



Julannah Gregory, RN; Charmayne Saddler-Walker, RN; Sharon Bedford, RN; Christine Toomer, RN; Cheryl Powell, RN; and Ari Moma, RN, at an Interfaith Medical Center recognition breakfast on March 11

NYSNA members put Interfaith Medical Center on path to recovery, p. 10

2016 Lobby Day resonates
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By Judy Sheridan-Gonzalez, RN
NYSNA President



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Reflections on election themes

Years ago, I heard a patient say to a female physician, “You are such a nice nurse!” To which the doctor, clearly perturbed, hissed, “I’m not a nurse, I’m a doctor!”

I explained to the doc that the patient was in fact complimenting her.

She looked at me like I was a Martian.

It’s progress that more women can become physicians these days than in years past. What’s unfortunate is that once some people “make it,” they easily forget where they came from and even who they are. Combatting stereotypes is important but not at the expense of denigrating our roots or certain essential characteristics that make us what we are.

The fact that women tend to be sensitive to peoples’ needs used to be seen as a sign of weakness. Today, many people still view sensitivity as a feeble quality and being tough and even harsh as a sign of strength. One need only look at the popularity Donald Trump has generated by being rough, tough and even nasty. Why is this?

Feeling “cheated”

When people are unhappy and powerless, even though they work hard and “follow the rules,” they feel inherently cheated. Understanding the dynamics of who is cheating us is not simple; there are many layers to wade through to discover this. It is much easier to drown our miseries in electronic distractions, fantasy games, television, a variety of addictions: alcohol, drugs, food, consumerism and forever trying to “improve” upon our own physical appearance (which is never good enough, especially for women).

But these addictions/distractions don’t ease the pain of powerlessness. This requires an object to blame for our miseries. Many of us blame ourselves and live with sub-clinical depression. How convenient to find a politician who provides us with assorted scapegoats and has the audacity to express such animosity in the public arena! It makes us feel empowered, exonerated... and brings out the so-called “dark side” we often suppress.

“America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves.”

— Abraham Lincoln, 1838

When victims become predators, we need to worry. Think of *Lord of the Flies*, or the behavior, sometimes, of first or second-generation immigrants who dump on the latest (“different”) group of newcomers. The conservatism that dominated right-wing politics for years was dependent upon the belief among folks that there was always someone worse off than

Dramatic changes in tax codes that disproportionately benefit the super-rich have resulted in budgetary shortfalls. Deregulation has allowed mega-mergers and monopolies to proliferate, as well as the increase in the poisoning of our environment. Privatization denies public oversight of corporate behavior. Free trade agreements have moved industry—and millions of



they were. This is what prevented poor white folks, particularly in the South, from questioning their own exploitation. At least they were white, they were told, and were spared the worst.

But now there is a revolt in the Republican Party. People are afraid of the future—they are not happy with things as they are. They are nostalgic about the age of prosperity in this nation and wish to bring back “the good old days.” They want a simple explanation as to why things are so rotten and a “quick fix” for America.

Revolt in the ranks

In fact, understanding what has happened to this country over the past 40 years is not so difficult but it does require some analysis. There is a revolt among voters in the Democratic Party as well, as many of their leaders have also supported some of the legislation that has caused a deterioration in the standard of living of the so-called middle class, or working class of this nation.

decent jobs—off shore. Successful attacks against unions have led to a downward spiral of low wages, the loss of pensions, the reduction of health benefits and the terrors associated with unstable employment.

An opportunity for real dialogue

“Election fever” has generated debates among families, friends, neighbors and coworkers. There is great value when a window is opened that promotes dialogue about the very serious social issues of our times. But dialogue implies listening to one another and trying to carefully sift through the words we use to truly understand the concepts that are being expressed.

Most of us want the same things: meaningful and satisfying work, stability in basic human needs, loving relationships, time to enjoy the wonders around us, a sense of safety and a secure belief that our children will inherit a better world. Creating such a world requires educating ourselves, seeking out alternative sources of information and committing ourselves to action.

NYS victory: wages and leave



All New Yorkers had reason to celebrate on April 4 as Governor Cuomo signed into law the country's strongest and most comprehensive paid-family leave law and a large raise in the state's minimum wage. Both were contained in the 2016-2017 state budget.

New York now leads the nation in creating a worker and family friendly economy — and is laying a foundation for better health.

The legislation gained bipartisan support following a campaign by hundreds of thousands of parents, caregivers, business owners, unions, public health advocates, and others. NYSNA members were there with the governor, assuring widespread public support for both issues translated into legislative votes and passage.

Higher minimum wage

Under the new law, New York's minimum hourly wage will rise from the current level of \$9 to \$15 in 2018 for workers in New York City employed by businesses with more than 10 employees; workers elsewhere in the state are to receive a raise as well, but somewhat lower. The plan is to have the entire state at a new rate by the end of 2021.

The rising minimum wage is expected to produce a substantial economic lift for the million-plus New Yorkers who will receive \$10,000 annual increase in their income.

A higher wage also means better health. The correlation between poverty and poor health and premature death is well established. *The American Journal of Public Health* recently published an analysis by NYC Health Commissioner

Mary Bassett that found that a \$15 minimum wage would have significant health benefits, including lowering the rate of premature death in high poverty communities and saving up to 1,000 lives a year.

Two weeks prior to the April 3 budget deal, NYSNA retiree Lesline Brown-Hazel, RN, was among our union's contingent at a March 15 rally where thousands of union members, low-wage workers and social justice activists convened at the Empire State Plaza in Albany to deliver a final push to the state legislature to take up Governor Cuomo's challenge and pass the minimum wage raise.

Ms. Brown-Hazel sees the *Fight for \$15* as a healthcare issue. "It's all connected. People can get out of poverty if they earn a decent living. Then they can take care of themselves and their families and not have to worry about whether they can afford food, health insurance, and everything else they need to be healthy."

