



NEARO Outreach



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FROM THE PRESIDENT

by Joel Gewirtz

Dear NEAROnes,

As I write this, the good citizens of Ohio have just spoken—and what they had to say was a bit louder because of help from some of our fellow retirees. The issue before Ohio voters

was the Republican-dominated state government's hasty, ill-conceived anti-labor vendetta, which scapegoated Ohio public employee unions for nationwide fiscal problems they had in no way caused. Fortunately for Ohio, what its voters overwhelmingly said on November 8 was "No!"

Thanks to an effort initiated in September by NEARO board member John Thurston, our board had appointed a committee to survey and identify NEARO members willing to help NEA and its affiliates in this time of threats to the very existence and survival of unions. More than 30 of us around the country volunteered, and soon seven stalwarts were off to Ohio for two weeks of helping to get out the vote to overturn the new state law known as Issue 2 (see stories beginning on page 6).

The results in Ohio were both decisive and satisfying. It would be wonderful to conclude that America's voters have suddenly come to their senses and embraced the values that seemed taken for granted when those of us in the geezer cohort were growing up: truth, justice, and the American way (even without an ability to leap tall buildings). But I'm a realist and I don't expect to see that kind of change. Frankly, at this point I have no idea what kind of change I can realistically believe in, and I'd probably settle for even a half-hearted belief that 50 percent

of America's registered voters will suddenly come to their polling places, if not their senses.

Speaking of democracy, I have encountered some concern that our NEARO elections may not always appear to reflect its full flowering. While our nominating process does, on rare occasion, result in the heart-pounding thrill of a contested election, far more often it conveniently presents the electorate with precisely the same number of candidates as positions to be filled. I have heard it said that this is simply because our system generally identifies by some mysterious consensus the single best candidate for each position. Of course this is a good thing, because it spares us both the expense and the lingering animosity of full-scale, nationwide negative advertising campaigns, and avoids the annoying logistics of a mail-ballot election,



NEARO WINTER MEETING FEATURES HOLIDAY LUNCHEON

Our winter membership meeting will be on Wednesday, December 14, in the NEA Auditorium--the "A" side. Business meeting starts at 11 a.m., followed by a festive holiday luncheon (turkey and all the trimmings). The NEA staff choir has been invited to provide live holiday music.

As always, the NEARO board of directors will meet in the same room beginning at 9:30 a.m.

New this year: bring a new, unwrapped toy with you, which will be donated to the Toys for Tots campaign to help brighten the holiday season for children in DC-area needy families.

while at the same time ensuring that each of us feels entirely comfortable with the representatives we have, uh, chosen to lead our organization. Each time I hear this, though, the other, quieter voice in my head responds, "You're kidding, right?"

In any event, the Nominations Committee has received from its thorough—and thoroughly democratic—canvass of the membership exactly three candidates to stand for the three seats on the NEARO Board of Directors that will become open on January 1. One is

Norma Kacen, an incumbent. The other two are Pat Orrange and Ron Houston, both new to the board. Since nominations are now closed and this election will be uncontested, we can safely anticipate the declaration of these candidates as elected by acclamation at our December meeting. To these three fine folks: welcome, and welcome back.

And to all members, their families, and those close to them, best wishes from NEARO for a good holiday season and a peaceful, healthy, happy, sane, and good-tasting 2012.

RETIREMENT PLAN UPDATE

by Lynn Ohman, NEARO Representative on the NEA Retirement Board



The NEA Retirement Board holds its next regularly scheduled meeting on November 29—too late for a report to be included in this newsletter. As you know, it's been a wild ride for the financial markets generally since mid-summer, and that volatility is likely to continue right up to the end of the 2011 calendar (and retirement plan) year.

We won't know the final results for NEA Retirement Plan investments until the year closes. At this point the Plan is just slightly positive in overall annual investment return performance. At the close of the year and after the actuaries have evaluated funds available against liabilities, we will get a formal assessment of the overall health of the Plan.

As you may recall, the Plan was 94 percent "funded" at the close of 2010, meaning that the value of plan assets was 94 percent of what is needed to pay the benefits of current and future retirees. We won't have a comparable 2011 statistic for a few months. However, poor investment returns in 2011 may mean that NEA and other Plan employers will need to increase their contributions to the Plan in 2012. As always, NEARO will follow developments and keep you posted.

