



## Business Watchdog: Tear Up UFT Pact, Scrap Pay Pattern

By DAVID SIMS

A report by the Citizens Budget Commission has urged the city to play hardball with the United Federation of Teachers on its upcoming contract, calling on Mayor Bloomberg to disregard the current bargaining pattern and require Teachers to contribute to their health insurance premiums.

The report was released Nov. 11, 11 days after the expiration of the UFT contract, although negotiations have been ongoing for months. The CBC issued a long list of major changes the city should pursue, such as a merit pay system for all new Teachers and the firing of excessed Teachers after six months on the Absent Teacher Reserve.

### **Pattern? Ignore It**

The most-controversial demand made by the business-funded CBC is that the Mayor ignore the city's civilian bargaining pattern, which granted two 4-percent raises over two years to several unions, and instead oppose such raises, as he did in criticizing Transport Workers Union Local 100's arbitration award which granted two 4-percent hikes, followed by a 3-percent increase, over three years.

**MAYOR BLOOMBERG:** CBC exhorts him to get tough. Pointing to the UFT's 43-percent increase in wages since 2000, versus a 29-percent raise in inflation over the same period, the CBC recommended that "no wage increase should be agreed to without union concessions and reforms to staffing practices." Democratic mayoral candidate William C. Thompson Jr. last month gave fuel to such arguments when he said the city didn't have the money for an 8-percent UFT raise.

Reduced pension rights for future Teachers were agreed to, in a deal struck between former UFT President Randi Weingarten and the Mayor last summer. The accord allowed those hires to continue to qualify for a full pension at age 55 after 27 years of service, but increased their contributions into the Teachers' Retirement system to 4.85 of salary percent over an entire career, rather than the first ten years.

### **Want 10% Health-Care Bite**

The CBC was unsatisfied with the agreement, calling for a "higher minimum retirement age," while also noting that the deal struck still has not taken effect because required state legislation has not yet been passed.

The report, while acknowledging that health insurance negotiations are carried out at large with the Municipal Labor Committee, also wants Teachers to pay 10 percent towards their individual coverage premiums and 20 percent for family coverage, with retirees covering half of their premiums. The total cost savings, it estimates, would be \$225 million; currently the city covers the full cost of premiums for its employees.

### **Took Pages From Klein's Book**

A UFT spokesman declined comment on the report.

While raises remain up in the air, pension and health changes are unlikely to be enacted in the UFT contract, given the deal struck for the former and the MLC negotiations for the latter. But the other reforms sought by the CBC fall roughly in line with Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein's ultimate goals, which the UFT has sought to moderate in negotiations during his tenure.

On merit pay, the current system applies only to some schools and distributes monetary rewards to the entire faculty, rather than rewarding individuals. The CBC seeks not only to expand merit pay to every new Teacher hired, but to narrow the focus of the awards and enact salary reforms to further spur achievement among longer-serving Teachers.

"Annual raises make some sense early in Teachers' careers...however, after eight to ten years, Teachers reach their stride and their performance level reaches a plateau," the report stated, recommending the total halt of seniority increments for Teachers after 10 years of service.

### **'Reward Good Teaching'**

"A better way to spend this money is to reward good teaching instead of longevity," the report continued. "Any compensation above [a base salary should be] based on multiple criteria that include, but are not necessarily limited to, student growth as measured on valid standardized tests."

The CBC also wants to strip job protections afforded senior Teachers. Rather than having layoffs automatically affect the most-junior Teachers, the contract should give "Principals an enhanced role in deciding the order of layoffs so that recent job performance can be a factor," the report states.

Another hot-button issue, the Absent Teacher Reserve, which at last count contained more than 1,000 excessed Teachers earning full salary, should be reformed to eliminate any Teacher who doesn't obtain a new job in six months, the CBC recommended. Mr. Klein has echoed such a view in interviews, saying it would help the city save money to be able to lay off ATRs after a given amount of time.

One last topic is something that the CBC and the UFT actually have common ground on: the matter of Teachers in rubber rooms, who are waiting to have their disciplinary cases heard by arbitrators. The CBC's demand, that more arbitrators be hired to help speed up the process, highlights a problem UFT officials have pointed to in the past.