

UNION SPOTLIGHT

AFT Washington, AFL-CIO

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March 2023



Union members from Local 1485 and Local 6390 at Yakima Valley College turn out for a press conference at Yakima Valley College in March. See story page 7.

Photo by Ray Carrillo

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Welcome Our New Staff

By Cortney Marabetta, Communications Specialist

Eagle-eyed readers will note that we had some staff changes at the end of last year.



Rosalinda Aguirre

the WEEL (Washington Educators in Early Learning) project. She has a long resume of labor and social justice activism. Her years of activism include working with farmworkers in California, joining with other clerical support staff at the UW to form their union to community organizing with immigrant women across the state. In her spare time, she volunteers in community organizing and writing classes at the Hugo House.



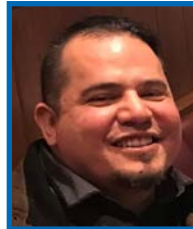
Jacqui Cain

recently at Pierce College local #4821.

Rosalinda Aguirre is not new to AFT Washington. From 2007 to 2014, she worked as an organizer and then in administration on

At Pierce she was both the Communications Coordinator and Adjunct Faculty Representative where she served on grievance and bargaining teams. and led unemployment benefits workshops. Jacqui is also currently serving as the Vice-President for Contingent Faculty Issues for AFT-WA. Outside of work she enjoys traveling, theater, and taking her dog for long walks.

Javier Cortez is the newest Union Organizing Representative. He has been in the labor movement for a long time and has experience in helping build unions in both the private and public sectors as well. He has helped represent hospital unions, and recently assisted interpreters in getting a union. Javier is happy to work with AFT Washington locals, our members, and leaders, in building a stronger union by organizing and fighting for improvements in the workplace. He lives in Tacoma, and enjoys the outdoors, which is one of the reasons he moved to Washington from California. He looks forward to meeting and building with you!



Javier Cortez

Welcome aboard to all!

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David Ortiz

Vice President At-Large Pos. 2
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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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History Made: WSLC's New Leadership

By Karen Strickland, AFT Washington President

History was made this year when Washington State Labor Council (WSLC) President April Sims and Secretary-Treasurer Cherika Carter were sworn into office on January 6th.

President Sims is the first woman to lead our labor movement, and she's the first Black woman in the country to lead a state AFL-CIO. Along with Secretary-Treasurer Carter, they form the first Black-woman-led

AFL-CIO state affiliate in the country. And this is how we transform!

This has demonstrated the values that we at AFT Washington hold dear – unity, inclusion, diversity, equity – as a labor leader for many years. She has deep respect for and commitment to the public sector workforce and public education at all levels and she is a leader who

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Karen Strickland

President's Column

Our theme for this year's *Spotlight* series is the same as our convention theme: The Future is Union Made! One of the things I appreciate about this theme is that it begs so many questions. *Who* is the union? *Which* future are we talking about? *How* is the union deciding what this future looks like? *How* do we go about making that future?

It's easy to "third party" the union, that is, talk about one's union as if it exists apart from the membership. Sometimes we hear statements like "the union decided..." or "the union wants me to..." But the answer to "who" is the union is, "It's you - the workers!" There is no union without you. Your local leaders are workers, just like you, and they strive to bring your voice into their work as leaders. At the state federation, we use committees, councils and local-based activity to decide on priorities and programs and how to move them forward.

We know, though, that sometimes the who does not fully represent the membership; exclusion harms those left out and those that are in, and it weakens our collective power. Organized labor has a long history, some of which has replicated the exclusion seen in broader society. Dismantling racist, sexist, and all forms of discriminatory practice is an

ongoing process. AFT has a powerful legacy of addressing this with the 1953 decision to require that locals be integrated. We must vigorously seek to engage all members - and that doesn't happen by hoping. It requires proactive, ongoing outreach and removing obstacles. Our Race and Labor workshop program and our Anti-Racism in Collective Bargaining project are two examples of this work. Additionally, we have staff and board members representing AFT Washington in WSLC, SBCTC, and AFT efforts to dismantle oppressive systems and implement equitable practices both within the labor movement and within education. If we are to build a future that works for all communities, then all communities must be involved in designing it.

