EDITORIAL
By Sylvia Snape

We are back. It’s been a year since the last NEWGRAM was printed. A new Communications Committee has been formed and a monthly NEWGRAM is planned. It is our hope you will read and respond to the NEWGRAM, as it is intended to be a communication tool for every member of U.S.A. Some of us have access to email and are in the information loop on a regular basis. But we know not everyone sees the online information, hence, the return of the NEWGRAM. We welcome your comments and your contributions.

And what a busy year it has been! From lay-offs to lobbying, there has been no time to rest. Thanks to the efforts of Donna Johnson and the Executive Board, and the Stewards Council, much has been done to see us through these trying times.

Our local lost over 50 members to lay-offs. Without the relentless efforts of USA leadership and Bob Whalen, MTA Legal Council, who met with each of the effected members, and filed countless grievances on behalf of affected members, fewer people lost jobs than might have without their efforts.

Twice this year we rode the bus to Boston and lobbied the legislators to fund our contract. This month, we saw that long overdue raise in our paychecks, and we have the promise of retroactive pay in three installments over as many years. Thank you to all who have written, emailed, and phoned your legislators. Your actions have been vital in moving toward finally seeing our contracts funded. Don’t give up yet. Persistence is the key. We can’t let up the pressure until we see the all three of the retro checks in our bank accounts.

Much praise and appreciation is due to MTA for putting aside all other issues to concentrate on Higher Ed. contract funding. We could not have done it without them. It has been amazing to see their power put to use on our behalf. This is why we pay our dues, folks. MTA really came through for us and continues to do so.

U.S.A is interested in discovering the impact on our members who are left with fewer staff numbers after lay-offs have occurred in their area. If you have a story to share concerning the effects of lay-offs in your area please contact someone on the NEWSGRAM staff or the U.S.A. office. You may submit your story anonymously if you feel you might suffer adversely for speaking out.

Fewer workers means members are expected to do more work than a year ago, creating high-stress working conditions, which in turn, impacts the students. Ironically, student fees and tuition continue to rise, while diminished services and fewer classes are available. It’s easy to accept additional responsibilities with no complaint, because we know the students will ultimately suffer if the work goes undone. Don’t fall into that trap. Take your lunch break. Stick to your allotted work hours. Remember that you are, after all, only one person, and should not be expected to do the work of two. And let your steward know if you are asked to work more than you had been working prior to losing co-workers. If you don’t know who your steward is, contact the U.S.A. office at 545-0165. Communication is the key and if we stick together we have hope of seeing positive change in our workplace.
We have an election coming up! This year we’ll be looking for a member-at-large, stewards for all districts, delegates to the MTA Annual Meeting (Boston), and delegates to the NEA Representative Assembly (Washington, DC) as well as voting on 2 constitutional amendments: to extend officers terms from the current maximum of 5 years to a maximum of 7 years; and to form a retired membership and its privileges and a retired membership committee and its functions. Nominations opened January 28 and close February 11. The balloting period begins February 25 and ends March 10. This will be a mail petition.

The Executive Board recently approved a redistricting plan. We have fewer members so we didn’t need as many districts. Stay tuned to the website to see your new district and possibly your new steward.

There is a new organizing/activist committee that’s been meeting regularly on Saturdays at the Campus Center. All of our hard work and efforts have paid off but we still have many challenges ahead. Anyone interested in job security, good working conditions and especially those interested in receiving the rest of your compensation should come to these meetings. Stay tuned to your mail for info about the next meeting.

Donna Johnson recently sent an e-mail out to the listserv about the Labor Relations Commission issuing a decision in our favor on the ½% case. We will have more details on this in the next Newsgram. For those not on the listserv, this is the text of Donna’s email:

*We won a great victory yesterday. The LRC issued a decision finding that the University violated collective bargaining law 150E, when it reneged on the settlement agreement in the 1/2% case. The University was ordered to submit the appropriate request to the Legislature within 30 days. Bob Whalen is analyzing the decision more thoroughly and will provide more information in the Newsgram. Perhaps 2004 will be a better year than I expected.*

USA PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

Jacqui Gentl, recently retired, longtime USA activist, steward and board member, recently underwent bypass surgery at Bay State. At press time she was doing fine and we wish her well. Get well soon so you can enjoy your retirement!

Rosemary Riley is has been busy campaigning for a seat on the Executive Committee of NEA. The election will take place at the NEA representative assembly in Washington this summer. Her campaign has her traveling around the country and keeping very busy. Rosemary has been a good voice for ESPs in higher ed for years and we wish her the best of luck. Keep up the good work!

