

Contract Negotiations 2009
AFSCME 3800/3801, Council 5 and the University of Minnesota

Minutes from 5/18/09 negotiations meeting, 101 Walter Library
Notetaker: Kem Tae Lynch

AFSCME 3800/3801 Negotiating Team:

Kurt Errickson, Council 5 negotiator
Phyllis Walker, President
Cherrene Horazuk, Chief Steward
Peter Lunney, Med Area (absent)
SvenErik Olsen, Med Area
Kelly Alghamdi Zimmerscheid, East Bank
Laura Mirelez, East Bank
Andy Carhart, West Bank
Julia Gladhill, St. Paul (absent)
Ginger Nohl, Morris/Crookston (absent)
Laura Stoli Schmidt, UMD
Kem Tae Lynch, At-large

University of Minnesota Management Negotiating Team:

Bob Altman, Human Resources, University Negotiator
Fred Owusu, Academic Health Center
Bob Crab, U of M Bookstores
Sara Shuford, Economics
Judith Karon, UMD
Margaret Klein (absent)

Bob Altman: We want to make it [the relationship between the unions and the University administration] better, each year is rough but the goal is to change it.

Kurt Errickson: Regarding the University's opening proposal - I want to know the exact changes and their significance. Can we go through this line by line?

BA: (see University of Minnesota Proposal, May 1, 2009). My attempt at changing the language on wages was to put forward a twofold wage proposal; two salient proposals. We crossed out new wage increases....Can I just give my two-minute back up? I'm not really happy with what I need to do with wages... What I have here; I have a wage freeze and a step freeze. I'm sure everyone knows what I'm talking about, we're proposing to freeze them for the duration of the contract. Not to get rid of them, and no increase in any schedules for any of the classes. I'm sure one thing we may have agreement on is that times are tough at the U, no secret about that. We're doing what we can. One priority is to maintain as many jobs as we can, and when the budget is the way it is maintaining jobs is a tough thing. We want to maintain all [the jobs] but we are doing this to try to keep as many as possible. One thing was the RIO [Retirement Incentive Option] that was attempt at seeing if people voluntarily wanted to leave the U. We were diligent in making sure we gained something by determining who we would replace. Many positions of people who retired under RIO were not replaced. We put in a hiring pause, basically a hiring freeze, to use anything not a layoff to reduce people. We're trying to use current people to fill jobs rather than hiring people at a time we'd be letting people go. The third piece of an attempt to keep jobs on campus

was a wage freeze for a year for those the president can unilaterally put into. If you pay people more money and you still have to balance the budget, having a wage freeze is having an attempt at keeping jobs as many as we can. Which brings me to the wage proposal; not many of us are excited at what is happening with wages. What's crossed out applies to the wages from last year, this always would be happening since it's irrelevant. Normally new numbers would go in, but we're trying to put in a wage freeze, so no new numbers. The other part is to freeze steps- we aren't proposing to replace steps- we're hoping that there will be better times ahead and we'll continue to get wage increases and steps will be a part of them. 6 years ago this happened; I wasn't there. They highlighted portions of the contract, it wasn't for entire contract, and that's what we're proposing.

KE: So did you say the step language is based on language from an earlier point in the relationship?

BA: I'm saying we've done something like it before, highlighting it to say this language is frozen and hopefully it will be put back in at the later date.

KE: I think that logical explanation... If it's all right, I'd like to go through the actual document, I just walked through it and would like to understand it. I think it's pretty transparent, but I'd like to go through it point by point by point, point one by one.

BA: I would have put wage schedule updating... I'm not trying to be tricky, we'd be just changing the dates...

KE: That's fine, in terms of the bargaining process, many employers do bargain like this, line by line across the table. So I want to go through it, line by line.

BA: We would be updating the wage schedule, updating the dates. 2008 aren't relevant any more.

KE: So then next sentence appears to be unchanged, salaries frozen until... The promotional language is unchanged.

BA: The way, and I don't mind doing this [go through the proposals line by line], the attempt was to underline the stuff that's new and highlight the stuff that's old.