Another question begged by our theme is "which future?" The future of work? Of education? Of transportation?

The answer is a resounding YES, to all of it, and even more. I've used the phrase "whole person unionism" in the past to illuminate the fact that the various parts of our lives intersect and interact. Our quality of life hinges on the quality of our working conditions, our physical environment, our access to rest and recreation, and much more. I see a future where unions and communities work shoulder to shoulder to realize the co-created future we want.

Bargaining for the Common Good (BCG) is a concept you may have heard when our higher ed faculty siblings in Chicago went on strike in January. In addition to better wages and job security for contingent faculty, they wanted improvements in counseling services for students. "The administration told the bargaining team that students' mental health is 'not your business,'" said AFT President Randi Weingarten when she spoke to striking Chicago teachers. "Of course it's your business. It's everybody's business, and that is

what bargaining for the common good means."

The Chicago Teachers' Union has incorporated BCG as well, with current president Stacy Davis Gates saying, at the same event, "Common good bargaining is the only type of bargaining that is going to transform the very type of places where we work and where we live."

When I reflect on our theme, I see a blurring of the lines between working conditions and living conditions, and I see strong coalitions of union members, unrepresented workers, students, families, faith communities, and community organizations coming together, much like the Communities for Our Colleges coalition has done.

Our campaigns, whether related to the bargaining table or our legislative agenda, must be informed by the reality of racial, economic and social inequality and build a lasting coalition fully invested in the betterment of all and centering the voices of those closest to the problem. In doing so, we have a shot at overwhelming the concentrated power and wealth that blocks the full funding of our schools and colleges by refusing to pay their fair share. In doing so, we may be able to disrupt the perpetuation of environmental degradation, infrastructure failures, and outsized defense budgets. In doing so, we deal with the consequences of our society's failure to ensure the basic needs of all people in this wealthiest of nations are met.

As you can see, by answering the "who" and the "which" questions I posed at the beginning, we answer the "how" questions as well. "How" is "by refusing to accept a world where we cannot thrive, and acting to change that world."

Organized labor has the loudest collective voice of ordinary people in this country, and after decades of absorbing

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Professional Exempt Staff Win First Contract at Grays Harbor College!

By Bob Downing, Union Organizing Representative



Student success navigators, coordinators, associate directors, and more professional exempt staff at Grays Harbor College have organized with AFT and bargained their first-ever union contract. Improvements in the agreement include the right to file grievances, new wage bumps for seniority, more paid time off, and most importantly, a real voice on the job.

Associate Director of Running Start Lori

Christmas was there throughout the entire campaign. “When we called AFT, people were fearful of losing their jobs because admin was making our lives super difficult,” she says. “Looking back, it was totally worth the journey, since we are now successfully pushing back when management tries to throw new job duties our way. We can finally say no without being afraid.”

In January 2021, with the support of

more than 70% of her coworkers, Lori and the rest of the AFT organizing committee filed to organize through the state’s Public Employees Relations Commission (PERC). “It was not an overnight process,” Lori says, “but we spent the time doing surveys, building up our bargaining team, and preparing ourselves to finally get to the place we needed to be: the bargaining table across from Grays Harbor College administration.”

The group joined the Grays Harbor Federation of Teachers Local #4984, the faculty local. “We just thought it made sense for us to have one local, since we’re all here for the same reason: student success. We don’t need to be in separate silos. And they agreed!”

The new members unanimously ratified the contract in October 2022. “I want to be involved in improving things for students at a statewide level now,” Lori says. “That includes helping other college employees overcome their fear and go union. When you have a bigger voice at work, you can make a difference.”

At Yakima Valley College, Escalating Actions Are The Way To Go

By Rachel Dorn, President, AFT Yakima Local 1485

Last week, the AFT-Yakima 1485 faculty union, in collaboration with the other two YVC unions, AFT Yakima Pro Staff and the WPEA Classified local, held a press conference on the Yakima Valley College campus. More than 60 members joined union leaders for a press conference. Tuesday’s event, Thursday’s Board of Trustees meeting, and union concerns have been covered by 5 news outlets. These were the latest steps in a series of escalating actions taken by the unions over the past year in reaction to delays, unfair bargaining tactics and issues related to harassment and retali-

ation against members. Other actions taken this year include t-shirt Thursdays, letter writing campaigns, public comment at BOT meetings, grievances, ULPs, mass attendance at bargaining meetings, and a march on the president’s office.

