

UNION SPOTLIGHT

AFT Washington, AFL-CIO

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March, 2021



AFT Washington's staff have become very proficient with Zoom.

Photo by Bob Downing

INSIDE

Welcome Lydia Petroske! 2 (top)

AFT Creates AAPI Task Force 2 (bottom)

President's Column 3

**CPTC Classified Local 4789
Ratifies New Contract 4**

**The Social Contract and
Good Government 5 (top)**

**Vaccination Nation: The
Pandemic's Next Phase 5 (bottom)**

**Big Dreams, Bold Action: The 2021 AFT
Washington Convention 6 (top)**

Join Our Mailing Lists! 6 (bottom)

**The New Deal For Higher
Education Launched 7**

**INSERT: Spotlight On Retirees
In Action (2 sided)**

Welcome Lydia Petroske!

By Cortney Marabetta, Communications Specialist



Lydia Petroske, administrative support specialist

Lydia is excited to be joining the Administrative Support Team. She is a lifelong Washingtonian and grew up in a family of educators, observing the importance of organized labor in Washington's educational system. She is

glad to be coming full circle to support AFT Washington's membership in improving working conditions and

bettering Washington's educational systems. She holds a degree in environmental studies and politics from Whitman College in eastern Washington. She brings previous experience in administrative support from working at the employment law firm and has experience with labor and environmental organizing. Outside the workplace, Lydia enjoys cooking elaborate meals, reading speculative fiction, and exploring Washington's many trails. She is a member of King County Search and Rescue.

AFT Creates AAPI Task Force

By Cortney Marabetta, Communications Specialist

The AFT has created and begun staffing the Asian American & Pacific Islander Task Force (AAPIT) that Randi Weingarten mentioned in her remarks at the 2020 convention. In the section of her speech discussing the crisis of racism America is facing, she said "We are continuing the work of the AFT Latino Task Force, we are creating the AFT Asian and Pacific Islander Task Force. And anti-racism training will be part of all AFT leadership training."

AFT Washington's Vice President for Human Rights, Tracy Lai, has been invited to serve on the task force in recognition of her commitment to advancing issues of importance to the Asian American and Pacific Islander community, commonly abbreviated AAPI, to educators, and to the labor movement. The mission of the task force is to raise the visibility and urgency of issues impacting the AAPI community within the union. The AAPI community

has faced a disproportionate share of racially-motivated attacks since the pandemic began, due to the perception that COVID-19 is a Chinese virus, but the community has long struggled to be fully included in the labor movement as well, and it's great news that the AFT is bringing a more intersectional lens to this task force.

The AAPI community is one of the most diverse and fastest-growing groups in the nation, as it is expected to double to over 47 million members by 2060. The AAPI community is also part of the diverse membership of the AFT and the communities it serves; membership in the task force has been constructed to ensure constituency, geographic, and ethnic diversity.

We congratulate Tracy on being named to the task force, and look forward to learning more as the committee gets under way!

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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 and prospective members in early childhood education, K-12, and higher education in Washington State and is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers, which represents 1.7 million members nationwide.

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Karen Strickland

President's Column

Rebuilding the Social Contract

How is 2021 starting off for you? Does the ground under your feet feel a bit less shaky? Still wondering when the next aftershock might rattle you? Starting to feel hopeful, but a little nervous at all the unknowns in these strangest of times?

2020 was a year of fear, loss, bewilderment, outrage, and trauma. As 2021 launched, though, we celebrated winning two U.S. Senate seats in Georgia, giving us the Senators we need to get the kind of policy and funding that supports education, healthcare, economic stability and so many other needs. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to the Black women in Georgia who have led on voter rights over the last decade, and the voters who showed up at the polls. We can be hopeful about President Biden's selection of an elementary school educator, Miguel Cardona, for Secretary of Education, and his pick of the first union member in almost fifty years, Marty Walsh (Laborers, 223), as Secretary of Labor.

