

Unions' Rally Opposing HA Service Cuts Takes a Get-Out-the-Vote Turn

By DAVID SIMS | Posted: Monday, July 8, 2013 4:15 pm

Housing Authority employees and residents protested cuts to their agency July 2 as the number of layoffs resulting from the Federal sequester cuts came into clearer focus, with Teamsters Local 237 President Gregory Floyd saying he is also concerned about the long-term future of the agency.

His union organized the rally, on Broadway outside City Hall, to draw attention not just to this year's cuts, which will lead to the privatization of senior and community centers and possibly the loss of 75 to 100 jobs, but longer-term structural problems in the agency.

'Paint Coming Off Walls'

"There's small children living in apartments where the paint is literally coming off the walls. I'm worried about the future of people living in public housing," Mr. Floyd said in an interview. "This administration is leaving. We want them to leave the furniture on the way out the door."

He has called for the ouster of HA Chairman John Rhea, even though he is virtually certain to depart with Mayor Bloomberg at the end of the year. A once-strong relationship between the union and the agency has soured as HA debacles have piled up, mostly revolving around a huge backlog in work orders and unspent capital funds of more than \$1 billion.

Social Service Employees Local 371 President Anthony Wells has a more immediate problem, representing members in the senior and community centers that will be closed and handed to private non-profit agencies through the Department of Youth and Community Development.

City Council funding in the budget agreement has stalled that transfer until January (it was originally scheduled for August), giving the union time to try to save the employees.

"We're thankful that the Council was able to stop the layoffs for August. No one will lose their job then, but we've got work to do," he said in an interview. "And we also continue to fight the privatization of the centers, because nobody does it better than these workers."

Lot Riding on Election

He added that "the mayoral elections will have a big impact" on what happens in January.

Mr. Wells's parent union, District Council 37, has endorsed City Comptroller John C. Liu; his local could make its own endorsement but has not done so. Local 237 is backing former Comptroller William C. Thompson Jr., who spoke at the rally.

“Those who live in the Housing Authority developments...have been treated like second-class citizens,” he said. “There’s money for repairs, to bring the elevators up to par, to do renovations, to stop leaks, to fix doors, to hire people. And what’s happened? They’ve held on to that money, more than \$1 billion.

“And what do they want to do? They want to make cuts. Close senior centers, youth centers, lay people off. Is that the right thing to do? No it’s not,” he continued. “People in Housing Authority developments deserve services like everyone else.”

He outlined one way to solve some of the HA’s budget problems—eliminate the surcharge that the agency pays to receive services from the Police Department and Department of Sanitation.

‘They’re Charged Twice’

“The people in Housing Authority developments pay taxes, but money comes off the top, \$75 million to pay for police,” Mr. Thompson said. “But they pay taxes! More money comes off the top to pay for sanitation. But they pay taxes! Leave that money there; there isn’t a deficit. We don’t have to lay people off.”

Mr. Floyd’s speech focused on getting out the vote in HA projects and registering people to get the maximum influence out of the 600,000 residents of public housing.

“You can make the difference; you have the chance to help NYCHA,” he said. “Just pull a lever and get involved.”