By Richard Stutman

As nearly everyone is aware, negotiations ended unsuccessfully last month after a three-day marathon bargaining session, culminating in what amounted to a 16-hour ‘quadruple overtime’ that essentially ended in a tie. Put another way, the parties could not reach agreement on finances. The major outstanding issue: the city’s failure to move substantially on finances. The school department’s interest essentially ended in a tie. Put another way, their members are about as satisfied as we are. Their position as we are—two years without a contract. Their members are about as satisfied as we are.

Last week, the Boston Police Department’sBTU hall for commissioner Edward Davis to give a speech on the state of the police department. Members of the Boston Police Patrolman’s Association took the occasion to picket the commissioner. BPPA is in the same position as we are—two years without a contract. Their members are about as satisfied as we are.

The inescapable conclusion is that the city doesn’t want to settle our contract or any other contract right now—how else can we explain the dilemma facing all of us, from police and fire to parks and secretarial? For each city union to have any other contract right now—how else can we explain the dilemma facing all of us, from police and fire to parks and secretarial? For each city union to have any other contract right now—how else can we explain the dilemma facing all of us, from police and fire to parks and secretarial? For each city union to have any other contract right now—how else can we explain the dilemma facing all of us, from police and fire to parks and secretarial? For each city union to have

By Richard Stutman

Richard Stutman

BTU President
AFT Massachusetts President Tom Gosnell introduces the keynote speaker U.S. Senate candidate Elizabeth Warren.

Building a Social Justice Education Movement

Free conference for Educators ★ Students ★ Everyone

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AFT Massachusetts President Tom Gosnell positively beamed that Massachusetts again ranks #1 in the nation according to NAEP, and ranks first in science in the western world. “100% of regular public schools in Massachusetts work under a collective bargaining agreement. None of the regular public schools in Alabama and Mississippi have collective bargaining; they rank the lowest in the nation,” said Gosnell.

The three most common words were passion, dedication, and relationships. Adam pointed out that “nowhere on the list was test scores.”

Though he is honored to be the Massachusetts Teacher of the Year, Mr. Gray left the podium with these parting words, “Unions matter. Notice the ‘s’ in mediators, I mean it to be plural. Unions matter, too. And please continue believing.”

US Congressman Bill Keating was candid in his remarks. He acknowledged that if it weren’t for unions, he would not have been elected. He thanked us for our support and then gave a somber report from Washington, D.C.

“The American Dream is under attack in Washington today,” he lamented. Before Social Security was enacted, half of all American elderly were in poverty. Today, he stated, college loan rates are kept low by cutting affordable health care for women and children.

“I dream,” said Keating, “of a tomorrow in America where a good public education is enjoyed by all. It will happen because of unions, teachers, and people like you who come here (to the AFT-MA convention) in the morning.”

AFT-MA president Tom Gosnell next welcomed state representative Tackey Chan, who, according to Gosnell, is “a superb supporter or public education.” Rep. Chan acknowledged our dedication to public education and gave his unconditional support to the labor movement. He said that 35% of his constituents are union members, and that he won’t let us down.

The mood turned starkly serious when Paul Toner, president of the Massachusetts Teachers Association, addressed the audience on the looming threat of Stand for Children’s impending ballot initiative. The MTA has filed a lawsuit against Stand for Children stating that the eleven major components of the initiative are too complex for a ballot initiative, as defined by state law.

Toner said, “It’s not just ‘We want a great teacher in every classroom,’ it’s far more complex than that.” The initiative deals with transfers, layoffs, excessing, and a host of other matters too unwieldy and varied to summarize with a simple Yes/No vote.

“It’s not (as simple and straightforward as asking if we should add a nickel deposit on a can of soda),” said Toner by way of comparison.

Unfortunately, Stand for Children seemingly has support, said Toner, and they have many millions of dollars. “We need to engage the community, not just to fight Stand for Children, but forever and for all issues,” he said as he departed.

The keynote speaker was up next. Elizabeth Warren, candidate for U.S. Senate, told all that she is from a working class family who knew hard times. “I fear,” she said, “that we are not making the same investment in our kids (as we are making in our financial markets). I am in this race not to say ‘I got mine, you are on your own’; but so that all kids can have a chance.”

