

UNION SPOTLIGHT

AFT Washington, AFL-CIO

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October 2022



The 2021-2022 AFT Washington Executive Board at their retreat, where they discussed issues of racial equity and advancing our union’s equity goals.

Photo by Claudia Paras

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Living The Legacy Honors Women Leaders

By Karen Strickland, AFT Washington President

AFT's convention offers many inspiring moments. One of those is the recognition of long-serving women leaders who have made a mark on our union at the local, state, and/or national level with the Living the Legacy award.

This year I had the privilege of nominating two of our long-time leaders, both from AFT Seattle, Local 1789. Annette Stofer is the current president of AFT Seattle and Tracy Lai is the Vice President for Human Rights on our AFT Washington Executive Board.



Tracy Lai

Tracy Lai joined AFT Seattle, Local 1789 in 1985, helping to build the union in leadership positions ranging from division representative to executive board secretary to co-president of the local. She has always

lived the principles of solidarity, inclusion, and mentoring in every role she has filled and each union activity she has participated in. Tracy consistently builds bridges between our union and community. She has also represented our membership well on the AFT Human, Civil and Women's Rights Committee and the recently formed AFT Asian American & Pacific Islander Taskforce. Tracy's contribution to our union has

been invaluable and after 37 years of union activism, she shows no signs of slowing down!



Annette Stofer

Annette Stofer joined AFT Seattle, Local 1789 in 1990 and from early on tackled the fight for pay equity for part-time faculty. Her path to the current presidency of AFT Seattle, Local

1789 grew out of her role as part-time faculty representative at South Seattle College, then part-time representative for the district. She participated on the bargaining team for numerous contracts and worked to build the statewide campaign for part-time pay equity long before the issue became "a thing." She played a critical role in winning "Best Practices for Part-Time Faculty" legislation and has continued that work right up to the most recent Best Practices Task Force established by the SBCTC. Annette is a union leader with many skills, ranging from dissecting contract language, to a steadfast commitment to workers' rights.

With honor and gratitude on behalf of the members of AFT Washington – thank you!

AFT Washington Executive Board

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Vice President At-Large Pos. 1
David Ortiz

Vice President At-Large Pos. 2
Vacant

Vice President At-Large Pos. 3
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Vice President for Community and Technical Colleges Council
Jaeney Hoene

Vice President for School-Related Personnel Council
Diane Hollstrom

Vice President for 4-Year Colleges and Universities
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Susie Wilson

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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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Welcome Aboard, Emilia Barnecut!

By Cortney Marabetta, Communications Specialist

Emilia Barnecut (she/they) is excited to be the newest member of AFT Washington's Administrative Support Team. With a background in community organizing, electoral politics, and legislative policymaking, they are looking forward to using their skills to support AFT Washington's membership in improving working conditions and bettering Washington's educational system. Previously, Emilia served as the

Legislative Assistant to Senator Claire Wilson in the Washington State Legislature. Outside of work she can be found enjoying time with friends and family, reading in the sun, and trying to keep her cat and dog from causing too much trouble.

You can reach out to her at ebarnecut@aftwa.org and you'll be hearing from them soon! Welcome Emilia!



Karen Strickland

President's Column

I don't know about you but having worked in the field of education for the last thirty years has created in me a sense of freedom, relaxation, and spontaneity during the summer. Somehow, though, when I see Labor Day just around the corner, I'm shocked by the fact that summer is so quickly coming to an end, and I wonder where the time went. Although my summers look different as the union president compared with when I worked at the college, things do still slow down a bit... fewer meetings, co-workers on vacation, out-of-office messages on the daily. What doesn't slow down is the fight for dignity and safety on the job, the march to the November election, the ongoing ups and downs of the pandemic, income inequality, the increasing pace of climate change.

In our last *Spotlight*, I opted to focus on hope instead of despair and the ways we can live and work in solidarity for what we want to see in the world. In the rapidly moving, harsh and hyper-critical media world we currently live in, it can be difficult to see the progress resulting from living in hope, but that progress is there, nonetheless. In this issue, I want to elevate and make salient the recent accomplishments of Congress and the White House. When we see the payoff of our work for a better world, it's important

to take a moment to savor it and use the energy to get ready for the next lift.

