

## ANNUAL REPORT ON STATE OF THE UNION

Our College and our careers are at a crossroad. Hopefully, we will emerge from what has been referred to as the “lost decade” at Henry Ford Community College with competent leadership and renewed morale. Hopefully, we will emerge from two failed presidencies, that were characterized by rigidity, dismissiveness, insecurities, and belittlement. To the second of these failed presidencies can be added insulting behavior toward faculty in general as well as community leaders, arrogance, threats, vindictiveness, and a dearth of written and critical thinking skills.

College faculty, staff, and administrators owe a deep debt of gratitude to the majority of our Trustees who courageously recognized the errors of Boards past in hiring two unsuited presidents who had very damaging impact on the programs, employee morale, and reputation of our College.

We are now in search of a new president: one who can restore the morale and who respects the professional standing and input of faculty; a president who does not exploit the support staff with the arbitrary redefinition, if not the elimination, of positions; and one who will not foster divisions between 1650 and other unions on campus, by blatantly misrepresenting the \$29 million in Local 1650 contract concessions, which were critical in saving the College – and which continue to build the College’s \$18 million fund balance.

Thankfully, we have seen the last of a President who did all of this while lining his pockets with pay raises and outside “consulting” fees – and who did so while employees sacrificed, taxpayers sacrificed, and students sacrificed to help save the College. That the College survived this turbulent, unfocused, and divisive period, that it survived this “lost decade,” is a tribute to all employees – who kept the College and its programs afloat and its reputation intact – while awaiting a competent president.

What now lies before us is the opportunity to secure confident, collegial, and competent leadership – leadership which does not see advice as pushback or disagreement as disloyalty. We await a president with a mature, secure, stable personality – one who can lead with thoughtfulness – and by example. Rest assured that the 30 College and community leaders, now serving on the Presidential Search Committee, are dedicated to this end.

However, the self-serving negativity of the last five years, the culture generated during our “lost decade,” must still be addressed. In some 40 years as Local 1650 President, I have taken only two grievances to the Trustees and only one bargaining unit clarification matter to MERC. In the last five years, three unit clarification disputes have gone to MERC or are pending – and six grievances are soon to go to the Trustees – after nearly two years of effort by 1650 to resolve them short of such steps.

There still resides among some College administrators the toxic residue of the last five years. Some administrators continue to extrapolate from hearsay, or from but one allegation, negative mind sets about all faculty. There still remain remnants of the recently departed President and recently departed Vice-presidents’ self-serving prejudice, that a faculty member is “guilty until proven innocent.”

Beyond the local level, at the State and federal levels of government, far right partisans continue to attack our pensions, our insurance coverage, our bargaining rights, and our funding. I once was very careful about not offending our Republican members, but the years and attacks by Republican officeholders have indicated who our enemies are.

50% of HFC’s revenue once came from the State, now only 20%. Student tuition has shot up to cover the State shortfall. There was a time when both political parties viewed education as a common good, not a product to be purchased by those able to do so. Veterans’ educational benefits; public service work credit to reduce student debt; low or no interest federal student loans versus high interest loans benefitting the banking industry; local control of collective bargaining – all this and more have been under attack. Outrageous tax breaks – at the State and recently federal levels – have benefitted, and will indefinitely benefit, the wealthy and large corporations – profiting Republican donors at the expense of the middle and working classes.

The far right Republican agenda is to “starve the beast of government.” The goal is to generate so much government debt that education funding, public health care, medicare, medicaid, and even Social Security will be drastically reduced. This has been the far right agenda since the beginning of these programs; and their rhetoric, tactics, and goals have not changed. Their tactics are to demonize and then privatize these vital functions – bringing profit to their donors at the expense of taxpayers and those in need.

Too many in the middle class, focusing on their current standing, fail to acknowledge when disparaging those in need that “there but for the grace of God, go I.” Too many in the middle class refuse to see that government social programs, and the values driving them, brought us and our families into the middle class. If the far right succeeds, such programs will not be there for the grandchildren and great grandchildren of the current middle class. “There but for the grace of God” go our grandchildren and great grandchildren.

It is easy to fault those in need, or to offer a “band-aid approach” to their needs, when a large scale commitment is needed. If we fail to embrace an “American community” – our grandchildren and their children will eventually reside in a “banana republic” that benefits and protects the privileged and gated few at the expense of those in need. And those in need may one day very well be our own progeny.

Ultimately our futures – our professional lives and our livelihoods – and those of our children and their children – are in the hands of those we elect to office. It is folly to fail to engage in politics. Everything in our careers is political; everything in life is political, in one sense or another. It is folly to oppose “in principle” contributing funds to political efforts. Our opponents have no such qualms. We can not “unilaterally disarm” while our opponents elect their surrogates and appoint judges who defend the unmitigated flow of dark money to far right candidates and their agendas through Citizens United.

90% of 1650 members once recognized the need to contribute political action funds, and over 50% contributed their time, to elect those who would represent – and not exploit – us. Were we not politically active, we would not have recently won the 3% MPSERS reimbursement case. We would not now be in the process of seeking a stable, competent College President. In fact, political action created this Union – and the contract, wages, benefits, and professional standing we now enjoy. Every election puts all of this at risk.

The future of this College, of our community, of our State, and our federal system checks and balances are at stake next November. Whether that future is bright or dark will be of our own making.

John McDonald  
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