

From a Right to Work State to a Strong Union State

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A student once told me that my home state was a fly over state; a state of little to see, little to do, and extremely conservative. Now I have no doubt that some see Nebraska as a fly over state, but this student was wrong in that it does possess extreme beauty worth seeing and experiencing. A drive across the state would reveal breathtaking beauty across the green lush fields, the rolling grasslands in the sandhills, and even the cities possess a simple beauty across their skylines. There, however, was one instance the student was correct; Nebraska is conservative in nature and traditional in values.

Nebraska has been a right to work state since 1946. While Nebraska has some strong unions and unions that have gone on strike, it was not something that was ever discussed in my household or discussed by those around me. Often any media accounts on union activity were negative in nature. My move from Nebraska to Pennsylvania brought with it many changes, most were easily adapted to, but the concept of a union and its true meaning was thrust into my career early on.

As a non-tenured faculty member in my very first academic position, I had to vote on whether or not to authorize

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a strike. As a primary breadwinner for my family, the thought of a strike struck great fear in my heart. Would my family and I be able to survive financially if a strike occurred? What would it mean to strike? What was stalling negotiations? Were the benefits being sought worth the potential for a strike? And did I mention the financial impact, with a mortgage, car payments, and student loans? As I walked to the location to cast my vote, I believed that the union was doing what was right, that negotiations were going nowhere, and we had to unite. Over my career, I have participated in three strike authorization votes. Each with the same initial fears about the financial repercussions, but in each instance knowing that the union was standing up for what was right.

With each successive strike authorization vote, I realized that I needed to become more involved in the union. I started out as departmental representative to rep council and ran for and was elected a member of the chapter nominations and elections committee. While my involvement at this point allowed me to remain informed, I sought a more active role where I could contribute to the union. I needed to understand the workings of the union and in turn, needed to do more. After I was tenured and promoted, I was elected to legislative assembly. After my promotion to full professor, I was elected as chapter vice president.

This progressing involvement with the union came with a cost, not a monetary cost, but one measured in conflict. My obligation to the union was often conflicted with my sense of traditional responsibility as mother and wife. As I became more involved, more of my time was required. As with any faculty member with a partner or spouse and children or dependents, I struggled with balancing the time devoted to work and to my union and with family obligations. Most of the conflict was over time. My spouse, as a nonacademic and having never been involved in a union, had little understanding of the requirements of my time. A sense of guilt was ever present; if it wasn't self-inflicted guilt, it was guilt trips. Guilty when I was at work or at extra meetings with the union

and not spending time with my family, and guilty when I was at home and not spending time working or focusing on union issues.

My first year as chapter vice president occurred just as serious discussions of a strike authorization vote and the potential for a strike were being discussed. I approached this vote with no fear. I support the union, and I believed that the union was taking the right approach with the issues at hand. I attended strike school during the legislative assembly and assisted with our chapter events preparing for the strike during the fall of 2016. The sense of community and mutual support by faculty for faculty grew as the date approached. But for me that sense of support did not cross into my home.

As the strike date approached, I experienced increased pressures at home. Still a primary breadwinner, I worried that my savings and my family's financial future would be impacted by a lengthy strike. My beliefs in and responsibility to the union were in direct conflict with my responsibilities to my family. Worry set in about how long the savings would hold us over. What would happen if the savings ran out? How do I support my family but stand up for what I believed was right and support my union, as well? I trust my union and the causes they uphold which allowed me to put to rest some of these worries. However, not all of my family possesses that same trust in the union. Add another point of conflict.

Remember that fly over state I'm from? That conservative, traditional place? Those values do not just change overnight; they are ingrained in us, become a part of us. Those values caused great conflict within my home. In turn, the place I thought I would have the most support, offered me the least. Lengthy discussions/debates/arguments all ended with my emphatic responses that I would never cross the picket line even if the savings ran dry.

I found support among the faculty who marched the picket line with me, the students who offered their heartfelt support and fattening food, the other unions who supported ours, and the businesses offering locations for rest or more

food. We were all in it together. We all had the same pressures, concerns, fears, but we all believed in what the union stood for and we stood together.

The strike lasted three days. Each day I stood with my peers, walked the picket line, and showed my support for my union. Each night, I went home to a place of conflict and a place of worry. I worried over what impact the strike would have on my family, but at no time did I ever regret going on strike and choosing to picket. There comes a point in time where we have to stand up for what we believe in regardless of the outcome. We took that stand.



