

# **UNION SPOTLIGHT**

AFT Washington, AFL-CIO

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May, 2019



**Students at Seattle Central College supporting the April walkout, held as part of the [Re]Invest In Our Colleges campaign**

*Photo by Bob Downing*

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## Richard Burton Says Farewell

My former colleague and still-quiete-wonderful person, Mary Jo Shannon, had a great sign on her desk that read, “Never miss an opportunity to shut up!” I’ve often both chuckled and reflected seriously on this prosaic proverb, in the context both of being a union staff person needing to get my own ego out of the way of the needs and views of members, and that of being a person vested with many political and economic privileges. But since I’m leaving, I figured I’d say a few words anyway (!)

A very wise, great, and (relatively) unsung woman leader from our history, Ella Baker, once said: “If you have strong people, you don’t need strong leaders.” When it comes to our efforts in our union locals, I think this is an important point. When we’ve had impressive accomplishments in our locals, I believe it’s been because of the collective, creative, and courageous efforts of union members working together, rather than just one leader (even though we’ve had some very impressive leaders). Perhaps our biggest challenge is finding ways to build inclusive, democratic union structures and communication methods to encourage and allow this to happen.

And, speaking of unsung, this November will mark a key anniversary. November of 2019 will

mark the 20th anniversary of Seattle’s WTO protests. While there have, of course, been changes in the city’s skyline since then (a lot more shiny new buildings!), there are considerably more disturbing continuations and exacerbations of power imbalances and inequities. Our city and our country seem desperately in need of profound change now, perhaps even more than then. As someone who is proud to have been a quasi-humble and enthusiastic participant in those historic events 20 years ago, I hope we continue somehow to find a way to be guided by the ongoing hope and possibility that drove so many into the streets back then.

Trying to find a way both to conclude and shut up simultaneously, I’ll cite the inspiring last words of someone else – those of Julian Bond, reflecting on his experience with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC): “[SNCC] demonstrated that ordinary women and men, young and old, could perform extraordinary tasks. They did then and can do so again.”

I’ll soon be living in the New York borough of Queens. But, despite the long distance, I’ll remain.

*In solidarity,  
~ Richard Burton*

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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 1.6 million members nationwide.

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*Karen Strickland*

## President's Column

# Fighting and winning!

**L**abor and economic policies in the U.S. and globally are more divergent than they have ever been before. Labor seeks to improve the working lives of its members; economic policy is having the effect of concentrating wealth in increasingly fewer hands. But it's no longer an inevitable slide - the labor movement is fighting back and winning!

In the last several months we've seen significant gains at the bargaining table benefitting education workers, students, and communities here in Washington and around the country. AFT Washington members fought for and won double digit raises, in Los Angeles the school board called for a moratorium on the use of public dollars for charter schools as a result of the UTLA strike and in Washington D.C. a grievance on behalf of teachers unfairly fired resulted in a \$5 million settlement. When we fight, we win!

Union membership is growing, both as a result of workers choosing to form new unions and nonmembers becoming members. Part-time and full-time faculty at the University of New Mexico recently voted to form a union, as did charter school education employees in Pittsburgh and graduate students at Brown University (just to mention a few), adding to the 1.7 million AFT members around the country.

In the months since the Supreme Court ruled against fair share, our staff has worked with local leaders and activists to talk to hundreds of former fee payers about the work of their union and the value of joining. People get it - they know that a powerful union translates to a better workplace and stronger communities - and they are signing up to join. On top of that, more and more of our members are becoming activists, and activists are becoming leaders. Lots of members have stepped up to take a more active role in their union - for example, our Issaquah School District nutrition services workers stood firm with their Teamster and SEIU co-workers when a strike was imminent. They were in it together to demand raises. Since the legislative session began January 14th more than 100 of our members in the community and technical colleges have testified at a hearing in Olympia, written their legislators, met with their legislators, attended town halls, and helped steer the [Re]Invest in Our Colleges (ROC) campaign. AFT Seattle Local 1789 voted to walk out on April 16th, calling on the legislature to "ROC or WE WALK!" And we have several new local presidents, treasurers, and local leaders representing their fellow workers in the workplace - our members are seeing the need to get involved and they are following through.