She speaks from a personal perspective. "I wasn't always a nurse. When I started working, I worked

for minimum wage. This was the 1970s and I made \$3.25/hour. Thirty-five years later, wages are barely double that, even though inflation rose a lot faster. The *Fight for \$15* is overdue."

Paid leave

The new family leave law will enable both full- and part-time workers on the job for at least six months to take 12 weeks of paid time off to care for a new child or a sick parent, child, spouse, domestic partner or other family member. It goes into effect in 2018 and comes into full force in 2021.

With 12 weeks leave, New Yorkers will have twice the leave provided in California and New Jersey and triple that of Rhode Island. New York makes no exception for small businesses — all workers are covered. Advocates hope New York's law will set the standard for paid leave throughout the country.

"By moving to a \$15 statewide minimum wage and enacting the strongest paid family leave policy in the nation, New York is showing the way forward on economic justice," said Governor Cuomo. "These policies will not only lift up the current generation of low-wage workers and their families, but ensure fairness for future generations and enable them to climb the ladder of opportunity. I am proud to sign these programs into law, because they will ensure a stronger, fairer and brighter future for all New Yorkers."

President Obama issued a statement praising New York's leadership on the issue. "Americans shouldn't need to choose between their families and making ends meet," the President said.



Top (L to R): NYSNA and 1199SEIU at the March 15 rally in Albany; Governor Cuomo addresses supporters; NYSNA retiree Lesline Brown-Hazel, RN.



By Jill Furillo, RN,
NYSNA Executive
Director

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, as well as the American Medical Association, says that the restrictions placed on women's health clinics in Texas are medically unnecessary and have the effect of harming women's health.



"Abortion alley" of the era that preceded Roe v. Wade ruling

Fighting for women's lives

There is today a profound attack on public health, as access to comprehensive services for women's health, including safe abortion care, contraception and cancer screening, are threatened. As nurses, in a profession predominantly comprised of women, we are compelled to speak out against those forces intent on denying women the care they need and to which they are entitled.

Across the nation, a large group within the Republican Party is waging war on women's reproductive rights. Access to safe and legal birth control and abortion is not only a constitutional right, but also a matter of life and death. Before the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling, 1.2 million women across America had illegal abortions each year. These procedures were often performed outside of a medical setting, in unsanitary conditions, with no access to anesthesia, and they resulted in approximately 5,000 deaths a year due to preventable complications like sepsis and hemorrhaging. Low-income women and women of color suffered the most from lack of access to safe abortions.

The burden caring for women after they underwent these unsafe procedures fell heaviest on our public hospitals. In 1962 alone, almost 1,600 women were admitted to Harlem Hospital, part of NYC H+H, after receiving incomplete or dangerous abortions, amounting to one abortion-related hospital admission for every 42 deliveries at the hospital that year.

Republican attack

Since the midterm elections in 2010, Republicans have controlled both the U.S. House and Senate. In the same election year, Republicans

swept state gubernatorial races—11 governor seats that had been held by Democrats flipped to Republicans—as well as many state legislative races. Republicans, boosted by hundreds of millions of dollars in contributions by super PACs like the Koch brother-funded Americans for Prosperity, have used their increased power to pass laws restricting access to women's healthcare, including safe abortions. In 2011 alone, 92 provisions that restricted access to abortion were enacted on the state level.

The harmful consequences of these restrictions are becoming increasingly apparent. The *New York Times* recently reported that Google searches for self-induced abortions have spiked to show a level of demand creeping back up to what it was in the era before *Roe v. Wade*. In 2015, there were 700,000 Google searches for some version of self-induced abortion, including by coat hanger, bleaching the uterus, or punching one's own stomach. The level of desperation correlates with increased restrictions on abortion rights. Mississippi, a state with only one remaining abortion clinic, had the highest number of searches for self-induced abortions.

Supreme Court

Last month the Supreme Court heard *Whole Woman's Health v. Colemajo*r, its first major abortion case since 2007. The case pertains to restrictions placed on women's health clinics by a Texas law that requires any clinic performing abortions to be staffed by physicians who have admitting privileges at a nearby hospital and for the clinics to maintain Emergency Room-like standards not required of other kinds of outpatient clinics. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists as well as the American Medical Association, among other medical groups, said that the restrictions are medically unnecessary and have the effect of harming women's health.

Partial implementation of the Texas law led to the closure of more than half of all abortion clinics in the state and experts expect that full implementation would

reduce the total number of clinics to fewer than ten for a state with more than five million women of reproductive age. A decision in that case is still pending.

States are continuing to enact restrictions that put women's lives at risk.

The state of Indiana has already applied a convoluted feticide law to sentence Purvi Patel, a woman who miscarried after allegedly attempting to obtain abortion pills unlawfully, to 20 years in prison. Not only are women's lives at risk from lack of access to safe abortions, but Republicans want to punish women who, out of desperation, take matters into their own hands.

Preventative care

The best way to reduce the number of abortions performed is to ensure that women have the resources to avoid unwanted pregnancies. Yet the same groups campaigning to hamper women's access to safe abortions also oppose access to birth control, sex education, and preventative healthcare.

Nine states have recently defunded Planned Parenthood, an organization committed to public health through a range of comprehensive services for women's health. Despite its public health mission, Congress has repeatedly voted to defund Planned Parenthood, which would deny services it provides to millions of women—from cervical cancer screenings, to contraceptives, to tests and treatment for sexually-transmitted diseases.

In spite of these setbacks, some states are making progress in women's healthcare. Oregon recently became the first state to expand access to birth control medication by offering it over the counter; California will now allow women to get birth control directly from a pharmacist. Here in New York, Governor Cuomo signed legislation allowing pregnant women to enroll in our state's healthcare exchange any time of year by making pregnancy a qualifying life event. With a united effort, we can continue to move forward to protect the health and safety of women, a paramount public health issue.

