

NORTH HARRIS COUNTY COLLEGE UNITED FACULTY

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THE ADVOCATE

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President's Column

by Alan Hall

In its June meeting the Board of Trustees took action on Dr. Airola's salary and benefits recommendations, approving them in the form submitted. Since the Advocate sustained a focus on the theme "Senior Faculty Should Not Lose Ground" over the past academic year, I was particularly interested in how the Board would respond to the need of faculty at Step 16 to avoid what, under the present structure, would mean less and less take-home pay for the last twenty or thirty years of their careers. The AFT believes that a faculty member facing that prospect would need miraculous powers to remain truly dedicated to teaching and professional development over the long term. Since an increasing number of our faculty are arriving at Step 16 (it will double this year), the College's reputation for outstanding instruction will be increasingly jeopardized until this issue is resolved.

In essence, the Board approved salary increases for non-Step 16 faculty that will range from 4% to 6%; this range includes the step increment. Step 16 faculty in Categories I through III, without the step increment, will see an approximately 2% increase. For Step 16 faculty in Categories IV and V, the Board granted a one-time supplement of \$500 in addition to the 2% increase. The reason for the exclusion of Step 16 faculty in Categories I through III is Dr. Airola's conviction that a faculty member who has not earned a doctorate, or at least achieved ABD status, has not really exhausted his or her options for salary gains.

Though we are far from claiming victory, the AFT doubts that anything would have been done without our efforts to publicize this issue and work with administrators to resolve it. We were grateful when Board Member David Robinson alluded to our campaign in calling upon Dr. Marsee to predict whether Step 16 faculty covering their families with the College's group medical

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insurance will again lose ground in the coming academic year. Dr. Marsee predicted that they will not because the premiums for that insurance will probably remain the same. This is wonderful news, but we should not conflate this bit of good fortune with a solution to the problem.

Dr. Airola has clearly bequeathed the problem to his successor, while providing some temporary relief for a fraction of those losing ground. His argument that those in the lower categories have not topped out may work for academic faculty; I can see his side and also the other side. But what about occ/tech faculty in fields where no doctorates are granted? I foresee this issue as a continued opportunity for AFT leadership on behalf of the faculty. We got a start this year, and I hope that groundwork has been laid for future efforts. We are prepared to see it through.

PSRP News by Greg Mitchell

It is unusual in Texas union politics for the union and non-union factions to see eye to eye on everything. However, we can all applaud the PSRP's recent opportunity to express its views on the attributes that a candidate considered for chancellor should possess. This opportunity came last month in a private meeting with representatives of Paul R. Ray & Company, Inc., the search firm hired by the College to assist in efforts to find a new chancellor.

The PSRP recommended that the new chancellor be someone who would actively recruit students and employees from the multicultural ethnic community. We also indicated the need for someone with administrative experience from a multi-campus college and some administrative experience from a college other than NHCC. The candidate should possess courage, open-mindedness, and a willingness to start new programs or change existing ones to meet the rapidly changing needs of our information/service economy. PSRP held that there should be a track record of concern for employees' rights as codified by the elected Board of Trustees.

Among the Support Staff Councils, only the East Campus Council took any organized stand on the characteristics of the new chancellor, a stand almost identical to that of the PSRP. The Tomball Council offered no input, but there was a special problem related to the South Campus Council's lack of input. Its last president, Marilyn Tanner (a charter PSRP member) resigned from her job a month ago, and Dr. Phillips had not yet appointed a replacement for her. This incident highlights the dubious nature of the process in which a campus president appoints the support staff council. On the East Campus the entire support staff democratically elects the support staff council, including the council president. I believe the East Campus process to be inherently better because more representative.

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On another matter, the defeat that we all suffered in the Magnolia election should alert us to mobilize in the upcoming Conroe action. The voters in Magnolia chose not to come into the NHCC District by a mere 50 votes, but the stakes in the Conroe election will be much higher. When we lose an election like this, we all lose, union and non-union employees alike. We lose the opportunity to expand our district, our tax base, and our recruitment pool. As a politically active organization, the PSRP could have found 50 votes in the town feed store during the 12 hours the polls were open.

I will occasionally use my office of president as a bully pulpit to spur action on our part in cases like the Conroe election. With a campus to offer, we have carrot enough. With committed politically active members, we have the stick. We need to get up early enough to move this mule. There's no need for union and management to be adversarial in a situation like this. This election and more issues to be addressed in future issues of the Advocate will bear out this point more clearly.