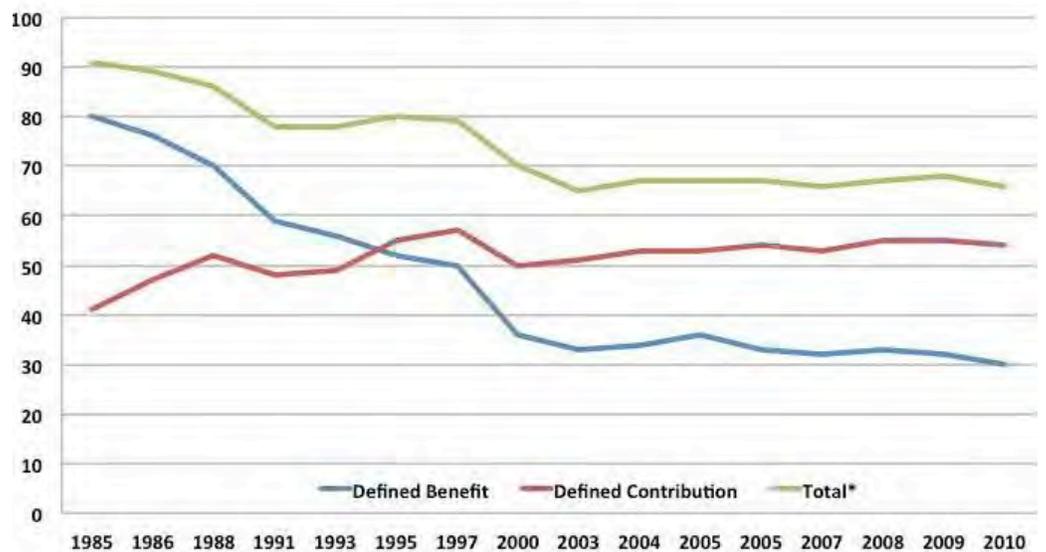
Please remember that the Retirement Plan invests for the very long term. Relatively short term volatility and weak investment returns are challenging and frustrating. However, they are not directly related to the Plan's ability to pay current retirees or to fund future beneficiaries.

DEFINED BENEFIT PLANS: A DYING BREED

We are all fortunate indeed to have worked for NEA or the other employers in the NEA Retirement Plan and to have qualified for the Plan's solid "defined benefit," otherwise known as a monthly pension. Such defined benefit plans, once widespread, have become increasingly rare since the mid-1980s,



% of Employees Participating in Defined Benefit and Defined Contribution Plans, Large and Medium Private Establishments, 1985-2010



when Congress and large financial institutions began encouraging employers and employees to forego them in favor of defined contribution options, such as 401Ks and IRAs.

The percentage of employees working for large and medium-sized private employers who participated in any type of retirement plan option dropped from 91 percent in 1985 down to 66 percent in 2010. In the same time period, for employees in retirement plans, the percentage participating in defined benefit plans like ours dropped from 80 percent down to 30 percent. Participation in defined contribution plans grew modestly, from 41 to 54 percent.

2012 COLA WILL BE 2.8 PERCENT

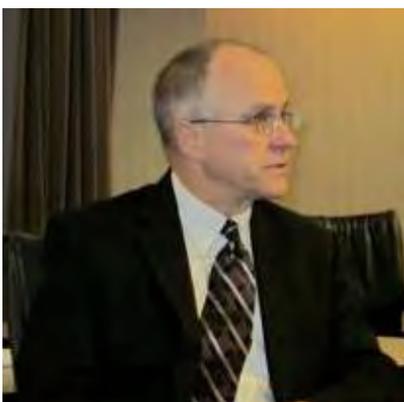
A letter from NEA Human Resources will be included with your regular pension benefits statement from State Street in December, explaining that effective with the January 2012 payment your pension will be increased by 2.8 percent. Our annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) is calculated by determining the percentage increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) from the previous October to the most recent October, and then applying 80 percent of that increase to NEA pensions (the resulting increase must be at least 1.5 percent but can be no more than 3 percent). The calculation for 2012 is straightforward: the CPI increased 3.5 percent from October 2010 to October 2011, and 80 percent of that is 2.8 percent.

NEW NEA EXEC WELCOMES NEARO'S HELP

Speaking extemporaneously at NEARO's Sept. 14 fall membership meeting, new NEA Executive Director John Stocks, 55, talked about his life—and his experience fighting union-busting legislation in Wisconsin. Here are excerpts from his remarks, followed by Stocks' answers to NEARO members' questions.

I was born and reared in New Orleans, Louisiana. At age 17 I left to attend Evergreen State College in Washington State. I studied political economy and after graduation went to Boise, Idaho, to work as a community organizer.

