

## 2 Health-Care Unions Reach Contract Terms Cementing City's UFT Pattern

By RICHARD STEIER | Posted: Monday, June 30, 2014 5:00 pm

The de Blasio administration June 25 announced contract deals with two unions representing nurses and other health-care professionals that essentially replicate the terms reached in early May with the United Federation of Teachers but which one union leader said were more important for the benefit-fund gains beyond the pay hikes.

Those improvements accounted for slight differences from the nine-year, 18-percent wage deal ratified by UFT members, with the New York State Nurses Association agreeing to extend its pact an additional 4½ months and 1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East accepting a slightly smaller wage increase in one year of its deal to even out the costs to the city.

### 4% Hikes, 'Retro' Staggered

The biggest-ticket financial items remain the same: two 4-percent wage hikes covering 2009 and 2010, although retroactive pay as well as the full implementation of the increases will be delayed so that the biggest costs to the city come at the tail end of the contracts and beyond.

While 1199—a major player in city politics and arguably the most-important union supporter in Mr. de Blasio's election last year—represents 200,000 mostly private-sector members in New York, it is actually the smaller union for municipal-bargaining purposes: just 2,500 of its members work for the city as Licensed Practical Nurses, Pharmacists and Dietitians. The New York State Nurses Association, which represents Registered Nurses employed by the Health and Hospitals Corporation, has 8,000 members covered by its deal.

Anne Bové, NYSNA's HHC Executive Council President, said in a June 26 phone interview that there were some reservations among members—just as there had been within the UFT—about the



Bove\_Ann\_Official.jpg

ANNE BOVÉ: 'A huge step forward.'

delays in payment of the raises and the retroactive money that had accumulated. This occurred because then-Mayor Michael Bloomberg in the middle of a bargaining round refused to grant the two four-percent hikes to some unions that he had previously negotiated with others representing roughly 200,000 city workers, citing the national financial crisis and its impact on the city's budget.

"Nothing's perfect," she said of the delayed payments under the contract, "but [members] see it as a reasonable solution to a difficult situation."

### **Too Great a Burden**

Mr. de Blasio and city Labor Commissioner Robert W. Linn have emphasized that the retroactive pay that built up because of Mr. Bloomberg's refusal to bargain—at the same time that he was insisting that the city could not afford to honor its long tradition of making raises retroactive to the starting date of new pacts—would come to more than \$4 billion if applied to all the unions that were denied those raises by the prior administration. If paid out during the just-begun fiscal year, they had said, the burden on the city would be so great as to put its financial stability in jeopardy.

The argument resonated with Ms. Bove. "I grew up in the '70s and saw the city almost go broke," she said in reference to the 1975 fiscal crisis that resulted in tens of thousands of municipal layoffs and required the unions to commit billions of dollars from the pension funds to purchasing city bonds to head off a possible bankruptcy. "I understand that there has to be a certain level of fiscal responsibility, and this contract offered that kind of fiscal framework. We had people laid off in '92 and '96, and I don't want to have to face another nurse about that again."

What generated enthusiasm among union officials, she said, was the creation of a child-care and elder-care fund, which is also a key feature of the 1199 deal, paid for through the alterations in the terms of those deals to fit within the cost parameters of the UFT pact. For each union, a committee consisting of equal numbers of labor and city/HHC representatives will develop the programs and determine the amounts available to provide benefits to the dependents of union members.

### **'Why Did We Wait?'**

The reception to this facet of the deal within the union was so positive, Ms. Bove said, "It was almost like, 'Why didn't we have this before?' That's a huge step forward in terms of the extended [family]."

As is also true for 1199, she said "our training and education fund is much improved" under the deal. For this, too, there will be joint committees created to develop eligibility rules and procedures for programs that allow members to gain additional education and improve their skills with an eye in both instances toward gaining promotions and enhancing the quality of care

provided.

NYSNA and the city agreed to create Nursing Practice Councils at each HHC facility to improve patient care while also improving recruitment and retention of top-quality nurses.

Mr. de Blasio in a statement described the deals as “another step toward restoring a productive, respectful relationship between the city and its workforce, while securing much-needed certainty that protects our long-term fiscal health.” The 1199 pact is retroactive to Aug. 5, 2009 and runs through Aug. 4, 2018, although 50 percent of the retroactive money owed to members will actually be paid in equal increments in 2019 and 2020. The NYSNA deal, because of the 4½-month extension, is retroactive to Jan. 21, 2010 and expires on June 5, 2019, with the same retroactivity schedule in effect.

Just as importantly from the city’s viewpoint, the deals further cement the pattern set by the UFT pact, which Mr. de Blasio hopes to extend to the rest of the workforce even though a large segment of the affected employees long ago got the two 4-percent raises. As a result, the remaining wage hikes of 10 percent over a seven-year period do not seem particularly enticing.

### **Civilian Talks Moving**

Most civilian-union leaders have nonetheless seemed willing to pursue similar terms; Mr. Linn said he has bargaining sessions scheduled this week with both District Council 37 and Teamsters Local 237, whose president, Gregory Floyd, had said even before the UFT deal was ratified that he was eager to negotiate a deal consistent with the pattern. His union and DC 37 each long ago secured the 4-percent hikes in bargaining with the Bloomberg administration, meaning their embracing the rest of the UFT pattern would be significant.

Uniformed-union leaders, however, have argued that with the two 4-percent raises long ago paid to and spent by their rank and files, the remaining economic terms are inadequate, particularly given that they in most cases are closing in on four years of working under expired contracts. The Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association, the city union that has had some success over the past decade in doing slightly better than established city bargaining patterns by going to arbitration, is pursuing that avenue again. A mediator is currently involved in its discussions with the de Blasio administration to determine whether the two sides are truly at impasse and the state Public Employment Relations Board should appoint an arbitration panel to settle the dispute.

In addition to the two 4-percent raises, with their large retroactive balances, that are being paid out in four increments beginning in July 2015, the schedule for subsequent raises under the contract for NYSNA is as follows:

- 1 percent effective retroactive to July 21, 2013, and then the same percentage on July 21, 2014

and 2015;

- A 1.5-percent hike as of July 21, 2016;
- A 2.5 percent increase effective Jan. 21, 2018;
- A 3-percent wage boost as of Jan. 21, 2019.

### **1199 Payouts**

For 1199, the schedule is somewhat different, starting with the implementation of the two 4-percent raises occurring in February of four consecutive years beginning in 2015. The other increases will occur as follows:

- A 0.35-percent hike retroactive to Feb. 5, 2013;
- 1-percent raises effective on both Feb. 5, 2014 and 2015;
- A 1.5-percent increase as of Feb. 5, 2016;
- A 2.5-percent raise starting Feb. 5, 2017;
- A 3-percent salary boost effective Feb. 5, 2018.