**PEF Region 8 PAC Meeting Minutes**

**January 11, 2022**

**Zoom Meeting 6:00 PM**

**Attendees:**

Michael Blue, Danielle Bridger, Martin Robinson, Patrick Lyons, Mike Kuzia-Carmel, Sheryl Sperry, Margaret Ann, Andrew McMahon, Ken Ferro, Mario Chiarello, Prakash Lal, Keisha Rivera, Pat Coonrod, Jeanette Santos, John Desormo, Gustavo Santos, Morgan Perez

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

The January 2022 PEF Region 8 Political Action Committee (PAC) Meeting was called to order at 6:06 PM on Tuesday, January 11, 2022. Roll call of attendees was taken.

1. **ACCEPTANCE OF AGENDA**

The proposed agenda for the meeting was discussed. Mario Chiarello asked if discussion of the endorsement subcommittee could be added as an agenda item under 5. LEGISLATIVE UPDATES. A motion to adopt an amended agenda with the requested agenda item added was made by Martin Robinson and seconded by Mike Kuzia-Carmel. The motion passed without objection and the amended agenda was accepted.

1. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Approval of the minutes from the December 7, 2021 PEF Region 8 PAC Meeting was discussed. A motion to approve the meeting minutes was introduced by Martin Robinson and seconded by Michael Blue. The motion passed without objection and the minutes from the December 2021 meeting were approved.

1. **REGION COORDINATOR COMMENTS**

Danielle Bridger provided comments and updates as the Region 8 coordinator.

* IT has provided an updated link for the Zoom meetings. This link is available on the PEF website and is functional for all Region 8 committees, including the PAC.
* New steering committees will begin to meet on a monthly basis

1. **LEGISLATIVE UPDATES**

Patrick Lyons, the lobbying coordinator for PEF Region 8, provided updates on recent legislative activity in New York State.

* The Legislative Session started on Monday, January 10, 2022.
* Governor Kathy Hochul gave her first State Of The State (S.O.S) Address on Wednesday, January 5 2022. The S.O.S. is largely rhetorical, but often serves as an indicator of funding/budget priorities for the coming year. Patrick stated that the real “proof in the pudding” is in the state budget, for which an initial draft is expected to be released later this month.
* Within the S.O.S., Governor Hochul made the healthcare profession a point of emphasis, both in private and in public facilities. NYS intends to make investments to attract and retain healthcare professionals → this is significant as PEF currently represents many healthcare professionals already.
* The Office of People With Developmental Disabilities was granted $500 million through the CARES Act. This funding included $1,000 hazard pay bonuses, $500 vaccination incentive bonuses, and $400 longevity bonuses for healthcare workers.
* Governor Hochul is proposing to expand the roles and responsibilities of nurses. The PEF position is that any increase in role should be accompanied by an increase in pay. This is particularly true for supervisory responsibilities.
* New York State may join the Multi-State Nurse Compact. This allows interstate travel for nurses. They typically are hired to work in healthcare facilities on relatively short (i.e., months long) deployments. PEF is concerned with issues relating to differences in nursing certification standards, and the use of this pool of healthcare workers as leverage against organized labor.v During 2021, healthcare workers in New York State logged approximately 19 million hours of overtime. So-called “agency nurses” have been infiltrating hospitals and other facilities in other states, and coming into conflict with existing staff. This issue will be discussed with the PEF Nursing Committee.
* The New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS) is looking to expand community-based services. PEF is fighting to ensure that these will be public programs and to prevent facility closures. NYS has a duty to provide services. An example of a recent proposed closure via consolidation was cited - Childrens’ Psychiatric Care at Hutchings Psychiatric Center is proposed to be transferred to SUNY Upstate. This would result in a reduction from 30 beds for full-time care to 11 beds for dual-diagnosis.
* On the criminal justice front, in the SO.S. Governor Hochul committed to  reduce gun violence. This includes the introduction of so-called “Red Flag” Laws. Gov. Hochul is also in support of the Jails-To-Jobs Program, which works with the Parole system to help re-integrate convicts into the community. This program provides mental health services, health services, and housing. There has been a loss of almost 7,000 staff statewide in criminal justice facilities since the start of the pandemic. This has led to widespread staffing shortages.
* Prakash mentioned an initiative to increase IT staffing within state agencies.
* Gov. Hochul expressed support for automating debt forgiveness for state employees.
* Gov. Hochul also expressed support for providing a childcare benefit for up to 100,000 families.

