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Special
Convention Edition



State of the Union reflects PEF's Stronger Roots, Bolder Future'

By KATE STICKLES

President Wayne Spence delivered his 11th State of the Union address at the 47th annual PEF Convention October 20 in Lake Placid, sharing the union's victories over the last year and looking to continued success in the future.

"This year's Convention theme, 'Stronger Roots, Bolder Future,' reminds us that we are not here by accident, we are a product of decades of collective action, hard-fought battles, and unbreakable solidarity," President Spence told the nearly 700 delegates. "Our roots are strong. They were planted by the trailblazers who came before us – those who demanded fair pay, fought for safety standards, and believed that dignity at work was a right, not a reward.

"Those roots anchor us, give us strength when political winds shift, steady us when others try to divide us, and remind us that we are one union, one voice, moving forward together," he said. "But roots don't just keep us grounded – they nourish growth. They allow us to envision, reach, and rise toward a bolder future – one where workers are protected and empowered, where our members are not just heard but heeded."

Among the achievements this past year, PEF led the fight to save SUNY Downstate, resulting in \$1.1 billion in funding to preserve Downstate as a full-service public hospital.

"We didn't just save jobs – we saved healthcare in Central Brooklyn," President Spence said. "We did something that folks didn't think we would be able to do. What we now have is a template on how to work with the community to come together, not just as a union, but as a collective force to tackle issues. Other unions are looking at what we did in Brooklyn as a template for what can be done across the country."

In 2025, PEF's advocacy included fights for salary upgrades for underpaid titles; staffing relief at critical state agencies; and Civil Service modernization footed in fairness. Over the last year, PEF helped win \$50 million for body scanners at DOCCS and other facilities and \$25 million to expand mental health services through Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams and case management.

Each department at PEF played pivotal roles in protecting, empowering, and lifting up members across the state. PEF Legal secured \$128,000 in back pay for members thanks in part to the Expedited Suspension Review process secured in the last contract. The Health and Safety, Organizing, and Communications departments banded together to develop the Stop Workplace Violence campaign, which led to potentially life-saving changes at OMH.



"We now hear about violent incidents in the workplace immediately, allowing us to quickly support members," President Spence said. "If you remember, it was last year at Convention that member Peter Shiffman was assaulted by a patient at South Beach Psychiatric Center and I showed you a photo of his horrible injuries. He is still recovering and now sharing his story. WCBS-TV in New York talked to him, Carl Ankrah, and me for a piece that really highlights our efforts to curb workplace violence in state agencies. We don't have to wait for somebody to be attacked to change those situations. We need to highlight these things."

President Spence reported that PEF has already begun asking the state to come to the table and start work on a successor collective bargaining agreement. "The Contract Team is ready to work," he said. "They have been training and putting in the work and doing their homework."

RELATED: [Convention workshop seeks member input on contract](#)

PEF continues to grow, with 1,600 new dues-paying members added in calendar year 2024.

"That's not just a number," President Spence said, "that is power at the bargaining table, in the Legislature, and at the workplace. We will never allow our members to become collateral damage in a broken system. We will fight. When things go wrong, we will demand safety, respect, and action, not apologies."

The Trump Administration has begun implementing aspects of Project 2025, President Spence said, including massive cuts to Medicare and Medicaid, which ripple across state agency budgets where members work.

"We cannot allow national politics to destroy local services," he said. "I believe our future is a bold future. Let us recommit. Let us refocus. Let us rise – together. Because we are stronger than the crisis and bolder than the opposition. We set the bar. We raise the standard. We lead the way."

RELATED: [Gov. Hochul, Comptroller DiNapoli, labor leaders address delegates](#)







Stronger Roots, **Bolder Future.**

2025 PEF Convention

Nearly 700 delegates conduct business of the union at 47th annual PEF Convention

By KATE STICKLES

The 47th annual PEF Convention kicked off October 20 on the 1932 ice rink at the Olympic Center in Lake Placid, bringing together nearly 700 delegates from various agencies all across the state to consider a constitutional amendment, legislative agendas, and 38 different resolutions.

"It's my honor and privilege to stand before you, the heart, the voice, and the driving force of our union," said Convention Chair and Vice President Darlene Williams. "This year's theme is Stronger Roots, Bolder Future – where we are going depends on where we come from. PEF was founded in 1979 and built by people who refused to settle for less, believed the voices of the public employee mattered, and paved the way with passion, courage and persistence.

"I hope the delegates in this room have that passion, have that courage, and have the persistence to stand up for what is right," she said. "They faced tough fights, long nights, and sometimes impossible odds and yet they stood their ground and because of that, we stand here today."

VP Williams said in a divided world, it is more important than ever to stand together.

"When it comes to standing up for safe workplaces and fair wages, we don't wear red or blue, we wear PEF," she said. "Let's celebrate how far we've come and recommit ourselves to shaping the path ahead. This is our moment."

A stable fiscal position

PEF is in "the best financial position in the history of the union," reported Secretary-Treasurer Joe Donahue to the delegates. "I am proud of all the hard work that we have put in to make this union larger, stronger, as well as more relevant. We have led by example and other unions look to us. I can report to you PEF is in very good financial shape, and I intend to keep it there."

