Our recently negotiated 3 year contract (2018-2021) was completed in an extremely difficult economic environment. Despite these conditions, our Negotiations Team secured a contract that provided salary raises and step movement for all teachers. Additionally, we were, again, able to have teachers keep their health plans that were available to them upon hiring. This “grandfathering” of medical plans, as well as the payment for “medical opt-out”, was a huge win as many school districts simply have changed and/or removed medical plans that teachers have had for many years.

Health Savings Accounts (HSA) have become increasingly popular as employers struggle to provide quality health care while controlling costs. An HSA is a special tax-sheltered savings account used with medical plans. All New Haven teachers have the option of selecting the HSA. Whenever a new item, product, or service is introduced by management, there is an understandable level of initial skepticism. When something is taken away, the natural assumption is that the replacement can’t possibly be as good (as an FYI, I will absolutely be moving to the HSA for my medical coverage and I am one that is grandfathered and can select any of the 4 plans). The fact is the health care industry has and continues to change dramatically. Our Negotiations Teams has retained outstanding medical coverage for all teachers, amazingly through the four consecutive contracts of my tenure as president (2010-2014, 2014-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2021.)

The HSA plan costs thousands less than the PPO’s and provides the same network of doctors and services. We have negotiated a reduction in the cost share from 15% to 11% so those that chose the HSA plan last year will see a very nice decrease in the cost share. I do emphasize that teachers that have grandfathered options available to them must examine their own unique family circumstances when deciding on
The new insult Betsy DeVos is hurling at her critics — and why it matters

By Valerie Strauss Originally published October 10, 2017 at www.washingtonpost.com

First, they were “defenders of the status quo.”
Or “defenders of the ‘system.’ ”

Those were the insults Education Secretary Betsy DeVos hurled at people who don’t like her brand of school reform. The insults were aimed at people in the education world, especially teachers unions, who oppose her brand of school reform — which favors “choice” and the use of public money for private and religious education. She was accusing them of caring not about children but about themselves, as she made plain in one of the first speeches she delivered as education secretary, on Feb. 23: “Defenders of the status quo will stop at nothing to protect their special interests and their gig.”

To be sure, “defenders of the status quo” was not original to DeVos. The term was used over and over by Arne Duncan, education secretary for seven years under President Barack Obama, when he attacked critics of Obama’s standardized test-based reform program. But DeVos and her speechwriters seem to like it just fine, too.

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HSA “Health Savings Account”...continued from page 1

a health care plan. But our Negotiations Team considers what would be good medical coverage for a majority of New Haven teachers and, only then, moves to accept these plans.

I will share this following story as a pertinent example of health care concerns that have come to my attention. When the “Central Preferred Comp Mix” plan was the option to newly hired teachers in a previous contract, a teacher called and complained that he had to pay over $1200 in out of pocket expenses not required by the Century Preferred Plan. He was irate that he did not have the same plan as other veteran teachers. But I responded that the Century Preferred Plan cost share (at the time) was $7000 and the Comp. Mix Plan cost share he paid was $4000 for the year. Despite paying $1200 in additional out of pocket costs, he actually saved $1800 that year.

As an FYI, when the Comp. Mix Plan was offered, I moved to it because of the lower cost share with similar coverage and provided services. The Negotiations Team (myself included) have always reviewed the plans offered and asked ourselves this simple question, “Would we be satisfied if this were our health care plan?” If the answer is “no,” then we simply reject it and will not consider it as an option in negotiations.

These decisions require facts and, regardless of the options available, it is important to know the particulars. I have posted a 12 page FAQ document, provided to us by Anthem, with detailed information on the HSA. It has abundant details in an understandable “Question and Answer “ format. It can be found at www.newhaventeachers933.org . I urge everyone to review it, as many will see it as I do, an opportunity to keep all of our existing benefits and continue to see our doctors that we have had for many years, while reducing expenses for our medical cost shares. Make certain that whichever plan you choose, you understand it in order to take full advantage of the plans components. This will maximize your health coverage and minimize your costs. A
Reminders for a “New Year”  By David Cicarella, NHFT President

Our New Year’s celebrations are in actuality more of a mid-year celebration for teachers respective to our September through June school calendars. It is an appropriate point for both updates and reminders for items that continue to cross my desk.

