



# SOMERS FACULTY ASSOCIATION

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NEW YORK STATE UNITED TEACHERS  
American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO 3013

## **CONFUSED ABOUT REDISTRICTING? YOU'RE NOT ALONE!**

The latest round of redistricting in New York State was a mess, with courts throwing out the maps passed by the legislature, followed by a rushed process to get court-drawn maps in place in time for a delayed primary. In the end, the maps adopted by the court are among the most competitive and politically balanced in the nation — New York is one of only a handful of states where competition increased rather than decreased after redistricting. But the treatment of some communities, especially in New York City, and the lack of time to have a robust, participatory process for input on the new maps left many deeply dissatisfied.

Midterm elections are traditionally bad cycles for an incumbent party, like the Democrats this year, but a tightening in the polls could lead to a close finish for whoever controls Congress come January. Lee Miringoff, director of the Marist Institute for Public Opinion and assistant professor of political science at Marist College, said congressional districts like the 19th in the Hudson Valley will get a lot of national attention and [could be "critical"](#) as each party pushes for control.

If you don't know your congressional district, senate district, or assembly district (or anything about your current representative), you should look it up! [Elected Officials & District Map | New York State Board of Elections \(ny.gov\)](#)

## **SUMMER PRIMARIES IN NYS SET THE FIELD FOR NOVEMBER GENERAL ELECTION**

New York voters chose their nominees for the U.S. House of Representatives and state Senate, ending the second of two primary campaigns in the state as the focus now turns to the general election. The road to a majority in the House likely runs through New York, and given the history and political environment, it should still be a good night nationally for Republicans in November. But primary results in parts of New York state could give Democrats some reason to hope amid close races in parts of upstate New York.

If you're a Democrat, the 19th congressional district victory for Ulster County Executive Pat Ryan lands like a thunderclap. Despite the political headwinds, Ryan was able to defeat a fellow county executive and well-known Republican, Dutchess County Executive Marc Molinaro. Democrats will argue this bodes well for November, and demonstrates their voters are engaged on issues like abortion rights after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*.

Republicans, however, won't be willing to read the tea leaves like this. Low turnout, plus the stakes themselves are quite low. Ryan and Molinaro were not vying for a seat to win control of the House, but a district that was vacated by Lt. Gov. Antonio Delgado. Ryan will fill out the remainder of that term. The district itself in the Hudson Valley has been redrawn, and Ryan and Molinaro will both be running for separate newly drawn seats this fall.

Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney fended off his primary challenge from state Sen. Alessandra Biaggi in the newly drawn lower Hudson Valley House seat. Maloney, the head of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, called it a victory for the "mainstream" of politics. It's a phrase that may clang in the ears of progressives, but the night was a sign establishment Democrats have found ways of fending off challenges to their left flank.

## **PRESIDENT BIDEN CANCELS STUDENT LOAN DEBT FOR SOME BORROWERS**

President Biden announced that he would cancel \$20,000 in student loan debt for Americans earning less than \$125,000 per year, capping months of anticipation over a campaign promise to provide economic relief to millions of people, according to four people familiar with the announcement. Mr. Biden also extended a pandemic-era pause on loan payments until the end of the year. It has been in effect since March 2020.

Across the United States, 45 million people owe \$1.6 trillion for federal loans taken out for college — more than they owe on car loans, credit cards or any consumer debt other than mortgages.

## **SUPREME COURT STRIKES DOWN MAINE'S BAN ON USING PUBLIC FUNDS AT RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS**

In June, the Supreme Court [ruled](#) that Maine violated the Constitution when it refused to make public funding available for students to attend schools that provide religious instruction. The opinion by Chief Justice John Roberts was a broad ruling, making clear that when state and local governments choose to subsidize private schools, they must allow families to use taxpayer funds to pay for religious schools.