Nurses picket for patient care in Central New York

Hundreds of NYSNA nurses at three Central New York hospitals held informational pickets on March 18 about their ongoing struggle to win fair contracts that include provisions for safe staffing. Nurses were joined by state and local elected leaders and labor and community allies.

Members at Samaritan Medical Center in Watertown, St. Elizabeth in Utica, and Oneida Healthcare Center have presented contract proposals that would raise patient care standards, resolve staffing concerns in a meaningful way, and provide fair wages and affordable healthcare for nurses, but all three facilities have balked at settling contracts that include patient and nurse standards comparable to those already in place at 60 other New York hospitals.

The day's pickets began at Samaritan, where Debbie LaMora, RN, told those gathered. "It is important to me as a nurse, as a mother, and as a New Yorker that

safe staffing levels exist. Safe staffing really does save lives."

At noon, nurses and supporters at St. Elizabeth Medical Center joined the day's action. When the Samaritan and St. Elizabeth pickets concluded, the action shifted to Oneida. Sharon Stoner, an Oneida RN, addressed the crowd: "Any nurse will tell you that all they want to do is ease a patient's pain and discomfort, and give them all the care they need. That's why I am speaking out about safe staffing."

The pickets received broad news coverage and political support. "Safe staffing is critical for the health and safety of every patient in New York State," Assemblywoman Carrie Woerner told the press. She, along with fellow Assembly members Phil Steck, Addie Russell, Anthony Brindisi, Pamela Hunter, Aileen Gunther, and Angelo Santabarbara, and State Senator Joseph Griffo urged the hospitals to listen to the nurses and reach fair contracts.



Nurses and supporters at Samaritan Medical Center



St. Elizabeth RNs Ashley Ross (left) and Joanne Campbell on March 18.

One of the driving forces behind health care reform was addressing the prevalence of readmissions of patients because they went home and got sick again. Ensuring that trained nurses are interacting as much as possible with their patients is central to staying healthy after leaving the hospital."

Assemblywoman Addie J. Russell, a cosponsor of the *Safe Staffing for Quality Care Act*, told the *Watertown Daily Times* while walking the picket line with the nurses.

Code Blue at Jacobi ER

With the hiring of a new Director of Nursing in January, Jacobi Medical Center's nurses are hopeful that they will have a new ally to work with to solve the staffing crisis in the hospital's Emergency Department.

ED staffing has been deteriorating for the past several years, and "It's not uncommon for 4 or 5 RNs to care for 60 to 70 patients," according to Sean Petty, RN and LBU President. The growing crisis in the ED spurred nurses to develop an outreach program to raise awareness of the threat to this important community resource. In early fall, the nurses began a concerted POA campaign that culminated in a report presented at a labor-management meeting in December. "We wanted to give management another opportunity to recognize the crisis."

NYSNA nurses, ED doctors, and other staff spoke out at the February Community Board 11 meeting on the severity of the crisis and urged the community to action. NYC Public Advocate Letitia James, Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr. and State Senator Jeffrey Klein heard from the workers that the hospital's approach of hiring a few nurses at a time is not working.

Vicious cycle

"We are in a vicious cycle. The hospital spends a lot of money and time hiring and training new nurses. By the time they're up to speed, they either leave the ED or leave Jacobi. In the rare instance that they do stay, a more senior RN has had enough and left. The bottom line is that staffing has not improved, it's gotten worse," said Marie Galin, RN. Ms. Galin

is confident that if the ED were staffed properly, new nurses would stay because veterans like herself would have time make them feel like part of a team.

She added, "The worst part is that nurses have no time to help each other. Every nurse is so worried about her own license that we have no time to lend a hand. I've never experienced that before."

Mr. Petty likened Jacobi's understaffing to a sick patient, "When we treat dehydrated patients, we don't give them water sip by sip, we give them a massive infusion. That's what we need at Jacobi. We need a massive infusion of nurses."

With a new Director of Nursing and the involvement and support of elected officials and the community, the nurses are hopeful that they will be able to unite around the common goal of providing the very best public healthcare to all New Yorkers.

Assembly Members said...

Kenneth Zebrowski (D-96)

"Nurse staffing is not an abstract concept. It's a proven fact that safe staffing improves outcomes and saves lives. It's about time that we pass this bill!"

Carrie Woerner (D-113)

"You have to raise your voices so the entire Senate hears the message that safe staffing saves lives!"

What do we want? SAFE STAFFING!

It was a record turnout for NYSNA on Lobby Day 2016, a surge of support for safe staffing, with our members leading the way, other unions on hand and supporters cheering us on. Albany heard the message loud and clear, "Safe Staffing Saves Lives!" when 2,000 members from all corners of the state converged on the State Capitol April 13.

NYSNA members visited legislative offices, meeting with state assembly members, senators and staffs. Nurses put forward our case for safe staffing ratios with personal stories and facts and figures on unsafe staffing. They asked uncommitted legislators to support the *Safe Staffing for Quality Care Act*.

In the Assembly, the bill recently left the Codes Committee and was sent to Ways and Means, its last stop before a floor vote. Nurses asked the 91 assembly members

and 28 senators who already sponsor the bill to redouble their efforts to build needed support in the Senate so a vote can be accomplished this year.

The record turnout is an indication that the bill's time has come. "California has had its safe staffing law for 12 years. We're burning out. It's time for New York," said Karen Wagner, an RN at Montefiore Children's Hospital.

A full house

It was the first Lobby Day for her co-worker Clara Wesly-Camach, RN, whose decision to attend came after a particularly harrowing day last December. "We had 4 nurses for 36 patients. The ER was swamped and sent us another patient, a baby that needed constant monitoring and should have never been sent to our floor. He had barely arrived when he coded. I was so thankful that my patients

Richard Gottfried (D-75)

"The first step is to make a conscious decision to do the right thing, that is to save lives by making sure there are enough nurses. Everything else will fall into place after you make the commitment to do what's right."

and I survived that day that I vowed to do whatever I could to make sure no one is ever put in that situation again."

