

CAMPUS VOICES

News from Tennessee's higher education union
January 2010 • www.ucw-cwa.org • Published by UCW-CWA Local 3865



Fighting for Jobs, Public Higher Education and Economic Recovery

Organizer Tom Smith

IN OCTOBER, UCW activists across Tennessee kicked off our 2010 Campaign to Support Tennessee's Economy! Save Higher Education! This year our union will continue to organize for change in higher education:

1: Saving jobs and opposing higher education budget cuts. Public workers did not create these problems and cuts to public education will not solve them. In fact we know that public higher education is a jobs creation program, and more cuts will only worsen the recession!

2: We need higher education administration reform. For too long the ranks of administrators at UT and TBR have grown while the number of staff and faculty on campus and in the classrooms have shrunk. We need real cuts at the top, not just shell games and changes in job

titles, and we need those resources directed at staffing levels and pay of campus staff, lecturers and other faculty.

3: We need candidates for next year's elections that are committed to protecting public workers and higher education funding. These candidates need to be honest that the easy road state government has been on for so long cannot continue. We need leadership from our elected officials. UCW is committed to talking with tens of thousands of Tennessee voters, gathering petition signatures for our 2010 Candidate Pledge and taking the pledge to the gubernatorial, state house and state senate candidates!

4: We will fight for increased legal protections at the General Assembly for higher education employees in case of layoffs and furloughs. We will

also work with the Legislature and push TBR and UT administrations to guarantee real due process rights.

In the past year UCW has grown from an organization of 650 UT-Knoxville and UT-Chattanooga employees. Now we are the statewide voice for over 1,000 higher education staff and faculty at University of Memphis, UT-Martin, UT-Knoxville, Middle Tennessee State University, Pellissippi State Technical Community College, East Tennessee State University, UT-Chattanooga and UT Health Science Center in Memphis. We know that the first 1,000 is only the beginning. We are on the move, and united with one another, nothing can hold us back!

Our state is facing a massive revenue crisis. Public services and education are under attack. Nationally the official unemployment rate is over 10 percent.

Tennessee stands at a crossroads: do we take the easy road of more budget cuts, more layoffs of public employees, program eliminations and allow the state to break its promise of quality, publicly-funded universities and colleges?

Or do we take a balanced approach to the revenue crisis, protect higher education and other public programs that are essential to our state's efforts at economic recovery, save jobs that provide health insurance and other important benefits and get real about addressing the inadequate wages paid to too many of our higher education workers?

We know that without collective action we have no power to confront these pressing issues. That is why over 1,000 higher education employees are a part of United Campus Workers – Communications Workers of America, and if you haven't joined yet it's time to get off the fence!



UCW members in Memphis meet with State Representative Barbara Cooper in November 2009. From left to right (front) Dennis Laumann, Donna Wilkinson, State Representative Barbara Cooper, Stanley Tyler, George Cook (rear) CWA International Vice President Brooks Sunkett, Tony Patton, Tom Smith.

President's Corner

President Tom Anderson

STATE FUNDING for public higher education is a vital component to improving the economy of our state. Pushing for increased funding for public higher education has been a major part of our union's campaigns for many years—and for good reason. Without state funding the educational landscape in Tennessee will be dismal indeed.

They have already started implementing some so-called cost saving measures by refusing to hire new custodial, maintenance and clerical staff where it is badly needed. The new construction and renovations continue non-stop on campuses all over Tennessee, and as these project get finished and new buildings open up for use, they expect housing and maintenance that are already practically skeleton crews to double their work with no extra help. Oh, and they have to do it in the same eight hour day too: no overtime!

At the same time, the reductions of top-level higher education administration that were so proudly announced on some campuses not long ago have turned out to really be nothing more than a sham. They are playing a shell game and hoping no one notices. Vice Presidents lost titles but no salary reduction. With the exception of low- and medium-waged clerical workers who have been laid off, it appears many of the positions supposedly cut at the UT system level have been transferred to the specific campuses to which they are attached. Before we see any more layoffs or program cuts, top-level administration reforms must take place across the Tennessee Board of Regents and UT systems.