The decision was the latest in a series of cases in recent years in which the court has sided with parents and religious institutions challenging state policies that barred them from receiving education-related funds that were available for secular, but not religious, recipients. The court's three liberal justices dissented from the decision, with Justice Sonia Sotomayor cautioning that her colleagues had "upended constitutional doctrine" and expressing "growing concern for where this Court will lead us next."

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten said: "Remarkably and stunningly, even for this right-wing majority, this decision completely vitiates the establishment clause of the U.S. Constitution and, with it, the separation of church and state, a core constitutional principle that has bound this country together since its founding. Today the court has decided that taxpayers must pay for the private religious education of others."

## **LEGISLATIVE RECAP: NYS GOVERNMENT DELIVERED THIS PAST JUNE**

At the end of the [session](#), the state Senate and Assembly passed numerous bills that NYSUT activists and legislative staffers pushed through since the state budget was finalized in early April. "Many of these wins came down to the last days of session," said President Andy Pallotta, "but our advocacy paid off again this year." Although a few have been enacted, most of the bills await the governor's approval.

Both houses passed a bill to reaffirm long-standing precedent to allow unions to introduce evidence showing both the employer and employee bargaining units' intent to provide retirees with health insurance for life, regardless of the language in a collective bargaining agreement. The longstanding precedent was recently struck down in court.

With regard to the pandemic, one bill extends through 2023 the death benefit for public employees who died as a result of exposure to COVID-19. Another extends through 2023 the four-hour paid leave for public employees to obtain COVID-19 vaccine or booster shots.

Among the acts that have already been signed are changes to the APPR and tenure laws as districts and educators continue to deal with ramifications of COVID-19. The changes provide a path to tenure for educators in their probationary period and suspend for a year the annual professional performance review process, while ensuring districts are not penalized for not undertaking APPR this past year.

Finally, vesting after five years is back! New York's Tiers V and VI used to wait 10 years to be pension eligible, now it's five. Lawmakers and Gov. Kathy Hochul, in the 2022-23 state budget, rolled back a Cuomo-era pension reform that required employees in Tier V and VI of the state pension system to work for 10 years before being vested, or eligible to get full lifetime pension benefits.

### **CHILD CARE SUBSIDIES EXPAND TO LOWER-MIDDLE CLASS FAMILIES**

Families who have never before qualified for child care assistance can now [get help](#) paying the bills for summer camp, after-school care and day care. Starting Aug. 1, New York state expanded the child care subsidy to those who make 300 percent of the national poverty level, up from 200 percent. That means a family of four, with a household income of \$83,250, can get help paying for child care. Income cutoffs for this year are \$69,090 for a family of three and \$54,930 for a family of two. For a family of four, the income limit used to be \$55,400. That change alone has made nearly 400,000 additional children financially eligible, the state said.

### **NYS SENATE STAFFERS SEEK TO UNIONIZE**

New York Senate staffers have begun [organizing a labor union](#), a step that could eventually allow them to collectively bargain a contract. In July, a group of Senate legislative staffers announced that they are in the process of forming the New York State Legislative Workers United (NYSLWU). According to a press release, those looking to become members of the NYSLWU hold a range of ideological perspectives and work in Senate offices representing "every corner" of New York. The effort in the state Senate follows the successful unionization of the New York City Council staffers, U.S. Congressional staffers, and legislative staffers in Massachusetts.

### **AMAZON WORKERS IN UPSTATE NY SEEK TO UNIONIZE, TOO!**

Workers at Amazon's distribution center in Schodack are attempting to form a union. "We're calling on Amazon to fight fair," [union organizer](#) Heather Goodall said. The group filed for an election with the National Labor Relations Board, citing poor wages and safety concerns.

A brief statement from Amazon states "Our employees have the choice of whether or not to join a union. They always have," Paul Flanagan wrote. "As a company, we don't think unions are the best answer for our employees. Our focus remains on working directly with our team to continue making Amazon a great place to work."

Despite that sentiment, union organizers claim top brass at the Schodack facility have instilled fear in employees over joining the effort, even calling the police during what Goodall described as an informational session inside a break area. The encounter was shared on social media.