Rally for Respect

The next step in the struggle for an equitable contract for all state employees will take place on Wednesday, June 1, 4:30 PM, at the State House. Working RI, a coalition of state employee unions, will hold the “Rally for Respect” on the Smith Street side of the State House. RIC/AFT members are invited to join thousands of other state employees to rally for a just contract with health benefits. Join us at the RIC/AFT banner and demonstrate with your colleagues.

At press time the RIC/AFT was trying to arrange for bus transportation from the College. Watch your RIC email for an announcement of bus service. Should that occur, the first 40 faculty members to reserve space by calling the union office will be bused to the rally, leaving the College around 3:30 PM and returning immediately after the rally concludes. Parking near the State House is expected to be very tight, so Working RI suggests that participants car pool and arrive early – before 4 PM.

Faculty Stands up to Governor

About 90% of faculty members in attendance at undergraduate commencement last Saturday stood in silent demonstration of unity, holding high their “RIC/AFT Solidarity” buttons, when Governor Carcieri gave greetings. “We wanted to show our opposition to the Governor’s failure to negotiate in good faith,” explained Jason Blank. “The challenge was to support the students and their families while showing the Governor how upset the faculty is. We’ve gone more than 1,000 days without any salary increases. We have faculty members taking two jobs to support their families, and wondering whether they can afford to stay. It has become routine for faculty members to pay their own way to professional conferences in order to meet their scholarly obligations, because there is no travel money available; yet tenure and promotion require professional participation. All this is occurring in a time of rising consumer prices and a continuing barrage of cutbacks in public services. Our faculty is hurting – as are all state employees – and they’ve directed the union to act.

“This time around,” Blank continued, “the Governor has approached salary negotiations with a destructive agenda. He went public with his demands that state employees take a net cut in salary combined with benefits, a violation of collective bargaining protocols. He’s attacked us in the press, alleging that public employees are responsible for the state’s fiscal problems. His budget omitted “asset protection” for buildings in the public higher education system, effectively sentencing the system to long-term disrepair. As anyone can see, RIC’s buildings need constant maintenance, as do all structures. The shame of it all is that this Governor is a graduate of the public system, and is now abandoning it. He likes to remind us that Ms. Carcieri is a RIC graduate. Clearly, his policies are to pull up the ladder behind him.

“The ‘Education Governor’ speaks with a forked tongue,” Blank concluded.
Negotiations Update

The RIC/AFT Negotiating Committee met with BoG negotiators on May 11, May 17 and May 24, following a number of “pre-negotiations” meetings. While we cannot report details until an Agreement is reached, the recent sessions were extraordinarily productive. We reached tentative agreements on many topics, including some with monetary implications. As in the past, President Nazarian played an essential role in reaching these agreements. While the remaining issues involve more costs to the state, negotiators on both sides are hopeful that the session scheduled for Friday, June 3, will continue to be productive. “It all depends on the Governor,” commented Jason Blank. “We’re hopeful that the Rally for Respect two days earlier brings him to his senses. I cannot and will not come back to the faculty with an offensive tentative agreement.”

Conversion to United Health

The conversion of health insurance coverage to United Health for state employees has been completed. Already, we have received reports that prescription coverage has been reduced under United. This is a violation of our Contract, and we are aggressively pursuing these errors. If any faculty member experiences ANY decrease of health benefits coverage, you should contact the Union office immediately. We will tolerate no reduction of benefits by United Health.

RIC/AFT Summer Schedule

The Union office is open all summer. Ben Quattrucci, the office manager, is here 7 AM to Noon every week day. Jason Blank will be in the office most days. All voice mail and email messages will be returned within a day. Union committees will meet on an as-needed basis. Should a tentative agreement be reached by the Negotiating Committee, the Executive Committee will meet immediately to review the contract proposal, and the faculty will receive by mail to your homes an announcement of membership meetings, followed by a mail ballot on the TA. Faculty members are advised to inform the union office of address changes.

Labor Institute Dinner

The Institute for Labor Studies and Research 25th Annual Awards Evening and Silver Anniversary Celebration will be held on June 2, 6 PM, at the Westin, in Providence. The keynote speaker will be Ed McElroy, President of the national AFT and former president of the RIFTHP and the RI AFL-CIO. Anyone interested in attending is asked to call the RIC/AFT office, 456-9842.

Jason L. Blank, President