

# URI AAUP NEWS

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND CHAPTER - AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS

PRESIDENT: Cate Morrison  
VICE PRESIDENT: Erik Loomis

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## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

by Cate Morrison

Hello! My name is Cate Morrison and I am your new AAUP chapter President. I am a Teaching Professor in the Department of Communication Studies, and I'm very glad to meet you. Today, I have one simple message to both our existing and new members, and that is to be excellent to each other.

I've thought a lot about what to say in this inaugural column. You can understand why. On the one hand, we have massive changes at the federal level. Around the country, people are losing their jobs. Here at URI, many of our colleagues have seen federal grants cancelled. Asking how another academic is doing, even in the best places, usually elicits a brittle laugh with the response "things are OK here...so far." On the other, for me, there's the weight of a new position. I personally believed—though it goes against everything I have been taught—that there was some kind of magical combination of words that would fix everything. I would say something that no one had thought about before, something that would change hearts and minds in a brand-new way.

At the end of this process, however, I realized there are no magic words. Perhaps it is a failing on my part, but I don't think so. What I want to say now is the same thing that I have always said. These thoughts are not new. They are not even unusual. However, I believe that they are true. The only way we can respond to the moment is through care for one another.

Bad times bring people together. They force us to realize that we are not alone. Others face similar or even worse difficulties. These problems cannot be solved individually. They must be addressed together. Across the university, no matter your specialty, you and everyone around you has a target on their back because the very idea of higher education is under attack. It is maybe not surprising, then, that my answer is solidarity. In *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*, Bill gives this advice to the future: be excellent to each other.

We are under extraordinary amounts of pressure. Some of it is the same kind of pressure that always exists in

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## LABORFEST 2025

by Erik Loomis

The URI/AAUP Organizing Committee is extremely excited to hold our first ever labor teach-in for our members and the larger community. Laborfest will be a fun day, an educational day, and an empowering day. We believe that coming together as faculty, URI community members, and Rhode Islanders on Saturday, October 4 is a great way to build solidarity, teach the rest of the state what a strong union we have, and have conversations on how to build power on and off campus.

The day will start with a plenary session from Rhode Island Secretary of State Gregg Amore, a major friend to organized labor at the statehouse. Secretary Amore cares deeply about education and public service. He taught civics and history at East Providence High School for 27 years and was named Rhode Island History Teacher of the Year in 2008. He served in the Rhode Island legislature representing East Providence for ten years before running for Secretary of State in 2022. He will be a powerful voice to start off our Laborfest.

We will then have two periods of breakout sessions, divided by lunch. Each session will have three choices. We are very excited about all six sessions.

For the first breakout session, we have a training run by Fil Eden and Alex Lucini called "Building Our Power, Using Our Power: How We Make Our Jobs and Our World Better through Solidarity." Fil and Alex both work for the National Education Association-Rhode Island and Fil represents Graduate Assistants United here at URI. These experienced organizers will train us on how to build power outside of the contract and become the force for justice that we can be.

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## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S COLUMN

by Jay Walsh

This year begins on a particularly strong note for URI/AAUP. Your newly ratified contract is now finalized, and copies are being delivered to all members by campus mail. Please take the time to review the agreement carefully.

### **The Best Raises in 22 Years**

Let's start with the headline: raises. This agreement delivers the best salary increases in the past 22 years. In an era when higher education budgets are under pressure and many faculty across the country are watching their real wages fall, URI faculty will see meaningful improvements.

### **Improvements to Parental Leave**

The bargaining team also secured important improvements to parental leave. Faculty deserve to be able to balance their professional responsibilities with family life, and this contract brings us closer to that goal.

### **A Fairer Review Process**

Another major win lies in improvements to the review process. We know that faculty evaluations should not be just bureaucratic exercises; they should help guide careers. Bargaining achieved greater clarity, fairness, and consistency in these processes.

### **The Power of Solidarity**

None of these gains would have been possible without your support. Negotiations were not smooth. At one point, the talks were stuck, and management's side was playing hardball. But then your negotiations team was able to share a petition signed by two-thirds of URI/AAUP members indicating their support for the bargaining team. Dropping that petition on the table was not just symbolic. It made clear to management that the faculty were united and that the bargaining committee spoke with the full backing of its members. That solidarity mattered. It changed the tone and path of bargaining. Good work!

### **Administrative Turnover and Our Path Forward**

You have also noticed the massive administrative turnover at URI. Deans, directors, and even senior administrators seem to come and go at a rapid pace. In times of instability, it is natural for faculty to feel frustrated. Your best way forward is to work consistently and professionally together with your co-workers. You can make it through turbulent times better when you have each other's back. Stick together regardless of who is sitting in the dean's office or Green Hall.

