

UT CAMPUS VOICES

News from UT's staff and faculty union



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Higher Education Employees Face Massive Budget Cuts We Need Organization and Political Involvement Now More Than Ever



UCW-CWA member Bingham Pope helps hand out information about the state budget cuts to UT employees as part of the union's educational efforts.

By Tom Smith, UCW-CWA President

When Governor Phil Bredesen first introduced his "back-to-basics" budget in early February it was obvious to most that this was not going to be a good year for higher education in Tennessee. Initial sales tax revenue figures were below expectations and the economy continued to weaken.

Since then the state tax revenue shortfall continued to worsen, topping \$450 million. The funding outlook for higher education and its employees has become a dire crisis.

Under this budget, higher education funding was cut by a whopping \$56 million. Take a moment and let that number sink in.

We have seen enrollment hit new, record highs as more students come to state schools with HOPE Scholarships. The need for a college educated workforce in Tennessee continues to intensify. In spite of these trends the General Assembly just slashed our budgets, effectively rolling back the efforts of recent public investments to combat years of declining state funding for Tennessee's universities. Add to this a lower than expected tuition increase, and UT alone is coping with a \$50 million deficit (*The Tennessean*, May 23, 2008).

Lack of Leadership Yields Unnecessary Budget Cuts

Perhaps what makes these cuts especially egregious is the fact that they might have been avoided entirely.

Tennessee's tax structure is reliant almost entirely on our sales tax. As a result, Tennessee has the dubious distinctions of having the nation's highest tax on food as well as the highest overall sales tax. *Yet despite our dependence on the sales tax, we have \$2.7 billion in exemp-*

WHAT WE KNOW NOW

- Legislature cuts \$56 million from higher education budgets
- No pay raise for higher ed workers; \$400 one-time bonus in October for employees with 3 or more years
- Bredesen buyout package offered to agency employees, NOT UT workers
- \$2,700,000,000.00 remain in sales tax exemptions; despite budget difficulties state lawmakers attempt to add even more for pet projects
- Efforts to close massive loopholes that allow large businesses to hide profits out-of-state avoiding TN taxes deferred to "study committee"
- Despite cuts UT will raise tuition by only 6%
- Bredesen refuses to use "rainy day" fund to offset higher education cuts; Governor plans to spend an additional \$100,000,000.00 to attract new corporations to TN

UCW-CWA ESTABLISHES BUDGET CUTS HOTLINE

If you have questions, new information or are worried that your job or department may be facing major cuts please contact us.

1-877-292-3865

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 Communications Workers of America
 Local 3865

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UCW-CWA member Ginger Loy (center right) with Josh Smyser, Karen Principe and Leslie Principe (left to right) of the PSA's Union Summer Project pose for a photo

UT students continue union support work

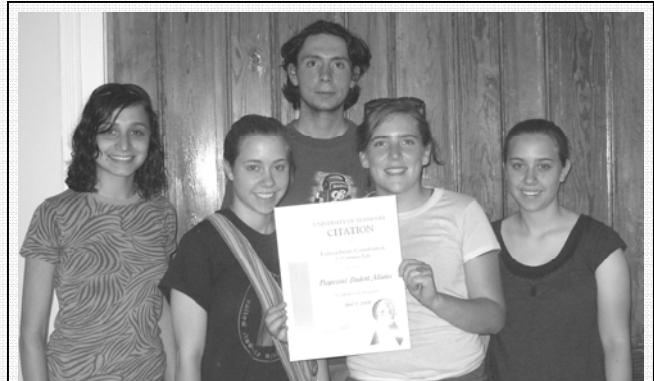
Progressive Student Alliance Receives Contribution to Campus Life Award, Launches Union Summer Project

By Gabby Kindell,
 Progressive Student Alliance

Last month the Progressive Student Alliance was honored at the annual UTK Chancellor's Awards Banquet for their efforts to garner fair wages for UT workers, and this summer they will work with Cameron Brooks and Tom Smith on their Union Summer project, during which they hope to increase membership and carry out other projects with the goal of strengthening the union.

Anne Barnett, PSA's chairperson, accepted the "Extraordinary Contributions to Campus Life" award on behalf of PSA during a ceremony in the UT-Knoxville University Center on April 9th. PSA was applauded for "working toward positive change in the lives of UT students, faculty and staff, including a goal of fair compensation for all UT workers." PSA was one of two groups to receive organizational awards for their contribution to campus life.