TEVAL

Goal Setting

- Goal setting should have been completed back in September (or early October)
- TEVAL clearly dictates that all SLO’s must be mutually agreed upon with a clear process to facilitate the mere handful of cases where the IM and teachers could not agree upon the learning goals

Mid-Year Conferences

- SLO’s can be adjusted, when appropriate, at this conference
- “Self-Ratings” – teachers complete a self-rating (using the 1-5 scale of NI (Needs Improvement) to EX (Exemplary). The purpose of this UNOFFICIAL rating exercise is merely to prompt a discussion between the teacher and IM on areas of both agreement and disagreement. For example, if the teacher self-rates as ST (Strong) in classroom management and the IM has the rating at DV (Developing), it is important to have this discussion in February and not in June when it is too late to address these concerns or items of disconnect.
- I receive phone calls every year after mid-year conferences from teachers upset because they were rated DV (Developing), for example. Teachers do not receive a rating mid-year. The “self-ratings” and discussion are not consequential.

Attendance

- Teacher attendance is not an item for TEVAL. While certainly important, all attendance concerns are handled by administration at the building level and/or HR. I have repeatedly addressed this concern over the years where IM’s mistakenly rate teachers’ attendance as part of “RELIABILITY” under professional values. (Tardiness however, is addressed in TEVAL – being on time for school, meetings, required school events, etc.)

Union Representation

- Prior to TEVAL, teachers often attended a meeting to discuss their evaluations facing the principal, assistant principal, director, subject supervisor, etc. It was quite intimidating, especially for new teachers. Therefore, the TEVAL committee specifically wrote into the “ground rules” that all TEVAL meetings (goal-setting, mid-year conferences, feedback conversations, etc.) were to be “one-on-one” with only the IM and teacher present, with no additional administrators and no union representation.
  The intent was to create a professional, working relationship between the IM and the teacher.

30 MINUTE TIME PLAN

The 2014-2017 NHFT contract provided teachers in New Haven the opportunity to develop and, ultimately, decide on the use of the additional time beyond our student day. The purpose was to allow for additional, collaborative teacher time and allow each school to determine how best to use that time.

The Contractual Components of Creating the 30 Minute Time Plans:

- Over the course of the year each respective school creates a mechanism whereby both the teachers and administrators collaborate on a plan to use of the contractual time beyond the student day.
- This mutually agreed upon plan is then posted for 5 days to allow teachers to review, comment, ask questions, etc.
- After the 5 day review period an NHFT official (usually me) will conduct a secret ballot vote at the school. For the plan to pass both the principal and 75% of the teachers must approve.
- The vote has a May deadline. If passed the plan is implemented for the next school year.
- Time plans cannot be adjusted or changed during the school year. The contractual process must be followed and changes to the existing plan take effect the following school year.

LESSON PLANS

I continue to receive questions from teachers asserting that a handful of administrators continue to ask for either specific content (listing of objectives, for example) and/or a specific format to lesson plans. This is in direct contradiction to our well-articulated lesson plan policy,
NHFT Holiday Party
Omni Hotel Grand Ballroom
New Haven, CT
December 15, 2018
Now she has added a new insult to her repertoire. Instead of “defenders,” she used this term in her recent speech at Harvard University: “sycophant of the ‘system.’” The full section in which she uses this refers to lotteries in which families win seats for their children in charter schools in those areas where there is a bigger demand than supply:

I suggest that any sycophant of the “system” or skeptic of choice visit one of these lotteries. Watch the faces of parents

DeVos, then, is saying that those who support traditional public schools don’t really have principles and go along with something to get something for themselves. There is no room in her worldview, then, for people who have genuine disagreements with her on policy and principle. She knows best.

The other phrase in that sentence, “skeptic of choice,” is one that she has used in some form for months, again telegraphing her belief that anybody who doesn’t wholeheartedly agree with her — without a single question about the efficacy of her approach — is not only wrong but unprincipled, because if they did see one of the lotteries she describes they couldn’t possibly believe what they believe.

