



Your Union Newsletter

JANUARY - FEBRUARY, 2015

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From the District – District 5

Submitted by Dave Rasmussen

The UWM Classified Staff Council held their first All-Classified Staff Day on October 30, 2014. This was billed as an opportunity for staff to learn what "governance rights" meant for classified staff in general and to gather together as a collective to be able to network and share in a manner we don't generally have opportunity to do.

Chancellor Mark Mone and Stan Yasitis, Chair of the Classified Staff Advisory Committee (CSAC, <http://uwm.edu/secu/classified/>) welcomed us followed by keynote national speaker, Patricia Clayton, a host for radio and television interview shows for ten years with an extensive background in business and education. Workshops, lunch, door prizes and a presentation by Vice Chancellor Robin Van Harpen rounded out the day.

Part of the event invitation sent to all Classified Staff read, "Since this is a regular work day, and WE keep UWM working, we have to be conscious of UWM's operational needs, so check with your supervisor now about attending. This event is supported and sponsored at the highest UWM levels."

Upon arrival I noticed very few of my IT brethren in attendance - instead overwhelmingly service workers, people who worked outside first shift, grounds crews, etc. Pat Clausen's keynote "Powerful Perspectives = Better Results" was described as taking charge of our thoughts and words to shift our experiences to become creators instead of reactors - choosing words wisely for better results. Three workshop tracks followed included a continuation of Pat's talk – "The Best Motivation Comes from Within" (engagement in the workplace), Title IX at UWM (Federal gender discrimination law) and "'Tis a Gift to be Simple" (building your own brand - attitude, appreciation and service). The program ended with Q&A with Pat and Stan wrapped up by door prizes and evaluations.

The UWM Campus administration has been inclusive with the classified staff in shared governance structure of the university since Act 10. We have to thank them and our brother Stan Yasitis, Chair, and the rest of the Classified Staff Advisory Committee for their collective work for this event.

GEF1 Employee Brown Bag Council

Submitted by Sue Handrich-Herr

The GEF-1 All Union Building Meeting has had a makeover for the new year. For the first six months of 2015 we will be having an educational series of Brown Bag sessions. We have chosen a specific topic for each meeting that will be presented by a speaker between 12:00-12:30. Employees from all State Employee Unions, whether currently members or not, and those from other buildings, are welcome to attend. All are welcome to attend the entire meeting, which starts at 11:45, or come just for the speaker at noon.

The first brown bag session was held January 27, 2015 and was very informational. The speaker, Susan McMurray, a lobbyist for AFSCME, discussed changes proposed for state employees in the upcoming budget, and other changes they anticipate and are watchful for. There were a few new faces, and hopefully as word gets out, we'll see several more.

The next session, Civil Service Rights, to be held February 24, 2015, is a must see for all employees formerly under union contract. We will cover the rights we still have under Civil Service Statute.

All sessions are held in the GEF-1 building, 201 E. Washington Ave., Madison, WI 53203, in room H306. The meeting begins at 11:45, and the Brown Bag session begins at 12:00 noon. The meeting is held the last Tuesday of every month, with no meeting in December.

Future sessions:

- February 24, 2015; Civil Service Rights
- March 31, 2015; Your Personnel File
- April 28, 2015; Discrimination and Harassment
- May 26, 2015; FMLA (Family Medical Leave Act)
- June 30, 2015; Reasonable Accommodations

If these sessions appear to be well-received, we will schedule Brown Bag sessions for the remainder of 2015, and possibly consider holding them at alternate locations as well.

We hope to see you there. Please share this information with your friends and coworkers that may be interested in attending as well.

National Adjunct Walkout Day to Hit UW

Submitted by Barb Smith

Unions at UW-Madison and elsewhere are organizing events to bring attention to job insecurity and contingent labor in higher education on February 25, dubbed "National Adjunct Walkout Day." Look for noontime informational pickets, and an evening Teach-In at UW-Madison. AFT-Wisconsin endorsed actions for Feb. 25 at their statewide federation convention in Green Bay in November, and other UW campuses in the state may take part as well. A new urgency is felt at press time, in light of the dramatic attacks on the UW budget anticipated in the state budget to be unveiled in the first week of February.

The goal of the events of Feb. 25 is to bring attention to the Adjunct Professors, Lecturers and Instructors who receive relatively low pay, little institutional support, and whose poor working conditions impact student success. Adjuncts

usually have PhDs, frequently do not receive benefits, work on one year contracts, and make up the majority of new hires in most higher education settings. Most students do not know which of their teachers are Adjuncts versus tenure track faculty.

