

UNION SPOTLIGHT

AFT Washington, AFL-CIO

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June 2023



UCWU Northshore members Kristine Bengochea, Helen Margetan, Carla Powell, and Mary Ege, with AFT Washington staffers Javier Cortez and Enrie Marusya (not pictured) are starting bargaining off strong with a petition to the boss.

Photo by Enrie Marusya

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What Are Constituency Groups?

By Cortney Marabetta, Communications Specialist

We often speak of ways to grow the relationships locals (and members) have with the larger labor community. There are many organizations that aren't directly unions that are part of the broader labor movement; one such is constituency groups.

The AFL-CIO defines a constituency group as groups that "address the challenges that workers from diverse backgrounds face. These groups reach out to the communities they serve, build solidarity, help out with organizing efforts, and ensure full participation in our movement." AFT Washington has worked with all of the Washington state chapters, so the names may be familiar to you.

A. Philip Randolph Institute: APRI is an alliance between labor and the civil rights movement. Today, it fights for racial equality and economic justice.

Asian Pacific American Labor

Alliance: APALA is the nation's first national organization of Asian American and Pacific Islander workers. It focused on advancing worker, immigrant, and civil rights.

Washington Alliance for Retired

Americans: WSARA's mission is to ensure social and economic justice and full civil rights for all citizens so they may enjoy lives of dignity, fulfillment, and security.

Coalition of Black Trade Unionists:

CBTU is an independent voice for Black workers in the labor movement.

Coalition of Labor Union Women:

CLUW unifies union women to face shared concerns and takes action on issues important to women workers.

Labor Council for Latin American

Advancement: LCLAA represents 2 million Latinx workers. The council organizes working people to protect the rights of, and expand the influence of Latinx people.

Puget Sound Advocates For

Retirement Action: PSARA works across generations for social justice, economic security, dignity, and a healthy planet for all of us.

Pride At Work: Pride At Work brings together the labor movement and the LGBTQ community in pursuit of social and economic justice.

Washington Young Emerging Labor

Leaders: YELL helps young union members learn how to navigate the union movement, gain leadership skills, get to know other union members, and build and maintain a strong labor movement.

If you are interested in getting involved we are offering 2 scholarships for each group; please contact aftwashington@aftwa.org to learn more.

AFT Washington Executive Board

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David Ortiz

Vice President At-Large Pos. 2

Vacant

Vice President At-Large Pos. 3

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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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And That's A Wrap! The Legislative Session Is In The Books

By Cortney Marabetta,
Communications Specialist

This year's legislative session was challenging from the very start. We knew that the state had the opportunity to make serious investments and that there were a lot of competing priorities. On top of that, there was some signaling of reticence on the part of the legislature to

budget for the kind of sweeping changes we need. That made our significant wins at the end of the session all the sweeter!

During the entire session – starting even before it – AFT Washington members

(Continued on pg. 4)



Karen Strickland

President's Column

We just wrapped up our 83rd convention, providing us with the chance to connect, acknowledge the work of locals, members and community partners, set a course for the next couple of years and elect our executive board. Our keynote conversation with Washington State Labor Council president April Sims and AFT Secretary-Treasurer Fed Ingram was provocative, entertaining and inspiring as they explored the meaning of our theme – The Future is Union Made: We Are The Union! Much of the discussion revolved around *who* is the union, and *what* we want the future to be. These are two leaders who know the task at hand is a big one, but who are undaunted and committed to the win!

Now I want to focus on *how* we make the future we want to live in. Many of our members don't know they're part of AFT. They may not know who their local president is, and even if they *want* to get involved, they may not feel like they belong. The interdependent relationship between locals and AFT Washington is unfamiliar to many, who may not realize how much stronger we are when we work together. A recent example of maximizing the strength of this relationship comes from our Federation of Head Start Employees, local 6153.

FHSE's members are incredibly dedicated early learning educators working with children and families who face big struggles. Their wages were so abysmally low that when the state's minimum wage law was passed, their wage schedule had to increase to meet the bare minimum of \$11/hour!

In 2021, the leaders and AFT Washington staff began prepping for negotiations with a membership drive, activating and engaging membership. During bargaining, the employer noted that an unfunded healthcare mandate was costing the district a million dollars a year. Our team suggested we collaborate to secure funding from the state in the upcoming legislative session. This gave the boss the chance to follow through on their claims of concern for the workforce, and the partnership gave us leverage in our legislative advocacy.

