

CAPS JULY

JULY ISSUE: #20-7
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Last month CAPS members overwhelmingly voted to approve a bargained “side letter” solution with the Newsom Administration that reduced pay starting July 1 for Unit 10 rank-and-file members by 9.23 percent; but with the other items bargained by the Bargaining Team will feel more like a 5.93 percent reduction. The Administration then applied the same reduction to Unit 10 supervisors and managers. A record number of CAPS members – nearly 3 in 4 – voted on the side letter. And more than 90% of the ballots cast supported the solution, also a record.

As we all know, the COVID-19 pandemic has killed nearly 600,000 people worldwide, with millions more infected. Our governments and the private sector were not prepared for a public health crisis of this magnitude. Despite Governor Gavin Newsom’s leadership and science-based decision making, California still faces a \$54 billion deficit triggered by a response to the virus. Most of the economy shut down for several weeks and severely restricted state revenues that rely on commerce.

The federal government has been unable to reach agreement to assist state governments in avoiding a severe economic recession – the third in the last 20 years and the worst downturn since the Great Depression.

The State of California and public employee unions like CAPS have confronted severe budget cuts. Meanwhile, more than 42 million people nationwide have filed for unemployment benefits since COVID-19 was declared a pandemic. State Scientists face yet another Personal Leave Program (PLP). Meanwhile, U.S. billionaire wealth has increased \$584 billion at the same time, according to the Institute for Policy Studies.

We know there is something profoundly wrong with this situation – income and wealth inequality – beyond our control.

It is important to understand the federal government’s role in this. As of mid-July, Congress has provided some financial assistance to California for COVID-19 public health costs, but nothing to backfill lost revenues. Every state in the nation faces similar fiscal distress. Governors individually and collectively have asked Congress and the White House to approve a states-aid bill, but legislation has bogged down. CAPS has made formal requests to federal lawmakers for budgetary relief and will continue to advocate regarding this matter until our leaders in Washington, D.C., do the right thing.

This is particularly important to CAPS members. PLP 2020 went into effect on July 1 and could run through June 30, 2022. However, the CAPS Bargaining Team negotiated side-letter language that will end PLP 2020 earlier and restore the previously-agreed-to 5% salary increase if the federal government provides aid or the state’s revenues improve.

The Bargaining Team did not want to bargain to reduce hard-won pay gains made over the last decade, particularly in light of long-standing salary inequities for Unit 10. But compared with state-imposed furloughs that would have mandated two days off work per month without pay, PLP 2020 was preferable. It provides flexibility, higher limits for bankable leave hours, and lower out-of-pocket contributions for pension and retirement benefits that increase take-home pay. For more details, go to capsscientists.org and click on the [Bargaining Updates](#) link. (The page is password protected.)

The Bargaining Team must still bargain with CalHR for a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to replace the MOU that expired on July 1. Those sessions will continue to focus on wages, benefits, and other terms and conditions of employment for Unit 10. Meanwhile, rank-and-file employees will continue to work under the terms of the expired MOU and the side letter. The next MOU will carry over the side letter’s provisions and will require ratification by CAPS rank-and-file members.



SCO LAUNCHES PAY PORTAL FOR ALL STATE EMPLOYEES

The State Controller's Office (SCO) has released Cal Employee Connect for all civil service and California State University employees and will no longer issue paper copies of direct deposit pay stubs. This secure self-service portal allows state employees to view, print, and electronically save W2 records, leave balances, direct-deposit statements, and more. The State prioritized the new service to meet the needs of employees working in alternate locations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Register for access to Cal Employee Connect at connect.sco.ca.gov.

CAPS MEMBER FEATURED IN BRITISH SCIENCE MAGAZINE

CAPS member Brett Furnas recently made waves across the pond in a feature for *BBC Science Focus Magazine*. An Ecologist at the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Brett was the lead author of a research paper published in *The Auk: Ornithological Advances Journal*. It examined the impact of low-intensity wildfires on bird population diversity. Researchers found that when birds flee a fire area, they diversify nearby environments.

Science Focus was drawn to the study by the unique method Brett and his team employed to figure out the birds' migration pattern: "Researchers in California recorded the mating songs of over 1,500 Hermit Warblers, which are small grey and yellow birds found in a few Pacific Coast states. As the birds spread over different forest types and areas, they have each developed their own unique mating song. The researchers found that originally, there were 35 different song dialects.

"The team's research showed that after an area is hit by a wildfire, it is recolonized by a more diverse group of birds, which leads to more variation in bird song. The birds that have fled the wildfire will also find a new home, bringing their song to the area."

