

Potential walkout looms

GEO organizers say mass mobilization necessary to force admin concessions

In response to a failure of the administration to move substantively the core issues on GEO's strike platform, union members are planning a massive mobilization push this week as a last-ditch effort to pressure the administration and avoid a walkout.

This Thursday, March 20 at 2:30 p.m., GEO members and allies will meet on the Diag to rally to push for a better contract. After a half hour of chanting and speeches, the assembly will march to the Fleming Administration Building to deliver a letter to the University Regents during their monthly meeting.

GEO Steward Zakiya Luna said that the rally will cap a series of escalating actions designed to educate the university community and show resolve to the administration.

"We started off with a grade-in that was fairly low-key," Luna said, referring to the Feb. 20 event in Haven Hall that drew 125 GSIs. "That event was followed by union members chanting loudly and distributing leaflets on the Diag last Monday. This plan for a massive rally escalates our action again to give us more leverage at the bargaining table," she added.

GEO Lead Negotiator Colleen Woods said that the rally is the last chance to demonstrate GEO's solidarity to force the administration to make concessions and stave off a work stoppage.

"If they see 50 people out there, they won't give ground," she said during a caucus session at last Thursday's negotiations. "But if we turn out hundreds people, we'll show them that we're serious."

Currently GEO members are circulating petitions among membership seeking signatures to support a proposed two-day walkout on March 25 and 26. GEO staffers confirmed that more than 400 members have signed, with more signatures expected this week.

HELP GEO MOBILIZE:

MEMBERSHIP MEETING:

TUESDAY March 18, 7 p.m. Ballroom Michigan League: Come and hear about the state of talks and vote on sending out a strike ballot

RALLY

THURSDAY March 20: 2:30 p.m. The Diag: Join your fellow workers and get fired up about getting a fair contract. We'll march to the Fleming Building near the Cube to deliver our message to the Regents. Afterward, we'll go to the bargaining session.

BARGAINING:

TODAY March 17: 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Mason Hall 1427

THURSDAY March 20: 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Michigan Union: Wolverine ABC

Contact your department steward or e-mail umgeo@umich.edu with any questions.

On Tuesday, March 18, GEO members will meet in the Ballroom of the Michigan League to decide whether to send out a strike ballot that would authorize the Stewards Council to declare a work stoppage. Woods and the negotiating team will provide a bargaining update, after which members will discuss the situation and vote.

As the situation develops, GEO organizers are emphasizing members to prepare for a walkout.

"We all need to be talking with other members to get more commitments to our cause," GEO President Helen Ho said. "We also need to be talking with our students and professors to get support and help them understand what it means to respect a picket line."

If they have questions about how to bring

up the topic of a work stoppage with their students or professors, or wish to sign or circulate a strike petition, union members should see their department steward or e-mail umgeo@umich.edu.

MSA backs GEO

Finally, in a sign that undergraduates support GEO's cause, on March 11 the Michigan Students Assembly voted 26-6 to approve a resolution supporting GEO's bargaining platform. The resolution was sponsored by Elson Liu, a GEO member and Rackham representative and cosponsored by six other students, including three undergraduates. The resolution has been presented to the administration bargaining team, The Michigan Board of Regents, Provost Theresa Sullivan and President Mary Sue Coleman.

Admin yields a bit more on pay

GEO attributes move to increased member pressure

With the threat of a walkout looming, UM administrators have made small concessions on pay and child-care benefits to GEO, while the two sides have also agreed on an article that would provide new parents with up to six weeks of paid leave.

Last Monday, the administration raised its salary offer from a 3, 2.5 and 2.25 percent during a three-year contract to 3 percent of each year. The concessions add up to roughly \$315,000 over the course of a three-year contract.

GEO countered by accepting the last two years of raises, but stuck firm on its' initial proposal of a 9 percent raise for the first year. The nine percent raise equals the amount necessary to close the gap between the \$15,199 earned by a .5 fraction GSI over eight months and the \$15,980 that the Office of Financial Aid estimates is necessary to live, when allowing for a 3 percent cost of living adjustment and taxes.