PSA was proud to receive recognition for their hard



Members of the Progressive Student Alliance pose with the Contribution to Campus Life Award

work, and hopes that the university, in honoring PSA, also recognizes the need for fair pay and working conditions at UT. This award is a victory for both PSA and UT workers, and PSA looks forward to further collaboration and success with the union, especially in regards to their Union Summer project.

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UCW-CWA Investigates:

Parking fee increase planned at UT Knoxville

UTK Parking Services began announcing plans to increase staff and faculty parking fees effective July 1, 2008. UCW-CWA has obtained information that monthly parking costs will increase by an additional \$1.20. This change will bring the charges to \$26.50 each month, or \$318 a year.

Donna Hurst, UCW-CWA member in Student Financial Aid and ERC representative first heard about the increase at the May ERC meeting. "They talked about how we were not going to see a pay raise, how insurance was going up and they then get to the parking increase. When they asked for comments it was clear everyone is very upset that it is going up again."

Wes Knott, UCW-CWA Bookkeeper and ERC alternate for the library was also at that meeting. "Brian Browning from the VC Finance and Administration (Denise Barlow) office said that the money that Parking Services got from athletics would not change and that it was problematic to change the parking from \$5 to an odd about like \$6 or \$7 because it would require attendants to have to make change and deal with 1's. We got the impression that raising student, staff, and faculty rates was an easy non-controversial way to generate more revenue for Parking Services."

While UT has little control of the decision to raise insurance costs, and the choice to cut the proposed 2 percent pay raise came from Nashville, many employees have pointed out that the pronouncement to raise parking is an entirely internal one.

Kathy Herd, UCW-CWA Steward and ERC Representative in Facility Services acknowledges that these plans have been in the works for some time. "They

decided to do this a long time ago. They are not just 'springing' it on us." She admits it's not the increase which bothers her, but instead what the money will be used for. "What I don't like is a decision to up our parking to building a garage with administrative office space for Parking Services. We should not have to pay for administrative office space."

Calls to Parking Services officials requesting information on the number of new parking spaces being created and the rationale for the fee hikes were not returned.



This mostly empty parking lot is a rare sight at UT Knoxville where crowded lots and high fees are major issues of concern for employees

"I think this increase is awful" says Michelle Brannen, Hodges Library Studio and Media Center departmental supervisor and UCW-CWA member. "It would be one thing if we were ensured a space, or even got to park close to where we worked. As it is, this will just be another garage far away from my office."

Donna Hurst agrees. "It's a shame we have to pay for parking in the first place. We are paying them for the service we give the university by working here."

UCW-CWA has been an advocate for alternatives to the current parking fee system. "We have pushed for several years now in educational pieces and in our interactions with top level campus administrators to consider a sliding scale for parking fees here at the Knoxville campus," explained Tom Smith, UCW-CWA President. "This latest fee hike shows the need for a parking system that does not unfairly burden employees making less than \$100,000."

Some have decided to cut their losses. Explains Brannen, "I am giving up my tag. I can park closer on the street for free."

Campus Voices Editorial: UT employees need organization. If not now, when?

By Shela Van Ness, UTC Chapter Vice President

For those feeling the financial pinch deriving from over a dozen years of less than cost of living raises, let's connect some dots. Earlier this year the legislature gave another "tax free weekend." This circus event came at a time when sales tax revenues are down nearly \$500 million. As a result this year's state budget slashed funding from higher education spending, cut over 2,000 state jobs, and cut back over \$80 million in funding for low income Tennesseans struggling with out-of-control medical expenses.

They intend to give more money to all UT institutions to pay their skyrocketing utility and gasoline costs, but when it comes to those who do the work of the university, they choose to ignore your family's need for electricity and gasoline. Then there is the "disappeared" funding last year to help with pay compression for higher education employees.

Who speaks for you and your family? The United

Campus Workers - Communications Workers of America is active on four UT system campuses. We have earned respect and positive rapport with key legislators, but they know that despite steady growth, we are small compared to other big interest groups. When hundreds more of our coworkers join us, we will represent a substantial block of votes they cannot ignore. Each of our homes likely represents an average of three votes, a fact to which legislators are very sensitive.