I'm calling out these wins and signs of worker power because the world of work is changing and we need to recognize the role that we can play in influencing what these changes look like and how we, our families and our communities are impacted by them. Change is not new, of course...it is probably the one thing we can most

count on happening (well, that and climate change). But it can both feel and be threatening. Automation does not warm the hearts of those whose jobs are likely to be automated. The gig economy is touted as offering flexibility, autonomy, and freedom, yet we know that Uber drivers don't get healthcare insurance or retirement and often earn less than minimum wage. Services like Upwork or Task Rabbit may offer some advantages for freelancers, but they also encourage competition over stability, and that leads to lower wages and economic instability. Contracting out and misclassification are on the rise and these practices are often motivated by a desire to save money. According to a Bloomberg article from last year, while Alphabet (parent company of Google) reported 89,000 direct employees, an internal source stated that contractors outnumbered direct employees for the first time in the company's history. As I write this, some of our members in the Federation of Head Start Employees, Local 6153, are at risk of losing their jobs as the employer seeks to reduce their expenses by contracting out preschool for lower income children (their claim is that paying for healthcare and increasing the minimum wage to \$13.50 is not affordable...and they may be right, but the solution is to adequately fund childcare rather than seek to pay even less for this important work!

In spite of work-related trends resulting in negative impacts on workers, we can look at recent wins in the legislative/policy arena to understand the labor movement's capacity for improving our work lives. Paid Family and Medical Leave premiums began January 1st

*(continued on pg. 7)*

# Persistence Pays Off!

By Ray Carrillo, Union Organizing Representative

**“W**e finally won our contract with the University of Washington after many months of negotiations, actions, and effort...” - Richard Moore, Co-President AFT Local 6486.

The University of Washington English Language Faculty, Local 6486, secured their contract after protracted bargaining with the university. Members mobilized for various actions like sticker campaigns, leafletting, work-to-rule

actions, letters to the UW President from fellow UW unions and the Presidents of both AFT Washington and the Washington State Labor Council, pickets, and speaking at the Board of Regents meeting to win a fair contract. In January the membership took a vote and by overwhelming majority rejected management’s last offer. The bargaining team went back into bargaining in

February and was able to reach a recommendable tentative agreement. The contract improvements included retroactive wage increases back to September 2018, a bonus for contract ratification, and added an Advanced Lecturer premium in recognition of additional work. The local ratified their contract and are working towards a wage re-opener later this year.



## Welcome New Staff



Bob Downing

Our new Union Organizer Representative! He’s been working for AFT as a Project Staff Organizer since last May, and now he’s accepted a permanent position with AFT Washington. Originally from St. Louis, Missouri, Bob graduated from the University of Missouri-Columbia with a double degree in Spanish Language and English Literature. He taught Spanish as an

adjunct for one year before he left Missouri to work for the United Farm Workers on their campaign to organize strawberry pickers in Watsonville, California. He went on to work for SEIU for 15 years as an organizer and chief negotiator for hospital workers, mainly in western Washington. He lives in south Seattle with his partner Susan, a nurse and union activist at Swedish Medical Center, and his daughter Emma, a Seattle Public Schools student. He is also a classical stage actor who has appeared with the Seattle Shakespeare Company and several other theaters in the region.

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Irene Morrison

AFT’s new Project Staff Organizer, comes from Pierce College, where she is an adjunct composition instructor. Her first local union was UAW 2865, the union of TAs, tutors, and readers in the University at California System, where she was Southern Vice President. Irene has a PhD in English from UC Riverside, and has published parts of her dissertation on post-colonial science fiction in *The South Atlantic Review* and *The Journal of Postcolonial Writing*. She fell in love with the Olympics and never wants to leave Washington.

