



Presidents Report

Sarah R. Mesmer, President

It's hard to believe that we are once again at the time of year where districts and schools are working on budgets and staffing for 2018-2019. In most of Colorado the numbers are grim. You all know that in this country Colorado ranks near the bottom, 40th, in per pupil spending and educator compensation. As a result there is a significant teacher shortage. Recent graduates entering the profession often leave within five years in search of a career in which they can make a living wage.

Thankfully, there is a light out there in [Cary Kennedy](#), gubernatorial candidate. It is rare that AFT-Colorado endorses any candidate at the primary level, but never before have we had a candidate who has promised to make education the top priority. As the former Colorado Treasurer, Cary understands the inadequacies produced by the state school funding formula and the restraints of the Tabor amendment. Cary's education platform is

comprised of the following elements: providing great educators in every classroom, paying educators as professionals, protecting retirement, expanding the teacher talent pipeline and developing a more diverse teaching workforce, empowering teachers to be leaders, engaging the community and making our schools more equitable, and making education Colorado's top priority.

Cary is also labor-friendly and is actively seeking the endorsement of unions across the state. Because of her extraordinary commitment to making education her number one focus, AFT-Colorado and CEA joined together to support Cary at the primary level. I am excited and intend to do everything I can to help Cary become the next governor of Colorado. I invite you to do the same. Collectively there are tens of thousands of members who, if we mobilize, can become a powerful force to help propel Cary to victory. Let's do it!

Important dates to remember

March 3: Student Debt Clinic – page 7

March 6: Colorado Caucus – page 3

March 8: Illusion of School Choice Forum – page 10

March 13: COPE Meeting – AFT Colorado offices 1:00 PM

March 21 & 26: Lobby Day – page 3

April 13 - 15: AFT PSRP Conference, St. Louis, MO

May 12: 26th Annual Letter Carriers' Food Drive – page 9

July 13 - July 16: AFT 2018 Convention, Pittsburgh, PA

Colorado retirees speak up for retirement security



Just before state lawmakers in Colorado began their 2018 legislative session, a coalition of union members took part in a Colorado AFL-CIO rally on Jan. 8 at the state Capitol to draw attention to their priorities, which range from expanding collective bargaining to protecting retirement security. Joanne Slanovich, a retired member of the Douglas County Federation, spoke at the rally about policy changes that would make it harder for educators and other public workers to retire with dignity.

For Slanovich, her biggest concerns are recent proposals that would affect the Colorado Public Employees' Retirement Association, also known as PERA. Last November, Gov. John Hickenlooper announced a proposed package of changes to the PERA system. Under his plan, there would be no additional employer contributions, but employee contribution rates would increase by 2 percent (beginning Jan. 1, 2019) and the cost-of-living adjustments for all current and future retirees would be reduced to 1.25 percent. The proposals will be sent to the Colorado General Assembly for approval.

Retiree activists like Slanovich know these changes would hurt active and retired public employees. "PERA doesn't just cover teachers, it also ensures that firefighters, police officers and other government employees are able to retire securely after a lifetime of public service," says Slanovich. "After a lifetime of working hard and paying into our pension, I believe we, and all Americans for that matter, should have the opportunity to retire with dignity.

"When I first started teaching, I didn't really think about my retirement. But as a former teacher now, I am covered by PERA. Because I am covered by PERA, I am not eligible for Social Security, so I—like other retired teachers in Colorado—depend solely on my PERA benefits to survive."

Slanovich acknowledges that PERA needs a few tweaks to ensure it remains strong but says that lawmakers need to start focusing on retirement security in Colorado, not making it harder to save.

"They keep chipping away at our pension and have done nothing to bolster the program. Every year, they want to cut public pensions, but they need to realize that every dollar taken from us is one less dollar we would have spent right here in Colorado at small and local businesses," says Slanovich. "We need to be investing in our state and the people that make it great." -Adrienne Coles

Lobby Day

Building off of 2017's overwhelmingly successful lobby days, we are excited to announce AFT Colorado will be hosting two lobby days this year. Our friends in the state capitol want to hear from you, and we want to make it as easy as possible for you to have your voices heard. If you're sick of just reading about the political issues that have a profound effect on your lives, like your healthcare and your pension, then please join us on one of the following days:



Wednesday March 21, 9am – Colorado State Capitol

Tuesday March 27, 8:30am – Colorado State Capitol

Never been to a lobby day or spoken to your legislators? Don't worry! You will be alongside your fellow union brothers and sisters, and AFT Colorado's legislative team will be there to assist you in any way possible. Your state legislators are just people like you, and your voice is more powerful than you may think. You care enough about your state to vote, and now you have an opportunity to follow that up and keep our elected officials honest. We will also be joining the Colorado AFL-CIO for training on the legislative process so you can bolster your long-term skills as an activist. If you are interested in joining us, please reach out to your local president or our political director at rcase@aftcolorado.org

Caucus



We spent some time in this newsletter informing you on how you can get politically involved, but the number one way you can take ownership of Colorado's political destiny is to **vote!** Before we vote in the crucial elections for governor and state assembly this fall, first we must attend caucus.

This year's precinct caucuses will be held on **Tuesday March 6**. To find your caucus location visit your [political party's website](#). If you have any other questions, visit the [Secretary of State's website](#), or email Ryan Case at rcase@aftcolorado.org.

We are incredibly excited to have the opportunity to support a gubernatorial candidate like Cary Kennedy, and for our members that are registered Democrats, it is imperative that you support her at your local caucus. We believe she is the candidate that is the most dedicated to improving Colorado's education system and treating public school employees as the professionals they are, and we believe your vote at caucus will be best made in support of [Cary Kennedy for Governor](#). To ensure she wins, vote at your local caucus, and then go on to become a delegate for your county and state assembly and support her there.

AFT Colorado has endorsed

Initiative #93 Greats Schools Thriving Communities ballot initiative

WHAT IS THE GREAT SCHOOLS, THRIVING COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE #93?

This ballot measure builds on the successes of Colorado's public schools by expanding educational opportunities for our students to prepare them for success in college, career and life. This initiative funds those expanded opportunities through tax increments on income earned above \$150,000 and on corporations and ensures that decisions about how to use those new funds are made at the local level. To provide sustainable support for schools for years to come, it stabilizes the volatile local share of education funding by first lowering property tax rates and then freezing the rates, which are third lowest in the nation.

Ballot Language — Initiative #93

SHALL STATE TAXES BE INCREASED \$1,600,000,000 ANNUALLY BY AN AMENDMENT TO THE COLORADO CONSTITUTION AND A CHANGE TO THE COLORADO REVISED STATUTES CONCERNING FUNDING RELATING TO PRESCHOOL THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL PUBLIC EDUCATION, AND, IN CONNECTION THEREWITH, CREATING AN EXCEPTION TO THE SINGLE RATE STATE INCOME TAX FOR REVENUE THAT IS DEDICATED TO THE FUNDING OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS; INCREASING INCOME TAX RATES INCREMENTALLY FOR INDIVIDUALS, TRUSTS, AND ESTATES USING FOUR TAX BRACKETS STARTING AT .37% FOR INCOME ABOVE \$150,000 AND INCREASING TO 3.62% FOR INCOME ABOVE \$500,000; INCREASING THE CORPORATE INCOME TAX RATE BY 1.37%; FOR PURPOSES OF SCHOOL DISTRICT PROPERTY TAXES, REDUCING THE CURRENT RESIDENTIAL ASSESSMENT RATE OF 7.2% TO 7.0% AND THE CURRENT NONRESIDENTIAL ASSESSMENT RATE OF 29% TO 24%; REQUIRING THE REVENUE FROM THE INCOME TAX INCREASES TO BE DEPOSITED IN A DEDICATED PUBLIC EDUCATION FUND AND ALLOWING THE REVENUE COLLECTED TO BE RETAINED AND SPENT AS VOTER-APPROVED REVENUE CHANGES; REQUIRING THE LEGISLATURE TO ANNUALLY APPROPRIATE MONEY FROM THE FUND TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO SUPPORT EARLY CHILDHOOD THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL PUBLIC EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS ON AN EQUITABLE BASIS THROUGHOUT THE STATE WITHOUT DECREASING GENERAL FUND APPROPRIATIONS; DIRECTING THE LEGISLATURE TO ENACT, REGULARLY REVIEW, AND REVISE WHEN NECESSARY, A NEW PUBLIC SCHOOL FINANCE LAW THAT MEETS SPECIFIED CRITERIA; UNTIL THE LEGISLATURE HAS ENACTED A NEW PUBLIC SCHOOL FINANCE LAW, REQUIRING THE MONEY IN THE FUND TO BE ANNUALLY APPROPRIATED FOR SPECIFIED EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND PURPOSES; REQUIRING THE MONEY IN THE FUND TO BE USED TO SUPPORT ONLY PUBLIC SCHOOLS; REQUIRING GENERAL FUND APPROPRIATIONS FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION TO INCREASE BY INFLATION, UP TO 5%, ANNUALLY; AND REQUIRING THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO COMMISSION A STUDY OF THE USE OF THE MONEY IN THE FUND WITHIN FIVE YEARS?

