The struggle for healthcare, economic justice, social solidarity

Editor's note: This article was written by Vermont-NEA's Mark Hage shortly after West Virginia teachers staged a successful strike.

On March 7, West Virginia's 30,000 teachers and ESP brought their statewide, nine-day strike to a victorious end after their elected representatives approved a 5 percent raise for them and all public employees.

In most reports on the strike, a primary demand of the workers went unmentioned or was downplayed. That demand was for affordable health care. The Public Employees Insurance Agency (PEIA) manages the health insurance program for all West Virginia's public employees. Out-of-pocket expenses have risen sharply in the state, and premiums under PEIA could rise by as much as 11 percent each year beginning in 2020.

West Virginia Education Association President Dale Lee told a state Finance Board before the strike, “You can't continue to fund PEIA on the backs of employees. You can't continue to take away.” A teacher summed up the PEIA crisis continued on p. 7

Bargaining Not Subject to Open Meeting Law

MONTPELIER – The state’s highest court in February unanimously rejected a Vermont School Boards Association-backed assertion that the state’s Open Meeting Law required boards and local education associations to conduct contract talks in public.

“We hold that collective bargaining labor negotiations...are not ‘meetings’ under the Open Meeting Law,” Justice Harold E. Eaton Jr. wrote for the court in Negotiations Committee of Caledonia Central Supervisory Union v. Caledonia Central Education Association.

The ruling was a huge victory for all public employee unions in Vermont.

As the law firm Pyle Rome Ehrenberg PC in Burlington said, “The case represents a major victory for public sector unions in Vermont and a set-back for the Vermont School Boards Association, which has been attempting to undermine teachers’ unions by forcing them to negotiate in public.”

The matter was argued before the Supreme Court after the school board rejected a Vermont Labor Relations Board finding that said the Open Meeting Law does not apply to labor negotiations.

The Caledonia Central Education Association, represented by Vermont-NEA lawyer Rebecca McBroom, argued before the labor board — and again before the Supreme Court — that applying the Open Meeting Law to contract talks would disrupt decades of labor practice.

“We are pleased that the Supreme Court reached the same conclusion we have: that the Open Meeting Law was never intended to force public bargaining,” McBroom said.

“This is a good ruling for labor relations, and it means that local educators and local school boards can have robust and productive contract talks as equals at the table.”

The case came about in 2016 when the negotiating committee for the Caledonia Central Supervisory Union said that contract talks with educators had to occur in public, adopting a relatively new assertion pushed by the state school boards association.

The education association rejected that argument, and contended that talks be held in private as they have in the past.

The school board in December 2016 asked the Caledonia Superior Court to rule that the Open Meeting Law applied; that court ultimately dismissed the board’s suit saying the Vermont Labor Relations Board was the appropriate venue.

The school board appealed that decision to the Supreme Court, resulting in today’s ruling.

Earlier, in a similar dispute between the Washington Northeast Supervisory Union and the Cabot Teachers’ Association and Twinfield Education Association, the Vermont Labor Relations Board ruled that the Open Meeting Law could not be used to force public negotiations.

The Supreme Court argued that the Open Meeting Law itself is ambiguous on whether it applies to labor talks.

However, the court concluded the intersection of that law with the Public Records Act, the Labor Relations for Teachers and Administrators Act, and decades of past practice make it clear that the Open Meetings Law does not compel public contract talks.

“Considering the sensitive nature of certain negotiation topics – such as references to individual employees or private information regarding specific personnel – we find it unlikely the Legislature chose not to provide a mechanism for a committee and a teacher’s association to negotiate privately in these instances,” the court said.

The court also made clear that contract talks are meetings of equal parties, and applying the Open Meeting Law would unplug that balance.

“We are especially gratified that the Supreme Court reaffirmed that educators and school boards are equals at the bargaining table,” McBroom said.

The court also outright rejected the newly formed VSBA assertion that the law requires public bargaining.

For decades, the court pointed out, teachers and school boards have conducted bargaining in private.

“We are hard-pressed to believe that the experienced lawyers engaged in labor negotiations of this type overlooked this issue until recently,” the court said.

The court also pointed out that provisions in the Public Records Act related to teacher bargaining stand squarely in opposition to an argument that bargaining must be done in public.

The court specifically said that prohibitions on the release of certain documents “makes little sense if the earlier aspects of negotiation have been conducted in public.”
Time to Listen, Learn from Our Students

Martha Allen

When an adult talks to a child, it is an expectation that the child listen to what the adult is saying. After all, we know that with age comes wisdom, a saying that must have been coined by an adult.

