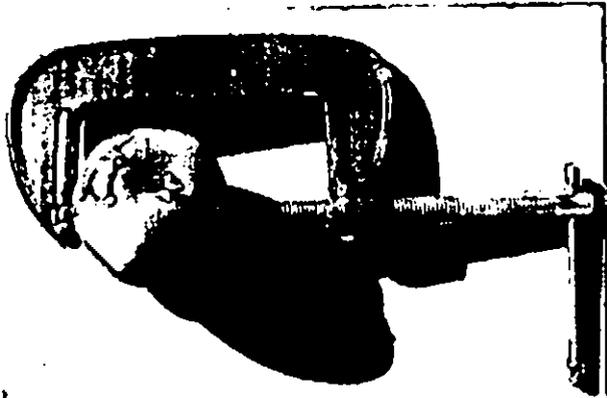


## Schools and Public Employees

### UNDER ATTACK

### Talking Points



Executive Budget Puts Squeeze to Education

### Cuts in State Aid to Schools

**Threat:** The Governor has proposed a \$1.5 billion (7.3%) cut in state aid to schools.

**Impact:** This cut would reduce state aid to a level less than it was in 2008-09. Just last year, schools eliminated about 10,000 positions due to budget cuts. Even more personnel cuts will mean larger classes and fewer programs. Some schools may not be able to offer all the required courses.

**Response:** Schools are a SPECIAL interest. Cutting school budgets is a recipe for disaster. Public schools are being pushed for better test results while funding is being cut. School staffing is already at bare-bones levels in many districts. More layoffs mean more community members out of work.

### Property Tax Cap

**Threat:** A state property tax cap threatens to limit communities to a maximum increase of 2% or the rate of inflation, whichever is lower.

**Impact:** State aid cuts will be much more severe if districts do not have another source of funding to compensate. Those urban & small rural schools most dependent on state aid will be hit hardest. State aid cuts will mean *smaller* school budgets, not just budget freezes, if property taxes are capped.

**Response:** A property tax cap only works if the State makes up for the lost funding, but the State is ready to reduce its funding of schools for the third straight year. At the same time, the Governor is proposing state aid cuts and a property tax cap, he is also proposing to reduce taxes on those with the highest incomes.

### Salary Freeze

**Threat:** Municipalities and school boards have endorsed the idea of a statewide salary freeze for all public employees, just as the Governor has promised a freeze on state employees.

**Impact:** NYS would have to pass legislation to negate collective bargaining agreements, a move which we believe is unconstitutional. If enacted a salary freeze would make public service even less attractive and would have lifetime impact on public employees' earnings and retirement security.

**Response:** Teachers and other public employees are not the enemy. Their services are essential to the community, and they are not overpaid in salary or benefits. The burden of schools and other public services needs to be shared more fairly, relying less on property tax and more on fair share taxes from higher earners.

### Pension Reform

**Threat:** Municipalities and school boards claim that public employee pensions are "rich" and simply unaffordable. They : employees need to contribute more (e.g. : every year) and pensions should be replaced defined contribution plans like 401(k)s.

**Impact:** Reducing the benefits is another way of reducing the attraction of difficult jobs. Defined contribution plans are a great way to get Wall Street to make money while shifting the financial risks to working people.

**Response:** Like health insurance, retirement security should be there for all community members. Public employee pensions are not "rich." With a few exceptions that make it news, most retired public employees receive modest pensions as one of the key rewards of a career of public service. Pension costs employers have averaged a little more than 10% for the last 15 years—less than the cost of social security. For many of those years the cost was even less. Pensions are the most economical way of providing retirement security.

### Tenure

**Threat:** Some are calling for an end to teacher tenure, characterizing it as "a guarantee of lifetime employment."

**Impact:** An end to tenure puts great power in the hands of administrators and school boards to dismiss teachers for reasons that may be political or financial.

**Response:** Tenure is not a guarantee of job security; it is a guarantee of due process. It requires evidence and a fair hearing, rights that all employees should have. An end to tenure could put teachers at the mercy of administrators and school boards whose motives and skills have often been suspect in the past when deciding who should be fired.

## Health Insurance

**Threat:** Municipalities and school boards insist that public employees must pay a minimum amount for their health insurance. They want NYS to pass legislation to establish a minimum share for public employees.

**Impact:** Ignoring the fact that very many public employees already pay substantial amounts for health insurance, this is another effort to reduce one of the key benefits that allows public employees to accept relatively low paying jobs.

**Response:** Again, public employees are not overpaid in salary or benefits. Communities and legislators should be fighting to see that all community members have decent and affordable health insurance.

## “Triborough” Amendment

**Threat:** Municipalities and school boards want to eliminate the section of the Taylor Law that protects the provisions of an expired contract until a new contract is ratified. They say Triborough makes it too easy to negotiate increases in salaries and benefits.

**Impact:** Repeal of Triborough will give employers an unfair advantage. They will be able to cut salary and benefits when a contract expires while employees will not be able to withhold their work because public employee strikes are illegal.

**Response:** Employers will have an unfair advantage because only they will have the legal right to create a crisis situation. Triborough was adopted to level the playing field, and it succeeded. Employers could no longer provoke strikes, and strikes became very rare.



## Seniority

**Threat:** Municipalities and school boards are calling for an end to tying layoffs to seniority. They argue that many “young” and “energetic” employees are more valuable than veteran employees. These critics say “merit” should dictate which employees to layoff.

**Impact:** Many veteran public employees are paid higher salaries because of their years of service—a system devised long ago to compensate for low starting salaries. Once free from requirements to lay off senior employees last, employees will discover that older, higher paid staff members will inexplicably have less “merit” than they did before.

**Response:** Veteran employees bring experience and efficiency as well as energy. Financial pressures are always a challenge for public employers even in relatively good times. Ending layoff by seniority will inevitably lead to thinly veiled age discrimination and discrimination against those with higher salaries.

## Subcontracting

**Threat:** Municipalities and school boards seek greater freedom to subcontract services. Under the Taylor Law, they are required to negotiate with their unions before they can subcontract work performed by union members. Employers claim that “privatization” will provide savings.

**Impact:** Public employees will inevitably lose jobs to private contractors who pay even lower wages and salaries. Because private contractors are in business to make a profit they will depress wages even further. Community income will decrease. Lower wages mean lower quality job applicants, a privatization reduces public control of those employees and services.

**Response:** Unionized workers have a long history of providing higher skills, better service, and more loyalty. Private contractors, despite their claims, are ill-prepared to provide many of the services provided by municipalities and schools.



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