

NORTH HARRIS COUNTY COLLEGE UNITED FACULTY

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THE ADVOCATE

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Edited by Steve Davis

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

The AFT has now passed its tenth year of operation. Thanks to a handful of courageous, dedicated souls, the union has grown to quite a respectable size. The more members we have, the more we are able to accomplish.

Many District employees are aware of the union's presence, but unaware of its accomplishments and services. I have also discovered that some support staff members are still unaware that they are eligible for membership. The union represents both faculty and staff. The following list is only part of the union's accomplishments in the last decade. Since 1980, the AFT has achieved these items:

- brought Lt. Governor Bill Hobby and State Representative Wilhelmina Delco to the District to receive awards for their legislative support for public higher education in Texas;

- sponsored the "Thoughts on Teaching" seminars in which faculty recognized for their excellence discussed their teaching methods;

- lobbied the administration and Board on issues of salary, benefits, and working conditions;

- co-sponsored with the North Harris and Kingwood College Faculty Senates seminars on how Board policy applies to job performance and professional behavior;

- been the only faculty organization to be represented consistently at Board of Trustees meetings over the last ten years;

- regularly published the Advocate, which helps keep employees informed on a host of relevant issues.

In the last year or so alone, the union has done the following:

"Education for Democracy — Democracy for Education"

brought Senator Carl Parker, Chair of the Senate Higher Education Committee, to the District to receive an award for his support of higher education. This month, Texas Monthly echoed our choice by naming Senator Parker one of its ten best legislators for the year;

testified before the Senate Higher Education Committee on issues affecting the District;

published a directory of interests and hobbies held by employees for the benefit of people with similar interests;

sponsored a program focusing on health care issues;

helped resolve conflicts for two support staff members, one regarding a work schedule, and the other regarding a conflict over compensation;

represented three faculty and one staff member who were victims of sexual harassment;

advised a support staff member in another case of sexual harassment;

focused District attention on the problems of compensation associated with Step 16.

When times have been tough, the union has been there. We have stood toe to toe in the arena, but we have also been able to negotiate quietly behind the scenes. We have done a lot. With your help, we can do more.

Alan Hall

CONGRATULATIONS

We call the attention of our readers to the current issue of THE PAPER, which has a complimentary article featuring the work of cosmetology instructor, Lana Smith. We are always proud to see AFT members like Lana recognized for the service they provide students and the District. Cosmetology is a high-quality occupational program--one that is especially critical because of its ongoing contact with the community. We congratulate all of those teachers who work so diligently to make it a success.

NETWORKING DIRECTORY

The AFT publishes a networking directory which identifies District employees who have various interests or hobbies so that people with similar interests might have a means of finding out about and contacting each other. If you have not received a copy, or would like to be included in the next edition, please contact John Jackson (443-5625) or Alan Hall (443-5544) at North Harris College.

As this issue of The Advocate goes to the printer on payday, a few observations on benefits and salaries are apropos. Dr. Pickelman and his administrative team are off to a good start as far as certain of these critical issues are concerned. While the District Benefits Committee, chaired last year by Jim Henderson, was disappointed in some ways, the 5% raise for all NHMCCD employees was not a miserly one, especially given the current mess in state finances. This was certainly good news to the souls who have topped out at Step 16. Last year, when the present writer had the misfortune to be in the hot seat as District Benefits Committee chair, faculty members at the first three pay levels of Step 16, received raises that averaged just over 2%, while the rest of us saw our salaries rise an average of 5%. At least this gross injustice was not repeated.

Also welcome is the increase in pay for adjunct instructors. While last year, starting salaries were \$1025 per section for those part-time faculty in the lowest pay category, now those instructors earn \$1200. Other pay categories were increased by the same amount. All of us realize how important the part-time faculty are to the mission of this District. Many of us who now toil on a full-time basis paid our own dues sweating in the vineyards as adjunct instructors. Certainly any movement toward making these salaries at least respectable is appreciated.