AFT's biennial convention has been a source of inspiration and motivation for me for many years and the Boston gathering this summer was no exception. The speakers were extraordinary, from Reverend Dr. Amos Moss who preached on the power of perseverance in the face of odious opposition to block African Americans from voting, to Amazon employee-turned-organizer Christian Smalls, who skipped listing our collective grievances and urged us to just get at it! Dr. Jill Biden (who's a member of NEA, but we won't hold that against her) also joined us and as a community college teacher myself, I could not ignore the possibilities that emerge when someone with first-hand experience like mine is in the White House.

Equally compelling were the stories shared by our AFT siblings from around the country as they spoke in favor of resolutions which will define and influence the work of our union over the next two years. Nurses spoke of their experience working through the pandemic, immersed in crisis and trauma on the job and fear for the wellbeing of their families at home. Adjunct faculty, including our own Natalie Simmons of AFT Seattle 1789, called out the decades-long pay inequity, precarity, and lack of respect at work. School-related staff members told of struggling with staff shortages and demanding working conditions and a need for dignity in the workplace. Members conveyed with conviction the desperate need for these issues to be addressed with robust solutions and the roar of the 2500 unanimous "AYES" in support let all of us know that we are in this together. It was a victory over our common woes and common foes, and the resolutions passed promise a robust response to the challenges of this moment and preparation for the future.

As is often the case, President Biden suffered a steady decline in his approval

ratings since his inauguration. Those ratings have now reversed direction. While still troublingly low, it seems the public is responding to the White House's ability to get stuff done and that a lot of the stuff getting done directly addresses the needs of working people. The President has signed many important executive orders, including one ensuring healthcare access for veterans with health issues related to toxic environmental exposure. The recently passed (without support from a single Republican) Inflation Reduction Act caps the cost of insulin, makes healthcare more affordable, champions real investments in addressing the climate crisis (I plan on installing a heat pump instead of replacing a broken furnace and the rebate will make it more affordable), and makes our tax system more fair by increasing taxes on wealth. And then we have the recent improvements to the student loan system, most notably forgiveness of \$10,000 to \$20,000, along with lower payments through income driven repayment plans. These laws will make a real difference in the lives of our members, our students, and their families. They represent a strong start, and make possible the once unthinkable: the Inflation Reduction Act is the first federal bill passed that addresses climate change, for example.

(However, it's not lost on us that the debt forgiveness plan doesn't heal systemic racial inequity or open the door to post high school education as widely as we'd like it. Cost-free college is the best pathway to preventing the need for loan forgiveness in the future; the Communities for Our Colleges Coalition is prioritizing this for the 2023 legislative session, and we will continue our efforts to get all debt forgiven.)

Biden's policy advances make clear the importance of the election just days away. I know many of you who are able to vote have already cast your ballots; if you haven't, make a plan and get the

(Continued on pg. 4)

We Want To Hear From You About Progress Towards Student Debt Forgiveness!

By Enrie Marusya, Union Organizing Representative

Among the proudest moments of AFT is the successful lawsuit against the DeVos Department of Education that dramatically expanded access to Public Service Loan Forgiveness. AFT Washington has been tireless in spreading the message that more of our members now qualify and are having their student debt extinguished. Our members have even come together to get legislation passed at the state level to expand access, including for adjuncts.

We want to celebrate together! If you've had your loans vanquished (we hate the term "forgiveness" because that implies you did something wrong, but we haven't settled on the best term yet) thanks to these changes, please let us know by taking the survey on our website – you can find it at www.aftwa.org. Whether or not you took one of

our debt clinics, we want to track our collective victories.

With current backlogs, those who've recently taken one of our workshops may be in the queue for as long as six months before they achieve debt liberty. We also want to hear from you via the same survey! This fight isn't over yet, and we seek an idea of how far we still have to go to reach our goal of ensuring all our members who are eligible have their debt knocked out.