PEF received an unmodified opinion in its audit by the Bonadio Group, the best opinion that can be given. (The full audit was published in the [September 2025 Communicator](#), page 36.)



Secretary-Treasurer Joe Donahue delivers his annual report on Oct. 21, 2025.

"Current assets of the union stand at over \$32.2 million, an increase in almost \$3.7 million from the prior year," Donahue said. "This increase is due to the change in net assets from operations of \$1.31 million as well as investment gains of \$659,000."

Current liabilities increased approximately \$750,000, mainly due to the timing of invoices after year-end. Total liabilities increased by approximately \$2.15 million due to significant increases in post-retirement liability, higher than anticipated medical claims in 2024, and an increase in the active number of participants in PEF's medical plan.

Membership is up, Donahue reported, with dues revenue exceeding \$44 million, coming in at approximately \$44.4 million for fiscal year 2024-25, an increase of approximately \$3.6 million.

"This significant increase is due to membership going from 51,673 at the end of 2024 to 54,277 at the end of 2025, an increase of 2,604 members throughout the year as well as the 3% contract raise in April 2024," the Secretary-Treasurer said. "Total revenue grew by approximately \$4.08 million to \$47.7 million while total expenditures increased by approximately \$3.68 million to \$45.9 million, a change in net assets from operations of a positive \$1.31 million.

"Of course, our costs are increasing, but so are our efforts to recruit and retain members," he said. "Due to these uncertain times at the federal level, we need to be prepared for anything that negatively

impacts our membership. Just like when the Janus decision was handed down, we need to plan for the worst yet hope for the best.”

PEF’s three trustees, Muriel Hardy-Lee, Kelly Nadeau, and Radhakrishna Mohan, also presented their report to delegates, noting that PEF is “financially stable and secure” and there were no findings of fraud, waste, or abuse in audits of officers, Regions, or Divisions.

Legislative agendas



PEF Vice President and Statewide Political Action Committee Chair Randi DiAntonio chairs debate over the State and Federal Legislative Agendas on Oct. 21, 2025.

PEF Vice President and Statewide Political Action Committee Chair Randi DiAntonio presented the state and federal legislative agendas and chaired the debate and adoption of both.

“Right now, federal funding is under siege, and the consequences are already hitting home for the New York State workforce,” DiAntonio said. “We depend on those federal dollars. Over one-third of our state’s budget, \$93 billion, is tied to federal sources. When Washington cuts, New York feels it deeply. This is an all-hands-on-deck moment. Every day, every bill passed or blocked, every budget shift – it affects our ability to serve, to live in this state, to support our families.”

The approved Federal and State Legislative Agendas will be added to the [PEF website](#) as soon as the amendments approved by Convention delegates are incorporated.

Convention charity fundraiser breaks record



Host Region Coordinator Barbara Stransky, left, poses for a photo with Region 7 delegates and representatives from the Gouverneur Breast and Ovarian Cancer Fund.

Every year, the host Region selects a local charity and organizes a fundraiser. This year, delegates shattered expectations and donated \$12,117.69 to Region 7’s chosen charity, [the Gouverneur Breast and Ovarian Cancer Fund](#).

“I am beyond speechless,” said Region 7 Coordinator Barbara Stransky. “This is a record for a PEF Convention.”

Every penny donated to the Gouverneur Breast and Ovarian Cancer Fund goes to help someone who is facing the long road from diagnosis to recovery in St. Lawrence, Jefferson, Lewis, and Franklin counties. All donations provide direct financial support to someone who needs help during this challenging time.

“This is by far the largest the Convention has ever raised,” said President Spence. “Thank you for blowing it out of the water in terms of what was raised.”

Constitutional amendment and resolutions

Delegates voted to amend the PEF Constitution to deem the New York State Office of Information Technology Services as a separate Department for the purpose of representation under Article VII, which governs the Executive Board. The change “calls out the agency and helps create an identity,” proponents said.

Of the 38 resolutions presented to Convention delegates, 12 made it to the floor for debate and consideration by the body. Prior to the start of plenary sessions, delegates met to discuss the resolutions, recommend action, and prioritize the order in which they were considered.

Adopted as printed or as amended included:

Resolution 5: On establishing a comprehensive council leader training and certification program;

Resolution 7: On fighting back against federal budget cuts;

Resolution 8: On fixing Tier 6 and improving retirement equity;

Resolution 9: On addressing workplace violence;

Resolution 13: On encouraging and promoting management participation in labor/management;

Resolution 20: Dealing with addressing extra vacation pay disparity;

Resolution 26: On reimagining the PS&T evaluation and examination system for talent acquisition and retention;

Resolution 27: On amending the Leave Donation Program/Exchange Program.

Resolution 33, on accurate and explicit financial reporting, was tabled, as this information is already provided to the Executive Board quarterly. **Resolution 15,** which called for creation of a statewide director of health care services on the PEF staff, was heavily debated and delegates voted to recommend the President form a committee to discuss the proposal. **Resolution 1,** which dealt with fighting racism at the Department of Labor, was referred to the agency’s labor/management committee. **Resolution 31,** asking for full mileage reimbursement for Convention delegates who don’t carpool, failed.



