

February 2012

Legislative updates

John Miller

Richard Wandling

Ellie Sullivan

UPI Talk

Illinois 2012 Legislative Update

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As we move into a new legislative session, I cannot help but think of the movie *Groundhog Day*. Based on numerous discussions, I believe we are in for almost a repeat of last year. So, we are geared up for another attack on our pensions, attempts to eliminate the 50% tuition waiver, cuts in the budget, and no solution to the downstate HMO problem. I wish that I had something more positive for you, but in an election year, there seems to be more political posturing than dedication to solving the problems. Gratefully, there are some notable exceptions such as Representative Roger Eddy, Representative Chapin Rose, and Senator John Sullivan, among a handful

of others, but the challenges are great. I am not saying that the house is on fire, but we will need our collective strength to protect, again, public education and our own profession.

On the pension front, the conversation still seems to be driven by cuts in benefits rather than identifying revenue sources to pay the state's past failures to fully fund the pensions. There seems to be serious discussion surrounding proposals about forcing universities and school districts to pay some of the cost for their employees' pensions. In essence, this would amount to the state cutting higher education and K-12 schools and putting greater pressure on property taxes and tuition. Apparently, the Civic Committee has created its own political action committee (We Mean Business PAC) to help fund candidates running against those who believe in the Illinois Constitution protection of our pensions. This PAC has raised more than \$250,000 to support candidates who are willing to "reform" Illinois pensions. The We Mean Business PAC is just another attempt to eliminate our pensions. Fortunately, we have representatives and senators such as Representative Eddy, who recognize the importance and fairness of our pensions. In addition,

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We will need our collective strength to protect, again, public education and our own profession.

John Miller

UPI Talk

Editor: Terri Fredrick

Update from CPAL

Rich Wandling

UPI's Committee on Political Action and Legislation (CPAL) completed a busy fall semester at Eastern Illinois University. A highlight of the past semester was the November 8 campus forum on *The Economy: Does Government Have a Role?* Cosponsored with EIU's Faculty Senate, this forum offered a range of campus faculty and staff perspectives on the appropriate relationship between the public and private sectors in an economy with troubling features such as high unemployment, growing income inequality, and the precarious state of the middle class. And as we all know, these problems have not been helped by a political environment that includes open efforts to undermine collective bargaining, perpetuate an unfair and inadequate tax system, and, in general, favor privatization of the public interest. Of course, this environment means that CPAL needs to remain vigilant.

A couple other initiatives merit attention. With the help and guidance of Charles Delman, we have moved our committee's key communications to a WIKI. From meeting agendas and recaps on through document development, this step has been of great benefit to our mission. Probably the most substantive impact has been the WIKI's role in getting committee input during editing of letters-to-the-editor on issues affecting higher education, the public sector, and the quality of life in modern society. The second initiative was an intriguing presentation by Keith Taylor, an EIU graduate and now a doctoral student in the University of Illinois's Community Development program. Keith discussed both his research and extensive experiences relative to cooperative enterprises, noting opportunities that UPI may wish to consider as alternative ways of responding to community needs.



The spring semester promises to be another busy one for CPAL, with major agenda items including follow-up on the fall forum on government and the economy. The policy issues are way too complex and important to do justice to them in one forum. We also will give further thought to the community enterprise approach, along with moving ahead with traditional activities such as directly communicating UPI concerns to area legislators, ensuring that our voice is present in the media, and working with UPI leadership and membership on policy priorities. If you have any suggestions, be sure to pass them on to our members.

CPAL Members:
Jon Coit, History
Charles Delman, Mathematics
Michael Gillespie, Sociology/Anthropology
Barbara Lawrence, Chemistry
Andrew McNitt, Political Science
Dannie Otto, Philosophy
Nora Pat Small, History
Richard Wandling, Political Science
Bailey Young, History
John Allison (ex officio), English

ASP and ACF Luncheons

In preparation for negotiations, EIU-UPI hosted luncheon discussions this month for Academic Support Professionals (ASPs) and Annually Contracted Faculty (ACFs). Members of the EIU-UPI Executive Board and the EIU-UPI Negotiating Team attended both meetings to provide information, gather feedback, and answer questions.

The ASP luncheon, hosted by Shelley James from the Academic Advising Department, was held on Tuesday, January 17. Attendees discussed topics such as minima salaries, changes to the order of application for raises, and two-year contracts. Tim Shonk, the chapter's grievance officer, was on hand to answer questions about the grievance process.

