

UNION SPOTLIGHT

AFT Washington, AFL-CIO

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October, 2015



2015 Leadership Retreat

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Cover photo:

Photo left-right:

AFT Washington President Karen Strickland, AFT Renton Classified President Janet Watson, AFT Vice President Mary Cathryn Ricker, and AFT Renton Classified boardmembers Beth DeCou and David Hatch.

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Changes at State Fed

We are pleased to announce the hiring of internal organizer, **Richard Burton**. Many of you may already know



Richard Burton

Richard because he worked for AFT Washington as a state political organizer from 2007 through 2011. He left to take a similar position with the Washington State Nurses Association (WSNA), an affiliate of AFT, and he also worked as a project staff organizer for AFT. Richard will primarily help our locals with internal organizing and mobilizing efforts, staff the statewide Contingent Faculty Issues Committee, and coordinate (Un)Popular Economics workshops at our locals.

Another new hire is **Dan Troccoli**, a substitute high school teacher and member of the Seattle Education Association/WEA. He is very active in his union and social justice issues. Dan worked as an internal organizer at AFT



Dan Troccoli

Washington on an interim basis last year while Tracey was on parental leave. He's returned to work for AFT as project staff to organize more professional staff units and build membership among our agency fee payers. He replaces Natalie Sowinski who is pursuing an electrician pre-apprenticeship through ANEW (Apprenticeship and Non-Traditional Employment for Women).

Lastly, AFT National Representative **Mary Jo Shannon** has been assigned to Washington and Alaska to help with agency fee organizing efforts (see article on page 4).



Dan Troccoli

Mary Jo was working for AFT in Texas the last four years on an organizing project with K-12 employees. She is no stranger to AFT Washington, she worked on a project to organize child care through the Washington Educators in Early Learning (WEEL), which was based out of our office.

Tracey Whitten, our internal organizer the last three years, left AFT Washington to work for a start-up IT company. We wish her the best and are currently in the process of hiring her replacement.

*Please welcome
Richard,
Dan,
and Mary Jo!*

If you'd like to go green and get Union Spotlight electronically, please contact Christine Landon, 206-432-8075 or clandon@aftwa.org.

AFT Washington Executive Board

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Board meetings are usually held on the first Saturday of the month except for holidays and summer months. Board members are elected to two-year terms.

AFT Washington represents over 6,500 members in early childhood education, K-12, and higher education in Washington State and is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers, which represents 1.5 million members nationwide.

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Karen Strickland

President's Column

Building Our Power

Let me get to the point. I've written about the attacks coming at unions from all directions. I've shared my perspective: these **threats are opportunities**. We need not fall into the victim role and cry "woe are we" when **we have the most powerful tool at our disposal**. That tool is the shared interests of our membership – our interest in a quality of life that allows us to thrive, not just survive, and a community where all are respected and welcome. These shared interests form the basis for our collective voice and action, a voice we have raised and will amplify. Our collective voice is a mighty source of strength.

So this year, our executive board decided to expand our annual retreat to include teams from each of the locals. We began with WSLC Secretary-Treasurer and AFT Seattle Local 1789 member **Lynne Dodson** and WSLC Political and Strategic Campaign Director **Teresa Mosqueda** talking about the challenges at the state and national levels and the pathways to victory available to us. Then there was time for members from different locals to dissect the idea of and create a picture of what a "Powerful Local" looks like. Finally, we spent the afternoon with teams and staff developing a plan for achieving realistic goals for the year; goals that will translate to increased power.

Sixteen locals participated, examining their locals' needs and strategizing how best to meet them. **Shoreline Community College Local 1950** focused on how to make sure union officers and representatives understand their role and have the support to fulfill them effectively. For **AFT Renton Classified Local 6367**, the focus was engaging more members to take an active role in the union. The fact that they are currently negotiating for salary increases gave them a ripe opportunity to act on their plan right away. Two new members from **Skagit Valley College Local 4985** leaped in with both feet immediately taking the next steps for engaging their contingent faculty. Our two newest locals, **AFT UW English Language Faculty Local 6485** and **AFT Seattle Professional Staff Local 6550**, decided to experiment together with a tool for video meetings called Collaborate, with the goal of making participation in union meetings easier for the membership (recognizing, of course, that nothing beats face-to-face contact for building relationships and solidarity).