Governor Hochul thanks PEF members

By NAJEE WALKER

New York State Governor Kathy Hochul took the stage on Day One of the PEF Convention on Oct. 20, 2025, with one simple message: Thank you.

"The reason why your union and the work you do is so personal and important to me, is because of my record as a public servant," Governor Hochul told the nearly 700 delegates in Lake Placid. "I was elected to serve 31 years ago, and I know it is because of people like you — the hardworking, unsung heroes, that so many New Yorkers get to thrive."

The governor understands the frustrations of Tier 6, she said, because she knows the struggles all New Yorkers face as things get more expensive across the state and the country.

"Our costs continue to rise as inflation wreaks havoc on our lives. That is why my administration is countering the sweeping DOGE (Department of Governmental Efficiency) cuts made earlier this year," she said. "We're making it easier for federal workers who have lost their jobs to enter into state service instead."

Governor Hochul also celebrated a new unemployment benefit, one championed by PEF as well, which increases the historically low benefit from \$540 per week to \$869 per week.

"As more workers are laid off or on strike due to issues coming down from the federal government, these increases will keep those New Yorkers afloat as they try to find their way again," said Hochul.

Several pieces of legislation that made their way to Governor Hochul's desk were brought to the finish line by PEF. In her address, Hochul highlighted the more than \$1 billion in funding for SUNY Downstate, the \$1 billion in funding for mental health and addiction services, and the LOADinG Act legislation—which compels agencies that use Artificial Intelligence to disclose when it is being used, and not displace workers.

"All of this legislation was made possible thanks to PEF and thanks to your caring and compassionate workforce," said Hochul. "I know that you are committing yourselves every day to being a part of making New York just a little bit better. I believe in that mission, and I know you believe in that mission, too."



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Today**

Labor leaders emphasize unity and collective action

By **KATE STICKLES** and **NAJEE WALKER**

During his keynote address at PEF Convention on Oct. 20, 2025, Transit Workers Union (TWU) International President John Samuelson delivered a strong reminder that unions must stick to their values and take the fight to management.

"We have demonstrated that growth is possible," he said. "Workers have a favorable opinion of unions when they fight. TWU's philosophy is sticking to our core values, taking the fight to the bosses and winning solid contracts. There is great synergy there. We win solid contracts every time we win a fight, workers on the outside see the victories, and they want to join the TWU."

"Our footprint gets bigger, we grow our political strength, and we are able to win more victories," he said. "The more we win, the more (workers) want to join. It all starts with having the audacity to take on the employers in contract fights."

In 2026, several large union contracts will expire, including PEF collective bargaining agreements with New York State. Samuelson said unions shouldn't trust any particular political party and need to remain a unified labor movement.

"At the end of the day, I would say there is no governor, no mayor, that can compel us to sign a contract we don't want to sign," he said. "We're here because we want to take care of our families. Let's be in lockstep and as long as we're together, we're not going to be beaten by Gov. Hochul, Democrats, or Republicans."

Mario Cilento



NYS AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento addresses the PEF Convention on Oct. 21, 2025.

On day two, delegates were joined by New York State AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento, a long-time unionist who began his career with the Communication Workers of America (CWA) in 1990.

He thanked PEF members for continuing to give their time and hard work to the union, but also to the labor movement. He also thanked

President Wayne Spence for continuing his work as a Vice President of the NYS AFL-CIO.

"Wayne serves on the executive board as a vice president. In that capacity, he has two responsibilities," Cilento said. "First is to represent the interests of this union and every single one of your members. From the day that he came onto our executive board, he would speak to the issues important to PEF. To this day, he has the full, unmitigated support and respect of every single union leader around that table. And considering we have some of the most powerful labor unions sitting around that table, that means something— when Wayne speaks, everyone listens."

In his VP role in the federation, President Spence helps chart the legislative and political priorities for 2.5 million NYS AFL-CIO members.

"You have some incredible accomplishments this year, including \$1 billion in funding for SUNY Downstate, and your union was able to push legislation twice in four years to Fix Tier 6, and those are great accomplishments," said Cilento. "But every year I have to go and see the governor to talk about the legislative agenda. And while fixing Tier 6 are priorities for PEF and our public-sector unions, I can also tell the governor that those are the priorities of our building trades and private-sector unions as well."

Cilento also addressed politics, reminding delegates that union members vote for both Democrats and Republicans, but it is up to union leaders to educate members on the best candidates at every level for working class people. He also reminded delegates that there are attacks on the rights of working people to organize and engage in collective bargaining across the country.

"Imagine if you went back into the office on Monday morning and found that your manager or supervisor was going to rip up your CBA? Forget about wages, benefits and conditions of employment. And they're going to cut 50% of the workforce right now," said Cilento. "What would your reaction be?"

Cilento said it is up to leadership to be factual with their memberships. Leaders will need to educate members and hope they make the right choice at the voting booth in order to keep jobs from being lost and unions from being dissolved, regardless of what party is in power.