These appointments represent a shift in the policies we can expect to come out of D.C. They represent a renewed commitment to the social contract, or the way we collectively look out for one another. The role of our union and the role of each of us in fulfilling the social contract is significant, and we can count on greater support at the federal level to do our part.

The pandemic has wreaked havoc on so many lives – our members have shifted how they do their jobs on a moment's notice, lost their jobs, gotten sick, cared for sick family members and lost loved ones to COVID-19.

Many people are feeling hopeless, frustrated, angry, and unanchored as we try to find firm footing amidst colliding and conflicting circumstances. Students need to get back to school but workers need to be safe at work. We are dependent on the internet for everything, yet the digital Grand Canyon leaves out the most marginalized people. We need to get at least 75% of people vaccinated to give herd immunity to those who can't be vaccinated, yet just two months into the vaccination launch the systemic racism in healthcare is showing up in the disparate rates of who is getting the shot.

We are in a challenging situation, but not an impossible one. In fact, our members are dealing with the consequences of problems ignored for far too long – breaches of the social contract. Delivering food to kids, repairing HVAC systems in disrepair, finding emergency resources, problem solving with students who don't have the tech required to keep up with coursework – you are filling the breach day in and day out.

In a society as wealthy as ours, people's pain and suffering is the result of wrong priorities. We can point to the distance between the impacts of the breach and those with power as the cause of failure. People who have money or power are often blind to the needs of others. You, though, are on the frontlines, seeing up close and sometimes personally the harm of a weak social contract. By virtue of that placement, you are best

positioned to drive the solutions and policies to address the failures we face. Right now we must demand that our voices be heard and influence both the solutions to the multiple crises we face and the building back better President Biden has promised.

As school re-opening and the vaccination roll-out continues, we must keep asking the tough questions, insisting on high standards and demanding accountability for the safety and well-being of our members and our students.

As systemic racism continues to play out across our institutions, we must become completely intolerant of it and fight for anti-racist solutions.

As we are called upon to do a better job of preparing people for careers and lifelong learning, we must set a high bar for our government's investment in those goals, and the New Deal for Higher Education (See page 7 for more information on this) gets us started on that path.

As we approach herd immunity and a return to normalcy, we must remember who was deemed essential during the pandemic and prioritize those people, working people, in ways that show they – you! - are still essential.

In thinking about the repair and rebuild I am reminded of the Reverend William Barber and other leaders of the Poor People's Campaign, who put it like this:

"If America does not address what's happening with visionary social and economic policy, the health and well-being of the nation is at stake.... What we need is long-term economic policy that

(Continued on pg. 4)

CPTC Classified Local 4789 Ratifies New Contract

By Susan Hoppe, Local President & Irene Morrison, Union Organizing Representative



On December 11th, 2020 President and Negotiations chair Susan Hoppe and Vice-chair Karina Calzada signed Clover Park Technical College (CPTC) Classified Local 4789's new 4-year contract! Local 4789 members voted unanimously and by a supermajority to ratify their Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). It was a long process, but with the support of the members the outcome was a good contract.

The key changes include a 3% across the board wage increase upon ratification as well as 20% raises for temporary workers, and a new level for workers who have maxed out their pay scale to bring their wages in line with the rest of the state. Workers also received an additional day of paid leave and language clarifying disciplinary, reclassification, and leave procedures. In light of COVID, there will also be a reopener for wage negotiations in 2022.

Presidents Message

(from pg. 3)

establishes justice, promotes the general welfare, rejects decades of austerity and builds strong social programs that lift society from below.”

- Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II, Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis, Shailly Gupta Barnes, and Josh Bivens, *“Moral Policy = Good Economics”*

Those last four words are key. It is a call to us – ordinary people, living our

lives, raising our families, doing our jobs, living in our communities – to raise our voices together to define what we need and what we want in our social contract. The pandemic has wreaked havoc on a system that didn't prioritize us. We can't return calmly to normalcy without using the lessons learned as a roadmap to the world we want to live in. It's a world we can make better – we see clearly what's needed, and we can turn that vision into action.

