Dear USA members,

As the fall begins we realize that the students are back and our workday is more hectic. At this time of the year we are getting ready to rake leaves, close up our pools, and put away the lawn furniture. Our lives will start to shift into high gear as the holidays are just around the corner. Let us not forget that November is election month and each and every one of us needs to voice our opinion at the polls. Now more than ever we must get the vote out to ensure that education friendly legislators and an education friendly president are elected. Each of us must do our part and encourage our family, friends, and neighbors to do the same. Our future and the future of higher education across this State depends on our taking responsibility in November. Please do your part.

On the retro I can only say that I too was disappointed that it did not go through in this supplemental budget but I assure you that the MTA, the Higher Ed Unions United, and the Amherst Labor Coalition will not give up on ensuring these monies for our members. I have spoken with the MTA and getting the retro monies funded is still a priority for them. We have the assurance of all the key players that this will still happen in the new legislative session. It will be our responsibility to hold the Legislators to their word and I will be letting you know how you can help in the upcoming months. I will continue to keep you all posted as to where we stand on this issue.

As the pace gets more hectic here on campus I would like to remind all of you that you have rights and should not forfeit these rights because you are so dedicated. Remember to take your breaks and your lunch. If you are doing work out of your job title or if you are working overtime and not being compensated please contact your steward right away. Remember the union is only as strong as its members because the union begins with “U”.

In solidarity,
Donna Johnson
President USA

Why I’m Involved with the Union—Linda Hillenbrand, U.S.A. VP

There are more than a few reasons why I got involved with USA - and why I continue to stay involved with USA. After working with other members as a steward and attending my first few meetings I realized how utterly important this union is to all of us. This is the only union job I've ever had and I never want to be without a union contract ever again. Having the protection of this contract means you are not alone. Having leadership that you can count on to fight for you and protect that contract is irreplaceable. It doesn't take much to get involved but it can be a tool to help you find your voice and the courage to fight for your rights on the job. Too many people do not have rights on the job and I'll always be grateful that we do and will do what I can to keep those rights.

USA Health & Safety Committee Needs Your Help! Don Taylor, Chair of the Stewards Council

The USA Health & Safety Committee is working on many fronts to improve the conditions our workers face on the job. We are currently working in three buildings with severe problems: DuBois Library, Herter Hall, the Student Activities Office in the Student Union. In addition we are monitoring the DuBois Library construction project, providing information and advice to workers there and trying to hold university management to their legal mandate to protect worker health and safety. But we have only scratched the surface. Many building on campus have serious health and safety problems. We want to identify them and take action.

To do so we need worker representatives in all buildings on campus. So far we have reps in fewer than half the buildings our members work in. We need more USA workers to join us in identifying problem areas and passing on health and safety complaints from building workers. You will simply survey your building on occasion, collect any complaints from your coworkers, and send the information to the committee.

This is a great way to get involved with the USA, while helping yourself and your fellow workers. The job requires very little time. Building reps give any
information they collect directly to our committee: they are not required to be visible or get involved with management. We start you off with a brief training at a time that will meet your own schedules; there will be no regular, required meetings. This activity can be fun and interesting, and very valuable to our workers.

If you are interested, please get in touch with Don Taylor (5-3308; taylor@chem.umass.edu). Please consider this opportunity to get involved with your union.

Help Us Move in a Different Direction
Dave Korowski, OIT

You may have noticed that we have made some changes in the Newsgram. There are a few format changes, but we’ve also changed the content. We members of the Communications Committee believe that this is YOUR publication, and we want to make it as interesting, readable, and informative as we can. We want to avoid having our little paper be an unchanging and depressing litany of political articles. It seems that in the last few years, all the news from the political front has been bad, and I’m sure that most of you reading this get tired of a steady diet of bad news. I know I do.

We welcome all our readers to become contributors. You don’t have to be a polished writer—just put your thoughts and ideas on paper (or email) and send them to us. Do you have a story that’s funny, interesting, inspiring, or spiritually uplifting? Jokes, recipes, anything you think would be of value to our readership? We want to put them in this paper! Please don’t be shy. As an example, I have an inspiring little story of my own that I’ll tell you below.

I was a construction worker in the 1970’s and also training in martial arts. One day at my jobsite I was carrying a 90 lb. jackhammer over a considerable distance. It was a hot summer day, and I alternated cradling the machine in one arm and then the other. As I was about halfway to my destination, a little yellow butterfly flew in front of me.

While still holding the jackhammer, I reached out quickly and caught him in my hand. I then opened my hand and let him fly away unharmed. This is what it is like to be at peace and in harmony with all things. Sometimes little things teach large lessons. I often think back about what that little yellow butterfly taught me.

Springfield Rally, Donna Johnson

Many of you are aware that a Control Board now runs the city of Springfield, and the board is controlled by Governor Romney’s appointees. All of the municipal employees are without contracts and the undercurrent is that the city’s employees, including the teachers and ESP’s of the Springfield Education Association, are a major cause of the city’s financial problems. This is clearly an attack on collective bargaining and Unions. If the Governor and his team succeed in Springfield, what will stop him from coming after the rest of us. Please join me at a rally on October 15, 2004 at City Hall/Court Square in Springfield, Ma. At 4:30 p.m. We must let the people of Springfield and our elected officials know that we are not the cause of financial problems within the State and any attempts to balance the budget on the backs of workers will seriously erode the quality of life for all citizens.