Recently, the voices of children have risen up across the country, and it is time for the adults to do some listening of their own. Unfortunately, too many children have had to die before the adults were ready to listen.

The students in Parkland, Florida realized that nothing would happen, no changes would be made, and certainly, no laws would be passed if it is left to the adults to address the issue of guns. It has been almost twenty years since the shooting in Columbine, Colorado and still nothing of any substance has been done to prevent further murders of our children.

In my travels around the state, I meet many high school students. I am always impressed by their maturity, commitment, and enthusiasm on issues of importance to them. These students are very articulate and they have opinions and solutions for many of society’s long-standing problems.

Students in the United States have their own sense of ethics, ideals and beliefs. They have not been corrupted by politics and financial influences and are not willing to let that happen to them. The adults in this country exist in a complex world, and have decided that political considerations must be made before coming to a decision of any sort. Kids don’t look at issues through that foggy lens. Their views are not tarnished by coercion, manipulation, and other pressures. Our kids see the problems clearly and have found solutions. They cut to the chase and won’t be dissuaded.

Their courage and determination in such a time of adversity is admirable. It is far past time that we listen to our young Vermonters and act on their behalf, now.

Last year, Vermont-NEA awarded one of its Human and Civil Rights Awards to Muslim Girls Making Change, MGMC is a group of four high school girls who found their voices in slam poetry. They travel the state performing their work, expressing themselves articulately, demonstrating that their views on discrimination and religion are as poignant and convincing as any adult could wish to be. They leave an indelible mark on all who see their passionate performances. They are making a difference and are most certainly making change.

In February, a student group from Montpelier High School, the Racial Justice Alliance, succeeded in having the Black Lives Matter flag raised on the school flag pole. This was the students’ initiative and this may be the first time in the country that a BLM flag has been raised at a high school.

Adults didn’t do this. If anything, the adults caused this initiative to take longer than it should have. These students knew it was a significant act, and by having that flag flying in their school yard it would make a difference as they strive for racial justice every day.

Many Vermont students walked out of their schools on March 14th for seventeen minutes to honor the seventeen students who were shot and killed in their Parkland, Florida high school. Even though the weather deterred their action, they persevered and made sure they would honor those lost and support those who are now fighting for common sense gun laws in Florida and around the country.

These are our students in action.

These are our students living a civics curriculum of their choosing.

These youngsters are watching us and they don’t like what they see. They are speaking out because they will not allow these injustices to continue when they are adults. The time is right for them and it is high time the adults listen and support those who will be running our country in the years to come. We are making it difficult enough for these kids. We must step away from our complex, political quagmire and listen to our future. Religion, race, and gun safety are just three conversations we must have with our children.

Let’s listen and learn from these kids!
5 Ways to Create Safe, Supportive Classrooms

You're in a unique position to help your students cope with grief. Here are 5 strategies to create a safe, supportive environment.

Your students may be dealing with a range of crises, from distressing national news of natural disasters, terrorist threats and school shootings, to trauma that hits closer to home, such as abusive caregivers, family illness and suicide.

Experts agree childhood trauma is among the most relevant and significant psychological factors affecting education today. In one study of traumatized youth, 78 percent of the children studied reported multiple adversities, with the average initial exposure at 5 years, suggesting trauma typically occurs early and repeatedly. To add insult to injury, exposure to adverse events and trauma hampers student learning and their ability to develop the skills needed to thrive.

The good news: Educators are in a unique position to help students feel safe, supported and connected, says Ben S. Fernandez, M.S., Ed., Lead School Psychologist, Loudoun County Public Schools in Ashburn, Virginia. "In addition to teaching reading, writing and math, teachers are building meaningful relationships with students."

In some cases, schools offer the only reliable support a child has—and that makes a lifelong impact.

Not only can educators forge important relationships with students, they’re also in a good position to model effective coping skills. Here, five strategies to establish a supportive, compassionate environment that enhances social, emotional and academic wellbeing.

1. Plan ahead. Don’t wait for a crisis to strike to prepare a response. "Preparedness is critical," says Fernandez. In addition to emergency drills, periodic policy reviews and educational activities surrounding crisis response, school assemblies can safeguard student wellbeing. To that end, Fernandez’s district in Loudoun regularly hosts depression and suicide awareness presentations. "We explain the symptoms of depression, what it looks like, and most importantly, what to do if you think a friend is considering suicide." In at least one instance, these efforts saved a life. When a Loudoun teen didn’t show up for class, his friend called staff the absent child had warning signs of suicide. When authorities arrived at the boy’s house, he was in his room writing a suicide note.