Plenty more was tackled that day and people left feeling empowered by their greater understanding and the knowledge that they are not alone, but, rather, are part of a group of AFT Washington members with shared aspirations, challenges, and strengths. They left with at least a start of a plan and the stage set to get busy upon returning to their local.

Take-aways from the event were many. The importance of teams was one, in part because it's all too easy to spend a day talking, thinking, and planning, and then quickly becoming

overwhelmed with the day-to-day demands after returning to work. Local presidents have many other demands on their time. Becoming a more powerful local requires that union leaders and activists "own" responsibility for moving the powerful local effort.

Second, we prioritized commitments and accountability to follow-through by signing a commitment letter between members and me, and participants appreciated this.

Relevant and accessible training was a third take-away. We offer training in a variety of formats and on a range of topics. We are always looking at ways to increase accessibility and address the topics locals need – this is essential to building powerful locals and it will continue.

The state federation and you, the membership, rely on our local leaders. But we all know that a powerful local is the result of the work of many. Something I've said before and which bears repeating is "the power of the movement lives within the people. The power of the people lives within our relationships to one another." With that in mind, I have some suggestions/requests:

- If your local participated in the retreat (the list of participants is below), reach out to one of your officers and learn about the work the team did and how you can get involved.
- If you are a local officer and your local didn't participate, contact me or one of our staff to learn more about it.

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What you need to know about Friedrichs

[revised from original article by Sam Lieberman, Tim Shea, Robert Morgenstern, AFT]

Any union member in this time of constant attacks on working families could understandably be excused for feeling battle weary. Every election, we are told, is the most important election, and every fight is the biggest fight against the longest odds.

It's important, though, to be aware of a U.S. Supreme Court case that may present us with a national challenge and a tremendous opportunity.

In *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*, a group of educators backed by a right-wing group filed a lawsuit that has made its way to the highest court in America. It asks the court to decide whether public sector unions may continue to charge nonmembers a fee equal to the cost of representing them. This fee is called “agency fee” or “fair share.” In states where there is no fair share, the union must sign up everyone as a member—not merely a fair share payer—to keep the union strong.

If the court rules against the union, then our work will become harder. But if we are prepared, our efforts will become stronger.

Why is union power so important? More union power brings more resources for public services—better opportunities for students, safer hospitals and other public facilities, and the best infrastructure available to help our nation thrive in a global economy. When unions are strong, income inequality lessens and we have a larger and more vibrant middle class.

What's behind the case

Let's say public sector workers in a given workplace decide they want to form a union. Once they choose union representation, the union becomes their exclusive representative. In other words, the union is the only organization permitted to represent their interests to their employer. What's more, the union is required by law to represent their interests. This is true even if a worker chooses not to join the union and pay union dues.

The First Amendment gives all of us the right to join or not join any group we want. It is easy to see how this could present a challenge for the union; it has the legal obligation to represent all employees in the bargaining unit, whether or not they join.

To deal with this problem, unions developed the concept of agency fee, also known as fair share—because it's only fair that employees who reap the benefits of a good union contract pay their fair share of the cost of negotiating and administering the rights of employees under that contract (such as grievances, arbitrations, advocating for better wages and working conditions).

The agency fee equals the amount of money needed to represent a member in collective bargaining. Other expenses, such as costs for political activity, are not charged to fair share payers—in other words, these nonmembers only pay for bargaining and administering a contract that covers their wages, hours, and working conditions.

In the 1970s, a group of teachers in Detroit who did not want to join the Detroit Federation of Teachers or pay the agency fee brought a lawsuit, *Abood v. Detroit Board of Education*. They argued that having to pay the fee violated their First Amendment right to associate with whomever they wanted to. The Supreme Court upheld the agency fee, saying it did not violate the First Amendment.

