No Furloughs; No Pay Cuts

The governor’s plan to furlough state employees’ workdays went down to well-deserved defeat. Plan B, across-the-board pay cuts for all state employees, should join Plan A in the circular file. Any scheme that attempts to solve the state’s accrued budgetary crisis by victimizing state employees will be met with concerted resistance by a broad range of unions and enlightened community groups.

All the unions in the state have joined in a campaign to fight these horrendous creations of the governor. The unions have further expanded Working R.I. We are contributing finances, expertise and legal help. Now that the furlough idea has bitten the dust, the new battle will be the pay reduction plan. That was really the isotope of furlough. We are under contract and any reduction of our pay will be met with immediate action. Over the next weeks and months, this issue will be played out in the Legislature, courts and in the media. As was the case with the furlough proposal, public statements by government officials and accounts in the press were incomplete and inaccurate. We will monitor the situation and report events accurately as they occur.

Negotiations

The current contract between the RIC/AFT and the Board of Governors for Higher Education expires on June 30, 2007. On March 31, a letter will be sent to the BoG initiating the collective bargaining process. Later this semester, in preparation for negotiations, a number of efforts will be undertaken:

- The Program Development Committee, mostly composed of departmental representatives, will survey the faculty regarding priorities for negotiations.
- One or more membership meetings will be held to review negotiations processes, gather additional input and update membership about the status of negotiations.
- A Negotiating Committee will be established. To volunteer, call the RIC/AFT office, ext. 9842.

It is not coincidental that in the months preceding negotiations the state seems to experience budget shortfalls. While we take the current situation seriously, we will not be deterred from pursing a new contract that serves our members well. We anticipate that the BoG representatives will sit at the table in good faith. We have been informed that the RIC administration team will consist of Mark Motte, Ivy Locke, Richard Prull, Earl Simson, James Schweikart and Ann Marie Coleman (BoG).

The Council of Higher Education, which consists of all the unions under the BoG, has been reconvened, to coordinate collective bargaining across all units, as we did in 2004. This group is also part of the coalition of organizations working to defeat the governor’s anti-union budget “solutions.”

Legislation

We have introduced the “Sovereign Immunity” Bill once again. This act would permit suits against the state by state employees and other parties seeking to enforce workers rights, civil rights, patents and copyrights.
We have joined with others to introduce legislation on domestic partners. This act would provide domestic partners with the benefits of the Parental and Family Medical Leave Act.

We have initiated and introduced two complementary bills. The first, entitled “The Faculty and College Excellence Act of 2007,” would require that 75% of all classes at RI’s higher education institutions by 2013 be taught by full-time, tenured or tenure-track faculty. The bill also contains protections for adjunct faculty, such as seniority and priority hiring. The second act, entitled “Public Officers and Employees,” would provide medical and retirement benefits for qualified adjunct faculty employed in the public higher education system. Both acts recognize that the stability and consistency of a college depend upon qualified faculty and that adjunct faculty members’ rights should be protected.

Health Insurance News

We have handled a number of complaints from faculty about co-pays, prescription formulary changes and disposable medical supplies. If your charges go up, you may be experiencing higher medical costs with the same co-pay percent, which is allowable, or unauthorized co-pay increases. To be sure that you are being charged appropriate fees, contact the RIC/AFT office.

A faculty member called to report that if you check the United Health Care web site, www.myuhc.com, you can access your account, review claims and payouts, do a health risk assessment and, check your medications for possible generic drug alternatives. The RIC/AFT member found a $5 co-pay alternative to a $30 prescription, informed the physician, and is saving a cool $300 per year.

Reminder: we have a UHC representative who is responsive to our calls. Please call the RIC/AFT office with any questions, concerns or complaints.

FICA

When the conversion to PeopleSoft took place, the College discovered that it had inadvertently withheld FICA taxes from some faculty and staff. The College immediately refunded the amounts for 2006. All faculty and staff who were affected have received special checks. Rob Bower, President of the PSA@RIC, and I immediately asked about prior years. The College commissioned KPMG, an accounting firm, to determine whether the problem existed in prior years. It did, but under IRS regulations, only 2004 and 2005 can be remedied. All faculty and staff who are eligible for a FICA tax refund have been informed and have been asked to complete the paperwork.

RIC Men’s Basketball

We congratulate the RIC Men’s Basketball Team for its successful season: Little East regular season champions and home court advantage in the LEC playoffs. We encourage faculty and staff to attend this weekend’s games at the Murray Center.

Jason L. Blank, President