After negotiations stalled last spring, AFT-Y rolled over the contract for one year, with the hope that enrollment would increase from pandemic lows (as it has), and with a plan to activate the membership via escalating action.

AFT-Y pursued two grievances over the

summer; we won both. We filed a ULP stemming from delayed responses to our information requests and began bringing our issues to the attention of the Board of Trustees. In early fall, AFT-Y hand-delivered letters from faculty expressing concern over the college’s failure to create the 10 new full-time faculty positions identified in SB 5194.

In a separate conversation, one of the college’s vice presidents made it abundantly clear that she was uninformed about the Nurse Ed funding bill and did

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The Future Is Union-Made

The theme of this year's convention is The Future Is Union-Made. This theme was chosen for many reasons: among them, we felt that the rising levels of unionism in America are positive developments for workers, and the trend of visible union activism such as the Starbucks and Amazon unionizing campaigns are signs that workers think that bad jobs are unsustainable and unions are a way to change that. This shift is promising!

The future cannot be made if it is not union. As President Strickland pointed out in her letter in this issue of the Spotlight, creating the world we want to see – a world that empowers workers and creates conditions for all of us to thrive, not just the wealthy few – requires that workers be empowered and taken seriously. A union-made future is a necessity.

We took the opportunity to ask a number of members what “The Future Is Union-Made” means to them. Here are their responses.

Jake Heare, *Green River College, Contingent Faculty and United Faculty Representative*

“The Future Is Union-Made” means that together we can unite to build a brighter future for us all. In a world darkened by threats both local and global, physical and financial, public and private, we can still unite together to beat back oppression, ignorance, and irrelevance. As education and information technologies reshape the labor landscape, as executives and owners look for further means to “cut spending”, as politicians and pundits demonize the diversity and community we build, through the collective action of us all, we can shape a better world for us and our children.

It is the diversity of thought, experience,

and perspective of all union members, especially those voices from Black, Indigenous, people of color and other marginalized communities, that will generate the ideas needed to make the change. From construction, to maintenance, to eventual outgrowth, it will be all union members that bring these ideas to life. Together we stand in the face of inequality and injustice. It is the membership and communities we build that will do the work to overcome them. After all, The Future is Union Made.

Renee G. Potter, *AFT Washington Retiree Chapter, Director*

Upon asking myself what this phrase means to me, honestly, I had to say, not much. Thinking further, I realize my union experience has been on a growth spurt since I retired in June 2016.

I had thought I would simply resign to take a few months off, then return to work, so I had unexpected free time. Casual union activities easily folded into more formal and frequent ones. From a national perspective, 2016 was a good time to become active, and a critical time for political opinions.

It's one thing to be politically aware and active within a group of friends or in a state like Washington, where similar-thinkers are all around me. It's quite different to live in another state with all sorts of difficult legislation.

Being active in a union gives me a collective voice, one more effectively heard. I am not alone, a single voice lost among loud and extreme ideas with baseless accusations. Instead, I am part of a larger, louder voice.

I'm not the only one thinking union. Last year saw a marked rise in labor organizing to address less earning power among the middle class workforce, safety

concerns and better working conditions. Younger workers have become more active, visibly so at places like Starbucks and Amazon. The future is being made by unions standing up for a better world for all of us.

Tracy Lai, *Seattle Central College, Vice President of Human Rights*

The future is union-made makes me think of a future of increased and popularized unionization. Already we've experienced “Striketober” and other upticks in organizing – now more than ever, workers recognize the power of being organized and collective bargaining. Not only in our workplaces, organized workers should provide leadership and collaboration on issues of the day such as climate justice, reproductive justice and more! In countries where unionized workers have high density, there's more cross-over and involvement of workers in every aspect of community life. I imagine a future in which unions and workers are at the center of all things justice!

