



# The Advocate

## Board and Bond Elections

The AFT congratulates the winners in the November 7<sup>th</sup> Board of Trustees elections: Position 1, Dr. David Holsey; Position 2, Chris Daniel; Position 8, Randy Bates. We look forward to working with these and the remaining members of the Board over the next few years. A newly constructed Board is always an interesting learning experience for everyone, a newly diverse group who hopes for a better, grander version of a pretty established world. As always the AFT will be close by to listen, help, monitor, suggest, and sometimes fuss, but we will also evermore work with all the groups who make up the whole of NHMCCD.



We also grieve the loss on the bond referendum and wonder what we will do now. In particular, the Academic Building at NHC is in need of serious renovation. Montgomery College, bursting at the seams, is operating out of some temporary buildings for classroom space. If public schools are any indication, “temporary” eventually becomes permanent, adding a certain “wrong side of the tracks” quality to our otherwise well planned and beautiful wooded campuses. Some similar



scenario plays out at most campuses across the District, placing a significant set of challenges before us all. Ultimately it will be up to the new Board to decide what solution to put in place.

One curious bit of information the union discovered is that a number of District employees are not registered to vote. There are legitimate reasons in some cases. However, in many situations there is no apparent reason other than apathy. Apathy makes me want to scream like a jungle cat, whether I’m witnessing apathetic students in the classroom or so called “citizens” in a general election process. Voting in this country is a citizen’s sacred right. However, it is also a matter of practicality: of nickels and dimes, of our kids’ school clothes, of office space, of mediated classrooms, of student opportunities for cultural enrichment. The past election affected our lives as will every future election. We are talking about events that affect us directly every day. We have to care; otherwise, we have no one to blame but ourselves. The AFT urges all eligible employees to wake up and register to vote so that all voices will be heard.



Pat Gray

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## Salary News

Last Spring, the AFT had heard that the Board of Trustees was considering a 3% raise for this academic year. We made the case in The Advocate that a minimum of 7% was necessary just to keep employees even with inflation. Our argument was based on the fact that the cost of living increased 4% last year and we were already 3% behind when the Board failed to provide a raise for 2003/2004. Ultimately, the board approved a 4% raise for this year with a \$1,200 minimum. The union applauds the minimum which keeps the gap between upper and lower salaries from increasing dramatically.

The AFT realizes that employee salaries constitute approximately 80% of the annual budget and represent a significant challenge to the Board.



However, the 4% only keeps us even with inflation from last year. Therefore, the majority of employees continue to remain 3% behind the cost of living. This erosion of income has caused us to fall behind some local school districts. For instance, with the 4% raise, an entry level Master's faculty member at NHMCCD earns \$37,267 this year. That same faculty member would earn \$40,500 at Humble ISD.

The average raise in Houston this year was 4.5%, and the Houston Chronicle predicts an average increase of 4.7% next year (Aug. 30, 2006). However, the Chronicle reports what the AFT predicted last Spring: raises are being



devoured primarily by unstable fuel and medical costs. While 4% is clearly better than the 3% the Board was originally considering, it is inadequate to prevent our losing ground financially. It would be dishonest to pretend otherwise. Over this academic year, the union will keep a watchful eye on inflation and make the case that it is time for the Board to address this issue fully by providing employees a true raise so that we are ahead of inflation and actually experience an increase in purchasing power.



Alan Hall

## Growth Awards

We are pleased to announce that our local has received two awards for growth for the 2005/06 academic year. First, we were honored by the national American Federation of Teachers with a "Pride of the Union" award for outstanding growth. Secondly, we were recognized for being first in percentage growth by our state affiliate, the Texas Federation of Teachers, the third such award for us in recent years. This award means that, last year, we were again the fastest growing AFT affiliate in the state.





## **Some Employees Harmed Again**

Not every employee received the 4% raise. An increasing number of non-faculty are topping out in their pay categories, seven of them for as long as four years now. This fact means that these employees are now more than 12% behind the cost of living but still face the same fuel and medical costs as the rest of us. The total number of employees who have topped out, according to DSTC, is 25. As the District ages, this number, of course, will grow.

For the last few years, the AFT has pressed the administration to provide a salary adjustment for employees who have topped out, but to no avail. We have heard arguments that certain positions are worth only so much money. We understand the point, but we find that thinking far too general. How is the value of positions calculated? By difficulty of tasks performed, level of responsibility, training required, number of employees supervised? Moreover, the truth is that employee loyalty to and longevity with the district are valuable in themselves and deserve to be rewarded.

We are happy to report that, with a growing number of employees joining the ranks of the topped out, the administration now seems more open to discussion. The union is hopeful that this problem will be resolved very soon.