If you saw "An Inconvenient Truth" you remember the illustration of the frog sitting in water. As the water gradually heats beneath it, the frog just sits, adapting gradually to the heat. At some point if the frog does not jump out to save itself, it will surely boil. I think UTC employees have been in the hot water for quite some time.

United Campus Workers wants to put our needs on the negotiating table when decisions regarding pay and your family's lifestyle are being determined. We are a thoroughly democratic organization, with many of the nicest, most accomplished and loyal employees of UT. Won't you help? If you have not joined yet, the question truly has become "if not now, when?"

Member Testimonial: Faculty leader makes the case for joining UCW



*Submitted by Richard Rice,
former UTC Faculty Senate
President; Board of Trustees
Member 2005-2006*

I support the union because of President Petersen and previous administrators here at UTC who spoke of their "concern" about faculty and staff salaries that almost never have kept up with inflation. They did not address our genuine needs nor directed funds our way, instead pursuing other "priorities."

Last year nation-wide administrative salaries went up 4% but we probably will not see faculty-staff increases at all. Nothing new there; over the years UT employees have been taken for granted, and we did nothing. Administrators have their role – although it is hard to discern what some of them actually do – but

what makes this university really work are the staff who service the physical plant and the faculty in classrooms teaching our students. Why should we accept decades of inflation-eroded salaries?

Alone we can be called "disgruntled employees" and ignored, but a large and active union is in itself a message that we reject the paternalistic crumbs thrown our way.

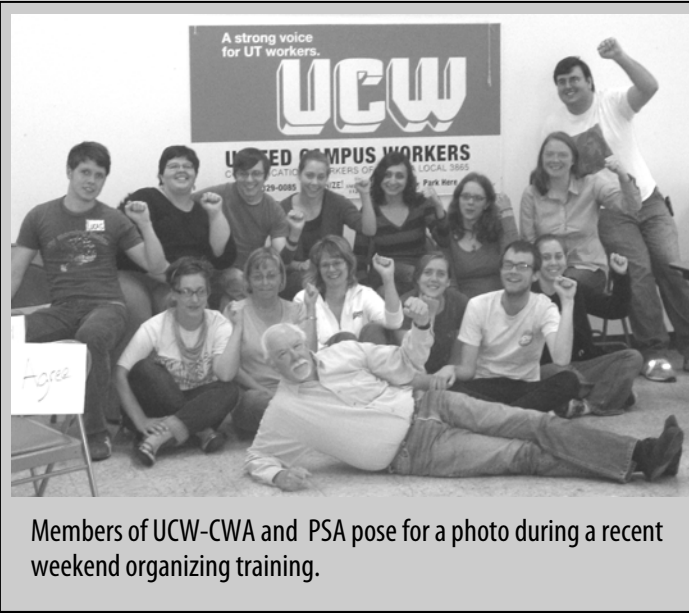
I realize that some staff and many faculty harbor strong reservations about unions, thinking that they will prosper as individuals of merit recognized by their administrative superiors, but few boats will float high without a rising tide. It is a fact that campuses with unions have higher average salaries than those that do not. It is not surprising that in recent decades union growth has been in white-collar service industries such as higher education.

Joining the union is not the only way you should protest, but it is now possible and effective to register your discontent and work for a decent wage. If not for the money, then for the respect you deserve.

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This summer, more than 15 members of PSA will engage in a variety of activities to help build the union. Union Summer officially kicked off on May 16th and 17th when members of PSA joined with other union members for an Organizing Training at the UCW office.

Not only will PSA members be speaking to non-union campus workers in an effort to increase union membership, they will also build the union's website and engage in their own Living Wage Video Project. PSA members will make all articles about the union available so that anyone accessing the website can read about our victories.



Members of UCW-CWA and PSA pose for a photo during a recent weekend organizing training.

PSA will be conducting video interviews with union members and others this summer, which they hope to edit into a video that can be used to support the campaign for a living wage. One week into Union Summer, PSA members are excited about the opportunity to strengthen the union and are

looking forward to celebrating their achievements by the summer's end.

Letters to the Editor:

UTC faculty leader corresponds with Nashville

Dear Governor Bredesen and members of the General Assembly,

If I understand last week's news stories correctly, then a number of things will happen as a result of the Governor's proposed budget.

