

Unions: Few Janus defections

Not many losses reported after high court ruling

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ALBANY — Public worker unions say few members have abandoned their unions so far since a U.S. Supreme Court ruling in June made it easier to drop out of labor organizations and to stop paying union dues and fees.

Immediately after the Janus v. AFSCME court decision, some national unions predicted membership losses would eventually range from 10 percent to 50 percent. But in New York, public union workers say that hasn't happened so far. However, unions in New York have lost revenue from at least 31,000 state workers who were freed by the court decision from paying fees to unions they had refused to join, according to the state comptroller's office.

Shannon Hutton, communications director of the Civil Service Employees Association, said only a small percentage of members left the union since the Janus decision. But she said she had no specific numbers on departures.

"Despite the Janus decision, the overwhelming response from our members is that they're sticking with our union," said Hutton, of the union with 300,000 members. "Based on the daily calls we're receiving, we expect this trend to continue. Our members aren't being fooled into giving up their hard-won rights and protections to save a few bucks."

The New York State United Teachers union said it had lost fewer than 90 of its 675,000 members. "It's a pretty good showing," said union president Andy Pallotta.

Out of about 14,000 workers who paid a required agency fee but had refused to join the union, 1,300 so far have signed onto NYSUT, he said. The decisions by the rest of the agency fee payers won't be clear until November, he said.

Pallotta credits a new aggressive retention program spurred by the Janus case months before the court's ruling. That in-



Union activists and supporters rally against the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in the Janus v. AFSCME case on June 27 in lower Manhattan.

cluded knocking on the doors of 100,000 members and meetings in schools to discuss the benefits of a strong union, including bargaining power in contracts and legislative clout in Albany.

'Change in philosophy'

"It's a change in philosophy," he said, adding that the effort has made the union stronger and more responsive.

There is no independent tabulation of teachers or other unionized government workers who have so far dropped out of their unions.

Unions have for months braced for the decision they knew could dramatically reduce their membership and revenue. For example, the National Education Association, which at 3 million members is the country's biggest teacher union, announced that it expected to lose 8 percent to 14 percent of members and \$28 million to \$50 million in revenue from dues in addition to layoffs of union staff.

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The court decision could have a long-term impact on unions because it requires workers to affirmatively opt into a union to join. The decision struck down the common practice of automatically placing new hires in unions, requiring them to make the effort if they wanted to leave the union.

"My sense is that there will be declines in the short to medium run in membership and revenue, and thus political clout, across public-sector unions," said Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, assistant professor at Columbia University's School of International and

Public Affairs.

He said more workers would discover that, because of the Janus decision, they could get the same union benefits without having to join the union and without having to pay a union agency fee for its work.

State responses awaited

"In the longer-run, the effect of Janus on the unions will depend on how the unions adapt and the sort of responses we see from state governments," Hertel-Fernandez said. "Some states, including New York and California, have already taken steps to make it easier for

unions to sign up new members, to allow unions to exclude some grievance services to non-members, and to make it more challenging for workers to leave the union [or to stop paying dues]."

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, who successfully regained important political support from public worker unions for his reelection bid, issued an executive order in June prohibiting state government from disclosing contact information for state employees "amid reports of individuals and organizations harassing union members or prospective union members" into shunning their union.

In April, the State Legislature passed a law that says unions in New York can't be forced to provide all their services to nonunion workers, such as legal representation in discipline cases. The law applies to all public worker unions, including those representing employees in local municipalities and school districts.