2. Model effective coping strategies. Whether you’re teaching preschoolers or teenagers, children take their cues from adults. You’ll be better equipped to respond to students’ needs if you’re coping well yourself. To help you feel more connected and secure, discuss your feelings with family, friends and especially colleagues. "Go to happy hour with your colleagues or just sit in the classroom and have a conversation about what’s happened so you can process it yourself," says Anne McInerney, LCSW, District Homeless Liaison at Project REACH/Fostering Connections, St. Paul Public Schools. Then strive to maintain healthy routines outside of the classroom. Eat well, exercise and avoid numbing your feelings with alcohol or other substances. Remember, too, that it’s okay to take a time out and/or ask for help.

3. Don’t sweep trauma under the carpet. Encourage children to talk about traumatic events that affect the whole school. Carve out class time to give children an opportunity to share their experiences in a safe, accepting environment. They don’t even have to communicate in words. Varying projects including drawing, storytelling, music and drama can help children bring life to their emotions around distressing events. Need help coming up with an appropriate icebreaker? Ask a school psychologist, social worker or counselor for ideas.

4. Call in supports. Before crisis strikes, determine who you can call in your district for support. "It’s important for staff to know who is available either in their building or in their district to help with difficult situations," says McInerney. Social workers, school counselors, even support services that fall outside the school system may be relevant in some cases. If you’ve identified those resources, you’ll know exactly what to do and who to call when you see a child crying in the corner.

5. Watch for warning signs. Depending on the developmental age of the child affected, symptoms may include sleep disturbances, withdrawal from friends, clinginess, poor concentration, delinquent behavior, even physical complaints. "As educators, when you see certain behaviors, whether aggression or apathy, take a step back and ask yourself whether the child is really being oppositional and defiant, or if there’s something else behind those behaviors," says Fernandez. Even frequent headaches or stomachaches could be signs of emotional distress.

While there isn’t anything inherently good about surviving a crisis or trauma, research suggests educators and students alike may experience significant growth on the heels of such struggles.

The key to ensuring students grow from traumatic experiences rather than shrink from them? Creating a safe, supportive environment that fosters a sense of optimism, extraversion and openness to new experiences.
Green Mountain-NEA member Joan Savaglio is this year’s Vermont-NEA ESP of the Year. She delivered these remarks to more than 100 of her colleagues during this year’s ESP Conference in Killington.

I can’t express how grateful I am to my local, the Green Mountain NEA, and the Vermont NEA for granting me the Vermont ESP of the Year award. As an officer of my local, a chief ESP negotiator and advocate for ESP in my district, I believe I have gained immeasurable growth and experience through everyday interactions with my professional and union peers. NEA leadership training and development has often translated into skills and opportunities which have also served well in my personal life. For these opportunities, I am also grateful.

Above all, the support of my husband and family who have encouraged me to commit much of my time and energy to union involvement on behalf of Educational Support Professionals is something I will always be most grateful for.

I thank you.

We all have our own story of how we became paraeducators. I think mine is similar to many as I more or less fell into the profession rather than seeking it. As an at-home mother of three, I was often parent-helping in my children’s classrooms. After several years of being a familiar face in the building, the school secretary thought I’d like to be paid for my time in the building; would I be interested in substituting teaching?

I agreed, enjoyed it and learned quite a bit. After a year or so of subbing (and still parent-helping), the principal approached me saying, “We have a student who needs an assistant and I think you’d be a good match.”

I agreed.

No training.

The only direction offered?

“Be a mother to her.”

To me, that statement spoke volumes about the then-current attitude toward “aides” and the undervalued work they performed.

I had no idea that then, in December, I would be this student’s fourth assistant that school year. It was a very challenging situation and an eye-opening introduction to the deep and varied supports needed by our students.

Now, 23 years later, we can all look back and see concrete evidence of a positive evolution from the old “classroom aide” model to the profession of “Paraeducator.” I believe one of the driving forces behind this shift is education workers relentlessly demanding TRAINING.

- Teach us how to be effective educators.
- Train us in the safest, most effective ways to handle challenging student situations.
- Include us in trainings for new academic classroom programs (such as Common Core, new reading/writing methods).

