



## Your Bargaining Committee

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Dear New Jersey State Worker,

This is an important letter bringing you up to date on a few issues, so please take the time to read it through. It discusses Contract Negotiations, the State Budget, how the Trump Administration agenda could impact CWA members, and it provides information about our next Tele-Town Hall Meeting.

## **Contract Negotiations—March 24th\***

We have scheduled negotiations with the Christie Administration for March 24, 2017. (Please wear red to work that day to support the Bargaining Team.) There are several reasons for our change of direction. Back in 2015, the Christie Administration failed to give timely notice for negotiating a new contract, which would mean the contract was automatically extended for one year. This means we would not receive an across the board percentage increase, but that steps and other annual payments should have been paid. Christie's team disputed this, and we had to challenge it with legal action.

When the Contract expired, the Christie Administration attempted to chill negotiations and gain leverage by **illegally suspending increments**. We took legal actions to respond to this violation of the Contract and the law including filing an unfair practice, a grievance and a lawsuit. The Administration relied on two local government cases as the basis for its illegal action: Atlantic County and Bridgewater. These cases were being appealed by the FOP and the PBA, and these unions were represented in the appeals by same lawyers that CWA uses – Weissman & Mintz. We believed that if we could win these two cases in Appellate Court, the Administration would have to pay retroactive increments and there would be much less pressure to settle for less than what is fair.

Although this strategy has gone exactly according to plan— the Appellate Court unanimously overturned the PERC decision that suspended increments after contract expiration— three things have happened that have led us to decide to go into bargaining anyway and not wait for the Supreme Court to rule on these cases:

1. IFPTE Local 195, the Union that represents craft, security and transportation workers, and the IBEW Local 30, the union that represents management, settled short. They settled their contracts for 0%, 0%, 1.75% and 1.5% on wage increases. This is very low, but it established a pattern. This is the problem when smaller unions jump quick: they create obstacles that are nearly insurmountable even for stronger unions to climb. CWA, AFSCME and the AFT are confronted with a terrible pattern. **In the past, the best contracts for everyone have been when CWA was on lead, because we did not settle for crumbs. The IFPTE and IBEW agreements also extend the current chapter 78 health care contribution rates until 2019 and have some dangerous**

**language about how steps were withheld after the contract expired, as well as some troubling changes to language regarding overtime, job banding and work rules.**

2. The courts are moving very slowly in the increment cases. Oral Argument in the case before the Supreme Court isn't even scheduled until March 13, and it is possible that another July is going to go by and thousands of our members haven't received an increment. The very thing that the Administration was trying to accomplish, the suffering of our membership and the pressure to settle a bad contract, is happening. **This is one of the very reasons withholding increments as leverage is illegal.** It is because it works. We have members who work next to IFPTE 195 or IBEW members and they are getting increments and as of July across the board increases and CWA members are not. We expected the courts to move more quickly. But it hasn't – and the combination of the IFPTE agreement + the slow moving courts – is angering and frustrating our members.
3. Donald Trump won the election. We hoped that with Hillary Clinton in the White House, and Phil Murphy in the State House, we would have strong allies with whom we would be able to address the critical issue of our pension and healthcare costs. We still expect to be able to do that with Phil Murphy, but he will have to govern with a hostile Federal Government that is looking to cut funds to New Jersey and other states (especially Blue ones.) After 8 years of a defensive fight with Chris Christie, we are poised to have a defensive fight with the Trump Administration for another four years, all at a time when we must save the NJ pension.

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### **State Budget**

Governor Christie gave his final Budget address on February 28. Although he has committed to a \$2.5 billion pension payment, the budget still has issues we are concerned about, including a cut he is making to healthcare spending of \$125 million that we cannot under any circumstances absorb.

We are analyzing the budget and more information about it will be coming out shortly.

**We will have a Telephone Town Hall Call on March 29 at 7 p.m. to discuss negotiations and the state budget.**

**Please sign up at:  
[www.cwanj.org/signup](http://www.cwanj.org/signup)  
to be included in this next call.**

**WEAR RED TO WORK  
ON MARCH 24  
TO SUPPORT YOUR  
BARGAINING TEAM!**