### **Professionalism and Collegiality**

I also need to address a recurring issue. Too many of the calls that come into this office are not about management, contracts, or grievances. Instead, they are about conflicts between colleagues. Let me be clear: URI/AAUP is not a therapy office. URI/AAUP doesn't apply marriage and

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## LABORFEST 2025

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"Self-Care in Times of Crisis" is organized by our colleague, Christine Weinkauff Duranso from Psychology. Featuring our colleague from the URI Wellness Center, this session will help us figure out how to get through these times of crisis and preserve our mental health to be the best professors and mentors and activists we can be.

Third will be "Historical Resistance to Oppression." Featuring your colleagues Michael Ortiz and Jessica Frazier from History, as well as renowned labor historian Steve Striffler from UMass-Boston, this will be an inspiring and important conversation about what we can learn from the past to help guide us today.

Those who register early for Laborfest will be provided lunch. See the link below!

After lunch and good conversation with our colleagues, we will return for a second set of breakout sessions.

URI/AAUP Executive Director Jay Walsh and your colleagues Ernie DuPuis and Matt Hodler will hold a training called "Using One-to-One Conversations to Grow Membership, Identify Issues, and Build Power." We talk to our colleagues about many things, but how do we talk to them in ways that builds solidarity with each other for common goals to make for a stronger union and a better place for us all to work? How do we talk to nonmembers about joining the union? How do we talk to members about taking the next step to active engagement in the union? How do we create the trust we need to believe that we can fight together? This session will provide you real training on how to address these questions.

We will also have a session titled, "Academic Unionism in New England." This brings union leaders from three New England universities to have a conversation about what has worked on their campuses, what has made for stronger contracts, and the challenges that they face. It will feature our own URI/AAUP president Cate Morrison, Erik Christiansen, former president of the union at Rhode Island College; and long-time union activist, past president, and current vice-president of the UMass-Amherst union, Eve Weinbaum. Our past president Miriam Reumann will moderate this excellent discussion.

Finally, we are proud to have a panel titled, "Defending Immigrants on Campus and at the Workplace." We know that many of our colleagues and students are immigrants. Attacks on immigrant rights in Rhode Island threaten us all. We will have a conversation featuring Aviva Chomsky, a historian and immigrant rights activist at Salem State University, as well as representatives

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## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S COLUMN

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family therapy strategies to co-worker disputes. Our mission is to represent faculty fairly and protect your contractual rights.

When disputes among colleagues spill over into the union office, it drains resources that should be focused on the real challenges we face like securing better compensation, defending academic freedom, and protecting the conditions under which you teach and conduct research. I urge you to handle disagreements professionally and collegially. We all have moments of frustration, but there is far more power in working together than in working against each other. Respect your colleagues, even when you disagree. We are strongest when we are united, and every bit of solidarity matters.

### Closing

This contract is proof that solidarity works. The petition made a difference in negotiations. The raises, the leave, the review process improvements, and more were possible because you stood together. Now, as we head into a new year, I am asking you to keep that experience in mind. Support one another. Stick together. Build each other up, don't tear each other down. Remember that your union is only as strong as the bonds you maintain with each other.

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from two Rhode Island immigrant rights organizations. Marcela Betancour is executive director of Latino Policy Institute in Providence. We will also be joined by one of the members of Fuerza Laboral, a workers rights group based in Central Falls. Our colleague Julie Keller will moderate this conversation.

Finally, we will close the day with a second plenary. Patrick Crowley is president of the Rhode Island AFL-CIO, a long-time organizer with the National Education Association, and one of the nation's foremost union leaders working with environmental organizations to create green jobs. He has a rousing story to tell—a story about how unions and workers coming together in solidarity came together to resist that and make the state one of the nation's leaders in protecting workers' rights.

Lunch and free childcare will be provided for people who register. Please come out and show solidarity with your fellow URI/AAUP members and workers throughout Rhode Island by joining us on October 4 for Laborfest!

[Register using this link.](#)

## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

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academia. We have colleagues who are just beginning their professional journey, colleagues who are going into final steps for the tenure process, and colleagues who are in the midst of reinventing themselves later in their academic careers. Other pressures are new. People find themselves having to scramble to do their jobs when many opportunities have dried up. Their books are pulled off of shelves. The very value of their research, of themselves, are called into question. We can make space for those people. We can help and support them. We can show them that they are valued members of a shared community.

We can only show solidarity by pushing back against some of our own instincts. Those instincts draw us to talk *at* rather than *to* one another. Those instincts, stretching all the way back to our own studenthood, lead us to search and destroy rather than listen and learn. Those instincts, in all circumstances frankly, but most certainly, most obviously, at this point cannot help us. There is no one individual who can change the outcomes we all experience. There is no magical combination of words that can sort out the situation.

