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REPORT ON STATE OF LOCAL 1650

Our Union is in the midst of transition. The 2020 VESP will see at least 25 full-time faculty leave our College and our Union – and with them considerable knowledge of our institutional history – and their strong commitment to activism at the College.

We are beginning to see the replacement of these colleagues. The teachers new to the College must come to grasp and possess the legacy of Local 1650, which has been 60 years in the making. Their first lesson about that legacy is, perhaps, this year’s annual Report on the State of Local 1650. Such a report is required by the Federation’s Constitution. Hopefully, it will demonstrate the strength of the Federation in meeting the challenges of the concluding year and preparing for those in the year upcoming.

2020 — A Year of Unexpected Challenges

COVID-19 Strikes: In the Winter 2020 Semester, Local 1650 members once again saved the College and, yet again, admirably served our students, who so need and deserve affordable, quality education. In one week, 1650 faculty and other employees scrambled to move 90% of classes and students to online instruction, and then spent the rest of the semester revising coursework to deliver learning remotely. This saved the College and students we serve, but faculty’s efforts meant little to several Trustees.

I am proud to represent such professional educators and friends, who devote their careers to a College that provides so many, like me, a pathway to the middle class. Administrators and Trustees come and go, while faculty are the constant at HFC. We have to live with the consequences of the oft ill-advised decisions of the Administration and Trustees. Too often faculty are called upon to save the College – and we do it.

Trustees Violate 1650 Contract

Also unanticipated in 2020 was the Trustees' refusal to honor a signed contract – the first such act by any Board of Trustees in the 60-year history of the Local. The 2020 Trustees would not honor their contractual obligation to return to a minimum of 200 full-time faculty by the Fall 2020 Semester.

The Trustees then demeaned faculty in the very Contract Extension discussions, which were initiated by Local 1650, to phase in the Trustees' contractual obligation to hire nearly 30 faculty replacements by the Fall 2020 Semester. The Trustees could have addressed the hiring incrementally over the last eight years but refused to do so.

If 1650 had gone to arbitration and won, as we most certainly would have, the Board indicated it would hire faculty for one year and then terminate them the next year, upon expiration of the contract. The Board also threatened to target various long-standing provisions of the contract in the next round of contract negotiations: Faculty Evaluations, the Constitution's Governance Structure, Staffing, and Salary. We are seen by too many Trustees as overpaid and underworked.

Eight years ago, 1650 faculty made significant economic and staffing sacrifices to save the College from bankruptcy, a crisis then caused by an irresponsible President and Board of Trustees who failed their fiduciary responsibilities. Those faculty sacrifices continue to this very day. They built – and continue to increase – the College's \$24 million fund balance.

The concessionary reduction of full-time faculty from 205 to 170 was done to save the College from bankruptcy in 2012 – on top of salary losses and freezes. All of this resulted in an average salary increase of only 0.5% per year over ten years. Those and other 1650 concessions generated more than \$29 million for the College. However, full-time lines could not return to 200 in 2020. Evidently, the old adage applies: “No good turn goes unpunished” at HFC.

Moreover, the Board would not even countenance a three-year contract extension of 0%, 0%, and 3% because the Trustees did not trust the 1650 faculty to make sacrifices in the third year, if such proved fiscally necessary. Faculty could not be trusted, after 1650 sacrificed and saved the College from the fiduciary malfeasance of its Trustees and Administration in 2012. The history of the Trustees' recent refusal to honor the hiring provision of a signed contract speaks volumes about who is trustworthy at HFC – and who is not.

Two-year Contract Extension

Ultimately, Local 1650 agreed to a two-year extension of 0% and 0% to secure 190 full-time faculty lines. Clearly it is the College faculty – not the Trustees – who are committed to a cohort of full-time faculty which is necessary to provide curriculum and program development, advances in pedagogy, restoration of Counseling services for our changing student demographic, and full-time commitment to the College – an impossible commitment for underpaid and hard-pressed adjunct faculty who must cobble together an income from several colleges. Who then is committed to quality education – the revolving door of Trustees or those faculty and other employees who commit their entire working careers to our College and community?

Despite Trustee ignorance of or indifference to the needs of HFC faculty and their students, this Union still gives priority to students. The Union does not work rigidly to the precise terms of the contract when asked for exceptions to serve students in need. However, the Trustees' hostile behavior invites rigidity and working strictly to the letter of the contract.

The Trustees' priorities have been and continue to be “bricks and mortar” – and ever-increasing administrative positions – as full-time faculty numbers fall. Full-time faculty teach only 40% of College classes. If 60% of HFC teaching must be done by part-time faculty, perhaps 60% of the HFC administration, including the President's Cabinet, should be staffed by part-time administrators as well. Imagine the savings!

Academic Organization Committee

Also indicative of the Trustees and Administration's commitment to ever-increasing administrative staffing is their opposition to a review of the Academic Organizational Structure, which was imposed by President Jensen after the then Board of Trustees had set his termination date. The Trustees publicly endorsed to President Jensen's parting shot but characterized it as an “interim” arrangement. At the insistence of the 30-person Presidential Selection Committee, the job description for President Kavalhuna required a prompt review of the organizational structure.

