



# University Staff Association

## the Union Voice

### Spring 2012 Issue

We want to hear from you! Please feel free to contribute your news and opinions to USA Member-At-Large Public Relations coordinator, Emily West at [emily@usa.umass.edu](mailto:emily@usa.umass.edu)

**Special Announcement from Jane Litwin Taylor, USA Membership Secretary:** *If you have a change of name or home address, please contact Jane at the USA Office at 545-0165 or [usa@external.umass.edu](mailto:usa@external.umass.edu) so that she can update the USA & MTA databases. Human Resources does not forward these changes to the USA office.*

### Senator Kerry introduces Social Security Offset legislation

Just prior to congressional adjournment [2010], Senators John Kerry (D-MA) and Susan Collins (R-ME) introduced [The Social Security Fairness Act](#) (S. 2010), which is the companion to the House version (H.R. 1332) introduced earlier last year by Representatives McKeon (R-CA) and Berman (D-CA).

The [Social Security Fairness Act of 2011](#) (H 1332) to repeal the Social Security offsets was reintroduced in the House of Representatives in early April [2011] by Representatives Howard McKeon (R-CA) and Harold Berman (D-CA).

These bills are stuck in Congress and need your action! Read more at [MassTeacher.org](http://MassTeacher.org) . Petition Congress for our Offset legislation at [NEA.org](http://NEA.org) .

### Thoughts about how your retirement is being funded?

We all recently received a notice from Kelly Pleasant to attend the MA State Board of Retirement presentation on March 22 in the Campus Center. Did you attend? Many USA members did. We were given a (very) brief tutorial on how the system works. Then a guy from a private equity firm stood up. The firm is called SMART which stands for "save money and retire tomorrow." I don't think so. If you were there, what did you think of the event? And even if you were not, What do you think of how our retirement system is set up? If you want to share your ideas please go to the blog and share your thoughts [here](#).

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**99% SPRING** - [Inspired by Occupy Wall Street and the fight for workers in Madison, Wisconsin, the 99% will rise up this spring, from April 9-15.](#)

## **Grievance activity for this past year continues at a steady pace** by Jim Plaza

Grievance activity for this past year continued at a steady pace. A total of sixteen cases were resolved through the Grievance and Arbitration procedure (G&A) in article 27 of our contract. Of these cases, three were put into abeyance status with the agreement of the parties. This is done in particular situations to allow time for a discussed resolution to be completed (e.g. performance improvement plan), or to defer to the next annual review period.

If a member feels that some aspect of their work responsibility or a condition in their worksite is not right, they are advised to contact their district steward or the USA office to discuss the situation. The concern may be clarified through a review of the pertinent section of the contract with the member.

The recent bi-annual elections for district stewards produced a representative for nine of our ten districts (a vacancy still exists in district 5). Of the nine elected, seven were re-elections, with Maryelen Calderwood and Bill Coleman newly elected as representatives for district four and ten respectively. A welcome too Maryelen and Bill!

The cadre of district stewards, along with the grievance officer and president investigate and file grievances when warranted. By contract definition a "grievance" is an allegation by the grievant or the Association that an express provision of the agreement (contract) has been breached in its application. At times the violation is clear and a solution is readily evident and achievable. But other cases require substantial investigation and discussion. Past resolutions of similar cases provide a strategic direction for a remedy, but communication, cooperation and diligent effort are essential in successful grievance processing.

The current list is fifteen grievances awaiting resolution. Of this number, two have had a mediation hearing and the third should be mediated in the very near future. Mediation is a provision of the G&A procedure and is an alternative to filing a step 4 grievance with the University President's office. Past experience has indicated that mediation has been a more effective and beneficial method for dispute resolution, for both the member and the University.

## **An Invitation to Join the District Contacts Council** by Irene Dzioba

If you are concerned about the importance of communication among USA Union people, and have ever considered contributing towards strengthening it, then USA has a place for you. It's called the District Contacts Council, and is open to more volunteer members.