When I set out to write this column, I was suffering from that same kind of unhealthy individualism. I thought that it was about me. I was wrong. It is not about me. It is about *us*. The more we stick together, the stronger we can be. When I was asked during the COVID-19 pandemic what kind of advice I would give to my colleagues, I answered "learn the incredible power of saying it's OK." Something's late? It's OK. If you're afraid, it's OK. If you feel small, it's OK. No single individual at this university, no matter how smart or capable they are, has the one answer that will suffice for us all.

Welcome back to the 2025-2026 academic year at URI. I am happy to call you my friends. Be excellent to each other. This is the strongest and most radical action we can take.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Send us your concerns, opinions, and ideas

*Letters to the Editor* should be sent to Erik Loomis at [eloomis@uri.edu](mailto:eloomis@uri.edu)

## RALLYING AGAINST TRUMP'S DETENTION OF ACADEMICS

by Carolyn Betensky, English and Christine Weinkauff Duranso, Psychology

On July 7, a delegation of URI-AAUP members and staff traveled to Boston's US District Court for the District of Massachusetts for a rally marking the first day of arguments in the AAUP et al. v. Rubio et al. trial. The case challenges the Trump administration's revocation of student visas on ideological grounds, as well as the administration's unlawful detention and attempted deportation of non-US citizens. The court is expected to issue a ruling in the case within the next month.

Many of us watched, aghast, the coverage of Tufts doctoral student Rümeyza Öztürk being literally kidnapped off the street by masked, unidentified federal agents last March. Earlier that month, agents had seized Mahmoud Khalil, a recent graduate of Columbia University and green-card holder. Both Öztürk and Khalil were held without charges for months in detention facilities in Louisiana. Neither Öztürk nor Khalil had been accused of any criminal acts. Their offense, according to the Trump administration, was their open criticism of Israel.

In the pre-trial brief, the AAUP (alongside co-plaintiff the Middle Eastern Studies Association) argues that

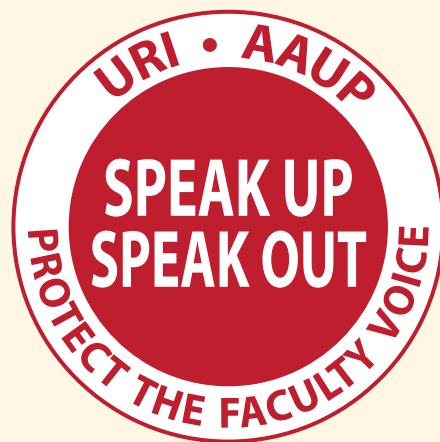
the ideological deportation policy, and the repressive climate it has engendered on college campuses, has far-reaching implications for the expressive and associational rights of their noncitizen and citizen members, and for Plaintiffs themselves. The AAUP's and MESA's non-citizen members have been harmed because the policy has forced them into silence. The AAUP's and MESA's citizen members have been harmed in their ability to hear from, and associate with, their noncitizen students and colleagues. The AAUP and MESA have also suffered organizational harm because they are no longer able to learn from and engage with noncitizen members to the extent they once did and because they have had to divert resources from other projects to address the all-too-real possibility that their noncitizen members will be arrested, detained, and deported simply for exercising rights the Constitution guarantees.

The chilling effect of the Trump administration's pursuit of international students (and faculty) on ideological grounds cannot be overstated. While courts ultimately found that the attempted deportations of these two academics were unlawful, the impact on our workplaces of the administration's actions remains enormous. And while in these instances, ideological punishment was meted out to those who were outspoken on issues pertaining to the plight of Palestinians, the administration's widespread attacks on

research and scholarship make us all potential targets.

Each of us benefits from the work being done by the national AAUP in the battle to protect academic freedom and higher education, in cases such as AAUP v. Rubio. You may find a more expansive list of current legal cases on the AAUP national website [here](#).

At the local level, you may participate similarly to support and protect the work we do as faculty here at the University of Rhode Island. Come to the next membership meeting this November (date to be determined, details will be posted [here](#)), or attend the October 4th Labor Fest 2025 event ([details and registration here](#)).



### URI/AAUP STAFF

#### Executive Director:

Jay Walsh | [jawwalsh@uri.edu](mailto:jawwalsh@uri.edu)

#### Executive Assistant:

Mary Pinch | [mpinch@uri.edu](mailto:mpinch@uri.edu)

Telephone: 874-2532 / 2534

Email Address: [admin@uriaaup.org](mailto:admin@uriaaup.org)  
[www.uriaaup.org](http://www.uriaaup.org)

### 2025-2026 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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