- Give us the tools for success when supporting differentiated learners.
- Show us how to apply the ever-changing technology used in our classrooms.
- Respect us by providing fair pay and benefits reflecting the work we do.

Some districts have stepped up and implemented professional trainings.

The VT NEA has, for years now, provided such training opportunities on campuses and here, at the annual VT ESP Conference. I know I have learned much at these conference workshops which apply directly to the work we do.

By being well versed in supporting our students, we have gained respect and become a true profession.

The other major facet of my NEA ESP experience has been first as a building organizer when my district initially organized ESP about 11 years ago. The many unfair practices between buildings in our district were obvious, the most glaring being total work hours not meeting eligibility requirements for benefits in some buildings.

The other inequity was paid duty-free lunch breaks. Some buildings had this, others not. Some paras had no breaks at all. There were many other unfair practices between the seven employers in our Supervisory Union and becoming part of our already established Teachers Union local has given us the power and authority to balance the many intra-district inequities. By establishing a solid working relationship with building and district Administration, through the collective bargaining process and having binding Master Agreements, I believe the Paraeducator is generally more accepted and respected than a decade ago.

Yes, we have more work to do. Much of this work is beyond the borders of our school districts. Living wage is an issue. State mandates are an issue.

As Educational Support Professionals we are very good at advocating for our students. But we also need to actively advocate for ourselves by becoming involved with the issues that challenge us. We need to educate those in our local and state government and in our communities about who we are, what we do and how mandates and wage issues unfairly affect us.

Are we ready for the challenge?
Educators, Mostly Women, Feel Left Out of Debate

MONTPELIER – As the governor talks of eliminating 4,100 public school jobs, women educators – who would bear the brunt of the layoffs – believe their “voice on the job was being put in jeopardy by men in Montpelier,” according to a Rutgers University report released to lawmakers.

The report – “Women’s Work? Voices of Vermont’s Educators” – relied on a survey of over 1,100 Vermont educators, and interviews with teachers and education support professionals across the state. The Rutgers researchers found a workforce overwhelmingly made up of women who feel left out of the debates over education policy in Montpelier.

“To that end, it is imperative to hear their voices,” the researchers – Rebecca Kolins Givan and Pamela Whitefield – wrote. “As one teacher put it, ‘there are more men in the political sphere. Our profession is mostly made up of women, but all of these men are making decisions about our lives, and they really don’t understand our reality.’”

The report details that reality. Among the key findings:

- Over three quarters of Vermont’s educators are women, including 75 percent of teachers and 87 percent of paraeducators.
- Nearly 40 percent of paraeducators are the primary earners in their household, but fewer than one in three paraprofessionals can survive on this income alone.
- In Vermont, teachers are paid only 87 percent of the typical salary of other professionals with the same level of education.
- Educators are experiencing high levels of workplace violence and threats of violence. Almost one out of eight teachers say they have been physically attacked by a student in the past year. Nearly a quarter of paraprofessionals reports having been physically attacked in the last year.
- Sixty percent of educators said they knew of a family in the school where they work who had experienced foreclosure or eviction in the past year. One quarter of educators reported knowing a family in their school who had faced bankruptcy in the past year.
- Nearly 70 percent of educators say they know a family in their school that has been affected by opioid addiction in the past year.

The educators at the core of Vermont’s excellent school system are under increasing pressure,” the researchers wrote. “While Vermont’s children are still receiving a high-quality education, the system increasingly depends on staff who take on second jobs, dip into their own pockets to help their students.”

The researchers also reported that educators believe things would be different if it weren’t a female-dominated profession. “In our interviews and our survey results, we consistently observed educators’ frustration that their voice on the job was being put in jeopardy by men (as they saw it) in Montpelier, who did not understand how hard educators are working and how much financial stress they endure.”

The research was conducted by the Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations. Givan is an associate professor of labor studies and employment relations. Whitefield, a doctoral candidate at the City University of New York’s Graduate Center, lives in White River Junction. You can read the report at vtnnea.org/rutgers.

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JOURNEY
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This year’s Vermont-NEA Representative Assembly is slated for Saturday, April 7 at the Stoweflake Resort in Stowe. This all-day event is the association’s most important meeting of the year, and it’s where delegates will vote on next year’s dues; hear from candidates for office and for the board; discuss resolutions; and celebrate our students, our teachers, our education support professionals, and our profession.

As you are all aware, our union and every other public sector union are awaiting the decision of the US Supreme Court in the Janus v. AFSCME case.

