



Dial ogue



April 14, 2005 • An Open Forum for Faculty at Santa Rosa Junior College •

THE AFA *Dial ogue* HAS BEEN CREATED TO AIR CONCERNS OF ALL FACULTY. THE AFA *Update* WILL CONTINUE TO BE THE FACTUAL VOICE OF THE AFA, WHILE THE AFA *Dial ogue* WILL ENCOURAGE CONVERSATION AND PUBLISH OPINIONS ABOUT WORK PLACE ISSUES AND POLITICAL CONCERNS. WE INVITE ANY FACULTY MEMBER TO SUBMIT LETTERS, ARTICLES, OR OPINION PIECES. AFA RESERVES EDITORIAL PREROGATIVES.

Negotiations or Hard Choices

by Janet McCulloch, AFA President and Regular Faculty in the English Department

I really love these little fireside chats. I tell you, the Faculty, what's going on from my standpoint, we talk it over in a calm and rational way, I communicate your needs to the gods, and then "all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds" (Voltaire).

But wait — that's not how it works!

In the past two years I have learned so much as President of AFA, much more than the twelve previous years I spent on the Executive Council. I have learned in excruciating detail of the junior high school antics of several dysfunctional departments; I have learned about the so-called "planning process" here at SRJC; I have become finely attuned to the State Budget as if affects our precarious financial stability; and yet I have learned the most about negotiations. What I want to communicate to you all is that the negotiation process is just a heartbreaking series of compromises — hard choices about what to trade off to get something that a large block of faculty want.

Last week one faculty member complained to me that we hadn't had a raise in four years. Let's be clear here — we have not had a raise for two years and, currently, we are in tentative agreement on a raise for that second year. When we ratify that agreement with the District, the raise will come in the form of a retroactive

check. And just a note about negotiation — simply because we ask for "X" number of dollars does not mean that we automatically receive the Grand Prize of our choice. While I am not sympathetic to the Board's arguments about maintaining such a high level of Reserves, I am also not interested in bankrupting the District, being placed on the State's Watch List, or forcing the students to suffer for our mistakes. The latter is already happening.

Many adjunct faculty members have expressed concern that the State of California (e.g. Arnold Schwarzenegger) will not fund the Adjunct Medical Benefits Program and that AFA is not doing enough to maintain these important safeguards. Without being part of the Negotiating Team, I can't see how someone could make that statement. Members of the Negotiating Team literally wake up in the middle of the night thinking about ways to avert financial disaster for the 209 adjunct faculty and their dependents who count on this coverage. We do care, but we have to find ways to make things work and we have to find ways to pay for them.

Still other faculty castigate us for giving too many rights and privileges to our adjunct colleagues. Clearly it's been a long time since they had to worry about their sources of income

each semester; or maybe they never did worry about whether their classes would have enough students or be given to a contract faculty member with bumping rights. AFA has negotiated landmark protections in Article 16 to reward committed adjunct faculty and to obviate the inequities of past hiring and scheduling practices. Problems still occur, but we do enforce the Contract when we find violations.

I suppose my ultimate point is that it is simply not enough to know what is right, or just, or fair — we have to know what to do about it. Even more important is the realization that what is right, or just, or fair is not a One-Size-Fits-All proposition. The AFA Negotiating Team serves several different groups with sometimes competing interests, and we balance those interests as best we can. The District also has interests that need to be addressed in the negotiation process, and they are often not the same as the Faculty's. And, although we are charged with maintaining and upgrading the salaries, benefits, and working conditions of all the faculty, there is always the responsibility to insure the long-term health of this college and — THE STUDENTS. Please remember that we do not live in the best of all possible worlds, but we are trying to get there little by little.

"A Full Frontal Attack on Education"

by Carol Ciavonne, AFA Vice-President and Adjunct Faculty in the English Department

So says Jack O'Connell, the California State Superintendent of Public Instruction, of Governor Schwarzenegger's budget proposal, according to Noreen Evans, Assemblymember for Sonoma, Napa, and Solano counties, who spoke to a small group of SRJC faculty on March 17th in Newman Auditorium. Evans addressed several important issues for faculty, as outlined in the Governor's Budget for the coming year:

- Elimination of funding for parity pay and office hours for adjunct faculty;
- Reduction in funding of the State Adjunct Medical Benefits Program;
- Elimination of the state's 2% contribution to the CalSTRS Defined Benefit Program*[†]; and
- Conversion of the existing CalSTRS defined benefit plan to a defined contribution plan;

Although budget issues are critical, Evans was most concerned about the Governor's proposed Constitutional Amendment #4, which would do two things:

- If the budget were not passed by the Legislature on time, the previous years' appropriations would automatically be adopted, which would create a flat budget with no new monies for new programs and services and would retain old monies designated for programs no longer needed.
- It would allow the governor carte blanche to declare a fiscal emergency up to four times per year, whenever the budget is more than \$250 million off (that's 0.24%); therefore allowing him to freeze or cut the budget.

The effect of implementing this amendment would be *immediate across the board cuts* for all programs, especially education and other social programs. Since some State funding in these areas is matched by federal funding, State programs that receive matching funds would thus also lose one federal dollar for each budgeted State dollar lost in a budget reversion.

Evans also said that the Governor's proposals will have the greatest negative effect on working women. The programs targeted for cuts (education, nursing, in-home care provision) are those which have higher percentages of women working within them.

The Governor is using the initiative process to put pressure on the Legislature, and the proposed initiatives are even worse than his legislative proposals. Some of the initiatives, for example, place financial caps on spending, which might seem like sound fiscal management, but these initiatives do not allow for changing economic conditions in the State. Evans commented that everywhere the Governor goes nowadays "even though media does not report it, there are protests." Evans also noted that the initiative verification process is being "offshored" to India.

A question was asked about last year's failed initiative (Proposition 56) which would have reduced the size of the majority vote of the Legislature needed to pass a budget from 2/3 to 55%. Evans said that this is the major problem in getting budgets passed; the 2/3 vote is extremely difficult to get, even with a slight Democratic majority. Faculty asked what we can do to prevent the Governor's constitutional amendment and to protect parity pay and CALSTRS. Evans suggested that we write letters to her, and to Wesley Chesbro, Patty Berg

and Joe Nation, (our local representatives in Sacramento) as well as to other key people: Don Perata, the Senate President pro tempore; Fabian Nuñez, the Assembly Speaker; Wesley Chesbro, the Senate Budget Chair; John Laird, the Assembly Budget Chair, and Governor Schwarzenegger.

She suggested that writing *personal stories that talk about the students you have helped* are especially effective. She also suggested that letters from groups, (a faculty union, for instance) signed by everyone, are also effective. Noreen Evans' office can help you get in touch with your legislators, or go to the AFA web site at www.santarosa.edu/afa/ to get the addresses of these legislators and the Governor.

Although the Governor has since said that he is going to regroup and reconsider the CalSTRS issues, faculty should continue to write letters and call their legislators to register their objection to the proposed changes to the CalSTRS program. The existing CalSTRS Defined Benefit Program is still very much in jeopardy.

* According to CalSTRS, the Governor's proposal released January 10, 2005, would change the Defined Benefit Program contribution structure by:

- Eliminating the State's contribution of 2.017% of the total teachers' payroll of two fiscal years ago;
- Increasing the employer's contribution by 2% of current payroll to a total of 10.25%; and
- *Allowing each employer to negotiate with its employees whether to pass on that increased contribution to its employees, so that the school district doesn't experience an increase in costs. (italics added)*