

President's Message

March 17, 2010

Dear APSCUF members,

With the state system's self-imposed deadline for the Retirement Incentive Package (RIP) coming on Friday, March 19th, I thought you would like an update as to where we are and how we got here.

On Jan. 28th, the Board of Governors had a conference call where they approved offering the RIP. The Chancellor called shortly thereafter to tell me we would be negotiating on the RIP. I want to emphasize his use of the word negotiate. As a retirement incentive package is a mandatory subject of bargaining, we began a process to prepare for negotiating. Fortunately, APSCUF held our Legislative Assembly the next weekend in Gettysburg.

At Gettysburg, the APSCUF Executive Council, the Negotiations Committee and the Assembly as a whole all voted to respond to PASSHE's demand to bargain with a counterproposal for a contract extension in conjunction with the retirement incentive. We also hired a negotiator to assist APSCUF at the table. At no time did anyone in leadership suggest that APSCUF ONLY approve the RIP. The reasons for this were fourfold: (1) the system had a large short-term surplus of funds to spend; (2) the system was not agreeing to replace any of the retired faculty (they said they would replace on a case-by-case basis), which we saw would lead to heavier burdens on faculty in terms of class size, advising, committee work and the rest of faculty workload; (3) the system was likely to save tens of millions of dollars from the plan that could be used to BOTH reduce future payroll and benefit a

broader spectrum of members; and (4) we saw the continuity that a contract extension would provide as a way to ensure continued high-quality instruction for our students.

When PASSHE and APSCUF met on Feb. 12th, APSCUF submitted its proposal for a contract extension. PASSHE's immediate reaction, which was a surprise as we had already alerted the Chancellor's office to our intention, was to say that they weren't authorized to negotiate and that they wanted to focus discussions on the details of the RIP alone. It seems incredible that they are not authorized to negotiate when a mandatory subject of bargaining is involved.

We were invited to another meeting on Feb 19th. After our negotiator determined through emails that they were not willing to negotiate, we decided not to attend. We did so on the advice of our negotiator, who saw no reason to talk about their issues if they weren't going to talk about ours. And they have still not agreed to talk about our proposal.

Our proposal should be seen by PASSHE as attractive: it almost exactly matches their own faculty cost projections which they presented to us in a PowerPoint on their projected budget for AY2011/12 & AY2012/13. Our proposal was a 2-year extension of the current contract with steps and 3% across the board for each academic year.

Over the past few weeks, both our negotiator, David O'Leary, and I have talked informally and through emails to the Chancellor and his people. I spoke to them as late as last week and was told that there was no movement on their part.

We are still willing to talk—or the key word, again—negotiate; we have encouraged them to work with us so that we can find a mutually advantageous agreement.

We all understand that the state, and therefore, the system is not flush with money. We understand that this RIP uses cash PASSHE has at hand in the short-term to create a positive financial outcome through its cost-savings. But to have hundreds of faculty retire (the projected number is over 300, including the normal cohort of retirees) without having PASSHE agree to replacement other than on a case-by-case basis seems to ask us to trust them to do the right thing. Doing so will likely damage the quality of our service to our students. We see no reason to sign off on such an agreement without their negotiating something that will benefit everyone – a contract extension that will provide both sides and students with labor peace in what will clearly be troubling budgetary times.

To be frank, we are surprised by PASSHE's seeming unwillingness to discuss these matters with us to this point, and we are still hopeful that we might have fruitful talks that will lead to a mutually beneficial agreement. Know that your APSCUF leadership is ready to meet. In the interim, we will do our best to keep you informed.

