Threats to Collective Bargaining in Connecticut

Diana Rios, UConn-AAUP President
Michael Bailey, Executive Director
Christopher Henderson, Internal Organizer

Shortly after the 2016 election, the AAUP warned that we could be facing the greatest threat to academic freedom since the McCarthy period. It now appears that such a warning was not misplaced. Extremists in the administration, Congress, and several state houses have created an atmosphere in which “alternative facts” reign supreme, and which encourages the introduction of legislation that threatens the core principles of our democracy. - Rudy Fichtenbaum, President, National AAUP & Hank Reichman, First VP, National AAUP

Connecticut is no exception. State and municipal employees are faced with a governor and a legislature seeking to pass state budgets by attacking their pay, pension and health benefits and reducing services to the most needy. Wisconsin and Michigan were not able to stop the tidal wave. Ohio and New Hampshire were able to fight back and retain collective bargaining rights. Will Connecticut’s collective bargaining groups stem this tide?

In his legislative budget address (Feb.8) Governor Malloy asked for $700 million in state employee concessions for 2017 and $800 million in 2018. This is an effort to close a $1.7 billion gap in 2017 and a $3.6 billion gap in the biennium budget. Informal discussions continue with SEBAC leaders to explore palatable changes to pension and health care benefits--benefits under contract through June 30, 2022. If an agreement is not reached for the $700 million, the governor has threatened 4200 state employee layoffs.

The Governor also included a 7.2% cut back in appropriations and fringe benefit reimbursements to UConn, decreasing the funding level down to $360.6 million, or a total cut of $28 million. Over the past eight years, UConn has absorbed $87 million in cuts to state funding appropriations. President Herbst testified to the Appropriations Committee on February 15, 2017 and indicated these continuous cuts cannot be sustained, “the administration will have to analyze how damaging the proposed cuts will be to the university.” The Governor has made no attempt to reduce the onerous fringe benefit rates attached to research-related employees.

On Wednesday, February 15, 2017, UConn and other higher education institutions responded by attending the General Assembly’s Appropriations Committee to voice their disapproval with the Governor’s budget and to plead to restore cuts. We will see how the legislature responds when and if, they pass a budget in the next few months.

Legislators in the Connecticut General Assembly have put forward over 100 bills to roll back the rights and protections for state employees, including UConn faculty and staff. These bills include: making Connecticut a “so called” Right-to-Work state (eliminating union power), eliminating tuition
waivers for university employees, requiring a Senate and House vote for every union contract, forcing all new employees to enroll in a 401K plan (thus excluding them from defined benefit pensions), increasing health care co-pays for all state employees, limiting wage increases through arbitration, and reclassifying faculty as managers to exclude them from collective bargaining protections.

A particularly onerous proposed bill would reduce current retiree pensions by 30% if pensioners move outside of Connecticut. This is likely unconstitutional, but is indicative of badly considered proposed legislation.

Continuous vigilance on bills is necessary and is part of the price of retaining hard-won rights and benefits.

On Tuesday, February 21, 2017, labor made a strong response. State and municipal employees filled three overflow rooms in the Legislative Office Building for a hearing by the Labor and Public Employee Committee. Before the committee were 25 bills that included changing the definition of a managerial employee, changing the pension calculations, reducing the cost of living adjustments and increasing employee contributions for municipal employees, and limiting the wage increases in arbitration awards.

UConn-AAUP President Diana Rios and Treasurer Oskar Harmon waited hours to testify against the bill that would reclassify faculty as managers and therefore exempt from collective bargaining. All our collective voices are needed. State employees and professors, in particular, are not viewed favorably by the general public and by extension many members of the legislature. They do not fully understand the important work you do for the state’s social, intellectual, and economic future. We want everyone to understand your profound positive impact and why you should not be the targets of regressive policy changes.

What can you do? We advocate writing op-eds, letters to the editor, testimony for the legislature, and participating at “in-district meetings” with your legislator. We can help you with information you need to take next steps. If you are caring for family and cannot go to the Legislative Office Building in Hartford for particular UConn-AAUP actions/events, take other actions to help maintain and protect higher education in the state. Attend town and city meetings, and perhaps run for elected office. If faculty and staff are more visible in the community, more vocal at the Capitol, and vote every election for pro-faculty, pro-UConn candidates, we may be able to shift negative narratives that plague the comment sections in various news outlets. We will continue to engage the legislature but your stories and your impact will make the biggest difference.