Creates a tax on federal taxable income above \$150,000 and on corporations to prepare every student for college, career and life.

Makes funding more sustainable for schools by locking in property tax rates (currently 3rd lowest in nation) after lowering them for everyone.

Money can only be used in support of public schools and requires accountability on public dollars.

Give voters a choice this November by helping us collect the required number of petition signatures. It is easy to collect signatures. Please contact AFT Colorado to get a petition or to sign one. You can reach us at shamilton@aftcolorado.org or rcase@aftcolorado.org. For more information about this grassroots initiative go to <http://www.greatschoolsthivingcommunities.org/>

With your help, we will continue our efforts to harness grassroots activism to stimulate wise investment in Colorado's public schools, colleges and universities.



OUR VISION

- Every student has the **opportunity** to reach his or her full potential and to participate meaningfully in the civic and economic life of the **community**
- The Colorado way of life provides every student the **chance to succeed** regardless of their zip code or their learning needs
- Quality public education develops a **competitive workforce** that will drive a **vibrant Colorado economy** for decades to come

THE CHALLENGE

- Colorado is experiencing a **teacher shortage crisis** — 95% of teachers in rural districts don't make enough salary to meet the cost of living
- Half of Colorado school districts have one or more schools operating on a **4-day school week**
- Colorado is recognized as a national leader in educational return on investment, yet **our achievement gaps are significant and growing**
- Colorado's investment in education is lagging behind other states. We **rank near the bottom in personal income invested in education**
- Education funding has not recovered from the recession: In the 2017-18 school year alone, Colorado schools were **underfunded by nearly \$830 million**

THE SOLUTION

Great Schools, Thriving Communities builds on the successes of Colorado's public schools by:

- Expanding educational opportunities for our students to prepare them for success in college, career and life
- Preparing a **qualified workforce for decades to come**
- Ensuring that Colorado's economic prosperity is shared with every community from corner-to-corner

We will achieve this by:

- Creating higher taxes on higher incomes and on large corporations
- Addressing the most pressing needs of our local schools, such as paying for full-day kindergarten and significantly increasing funding for Special Education, English Language Learners and Gifted & Talented students
- Providing sustainable support for schools, while helping out the state budget by stabilizing property taxes

GreatSchoolsThrivingCommunities.com

**GIVE VOTERS A CHOICE
THIS NOVEMBER!**

- DONATE**
- ENDORSE**
- SIGN A PETITION**
- VOLUNTEER**

@ GSTC2018

@ GSTC2018

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GreatSchoolsThrivingCommunities.com

**GREAT
SCHOOLS
THRIVING
COMMUNITIES**



#GSTC2018

92%

**OF FILERS
WILL HAVE
NO IMPACT
ON THEIR
INDIVIDUAL
INCOME
TAXES**

Legislative Update

The 2018 Colorado state legislative session has gone largely as one would expect with a split legislature – not a lot has happened. That is both good and bad. **The good:** bills AFT Colorado opposed, like one that would have allowed the concealed carry of firearms in schools and so-called “right to work” legislation, have failed to become law. **The bad:** bills that would have funded all-day kindergarten in Colorado and extended a loan forgiveness program for educators have failed.

That however, is not the end of this article. There is still one issue looming large at the Colorado state legislature – PERA. PERA, or the “Public Employees Retirement Association” provides retirement and other benefits to the employees of more than 500 government agencies and public entities in the state of Colorado. The PERA board of trustees, Governor Hickenlooper, and Walker Stapleton, (State Treasurer and Republican gubernatorial candidate), have all published proposals that aim to ‘fix’ PERA. It appears as though legislation that would—for better or worse—alter PERA could very well be introduced and passed in 2018.