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# The Changing World of Work

By Courtney Marabetta, Communications Specialist

It's no secret that how Americans work has changed in the last 70 years, from the postwar boom era of the 1950s to the increasingly uncertain world of the gig economy. But the changes we see now are not merely the result of inevitable social changes or the logical outcome of an economy that cycles from boom to bust with disturbing rapidity. Instead, it is possible to look at the historical world of work and identify four trends that have shaped the change in how we work. Changing industries and economies, education, technology, and acquisition of wealth are all factors that echo broadly across trendlines. While these factors don't delve into the more specific experiences of marginalized people, they nonetheless inform the experiences had by all American workers in the last 70 years.

In the 1950s, the world of work was very different from what it is now. For many, that time was a halcyon golden age, of stability – you stayed with an employer, often for a lifetime, and of economic prosperity – the post-World-War-II boom years directly benefited Americans. It was a time when workers showed respect to companies, and the companies that employed workers gave respect back, but not without the help of unions. For one example, the 1942 Stabilization Act, intended to combat inflation by limiting how much money an employer could offer, caused employers to offer benefits such as health insurance to attract top talent. In the 1950s that expanded through the action of unions, who bargained for better benefits for their members and shaped how we think of compensation today.

Economic prosperity wasn't limited to the fact that the American economy was shouldering the load of an industrialized world that was largely rebuilding from World War II's ravages; it was also a

function of employee value. In 1950, McDonalds still had only a single location in California. Barnes & Noble had three locations. Walmart wouldn't exist for twelve more years. The Home Depot was founded in 1978. Office Depot opened in 1986. In 1950, the stores that people shopped at were, generally, single-location stores, owned locally, who had a strong interest in guaranteeing a solid working life to their employees. Even Henry Ford famously made the point that he wanted his workers to be able to buy the cars they made, and he paid them accordingly. That was not a particularly novel view at the time. Employees were valued, and they were paid accordingly.

But the most significant part of the working world in the 1950s was the stability. With expectations of life-long employment, and wages that reflected the general post-war American boom, a worker's options in their personal life were surprisingly wide. The median home value in 1950 was \$7,400, while the median household income was \$2,990. A teacher in California at the time earned more than \$5,200 annually, and the average home in California cost \$12,800 – leading to a mortgage payment of \$59 a month. That's well within the accepted definition of sustainable, that you should pay a third or less of your monthly income for housing.

The modern American economy thrives when its members can afford to buy, but we've hamstrung that ability, between student debt, increasing property values, automation and technology, and many other factors. Obviously, a stable, financially achievable world isn't the one we live in now. So what changed?

It's possible to point the finger at a lot of causes. Jobs have changed – while specific data is hard to come by because

so many job titles that exist now didn't exist 70 years ago and vice versa, it's pretty easy to assert that there are fewer agricultural and manufacturing jobs now that there were in the first half of the 20th century. Likewise, there are more professional and managerial jobs now than there were then. Broadly speaking, the growth of professional and managerial roles accounts for the decline in other categories of employment. And as professions are saturated with available workers, the value of the profession declines, driving down salaries.

A corollary of changing job titles is changing educational requirements, as well. In 1950, about 40 percent of the population of the U.S. had completed high school; by 2015, that number was pushing 90 percent. In 1950, less than 10 percent of the population had completed college, and in 2015, almost 30 percent had done so. As job titles changed away from roles that traditionally had no formal education associated with them, such as manufacturing, employers expected more from their employees. There's a reason we're seeing an increase in the number of American students pursuing masters and doctoral degrees. Those statistics completely leave out apprenticeships, but again, it's about getting an advantage through learning, and employers are aware of it too. They now routinely ask for college degrees for jobs with duties that don't require them, because the degree confers value.

Or we can lay blame on technology. It's definitely the case that since the 1950s the use of technology has skyrocketed. That's what, in many ways, made jobs better: you can remote into a meeting; you can use a database or a search engine rather than having to search through physical files; you can track your

*(Continued on pg. 8)*



## Fighting To [Re]Invest in Our Colleges

By Sandra Toussaint, State Affiliate Political Officer

This legislative session has been a whirlwind of successes and disappointments, but the fight was worth it!

