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LTD: Health care and wages mar contract settlement

Continued from page 1

kick off a strike that union representatives say will include picket lines at all major LTD stations, including the University's.

"We ask our riders and other unions to join us on the strike line in hopes that this will end as soon as possible," Hunt said.

The union was hours away from a Feb. 1 strike but accepted a community committee's offer to enter a 35-day cooling off period and allow an outside auditor to look at the negotiations and make recommendations to both sides.

LTD declined the committee's offer and implemented a portion of its final contract offer Feb. 1, causing the union to declare a strike effective at the end of the 35-day cooling off period, which is today.

ATU and LTD have been at odds for more than 10 months over their 2005-07 contract, which has gone through several facelifts. LTD made its final contract offer Friday.

"The district made its best offer today that it thought it could make," LTD Service Planning and Marketing Manager Andy Vobora said Friday. "Our board has said we've stretched probably as far as we can go and still meet the needs of the community."

Hunt predicted Friday that the union membership would overwhelmingly vote down the offer, and union representatives and workers spent the

weekend putting the finishing touches on the picket signs.

The union began preparing for the strike last week, and Hunt said members will be compensated \$100 for every 40 hours they spend per week on the picket line.

The main sticking point in the negotiations continues to be health care. LTD originally said it had to make the switch from a preferred provider plan to a managed care plan but has now offered a preferred provider plan, though the union said the cost difference is still the same as the managed care plan.

A decrease in health-care benefits should result in an increase in wage benefits, Hunt said, but the LTD has not offered the funds necessary to make up for the difference in health-care costs.

"It was talked that the money that's in reserves was waiting for a rainy day — at 12:01 it's about to pour," Hunt said. "I suggest that they come back to the table with the money."

LTD has said it will not hire replacement drivers and is hoping to get the buses back on the road as soon as possible, something Hunt said is entirely up to LTD management.

"The wage committee will be available at anytime, at any place, anywhere, ready to get back and get these buses moving again," Hunt said.

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PFC: Members debate criteria for scholarships, exemption

Continued from page 3

negative side to the stipend model, I think it's important to finally have a discussion about the model," he said. "I think that overall we're satisfied with the job the PFC has done. I don't see a reason to justify major objections on our part to the budget ... they will be passing."

Committee members discussed options for giving the three positions more money, but they could not agree on a way to do so without exceeding the PFC's funding benchmark.

ASUO Accounting Coordinator Jennifer Creighton-Neiwert said funding the positions at current levels would increase the budget by roughly \$18,000, putting it over benchmark at 7.27 percent.

The PFC briefly considered cutting all stipends by an additional \$25. But PFC member Khanh Le said he would "hate to go and adjust all stipends" to benefit the three positions that would be significantly cut.

PFC member Jared Axelrod agreed, saying the PFC couldn't "keep lowering the stipend model just to get under 7 percent."

Creighton-Neiwert said pay for the general manager position should be made hourly regardless of whether it was increased because the expectations for the position differ from "educational leadership" opportunities offered by student government positions.

She also cautioned the committee about exempting certain positions.

"When you start granting exemptions, where are you going to stop?" she asked.

PFC member Jael Anker-Lagos questioned why the first two stipend categories would even be needed if the positions listed within them were exempted from the model.

PFC Chairwoman Persis Pohowalla said the new model is a scholarship

designed to compensate student leaders for the work and responsibility of their positions instead of the required hours or expenses required of their former positions as stipulated by the old model.

But she said questions remain about the criteria for awarding scholarships.

"That's a gray area that I don't think has been defined," she said.

Axelrod said the PFC should make groups conform to the stipend model, rather than tailoring the model to fit certain groups.

Pohowalla agreed, but said the new model significantly cuts pay for the three positions.

"I just feel really bad, that's all," she said.

Yet Pohowalla, who sent an e-mail Thursday night to student programs saying groups would not be able to appeal the budget, asked the committee whether it should grant a special exception for the general manager position because Nisser attended the meeting.

"If Charlotte wasn't here, what would we do?" she asked. "Do we want to talk to other groups before we conform to one leader?"

Nisser was the only group leader who commented at the meeting.

Pohowalla said the general manager's new pay is "not fair, but it is consistent."

"It's really unfortunate and it really pains me to do this, but I think we need to go with what we have right now," she said to the committee.

The PFC discussed writing a budget note to the Senate asking it to work on the general manager's pay.

Pohowalla also said the group will meet later this week to approve more of its minutes, a process that was delayed because of problems with audio tapes of some meetings.

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