Our lobbyist worked closely with the employer's lobbyist to get our members in front of legislators to share their stories and demonstrate the vital importance of their work and the need for fair compensation. Their effort bore fruit—the Legislature provided the funding and the team returned to the bargaining table with renewed strength.

Over the course of bargaining, FHSE won significant wage increases - many members now earn well over \$20 per hour. For workers that started out making minimum wage all these improvements meant a 50% increase! Other gains were won, too, including a higher wage for bilingual employees and more staff in the classroom – both producing tangible benefits and a demonstration of greater respect for the value these workers bring to their jobs.

The Head Start story is remarkable for a number of reasons, one being that we were in solidarity with the boss...

not a common experience! Another is that the experience of working with the administration for mutual benefit gave our members the skills and experience to persuasively make their case for the value of their work, and they immediately showed it through the gains they won in the contract.

Many locals and members are familiar with working side by side with workers in other unions but how often do you come together as union members to make improvements? Our three locals at Clover Park Tech College did so, forming Clover Park United along with their IUOE siblings. Their solidarity paid off in bargaining and in showing the employer they could not divide and conquer! When we talk about *how* to build the future, intra-local and inter-union relationships are key.

Building relationships in community is equally important. Looking outside your local and the locals at your campus, there are other powerful options, such as central labor councils and constituency groups.

Central Labor Councils are another way to get to know members from other unions and be "in the know" with what's going on. These are part of organized labor's governance structure and your local is entitled to send delegates to monthly meetings. Active involvement in the CLC with workers from all types of unions helps us strategize and problem solve around the commonalities we share, and call on one another when we need to exert pressure on the boss.

The AFL-CIO constituency groups play an essential role within labor, providing a space for union members from historically marginalized groups to share their struggles, celebrate their victories, problem solve and build solidarity. Invaluably, they instigate movement within organized labor to become more

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Walla Walla Community College Pro Staff Win Certification!



Photo credit Kerri Finkbeiner

By Jacqui Cain, Project Organizer

The professional exempt staff at Walla Walla have organized their union with AFT! The Public Employees Relations Commission certified the new bargaining unit, which includes a wide variety of workers such as Advisors, Coordinators, Specialists, and even Directors and Assistant Directors, earlier this month. Even with nine positions requiring closer examination, they had a strong showing with almost 70% voting in favor of unionization.

Lead organizer Joshua Slepkin said, "We've grown disconnected and felt

ignored or disrespected for far longer than COVID can be blamed. Working to build this union has brought us together, reminding me, at least, of why we care about education in the first place: we build strong communities.

The new AFT unit will be the first AFT local at Walla Walla. AFT staff will be working with them closely as they move forward in completing their constitution and bylaws and prepare to bargain their first contract.

Due to the strong growth in professional exempt staff organizing interest and the recognition of unique challenges that face professional exempt staff, AFT Washington is forming a Pro Staff Council. The members have been meeting to discuss issues such as CTCLink, inclusion in professional staff bargaining units, and overtime eligibility issues. If you are interested in learning more, please contact Ray Carrillo at rcarrillo@aftwa.org.

Powerful Locals Is Coming! August 3-5, 2023

Have you ever wondered how to build strong leadership teams? Want to learn contract bargaining strategies that get wins? Powerful Locals is the place for you!

Register on our website

<https://www.aftwa.org>

And That's a Wrap!

(from pg. 2)

took action – a lot of action. We sent cookies and letters to legislators, had a presence at district town halls, and we were visible on campus during both Lobby Day and the Day of Action rallies and walkouts in April. Lobby Day was one of the largest in over a decade. And we didn't stop there. Members sent letters and postcards and signed more petitions, targeting committee members and budget writers.

Because of members showing up, sharing your stories, raising your voices, being present, all that effort paid off, with legislation and in the budget.

Working in coalition with Communities for Our Colleges, we were able to make the case for benefit hubs and expansion of childcare accessibility to un-

Key Investments

- Full funding for the I-732 COLA at 8.9% and 5.87% for CTC faculty and technical college classified staff.
- COLAs of 4% and 3% for CTC professional staff and four-year college and university faculty.
- Definition of part-time/adjunct pay equity as at least 85% and directive to the SBCTC to develop a plan to achieve pay equity by.

documented students. In that coalition, our members have materially lowered the barriers to education for Washington state students and started laying the groundwork for cost-free college in Washington state.

All in all, we built a great foundation for the Bridge to the Future in this session, and we are looking forward to adding onto it in the next session.

