NEWS AND NOTES

- Sylvia Snape, a member-at-large on the e-board, along with some stewards, has been inviting agency fee payers to become full dues paying members. So far 5 have agreed to come on board. Now they can get the newsgram and other benefits that we enjoy! Welcome aboard!

- Welcome to Rich O’Rourke who has been appointed a steward for District 12, Goodell Building, Floors 1,2,3,4,6. He is replacing Linda Wallack, who has resigned. Thanks Linda for your hard work!

- Many members told us, via the bargaining survey, that they weren’t “invited” to membership meetings. We’re not sure how to announce these in a more direct way than a flyer mailed directly to your desk. Reminders are also sent out on the listserv. If you can think of a better way we are open to suggestions!

- A very BIG thank you to printing services which has been very accommodating with our monthly newsgram. They have been very quick!

- In early June, a few of us will be walking around campus with Sara Gibson, an environmental attorney, (being paid by MTA) to take pictures and look at problem areas on campus. We know that there are a lot of health and safety issues and we will be trying to address these as they come up.

- In the April newsgram we reported that 37 ULPs (Unfair Labor Practices) were filed on behalf of USA members. Donna Johnson and Bob Whelan met in Boston with the Labor Relations Commission and representatives from the University about these and it didn’t go as well as they would have liked. Donna states that they feel no harm was done and why shouldn’t they just go on from here? Since that is unacceptable the ULPs will be combined and will continue. These ULPs are important to USA and address many of the problems we’ve had with the administration for years.

- The UMass Boston Classified staff have not received their raises. Along with professional staff, faculty, students and graduate employees, they paid a visit to President Wilson on Thursday. President Wilson’s salary increase equals $91,000. Needless to say, they are outraged and want some support.

WHAT IS A FORM 30?

When your position was advertised on campus there had to be a Form 30 generated that outlined the duties of the position. Every single USA job on this campus has a Form 30. If you do not have a copy of this form, ask for it. If your duties are above and beyond what your Form 30 says then it’s time to talk to someone about an upgrade. Ask your personnel person or Human Resources for a copy. You should also ask your personnel person how your position is funded. This is something you are entitled to know. If you can’t get an answer, contact your steward.

ATTENTION: USA HAS A WEBSITE!

Did you know that most questions that we are asked are easily obtained from the website? It’s easy to get to with an easy-to-remember URL (www.umass.edu/usa) and most everything you need is there. The contract, constitution, grievance information, reclassification information, links to legislators (with e-mail links), newsgrams, listserv information, steward and e-board lists with phone numbers and e-mail links, the committee list and much, much more.

UMASS BUDGET TALKS

The talk about the budget for the University can be confusing. The Governor’s proposed budget appeared to be higher than the House budget for the new fiscal year. It was NOT higher. The House budget had a different appropriation for our salaries, so collectively the House budget was higher than what the Governor proposed although it was cut by 2%. Remember, the Governor believes we are paid too much and that we did not deserve our raises. The Senate Ways and Means Committee released their version of the FY05 budget and it’s better for us than both the House and the Governor’s budget. It raises the budget by 7% with tuition retention included. Their proposal keeps the health insurance the same and does not include the “take-backs” that Romney put into his proposal.
CLASSISM ON CAMPUS

Classism is defined as “bias based on social or economic class.” This is an easy explanation for a big problem. It’s not an obvious problem and it’s one that can sometimes be hard to identify. Some of us experience this from time to time and don’t realize what it is until it’s too late.

Classism is held in place by a system of beliefs which rank us all according to our economic status, job and level of education and sometimes our family background or origins. Some consider all who receive wages for work as working class and some exclude those in the workforce that are considered professionals and managers. When looking at these definitions you could say that 70-85% of the workforce are considered working class.

Public education is frequently under attack from Romney. Why? Can our Governor connect with working class parents who cannot afford to send their children to schools with headmasters or to private colleges? Can our Governor honestly say he supports the working class when he continues in his attempts to strip us of our contractual rights on the job and tells us we’re paid too much? The very nature of his attitude is classist.

What can we do about classism? This is a question that some of us have been thinking about and talking about on campus lately. Do we start at the top and educate those that stereotype us? Do we educate ourselves? When is it OK to say something when you’re being treated unfairly? When is it not OK? Empowering each other may be just what we need to chip away at the problem. Have you thought about what would happen if you confronted someone that was being classist? How much nerve does one need to make that confrontation?

USA has recently formed a committee to address classism on campus. With the help of the folks who have been working with on the CDSJ initiative on campus we may be able to come up with a few ideas but we will be needing help and participation from the membership.

THE NEA AND THE MARCH FOR WOMEN’S LIVES

The National Education Association is the 2.7 million member teachers’ union that co-sponsored the pro-choice March for Women’s Lives. This has angered pro-life educator groups like Teachers Saving Children, who say that the NEA should stick to education and stay out of the abortion debates. The NEA statement was, “The NEA supports current law. It believes in freedom of choice — for or against abortion. There should be no government limits.”

EYE ON ROMNEY

Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney has been more visibly busy lately as his profile gains significantly more national attention. Romney has done fund-raising for President Bush and the Republican Governors Association, spent two nights in the White House, is a Republican governor in a state that will soon hold the Democratic national convention while also having a presidential candidate from Massachusetts in John Kerry, is staunch opponent to gay marriages, and has written a book about his leading the 2002 Winter Olympics. He does plan to run for reelection. Speculation continues about whether or not Romney is considering running for US President in 2008.