Words matter — a lot. Her new insults suggest a growing intolerance by DeVos and her education allies for people who don’t agree with her. That would be right in line with others in the Trump administration but not something that augers well for those who believe that public education is a seminal part of the American democratic experience and that serious reform, with input from a range of views, is needed to ensure equity and quality in every school.

Duncan was hard on his critics, too, at one point going after “white suburban moms” who disagreed with his policies pushing high-stakes tests. In the end, that didn’t go so well for him. The teachers unions turned against him, as did a lot of parents — not only white — who found his policies more harmful than helpful in establishing public schools that ensure equity and a quality education for all students. You’d think his experience could be a cautionary tale for DeVos, but don’t hold your breath. He knew better, and now so does she. A

which is now over 6 years old and has been widely distributed to all teachers and administrators several times since its inception in 2011. I have copied and pasted the pertinent part of the memo that was distributed.

“Our district does not specify a checklist of items to include, nor do we impose a particular format. Evidence of proper planning and preparation will be observable when supervisors visit classrooms. To that end, teachers will construct lesson plans including pertinent information that will enable them to effectively deliver instruction consistent with our TEVAL document. For example P2 ‘Establishes clearly defined student learning goals and objectives for all students.’ It should be evident when your lesson is observed that teachers have clear goals and objectives for the lesson being delivered, whether the teacher has chosen to explicitly write it into their lesson plan or not.

Administrators may share suggested templates for lesson plans, but teachers should utilize a format in which they are most familiar and comfortable, leading to the ultimate goal of delivering high quality instruction. (Note: in some Turnaround schools, lesson plan templates were discussed with staff and agreed to as part of the election to work)” A
Judging by what’s in the Tax Cut and Jobs Act, Donald Trump and the Republicans who pushed this disastrous bill through Congress in December must have thought American inequality wasn’t unequal enough.

Their act showers benefits on the best-off taxpayers. For the rest of us, it offers only meager tax reductions written in disappearing ink.

In 2018, the Tax Policy Center estimates, taxpayers with incomes of $1 million or more will get an average tax cut of $69,660, while those under $75,000 will get an average cut of $353.

By 2027, 81 percent of the tax cuts will go to those taking in more than $1 million, while taxes on those making less than $75,000 will go up.

**BONANZA FOR THE 1%**

First, the act lowers the top income tax rate from 39.6 percent to 37 percent, benefiting taxpayers whose income exceeds $426,700.

Second, it increases the exemption for the alternative minimum income tax, which benefits nearly exclusively taxpayers with over $200,000 of income.

Third, it doubles the exemption for the estate tax to $11.2 million. This overwhelmingly benefits the top 10 percent of income earners, and especially the richest 0.1 percent—those with annual incomes in excess of $3.9 million.

The act does put a $10,000 cap on the state and local taxes you can deduct from your federal income tax, a provision that will hit wealthier taxpayers in high-tax states. Residents of those high-tax states often vote Democratic.

Business owners and corporate stockholders will be especially rewarded. The act slashes taxes on corporate profits from 35 percent to 21 percent. Most studies find that more than three-quarters of the benefits of lower corporate tax rates go to owners of capital, rather than their employees, and close to half of the benefits go to the richest 1 percent of taxpayers.

In the name of providing tax relief to small businesses, the act allows one-fifth of the first $315,000 of profits of pass-through businesses (which pay personal income taxes instead of corporate income taxes) to go untaxed.

Over 80 percent of the benefits of this provision will go to the top 5 percent of taxpayers, including the Trump family, which owns more than 500 pass-through businesses.

**EFFECTS CANCEL OUT**

Republicans were far stingier when it came to taxpayers with modest incomes.

They did double the standard deduction—used by most low- and middle-income taxpayers—to $12,000 for individuals and $24,000 for married couples.

But at the same time, the act eliminates the $4,500 exemption for each taxpayer and each dependent. For a family of three, these lost exemptions will cancel out the doubling of the standard deduction.

The act doubles the child tax credit to $2,000. A family with two children and $100,000 of income will get the full $2,000 credit per child.

