



Connect

NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTCHESTER COMMUNITY COLLEGE FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

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From October 27-29, several hundred activists and educators from SUNY and CUNY gathered in Saratoga Springs for the 39th annual NYSUT Community College Conference. WCCFT was represented by Mel Bienenfeld, Claudia Cardoso (Jacques), Richard Courage, Rowan Lindley, Kimberly Mallory, Joanna Peters, and Jim Werner. They attended meetings and workshops on collective bargaining, adjunct issues, political action, social justice, and labor history, among other topics.

To Joanna, "Listening to and learning from representatives of other unions both enlightened me and made me appreciative of the union structure we have at WCC." Claudia, on the other hand, was dismayed to learn that adjuncts at some SUNY colleges are not represented by any union. Kimberly found the conference "a very positive experience," especially a presentation on effective lobbying. Rowan noted that a workshop on leadership succession provided "ideas for giving members more opportunities to be involved in union

work, which then might develop into an interest in leadership positions." Jim found value in techniques "to strengthen our negotiating position by increasing member engagement, making people understand why union involvement is so important." Coming shortly before Election Day, a workshop on the proposed state constitutional convention served as a reminder that union activism extends far beyond local contract negotiations and grievance hearings.

Mel participated in a plenary session panel on higher education "reforms," such as Achieving the Dream and Guided Pathways. Joined by representatives of the American Federation of Teachers and the Community College Research Center, he described his "hypothesis that even if those proposing specific initiatives are sincere about 'reform,' in practice they get pushed by administrators trying to burnish their image as solving the problems of failing students. So far there are no strong results that the 'reforms' are helping."

TO MEL BIENENFELD AND THE WCCFT EXECUTIVE BOARD



State Sen. George Latimer thanking supporters on election night. Photo Credit: Jon Craig

“ I want you to know that you will be getting your contract signed very soon, very soon; perhaps sooner than you might expect. ”

George Latimer

Thank you for all you did to encourage us to actively work for the election of our new County Executive.

I know that many of us participated in different ways, according to our own abilities and time limitations. The excellent and widely disseminated union newsletter inspired us to do whatever we could to help elect George Latimer. We, as a union, came together to work on this campaign and it further united us.

I received an invitation to attend the “Victory Celebration” in White Plains. When I arrived, I was surprised to find that, as far as I could see, I was the only representative from our college. However, I knew many people from previous campaigns, so I did not feel like a total stranger. I have attended many election night celebrations, but this was the most crowded and noisiest I could recall, with much genuine affection displayed toward Mr. Latimer. It went quite late, and I stayed until the crowd began to thin out, well after midnight.

It was then I decided, as the only person there from WCC, to let George know that we had been with him all the way. I shook his hand and re-introduced myself, reminding him that WCC faculty had worked very hard for his victory. He replied: “Of course, I remember you and our conversation at the Union meeting” (following our contract ratification).

He added, very enthusiastically and sincerely, “I want you to know that you will be getting your contract signed very soon, very soon; perhaps sooner than you might expect.” I thanked him for that, as dozens of others stepped in to take my place. It was an unexpected and very reassuring moment. It seems that we once again have someone who will hear us and work with us as County Executive.

In solidarity,
Sheldon Malev

WCCFT NEWS

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT:

Rowan Lindley reports that eleven adjunct colleagues and twenty-eight full-timers received professional development reimbursement awards for 2016-17.

ADJUNCT COMMITTEE:

At the November membership meeting, committee members Gwendolyn Roundtree Evans, Gretchen Sancher, and Stephen Sewell presented the WCCFT Adjunct of the Year Award to Donna DeCosa, formerly a member of the Executive Board and adjunct instructor of mathematics. This was only the second time this award has been presented.

Message from the President

Mel Bienenfeld

At our November membership meeting, I told those present that the December 6 meeting will be a crucial one for us. We'll be discussing a response to the likely event that public sector unions will lose the "agency shop fee" next year as a result of the Supreme Court case of Janus vs. AFSCME.

This column is not the place to explain why that can be a crippling blow to unionism; we'll do that at the December meeting and elsewhere. But all of us – highly union engaged, moderately engaged, or unengaged – must understand what we need to do to preserve union strength under a so-called "right to work" regime. So I asked the November attendees to explain to their colleagues why they need to come to the December meeting. It's about protecting our union, and all public sector unions, now and in the future.

That doesn't mean the December meeting will be all "gloom and doom" – far from it! We have a lot to celebrate and a lot to be hopeful about. Consider:

- Members are showing great interest in the election of a new negotiating team.
- George Latimer won the County Executive election, with significant help from WCCFT.
- Members have increased their involvement, joining new committees at the November meeting and immediately beginning to work.
- The work of adjunct Kimberly Mallory and others on the issue of unemployment insurance benefits for adjuncts has begun to bear fruit. The issue was put on an agenda at the NYSUT Community College Conference, where Kimberly made an eloquent impromptu presentation, and NYSUT legislative staff have now revived long-stalled work on a related bill in Albany.

