USA NEWSGRAM
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RETRO PAY NEWS
By SYLVIA SNAPE

When the bill to fund our unpaid contracts were before the state legislature the funding was passed unanimously, due to the heroic efforts of MTA and USA and many other higher education unions in the coalition. We now see the raises in our paychecks. Because of the size of the retroactive monies owed us for 2001-2003, the legislators agreed to break the amount into 3 chunks and pay them over the next 3 fiscal years. However, the legislature could not act to bind future budgetary items, so each spring we must lobby the legislators to bring this forward for a vote. House Speaker Finneran, and Senate Leader Travaglini both promised to make sure this happens in Fiscal years '05 (begins 7/1/04), '06 (begins 7/1/05) and '07 (begins 7/1/06)—but we must be vigilant and make sure they are good for their word. Finneran in particular does not make promises lightly, but we are expecting him to do the right thing. We will also be fighting for the members who retired, to make sure that they not only receive the retro pay, but also have the last three years’ increase show in their retirement adjustments.

We must all continue to work together. Donna Johnson will continue to keep us posted on the details as they arise. In the meantime, if you have questions or want to participate in joining this effort, please contact your steward. Districts have changed, please call the office at 545-0165 or check the USA website.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

For those of you who are now making over $35,000 per year with the raises, expect to see your insurance raised 5% in July. Keep this in mind when the time to change your insurance carrier approaches this spring.

Tell your retired friends about the Massachusetts Senior Action Council. They were founded in 1981 to promote the rights, well being, and dignity of all people, particularly vulnerable senior citizens. They have over 2,500 members, 50 affiliated groups and 10 active chapters all over the state. www.masssenioraction.org

Working together…….The HEUU (Higher Education Unions United) is still meeting and keeping in touch at least once a month. Donna Johnson and Jim Plaza have been regularly attending. The UMass Labor Coalition, comprised of officers and representatives from the other UMass UMass unions also meets regularly. We’re all in this together!

The MTA has endorsed Senator John Kerry for the upcoming Presidential election. They believe that he has been right on the issues that are important to our members. For more information please see the MTA website about the issues.

THE SAME SEX MARRIAGE DEBATE
By ANDY STEINBERG

Same-sex marriages and civil unions have been in the spotlight a lot recently and the light on our state is pretty bright.

On February 11 the Massachusetts Legislature refused a proposed “compromise” that would’ve legalized gay civil unions and simultaneously banned same-sex marriages by a 104-to-94 vote, and the MTA sent the legislature a memo stating the MTA position in favor of gay marriage. If the compromise had passed, any Massachusetts gay married couples would have their licenses nullified in November 2006, the earliest date an amendment could be placed on a voter ballot. House Speaker Thomas Finneran said, “Every society, every culture, every nation in all of recorded history, including Massachusetts, has up until this point at least defined marriage as one man and one woman.” This is not accurate. For example, some Islamic cultures have in past and present said it is fine for one man to have many wives as long as he can provide for them all equally and well. Anthropologists and historians can give many examples.

Gay people are some of our families, friends, co-workers, doctors, teachers, firefighters, police, etc. This is not an opinion, it is a fact. They pay the same taxes that straight people do, why are they denied the same benefits? Ultimately some judges will decide for or against gay marriage with the only tried & true method, a Constitutional amendment.
KNOW YOUR CONTRACT
OUT OF TITLE WORK

With the recent early retirement and lay offs have you—
—been asked to do extra work?
—done the work of someone in a higher grade?
—done the work of someone out of our unit?
—covered for or will cover for someone who is out on leave?
and are they telling you it is only temporary?
—felt pressure to do any or all of the above?

We have language in our contract that covers these situations. For
more information or clarity on this issue go to the USA website
and look in the current contract under Article 10, Section 2 and/or
contact your district steward, which can also be found on the USA
website.  www.umass.edu/usa

Please keep in mind that this is YOUR contract. It’s in place to
protect you and it’s very important that we enforce the contract.
Don’t be intimidated by filing grievances -- it’s what we are
supposed to do when the contract is violated.

The world is a dangerous place, not
because of those who do evil, but
because of those who look on and do
nothing.—Albert Einstein

UMASS BOSTON CLASSIFIED STAFF
ARE IN THE NEWS
By Linda Hillenbrand

The UMass Boston classified staff contract, covering
approximately 425 clerical and maintenance workers—among
the lowest-paid UMB staff—was not negotiated in time to make it
into the original pool of unfunded contracts. Covering the same
period as all the other higher ed contracts (7/01-7/04), it was
finally ratified in August, 2003, languished for some time in the
offices and corridors of the UMass administration, and finally went
to the Governor in late November or early December. Governor
Romney rejected the contract, sending it back for further
bargaining because it was “too expensive.” The total cost of the
part of the contract which would bring those workers up to where
they should have been as of 1/01/04 (in the same manner as the
other contracts were funded) is a mere $750,000—compared to
the 26 million or so funded for the other UMass contracts.

SCORE A BIG ONE FOR USA!
MASSACHUSETTS LABOR
RELATIONS COMMISSION
UMASS FAILED TO TAKE STEPS TO
FUND AGREEMENT

In a victory for the University Staff Association, the Massachusetts
Labor Relations Commission has found that the University of
Massachusetts failed to take sufficient steps to fund a wage
reopener agreement with the union.

The case involves a 2.5 percent raise agreed to between UMass
and USA in FY 1998, with a proviso that there would be a
reopener if the University agreed to a higher raise for other units.
When other units did receive raises a half-percent higher than
USA’s, the union exercised its right to reopen. At the table,
however, UMass refused to grant USA the additional half percent.

