



NEWS

Service Employees International Union

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, March 11, 2010

SENATE AND ASSEMBLY INTRODUCE BILL TO ENSURE GOOD JOBS AT CON-ED SITES

– Bill Would Keep Public Utilities from Creating Poverty-Wage Jobs –

ALBANY, NY – State Senator Eric Schneiderman (Manhattan) and Assembly Member Mike Gianaris (Queens) today introduced a bill that would guarantee good wages, health care and other benefits to cleaners and security officers at public utility companies. Senator Joe Addabbo and Assembly Members Richard Brodsky, Hakeem Jeffries, José Peralta, Adriano Espaillat, Peter Abbate, Brian Kavanaugh and Darryl Towns called for prompt hearings and passage of the bill as they signed on as co-sponsors.

“New Yorkers are working hard, but they are struggling to get by,” said Senator Schneiderman. “We can’t let Con-Ed and other public utilities keep working families in poverty.”

“Con Edison must be held accountable to the workers who put in the elbow grease while its executives make millions sitting at their desks,” said Assemblyman Gianaris. Assemblyman Gianaris is a leading advocate for reform of Con Edison and public utilities and has worked tirelessly to advance legislation requiring the monopoly to be more transparent and accountable. “This unaccountable monopoly charges its customers higher rates each year, hands out millions of dollars in bonuses to its executives, and yet the contracted workers toil under the poverty line with little or no benefits. This abuse must be put to an end.”

New York’s public utility companies are bringing in billions of dollars from consumers and rate payers, including \$23.8 billion from New York. Con Ed, for example, reported \$13 billion in revenues for 2009, and National Grid’s reported revenues were \$23.3 billion. Meanwhile, many of the cleaners contracted to work at the utility plants are earning poverty wages and are forced to depend on public programs for food, health care and other support.

“Con-Ed executives are reaping in millions while some New Yorkers are pinching pennies to pay their bills,” said Héctor Figueroa, 32BJ Secretary Treasurer – the largest private sector union in the state. “State government must do more to keep this multi-billion dollar utility from taking advantage of our communities.” “New Yorkers are paying billions of hard-earned dollars to public utility companies,” said Jerry Dennis, SEIU Local 200 President. SEIU Local 200 represents 13,000 workers in 52 Upstate counties. “We cannot stand-by and watch them continue to turn a profit on the backs of the workers who keep their facilities safe and clean.” Despite making \$868 million in profits in 2009, Con-Edison contracted cleaners earn as little as \$8.50 an hour. Contract cleaners for National Grid, which brought in \$1.87 billion in profits in fiscal year 08-09, earn as little as \$9.50 an hour.

“It’s really hard to make ends meet on \$8.50 an hour,” said Fernando Cruz, a cleaner employed by Nelson Services at a Con Edison site in New York City. Cruz and his family rely on public health care and food stamps to get by. “Even though I work full-time, my family needs public assistance to survive.”

The bill would eliminate the current exemption for public utility companies in the state prevailing wage law which guarantees contracted service workers the private sector market rate at public sites and facilities. Since this law was passed in 1971, thousands of workers contracted to clean and secure public buildings and facilities have been supporting their families with good wages and health care.

32BJ is advocating for this bill as part of the “State that Works,” the union’s policy agenda for creating good jobs and an affordable state through economic development, contracting and tax abatement programs. SEIU Local 200 is also making this bill a top priority for 2010.

With more than 120,000 members, including 70,000 in New York City, 32BJ is the largest property services union in the country.

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