Without diving too deeply into the minutiae of these proposals or this issue, we would like to emphasize a few things. First – keep in mind it is an election year, and there are individuals and political interest groups looking to benefit from the idea that PERA is in trouble. This is simply not true – it may need some tweaks, but it is still on strong ground. Second – the AFT Colorado legislative team is working hard to ensure if there is any legislation introduced that aims to change PERA, it will not pass unless it strengthens PERA and does not do so in a way that falls on the backs of hardworking public employees such as yourself. Lastly – **your voice genuinely matters on this issue.**

Our collective voice is the most powerful weapon against outside interests looking to gut your pension for ideological or political reasons. There may be a time when we ask you to testify at the capitol, attend a rally, or to lobby, write or call your legislators to urge them to do the right thing. If that time comes, please join us in this fight and speak out! If you would like to attend our lobby day or you would like to receive weekly updates on PERA and other legislative issues, please email our political director at rcase@aftcolorado.org.



MORTGAGE
The Union Plus mortgage program makes buying or refinancing a home easy for you and your children.

CAR RENTAL
Up to 25% discount on car rental deals with Avis, Budget, Hertz, Dollar, Thrifty & Payless.

Four Ways to Save

AT&T WIRELESS
The only national unionized wireless provider. 15% savings for union members on the monthly service charge of qualified plans.*

CREDIT CARD
Several credit card choices,** all with competitive rates and U.S.-based customer service, designed to meet the needs of union members.

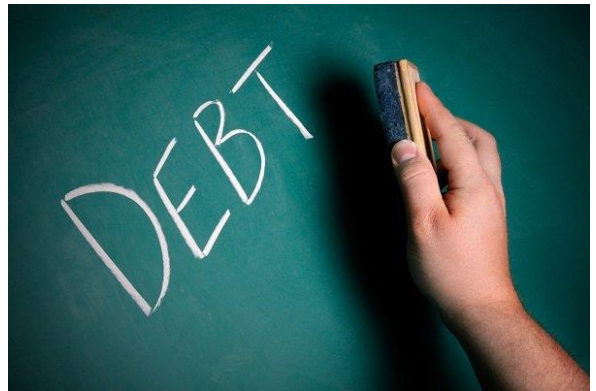
*Available only to current members of qualified AFL-CIO member unions, other authorized individuals associated with eligible unions and other sponsoring organizations with a qualifying agreement. Must provide acceptable proof of union membership such as a membership card from your local union, a pay stub showing dues deduction or the Union Plus Member Discount Card and subscribe to service under an individual account for which the member is personally liable. Offer contingent upon in-store verification of union member status. Discount subject to agreement between Union Privilege and AT&T and may be interrupted, changed or discontinued without notice. Discount applies only to recurring monthly service charge of qualified voice and data plans, not overages. Not available with unlimited voice plans. For Family Talk, applies only to primary line. For all Mobile Share plans, applies only to monthly plan charge of plans with 1GB or more, not to additional monthly device access charges. Additional restrictions apply. May take up to 2 bill cycles after eligibility confirmed and will not apply to prior charges. Applied after application of any available credit. May not be combined with other service discounts. Visit UnionPlus.org/ATT or contact AT&T at 866-499-8008 for details.

**Certain restrictions, limitations, and qualifications apply to these grants. Additional information and eligibility criteria can be obtained at UnionPlus.org/Assistance. Credit approval required. Terms and conditions apply. The Union Plus Credit Cards are issued by Capital One, N.A., pursuant to a license from MasterCard International Incorporated. Capital One N.A. is not responsible for the contents of this message and/or any other third party products/services mentioned. The MasterCard Brand Mark is a registered trademark of MasterCard International Incorporated.

UnionPlus.org/aftbenefits

Student Debt Clinic

AFT Colorado will be hosting another student debt clinic on March 3 at 10am. It will be held at the Douglas County Federation office at 304 Inverness Way South, Englewood, CO 80112 ([map](#)). For more detailed information on the debt clinics, please RSVP here: <https://bitly/2sRyyMM>



Student loan debt has a huge impact on many of our lives. The U.S. is on the verge of a devastating debt crisis not seen since the mortgage crisis of the late 2000s. Almost 45 million Americans have student loan debt, totaling \$1.4 trillion, and a staggering 2,000 people a day are going into default on their student loans.

Because we personally understand the frustrations that come along with trying to navigate the repayment process, regardless of whether or not you personally have student debt or you're a family member of somebody with student debt, we want to make sure you are equipped with the most complete information possible to maneuver the student debt landscape. There are several programs providing significant relief to those who have struggled, or are struggling, to make student loan payments. We will be going over these programs with you, in-depth, to ensure you can take full advantage of them.