The Changing Face of Work, and Our Movement

By Adair Dammann, Director of the Washington State Labor Education and Research Center

2022 brought thrilling renewed energy to our labor movement: a generational change in leadership of the AFL-CIO nationally and in our state; a wave of organizing among young workers in unexpected industries; militant bargaining and long-overdue wage gains throughout the economy. Numbers confirm the story: A Gallup poll confirmed that Americans' approval of unions has surged from a low of 48% during the 2009 recession to 71% last year -- the highest since 1965. The NLRB reported a 53% increase in union organizing petitions for the year ending September 2022, with workers winning fully 71% of their union elections. And workers won: 2022 bargaining brought workers their highest average pay increases since the 1980's.

The photos show us yet more: young rank and file organizers at Starbucks, REI, Trader Joe's; the BIPOC leadership among the triumphant workers at Amazon's Staten Island warehouse; the women's professional soccer unionists who scored an unprecedented equal pay victory; the Black women wielding the gavel at labor federations in Washington and in Georgia.

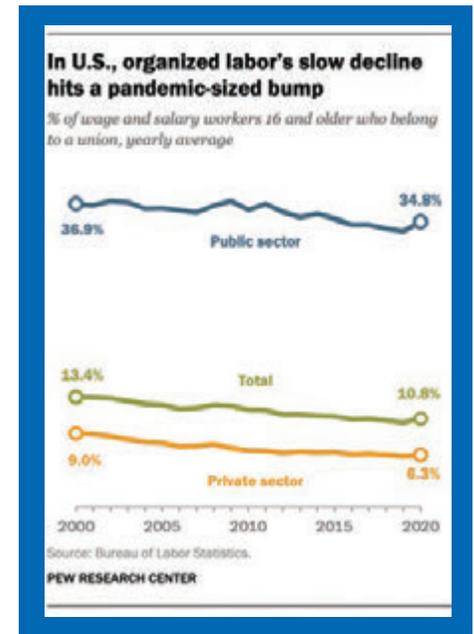
This renewed activism raises the prospect not only of new membership growth, but a changing face for labor as well. The Bureau of Labor Statistics confirms that union membership nationwide grew by 273,000 last year, the first overall increase in union membership since 2017, and the third largest since the mid 80s. But skeptics report a paradox: despite this numeric growth, the overall rate of unionization continued its slow decades-long decline, falling to an all-time low of 10.1% in 2022, (down from 10.3% in 2021). How do we reconcile this seemingly contradictory data?

Job loss and job growth through the pandemic:

Year-to-year data comparisons for the last three years are deeply skewed by the economic chaos wrought by the Covid pandemic. In the spring of 2020, millions of American workers experienced layoffs, furloughs, and unemployment; 9.6 million jobs were lost nationwide that year. The pandemic's economic impact on working families was massive yet distributed unevenly. The WA Labor Education and Research Center showed through a series of special reports that employment in some occupations and demographic groups was close to stable, while many workers – especially low wage, BIPOC, and women workers -- faced unemployment, underemployment, or simply dropped out of the workforce all together. Government employees, the most highly unionized workforce in the country, remained at near-full employment while other sectors churned. Unionized “essential” workers in healthcare and retail, as well as construction, transport, utilities, and transportation remained on the job, fighting for health and safety protection and hazard pay. Even in industries suffering severe job loss, unionized workers weathered the crisis with job protections and stability other workers lacked. Union-negotiated furloughs, Covid leave policies and hybrid work opportunities meant that union members often appeared in government data as employed union members rather than among the recently unemployed.

Against the national loss of millions of jobs, reported union membership dropped by only 300,000. The relative stability of union employment through the 2020 economic crisis therefore led to an uptick in unionization rates. The chart

below demonstrates this trend, and the influence of public sector workers on the data.



In 2022, public health emergency measures ended, stimulus dollars flowed, and unemployment dropped to 3.7%; however, the recovery, like the shutdown, landed unevenly. Recent employment growth has been strongest among workers most deeply impacted by the crisis, a partial rebound in status for vulnerable workers. Union membership rates edged downwards in the “post pandemic” recovery because of the employment surge in more volatile corners of the workforce; the number of union jobs grew, but not as fast as the workforce.