Marla Simpson, *Everett Community College, Senior Associate Instructor of Psychology*

Growing up, if I thought about unions – which I almost never did -- I'm sure my image would have been of men in hard hats, or factory workers on a picket line. My image of the future I was building for myself would never have included union membership. It was not because I opposed unions; it was rather that I didn't “see” myself joining a union. If anything, I thought of unions as a part of U.S. history, a black-and-white photo of a distant relative. I didn't fully understand how instrumental unions continue to be for ensuring that this crucial role of our lives, our role as workers, is valued. I didn't realize that unions were the mechanism that safeguards everything we want and need to live well: healthcare,
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The Future is Union Made

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safe workplaces, decent wages, retirement someday, weekends to spend with our loved ones. I didn't realize it then, but I do now. I'm not the only one. Right now, all around the country, new unions are forming to fight for these same, time-honored goals. Pro-union sentiment is the highest it has been since 1965. When I look now, what I see is a future built on solidarity.

David Thomas, *Pierce College, Vice President of Local 4821*

I'm a historian, so thinking about the future always starts with thinking about the past. In grad school, students who came before me had unionized, which meant I had health insurance and a modest safety net during some of the most precarious years of my life. In the classroom, I studied forms of American history that positioned labor struggle as central to personal and collective freedom. To me, the future unions will make is a future founded on those two hopes: forging better material circumstances that make dignified work a reality and building an inspiring social and political narrative that opens new opportunities for living.

Unions will always be a resource for workers wronged and a way to counter management's actions. But a union-made future is more than that: it's the chance to think and act collectively, over and over again, in a creative political space. It is a constant reminder that our historical inheritance is powerful but never set in stone as we imagine new possibilities for the future. As union teachers, too, we have the privilege of modeling those possibilities for our students, who, after all, will ultimately do much of that future-making.

David Ortiz, *Cascadia College, Vice President At-Large*

At times, unions are like families. As we all know, families expand and often create extended families. Our union is like an extended family; we embrace new family members from all our locals and constituencies. The caring and nurturing benefits of inclusion, equity, and belonging are at the heart of all families. We now have an opportunity to extend our family again by inviting Tribal Communities and Tribal Colleges into our union family. We must promote ongoing relationships with Tribal Communities who have resided in our state since time

immemorial. If we truly want to envision inclusion, equity, and belonging as guiding principles of solidarity, we must invest time and goodwill in establishing relationships with tribal communities. Consider the following ways in which Tribal Communities greet each other to establish good will.

The Cherokee tradition of acknowledging people as "all my relations."

The Lakota greeting Mitakuye Oyasin translates to mean - "we are all related."

We exist because we are in relations with others. Expanding our union to include American Indian and Indigenous voices allows us the opportunity to build Tribal relations now so, we can all benefit in the future.

We hope that you will join us, both at convention, and in considering what "The Future Is Union-Made" means to you, and what we all can do to create that world where workers are empowered and respected. The future requires us to solve some very big problems, and we can't do that without the workers.

President Message

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harm from a coordinated attack first drafted in the Powell Memo, we are finding our footing and growing stronger. As we reflect on, become inspired by, and strategize for the future we want to see, my hope is that we ever more robustly embrace the value of building our coalition to co-create the vision of the future we yearn for, and work towards it, united in solidarity, and unwavering in our goal of a better world, for everyone.

AFT Yakima

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not have the authority to bargain with us. We filed our second ULP of the year, for Bad Faith bargaining as a result.

Our efforts this year owe a lot to steps taken in Fall 2021 to increase active participation by members so that the workload would be more evenly distributed and all faculty would feel more integral to union operations.

AFT-Y leadership has kept members informed as to our actions, which has made member participation easier. Faculty have taken on tasks ranging

from maintaining up to date membership lists and contact information to attending lobby day and prepping language for bargaining.

These steps, combined with standing in solidarity with the other unions at YVC, have dramatically increased our presence and effectiveness. While the final outcome is not clear yet, taking a thoughtful look at what we could do to increase engagement by members and keep members informed, has paid off.

A Wave of AFT Blue Hit Olympia

By Anna-Marie Magdalena, State Affiliate Political Organizer



We made our presence known in Olympia, sharing our message on student success, pay equity, and recruitment and retention. With over 120 members in attendance, we were a wave of AFT Blue in Olympia and it was the largest lobby day in over a decade. Our meetings with legislators or their staff, included legislators across the political spectrum and from rural Washington to metropolitan centers.