Picking up Warren’s theme, Tom Gosnell wrapped up the conference by citing Diane Ravitch who says that income is the most important factor in determining a child’s educational success. “The U.S. ranks behind Turkey and Mexico in childhood poverty,” said Gosnell to a shocked audience.

On a positive note, Gosnell positively beamed that Massachusetts again ranks #1 in the nation according to NAEP, and ranks first in science in the western world. “I love our teachers, our kids, our communities,” he said. “We are making in a meaningful way. We are making a difference.”

See photos of the AFT Massachusetts Statewide Convention on page 8.
The Personnel Subcommittee of each School's School Site Council is vested with the authority to consider the termination or reassignment of permanent teachers who voluntarily apply for transfer into the school. They are encouraged to participate in the hiring of all teachers, as the Personnel Subcommittee is mandated to do so during the first teacher transfer posting at this time according to the contract. SSC Personnel Subcommittee members must attend new teacher orientations and coaching appointments at each school. In addition, school-based Lead Teacher/ Mentor/ New Teacher Developers will be selected from the qualified pool of eligible teachers at that school by the School Site Subcommittee.

The Personnel Subcommittee is made up of two teachers and one parent from the SSC as well as the Principal/Headmaster/ Program Director. SSC teacher members, elect who among their colleagues will serve as representatives to serve on the Personnel Subcommittee. Teacher and parent representatives on the SSC Personnel Subcommittee may designate temporary replacement representatives according to the position being filled. These temporary replacements will be selected from the list of the SSC. For example, a special education teacher may replace a teacher on the Personnel Subcommittee when a special education position is being filled. The teachers who are SSC members designate temporary BTU teacher replacements on the Personnel Subcommittee if they choose to. The Principals do not select teachers to serve on the Subcommittee.

As in all SSC decision making, members of the Council and its Subcommittee are urged to reach decisions by consensus. Decisions need to be formalized by majority vote with the Principal/Headmaster/Program Director voting with the majority.

When is the Last Date I Can Receive an Overall Performance Evaluation?

The contract details, “No teacher shall be involuntarily excessed from her/his school assignment after the running of these pools. However, in the fall, if the School Administration determines that it needs to excess teachers to correct class size problems, they are able to do so. Not more than (5) days notices shall be required for excessing during the school year.” The contract dictates, “Excessing from a school building shall be first by volunteers within a program area, then by reverse seniority within a program area. An employee who holds seniority in a program area other than the one from which he/she has been excessed shall be offered a vacancy in the building in such other program area. If there is no such vacancy he/she will be placed directly onto a system-wide excess list. An employee exercising a right to return to the teacher bargaining unit after layoff or demotion (or returning from a leave of absence of more than a year) shall be carried on the system-wide excess list in the applicable program area.”

The Human Resources Department has projected the excess pools will be run in May 29, 30, 31. Due to the somewhat unpredictability of the budget issues, these dates may be subject to change. Excessing pools are conducted in the following manner:

- Teachers will bid on listed vacancies in order of seniority. Each teacher must make (3) bids, except that the next-to-last teacher must make (2) bids and the most junior teacher must make (1) bid. Whena vacancy has received (3) bids, bidding will be ended on that vacancy.
- Teachers will be assigned to (1) of their bids.
- Teachers are limited to (1) bid per school.
- Teachers who are qualified in more than (1) program area may bid in (1) program area pool only.
- The contract states, “No teacher receiving an overall unsatisfactory evaluation of an excess pool will have bidding rights through the excess pools.” Such teachers will be assigned to a teaching position by the Superintendent. Any teacher who has received two or more overall unsatisfactory evaluations between Sept 1st and the date of the excess pool will not be allowed to participate in the excess pool.

For each teacher receiving an overall unsatisfactory evaluation of an excess pool will have bidding rights through the excess pools.

Correction

The last photograph on page 6 of the April, 2012 Boston Union Teacher was taken by Marilyn Humphries, to whom i owe a debt of gratitude for her technical assistance. Also, Timo Philip teaches at Brighton High School (page 7).

- Michael J. Maguire
With millions of dollars from foundations backed by Walmart, Bain Capital, and JP Morgan the deceptively named front group “Stand For Children” has proposed a controversial ballot initiative. While it claims to be a bill that promotes “great teachers and great schools” don’t be fooled. This proposal would silence community voices, hurt students and punish teachers, especially those who speak out on behalf of the students who need them the most.