And as always, please continue to spread the word. The expanded waiver for Public Service Loan Forgiveness currently closes on October 31st; if you need help getting started, contact us today! We'll be able to point you to the information you need.

AFT Washington / Barnard Iglitzin & Lavitt Scholarship Supports Four Students This Year!

By Lydia Petroske, Administrative Support Specialist

It's a natural fit for an educators' union to support the educational efforts of our members! Every year, AFT Washington and Barnard, Iglitzin and Lavitt award scholarships to applicants connected to AFT Washington members. This year, four scholarship awards have been granted.

James Stephens is a paraeducator and member of TFESP Local 461. He will be starting a Master's in education in Curriculum and Instruction at City University in Seattle and hopes to focus on elementary education. Emily Hancock, the daughter of a member of Bates Local 4184, will be attending Western Washington University to pursue a degree in Education and

Psychology. Laurel Ravert, the daughter of a member at Clover Park Local 4789, is attending American Public University System and studying business management. And finally, Sunny Simmons, daughter of a member at AFT Seattle Local 1789, plans to attend Portland State University to study mathematics.

Congratulations to this year's recipients!

The AFT Washington / Barnard Iglitzin & Lavitt Scholarship was initiated in 2005. To date, 47 scholarships have been awarded. If you'd like to support more students through a donation to the scholarship fund, please visit: aftwa.givingfuel.com/scholarship-fund.

President's Column

(from pg. 3)

ballot to a drop box or mailbox near you. If you can't vote, please encourage your family and friends to do so. Our endorsements are on page 6.

I won't say "this is the most important election of our lifetimes," but it may well be! We made a strong start with electing Biden in 2020, but the crises (including gerrymandering) are so extreme that we've got to vote now like we voted then, and make sure that the tide doesn't rush out on us, so we can keep improving life in America. There are too many problems to tackle and so much potential for solutions that we can't afford a Congress all too ready to "just say no!" or poised and ready to roll back even further reproductive health-care and LGBTQIA+ rights. Democrats are not perfect, but they believe in the public good and expanding freedom and human rights, as opposed to weakening our public institutions and limiting who has a voice and real opportunities to thrive.

It turns out I still don't want to focus on reasons to despair. The work that's being done by our elected leaders, both federal and state, is important progress for us all. Our role, as union members and education workers, is to continue raising our voices and asserting influence in every way we can so they make the decisions that uplift us, our families, our students and our neighbors. If you've been active in this work – thank you and keep at it. If you haven't been able to get involved yet, the time is now, and we have many ways for you to do that! Email us at aftwashington@aftwa.org for opportunities. You are an important voice and vote in the quest for a state legislature and Congress that work to invest in and elevate all of us.

Disinformation In Journalism: The Shape Of The Landscape

By Cortney Marabetta, Communications Specialist

In August, the White House's social media team raised eyebrows by calling out Republican Twitter accounts that were decrying President Biden's student debt forgiveness plan. The team retweeted the complaining accounts and included publicly-accessible data stating how much each person had forgiven in PPP loans. It was a fantastic response to the litany of complaint claiming that, among other things, ranchers and farmers should not be responsible for paying the student debt of Wall Street advisors and doctors – very culture-wars of the complainers. Presumably, according to the complaining accounts, ranchers and farmers should be paying off PPP loans forgiven in 2020, but nothing from a program intended to allow people to get good educations. And, of course, it was nice to see such blatant hypocrisy called out; too often, hypocritical statements by elected officials go unchallenged.

The larger problem, however, is that it was the White House social media team that did the calling out. America's journalists should be calling it out. It should not take a social media team that's tired of disinformation being ignored to correct the record. We should be able to rely on journalists to provide accurate information. Hypocrisy among elected officials is a problem for all of us, no matter where we stand on the political spectrum. You can learn media literacy and fact-checking tools (as we highlighted in the March issue of the *Spotlight*) and you can moderate your social media feed (as highlighted in the June issue) but ultimately, we rely on the accuracy of the information shared to us. This leads to a real conflict between journalists, corporate news outlets, and the truth.