As part of National Adjunct Walkout Day, UW-Madison unions will also be highlighting the plight of “contingent” workers which include the many temps, Limited Term Employees (LTEs) and Academic Staff members who work on one year contracts and soft money and who are at risk of being non-renewed with no Civil Service protections in case of layoff. In the last week of January, UW officials announced layoffs at UW are imminent, greatly expanding the sense of contingency of all workers at the institution. Outsourced custodial jobs at UW-Superior are the latest high profile layoffs at UW, stoking fears of large scale replacement of public workers on campus with low wage private workers. All categories of workers are united around their job security concerns at this time.

An injury to one is an injury to all, so plan to join the National Adjunct Walkout Day informational picket at lunchtime on Feb. 25, and stay after work for the Teach-In if you are in the UW-Madison campus area.

Volunteer Opportunity

Submitted by Sue Handrich-Herr

WPEC is seeking a volunteer to chair the WPEC Communications Committee. The current chair’s term ends in April. The duties of the chair include scheduling and facilitating the committee’s meetings, currently held one Saturday every other month. The chair creates the agenda, records the minutes, and coordinates development and distribution of the bimonthly newsletter.

If you enjoy writing, this opportunity is for you. The term for the position is two years. The existing chair intends to remain on the committee as a contributor. So you won’t be on your own.

If you are interested, please email WPEC-communication@aft-wisconsin.org to express your interest.

Proposed Changes to State Agencies

Submitted by Sue Handrich-Herr

Some State agencies may be in for some pretty major changes with the Governor’s new biennium budget. The budget, to be presented to the State Legislature February 3, 2015, will still be subject to changes made by the Legislature. But some of the details that have leaked out could mean some major changes for state employees in those agencies and their customers.

Top of the list is a proposed \$300 million cut to the UW System over the next 2 years. That amounts to about a 13% reduction of State funding that the UW System would receive. UW Officials warn that the cuts could lead to layoffs and cuts to student services. The plan also includes a 2 year tuition freeze, preventing the UW System from recouping the cuts from students. And it turns the entire system into a public authority, exempting it from many of the rules required for State agencies. The implications of this on staff are yet to be determined. Definitely something that will be watched closely. When asked about the cuts to the UW System, Walker responded, "I think much like we say after Act 10 for those who saw that initially as a budget reduction, it actually ended up providing great benefit not only to the taxpayers of the state, but ultimately to the people who relied on local government, as well as the state and the same will be true at the UW."

Included in the budget are proposals for two mergers of State agencies. The first would be the merger of Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Association (WHEDA) and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), which was created in Walker’s first budget and has been wrought with controversy since its creation. Proposed

to take effect January 6, 2016, Walker expressed to staff at both agencies that he envisions the agency to be overseen by a future board with no elected officials, only private sector appointees that he appoints.

The second merger would be the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) and Department of Financial Institutions (DFI). If implemented, it will be the second shake up for DSPS staff in 4 years. DSPS was created in Walker's first budget by the consolidation of the former Department of Regulation and Licensing and portions of the former Department of Commerce that were spun off in the creation of the WEDC.

Also proposed is the removal of the Worker's Compensation program from Department of Workforce Development (DWD) and the split of its functions and staff between the Department of Administration (DOA) and the Office of the Commissioner of Insurance (OCI). It must be pointed out that the Worker's Compensation program is a self-funded program. It is funded entirely by worker's compensation insurers and self-insured employer's yearly fees. No taxpayer money goes into the program. So any claims that this change is necessary to save taxpayers money are disingenuous. That being said, the current program run by DWD is a model for the nation. It provides a one-stop-shop for claimants, employers, and insurers. And in a 2013 study by the nonpartisan Worker's Compensation Research Institute, that compared the 16 states that handle 60% of all worker injury claims in the country, Wisconsin's costs were among the lowest. Despite medical costs in Wisconsin being higher than many other states, workers are back on the job faster. The median cost of claims for Wisconsin was \$7,118 compared to the median of all study states of \$8,973. What the split will accomplish is making it more difficult for workers to navigate the claim process, thereby potentially reducing the successful claims. Even so, there is still no savings to taxpayers in claim reduction. What is unclear is what may happen to the estimated \$50 million Uninsured Employers Fund (UEF). This fund, created by statute is reserved for payment of legitimate worker's compensation claims for employees who are injured while working for illegally uninsured employers. The UEF is funded solely by penalties assessed to employers for operating without the required insurance.