But because the credit is only partially refundable, a family with two children and $24,000 of income will get a credit of just $1,400 per child, and families with lower incomes will receive even less—as little as $75 per child.

The bill ends the itemized deduction for an employee’s unreimbursed job expenses, including union dues.

On top of all that, the bill scraps the Affordable Care Act mandate for individuals to buy health insurance or pay a fine. As a result, a projected 13 million fewer people will have health insurance.

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By 2027, 81 percent of the tax cuts will go to those taking in more than $1 million, while taxes on those making less than $75,000 will go up.

Premiums will rise, for non-group plans, by “about 10 percent in most years” in the next decade, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

Even if some of these cuts do help lower- or middle-income people temporarily, they’re set to expire in 2025. Taxpayers with incomes under $75,000 will actually see their taxes increase by 2027.

EXPECT NO BOOM

Tax cut supporters insist that this lopsided pro-rich law will create an explosion of economic growth that will create jobs and enrich us all. It’s not happening.

Cutting taxes on the rich is not an engine of economic growth, as plenty of evidence shows. The U.S. economy has logged its fastest growth when taxes on the rich were high. During the 1960s, the only decade in which annual economic growth averaged 4 percent, the top income tax rate got as high as 91 percent and never lower than 70 percent.

Compare that to the past 15 years. With a top tax rate of 39.6 percent, the U.S. economy has grown more slowly than it did during any decade from 1950 to 2000.

Why does taxing the rich actually help the economy? Part of the reason is that tax revenues allow more robust government spending to support economic growth. Gross government investment in the 2010-2016 period averaged just 3.7 percent of gross domestic product; in the 1950s and 1960s, the figure was greater than 6 percent.

Cutting taxes on corporate profits is similarly unlikely to trickle down. After-tax corporate profits, when compared to gross domestic product, are already nearing record highs. And our tax code is so riddled with loopholes that, despite a higher rate on paper, in practice U.S. corporations already pay about the same proportion of their profits in taxes as do corporations in other large, high-income countries.

Corporations are unlikely to use their windfall to make the investments that will jump-start economic growth, create jobs, and raise wages. After all, if they’re not investing now, it’s not because of lack of funds. In 2016, according to Standard and Poor’s, U.S. firms were already holding in the country $800 billion in cash and liquid assets, which they were unwilling to invest in long-term projects.

BOGUS BONUSES

Then there’s the discounted tax rate promised to U.S.-based corporations if they bring home the $2.6 trillion in profits they have stockpiled overseas. This too is likely to fail.

In 2004, the Bush administration offered a special 5.25 percent tax rate on repatriated profits. It managed to lure about $300 billion back to the U.S.—but corporations did not use those repatriated profits to increase domestic investment, jobs, or research and development.

Instead, a National Bureau of Economic Research study found that “a $1 increase in repatriations was associated with an increase of almost $1 in payouts to shareholders.”

Seemingly intoxicated by their coming tax windfall, some corporations are handing out bonuses to their workers. With its bid to merge with Time Warner blocked by the Justice Department, AT&T sought to make itself look good by announcing a one-time $1,000 bonus to more than 200,000 employees.

Walmart followed suit—but cleverly buried the fact that only workers who have been with the company for 20 years will get the full $1,000. The average Walmart worker is expected to get under $200. The bonuses will cost Walmart only 2.2 percent of the $18 billion it’s likely to save over the next decade from the tax cut, leaving plenty to hand over to shareholders.

Hours later, Walmart revealed it was closing more than 60 of its Sam’s Club stores and laying off thousands of workers.

THIS TAX GIVEAWAY TO THE RICH ADDS A WHOPPING $1.8 TRILLION TO THE FEDERAL BUDGET DEFICIT, ACCORDING TO THE CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE.

WATCH OUT, SOCIAL SECURITY

On top of all that, this tax giveaway to the rich adds a whopping $1.8 trillion to the federal budget deficit, according to the Congressional Budget Office. Republican lawmakers are already bemoaning the ballooning deficit they’ve created and saying they’ll have to cut Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and public services to close the budget gap.

That’s a one-two punch that we need to make sure doesn’t connect. A

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