A note on terminology: misinformation is, generally, incorrect information shared without the intent of causing harm. Disinformation is, generally, incorrect

information shared to deliberately cause harm. In that light, we have chosen to use “disinformation” as the category term to refer to both mis- and dis-information, because any disinformation makes misinformation toxic. The sources used for this article are linked on our website for space, so we wanted to be clear that we're using terminology a certain way.

In June of this year, the Pew Research Center published the results of a new survey of journalists, conducted in the first quarter of the year. Several of the questions clustered around the issue of disinformation, with some interesting results. Over 90% of the journalists surveyed reported that made-up information is affecting their jobs. Almost 60% of journalists reported that they had had conversations with colleagues about disinformation multiple times a month over the past year. Neither of those results are surprising in the context of a chaotic social media world that makes it much harder for people to recognize disinformation. It makes sense that as newsrooms contract and consolidate, journalists would look to social media as much as the rest of us do, and that they would be given false information in the course of following up on stories, on social media and off.

What's concerning about this 90% statistic is that 26% of journalists, according to the PRC study, found that they'd reported on a story that contained false information. And, worryingly, only 8% of journalists surveyed say that news organizations do a good job at handling misinformation – in part because most journalists' newsrooms do not have guidelines on how to handle disinformation. That might be why 11% of journalists reported they did not cover a story because they were concerned about disinformation. This is a huge concern: journalistic transparency and accountability standards mean leaving stories by

the wayside. Journalists tasked with reporting what is accurately happening feel they cannot identify the extent of disinformation in a story enough to cover it. Given how much disinformation is explicitly political, we should all be concerned by the lack of coverage.

And it is intensely political. PEN America (an AFT partner) did a survey of journalists last year that included a question about which potential sources of disinformation are the most egregious cases. 76% of respondents said right-wing conspiracy theorists; 70% said politicians or political organizations. Left-wing conspiracy theorists and foreign government actors didn't even come close (at 35% and 30% respectively). Our entire political landscape is being reshaped by misinformation.

The increasing corporatization and concentration of newsrooms contributes to the problem. When we live in a world where media ownership is the province of a very wealthy narrowly-defined demographic, the status quo power dynamic can create newsroom cultures, such as those of Fox News or Sinclair Broadcast Group (owners of KOMO), that disregard journalistic integrity and accurate reporting. Sinclair is particularly known for heavily-partisan “must-runs” – stories they mandate must be shown by the news channels they own – regardless of accuracy. Money also plays a role in another way: more and more legitimate news sites are paywalled, whereas organizations actively promoting misinformation are highly accessible.

There are some newsrooms that are taking real steps to combat disinformation. The Associated Press has a 12-person verification unit that investigates claims spread online, separate from their fact-check operation, and their reporters that cover disinformation as their beat, for example. But it's not

(Continued on pg. 7)

Have You Turned In Your Ballot Yet?

By AFT Washington Staff

By now you should have received your ballot for the election, and we've got endorsements for you!

Across the state, AFT Washington members took action to support our candidates. We sent member-to-member postcards in key races, including Kim Schrier in the 8th Congressional district. We made calls and texted to get out the vote for our public education champions, including incumbents Rep. Debra Entenmann in the 47th, Rep. Dave Paul in the 10th, and Sen. Emily Randall in the 26th. There are so many key races and swing districts in this election, this work is essential.

AFT Washington has endorsed candidates across the state – the list is below, and it's also on our website at <http://www.aftwa.org/endorsements->

[and-elections](#). But what goes into an endorsement? We look at a few things. For incumbent candidates, we look at their legislative scorecard: this year, if a candidate scored 83% or higher on their voting record for AFT Washington-supported legislation, they were automatically endorsed. Candidates below that or with no previous record were invited to submit a COPE questionnaire.

