



Representing Wayne State Faculty and Academic Staff

NEWSBRIEFS

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Union Wins Salary Corrections

Pay Below Minimums,
Improper Renewals, Miscalculated Raises:
You Don't Have to Worry About it Because We Do

It's a little bit like the public service workers who maintain the water system: you don't see them when they work below street level, and you probably aren't thinking about them when you stumble into the bathroom each morning and turn on the tap—but without them, the water pressure drops.

It's kind of like that here at Wayne: you may never have had reason to file a grievance or even call the union for assistance, but you have been served just the same.

In fact, the union's staff and officers were on the job even before you arrived, monitoring starting salaries to insure you were paid at or above the minimum specified in the contract. And once you are here, these same people check the monthly payroll records to insure everyone is receiving salary increases at or above the amount stipulated in the collective bargaining agreement.

In the overwhelming majority of cases where we find errors that short-change people's pay, we do not have to file a formal grievance. More often than not, it is a matter of simply notifying the Administration

of the mistake—perhaps caused by clerical error, or by a wayward mid-manager, or by a poorly conceived policy—and having the error corrected. Only when this process breaks down do we file a

grievance that can, if necessary, take the dispute before a neutral arbitrator for a binding decision.

In most cases, the faculty and

academic staff members who benefit from our intervention are unaware of the short-fall in their paychecks until we notify them of the correction.

In one case, a faculty member in the School of Pharmacy was renewed at a salary that was \$11,929 short of the proper amount. As it turns out, this person was not yet a union member or a fair-share fee payer. When we fixed the error and notified the individual, we got back a short email note: "Could you please send me the application to join the union. Thank you for your help, this was very impressive."

Who 'Ya Gonna' Call?

For those of you with questions about salaries, term renewals, or other matters of concern, contact the union (phone, email, and street address are on the masthead) and talk with our Executive Director, Jan Thompson. Jan can usually answer your questions on the spot; if not, she will pass them along—in the strictest confidence—to the relevant members of the union's Executive Board. Among the issues we routinely address:

Pay Below Minimums

We check the monthly bargaining-unit report which we receive from the Administration to identify people who were hired at below-minimum salaries. This situation was especially prevalent in Athletics this year and resulted in some individuals having their salaries increased by as much as \$2,510. Minimum salaries are stipulated in the collective bargaining agreement under Article XII (page 23 in the contract book), and for faculty range between \$26,463 for a 9-month lecturer and \$48,696 for a 12-month professor; for academic staff, minimum salaries range between \$24,740 for a 9-month employee at Grade 1 and \$43,485 for a 12-month employee at Grade 5.

Improper Renewals

In checking over the salary distribution information provided by the Provost's office, we found some people whose salaries had actually been decreased. When we asked about these situations, there were often logical explanations such as the loss of a temporary administrative attachment, or a change from a 12-month to a 9-month position. But we also discovered some substantial errors. In one case, a faculty member in the School of Pharmacy was renewed at a salary that was \$11,929 short of the proper amount. As it turns out, this person was not yet a union member or a fair-share fee payer. When we fixed the error and notified the individual, we got back a short email note: "Could you please send me the application to

join the union. Thank you for your help, this was very impressive." This was not the only such case where we helped non-members, nor was it the only case where the person we helped decided it was time to join

Miscalculated Raises

It also became evident in checking the salary distribution information that the recent 2% across-the-board (ATB) salary increase called for in the contract was not being calculated accurately or fairly for people on fractional-time appointments. In this case, the Administration policy was to first calculate the salary at its full-time equivalent and then pro-rate the increase by the relevant fractional-time—the problem being that the ATB increase only applies up to a "cap" of \$97,920 (for 12 month employees), and this "cap" was improperly applied to fractional employees whose "full-time equivalent" salary was above the cap, but whose *actual* salary was well below it. This mistake is now being corrected retroactively for the 31 people affected, with the amounts involved ranging from \$100 to \$362.

Some of the amounts involved in the above cases are substantial; some are minor. But even when there are no problems with your pay, it's good to know there is someone working to keep that "tap water" running the way it's supposed to.

State Budgets: Bush Policies Will Devastate Local Programs

AFT On Campus

The Bush administration's overall strategy to permanently reduce the role of the federal government is likely to worsen the budget crises for states even if the economy begins to recover, say fiscal policy experts.