At the same time, teachers like myself who teach an overload benefit from this. My own extra (sixth) section this term brings me \$1325 rather than \$1150. That \$1325 translates to \$220.83 additional compensation for six checks, making a notable difference in the level of take-home pay. But I suggest to the Chancellor that one major policy objective in the near future be the total elimination of overload sections. None of us in the AFT disagree with the notion that the first priority for NHMCCD employees should be the service of our constituents. There is little question in my mind that faculty overloads are contrary to this aim. I started this semester with 215 students (some simple arithmetic shows that my supposed class limit of 35 is being ignored). With one-third of the term completed, 208 are still attending--about 7% of the Fall enrollment at Kingwood College. There is somewhere in here a point of diminishing returns. Just to learn the names of so many new students within the first couple of weeks creates enormous pressure. It becomes awfully tough to get to know students and their particular needs, to assign and grade sufficient writing, and to make special efforts in the area of retention with enrollment at this level. Of course, no one forced me to accept an overload section. Financial pressures dictate this course for a large number of our faculty. Overloads thus become financially addictive. As we see with tragic results in other areas of our national life, just saying no isn't always easy. So my advice to the Chancellor is to come through on his promise to raise faculty salaries to such a level that a prohibition on overloads simply can be decreed as part of a package solution to faculty compensation. My sense is that the bulk of faculty teaching overloads on a regular basis would gladly trade such an outcome for the present arrangement.

Finally, there's good news in regard to health insurance premiums. The District's decision to pick up a slated 7% increase for medical coverage along with an increase in the state appropriation for those with dependent coverage brought about an actual reduction in the amount

of money taken out of our checks (at least for those of us who carry spouses and/or children on our coverage). This buys a little breathing space until a more comprehensive fix can be effected.

Early in September, the AFT did a series of programs around the District on the Canadian health care system and the inspiration it provides for health reformers in the United States. Canada since the early 1970's has maintained a system of national health insurance that provides universal coverage for its citizens. Canadians have the revolutionary idea (at least for our country) that access to quality health care is a right for all people and not a privilege dictated by one's leverage in the market place. The Canadian system covers everyone for about two-thirds the per capita cost of health care in the U.S. Canada leads our nation in key indices like life expectancy and infant mortality. Of course, the American system is second to none for those who can afford to pay what physicians and hospitals demand. But with 37 million of our countrymen completely uninsured (the figures are tragically high for blacks and Hispanics), and with even the middle class struggling to keep up with insurance premium increases, the overall excellence of American medicine becomes increasingly moot.

Fortunately, there is a bill currently introduced in Congress that would establish a Canadian-style system here. H.R. 1300, sponsored by Representative Marty Russo of Illinois, would provide universal health coverage through a single-payer (i.e. government) approach. The strength of this proposal is that it gets the private insurance companies out of the health insurance business, thereby simplifying payment procedures and cutting costs. Of course, this bill stands little chance of passage, given the gutlessness of our current political leaders and given the endless greed of special interest groups--the insurance industry and the American Medical Association--that stand in the way. Still, this is an issue that demands our political energy. Any society which purports to be decent and humane cannot tolerate the obvious inequity of the current health care system.

Those interested in working on this issue should contact Jobs With Justice, a coalition of local unions supporting the Russo Bill. Call my friend Judy Graves of the Texas State Employees Union at 797-0177 for information on coming activities. Tell her the AFT sent you.

Steve Davis

HOW ABOUT JOINING AFT?

All faculty and staff can enjoy the benefits of association with other employees committed to making NHMCCD an excellent place to work and teach--and the benefits of strong legal and professional liability protection should you ever need them. Monthly dues rates are \$19.35 for fulltime faculty, \$12.20 for fulltime staff and adjunct faculty, and \$9.10 for part-time staff. Discuss membership with Alan Hall (443-5544, 353-8634), Greg Mitchell (359-1698, 592-1660), or any other of the propagandists and agitators (Cher Brock, Steve Davis, Robert Emerson, Bob Locander, Mel McFadden, Allen Vogt) on the union executive committee.