By Jessica Tang

Good afternoon. First of, I would like to thank you all for giving classroom teachers a voice. I am a parent, an educator, and a policy advocate, and I have been observing with concern the perspectives on this ballot initiative. Teacher voices are not heard enough in policy decisions despite the fact that we have intimate knowledge of the field and teaching that we persevere, day in and day out, in the classroom with our students. Speaking of which, I have to admit I’m pretty annoyed right now that I’m missing a few classes because I have to be here.

I HATE missing any day of school. However, I left my classroom this morning because it’s important. This initiative really is terribly misguided, and I am extremely concerned about what will happen to public education in Mass. The vast majority of parents have no clue this ballot measure exists.

Students tend to be very practical. They often say they need basic things like books, beds, food. Even in the vast majority of our better schools, there are only enough books for one class, and students can’t take books home because their parents can’t afford them. And we expect them to learn this way. They have to worry about their desks breaking or chairs breaking. They want materials and resources like lab equipment and field trips that expand their hands on learning and gain exposure to new places and ideas.

If you ask parents, they often talk about opportunities for their students. They want eloquently explained, it is both a “distraction” and “divisive.” Instead of focusing my energy and time trying to defeat an insurance rate hike, I would rather be in our classrooms with our students than in your halls convincing you that this initiative is wrong.

By Berta Rosa Berriz Miró

Good morning. My name is Berta Rosa Berriz Miró. I am a Lead Teacher at the Boston Teachers’ Union School in Jamaica Plain, and I have been with Boston’s Public Schools for 32 years. I take pride in my profession: teachers are the first line of defense.

I am also a Cuban immigrant who came to this country as an eight year old child, speaking no English, who was tossed into a classroom where my language, culture – even the correct pronunciation of my name – were discarded by well-meaning teachers who believed that “becoming an American” meant leaving my family identity at the border.

My call to the teaching profession is rooted in this early experience. And when I look at the children who enter my classroom I wonder to what extent will they be made to feel that they had no value or brought no assets to the teaching-learning relationships.

I come before you today, because another group of well-meaning people are about to make a decision that will devalue another essential educational asset – our teachers. And while I appreciate that others will go into exhaustive detail on the flawed logic, unwieldy mechanics and potential harm of the Stand for Children ballot initiative, I will draw your attention to the inordinately high cost of implementing educational reform that ultimately caused far more harm than good. I believe there’s a lesson there that we need to heed.

In 1992, Boston Teachers Union, the Berriz Miró’s voters voted overwhelmingly to dismantle bilingual instruction. Notably, the 70-30 landslide was centered in suburban communities with no children, no classroom experience, and no direct experience with immigrant children, English language learners, or the actual practice of bilingual education.

The BPS muddled the bilingual education had a much-needed bridge to English proficiency. Also noted was that hundreds, if not thousands, of students were affected by the vote and had little voice in the outcome.

That those well-meaning individuals who advocated for the dismantling of a settlement of a Silicon Valley millionaire with or no children, no classroom experience, and no or direct experience with immigrant children, English language learners, or the actual practice of bilingual education.

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That those well-meaning individuals who advocated for the dismantling of a Silicon Valley millionaire with or no children, no classroom experience, and no or direct experience with immigrant children, English language learners, or the actual practice of bilingual education.
Their children to not only learn about math and English, but also have opportunities to participate in arts education, music education, and physical education. They want safe schools where they know their children can focus on their learning and not be distracted. They want account-ability, but do not want their children to be over-tested or constantly stressed out about high stakes tests. They want support and interventions if their children are not making enough progress, and they want enrichment activities if their students are doing well. Lastly, parents want smaller class sizes that provide opportunities for more individualized attention and relationship building with experienced teachers -- a combination which consistently is shown to lead to improved student outcomes.

If you ask community members what their vision of successful schools are, they will say that they want schools in their communities that they are proud of. Not just a few, or specifically “that one or a few blocks down,” but all. They want schools that not only prepare students for the future as thinkers, leaders, and active citizens, but schools that also engage and contribute to the communities their students come from. The schools should support the communities, and the communities, the schools.