KE: I know this is tedious and I appreciate it.

BA: No that's ok.

KE: So, the step progression, no progression July 1- June 30. It will be discontinued until a new agreement is negotiated.

BA: This is not new language; we just highlighted it.

KE: Yup. It looks like the other salary adjustments deal with the general [the across the board general increase] and lump sums.

BA: Like I said, normally this would be replaced with new stuff, but since we're proposing freezes, it wouldn't get replaced with any new stuff.

KE: The last page remains the same, so these are unchanged. It's just stuff that's highlighted.

BA: Can I give you a health care preview? We're presenting this afternoon; I wish it were different. But it's in the works, and with discussion and discussions ongoing, it'll [the proposal] be verbal and with something in writing later. Dan will explain the changes later and we'll go through point by point.

KE: We're looking forward to it.

BA: I want to talk a little bit about it [the proposal]. It's short; not easy to propose and stomach but short. We don't want to prolong it; we put forward what we need to do. We didn't do any takebacks and wage cuts. It's pretty straightforward and brief. But it's not tasteful; it's difficult to swallow. We're trying to get these changes in and move on to a better day.

KE: Ok, thank you for that, we're ready to share our opening proposal. (See AFSCME 3800/3801 Proposal 5/18/09)

BA: I apologize about some housekeeping- we have one management person not here, Margaret Klein. She'll be meeting with everyone but with is currently meeting with healthcare [negotiations] right now because of her health care experience.

KE: We also have additional committee people not here for various reasons. [Missing members listed.]

KE: I'm glad job security is important for the U. It's important for our members, too, being able to provide for their families and prosper, and to help the educational mission of the U: the students. The U can't operate without our people. Our first proposals relate to job security. The problem we've encountered is there are a proliferation of job descriptions within job classifications that have specific qualifications, so people aren't able to bump. It's true that a specific skill in these positions is valuable, but it's also important to remember the contribution that senior employees make. They contribute to students the [knowledge that] is within them. This seems like a better investment in staff to make it easier for employees to relocate within a class, for bumping and layoff purposes.

KE: Staff will be qualified for all lower positions in the class. Our members who have climbed the ladder at the U- as people moved, learned about the U, learned new job skills, [these members] have ample ability to succeed within lesser jobs in their classification. They should be able to bump someone in the position below them. I know we will need to explain this more in depth; there will probably be a cascade effect.

BA: Just to make sure I'm understanding- and I always butcher these job titles- if you were Executive Office and Administrative Specialist, the lower job class is Principal Office and Administrative Specialist?

KE: Right.

BA: Does Office Support Assistant fit under all of them? There's essentially three groups..?

KE: Yes.

BA: We do have one other class- Program and Project Specialist. For purposes of understanding, what would the branches under that look like?

KE: Let's discuss that in caucus and get back to you.

BA: I think I understand in general.

KE: We realize this is a dramatic change from the U's current method. The U is facing dramatic challenges and in order to prosper we need to adapt. This is an important step to the challenges that face the U.

KE: The next proposal is very important. We recognize the importance of getting people get back to work off the layoff list. We know there are not many vacancies so we don't expect this to be unduly burdensome, and we would appreciate this.

KE: The next section of our proposal relates to an effort that both parties can take to advance their careers at the U. Our position is that once a position is posted, before the U looks at outside applications, the U will spend five days looking at current employees. We will not ask for the U not to hire outside applicants or change your ability to, but just a 5-day window to examine only current employees. This is very similar in effect to a practice with the Teamsters.

BA: Just once again- if I had a job, Principal Accounts Specialist, for example, that was vacant, I would post it, internal candidates could apply online and so could someone from Target. Internals and externals could apply both on day one currently. You're asking, if [the job was] posted on a Monday then through Friday we would only look at clericals, and then the following week open it up to Target? I think I understand that.