"No matter who you are or where you're from, we all share the same needs, the same concerns and the same wants. We share the same values and the same principles and the same ideas," Cilento said. "We all want to be able to go to work and support ourselves and support our families, we all want to be a part of the economic engine that runs this country and we all want to be productive members of this society."

Randi Weingarten



AFT President Randi Weingarten addresses the PEF Convention via Zoom, joined by U.S. Rep. Timothy Kennedy (D-26), on Oct. 21, 2025.

AFT President Randi Weingarten also appeared before the delegates via Zoom on day two of Convention. Weingarten was in Washington visiting legislators as the government shutdown continued and was joined briefly by Congressman Timothy Kennedy, who represents New York's 26th District, encompassing the city of Buffalo and Niagara Falls.

"I wanted to jump on and say thank you so much for your leadership in the workforce," said Representative Kennedy. "PEF, you are second to none. We are fighting to protect healthcare and to lower costs for working families, and I cannot thank you enough for all that you do for the great people of New York and this nation."

Weingarten opened her remarks by recognizing the ongoing fight to fix Tier 6 in New York State.

"Your issues are similar to many pension funds across the nation," said Weingarten. "We need to make sure that the kitchen table issues — decent healthcare, good wages — basically, having the things you need to make sure you can do your job, we need to make sure that there is more fairness on these issues."

Weingarten said that these issues should be bipartisan. As rising costs for everything from food to health insurance threaten working families, due in part to the government shutdown and federal cuts earlier this year, Weingarten believes that unions will need to fight at every level to make sure government works for them.

"You have to remember that the \$1 billion you got to save SUNY Downstate did not come magically," said Weingarten. "It was the strength and determination of PEF. All of the members of PEF. We have the power and strength to keep going together to deliver those outcomes."

Delegates were asked to keep an open mind about becoming politically involved wherever they can. Weingarten thanked members who showed up to No Kings rallies across the state in June and again on Oct. 18 and said that when PEF members show up to represent working people, they give working people a voice in government.

"Just as you, as a union, deliver the voice you need at work; you also need a voice in government," she said. "We use that voice to get better wages, healthcare, housing and so much more. Politicians on both sides are running campaigns on affordability. Our voice is so important right now."

April Verrett



SEIU President April Verrett told delegates it's important "to sing with one voice and sing the same song," on Oct. 20, 2025.

SEIU President April Verrett, who counts many PEF members among her two million members, built upon the Convention theme "Stronger Roots, Bolder Future" in her address to the delegates.

"We are gathered at a time when your work and courage has never been more needed," said Verrett. "It is no coincidence that this year's convention theme is 'Stronger Roots, Bolder Future,' because that is what President Wayne Spence has built. That is what all of you are building together, and that is what our movement is being called to live up to right now."

Verrett's positive message of solidarity came with a dose of reality: that unions are under assault, that the news can be exhausting, but in the end, she believes that unions will stand strong.

"We are in a time of crisis," she said. "Every day we wake up to another assault on our rights. But in moments like these, we must remember that chaos is the point. They want to wear us down and thin us out, but we do not come from weakness. This movement for building worker power was built on strength. Our roots are deep and held steady through every storm."

Verrett reminded delegates that the labor movement has fought to organize in fields and factories for eight-hour workdays, and more recently, showed up for the people of the nation as well as for their union members at the height of a global pandemic. That work, said Verrett, is continuing.

"When systems collapse, it is working people who show up to build something better," said Verrett. "I see the fire in the room. Healthcare workers are pushing back against being erased by algorithms, you are standing firm against dangerous work assignments that jeopardize your safety, and you're organizing for equity, fairness and a voice. Not just at the table, you are redesigning the system itself."

Verrett called on delegates to keep their roots and history in mind when considering where to go next. The future, she said, may look uncertain, but as long as the labor movement remains united, she believes unions will win.

"The enemies of the labor movement are coordinated and moving as one. They are well-funded and playing for keeps," Verrett said. "We cannot afford division. We cannot waste time tearing each other down. We are building a movement choir, so we have to sing with one voice and sing the same song."



Delegates discuss contract ideas

By KATE STICKLES

Between plenary sessions on Monday and Tuesday, Convention delegates had a chance to share some topics they would like to see addressed during the next round of contract negotiations. Some of the top suggestions were telecommuting, short staffing, and improvements to the dental plan provider network, in addition to across-the-board raises and continuation of the Higher Education Differential.

"We have a really amazing contract team," said Contract Administration Director Debra Greenberg. "We have a great chief negotiator and a strong administration at PEF, but we really need membership's involvement. We could go in there with the most persuasive arguments, but we need people being vocal, talking to fellow members, participating in solidarity events, writing letters. Showing unity is what is going to really help with the contract."

On the issue of telecommuting, members noted different standards at different agencies and across different units. Some suggested telecommuting accommodations for weather and adverse situations where it's dangerous to travel to worksites.

Capping caseloads, offering more varied shifts and staggered worktimes, and fairly enforcing lunch and breaks at institutions and hospitals, where members often work through both, also came up. In addition, many members expressed frustration with the Anthem dental plan and want to see improvements to the provider network.