Alan Hall

## **Election Notice**

Every two years, the election of local AFT officers is scheduled for the following positions: President, Campus Faculty Vice-Presidents, Secretary, Treasurer, and Newsletter Editor. In addition, the election of Paraprofessional Chapter (support and professional staff) positions for President and Campus Staff Vice-Presidents takes place at the same election in November of even-numbered years.

Union members who are interested in running for an elected office or in nominating another member for a specific office should contact AFT Secretary Bob Locander at NHC by November 30th. As stated in our local constitution, balloting will proceed for only the elective positions where two or more members have been nominated.





## Adjuncts---the Good News

### **Training**

Last Spring a controversy arose when the administration announced that adjunct faculty would be required to attend 2 ½ hours of civil rights training without compensation. The mandatory training for all employees resulted from the District's insurance carrier's insistence because of a civil rights case against an administrator. This administrator was coincidentally a CRA (Civil Rights Administrator) charged with investigating such complaints. The college spent a considerable sum of money defending and ultimately settling the case. The problem for adjuncts was that they were contractually obligated to teach their classes and hold office hours. However, they were not obligated to attend training.

Immediately upon learning of the administration's intent, the AFT protested. A lengthy discussion/debate ensued, and the union was surprised to find such a degree of administrative resistance. Persistence paid off, for the District finally agreed that payment for the training was appropriate. Adjuncts were paid \$20/hour for a total of \$50 to attend. The AFT was amazed at how long and difficult a task it was to convince the administration of something so patently obvious.

### **Salaries**

The AFT has been advocating a salary increase for adjuncts for sometime. Last Spring, we recommended an increase of \$14 per contact hour which would move adjuncts from \$36/contact hour to \$50/contact hour or \$2,400 for a 48 contact hour course.

Such an increase would have made the District's adjunct salaries competitive with several colleges with which NHMCCD competes for adjuncts.



The adjuncts received a \$2/contact hour raise for this year, an increase of \$96 for a 48 contact hour course, not the \$672 that was needed but certainly a step in the right direction.

### Adjuncts---the Bad News

Citing the \$2/contact hour raise as justification, the administration has inserted a new requirement into the adjunct Memorandum of Assignment. It reads, "You shall be required to complete district and college professional development, which shall be deemed a term and condition of employment. There shall be no additional compensation for your attendance at professional development." The union's position has been that adjuncts deserved a raise for the service they were already providing the District. For management to make training mandatory and uncompensated makes the raise adjuncts received basically a wash.

It is interesting to note that the union discussed with the administration at length our position regarding compulsory unpaid professional development for adjuncts. However, the administration did not consult with the union before inserting this new requirement. We find it hypocritical that the administration gives a lot of lip service to participatory governance yet often fails to live up to it.

Alan Hall



## AFT Sponsors Police Training

On Friday, October 27, the union began sponsoring an excellent training program for NHMCCD campus police officers and other local law enforcement agencies. The first session was held in Winship 183 at NHC. The program is conducted by the Counter Terrorism Intelligence Group, a FBI task force working with officers from local agencies including Houston Police Department, Sherriff's Department, Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, and Federal Air Marshals. The Houston taskforce received the FBI Director's Award in 2004, a most prestigious honor.

The AFT has been a strong supporter of training for the District's campus officers and sponsors this program out of a concern for the safety of our students and employees with particular concern for the safety of our officers charged with public safety on our campuses. The training is timely in the face recent school violence. Columbine and the Belsan school siege obviously come to mind as well as four recent violent events in a two week period, including one violent act at a community college.



The training proved to be a great success. Many of the officers attending made a point of stopping to thank the union for sponsoring such an outstanding program. An added benefit was that the training generated media attention for the college. Channel 11's Jeff McShan and the Houston Chronicle interviewed presenters and attendees as well as AFT president Alan Hall.

Campus officers interested in attending future sessions may contact Debra Pruitt, Program Manager, Law Enforcement Academy. External agencies should contact Officer Fred Kessler, HPD, JTTF, at 713-639-8515. The next training date will be January 26, 2007.

Staff

### Membership Eligibility

Membership in the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) is open to full and part-time faculty and staff up through the dean level. If you would like to join or find out more information about membership, please contact any of the officers listed on page 8 of this newsletter, or check out our online information and application at [www.aft-nhmccd.org](http://www.aft-nhmccd.org).

