



University Staff Association

the Union Voice

Fall 2012 Issue

We want to hear from you. Please feel free to email your ideas and news to the Communications Committee at usa@external.umass.edu or call Union Office at 545-0165. *Thank you, the Communications Committee*

UNIONS: The United States stands today on the precipice of major social and economic renewal. What role will unions play in moving this forward? Will they be part of the solution? What does the history of unions in America tell us about labor's role in social evolution? What are we seeing currently in the news of new social movements that might give us hope that we can turn this attempt at the oppression of labor around? How will we assure the safety and security of our workplace and those of our family and community?

Did you know that our Union contract has a provision for voting?

Article 9: Leave Section 4: Voting Leave

An employee, whose hours of work preclude him/her from voting in a town, city, state, or national election, shall, upon application, be granted a voting leave with pay, not to exceed two hours, for the sole purpose of voting in the election.



Election Day: Tuesday, November 6, 2012

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COUNT DOWN TO ELECTION DAY

Interesting Facts about U.S. Presidential Elections

The presidential election, held every four years, is the most closely watched and widely publicized of all U.S. elections. It is the one truly national election in American politics. History was made in 2008, with the election of Barack Obama as the nation's first African-American president, but as the following piece demonstrates, American presidential elections are full of interesting facts and trivia.

Misconceptions

- When voters cast their ballots in the presidential election, they are not voting directly for their preferred candidate but for a slate of their state's electors to vote for that candidate. The electoral vote, held about a month after the November election, decides the presidential race.

History

- If no presidential candidate receives a majority of electoral votes, the U.S. House of Representatives decides the election. This has happened twice in American history: in 1800, when Thomas Jefferson won, and again in 1824, when John Quincy Adams was elected.

Significance

- It is possible for a candidate to win the most popular votes and still lose the electoral vote. Just ask Al Gore, who won the largest share of the popular vote in 2000, but still lost to George W. Bush.

Fun Fact

- James Buchanan, elected in 1856, is the nation's only bachelor president to date. No word, however, on whether he left his socks and underwear on the floor of the presidential mansion.

Identification

- In 2008, Barack Obama was elected the nation's 44th president. However, only 43 individuals have held the office. Grover Cleveland was elected twice to nonconsecutive terms; first as the 22nd president and later as the 24th.

Above taken from ehow.com

Read more: http://www.ehow.com/facts_4969498_interesting-facts-us-presidential-elections.html

Submitted by Leslie Marsland

The enrollment period for 2012 HCSA and/or DCAP Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA) ends November 16, 2012.

A Flexible Spending Account (FSA) is a benefit governed by the IRS and sponsored by your employer.

An FSA allows you to pay certain Health Care and/or Dependent Care expenses with pre-tax money. Money is diverted out of each of your paychecks on a pre-tax basis and put into a Health Care Reimbursement Account and/or a Dependent Care Assistance Account. Since the money you choose to put into the FSA accounts are non-taxable, you will save Federal Income Tax (10% - 35%), FICA (1.45%), and State Income Tax (5.3%). The savings range from 16.75 % to 41.75% depending on your federal tax bracket.

Once enrolled, you are allowed to draw money out of the accounts to reimburse yourself for out-of-pocket medical and/or dependent care expenses incurred during the plan year which are not reimbursed from insurance or other sources.

How do Flexible Spending Accounts Work?

You conservatively estimate how much money you expect to spend in Health Care and/ or Dependent Care expenses for the year. IRS regulations stipulate that once you enroll in your Health Care Account and/or Dependent Care Account the election is locked in for the balance of the year.

Expenses must be incurred during the plan year. At the end of each plan year there is a run out period for you to submit claims with receipts to Benefit Strategies for reimbursement. Any monies left unclaimed at the end of the run out period will be forfeited to your employer. Once you have decided the amount you would like to contribute to the FSA, it will be deducted by your employer from your paycheck. The payroll deduction is calculated by dividing your annual election by the number of paychecks you receive in a year.

What's covered? Physician & dental co-payments, pharmacies, hospitals, chiropractors or optometrists and even some over-the-counter products.

