

Colleagues,

It is hard to believe that it was a week ago we were in the Capitol for the press conference. Time seems to have lost all form since then; it feels like that event was both 6 months ago and yesterday. Now we are in the grinding part of our effort. The legislators are in caucus. We keep reaching out, but nothing seems to be happening. We understand from previous issues that this is part of the process, but it is a tedious and infuriating part. We keep sending our emails and making our calls, as do you, but we cannot see if we are making progress. We need signs of encouragement and hope to get through the legislative slog. Fortunately, we have them.

One particularly positive development has been the efforts of the other members of the bargaining unit to join the effort. We use the phrase, "It is not *their* fight, it is *our* fight!" when we talk to the other members. That feeling is beginning to resonate. Jeremy LeDuc, a science teacher from Goodwin, mailed our GetActive link to scores of people. Cheryl Christie Collett sent letters to every member of the Appropriations Committee as well as the Governor and Lieutenant Governor. Ruth Cion, a special education teacher at Goodwin, agreed to co-chair the crisis committee and recommended we put out a special Vocational Instructor Extra, which will be in the schools before the end of the week. Dozens of other teachers have emailed their legislators; many of the over 500 fans we now have on the "Save the LPNs" page on Facebook are our teachers. Another positive sign is that the Facebook page has generated almost 200 letters to the Governor.

The other positive sign is that as we refine our position, as we discuss the financial picture with more and more people, the sheer logic of our argument seems too obvious not to prevail. Almost 90% of the teachers in the program have SEBAC layoff protection; they will not only continue to get paid, they will receive 20% more money once the salary is prorated to 240 days. The State will also lose the tuition money, and will have to refund the \$50 application fee to nearly 1000 applicants. Where is the short-term savings? If the State raises fees to cover half the cost of the program, to roughly \$9,000, a student who graduates and gets a 35-hour a week job at \$20 per hour – both conservative estimates – will repay the State in income tax in 6 ½ years. That figure does not include increases payment in sales tax (because they have more money to spend) or the fact that many of the graduates will no longer have to use WIC or HUSKEY or several other forms of State assistance; really, the tuition would be paid back in under 5 years, and then these graduates are a financial benefit to the State. Where is the long-term savings? And if there are no short-term savings and no long-term savings, then why exactly are we even discussing the elimination of the program? If we ask these questions often enough and to enough people, eventually somebody has to act and the program will be restored. Is that naïve? We don't think so.

Finally, in this absence of news from the legislature, it is inevitable that rumors will begin to fill the silence. Please call us to check anything you hear. The past three weeks have been so emotionally draining, so filled with moments of hope and moments of anxiety, that it would be cruel to let anyone become emotionally invested in a rumor, good or bad. We will tell you what we can confirm is factual. Today, we can confirm that the Democrats are in caucus discussing budgetary issues. Everything else is conjecture. When we have news, we will share it. These are the days when the struggle for what is right seems most difficult. Progress can occur even when we don't see it. Keep up the good work.

In Solidarity,

Ed, Jan, and Rick