

Letter: Face-to-Face with Unions

ROBERT CROGHAN | Posted: Monday, July 14, 2014 5:45 pm

A recent letter to the editor asked a number of valid, pertinent questions regarding collective bargaining by the city unions. The writer ends with an aside that he was unable to find an e-mail address at different unions, including the Organization of Staff Analysts. He connects such an e-mail address to a place where a union member can voice concerns regarding contract negotiations.

The writer is correct that an e-mail address is one way to voice a concern, but perhaps it is not the ideal way to do so. Most unions have membership meetings, regularly scheduled, well-advertised, held at central locations near public transport and open to all members. OSA, for example, had such a meeting recently and the sole topic on the agenda was the upcoming contract negotiations. There was give and take at the meeting and all of the writer's concerns were actually voiced and discussed at the meeting. A committee of activists even met thereafter, at more than one meeting, discussing ways to advance the members' demands.

If the writer was, or will be, unable to attend the regular general membership meeting, there are other ways to communicate. Many locations are fortunate enough to have on-location activists or even union officers, chapter leaders, or delegates. The union office itself can be visited for discussion by phone or in person five days a week and any evening or weekend by appointment. Also, the union leadership reads all correspondence received and responds by phone or return letters, and this has been standard practice since before OSA became a union.

Finally, the union leadership can also be reached by way of a letter to the editor in The Chief. Most city union leaders and staff read The Chief regularly, including the letters-to-the-editor column. OSA not only subscribes for its offices but also purchases and circulates in the office six copies bought at the newsstand each Tuesday morning. You see, we don't want to wait until the mail edition arrives on Wednesday. Naturally we subscribe to the online edition as well, but for many of our officers and staff, the tradition of unfolding the actual paper copy of The Chief before work or over lunch goes back to the start of our civil-service careers. For some of us it is the only newspaper we like to read because it reports on the life and times of the city workforce, and it is far more accurate than the mainstream media and it is always on our side.

I want to assure the writer of the letter that his concerns are matched by equal concern shared by the general membership at OSA's recent meeting.

Many years ago, the Office of Labor Relations was located at 110 Church St. It was discovered that somebody (the city?) had wired the elevators for sound during contract negotiations. E-mails are easy and convenient to send, but as we have all learned, over and over, they are not at all secure.

Members' involvement is best expressed by filing contract demands and, if so inclined, speaking, in person, to their representative. Any elected representative who does not want to discuss the negotiations is a rare example of a misplaced person. Much can be said, off the record, in person, that should not be

said for publication nor written into an e-mail response.

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