Many State employees will be listening with bated breath over the next few weeks as the Legislature dissects the plans proposed in the Walker budget. Hopefully they will take a prudent look at the proposed changes to decide if they are the best direction for Wisconsin citizens, and not merely a scheme to advance the Governor's "small government" image.

Mad Money: Outsourcing State Jobs

Submitted by Barb Smith

Outsourcing leads to layoffs of state employees, threatens the job security of those who remain, and often delivers substandard services to the public. There is far too little oversight of outsourcing. Private companies often fleece our public agencies with no consequences. Tax money is too often wasted on outsourcing. Public employee unions and WPEC have long campaigned against outsourcing our agencies' work to private companies.

Below is a link to one journalist's recent story on this subject. But first, a pop quiz:

- 1) What state agency expense has risen by 56% in four years?
- 2) When it looks, how often does the state find it is cheaper to do work in-house?
- 3) Is the UW required to estimate whether outsourcing is cheaper before doing it?
- 4) When outsourced projects are complete, do agencies compare estimated vs. actual costs?

<http://wisconsinwatch.org/2015/01/state-agency-spending-on-outside-service-contracts-continues-to-rise/>

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Answers to Pop Quiz:

1) Outsourcing. 2) Over half the time. 3) No. 4) No.

WPEC and #BlackLivesMatter

Submitted by Barb Smith

1. Public Employee Unions Were Always Joined to Civil Rights Struggle

WPEC and the new Black Lives Matter movement have a lot in common, and we should work together.

#BlackLivesMatter refers to the many actions and groups that sprang up across our country in response to the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and Eric Garner in Staten Island, NY – both at the hands of the police. Led by young African-Americans, #BlackLivesMatter has become a movement with demands ranging from reforming policing and incarceration policies to fighting poverty. In Wisconsin with the nation's worst racial disparities in the criminal justice system, #BlackLivesMatter has been active as well.

The fate of public workers and African-American workers are bound together, and we must advance together. Recently, Twin Cities author Joe Burns wrote a book called Strike Back! about the birth of public employee unions in the 1960s and 70s. Former WPEC “Steward of the Year” Mike Sadlier, who lived through some of this history, declared this book a “great read” recently. The book describes how the ferment of civil rights struggles was crucial for winning labor struggles in this period.

Before the 1960s, many Americans thought public workers should not be allowed to have unions and fully supported laws against striking. That all changed through the activity of workers. The garbage workers strike in Memphis in 1968, the hospital workers strike in Charleston a few years later, a teachers strike in Chicago, and other major strikes won public workers much-needed job improvements and transformed the idea of public sector unions into an accepted feature of the landscape.

Fast forward to today's austerity regime and attacks on public workers. National studies indicate that these attacks hit African-American communities particularly hard, partly because African-Americans have a foothold as workers in public agencies. For example in Wisconsin state agencies and the UW, African-Americans are 5.7% of the classified staff vs. 4.5% of the labor force. Protecting public sector employment is good for all, including the many African-Americans doing public service in our state agencies in WI and at UW.

2. Ballooning Prison Budgets Squeeze Other Public Services

The #BlackLivesMatter movement has highlighted corrections policies, something that should concern every public sector unionist as well. One of the biggest long term changes in state government in Wisconsin has been a shift toward spending more on corrections, and less on other services. In 1990, Wisconsin's prison population was 7,000 but today it is over 22,000. Between 1990 and 2012, the amount spent on prisons in Wisconsin grew by 620%, not accounting for inflation. In 1990, WI prison spending was only one quarter what was allocated to UW. Yet in a story that broke in January 2015, it was revealed that in 2011 for the first time, the state of Wisconsin budgeted more for prisons than for the UW system.

Our state leaders have put us in a straightjacket by adopting an austerity ideology that state government should not increase no matter what. Worse, our leaders' decision to shift money to corrections has starved most other public services. We all see this every day in the pinched budgets and hiring for the programs our agencies offer to an increasing, and increasingly needy, population. Most state agencies have fewer workers. We know that Wisconsin's refusal to hire sufficient Revenue Agents, for example, has deprived our state of corporate tax revenue that goes uncollected. Over the decade FY2002-2012, 1500 positions in administrative support were eliminated from our state agencies and UW. Yet Correctional Officers and Sergeants are the two most populous job classifications in state service, and there are over 1,000 Probation and Parole Agents. Cuts to programs for education, health, mental health, welfare,

and employment have become more obvious since the 2008 economic downturn, and feed poverty and despair. Moreover, WPEC members are well qualified to rejuvenate these programs given the chance.