APSCUF's Legislative Assembly Sends Strike-Authorization Vote to Campuses as Negotiations Continue

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, contact:

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APSCUF faculty members at each of Pennsylvania's state-owned universities will participate in a strike-authorization vote Sept. 7–9, after delegates agreed to move the vote to union membership. Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculty coaches will participate in a strike-authorization vote Sept. 14–15, after APSCUF's Executive Council approved a request by the coaches' leadership.

APSCUF's legislative assembly convened this morning for an emergency conference call, during which delegates agreed unanimously to forward a strike-authorization vote to all 14 campuses in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education.

Today's call is the second of multiple steps before a faculty or coach job action could commence. Those steps could not be completed before classes begin Aug. 29.

"Our faculty and coaches clearly feel that the State System has not negotiated fairly; they are more interested in playing games than negotiating seriously," APSCUF President Dr. Kenneth M. Mash said. "It is completely unfair to our students for the State System to continue to drag this process out. Eventually, there will be a contract. We don't know what the State System gains by continually creating distractions."

Following the vote, teams began a two-day contract-negotiation session at the APSCUF office in Harrisburg. APSCUF will issue a press release at the conclusion of talks tomorrow.

APSCUF scheduled today's call in June after contract negotiations remained stagnant. Negotiation teams have met four times since then and agreed on minor issues, but they have not made major progress toward a contract APSCUF feels preserves quality and is fair to faculty.

"The State System wants to have graduate students teach, increase the use of temporary faculty, force students into distance-education courses, and cut the pay for those at the very bottom of the pay scale," Mash said, "We will, if the System gives us no other option, stand up for our students, our universities, and ourselves."

Faculty and coaches are separate bargaining units, and they must act independently. Both APSCUF's faculty and coach contracts expired June 30, 2015, and negotiations began in late 2014.

APSCUF represents about 5,500 faculty and coaches at the State System universities: Bloomsburg, California, Cheyney, Clarion, East Stroudsburg, Edinboro, Indiana, Kutztown, Lock Haven, Mansfield, Millersville, Shippensburg, Slippery Rock, and West Chester Universities of Pennsylvania.



Contract Remains Elusive After Today's Negotiation Session

Aug. 31, 2016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, contact:

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Negotiators are no closer to a deal after today's faculty contract negotiations between the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education and the union representing Pennsylvania's state-owned universities' faculties and coaches.

Teams from the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties and from the State System met at West Chester University, where they discussed tenure and retrenchment articles but made no progress on the contract overall.

"We've been negotiating now for almost two years," APSCUF President Dr. Kenneth M. Mash said. "The time has come to stop piddling around. We need to get down to business, and the System needs to get serious. It's unfair to do this to students."

APSCUF faculty members at each of Pennsylvania's state-

owned universities will participate in a strike-authorization vote Sept. 7–9, after delegates agreed last week to move the vote to union membership. The vote is the third of multiple steps before a job action could commence. APSCUF coaches will participate in a strike-authorization vote Sept. 14–15, after APSCUF’s Executive Council approved a request by the coaches’ leadership.

The next faculty negotiation session is slated for Sept. 8.

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Faculty Strike-Authorization Voting Begins Today on State System Campuses

Sept. 7, 2016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, contact:

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Faculty members at each of Pennsylvania's state-owned universities began strike-authorization voting today and will continue casting ballots through Friday. Delegates agreed last month to move the vote to Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculty membership. The vote is the third of multiple steps before a job action could commence.

APSCUF coaches will participate in a strike-authorization vote Sept. 14–15.

Voting comes amid negotiations that have been ongoing since late 2014 but have not yielded a contract that APSCUF feels preserves quality and is fair to faculty. Faculty and coach contracts expired June 30, 2015.

“We’ve been more than patient,” Dr. Allan N. Benn, an East Stroudsburg University professor, said in a speech to

ESU APSCUF members Tuesday. “The System has rejected the usual road to a fair contract: realistic exchanges of proposals, considering the needs of the other side, and the actual needs of our students. There is no other way. We must vote ‘yes’ on the strike-authorization memorandum.”

APSCUF will count ballots Monday, Sept. 12.

The next faculty contract negotiation session is slated for Sept. 8.

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