In Boise I built neighborhood organizations for low- and moderate-income people. In Coeur d'Alene I was involved with Morris Dees [of the Southern Poverty Law Center], working against a neo-Nazi group. Afterward I was elected to the Idaho state senate. During this time I developed close ties to the Idaho Education Association (IEA). IEA Executive Director Don Rollie and I became friends; Connie Hutchison (then a UniServ director and later IEA president) and I married.



Wisconsin was my next step. My work in Idaho led to my being hired by the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) as director of government

relations (GR). While in that post, I worked on the front lines of a major Milwaukee education reform movement, pushed by then-Gov. Tommy Thompson and involving charters, vouchers, and alternative certification. I worked in GR for 13 years and then became WEAC's assistant executive director.

In 2003 I came to NEA as a director and worked for 18 months on such programs as the Great Public Schools Action Plan, membership, and the 2004 presidential election in which NEA supported John Kerry. In 2004 NEA Executive Director John Wilson asked me to become his deputy executive director.

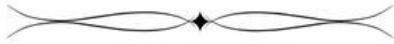
Thus started my long-distance commute from NEA's national headquarters to Madison, Wisconsin, every three weeks for eight years. My wife, who has a Ph.D. in Educational Policy and Leadership, worked in Madison, and our two kids were in college.

Following John Wilson's retirement I was brought on as NEA's executive director, working in a transitional capacity between the Dec. 2010 Board of Directors meeting and Sept. 1, 2011. As of today [Sept. 14] I've been on the job for nine days.



"We face an array of forces against us who have lots of money," says NEA Executive Director John Stocks of union-busting campaigns in Wisconsin and other states.

I come from a long line of social activists. My mother and grandmother and great great aunt were settlement house social workers. Most of the rest of my family were doctors, ministers, or teachers.



Q: Can you give us your thoughts on the anti-union sparks spreading from Wisconsin to Ohio and across the U.S.?

Stocks: As WEAC's chief lobbyist, I'd known Gov. Scott Walker for many years. Last winter I spent 27 days in Wisconsin to help organize the resistance there. I'm a damned good organizer. We organized college students and worked with a teaching assistants affiliate and with labor. We got 100,000 people to participate in demonstrations, sleep-ins, and other activities.

What were the lessons from that? It is not about whether we [the unions] are the status quo, opponents of a balanced budget or education reform. It's about people who say they are balancing the budget by taking back bargaining rights, [but] don't believe that public employee unions should exist.

We face an array of forces against us who have lots of money from hedge funds and other sources. They include libertarians like the Koch brothers, the ideological right that uses single issues such as abortion to drive a wedge between NEA members, profiteers whose objective is to capture the money

spent on public education and privatize it, and the reformers who say that public schools are not serving poor kids.

These forces are against unions in general, and ours in particular—and they're now attacking everything from payroll deduction of dues to members' pension funds. These are highly orchestrated strategies funded by corporate money and private foundation money. They're under way in Wisconsin, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Florida, Idaho, Arizona, and Tennessee. To follow what's going on in the states, go to our website: www.educationvotes.nea.org.

Q: Can we somehow attack the financial heart of those who are funding anti-union efforts?

Stocks: We can't focus on boycotting the Koch brothers; their money is in finance, and they won't be pressured by product boycotts, which just aren't effective against super-diversified, multinational conglomerates. We'll do better by speaking to the hearts and minds of people who support public schools.

Q: How receptive would you be to an offer of assistance from NEARO?

Stocks: I would be highly favorable. The Ohio Education Association needs 100 bodies for a ballot measure referendum in November, and several other state affiliates have requested assistance. We need all the help we can get.



Some of the attendees at the September 2011 NEARO meeting (left to right):

Rozanne Weissman, Rosemary Rathz, Lynn Marshall, Dale Robinson, Roger Stephon, Joel Gewirtz, Ann Kurzius, Edna Frady, Gaye Barker, Norma Jones, Margaret (Marge) Laney, Mary Sosa.



'Grouchy Old Man' Sounds Off on . . .

LOSING IPOD, REDISCOVERING LOVE OF MUSIC

by John Conway (retired from NEA Government Relations in 2000)

I recently lost my iPod. Well, that's not exactly true. In the interest of full disclosure, I forgot to repack it upon returning from a blackjack tournament. I'm sure some hotel housekeeper thinks I'm a great tipper, but the awful truth is that I've grown more forgetful in my aging years (I bet you can relate!).

I moped around the house for days as I tried to reconcile the guilt that comes with losing a valuable possession. I was soon reminded by an understanding spouse that things can be replaced; a successful eBay auction and iTunes download brought back all the joy of portable music.

