



AEEF News and Views

Newsletter of the Association of Employees of the Educational Foundation



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SPECIAL EDITION

WGBH Rejects FY10 Relief from Union: Seeks Broader Concessions in 2010

Union and management negotiators failed to reach agreement on economic concessions being sought by management. Though the request to bargain was ostensibly about closing part of a \$6.9 million gap in the upcoming FY10 budget (see page 2), AEEF representatives quickly discovered it was also about management positioning itself to seek deeper concessions during our next contract negotiation in 2010. This fact came to light when union negotiators, following the recommendation of the Executive Board, offered the following proposal to provide some of the economic relief being sought by management for FY10:

- Extend the existing contract for an additional year
- Defer the wage increase from FY10 to FY11

Instead of counterproposing additional cost-saving measures, management rejected the idea outright. The union modified the proposal to also:

- Reduce the retirement plan match by half for FY10
- Include the ability to renegotiate the deferred wage increase in FY11 (in the event of a future economic shortfall)

Management, however, made it clear that the *concept* of an extension was off the table: There

are major benefit changes they intend to seek during our next contract negotiation and they do not want to be financially committed to those benefits for an extra year.

Alternate union proposals offered in an attempt to find agreement included:

- Forgoing the FY10 wage increase in exchange for a no-layoff pledge
- An offer of reducing the FY10 wage increase by 1.25% and accepting one week of unpaid furlough (excluding Media Access employees) in exchange for
 - o an additional week of vacation time
 - o an extension of staff recall rights from 1 year to 2 years
 - o access to career development services from Human Resources for 3 months following a layoff
 - o and the proportional layoff of AEEF to non-AEEF employees

All were solely for FY10 and all were rejected.

Instead, management stuck to variations on the same theme:

- No wage increase
- End the guaranteed retirement match by giving management control over how and when the match is implemented

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- No wage increase and 4 days off between Christmas and New Year's (or the equivalent for essential personnel)
- No wage increase and cut the retirement match in half with 4 days off between Christmas and New Year's (or the equivalent for essential personnel)

In every case management refused to guarantee that all savings would go directly and solely to preserving jobs.

Management's request to negotiate was made pursuant to section 12.6 of our contract, which provides for a request to bargain over possible adjustments to the wage increases during a given fiscal year when the Foundation establishes a budget target number of at least -3% for that year. The union calculates that management met the criteria.

The negotiations took place at WGBH starting on July 8, but were quickly postponed by three weeks when the union rejected a confidentiality agreement and insisted that management present only financial information which could be shared with rank and file members. Management said the postponement was to ensure managers were fully briefed first.

Despite the inability to reach a mutually acceptable agreement by management's deadline of August 5, 2009, both parties affirmed their willingness to meet and negotiate further if either side develops new proposals to offer. Barring any such agreement, all AEEF members are scheduled to receive a 3.25% wage increase, as well any applicable range increases, beginning October 26, 2009.

Jon Abbott Asked and the Union Answered "Yes"

In his July 23, 2009 e-mail to all staff, WGBH President Jon Abbott was clear in his request to AEEF members: "...we have approached the leadership of AEEF to bargain the FY10 raises and retirement contribution matches for that union's membership. A successful outcome could save WGBH approximately \$1.3 million, of which \$1 million represents savings to the discretionary budget. That amount would close 15% of the budget gap and relieve some of the stress on departments."

The AEEF officers believe the union responded responsibly and creatively to Jon's request by offering a proposal which laid the groundwork for addressing his stated concerns for the FY10 budget. Despite the hardships reported by members who have had only a 0.5% increase in pay since 2007 and dozens of members working in the Media Access Group who experienced a wage *reduction* between 15% and 32%, the union offered a proposal which sought to address the FY10 budget shortfall by extending our contract by one year, deferring FY10 wage increases to FY11, and reducing the retirement plan matching contribution by half for an estimated savings of \$945,013, or 73% of the savings being requested. But management refused to counter propose additional cost saving measures and, instead, rejected the concept of extending the contract outright. "We're particularly disappointed because we made an earnest effort to accommodate precisely the concerns raised by Jon Abbott in his memo to staff," says AEEF President Jordan Weinstein. "Our proposals met Jon Abbott's requests to help close part of the \$6.9 million gap in the FY10 budget through both a second year of wage concessions and a change to our retirement benefit which we have no legal obligation to make. Management said 'no' to those savings because they clearly don't want to wait another year to begin seeking broader concessions to our contract."

Questions and Answers

Q. Is it right for AEEF members to continue receiving raises and a retirement contribution from the foundation when these benefits have been taken away from other employees?

A. The AEEF supports fair wages and benefits for all WGBH employees, union and non-union. The AEEF is committed to the belief that employees deserve a voice in determining what the appropriate terms and conditions of employment should be, including whether, when, and by how much wages should increase. For union members, this is accomplished through the process of collective bargaining with management. In this process, union representatives assess available information and offer proposals and counterproposals in an effort to reach an agreement that balances the Foundation's institutional interests with the professional and personal interests of our members, who ultimately vote to approve or reject those terms.

Our union has a long history of working cooperatively with management to navigate the prevailing economic circumstances as well as industry trends in setting such terms of employment in a manner that is reasonable, fair, and responsible. In fact, our contract has historically led the way for setting standards and raising the quality of work life for all WGBH employees.

Q: Did AEEF refuse to discuss changing the Foundation's matching contribution to the 403(b) retirement plans?

A: No, the Union did not refuse to discuss changes to the 403(b) plans, but indicated that we were not initially inclined to discuss the 403(b) plan because the contractual provision under which management requested bargaining is limited strictly to a given fiscal year's wage increases. Shortly thereafter, the union offered to reduce the matching contribution by half as part of a proposal which would have saved approximately \$945,013 of the FY10 budget or 73% of the total savings management was seeking, but management rejected the offer outright.

Q: Isn't the financial success of our members tied to the financial viability of WGBH?

A: Absolutely, and our union has a long history of negotiating contracts in partnership with management that have allowed the Foundation to operate within its means and provide the wages and benefits our members believe are appropriate. In FY08 for example, AEEF wages accounted for less than 8% of WGBH's total expenses.

Q. Is the bargaining over?

A. AEEF has made it clear to the Foundation that we are willing to hear any new proposals they might want to present and that we will continue looking for creative solutions that meet the interests of both parties.

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