find some more money," added Aaron Krall, president of the UIC United Faculty. The union represents 1,500 members, and nearly 900 participated in a strike vote back in November after many became frustrated that they were working under an expired contract, according to the newspaper. Many classes have been canceled, although courses at the colleges of Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy and Law will not be affected because the union does not represent faculty in those schools. In a letter to students, Javier Reyes, the university's interim chancellor, and Karen Colley acting provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs, called the work stoppage "disappointing and not in the best interest of the university or our students." "However, UIC fully respects the rights of its employees under the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Act and other applicable laws," they stated.

— C.L.



Anthony Behar/Sipa USA via AP Images

People walked past luxury brands in SoHo last month. An economic downturn remains very possible. Yet in recent weeks, with inflation showing widespread signs of easing, a more cheerful view has begun to gain traction: Maybe a recession isn't inevitable after all.

Can we avoid a recession? Signs point to 'soft landing'

BY CHRISTOPHER RUGABER

For months, the outlook for the U.S. economy has been a mostly bleak one: Inflation hitting a four-decade high, consumer spending weakening, interest rates surging. Most economists penciled in a recession for 2023. An economic downturn is still possible. Yet in recent weeks, with inflation showing widespread signs of easing, a more cheerful view has gained traction: Maybe a recession isn't inevitable after all. One reason for the tentative optimism is evidence that an acceleration in U.S. wages, which has benefited workers but also heightened inflation, is slowing. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell has frequently pointed to fast-rising worker pay to explain why the Fed has had to raise interest rates so aggressively. Fed rate hikes, if carried out far enough and long enough, can weaken the economy so much as to trigger a recession. In the meantime, the job market — the most important pillar of the economy — remains remarkably sturdy. These trends are raising expectations that the Fed might manage to engineer an often-elusive "soft landing," whereby the economy slows but doesn't go into reverse and unemployment rate rises slightly but stays low. It would still mean painful times for many people. But it wouldn't inflict the

widespread unemployment that typically results from a recession. "All the signs are pointing to a higher, not a lower, probability of a soft landing," said Alan Blinder, a Princeton University economist who formerly served as vice chair of the Fed. "It may still not be more than 50-50. But 50-50 is looking better than it was a few months ago." **A number of factors** The most positive sign, Blinder said, is the ongoing slowdown in inflation. The inflation slowdown stems from a range of factors, including cheaper gas, the unraveling of supply chain snarls and smaller profit margins among many retailers. The national average price of a gallon of gas was \$3.27 last week, far below the \$5 peak in mid-June. Average used car prices, which skyrocketed 37 percent in 2021, have dropped for five straight months. They're now 3 percent cheaper than they were a year ago. Clothing prices have declined in two of the past three months. Furniture prices have dropped for three straight months. In the meantime, consumers are spending less, forcing many retailers to cut prices to pare their inventories of goods. Online prices have fallen for four straight months from year-ago levels, according to

Adobe Analytics, particularly for computers, toys and sporting goods. "The sooner the inflation rate falls," Blinder said, "the sooner the Fed will ease up, and therefore the less the chance of a recession." All that said, there are plenty of threats to a soft landing. As China's economy reopens from its Covid lockdowns, it may start to absorb more of the world's oil supply. That could send U.S. gas prices up again. And while layoffs remain historically low outside of technology companies, that trend could reverse if businesses become anxious again about the economic outlook. Congress may also struggle to raise the debt ceiling by this summer, which could cause economic turmoil, or a deep recession if they fail to do so. But for now, a soft-landing scenario is beginning to play out. Even as the central bank has jacked up its benchmark rate at the fastest pace in four decades, the economy has kept growing and businesses have kept hiring. In December, employers added a solid 223,000 jobs, and the unemployment rate dropped back to 3.5 percent, matching a 53-year low. "The job market data is very supportive of the idea that the economy can ... slow without recession," said Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics.

Job cuts in tech sector spread, Microsoft lays off 10,000

BY MATT O'BRIEN

Microsoft is cutting 10,000 workers, almost 5 percent of its workforce, joining other tech companies that have scaled back their pandemic-era expansions. The company said in a regulatory filing Wednesday that the layoffs were a response to "macroeconomic conditions and changing customer priorities." The company said it will also be making changes to its hardware portfolio and consolidating its leased office locations. Microsoft is cutting far fewer jobs than it had added during the Covid pandemic as it responded to a boom in demand for its workplace software and cloud computing services with so many people working and studying from home. Microsoft's workforce expanded by about 36 percent in the two fiscal years following the emergence of the pandemic, growing from 163,000 workers at the end of June 2020, to 221,000 in June 2022. The layoffs represent "less than 5 percent of our total employee base, with some notifications happening today,"

CEO Satya Nadella said in an email to employees. "While we are eliminating roles in some areas, we will continue to hire in key strategic areas," Nadella said. He emphasized the importance of building a "new computer platform" using advances in artificial intelligence. He said customers that were accelerating their spending on digital technology during the pandemic are now trying to "optimize their digital spend to do more with less." "We're also seeing organizations in every industry and geography exercise caution as some parts of the world are in a recession and other parts are anticipating one," Nadella wrote. Other tech companies have also been trimming jobs amid concerns about an economic slowdown. **Amazon, Salesforce also cut** Amazon and business software maker Salesforce earlier this month announced major job cuts as they prune payrolls that

rapidly expanded during the pandemic lockdown. Amazon said that it will be cutting about 18,000 positions. It's the largest set of layoffs in the Seattle company's history, although just a fraction of its 1.5 million global workforce. Facebook parent Meta is laying off 11,000 people, about 13 percent of its workforce. And Elon Musk, the new Twitter CEO, has slashed the company's workforce. Nadella made no direct mention of the layoffs on Wednesday when he put in an appearance at the World Economic Forum's annual meeting happening this week in Davos, Switzerland. When asked by the forum's founder Klaus Schwab on what tech layoffs meant for the industry's business model, Nadella said companies that boomed during the COVID-19 pandemic are now seeing "normalization" of that demand. "Quite frankly, we in the tech industry will also have to get efficient, right?" Nadella said. "It's not about everyone else doing more with less. We will have to do more with less. So we will have to show our own productivity gains with our own sort of technology." Microsoft didn't immediately respond to questions about where the layoffs and office closures would be concentrated. As of June, it had 122,000 workers in the U.S. and 99,000 elsewhere.

Associated Press business writer Kelvin Chan contributed

'We will have to do more with less. So we will have to show our own productivity gains with our own sort of technology.'

— Satya Nadella, MICROSOFT CEO