

ROMNEY UNFAIR TO COMMUNITY COLLEGE STAFF

When the Legislature voted last Wednesday to override Gov. Romney's veto of negotiated pay raises for state college faculty and staff, there was one important group of 2,000 professors, counselors, librarians and college staff who were completely left out.

Gov. Romney told the Legislature that the state has no contractual obligations to provide increases for community college faculty and staff.

But this makes no sense to the faculty, staff and presidents of the state's 15 community colleges.

Massachusetts Community College Council, the union representing community college faculty and staff, including 135 employees of Bristol Community College, negotiated an agreement in 2002 with the college presidents and Board of Higher Education that has still not been funded.

Aware of the state's fiscal crisis in 2002, the union did not ask for raises, but instead negotiated a classification system to give some increases for years of service and experience.

But both Gov. Jane Swift and Gov. Mitt Romney failed to honor the agreement that would give the average employee an increase of between \$400 to \$700 for a total cost to the state of about \$3 million.

So the faculty and staff have received no salary increases for nearly three years.

It was unfortunate that the new speaker of the House, Salvatore Dimasi, did not confront the governor on his unfair omission of this important group before he led the Legislature in the override vote to help other state college faculty and staff get raises.

Community college faculty and staff are some of the unsung engines of the Massachusetts economy. These schools are retraining workers, partnering with local businesses and addressing some of the most immediate educational needs in our state.

Shawn Feddeman, Romney's spokesman, said, "The governor has a very strong commitment to community colleges."

But words are not enough, the governor should have honored an agreement negotiated in good faith with the Board of Higher Education, the college presidents and the union.

Donnie McGee, a professor of English at BCC and union spokesman, said she doesn't know what to do to get the community college faculty and staff out of this "limbo" situation.

"We don't understand why this isn't considered a contract," she said. "To us, it's a contract. The only thing that didn't happen is the governor didn't send it to the Legislature and the Legislature didn't put forth funding."

"It's so short sighted," said Jack Sbrega, the president of Bristol Community College. "In Massachusetts, our most precious resource is our human resource. And this was agreed to by the union and the Board of Higher Education and the college presidents."

Legislators from around the SouthCoast must work with the community college faculty and staff, as well as the college presidents, to get these 2,000 employees out of limbo.

After three years of waiting, they deserve a raise. They also deserve a change in the law that now allows for these "funding quagmires." The law should not allow a fairly negotiated contract to be disregarded by a governor.

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