



Representing Wayne State Faculty and Academic Staff

NEWSBRIEFS

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Wayne First, Not Prisons

AAUP-AFT Kicks Off Political Mobilization This Fall

By Steve Babson, Information Coordinator

In response to the continuing state budget crisis and cuts in support for Wayne State, the union is mobilizing an urgent campaign to change state budget priorities. We will join a widening coalition of groups calling for an increase in state support for education and healthcare, funded by cuts in the state's bloated prison system and tax reforms that spread the burden more equitably.

Michigan now spends more on prisons (\$1.94 billion) than it does on the state's 15 public universities (\$1.78 billion). Under misguided sentencing and parole policies implemented by previous Governor John Engler, the number of prisoners in our state system—the fifth largest in the nation—has quadrupled since 1981. (See the chart on page 2.)

The Department of Corrections has continued to grow over the last five years, while state support for Wayne State has plummeted from \$250 million to \$197 million. These catastrophic cuts have rippled through the university, forcing tuition upwards—at least a 13% raise for this year—and pitting program against program in a struggle for scarce funding.

Academic Political Action

The AAUP-AFT's Political Action Committee (PAC) is preparing a campaign to lobby the legislature and support candidates who recognize the need to educate our citizens and provide affordable healthcare for all.

Public safety is part of the equation, but prisons should be the last resort, not the first priority, for protecting the community. Cutting social services and education to pay for still more prison beds only contributes to the long-term causes of crime: poverty, hopelessness, and the violence that accompanies these social ills.

Changing the state's budget priorities, however, will take more than well-reasoned position papers. It will require volunteers willing to work for change, and it will take money to support candidates who agree with our priorities.

State law stipulates that dues money can be spent on political education, lobbying, and candidate endorsements aimed at the membership, but cannot be spent on candidate endorsements aimed at the general public or on contributions to a candidate's campaign. For these initiatives, we need to ask our members for voluntary contributions.

Call for Volunteers

The union will urge our members to support the campaign through this newsletter, through email reminders, and through our new (later this fall) web site. But the best way to enlist support is to ask for it in person.

During the month of October, we need volunteers to visit co-workers and make a soft-sell pitch for supporting our union's PAC. We expect

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some people will decline for personal and political reasons, and that's understandable. But we are confident that many others will contribute whatever they can afford (see page 3 for details).

To give volunteers a heads-up on the political issues involved and how to communicate them, we are scheduling a lunch-hour orientation for noon on September 27. Contact the union office to confirm the location and your participation.

The money we raise, it should be stressed, will only be used here in Michigan to raise public awareness of the issues and to support candidates for state office who recognize two essential facts:

First, that WSU plays a vital but little-understood role as the number one source of Michigan's doctors, nurses, lawyers, and other professionals;

Second, that Wayne's 30,000 students and 7,000 employees are voting constituents across southeast Michigan. Too often, legislators in outlying districts indulge their prejudice against Detroit and dismiss WSU as an inner-city school. Wayne is, indeed, central to Detroit. But our students and employees are also voters in every community in southeast Michigan.

Bang for the Buck

Many members will ask why they should contribute to our PAC instead of making their own personal contribution to candidates of their choice. It is not an either/or decision, of course, but there are important reasons why a PAC contribution gives more "bang for the buck." Individual donations disappear into a larger pool and leave no significant marker of why that individual is supporting a particular candidate. Our PAC dollars, in contrast, go into the American Federation of Teacher's statewide fund and are delivered to candidates with a clear message of who we are—as a group—and who that candidate needs to listen to. After the election, we can send delegations to lobby endorsed candidates and remind them of our shared agenda.

This is not something that Wayne State's administrators can do with nearly the same effectiveness. If nothing else, they simply don't have the numbers or the capacity to mobilize that we do.

We also have a political agenda that includes the nomination and election of candidates to the Board of Governors (BOG). It makes a great deal of difference to our working conditions and professional careers that we have members of the BOG who respond to the needs of academic employees and who support collective bargaining.

An Agenda for the Future

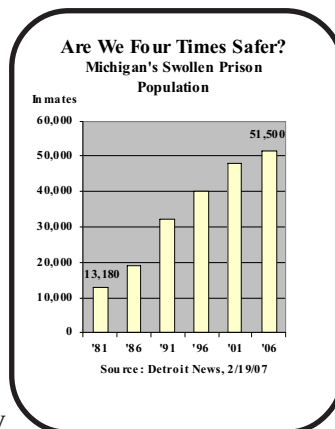
Our PAC dollars will go to candidates who support us on four basic issues:

1) Schools First, Not Prisons

We have a crime rate in Michigan that is comparable with other midwestern states, but we have 22% more inmates as a percent of population than Ohio (the second highest midwestern state) and 172% more than Minnesota.