The District Contacts Council meets once a month for one hour with union release time to discuss our important role in the distribution of union information. This union position doesn't involve a lot of time, and yet provides a valuable service to the membership.

Currently, we are involved in distributing posters regarding the "Campus Coalition Against Workplace Bullying" as well as supporting our union brothers and sisters at University Health Services (UHS).

We'd like to get to know you, and hope you'll give volunteering for the DCC a try!

To volunteer, please contact me at [idzioba@oit.umass.edu](mailto:idzioba@oit.umass.edu), or contact your Chief Steward, or call the Union office at 413-545-0165.

Irene Dzioba, DCC Chairperson  
[idzioba@oit.umass.edu](mailto:idzioba@oit.umass.edu)

## **Elizabeth Warren for Massachusetts** by Andy Steinberg

In the 2012 MA election, Democrat Elizabeth Warren is running for the US Senate seat now occupied by the Republican incumbent Scott Brown.

At age 12 Warren's father suffered a heart attack, which led to losing their car, a pay cut, and medical bills. Warren's mother went to work for Sears and the family struggled. At age 16 George Washington University awarded Elizabeth Warren a full debate-team scholarship. She began her career teaching disabled children in a public school for a year.

Warren is currently a Harvard Law School professor, policy advocate, and American bankruptcy law and middle class finance expert. She has discovered that most people in bankruptcy are hard-working middle-class people who had expensive illnesses, family breakups and/or job losses. She worked in the Troubled Assets Relief Program and worked with the federal government to [set up the new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau](#). (Here's [what they do](#).)

Time magazine twice named her one of the 100 Most Influential People in the World.

The Boston Globe named Elizabeth Warren 2009 Bostonian of the Year. Warren has been repeatedly honored by the National Law Journal and was the first professor to win Harvard Law School's Sacks-Freund Teaching Award twice. She has appeared on the PBS show NOW, Real time With Bill Maher, and The Daily Show.

Warren does not support privatizing Medicare, voucher programs or cutting benefits. She favors bringing our troops in Afghanistan home, citing the high cost in lives and the exorbitant financial debt the military-industrial complex is costing tax payers, while remaining vigilant against Iran's nuclear weapons program and terrorists like Al Qaeda. She

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## **What's In Your Tap Water?** by Irene Dzioba, member Health and Safety Committee

What's in your water? Is it a pharmaceutical grade compound? Sodium Fluoride, Fluorosilicic Acid, Sodium Fluorosilicate. Does that sound like something you want to drink?

If you don't know if your water is fluoridated, you can find information [here](#). Just click the state, and then the county that you want information on. The Town of Amherst, Hampshire County, for example, puts Sodium Fluoride into its water. (Included in Hampshire County are parts of Pelham and parts of Belchertown.)

There is a great deal of controversy surrounding the use of medication in people's tap water. The American Dentistry Association warns against using fluoridated water in formula for infants under six months old. "The Fluoride Deception" by Christopher Bryson, highlights the history behind the philosophy of fluoridating public water supplies.

An organization called the Fluoride Action Network is available on the web, that educates on the cons of fluoridation can be found [here](#). A popular environmental group that offers additional information, The Environmental Group, is on the web [here](#) and says:

The Environmental Working Group supports the use of fluoride in toothpaste, where there is strong evidence of its effectiveness. But EWG's analysis concludes that fluoridation of public water supplies should end, because the risks outweigh possible benefits, especially for infants and young children, who consume more water than adults relative to their size.

So, regardless of one's opinion, [pro or con](#), we can agree that fluoridated water may be a cause for public concern.

## **MTA supports Occupy Wall Street, Occupy Boston**

The Massachusetts Teachers Association supports Occupy Wall Street, Occupy Boston and similar protests across the country that are calling attention to political and economic systems that unfairly reward the wealthy at the expense of everyone else and are contributing to high levels of unemployment and economic insecurity.