After two years of inaction by President Kavalhuna on this issue, Local 1650 proposed a review committee consisting of Local 1650, the Faculty Senate, and the Administration. President Kavalhuna opposed Administrative participation. Thus, the Committee meets absent Administrators, though their experiences and opinions have been and will continue to be sought by the Committee.

Local 1650 Political Challenges

Why is 1650 involved in political action? The fate of our College and the fate of our careers are in the hands of elected officials. While some faculty may consider themselves professors or academicians, we are, in fact, public employees of the HFC Board of Trustees. This elected Board ultimately sets both educational and fiscal policy at HFC – and it is party to our collective bargaining agreement.

Four HFC Board of Trustee seats were on the November 2020 ballot. Two of the three 1650-endorsed candidates – Patrick D’Ambrosio and Irene Watts – were elected. Both will be fair-minded Trustees who value public education and collective bargaining rights. Both are grateful to Local 1650 for our support.

State Political Challenges

At the State level, Dearborn’s State Representative Abdullah Hammoud, Ms. Kelly Breen (38th District Oakland County) and the other State Representatives supported by Local 1650 won offices. In addition, the Local supported Wayne County Commissioner Sam Baydoun, a good friend of HFC, who was reelected to office.

The State Legislature provides 20% of HFC’s revenue – and thus 20% of the HFC budget for salaries, benefits, and instructional programs. The State once provided 50% of College revenue! Student tuition has now risen from 20% to 50% of HFC revenue to cover lost State Aid. **Higher education is no longer considered a societal and common good. It is now a product to be purchased by those who can afford it.**

Federal Volunteer Action

While Local 1650 political funds can not be used for federal candidates, the national AFT was influential in its support of President Biden and Vice-president Harris, as well as electing and reelecting U.S. Senators, including Reverend Rafael Warnock and Mr. Jon Ossoff of Georgia. They will break Senator McConnell’s stranglehold on the U.S. Senate and his stranglehold on virtually all important education and social legislation over the last 16 years.

A few 1650 officers and members contributed significant personal funds to federal candidates: Senator Gary Peters, Representatives Debbie Dingell, Haley Stevens, Elissa Slotkin, among others. These public servants will help lead the nation away from the disastrous policies, corruption, and sedition of Trump’s four years. Beyond contributing funds, Eric Rader, Linda Brandt, Wendie Lee-Jenkins, Sophia Beydoun, and others walked neighborhoods, worked phone banks, and attended rallies to bring change.

2021 Challenges Facing 1650

COVID-19 will still be a major challenge for all educators. The point at which vaccines can assure the full reopening of the College remains uncertain. The variables are many: the number of those vaccinated, the duration of the vaccines' effectiveness, COVID virus mutations, etc.

The Biden administration's aggressive approach to vaccinations is heartening. The impact of President Biden's COVID policy will determine the nation's economic recovery. That economic recovery will determine the future of HFC's enrollment, tuition revenue, and State Aid. Also positively impacting the College will be the aggressive Biden policy proposals for small businesses, free community college tuition, student debt relief, job creation programs in infrastructure, and the support of emerging energy sources.

2021 and 2022 Political Action

2021 will bring municipal elections. Major O'Reilly is retiring after many years of serving the City, supporting HFC millages, serving on HFC Presidential Hiring Committees, and befriending HFC faculty and Local 1650. All Dearborn City Council offices will also be on the ballot.

The Local must replenish its Political Action Fund to assist municipal candidates in 2021 and to prepare for the 2022 elections. Governor Whitmer, the State House, State Senate, and U.S. Congress candidates will be on the ballot. Governor Whitmer has fought hard to protect Michigan citizens from COVID and has extracted what funding she could from Republican legislators to support K-12 and College funding. She has contended with a hostile Republican Legislature threatening to impeach her, Trump's insults and threats, and a very active effort by right-wing terrorists to kidnap and murder her. Such is the state of our State and such is the state of our country after four years of Trump's hate mongering, lies, and rampant narcissism.

In 2021, to replenish our PAF, Local 1650 will be moving to more manageable 10-month donations of \$15 per month via Square. As in so many cases, Stacey Buchanan has taken leadership in this effort.

Online Student Impressions

In 2021, the Local will implement SmartEvals, an online survey replacing the Local's previous hard-copy survey of student impressions of faculty performance. This will require strong faculty encouragement of student participation. Chardin Claybourne has spent much effort in championing the move to SmartEvals.

To return to where this Report began, many new teachers will be coming to our College over the next three years. All of us need to mentor them on the importance of activism beyond the classroom. All of us must help them understand the importance of the Union to their professional lives and livelihoods. We owe this to our predecessors at HFC, who bequeathed so much to us. We owe this to our profession. We owe it to our new colleagues.

John McDonald

January 27, 2021