

State of the Union 2016

Annual Report on the State of the Local

When the Federation membership last met following the recent College Faculty Organization meeting, I spoke to significant rise in employee health care costs that 1650 members are experiencing. The Republican Hard Cap Insurance legislation – one of many Republican assaults on your bargaining rights and livelihoods at the State level – is taking full effect.

While Republican ideological attacks on educators loom large – so too do attacks on our professional lives and livelihoods by an equally ideologically driven, anti-faculty, and anti-union mindset among top College administrators. First a consideration of these local attacks, then the State attacks, and lastly, what we can do to counter them.

Shared Governance Still Under Attack

In the negotiations to save the College, it was fairly clear that we were dealing with a new College President with an ideological and personal agenda that would undermine the longstanding collegial relationships between administrators and faculty that had produced stable decision making and sound decisions at the College for decades.

Dr. Jensen's mere lip service to shared governance is due at best to insecurities and at worst by an outdated top-down management style and far right ideology. During and subsequent to negotiations, his agenda and animus were evident in his tactics, overreactions, and personal insults. These were prominently displayed yet again in his attacks upon shared governance and **upon the faculty participating in his phenomenally misnamed "Shared Leadership Committee,"** all of this even after the Federation provided a resolution to the inclusion of adjunct faculty in governance. **It was manifest as well in his negative reaction to the Senate and Union's objections to devaluing of the faculty role in strategic planning and in his rash proposals and his angry response to faculty concerns and advice regarding a vast expansion of distance education offerings.** It remains manifest in his attempts to remove work from Local 1650 – and his attempt to remove Local 1650 from its campus office.

Dr. Jensen's Non-Concession

Perhaps most disturbing have been Dr. Jensen's refusal to sunset any Federation contract concession, his blatant and unfounded and divisive allegations that College faculty made no real contract concessions, and his assertions — always without evidence — that **faculty are "overpaid" and "underperforming" "bullies" who did not embrace "student success."** While alleging such, Dr. Jensen was privately negotiating with the previous Board of Trustees the **sunset of his one contract concession** – and its **retroactive reimbursement** – and **wage increases** – and a provision to earn **outside consulting fees!** Yet throughout this process and thereafter, he continued to cite the burden of his one contract concession.

Dr. Jensen also speaks of the cut in compensation he took in coming to the College. Since he was unemployed prior to coming to the College, it is hardly credulous to say that rising from zero earnings to earnings of over \$170,000 amounts to a pay cut – although it must be acknowledged that he was in receipt of one-half million dollar payment from his previous College to leave.

Disinformation Regarding Salaries

Dr. Jensen continues to disseminate misleading information regarding College faculty salaries by citing and defending the highly questionable faculty compensation data which his administration formulates and submits to the government.

Why does he do so? The possible answers are many. Perhaps it stems from a right wing ideology. Perhaps from insecurity. In all likelihood it stems from both. He often defaults to attacks and indulges in personal insults when questioned. His top administrators, and in particular Dr. Pierner, are obsessed with the fact that the College faculty's EC earnings result in total compensation that exceeds their own, ignoring their very brief tenure at the College. One would have hoped that such behavior was beneath Dr. Pierner. Of course, EC derives from work beyond contractual work – just as Dr. Jensen's outside consulting earnings do. Perhaps his consulting fees should be made public and added to Dr. Jensen's total compensation, since they result from an agreement with the previous Board of Trustees and since Dr. Jensen so cherishes "transparency."

The issue here is ultimately a failure to lead by example. When people have lost jobs, employee groups have made and continue to make economic sacrifices, when taxpayers raised their taxes, when student tuition increased — all to save the College — one would expect the College President to lead by example.

Another consequence of Dr. Jensen's efforts to demonize and marginalize faculty has been to pit one employee group against another. His shut down of "all user" email, by design, impedes efforts to rebut his divisive allegations and examine his many proposals which beg careful examination. Yes, he is quite accomplished at "divide and prevail."

