

UNION SPOTLIGHT

AFT Washington, AFL-CIO

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October 2021



TFESP Membership Committee (Anitra Wise – front row first on left; Elizabeth Holland – back row second from right) sign up new members at New Hire Orientation.

Photo by Anna-Marie Magdalena

INSIDE

Let's Get Rid of Student Debt Entirely2

President's Column.....3

Contingent and Part-time Faculty Advocacy & Activism in the New School Year.....4

Every Member Counts: Engaging Members to Build a Strong Union!.....5

Go Vote!6

Enrolling in the WA Cares Fund6

Federation of Head Start Ratifies Improved Contract7

INSERT: Spotlight On Retirees In Action (2 sided)

Let's Get Rid of Student Debt Entirely

By Cortney Marabetta, Communications Specialist

How do you tackle a hydra? The simplest solution to stopping a creature that grows new heads when you cut one off is to not bother messing about with the head. In the US today, one of our great hydras is student debt and the cost of college. One head is existing student debt, another is forgiveness programs, a third is equity, a fourth is the cost of college – all of those and more are connected to a single body that squashes opportunity and the American economy. We're taking steps to stop that hydra in its tracks, and we're going to ask you to join us.

Existing student debt is a very real burden for the people who carry it, as well as a spoiler on the American economy, particularly when you consider how it impacts home-buying. It couldn't not, given that the rate of debt is growing six times faster than the economy this year. 43 million borrowers owe an average of almost \$40,000 each. A wipeout of student debt is a way to lift a lot of people into more financial security. Greater financial security allows people to put down roots in communities, work in meaningful jobs, and participate more fully in life outside of work. Loading graduates down with debt prevents those opportunities.

To tackle the current \$1.7 trillion in student debt, the AFT and others, like the Student Borrowers' Protection Center, are advocating cancellation of up to \$50,000 of debt for public service workers. If you or a friend or family member has debt, you can add your voice by telling Congress your story here: <https://bit.ly/3AnqO38>. Major improvements to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program means that 550,000 borrowers will be newly eligible for the program, but that does not mean the student loan debt problem is solved. This is an urgent need; the system must

be fixed so that people are lifted out of debt and into greater financial security.

It's also critical to remember that canceling student debt is a step toward racial equity. Systemic racism has prevented Black, Indigenous and other People of Color from accumulating generational wealth due to disparity in earnings, racist housing policies, the higher costs of things (like insurance, banking fees, etc.) paid by people with less money and so on. This, in turn, leads to the need to take on more debt for the education that is supposed to help attain economic security. This cycle perpetuates racial inequities and traps more graduates of color in greater debt than white graduates. It's unjust and we don't have to continue it.

And finally, we can increase equity and solve these problems even faster by providing free college. We should frame college as collective investment in our people, and treat that investment with seriousness. Burdening students with debt is increasingly harmful to all of us and many of our elected leaders agree! The budget reconciliation bill currently before Congress increases spending on Pell Grants and provides students 2 years of free CTC education.

We have a debt problem to solve, and one to prevent through free college. We need you to take action to help make these goals a reality! Check out the front page of our website, <http://wa.aft.org>, for links to actions you can take to support any or all of these approaches, as well as a link to AFT benefit Summer, a student-debt management tool you can access to get help with your student debt now. Rest assured, this advocacy will continue, and we'll add in more ways to tackle that hydra as they come up.

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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

We are and will be Union Strong

In preparing to write my column for the Spotlight I looked back at what I wrote a year ago...just six months into the pandemic. I was disheartened to read something I could have written today... "Tragically, we are facing crisis after crisis after crisis, most recently the rash of threatening tropical storms in the south and precedent-setting forest fires here in the west." As I write this, Louisiana has been thrashed by Hurricane Ida, making landfall 16 years to the day after Katrina devastated so many lives. Highlighting the harm of climate change, Ida carried on to cause death and destruction in New York and New Jersey.

And yet, the human spirit fights on.