One shocking fact that has come to light because of #BlackLivesMatter is that there is no national database of police shootings. Collecting and maintaining such statistics is the type of work we public employees are well equipped to do. Our public priorities must shift to fund this and many other forms of work to advance our state and improve the lives of people here. Our public employee unions must join the #BlackLivesMatter movement for our own self-interest as well as our concern for the whole community.

3. An Economy for Whom?

As public workers and union members, our main concern is to build prosperity for our families, especially after the attacks of Act 10. We need an economy that can build true wealth and security for us, and contribute reasonable taxes to provide well-funded public services.

Currently, corporate profits soar, but public services shrink. No wonder our agencies are pinched when banks operate with few rules, and two-thirds of Wisconsin's corporations pay no state income tax. There's a connection of our current crisis to the basic building blocks of our economy such as unfair bank rules. New scholarship suggests this is actually an old problem though. Bonds, corporations, and financing mechanisms that birthed today's industries grew out of a slave economy, as described in recent books such as [Empire of Necessity](#) and [The Half Has Never Been Told](#). It is hard to accept this image of a shaky -- and morally criminal -- foundation for the United States and modern Europe's economies. Furthermore, some elements of this foundation continue to operate actively today.

The Black Lives Matter movement is bringing attention to these uncomfortable facts. The urgency embodied in the name of this movement is not hyperbole. As shown in the recent book [Ghettoside](#) by Los Angeles Times reporter Jill Leovy, when young black men are murdered in big cities in the U.S, their killers don't get arrested most of the time (only 35% of the time in Chicago for example).

Perhaps the lesson is that we will not find security until we totally reorganize corporations and the rules that undergird our economy, based as they are currently on exploitation of people and the earth. Our unions can be a voice for workers in this transition.

In a short space, I have touched on reasons why WPEC and the #BlackLivesMatter movement should work together. We are both concerned with public spending priorities, quality public services, and fair treatment. We are both social action groups using peaceful non-violent approaches to pressure for change.

Our regional labor council, the South Central Federation of Labor, recently passed a motion in support of #BlackLivesMatter. WPEC should do the same, and join the struggle for a brighter future for all.

Pension Changes Hidden in the Cromnibus Bill

Submitted by Sue Handrich-Herr

Hidden in the Continuing Resolution/omnibus bill (Cromnibus) passed by Congress in December, 2014, as a stealth last-minute amendment, was an important change to pension protections that everyone should know about. Dubbed the Multiemployer Pension Reform Act of 2014 (MPRA), this bill impacts workers and retirees in private sector multiemployer pension plans that are considered to be at risk of being unable to pay 100% of benefits for the next 10-20 years. Multiemployer, or "Taft-Hartley", pension plans are almost exclusively plans administered by private sector unions. The bill applies only to plans that are categorized as a critical risk. Of the approximately 10 million people in multiemployer plans, about 1 million may be affected, or 1 in 10. For 2014 there were 150 funds on the critical list, and another 85 on the endangered list. A full list of the plans can be found at the US Department of Labor website.

<http://www.dol.gov/ebsa/criticalstatusnotices.html>

Prior to this change, if a private sector pension fund, either single employer or multiemployer, became insolvent and unable to pay its annuitants, the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corp. (PBGC) would step in and make payments to the annuitants. For 2015, the maximum payment is \$12,870 for multiemployer annuitants with 30 years of pension credits, unchanged since they were set in 2001. If the PBGC takes over a multiemployer plan it often results in a significant benefit reduction for retirees.

The problem is the PBGC's multiemployer fund itself is in financial trouble. The new law allows multiemployer pension plans that are classified at critical risk to slash existing and future annuity benefits many years in advance of insolvency by as much as 60% in an effort to keep the fund solvent and not to be taken over by the PBGC. The adjusted annuity rates cannot be lower than 110% of the PBGC maximum, or \$14,150 for a worker with 30 years. Benefits may not be cut for annuitants over 80 and those on disability, with smaller cuts for those between 75-79, than for those under 75. Plan trustees have discretion how the cuts are applied. Plans with more than 10,000 participants must allow all participants to vote on the reduction. To block the cuts requires a majority of all participants in the plan, not just a majority of those who vote. Sound familiar? Even if the majority of participants vote against the cuts, the Treasury Department can override the vote and uphold the trustees' decision if it perceives the plan poses a "systemic" risk to the PBGC.