Members in the news……Linda Hillenbrand, Women’s Studies (and Vice President) married Brian Blinn on June 21, 2003……Jane Litwin Taylor and husband, Patrick, bought a lake-front home in June of 2002……Dave Korowski, OIT, and his wife Shellagh celebrated their 20th wedding anniversary on 8/3/03…..Elaine Kostek, New Students Program, and her husband, Peter, celebrated their 35th wedding anniversary on 12/31/03…Darlene Baptiste, Undergraduate Advising Office, was engaged to Stephen J. Jablonski on 8/10/03 at Mt. Washington with a wedding planned for October 16, 2004 – and Darlene’s parents just celebrated 62 years of marriage…..Robin Coolbeth, Undergraduate Advising Office, wrote and acted in a fictional game show for Northampton Cable Access (Wednesdays & Thursdays at 6:00 p.m. on NCTV Channel 15)….

Don’t forget to tune into WMUA on Wednesdays from 6:00-6:30 for Upfront. USA’s own Dan Kibe has taken the reins of the show temporarily and is doing a great job. 91.1 on the dial.

Send us your news! lindah@wost.umass.edu
It’s an exciting time to be active in our union. USA workers all have seen first hand how unfairly our employer can treat us, and how powerful we can be if we all participate and work together. Many of us finally put that YOU in Union and it PAID off!

The state legislature funded our higher ed contracts because of hard political pressure. USA President Donna Johnson worked tirelessly with MTA leadership, and with UMass- and Higher Ed United local leaders and their affiliates, to set the stage in Boston. But in the end it was the broad participation of individual members that made the difference. And it was WE USA workers, in unprecedented numbers, that lead the way. We rallied and kept our cause in the public view; we lobbied at the State House; we mailed, we phoned, we faxed, we e-mailed: not just once but over and over as critical times arose. WE did it!

The funding battle is not over. We must continue to fight for our rights, for full funding of the retroactive portions of our contract, and for adequate state support for higher education. We also will bargain a new contract this spring, one that moves us ahead. We cannot accept the regressive move, back to the old days without union protections, that the Romney administration now plans for us. If we sit back and admire our new paychecks, we won’t be feeling good for very long.

There are lots of ways USA workers can join in. Some require as little time as sending a message to your state legislators at an appropriate time. Please remember how important those legislative contacts can be for us when you hear the next call for action. USA members also can get involved by spending an hour or two each month helping out with one of our committees. These groups carry out union business (e.g. Judiciary) or investigate job-related problems (e.g. Health&Safety). Altogether USA committees perform many tasks and supply information to our leadership. Again, a little bit of your time can really help a committee. As the old saying goes, “Many hands make light work.” The Stewards Council also has vacancies; there are USA districts on campus without a steward to help members there. Being a steward is one of the most rewarding jobs in the union. If you’re interested, talk with your own steward or your USA leaders: Grievance Officer, Frank Olbris or President, Donna Johnson.

Many USA workers would like to join in but don’t know where to start. Some members are concerned about how much they would be expected to know; other folks wonder how much time will be involved. We need everyone helping out, even for small amounts of time. Please consider joining us and making us stronger.

USA has begun the new Organizing Action Committee to help members get started. This group introduces new workers to activism in USA, teaches them the ropes of our association so they better understand how the union works, and will soon begin providing training on many union topics such as contract language and grievances. It’s never too late to join; we’ve had new workers come to each meeting. Why not come along the next time we meet? If you are interested, call the USA office (545-0165) and we’ll get back to you with details. Our new activists group helps workers take part in ways that fit their own schedules and lives. And it will make our union stronger because there will be even more YOUs in our union.
The USA contract has many ways to protect you if you are unfortunate enough to get laid off. All USA members, except probationary employees and those paid from grant, contract or institute funds (rights are more limited), are covered by Article 22 of our contract. A brief summation of the article:

**Article 22H/NOTIFICATION** – requires the University to notify unit members, in writing, at least thirty days in advance of a pending layoff.

**Article 22C/SENIORITY** – Layoffs must be conducted by job classification on the basis of the unit members’ campus seniority, provided the employee retained has the ability to perform the job.

**Article 22F/BUMPING RIGHTS** – When a member is schedule to be laid off, she/she shall have the ability to “bump.”

**Article 22G/PREFERRED STATUS FOR VACATION POSITIONS** – The member’s name will be forwarded for any vacant positions in an equal or lower-graded classification. Campus seniority will prevail in filling vacancies, provided the employee can perform the duties of the position.