That's how I learned again that music is an integral part of my life. Like almost everyone else in our generation, I played an instrument in junior high. (Do they still have music appreciation or junior highs anymore?) Mine was clarinet. (My father tried unsuccessfully to teach me to play the piano by ear the way he did.)

My love of all kinds of music really took off when a neighbor's kid taught me to whistle. To this day, I find myself whistling the notes of "Laura" or "You Go to My Head Like a Glass of Champagne" while shopping. Young people (you know, those under 40) look askance at me. I don't know if it's because they don't recognize the tune or are just disgusted with my disturbing the booming rhythmic noise from the overhead speakers. One of my favorite childhood memories is of the time my Dad came to my rescue when my aunt chastised me for whistling at the funeral dinner for my grandmother. He told her I had found my own way to celebrate the joy my grandmother had brought to my life.

Thanks in large part to my oldest brother, a teenage radio disc jockey in the '50s, I learned the

value of listening to sounds outside my comfort zone by sampling recordings from Chittlin' Circuit outlets. When everyone else went ape over the Beatles, I focused on jazz from masters like Stan Getz, Chet Baker, Herbie Hancock, and Wes Montgomery.

For the last two decades, my listening choice has focused on what most people would call "hillbilly" music. This is not only because I have settled in Tennessee, but also because I have come to love these stories of lost love, lost jobs, and the hardscrabble life of Appalachia's mountain people. Search out the lyrics to "Don't Our Love Look Natural Lying There," "You'll Never Leave Harlan Alive," or "Thirty Years of Farming" to experience real pieces of Americana.



Buying another iPod with its myriad playlists reminds me why I subscribe to Sirius/XM radio and keep adding Easy Listening choices from the iTunes Store (how did we survive before technology?). Revitalizing my music library and engaging in this listening pleasure help soften my grouchiness and add value to my existence.

John Conway is a regular contributor to these pages. He lives in Lenior City, Tenn. You can email him at tennjconway@yahoo.com.

RETIREES RETURN . . .

'OL' DAWGS' HELP SAVE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING IN OHIO

by John Thurston (retired in 1999 from NEA, where he worked in organizing, UniServ, government relations, membership, and the women's and minority intern training academy)



John Thurston, Mort Mondale, and Gene Preston work a "vote NO on issue 2" phone bank in Toledo.

Mort Mondale, Gene Preston, and I were among the six NEARO members and one spouse who helped with the get-out-the-vote (GOTV) effort, the last two weeks before Ohio's November 8 election. The three of us were sent to Toledo, a union town, where we spent the bulk of our time going door to door but also did a little phone bank work, working from targeted lists of voters expected to lean our way.

It was the typical feet-on-the-ground effort, with lots of folks not home, the occasional irate person planning to vote the "other" way, and cold, windy, or rainy weather on some days. But most folks we talked with responded favorably and even said thank you.

It was clear the "no" forces (urging voters to use their "citizens veto" to overturn Senate Bill 5) had lots more feet on the ground and spent more money than the "yes" forces who wanted to keep that union-busting bill as Ohio law. This was the first time I've ever seen such total cooperation between and among virtually all private and public sector unions. On election night the results (61 percent to 39 percent) clearly showed what can be accomplished when we are all on the same page.

NEA rotated over 50 of its own staff in and out of Ohio (most from the DC office), and the surrounding

state affiliates sent some UniServ staff in for a few days. AFT had a number of folks on site as well. NEA and the Ohio EA kept a low public profile despite the dollars and bodies put into the effort. I'm not sure how they're going to be able to demonstrate their role in preventing the loss of bargaining since the organizations' names weren't attached to the campaign in any public way.

Personally, being there was a great experience for me. Working side by side with retired colleagues as well as current NEA staff union members got the old juices flowing again.

And it was good to see that the commitment of us Ol' Dawgs to the cause is still as strong as ever. Two weeks was just about the right amount of time, since after all we retirees do have other things of importance to do, such as sailing.

The campaign was coordinated by WE ARE OHIO, a joint operation of virtually all national and state public and private sector unions. Most of the people who ran the day-to-day operations were "kids," who were clearly in their element with the high tech stuff.

The technical side of the operation was the most sophisticated I have encountered in my history as an organizer—a vast improvement from the old days when we used telephone books and knocked on every door. The ability to target and select specific audiences of prospective voters made the effort easier for the workers and more efficient for the campaign.

One sobering note is that there was another issue on the ballot that resulted in a very different outcome. Issue 3 was a vote promoted by the Tea Party-Republican folks to exempt Ohio from the new federal health care law (denigrated as "Obamacare"). It passed, 66 to 34 percent—showing that labor unions couldn't hold their own people on this issue. That may have serious implications for the 2012 elections in Ohio and elsewhere.



