

# Professionally Speaking

NEWSLETTER of the  
Wisconsin Science Professionals



Affiliated with American Federation of Teachers

AFT-Wisconsin, Wisconsin State AFL-CIO



MARCH 2006

## OSER classification survey D.O.A.

by Dave Edwards, Advanced Environmental Enforcement Specialist

As part of our last contract (2003-2005), the State through the Office of State Employment Relations (OSER) agreed to perform a Personnel Management Study on Department of Natural Resources water positions represented by WSP. Classification inconsistencies within DNR have a long history. Unfortunately, the September OSER survey was **Dead On Arrival**.

The long-standing argument is that within DNR, virtually all engineers are classified at the advanced level while WSP members are held to a much higher standard with only central office staff, regional experts, and a handful of others actually being able to achieve the advanced classification. Currently, about 25% of the Science Professionals at DNR are at the advanced level. If you remove central office staff from the equation, only about 8% of Science Professionals are at the advanced level.

The short version of the survey results is that OSER has determined that DNR staff represented by WSP are properly classified according to the class specifications and *"the advanced capability in the engineering specifications is an anomaly in state service."* It gets better. The survey goes on to say, *"There are very few other classifications that compare in the ability to move to the advanced level."*

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the term "anomaly" means: a deviation from the common rule, irregularity, something different, abnormal. The term "flawed" comes to mind while attempting to determine why engineers are treated so differently from other DNR employees.

WSP members work side-by-side with engineers, are assigned to the same program, work with the same administrative rules, and regulate similar facilities. Both classifications have components that are highly complex.

We have attempted to correct this problem with reclass requests to the advanced level, appeals, hearings before the Personnel Commission, and bargaining for the completion

of this survey. We have been unsuccessful in these attempts to convince OSER to fix this problem, let alone even acknowledge the problem exists.

OSER was correct in their assertion that there is an anomaly in the classification system. However, the anomaly is not with how the engineers are classified. The anomaly is with the classification system used for WSP members. That is where the problem lies. Retooling the classification system to allow all WSP members to reach the advanced level as easily as the engineers can, would correct this "flaw" in the classification system. Currently, we are not aware of any OSER plan to correct this problem.

What would a reclass to the advanced level mean to you? Well, according to our contract it could mean up to an 8% pay raise. With the next round of bargaining just beginning, you are encouraged to contact OSER and the WSP bargaining team with your concerns about negative impacts this classification anomaly has on WSP members.

A major goal of any regulatory agency is to be consistent in applying the rules across the spectrum of the regulated community. As employees of a regulatory agency shouldn't the State implement their classification systems with consistency and uniformity across the various unions?

This has been a 12-year battle for WSP. With your support, we will continue in our goal of giving all WSP members a reasonable opportunity in achieving the advanced level. The bargaining team needs to hear from you. Let's level the playing field. The stakes are high and you deserve a positive outcome.



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## Grievance Guide I – What is a grievance?

by Melissa Graf – Grievance Chair

The collective bargaining agreement — the contract between union and employer — is the legal document which brings a measure of justice, equality, and democracy to the employment relationship and the workplace. The grievance procedure in a collective bargaining agreement, and the effective use of it by the union and its membership, transforms the contract from a piece of paper into a living document.

A grievance is a complaint by an employee, a group of employees, or the entire union that:

1. Alleges there has been a violation or misinterpretation of a specific term of the contract; and/or

2. Alleges that an established policy, work rule, or practice has been applied unfairly or inequitably or has been arbitrarily changed.

Our contract states in Article IV, Section 4/1/1, “A grievance is defined as, and limited to, a written complaint involving an alleged violation of a specific provision of this Agreement. However, nothing in this Article will preclude an employee from verbally discussing any problem with his/her supervisor.”

Important things to remember grievances must be presented promptly and no later than thirty (30) calendar

days from the date the grievant first became aware of, or should have become aware of alleged violation with the exercise of reasonable diligence.