Abood has remained the law of the land since 1977. However, over the past few years, the U.S. Supreme Court has decided two cases calling that law into question.

In 2012, the court held in *Knox v. SEIU* that the First Amendment does not permit a public sector union to impose a special assessment unless a worker opts in. Two years later, in *Harris v. Quinn*, the court said the First Amendment prohibits the collection of agency fees from home healthcare providers, whom the court determined to be “partial” or “quasi” public employees, not full-fledged public employees like those in *Abood*.

Now there's the *Friedrichs* case. The court is being asked to answer two questions: (1) whether public sector agency fee arrangements should be invalidated under the First Amendment; and (2) whether it violates the First Amendment to require public employees to opt out of paying full dues (as they must do now) rather than having to opt in. This would **force unions to sign up members every year**.

We anticipate a court decision next June.

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Another Bad Idea from Tim Eyman

By Kristin Elia, State Affiliate Political Organizer

It's an election year and just like clockwork initiative-backer Tim Eyman has managed to put another bad idea on our ballots this November.

Initiative 1366 (I-1366) would cut the state sales tax – the largest, single source of revenue in Washington – from 6.5% to 5.5%, resulting in a loss of over \$8 billion over the next six years. The

Legislature would have to approve a constitutional amendment to require a two-thirds, or supermajority, vote in order to raise revenue by April 2016.

"... beyond the measure's sound bites and sloganeering, they'll find a toxic, complex proposal that would make the Legislature even more dysfunctional." – Seattle Times Editorial, 10/3/15

I-1366 holds our state hostage and is a false choice that takes Washington backwards. While it

sounds good to require a supermajority vote to raise taxes, the State Supreme Court ruled in 2013 that requiring such a vote is a violation of our constitution. Therefore, in order to avoid the potential \$8 billion hole in our budget, the Legislature will have to amend the constitution to do something that has already been ruled

unconstitutional. This **flawed initiative** is also likely to be found unconstitutional, but while we wait for that ruling our Legislature will be trying to diffuse a time-bomb.

If passed, I-1366 will **cause more partisan gridlock in Olympia** and lead to **devastating cuts to education and essential services** at a time when we are already up against a major budget crisis with the McCleary decision. Our lawmakers will be prevented from working together to move Washington forward. Even the Seattle Times recommends a 'no' vote on I-1366 stating that "beyond the measure's sound bites and sloganeering, they'll find a **toxic, complex proposal** that would make the Legislature even more dysfunctional."

This is a lose-lose initiative. AFT Washington encourages you to vote **NO on I-1366 this November.** Let's tell Tim Eyman he can keep his bad ideas to himself.

New position on AFT Washington Executive Board



Michael Boggess testifies for HB 1348

At our convention in May, delegates approved a new position on the executive board, Vice President of Contingent Faculty. Pierce College faculty member **Michael Boggess** has accepted the position until we elect officers in 2017.

Michael serves on the executive board of his local and is the chair of the Contingent Faculty Issues Committee.

If you are interested in working with Michael on Contingent Faculty issues, contact **Richard Burton** at 206-225-0621.

AFT Seattle Professionals Keep On Keeping On



AFT Seattle Professional Staff members Coryl Celene-Martyl (left) and Jayne Strom-Strebe (right) with Mary Cathryn Ricker, AFT Vice President.

Congratulations to AFT Seattle Professional Staff Local 6550 whose members overwhelmingly ratified their new collective bargaining agreement by 105 yes votes to 11 no votes.

According to **Coryl Celene-Martel**, “Organizing our union has given us so many extra opportunities to get to know one another, strengthen our community, and make new friends.”

Besides recognition, their contract gives them a voice in the workplace that has been glaringly absent. They made gains with their new contract like a grievance procedure, one-time allocation for pay equity adjustments, across the board wage increases, and an established Labor-Management Committee.

Of equal importance, the contract lays a solid foundation on which to

build future negotiations.

What's next?