At the lunch session that followed morning office visits, 10 Assembly members spoke in support: Aileen Gunther, RN (the bill's sponsor), Richard Gottfried, Ellen Jaffee, Shelley Mayer, Angelo Santabarbara, Nick Perry, Phil Steck, Carrie Woerner, Patricia Fahey, and Kenneth Zebrowski. Each vowed to work to pass the bill this session.

Beth Mohle, RN and head of the 57,000-member strong



Queensland Nurses' Union (in Australia), told the room, "I bring a message of solidarity from across the Pacific! Nurses around the world know that safe staffing saves lives!" She spoke about her union's successful "Ratios Save Lives" campaign that resulted in legislation that will go into effect July 1. She urged NYSNA nurses to stay on course: "All things worth fighting for are long battles. Stay united, speak out, lobby, and I know you will succeed!"

'Never seen a crowd this big'

Forming a sea of nurses and supporters, the broad halls of the Empire State Plaza Convention Center were full, and nurses made their way through the streets and the park in front of the state senate's legislative offices. "In all my years in Albany, I have never seen a crowd this big in this park," Assemblyman Richard Gottfried, chair of the Assembly Health

Aileen Gunther, RN (D-100)

"It took years to get the bill on mandatory overtime, but we did it. Safe staffing has taken years, too, but I'm with you now like I was with you then, and we will do it and do it together."



Angelo Santabarbara (D-111)

"It's time to pass this bill! It's long overdue, and it's common sense. I will push to make sure it comes to a vote this year."

Committee, told the crowd. Fifteen members and healthcare advocates, other unions and supporters addressed the group.

A CWA worker—on strike against Verizon (see box, right) closed the rally, pledging, "We stand behind you, and with you, until you get safe staffing."

CWA and IBEW workers on strike against Verizon were joined by NYSNA nurses in a throng of support. Senate staffers looked out their windows at the sea of NYSNA red, as the street in front of the senate offices was closed down.

The unity of nurses, legislators and supportive unions was a powerful symbol of the solidarity labor evokes.

Assembly members Carrie Woerner (second from left), Aileen Gunther, Ken Zebrowski, and Dick Gottfried helped carry the banner for safe staffing from the Convention Center out to the streets.

Solidarity with Verizon Workers

On the same day that NYSNA held its lobby day, nearly 40,000 CWA and IBEW union members at Verizon went on strike after ten months of contract talks reached an impasse. Verizon has already moved 5,000 jobs overseas and is trying to move thousands of others as well as to outsource work to low-wage contractors. Strikers outside Verizon's capital office joined NYSNA for the afternoon rally and then led nurses back to their picket line in a shared chorus of protest. Chants of, "What do we want? Safe staffing!" changed to, "What do we want? Fair contract!" as nurses stood side by side with telephone technicians and customer service reps. The huge mass of NYSNA and CWA members, all wearing red, showed the power of labor solidarity.



Capital Region members played host to nearly 2,000 NYSNA sisters and brothers.



Building RN advocacy



During the contract campaign and negotiations, members saw a clear path for getting involved."



Yasmin Bahar, RN, NY Presbyterian Hospital, Pediatric ER

NYSNA nurses from across New York gathered in the Hudson Valley on March 8, International Women's Day, for the union's first ever *Conference for RN Advocates*. The day's panels and workshops were structured to further develop the educational, organizing, and advocacy skills that participants had gained through completing NYSNA's two-part Member Leader (i.e. stewards) Training program.

In all, more than 200 LBU leaders, delegates, Unit Reps, Safe Staffing Captains, and members of local union committees on professional practice, legislative advocacy

and health and safety shared experiences and strategies for protecting patients and professional standards in a healthcare system that increasingly values profit over quality care and in light of the threats to labor unions posed by the *Friedrich's* case recently before the Supreme Court.

The power of unity

Peguy Ceneus, an RN in Montefiore Medical Center/Lucy Moses Division's Pediatric ICU, was excited to be there. "The contract campaign last year opened my eyes to the potential of what nurses can do when we're united. We saw our power first hand when we took

a stand on staffing and got the hospital to hire more nurses."

Ms. Ceneus enrolled in NYSNA stewards training earlier this year. "I loved the energy and learned so much about my union—especially about how it goes way beyond filing grievances." She plans on using her new training to help coworkers recapture and redirect the energy from the contract campaign into winning safe staffing. "The contract campaign was such a motivating experience. I'm trying to find ways to keep that fire alive."

Finding ways to keep members engaged was also one of the reasons that Yasmin Bahar, an RN on



Promise Nwankpa, RN, Harlem Hospital (left), led her table's discussion during the afternoon workshop on grievances.



Participants in the morning workshop on "Recruiting RN Members Leaders from a Diverse Nursing Workforce"



Peguy Ceneus, RN, Montefiore Medical Center Children's Hospital Pediatric ICU



Jennifer Brinkworth, RN, ECMC, speaking about the recent contract distribution campaign at her hospital

the NYSNA Executive Committee at NY Presbyterian attended. "During the contract campaign and negotiations, members saw a clear path for getting involved. Now that we've settled and won wonderful contract language, they're unsure about how to stay engaged and effect change." She hoped to come away from the training with ideas for addressing that issue. "I suspect that lack of engagement is contributing to poor retention at my hospital. I think working together and using the strong contract language we won would empower nurses and lead to lower turnover."

Campaign approach

In her morning presentation, President Judy Sheridan-Gonzalez, RN, addressed unsafe staffing and other challenges and urged nurse leaders to use a campaign approach within NYSNA facilities and communities to take on big picture issues. "Nurses are most effective and powerful when we engage, organize and build campaigns around issues of importance," citing the success of the recent contract, POA and Safe Staffing Captain campaigns.