We started the 2019 legislative session with HB 1300, our bill asking the state legislature to increase permanent funding to the Community and Technical Colleges (CTC) by \$500 million per biennium. It's a big ask, but our system has been underfunded for decades. We knew going into this that we'd have to do some negotiations, and a few things would likely be cut. We were of course aiming for serious salary increases and salary enhancements, but we were also trying to improve our institutional support for the students that rely on us as they better their lives. We wanted the money to go towards more counselors, programs enhancing diversity, equity & inclusion (DEI), premium pay for faculty working with incarcerated populations, professional development for all faculty & staff, and converting part-time faculty to full-time. We were trying to make our colleges better, but unfortunately this bill wasn't voted out of the House College & Workforce Development committee.

We also introduced HB 1355, establishing counseling standards and minimum student-to-counselor ratios. This was much more successful! Originally this bill was meant to take effect in time for the fall quarter this year, but after some conversations between us, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, and legislators, we amended it to be more inclusive. The bill

was amended to create a task force to study this issue and make sure that we cover as many bases as possible so we can provide the best possible service to our students. This bill was voted out of the House, the Senate, and has been signed by the Governor! It's officially law! We couldn't have gotten anywhere near this far without the tireless efforts of Earl Martin at Everett, Bernal Baca, our lobbyist, and the many counselors, students, and members who spoke to legislators and worked to make this a reality!

Very late in the session, we introduced HB 2059, our DEI bill. This bill would require each college in the system to set up a DEI office or program (depending on the college's needs), in partnership with each union, administration, and community organizations. Unfortunately, we pulled this together a little too late, and the House College & Workforce Development Committee had other priorities stacked up, so this bill wasn't heard in committee. We'll have another shot next year!

Now the budgets. The Governor published his proposed budget in December of 2018, the House published their proposed budget March 25th, and the Senate published their proposed budget March 29th. Breaking a decade-long tradition, the state legislature completed their joint budget on time! Seriously, the last time the legislature ended on time during a budget year was 2009. This is the fourth time

this has happened since 1981. Kudos to the legislature that we helped get elected!

All in all, the budget looks good for us. It's not quite what we were looking for, as most of the funds are split between the CTCs and the four years, and there's little to no emphasis on raising faculty salaries as a whole, but we did have one significant win. This session saw the Workforce Education Investment Account founded. This is an account solely meant to fund post-secondary education. We get our own source of funds! This is a real win for us because it shows that lawmakers heard us and followed through on making a real investment. The Governor is expected to sign all of these bills, and probably has by the time you read this article! If you want to check out all of the budgets, you should head over to [leap.leg.wa.gov](http://leap.leg.wa.gov), but also keep an eye out for our complete summary of the budget.

We've had quite the session, but our work isn't over (it never is, really). Next, we have to bargain these gains, and we have to elect county and municipal representatives that will support us in our goal of fully funding public education in Washington, from Pre-K through at least a baccalaureate degree. We have to start thinking about next session, when we want to propose our policy pieces to the legislature, too. The ROC doesn't end with the session - we've only just begun to roll.

# County and Municipal Elections Matter

By Sandra Toussaint, State Affiliate Political Officer

County and municipal elections matter. Why do they matter? Specifically, why do they matter to your local? Because school boards determine classified staff workloads and hours; because trustees are appointed by the governor; because housing costs are rising, and state government has been de-funding Community and Technical Colleges (CTC) for decades. County and municipal elections matter, and your local can have a dramatic impact on these elections. That will increase your union's power at the bargaining table, in the Legislature, and in your community.

Getting involved in county and municipal elections does not have to be a daunting task, and it does not need to require a huge commitment on the part of leadership. Many systems are already in place, and all you and your local would need to do is plug into these programs. Does your local pay dues to your Central Labor Council (CLC)? Send your local's delegate to the CLC meetings and influence who

they endorse; use the CLCs candidate questionnaire to help your local decide who you want to place your endorsement behind. Do you not like the CLC's questionnaire? Call or email your Political Organizer, Sandra Toussaint. She will help you write your own questionnaire or change the CLC's until it reflects what you care about.

Getting involved in county and municipal elections takes little effort and has a huge impact. It makes you a major player in politics that directly affect your community, and influences who the state federation supports and endorses! Here's a checklist of things you can do, from little effort to full throttle, to have a say in how your precinct, city, or county is run! You can get the full checklist from Sandra if you email her at [stous-saint@aftwa.org](mailto:stous-saint@aftwa.org).

