

UUP leaders stand out at AFT Higher Education Issues Conference

UUP leaders and chapter members were up front and highly visible at the AFT Higher Education Issues conference in Portland, Ore., March 29-April 1. The conference was titled "Solidarity in Action," and that theme resounded through workshops addressing the national conservative movement against the academy, especially emphasizing issues affecting part-time faculty and staff.

UUP President Bill Scheuerman, chair of the AFT Higher Education Program and Policy Council, led a forum of PPC members who fielded questions from the gathering of nearly 400 from around the country. Scheuerman also later delivered the remarks at the Opening Plenary.

In those remarks, Scheuerman summarized the scope of the conference—and the goals of AFT's new Faculty and College Excellence (FACE) campaign—when he told his enthusiastic listeners, "Our aim is nothing less than to achieve full equity in pay and benefits for non-tenured and part-time faculty, while strengthening the ranks of our full-time and tenured faculty."

Other UUPers who led workshops included:



UUP President William Scheuerman urges AFT higher ed leaders to actively support the union's efforts to protect academic freedom and equity for part-time faculty.

UUP VP for Professionals John Marino, who moderated a discussion on outsourcing and job security for professional staff; Ora James Bouey, Stony Brook HSC, who moderated a talk on access to college for first-generation, low-income students; and Patty Bentley, SUNY Plattsburgh, who led "Overcoming Gender and Family Bias on Campus."

The keynote speaker was Ted Kirsch, president of AFT Pennsylvania, who delivered an impassioned message on the need to attract and keep new members. Attorney Donna Euben of the AFL-CIO Lawyers Coordinating Committee delivered the Polishook lecture, named after former AFT VP and PPC chair Irwin Polishook. Euben touched on a recurring theme of the conference as she reviewed the many recent attacks on higher education from conservative movements inside and outside of government.

Spring DA to focus on political action, negotiations update

Political action will be in the air for the Spring Delegate Assembly, April 20-21, when more than 300 UUP members will gather at The Desmond in Albany for a weekend of solidarity built around the theme, "It's a matter of principle."

The theme denotes the many important issues facing UUP during this legislative session, and tops among them is the Berger Commission report that recommends removing the teaching hospital in Syracuse from the State University system. President Bill Scheuerman is expected to update the delegates on the union's campaign to keep the hospital within SUNY, a campaign that has figured prominently in UUP's recent advocacy efforts with legislators in Albany.

Members will also hear a briefing on the negotiations process. As of press time for *The Connection*, UUP and the state are expected to exchange negotiations proposals later this month.

The DA will also include the election of UUP officers and Executive Board members; the adoption of the statewide UUP budget; and the annual journalism awards for outstanding chapter newsletters. This DA's fundraising effort for the UUP College Scholarship Trust Fund will be a "Basket Bazaar," in which baskets donated by members and chapters will be raffled.

The keynote speaker will be Ray Strother, president of Strother-Duffy-Strother, a nationally known political consulting firm that has worked with UUP on ad campaigns for its legislative agenda. Strother, a consultant and strategist for a number of national Democratic campaigns, will talk about the 2008 elections.

Reminders/Upcoming meetings

APR 13-14 —Spring Leadership Workshops, Cooperstown

APR 20-21 —2007 Spring DA, Albany

APR 26-28 —2007 NYSUT RA, Washington, D.C.

MAY 7-8 —NYSUT Committee of 100, Albany

MAY 28 —UUP Administrative Office closed for Memorial Day

JUN 7-10 —AAUP Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C.

JUN 19-20 —New Leaders Orientation, HQ

JUN 21 —New Delegates Orientation, HQ

The Legislative Gazette —April 9

SUNY and CUNY get additional aid, but TAP funding remains stagnant

Advocacy groups for New York state's higher education system and the state and city universities of New York applauded Gov. Eliot Spitzer and the state Legislature on their efforts to provide the system with the "best" budget they have seen in years.

The state Legislature agreed with Spitzer's Executive Budget proposal to increase funding for SUNY's operating budget by 6.6%, to \$143 million, and CUNY's operating budget by 4.6%, to \$71.8 million, but with an added bonus: an additional \$17.5 million for SUNY's operating aid and \$17 million for CUNY's operating aid.

"By providing additional funding in operating aid, increasing aid to community colleges and increasing funding in several other areas, the New York State Legislature and governor continue to show their commitment to public higher education," said Casey Cannistraci, spokeswoman for SUNY.

United University Professions, the union representing 32,000 SUNY faculty, said it is pleased with the budget because it has not seen this amount of funding for the public universities in years, and because the state took notice of their need for more full-time faculty.

"Overall it's what we think is the best higher education budget in a generation. Most of the increase was added in Gov. Spitzer's original budget. We're obviously glad it was approved basically on-time because our members and the SUNY campuses know what funds are coming their way," said Don Feldstein, spokesman for UUP.

The union and SUNY and CUNY representatives spoke at joint budget hearings months ago to discuss their need for hundreds of new full-time faculty in order to provide a better education for their students. According to UUP, state-run universities would have to hire 2,000 more full-time faculty members to catch up to the student-to-professor ratio they should be at.

