**PEF Region 8 PAC Meeting Minutes**

**March 8, 2022**

**6:00 PM Zoom Meeting**

**Attendees:**

Danielle Bridger, Martin Robinson, Myron Getman, Sheryl Sperry, Mike Kuzia-Carmel, Kate Richardson, Mike Blue, Paul Burns, Mario Chiarello, Mickey Dobbin, Bruce Giddings, Kaleb Winters, Sharon De Silva, mimu, Jim Desso, Gustavo Santos, Rmoroz, Christopher O’Neill, Prakash Lal, Margaret Ann, Maddie Shannon-Roberts, Kevin Jones

1. CALL TO ORDER

* Meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM. Some items were discussed prior to the other agenda items.
* Sheryl asked if PEF will organize a donation effort for Ukraine. Danielle will ask president Spence at the E-Board meeting.
* Rising gas prices are impacting members returning to work at offices with reductions in telecommuting.
* Danielle has added an item to the agenda regarding the State Education Department (SED) ethics policy. This is based on a meeting the night before (March 7, 2022) where this issue was raised.
* Members are curious when in-person meetings at PEF HQ will begin again.

1. ACCEPTANCE OF AGENDA

* Danielle Bridger made a motion to accept the agenda.
* Chris O’Neill made a request to add communications item under “Regional Coordinator Comments,” item added to agenda.
* Motion to accept agenda was seconded → motion passed without any objections.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

* Danielle shared the minutes from the last meeting (February 8, 2022) with the group via Zoom.
* Mike Kuzia-Carmel asked if there is an archive of past meeting minutes. Danielle has some past meeting minutes with her and will help to set up an archive.
* Mike Blue made a motion to accept the minutes from the last meeting. Chris O’Neill seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.
* Minutes accepted

1. REGIONAL COORDINATOR COMMENTS

* Danielle briefly described how a recent uninvited guest infiltrated a PEF Zoom meeting. As a result, PEF will no longer provide Zoom meeting links on social media.
* Danielle discussed the initiative to improve communications for the committee. One issue is that members who have opted out from communications have fallen through the cracks and have been totally cut off from email communications. Danielle has been working with Dan and Jessica in PEF Communications to address this.
* Myron Getman indicated that PEF Communications uses Action Network to manage communications/outreach to members. Myron opted out because Action Network will sell member contact information to political entities; this ultimately results in members receiving unwanted correspondence and spam.
* Chris O’Neill stated that there had been past trouble for members in getting off of unwanted email lists.
* Danielle stated that she is open to suggestions on this issue. She will send out a letter to council leaders regarding communications.
* Sharon De Silva stated that PEF Administration is working on this issue (communications).
* Danielle stated that Delegate Petition Forms for the PEF Convention have just come out. The deadline for completing them is April 4, 2022.
* Gustavo Santos asked what are the dates of the Convention? The convention will be held from October 24, 2022 through October 26, 2022 in Niagara Falls.

1. STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (SED) ETHICS POLICY

* Kaleb Winters and Mickey Dobbin introduced the issue regarding an email sent from management to SED employees on the evening of Friday March 4, 2022. The email stated that employees must seek approval from the SED ethics office before running for elected office, including local school board positions.
* The concern with this email is that ethics offices have indicated that SED employees sitting on school boards constitute “the appearance of a conflict of interest.”
* Therefore, the implication is that most, if not all, applications from SED employees seeking approval to run for school board positions will be denied from the ethics office.
* Kaleb stated that the same issue is present at the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC). Ethics officers at NYSDEC have been asking for employees to disclose all volunteer activities. This information is also being shared with supervisors and division directors.
* Jim Desso stated that ethics offices have grown in scope over the years; this has naturally led to overreach.
* Sharon De Silva stated that state agencies have general ethics policies regarding permissible dual outside employment and outside activities. The Public Officers Law provides the statutory authority for these policies. Ms. De Silva suggested that PEF put this specific issue on the agendas for state and local Labor/Management meetings. This will put pressure on management to relax or reconsider overly restrictive ethics policies.
* Myron Getman asked if teachers can run for local school boards? There were conflicting answers to this question. Margaret Ann stated that a Guilderland teacher had held a position on a local school board. Others weren’t certain whether it was allowed for teachers to serve on the school boards for the districts in which they work. Gustavo Santos confirmed this, and stated that although school boards aren’t technically paid political positions, they are commonly regarded as such.
* Mickey Dobbin asked if ethics offices are generally getting stricter across the board. Mike Blue stated that this has been a long-standing issue with many agencies. Mike suggested that if an employee is in doubt about a specific situation to file a grievance and that field representatives have lots of experience with these types of situations.
* Chris O’Neill stated that the DEC ethics policy forbids employees from having any involvement with anything the agency regulates. As DEC regulates “all natural resources” this policy could be interpreted as covering most possible outside activities. Janice Trainor has been the agency representative for NYSDEC and is knowledgeable about ethics conflicts.
* Gustavo Santos asked if anyone from SED has contacted their field representatives yet/ Uncertain if this has happened.
* Kaleb Winters stated that the timing of the SED email is especially egregious given that individuals seeking school board positions are currently petitioning.

1. PAC CREDENTIALED MEMBERS

* Danielle Bridger met with Sharon De Silva last week to discus this. Sharon has asked all regional PACs to provide her a list of all credentialed members.
* Danielle Bridger and Mike Blue need to convene subcommittees to meet with legislators and PAC Political Action Liaisons (PALs). Individuals who are interested in participating on subcommittees should contact Danielle Bridger.

1. LEGISLATIVE BREAKFAST

* It is expected that PACs will soon return to in-person meetings (perhaps starting next month). With this in mind, Danielle Bridger opened a planning discussion on the legislative breakfast event. Specific dates and times were discussed.
* Danielle is planning a Leadership Conference at the Gideon-Putnam during the third week of May. Also, the Black and Puerto Rican Legislative Caucus will be held from April 8 through April 10. The AFT mobilization training is on April 26. Because of these conflicts, these dates will be avoided.
* Danielle Bridger offered Friday April 15 as a potential date. Mike Blue stated that we need to be cognizant of the legislative schedule. Past legislative breakfasts have been held Monday – Wednesdays. Most legislators travel on Thursday and are out of the area on Fridays.
* Martin Robinson posted the legislative calendar and suggested pushing the meeting back into May. Attempting to pick a date in April would leave little time for planning and logistics.
* Options at the end of the discussion included April 15th or May 3rd/4th. Likely venue would be the Albany Room. No final decision on a date.

1. OPEN BUSINESS

* Sandwich boxes from DiBellas will be made available for the first in-person meeting. Danielle stated that we will have to play it by ear until DOL/DOH guidance updated regarding in-person meetings.
* Chris O’Neill asked what is the date of the April meeting? The April meeting will be held on April 12, 2022 at 6 PM.
* Danielle Bridger made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mike Blue seconded the motion.
* Meeting adjourned.