Most of the difference with our midwestern neighbors is driven by harsh sentencing guidelines for non-violent crimes, and politically driven parole policies. In 1992, then Governor Engler replaced a civil service board with political appointees who deny parole out of political expediency. A third of our inmates are non-violent offenders and over a third of all inmates have served time beyond their minimum sentences.

The blundering that led to the improper release in 2006 of Patrick Selepak, who then murdered three people before his recapture, has inspired demagogues like L. Brooks Patterson to urge Michiganders to "buy Uzis" and Pit Bulls if there is any reform of sentencing or parole standards. In fact, the administrative incompetence that led to Selepak's unwarranted release has no bearing on the fact that thousands of non-violent offenders with records of good behavior should be released to well-supervised paroles. **con't on page 3**



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We support Governor Granholm's proposed revision of sentencing guidelines and we also support House Bill 4548, sponsored by Representative Paul Condino, that would reform parole policies. Both measures would free up millions of dollars for higher education, K-12, student financial aid, and healthcare. *For details, go to the web site of the Citizens Alliance on Prisons and Public Spending, www.capps-mi.org/*

2) Health Care for All

Many of Michigan's non-insured end up at the Detroit Medical Center, placing a severe financial burden on hospitals affiliated with our School of Medicine. Universal health care would spread the cost of health care far more equitably, and money saved from prison reform would in the meantime help fund health care for the poor.

3) Stem Cell Research

The current state restrictions on embryonic stem cell research prevent WSU's researchers from exploring life-saving technologies. We therefore support House Bills 4616, 4617, and 4618 that would remove unwarranted restrictions and bring Michigan into line with the prevailing practice in many other states.

4) Fair Taxation

Michigan's current income tax levies the same rate, 3.9%, on all taxpayers, regardless of ability to pay. Combined with local property taxes that fall hardest on lower income families, the result is a tax system in which middle-class families pay more than 10% of their income in state and local taxes, while upper-income families pay less than 7%.

A graduated income tax that added a new top rate of 7% on married couples earning over \$200,000 (\$100,000 on single taxpayers) would raise \$1 billion to fund education and Medicaid and help close the deficit. That would be comparable to Ohio's top tax bracket and lower than rates in California (9.3%), Iowa (8.98%) and Minnesota (7.85%).

We will have to revise the state constitution to permit such a "progressive" tax, so in the meantime we support a return to the old single rate of 4.6%. To lessen the burden on lower-income taxpayers, we support tax credits of \$140 for individuals and \$280 for couples who earn less than \$30,000 or \$60,000 respectively.

Editor's Note: Thanks to Mike McIntyre, Adrienne Aluzzo and Scott Schramm for their contributions to this article.

~Cut here~

Lets send more people to college, and fewer to jail

Help the AAUP-AFT persuade Lansing to
shrink our bloated prison system,
shift spending priorities to education and healthcare, and
support Wayne State

I can help:

___ Contribution: ___ \$5 ___ \$20 ___ \$40 ___ \$60 ___ Other: _____

___ Volunteer: ___ Talk to co-workers about the issues and urge their support
 ___ Join a delegation to lobby state legislators on behalf of Wayne
 ___ Join the AAUP-AFT PAC Committee

Name: _____ Department/School: _____ Email: _____

Home Address: _____ City _____ Zip _____

Make checks payable to "AFT Michigan PAC" and mail to AAUP-AFT, Wayne State University, 5057 Woodward Ave., Suite 3301, Detroit, MI 48202-4050. Contributions are not deductible for federal income tax purposes.

Job Security and Academic Governance in the Current Budget Crisis

Cuts in state support for Wayne State have led to cuts in program support across the university, up to and including the elimination of entire programs. We are dismayed by the lack of transparency in many of these hurried budget decisions.

Under the collective bargaining agreement, administrators are only obligated to consult with faculty and academic staff when elimination of a program leads to personnel reductions (Article X). Such program eliminations are subject to whatever academic governance procedures are relevant as specified in unit bylaws and the statutes of the Board of Governors.

These bylaws establish minimum standards of academic governance. They do not justify a failure to consult with those faculty and academic staff whose programs are slated for elimination. As a matter of collegiality, this failure is regrettable.

The union can take legal action against such administrative decisions only when they violate the

bylaws of the affected college or have a bearing on the collective bargaining agreement. Job security is one such issue, and in this regard, we have made a vigorous and successful effort to win the written—and legally binding—assurance of the Administration that there will be no layoffs of faculty or academic staff as a result of program eliminations.

It is worth noting that the Academic Senate's Policy Committee has gone on record supporting the position of Prof. Mike McIntyre, the Policy Committee's representative on the Board of Governor's Budget Committee, opposing the budget assumptions that underlie the Administration's current program reductions and eliminations.

We will report on the budget debate as it unfolds. In the meantime, members with questions or concerns should not hesitate to call our office:
(313) 577-1750

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