There are 3 steps to the grievance procedure. Step 1 is filed with an employee’s supervisor. If grievant is dissatisfied with results from Step 1, Step 2 can be filed with the designated agency representative. If dissatisfied with those results, Step 3 can be filed with the designee of the Employer (i.e. Division Administrator, Bureau Director, or personnel office).

This past year the union has seen a

fair share of grievances. They have dealt with issues surrounding transfers into new jobs, employees being fired without just cause, not being allowed to take leave time, inappropriate use of time, fleet vehicle policy, health insurance, implementing contracts with other unions, dental insurance, proration of personal holidays for less than full time employees, and the most popular arguing disciplinary actions.

Be sure to watch the next newsletter for more in depth information on grievances and what arbitration is.

### Opportunity is a knocking

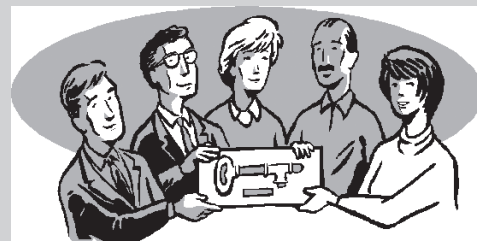
The WSP Representative council has sanctioned a competition for the design of a new Wisconsin Science Professionals logo.

Any and all are encouraged to submit their design ideas, and compete for a cash prize as well as the ability to say you have provided the fourth largest AFT-Wisconsin affiliate with a logo that will be used statewide.

For more information including examples of the old logo, facts and additional info about the WSP, either e-mail

[districtrep8@wspunion.org](mailto:districtrep8@wspunion.org), subject line to read “Logo Competition”; or mail to AFT-Wisconsin, 6602 Normandy Lane, Madison, WI 53719, Attn: Lynn Krasnowski, Logo Competition.

The judging will be at the Annual WSP Convention held April 29, 2006, at the Pyle Center in Madison.



# PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

by Donalea Dinsmore

## Affiliation at work

The last electronic newsletter announced WSP activist's successful effort to save pharmacists jobs at the Department of Corrections. What may not have been obvious is the significant role AFT-Wisconsin played. We knew that the facts surrounding contracting out pharmacy services supported our position; that it would not save taxpayers money but we were running into road blocks in getting that message through to key decision-makers. AFT-W went to work for us, often behind the scenes, clearing the way so Gary Steffen and Roger Springman could have a productive session with Secretary Frank. And that's only the most recent chapter in the work that AFT-W has done to show that contracting for medical services at Corrections doesn't make sense. AFT-W invested significant resources in this effort during the state budget process.



In this newsletter, you will find an announcement for a Professional Development Day at the end of April. Those of you who have attended past Professional Development Days can attest to the high quality workshops available free of charge to WSP members. If you haven't attended in the past, I encourage you to sign up this year. Sponsored by the State Employee Council (SEC), this event would not be possible without AFT-W support and the cooperation of the public employee affiliates.

Since mid-January at least six bills have been introduced in the Legislature that target public employees or their benefits. These bills range from limiting collective bargaining rights to mandating health savings accounts (in addition to our current health insurance plan) for state employees. The most recent legislation, SB588, imposes financial

penalties for state employees that "seek retribution" when issuing permits. The bill has a vague definition of "retribution" and could be construed to mean almost any comment or action that a member of the public objects to. Add to this the bills that impose revenue caps and you have the ingredients for an attack on the public sector. As each of these bills was introduced, AFT-W staff reviewed the language and provided an analysis of the consequences for public employees. AFT-W

staff provide us with key background materials so we as members of the union can talk with our legislators about the effects of these bills. Both AFT-W and AFT have e-lists for bulletins on current legislative action affecting us. While we oppose many of these legislative initiatives, there is also work to craft legislation that has positive outcomes for us and the public. The AFT-W lobbyist and other AFT-W leaders have worked diligently to shape legislation that encourages responsible contracting for services rather than the wholesale elimination of public service jobs with no

guarantee of cost savings or service improvements. During December, January and February, staff from AFT-W have held town hall meetings in Green Bay, La Crosse, Eau Claire and other key areas outside of Madison, to educate state employees represented by AFT-W unions about the consequences of the TABOR, now named the Taxpayer Protection Act and other key issues we face. Doing town hall meetings collectively has proven to be a cost-effective way to communicate face-to-face with members in areas where WSP has fewer members.