**Article 22D/RECALL** – Laid-off members shall be recalled into available jobs in their classification on the basis of campus seniority, provided they have the ability to perform the required job duties. Member remains on the list for 2 years. Unit members who would have been laid off but accepted a lower graded position shall be recalled to available positions in the job classification from which they were laid off. Member remains on this list for 1 year.

**Article 22H/RETRAINING** – The University is obligated to make every effort to provide preferential treatment to affected employees for retraining opportunities offered by the University during the layoff period.

For more detailed information about health insurance, unemployment, retirement options/possibilities, and tips on planning your job search, see the “If You’re Laid Off Guide” on the USA website (www.umass.edu/usa). Click on “Miscellany” to find the guide. For more in-depth career planning and development don’t forget our “Career Growth” part of the USA website.

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**QUOTABLE QUOTES**

“The labor movement means just this: It is the last noble protest of the American people against the power of incorporated wealth.”

Wendell Phillips  
Orator in the Anti-slavery movement

“Labor is prior to, and independent of, capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor, and could never have existed if Labor had not first existed. Labor is superior to capital, and deserves much the higher consideration.”

Abraham Lincoln

“The fight is never about grapes or lettuce. It is always about people.”

Cesar Chavez, Founder of UFW
A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE USA, ESP, MTA AND NEA
By Andy Steinberg

The University Staff Association www.umass.edu/usa union is you and I and about 1,000 other people who are the clerical and technical workers, bookkeepers, and secretaries of UMass Amherst.

The USA is a part of Education Support Professionals www.massteacher.org/career/esp, which comprises those members of the Massachusetts Teachers Association www.massteacher.org who work in public education support i.e. those who are not teachers themselves but are clerical, etc. The National Education Association www.nea.org functions at the local, state and federal level with 2.7million members in the United States.

NEA NEWS On Social Security
By Rosemary Riley

At the end of the first session of the 108th Congress, the House version of the Social Security Fairness Act (H.R. 594), which would completely repeal both the Government Pension Offset and the Windfall Elimination Provision, had 277 bipartisan cosponsors. The Senate bill (S. 349) had 29 bipartisan cosponsors. These numbers represent record levels of support for GPO/WEP repeal! Unfortunately, Congress finished its business for 2003 without acting on this legislation. NEA is now working on a strategy to secure a “discharge petition” - a procedural mechanism that would force the bill out of committee and onto the House floor for debate and vote. The support of 218 House Members is required to discharge a bill from committee without committee action.

WHAT CAN YOU DO? Call or e-mail Congress. Thank members (MA is ONLY state that has ALL Senators and Members of Congress signed as cosponsors) and ask them to urge their leaders in Congress to make this legislation a priority. You can e-mail from NEA’s website at www.nea.org/lac. Just select “Social Security.” The website provides sample message points for e-mails, but we encourage adding personal stories for greater impact.

NEA Conference Report
by Syloia Snape

National Education Association’s Northeast Leadership Conference was held on January 23, 24 and 25 in Mystic Connecticut. I was glad to attend as a representative from our local and a guest of MTA. NEA members came from all the New England states, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

Rosemary Riley had a campaign booth, which supported her candidacy for Executive Board of NEA, though she was at the Mid-Atlantic Leadership Conference in Baltimore for much of the time. We are very proud to have one of our own running for this important office. Thank you Rosemary for undertaking this awesome responsibility. I hope you win the seat when elections are held in July at the Representatives Assembly in Washington, DC.

The highlights of this conference included a very energizing presentation by Deb Erickson, called “Yes, I Can,” a workshop called Hints and Tips for New Leaders, a powerful talk by Warlene Gary, CEO of National PTA on the 50-year anniversary of Brown vs. Board of Education, and the keynote speech by Reg Weaver, President of NEA. Connecticut’s NEA chapter held an evening reception at Mystic Sea Aquarium, where we were fed wonderfully well and entertained by a woodwind choir from Watertown.

Aside from the delicious food and exciting speakers, this was a great opportunity for me to study legislative issues that educators and education support professionals are facing, and ways in which NEA is working to overcome inequities in the system. I brought materials home and will gladly share with anyone who is interested in more details.

I’m very grateful to MTA for sending me to this exciting conference. My pledge to fellow U.S.A. members is to use the information I received to better serve our local.
PUBLIC EDUCATION AND UNIONS IN THE NEWS
By Andy Steinberg

Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney has put forth a $22.98 billion budget proposal for state fiscal year 2005, which runs from July 1, 2004 to June 30, 2005. He claims it will avoid using shrinking state reserves and avoid new taxes, but will increase some fees by $16.5 million.

He plans to increase public higher education funding by almost 10% to $863 million. This is an improvement, even though two years ago it was $1 billion. He says he does not plan to privatize any campuses but will expand charter schools by getting rid of their enrollment caps.