A variety of speakers delivered the bad news to public employee unions and other state budget experts gathered in Washington, D.C., for a conference on funding state services, which was sponsored by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP).

Despite recent declines in the jobless rate, the much-touted economic rebound will not fill the gaps in state funding, they warned. With federal aid accounting for more than 27 percent of most states' general funds, the Bush administration's tax cuts and other cuts to discretionary programs—particularly human services—will shift more responsibility for services and programs to the states. CBPP estimates that policies enacted under the Bush administration will cost states \$185 billion between 2002 and 2005.

Bob Greenstein, CBPP founder and executive director, referred to the strategy as "putting new architecture in place to shrink the federal government's role." Even as the current economic downturn ends, the federal deficit will reach \$5 trillion (not including interest) over the coming decade if the U.S. continues its current policy, he said.

Further, if new tax cuts are enacted or if the existing Bush tax cuts set to expire over the next eight years are made permanent, Greenstein added, the federal deficit will stack up even higher.

The deficit's toll on state budgets will, in turn, put more pressure on state aid to localities, which accounts for more than 35 percent of local general revenues. State revenues to cities were cut by approximately \$2.3 billion for fiscal year 2004, a 9.2 percent decrease from 2003, noted CBPP executive director Iris Lav.

Creating a permanent reduction in federal spending is just one part of the Bush administration's larger agenda, said John Podesta, former chief of staff for President Clinton and current president and chief executive officer of the Center for American Progress, a Washington, D.C.-based nonpartisan research and educational institute.

"The tax cuts have been skewed to the wealthiest among us: for 60 percent of the population, the most recent tax cut distributes less than \$100 per year. Those Americans with incomes over \$1 million a year (about the wealthiest 1 percent of us) will receive more than \$20,000 a year over the next four years."

Other Bush administration priorities include eliminating taxation on investment income beyond capital gains and dividends, and restructuring entitlement programs such as Social Security and Medicare.

The tax-free savings and retirement vehicles that will be part of President Bush's fiscal 2005 budget proposal will chip away at state and federal tax receipts by providing tax shelters that would predominantly benefit wealthier individuals who have the disposable income to save. Moreover, such programs would "move the tax base to wage workers," Podesta noted.

This shift in the tax burden has not been all that effective in stimulating the economy. In part this is because the tax cuts have been skewed to the wealthiest among us: for 60 percent of the population, the most recent tax cut distributes less than \$100 per year. Those Americans with incomes over \$1 million a year (about the wealthiest 1 percent of us) will receive more than \$20,000 a year over the next four years. Because those with higher incomes are likely to already have what they need, they put a smaller percentage of new money into circulation.

That is why some economists have argued for a tax cut geared toward working families who do have unmet needs.

Academic Unions & Administrators Form Coalition to Fight Further Cuts

At a February 3 news conference, representatives of the Michigan Federation of Teachers (MFT) and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) joined with the Presidents' Council of State Universities and eight other organizations to lobby against further drastic cuts in state support for K-16 education.

Michael Boulus, executive director of the Presidents Council, drew particular attention to the cuts in higher education. "We are calling upon our state leadership to end the dramatic disinvestments in higher education, which must happen if our universities are to remain accessible and to continue serving as conduits for a skilled workforce, job creation, and company start-ups."

State support to Michigan's 15 public universities has already been cut by \$240 million in the last two years, amounting to a 15% reduction. Governor Granholm's Executive Order of last December calls for cuts of 5% to higher education, but promised that 3% of the cut will be restored to universities and community colleges if they do not increase tuition above the rate of inflation (which is 1.7%).

Unfortunately, this may not be the end of the drastic downsizing in public spending for social programs at all levels of government. Preliminary estimates indicate that the fiscal 2004 – 2005 Michigan budget will be in deficit by approximately \$1 billion, requiring additional cuts if no new revenues are available.

There are several forces driving this crisis, including the sharp decline in tax revenues caused by the cyclical downturn in the economy, and the long-term loss of jobs as corporations move manufacturing and professional work "off-shore" to low-wage economies. Tax cuts have further eroded the state government's finances.

Especially ominous for the long-term health of our state and our higher education system are the federal policies that starve local governments and force dramatic cutbacks in social spending. The Bush Administration has made no secret of its intent to continue cutting taxes for the wealthiest Americans, with corresponding reductions in social spending and aid to state and local governments. (See accompanying article on State Budgets.)

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