In August, Governor Inslee issued an executive order requiring all education employees be vaccinated, an order that is necessary for safer school re-opening. Our staff and local leaders are bargaining the impacts of the mandate (the pandemic has created a never-ending-bargaining scenario!). I'm particularly impressed by our three Clover Park Technical College locals who have joined together along with their IUOE co-workers to bargain the impacts of closure, re-opening and the vaccine mandate together. They increased their collective power in bargaining and the effectiveness of their solutions in this unprecedented situation – in fact, management could

hardly wait to agree to additional leave to facilitate members getting vaccinated!

We can also look to our leaders in the United Classified Workers Union who work in the Issaquah and Northshore school districts. They have engaged more of their members in leadership and union activity than ever before, participating in our annual Powerful Locals Conference, the Classified Council, and our Classified Staff conference. They are demonstrating what it takes to be a powerful local and are stronger than ever.

These are only two examples of local leaders stepping up in a big way on behalf of their membership and I hope you'll let them know how much you appreciate all they have done to navigate the unending challenges and changes precipitated by this pandemic.

On top of the pandemic, we also have to deal with the attempts of nefarious forces to undermine our unions and our investment in the public sector.

One such group is the so-called Freedom Foundation, a group I have written about before. All of our public sector members have been subjects of their public information requests and they are at it again. Funded by the usual suspects – the Kochs, the DeVos', the Bradleys – they encourage members to drop their membership, promising the moon in exchange. Their mission, and that of their funders, is fundamentally anti-worker. Their goal is to silence workers, diminish our democracy, shred the social safety net, and expand the already-obscene wealth gap. They have no shame and will exploit the fear, uncertainty, and instability generated by the pandemic to achieve their goals.

But they will continue to fail because working people know what we gain by joining together, from the higher wages and better benefits we get at work, to the progress towards social and racial justice we see in our schools, colleges, and communities. A recent survey by Oxfam found that Washington state is 7th overall in their ranking of the best states to work in, and number 1 in our wage policies. (Last year, in their ranking of best states to work in during a pandemic, Washington ranked number 1 overall.) It's easy to see the relationship between our high union density – we are the fifth most organized state in the country – and these rankings. On the federal level, the COVID relief and recovery packages, the infrastructure bill and the American Families Plan are the kinds of investments that the labor movement fights for because they improve our quality of life...and that's why the FF tries to silence us. As our quality of life improves, the billionaire class's ability to exploit our labor decreases.

Don't fall for the Freedom Foundation's lies. If you receive mail urging you to quit your union, reach out to your union leadership instead and ask how you can get involved and help make our state even "Union Stronger".

By the time you read this, the vast majority of you will have been vaccinated and returned to the classroom, the school bus, the kitchen or the campus. You will have done your part to get education and your community back to some sort of normal. But we're on the knife's edge as of this writing, and I don't know if case rates and hospitalizations will have continued upward, leading to school and college closures or if we'll have reversed the

(Continued on pg. 4)

Contingent and Part-time Faculty Advocacy & Activism in the New School Year

By Jacqui Cain, Vice President for Contingent Faculty, and Enrie Marusya, Union Organizing Representative

A Resolution for improving representation and working conditions

The Contingent Faculty Issues Committee (CFIC) of AFT Washington has been busy in the last six months. In May, the Committee brought forward a resolution at the AFT Washington biennial convention, encouraging locals to increase union membership among contingent/part-time/adjunct faculty, and to better represent said faculty and their needs in union leadership and bargaining. It also committed AFT Washington resources to the cause.

The resolution passed unanimously, and in August the committee held a workshop as part of AFT Washington's annual Powerful Locals conference on how to implement the resolution. One highlight of this was a walkthrough of a suggested calendar of events and actions that locals can take. This calendar is now being reworked in light of the Delta variant because in-person organizing and events no longer seem like the safest option. However, there are

still things your local can get started on! CFIC is asking all faculty locals to identify 1-3 potential leaders (likely already e-board members) to start attending the statewide monthly meetings. These are held virtually on the first Saturday of every month.

Virtual advocacy this Fall

At the top of the agenda for CFIC this fall is focusing on getting a strong turnout of contingent faculty to the upcoming State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) meeting on October 20th between 1:30-3:30. During that window, contingent faculty from across the state—including in our sister union WEA—will speak to the board about how the twin storms of COVID and ctcLink have negatively impacted contingent faculty and their students. We intend to provide an array of ways the SBCTC can help alleviate these woes—but first we need to hear from our membership about how COVID and ctcLink have impacted them. As part of this effort, be ready to share a petition asking that SBCTC take action,

complete with personalized messages from faculty to the board.

