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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SENATE VOTES FOR GOOD JOBS BILL FOR CLEANERS AT NATIONAL GRID, CON-ED AND OTHER PUBLIC UTILITIES

– Prompt Assembly Vote Expected –

Albany, NY—Thirty-three State Senators voted today for the public utilities good jobs bill (S-7096), which would create good jobs for workers contracted to clean National Grid, Con Edison and other public utility sites. Cleaners contracted to work at public utilities earn as little as \$7.75 an hour at these state-regulated multi-billion dollar utilities and as a result may be forced to rely on public programs to provide food and health care for their families.

“It’s a disgrace that public utility executives are making millions of dollars a year, while contracted workers are living in poverty,” said State Senator Schneiderman, the prime sponsor of the Senate bill. “This bill ends the exploitation of working families at the hands of unaccountable monopolies like Con Edison.”

“The Senate voted today to protect workers and taxpayers,” said State Senator Antoine Thompson, D-Parts of Erie and Niagara Counties. “We can’t allow National Grid and ConEd to continue taking advantage of New Yorkers.”

Despite skyrocketing profits at public utilities, many contracted cleaners are unable to make ends meet on pay as little as \$7.75 an hour.

On top of monthly utility payments, New York taxpayers are paying for public programs for basic necessities like food, health care and housing for low wage, uninsured service workers.

“When public utilities like Rochester Gas and Electric and National Grid hire irresponsible contractors that pay poverty wages, it puts an even greater burden on taxpayers and perpetuates the cycle of poverty in our communities,” said Jerry Dennis, SEIU Local 200 President.

New York’s public utility companies are bringing in billions of dollars in operating revenue from consumers and rate payers. Con Ed, for example, reported \$13 billion in operating revenues for 2009 and National Grid’s reported operating revenues were \$22.4 billion.

Rochester Gas reported \$1.01 billion in operating revenue and New York State Electric & Gas Corporation reported \$1.65 billion in operating revenues.

“My family relies on food stamps, and my older daughter receives free school lunch,” said Danny Mercedes, a contracted cleaner at ConEd who earns \$8.50 an hour. “Without this help, I don’t know how we could survive.”

“Public utilities that benefit from a state-regulated monopoly should be creating jobs that benefit New Yorkers,” said Hector Figueroa, 32BJ Secretary Treasurer. “We applaud the State Senate for voting for good jobs that New Yorkers need.”

The Senate bill would eliminate the current exemption for public utility companies in the state prevailing wage law, which guarantees publicly-contracted service workers the wages and benefits that are standard in the industry. Since this law was passed in 1971, thousands of workers contracted to clean and secure public buildings and facilities have been able to support their families with good wages and health care.

“State government should do more to keep multi-billion dollar utility companies from fueling poverty in our communities,” said Assemblyman Gianaris. “New Yorkers foot the bill when low-wage, uninsured service workers need medical care or are forced to turn to public programs for basic necessities like food or rent.”

Assemblyman Gianaris is the prime sponsor of the corresponding Assembly bill, A-10257, which is expected to come to a vote in the near future.

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

With more than 13,000 members in human services, the public sector, education, and building services in 52 Upstate counties, SEIU Local 200United represents more private human service agency workers than any other union in Upstate New York.

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