Governor Romney wants to increase spending on the UMass honors program called Commonwealth College from $1.7 million to $3.4 million. The program currently has 2,000 students in it.

Unfortunately the governor again wants to increase the % of health insurance that we state employees’ pay out-of-pocket, and reduce Medicaid payment to hospitals and reduce care for the uninsured. Also, Massachusetts used to have 115 acute care hospitals in 1986. Now there are 67, we lost 48.

The senior high school class of 2003 is the first to have the MCAS requirement. About 95% of students have passed. Eight students who are part of and represent the 5% sued the state on the grounds that MCAS concentrates on math and English and not on other subjects. (This reminds me of the push to change the SAT’s from a closely guarded secret into a more open forum in the 1970’s.) First the Suffolk Superior Court found against the students’ case. Then the Supreme Judicial Court also decided against them. Now the case is back before Suffolk again.

On the flip side, governor Romney said that students in the top 25% of MCAS can have their tuition waived at any MA state college in any two- or four-year program. The top 10% would get an additional $2,000 a year on top of the tuition waiver. This will cost the state $12 million.

UMass Resident Assistants, helped by the United Auto Workers, have formed the first union of its kind ever in the US! RA’s will now have grievance and arbitration rights, better parking privileges, and an increase in pay from $50.29 per week to $61.76 per week. Note that dorm housing is funded by student fees not state money.

Their next plan is to form a union of other undergraduate employees. UMass keeps undergraduate employees in a separate database from all other employees, which has caused problems in the past when an undergraduate has applied for a ProCard, travel reimbursement, or had an issue against the University.

MORE QUOTABLE QUOTES

“The labor movement means just this: It is the last noble protest of the American people against the power of incorporated wealth.”
Wendell Phillips
Orator in the Anti-slavery movement

“Labor is prior to, and independent of, capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor, and could never have existed if Labor had not first existed. Labor is superior to capital, and deserves much the higher consideration.”
Abraham Lincoln

“In our glorious fight for civil rights, we must guard against being fooled by false slogans, as “right-to-work.” It provides no “rights” and no “works.” Its purpose is to destroy labor unions and the freedom of collective bargaining.....We demand this fraud be stopped.”
Martin Luther King, Jr.
The MTA Annual Meeting

or

The Big Board Meeting

By Linda Hillenbrand

My first time attending an 2003 MTA annual meeting was quite an experience. After the first hour I realized that I was at a huge board meeting. USA board meetings have 12 people – this board meeting had over 1,000. People brought motions to the floor, they were debated and we voted. Some of the debates were very interesting and some were just a formality. The budget was explained and voted on with little debate. The organizational planning that goes into this meeting is immense and everyone involved in that is to be congratulated.

All the representatives of the many locals that were in attendance are elected by their members to go to this meeting and vote on issues that affect their locals. USA members elected us to go and speak for them and we did. There are numerous reasons that this meeting is important. As ESPs we are a small percentage of the MTA membership (around 10%) and it’s important that our voice be as loud as possible. As higher ed ESPs it’s even more important.

I encourage all USA members to visit the MTA site, talk to people who went, find out more about MTA and get involved. Better yet, nominate yourself (or someone else) to go to the annual meeting coming up in May. They need our input and our voices are important.

Burning Question

What is the Pacheco Law and Why is it Good for Us?

If some of you have been paying attention to the debates back and forth about the reorganization of public higher education then you’ve seen or heard of the Pacheco Law.

This law, which Republicans and conservatives tend to dislike, protects public employees from privatization. This law prohibits contracting out to the private sector any service currently provided by public employees and sets up some formidable hurdles in the bargain. Is this a bad thing? NO! Without this law there could very well be groups of us that would find themselves employees in the private sector. No contract or seniority. Less pay, less vacation, less of everything. The law was set up to protect public employees and it does just that. We do have good benefits. Would they be this good in the private sector?

Senator Knapik (Easthampton, Southampton, etc.), a Republican, was upset that it didn’t get struck down during Romney’s last attempt. Romney’s new budget, however makes another attempt at repealing this law. Apparently, this particular Senator does not support public employees. He was quoted as saying that he was disappointed and it could have raised money. Yes, from the corporations who would pay the University to take away our jobs! Why not just close those loopholes instead?

Read more about this at the following websites:

http://www.nea.org/privatization/index.html

http://www.aft.org/privatization/welcome.html
IT'S TAX TIME!
Your total amount paid to dues in 2003, which is deductible if you are itemizing is $315.76 for full-time and $157.82 for part-time members.

The articles inside this newsgram:
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