All this is to say that even though we won't be meeting in person or kicking off our big in-person membership drives yet, there are still plenty of ways for contingent faculty to start participating more in their local unions and at the state level. We'll also be working with locals this fall to get better data on their adjunct workforce and how to contact them, so that when it is actually safe to start in-person organizing, we'll be ready to hit the ground running. We strongly believe that it's time for local unions to better represent all their members and that starts with good data!

If you or an adjunct you know is ready to start advocating for adjuncts at the local and state level, or to get more information about the resolution and a toolkit for its implementation, contact Enrie Marusya (former name Irene Morrison, staff support for CFIC at emarusya@aftwa.org).

President Message

(from pg. 3)

trends I'm seeing today, on Labor Day 2021.

Whatever the status of the pandemic, we will continue dealing with it while we get out the vote for the November election, prepare for the 2022 legislative session and begin thinking about redistricting and the 2022 elections. We will do this in solidarity with you, our members, with our Labor family and

with our community partners. We will hold onto our Big Dreams and we will take the Bold Action needed to realize our vision of the schools and colleges we want to work in and the communities we want to live in.

We do have to deal with this pandemic, but we don't have to let it define our work or throw us off track. You can play a part in keeping us on track by getting

active in your local, for example by helping welcome new employees into the union. (See page 5 for a great success story on that!) Or you can join one of our committees – Human Rights, Legislative Affairs, [Re]Invest in Our Colleges (ROC), Committee on Political Education (COPE), or Retirees. We are Union Strong and there is room for you in our union.

Every Member Counts: Engaging Members To Build A Strong Union!

By Elizabeth Holland, Second Vice President of Membership, Tacoma Federation of Education Support Professionals, AFT Local 461 & Anna-Marie Magdalena, Union Organizing Representative



AFT Local 461 new members with Building Rep Coordinator Anitra Wise and Second Vice President of Membership Elizabeth Holland. Photo by Anna-Marie Magdalena

Robust membership committees make the difference in membership recruitment. Over the summer, our membership committee signed up 34 new members by being a constant presence at new hire orientation and following up with one-on-one conversations.

Making the connection at new hire orientations

Our goal going into the new hire orientation is that we sign up every single new employee as a union member. These new members will leave with a basic understanding of their rights as union members, who to contact from our union, and the importance of the labor movement in protecting workers. Signing up new members sends the message to the administration that we are increasing our membership numbers, have an organizing structure in place, and are able to put members into action.

We start with a new member packet. Pieces we include are a copy of the current collective bargaining agreement, welcome letter from local leadership, and union contact cards. After the member has signed the membership form, we hand out the membership packets and some union goodies.

Once we have the initial conversation, we follow up with the new members in different ways. Whether it is a postcard, an email to their personal email, or a welcome from the building representative, we want to make sure our members know we are a union that engages all its members and communicates with them on a regular basis. In addition, in the rare case we haven't signed up the new employees, having an in person one-on-one conversation with the goal of having the employee sign a membership form has been very successful.

The importance of one-on-one conversation

As union leadership, our conversation with members needs to reflect that we are listening to their concerns and responding to them. When engaging potential members, we need to be able to let them know that being a member of our union is going to make a real difference in their working conditions.

One of the struggles that membership committee members face is how to have these conversations in a virtual environment. In these virtual conversations we need to assume that members want to hear from our union and get more information. We can make a zoom date with potential members through texting or

phone banking. Another challenge is the need for paper membership forms, so we need to be able to create virtual membership forms to walk members through filling out the form. The virtual workplace has made it challenging to engage potential members and we need to find creative ways to overcome these challenges. If our members are physically in the building, we can hold membership drives with AFT Washington staff.

Membership drives and worksite reps

In the coming months we have scheduled membership drives with the support of AFT in order to recruit new employees we missed in the new hire orientation to become members. These membership drives give us the opportunity to have the important one-on-one conversations that identify issues of significance to our membership and follow up on getting these coworkers to become union members. In addition, we can identify potential building representatives who have the ability to lead their coworkers to take collective action.