PEF has submitted a request to bargain to the New York State Office of Employee Relations, but has not yet heard back about specific dates. The current Collective Bargaining Agreement for the PS&T unit runs through April 1, 2026. In the meantime, the Contract Team is still reviewing suggestions from members, so please email 2026ContractSuggestions@pef.org.



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Comptroller talks shutdown, budgets, and pension

By **NAJEE WALKER**

Traditionally at PEF Conventions, New York State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli could be found on Sunday at the President's Reception meeting and greeting delegates before they head to the Convention floor on Monday morning. This year, due to unprecedented cuts to the federal budget and the government shutdown, PEF President Wayne Spence invited DiNapoli to a panel discussion on the Convention stage on Oct. 20, alongside PEF Vice President and Statewide Political Action Committee Chair Randi DiAntonio.

Understanding the impact

DiNapoli said that since June 2025, New York has seen a direct impact to its budget as a result of federal cuts and the passage of the U.S. budget. About a third (\$93 billion) of the state budget is funded by federal dollars.

"Right now, we're in pretty good shape, but there were an additional round of healthcare cuts and Medicaid cuts. (The shortfall is) about \$750 million in this year's budget," DiNapoli told delegates. "When you consider the size of the budget and that our revenue is higher than projected, we could absorb whatever the impact was going to be. The problem is next year, and the year after that, and the year after that."

In terms of the state workforce, DiNapoli said that about 9,000 state employees are tied directly to federal funds. Eighty percent of employees at the New York State Department of Labor are federally funded. The Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance and the State Education Department are about 40 percent funded by the federal government, as are about 25 percent of employees who work in healthcare settings.

DiNapoli also spoke about the human impact of healthcare cuts.

"The way these cuts are targeted is largely at healthcare and safety-net programs," he said. "What is it going to mean if some of our neighbors, friends and family members who are now getting health insurance from the essential plans or the Affordable Care Act—if they're going to lose that coverage—what will that mean for them?"

Other programs around climate change, energy transition, and food assistance are also on the chopping block. PEF members help administer the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which if eliminated, could lead to as many as 300,000 New Yorkers losing the benefit that helps them feed their families.

Tier 6 Reform

President Spence asked about additional Tier 6 reform. DiNapoli said his main goal is to make sure the pension plan is always as close to fully funded as possible. He also said that while he is not in control of changes made to Tier 6, he recognizes that every reform comes at a cost.

"Changes to Tier 6, COLA (Cost of Living Adjustment) enhancements, those are all done by the Legislature and the Governor. We have had some enhancements to Tier 6, thanks to your advocacy, and I know there is pressure to do more," said DiNapoli. "Well over half of our employees are Tier 5 and Tier 6 now. There is going to be a cost impact, and we do try to make money through our investments."

Pension investments are subject to fluctuations in the stock market. Tariffs that were enacted by the Trump Administration caused some markets to swing downward in March, then recover in April.

"We still landed at the end of our fiscal year on March 31 at 5.84% positive return," said DiNapoli. "So, we are meeting our targets. If benefit enhancement is going to affect the cost, I have to make sure that we are charging the employers a rate to keep us as close to 100% funded as possible. My obligation is to you as members to raise the rates if I have to."

DiNapoli believes that additional pension reform is possible, especially because of the recruitment and retention issues among state agencies. So far, he said he's heard no objections from employers because they see the value in a better pension system.

"I think the more that labor can work together, I think we will see more of the changes that have happened already—like the change in terms of the salary average from five to three years, the change in vesting and the change in overtime calculation—more changes like that will happen because labor spoke with one voice," said DiNapoli.

Employer audits by the Comptroller

One closing question came from Vice President DiAntonio.

"The Office of the State Comptroller (OSC) audits state agencies," said DiAntonio. "And for those of us who sit at our Labor Management tables, we often turn to these reports to address overtime and staffing with the employer. Can you tell the delegates about those audits and where they can find them?"

DiNapoli said all audits are on the comptroller's website. Many of them are conducted by PEF members. He said audits can be a good way to save New York money or figure out if more money should be spent, especially when it comes to staffing.

"We often get good suggestions from rank-and-file state employees, including PEF members, on where to audit," said DiNapoli. "I think it is great when you all get involved and find ways for us to save money, especially given all the things we've talked about surrounding the federal cuts to services."

Israeli bonds tied to pensions

President Spence knows that PEF members have strong opinions on worldly affairs. There were some questions from Convention delegates regarding how their pensions invest in Israeli bonds, given the violence in the Middle East.

In response, DiNapoli said in his opinion as a fiduciary pulling that money would not be in anyone's best interest.

"We take the overall position that we are an investor, not a divestor," said DiNapoli. "If we put all our money in a savings account, nobody would argue with us. But we wouldn't be making enough money to pay for the pensions, which is really our obligation."

DiNapoli said the State's fixed income portfolio has been investing in Israeli bonds since before he became Comptroller in 2007. The return on the investment has been safe and reliable, said DiNapoli, about 5%. He also said that he understands that there are a lot of people hurting because of the situation in Gaza.

"I try to explain to people that we're invested in the bonds. We're not supporting a particular government in Israel," said DiNapoli. "I have my own opinions as well, but I can't let my opinions, or other people's personal opinions or political agendas, drive the pension. It is not fair to all of you."