Remember that faculty working conditions are student learning conditions. As teachers, scholars, and specialists across many fields, we create new knowledge. We help students reach for their dreams--for the benefit of the state of Connecticut.

We don’t have a mere hill to climb, we need to transcend the mountain. We can only do this together.

For up-to-date information regarding SEBAC, local negotiations, and legislative activity, please regularly visit www.uconnaaup.org.

Promotion Tenure and Reappointment Survey

In December 2016, the UConn Administration’s negotiating team made a proposal to change the Promotion, Tenure and Reappointment process. There were many changes to the process in their proposal. The UConn-AAUP negotiating team thought it best to survey the membership on certain aspects of the administrative proposal to guide the team in negotiations.

The survey was sent out through Survey Monkey and was open for responses for 14 days during the month of January. Thanks to all 467 members who participated in the survey.

Some clearly defined themes emerged on particular issues. Some respondents voiced concerns with question phrasing. UConn-AAUP may re-survey the membership in the future.
In order to devote our complete attention to changes in the PTR process, the two negotiating teams mutually agreed to remove PTR from this round of negotiations and dedicate time away from the table to work through improvements to the process. Both sides agreed that the PTR process was too important to try and rush it.

The full results of the survey can be found on the UConn-AAUP website. Some of the highlights are listed below.

Q. 1. Participants:
   Tenured – 61%
   Tenure track, pre-tenure – 23%
   Full-time, non-tenure track – 15%
Q. 2. Written PTR Guidelines for Academic Units
   Yes – 94%
   No – 6%
Q. 5. Moving third year review to the fourth year
   Support – 81%
   Oppose – 19%
Q. 11. Sixty-eight percent of respondents indicated that department faculty should decide if there should be a strict limit of 5 outside letters.
Q. 12. Sixty-seven percent responded that administrators should be able to choose outside letters independently.

SEBAC Negotiations, UCONN-AAUP Negotiations

Michael Bailey, Chief Negotiator

As has been the case for the past three state employee labor negotiations, a state budget crisis has prompted requests to adjust the pension and health care benefits already negotiated by the State Employees Bargaining Agent Coalition (SEBAC). The coalition is made up of 34 state employee labor bargaining units of almost 42,000 state employees.

The Governor’s request of $700 million in concessions from state employees has led to exploratory conversations with representatives of the Governor’s office as to how SEBAC can participate in filling the gap and honoring the Governor’s request. SEBAC leaders have established a goal that there will be no deal where the ratio of the gain that would be achieved, versus the cost to state employees, would be worse than walking away.

It is not a coincidence that a state budget crisis appears at the end of the state collective bargaining contracts. In past SEBAC negotiations, a change in the health and pension SEBAC Agreement has been accompanied with collective bargaining agreements for state employee bargaining units. The present negotiations with the Governor’s office appear to be heading to another such package. The major difference now is the composition of the legislature and the willingness to vote “no”. The recent vote on pension funding reform is a clear example.

The UConn Labor Relations Attorney Michael Eagen has resigned to accept a position at UMass-Amherst. Michael’s expertise and awareness of faculty will be missed in the continuing process of negotiating a fair contract. There are increasing pressures for a timely resolution to coordinate with any potential SEBAC Agreement. With these negotiating factors that are beyond our control, we deem it prudent to focus the remaining bargaining sessions on priority issues.
Mark Your Calendars

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UConn Information Meeting Re. Negotiations</td>
<td>Thursday, March 23, 2017</td>
<td>9:00am-11:00am</td>
<td>Storrs Student Union #304B</td>
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<tr>
<td>UConn Information Meeting Re. Negotiations</td>
<td>Wed. April 12, 2017</td>
<td>1:00pm-3:00pm</td>
<td>Storrs Student Union #325</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day of Action for Public Higher Education II</td>
<td>Friday, March 31, 2017</td>
<td>9:00am-1:00pm</td>
<td>State Capitol</td>
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<td>UConn-AAUP Excellence Awards Reception</td>
<td>Monday, April 10, 2017</td>
<td>9:00am-10:30am</td>
<td>State Capitol #310</td>
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<tr>
<td>UConn-AAUP Annual Chapter Meeting</td>
<td>Thursday, April 27, 2017</td>
<td>12:00pm</td>
<td>Storrs Student Union #331</td>
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