During a membership drive, we can help to build the worksite rep structure for each building, connecting members with our union and making our union part of their everyday work life experience.

The work we do to increase our membership and member engagement can never be done by one person. The labor movement is based on collective action, whether that collective action is signing a petition, going on strike, or signing up new members, everyone needs to be involved. A big shout out to Anitra Wise, Lisa Wolf, and Therese Belle, our building rep coordinators and membership committee members who make this work possible!

Go Vote!

By Cortney Marabetta, Communications Specialist

In last year's election, we saw record voter turnout across the state and across the country. This is pretty typical for presidential elections, which attract more voters' attention than any other election. The stakes feel higher, so the urgency of voting is higher. Outside of presidential election years, though, the numbers drop, often precipitously. This year's election, where there are no federal or state-wide officials on the ballot, has little to draw attention to itself.

But elections aren't a one-and-done process. They're often the beginning, or the middle, or the end of an elected's agenda. In 2020, more voters believed in Biden's vision of America than Trump's. More voters believed in Inslee's vision of Washington than Loren Culp's. Voters stated their interest in specific policies like free college and universal childcare at the federal level, and a fairer tax system at the state level. And in every election, we will get the opportunity to say whether the agenda in office is working for us. That's critically important.

Every time we have the opportunity to vote, we have the opportunity to say whether we like or don't like the actions of the person in office. And that means that every election is deserving of your attention. The races on the ballot this year, which for most people will be ballot measures, municipal elections, and school board elections, are as critically important as last year's federal elections.

This year, we've seen very, very contentious actions in school board meetings. Between the misunderstanding and manufactured outrage over Critical Race Theory and then the outrage over mask mandates, for children who are too young to be vaccinated, there's no way to say that school boards are just doing business as usual. They're dealing with big issues. We ask them to do the right thing, and in this election, we have the opportunity to decide whether we like the agendas being presented for our consideration.

And the thing is, it matters. Just like last year, when voters decided that they preferred the way Inslee was steering the state, it matters whose hand is steering your local school district. It matters who's sitting on your city council. Your opinion matters, too, and voting is a great way to make sure that you're heard.

Fortunately, in Washington, we don't face some of the roadblocks to voting that exist in other states: mail-in voting is extremely convenient, whether in a pandemic or not. Dropboxes are plentiful. It's in your interest to vote, and the state makes it pretty easy and safe to do so. You should have a ballot by the time you're reading this – be sure to fill it out and send in your vote!

For more information about Washington State's elections system, including where to vote in person and where to drop off your ballot, visit the Secretary of State's website at <http://www.sos.wa.gov>.

Enrolling in the WA Cares Fund

By Cortney Marabetta, Communications Specialist

Several years ago, the legislature approved the creation of a long-term care fund that Washington workers would pay for through a payroll tax. The fund has been set up, under the name WA Cares Fund. The provisions of the program require that workers pay into the fund, giving them access later in life to up to \$36,500 in long-term care monies that can be used for expenses such as retrofitting a house with accessibility furnishings, or paying a family member who is a caregiver. The fund was intentionally set up to allow workers to pay for more than most conventional long-term care insurances do; many of the allowable expenses under the fund are not other-

wise reimbursable through other insurance.

The program's opt-out date is approaching and it's being reported that some people are opting out of the program due to the perception of cost. The information about what happens if someone opts out is not very clear. In the interest of making informed decisions, here's what we know.

- The payroll tax is .58% - less than 1% - of your wages, and you contribute over the lifetime of your employment. That's 58 cents per \$100 earned.

- You qualify for the insurance after 10 years; 500 or more hours worked annually is considered one year.
- If you are self-employed, you can opt in to the Trust; this does not require an employer, as employers make no contributions to the fund.
- The fund will open in January of 2025 for eligible workers to begin withdrawing funds.
- You only pay the care fund premium while working, which is typically not the case with private insurers; the care fund cannot lapse for you once you retire.