In response to the current budget crisis, higher education administrators and lawmakers statewide are trying

to fix a spending crisis. They want to answer the question “where can we cut and do the least damage?” We have heard gubernatorial candidates talk about cutting spending to the bone and working back up from there. They say it will be difficult but we can get through it. They seem convinced that hundreds of positions can be eliminated, well over twenty percent of the funding to higher education can be cut and somehow our schools will maintain or maybe even improve our current standards and graduation rates.

I know I don't have to tell you how wrong-headed this thinking is. Recent economic impact statements found for every one higher education job at the University of Memphis and UT Knoxville another two jobs were supported by the universities' economic activity in the local area. Now that is what I call a jobs program!

In order to sell us on these cuts, lawmakers love to make comparisons to what regular folks do when they don't

have enough money coming in. They tell us that average people cut out the extras. Well I, like most of you, don't have too many extras to begin with. When I don't have the money to pay my mortgage or my light bill or to buy enough food for my teenagers I do what all of you do: I get a second job, or maybe a third. This is not a spending crisis: it is a revenue crisis.

Our state leaders have to find a way to put money into education to invest in the future of our state. The General Assembly must recognize the funding and revenue causes of this crisis and respond accordingly with a balanced approach that includes revenue increases by closing corporate tax loopholes, exploring unneeded exemptions to the state sales tax, considering a tax of Tennessee's top wage earners making over \$250,000, etc. These increases in revenue must be directed towards social services for the poor and unemployed to get us all through this recession and towards education, which we know is the best investment in future jobs, and broadly felt economic recovery for working people in Tennessee.

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What UCW Can Do for All of Us

Secretary Todd Freeberg

Experience had taught them the hard lesson that when you are unorganized you are at the mercy of the company, and that as a rule, despite pronouncements to the contrary, the company did not show much mercy.

from "Why Unions Matter" by Michael D. Yates, 1998, *Monthly Review Press*.

UNIONS are the main organizations of working people that keep those working people from getting exploited, overworked, underpaid or endangered by their conditions of work, taken advantage of, robbed, cheated, demoralized, isolated and generally run down and/or run through the shredder by those who employ them. History, experience and published studies indicate that union workers make more money and enjoy greater benefits, such as health care and pensions at the same jobs compared to non-union workers. The decline in the living standards of working people over the last few decades has corresponded very closely with the decline of unions over that time period.

Those of you who have criticisms, beefs, anger, complaints, disappointments, animosities or general unhappiness about your current job, you need to join us. If you do not, your dispirited voice is alone and without power. By not joining our growing union, you give tacit support to the status quo and, in effect, help prolong the very problems you face. We as individual workers do not face our employers as equals. When they tell us that we will have to do more with less, it is more and more certain that if we are not united, we all will be getting less and less. But together, we can face our employers as equals. To do so, you need to help grow our union. Only with the union will we have the energy and strength to make the changes that need to be made to make our universities the best they can be for our students

and workers and for the citizens of this state. It is the union that will bring you dignity, respect, power, emotional support and solidarity on the job, as well as concrete improvements in wages, hours, and conditions.

Get active in UCW today. Your dues (on the order of 43 cents a day) are what make the organization of our union possible. Our union needs you, and we all need our union, for the union makes us strong.

CWA Public Sector Meeting Report

Vice-President
Janet Miles

I attended the Public Sector Meeting in San Diego in September 2009 with Organizers Tom Smith and Karly Safar. It was a packed weekend with nine plenary sessions (history of the labor movement, healthcare reform, pensions, state budgets and various reports) and four workshop sessions. Tom and Karly presented in "Organizing in States Without Collective Bargaining Laws," and by splitting up, we were able to attend all the other workshops (negotiating, using social media, pensions, and state tax systems). I also attended the PHEARN (Public, Healthcare and Education Action Resource Network) meeting to learn more about how other locals are coping with similar budget issues.