Patrick Lyons reviewed the current PEF demands for the governor’s office.

* An end to the arbitrary 2% annual budget cap.
* An end to state program consolidation and facility closure (closure by consolidation).
* A commitment to invest in care services (e.g., mental health, substance abuse, recovery).
* Hazard Pay for frontline workers.
* Expanded attraction & retention program for Registered Nurses, including $1,000 in tuition reimbursement, $500 tax credit, and preferential admission to public universities.
* Cost-benefit analyses of incoming funding through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Framework, to eliminate wasteful use of funds.
* Enhancements to the current Telecommuting Program, in light of the current Omicron Variant of COVID-19.
* Significant changes to the Civil Service System, including: enhanced and expanded access to Civil Service Exams throughout the state, standardization of the 3% contribution across all tiers, reduction of the ten-year vesting limit to five-years for Tier 6 employees, and an expansion to the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) in the New York State PEnsion above and beyond the annual escalator.
* PEF encourages employees to get vaccinated but won’t support a vaccine mandate at this time.
* Michael Blue raised the issue of expanding the Empire State Fellows Program - this has historically been a way to circumvent the Civil Service process and has had some negative effects. Is there a possibility of expanding Civil Service to bulk up the IT titles? PEF wants to ensure that contractors aren’t being used to squeeze out and replace public employees.

* Mario Chiarello asked about the status of the Cost of Living Adjustment Bill. Patrick stated that the bill is currently with the Comptroller’s Office and still has to be costed out. This is being supported by NYS Senator Robert Jackson and NYS Assemblyman Peter Abbate. PEF is currently awaiting the bill draft to come back with fiscal notes.
* Prakash stated that over 1,000 IT staff have been lost during the pandemic, the state ios still backfilling positions that have been open since April 2021.
* Patrick Lyons posted a link to the S.O.S. in the meeting chat.
* Ken Ferro stated that closure of Department of Corrections (DOCS) facilities can have devastating effects on small communities where those facilities are major employers(ex. The north country). Most recent facility closures have been OPWDD facilities in the Finger Lakes region. The most common mechanism of closure is through suspending services and then never restoring them.
* Ken asked how is lobbying done virtually? Patrick stated that lobbying is all being done via Zoom and other virtual meeting platforms. Ken followed up by asking if legislators will have open Zoom meetings? Patrick stated that organizations like PEF have more influence than the general public in getting these types of meetings with legislators, although some legislators have occasionally held virtual town halls. Danielle stated that she will work with Patrick and Leah to try and set these meetings up between PEF and legislators.

Patrick discussed the current state of federal legislation.

* The Build Back Better and Voting Rights Act are both jammed up in the Senate. It is unclear if these bills will be able to be passed.

* The American Rescue Plan has provided significant funding to New York State. Coupled with the infrastructure bill, New York State should see at least $20 billion dollars over the next five years in federal funding. This will result in the creation of many jobs.
* Danielle stated that she will defer to Patrick Lyons (lobbying) office for setting up meetings.
* The question of how to do endorsements was made. Martin Robinson stated that there is still some time before PEF has to make endorsements. If PEF wanted to make an endorsement in a primary or in a local election, they would have to come next month (February 2022). This is uncommon.
* Michael Blue stated that one factor that has impacted the ability to set up meetings is that there are no longer PAC Political Action Liaisons (PALs).
* Danielle stated that COVID and the associated telecommuting has caused lots of fallout for members.
* Patrick Lyons stated that the primaries this year will be held in June; in order to make endorsements the Executive Committee would need them by late March.
* Danielle stated that the endorsement subcommittee discussion will be punted to next month (February 2022) due to Health and Safety concerns relating to COVID and in-person meetings. Danielle introduced a motion to defer discussing this to next month. The motion passed without objection.
* Patrick stated that most PACs have been meeting virtually.
* Ken Ferro suggested hosting a luncheon with new Region 8 and Executive Board Staff to get members more active. Most of these committees and meetings have been retiree-dominant.

1. **QUESTIONS**

The questions posed to Patrick Lyons throughout the LEGISLATIVE UPDATE section are discussed above.

1. **ADJOURN**

Meeting was adjourned.