We recognize that we need to do a better job of publicizing what we do for our members and how we benefit from our relationship with AFT and AFT-W and the dues that we pay to these organizations. At the last Representative Council meeting, WSP leadership began crafting a communication plan so we could make this more transparent to you. Watch for more information on our web site and in our publications.

## Professional Development Day announcement

Mark your calendars for Professional Development Day!

April 28, 2006

8am - 4:30pm (reception to follow)

Pyle Center, 702 Langdon Street, Madison



Professional Development Day workshops and lunch are provided at no cost to you. Watch for registration instructions and workshop descriptions to be sent to your email address soon. Don't miss this great professional development opportunity! You do not have to use vacation time to attend. Simply inform your employer at least 14 days in advance that you plan to attend.

# Union begins with U!

by Melissa Graf, Elections Committee

It is time for officer elections within the Wisconsin Science Professionals. Every two years these offices are elected at our yearly convention. This year's convention is Saturday, April 29<sup>th</sup>. The positions which are open for election are:

- **President:** The President shall act at all times in a manner which will maintain the organization. The President shall preside at all sessions of the convention and at all meetings of the Representative Council. The President shall report at the annual convention on all Representative council matters which occurred in the preceding year affecting policies, aims, and means of accomplishing the objectives of the Union. At the conclusion of the term, the president shall submit a report of progress to the Union.

- **First Vice President:** The First Vice President shall assist in general work among the members to keep the organization active and shall assist the President in giving leadership and direction to the Union. In the absence of the President, the First Vice President shall preside at meetings and perform all duties otherwise performed by the President. The First Vice President shall chair a committee(s) and/or oversee the function of committees as appointed by the President and approved by the Representative Council.

- **Second Vice President:** The Second Vice President shall assist in general work among the members to keep the organization active and shall assist the President in giving leadership and direction to the Union. The Second Vice President shall chair a committee(s) and/or oversee the function of committees as appointed by the President and approved by the Representative Council.

- **Treasurer:** The Treasurer shall receive and take charge of all money, property, and securities of the Union delivered to him/her by the officers of the Union. The Treasurer, or officer designated by the Treasurer, shall



deposit all money and securities in the name of the Union in a bank or banks selected by the Council. All disbursements shall be made by check signed by the treasurer or officer designated by the Treasurer. Checks shall be drawn only for such purposes as are required by the Constitution or are authorized by the Convention or the Representative Council.

The Treasurer shall prepare and submit a financial report the Representative Council at each meeting of the Council. The Treasurer shall prepare and submit a financial report the Executive Committee on a monthly basis.

The Treasurer shall be responsible for a yearly financial report to be given at the Convention.

- **Membership Secretary:** The Membership Secretary shall maintain membership and bargaining unit records and perform such duties as may be required by officers of the Union. On at least a bimonthly basis, the Membership Secretary shall prepare

and submit: 1) a membership report to the Representative Council; 2) a computer generated membership report to AFT; and 3) give notification to AFT-W of all membership additions, deletions, and address changes.

- **Recording Secretary:** The Recording Secretary shall keep a record of all proceeding of the Union and meetings of the Representative Council carry on correspondence of the Union and perform such duties as may be required by officers of the Union. The Recording Secretary shall distribute minutes to Representative Council Members and file copies of all minutes at the WSP office.

These definitions come from the WSP constitution. If you would like more information please contact anyone on the Elections Committee: John Burger, UWHAC, burgerj@wisc.edu; Melissa Graf, DOJ, grafmm@doj.state.wi.us, or Sara Schreiber, DOJ, schreibersj@doj.state.wi.us.