Although the protesters express diverse views, a unifying message is that financial and political institutions must be held accountable for the excesses that led to the current economic crisis, the struggles of the middle class and the growing wealth gap in the United States.

The MTA shares these concerns. We believe:

- Strong educator unions are needed to defend the interests of our students, many of whom are not able to reach their full potential because of the lack of necessary resources and supports in their schools and communities.
- Strong unions are needed to hold corporations and politicians accountable for how their policies affect working men and women.
- Strong educator unions are needed to defend the interests of teachers, higher education faculty and other education staff – public servants who have been under attack in many states by those who mistakenly believe that organized labor is responsible for the country's economic ills.
- Progressive tax reforms are needed to make sure the wealthy are paying their fair share and to guarantee adequate funding for education and other public services that are essential to the successful functioning of our democracy.

We encourage MTA members to participate in peaceful protest actions that call attention to these inequities and that seek reform of the financial regulations, campaign finance rules and tax codes that so handsomely reward the 1 percent at the expense of the remaining 99 percent.

Source: <http://massteacher.org/news/archive/2011/10-05.aspx>

## **Member Feature: Laurie Banas trains guide dogs in addition to her position on campus**

This Story was first published Feb 2, 2012, In The Loop, By Betty Wilda

Stroll across campus and you may well come across Laurie Banas and Jack, her newest guide dog in training. Banas, business manager for the Energy Frontier Research Center on campus, is a puppy walker for the Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind. Jack, the ninth dog she has trained, is her constant companion, preparing for a life of service. [Click here to go to the Video](#)

UMass source: <http://www.umass.edu/loop/print.php?articleID=145847>

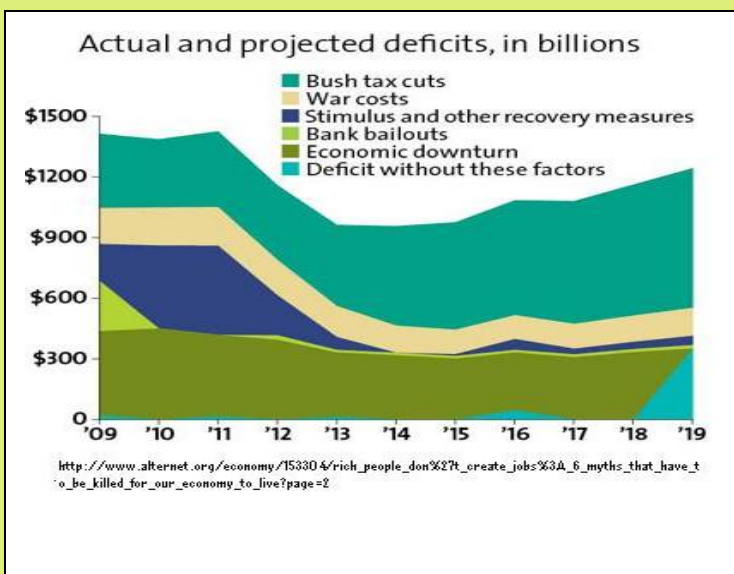
## 2012 NEA ESP Conference by Donna Johnson

I recently attended the 2012 NEA ESP (Education Support Professional) conference in Memphis Tennessee where I facilitated four training sessions and was part of a panel talking about “Elevating the Profession.” Needless to say it was a hectic four days. The NEA has made a commitment based on the data we have, to work harder on issues that ESPs face. This is huge, since NEA is primarily a teacher union. But the NEA realizes more and more our importance to the association and wants to work with us to provide better services for ESP members. I, for one, plan on making sure they follow through on their promise.

While in Memphis, I had the opportunity to rekindle friendships with colleagues and to network with ESPs from all over the country. It is amazing how good we have it compared to many. One thing that was made clear to me is that the COLA and contract language we just settled on in bargaining is much better than most of our colleagues have. Many school systems are freezing wages and actually taking back benefits. Things are tough all over.

