PEOPLE NEWS

Congratulations to Donna Johnson who is running uncontested for a seat on the MTA Executive Board. This is the first time an ESP has been elected to the E-board of MTA. A big handshake is also in order for Sylvia Snape too – she’s also running uncontested for a seat on the MTA Board of Directors, representing the UMass ESPs.

NEWS ITEMS

✔ Monthly membership meetings are set aside for relaying of information to members and for airing concerns of a general nature. If a member has a specific concern or complaint please see your steward or a board member so it can be discussed in a more private setting.

✔ Two receptions were planned for agency fee payers, inviting them to join the union. Refreshments were provided, the cost of which was shared by MTA. At the time of this report the second meeting had not yet happened, but we will provide the number of new members gained through this process at the annual meeting and in the May Newsgram. We owe many thanks to all the stewards and E-Board members who attended these events and urged the agency fee payers in their districts to attend.

✔ About 200 members voted in our recent election. These results are abysmal considering that we have over 4 times that amount of people that receive the ballot. Once upon a time folks signed a petition changing the constitution to have only mail balloting – the constitution at the time had the option of either walk-in or mail balloting. Members got what they wanted and now we have only mail balloting, which costs about $300 of your dues. Walk-in balloting costs about $100. Traditionally we used to get about 125 walk-in ballots. We’re not sure what the problem is or why so many of you threw away the ballots but we’d like to hear recommendations about what we could do to ensure that more members vote.

✔ If you are not on the listserv please consider joining as soon as possible. With the budget analysis, retro news, elections and other important issues coming up, it’s the best and quickest way to find out what’s happening as soon as information gets to us. See the website for a button to sign up.

✔ It’s our belief we can rest assured that the Governor’s proposal to rearrange the pension plan will fail, knowing that it would 1) affect the legislators unfavorably when they retire, and 2) would be so complicated and cumbersome to figure the actual amount of pension. The governance branch of MTA will provide updated information as it is available, so keep watch on the website. Any new information will be forthcoming in future newssgrams or through the listserv.

✔ This spring the Health Fair is April 27 in the Student Union Ballroom from 10:00-2:00 p.m. At press time the Benefit Decisions Guide should have made it to your campus address. 3 health plans are being dropped. The Guide has been posted on the GIC site. Look these over carefully. Your decision must be made during the enrollment period. We’ve enclosed an insert outlining some of the changes being made.

GRIEVANCE REPORT

There are currently a total of 16 ongoing grievances at press time. 10 are filed on Article 10 – Layoff and Recall, 3 are discrimination cases filed with MCAD, 2 are filed on Article 26 – Disciplinary Action and 1 on Article 29 – Employee Evaluation. Bob Whalen, our MTA uniserv rep recently filed 39 Unfair Labor Practices against the University for failure to provide information that was requested.
Part of Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney’s proposed budget, and in his push to change the court system, is a plan to create three definitions of poor: poorest or destitute (would be the only ones eligible for free legal aid), indigent, and marginally indigent. Romney wants to give judges less latitude to decide this, instead using over 12 criteria to determine these three categories, including: anyone who could buy a pack of cigarettes a day, cable TV, home internet, cell phone, pager, bank account with over $150, credit card limit of the same, etc. He claims that limiting free aid in this way will boost fee collections from $5 million to $27 million.

The chief counsel for the state Committee for Public Counsel Services, William Leahy, said that Romney’s budget is unrealistic and cumbersome. Margaret Marshall, Supreme Judicial Court Chief Justice, said that the courts have lost 1,200 jobs in the last three years.

After last spring’s 55,000 gallon oil spill in Buzzards Bay MA, Romney recently submitted a proposal of new regulations and fines. Oil barge owners would get incentives for taking extra safety precautions. Fines would be increased for those responsible for oil spills.

Governor Romney’s proposed budget halves the funding (from $12.2 million to $6.1 million) for aid to teen mothers, Children’s Aid and Family Service of Northampton, Children’s Trust Fund, and Healthy Families. State Representative Ellen Story said that we must raise taxes to fund these “incredible worthwhile services”. The offices of Representative John Scibak, Senator Michael Knapik, and Stan Rosenberg have been getting calls in support of these programs against the cuts.

Romney’s Adams Scholarship plan http://www.boston.com/mcas which would give free public college tuition based only on the top 25% of MCAS scorers, would favor richer school districts according to a Boston Globe analysis. For example, at Hyde Park High School in Boston, not a single junior would qualify, including the probable valedictorian. Romney claims that this analysis is wrong because “rich people don’t take advantage of it”. Even for those who would get the free tuition, fees and housing for an in-state UMass student cost about another $13,000 per year. Romney also wants parochial and private students to be eligible.

“Fire bad teachers” seems to be another Romney plan for “better schools”. Will MCAS scores determine who is a good or bad teachers? Bureaucrats? Administrators? Who will replace these “bad” teachers? Teaching is an incredibly challenging and underrated profession. Education would be better improved by more state resources.

The governor wants the 4-day Democratic National Convention this July to move from the Boston FleetCenter to South Boston’s Seaport district waterfront center, called the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center. He said that the Convention’s proximity to North Station and the Central Artery will cause a lot of public and private traffic problems. John Kerry and Mayor Menino have rejected Romney’s idea. Peggy Willhide, communications director of the Convention, said that it’s already too late to move an event of such scale and security concerns (Secret Service is handling security but not site selection). Some commuters have seemed supportive of having the Convention at BCEC instead of the FleetCenter, others have not (asking why it’s OK to have the Republican GOP convention in August in Madison Square Garden).