You can start using your benefit once enrolled. You do not need to wait for your payroll deductions to add up into the FSA

Methods of Reimbursement

- 1. Debit Card** (if applicable) –the most convenient form of reimbursement. Swipe your card at any approved vendor for eligible purchases and your funds will be debited directly from your reimbursement account to pay for your eligible pre-tax expenses.
- 2. Online Claim Entry and Receipt Upload** – Enter your claim information through the consumer portal and either: A.) Upload your receipt directly into the system for quick and easy processing! or B.) Print the confirmation and send to Benefit Strategies with a copy of your receipt for approval. To find out more about our receipt upload feature, click [HERE!](#)
- 3. Manual Claims** – Claims that are not paid for using the debit card or filed online can be submitted to Benefit Strategies using a manual claim form.

Benefit Strategies offers mobile applications for the iPhone, iPod Touch and Android devices to allow you to quickly view your account balances and activity 24-hours a day while on the go!

Article submitted by Leslie Marsland

Can't read the Union Voice?

Do you need glasses?

USA does have a vision savings plan offered through MetLife – it's free and a member benefit – Click onto the Benefits link on the USA website and check out the discounts available and area providers:

<http://www.university-staff-association.org/dental-and-vision/>

We have an approved provider right here on campus



University Health Service's Eye Clinic Offers:

- Complete **eye examinations** and emergency care
- **Eyewear** for every day, fashion, sports and work
- **On-site lens lab**, for same- or next-day service on most prescriptions and eyewear
- **Contact lens** specialists
- Online lens orders with our **Contact Lens e-Store**
- **Care** before and after laser vision surgery

Hours: Eye Care Services: Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Optical Services: Monday – Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Closed noon – 1 p.m. daily

Appointments: For an eye exam appointment or to order contact lenses, call Eye Care Services, (413) 577-EYES. For eyeglasses, call Optical Services, (413) 577-5007. *In an after-hours emergency, call UHS, (413) 577-5000.*

Article submitted by Leslie Marsland

Have you tried the "Marriott Meals"? If you haven't then you are missing something!

The Marriott Center for Hospitality Management presents "Marriott Meals"

Meals managed by HTM Students Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays of the 2012 Fall Semester

Lunches: \$8/person

12-1pm: Tuesdays - Thursdays

Dinners: \$13/person

6-7pm: Tuesdays - Thursdays

November 6, 7, 8

Cream of Mushroom or Veggie Soup
Caesar Salad | Wrap | Quesadilla
Cheesecake with Berry Coulis

November 13, 15

Cream of Broccoli or Minestrone
Steak Salad | Wrap | Quesadilla
Pumpkin-Apple Pie

November 27, 28, 29

Black Bean or Chicken Noodle Soup
Mexican Salad | Wrap | Quesadilla
Chocolate Mousse Cake

For more information visit: <http://www.isenberg.umass.edu/htm/meals/>

Article submitted by Leslie Marsland

What's coming in December?

Three holidays !

That's right – Three (3): December 25th, December 28th & December 31st!

How did this happen?

In May, 2010 the Massachusetts Senate voted 25-12 to eliminate two special Suffolk County holidays for state workers. The vote abolishes Evacuation Day (or St. Patrick's Day) on March 17 and Bunker Hill Day on June 17. The holidays, which celebrate Revolutionary War battles, are for about 50,000 state workers, municipal and county employees in Boston and the rest of Suffolk County. Under some union contracts, state workers in Western Massachusetts and other parts of the state receive the holidays as two floaters to be taken at any time.

Our bargaining team worked in conjunction with other state unions not to lose these "floating" holidays. We were successful! These "floaters" have been moved to the week between Christmas and New Year's Day. Although they are not being deemed "floating holidays" anymore, we were able to keep them. Here's the language:

In addition to the holidays listed in Section 21.1, bargaining unit members shall not be required to work on the immediate two (2) work days prior to New Year's Day, and they shall be deemed "Holidays." Anyone working these days shall be compensated in accordance with Article 12, §3. It is understood that the parties will work toward closing for the other two days between December 25 and January 1. If this is not accomplished by the end of this contract, these dates may be the subject of bargaining in a successor agreement. "Departments will be encouraged to allow members wishing to use accrued time for the remainder of the week, to approve said requests."

Cost of Living Increases !

Effective the first pay period in January 2013, each bargaining unit member who is on the payroll as of July 1, 2012, shall receive a base rate increase of 1.5% as a percentage of such unit member's salary on payroll as of December 30, 2012.

It's going to be a nice December after all

The Results are in -----Bullying Survey

Over 2200 campus employees from all of the major unions, as well as non-unit administrative and staff positions on campus, submitted information to the anonymous survey.

