

The Point



An Official Publication of AFT-Utah *A Union of Professionals*

A Monthly Newsletter

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Highlights from around the State

• **Mound Fort Junior High School** in Ogden District unionizes under AFT. Thanks to the great leadership of Work Site Leader, Stephanie Balmer and a unified staff, Mound Fort is banding together in solidarity. Union

members are working on solutions to improve working conditions and support each other through challenges.

• **Higher education** is the focus of AFT Utah leaders. AFT Utah V.P. of Higher Education, Paul Tayler, is heading up organizing efforts to

unify all higher education faculty and staff under the Utah College Council - AFT. This council will allow higher education faculty and staff throughout Utah to have a voice in higher education policy and at the legislative level.

Upcoming Events

• **Site Visits:** AFT Utah leaders and staff are traveling around the state meeting with members. If your local is holding an event, we would love to attend. Please inform us of the dates and we will make every effort to be there.

• **October:** Site visits will include the following districts: Ogden, Weber, Davis, Salt Lake, Granite, and Canyons. Higher Education: Snow, USU Eastern, Dixie State, UVU, and SLCC. If you wish to meet with us personally please contact us.

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Rise As One!

*We will never give up, we will never give in,
And we'll never, ever go away.*

We will build a brand new future for our daughters and our sons,

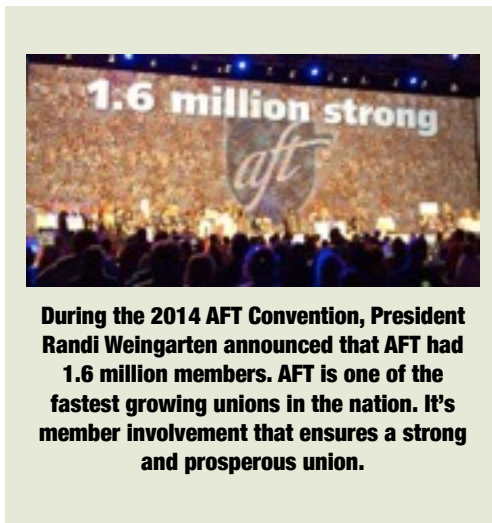
We will work 'til all workers rise as one!

Joe Jencks
Union Singer/Songwriter

Each of us has our own opinion of what it means to be a union member. Some of us may have joined AFT for the liability insurance. For some, being mistreated or neglected by another organization steered them towards AFT. Perhaps we wanted to have a voice and stand in solidarity with our union brothers and sisters. We may have joined for all these reasons and several more. The thing to remember is each of us get out of the union what we are willing to put into it.

Soda Machine or Gym Membership?

Union membership can be compared to a soda machine or a gym membership. If we use our union like a soda machine, we only use it when we need



During the 2014 AFT Convention, President Randi Weingarten announced that AFT had 1.6 million members. AFT is one of the fastest growing unions in the nation. It's member involvement that ensures a strong and prosperous union.

something or when it's convenient. Do we treat our union like that old soda machine that sits in the corner of the faculty room? Do we just pay our money and hope that it works when we decide to use it? On the flip side, if we were to compare our union membership to joining a gym, we would treat it differently. Like a gym membership, the union is there to provide everything we need to ensure our success. All the "equipment" is available for us to

use. The key is that we have to show up regularly to get the benefits. AFT Utah has the resources available to ensure that our AFT locals are strong and viable. Like going to the gym, we members have to bring ourselves and our colleagues through the doors and put in the work to get the results.

Coming Together in Solidarity

So it's time to stop making statements such as, "there's nothing that I can do." or "that it's out of our control." That simply is not true. As unionists we have to take control. The simple truth is that public school and higher education employees are under attack. There is a nation wide war on workers, and we should be calling the shots. So what can each of us do to make a difference? 1) Talk to your colleagues. Find those at your workplace that feel as you do and start meeting together to discuss the issues. 2) Contact the union. If you don't know who your union leaders are, call AFT Utah. We will help you organize at your worksite. 3) Don't be heroic. Do not approach your supervisor or administrator alone to tackle issues. We have to use our strength in numbers to create positive change at our workplace. These simple steps are the beginning of active unionism and the building blocks of solidarity.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



I have many fond memories of the excitement I felt on the first day of class when students entered my classroom. I was anxious to introduce all the creative and worthwhile things we were going to do that semester. I was looking

forward to the coming school year. I really did love my job! Why did I feel this way? Simple, I had support from my colleagues, my administration, and many parents. The students were excited for the new year. Sure there would be bumps in the road, but it was easy to smooth those out.

While visiting with teachers and staff across the state, I have observed that the excitement of teaching has diminished and been replaced with trepidation, stress, and a myriad of other negative emotions depending on the workplace environment. Top down mandates, high stakes testing, data driven curriculum, and a lack of shared governance has beat us down. Employees feel isolated, exhausted, and defeated even before students step foot on campus. It's an alarming trend. The pressure continues to mount and I'm concerned for the health and well being of many of our colleagues.

