USA NEWSGRAM
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CONTEMPLATIONS

UMASS ADMINISTRATOR’S LAMENT

First they came for the janitors
and I didn’t speak up
because I wasn’t a janitor
Then they came for the clerical workers
and I didn’t speak up
because I wasn’t a clerical worker

Then they came for the professors
and I didn’t speak up
because I wasn’t a professor
Then they came for me
and by that time there was no one left
to speak up for me

THE U IN UNION MEANS YOU

So, what exactly does it mean that the “The U in Union Means You” anyways? USA is not just an Executive Board. We are all workers just like you, volunteering our time to represent classified and technical staff to the administration of UMass. We are elected by the membership and are accountable to the membership just as we are to each other. That’s why we vote. What we do is a direct reflection of what our members ask us to do. We all take very seriously the trust that is given over to us when elected and when we aren’t doing USA work we are working next to our peers, keeping the University running smoothly.

It isn’t easy to run a union and we can’t make everyone happy — but we do try. We listen and do what’s in our power to do. Our contract protects us all as workers but we all must do our part in protecting ourselves in the workplace. Get familiar with the contract and know it’s limitations and it’s strengths. Find out who your steward is and introduce yourself. Know your rights and ask questions. If you don’t get an answer that makes you happy, then ask someone else. Be proactive about your rights instead of reactive. The job you save may be your own.

FAREWELLS AND WELCOMES!

A very fond farewell to Joanne McKay, our Parliamentarian, who has chosen to retire from the University and Amanda Alix, a member-at-large who was laid off. Joanne and Amanda gave USA many, many years of service and we’ll miss them both. Good luck to you both!

USA have four new e-board members. Our new parliamentarian, Joyce Allen-Davis comes to us from Human Relations. The three new members-at-large are Barbara McGlynn from Journalism, Frank Olbris from Mail Services and Dora Ramos from Auxiliary Services. A warm welcome for all of them!

USA has three brand new stewards. Welcome to Don Taylor from Chemistry who will be representing District 7, Joyce Allen-Davis from Human Relations for District 15 and Frances Corgnati from Electrical and Computer Engineering for District 16.

PROPOSED DUES INCREASE

Once again USA leadership needs to ask the membership for a dues increase. We’ve been finding it increasingly difficult in these bad times to keep up with the rising costs of almost everything. Believe us when we say that it pains us to have to ask for an increase. As we go over the budget and the items that cost more and more we start talking about how an increase is the only way for us to keep up. We are all employees, we pay dues just like everyone else and receive no pay for the work we do for USA. This is contrary to most unions whose officers are paid and on full release time. So we know that this is a bad time. We know that our contracts are stalled in the statehouse. We also know that USA cannot continue to function as we have been without a small increase. What we propose is a small increase of .50 cents per month this year and another .50 cent increase next year. This would mean .25 cents from each of our bi-weekly paychecks for a year and another .25 cents the year after. Doing this slowly will seem a lot less debilitating in our paychecks and would go a long way to helping USA function.

We would use the increase for the following:

- Jane Litwin Taylor, our outstanding part-time office manager has been with us for a long, long time. We need to give her yearly raises — she deserves raises as much as we do.
- Furniture! Jane’s desk is an ergonomic nightmare and has a broken drawer that’s dangerous to people and has snared, poked and ruined clothes for a long, long time.
- Our phone bill went up when the budget cuts began — no doubt in response to campus wide unplugging of phones not needed or not being used.
- The newsgrams — they are smaller and will be less frequent. They are expensive to produce.
- Accountant — The accounting firm who does our taxes has to increase fees every now and then. Everyone is affected by the economy.
- Arbitration expenses — the layoffs and protection for our members could run into increased arbitration costs

SAVE UMASS

There is a very large rally in the works for April 25th for staff, students and faculty to go to Boston. Sign-up sheets are being distributed around campus. For more information contact GEO or e-mail saveumass@yahoo.com.
CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT REVISITED

We would like to revisit the constitutional amendment that was brought to a vote in March, which did not pass. The vote was close however, so we will be bringing it to a vote again along with the proposed dues increase. The constitution as it now stands states that a member can run for two consecutive terms of two years and not more than 5 years total.

Supporters of this change would like to raise this to three consecutive terms and not more than 7 years. For instance, the same person can hold a position on the board for two full terms and at the end of those two terms, they cannot run again for the same position but can run for a different position. Or they can run again after two years has gone by. Raising the limits would simply ensure that leadership in these trying times stay the same. Continuity is important if members of the board are to be effective for USA as a whole. Board members still have to be elected and by extending term limits, members can be assured that the people they know are doing a good job can continue to do a good job.

And the opposition......In adapting to new political conditions and crisis situations, it’s important to consider that revitalizing leadership through change is a strength of democracy, even though transition may be difficult. Extending term limits demands careful consideration of the impact of the collected power of incumbency and the subsequent entrenchment of officers, e.g., Finneran; and, in contrast, restricting terms of office begets the benefits of leadership development and renewal. The best vote for the organization would be AGAINST extending the term limits.

EDITOR’S NOTES

--The recipe book is underway. In answer to all the grumblings out there, the recipe book is not being paid for by your dues. When we finish we will mail out postcards for members to return to us to reserve copies. We will only print what we need. This is an ideal way for members to support USA financially (there will be a tiny profit) and get something very cool in return.

--Many of you on the listserv know that Donna sends regular updates on what’s happening in the state legislature and across campus. These lengthy updates will now be posted on the website in letter form. Look down towards the bottom of the page. You can’t miss the links.

WEBSITES TO CHECK OUT

The National Council of Women’s Organizations has an on-line calculator that will tell you how much you’d lose if Social Security were privatized. Click on www.woman4socialsecurity/sscalc4/calculator.htm, enter your year of birth and earning and hit the “calculate” button.

If you don’t want to work until you’re 70 just so privatizers can reap millions from administering private accounts, check out the downloadable flier at www.aflcio.org/workingfamilietoolkit/ss.pdf.

If you haven’t already, check out the AFLCIO’s website, www.aflcio.org. Find out why labor unions don’t support privatizing social security, read about the heros of 9/11, keep up with news and legislation that supports workers’ rights everywhere.

CONTRACT HIGHLIGHTS

Please take some time to read Article 22 on bumping/layoffs and Article 8, Section 2 on overtime. Now, more than ever, it’s important to know your rights on the job. Out of title work will no doubt be an issue across campus as programs and departments are realigned. Call your steward if anything comes up that doesn’t look right and if you’re asked to take on any work that is left over from someone leaving.

OSHA/ERGONOMIC FOLLIES

One of the first things the Bush administration did at the beginning of their reign was to kill the OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) ergonomics protection rule. Many workers endure painful injuries because there is no requirement that employers protect their workers against ergonomic injuries. Activists came up against a Labor Department that would not hear from any scientific organizations that support protection against repetitive strain injuries—and they did ask to testify. The solicitor for the Department of Labor has said that the science of ergonomics is “junk science par excellence” and questions whether repetitive motion leads to ergonomic injuries. So, after 10 years, and with a new administration, workers have less protection from injuries and employers are left with no guidance.

Some of us spend a lot of time at our computers. Who hasn’t walked away from their desk with sore wrists, cricks in our neck, a sore back and arms? If you feel strongly about this please let your senators know how you feel. This is an important issue for workers.