... TO THE RAMPARTS

UNION MEMBERS PULL TOGETHER IN TOLEDO

by Mort Mondale (retired in 1996 from NEA Affiliate Services, where he ran the NEA-Retired program; formerly worked in IPD)

When NEARO put out a call for any of us who wanted to join the Ohio dust-up on NEA's dime, I said yes and was one of seven retirees put in the game. Senate Bill 5—Ohio Gov. John Kasich's Wisconsin-like law disabling unions—pulled union members together in ways the unions themselves could not.

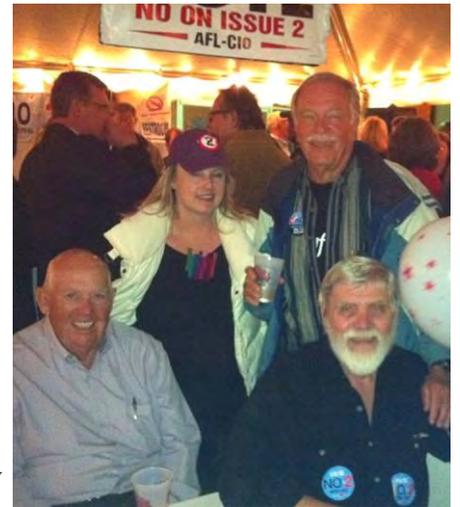
The Teamsters' building in Toledo was the Toledo organizing center. Over the 11 days I was there, hundreds of police, firefighters, teachers, association staff from Ohio and elsewhere, and a number of active NEA staff poured into the building to work phones, organize facilities, knock on doors (over 120,000!), and do whatever was needed.

"Issue 2" was the public's chance to stop Senate Bill 5. It went on the Nov. 8 ballot because of a petition signed by 1.3 million Ohioans—at least three times the required number of signatures. A "yes" vote would have continued SB5, and the "no" vote stopped it. Millions of dollars were spent by both sides, on every form of advertising you can imagine.

Three of us retirees worked out of the Toledo office: Gene Preston, John Thurston, and me. For 11 days we walked the streets of Toledo, knocking on doors to determine the level of support and advocating a "no" vote. I met wonderfully friendly and tolerant people—and their dogs—and was sometimes welcomed inside for a lengthier discussion. Early on, the predicted

spread in Toledo was 60 percent with us and 29 percent against us. It stayed that way; on election night it was 61-28.

My theory is that in Ohio as well as Wisconsin, unions were key to Obama's 2008 election, so disabling unions was a GOP strategy for defeating him in 2012. If so, the governors disabled themselves: Kasich and [Wisconsin Gov. Scott] Walker are both deeply wounded politically, and union membership is growing again. Greed has always been the Republicans' Achilles' heel, but this time it's political greed in addition to financial greed, and we can only hope they've done themselves in.



Exhausted but happy workers celebrate victory on election night at Teamsters local in Toledo: (from left) Gene Preston, Sarah Ferguson, John Thurston, Mort Mondale.

CURRENT STAFFER LEARNS FROM 'VILLAGE ELDERS'

by Sarah Ferguson (has worked in various departments at NEA headquarters since 1997; currently assisting with long-term strategy and leadership development through the Office of the Chief Learning Officer)

I was one of about 50 NEA headquarters staff who volunteered for a one- or two-week campaign assignment leading up to the Ohio election. So on Oct. 28 I headed to Toledo with the intention of staying one week, and by the time I returned to DC on Nov. 9 my trusty pedometer had logged over 175,000 steps! Staying for two weeks ended up feeling more like a marathon than a sprint, though the people running beside me made it much more gratifying than grueling.

Working with Mort Mondale, John Thurston, and Gene Preston was like being handed an amazing gift: a couple weeks of quality time with the village elders. Over the years I'd learned about the milestones in

NEA's history, but for once I got to hear firsthand stories that gave me insight into how and why things progressed the way they did. These three "wise guys" and their genuine, intense passion for workers' rights were so inspiring.

At times it feels as if we at NEA now spend more time talking about doing good than actually doing it! In Toledo we were definitely Doing with a capital D, and that traction felt great. The commitment and energy that Mort, Gene, and John brought to the cause were invaluable and added so much to the experience.



GOOD TO BE NEEDED AT AGE 80

by Gene Preston (worked at NEA 1967-76 as director of the Midwest Office and later director of collective bargaining, then spent 12 years as executive director of the Pennsylvania State EA and five years as general manager of the California State Employees Association, SEIU Local 1000)

First I want to thank NEARO and NEA for making this opportunity possible. Knocking on doors for five to eight hours a day for 11 straight days may not be glamorous, but it was a great experience.