My message to our beleaguered allies is "you are not alone." The role of unions is to provide the support that is lacking in the workplace. We can find solidarity, support, and strength as union brothers and sisters. The trend in our public schools and higher education institutions is to divide faculty and employees into departments to work on common assessments and curriculum. Crunching data becomes more important than effective teaching and time to prepare. The large workload cripples our ability to meet together as colleagues and work out solutions to create a better work environment.

I strongly believe this is not a coincidence. Those opposed to unions know that if we as educators remain divided and overwhelmed with work, we cannot organize. If we don't organize, we don't have a voice. If we don't have a voice, we cannot push the change needed to be successful and gain back the respect we deserve as professionals. It's our profession! We should be taking the lead and not allowing politicians, board members, or those that claim to understand education mandate how we teach and change what we know works best for students.

Our logo - AFT "A Union of Professionals" Well brothers and sisters, let's start functioning as one. Let's get organizing. It's our only hope if we are to change the state of our profession in Utah.

Yours in Solidarity,

Brad Asay

Joe Hill Centennial Celebration

During the past hundred years since Joe Hill's death, we have seen significant improvements in labor rights and protections. But, with the advent of big money into big politics, these basic reforms such as the 8-hour day, fair wages, and worker protections are now under threat of total obliteration by today's monied politicians.

It was a beautiful Saturday as unionists and union supporters gathered at Sugar House Park to celebrate the life of union organizer Joe Hill. There was food, booths, and excellent music. But more

than that, there was a sense of pride and nostalgia. To unionists around the world, this spot is holy ground. It's where a symbol and hero of the labor movement was martyred. There is a deep reverence for the great sacrifice and contributions of this respected union leader.

Relatives of Joe Hill came from Sweden to speak and share his life and legacy. Artists entertained and shared his story through music and his union songs.

Joe shared with supporters before he was executed, "Don't mourn for me, organize!" His life was dedicated to his fellow workers. We can gather strength from his advice, let's not mourn at what we've lost, let's organize!

Families Gather on Labor Day

A good old fashion family picnic at Copper Park in Magna.

Labor Day means a day off work for our members. We enjoy spending time with our families and friends as we enjoy this last summer weekend. Thousands gather every year at the annual Labor Day Picnic at Copper Park in Magna. Every year the crowds grow.

AFT Utah is one of the many union sponsors of this annual event. So what attracts so many to this location each year? There are prize drawings at the top of each hour. An excellent car show with hundreds of entries. Music throughout the day on the center stage. Tons of really good food. Events for all ages. The best reason to attend, visiting with fellow union members and the sense of solidarity. This is what draws the crowds. It's just good old fashioned fun and a great day to be outside enjoying the day.



So next Labor Day when you're making plans of what to do with your family, plan on attending this great event.

Bangladesh Union Leaders Visit AFT Utah

The struggles in Bangladesh are reminiscent of a time in the United States when garment workers were subjected to unfair and unsafe working conditions.

AFT Utah welcomed union officials from Bangladesh to their offices for a working lunch on September 21st. These visitors were on a nationwide tour as part of the U.S. Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program. The purpose for the visit was to examine **Strengthening Labor Unions and Improving Labor-Management Relations**. In attendance from AFT Utah was Brad Asay - President, Liz Weight - Vice President of Political Action, Cal Udy - Labor Relations Representative, and Penny Llewelyn - Office Manager. Representing the Utah AFL-CIO was Dale Cox - President and Steve White - Political Director. Representing IBEW was Russ Lamoreaux - Business Manager.

Bangladesh leaders included: • Mr. Jashim Ahmed - Collective Bargaining Secretary and Paralegal *Bangladesh Garment and Industrial Workers Federation (BGIWF)* • Ms. Moli Akter - President *Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS)* • Ms. Rukshana Yasmin Arzoo - Senior Program Officer *The Solidarity Center, Dhaka* • Mr. Md Rashadul Alam Raju *Bangladesh Independent Garment Workers Union Federation (BIGUF)*

With the assistance of interpreters from the U.S. State Department, all in attendance conversed about the challenges unionists face in protecting the rights of employees and their families. These union leaders



are facing the challenges that garment workers in the United States had to fight over 100 years ago. Dale Cox and

Steve White shared our union history over that past century and our current struggles. Our Bangladesh brothers and sisters shared the dire circumstances they face with political corruption and the unsafe working conditions that have led to the deaths of thousands of workers and the atrocities inflicted on union organizers.

Feedback we received via email stated, *"Your recent meeting with our International Visitors from Bangladesh has positively changed their perceptions of the U.S. and will facilitate meaningful progress for Strengthening Labor Unions and Improving Labor-Management upon their return home. The Visitors commented that meeting with you over luncheon was by far their most beneficial professional meeting in Utah."*