



March 23, 2010

To the University of Minnesota Faculty Senate:

Dear Colleagues,

We understand that the faculty senate will be meeting with President Bruininks on Thursday, March 25th, to consider a motion on mandatory furloughs and pay reductions. We are also aware that the Faculty for the Renewal of Public Education (FRPE) will offer two resolutions at the March 25th meeting, one calling for transparency in the University budget process, and one calling for sliding scale pay reductions. We write you today to express our support for these resolutions, and to ask you to stand with the frontline staff at the University by opposing mandatory furloughs for the lowest paid U workers, and by supporting the FRPE resolutions.

President Bruininks's current plan is for a temporary pay cut of 1.15%, with a slightly higher cut for senior administrators. For unionized staff, the president intends the cut to be taken in the form of 3 mandatory furlough days in December. This plan places an unfair burden on the lowest paid staff and faculty who are already struggling to get by, while over 250 administrators earn more than \$200,000.

In preparation for last year's contract negotiations, AFSCME surveyed our members regarding their financial situation. 66% of respondents have worked a second job to make ends meet, and 64% have borrowed money or used a credit card to make ends meet. 36% have had difficulty making a mortgage payment or rent. 6% have faced foreclosure (our survey was done before the foreclosure crisis hit) or eviction, and 14% have had utilities shut off for non-payment.

We asked our members what they go without due to our salary levels. The responses we heard were heart wrenching. One member has not traveled on vacation since 1991. Others do without computers or the internet, even though their kids need them for school. Many responded that they keep their thermostat set at 50-60 degrees in the winter, and walk whenever possible to save gas money and car costs. What they dream of being able to do is not lofty: going to a movie, enrolling their children in after school or summer recreation activities, occasionally going out for lunch or dinner, retiring.

These are members of the University community, our co-workers and yours, who are working full-time, and are already struggling to get by. Now, the administration wants to force a pay cut in the form of mandatory furloughs. They want us to lose 3 days pay over the holidays. For some at the University, losing 3 days pay may mean choosing California rather than Hawaii for vacation. For many of our members, however, it means wondering whether there is any money for a holiday dinner or gifts for the kids. It means borrowing money to pay the light or phone bill to prevent shut off. Quite simply, it means economic crisis.

We write to ask you to vote against President Bruininks' proposal. We understand the concern that some have voiced that voting against the administration will be viewed as faculty members being selfish and unwilling to take a cut. Nothing could be further from the truth. A vote against the administration is, quite simply, a vote against furloughs and in support of your low wage co-workers.

FRPE will be proposing an alternative that truly addresses the budget situation at the U while protecting the lowest paid workers at the University. We encourage you to vote for their Resolution on Salary Reductions. This proposal is based on a similar plan that the Board of Regents implemented during the financial crisis of the 1930's.

You may be told that voting against the administration will result in deeper cuts on academic units that will result in layoffs of low-paid workers. Unfortunately dozens of our members have already been laid off. Some of these layoffs have occurred in departments that have then hired senior administrators with six digit salaries. For this reason, we also ask you to support FRPE's Resolution on Financial Stringency, which calls for transparency in the University budget process. We believe that the best way of protecting jobs is through deeper scrutiny of expenditures and an open budgetary process that involves the entire University community.

There are options other than the administration's that can save the University money. AFSCME analyzed University salaries based on data requested and published by the Star Tribune. According to those figures, if the 250+ University employees making over \$200,000 took a five percent pay cut, the University would save \$3,207,656. If those making \$300,000 took an additional 5% decrease and those making over \$ 400,000 took an additional 5%, an additional \$867,929 could be saved. That's a total of \$4,075,585.

In addition, the University Central Administration should be required to drastically scale back the number of Vice Presidents, Senior VPs, Associate VPs, Assistant VPs, Assistant Associate VPs and other top administrators. For example, if the University reduced the top administrative positions at the U, (Associate Department Director and above), by 10%, the University could save another \$7,755,630. The total RECURRING savings from cutting senior administrative waste would be \$11,831,215.

In addition, there are models in other public institutions (Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis for example) in which voluntary furlough programs met the savings goals. If the administration implemented FRPE's sliding scale salary reductions for higher paid faculty and staff, and allowed lower paid staff to chose whether or not to take leave days, those who could afford to take days off without pay could and will do so, while those who are most vulnerable will not be forced into financial crisis.

On behalf of our members, we thank you for all the support and concern you have shown for our well-being. Your vote Thursday is not merely a vote regarding faculty salaries. It is a vote to use your power as faculty members to stand in solidarity with your lower paid colleagues at the University.

Sincerely,

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