KE: Ok, our next proposal. We do face many difficult issues at the bargaining table. I know the educational mission of the U is important to you, to your constituents, and to top leaders at the U. I know the changes enacted to the Regents Scholarship have been difficult to the leadership; they've also been painful and difficult to our members as well. In bargaining I try to focus on the problems. I know it's hard to compartmentalize an emotional response from the process to solve the problem, and I respect this hasn't been easy for anyone. But we propose that the U pay the full Regents Scholarship for our members. We have many reasons, and I imagine we'll discuss this later. Our members are among the lowest paid here at the U, and this proposal falls all the harder on our people. We've had eloquent input from our members about the educational benefits of having classes comprised of traditional, nontraditional, staff, students in classes to add to the breathe of the discussion. We believe the attempt to cut costs could be better handled by looking elsewhere. The pursuit of higher education for staff only enhances the support they can provide to students and staff. I know the U likes to retain internal equity for its employee groups, but we feel this is a special matter for our members and other people who are at the lower end of the pay spectrum. The next point is related. We've had members who've been denied permission to take classes under the Regents' Scholarship by supervisors even when classes don't conflict with work schedules. People who were interested in evening classes were denied permission by supervisors. I'm not sure if you're aware of it.

BA: No, I'm not.

KE: It maybe a simple misunderstanding...

BA: I've never heard of this.

KE: If you want to we can caucus and give you more information. Benefits are our next proposal. Internal equity is a good base, but to a certain degree denies reality. A significant difference of pay, or change to benefits might not be injurious to someone on the higher end of the pay scale, but can be to someone at low end. We'll get to wages next, we do want steps and generals, but it's

really important that we protect the benefits of our employees. They shouldn't be sacrificing co-pays for groceries or ignoring medical treatment. We're calling for no increases in the employee's share. We're also calling for an unusual aspect of short-term disability, which we can explain in more detail later but the effect of our proposal is that short-term disability would be open to the same enrollment as regular insurance is annually.

KE: Our next proposal is about parental leave. I understand you've seen this before. We're coming in with a fairly sparse package compared to recent years, and would like a little bit of internal equity to get same time to care for families that other groups get. Our membership is 93% female, so child-care and maintaining healthy and strong families is an overarching concern for us, so progress in this area would be helpful.

BA: I ask this for clarification as well, do you mean Professional and Administrative and faculty? I think one of the reasons- I'd just point out they don't get sick leave, they get a leave but using sick leave isn't an option. I could be misstating it on that one; I'd need to do more checking, but it is the Professional and Administrative you are referring to?

KE: Yes. I understand it's important to compare apples to apples.

BA: I need to check into this more. I don't work with the faculty group a lot. As I see people typing, I think I could be stepping on my tongue...

KE: No one at the bargaining table is omniscient, and everyone will have issues they need to investigate further; that's the way we are. Your point is interesting and also sparks my interest; I want to find out more info about the Professional and Administrative benefits package.

KE: Our next issue is wages. We propose generals [general across the board increase] of 2.5% in first year and 3% in second year and steps in both years. We didn't make a proposal regarding step increases because they automatically continue in the contract. Some across the board increase is important for AFSCME, as the effect of freezing wages falls harder on those who are lower paid; the effect falls unevenly. Look at it in same manner as a hiring freeze; it's like a hammer and works without specificity. For example, at University of Minnesota Physicians, our members are front desk receptionists and clinical schedulers. If the employer froze those positions, income would drop because people wouldn't have their appointments scheduled. The same is true with a wage freeze at the U. It's unduly harsh and makes it difficult to retain and hire people at the lower pay scale. Freezing wages at \$100,000 and freezing it at \$25,000 or \$30,00 has significantly different impacts on the ability of people in those jobs to live life, to take care of family, to support the U's core mission. While wage freezes for all is administratively easier and on the surface is wage equity, it makes it harder to keep good people in the lower paid groups at the U. Some need for a wage increase is very important for us.

KE: Our next proposal is fancy paragraph of "me too" language. If the U enacts a policy of compensation- not just for all employee groups but it could include employee groups- a policy that is greater than ours, the difference would be applied across the board to our members. If the U gave lump sum/bonuses or a small wage compensation, or a net increase to a target group above and beyond our total compensation then we would also enjoy the same increase.