Lunch speakers focused on achieving passage the *Safe Staffing for Quality Care Act* in the current legislative term. Several Westchester County Legislators spoke on their efforts to achieve a county resolution to encourage the State Assembly and Senate to pass the bill.

Lea Nason, a Pediatric Oncology RN at Westchester Medical Center



Lea Nason, RN, Westchester Medical Center, and Desiree Gibbons, RN, St. Joseph Medical Center, Yonkers

and a new member of the WMC Executive Committee, is committed to seeing the bill become law: "My goal is to take my advocacy past my unit, past my hospital, and into my community. Legislation is the only way to ensure that all New York's hospitals staff properly." Ms. Nason spends considerable time and effort educating patients and meeting with community groups to build a grassroots coalition to support the safe staffing law.

Member Leader Training is open to all interested NYSNA members. Since 2012, more than a thousand members have completed the two-part training. Contact your NYSNA Rep for more information, and the 2016 schedule is listed on the website (www.nysna.org) under "Upcoming Events."

Marjorie Peguero, an RN at Montefiore Medical Center's

Weiler Division, credits the training with helping her mature as a nurse. "I've learned how to express my opinions in a professional manner and how to approach management as an equal when addressing problems on my Unit. Plus, it's given me an outlet for dealing with bigger challenges like staffing."

Specific action plans

By the end of the day, each participant had made a specific action plan for taking the skills and lessons they learned back to their facilities and engaging their coworkers. Desiree Gibbons, RN at St. Joseph Medical Center in Yonkers, aptly summed up the day's many activities and workshops: "The most important thing I came away with today is that there is tremendous strength in unity."



**Be tenacious.
Be persistent.
Keep up your
unflagging
advocacy. The
evidence is
overwhelming
that safe staffing
saves lives."**



Catherine Borgia, Majority Leader of the Westchester County Legislature, spoke as part of the lunch panel.

NYSNA RNs among those honored at IMC

THIS MONTH, NYSNA NURSES, 1199SEIU caregivers and the doctors of the Committee of Interns and Residents were celebrated at a Women's History Month Breakfast to honor the work of the women who saved Interfaith Medical Center.

NYSNA nurses have worked tirelessly for the past two years to protect healthcare for Brooklyn patients. In Central Brooklyn, a medically underserved area with high rates of preventable illnesses and with some of the highest infant mortality rates in all of New York, RNs united with fellow union members, elected leaders, and the community to keep Interfaith Medical Center open for care. Just a couple of years ago, Interfaith was on the chopping block of Brooklyn hospitals facing imminent closure. Now, due to the efforts of the coalition spearheaded by NYSNA nurses, the hospital has come out of bankruptcy.

First African American woman named CEO of a New York Hospital

The Coalition to Transform Interfaith also celebrated the historic appointment of Interfaith's new President and CEO, LaRay Brown, who is the first African American woman to lead a New York hospital. For many years, Ms. Brown has worked productively with NYSNA nurses at New York City Health + Hospitals, where she served most recently as Senior Vice President for Corporate Planning, Community Health and Intergovernmental Relations and helped ensure that nurses could provide quality care in our public safety-net hospitals.

"Healthcare is a social justice issue," said Ms. Brown. "I aspire for us to be the best provider in our community and I'm committed to not just surviving but thriving."

Elected leaders join the struggle

Central Brooklyn elected leaders attended the March 11 breakfast and thanked NYSNA nurses and their union colleagues for organizing day and night to make sure that Interfaith could survive.

"I want to let you know how much I appreciate the work of NYSNA and 1199," said U.S. Congressman Hakeem Jeffries. "To draw from the brilliant urban philosopher Drake, 'We started from the bottom and now we're here.' Under the leadership of LaRay Brown and in partnership with NYSNA and 1199, the best is yet to come for Interfaith Medical Center."

New York City Public Advocate Letitia James rallied with NYSNA nurses over the course of many

member Carol Pittman.

NYSNA Executive Director Jill Furillo, RN, and LaRay Brown were both honored with bouquets of flowers to thank them for their leadership. "This women's history month, let's acknowledge the incredible women that stood up and stood together to keep this hospital open for care," said Ms. Furillo. "The unity that our union had, the unity that we built within the labor movement, with 1199

// Healthcare is a social justice issue. I aspire for us to be the best provider in our community and I'm committed to not just surviving but thriving."

**IMC President and CEO,
LaRay Brown**



(L to R): Christine Toomer, RN, NYC Public Advocate Letitia James and Sharon Bedford, RN



(L to R): Assemblywoman Annette Robinson, 1199SEIU Delegate Michelle Ned, Cheryl Powell, RN of NYSNA, and 1199SEIU Delegate Jeannette Harper

months in the snow, rain, and hail to protect Interfaith.

"I heard from 1199 and NYSNA every single day. They demanded that this hospital stay open," said Public Advocate James. Pointing to the 1199SEIU and NYSNA delegates being honored at the breakfast, she added, "Now is the time to be like them and keep working to make this hospital great."

NYSNA receives accolades

NYSNA honorees included Interfaith Medical Center RNs Christine Toomer, Sharon Bedford, Charmayne Sadler-Walker, and Julannah Gregory; Cheryl Powell, RN, Wyckoff Medical Center; and NYSNA staff member Eliza Carboni and retired NYSNA staff

and the Committee of Interns and Residents, the unity with the community – that's what saved our hospital. With that kind of power, we can always prevail."

Ms. Furillo added, "In our new CEO LaRay Brown we have an incredible advocate for workers and for patients. In our years of working with Ms. Brown we have had the common mission of uniting to provide the very best care to our community."