Our members brought the stories of

our students and coworkers to the forefront, sharing personal stories about what it means to teach and learn in our community and technical college system. The vast majority of participants were attending their first Lobby Day, and that energy plus being in person again created a strong sense of camaraderie.

In addition to meetings with legislators, members gathered at the rotunda and delivered our petition calling on the state to build the bridge to the future

to the Governor's office. Our petition highlights the need for real investments in faculty and staff at our Community and Technical Colleges, including real commitment to the principles of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, part time pay equity, and investment in the people who provide the learning conditions for our students.

During the afternoon, adjunct faculty members shared their experiences during the contingent faculty caucus. The caucus discussed that the path toward pay equity is through making sure that adjuncts are engaged with their locals and that locals are engaged with the forthcoming resolution.

By having such a strong presence on Lobby Day, we let our legislators know that they need to make investments in student success, and to do so, they need to invest in the faculty and staff who do the work. The bridge to the future does not build itself.

Refreshing the AFT Washington / Barnard Iglitzin & Lavitt Scholarship

By Cortney Marabetta, Communications Specialist

If you have been a delegate at the AFT Washington convention, you may remember the basket raffle we used to do. In a more hybrid world, we've been seeking new ways of filling the scholarship fund, with a goal of making donations more consistent through the year, as well as providing a fun event where members can do some good-natured competitive donation-raising. With those goals in mind, we are delighted to announce our newest FUNdraiser, Get On Your Bike!

How it works is simple. You have two ways to participate: by getting pledges from your union siblings, friends, and

family, then riding your bike (we suggest either per-mile or per-ride donations based on how much you think you'll ride in April), or by pledging to support one of your union siblings as they ride. President Strickland is pledging to ride 8 times for at least 100 miles – can you do more rides or more miles? Even if you don't think you've got the time, if you're going to get on a bike, join us!

The AFTWA/BIL scholarship is an award of \$1500 to AFT Washington members and family members who are seeking any level of educational achievement from AA to PhD. Last year we were able to award four scholarships; this year we'd

like to match that number, so we need your help to raise the funds!

If you are interested in making a one-time or ongoing donation, as a member or as a local, we have a donation page set up at aftwa.givingfuel.com/scholarship-fund.

The AFT Washington / Barnard Iglitzin & Lavitt Scholarship was initiated in 2005. To date, 47 scholarships have been awarded to help support the educational aspirations of members and their families. Let's keep it going!



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History Made

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embraces the opportunity to work through challenges, identify common ground and build bridges while setting a high standard for what we need to and can accomplish together.

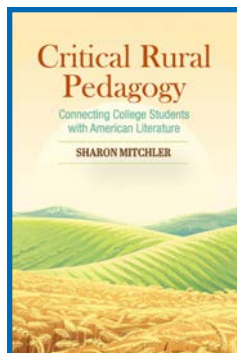
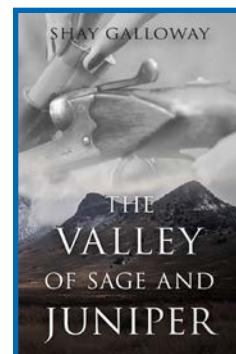
Secretary-Treasurer Carter has shown dedication to working people coupled with strategic acumen and clarity on the work before us.

President Sims will again be a guest at our convention and will participate in a “keynote conversation” along with AFT Secretary-Treasurer Fed Ingram. If you miss convention, don’t worry – we’ll record the discussion and make it available. Meanwhile, stay tuned with WSLC’s leadership and work by signing up for the Stand, the WSLC’s daily newsletter.

New Books By Our Members!

Shanelle Galloway, Pierce College, has a new book, *The Valley of Sage And Juniper*, out March 21st.

“When a mysterious preacher arrives in town, intent on taking their land, sisters Genesis and Isaiah must fight to keep their family’s ranch out of his grasp.” Signed copies will be available through Browser’s Bookshop in Olympia.



Sharon Mitchler, Centralia College, has published *Critical Rural Pedagogy: Connecting College Students with American Literature*, out March 28th. Sharon’s book argues for a reconfiguration of critical pedagogy, one that actively seeks to engage rural students to bring their lived experiences to college classes. Copies are available through many stores, including the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) store.