Over 50% of USA members responded to the survey.

The overall response rate for the survey was 28.3%, with response rates much higher within some bargaining units than others (e.g. 53% for USA/MTA and 45% for AFSCME vs. 4.2% for GEO and 26% for MSP)

For the detailed results go to the USA website: <http://www.university-staff-association.org/>

Social Security and WEP Update: The American Retirement Plan

Information adapted from Retirement Security.org

In our last Union Voice publication we reported that Massachusetts Senator John Kerry has sponsored a Senate Bill (S 2010) which is also in the US House (as HR 1332) to get rid of, or repeal, the “windfall elimination provision.”

How much of an impact can the Windfall Eliminations Provision (WEP) have? Apparently a big one. For a person who retires at 62 and is *not* affected by WEP, Social Security benefits are computed by applying the following formula to average monthly earnings: 90 percent of the first \$612 plus 32 percent of the next \$3,077 plus 15 percent of the remainder. If a retiree is subject to WEP, however, only 40 percent (or \$244.80) instead of 90 percent (or \$550.80) of the first \$612 is used to calculate benefits. This is a difference of \$306 per month.

Title: Social Security Fairness Act of 2011 **S.2010** Cosponsors (18)

Sponsor: Senator Kerry, John F. [MA] (introduced 12/16/2011)

Related Bills: H.R.1332

Latest Major Action: 12/16/2011 Referred to Senate committee.

Status: Read twice and referred to the Committee on Finance.

Social Security is not simply a government benefit, it is our American retirement plan.

We have saved this money for our futures over the years by paying into it and it is rightfully ours. Not only have we as workers paid into it, but our employers have too. There is a huge pool of money there that we built up over the years ourselves. To say that the seven states who still allow this money to be held back from working citizens, including the state workers of Massachusetts, by only giving us a small percentage of our social security savings is dishonest and unfair to the people of our state – one of the seven to still withhold a larger portion of these funds.

You can find your state representatives in the Cosponsors link above to write to them, urging them to put pressure on the State Committee on Finance to rush this change through. Many of us in this huge post-war generation are retiring. It’s time to address this issue properly. It could mean the difference between a retirement fraught with stress (and hunger) or one that is secure and enjoyable. We’ve worked hard our entire lives, we’ve earned a secure retirement.

Article submitted Emily West

USA Classification Project Update

The Classification Project is moving very slowly. This is in part because we want to get this right the first time around. However, we are extremely frustrated that the University appears to be dragging their feet as our colleagues in Lowell and Boston do not seem to have the same roadblocks as they move forward. The University has given us some language for job specifications for two series of workers, those who work in Grants and Contracts and those who work in IT. Soon we will be contacting some of you to meet with us and go over what they think those job responsibilities should look like because we feel that the people doing the work should have some input into what their job descriptions should say. We knew going into this that it could be a lengthy task and it is proving to be just that.

We will continue to update you as information is available.

USA Classification Project Committee:

Donna Johnson

Jim Plaza

Leslie Marsland

Linda Hillenbrand

Are you interested in becoming more active within our Union?
Can you volunteer and give some time to help?

We are looking for members for the following committees:

Charting Committee

What is charting? Charting provides leadership with a picture of the membership: where members are, to whom they relate, work location, job classification and mobilizers. The intent is to break down our membership in each location (building or department) and identify the everyday elbow to elbow contact within our work places. Think of it as huge membership phone tree.

Social Committee

The purpose of the Social Committee is to strengthen our union and foster a sense of community networking by organizing fun, interesting events for the entire membership. The ideal situation is to have enough members that each can choose one or two events to be involved with during the year, rather than just a few people being involved with everything. The responsibilities of the committee include:

- Brainstorm ideas for social events
- Report planned events to the Eboard for approval
- Execute planned events
- Submit a newsletter article to the Communication Committee for the Union Voice & Listserv

Public Relations Committee

The purpose of the PR Committee is to develop understanding of the purposes and the programs of the Union, the value of public education and the role of the employee. It shall inform members of the policies, programs, services and accomplishments of the Union.

If interested please contact the USA Office at 545-0165, usa@external.umass.edu

This last year Massachusetts has been struck with many weather related disasters including tornados, a microburst, tremors from the Virginia earth quake, an October snow storm that crippled western MA and most recently tremors from the Maine earthquake. It was just over a year ago when Massachusetts was hit by Hurricane Irene. Help came from many sources and our neighboring states. It's our turn to give back.