The ACF luncheon, hosted by Janet Carpenter from the Early Childhood, Elementary, and Middle Level Education Department, was held on Wednesday, January 25. Attendees discussed issues such as retention portfolio materials, Performance-Based Increase (PBI) procedures, office space allocation, services provided through the Office of Disability Services, class sizes and compensation for courses taught through Continuing Education, and increasing course and committee demands placed on ACFs in some departments.

Both luncheons were catered by Kathy Rhodes and the students of Pantera. Many thanks for the delicious meal.



Dannie Otto, Philosophy professor, discusses negotiation issues at the ACF luncheon on January 25, 2012.

THREE OF MY FAVORITE TIME SAVERS

- **IFT's Legislative Update and Legislative Tracker.** The Illinois House and Senate got back to business Tuesday, Jan. 10. IFT makes it easy to keep up with what's going on through Legislative Updates, issued each week or as needed. The Tracker allows you to view bills of interest arranged by topics, including Higher Education. Go to www.IFT-AFT.org and click on the "Legislative" button.
- The IBHE (Illinois Board of Higher Education) has a terrific resource in the **Friday Memo**. This excellent weekly newsletter includes stories on higher education. See www.ibhe.org and click on the link, "The Friday Memo" in the right column.
- **AFT Leadernet.** You must be authorized to access free resources including Daily News Clips and the SurveyMaker. I have asked Mary Durkin, mdurkin@upilocal4100.org our Director of Communications, to be the contact person for those who are interested.

Solidarity,
Ellie Sullivan, President
UPI Local 4100

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the coordinated effort of the We are One campaign continues. This campaign is a group of public employee unions and other related groups who are working together to identify reasonable solutions to the state's underfunding of its pensions.

Compounding the pension issues is approximately \$8.5 billion in unpaid state bills. This money is owed to universities, colleges, public schools, hospitals, cities, counties, and private businesses. The state is utilizing these entities as lending organizations and paying a higher cost in interest than if the state bonded the money. Senator Sullivan has been pushing a refinance package that would allow the state to borrow money from financial institutions at a lower interest rate rather than relying on our universities, schools, dentists, doctors, you and me, etc. to be the state's banks. Unfortunately, this bill has not moved very far despite a series of newspaper articles by the Associated Press pointing out the problem. Last year, the state raised income taxes to help address the structural debt, but this was only step one in the solution. The second step, Senator Sullivan's bill, was defeated. As a result, universities continue to face a backlog in bills. As of yet, there is no clear understanding as to how the Governor will attempt to balance the budget, but early indications suggest that most state agencies will see either no increases and/or face significant cuts.

Many university employees rely on the 50% tuition waiver for dependents that is earned after working seven years or more for a state university. As you may recall, there was an attempt last year to eliminate this benefit. Thanks to the many phone calls and emails to legislative offices, we were able to point out the significant hardship that this would cause. Though this bill was defeated in committee, we anticipate another attempt to eliminate this benefit. To prepare for this, we are developing a more aggressive campaign. We need your stories for this effort. How has the tuition waiver helped you

and your family? Did this benefit impact your decision to work at EIU? **If you are willing to share your story, please contact me.** As the legislative session comes into greater focus, we will once again be calling on you to call, email, and write to your legislators.

Finally, health care remains a major concern. Representative Rose has been incredibly supportive of protecting our access to an HMO and has been a strong ally in Springfield on this issue, but at the end of this fiscal year (June 30, 2012), the contracts with Health Alliance and Health Link will end. At this time, we are not optimistic that the contracts will be extended; like many others, we are hopeful for the results of a legal challenges brought by Health Alliance and others. Additionally, we have pushed, and will continue to push, this issue with the Governor and Department of Health and Human Services. I suspect that come March and April, we will again be calling on our collective strength to preserve common sense.

During the last Session, the odds were against us, but we pulled together, worked the phones and email, talked and worked with our legislators, and changed the tide. This is what gives me hope. Yes, we will face setbacks and disappointments, but I know that if we continue to work together, we will overcome these challenges.

UPI Elections are approaching!

We'll be electing new officers at the Local and Chapter levels.

Two dates to remember:

February 17 is the deadline for fair share members to join UPI in order to vote in the 2012 elections.

After March 30: Watch for your ballot in your home mailbox. If you don't receive a ballot, contact EIU-UPI president John Allison (jballison@eiu.edu) immediately.

Roc's Socials

March 02
April 06

4:30-6:00 pm

Roc's Blackfront
in the square