Sharon Bedford, RN, one of the NYSNA nurse leaders honored at the event, thinks that the future for Interfaith Medical Center looks bright. "Patients are coming and we're staying open for care. Our coalition has saved Interfaith and now we're working together to make sure our hospital thrives."

NYSNA speaks out for clean water

NYSNA member Wendy Czajak, RN, a licensed public health nurse in Onondaga County recently wrote an op-ed, published in *The New York Slant* calling for a coordinated public health response to the current water crisis in Hoosick Falls, a small town 35 miles north-east of Albany, where municipal water was found polluted with perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA).

The culprit is a local factory that uses the chemical to make Teflon. When PFOA makes its way into wells, aquifers and reservoirs that feed our drinking water, the effects endure for many years, and result in a public health emergency.

Governor Cuomo ordered tests of the village water supply, which showed the presence of PFOA, and his administration pressed the federal EPA to designate Hoosick Falls a Superfund site and to designate PFOA a “hazardous substance.” A new municipal carbon filtration system was installed which removes PFOA. However, there are still many residents who rely on private wells for their water, and some of these wells have tested positive for PFOA.

Serious health effects

In her op-ed, Ms. Czajak wrote, “My colleagues and I in the health care field see the damage and pain caused by pollution on a daily basis. We join with the many sickened and those living in fear in calling for companies to be held responsible for the release of PFOA into water supplies.”

The Hoosick Falls contamination came to light last summer when the current owner of the town’s factory, Paris-based Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics, conducted tests on the groundwater under its plant. Results showed a PFOA level of 18,000 parts per trillion—more than 50 times the acceptable level. The plant is a mere 500 yards from the village’s main water wells.

The chemical industry has known for years of the dangers posed by PFOA. The NYS Department of Health links it to testicular and kidney cancer, thyroid disease and birth defects in infants.

There is no life without clean water. When polluters destroy the quality of our water and air, they destroy the health of our communities.

DuPont, one of the largest producers, made huge profits before entering into a consent agreement with the EPA in 2005, which referenced “the movement of PFOA from pregnant women to their babies (and) the contamination of drinking water supplies.” PFOA has shown up in water supplies in 29 states. It most often gets there when

factories dump in landfills or storm drains adjacent to water supplies or through smokestack emissions.

Hold polluters accountable

Public health nurses are on the frontline of water safety and NYSNA RNs are ready to help Hoosick Falls residents and any others suffering from the effects of pollution. NYSNA is calling on the corporate polluters to pay for the contamination they have created.

There is no life without clean water. When polluters destroy the quality of our water and air, they destroy the health of our communities. “These companies must be held liable for damages and for cleanup under the law. New Yorkers deserve nothing less,” wrote Ms. Czajak.

Pediatric Division named in honor of NYSNA retiree Irmatrude Grant, RN



Irmatrude Grant, RN (second from right), with NYC Health + Hospitals COO Antonio Martin, Board member Josephine Bolus and East New York Clinic staff at the dedication ceremony. Right: Plaque at the entrance to the Pediatric Division.

NYC Health + Hospitals recognized the extraordinary career of NYSNA retiree Irmatrude Grant, RN, by dedicating the pediatric division of its East New York Health Center in her honor. A plaque featuring “The Irmatrude Grant Pediatric Division” with Ms. Grant’s photograph and biography now hangs outside the second floor entrance to the unit.

The dedication ceremony took place on the afternoon of February 17, when NYC Health + Hospital executives, nurses, physicians and board members gathered to honor Ms. Grant with this special recognition. Their remarks offered personal testament to the many, many lives that Ms. Grant touched during her remarkable career.

Ms. Grant was taken by surprise by the whole event. “They invited me to come by the center but didn’t tell me why. The dedication was totally unexpected and a very happy occasion for me.” The dedication ensures that Nurse Grant’s contributions to the public health clinic where she spent four decades of her career will be remembered and celebrated.

Ms. Grant’s retirement after 54 years of nursing and community service was profiled in the December/January issue of NY Nurse. Although officially retired, she is still active volunteering as chairwoman of the Brooklyn Perinatal Network and with the American Red Cross.

SOS on NYC's Public Hospitals

DEMANDING ADEQUATE and equitable federal, state and municipal funding for New York City's public hospital system was the focus of an April 14 press conference on the steps of City Hall. NYSNA, with Save Our Safety Net Coalition (SOS-C) partners Doctors Council, SEIU, AFSCME DC37, community health advocates, elected officials, and NYC H+H patients spoke of the pivotal role the public system plays in providing care to the uninsured, underinsured and immigrant communities.

Tale of two hospitals

"This city has a tale of two hospital systems: A public health system that provides access to all, and a private system that provides access to some," said Anne Bové, RN, and President of NYSNA's NYC H+H Executive Council. "H+H is the very foundation of healthcare in this city. You destroy it, and the whole system comes falling down."

A consulting group hired by the City is expected soon to release a set of recommendations for finding "efficiencies" in the public hospital system. Advocates for the public sys-



Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer (center) looks on as Anne Bové, RN, speaks against New York City's "Tale of Two Hospital Systems."

tem are skeptical. "We will not support calls for cuts or any attempts to dilute our public health system through privatization. The public's interest is best served by a strong public health system and funding must align with that vision," said NYC Public Advocate Letitia James.

Demand transparency

SOS-C is calling for the City to ensure transparency, community engagement and accountability in

any process to reform the public hospital system and seeks to work with the City to make improvements in H+H in terms of quality care and to push the state and federal governments to help solve H+H's financial issues. "Quality care takes money. We must choose to improve—not cut—resources to make our system the best it can be," said Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer.



Buffalo members join the celebration

Buffalo members know that spring has sprung when Dyngus Day rolls in, marking the end of Lent and the arrival of Easter. The city adopted Dyngus Day ten years ago as a way of celebrating its Polish-American culture, heritage and traditions and as a means for revitalizing its neglected east side Polish neighborhood.