Britta Kindervater and Ben Kimsey table at UT-Chattanooga in November 2009.

State Insurance Dependant Eligibility Update

Vice-President
Janet Miles

Last summer, the state decided to audit employees with dependents on their insurance. The audit was not well publicized until UCW alerts led to increased communication.

University of Memphis HR scheduled open houses and information session MTSU chapter leaders sent letters to HR Director Kathy Musselman offering union support with staffing open houses and contacting employees.

Almost immediately after the UTK chapter mobilized a delegation to the HR office, UT Pres. Simek's Chief of Staff called President Tom Anderson and invited him to meet with her and the Director of Payroll. They agreed to take further steps to contact employees, and they dealt with Tom as President of UCW, not a "concerned employee." In all, this was a successful campaign.

Myths vs. Facts of Union Membership

MYTH: It costs too much to join.

FACT: Joining UCW-CWA means paying monthly dues of \$13. That is only \$0.43 a day. Consider you may have spent many times that amount to get an education because you rightly saw it as an investment in your future. Similarly, joining the union is a collective investment with direct benefits to you. UCW-CWA has lead the fight for pay raises, for example due to organizing efforts at UT the pay for staff has increased by over \$3,000 since 2004.

MYTH: Unions are illegal in Tennessee, and I can be fired for joining.

FACT: No, unions are not illegal in Tennessee. Your right to belong and be active in a union or employees association is protected by state and federal law. It is illegal, however, to be fired for joining a union.

MYTH: If I join a union, I will be forced to strike.

FACT: Tennessee law currently prohibits state workers from striking. But more importantly, we are the union! UCW-CWA does what our members want to do. Through the union, all workers have a voice. UCW was started in 2000 by a small group of UT workers. Though we now have over 1,000 members across the state at TBR and UT schools, we are still a union that is run by its members.

MYTH: Union dues go to pay labor bureaucrats who hobnob with managers and politicians.

FACT: UCW-CWA's elected leadership is made up of rank-and-file higher education employees who are elected by other union members. Executive Board members are not paid. As a member, you see where

your money goes. We are a democratic organization: you have a vote on where your membership dollars are spent. Additionally, we have quarterly financial reports that detail where your dues money goes, and every member has a right to request detailed accounts of all expenses.

MYTH: I am a professional. I do not need a union. Unions are for factory workers.

FACT: Being a "professional" is no protection against being underpaid, overworked or treated unfairly. In fact, professionals are sometimes the most overworked and underpaid. This fact has led tens of thousands of university faculty, professional staff and technical employees across the country to form unions. Being in a union is not about the type of work you do. It is about respect and fairness on the job. We all deserve those things.

Benefits of Union Membership

Secretary Todd Freeberg

THERE are many reasons for joining UCW-CWA. By joining, you are helping build our union. This will help make our universities better for all of us: staff, faculty, graduate students and undergraduate students.

There are additional and substantial money-saving reasons for joining UCW-CWA. By joining the union, you are able to access benefits to CWA members through Union Plus programs developed and managed by Union Privilege. Union Privilege was founded by the AFL-CIO with the aim of providing significant consumer benefits to union members. No dues go into the development or operation of these Union Plus programs.

Scholarships: For over 15 years, the Union Plus Scholarship program has provided over \$2.4 million to help with higher education costs for over 1700 students.

These scholarships are awarded annually and range from \$500 to \$4,000. Additional scholarships are available from the CWA Bern foundation and the State AFL-CIO Home buying, mortgage counseling and refinancing made easier and more affordable.

Savings in auto insurance (of up to \$342 annually – average premium savings)

Quality supplemental insurance programs at low or no cost, including \$5,000 no-cost accidental death coverage, and spouse and domestic partner coverage.

Low cost or free legal advice: one toll-free call can put you in touch with a national network of over 2,000 law offices offering free or low cost services to our union members.

Ability to obtain a Union Plus credit card, with no annual fee and a competitive APR.

Free counseling for credit and housing issues including debt management programs. Trained and certified counselors are available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day by phone or online.