### Monthly AFT Dues

Full-time Faculty	\$28.30
Full-time Professional Staff	\$24.50
Full-time Support Staff	\$20.90
Adjunct Faculty & Staff	\$10.00



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2/06

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## Campus Updates



NHC continues to face numerous personnel issues. We have advised two staff members regarding workload issues and four staff members and one faculty member regarding various conflicts with supervisors. The union has served as a representative for two faculty members involved in departmental conflicts. We have advised and represented two staff members in a conflict with supervisors and a colleague. Finally, a good deal of time has been devoted to representing a staff member faced with what the AFT believes to be an unjust termination.

Bruce Machart, AFT Faculty VP



The semester started off a little rocky with some major reorganization in the admissions and advising area at Kingwood. KC-Central was created just prior to the beginning of the semester, and there were some departures and reassignments that occurred just before the fall rush. Several AFT members came to Laura and me with concerns about the timing and reasons for the changes. I was able to meet with Dr. Jenkins and Dr. Stegall about these concerns, and the faculty senate wrote a letter to Dr. Stegall addressing faculty concerns. We received a prompt reply, and all concerned are working to rectify the situation prior to spring registration. Dr. Jenkins & Dr. Sawma met with a large number of concerned administrators, faculty and staff for a wrap up of registration, and we are looking forward to improvements this spring. The physical plant at Kingwood is probably the least suited for a massive registration crunch that we experience during rush, and we are always looking for ways to make it work more efficiently. We hired two new advisors just prior to fall registration and have hired two more in September. The advisors are actively soliciting current students to make appointments now and plan their schedules for this spring. Meetings have also been set up with advisors, counselors, department chairs and program coordinators to more efficiently work together in advising and registering our students. I hope to have a glowing report on the success of KC-Central after spring registration.

Rich Almstedt, AFT Faculty VP

Robert McGehee was recently appointed as AFT faculty vp for Cy-Fair College and will have a report in the next edition of The Advocate. The AFT is very excited about Robert's addition to our Executive Committee; we think he will be a fresh and exciting new perspective to our work.

Pat Gray  
Editor



Ahoy Maties,  
Tis the dawning of a new sailing season and the ships have put out from Port Registration. All skies appear clear, winds calm to slight and conditions smooth. T'were some shifting of commands (Deans and departments) o'er the late summer as we docked, got scrubbed (barnacles and whatnot) and re-fitted for the fall. Tis hoped reassignments will ease the workload of a few deckhands. We will see; we will see.

Richard Becker, AFT Faculty VP



We have been busy this summer meeting with staff members and administration. Cheri has worked on a wide range of staff issues including securing an accurate position description and identifying the possible need for ADA accommodations. Julie has been working on similar issues for faculty. We really enjoyed our membership meeting on October 4<sup>th</sup>. AFT President Alan Hall was our guest speaker. A general information meeting will be held soon for those interested in joining the AFT. If you would like to know more about the AFT, go to our web site [www.aft-nhmccd.org](http://www.aft-nhmccd.org) or contact your campus VP. Have a great semester everyone!

Julie Alber, AFT Faculty VP  
Cheri Riggs, AFT Staff VP



## **Social Security**

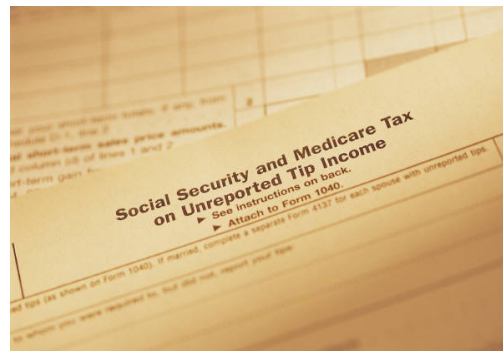
From time to time, District employees receive information about two provisions that negatively affect those of us who retire from the college and are Social Security eligible. Since the District does not pay Social Security, unless these Social Security eligible employees have 30 years in with Social Security, they will face the Wind-fall Elimination Provision (WEP) and the Government Provision Offset (GPO) also known as Spousal Offset. If an eligible employee retires from the District, the WEP will reduce the SS benefits to which the employee is entitled in her own right by as much as one third. The Spousal Offset will significantly reduce or even eliminate any widow or widower's benefit.

H. R. 147, known as the Social Security Fairness Act, would eliminate these two provisions that unjustly affect many public employees. I recently received a request for information from a District employee that demonstrates why the Fairness Act is so important. I was both touched and troubled by this employee's story, so much so that I asked for and received her permission to relate it in the newsletter.