At the end of the roundtable, DiNapoli thanked PEF members for their hard work and dedication.

"Thank you for your support and for supporting each other. Your unity is needed now more than ever," he said.



PEF delegates approve state and federal legislative agendas

By **NAJEE WALKER**

One of the most important duties carried out annually at PEF Convention is the debate and approval of the union's State and Federal Legislative Agendas. Developed in coordination with PEF's Regional and Statewide Political Action Committees, the agendas delineate the issues PEF will advocate for and against in the coming year, both in Albany and in Washington.

PEF Vice President and Statewide Political Action Committee Chair Randi DiAntonio chaired the debate on Oct. 21 in Lake Placid.

"As you have heard many times from other speakers before me, but it is worth repeating—because it is important—federal funding is under siege," she said. "And the consequences for that are already hitting home for New York State's workforce."

One-third of the State's budget — which is about \$93 billion — is tied to federal funding. In addition to cuts by the Trump Administration earlier in the year, which threaten many of New York's public services and jobs, the ongoing federal government shutdown has frozen much of the funding to the state and the services they fund.

At last year's PEF Convention, the union held honest discussions about the theoretical issues faced if the Project 2025 playbook were to be implemented. Now, said Vice President DiAntonio, those challenges are being implemented in real time.

"Across federal agencies, more than 300,000 workers have already lost their jobs," she said. "And 1 in 14 federal employees lost their collective bargaining rights. The goal is very clear: weaken unions, shrink public service, to silence voices of working people."

DiAntonio reminded delegates that this strategy has been deployed before against public service workers. The tactic, she said, is to devalue the work done by public servants only to then lean on nepotism, political appointees, and privatization.

"We have heard people refer to the federal workforce as bloat, fraud, waste and abuse," she said. "People say that about us too. That we're a burden on taxpayers. Think about how hard you work just to be characterized that way."

DiAntonio urged delegates that despite the political machine moving against unions, the reason for unions to fight is not about politics, but principles: good contracts, collective bargaining, due process, healthcare, wages, security, and dignity in the workplace.

"Our strength lies in our union; in our values; in our strategy," she said. "When we are united, we are powerful. When we are divided, we are paralyzed."

With unity of purpose and by forming coalitions with other unions, PEF has delivered legislation that reforms Tier 6 of the State pension plan, regulates AI transparency, and recognizes mental healthcare coverage under workers' compensation. Additionally, PEF played a key part on the HALT (Humane Alternatives to Long-Term Solitary Confinement) Committee, which recommended changes to the law that governs the use of solitary confinement in correctional facilities.

"A lot of people tell me, 'I'm not political.' If you are a government employee, you are political," said DiAntonio, echoing a sentiment she shared with delegates at the 2018 Convention in Lake Placid. "Because we need to maintain and grow our funding so that we can keep delivering services and keep our jobs. This is an all-hands-on-deck moment."

DiAntonio urged delegates to think of political action as part of their job. Writing letters, attending rallies, and going to meetings or visiting legislators are part of what it means to be a unionist and a public servant.

"I encourage you all to join your region's Political Action Committee. We need activists in every legislative district—regardless of your party affiliation—because it gives members a collective voice in decisions that affect their jobs, benefits and working conditions," she said. (Interested members need only contact their [Regional Coordinator](#) to get started.)

Following the vice president's speech, the delegates voted to add language to both the state and federal legislative agendas to include PEF's advocacy for "making childcare for all more affordable, accessible and higher quality through increased funding, workforce development and expanded subsidies."

The delegates also added language to the state agenda that included support for legislation that pays full salary and medical payments for employment-related heart disease injuries for parole offices, senior parole officers, parole revocation specialists, preliminary hearing officers and administrative law judges.

Both the amended federal and state legislative agendas for 2026 were approved by the delegates. (They will be posted on the PEF [website](#) when all the final edits are made.)

COPE contributions are up

Contributions to the Committee on Political Education (COPE), a crucial component of PEF's advocacy on the federal level, were up again this year.

"Why do we care about federal dollars?" said COPE Coordinator Don Morgenstern. "We care because more than one-third of the state's \$254 billion budget comes from federal funds. Medicaid funds services at OMH, OPWDD, DOH, OASAS, SUNY hospitals, Roswell Park. DOL is over 90% federally funded. We can't use dues money to lobby federal politicians – this is why we have COPE."

Morgenstern reported COPE contributions are up 10% for the third year in a row, and the number of contributors is up 7%. PEF Division 407, Metro NY DDSO, continues to be the division with the highest number of members contributing at 60%.

Members can fill out and submit an electronic COPE application on the [website](#) or the [PEF app](#).



Recommit Today!

New + Existing PEF Members

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Pictured from left to right in the group shot, PEF Assistant Director of Health & Safety Josh Kemp, Health & Safety Assistant Niki Grabo, Article 18 co-chair Leisa Abraham, Health & Safety Director Geraldine Stella, Article 18 co-chair Gabriela Franklyn, and Health & Safety Specialist Jazmine Nova Morales.