Please help the victims in New York and New Jersey however you can.



If you aren't able to personally provide shelter and supplies to those affected by Hurricane Sandy, it doesn't mean you can't help at all. There are many organizations along the East Coast that are providing shelter, food and other supplies to victims of super storm Sandy.

One way to help is by donating to the Red Cross. All donations will provide shelter, food, emotional support and other assistance to those affected by the storm. To donate, visit www.redcross.org, call 800-Red-Cross or text the word "Redcross" to 90999 to make a \$10 donation.

Nearly 100 Red Cross blood drives were canceled because of Sandy, so blood supplies are low in the areas affected the most. The Red Cross asks that those who can donate to schedule an appointment to give blood. The New York Blood Center is urging people to donate blood for those in the New York/New Jersey area. To donate, call 800-933-2566 or visit www.nybloodcenter.org.

The Salvation Army has dozens of mobile feeding units and shelters along the East Coast that are working to serve thousands in the most heavily hit areas. Visit www.salvationarmyusa.org to donate.

Feeding America has thousands of pounds of emergency food, water and supplies in the disaster zone that it is working to distribute to the storm's victims. To donate, visit www.feedingamerica.org or call 800-910-5524.

AmeriCares is providing medicine and other supplies to people affected by Hurricane Sandy. To donate, visit www.americares.org.

World Vision is distributing flood clean-up kits, personal hygiene items and emergency food kits to people hit by the hurricane. To donate, visit www.worldvision.org.

Save the Children is also working to provide relief to families and their children. Visit www.savethechildren.org to donate.

Samaritan's Purse is asking for volunteers to help storm victims. To volunteer, visit their <http://spvolunteernetwork.org/projects/hurricane-sandy-response.aspx>

Article submitted by Leslie Marsland

Elizabeth Warren for Massachusetts

Massachusetts Teachers Association strongly supports Elizabeth Warren for the U.S. Senate.

Please see the MTA endorsement if you are undecided in the race between Warren and Brown:

- **Brown supports policies that favor the wealthy at the expense of public employees, the middle class and low-income families. His votes show his priority in support of the wealthy.**
- **Elizabeth Warren believes in accountability for Wall Street and a level playing field for the middle class.**
- **Warren understands the value of public education because it changed her life.**
- **Warren believes that investing in our children is essential to our economic future.**
- **Warren says we need to make college more affordable so students don't find themselves drowning in debt when they graduate.**
- **As a teacher herself, Warren understands the challenges that today's educators face both inside and outside the classroom.**
- **Warren wants to put people back to work in Massachusetts.**
- **Brown voted for a Republican budget bill estimated to cost 17,000 jobs in Massachusetts and reduce federal training to the state by millions of dollars, affecting 27,000 potential workers.**
- **Warren opposes the private school voucher proposals and similar proposals that take money away from public schools.**
- **Warren strongly supports unions. She will fight to protect collective bargaining and the right to organize a union.**

Article submitted Emily West

The ROMNEY-RYAN TICKET: Support for the Wealthy ----- *from MoveOn.org*

Mitt Romney has picked as his running mate 42 year-old Republican Congressman Paul Ryan (R-WI), the architect of the GOP budget, which the New York Times has described as “the most extreme budget plan passed by a house of Congress in modern times.” Here are 8 things to note about Paul Ryan’s proposals:

Ryan wants to raises taxes on the middle class, and cut taxes for millionaires. Paul Ryan’s infamous budget — which Romney embraced — replaces “the current tax structure with two brackets — 25 percent and 10 percent — and cuts the top rate from 35 percent.” Federal tax collections would fall “by about \$4.5 trillion over the next decade” as a result, and to avoid increasing the national debt, the budget proposes massive cuts in social programs and “special-interest loopholes and tax shelters that litter the code.” But 62 percent of the savings would come from programs that benefit the middle-class, who would also experience a several thousand dollar tax increase.

The Mitt Romney Paul Ryan ticket would hit Seniors, Students, and Middle Income Earners the hardest.

