

Board of Regents Public Forum on the University Budget
Wednesday, June 17, 2009
Testimony of Phyllis Walker, President of AFSCME 3800

The citizens of Minnesota gave the land and the money to build the University of Minnesota. They did this because they wanted to provide a quality, affordable, higher education for themselves and their families.

In the 20-plus years that I have worked here I have watched the U move away from its land grant mission as the number of vice presidents, assistant vice presidents, associate vice presidents, assistant to the associate vice president and other top administrators who do not contribute to the U's academic mission skyrocket. Public funds that should have been used to further the educational needs of Minnesotans and subsidize tuition have instead been used to pay exorbitant salaries to the people at the top—exorbitant salaries that are more in line with the income levels of top executives in major corporations than that of public servants.

The University has instructed departments to cut their budgets by 4% to 6%. Some departments have chosen to make these cuts through layoffs—layoffs of clerical workers. It is interesting to note that the decision of what jobs to eliminate is being made by overpaid administrators who are not eliminating their own positions—only ours.

Their self-serving decision to lay off front line workers has a negative educational impact and a negative economic impact. Eliminating clerical jobs jeopardizes the educational mission of the U. Clerical workers not only make it possible for students to navigate the complicated University system from admission to graduation, they also make it possible for faculty to carry out their important academic mission.

When front line workers are laid off the work remains—it doesn't just disappear—someone has to do it. Our contract, that YOU signed, states that clerical workers cannot be laid off and their work reassigned to students or temps—you can't lay off clerical workers and hire students or temps to do our work because YOU will be in violation of OUR contract—the contract YOU signed.

That leaves existing employees in the department such as Civil Service, P&A and supervisors to do our important work. But if our job duties are assigned to higher paid workers, the cost to the University will increase—cutting the positions of the lowest paid workers is not the answer.

There are 254 University employees making over \$200,000 per year. If they took a 5% pay cut, the U would save over 3 million dollars. If those making over \$300,000 took an additional 5% decrease and those making over \$400,000 took an additional 5% decrease, over \$800,000 would be saved. That's a total of over \$4 million.

The University Central Administration must be required to drastically scale back their numbers. With a 10% reduction of the top administrative positions, over \$7 million would be saved. The total savings is \$11,831.215.

If your goal is to reduce salary expenditures without short changing students—eliminate bloated salaries and unnecessary administration positions, eliminate the people who do not further the U's academic mission. Chop From The Top.