Until this change in law, the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA) ruled that defined benefit plans may change the rate at which you earn future benefits but cannot reduce the amount of benefits you have already accumulated. For example, a plan that accrues benefits at the rate of \$5 a month for years of service through 2013 may be amended to provide that for years of service beginning in 2014 benefits will be credited at the rate of \$4 per month. The amount that you had earned at the point of retirement could never drop below that rate during your retirement. With this change it allows funds classified at critical risk to slash previously earned benefits to existing retirees. Imagine being retired, living on a fixed income, and suddenly being told the pension you were promised at retirement is being slashed by 60%. For many, that would be difficult to manage.

This new change in law does not impact single employer pension funds or public sector pension funds, such as the Wisconsin Retirement System. But what it does do is undermine a 40-year legal precedent that a plan couldn't be amended to retroactively eliminate or reduce a pension benefit that had already accrued. Anyone that is relying on a defined benefit pension, such as ours, should be wary of the precedence this sets.

Public Service Recognition Week – May 3-8th, 2015

Submitted by Jeff Myers, Wisconsin Science Professionals

Celebrated the first full week in May since 1985, *Public Service Recognition Week (PSRW)* - publicservicerecognitionweek.org - is a time set aside to honor the men and women who serve our nation as federal, state, county and local government employees. Throughout the nation, public servants use this occasion to educate others about the work they do and why they have chosen public service careers, as well as the many ways government services make life better for all of us and ensure that our government is the best in the world.

For the past couple of years, AFT-WI and AFL-CIO members have taken time to volunteer in their communities across the state during this week. Once again, Ann McNeary, the United Way Dane County/AFL-CIO labor liaison has offered to help us coordinate and track union member volunteering efforts during this week. A list of some of the opportunities for this year are listed below.

However, for the latest information see the United Way Dane County website at www.unitedwaydanecounty.org/labor-participation

You can also contact: Ann McNeary, AFL-CIO Community Services Liaison, United Way of Dane County, Email: labor@uwdc.org, Phone: 608-246-4355

Activities Currently Planned for 2015 – more opportunities will be listed in the future

National Association of Letter Carriers Food Drive - Saturday, May, 9, 2015– Website:

<http://www.nalc.org/community-service/food-drive>. This national campaign is a great way to volunteer with your local post office.

On Saturday, May, 9, 2015, letter carriers across the nation will be picking up donated food items and giving the donated items to local food pantries. This is the largest single-day collection both locally and nationally.

Often help is needed in unloading and sorting collected donations. At a minimum, consider contributing food items that day - plastic bags of non-perishable items will be picked up that Saturday by your letter carrier. If you are interested, please contact Ann McNeary, and she can connect you with a volunteer opportunity or you might also contact your letter carrier, local post office, or local food pantry to ask how you can help.

Habitat for Humanity – Dane County - Friday, May 8th, 2015

Help with other state public employee union members on a work crew to build a house in Sun Prairie. This is the third year of volunteering with Habitat for this type of project. You will finish the day tired but very satisfied and learn how to perform a house building task too! Must be available for the entire day 8:00 am – 3:30 pm. Contact Jeff Myers at wspresident@wspunion.org or 608.334.1643 to sign up.

Union Begins with “U” – Calendar of Events

Know of any labor friendly events in your community that you would like to share with other members? Please email the details and links to: wpec-communication@aft-wisconsin.org

February 9-11, 2015	Labor & Employment Law, UW School for Workers, Madison
February 24, 2015	Forward \$15: Conversation, Celebration, Change, 8:00-10:00am, Good Shepherd Parish, Madison
March 2, 2015	WI Alliance for Retired Americans Biennial Convention, 8:00-3:00, Concourse Hotel, Madison
March 14, 2015	Executive Council Meeting, 8:30-12:30, AFT-W Building
March 14, 2015	Communication Committee Meeting, 1:00-3:00, AFT-W Building
April 11, 2015	Wisconsin Labor History Society Annual Conference, 9:00-3:00, Madison Labor Temple
April 25, 2015	WPEC 2015 Convention, Dane County United Way office, Madison
May 3-8, 2015	National Public Service Recognition Week

Have an article or story of interest you'd like to see in the newsletter? We welcome submissions. Please review the [Standards and Guidelines](#) to ensure your submitted article meets those guidelines. Submissions can be made via email: wpec-communication@aft-wisconsin.org.