*\$100 million will be added to the state budget to provide incentives for companies to locate in Tennessee and create new jobs while up to 2,000 already employed state employees will lose their jobs.

*Higher education funds will be cut by \$55 million, causing tuition to go up, making it harder for Tennesseans to attend college, thereby keeping our work force below national averages in education levels and causing companies to locate to other states with higher levels of education.

*State employees will not get raises (in spite of 4% inflation in 2007) and will have to pay more for their health insurance while state judges, assistant prosecutors/investigators, and others will get mandatory raises.

In addition, while eliminating some or all of the current exemptions to the state sales tax would solve our current budget problems, no legislation to remove these exemptions is under consideration at this time.

I do not know whether the state's rainy day fund should be tapped to help deal with these problems. However, I understand that Tennessee has fewer government employees than other states of similar population, and I am dismayed when I hear the Governor say that state government is "fat around the middle," that cutting state employees "won't even draw blood," and that the tighter budget he has proposed is "no huge crisis."

I have been privileged to be on the faculty of UT Chattanooga for the past 33 years. However, for the entire time I've lived in Tennessee, funding for state government and higher education has seemed to be either "feast" or "famine." I believe that the state needs both more stability in revenue and the elimination of the contradictions I've pointed out above. I look to you and other state officials to begin to solve these problems. I would really like to be more certain of our state's future and more proud to be a Tennessean than I am today.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,
George Helton

Continued from front page

tions on the books right now. Several lawmakers attempted to ram through additional exemptions to the sales tax for their personal pet projects.

There are numerous additional funding alternatives that would have prevented these massive cuts to our public services.

One such example, the Food & Business Tax Fairness Act (SB3158/HB3182), sponsored by Sen. Burchett & Rep. Fitzhugh, would have eliminated a number of loopholes that allow corporations to dodge state taxes. This legislation would have provided much needed relief to Tennessee's working families, reducing the sales tax on food from 5.5% to 4.5% (cities and counties can

add up to 2.75% to the state rate). Advocates of the measure estimate it would net between \$20 million and \$150 million in additional revenue, even after factoring in the revenue lost to the food tax reduction.

The state also has a \$750 million rainy day fund. A small portion of this could easily have staved off some of these cuts we will now have to live with.

By simply closing some of the most baseless exemption loopholes the Governor and General Assembly could have easily made back the

sales tax shortfall. By stepping up to the plate and providing leadership this crisis could have been prevented. Sadly, we saw more of the same as the Legislature stuck with policies despite their proven record of failure.

We should also be clear, more than just higher education will suffer greatly under this budget. Governor Bredesen also pushed a major cut to funding meant to assist hard working Tennesseans afflicted with serious illness who are facing foreclosure on their homes and possible homelessness, bankruptcy and utter destitution has been called heartless by some. He announced



UCW-CWA members take a break from meetings with state legislators to pose for a photo.

this cut at the same time as a plan to spend an additional \$100 million to entice big businesses to relocate in Tennessee.

The Department of Children's Services, having seen its Federal funding evaporate, is firing nearly 200 employees across the state. In addition to these layoffs, the Governor has committed to trim over 2,000 state jobs. The General Assembly passed a buyout package designed by Governor Bredesen to coax enough state workers into leaving their jobs voluntarily in an effort to avoid additional layoffs. *It is important to point out that the*

Bredesen buyout package of 4 months salary, \$500 per year of service, continued medical coverage and college tuition is not currently being offered to higher education workers.

Where Do We Go From Here?

UCW-CWA's leadership will keep our members informed as more details come to light on how these cuts will be handled. In the meantime, we have established a hotline for all UT employees interested in more information about what these cuts will mean. If you have questions, or are worried that your job or department may be facing major cuts please contact us at 1-877-CWA-3865.

As of this writing, UT has announced plans to raise tuition. Caving to state pressures tuition will not rise higher than 6% according to a statement from UT President John Petersen.

While the decision not to burden students and their families with the state's lack of prudent fiscal policy is certainly welcome news, tuition increases will continue to be a sticking point as long as Nashville refuses to fully fund higher education.

It is certainly true that rising tuition prices have made it much harder for student from working class backgrounds, non-traditional students, and all those working to put themselves through school.