The 2020-2021 AFT Washington Scholarship is Still Fundraising

Not even a pandemic can stop the scholarship, but it still needs funds. If you or your local is interested in donating, contact AFT Washington at aftwashington@aftwa.org to find out how to donate.

The Social Contract and Good Government

By Cortney Marabetta, Communications Specialist

This year in the *Spotlight*, we are examining the role of good government in carrying out the social contract. As the President's Letter discusses, education workers occupy a special place in the social contract. You are the person who sees what your school and your community is experiencing. You are the person who can see the needs and the wants of the students and parents and communities around you, and you are the person who can see the unique ways that schools and colleges can help to close the gaps and ensure that the social contract is met. But the social contract is not only filled by education workers. It's also filled by our collective belief in and commitment to good government.

In discussing the challenges we face, Randi Weingarten wrote, "In a national

town hall last month, President Joe Biden focused on unity, making it clear that Americans need to put partisan politics aside and come together to solve the monumental challenges before us. His American Rescue Plan to stop coronavirus and deal with the pandemic's impact on our nation does just that. And the American people agree.

"According to major polls, the American Rescue Plan has more bipartisan support than virtually anything else has in the last few years. This plan is more than just popular: Biden's American Rescue Plan meets the moment—as COVID-19 is ravaging our families, states and schools.

"Unity is more than just about lawmakers agreeing on a piece of legislation—it's about getting vaccines in arms, safely reopening schools for in-person instruc-

tion, giving every American a chance to survive the crises facing our nation, and preserving critical jobs and services in our states, cities and towns."

Unity is about the social contract and about good government. We all play a part in upholding the social contract in our communities, but it is also an obligation by elected leaders to meet our needs as well. As of this writing, the American Rescue Plan has passed the House – we hope by the time you read this, it has passed the Senate and we are seeing the effects, which will give support to individuals, small businesses, states, and local governments, and increase funding for vaccinations and testing, all things we all know that we need, to fulfill the social contract and create the conditions for all to thrive.

Vaccination Nation: The Pandemic's Next Phase

By AFT Washington staff

It has been one year since communities throughout our state shut down. Schools and colleges shuttered their buildings and education workers shifted to a different way of working. Now we are on the path to herd immunity as roughly 45,000 Washingtonians are vaccinated each day. There is a light at the end of the tunnel, but our challenges haven't ended.

While the vaccine distribution makes in-person school more viable, we still face competing interests, logistical challenges and pre-existing racial and economic inequities as we seek some degree of normalcy. Bringing students back en masse will still require masking, social distancing, good ventilation and sanitation practices, even with a high rate of vaccination. Teachers and staff are intent on

doing everything possible to create the safest workplaces possible, but both workers and parents remain fearful of contracting and spreading COVID-19. At the same time, the urgency of getting kids back in the classroom is heightened as we see the harm resulting from remote learning, including learning loss, food insecurity, and anxiety and other emotional challenges. And there is the urgency created by the unemployment many AFT Washington members and their families have struggled with during the pandemic.

Leaders have been bargaining through the pandemic to increase members' safety and to build an interlocking network of safety measures as we look toward reopening. Bargaining teams have won big victories and kept

people safe, and they will bargain for safe reopenings as well. While the challenges we face are large, the solutions are not unknown. Vigilance, in maintaining the safety practices that have helped us reduce the rate of illness. Leadership, as we communicate to employers and each other about workers' needs. Patience, for those of us who may not receive the vaccine until late spring or summer.

The work of recovery has started and will be ongoing. Vaccinations are increasing; deaths and illnesses are decreasing. The US added more than double the projected jobs back into the economy in February: recovery is arriving. Our recovery will be faster and lead to a new and better "normal" if we learn from our past. To reopen schools

(Continued on pg. 8)

Big Dreams, Bold Action: The 2021 AFT Washington Convention

By AFT Washington staff

The 2021 AFT Washington Convention will be held from May 13th to 16th this year. The convention will be virtual, giving us the chance to do things a little bit differently. The theme for the convention is “Big Dreams, Bold Action”. We’ve seen both in the last two years, with big dreams giving us the power to take bold actions, like working to realize a fully-funded, equitable, supportive education system that meets the needs and challenges of its students. That’s a big dream with a lot of parts to tackle, and members of AFT Washington have taken bold action to realize it. Members have been on the front lines, particularly in the pandemic, and this convention is an opportunity to recognize your big dreams and your bold actions that have helped us envision what recovery should be.

