

Testimony of Amy Selvius, Secretary of AFSCME 3800
Board of Regents Public Forum on the University Budget
Wednesday, June 5, 2013

My name is Amy Selvius, and I am the Secretary for AFSCME Local 3800. Thank you for this opportunity to speak. I want to read from one of our members in Greater Minnesota:

Dear Board of Regents,

Having talked to coworkers at the University of Minnesota who see that the value of their paychecks is shrinking and I want you to understand that the University's budget decisions over recent years have caused employees considerable financial stress. For nearly 20 years, I have been a loyal University employee working full time. Recent wage increases have not even covered increased health insurance premiums so do not cover cost increases for groceries, utilities, and the gasoline needed to get to work. In addition to working full time at the University, I have three other occupations that provide some additional income.

My budget is not large enough to cover vehicle and home repairs. I drive a vehicle that is nearly 20 years old and has over 200,000 miles. I bartered 100 hours of my work to buy it from a friend six years ago, and I have no savings for a replacement vehicle. I carpool with another person for 15 of the 20 miles to work whenever our schedules allow. I commute because the real estate prices are lower where I live than in the city where I work. I use my University vacation time to work at other things and do not actually go on vacations. I even stopped making day trips to State Parks. I have never traveled in an airplane or attended a major league game. I do not see movies in theatres or even rent them, and I do not have cable television. Cafeteria and restaurant meals are not in the budget; I bring food from home. I have a huge vegetable garden and spend time preserving produce for winter consumption. Most groceries I buy are from a 'bent and dent' store. Many of them are extra inexpensive because they have passed their expiration date. My home's thermostat is set at 55 degrees in winter and I wear layers of clothing. In summer, I do without air conditioning. I pay for a haircut less than once per year. Friends have given me the majority of the clothes and shoes I wear.

I decided not to have children because I struggled so much to pay my own living expenses. The thought of paying a big increase in premiums plus higher copays and a new deductible in 2014 really scares me. When the copay was \$11, I had appointments with a counselor. I quit seeing my counselor so my spouse could start seeing one. My spouse quit when the copay went to \$15. I used to have a couple prescriptions. Since it was not a life-threatening condition, I stopped refilling those prescriptions. I schedule annual dental exams, eye exams, and physicals because those appointments are covered without copays. I go without new eyeglasses as long as possible even if my prescription has changed. Please do not increase the cost of my medical care. Please continue the Medical Premium Relief Program that helps lower income employees like me.

If you do not care that clerical employees like me need wage increases that keep up with inflation, then here are some reasons why we deserve wage increases that pay the bills. My supervisor has nominated me for an outstanding staff award, saying that I am an exemplary

employee and that I am consistently hard-working, versatile, knowledgeable, cooperative, kind, respectful, and willing to help others achieve their goals. My coworkers are also dedicated and talented employees. A group of coworkers nominated me for a University service award. They mentioned my commitment to the University, my participation on committees, and my desire to continually learn. They said that I am well-respected and sought out for my knowledge and my thoughtful, reasoned opinions and know that I work to increase camaraderie and boost morale. I also graduated from the University of Minnesota with two undergraduate majors that are relevant to my work.

Please pardon me for asking to remain anonymous. It is embarrassing to live this way, and I want to remain a respected member of the University community.

Sincerely,

A University of Minnesota clerical employee from rural Minnesota