Communication and facts are key to Health & Safety advocacy

The annual Health & Safety (H&S) Breakfast during Convention on Oct. 21 started with a 12-person game of “Telephone,” driving home the point that oftentimes news that travels from person to person loses a lot along the way, leaving leaders with incomplete or incorrect information to work with at the health and safety table.

“Isn’t this what is happening all the time?” asked Article 18 co-chair Leisa Abraham. “We’re not going back to the source, we’re hearing it from the last person, and we act on that final message. We really want to talk about the importance of communication.”

In the vendor area at Convention, PEF Health and Safety staff asked delegates to rate communication, management commitment, union involvement, hazard reporting and fixing, training and knowledge, and H&S committees at their worksites as either positive or needs improvement.

“Communication was one of the biggest things we need to do better,” Abraham said.

Fellow co-chair Gabriela Franklyn said follow-up is crucial.

“A lot of times our members will bring us the last message so we must take our time to investigate and do our due diligence to bring the facts to management so we can address issues in a timely manner,” she said.

Without correct information, little can be done to effect change.

“It’s really important to know what’s happening on the ground,” Abraham said.

PEF launched a “Stop Workplace Violence” campaign this year, where staff and leaders do tabling events at worksites and share information with members on how to protect themselves and what paperwork to obtain and fill out.

“If it’s not written down, what does management do? Nothing,” said Abraham.

In the coming year, the H&S department and union leaders will continue tabling to educate members about workplace violence, and remains committed to growing health and safety committees across the state.

“We have to teach people to be advocates in the moment,” Franklyn said.



PEF nurses celebrate Nurse Coordinator and organize at Convention

By **NAJEE WALKER**

The annual Nurses' Luncheon at the PEF convention delivers important information to delegates who work as nurses and healthcare workers across the state. It is an opportunity for nurses across agencies to share their issues and communicate with PEF leaders and staff where they need the most assistance.

At a time when nurses have seen record high numbers of assaults and where unsafe work conditions are on the rise, Amy Lee Pacholk, a Registered Nurse in the Teaching and Research Civil Service title who works at University Hospital at SUNY Stony Brook and is co-chair of the PEF Statewide Nurses Committee, reminded the nurses in attendance that there are a few initiatives that need their support.

"We need to have somebody sitting at the table. I know you have all heard the statement that if you are not sitting at the table, then you do not get to make the decisions," said Pacholk. "What we have found over and over again is that healthcare, at large, is not being advocated for in PEF the way that we need it to be advocated for."

More than 20 percent of PEF members are nurses or hold a healthcare title of some kind. They work at SUNY facilities, OTDA, OPWDD, DOCCS, DOH and multiple other agencies.

"The truth is, if you work for a healthcare agency, you know that our needs are not met by the contract alone," said Pacholk. "We generally can't use our cancer screening time as nurses if we work the evening or night shift as doctors' offices and imaging centers are not open at that time. Civil Service law states that one can only use that benefit while working, so the Civil Service law needs to change to accommodate our members who work evening and night shift members.

Pacholk told the nurses that with all the moving parts associated with the needs of nurses and healthcare workers, the nursing delegates in the room needed to support Convention Resolution 15.

Resolution 15 was considered by the full delegation on Oct. 21 and 22 and it was recommended that PEF President Spence refer it to a committee for further consideration. It would create a new director-level position at PEF called the Director of Nursing and Healthcare. The director would oversee the Nurse Coordinator and be a liaison between other union departments like Organizing and Field Services, to help lead advocacy campaigns focused on nurses and healthcare members.

Pacholk also took time to honor Nora Higgins, who is retiring as Nurse Coordinator.

"Nora Higgins is a special person," said Pacholk. "Thank you, Nora, for your service as a nurse, an educator, a PEF steward of Division 225, a delegate to the Long Island Federation of Labor, a member of the Professional Nursing Association of Suffolk County, the PEF Region

12 Coordinator, PEF SUNY Labor Management Chair, PEF Statewide Nursing Chair, the PEF Nurse Coordinator and a constant advocate."



Pacholk thanked Higgins for sharing her institutional knowledge with fellow nurses over the years, as well as her leadership and dedication.

Pacholk then welcomed attorney Alex Dell to discuss Workers' Compensation benefits. Pacholk said that nurses and healthcare workers are likely not fully taking advantage of their robust workers' compensation benefits.

"I have had multiple nurses call me after getting injured or assaulted on the job and ask about next steps," she said. "And while I thanked them for calling me, I do ask why they do not use their workers' compensation benefits. Most time, they do not know they have the option."

During his presentation, Dell briefly covered the benefits available to PEF members, including nurses, but focused on the updated Workers' Compensation Law in New York, including the changes to mental health coverage.

"Prior to June 4, 2025, if you alleged that you had a mental health condition from your employment, either from a singular event or over time due to the nature of your work, you would be denied a claim because it would not be considered beyond normal and ordinary for your work," said Dell. "They would deny the claim and say, 'you signed up for this'. Well, June 4, 2025, has changed the landscape for the better."

PEF advocated strongly for the change, and now acute, major depressive, and post-traumatic stress disorders are all covered and compensable under the Workers' Compensation law.



