



AFT Colorado: A Legacy of Making History in Hard Times

Ellen Slatkin, Interim President



In 1928, vocational teachers at the Emily Griffith Opportunity School in Denver founded the first local of the American Federation of Teachers in the state of Colorado. The year seems, in retrospect, to have been an inauspicious one for teacher unionism amidst a hostile national and state business climate for worker empowerment and the mission of public education. The immediate state context for hostility to labor organization was the 1927 Columbine Mine Massacre. There, six miners were killed and uncounted numbers of others injured when management -friendly law enforcement fired machine guns on the strikers. The vocational local was number 203 of the national AFT, but it was in its organizational infancy, scarcely twelve years old and bleeding members and chapters when the Emily Griffith teachers stepped forward to organize on behalf of their profession and the education of their students.

The next AFT local, the Denver Federation of Teachers and the state federation, the Colorado Federation of Teachers, share a common birth year in 1946, the first full year following World War II, filled with optimistic possibilities for education, for labor, for teachers and students. That optimism and the momentum for change it encouraged would be soon undercut by conservative efforts to curtail free inquiry and social movements under a resurgent Red Scare, and in Colorado, by the implementation of the Colorado Labor Peace Act of 1943.

We gather for the AFT Colorado Convention on April 25, 2015, to celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the state federation in 2016, and decide on our organization's agenda and priorities for the next two years. As we do so, it is worth remembering that our predecessors faced victories and setbacks at the national, state and local levels as they pushed for and achieved the passage of a statewide teacher tenure law, crafted and supported school funding measures, lobbied and negotiated and struck for collective bargaining and saved tenure and academic freedom in higher education in Colorado. They were not cowed by hard times. We are inspired now by their examples. We are ready to take up the challenges of our own times, preparing to grow our democratic organization and to fight for the dignity of our members and the well-being of the communities we serve.

Update from the Capitol



This legislative session has been nothing short of dramatic. With Democrats in control of the House and Republicans in control of the Senate, there has been a lot of friction and strictly party-line votes when it comes to contentious issues like the [Parents' Bill of Rights](#) and changes to PERA.

K-12

One issue that everyone seems to agree on is [testing and assessments](#). The over-testing of our students is something that legislators from the left and the right identify as a problem; the difference comes in the solutions sought. Numerous testing reduction bills have been introduced prior to the final report from the Testing and Assessments Task Force, and we have yet to hear any in committee as of February 17. We are anticipating a VERY busy March while the backfill of education-related bills is finally calendared to be heard in committees.

Higher Education

On the other hand, many of the higher education bills have already passed through or have been killed in committee. Senator Kerr's bill ([SB 62](#)) to cap tuition increases was killed in the Senate Education committee on a party line vote. [Senate Bill 94](#), Senator Kefalas's second attempt to address community college adjunct professor inequities, was killed on a party line vote in the Senate State Affairs committee. Not everything has been killed in committee, however. [Senate Bill 117](#), which is basically an anti-affirmative action bill, was heard in the Senate Education committee. Students from across the state and the Colorado Department of Higher Education testified against the bill with no one testifying in favor of it, yet it still passed out of committee. AFT Colorado is opposed to this bill. We believe the state needs to ensure that it continues on its promise to close the achievement gap.

Workers' Rights

Right to Work ([HB 1076](#)) was killed again in committee this year. This anti-union bill, sponsored by Representative Everett (his third attempt) and eleven other House Republicans, died on a party-line vote in House State Affairs committee. We are still waiting to see if a similar bill will be introduced in the Senate where it has a much better chance at passing through committee.

Lobby Day

At AFT Colorado we are conducting our Lobby Days a bit differently this year. We have asked each local to adopt a day. This means more presence at the capitol so legislators are reminded of who we are and the individuals we serve. The smaller lobbying groups also means that our members get to have more meaningful conversations with their legislators as they can talk about issues relevant to their own sector or local. Check with the president of your local to find out when your Lobby Day is scheduled.

If you would like to sign up for our weekly legislative alerts that have all the bills we are

AFT Colorado Biennial Convention

This is a **call** to the **AFT Colorado Biennial Convention** convening at 10:30 am on Saturday, April 25th, 2015 at our affiliate Colorado WINS' office located at 2525 W. Alameda Ave, Denver, Colorado 80219. Registration and pre-convention committee meetings will begin at 10:00 am with officer nominations, resolutions and constitutional revisions being the order of business.



Members may contact their local union if they are interested in running for any officer position or would like to attend as a delegate. The terms of office are for two years. Deadline for nomination of officers is March 26th.

AFT Colorado will recognize outstanding members by awarding: The Meyer/Mall Award and Friends of Public Education Award. Contact your local union if you know of anyone who deserves one of these recognitions. The deadline for submission is March 26th.

The AFT Colorado Convention delegates will consider proposed amendments to the constitution or bylaws, and proposed resolutions. They will also nominate and elect officers of the State Federation. We encourage you to take part in this process. Please contact your local union leader if you wish to attend.



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AFT COLORADO
STANDING TOGETHER: MAKING A DIFFERENCE
Committee on Political Education (COPE)
Deduction

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What is COPE? COPE is how AFT Colorado raises and collects voluntary political contributions from members. COPE is a non partisan political education committee. These voluntary funds are used statewide to help back candidates and committees that support education and labor. There is one reason AFT Colorado needs to grow our COPE program, **YOU**. With the current economic environment our priorities are vulnerable and are constantly being targeted for reduction. Education budgets, programs, and services are often first on the chopping block when states face dwindling tax revenues. Along with decent working conditions, retirement, and health care. All vitally affect our lives. A strong COPE program will protect our various interests.

At the local level COPE is essential. AFT Colorado will use your voluntary funds to assist in school board races, levies, and referendums in your district. Reductions in state education aid and inflation have made local budgets even more of a challenge. We use COPE dollars to work with labor and education friendly supporters on both sides of the aisle.

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I hereby authorize a monthly contribution to the AFT CO COPE (AFT CO COPE) in the amount indicated above. This authorization is signed freely and voluntarily and not out of any fear of reprisal, and I will not be favored nor disadvantaged because I exercise this right. I understand this money will be used to make political contributions by AFT CO COPE. AFT CO COPE may engage in joint fundraising efforts with AFT COPE and/or the AFL-CIO. This voluntary authorization may be revoked at any time by notifying AFT CO COPE in writing of the desire to do so. Contribution or gifts to AFT CO COPE are not deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purposes. Contributions cannot be reimbursed or otherwise paid by any other person or entity.

SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____