... (missed part of the discussion)

KE: We would get the difference, as well. It's basically just a safety valve, so that if we do agree on a wage package that reflects the current economic conditions and things change, then we get it too.

KE: Next is the bullying language, which is the same language proposed by the techs; you've seen it.

BA: We've not seen anything else from other committee groups. I'd just assume that nobody on our committee has seen any of the proposals from other groups.

KE: Well basically it's simple language, [READ LANGUAGE]. I added a footnote at the bottom of [the page] where we can squeeze it in [the contract]. We share a commitment to the principle that bullying is not tolerated, a commitment to a safe workplace. We know this is not an easy problem to solve but would like to take steps to fix this problem at the bargaining table. At this point, we don't think we'll be adding any other proposals but we reserve the right to add or amend if necessary.

KE: What kind of questions do you have about our proposals?

BA: Well, the Regents' Scholarship, why would a daytime person be denied the right to take a night class? We could redress this with specific supervisors directly. We continue to take the position that the Regents' Scholarship is not negotiated with the bargaining groups. This might change in the future but we take the position that we won't negotiate it; that's been the U's position for as long as I've been here. I just wanted to make that clear.

KE: OK, let's take 15 minutes...

BA: We won't be able to respond in 15 minutes...

KE: Oh no, I just wanted to talk about your Regents' question and short-term disability.

BA: Also, how project program specialist relates to your proposal.

KE: Oh, right. Ok, let's plan on taking 15 minutes but we'll come up and get you when we're done, ok?

BA: OK, we're in Room 405.

CAUCUS FROM 10:40-11AM

RETURN FROM CAUCUS 11:20AM

KE: Just a quick clarification here: I thought we needed to clarify some issues with short-term disability, but it turns out we don't. For the Regents' Scholarship supervisory issue, Laura will be talking.

Laura Stoli Schmidt: What I have is sort of anecdotal discussion, but I can go back later to Duluth and find out the exact specifics. One is of a person, an exemplary employee who received an Outstanding Service Award. She was interviewing for a position and the supervisor told her in the interview that the supervisor would not approve the Regents' Scholarship, so she [the interviewee] looked for a different job. I would need to get the specifics from Duluth. But if you

don't intend to deny approval, then why do you have a policy saying that you need approval at all times?

BA: That seems like a strange thing to say when looking at applicants. As I see it, that discussion should take place once the class is selected by the employee. While we require approval, the discussion about someone not getting it seems unusual and inconsistent with practice.

KE: That is one specific issue that motivated the proposal- why do you need supervisor approval if it doesn't conflict with work hours? Why retain the right to disapprove a class if it doesn't conflict with work hours? The next logical step is to remove that power away from the supervisor so misunderstandings don't happen.

KE: As for the Program Project Specialist, we'd like to caucus on it more unless you'd need an answer for your counter proposal?

BA: No, that probably won't be necessary.

KE: Now on to the "me too" language. This is in response to the economic times, an unusual proposal for unusual times. I know that the cost of calculating wages is one we disagree on and has been an emotional topic. AFSCME maintains that the steps are part of an ongoing budgeting cost and part of the base package. But for this "me too" language, in order to construct a yardstick for the "me too" language to be based upon, it's our position that we will roll steps into part of the package.

BA: Well, we've barely scratched the surface here and I don't think we'll fool anyone by sitting here until the lunch hour, so I think we'll see each other at 1:15?

KE: Do you want to try to pull together a counter by today or next week?

BA: Is it important to know now? I can let you know at 1:15.

KE: Sure.

BA: Are we meeting tomorrow?

KE: Our team doesn't have the day off.

BA: That's helpful; let's just play it by ear. We'll try to be back here at 1:15 to help move chairs; I think we'll have three times the number of people.

KE: All right.

HEALTH CARE PRESENTATION at 1:30PM.

Health care negotiating team, tech negotiating team, clerical negotiating team and the three management counterpart committees were all in attendance. Management verbally presented their proposal. A written proposal will be given to all committees at a later date.

Day One Ended.