Republican Attacks on Union

Unfortunately, the situation at the State level is also driven by right wing ideology. The litany of anti-education, anti-teacher, and anti-union legislation emanating from Lansing Republicans is indeed long. Among that list are:

1. "Right to Work for Less" legislation, designed to weaken the Union response to demonize, marginalize, and wherever possible privatize public education and public services to generate private profit.
2. Appointment of Emergency Financial Managers (EFM) to vacate the authority of elected officials and vacate union contracts. EFM's have been in charge of the Detroit Schools for over a decade and Flint water since 2013! Now there is a record of autocratic achievement! It should also be noted that Dr. Jensen threatened to bring in an EFM to vacate the 1650 contract during negotiations to save the College.
3. The dismantling of MPSERS for new hires, with the loss of future participants in the system and the political influence needed to protect the retirement benefits of current participants.
4. The taxation of pensions and cuts in education funding in order to fund a \$1.8 billion corporate tax break.
5. Hard Cap Insurance legislation, which is dramatically shifting health care costs to employees in amounts upwards of \$4,000 per year for families.
6. Proposed legislation to deny Union elected officers MPSERS credit, even if the cost is fully reimbursed by the Union. Who is going to run for Union office if their pension is reduced in value by 5, 10, 15, or more years of retirement credit?
7. Elimination of straight party voting – Michigan's version of voter repression. Voting on each and every position on the ballot will clog the voting process, as it is intended to do, discourage

“down ticket” voting, and discourage voter participation due to long voting lines. Ideology and holding political office again trump democracy.

8. Attaching minor funding measures to legislation in order to prevent voter referenda to overturn Right-to-Work, voter suppression laws, pension taxation, and other ideologically driven legislation – again frustrating the democratic process.
9. Prohibiting schools and colleges from providing any information regarding approaching millage campaigns in order to suppress voter turn-out or create uncertainty in the minds of voters.

The Solution – Political Action

The response to all of this must be political action and political funding. Like it or not, College faculty are public employees, whose professional lives and livelihoods are determined by politicians. We simply cannot concede the political arena to those who would destroy public services, public education, and public sector unions.

For decades Local 1650 has “fought above its weight” in the political area. With at most 205 members, the Federation has provided major support to College millage campaigns, responsible Board of Trustees’ candidates, and candidates for State office supportive of public education, its proper funding at all levels, and our right to bargain our contract at the local level.

Despite Dr. Jensen’s contention, as he published in the College catalog, that he led the successful millage campaign during the College’s financial crisis, it was in fact Local 1650 that yet again financed the millage advocacy campaign, and wrote all advocacy campaign literature, and supplemented, as it has for years, Ms. Chadwick’s informational College literature, which is now prohibited by State Republicans.

Local 1650 supported two successful Trustees and one Trustee appointment – Trustees who have already revealed an openness to listen to advice from all constituents and not simply act as a “rubber stamp” for the administration. Local 1650 also provided the most volunteer hours in the Dearborn based State 2014 Campaign Office. None of this was done – it cannot be done — with “smoke and mirrors.” Nor can it be done by a few who carry the freight for the many.

In 2015 and 2016, Federation members will again need to volunteer hours – and contribute funds – to stop the administration’s attacks on College faculty, elect Trustees who are not in thrall of the College administration and its ill-advised, self-aggrandizing agenda, and defeat the ideologically driven legislators and policies in Lansing.

Reasons for Optimism

Yet, there are reasons for optimism – but only if all of us engage in political action. We have seen success in millage campaigns and in the election of new Trustees – and in a Union and Faculty Senate that will not be intimidated in the face Dr. Jensen’s personal attacks.

Passivity or the “pass the buck” approach of some can only be offset by activist members for so long. As I mentioned in that last Faculty Organization Meeting, Local 1650 members are feeling severe economic pain for the first time in decades. We are seeing ideological attacks on faculty professionalism and faculty standing — from Lansing and from our own administration.

The remedy is political action. In the words of Henry David Thoreau: **“Even voting for the right is doing nothing for it. It is only expressing feebly to men your desire that it should prevail. A wise man will not leave the right to the mercy of chance”** Yes, our challenges from the State and our

internal challenges are many. Our course of action is political action – action beyond voting – so that we do not leave our College and our professional standing to **the “mercy of chance.”**

John McDonald

January 25, 2016

Dearborn, Michigan