I would like to thank NEA for the opportunity (they paid my way) they gave me to network with others and to be able to bring back information for our local. I was able one afternoon when we had free time, to check out Graceland and I am so happy that I went. I didn't find Elvis alive and well, but I sure do have a better picture of how he lived.

In Solidarity, Donna



### Grievance activity continued from page 3

The current list is 15 grievances awaiting resolution. Of this number, 2 have had a mediation hearing and the third should be mediated in the very near future. Mediation is a provision of the G&A procedure and is an alternative to filing a step 4 grievance with the University President's office. Past experience has indicated that mediation has been a more effective and beneficial method for dispute resolution, for both the member and the University.

### Tax The Rich! by Emily West

Last year the economy started to creep forward for the majority of the American population. The federal government has been cautiously stimulating the economy while attempting to support the unemployed and the underemployed. One of the steps Congress is expected to take this year is to place the tax percentages back, for the very wealthy, to where they were before the country was taken for this thrill ride by the last Administration. The chart to the left shows us, in particular, how much money is missing from the federal budget because of the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy. Congress is also passing tax reductions for the segments of the population who are hurting the most, and giving small businesses sizeable tax credits if they hire people and provide health insurance for their employees. This all clearly makes sense. The conservative talking heads (corporate media) will tell us this isn't "right," that the "trickle down" theory is the way to go, but we've tried "trickle down" long enough – in all fairness – and we now know that what trickled on us was anything but money.



## **Our Occupy Moment** by Emily West

**2011 was the Year of the Protester**, according to Time magazine. It was the first time that an individual was not chosen by Time as [Person of the Year](#), but an icon was chosen instead. We have seen massive Occupy movements all over the world. So we have to ask Why? To answer that question, it takes an expansion of perception.

Our American movement began in New York City with Occupy Wall Street, as Americans spoke out against Wall Street gamblers who began the demise of our economy by [gambling with taxpayer-backed money](#) after the safety nets that once kept the system in check were systematically [removed during the Bush and Clinton years](#). Big Money gambled to win with very high stakes, even setting up bets against the US economy, called [hedge funds and credit default swaps](#), so they would “win” either way.

The [Occupy](#) movement in America emerged primarily from the youth in our northern states but has spread to all corners of the country and represents every issue, age, and social strata of democracy and economic justice. There are several movements that have emerged to correct what went wrong on Wall Street including [lawsuits to stop the widespread foreclosures](#), (cursory) investigations into Big Banks to [look at the illegalities of the 2008 Bailout](#), legislature to [put the regulations back into the financial system](#) that were removed in the last two decades, to stop the movement of America’s wealth moving upward to the top 1% and away from the middle class. Several [Constitutional Amendments](#) are being pursued as well in Congress and [American grassroots groups](#) have formed to undo the Supreme Court blow to our democracy, the unlimited corporate donations to elections recently allowed by the new right leaning, corporate Supreme Court ruling of [Citizen’s United vs FEC](#). A call for the return to the [Volker Rule](#) has become prominent in progressive circles, as well as the new [Consumer Financial Protection Agency](#).

Progressives, Greens, one American Socialist, and a few Libertarians are leading many of these reform movements, as they have taken on the task of representing the people which [Congress has not done enough](#) of in recent years. Another Occupy movement issue is that the [Federal Reserve be investigated](#). The most prominent is being led by Bernie Sanders of Vermont, but one of the Republican presidential candidates, Ron Paul, has taken on this Federal Reserve issue as well. The Fed has been [a private bank](#) with undisclosed dealings for wealthy global bankers since 1913 when Woodrow Wilson [allowed private bankers to take over the federal banking system](#).