And lastly, if you ask teachers what solutions work best, we would say all of the above. And above all, we say, support us in our classrooms and help us to be the very best teachers we can be so that we can be a part of all of the above!

Teachers have incredible challenges every day and although it often feels like everyone expects us to do everything by ourselves, we really can't. Unfortunately, the solutions that I just mentioned are nowhere to be found in the ballot initiative. The initiative mentions the word “bargain” more than the word “children” or “students” because that's what this is really about. It is NOT about books and resources or supporting parents and teachers, it's about “bargain,” meaning “cheap,” teachers and using evaluation as a means to get them. It’s about implementing a new evaluation system despite the fact that community stakeholders across the state already spent days in a very collaborative process to create a new system that hasn't even had the opportunity to be fully rolled out and tested. It is an outrage that after such an exemplary and inclusive process that offers a homegrown solution to the challenge of evaluating teachers, we now run the risk of placing teachers at the mercy of a cookie-cutter proposal imported from outside the state. It is a complete disAlloc-ation from what parents, students, and teachers really need, and instead of supporting those of us who commit our time and energy to educating students, it is creating more anxiety, stress, and hardship for us to serve our students best, and in fact, it is a detriment to students and our ability to advocate for what our students really need.

Lastly, it undermines experience. Any teacher will tell you that their first few years of teaching were the hardest -- I know mine were! Although I know I was still effective my first year, I am so much more effective even years later. Experience matters and schools need experienced teachers to share their expertise and mentor newer teachers. Instead of valuing experience, however, this ballot initiative devalues experience and leaves outspoken veteran teacher leaders vulnerable to retribution. This leaves students vulnerable as well. I know that when I become a parent, I want a teacher who is not only unafraid to advocate for the needs of my child, but also has the knowledge and ability to do so in a very complicated bureaucratic system. Furthermore, I want teachers who are working in schools and communities that have the resources, collaboration, and support to find solutions to difficult, complicated problems.

This is why our governor, our educational leaders, our principals, parents, professors, community mem- bers, and effective award-winning teachers oppose this ballot initiative. We know it is essential to recognize the individual needs of each student and each school. There is no “one size fits all” answer to improve teaching or learning and this proposal puts the success of our students at risk. The best solutions are achieved when teachers can work together with principals, parents, and community members that understand the unique issues we face. This initiative is a distraction from real solutions. It does nothing to support great teachers and great schools, and I am appalled that up to 11 million dollars is being spent on a campaign to pass a terrible law rather than on the solutions that community members actually want, like books and science labs for students.

Please, please help us to defeat this initiative so that we can refocus our energy, time, and resources on real, collaborative solutions for our students.

(Jessica Tang is a teacher at the Young Achievers School.)

TEACH, Teachers Are Talking, Is the Nation Listening? has received the Indie Spec Best Cinematography Award from the Boston International Film Festival. The winning films were announced at the closing ceremony of the 2012 festival at the AMC Loewes Theater, Boston Common, on Sunday, April 22, 2012. TEACH was screened at the festival on Monday, April 16 before a very large and enthusiastic audience. The screening was followed by a spirited Q and A discussion. Many additional screenings are being planned for the Boston area and in cities all across the country. Please visit the Teach documentary website for details: http://www.teachdocumentary.com

TEACH Screenings

Please contact us to set up a screening of TEACH. There are many screenings scheduled or being planned in this area and around the country in such cities as Detroit, Denver, Cities in Florida, Eugene, Oregon, multiple ones around Seattle, multiple ones in New Jersey, New York, multiple screenings in California, multiple colleges and universities, and others. We have also had very successful TEACH “Coffee” screenings similar to the political candidate coffees in previous political campaigns. The important messages of TEACH need to be heard and seen by as many people as possible considering the barrage of attacks and the misinformation that is being spread by conservative millionaires and their think tanks and foundations.

To set up a screening for your organization, union, or a TEACH Coffee Screening, please call or email us:

Marc: 617-699-0349  Bob: 617-699-6093 or email: filminfo@teachdocumentary.com

Visit the Teach documentary website and image gallery and find out how you can help spread the message of TEACH.