They are now in the midst of a membership drive and will adopt a constitution and bylaws and elect officers.

There's no moss growing under their feet! Solidarity forever!

Equity for Adjuncts Can Be Achievable

Campus Equity Week, running this year from **October 26th – October 30th**, is a time to honor and actively support thousands of adjunct and part-time faculty who **teach more than 50 percent of the classes and make up 66 percent of the teaching faculty** at our higher education institutions.

Building awareness around adjunct faculty issues is happening in many of our affiliated unions where local activists have continued to think of new and different ways to address part-time faculty issues. At the state level, we have a Contingent Faculty Issues Committee chaired by Pierce College faculty member **Michael Boggess** and staffed by **Richard Burton**, AFT Washington Internal Organizer.

Active participation from part-time, adjunct faculty members builds our union by raising important issues

to the local and state levels. As long as this large block of faculty have less pay and job security, and have substandard working conditions, all faculty are worse off, and student learning is threatened.

There is a palpable contradiction in an institution that claims to be concerned about giving all students a chance at a better life while systemically subjugating more than half of its faculty to a worse one. There is strength in numbers! Let's build up a level of leadership and member engagement around part-time faculty and the issues that affect us.

If you are interested in learning more about how to start or continue organizing part-time faculty at your local, please contact **Richard Burton** at 206-225-0621 or rburton@aftwa.org.



Friedrichs

(continued from pg. 4)

Reclaiming the promise

Friedrichs represents a real threat to workers, so we have two choices: We can agonize or we can organize. The AFT already is rising to this challenge, operating as if the justices will issue an unfavorable decision. Our staff are gearing up to work with local leaders to sign up members, especially by bringing nonmembers and agency fee payers on board as members.

At the end of the day, what this really means is yet another attack by those who do not share our vision. We, and our community partners, are in this fight together for worker rights, a strong middle class, and the American dream. We can achieve complete membership in our local unions. And when we do, we'll come out stronger.

For questions or information on how you can help, contact AFT National Representative **Mary Jo Shannon** at mshannon@aft.org.

CALENDAR

Campus Equity Week

October 26-30, 2015

Classified and CTC Councils and Executive Board Meetings

Saturday, Nov. 7, and Saturday, Dec. 5, at the following times:

9 AM – 12 Noon (CTC Council)

10 AM – 12 Noon (Classified Council)

11:30 AM – 3 PM (Executive Board)

Local Executive Board Trainings

Sat., November 14, 9 AM – 11:30 AM, at AFT Washington office

Tues., November 17, 4 PM – 6:30 PM, at AFT Washington office

Classified Professional Development Conference

Sat., March 12, 8:30 AM – 2 PM

Location TBD

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President's Column

(from pg. 3)

- If you aren't a local officer and you're curious about the Powerful Locals Initiative, talk to one of your local officers to learn more and get involved.
- And for everyone, attend your next membership meeting. If one isn't scheduled, ask your local president to schedule one before the end of the year.

I want to extend my deep gratitude to those of you who participated in the retreat – without you, the staff and I cannot effectively meet our responsibility to the membership. With you, we can make an impact and Reclaim the Promise of public education and our democracy.

I also want to extend my appreciation to the AFT Washington staff for leaping into new territory and working with our locals to realize the full potential of our power.

Participating locals included:

- AFT Renton Classified #6367
- AFT Seattle Colleges #1789
- Clover Park Technical College Classified #4789
- United Faculty of Evergreen #6392
- Lake Washington Institute of Technology Faculty #3533
- Lake Washington Federation of College Classified #4787
- Pierce College Federation of Teachers #4821
- Renton Technical College Federation of Teachers #3914
- AFT Washington Retiree Chapter #8045R
- AFT Seattle Professional Staff #6550
- Shoreline Community College Federation of Teachers #1950
- Skagit Valley Federation of Teachers #4985
- South Puget Sound CC Federation of Teachers #4603
- Tacoma Federation of ParaEducators #461
- United Classified Workers Union #4795
- AFT UW English Language Faculty #6486