So let's all roll up our sleeves and pitch in. We've got powerful enemies, but we're powerful too! If you can be in Valhalla on December 6, I'll see you at the meeting. You'll be there--right?

In solidarity, Mel

CONTRACT CORNER

Judy Langer, Vice-President

The ballots are in the mail and by the time you read this column, the membership will have its first elected negotiating team in the twenty-first century! This is a very exciting and very powerful event. Congratulations to these individuals. They have been selected by their peers specifically for the task of negotiating the next contract. We now have a team that will remain intact from the start to the end of negotiations -- a continuously united front on our side of the table. Historically, the negotiating team was elected independently of the Executive Board. However, at some point in the recent past, the separate election was eliminated and the team became a subset of the board.

One of the resulting problems was that contract negotiations outlasted Executive Board members' terms since board elections are held every two years. New board members had to periodically be brought onto the negotiating

team, slowing the process as they had to be trained and integrated. Last time, almost the entire team had to be replaced. With an independent election, this should never happen again. We will have a stable, ongoing negotiating team, and only the WCCFT president and vice-president must face re-election. The core of the team remains in place.

We have also tried to balance the team to represent different segments of the faculty. Our last team was in fact selected from the Executive Board to represent all our constituents. We had fulltime and adjunct teaching faculty, a fulltime counselor and a fulltime academic support coordinator. Our recent constitutional amendment mandates such balance as a permanent feature of our negotiating team.

Our newly elected team will be introduced at the December 6 meeting, and we will schedule our first training session shortly thereafter. The team will meet in January and will hit the ground running for the Spring semester. Please start sending in your best ideas and suggestions for our negotiating proposals.

WHAT'S AT STAKE IN THE JANUS CASE?

BY ROWAN LINDLEY

Janus v. AFSCME, much discussed at the recent NYSUT Community College Conference, is the latest in a series of so-called "Right to Work" legal cases. Union representatives call it the "Right to Work for Less," emphasizing the intention to weaken the labor movement and undercut salaries, benefits, and working conditions of public employees. Janus will probably be decided by June, and given the new composition of the Supreme Court, is likely to be decided against the union position.

The issue is whether it is legal to charge non-members fees for the union that represents them, which is obligated to negotiate for them and help them resolve grievances. In New York these are called agency fees and are charged to bargaining-unit faculty who have not joined the union. If the court rules against us, unions would no longer be able to collect these fees. The financial impact on WCCFT would probably be great since many adjuncts are here only briefly and may feel little connection to the union. More importantly, however, if faculty, whether full-time or adjunct, decide they would rather keep the fees (and anti-union propaganda will encourage us to "give yourself a raise, quit the union"), the WCC Administration may decide that it does not need to treat our weakened union



with any respect. Our strength has always come from our unity; it is essential that we preserve that.

Please attend the December 6 membership meeting to learn more about Janus, the implications of a negative decision, and what we might do to mitigate them. We need to work together to keep our union strong.

UPCOMING EVENTS

MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS TEC 107

Dec. 6

NEA HIGHER ED CONFERENCE

March 15-16, 2018, Chicago

NYSUT REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY

April 27-28, 2018, Buffalo.

FT Connect strives to keep you informed about significant events affecting you as a WCC faculty member, to advocate for your rights, and to provide a forum for your views. Please send your feedback, ideas for articles, or letters to editor Richard A. Courage at richardcwccft@gmail.com.

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EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS

Richard Courage

richardcwccft@gmail.com
914-606-6106 SCI-362

Gwen Roundtree Evans

gwenrewccft@gmail.com
914-606-6581 STC-209

Virginia Falcone

ginnyfalconegfwccft@gmail.com
914-606-6745 ADM-120

Joanna Peters

joannapwccft@gmail.com
914-606-6234 Lib Ground-41

Gretchen Sancher

gretchenswccft@gmail.com
914-345-8856 TEC-32

Stephen Sewell

stephenswccft@gmail.com
914-345-8856 TEC-32

Don Weigand

donalddwccft@gmail.com
914-606-6572 STC-209

Jim Werner

jimwwccft@gmail.com
914-606-6840 SCI-301

WCCFT OFFICERS

President:

Mel Bienenfeld

melbwccft@gmail.com
914-345-8856 TEC-32

Vice-President:

Judy Langer

judywccft@gmail.com
914-345-8856 TEC-32

Secretary:

Rowan Lindley

rowanlwccft@gmail.com
914-606-8584 TEC-124B

Treasurer:

Donald Shernoff

donswccft@gmail.com
914-345-8856 TEC-32

WWW.SUNYWCCFT.ORG



Westchester Community College Federation of Teachers

Westchester Community College | Technology Building, Room 32, Valhalla, NY 10595
WCC System: 914-606-8421 | Independent WCCFT: 914-345-8856