Ryan wants to end Medicare, and replace it with a voucher system. Ryan’s latest budget transforms the existing version of Medicare, in which government provides seniors with a guaranteed benefit, into a “premium support” system, or voucher. All future retirees would receive a government “contribution” to purchase insurance from an exchange of private plans or traditional fee-for-service Medicare. But since the premium support voucher does not keep up with increasing health care costs, the Congressional Budget Office’s estimates that new beneficiaries could pay up to \$1,200 more by 2030 and \$5,900 more by 2050. Ryan would also raise Medicare’s age of eligibility to 67.

Ryan apparently thinks Social Security is a “ponzi scheme.” In September of 2011, Ryan agreed with Rick Perry’s characterization of Social Security as a “ponzi scheme” and since 2005 has advocated for privatizing the retirement benefit and investing it in stocks and bonds. Conservatives claim that this would “outperform the current formula based on wages earned and overall wage appreciation,” but the economic crisis of 2008 serves as a wake-up call for policymakers who seek to hinge Americans’ retirement on the stock market. In fact, “a person with a private Social Security account similar to what President George W. Bush proposed in 2005 would have lost much of their retirement savings in the 2008 stock market crash.

Ryan’s budget would result in 5 million lost jobs in 2 years. His budget calls for massive reductions in government spending. Ryan has proposed cutting discretionary programs by about \$120 billion over the next two years and mandatory programs by \$284 billion, which, the Economic Policy Institute estimates, would suck demand out of the economy and “reduce employment by 1.3 million jobs in fiscal 2013 and 2.8 million jobs in fiscal 2014, relative to current budget policies” as a sizeable portion of the population are working within a government system, at imperative jobs such as teachers, and those in the public service sector. Cutting out these imperative government jobs reduces our social system as well as taking that money out of circulation. Growing an economy results from adding money not subtracting money in circulation within a social system.

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The ROMNEY-RYAN TICKET: Support for the Wealthy -

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Ryan wants to eliminate Pell Grants for more than 1 million students. Ryan's budget claims both that rising financial aid is driving college tuition costs upward, and that Pell Grants, which help cover tuition costs for low-income Americans, don't go to the "truly needy" which is false. He wants to cut the Pell Grant program by \$200 billion, which could "ultimately knock more than one million students off" the program over the next 10 years. This could negatively affect our student enrollment on the UMass campus as well as the number of jobs required to maintain the university. Romney, in a recent attempt to sound Centrist has claimed he would keep the Pell Grants.

Ryan supports \$40 billion in subsidies for big oil. In 2011, Ryan joined all House Republicans and 13 Democrats in his vote to keep Big Oil tax loopholes as part of the FY 2011 spending bill. His budget would retain a decade's worth of oil tax breaks worth \$40 billion, while cutting "billions of dollars from investments to develop alternative fuels and clean energy technologies that would serve as substitutes for oil."

Ryan believes that Romneycare is "not that dissimilar to Obamacare." Though Romney has gone to great lengths to distinguish his Massachusetts health care law from Obamacare, Ryan doesn't see the difference. "It's not that dissimilar to Obamacare, and you probably know I'm not a big fan of Obamacare."

Romney recently showed his "true colors" to his fellow Americans. Mitt Romney recently told the world, viewed through a hidden camera, in case you missed it, that he disregards 47% of America's citizenry. The GOP presidential nominee told attendees of a \$50,000-a-plate dinner that 47% of Americans are "victims" who are "dependent upon government" and "pay no income tax." Of course they pay state and income taxes but he is ignoring that fact. He noted: "My job is not to worry about those people. I'll never convince them they should take personal responsibility and care for their lives." These comments set off a media firestorm around the world. Romney is also not a friend to organized labor.

Watch the hidden video recording of Romney speaking to the \$50,000 a plate donors here:

<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/09/watch-full-secret-video-private-romney-fundraiser>

Article submitted Emily West

Internet News Sites worthy of mention for union workers:

TruthOut <http://truth-out.org/>

Nation of Change <http://www.nationofchange.org/weekly-newsletter>

Common Dreams <http://www.commondreams.org/>

Thom Hartmann <http://www.thomhartmann.com/>

The Nation <http://www.thenation.com/>

AlterNet <http://www.alternet.org/news>

Labor Notes <http://labornotes.org/magazine>

What's your favorite news and information website? Send us the link!

Article submitted Emily West

Occupy Your Union!

Non-writers, non-journalists, anyone with something to say to your brothers and sisters of our USA union, we want to hear from you! Please contact the Union Office at usa@external.umass.edu or call 545-0165