

PEOPLE POWER

HEOs using gains to build for the future

By ANDREA VÁSQUEZ

In the last PSC contract with CUNY, Higher Education Officers (HEOs) made some important gains for improving our opportunities for reclassification and salary advancement. HEOs do not have a promotional system, as faculty have, and many of us experience the frustration of being unable to advance in salary and responsibilities. The 2010-2017 contract included a new provision for a salary increment of \$2,500 for HEOs at the top step for their rank, and introduced improvements in the system of reclassification to higher ranks. Since the contract was ratified, HEOs have been the driving force in implementing these provisions and have shown how a strategy of member-driven contract enforcement can build union power. We now find ourselves in a strong position to confront the anti-union Supreme Court decision expected in *Janus v. AFSCME*, and we are better prepared to begin negotiating our next collective bargaining agreement.

ACTIVE MEMBERS

At every CUNY campus HEOs have stepped up to serve as PSC representatives on labor management committees whose charge is to be the first to review applications for a salary assignment differential. At a time when conservative forces are counting on weakening worker organizations, this increased activism and contract enforcement has led to a feeling of “ownership” of our benefits, our contract and our union. Members have participated in contract training sessions, informational meetings on the new benefits and PSC HEO chapter meetings. These actions, along with the support work of HEO delegates and PSC staff, led to the formation of all 22 labor management committees. Many HEOs have begun to receive the \$2,500 raise. Additionally, there was an upswing in the number of applications and approvals for reclassification, as members have been educating themselves and each other on all opportunities for advancement.

Letters of commendation, excellent evaluations, skills certificates and a clear ability to master additional duties over time – these are some of the ways that HEOs have met the criteria for the new salary increase. The successes have often been smooth and swift. At Queensborough Community College, over

a dozen applications went all the way through to presidential approval. And at the Graduate Center and the College of Staten Island, a total of five differentials went through the process successfully in less than a month.

We have seen 64 submissions: 30 have received the differential, and more are in the pipeline; three have applied for reclassification instead. Members are monitoring the applications locally and the union is diligently following up and intervening when necessary.

ISSUES AHEAD

Serious problems persist on several campuses, particularly those that relate to funding. Initially, the Hunter College administration attempted to postpone implementation of the new contract provision for 18 months, claiming there wasn't enough money in their budget. The PSC began grievance proceedings (because a college may not unilaterally decide to postpone implementing our contract), which led the administration to consider the applications. Ultimately, Hunter granted the differential to four HEOs. At City College, members who were approved in the HEO labor management committee passed the recommendations along to the College HEO Committee

(also known as the Screening Committee) and were then told that the applications were being put “on hold” due to budget. The College HEO Committees are charged with evaluating the applications based solely on the contract language: “accretion of duties or excellence of performance.” The College HEO Committee may not use the college's budget as an excuse to deny the differential. The PSC is now filing a grievance against City College and two other colleges because of “improper application of criteria for eligibility.”

At John Jay College and the Borough of Manhattan Community College members and HEO labor management committee members waited from three to six months to hear about the decision, and at Hostos Community College an application inexplicably languished in human resources for many months. Members should not be subjected to these wildly uneven implementation experiences. CUNY agreed to this provision and members deserve a smooth and respectful process that encourages this opportunity for advancement. In the PSC's demands for the upcoming contract, we will fight to improve the process and guarantee that the work HEOs do for CUNY and its students is recognized.

There are still more than 400 HEOs across CUNY who are eligible for the salary differential, and they are encouraged to consider applying. Others who are not yet at the top step should begin to create a portfolio of material that can be used in the future to make the case for the salary differential or reclassification.

LOOKING FORWARD

Raises are great and should be fought for and received. And reclassifications are great and should be granted whenever someone is working out of title. But the picture is broader than that; it is about engaging and activating members. As a result of the work HEOs have done and as we kick off the next contract campaign, we find ourselves in a strengthened position. The contract work has made the PSC more visible on campus, and the membership-building that has accompanied contract enforcement has fortified our numbers. In the face of *Janus* and other attacks on working people, the link between contract enforcement, member activism and union power is apparent. As always, it's on us to continue to strengthen, improve and defend our gains as we move forward together in defense of our working conditions, the students we serve and this public university system.