Today, Buffalo is the official Dyngus Day capital of the world, hosting a parade and the largest concentration of festival locations, polka bands, food vendors, and Polish traditions. NYSNA nurses and their families took part in the festivities held on March 28.

RNs for better patient care on LI

NYSNA nurses at St. Charles Hospital braved the rain on April 8 and held an informational picket to shine a spotlight on unsafe staffing. Maureen Woodruff, RN, a 46-year veteran at the hospital and lifelong community resident told supporters, "My priority as a patient advocate is to ensure that the best possible care is given to my patients, but short staffing is a persistent problem" that is jeopardizing patient care throughout the hospital.

Patients short-changed

Emergency Department RNs report being stretched very thin, ICU nurses say they often care for three or four patients each, and nurses in the facility's Rehab unit say there are times when they each must care for 11 patients. Tracy Kosciuk, RN, said, "As a nurse for

28 years at St. Charles, I have seen the needs of our patients change over the years. Patients are coming in much sicker. Unfortunately, nurses have less time at the bedside. My top priority then and now and always will be my patients. But it's gotten more difficult."

The 328 NYSNA RNs at the Port Jefferson hospital have been working without a contract for more than year. They have presented safe staffing proposals across the bargaining table to management, but have yet to achieve resolution.



St. Charles nurses take their safe staffing message to the streets.

NYSNA mobilizes Staten Island on proposed psych bed closures

Staten Island University Hospital's proposed closure of inpatient psychiatric services drew community members to a February 29 forum hosted by NYSNA at the College of Staten Island. NYSNA Treasurer Pat Kane, RN, a Staten Island resident, and several of her NYSNA coworkers disputed SIUH administrators' claim that the closure would be justified due to consistently low census and presented compelling evidence to the contrary.

Ensuring community input

State data show Staten Island has a psychiatric hospitalization rate of 773 per 100,000—a rate considerably higher than the city-wide average of 664 per 100,000. Furthermore, the borough's suicide rate has risen 5% since 2013; its death rate from drug overdoses is the highest in the city; and it has the



NYSNA Treasurer Pat Kane, RN, led the February 29 community forum on SIUH's proposed bed closures.

highest rate of youth substance use of opioids and other prescription drugs in all of New York City.

Community member Paul Scublinsky said he fears that the closure would limit Staten Islanders access care: "If we lose our only inpatient psychiatric unit,

how are we going to attract psychiatrists to this community?"

Richmond University Medical Center has the only other inpatient psychiatric unit on the north side of the island. The census in its 65-bed inpatient psychiatric unit is consistently high, and nurses there regularly report short-staffing and over-crowding.

"When these kinds of decisions are made, the community has a right to be informed and have their say," said Ms. Kane. The proposal cannot advance without Certificate of Need approval from the NYS Department of Health. NYSNA members will be working with other healthcare professionals, political groups, the Legal Aid Society and the West African immigrant community to ensure that the mental health needs of Staten Island residents are given primacy in the Department of Health's decision on SIUH's proposal.

Giving back to our communities

The spark for this summer's "Annual Health and Wellness Fair" in the Bronx started forming in the mind of Dennis Stanberry, RN at Montefiore Moses Division, years ago when he was working in the hospital's Emergency Department. "I was struck by the lack of basic healthcare knowledge and resources in the community. We had patients that had no idea of the relationship between obesity and diabetes," he said. "Without basic knowledge of our bodies, it's no surprise that Bronx residents fare poorly in so many healthcare indicators."

The health fair is the latest effort in Stanberry's record of giving back to his community. In 2014, he established non-profit Mocho Village after a birthday request for used books for his childhood school in Jamaica turned into something unexpected. "The response was beyond anything I could have imagined. We shipped 27 barrels of books!"

Mocho Village now recruits doctors and other healthcare professionals to travel to Jamaica to run

summer camps and bring needed services to poor areas, and it has expanded its reach to New York City. When Stanberry speaks with children, he tells them, "I am a product of the same environment but look at all that I've accomplished. I didn't learn to read until I was 14, but now I'm a Registered Nurse at one of New York's best hospitals."



Dedicated to the Bronx

Stanberry left Jamaica for the Bronx at age 24. While working construction, he took a nurses' aide course at night and kept going until he earned his RN degree. In January 2005, he started working in Montefiore's ED, where he spent five years before taking his current Recovery Room assignment. Throughout, Stanberry never stopped thinking about his experience in the ED and what he could do to address the health disparities that plague the Bronx.

In 2015, Stanberry reached out to the Bronx Borough President's

Office, Montefiore, and other health providers to put together the **First Annual Health and Wellness Fair**.

"People are starved for information, so we recruited doctors, pharmacists, nurses, and others to participate." Stanberry also hoped the fair would inspire the area's youth: "We need to get home grown kids into healthcare professions so they

can come back to the Bronx and work to improve the community's health." Last September the NAACP recognized him for this effort.

Planning is now underway for the **Second Annual Health and Wellness Fair**, scheduled for July 9 on 216th Street between Paulding and Bronxwood Avenues. As to future ventures, Stanberry would like to see Mocho Village expand into different chapters to promote education about healthcare at the grassroots level. His advice to others: "Feel free to take the Mocho Village model and use it in your own communities."



Stanberry speaks with high school students in Jamaica.



Mocho Village organized a Bronx health fair last summer as a way of improving the healthcare knowledge base in the community.

NYSNA members join celebration of International Women's Month



Top left: NYSNA member Kirsys Baez, RN at Elmhurst Hospital, receiving the Audrey Smith Campbell Leadership Award for outstanding leadership and activism from 1199SEIU Senior EVP Yvonne Armstrong. Right: NYSNA member Rosamonde Semexant, RN at CenterLight Healthcare, celebrating her Haitian heritage and wearing the safe staffing banner.