I started this assignment with some trepidation. I was not sure that an 80-year-old should take on a responsibility like this. The first few days I was tired, but it got easier every day. It was good to be needed. I was thanked every day by Ohio voters who said they appreciated the work we were doing. It was fun to be a winner.

NEA retirees are particularly well suited to talk about how bad things were before teacher collective bargaining—and how bad things would be again

without it. In the 1950s I left my job at a Lincoln-Mercury assembly plant, where I worked to earn my way through college, to start teaching. I earned \$25 less a week and lost my health insurance in order to teach.

I really enjoyed sharing “war stories” with Mort Mondale and John Thurston over dinner. History shared through stories is more alive and inspirational than written history. War stories about early bargaining, organizing, and legislating should be captured before they are lost forever.

Thank you for this fulfilling experience. If NEA can use me again, just call and I’ll be there.

CANVASSING AND PHONING IN CINCINNATI

by Rachel Hendrickson (retired April 30 as Coordinator of NEA Field Operations and moved from Virginia to Maine the day after)

I was in Cincinnati for the final week of the campaign. I spent a day canvassing door to door with an AFSCME leader from Pennsylvania. Bunny works at one of the colleges where the Pennsylvania State EA represents the faculty and AFSCME represents the support staff. Another day I went out with current NEA staffer Montre Dupre, who walked my “old dawg” legs off. I’d be working one side of the street, look up, and she’d be already halfway down the block, sprinting from house to house.

Other days I helped out at a phone bank. I was tremendously impressed by all the folks who told me that of course they were going to vote “no.” They truly understood the stakes.

One recently retired UAW member said of course he and his wife were both going to vote “no.” I mentioned that their daughter was also listed as a voter in the house. He conferred with his wife to see if she thought

their daughter had ever voted, and the consensus was that she hadn’t. They assured me they were going to escort her out of the house on election day and over to the polls.

Other memories: a young Ohio teacher working the phone banks for six hours straight on the Sunday before the election and talking about how important the vote was for education. Having dinner with staff and governance from UFCW [United Food and Commercial Workers] Local 75 who said they’d spent the day canvassing because they knew “an injury to one is an injury to all.” That’s a real belief for them, not just a convenient slogan.

I would do it all again in a flash: bad hotel continental breakfasts, dying flashlights, too many sugar-glazed donuts, bad chairs, bad lighting, sore feet, and wonderful, important work. 



FULL COURT PRESS IN DAYTON

by Sam DeHaven (worked as a political organizer in the NEA Pacific Regional Office from 1983 to 1991, then for the California Teachers Association as a UniServ director; retired in 2009)

When John Thurston put out the email requesting help in Ohio I responded and told my wife, Marilyn Aden, a retired California Teachers Association organizer. She too wanted to volunteer, so we both got our names on the list and asked to be sent to the same location. We were assigned to Dayton.

We got in late Friday night and Saturday morning we found the AFL-CIO regional office, where the zone coordinator was expecting us. He gave us packets of information and then talked with us about our assignment and his expectations. They already had plenty of canvassers, so we were to go to the IBEW [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers] hall to make phone calls.

The phone bank was done in two parts: the IBEW called union members and the “We Are Ohio” campaign used computers to do what we call predictive dialing. The computer has a list of registered voters and begins calling. When someone answers, the computer notifies the volunteer caller; the voter’s name and a script pop up in front of him or her.

We reported to Shonda Sneed, the “We Are Ohio” phone bank coordinator. She was wonderful to work with and always had a smile. She knew the technology and could untangle whatever mess the computers created. Marilyn and I spent 12 days with Shonda and would be happy to adopt her. She put in 12-hour days—and one night went home and cooked chile and cornbread for the phoners. Our co-workers in nearby cubicles included a retired Dayton teacher, two staffers released from their unions (AFSCME and UFCW), and a retired Dayton policeman.

The prospective voters we called kept things interesting. Asked if she knew how she’d be voting on Issue 2, one woman responded “with a push pin.” Another asked me how I’d gotten her cell phone number. I told

her it was the number she wrote on the form when she registered to vote. “Ah [expletive]!” she said.

Marilyn and I worked the phones every day except election day, when we were asked to canvas a precinct. It was in a suburban precinct and the temperature was 72. We had a fine time.