In solidarity,

Donna Johnson
MTA Executive Committee Region H

Behind the Scenes: How Workers are Treated-Issues of Class and Caste Jane Litwin-Taylor, Office Manager

A Labor/Management Workplace Education offering by this title will be held on Thursdays, October 14 - December 16 from 11:30am-1:30pm and is facilitated by Daria Fisk. USA Members are strongly encouraged to sign up for this class, as issues of classism affect all of us greatly and this will be a wonderful opportunity to problem-solve and create responses to the classism many of us experience daily in our jobs at UMass. If you have any questions about this course, please feel free to contact me at the USA Office at 545-0165 or Daria Fisk at 545-1471.

Weingarten Rights
Sylvia Snape, Dept of English

Along with your MTA membership card and benefits booklet, you received a card stating your Weingarten rights. In previous issues these right have been explained in great detail, but suffice it to say that you might want to carry this card in your wallet or purse, in case you ever get called into a meeting where you fear you might be disciplined by a supervisor. On the reverse side is space to write in the name and contact information for your president, and building rep (for us it’s the steward). If you don’t know who your steward is, please give Jane Litwin-Taylor a call at 545-0165. U.S.A. Calendar.
Eye On Romney

Andy Steinberg, Graduate Research

On Tuesday August 10, Governor Romney signed into law, as part of a transportation bond bill, a pilot wetlands banking program, drawn up by the Legislature, for the Taunton River Watershed. Since MA wetlands make it possible for 120 highly threatened species to survive, and since all wetlands are natural flood valves and pollution filters, environmental activists are not happy about this. MA Sierra Club director James McCaffrey said that making it easier for developers to fill wetlands is not appropriate at all. MA has been preserving wetlands as a longtime goal, and developers who fill or build near wetlands must replace them in another location. The new law allows developers to convert wetlands, and then just buy credit from an organization or bank that has restored wetlands. John DeVillars started this new measure when he was EPA regional administrator from 1994 to 2000 by founding the Boston environmental consulting firm BlueWave Strategies, which he still serves on. BlueWave may become the MA wetlands credit banker. Environmental Affairs Secretary Ellen Herzfelder had her spokesman Felix Browne assure us that the protection has not been lessened and concerns are exaggerated.

On Wednesday August 11 Romney approved 1.28 billion borrowed dollars (the state cap) for improvements to Westfield’s Western MA (long term care) Hospital, a new Franklin County jail in Greenfield with a greater inmate capacity, and a new women’s prison in Chicopee (only the 2nd such in MA), among other things. Chicopee’s Mayor, Richard Goyette, was delighted that the prison could create 150 jobs. Hampden County Sheriff Michael Ashe was very pleased that this should improve the conditions for female prisoners. Representative Donald Humason, Senator Michael Knapik (both Westfield Republicans) and Franklin County Sheriff, Frederick Macdonald, also applauded the new prison.

Ann and Mitt Romney both support stem cell research, as do John Kerry and Nancy Reagan. Stem cell research could potentially lead to cures for many diseases, as stem cells can turn into any cell in the body, replacing damaged or destroyed cells, but embryonic stem cells are equated with abortion by the powerful religious right like President Bush. Ann Romney was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1998, she is currently in remission. She has used multiple treatments, including IV steroids, horseback riding, and acupuncture. After Bank of America assimilated Fleet Boston Financial Corp, Romney sought a public accounting of the takeover. BoA promised not to cut any jobs because of this merger, then laid off hundreds of Fleet employees only. BoA also promised to keep six division headquarters in Boston, then kept only four. MA has over $100million in BoA certificates. Romney and Lt. Governor Kerry Healey both urged Boa to keep their promises and not break commitments to state regulators, this surprised me!

A recent UMass poll of 600 voters published in the Boston Globe showed that Romney’s approval rating has dropped from 61% last spring to 54% now. His rating as governor has dropped from 55% to 44%. This was attributed largely to Romney being out of MA for 22 of the 29 working days in August alone, promoting his book, vacationing, and political matters. Romney also traveled with President Bush to the Republican National Convention in NY on Labor Day weekend, where the MA governor threw a party for over 1,000 people. Romney has said that Kerry will win the presidential debates, but that Bush will win the election.

As many of you have probably heard, Romney has vetoed the retroactive pay of $32 million for 13,000 public higher education employees. This would be roughly $1,600 per person after taxes and deductions. The Legislature is in informal session until formal session starts on January 1st when they will be able to override the veto. Romney said that he would rather lower the state income tax rate from 5.3% to 5%, than approve our retro pay. This sounds more like an ideological reason than a fiscal reason to me.

UMass Amherst will not have an on-campus voting site for the Presidential election on November 2. Romney did not file a bill himself, and now there is insufficient time for the Legislature to do so, so students living on campus will have to vote off-campus. UMass is divided into 4 Precincts which are spread among 3 voting places. UMass will provide shuttles buses for all three locations.

The Chicopee Chamber of Commerce’s (reservations 413-594-2101) president Gail Sherman asked Romney to speak at the chamber’s Checkpoint annual event on October 13 at noon, and Romney accepted, to the amazement and delight of the chamber’s staff. This will be on 1599 Memorial Drive at Castle of Knights. The chamber sponsors are Marois Construction, Tsubaki, Coler & Colantino, Chicopee Savings Bank, Waste Management, and Westover Metropolitan Development.
Governor Romney has stated that he is against gay marriage, but is wholeheartedly supporting openly gay House seat candidate Richard Babson of the Back Bay, Republican. Romney has helped Babson with a grass-roots campaign support and research. Babson is also the multimillionaire chairman of the Wellesley-based investment advisory firm called Babson-United Inc.

October and November Calendar

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U.S.A. Newsgram Contributors: Linda Hillenbrand, Donna Johnson, Dave Korowski, Sylvia Snape, Andy Steinberg, Don Taylor
If you would like to serve on a committee, be a steward, a building rep, or contribute articles to the Newsgram (!), please contact the USA office at 545-0165.