Differentials in job growth between sectors also contribute to a shift in the demographic makeup of the workforce. For instance, employment of Black men, who suffered high and disproportionate unemployment throughout the pandemic, grew 13% in the 2022 rebound. White

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Changing Face of Work

(from pg. 5)

men, whose employment was more stable through the crisis, experienced only 3% job growth last year. This race-linked differential in return to the active workforce shows up within the ranks of union workers as well; employment growth among Black workers amplified the existing higher unionization rates of Black workers. As the Economic Policy Institute reports:

The entire increase in unionization in 2022 was among workers of color—workers of color saw an increase of 231,000, while white workers saw a decrease of 31,000. Of all major racial and ethnic groups, Black workers continue to have the highest unionization rates, at 12.8%. This compares with 11.2% for white workers, 10.0% for Latinx workers, and 9.2% for Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) workers.

The gender gap in unionization is small—0.6 percentage points—and held steady in 2022. The unionization rate for men is 11.6% and the unionization rate for women is 11.0%.

Looking ahead: how will current trends impact future union growth?

Union membership grows and changes as our current bargaining units expand, and as new workplaces organize. As our community emerged from the pandemic, the WA Labor Center researched how the workforce upheaval of the last three years, plus the massive federal stimulus and infrastructure investments would affect union jobs and union membership in King County and Washington State. Future growth will be strongest in industries not yet well unionized: Information services (4%), especially the tech and professional positions (2.9%). In partially unionized sectors, annual job growth will be most robust

in retail (2.5%), education (2.5%) and health care (2.1%); with more moderate expansion in transportation, warehouse, and construction. These sectors are crucial to unionize and support in order to see increased economic and political power for workers.

Who is organizing, and why?

The “why” is the easy part: Workers are angry and frustrated with:

- A broken economy in which the rich get richer (and work remotely) while gig workers juggle part time jobs and Covid risks.
- Stark race- and gender-linked differentials in Covid-era unemployment, as well as in Covid exposure, illness, and death.
- Inflation driven by federal monetary policy aimed at “putting the brakes on” rapid economic recovery.

With the return to an historically low unemployment, frustrated workers hold increased economic power, which they have demonstrated in two ways. Many quit and parlayed a resignation into a better job: more than a third of US adults changed jobs in the two years ending September 2022, heavily the younger and lower income workers. Other workers took a stand and organized: especially younger, lower wage workers. Here in Washington, more than 15,000 workers have organized new unions in the last three years – most in the growth sectors of education, healthcare and retail. Far and away Washington’s biggest union win: the 3000 newly organized student employees of the UW and Central Washington University who united under UAW.

Possibly the most high-profile unionization efforts reflect the trend

to organize: Starbucks and Amazon. Starbucks workers accounted for one third of the NLRB elections conducted in 2022. Workers in 308 stores, covering 7800 workers in cities and towns across the country, have voted to unionize. The Amazon Labor Union won the single largest NLRB election in recent years, uniting 8325 workers at the Staten Island warehouse. In pictures, they look like what we expect the new labor resurgence to look like: disproportionately young and disproportionately non-white. They look exactly like the people who have been the most disenfranchised historically, joining and forming unions because labor has demonstrated its benefit throughout the pandemic. While highly visible in their election victories, these workers face long battles for good contracts. They have shown us how fiercely corporate leaders will fight unions in not-yet-organized sectors.

Starbucks and Amazon workers on their own won’t create a labor resurgence. However, they’ve inspired millions of workers like them, including within our own ranks. The media focus on their efforts has already borne fruit: it has shown a new generation of workers that yes, you too can unionize, and build a union that fights for workers like you. We owe all of the young organizers – including our siblings in higher education, the UAW student workers – for the energy they bring, and for pointing to the source for a new and energized labor movement: younger, more racially- and gender-diverse workers, in part-time, lower-wage, often precarious positions. It is up to labor activists everywhere to help ensure our own unions welcome and support these workers, and that we live up to the challenge of transforming their work lives.

Highlights From The Convention

By Cortney Marabetta, Communications Specialist

Last month, AFT Washington members came together to do the important work of passing resolutions, considering amendments, electing officers, and also the rejuvenating work of spending time in community. Our Friday event, held at Renton Technical College and catered by students in their Culinary program (with wine from South Seattle College's wine academy and beer from Skagit Valley College's Craft Brewing program) was a fantastic reminder of the joy and power of unionism. Our keynote conversation with Fedrick Ingram, Secretary-Treasurer of AFT, and April Sims, President of the Washington State Labor Council, was electrifying: you could feel the energy as they spoke to the vision of a union-made future they are working to create. You can see the recording on our website.

The delegation passed six resolutions, ranging from deepening our relationships

with tribal government leaders to engaging more of our retiree members to launching a Respect campaign with Classified staff locals. We also continued our effort to make our per capita system (the revenue we collect from locals) more fair and sustainable. We presented our board awards with four human rights awards, four Troublemaker awards and one Getting It Done award – congratulations and thank you to our members and community partner who have gone the extra mile to make our world a more just one.