This case (see next page for a detailed infographic on what the case is about) could make the entire country a right-to-work environment in which non-members will no longer be required to pay fair share fees. Our duty to represent all members of a bargaining unit – whether they belong to our union or not – will not go away. Your board of directors has been planning for this, and it has informed their resolution on the topic of gun safety. The proposed resolution reads:

Vermont-NEA believes that all students and education employees must be allowed to learn and work in an environment free of unauthorized guns and other deadly weapons. Severe penalties should be enacted and strenuously enforced for criminal actions involving guns and other deadly weapons, especially in school settings, and for those who profit from the illegal sale, importation, and distribution of these weapons. The Association also believes that individuals who bring guns or deadly weapons to school should be excluded from school and school grounds until completion of a mandatory prescribed intervention. Further, the Association opposes any proposal to arm teachers.

The Association further believes that our communities, schools, and students are safer when common sense gun regulations are in place. The Association supports banning assault weapons, limiting the capacity of ammunition magazines, requiring background checks and a waiting period for all gun purchases, creating a national database of gun sales, and preventing people with mental illness and/or a documented history of domestic violence from purchasing firearms. The Association believes that minors shall not be allowed to buy, own, or sell firearms. The Association also believes that scientific and medical research on the causes and prevention of firearm violence should be extensive and ongoing and that gun owners should participate in educational programs that stress responsible ownership, including safe use and storage of guns.

We also will be joined by one of the country’s most prominent labor activists, NEA Vice President Becky Pringle. Known as a fierce social justice warrior, defender of educator rights, and an unrelenting advocate for all students and communities of color, Becky Pringle steps up in the labor movement to say: "When they try to silence our voices by stripping the rights of unions to collectively act in the best interests of our students and our families across the nation, it is our duty to use the power of our vision and the weapon of our voices against the foes of opportunity and human and civil rights.”

Becky is a middle school science teacher with 31 years of classroom experience, and also serves as the vice president of the nation’s first and largest labor union and professional association for educators. Always, the most detailed packet of information can be found in The Call, the official guide to your RA. Please check it out online at: vtnnea.org/repassembly2018

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<th>2018 RA Agenda</th>
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<td><strong>Saturday, April 7</strong></td>
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<td>Stoweflake Mountain Resort</td>
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<td>Breakfast 7.30 am</td>
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<td>Business Begins 8 am</td>
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<td>1. Credentials Check – 8:00 a.m.</td>
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<td>2. Call to Order – 8:30 a.m.</td>
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<td>3. Report of Credentials Committee</td>
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<td>4. Adoption of Standing Rules</td>
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<td>5. Adoption of the Order of Business</td>
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<td>6. Action on Minutes of 2017 Representative Assembly</td>
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<td>7. NEA Fund for Children and Education</td>
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<td>8. Address by National Education Association Vice President Becky Pringle</td>
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<td>9. Presentation of Proposed Budget: 9:30 a.m.</td>
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<td>10. President’s Report and Introduction of Vermont-NEA Board of Directors</td>
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<td>11. Break: 9:45-10:00 a.m.</td>
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<td>12. Student Performance: 10:00-10:30 a.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Filing (deadline 1:00 p.m.) of New Business and Proposed Resolutions</td>
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Break for Awards Luncheon

- Complimentary Luncheon Buffet for delegates, staff, award winners and their families and colleagues
- Vermont-NEA Educational Support Professional Award
- Friend of Education Award
- Human and Civil Rights Awards
- Maida F. Townsend Scholarship Awards

| 14. Report of Credentials Committee |  |
| 15. Vermont-NEA Candidate Speeches and Introductions |  |
| 16. Executive Director’s Report and Staff Introductions |  |
| 17. Adoption of Proposed Budget and Dues Schedule |  |
| 18. Action on Resolutions |  |
| 19. Unfinished Business |  |
| 20. Action on New Business |  |
| 21. Adjournment |  |
For the Many, Not the Few

Shifting Winds of Opinion
Support for a national health care system that protects all Americans has been growing in recent years. A Gallup poll in 2017 found that 47% of Americans support a government-run health system, noting “This marks a significant shift in attitudes from earlier this decade, when Americans consistently preferred the private insurance option.”

In a Bloomberg News poll last July, 35 percent of Americans said health care was the biggest issue facing the nation.

It was the first time in the poll’s history health care secured the number one spot. It’s not hard to understand why.