(Continued on pg. 7)

Federation of Head Start Ratifies Improved Contract

By Enrie Marusya, Union Organizing Representative

Just in time for the new school year, the Federation of Head Start ratified a new contract! Thanks to the collective actions of union members and their brothers and sisters from other locals over the last school year, the bargaining team had the momentum it needed to ensure that represented staff had actionable safety language in their contract. The language covers both environmental safety and when children exhibit unsafe behaviors. The unit demanded this language in response to several safety incidents before COVID that resulted in staff going to urgent care.

In addition, staff won unprecedented 7-21% raises and a new step in their salary scale. The raises come from a combination of across-the-board raises and upward movement in the scale for hard-to-fill positions, such as bus drivers. A new designation for each Head Start center was also created, with premium pay, so that one staff at every center has the additional training needed to lead when Center Directors are absent from their worksites.

"We didn't get everything we wanted, but we worked within the limits of the nationally underfunded Head Start program to get as much as possible for

our members," said Amanda Lalicker, the new president of the Federation, which is located in ESD 113, Thurston and Grays Harbor counties. Most of the unit's workers still do not make a living wage, which the local pinned at around \$20/hr depending on where in the region they lived and the size of the worker's family. "That's why we must continue to advocate at the state and federal level for increased funding."

Amy DuBois, a long-time bargaining team and board member, thanked everyone who came out to support the Federation. "We could not have done this without the members of our union, other local unions, and community members – including current and past parents – who signed our petition and came to our Board of Directors' Zoom meeting in support. They heard us all." The Board meeting in question was featured in the June issue of the Spotlight.

Lalicker, DuBois, and other members of the board and bargaining team plan to keep up the fight and are meeting with administration in the coming weeks over state legislature lobbying efforts. Lalicker has been on the national stage recently to discuss federal legislation as well. You can find the Committee for Education Funding FY 2022 Budget Book Briefing panel she was on (recorded July 13th) here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYrYTX8jK2I>



FHSE members were not able to meet in-person as a unit because of the delta variant, but centers were able to meet individually to ratify the contract. Pictured are members from the Washington Elementary center.

Photo by Amy DuBois

We're overhauling our website! Check back through the fall for updated content and resources.

Visit <http://wa.aft.org> to see what's new!

Cares Fund

(from pg. 6)

The opt-out window is 10/01/21-12/31/22, and anyone who opts out must apply for opt-out and provide the approval letter to their employers.

The main thing to be aware of is that if someone opts out of the WA Cares Fund, it is permanent. Even if you get private or employer-provided long-term care insurance and lose it due to no fault of your own, you cannot opt back in to the long-term care program. There are no qualifying events that will allow

you back into WA Cares once you have opted out. Given that 7 out of 10 Washingtonians will need long-term care at some point in their lives, that Medicare does not cover long-term care, and also given that the program is quite expansive in what it covers, people who choose to opt out should be very aware of what that entails.

For more information and to read more about the benefits of the program, you can visit their website at <https://www.wacaresfund.wa.gov>.



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Upcoming Workshops

For registration links to these virtual trainings, please contact Lydia Petroske at aftwashington@aftwa.org

Contract Enforcement & Grievance Workshop

Tuesday, October 26, 2021

5-7pm

Our Collective Bargaining Agreements are one of the cornerstones of having a powerful local. A contract that is enforced makes a big difference in how our union and our members are treated in the workplace. This training will cover the ins and outs of filing grievances, unfair labor practices, duties of union leaders, and how we make sure that management does what the contract says they will do. Please plan on attending the entirety of the training and have your local's contract available for reference.

Organizing to Increase Membership Workshop

Tuesday, November 16, 2021

5-7pm

Learn steps of an effective organizing conversation to increase membership at your local and communicate about our union using issues, values, and personal experience. During this interactive, virtual training, you will have the opportunity to practice one-on-one conversations that result in successful recruitment of potential members.

Worksite Representative Workshop

Tuesday, January 25, 2022

4:30-7:30pm

Whether you are called a union steward, building rep, officer, executive board member, we all want to do our best to represent our members. During this training you will learn the importance of engaging our membership, building our power inside and outside of the worksite and enforcing our contract.

**If you'd like to go green and get
Union Spotlight electronically, please contact
Cortney Marabetta, 206-432-8084 or
cmarabetta@aftwa.org.**