Convention luncheon honors veterans

By KATE STICKLES

It was a full house for the annual Veterans' Luncheon at Convention, save for one chair left empty at a small table set for one, in recognition and honor of prisoners of war and comrades missing in action, a dignified and solemn symbol at many formal dinners and occasions.

"This is our way of symbolizing the fact that some are missing from our midst," said Veterans Committee member Bruce Jagroop, an occupational and environmental therapy specialist at Roswell Park in Buffalo. "They are commonly called prisoners of war and missing in action, but we call them brothers. They are unable to be here today, so we remember them."

Veterans' Committee chairman David Krobe, who is the president of PEF Retirees in Region 1, was unable to attend, so committee member Christopher Buman, a real property analyst at Tax & Finance in Batavia, conducted the Missing Man Table ceremony. He explained each item on the table and its significance — from the small size of the table, symbolizing the frailty of one prisoner alone against his oppressors; to the single red rose displayed in a vase, reminding us of the families and loved ones keeping the faith, awaiting their return.

This year, Jeffrey Todd, a veterans' benefits advisor in the Potsdam office of the New York State Department of Veterans Services, not to be confused with the federal Veterans Administration or VA, spoke to attendees about services the state provides and advised them to contact the New York State Veterans Services Office nearest them for assistance.



"There are two types of VSOs, state and county," Todd said. "County offices only work within their county. State offices work throughout the state, and we can also go outside the state as far as representation, so if you have a veteran that moves around, it's always best to divert them to the state office."

The PEF Veterans Committee also includes Troy Decker, a municipal auditor with the Comptroller's Office, Retirees Representative Robert Harms and PEF Associate Counsel Ben Traslaviña.



First-time Convention delegates surge in 2025

By **NAJEE WALKER**



PEF's 47th Annual Convention saw nearly 700 delegates take part in plenary sessions and workshops at the Olympic Center and various hotels around Lake Placid. More than 200 of those delegates participated for the first time.

We caught up with a few of the delegates to get a sense of why they chose to join the union's highest decision-making body this year.

"I really want to help contribute and to effect positive change within the union," said **Aiesha Quick, a parole officer in Queens**. "I learned a lot about the resolutions and the voting process."

Quick has been a PEF member for 10 years and has worked for DOCCS for about four years. She is already involved in Health and Safety and Labor-Management meetings at her office and felt that attending Convention would be a chance to meet new members.

Adam Warrenchak is a Contract Management Specialist with the Office of the State Comptroller in Albany. He has been a PEF member for seven years and with the Comptroller's Office for about two-and-a-half-years. He was recently elected to the PEF Executive Board.

"Convention is where the entire membership really has a voice," he said. "I wanted to be here because it's one of the rare times when so many PEF members from across the state come together. It is a chance to hear different perspectives, share concerns from my division, and learn from others who face different challenges."

Joseph Moynihan works at the Department of Veterans Services in Buffalo. He is also an Executive Board member. As a board member, he was familiar with parliamentary procedure and PEF's adherence to Robert's Rules of Order, but with hundreds of other delegates in the room, the rules looked very different.

"I did not recognize how big the scale was going to be, so it was definitely a new experience to recognize just how many people are involved in this process, as well as the sheer consolidation of everyone throughout the state," he said.

First-time delegates had the goals of their members from their home regions in mind as they traveled to Lake Placid. For **Sandy Darby-Roberts, an Employment Counselor with the Department of Labor in Region 11**, the contract was top of mind for her constituents.

"Everyone is worried about raises and the federal cuts. Those were some of the major issues that my members were concerned about," said Darby-Roberts.

She was given some hope after hearing about New York's ability to absorb some of the impacts from those cuts from speakers at convention.

"I think it's great, the fact that there's a little bit of a cushion—my grandma would always say that it's good to keep a little something for a rainy day—so it's great that we have that to lean on," she said.

Moynihan feels the same but added that he thinks the state has the back of both state and federal workers during this unprecedented time.

"There are obviously some concerns with federal deficits affecting us in the state, but from what I have heard over the last couple of days, I feel pretty confident we'll be able to weather that," he said. "And then make sure we still have the necessary steps in place to ensure safety, welfare, fair wages and respect for our workers."

Each delegate said that they learned a lot and even had some fun at Convention. Quick said although she didn't get too involved on the convention floor, she looks forward to coming back next year.

"I think it was an absolute fabulous experience, I learned so much about Robert's Rules of Order, I did candle making, we had boots on the ground—there were so many other activities to do—it was a great experience, and I would definitely do it again."

Warrenchak hopes that even more people get involved next year when Convention takes place in Niagara Falls.

"The union is only as strong as its members," he said. "When more people get involved, we get more perspectives and stronger decisions. Even if someone doesn't run for a delegate or board seat, attending meetings or helping on a committee makes a difference. The more members we have engaged, the more power we have at the bargaining table and in shaping our future."

Editor's Note: The 48th PEF Convention will take place Oct. 18-21, 2026, in Niagara Falls. Keep an eye on your email and the [PEF website](#) for information in the Spring of 2026 about how to petition to become a delegate.