Romney’s top priority plan for a new highway overpass at the Sagamore Rotary to improve driving time to Cape Cod has been postponed by the Transportation Committee. This project would cost at least $35 million, possibly as much as twice that. Some environmentalists and planners say that improving the traffic will cause more pollution and development.

For a detailed list of the NEA benefits open to USA members, go to the NEA Member Benefits website: www.neamb.com. There is a link from the NEA.org website also which is linked from the USA website. Member Benefits has 28 different products, not the least of which are Mortgages, money markets that pay twice what the typical money market accounts pay, life insurance, and auto insurance. Please take a moment to check this valuable resource out, and discover how you may be saving money by using your connection to NEA.

The MTA Benefit website (mtabenefits.com) is worth looking into if you haven’t looked lately. You’d be surprised at some of the places you can get discounts…for instance……Whalen’s Stationers, B.J. Wholesale Club, Ten Thousand Villages, Uplinc, FTD.com, Weight Watchers and Jazzercise to name a few.
The AFL-CIO recently put out a special report on jobs with some interesting and not-so-good statistics. From the Bureau of Labor Statistics: 2.9 million private-section jobs lost and 2.8 million manufacturing jobs lost from January, 2001 to January, 2004; 14.7 million workers unemployed, underemployed or given up; 1.9 million workers jobless for 27 weeks or more — the same 10-year-high rate reached in August (January 04); 10.5% of African Americans officially unemployed (compares with 8.2% in January 2001); 5 percent of women officially unemployed (compares with 4.1 percent January 2001); 7.3 percent of Latinos unemployed (compares with 5.8 percent in January 2001); 9.8 percent of young workers are officially unemployed (ages 20-24, compares with 7.0 percent in 12/2000). The U.S. Census Bureau tells us that 3 million more people are in poverty and there is a 1.7 percent decrease in median family income.

There are a lot of CEOs out there that think it’s great to ship out U.S. jobs. The Bush administration agrees. A few quotes that might just raise your blood pressure: “There are four or five times as many smart, driven people in China than there are in the U.S.” Alan Lacy, CEO of Sears, now planning to send information technology jobs offshore.

“Outsourcing is just a new way of doing international trade. When a good or service is produced more cheaply abroad, it makes more sense to import it than to make or provide it domestically.” N. Gregory Mankiw, Chairman of Bush’s Council of Economic Advisers.

On March 13th, as part of a 3-member team, I presented a workshop at the NEA ESP Conference called “Building Stronger ESP Locals in Higher Education and K-12.” Each member of the team shared success stories from our locals that provided models for other locals to use in building their local. I told about UMASS’ loss of contract funding and how we got it back, as well as inviting agency fee members to join the union, and inviting members to attend district meetings and respond to a survey prior to bargaining. Eighteen people from all over the U.S. attended the workshop and gave the team favorable evaluations.

On March 11th and 12th I attended NEA Education Support Professional (ESP) Pre-conference Emerging Leaders Workshop. There were over 80 emerging leaders in this workshop, and we all participated in several sessions geared toward understanding leadership, assertiveness training, public address, parliamentary procedure, and running a campaign for office.

The NEA ESP Conference was held on the 13th and 14th and was attended by over 500 ESPs from all over the U.S. Many workshops were given and I attended two—one on the Living Wage, and another on bargaining a workable raise. I have literature from both of these sessions and would love to share it. I’ll put copies in the U.S.A. office so ask her if you would like to have a copy.

There are two unions in Iraq that are fighting to get jobs for their people (7 million or 70% of the workforce are unemployed), the Iraqi Workers Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) and the Union of the Unemployed. The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) has been making things difficult for them by raiding their board meetings and dragging the board members out in handcuffs and arresting the leaders at organized demonstrations where Iraqi workers demand unemployment benefits and jobs. Hussein re-classified most of Iraq’s laborers back in 1987 as “civil servants” and denied those workers the right to form a union and collectively bargain. The American-led occupation authority has forbidden them from bargaining, ruling that the Hussein law is still in effect.

A big fear of workers and of the unemployed is privatization. Many Iraqi state enterprises will be sold, including cement and fertilizer plants, phosphate and sulfur mines, pharmaceutical factories and the country’s airlines. Back in September, the CPA published Order No. 39, which permits 100% foreign ownership of businesses — except for the oil industry — and allows the transfer of profits outside the country. Workers fear that foreign owners will cut labor costs through layoffs. Resistance is illegal since unions are illegal. International conferences are taking place every week at which Iraqi assets are put on sale to private buyers. Among the companies expressing interest: ExxonMobil, Delta Airlines and American Hospital Group.
ON THE LIGHTER SIDE....

In an effort to add diversity to the workforce, five cannibals get hired by a large University. During the welcoming ceremony the Chancellor says, “You’re all part of our team now. You can earn good money here, and you can go to the snack bars for something to eat. So please don’t trouble any of the other employees.” The cannibals promised.

Four weeks later, the superintendent returns and says, “You’re all working very hard, and I’m very satisfied with all of you. However, one of our support staff has disappeared. Do any of you know what happened?” The cannibals all shake their heads no. After the boss left, the leader of the cannibals says to the others, “Which of you idiots ate the staff person?” A hand raises hesitantly, to which the leader of the cannibals replies, “You FOOL! For four weeks we’ve been eating Deans, Chancellors, Vice Chancellors and Administrators and noone noticed anything, and YOU had to go and eat support staff!”

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