And finally, the new officers were elected and sworn in. We had a strong turnout for nominations from the floor as well as a suite of candidates nominated prior to the start of convention.

We launched a new scholarship fundraiser, Get On Your Bike And Ride!,

this year and seven members clocked miles in the month of April, raising over \$5000! A flurry of donations from locals came in as convention was wrapping up on Saturday afternoon, and when the dust settled, we surpassed \$6000! With \$3000 from Barnard, Iglitzin and Lavitt, our partner in the scholarship program, we will be able to offer six \$1500 scholarships for the next school year! Big thanks to everyone who donated and everyone who pedaled for dollars: Nina Benedetti from AFT Everett Higher Ed Local 1873; Katy Dichter and Tracy Lai from AFT Seattle Local 1789; David Shapiro from Cascadia College Local 6191; David Fox from Lake Washington Faculty Local 3533; Stan Shikuma of the Washington State Nurses Association; and President Karen Strickland. Collectively they rode about 1000 miles on 71 rides!

Thank You, Outgoing Board Members!

By Karen Strickland, President

Delegates at our 2023 convention elected new board members who will take office on July 15th. As we welcome our new leadership, we want to acknowledge our outgoing board members and thank them for representing you, our members, and guiding our union to grow stronger every year.

Tracy Lai, Vice President for Human Rights, has served since 2013. She has been a creative and unrelenting advocate for human rights for all and consistently elevated the importance of building relationships to our work as a union. Tracy has opened many doors to members who don't see themselves represented in the union and has been a mentor and role model to many.

Richard Moore, Vice President At Large, has served since 2015, when he joined the board soon after forming a new local of the UW English Language Faculty. His perspective from a small local in a large employer has been an important one as we have developed strategy. He has modeled the values of cross-union relationships and fighting for workers in the face of great obstacles.

Tran Phung, Vice President for Legal Defense, has served since 2017 and has played an important role in building the connection between her local, Whatcom Community College Federation of Teachers Local 3191 and our state federation. She has been invaluable in bringing the perspective of locals outside the Puget Sound corridor to the decision

making of our board.

David Ortiz, Vice President At Large, has served in his current role since 2019, and served previously as the inaugural Vice President of Human Rights, from 2010 to 2013. He has been essential as a member of our Personnel Committee and in moving our program to become an anti-racist, unified and inclusive union, specifically leading our anti-racism in collective bargaining project, our race and labor workshop and deepening our relationships with tribal governments. David sets a high standard and supports us all in reaching it.

Susie Wilson, Vice President for Legislative Affairs, has served since 2021. She previously served on our

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President Message

(from pg. 3)

inclusive and dismantle oppressive systems. Their work reflects their needs and interests of the members, but the resulting changes benefit all of us. Check out page 2 to learn more.

Finally, I'd like to link what I've written about to our Powerful Locals Program. We'll hold our annual conference August 4th – 6th virtually, providing the opportunity to gain knowledge and build skills. We know what it takes to be a *powerful local* and we know that it demands something of the membership...at times it demands a LOT from members. Going to the meeting when you're already tired from a full day, sending a letter to your legislator, or telling a new coworker about the union – all of those moments are part and parcel of the "something" that being in a union and working for a better future calls on us to give.

But while a powerful union demands something of us, it is a demand that is shared. That's what a union is: it's workers coming together to make the load of labor lighter for all of us.

The future we want to live in doesn't come easy. To paraphrase April Sims' comment in our keynote conversation, *the labor movement wasn't built out of easy times on the job, rather, it was born of struggle*. And Fed Ingram stated that *we have to fight the forces that fight against us*. The work can feel like an unrelenting uphill bike ride... but, as in bicycling, when you get to the top and then get to fly down the hill, the exhilaration and feeling of accomplishment is powerful.

In this work a beautiful thing happens when we get involved, when we say yes, I can help with bargaining, I can call five

co-workers, I can go talk to the PTA or student leadership! That activity – the **doing**, the **solidarity**, the **changes we see** – reinforces us, energizes, and motivates us to keep going. And that's how we build the future.

After all, if we don't, then who will?

Outgoing Board Members!

(from pg. 7)

Personnel Committee, where her careful and thorough analysis was invaluable in all deliberations pertaining to personnel. Her diligence played an important role as we developed our legislative agendas and strategized throughout the last two sessions.