AFT employs some of the nation's most knowledgeable experts on the student debt crisis and has incredible resources on this issue. There are programs that can save you hundreds of dollars a month and even forgive your debt after a certain amount of time. So we hope you take advantage of this student debt clinic! We look forward to seeing you there. Please RSVP at the website above and/or email our Political Director, Ryan Case at rcase@aftcolorado.org.

Local Union Updates



DFPNSE

**Denver Federation for Paraprofessionals
and Nutrition Service Employees**

Profit Sharing-Nutrition Employees

This is the second year the Denver Federation for Paraprofessionals and Nutrition Service Employees made a profit by serving students in Denver Public Schools. As a result, the nutrition employees were able to share the profit from the Enterprise Department. Every employee, who qualified, received a share of the profit - up to \$200. The payout was included in the February 15, 2018 paychecks.



Letter from Douglas County Federation President: Thoughts after the horrific shooting in Broward County, Florida

Thank you. Thank you for being there for our children. Thank you for being there for each other. Thank you to our mental health support staff- I know these times are especially demanding for you and I am so grateful you are here for our children.

I'm going to share my personal story, in the hopes that you know you are not alone, and so you know you have someone to talk to. My husband is a teacher at Columbine High School, and was teaching there on the horrible day, April 20, 1999. If you want to read his story, you can [read it here](#). I will warn you, it's upsetting and it's long. But it's also incredible, and it's a story about how he moved on.

I made an appointment with a therapist within a week of that shooting. I didn't know what I needed, but it seemed like an obvious decision. I'm glad I did. I felt like I didn't have the right to be in the pain I was in because I wasn't "there." Of course that's flawed thinking. Everyone has the right to feel exactly as we feel. And if we are upset, sad, angry, scared, or whatever the feeling is, it is ok. I learned to accept myself, accept what I was feeling. My story is long and complicated, so I will skip most of it and fast forward to February 23, 2010 when I was teaching at Acres Green and my husband, Kiki, called me after school and said, you're going to need to sit down. I did and he told me that there was a shooting at my step-son's school, Deer Creek Middle School. I still remember the compassion George Boser showed me when he told me to leave and of course I wasn't working the next day and they would get the sub and write the plans. (Thanks again George, and thanks to my amazing teammates who carried me through this!). I picked up our son, and then we drove to get Lucas. I handed my cell phone to my youngest, Samson,

and told him to call his Nana and tell her what was going on. I overheard him tell his Nana, right now we need to start forgiving the shooter. It will only hurt us if we carry the anger inside. Ah, the wisdom that comes out of the mouths of babes, right? We would see Lucas' backpack on the news when the helicopter filmed the scene, and that's when I knew how close he was to the shooting. His friend had to pull him away as he froze in disbelief, and then they ran for miles to get away.

Samson was right, at least for me. Forgiving the shooter was important for my own healing (I began that process for the shooters at Columbine High School within a week of that shooting). The shooter at Deer Creek was schizophrenic, and his family didn't have the resources for his medication. They had tried. My husband had worked with his father at one point. This was a human being who wasn't well. For me, forgiveness is recognizing the humanity in a person and their act. However, not everyone will want to forgive or be able to forgive, and that's ok too. There is no "right way" to navigate through these times.

I remember when my first graders asked me, days after the shooting at Columbine, if I could keep them safe. I remember telling them that of course I could and would, all the while knowing I was lying. The truth was, I would do everything in my power to keep my kids safe, but some things are out of our control. The teachers who have been unable to protect their students in these horrific events most certainly tried, some dying in the process. Through the years, my husband has traveled the country talking to teachers, staff members, administrators, parents, and students about the process of healing and moving on. Kiki has worked alongside survivors (continued on page 9)

from Newtown, Platte Canyon High School, Marysville-Pilchuck, West Nickel Mines Amish School, Virginia Tech, Arapahoe High School, and others; sadly there are too many to list. Our family believes strongly that it's important to talk about our experiences, and Kiki will tell you ask me anything. That offer stands for me as well.

I don't have any answers. I have a lot of strong opinions, that's for certain! But I won't engage in that here. I will say that for me, forgiveness and action are what help me move forward after these awful events.