The convention will also feature workshops open to all members to attend, not only the delegates. We’ll be

publicizing details of the schedule as we finalize the events, but do keep an eye out for the workshop opportunities - everyone is welcome to join us!

Along with that, we will be electing Executive Board officers for the 2021-2023 term. The work our union does calls for an engaged and dedicated Executive Board’s guidance, from determining how to build the power of our membership to setting our legislative agenda to improving working conditions for members. We also invite and encourage your local to submit resolutions! And of course we’ll be honoring people who’ve done powerful and important work in this time with the board awards.

Due to the challenges of filling out a physical nomination form when many of our members are working remotely, we have made some changes to the nominations process as well. This year,

there is a new LeaderNet Nomination Form option. If you are interested in running on the 2021-2023 AFT Washington Executive Board ballot, you can find the steps for nomination and an explanation of the nominations process on our website at <http://wa.aft.org> – select “Convention” under “News”. We will still allow nominations from the floor.

Our goal is to keep the convention engaging and refreshing, so we’re structuring it a little differently than we’ve done in the past. We want everyone who attends to be able to focus on all the elements of convention, not just the business. There’ll be some new things we haven’t done before – we’re excited about an option that’ll let you circulate and network during the entertainment! The details of the workshops and other components of the convention are still being worked out right now, but more information is coming very soon.

Join Our Mailing Lists!

By Cortney Marabetta, Communications Specialist

AFT Washington sends out several newsletters that you may not know about. Among our regular publications, we have the AFT Washington *Weekly Update*, which focuses primarily on upcoming events and news of interest to the members. That newsletter goes out every Monday. It’s short, sweet, and to the point. We’ve been able to let people know about some great trainings and events!

The *Weekly Update* is sent to as many members as we can reach, but we are missing emails for a lot of members. If the update sounds like a newsletter you’d be interested in receiving, contact Cortney Marabetta at cmarabetta@

aftwa.org or (206) 499-4826 so she can get your information updated and add you to the *Weekly Update*’s mailing list.

In addition, we also put out the *Legisletter* to keep readers informed about policy, laws, and funding decisions being addressed in Olympia. This newsletter is sent out periodically during the year, primarily during the legislative session and the election. It features updates on the legislative session or election, and focuses on AFT Washington’s efforts at that time, whether they are endorsements or work on advancing our legislative agenda. To sign up for the *Legisletter*, you can visit our website at wa.aft.org.

Click on Actions & Events, then go to Legislation, and the signup form is at the top of the page.

We also have a newsletter for local leaders, the *Pulse* - contact us when officers change so we can make sure to keep your local’s leaders updated. And finally, you can always contact Cortney Marabetta about getting the *Spotlight* electronically - just shoot her an email!



The New Deal for Higher Education Campaign Launched

By AFT Washington staff

On February 10th, the AFT and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) launched the New Deal for Higher Education campaign. This campaign is born out of the years of neglect that led to students and education workers subsidizing the true cost of essential post-high school opportunities as the value of higher ed has been derided. Campaign leaders call for the common good to be prioritized, stating “Expertise and critical thinking are under attack, and our society suffers as a result. We need to reaffirm the role that higher education plays in our society. We must stand up for a just, inclusive system of higher education, one that can help transform our society. We need a new deal for higher education.”

The target of the campaign is the federal Higher Education Act, which has not been reauthorized since 2008. We hear little about this Act so forgive yourself if you know nothing about it. Its focus has been on students – financial aid, Title IX protections, etc. – but we have an opportunity with the Biden administration to win a bolder federal commitment to higher education.