We hope to see you at convention!

## WSP Annual Convention April 29, 2006 Pyle Center, Madison

### TENTATIVE AGENDA

8:30-9:00am	Registration, coffee and rolls
9:00am	CONVENTION SESSION
	• Welcome and opening remarks
	• President's message
9:30am	Andy Gussert AFT-WI President
9:45am	Gary Steffen, Roger Springman – Contracting out
10:00am	Break
10:15am	Guest speaker – TBA
11:00am	Brooke Ludwig – Budget: What is it? How do we create it? Why do we care?
12:00-1:00pm	Lunch (provided for convention delegates)– Speaker
1:00-3:00pm	CONVENTION BUSINESS
	• Bargaining update
	• Committee reports
	• Constitutional amendments
	• Dues increase discussion
	• Budget approval
	• Election of officers



## SHORT TAKES

by Shirley Haidinger

### Scholarship reminder

There's still time to apply for one of the scholarships from the AFT Porter Scholars Program. Completed applications must be received by March 31, 2006. For more information go to [www.aft.org/aftplus/scholarships/index.htm](http://www.aft.org/aftplus/scholarships/index.htm).

### Unions grow by 200,000+

Union membership numbers, released by the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Jan. 20, show a significant increase of 213,000 union members in the past year while union density remained steady



at 12.5 percent. Those numbers reverse a trend of decline in recent years as good union jobs disappeared. "In a political climate that's hostile to workers' rights, these numbers illustrate the extraordinary will of workers to gain a voice on the job despite enormous obstacles," said AFL-CIO President John Sweeney. Also in 2005, BLS figures show the increase in union members' wages was double the increase in wages of nonunion members, underscoring just how important union membership is to workers at a time when wages are being held flat and health care and retirement costs are being shifted from employers to employees.

### Prices climb, wages drop

With prices rising at the fastest rate in five years, the average hourly wage dropped for the third year in a row. The BLS reported Jan. 18 that the average hourly wage fell 0.5 percent last year, while real weekly wages for nonmanagerial employees — more than 80 percent of the workforce — declined 0.4 percent, after adjusting for inflation. At the same time, the consumer price index, driven by surging energy costs, rose 3.4 percent over the same period. BLS figures also show the inflation-adjusted



median weekly earnings of wage and salary workers in the fourth quarter of 2005 declined 1.8 percent from a year earlier to \$321. "The growing economy is showing up everywhere except where it's needed most: in the paychecks of working families. The gap between real wages and productivity growth remains a fundamental problem in the current economic expansion," said Jared Bernstein, senior economist for the Economic Policy Institute ([http://www.epi.org/content.cfm/webfeat\\_econindicators\\_wages\\_20060118](http://www.epi.org/content.cfm/webfeat_econindicators_wages_20060118)).

### Quotable quotes — government

It is not by the consolidation or concentration of powers, but by their distribution that good government is effected.

—Thomas Jefferson

Government... Never for a moment should it be left to irresponsible action.

—George Washington

America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves.

—Abraham Lincoln

One of the important lessons of Watergate was that unless the government trusts the people and conducts itself in an honorable fashion, then the people won't trust the government...

—Archibald Cox

Our whole constitutional heritage rebels at the thought of giving government the power to control men's minds.

—Thurgood Marshall

### Tax help available

April 15th just got a little less taxing. With the **Union Plus Online Tax Preparation Service**, union members and their families can use an online tax tool to prepare and file their taxes — at half the cost of similar services from H&R Block® and Quicken® — available at <http://www.unionplus.org/taxes/>.

### Congress feels heat from AFT members

Our members' voices are being heard, thanks to the AFT's lobbying efforts supported by two programs launched last summer: the 13,500-strong AFT e-Activist network and the union's Activists for Congressional Education (ACE) program, which connects AFT

members with their representatives and senators through personal visits and contacts. AFT leaders and activists are asked to keep up the good work.