Andrea Vásquez is the HEO PSC chapter chair.

Rank-and-file HEO action

A tax bill

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The rest of us will have to reconcile the difference, not necessarily with higher taxes, but with diminished benefits and federal programs.

SMASHING THE STATE

In a December 3 analysis in its news pages, *The New York Times* sounded the alarm that “Republicans are preparing to use the swelling deficits made worse by the [tax] package as a rationale to pursue their long-held vision: undoing the entitlements of the New Deal and Great Society, leaving government leaner and the safety net skimpier for millions of Americans.”

It's the old conservative refrain of “starve the beast.” Using the projected \$1.5 trillion deficit triggered by the tax bill as cover, Speaker of the House Paul Ryan has already announced a wish list of cuts to safety net initiatives.

Cuts to Social Security and Medicare are all but inevitable.

The starvation food chain starts with the federal government, but ultimately works its way down to state and local entities, particularly in higher-taxing blue states like New York and California. Under the GOP legislation, whether you file individually or as a married couple, deductions for state and local taxes (SALT) will cap at \$10,000. This includes property taxes, the primary source of K-12 funding for many communities. Unable to soften their tax burden with unlimited deductions, taxpayers, not surprisingly, may push for lower SALT. Combined with a starvation diet of federal funds from Capitol Hill, states and local governments will face tremendous pressure to downsize their tax burdens.

Starving state and local governments by targeting SALT deductions “was our point from the start,” said Jonathan Williams, chief economist at the American Legislative Exchange Council

(ALEC), a right-wing advocacy group that has successfully crafted fiscally conservative legislation for dozens of state governments.

“We hope that it [SALT caps] engenders more fiscal discipline at the state level in those high-tax states,” Williams added.

RIPPLE EFFECT

The consequences will ripple through public K-12, and higher education and multiple safety-net programs, not least being health care (compounded by the tax bill's removal, starting in 2019, of the Affordable Care Act's individual mandate).

The good news is that most Americans oppose these monstrous policies. That's why we need to re-imagine the political landscape and reframe the political dialogue, as Occupy Wall Street briefly did earlier this decade, with a laser focus on inequality – and how we fight it.

Bill Friedheim is the chair of the PSC retiree's chapter.



Vincent Boudreau

Boudreau to lead CCNY

By ARI PAUL

After serving as interim president of City College of New York (CCNY) for more than a year, Vincent Boudreau has been appointed the college's permanent president.

Initially, union officials on campus were dismayed when they learned Boudreau, who had previously served as dean of CCNY's Colin Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership and came to CCNY as an assistant professor of political science in 1991, was not in the running for the permanent choice despite being chosen as the interim leader. He was nevertheless considered for appointment late last year, but the CUNY Board of Trustees delayed his appointment in October after local politicians publicly criticized his pending appointment. CUNY announced Boudreau's appointment in December.

Boudreau came to the interim position at a critical moment – he took over when then-President Lisa Coico abruptly resigned amid an ongoing investigation into financial improprieties at CUNY campus administrations.

UNION RESPONDS

PSC chapter members hailed Boudreau's appointment as permanent president, citing his good leadership in relations with the union, and the fact that he is well suited to address issues of discrimination and inclusiveness on campus. Kathlene McDonald, PSC chapter secretary and chair of CCNY's department of interdisciplinary arts and sciences, told *Clarion* that the chapter looked forward to working with Boudreau to “build a more diverse and inclusive campus, as well as to develop a strong stance against discrimination, sexual harassment and retaliation against faculty, staff and students.”

“He is one of us, and he will take CCNY through this turmoil period,” said City College PSC Chapter Chair Carol Huang. “Now that he has been appointed as permanent president, his attention can shift from internal troubles to seeking more external funding as all university presidents do. His appointment will enable him to carry out his vision.”