The unions’ response in Ohio was what I would call a full court press. Several NEA officers and board members came to our phone bank and called voters. I met an Amalgamated Transit Union president who had come to Dayton with others from his union to do whatever they could to stop the erosion of collective bargaining. He said that in Michigan they are facing 24 anti-union bills. They expect to kill the big ones, like right to work, but some will get through. And then they expect the governor and the Republican legislators to come back with a “right to teach” bill. I fear something similar awaits the teachers in Ohio. The unions stood together this year and stopped an assault on public employees, but what will be the response if next time teachers are the sole target?



Sam DeHaven, retired police officer John Benysek, and Sam’s wife Marilyn Aden wave from their duty station in Dayton.

More NEARO Volunteers Needed; You’re Invited To Join the Fun!

NEA has expressed interest in NEARO’s attempt to expand the pool of volunteers available for other major political efforts around the country. Watch for another emailed survey and consider responding to volunteer for a future assignment! NEA pays your expenses. As NEA Director of Field Operations Barby Halstead-Worrell says, “The challenges facing our members and the Association now are more destructive than anything we’ve ever seen. To advocate for our members—and indeed to save public education—we need to tap the skills and expertise that retired staff have developed over their successful careers as organizers, PR folks, trainers, and political specialists.”

CHARTER SCHOOLS: NOT ALL BAD

by Barry Abel (NEA Communications and Organizing, retired 1999)



Back in the 1990s, when charter schools were new and so were many of us, NEA's initial reaction was to "just say no." But cooler heads advised us to think the question through first. So NEA set up a team to investigate a variety of charter schools. Bob McClure headed that effort; I was a member of the team. We visited and studied a number of charter schools—some awful, others awfully exciting. We also agreed to advise five charter schools, observing their responses to pressures upon them over a multi-year period.

With a complicated topic like charter schools, the discussion always depends on where you are, what your state law provides, and of course which particular school you're looking at. In some places charter schools have been used to undermine public education; in other places charters really do attempt to inject flexibility into an all-too-rigid system.

Some union leaders fear charters will move teachers out of the union and fail to protect their tenure and other rights. They often prefer that charter schools exist within the public school system. This would leave them subject to the general rules of the district, including unionized structures, with safeguards to ensure that the charters meet standards and deliver what they promise. To me that just makes sense.

Too often public schools, especially those in crowded urban population centers, apply one-size-fits-all 'solutions' for every situation. But kids—that is, people—don't come in one-size-fits-all packages. Having different approaches and philosophies as alternatives makes sense; charter schools can be helpful.

It starts with the state charter school law. The right wing—which seems to do a far better job of labeling things than does the left or center—refers to "strong" and "weak" charter laws. As with "No Child Left Behind," you need to be careful about what "strong" and "weak" really mean. By "strong," public school opponents mean laws that eliminate as many regulations as possible, allowing entrepreneurs the maximum amount of freedom to set up and run their own schools. By "weak," they mean laws that leave in place legal requirements, such as teacher rights and standards for employment.

Those who truly seek reform and creativity in education get frustrated by "weak" charter laws that appear to allow for change yet guarantee that no meaningful change will actually occur. They have a point. But "strong" charter school laws under which "anything goes" pose their own problems. In Michigan, for example, when the charter law was first enacted, pressure was applied to force the chartering

powers—universities—to give out as many charters as possible. The universities complied, issuing charters without time to investigate all the proposed schools. Two years later about 100 charter schools had failed. The students they were supposed to be serving were left lagging two years behind their peers.

The public charter school with which I worked directly was in Hawai'i's Windward district of O'ahu. This elementary school was allowed to establish its own personality and approach—voted on by teachers and parents, approved by the board of education—but had to adhere to fundamental district rules. The teachers were represented by HSTA/NEA just like all teachers in the district and state.

The principal of that charter school felt that all public schools should be charter schools in that each should be organized around a particular philosophy. District oversight would ensure options within each of a district's geographic areas. While every school would teach the fundamentals, in a given area different schools could emphasize, say, literature, the arts, math and science, English, or developmental skills. Schools could be more or less flexible, depending upon what students needed, parents wanted, and teachers felt most comfortable with. Teachers would have more choice about the approach to use; families would have more choice about the kind of school they wanted their kids to attend.

In this principal's vision of an ideal world, parents could apply to whichever school they thought would best suit their child's development. After enrollment, testing and teacher observation could lead to counseling, with a student being placed in a different environment if necessary. In other words, flexibility would allow teacher input into creating schools that could actually be centers for individual student-based learning and development, rather than factories for containing and processing students *en masse*.

There are many holes in the charter concept, and there's been much abuse in its application around the U.S. Today's public schools face severe problems—adequate funding would certainly help a great deal but it will never solve all of them. More creativity is needed, but with safeguards so that "creativity" doesn't become a cover for destroying school workers' protections from abuse by those with power over their work lives.