Union members-only discounts on car rentals, *Consumer Reports* subscriptions, Goodyear Tire and Service, health clubs, Turbo Tax, and many more.

So in addition to the sense of solidarity in building the union to make our universities the best universities they can be, there are substantial day-to-day money saving possibilities that are available to members of UCW-CWA.

Help us build our union, and help save yourself some money! Encourage your coworkers to join, or if you haven't yet, join today!

Member Spotlight



BRITTA KINDERVATER

joined United Campus Workers shortly after she came to UT-Chattanooga as an administrative assistant in the Department of Political Science in 2007. Since then, Kindervater has provided leadership for the union, and she recently became the chapter's secretary.

"I joined the union as I believe it gives a voice to employee concerns and balances the relationship between employer and employee," she said.

Kindervater feels the biggest challenge facing the union is reduced funding from the state because it requires students to rely on private funding for their education.

"It really should be public funds for public education," said Kindervater.

Kindervater also feels decision makers need to emphasize the connection between publicly funded higher education and local and state economies.

"No raises in the immediate future is also a real hardship for employees, financially and morally," she added.

Honduran garment workers union, student activists win historic campaign

Member Thomas Walker

MEMBERS of the Honduran union SITRAJERZEESH, who work at a factory producing university apparel contracted through the giant Russell Athletics, recently won a historic victory in alliance with activists from United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) and other partners. On November 17, 2009, leaders of SITRAJERZEESH and USAS signed an agreement with Russell Athletics to reopen the plant that the workers had produced garments at and that had been shut down after a successful unionization drive following long-standing grievances around wage, health and safety and basic fairness issues.

Leaders of SITRAJERZEESH had met with a delegation of UCW leaders and members of Progressive Student Alliance, an affiliate of USAS in Knoxville and an ally of our union's work since its inception. Moved by the testimony of the Honduran union activists, UCW issued a letter of condemnation calling for the University of Tennessee system to sever its ties with Russell Athletics in compliance with its membership in the Workers' Rights Consortium, a labor rights body which monitors apparel production for member universities to prevent abuses.

The meeting and letter show an important link between workers abroad and at home as they struggle for justice in the workplace, challenging the notion that "the bottom line" matters more than the people themselves. Moreover, the role of student activists in support of workers was critical in the Russell campaign, just as it has been throughout the history of UCW's work. When workers and students stand together, victory is all the more likely.



MTSU union members meet with State Senator Jim Tracy before classes begin in January 2010. From left to right (front) Pete Roode, Rachel Kirk, Michael Principe (rear) Eric Snyder, Karly Safar, State Senator Jim Tracy, Rick Rishaw, Alfred Lutz, Tom Smith.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

KNOXVILLE chapter meets the first Tuesday of every month at the UNITE building, 1124 N. Broadway. Contact Janet Miles for more information at (865) 705-8040.

MARTIN chapter meets the second Thursday of every month at the IBEW Hall, 402 Jackson Street. Contact Tim Hacker for more information at (731) 881-7283.

MEMPHIS chapter meetings are TBA. Contact Tom Smith toll-free for more information at 1 (877) CWA-3865.

MTSU chapter meets the last Thursday of every month, location TBA. Contact Karly Safar for more information at (615) 519-0157.

CHATTANOOGA chapter's January meetings is Wednesday, January 20, 2010. Contact Cameron Brooks for future meeting dates at (865) 387-4408.

UCW LOBBY DAY: Tuesday, March 9, 2010 at Legislative Plaza in Nashville.

UCW MARTIN CHAPTER LOBBY DAY: Tuesday, March 16, 2010 contact Tim Hacker for details.



UCW Martin leaders Steve Crowell, Grounds, and Tony Maisano, HVAC, chat about pay issues in preparation for a meeting with State Representative Mark Maddox. The November 3, 2009 meeting with the Representative was a great success.

E-MAIL NEWSLETTER SUGGESTIONS TO FAIRNESS@UCW-CWA.ORG

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