## Through the Central Labor Councils

- Follow CLC endorsement.
- Utilizing CLC Candidate Questionnaires and Interviews to decide independently.

- Fully participate in the CLC endorsement process, by utilizing your local's delegate.

## Going Independent

Develop your own endorsement process for your local.

1. Create a Political Committee, or Sub-committee of some kind.
2. Determine your endorsement timeline.
3. Create an evaluation method.
4. Send out questionnaires or interview requests.
5. Have your Executive Board vote to endorse, based on the committee's recommendations.
6. Send official request for state endorsement to Sandra Toussaint.

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

## Presidents Column

(from pg. 4)

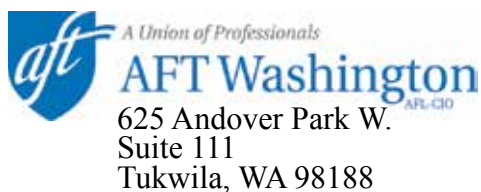
and workers will be able to receive the benefit starting January 1, 2020 – that's three months of paid leave if you become a parent, have a health issue, or have a family member that has a health issue and needs your care.

January 1, 2020 is also when the state minimum wage will go up from its current \$12 per hour to \$13.50. This is because of the partnership between labor and community groups to pass an initiative setting the minimum wage at that level. Right now labor is involved in expanding the group of workers eligible

for overtime. Currently, salaried workers who earn more than \$23,600 (think fast food restaurant manager) aren't eligible for overtime, no matter how many hours they work. That amount hasn't changed since 2004 – it's about time!

I'm skimming over the surface of the challenges we are, and will increasingly, face in the coming years, as well as organized labor's track record in making things better for workers. Over the next year, the *Spotlight* will delve into some of the ways in which the world of work is changing with an eye towards tackling

the challenges presented by those changes as well as seizing the opportunities presented by them. Change is unsettling and often sets the stage for a decline in our individual and collective well-being. We have the ability to steer this ship in the right direction, so long as we all recognize what needs to be done, and then we join together to do it. I urge you to notice changes that are happening in your workplace and join with your fellow union members to influence the direction they take.



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## The Changing World of Work

(from pg. 5)

emails more often and be more responsive to them. And it's also made jobs worse. You can check your email at home; why don't you? And, crucially, your skills may be devalued because why shouldn't an administration with insufficient funds replace registrars with online class registration?

There's a fourth entrant in this race, too. The way people and companies accrue wealth is possibly an even more significant factor in our working lives. It speaks much more to how employers value employees, and much less to how an employee performs their work.

In the 1950s, a typical CEO made 20 times the salary of his average worker. In 2017, an average CEO at a Standard & Poor 500 Index firm made 361 times the average worker. AFL-CIO's Executive Paywatch reports, the average wage,

when adjusted for inflation, has stagnated for over 50 years; while CEOs' average pay has climbed 1000 percent since the 1950s.

It is not in question whether the types of work we do have changed since 1950, or indeed since 1990, nor is it in question that people have lost jobs to automation of all stripes. It's clear that an increased demand for education-as-distinction is becoming education-as-baseline. All those things, and many more that are simply beyond the scope of this article, are components of the changing world of work. But the sheer hoarding of wealth by CEOs, owners, and the one percent represents possibly the biggest change and threat to our working lives of them all. Hoarding money is a tacit recognition that CEOs don't value their employees as much as they value themselves.

Workers suffer under a system where money is valued more highly than work. Workers who become too expensive, through age, education, time in a role, or medical costs, are let go and cheaper workers are brought on. It's easier to train new people than it is to pay fair salaries, for a lot of companies, at least if they want to retain high CEO pay. It's easier to make college professors into adjuncts who might never teach another class in their lives than invest the money and the time into developing someone into a competent, thoughtful professor and giving them tenure. It's just easier to treat workers as disposable before they become expensive. And in many ways, that attitude and the bars that it places across a worker's path is the underlying issue that informs the working experience of most, if not all, Americans.