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University of California postdoctoral researchers applaud U.S. House committee hearing on understanding problems in first contract negotiations

Reps. Miller, Lee and Woolsey to attend April 30 session in Berkeley, Calif.

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BERKELEY, Calif. – Six-thousand postdoctoral researchers are applauding the decision of the U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor to hold a public field hearing on “Understanding Problems in First Contract Negotiations: Post-Doctoral Scholar Bargaining at the University of California.”

“The university has dragged this out for far too long,” said Xiaoqing Cao, a cancer researcher from UCLA who now serves on the bargaining committee for Postdoctoral Researchers Organize/UAW (PRO/UAW), the Postdocs’ Union. “We see this hearing as an unprecedented opportunity to shed light on UC’s pattern of stalling and delays that we hope will help us reach an agreement very soon.”

The hearing will be 11 a.m. Friday, April 30, at the Berkeley City College Auditorium, 2050 Center Street, in Berkeley. In addition to Committee Chair George Miller, D-Calif., Reps. Barbara Lee and Lynn Woolsey, also California Democrats, are expected to participate in this unprecedented Congressional look into contract negotiations at UC

Since postdocs formed their own union in November 2008, PRO/UAW and the University have held 56 days of bargaining sessions, but they have yet to reach a tentative agreement.

“Postdocs want a fair first contract now,” said Norval Hickman, a Postdoc who researches tobacco addiction at UC San Francisco. “We started forming our union several years ago because we deserve fair salary increases, improved benefits and real workplace rights. A majority of my co-workers from across the university system have made it clear to the administration over and over again they have to stop stalling.”

In August 2009, 60 percent of Postdocs signed onto an open letter to UC President Mark Yudof urging him to reach an agreement.

In December Postdocs picketed on all 10 UC campuses to protest the university’s attempt to hide behind the state budget crisis by refusing to agree to salary and benefit improvements for Postdocs – whose funding comes mostly from federal grants.

Earlier this year, a majority of Postdocs also signed letters to their congressional representatives asking them to contact Yudof and urge him to reach an agreement. Postdocs also voted by a 92 percent margin to authorize the bargaining committee to call strike if they deem it necessary.

“The fact that this hearing has been scheduled shows that UC has dragged this out too long and needs to reach an agreement now,” said Jim Wells, director of UAW Region 5, which includes California.

“The Postdocs formed their union 18 months ago,” said UAW Vice President James Settles, who directs the union’s Technical, Office and Professional Servicing Department. “U.C. needs to stop giving them the runaround and finish the negotiations.”

For more information, contact: Matthew “Oki” O’Connor, (510) 932-8418

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