Sarah Annabelle Chmura, RN, ECMC, representing her Mohawk heritage on the Red Carpet for Social Justice.

NYSNA members joined union sisters from 1199SEIU, AFSCME, and UFCW along with advocates from community health and social justice groups on March 11 for a shared celebration of women's accomplishments, diversity, and collective strength. More than four hundred women gathered at 1199SEIU and cheered on the evening's "stars" — 28 women who paid tribute to either their cultural heritage or a woman they admired and raised awareness for their personal social

justice passions by performing, dancing, or singing their way down the *Red Carpet for Social Justice*.

This was the second year that NYSNA has taken part in the event, which brings together women from across the labor movement and builds solidarity around common social justice struggles. What started as a New York City-centered and 1199SEIU event eight years ago has grown to include over 20 other unions and groups.

This year's event included women from Albany, Baltimore, New Jersey

and even Buffalo. Sarah Annabelle Chmura, a NYSNA RN from Erie County Medical Center, represented the Mohawks of Kahnawake as she walked the Red Carpet for climate justice. "I loved seeing all the different women celebrating their cultures and was so honored and happy to be part of this incredibly energetic and positive experience."

Leadership award

Kirsys Baez, a NYSNA nurse at Elmhurst Hospital, celebrated her Puerto Rican heritage with her daughter Kelsey as they danced their way down the Red Carpet. Later in the program, Ms. Baez received the 1199SEIU Audrey Smith Campbell Leadership Award for her work to ensure justice for all — for her patients, her coworkers, and her community.

Four other NYSNA RNs also walked this year's Red Carpet: Jacqui Gilbert, representing Trinidad and Tobago; Hortense Palmer, representing Jamaica; Cheryl Powell, representing Angela Davis; and Rosamonde Semexant, representing Haiti and carrying the banner for safe staffing. Two NYSNA staff members participated as well: Minerva Solla represented Cuba and Kim Lyons represented Ireland.

St. Patrick's Day unity on Long Island



(L to R): NYSNA float; Long Island's youngest safe staffing advocate; St. Catherine ED nurses Tara Carpenta, RN, and Lynette Iahann, RN, with her children; and nursing students who marched with NYSNA.

NYSNA members from six different hospitals gathered on March 19 in Patchogue for the annual St. Patrick's Day Parade. Nurses

from Northwell Health's Syosset, Southside, and Plainview Hospitals were joined by members from LIJ Valley Stream, St. Catherine of

Siena and Harlem Hospital Center. It was a family affair with kids, dogs, and strollers forging the way for NYSNA's float.



(L to R): NYSNA RNs Michelle Gonzales, Kirsys Baez, Linice Zambrano, and Karines Reyes-Urbez with NYS Senator Adriano Espaillat at the Somos conference.

Onondaga RNs keep pushing for fair contract

Onondaga County NYSNA members showed up in force, and wearing red, to hear County Executive Joanne Mahoney present her “2016 State of the County” address. In December, Ms. Mahoney and county legislators voted themselves substantial pay increases but have resisted nurses’ demands for a fair contract for the county’s 50 RNs.



Onondaga County NYSNA members joined their Syracuse neighbors at the March 1 State of the County presentation.

Syracuse celebrates St. Patrick’s Day



Syracuse area NYSNA members and their families traded red scrubs for green on March 12 for an early St. Patrick’s Day celebration.

NYSNA advocates at Somos

Members from Montefiore, Bronx Lebanon, and NYC Health + Hospitals Elmhurst Hospital attended *Somos el Futuro* in Albany, March 18-20, where they participated in workshops on the Puerto Rican debt crisis, reforming the healthcare delivery system, environmental justice and more. When not in workshops, they spoke with elected leaders about safe staffing and other issues of importance to nurses and our patients.

Settlement with Livingston County

Livingston County’s 28 NYSNA public health nurses reached a mediated settlement with county supervisors this month that includes raises and increased longevity and on-call pay. The agreement is retroactive to July 1, 2014 and goes through June 30, 2017.

NYSNA welcomes Clifton Park ED



Catherine Lucas, RN and Ellis LBU Secretary (left), with Clifton Park RNs Gary Miller (center) and Lisa Cramer (right). On February 26, Clifton Park ED nurses won NYSNA recognition at Ellis Hospital.

Long Island labor gala



Congressman Lee Zeldin (R) with Tracy Kosciuk, RN and St. Charles LBU President, at the Long Island Federation of Labor’s annual dinner on March 4.

Solidarity at VBMC

NYSNA nurses and 1199SEIU caregivers at Vassar Brothers Medical Center in Poughkeepsie held a candlelight vigil on April 6 to call community attention to staffing shortfalls at the hospital and to a new policy, which management has euphemistically named “the Dependability Policy,” that penalizes employees who call in sick.

RNs filed twice as many POAs in the past year than in the previous year, documenting dramatic increases in staffing shortfalls in nearly every department among nurses, technologists, technicians, and support staff. Short staffing puts tremendous strain on nurses and caregivers and can threaten the quality of care that patients receive. The new so-called Dependability Policy adds to the strain, and staff say they can no longer call in sick without fear of reprisal, and they worry that forcing sick caregivers to work could put patients at risk.

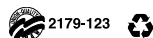
“Inadequate staffing throughout the hospital, working to exhaustion—these conditions show that management has little regard for employees and the community they serve,” said Rose Decker, RN.

NYSNA and 1199SEIU members have vowed to continue to work together to fight for safer staffing for patients and against the implementation of the so-called Dependability Policy. “We go above and beyond every day to give our patients the care they deserve. Instead of recognizing our contribution, VBMC chooses to be punitive,” said Cyndi Sexton, RN.



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SAVE THE DATE

Fight for Safe Staffing



**Multi-Union
Lobby Day
Tuesday, May 10
Albany**

CONTACT your rep or email mcp@nysna.org.