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However, the state faces real questions of commitment if they continue to under fund higher education, then attempt to regulate the institutions when it comes to decisions concerning tuition levels.

If the 2008 Legislative Session has shown anything, it has painted a clear picture of the crisis facing our public services. As higher education employees we cannot continue

to allow our friends, neighbors and coworkers to ignore this crisis. We

also cannot continue to sit back and believe that the administration can solve these problems for us. In email after email UT system and various campus level administration mouthpieces passed on the deteriorating conditions in Nashville as inevitable even while fierce de-

bate of the nature and scope of the cuts was taking place in the General Assembly. And how could they have acted differently? The Governor is after all the chair of UT's

Board of Trustees.

The need for a voice that is independent of the administration, that can speak up for higher education, its institutions and most importantly its employees in Tennessee is crystal clear and felt all across this state.

We know that voice is UCW-CWA. We know what we need; no one other than ourselves can win it. Now is the time to remind our coworkers of these facts.

2008 Campaign for UT's Working Families:

UCW-CWA members mobilize thousands for legislative campaign

By Cameron Brooks UCW-CWA Lead Organizer

As the Legislative Session comes to a close, we feel it is important to look back at just how much UCW-CWA members did to advance the interest of higher education workers over the past several months.

Supporters of UCW-CWA's 2008 Campaign For UT's Working Families sent literally thousands of post-cards and almost 1500 emails to leaders in the General Assembly.

Some naysayers may point to the state budget and scoff at our attempts to improve the funding situation. However, on every trip our leadership took to Nashville, state senators and representatives referenced the extent to which our message was being received.

UT union workers call for 'rainy day'

BY DARREN DUNLAP
dunlapd@knoxnews.com

Workers at the University of Tennessee put this proposal to state officials Monday: Tap the "rainy-day fund" to stave off proposed reductions by Gov. Phil Bredesen.

Workers at UT took their message to the Knoxville campus early Monday morning. A group of about 10 workers handed out flyers urging others to call their elected officials about budget cuts that could "hurt" UT's working families. They started at 7 a.m. Monday in the parking lot of UT's College of Veterinary Medicine.

"We're really putting it back in people's hands and telling them, 'This budget is not done,'" said Cameron Brooks, lead organizer for United Campus Workers — Communications Workers of America.

UT officials were awaiting more details on the budget Monday.

UT President John Peters-

en wants the university to have the flexibility to make "selected rather than across-the-board reductions," he told faculty and staff last week by e-mail.

"We are now asking our campus chancellors and other leadership to decide how their organizations or units would make necessary spending cuts," Petersen said.

The budget cuts will affect tuition levels, making increases "unavoidable," he added.

Union workers at UT feel that Bredesen's proposed cuts of \$55 million to higher education will result in job losses on campuses. The cuts aren't inevitable, the group contends.

The state could offset the higher-education reductions by using its "rainy day" savings and by closing exemptions to the sales tax in Tennessee, according to Brooks.

Darren Dunlap may be reached at 865-342-6334.

UCW-CWA's efforts also resulted in several stories in local papers and the nightly TV news educating our communities of what all was at stake with this budget.

In the end we may not have been able to roll back these cuts, or force Nashville to pass a cost-of-living raise. But our push for some form of salary increase did contribute to the decision of giving all state and higher education workers a one-time bonus of \$400 in October (some had pushed to make this bonus a percentage of one's salary which would have unfairly benefited higher paid workers).

Ultimately this decision came down to the power of numbers. When UCW-CWA has thousands of members we will not be talking about funding cuts; we will be discussing pay raises.

Coverage of UCW-CWA's activities in the Knoxville News Sentinel

CALENDAR of EVENTS

Knoxville chapter meetings : July 1, 2008 at 5:30pm

Special Membership Meeting and Dinner to discuss State and Higher Education budget cuts, parking fee increase and next year's goals at UCW-CWA's office, 1124 N. Broadway, Knoxville, TN, 37917

Chattanooga chapter meetings: TBA, Brock Hall Room 303

Contact Shela Van Ness at 423-645-0385 for information



UCW-CWA Members Ayo Alvaro, UTK Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures (Top) and Laura Maynard, UTK Social Work (Left) enlist student and community support in the union's legislative campaign



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