

**“THE MOST THREATENING CLOUD
OVER SUNY IS THE ONGOING TALK ABOUT
BUDGET-DRIVEN LAYOFFS AND NONRENEWALS.”**



By William E. Scheuerman
UUP President
bscheuer@uupmail.org

Weathering the storm

Welcome back. I hope you had a productive and restful summer. If the incessant rain disrupted some of our good times, as it probably did, threatening storm clouds of a different kind now loom over SUNY. Of course, storm clouds need not bring disasters; too much rain may cause floods. But, without rain, flowers won't grow. So, let me tell you where the rain clouds are and what UUP is doing to nurture SUNY's garden and avoid the flood.

The first and most threatening cloud over SUNY is the ongoing talk about budget-driven layoffs and nonrenewals. The budget passed by the Legislature provides no new public dollars, but it did allow the University to generate revenue through a tuition hike. Despite the hike, campus managers are still scrambling to make ends meet. SUNY managers are considering layoffs and nonrenewals as a solution to their fiscal crunch. But does it justify layoffs? We don't think so, and we're not alone. We lobbied hard to get both houses of the state Legislature to agree with us. In fact, the Legislative Green Book, the record of legislative intent passed by joint resolution, clearly states that the budget signed into law by the governor provides sufficient revenues to avoid budget-driven layoffs. This legislative intent sends a clear political message to managers who want to cut faculty and staff. UUP was successful in gaining such language during the mid-'90s to avoid layoffs during the state's last deficit period.

Our struggle to prevent layoffs is ongoing and we're optimistic we'll get the kind of no-layoff commitment we're seeking. Here's what we've been doing. Following the publication of the Green Book, we met with Chancellor King. The chancellor has given his commitment to UUP to work on the no-layoff assurance. That's good, but not good enough. We know we can't get a no-layoff commitment from SUNY without support from the governor. It's one thing to oppose layoffs during tough fiscal times and another to find a way to stop them. I am hopeful that, by the time you read this editorial, the governor, the Legislature and the chancellor will find a way to prevent layoffs during this bad fiscal period.

The second and less-threatening cloud, right now at

least, is the status of contract negotiations. Unlike the negotiations of 1994, when the state wanted us to surrender tenure, state negotiators are working well at the table. In fact, at this point, negotiations with the state have been positive and even amiable. So why don't we have a new contract? The state is still facing a fiscal deficit and, at this point, salary demands are falling on deaf ears. Does this mean we're about to sign a new contract with no money? *Absolutely not.* Our members need and deserve salaries and benefits commensurate with the first-rate colleges and universities in the U.S. It's a priority. Our goal isn't just to get a contract, but a contract that contains a fair and equitable salary increase.

Our plan is simple. First, we're working with political leaders to find new revenue sources. This effort was successful and we avoided real budget cuts as a result. That's a start. We're also waiting out the fiscal storm. Just last year, we heard budgetary projections of a two-year deficit approaching \$20 billion. The number is now down to \$5 billion. There are signs that the economy is beginning to turn around in New York state. I'm optimistic that our patience in the process will lead to dividends.

In the meantime, our Negotiations Team, led by the capable Phil Smith, is back at the bargaining table preparing the way for a contract that will meet the needs—financial and professional—of our members. Beginning this month, we will issue regular negotiations updates advising you of our progress and seeking your input. We'll give the updates to your chapter president to distribute. We'll also put them on the UUP Web site and in *The Voice*. We are committed to keeping rank-and-file members informed, and we need to hear what you think. After all, this is a union contract and you are the union.

This year is going to be a busy and challenging one. I know we're up to the challenge. As long as we continue to work together, it's just a matter of time before our well-toiled garden produces fruit.

The Voice encourages letters to the editor about union and SUNY issues, politics and other membership concerns.

For more information, contact UUP Director of Communications Frank Maurizio at (800) 342-4206 or fmaurizi@uupmail.org.