

**Message from Neil Gilbert Siegel, IBM Professor of Engineering Management and Professor of Industrial and Systems Engineering and Computer Science Practice with Distinction, as shared with Viterbi Faculty on Wednesday, April 22, 2026**

---

**I oppose this particular union**

I write to you to express my personal opinion regarding the forthcoming USC union election. No one has asked me to do this.

I am, like you, teaching faculty at USC. I am a professor of practice in the school of engineering. I spent many years in the aerospace industry, reaching the rank of vice-president and chief technology officer at a major corporation. After retirement 10 years ago, I came to USC to teach.

I have also long been a professional musician, and have in fact been a member of Local 47, Professional Musicians, AFL CIO, for a long time; I remain a member of that union. My credentials of supporting unionization in situations where it makes sense cannot be disputed.

But I strongly oppose this particular unionization effort. In my view, both the timing and the proposed union partner are wrong.

My experience at USC is that shared governance between faculty and administration works pretty well. Compared to private industry, we are very strongly involved and empowered indeed. I have sat on many committees of non-tenure-track faculty choosing candidates for a position, and also for promotions. Our recommendations always go through. This type of grass-roots governance does not happen in private industry! At USC, we also are allowed to act as managers for our teaching assistants and course producers. In the classroom, in the appointment process, and in the promotion process, we have exactly the same authority within our domain as the tenure-track faculty have in theirs.

I point out that, no matter what the union says, that participation in shared governance will be significantly attenuated if we unionize. I don't know if you have ever worked in a unionized organization; I did for years and years (we had unionized employees at my former company) — the union will insist — no matter what they say while they are trying to get you to vote them in — on putting themselves between us and the administration. We will not be able to talk to the administration AT ALL; everything will all have to go through the union, as a "translator". Based on actual experience, it will be a gigantic step backwards. In the interest of "standardization" and "rules", we will lose much of the flexibility and autonomy that we have now.

Nor, in my view, ought we to believe that having a union would result in significant improvements in salaries and benefits in the near-term; USC is in desperate financial straits. Anyone who tells you otherwise is ignoring the facts. In my opinion, this is not the time.

Even if I thought that we needed to unionize at this time, the United Auto Workers (UAW) – our proposed union – would be the last partner I would select. Look at their track-record: when I got my driver’s license, General Motors alone sold half the cars in the U.S.; today, they sell only about 17%. That is, during my time as a driver, GM has lost 2/3 of its market share. Chrysler and Ford have similar records. Much of that market-share loss is due to bad management at those companies. However, in my opinion the UAW has definitely had a big role in that disaster, too: in my view, they are usually inflexible and rigid; they are too often adversarial. Instead of collaborating with their companies to find a way to compete better, they insisted on remaining adversarial, even while they were helping to “sink the ship”. This is not what we need. I believe that we can do better.

I welcome discussion on this important matter.