A push back to reverse the removal of the [Glass-Steagall Act](#) will [return controls to The Fed](#) allowing the guidance of national beaucroatic regulations to rein in Wall Street which will be of enormous benefit to US tax payers, rather than allowing our tax monies to benefit private bankers and [Wall Street gamblers](#) exclusively. The movement is also demanding that [a tax be assessed for all Wall Street transactions](#) as well as placing the [taxes for the wealthy](#) back to [pre-Bush levels](#) and closing the tax loopholes that allow for a sizeable and unnecessary loss in federal revenue. The US financial gurus say these last three items would generate enough income to pull us out of this recession rather quickly. There is also a great deal of evidence that [more social programs](#), not less, would move the population forward. The foreclosure issue has also finally been addressed with the [Obama Administration allotting a \\$25 billion](#) settlement to begin to resolve the foreclosure issue that initiated our economic unraveling.

The Occupy Movement itself has disappeared from view, as it has embedded itself in other movements and [the overall effects seem to be holding strong](#). The movement has launched an unprecedented move toward Economic Justice, and away from rampant [crony capitalism](#) which brought on the financial meltdown, [the “thing” that allowed Wall Street and the big banks to “go wild”](#) and which launched the recession. The regulations that kept our economy in check were removed by the corporatists in our government under the guise of allowing [free market capitalism](#) to run its course with the now defunct [“trickle-down”](#) financial theory that clearly has never worked. The 1% argue that this “tickle down” is the only way to get our economy to grow, but that has been proven wrong time and time again.

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### **Elizabeth Warren for Massachusetts continued from page 3**

supports the US-Israel alliance, and veteran's rights and benefits. Warren has fought against the right-wing attacks on women's health, she is pro-choice and pro-LGBT rights. She emphasizes the importance of first responders like firefighters, paramedics, police and other emergency workers.

Elizabeth Warren on Federal Debt and Fair Taxation [Video](#)

Memorable Warren Quote: "We live in an America that has hammered, chipped and squeezed the middle class, while the government has said to large corporations that you don't have to pay anything in taxes."

### **Recap on Scott Brown: One Term**

Scott Brown describes himself as a Reagan Republican, however, the Tea Party has fundraised for him. On the bail-outs Brown assisted the mega-corporations that have ruined the US economy, and Wall Street giants Goldman Sachs, Fidelity, Chase, Liberty Mutual, and MassMutual have contributed funds to his campaign. Brown made almost one million dollars from Wall Street and used his vote to water down financial reforms that would correct the Wall Street imbalances. He has accepted more than \$100,000 from oil and gas interests while voting to preserve tax breaks for the oil industry and wealthy corporations and he voted to oppose controls on greenhouse gases.

Brown voted for a Republican spending bill that would cost Massachusetts 17,000 jobs and take away job training assistance for 27,000 potential workers, and he voted against \$655 million in federal budget assistance to Massachusetts.

Brown advocates for veterans but agreed to send thousands more troops to Afghanistan. He supports indefinite imprisonment and enhanced interrogation like waterboarding (most define as torture). He supports the death penalty, penalties for illegal immigrants and employers, stronger sex offender penalties, protecting our borders, and the right to bear arms. Brown claims he does not oppose MA same sex marriage, and is against abortion.

Brown has flip flopped on health care, supported a failed amendment to make it more difficult for rape victims to obtain emergency contraception from religious health workers and agencies. He has supported MA universal health insurance including state subsidy funding, but opposes President Obama's health plan for financial reasons, he says. Brown voted against the president's jobs bill, which would keep thousands of educators from being laid off and put tens of thousands of Americans back to work, as well as modernize facilities in schools across the nation.

Notable link:

"The oil lobby group American Petroleum Institute launched ads in Massachusetts late last week on behalf of Koch-funded candidate Scott Brown (R-MA) as part of its [\\$2 million national campaign to protect oil subsidies](#)".