I would love to host a gathering where [Kiki](#) can come and talk with any of you who are interested. He will help us process this time we live in and can share with you how he has supported his students as well. If you would be interested in attending such a gathering, please [let me know here](#).

I wish you peace as you carry forward, and I urge you to take care of yourselves and rely on your friends and colleagues when you need them. Please let me know how I can support you.

In solidarity, Kallie Leyba President, Douglas County Federation A team of professionals putting kids first



SAT., MAY 12, 2018

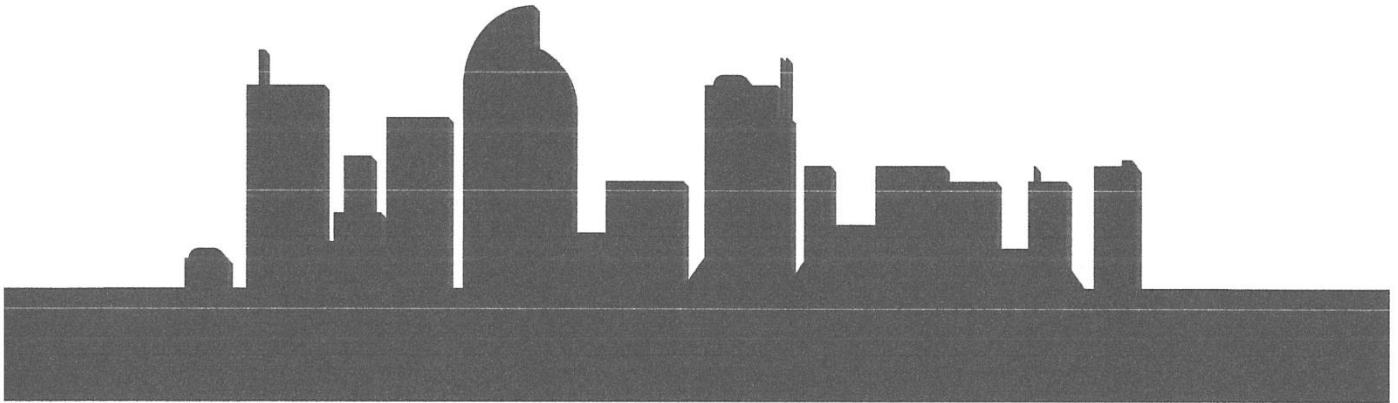
PUT YOUR NON-PERISHABLE DONATION IN A BAG BY YOUR MAILBOX.
WE'LL DELIVER IT TO A LOCAL FOOD BANK.

National Partners



THE ILLUSION OF SCHOOL CHOICE

A Community Forum Against School Closures



**Thursday, March 8
5:30 – 7 pm**

**Abraham Lincoln HS
2285 S Federal Blvd
Denver, CO 80219**

Forum Organizers:

THE ALLIANCE
TO RECLAIM OUR SCHOOLS
COLORADO



**CAUCUS of
TODAY'S TEACHERS**

The **Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools Colorado** and the **Caucus of Today's Teachers** present a community forum to discuss the inequities of our education system and the damage that corporate reforms have inflicted on our communities.

This event is open to the Denver Metro community, including neighboring districts.

The event will feature information about the state of Denver Public Schools and opportunities to discuss issues, build alliances, and take action moving forward.

R S V P a t :

<http://tiny.cc/SaveOurSchools>

Learn more about TodaysTeachers.org

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

www.aftcolorado.org 720-443-8032

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.

FIRST NAME _____ LAST NAME _____

BILLING ADDRESS _____

BILLING CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

HOME PHONE _____ WORK PHONE _____

MOBILE PHONE _____  wish to receive periodic text messages and accept the associated charges.

HOME EMAIL _____ LOCAL _____

WORK LOCATION _____

PAYMENT

*Due to the associated fees, we prefer that you sign up for **bank draft** payment.*

MONTHLY COPE AMOUNT ☐ \$5 ☐ \$10 ☐ \$15 ☐ \$OTHER _____

BANK

DRAFT **PREFERRED METHOD******

Fill out below or simply attach a voided check.

BANK NAME _____

ROUTING NUMBER _____ ACCOUNT NUMBER _____

CREDIT/DEBIT CARD: If you choose this method, we will follow up with you to change to bank draft at a later date. CARD

TYPE: ☐ VISA ☐ MC

NAME ON CARD _____

CARD NUMBER _____ EXP DATE _____

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.