### 'Friends with Low Wages'

Check out a great new video about how Wal-Mart treats its workers, "Friends with Low Wages." The Flash video on the American Rights at Work website parodies Garth Brooks' popular song, "Friends in Low Places." Brooks recently signed an exclusive distribution deal with Wal-Mart and was featured in the retail giant's holiday ad campaigns.

### Sweeney outlines ambitious pro-worker agenda

In a major address Jan. 18 at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., AFL-CIO president John Sweeney described the state of the American economy as "the senseless destruction of the good American job" and outlined

an agenda to stem the erosion of the middle class. For more than two decades,



Sweeney said, corporations have competed in the global marketplace through privatization, deregulation and de-unionization — all of which degrade work and workers — rather than through innovation and ingenuity. The resulting damage to workers, in addition to millions of lost jobs, includes cuts in wages, healthcare and pensions that have "swamped the boats of middle-class workers and destroyed the frail crafts of ethnic and immigrant workers," he said. Sweeney called on Congress to adopt a much different agenda that includes fair trade agreements, the repeal of tax incentives that encourage corporations to send jobs overseas, universal health coverage and passage of the Employee Free Choice Act, which would guarantee workers the freedom "to come together in unions and bargain for a better life." For a transcript of the speech, go to the AFL-CIO Web site.

# So you think your pension is secure?

by Gary Steffen

The Wisconsin retirement system has a reputation of being one of the best in the country, if not the world. However, there is growing concern in the rest of the US about unfunded liabilities in at least 17 state pension funds. There have been numerous proposals to deal with these liabilities and they include privatizing retirement systems, moving pensions to 401K plans, limiting benefits for retirees, cutting health care for retirees, modifying the years of service formula to decrease payments and raising the retirement age from 55 to 60. All of these proposals mean a decrease in the pensions for public employees.

There is even trouble at the Federal level. The Federal pension agency of the US government currently has a \$23 billion deficit. This agency only covers pensions for private companies. In the next decade its deficit is forecast to grow to \$71 billion dollars. How does this compare with the problems with state pensions?

The unfunded liabilities in the 17 states that have deficits vary from \$1 billion to \$39 billion. Illinois has a \$39 billion under funded liability and Ohio is not far behind with a \$30 billion deficit; four other states, New Jersey, Michigan, Oregon and Colorado have deficits of over \$10

billion. For all of these states the problems did not occur in the last year. For all of them the bursting of the "technology bubble" in the stock market was a significant factor. Another factor was the reduction in Federal funding given to the states around the same time. Since most of the states have a balanced budget requirement they had to make cuts someplace. They chose to do it in the state pension funds where the effect could be delayed.

Why has Wisconsin escaped this situation? Although Wisconsin does have a structural problem in its budget, and has had this situation for many years and will for several more years, the Wisconsin Retirement System's (WRS's) actuary has found the retirement system to be in "excellent financial condition." The September 2005 issue of the Trust Fund News indicates that the WRS had assets with an actuarial value of \$66.2 billion at the end of 2004. Current benefit promises are at \$66.6 billion so the WRS is currently funded at 99.4% of liabilities. Unlike many state retirements systems the WRS is overseen by the independent Employee Trust Fund (ETF) Board as required by state law. The law also requires mandatory retirement contributions.

If the economy and stock market were to suffer a setback, however, Wisconsin could be forced to make some hard decisions that will affect us all. As we

know, the Legislature can make changes to existing laws including those governing the WRS. Along with recent changes in Federal pension reporting requirements (see AFT the February/March issue of "Advocate" at AFT.org) our system may also come under attack. AFT-W and WSP have recognized the potential problem and is acting on it. We are working with the AFT national to keep our pension system sound for our members. There will be more information in the future, but rest assured, both AFT and WSP are looking out for our member's futures.



# Events

<b>2006</b>	
April 28 .....	State Employee Council Professional Development Day, Madison
April 28 .....	WSP Rep Council Meeting (tentative), Madison
April 29 .....	WSP Annual Convention – Officer Elections, Madison

## Wisconsin Science Professionals

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