Boston Teachers Union School

1st Annual Community Event

$25 Per ticket

When: Saturday
June 9, 2012

Place: BTU Hall
180 Mount Vernon St.
Boston, MA

Time: 7:00 PM

Comedy

Cash Bar

Dancing

Hors d' oeuvres

Silent Auction

Purchase an event ticket today @
http://btucommunityevent.eventbrite.com

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Anne Moseirs @ amoneasir@gmail.com or
Beth Gramann at: 617-513-3688

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Baldwin Early Learning Center

The Baldwin ELC is a small school in Brighton with an ethnically diverse population of students in K0 through grade 1. It is an inclusive school with 2-3 adults in every classroom, assuring attention to individual student needs. According to principal Graciela Hopkins, this has been attained through the flexibility of pilot status, which allows parents and others to be “classroom assistants”. The school is open from 7:30AM to 4:45PM, providing surround care to the children. Instead of the usual “P+D” periods, every teacher has one and a half hours “free” in the middle of the day.

The sun was streaming in through large windows and students were working in a variety of learning centers in each classroom. In one room a group of students were investigating the relative speed of two different liquids (as they flowed down a clear piece of plastic) while others were making dolls, building model boats, or creating collages. During a literacy period, about half the class was practicing forming letters while others met in guided reading groups. Math activities in another room included a cash register where the number of coins matched the number of items “purchased” and blocks for making towers of a height determined by the role of giant dice. K1 students were using eye droppers to discover what happens when different colors are mixed.

After a class meeting, one little boy was selecting the order in which his classmates got to choose their center activity. It was great to see young children having this kind of responsibility! I especially liked the “Family Information Boards” outside many classrooms full of weekly newsletters, snack schedules, supplies needed, words of the week, birthdays, thank yous, books read, calendars, and activities to do at home.

I have to admit that I have always hated taking students in lines through school hallways, although I appreciate the need for quiet. This poem was taped to a classroom door with photo illustrations of a student showing each behavior:

My hands are to my side,
I’m standing very tall.
I’m looking quietly straight ahead,
I’m ready for the hall.

Having watched the antics of many older students as they change classes, I wonder what it would be like to have middle schoolers repeat this little poem while lining up! It also occurs to me that if students were given time to move and socialize during their classes, they might have less need to disturb others while moving through hallways. What do you think?

We were in gym class on the back playground. We were jumping in and out of hoops. We've learned to jump sideways and backwards.

– Jordan Chhay & Jordan Smith, Grade 1

We were playing a math game: throw the dice and add the numbers, make a tower with that many cubes, then knock it down! We're also learning about shapes like circles and triangles and hexagons and more!

– Sarin Chaimattayopomp & Ariane Amada, K1

We wereRES”.

– Luca Orlandi, Grade 1

I was painting the mouth of a miniature ice skater just like me. I made her body by putting “model magic” over a pipe cleaner and bead shape, then painting it my skin tone. This year in art I’ve learned how to use different materials and to be more creative.

– Abby Butts, Grade 1

We were choosing what book we were going to read. We're learning how to read and do stuff like adding and subtraction.

– Avery Williams & Darwin Green, K1

I was making a boat with Mr. Damon. I learned how to make it and it floated!

– Naila Hernandez, K1

We were reading with Ms. Thu. We're reading a lot of books about Rosie and Bella, two friendly dogs. We are learning lots of new words every day!

– Jack Quinn & Vita Babicheva, K2

We were in gym class on the back playground. We were jumping in and out of hoops. We've learned to jump sideways and backwards.

– Jordan Chhay & Jordan Smith, Grade 1

I was making Qs and Gs. I am learning my letters this year.

– Djaza Teixera, K2

I was making Os and Gs. I am learning my letters this year.

– Avery Williams & Darwin Green, K1

We were in gym class on the back playground. We were jumping in and out of hoops. We've learned to jump sideways and backwards.

– Jordan Chhay & Jordan Smith, Grade 1

(Amika Kemmler Ernst is a recently retired BPS New Teacher Developer with extensive experience as a classroom teacher, curriculum developer, and graphic artist. Her “We’re Learning Here” Project features images of everyday learning in our public schools, along with the words of the students pictured.)
Haiti: After the Earthquake by Paul Farmer

On January 10, 2010, a massive earthquake devastated the island of Haiti. Its impact was cataclysmic by any and all definitions of that word. Filled with hundreds of thousands of people in an instant. It tested severely the poor nation’s ability to rebuild its infrastructure most particularly its non-existent public health system, water and sewerage system, and school system.