This employee worked twenty seven years under SS, began drawing SS benefits, but she decided to come to work at NHMCCD to supplement her SS income. After six years with the District, she is ready to retire. She will be eligible for \$316.48 per month from TRS. The WEP calls for her SS benefit to be reduced by 50% or \$158.24 per month. Her spousal benefit will also be affected. However, there is some difficulty with interpretation of the rules. Even many Social Security Administration employees do not understand the rules. For instance, when the District employee approached the SSA about how she would be affected by the WEP and GPO, she got a different answer from each of three SSA employees. One SSA official in the Conroe office told the employee that when she begins to receive TRS pension money her monthly SS benefit, including the spousal benefit, would be reduced by 60% for the rest of her life. She explained to him that if she retires in 2006 based on her SS monthly benefit, she would draw \$77.00 less than she presently receives which would include the TRS payment of \$316.48. Imagine her shock. The SS official responded that it was not his concern.

Here is the accurate breakdown of how this employee will be affected described by a SSA person who understands the rules.

Present 2006 SSA monthly benefit	\$654.00
Less Medicare Insurance	(88.50)
Present SSA monthly benefit	565.00
Less WEP estimated deduction	158.24
Net SSA monthly benefit	407.26
Add estimated TRS monthly pension	316.48
<b>Net estimated monthly SS &amp; TRS</b>	<b>723.84</b>



This employee will lose half of her \$316.48 monthly TRS retirement because her SS benefit will be cut by \$158.24.

This employee's story illustrates two important points. One is that our District employees need to be persistent in making sure that SSA applies the rules correctly to their SS benefits. It is entirely possible that employees could lose benefits because SSA employees do not know the rules. The second point is that the whole situation is an outrageous injustice. Citizens who draw a private pension do not experience the harmful effects of the WEP and the GPO. Those provisions only apply to a fourth of public employees in the U.S., including public education employees and the heroes of 911 like police officers and firemen.

If the Social Security Fairness Act passes, this injustice will be eliminated.

Alan Hall



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### CALL FOR ARTICLES

We invite all employees to send us their opinions, news, questions, and so forth. *The Advocate* is a forum for information and free interchange of ideas. Send your articles to **Pat Gray, Editor**, NHC, ext. 5545 or e-mail: [patsy.gray@nhmccd.edu](mailto:patsy.gray@nhmccd.edu), or **Heather Mitchell, Assistant Editor**, CFC, ext. 3254, or e-mail: [heather.mitchell@nhmccd.edu](mailto:heather.mitchell@nhmccd.edu) or submit to any of the other following officers:

Alan Hall, President	North Harris College	ACAD 217-G	ext.5544
Velma Trammell	North Harris College	WNSP 174	ext. 5612
Bruce Machart	North Harris College	ACAD 217-A	ext. 5542
Bob Locander	North Harris College	ACAD 270	ext. 5592
Allen Vogt	North Harris College	ACAD 264-C	ext. 5583
Vivian Brecher	North Harris College	LIBR 114	ext. 5403
Rich Almstedt	Kingwood College	FTC 100-G	ext. 1656
Laura Yates	Kingwood College	SFA 113-D	ext. 1414
Richard Becker	Tomball College	E-271-D	ext. 1835
Julie Alber	Montgomery College	SSC 205-A	ext. 7241
Cheri Riggs	Montgomery College	C 100-C	ext. 7370
Robert McGehee	Cy-Fair College	ART 113-H	ext. 1217

## Membership Has Its Benefits

The union encourages employees to join because they believe that college employees should have a voice in their professional lives. We don't encourage employees to join because they anticipate conflict or are already engaged in a conflict. In fact, if they are already embroiled in a situation, we are unable to help them. It is all too common for someone to approach the AFT and say something like, "I've been an employee for the district for several years, and I've just recognized the importance of joining." Typically, following that comment is, "I'm in trouble and need help." I finally lost track of how many times in the last year I've had to say, "I'm sorry, but member benefits don't cover anything that pre-dates membership." The individuals to whom I had to say that were invited to join and provided some advice on how to proceed with their

situation, but assistance ended there. Were they members, a host of benefits would have been available. The AFT provides its members with advice and guidance as well as representation in conflict resolution and grievances. We have our own local attorney and can seek legal advice and counsel for members. We maintain a local legal defense fund. In addition, membership dues include, at no extra charge, \$8 million in professional liability insurance for claims arising out of professional activities.

Most of our members don't join because they believe that they may need the AFT's help in a conflict. They join because they believe in the values of the AFT— that employees should be treated with dignity and respect, that employees should help each other, that employees should

have a voice in their professional lives, that employees deserve fair pay and good working conditions, and that the district needs a system providing checks and balances. They join because they want to support an organization that helps others in so many ways. A nice benefit is that, if they do need help, it's there for them.

If you believe in these values and are not a member, now is the perfect time to join. The AFT advocated effectively for the raise employees received this year. The annual membership dues are a small percentage of the raise. If you believe in our values, take action now and join the AFT.

Alan Hall