GEO lead negotiator Colleen Woods said that the nine percent raise in the first year remains non-negotiable.

"Our members have been consistently telling us that this is very important to them," she said.

The parental leave provision, agreed to last Thursday, provides new parents with up to six weeks of paid leave – three weeks specifically for having the child and the three existing weeks of sick leave. In addition, with the agreement of their department, new parents can take the rest of the semester off without pay, but still keep their health care benefits.

Although she saw it as a victory, Woods

emphasized that it essentially mirrored Rackham's new parental leave policy.

"It's good news for our members that they have parental leave that they didn't have before," Woods said. "But we do have to remember that this is essentially Rackham's new leave policy, so the administration did not make much of a concession."

In other signs that some progress is being made, the union and the admin agreed to improved posting language that would allow job seekers to sign-up for a weekly list-serve that would list available job postings, instead of the current cumbersome system.

GEO also won protections against workplace bullying and a commitment to explore ways to better serve the needs of GSIs with disabilities.

On Monday, agreement was reached on the grievance procedure. Finally, the administration made a small concession, increasing the child care subsidy for each child by \$50 a term, in addition to the \$100 per term it had agreed to make two weeks ago. The total value of the two concessions is about \$90,000 over three years.

"These wins at the table are the direct result of the organizing efforts of GEO members and supporters – we don't win a better contract at the bargaining table. The administration has moved slightly because they know that we care about the quality of the new contract and are willing to stop work for it," wrote GEO Organizer Stephen Sparks in an recent e-mail to membership.

The two sides remain far apart on health care, parity issues for low-fractions, sum-

mer bridge pay, all issues that play important parts on GEO's strike platform.

In an attempt to get admin to agree to increasing tuition waivers for low-fraction GSIs, GEO dropped its demand that the university pay all fees for GSIs, a concession amounting to \$1 million over the three years of the contract. To focus on priorities in mental health care and eliminating health care premiums for low-fraction GSIs, the union dropped its demand for vision care, which would have cost \$600,000 over three years. However, the administration made no concessions in its response last Monday.

In light of the serious situation, GEO and the administra-

tion bargaining teams will meet four times this week. On Monday, negotiations will take place on in Mason Hall 1427, while on Thursday the two sides will meet in the Anderson Room of the Michigan League. Rooms have not been determined for the other two sessions.

Union organizers strongly encourage members to attend negotiations.

GEO negotiators have emphasized that while they welcome the opportunity to bargain more frequently, that the admin needs to back up its words with concrete shifts in its negotiating posture.

"Meeting more often is encouraging—GEO always wants to negotiate," GEO bargaining team member Spencer Piston said. "But we need to see some substantial concessions from the admin or the increased number of bargaining sessions will not help us reach an agreement."

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**– Stephen Sparks
GEO Organizing Committee**

Stewards Council endorses DAAP in MSA elections

Union backs Stenvig for MSA president for her support of GEO

In the upcoming elections for the Michigan Student Assembly and Rackham Student Government, the GEO Stewards Council has endorsed the Defend Affirmative Ac-

tion Party as well as independent candidate Elson Liu, who is a GEO member.

In reaching the decision to endorse the DAAP during the March 12, meeting stewards noted that the party's members consistently have backed the union's position and unanimously endorsed the March 11 resolution supporting GEO's platform. Liu was the primary sponsor of the resolution.

In particular, the DAAP's Kate Stenvig,

who is running for MSA President, strongly supported and co-sponsored the resolution supporting GEO. In contrast, Sabrina Shingwani, the Michigan Action Party's candidate, voted against GEO.

The other two candidates the DAAP has fielded in elections open to graduate students are Maricruz Lopez and Liana Mulholland. Students will receive an e-mail with a link to the MSA voting Web site.