Dr. Paul Farmer has worked in Haiti for over thirty years with his organization—Partners in Health and its Haitian counterpart, Zanmi Lasante, to bring a measure of hope to the devastation told us this would be one of the most daunting of tasks that could be imagined on this planet. Dr. Farmer, Kolokotrones University Professor at Harvard Medical School and Chair of the Department of Global Health and Social Medicine at Harvard Medical School has written an important and historical book that will be read for several generations in this century and next. It is that timeless. Among the other credentials of this remarkable man are: Chair of the Division of Global Health Equity at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston and most importantly co-founder of Partners in Health. He also serves as UN Deputy Special Envoy for Haiti under President of France, Nicholas Sarkozy who is finally forgiving this “fault” just this year.

Even less well known is the historical role of the United States in Haiti, interfering in the trade policies of the government in Port au Prince so that US sugar interests would profit and Haiti would suffer. Moreover during the years prior to the Civil War the Southern slave owners in America regarded the republic of Haiti as a terrorist haven of free blacks endangering the U.S. Coast. Later, for seventy years—1917 to 1934 the U.S. Marines occupied Port au Prince with the sole purpose of not implementing democracy. They were not helping the baby in the bed for the benefit of U.S. trade interests and Wall Street banks. After 1934 the U.S. installed a puppet government by a succession of incompetent and/or vicious dictators, most notably the Duvaliers—Papa and Baby Doc, who ran a murderous regime policed by the infamous “ton ton macoutes”. The later were nothing but a Henry Kissinger’s cutouts. See Graham Greene’s “The Comedians” for achilling novelization of what it was like circa 1962.

Dr. Farmer’s book is a comprehensive account of the valiant effort post earthquake to slowly and methodically build an infrastructure that was simply nowhere to be found at all. It is the epic story of heroism in that his volunteers worked under terrible conditions (under tents in hot dusty weather) for months with the United States military also involved. What is remarkable is that all development sources recognize the need for infrastructure in Haiti as well as democratic government that meets the public health needs of all of Haiti’s citizens. This book is a fascinating reading for my politicized friends who are lamenting about inaction and reaction throughout the world and most especially in the United States. Partners in Health / Zanmi Lasante have shown the way for idealistic youth as well as old fossils like myself. To coin a cliché, we must walk the walk as we talk. Read the book it will make your life better. And maybe somebody else’s too.

Paul Tenney is a retired teacher.

INFORMATION FOR NEW RETIREES

When you retire, you are no longer a member of the Union because you no longer pay dues. And, you are no longer a member of the Health and Welfare Fund, which means you no longer have dental coverage and eyeglass coverage. If you wish to continue your connection to the union, you can join the Retired Teachers Chapter (RTC). The dues will be taken from your retirement check each month ($5 for teachers, $2.50 for paras).

The RTC offers a dental insurance benefit to its members for a fee each month. Our Dental Plan carriers cover you and your spouse. You can also avail yourself of COBRA coverage through Health and Welfare for 18 months after retiring. For info on COBRA call 1-617-288-0500.

Complete the information below and we will send you the application form.

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| Address |
| City/State/Zip |
| Email |
| Telephone |

Circle your previous position: Teacher Paraprofessional

Send this form to: BTU-RTC, 180 Mount Vernon Street, Dorchester, MA 02125
Scenes from the AFT Massachusetts Statewide Convention

Photos by Michael J. Maguire

A full house of delegates listen to Senatorial Candidate Elizabeth Warren.

Elizabeth Warren with Ryan, Declan and Karen Hocker.

Massachusetts Teacher of the Year Adam Gray, formerly of Monument High School.

Robert Lamothe introduces his award-winning documentary, TEACH.

State Rep. Tackey Chan stops to converse with BTU Community Outreach Organizer Brenda Chaney.

U.S. Senate candidate Elizabeth Warren delivers the keynote address to the AFT Massachusetts statewide convention delegates.

Timo Philip of Brighton High School makes a motion to move the AFT Massachusetts to secret ballot voting. The motion did not pass.