The COPE questionnaire covers topics of interest to AFT Washington's members in all constituencies, including any current or past labor affiliation. Then we get into questions on revenue and Guaranteed Basic Income, investment in education, safety at work for education professionals, and privatization of education. There are also questions on collective bargaining and social justice

topics. Once the COPE Committee makes a recommendation, the Board votes on endorsement.

It's a process with a lot of checks to ensure that we endorse candidates who will work to make a difference for working people. Particularly now, we need folks who care about working people in elected office and we're always pleased to be able to present a strong list of endorsed candidates!

Before we get to the candidates, a quick note – if you aren't familiar with COPE and the COPE committee, you should be! Our union dues cannot go to contributions to candidates, so our endorsements come from voluntary COPE donations. If you'd like to sign up to donate to COPE, you can do so here: <https://bit.ly/AFTWA-COPE>.

Here are our endorsements for the 2022 Washington State General Election.

Senate

21 Marko Liias
26 Emily Randall
27 Yasmin Trudeau
29 Steve Conway
30 Claire Wilson
32 Jesse Salomon
33 Karen Keiser
34 Joe Nguyen
35 Julianne Gale
36 Noel Frame
37 Rebecca Saldaña
38 June Robinson
42 Sharon Shewmake
43 Jamie Pedersen
44 John Lovick
45 Manka Dhingra
46 Javier Valdez
48 Patty Kuderer

United States Congress

1 Susan DelBene
6 Derek Kilmer
7 Pramila Jayapal
8 Kim Schrier
10 Marilyn Strickland

House of Representatives

1 Davina Duerr
1 Shelley Kloba
3 Timm Ormsby
3 Marcus Riccelli
5 Bill Ramos
5 Lisa Callan
10 Dave Paul
10 Clyde Shavers
11 David Hackney
11 Steve Bergquist
18 Duncan Comacho
18 John Zingale
21 Strom Peterson
21 Lillian Ortiz-Self
22 Jessica Bateman

22 Beth Doglio
23 Tarra Simmons
23 Drew Hansen
24 Steve Tharinger
24 Mike Chapman
26 Addison Richards
27 Jake Fey
27 Laurie Jinkins
28 Mari Leavitt
28 Dan Bronoske
29 Sharlett Mena
29 Melanie Morgan
30 Jamila Taylor
30 Kristine Reeves
32 Lauren Davis
32 Cindy Ryu
33 Mia Gregerson
33 Tina Orwall
34 Emily Alvarado
34 Joe Fitzgibbon
35 Sandra Kaiser
36 Liz Berry
36 Julia Reed
37 Sharon Tomiko Santos

37 Emijah Smith
38 Julio Cortes
38 Mary Fosse
40 Debra Lekanoff
40 Alex Ramel
41 Tana Senn
41 My-Linh Thai
42 Alicia Rule
42 Joe Timmons
43 Frank Chopp
43 Nicole Macri
44 Brandy Donaghy
44 April Berg
45 Roger Goodman
45 Larry Springer
46 Darya Farivar
46 Gerry Pollet
47 Debra Entenmann
47 Shukri Olow
48 Amy Walen
48 Vandana Slatter
49 Sharon Wylie
49 Monica Stonier

The Early Stages: Legislative Agenda Development

By HyeEun Park, Government Relations Specialist

As summer draws to a close, the work on our 2023 Legislative Priorities is underway! While we are in the first stages of crafting our legislative priorities, we are focusing on a few key policy priorities:

1. Increased compensation for all
2. Pay parity for adjunct faculty
3. Investing in community and technical colleges (CTCs)

At the Washington State Labor Council (WSLC) Convention in July 2022, we submitted a resolution that prioritizes the issues of inadequate compensation and pay inequity. The resolution calls for the WSLC to:

- Prioritize investments that further the CTC system goals of recruitment and retention of the CTC workforce.
- Actively support policies and funding that will increase equity across instructional programs and between full and adjunct/contingent faculty.
- Actively support equitable legislative investments in the CTCs.
- Elevate and amplify the work being done to secure the needed investments in the CTC workforce within the Labor and broader communities.