### **The USA Classification Project** by Linda Hillenbrand, Donna Johnson, Jim Plaza & Leslie Marsland

As many of you know, USA has been working toward developing job descriptions that accurately reflect the work we do. For a few years now we have been meeting with management (Ernie Woo/Juan Jarrett) on how best to proceed. The biggest hurdle was for our Human Resources (HR) department to convince the state HR Division to allow us the flexibility to design new job titles. The majority of us are in the Clerk Series, which has not accurately reflected what we do for 15+ years. Our HR department was given the blessing of HR in Boston and they have proposed a new set of descriptions to replace the Clerk series and an IT series. The Classification Committee (the authors of this article) has met with management to discuss what they've proposed. We will be preparing a response to their proposal soon.

We know the process is slow but it's very important to our members. We want the titles to truly reflect what we do. We will continue to update you all as we work toward a mutual agreement.

## **Our Occupy Moment continued from page 6**

Instead “trickle down” has simply moved profits UP the economic ladder to [the top 1% who have nearly tripled their earnings in recent years](#), leaving a huge segment of the population dramatically reduced. So, along with all these other Occupy movements, our next move should be to [raise the minimum wage with a federal mandate to \\$10 per hour](#). Chris Hedges (The Nation, MSNBC) explains that:

Executive salaries, along with prices, have soared even as worker salaries have stagnated or declined. But the call to raise the minimum wage is not only a matter of economic justice. The infusion of tens of billions of dollars into the hands of the working class would increase tax revenue, open up new jobs and lift consumer spending.

It is estimated that almost [half the US population](#) have related to or have even been enthusiastic about the activism of the Occupy Movement. “It’s about time,” [Carne Ross of The Nation](#) writes about the movement:

This is a politics of the many for the many, rather than that of a small clique of elected representatives, co-opted by the powerful few.

[Nothing this big moves forward without our youth’s involvement](#). Young people have traditionally had more time and energy to devote as instruments of social change. Young people are often idealistic, and ready to recognize the injustices that created our current economic slump, as well as to act on these injustices. They are also paying more – far more – for their educations, as well as more for food, housing, and etc. than any other previous generation. To make it even tougher, our youth are emerging from the college campuses with degrees ready to join the working world into a depressed economy and finding there *are no jobs*, but their tuition loan repayment period has launched nonetheless. They are in a double bind. This has clearly motivated them.

Here is a series of photos that my oldest daughter, Anastasia Seager, took while she was in NYC in October. NYC OCCUPY PHOTOS by Anastasia Seager: [Click here for slideshow](#). A few [Occupy videos](#) you might enjoy too.

Occupy left its mark on America, emboldening us and [broadening our political perspectives](#), and launching us into an era of social awareness unprecedented in American history. And... it looks like Occupy will be back this spring—it never really went away. What will this second phase of activism look like? Find out [here](#).

So let’s do it - let’s Occupy Everything that’s meaningful. The first place we might want to occupy that would be significant? Occupy your Union. Together we are more, much more.

## **Our Occupy Spring (2012)**

Democracy movements and revolutions have emerged all over the world. The movement now known as [“The Arab Spring”](#) launched [a global revolution](#) that is unprecedented. It included Iran, Egypt, Spain, Lebanon, Libya, Greece and Syria to name just a few. Americans were affected by these revolutions and in Sept of 2011 launched the Occupy Movement aimed at protesting Wall Street and the mega-banks that destroyed our economy. The Occupy movement spread like wildfire across America and had the support of the majority. Local police were sent out to destroy the movement. Occupy now seems to have gone underground. Rumor has it, however, that it will re-emerge as the weather warms. The Nation magazine gives us a peek at what to expect [here](#) with an interview from Marina Sitrin.

## **[Wall Street does it again:](#) Gas Prices going up? Who is to blame?**

Check out [McClatchy’s take](#) on what’s driving oil and gas prices up. Then take a peek at the view from Washington at [White House Energy Report](#). Great cartoon [here](#).