CAPS congratulates Brett Furnas and his team for their innovative research and thanks them for earning positive recognition for State Scientists and their public service.



CAPS CALLS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GRANT APPLICANTS

As one of the many benefits of membership, CAPS provides quarterly awards of \$400 to support scientific research and professional development activities not fully funded by the state. Unfortunately, due to efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19, the CAPS Member Benefits Committee has temporarily suspended awards to facilitate attending in-person meetings. All other professional-enhancement activities remain eligible.

Professional development grant applications will be evaluated for the quality of the application, relevance or impact of the sponsored activity on the applicant's career, and the degree to which the grant will affect the applicant's stated purpose. CAPS also gives preference to spreading awards among members in various state departments and agencies, to the degree possible. Four award recipients are chosen each January, April, July, and October, so applications should be submitted before those months to be eligible for the next selection. More details about the members-only grant program and a downloadable application are available online at capsscscientists.org/application/benefits/grant.

President's Column

Margarita Gordus



CAPS MEMBERSHIP SHOWS SOLIDARITY IN ADVERSITY

CAPS' solidarity was severely tested last month, and State Scientists stuck together as never before. I believe adversity has made us stronger, more united, and more respected by Governor Gavin Newsom and his bargaining team at CalHR.

And this despite one of the most challenging periods for state employers and employees since California law allowed us to organize and collectively bargain 43 years ago.

In mid-March, the COVID-19 pandemic literally changed our country and our way of life. Like much of the nation, California closed all but essential businesses to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus. Newsom's shelter-in-place order was informed by science and undoubtedly saved lives. But it also forced much of the economy to go dark, which in turn depressed government revenues that depend on commercial activity.

Suddenly, the Newsom Administration's January forecast for a healthy 2020-21 budget surplus became a dire May prediction of a \$54 billion deficit. The Governor told departments to cut their budgets and braced schools for deep funding cutbacks. He said the Legislature would authorize a 10% reduction in employee compensation costs. The only question was whether the reduction terms would be bargained or imposed.

CAPS' Bargaining Team, which I chair, struggled with the Governor's mandate. It went against what our salary comparisons tell us, and the reason we volunteered for the job. We wanted to advocate for pay equity to be implemented in full this fiscal year. At the same time, we also understood the Governor's position: The state needed to make deep cuts to the budget. The Administration expected everyone to sacrifice.

While we were bargaining, Oregon state employees were furloughed. Scheduled state pay raises in New York were deferred. Minnesota was considering the same. New Jersey was considering delaying its state pension contributions and downgrading retirement benefits. Georgia and Nevada furloughed state employees. Pennsylvania froze salaries. None bargained with employees first.

Closer to home, memories lingered of the furloughs imposed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger after the housing bubble burst in 2008. The state's budget deficit eventually reached \$60 billion. Schwarzenegger imposed three "Furlough Fridays" per month that reduced state salaries by nearly 15%. Lawsuits and protests followed.

But Newsom, unlike Schwarzenegger, was looking to cut salary costs by 10% – and this Governor was willing to talk it over with us first.

The Personal Leave Program 2020 (PLP 2020) solution we bargained is more creative, less financially burdensome to CAPS members, and more flexible than the old "Furlough Fridays." It meets the Governor's compensation costs-saving target. And under certain circumstances, the program can end early.

You know the rest. A record number of members voted on the proposed solution. A record number of ballots cast supported it. (We've posted the statistics on the last page of this CAPSule.)

The Bargaining Team is gratified by the level of your engagement and support for a challenging proposal. Beyond that, the outcome of this vote signals CAPS' undeniable solidarity as we return to bargain a new Memorandum of Understanding.

And you can bet that Governor Newsom and his team have noted that when this Bargaining Team speaks, it has the full backing of CAPS members.



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CAPSule (ISSN 10446230) is published monthly by the California Association of Professional Scientists, 455 Capitol Mall, Suite 500, Sacramento, CA 95814. Periodicals Postage Paid at Sacramento, CA. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: 455 Capitol Mall, Suite 500, Sacramento, CA 95814-2483.

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BY THE NUMBERS: CAPS' Side Letter Vote

CAPS members showed an unprecedented degree of solidarity last month in accepting a side letter with difficult terms that temporarily reduce their pay in return for additional leave hours. Governor Newsom and the Legislature mandated state employees' compensation costs be cut by 10% as part of deep budget reductions triggered by the COVID-19 recession. Member unity will be crucial when bargaining for the successor Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) resumes.

