



January 8, 2016

Fellow AFSCME member:

On Thursday, December 10, 2015 our AFSCME Clerical Bargaining Table Committee reached a tentative agreement with the University for the July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2017 contract. **Our committee recommends that you vote in favor of this agreement.**

When we started preparing for negotiations early in 2015, we polled members and fee-payers to determine our top priorities. The results were: 1) to make real economic progress; 2) six-weeks paid parental leave; 3) restore the Regents Scholarship; 4) strengthen job security language; and 5) have accountable measures to stop workplace bullies.

Negotiations carried on for more than six difficult months, during which U managers repeatedly said they budgeted only 0.5% for raises and that they were unwilling to move on any of our other priorities. Finally on December 10, the University's negotiators came to the table stating their willingness to address a number of our key priorities. We reached a tentative agreement on one of the best contracts we have had in years.

Clerical workers who are not at the top of the pay scale will receive 7% increases over the course of the contract: 1.5% across the board each year, plus the 2% step increases on your anniversary date that are already set in the contract. **Clerical workers who are at the top of the pay scale will receive 3.5% in increases over the course of the contract:** 1.5% across the board in year one, and 2% in year two. Year one increases are retroactive to June 29, 2015. Importantly, for the first time in a decade, we compelled the University to expand beyond their planned budget for across the board wage increases. We know that clerical workers deserve more, but this is an important step forward.

The University also agreed to a \$15 minimum wage for all clerical positions. Any clerical workers currently below \$15 will have their wages go up to \$15, retroactive to June 29, 2015. Our lowest paid coworkers will receive as much as 10% increases during the life of the contract. Throughout bargaining, the University suggested that we could reduce the across the board increases to pay for the \$15 minimum, but we refused to pit one group of members against another. In the end, the University found additional money to make this happen.

Perhaps most significantly, **we won six weeks of paid parental leave for birth mothers.** Until now, clerical workers received only two weeks of paid leave and had to either cobble together additional vacation or sick leave, use short-term disability, take time without pay, or return to work after only two weeks. For years, we have been pushing for expanded parental leave, but the University refused, even though faculty and P&A employees received six weeks paid leave for birth moms. We now have parity with them.

The University negotiators repeatedly told us that "the contract does enough for families" and that they weren't interested in expanding parental leave. We exposed the elitist nature of the University's position and they finally did the right thing. We won six weeks of leave not only for AFSCME members, but also for Teamsters, who were given the leave as part of their final agreement even though they had not proposed it. Six weeks of paid parental leave for birth moms is one of the best benefits for public workers in the state, and is something we can all be proud of winning. It's also something the University should be proud of providing.

The University's health insurance proposal, for the first time since becoming self-insured, did not include any cost shifts or increases in copays. The only contract changes were coverage dates and eliminating the category of registered same sex domestic partner (LGBTQ partners of employees will need to have proof of marriage to qualify for insurance).

The fights we have led against rising health costs resulted in the University's status quo proposal and for the first time in years, our wage increases are not being eaten up by rising insurance costs.

For years, the University has refused our proposals to address workplace bullying. Early in this round of negotiations, the University negotiators said that they were only interested in discussing "resiliency training" (i.e. training people to better withstand bullying). On our final day of bargaining, **the University proposed a Memorandum of Understanding stating that "the parties agree that all employees should be able to work in a respectful environment."** The MOU calls for the formation of a labor-management committee to work on a common definition of bullying, discuss ways to educate and communicate about respectful workplace, and explore procedures for investigating and following up on bullying complaints. While not the same as grievable contract language, the MOU is a starting point.

We are disappointed that the University would not restore the Regents Scholarship. We will continue to work with faculty and other staff groups to pressure the University for full scholarship benefits.

This year, our members had enough of a declining standard of living while administrators and athletics coaches have seen huge salary increases. To fight back, we waged a campaign for **Raises and Respect** along with other unionized workers on campus. The four AFSCME locals and the Teamsters at the University worked closely together, refusing to allow management to divide us. Our joint campaign highlighted the differences between the "Two Universities" – one for the low-wage workforce and another for those at the top.

This campaign was developed and led by our Clerical Assembly, an elected group of nearly 100 clerical representatives from throughout the University system who met regularly to formulate strategies and actions to convey our message. Assembly members worked tirelessly to involve our coworkers and to get the word out to the broader University community about the issues frontline workers were facing at the U:

- Our hearing on the economic realities for frontline workers in January 2015 was attended by members of the State Legislature's Higher Education Committee, who then raised our concerns at their committee meetings.
- Over 50 members met with their legislators in April, advocating for University funding and for fair wages.
- AFSCME and Teamsters testified at the Board of Regents' budget hearing in May.
- Over a dozen members testified to the University's negotiating committee about low wages, parental leave, workplace bullying and the Regents Scholarship.
- Thousands of signatures on petitions and emails from coworkers, faculty, students, and alumni were delivered to President Kaler, Vice-President Kathy Brown, the Board of Regents, the University Foundation and the Alumni Association.
- Hundreds of clerical workers wore AFSCME t-shirts every Friday as a show of workplace unity and strength.
- Multiple letters and editorials by members and supporters were published in the MN Daily and other media.
- Dozens of clerical workers who were previously fee payers joined our union to make a public commitment to their own economic wellbeing and that of their coworkers.
- We organized numerous rallies and informational pickets to let the Administration know that union workers were united and that a significant number of workers would consider voting to strike if they didn't get a contract with raises and respect.

When we collectively raise our voices, we have the power to win. This agreement was reached due to our unified contract campaign with AFSCME Locals 3801, 3800, 3937, and 3260 and Teamsters 320; solidarity from faculty, students, non-unionized staff at the University and our community and union allies throughout the state; and most importantly, the dedicated and ongoing actions of our members. **Thank you!**

We are already planning for our 2017-2019 contract. Join our Clerical Assembly and be part of building for our future. Contact us at afscme3800@gmail.com if you would like to join the Assembly or to nominate a coworker.

In solidarity,

3800/3801 Bargaining Table Committee

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