**What is VOTE-COPE?**
VOTE-COPE is the political action fund of New York State United Teachers, supported by members' voluntary contributions to support grass-roots lobbying and political action on behalf of education, health care and labor issues.
Public employees must have a voice in the legislative battles and debates that take place over public service. Unionized professionals gain that voice by joining together in a state and national union. Together, public employees and unionized private-sector employees can seek funding to improve public services and overall government spending on employee salaries and benefits. Through effective involvement in political action, union members have clout at the bargaining table where it counts.
The NYSUT Legislative Department works continuously to preserve and enhance the rights of all employees to organize into unions and to effectively represent their members. These rights are contained in legislation commonly known as the Taylor Law. Through its legislative efforts NYSUT has not only enhanced Taylor Law rights of members, but has also been successful in other areas such as extending agency fee rights to public sector unions and passing legislation to protect the health insurance benefits of our retirees. In addition, NYSUT's legislative efforts bring benefits to professionals in various sectors, e.g. additional higher ed funding for colleges and universities, and Employee Retirement System enhancements that benefit professional employees working for municipalities. Members support NYSUT's legislative efforts through their voluntary contributions to VOTE-COPE, NYSUT's political action fund.
NYSUT, AFT and NEA are recognized as the most influential and successful advocates for children, public schools, higher education and labor in New York and in Washington.
NYSUT's Legislative Department drafts, introduces and lobbies for bills to improve state aid to schools and colleges, Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) funds, licensure, tenure, occupational health and safety, education standards, health care, retirement, and other issues affecting its members. The department also spends considerable time monitoring and opposing legislation that would be adverse to our members' interests.
Lobbying for public higher education keeps college affordable and accessible for not only members, but also all New Yorkers and their children. Fighting for greater state support for public education helps to improve our schools and keeps real property taxes down.
While NYSUT represents thousands of health care professionals, their lobbying efforts benefit each and every individual who's ever been to a doctor's office, hospital or nursing home.
VOTE-COPE is NYSUT's non-partisan political action arm that coordinates the voluntary contributions of members and supports NYSUT-endorsed candidates and campaign committees. Those candidates can count on NYSUT volunteers to help get out the vote and to support their campaigns in other ways as well. During election campaigns, NYSUT calls on members to help. New members can play a vital role in VOTE/COPE activities, especially in telephone bank solicitations for voter registration and to get out the vote for NYSUT-endorsed candidates. VOTE-COPE activities are funded entirely through voluntary contributions from members. No dues money is ever used to support VOTE-COPE activities.
Support for candidates for public office is determined not by party affiliation but by a politician's record of support for union members' issues. Regardless of party, the critical issue is the level of commitment the candidate has demonstrated to union members and to quality service. When politicians support collective bargaining, better public employee salaries and improved funding for government services, they know there will be solid support for them in the next campaign.
In addition to its full-time professional staff of legislative representatives who maintain regular contact with elected government officials, NYSUT depends on its Committee of 100, a statewide, grassroots network of member-volunteers, to carry out its political action efforts. The name Committee of 100 refers to a small group of NYSUT activists who first came to Albany in the 1970's to fight for greater state aid and for pension reforms. The Committee of 100 has grown to include more than 750 volunteers who make the biannual trek to Albany for political action.