After research by MTA Higher Education Consultant Stevens Day
and MTA attorney Judy Neumann, the USA sued the University
under a little-known provision of the state personnel law that
requires that confidential employees, who would otherwise be
included in the bargaining unit, receive the same salaries as unit
members. Since UMass had granted the confidential employees 3
percent raises, USA argued that the University violated the law by
granting the confidential employees a half-percent higher raise.

The lawsuit was settled by an agreement that USA members would
be granted a retroactive half-percent raise, subject to funding.

UMass submitted the agreement to the Executive Office for
Administration and Finance for submission to the Legislature for
funding. However, EOAF declined to submit the agreement, and
USA then filed a prohibited practice charge with the MLRC, citing
the University for failing to take adequate steps to secure funding
for the agreement.

In a ruling handed down January 21, the MLRC found that UMass
indeed had failed to take sufficient steps and ordered the
University to submit its funding request to the Legislature and to
post a notice to bargaining unit members.

“This victory again demonstrates that we will not sit back and do
nothing when the rights of our members are at stake,” said USA
President Donna Johnson. “The University must understand that
when it enters into an agreement, it must follow through.”

We must indeed all hang together, or,
most assuredly, we shall all hang
separately.—Benjamin Franklin, July 4,
1776
EYE ON ROMNEY
BY LINDA HILLENBRAND AND ANDY STEINBERG

Romney’s budget proposal would make some drastic changes—none of them good. He wants to get rid of or make changes to the following: bumping rights, seniority, step increases, just cause, release time for union officers, tuition remission, health insurance, and pensions. We also hear that he’ll be offering 0-0-0 or 0-0-1 for new contracts. None of this comes as a surprise but we’d prefer not to have to have this fight. Romney is not a friend to labor and will keep trying to make these changes as long as he’s in office. MTA’s analysis of his budget will be available soon.

And around the state…….Romney seems a bit quieter this month than last month, but he has increased his attack on the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, claiming it is rogue agency filled with excessive patronage, and he wants to merge it into the highway department to save $190 million initially with a $20 million per year savings afterwards, his figures. Authority Vice Chairman Jordan Levy said that patronage is nonexistent or minimal at worst, and claims that since Romney’s points don’t add up at all the governor is resorting to smear tactics and personal attacks. Romney’s January 2004 State of the State speech took some verbal shots at Authority Chairman Matthew Amorello, while on another occasion Romney said that Amorello was doing a fine job. The state of MA and the city of Boston opposed the Authority when it sold land in Allston MA last year. Romney used this as an example of how he feels the Authority is too independent of State control. Levy replied that the Authority is funded by tolls and not by taxes.

NEA TERRORISTS ??
BY ANDY STEINBERG

In Washington DC, Education Secretary Rod Paige said that the National Education Association union is a “terrorist organization” in a closed two-hour meeting with governors in the White House, part of the four-day annual meeting of the National Governors Association. Both Republican and Democratic governors have confirmed this, including Jim Doyle (D) of Wisconsin, Ed Rendell (D) of Pennsylvania, Bob Holden (D) of Missouri, Jennifer Granholm (D) of Michigan, and Jim Douglas (R) of Vermont. They claim that Paige’s comment is in reference to the NEA not cooperating with President Bush’s “No Child Left Behind” law. Democrats have said that Bush failing to fully fund this law just increases states’ burdens. The NEA has asked President Bush to express his regret by asking Paige to step down but our President has, so far, been silent. And don’t miss the new commercial that the NEA has put out in response to the insult — it’s on www.nea.org.

EXCERPTS FROM NEA HIGHER ED JOURNAL
Combating Negative Views of Unions: A Defense of Labor Studies, by Victor G. Devinatz

These excerpts are taken from an article, which gives an overview of the perceptions of unions and union members nationwide.

After nearly one hundred years of largely negative cinematic images, is it any wonder that few Americans—at least according to various public opinion polls of the last several decades—want to think of themselves as working class? Ask any group of students or voters what is the first thing that comes to mind when they hear the words “union,” “union leader,” “working class,” or “strike.” In all probability, the answer will not be positive…. Workers and their organizations are rarely depicted as rational bodies that seek a better standard of living for all wage earners.

Within the United States, labor unions have demonstrated the capacity for promoting democracy both in the workplace and in society at large.

With respect to passing legislation directly related to the labor unions’ agenda, evidence indicates that unions have been most successful in helping to enact legislation that is beneficial to all workers, not only to unionized workers. (Richard B. Freeman and James L. Medoff, What Do Unions Do? New York: Basic Books, Inc. 1984).

It is also important to discuss how the labor movement has often been active in promoting social justice in the United States.

Although it is true that only about 20 percent of American workers are in unions, that 20 percent sets the standards across the board in salaries, benefits and working conditions. If you are making a decent salary in a non-union company, you owe that to the unions. One thing that corporations do not do is give out money out of the goodness of their hearts.—Molly Ivins
COOL WEBSITE!
www.boycotts.org

Very cool site that gives you details about current boycotts with all your questions answered and contact information. Some of these will surprise you and some will shock you!

The State of South Carolina (confederate flag)
R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company (anti-union)
Taco Bell (tomato picking)
Citigroup (mining in the Amazon)
World Bank (big bad bank)
Discover (dam in China)
BPAmoco (slavery)
Forever 21(U.S. sweatshop)
Gap (clear cutting redwoods)
Kraft Foods (owned by Phillip Morris)
Neiman Marcus (furs)
Diamond Walnut (strike)
Nestle USA (infant formula)
Vogue (fur, etc.)

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