May 3, 2012

Faculty, Grad Employee Contracts Rejected

On May 7, the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education voted down contracts for faculty and graduate assistants at the University of Rhode Island. Agreements on the contracts were reached nearly two months ago by negotiators for the board and the University of Rhode Island faculty union and graduate student union, both chapters of the AAUP. The contracts were the result of over eight months of difficult negotiations, in which both sides made concessions. The board’s about face came after Rhode Island governor Lincoln Chafee publicly criticized the financial aspects of the contract, 3 percent raises each year for three years, as being too generous.

The URI AAUP chapter executive director, Frank Annunziato, had this to say in a statement issued after the decision:

Board negotiators represented to us that they were authorized to reach agreement with us.

Of course, all that changed once it became clear that Governor Chafee had scolded them for entering into a three-year contract that called for 3 percent raises each year. Suddenly, Board members forgot that they knew what they themselves had authorized. Suddenly, they became concerned about the financial “impact” of our contract, even though they had the agreement before them for several months.

The Board of Governors also rejected the contract that the Graduate Assistants United (GAU) bargained on behalf of URI’s 600 teaching and research assistants. Since their salaries are so low, the “financial impact” of their raises is miniscule. These are URI students and one would think that the Board of Governors would care about their welfare. A majority of Board members, however, seem more concerned about the Governor’s political future than the future of public higher education in Rhode Island.

Today, our attorneys will file an unfair labor practice complaint with the Rhode Island Labor Relations Board. The gist of our complaint is that the Board of Governors bargained with us in bad faith. We will ask the Rhode Island Labor Relations Board to require the Board of Governors to honor this collective bargaining agreement. We are also contemplating additional legal action.

See more in the *Providence Journal*. 