The resolution passed unanimously at the convention, underscoring how critical our legislative priorities will be this session.

What we've seen over the last few years is that Washington state needs our members. The state's goal of 70% attainment of post-high school credentials relies on keeping and expanding community and technical college programs.

Solidarity isn't just supporting picket lines; it's recognizing where the next generation of labor workers will come from. Many come through the Community and Technical College system, through academic programs, apprenticeship programs, or more circuitous routes. The current and future union members in the CTCs need the labor community to stand with them to improve working conditions. This is why we brought the resolution before the Washington State Labor Council, and why we're pleased it passed with such strong support.

We continue collaborating with many stakeholders as we develop the rest of the legislative agenda, like the Communities for Our Colleges Coalition (C4C), on legislative priorities like increased funding for wraparound services including childcare and transportation. We also work with Balance Our Tax Code coalition (BOTC) on progressive revenue bills like Guaranteed Basic Income (GBI). Additionally, we are working with other higher education partners to address issues that affect our classified and professional staff, such as SEBB benefits, and we are working with retiree organizations such as PSARA to secure a COLA for TRS1 retirees

Do you have legislative priorities that we should know about? Would you like to become more involved in developing our agenda for the upcoming biennium? Please get in touch with Cortney Marabetta at cmarabetta@aftwa.org for more information!

Disinformation In Journalism

(from pg. 5)

enough, in a world where online information spreads quickly, many news sites are paywalled, and journalists are reluctant to cover stories about disinformation. It leaves us, the people who rely on journalists giving us accurate information, without the tools we need to sort out the truth from the vast cloud of false information that envelops it.

It leaves the White House social media team as the bulwark calling out elected Republicans' hypocrisy about student debt forgiveness. And that is not a channel most of the public will ever see.

In order to have a functioning, flourishing democracy, we must have a functioning news media that is willing to call out disinformation and reject it. Unfortunately, the collapse of the media landscape to fewer, bigger owners of larger channels, and the deprioritization of combatting disinformation from newsrooms and some journalists has left us in a situation where Americans do not have the ability to rely on the reporting we receive. The solutions to be found are not on a scale with the problem, but while we work for the big change we need (decreasing the number of outlets a company can own is one very important step; building tools and increasing staff to help identify disinformation is another) it helps to pay attention to where you get your news, how and if you pay for it, and whether you can spot errors in it. We work for the change we need, with the tools we have, and it's most important we be aware that this tool is flawed. Not broken, yet; we can still repair it. That starts with using it thoughtfully and with care.



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The AFT Washington Board Awards

Next year, at our 2023 Convention, AFT Washington will award Board Awards, across a variety of categories. If you know about a member leader going above and beyond for their fellow workers or the labor movement, there's an award that fits them!

- **Troublemaker Award:** for member leaders who call out and stand against threats to working people, quality education, the labor movement.
- **Treasurer Award:** for those hardy souls who step up and take on the challenge of managing the local's finances.
- **Leadership in Organizing Award:** for those members who have gone above and beyond to recruit new members and get folks engaged in their union.

- **COPE Award:** for locals that have significantly increased their member participation and contributions to the Committee on Political Education.
- **Community Engagement Award:** for locals that have built partnerships with students, community organizations, and other stakeholders in their school or college.
- **Powerful Locals Champion Award:** for locals that have taken steps to become a Powerful Local by participating in trainings, creating action plans and SMART goals, and utilizing the Powerful Locals Assessment Tool.
- **Leadership in Collective Bargaining Award:** for those bargaining teams who have made gains above and beyond or been

especially effective in strengthening their union.

- **Cesar Chavez Human Rights Award:** for an individual, group, or local who has a mission or vision that embraces human rights and confronts challenges to human rights head-on. This award is given by AFT Washington's Human Rights Committee and is the only award not limited to members or locals.

Any AFT Washington local can submit a nomination for our board awards. If you need help with a nomination, reach out to your local's AFT Washington Union Organizing Representative (UOR) or email our office at aftwashington@aftwa.org.