The campaign’s policy plan states “A true New Deal for Higher Education will reauthorize the Higher Education Act and create other federal policies that establish dedicated public funding streams and hold administrations accountable for how those monies are spent. This campaign will advocate for:

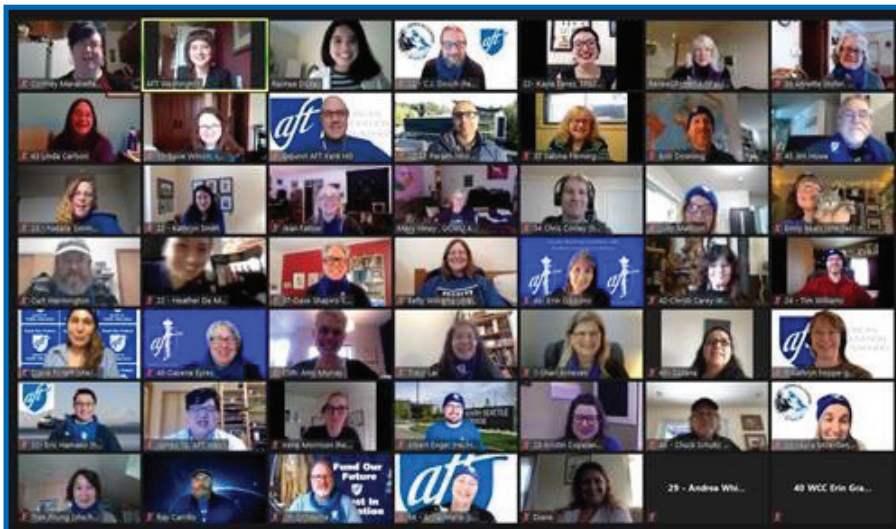
- prioritizing teaching, research, and supporting student success;
- allowing all students to access higher education regardless of their ability to pay;
- ensuring job security, equitable pay, professional voice, and sustainable careers for all faculty and staff;
- creating academic environments free from racism, sexism, and other bigotries that prevent learning, degrade research, and perpetuate inequality; and
- canceling student debt for borrowers who have unjustly shouldered the burden of financing higher education the last forty years.”

It’s time we become intolerant of the neglect of higher education and amplify

the voices of educators in building the solutions to fully address the needs of students and workers. With 70% of jobs requiring post-high school education, we can no longer act as if higher education is discretionary. It is essential to the common good. It must be treated as such.

As with most things, it won’t happen without our voices joining our colleagues throughout the country demanding it. You can sign on at the New Deal For Higher Education website, begin the conversations about the possibilities with your union siblings, and check out the Campus Toolkit on their site to plug into the campaign. This is a campaign we’ll be following closely, given its benefit to both education workers and students. You can read periodic updates in the *Legisletter*. If you’re not subscribed to that newsletter and want to know more, check out the article on page 6 of this issue of the *Spotlight*.

We are also continuing our work in the PreK-12-focused Fund Our Future campaign - we’ll have an update on that work in the next issue, as it’s been a while since we talked about AFT’s and our efforts in that campaign.



Lobby Day 2021 Was A Little Different and A Lot Of Fun

(Left) photo by Carolyn Brotherton

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Pandemic's Next Phase

(from pg. 5)

and colleges safely, we can draw from the experience of those who have been open and do what has worked. We can follow the lesson of the Great Recession and invest our way out of the recession. The American Rescue Plan invests significantly in education, local, state and tribal governments, individuals, families,

and businesses.

The development of the COVID-19 vaccine is an incredible accomplishment and a demonstration of the ability to achieve great things when we decide they matter. That may be the most powerful lesson of all, and one we should

put to work as we tackle long-standing problems made stark in this pandemic – the need for universal healthcare, systemic racism, disinvestment in the public good and more. Let's set our sights high and build back better.

Convention is coming!

Join us May 13th through 16th for the 2021 AFT Washington convention. Details inside, and more information to come soon!