COLLEAGUES FIRST, FRIENDS FOREVER



(Left to right) Isabel Bernal, Odessa Jones, Eurcelle Lewis, and Janice Jackson worked together at NEA in the 1990s. Since retirement, they have stayed in contact with one another. Once a year they get together for lunch when Isabel, who lives in Deltona, Florida, comes to the DC metropolitan area.

WELCOME, NEW RETIREES!

Sandra Baldwin NEA Legal Services 10/31/79-8/1/11	Wanda Ingham Maine Education Association 1/3/89-10/1/11	James Petrie National Education Association 8/1/94-8/1/11 (Deferred Vested)
Michael Bernier Florida Education Association 8/1/05-8/1/11	Hilda Jones Maine Education Association 7/15/86-9/1/11	Vincent Santaniello NEA-Rhode Island 5/1/75-8/1/11
Cathy Betley-Fotino Arizona Education Association 3/6/84-11/1/11	Charles Mack NEA Conference & Facilities Mgt. 9/30/80-8/1/11	Donna Simpson Assn. of PA State Colleges & Univs. 9/1/95-8/1/11
Joel Bradshaw NEA Government Relations 9/18/95-9/1/11 (Deferred Vested)	Judith McQuaide NEA Research 2/14/00-9/1/11	E. C. Walker National Education Association 2/1/01-9/1/11
Steven Crouse Maine Education Association 9/1/85-9/1/11	Thang Nguyen NEA Academy 6/18/79-9/1/11	Joan Werzer NEA Financial & Membership Svc. 4/29/02-8/1/11
Alice Gartell Arizona Education Association 8/24/93-8/1/11	Josie Ochoa Arizona Education Association 1/29/85-11/1/11	John Wilson National Education Association 11/1/00-9/1/11
Donna Giles North Carolina Ed. Association 12/1/1999-8/1/11 (Deferred Vested)	Karl Ochs NEA Affiliate Learning & Effectiveness 3/27/01-9/1/11	John Yrchik National Education Association 1/8/86-9/1/11
Keren Henne Arizona Education Association 1/3/01-11/1/11	Diane Ostrozinski Clark County (FL) Educ. Assn. 8/31/06-9/1/11	Suzanne Zimmer Arizona Education Association 12/7/81-8/1/11 (Deferred Vested)
Deborah Hilmoe-Jurgens Arizona Education Association 4/1/06-11/1/11	Valerie Perry NEA Information Technology Svs. 12/6/82-9/1/11	

DIRECTORY CHANGES

Mabel Barker	270 McKenzie Rd, W Apt 4-2 Pinehurst, NC 28374	Ken Butler	<i>kenbutler@verizon.net</i>
Grace Brubaker	125 Rosewood Circle Bridgewater, VA 22812	Barbara Parker	4801 Connecticut Ave. NW #517 Washington, DC 20008 202-290-2153

FAREWELLS

Tom Bilodeau, who retired earlier this year from MEA-MFT (the former Montana Education Association), died suddenly Sept. 30 at age 55. A former member of the legal staff at the Wisconsin Education Association Council, Tom moved to Montana to fill a UniServ position in Great Falls. Within a year he became the state association's director of research and bargaining, coordinating MEA-MFT's successful legal battles to gain funding equity among Montana's school districts. The great outdoors (hiking, skiing, hunting) and world travel were huge parts of his life. Tom was a self-proclaimed socialist with a lifelong commitment to the working class and the American dream. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to his widow, Jane Bilodeau (a UniServ consultant for the Oregon EA), 2144 Duncan Drive, Medford, OR 97504.

Brice Bonwill died suddenly on Oct. 28 at age 57. Prior to his recent retirement he was a manager in NEA Information Technology Services. Expressions of sympathy may be mailed to Brice's wife, Jeanne Bonwill (who also worked for NEA), at 130 Autumn Dr., Stafford, VA 22556, or posted online at <http://www.legacy.com/guestbook/DignityMemorial/sign-guestbook-thank-you.aspx?n=george-bonwill&pid=154438264&enryId=55054173>.

Joe Falzon, a long-time staff member in NEA Research and Government Relations, died on Sept. 20 of heart failure and complications of diabetes. Joe, who retired in 2007, worked at NEA for 35 years. He was loved and respected for his work in the NEA Staff Organization (NEASO) on behalf of his fellow NEA employees. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to Joe's wife, Alicia Falzon, and children Charles, Alex, and Virginia at 10900 Pleasant Hill Dr., Potomac, MD 20854.

NEARO

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