Governor Romney has appointed Democratic business strategist Ranch Kimball as his new economic development secretary. Kimball has a background in consulting and finance and calls himself a “Romney Democrat”. Kimball is replacing former secretary Robert Pozen (a former Fidelity executive) who resigned in December. Democrats claimed that Romney not filling this position sooner made job losses worse by making it harder to lure companies to MA and keep the ones already here. When he ran for governor, Romney said he was experienced in luring and keeping companies.

The governor claims that MA is struggling financially because the pay rate of municipal workers is too high, and that public employee unions are so strong politically that they have a monopoly over public services. Spokesman for the Boston Teachers Union Stephen Crawford said, “Collective bargaining agreements are just that — agreements between workers and management. If there’s an unexpected shortfall in the income that cities were counting on, it’s due to the failure of the Romney administration to do what it pledged to do during the last campaign: to maintain essential services without severe cuts and no new taxes.” Romney admitted that his idea is still somewhat vague. Northampton Mayor Clare Higgins said that in this competitive market the city has to compete for the best teachers, firefighters, etc. Lt. Gov. Kerry M. Healey said she didn’t know if the Governor knew of any overpaid government workers in Franklin or Hampshire county. Michael McGlynn, Mayor of Medford said that his city workers “don’t get enough credit for all the work they do. We’ve signed contracts with municipal employees in past years with zeros [for raises]. Last year, city employees voted to increase their health insurance payments over the next two years. Nobody is settling their contract, taking their check, and buying an expensive summer home or taking a trip to Europe.” Many cities and towns are dealing with Proposition 2 ½ overrides to pay for state workers, in Northampton an override vote is on May 25. In March, Amherst did vote for the override.
I don’t know how many of you reading this have ever been laid off, but I spent a lot of hours shuffling through unemployment lines when I was a construction worker. Jobs were always temporary and lasted weeks or months, and then I was looking for work again. But being laid off from construction in the winter months wasn’t so bad. It beat spending eight hours outside in sub-zero weather, and it gave me more time to devote to martial arts.

Ultimately, this kind of work was very physically demanding. I was outside in 30 below zero weather, and when I worked in Georgia, the temperature got up to 145 degrees. As I got older, I knew I had to come in from the cold and find something less strenuous. When I considered my options, I remembered that all the people I’d ever talked to about state employment told me that the money was okay, but the benefits were terrific—and you never got laid off. That sounded good to me, and I got a job at UMass. But after I’d been on campus for 15 years and retirement was almost in sight, the office where I’d been working for 10 years was closed due to budget cuts. So much for no layoffs.

Fortunately, the union was there for me and they helped me to bump into another position. I was safe and things were good—but only for another year. I was laid off once more, and this time the cloud didn’t have a silver lining. I used up most of my benefit time to stay on the books so I could find another job on campus. But I found no other job. I began to realize that this was a different kind of “laid off” for me. I wasn’t in construction anymore. This time I was in my fifties and no longer a young guy just waiting for the next building project to come along. The situation was starting to get serious.

Still, my wife was very supportive: “Just take it easy. You’ve been under a lot of stress.” So I took it easy for a month. I signed up for unemployment and was able to register on line every week from home and get a check in the mail. I surfed the net for jobs. I went on interviews on campus, and some of them seemed promising. But another month passed and I got no offers. But, hey, I was taking it easy.

I discovered the wealth of daytime television that I had been missing by going to work every day. Jerry Springer and court TV—Judge Joe, Judge Judy, and others. Life was good. I did a lot of cooking, and I was averaging one job interview a week. It was just a matter of time before I’d be back to work.

But as I approached the third month, I started hitting the wall. It was November and my unemployment checks would only last until February. A lot of time had passed, and now time was running out. Where the hell was this new job? There were more interviews on campus and even a few second interviews—but now I was starting to have a lot of second thoughts. Maybe I should shave off the beard that I’d been growing every winter for the last 30 years. Maybe I should have expressed myself differently in that last interview.

Or maybe I should just be twenty years younger. I began remembering all the horror stories I had heard about guys in their fifties who are laid off from good jobs—for whatever reason. And they never get another decent job again. Ever. They end up working at WalMart. I thought of the WalMart a mile down the street from my house. I took a walk to the liquor store.

The walls started closing in, and I found that I wasn’t getting much done during the day other than a lot of cooking for only two people, and the refrigerator was filled with tons of leftovers. I was eating and drinking too much. I put on twenty pounds, and the holiday season was approaching. This was the toughest time, and what got me through it all was the support of my long-time co-workers, my wife, and our union president, Donna Johnson. Everytime I saw her, she’d say: “Don’t worry, buddy, you’re going to get a job.”

And Donna was right. Just before Christmas, I got a job. But the process took over four months. I have 16 years experience, a wide assortment of skills and abilities, and a degree from UMass. But it still took me over twenty interviews to get back on campus. I can only wonder why, and extend my sincere thanks to all those who helped me, especially my wife—and Reb, Alice, Mary, Donna, and Bob. Hard times make you appreciate the value of friends.
DID YOU KNOW that Massachusetts is the 3rd least affordable state in which to buy a home? According to the most recently census data, the typical Bay State house costs 3.89 times the typical household income. For the nation as a whole, the typical house costs 2.92 as much.

THANKS TO USA

I got a lot of help from the Union, especially from Donna when I got laid off. The Union worked hard to find me a new position. They also gave me hope, when I wasn't feeling very confident. I was only out of work for 1 month. I'm enjoying my new position at the Controllers Office thanks to the Union.

Mary Anne Sarafin

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