Despite the increase in funding this year, SUNY and CUNY have only seen an increase in funding for the past two years and still have catching up to do in order to be as well funded as they were in the past. In 1990 the state provided about 75% of SUNY's budget, but now it only funds about 51%, according to UUP.

The Legislative Gazette —April 2

UUP, PEF suing to prevent hospital merger

After months of protesting the Berger Commission's recommendations to privatize State University of New York's teaching hospitals, the union that represents SUNY faculty took action last week by filing a lawsuit against the commission, the governor, the Department of Health and the health commissioner.

UUP announced that it filed the lawsuit in state Supreme Court in Albany to ensure SUNY Upstate Medical Hospital in Syracuse is not combined with

(*excerpts of selected newsclips*)

Crouse Hospital, a private hospital. If the hospitals were consolidated, operations at the SUNY hospital would fall under the jurisdiction of Crouse, which could have detrimental effects, according to UUP.

"We are filing suit to protect the rights of our members and the health of the patients they serve, but at the same time we will continue to look for ways to work cooperatively with the state to resolve this issue," said UUP President William Scheuerman.

The Berger Commission, known officially as the state Commission on Health Care Facilities in the 21st Century, developed a hospital closure and consolidation plan during the Gov. George E. Pataki administration aimed at eliminating redundancies and cutting costs for the state. The commission's recommendations, which became law on Jan. 1, would affect hospitals, private and public institutions alike, statewide.

Advocates of keeping SUNY's teaching hospitals under SUNY's control have argued that if they are merged with private institutions, patients would have less access to medical care and students would have less access to equipment to learn on.

UUP is not the first union to file suit against the state over the Berger Commission; the Civil Service Employees Association is also suing to prevent the consolidation of hospitals.

"It was not up to the Berger Commission to make a public policy decision about a public institution," said Scheuerman. "Only the state Legislature has the authority to make a policy decision to take a public entity out of the public control, and there is no rationale for making such a decision for Upstate Medical University."

The Legislature had the opportunity to vote down the Berger Commission's recommendations last year, but instead took no action, which resulted in the panel's proposals becoming law.

Along with UUP, the Public Employees Federation, a state employee union that represents about 56,000 professionals, announced that it too was filing suit in opposition to the Berger Commission's recommendations and in support of SUNY Upstate Medical Hospital. In their legal filing, PEF argues that combining Crouse Hospital with Upstate Medical is unconstitutional and a ruling that is outside the jurisdiction of the commission and the governor.

"Decisions to close or merge hospitals should not be made by a commission that is unaccountable to the public and appointed by an outgoing governor," said PEF President Ken Brynien. "Only SUNY trustees have the authority to operate Upstate Medical Center. The authority cannot be transferred to any other entity."

According to PEF, SUNY Upstate Medical is financially sound and has an average occupancy rate of 80%, but Crouse Hospital has recently risen out of bankruptcy and has an average occupancy rate of less than 50%. PEF argues a merger would, on a financial level, not be in the state's best interest.

"In fact, the chancellor of SUNY has estimated the merger proposed by the Berger Commission would cost the taxpayers more than \$700 million. It just doesn't make sense," said Brynien.

The Post-Standard —March 28

Unions at Upstate sue to halt changes

Three unions representing employees of SUNY Upstate Medical University in Syracuse are suing the state to block a proposal that would make SUNY relinquish control of University Hospital, Upstate's teaching hospital.

UUP, which represents 2,200 employees at Upstate, and the New York State Public Employees Federation, which represents 1,000 upstate workers, filed lawsuits Tuesday in state Supreme Court in Albany against the Berger Commission, the governor and other state officials.

The CSEA, another union, filed a similar suit on behalf of workers it represents at Upstate; Van Duyn Home & Hospital nursing Home; Erie County Medical Center, in Buffalo; and Glendale nursing home, in Schenectady.

The Berger Commission is a state panel that issued recommendations in November calling for the closure, consolidation and downsizing of hospitals and nursing homes statewide. The commission recommended that University and Crouse, a private hospital next door, be jointly governed by a non-SUNY entity.

The UUP lawsuit says the recommendation is unconstitutional, irrational and illegal because it usurps a decision-making role that by law belongs to elected officials. The suit is asking the court to stop the state from proceeding with the recommendation to join university and Crouse, according to Denyce Duncan Lacy, who speaks for the union.

In its lawsuit and public lobbying campaign, the union contends the commission's proposal could jeopardize Upstate's public health, teaching and research mission.

Lawyers for New York State United Teachers, UUP's statewide affiliate, are handling the lawsuit for UUP. Richard Iannuzzi, president of NYSUT, said the union still hopes to negotiate a solution with the state, but it filed a lawsuit to keep all options open.

UUP in its suit said the Berger Commission did not have the authority to change the governance of a SUNY entity.

"Only the state Legislature has the authority to make a policy decision to take a public entity out of public control, and there is no rationale for making such a decision for Upstate Medical University," UUP President William Scheuerman said. PEF is asking the court to grant an injunction blocking SUNY and the state Health Department from enacting the commission's recommendations.

Marc Carey, who speaks for the Health Department, said the commission's recommendations automatically became law Jan. 1 because the Legislature did not act to reject them after they were released in November.