The country’s for-profit, health care industry is bleeding out public and family budgets, and causing hardship for working families.

Medical debt is a leading cause of personal bankruptcy, and medical bills are driving Americans to crowdfunding companies like GoFundMe for charitable assistance. Nearly half of the $2 billion raised on that site from 2010 to 2016 went to health care-related campaigns.

Unions and Employers: Let’s Come Together for Health Care Reform & Equity
The U.S. spends substantially more on health care than every other country, but we score poorly year after year on measures of affordability, access, health outcomes, and equality between the rich and poor compared to other advanced, wealthy nations.

According to a recent study spanning 50 years, the U.S. has “poorer child health outcomes than other wealthy nations despite greater per capita spending on health care for children.”

We need Medicare for All, and we desire a health care system whose costs, in the words of Warren Buffett, don’t act like a “hungry tapeworm on the American economy.” Until that day comes, though, our union must lead a reinvigorated reform effort in Vermont.

We must bring together other unions and employers fed up with excessive medical and prescription charges, insurance premiums and out-of-pocket costs, and who are willing to work together in a partnership of equals. Over the next months, We will explore how to do this. For much more, visit vteaa.org/reformnow.

Right-Wing Network
The State Policy Network (SPN) is a Koch Industries-funded consortium of conservative and libertarian state policy “think tanks.”

In fact, not only do they believe that you and I have better way to tax our fellow Americans to increase our chances to reduce the federal policies of the American Left, but we are also among right over. It’s a political buzz on permanently break its stranglehold on our soci-

...They’re talking about government employees unions.”

— Trace Sharp, CEO of State Policy Network (SPN), from The Daily Caller

Origins of the Case
Governor Scott Walker (Wisconsin) launched a political attack on public-

...services workers during the Scott Walker regime to challenge the collective 

...bargaining rights of public sector workers in Wisconsin.

The federal courts rule he has no standing, which means in the legal argu-

...the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)

...agreed to AFSCME’s political demands, even though he benefits from 

...the collectively bargained contract for workers.

The case was accepted for review by the U.S. Supreme Court on Sep, 

...2014. The case will be heard by the Court in February 2016, with 

...the decision handed down at any point from March through the end of June 2016.

Impact of the Case
If the Supreme Court decides in favor of the plaintiff, Black-

...arranty effectively eliminates the Wisconsin state’s ‘Right to Work’ for public employees.

Unions have contributed to Wisconsin employees to a wide variety of issues 

...working-class rights to collectively bargain their working conditions, salaries, and benefits with their employers.

...effectively undermine their collective bargaining rights and compel them to pay 

...for political activities for which they are not similarly compensated.

Less collective power for working people is speaks up for their 

...unions to negotiate wages and working standards, which lead to 

...transformed income inequality and disproportionately hurts women 

...and people of color.

It adds to the growing gap between the hundreds of people who are willing to let public health workers to negotiate state staffing rules, the teachers to negotiate minimum class sizes, and the USW workers to push for safer emergency response times.

Understanding Janus v. AFSCME
Unions work because everyone who enjoys the benefits of representation of the negotiating table pay a fair share. The corporate interests behind Janus v. AFSCME want to write the economy against working people and take away their freedom to negotiate for better wages, benefits, and protections that improve working conditions and quality of life in our communities.

Infographic by David Wright, Delaware State Education Association

Fair Share: Dispelling Myths
Question: Is anyone ever forced to join a union or pay for political activities undertaken by the union?
Answer: No. No one is ever forced to join a union and no one is ever forced to pay any fees that go towards the union’s political candidates. That is different for your local, state, and federal level, where unions typically charge political fees. However, members can opt out of the political activities, and the union would not be able to collect any political fees from them.

Unions are beholden to members who support their mission and to allow those unions to collectively bargain for your working conditions, wages, and benefits.

How to Fight back Against Janus
Deny corporate business the opportunity to use working people by supporting campaigns to end your state’s “right to work” and to allow those unions to collectively bargain for your working conditions, wages, and benefits.

Explain to your friends and neighbors that are not in union how to 

...“right to work.”

...political activities for which they are not similarly compensated.

...better wages, benefits, and protections that improve working conditions and quality of life in our communities.
‘Too Many of Our Students Have Been Slaughtered’

As of press time, the Vermont legislature was considering measures that would address the issue of gun violence. Vermont-NEA President Martha Allen applauded the moves. Here’s what she said as debates got underway:

“Unlike the president and his preposterous proposal to arm teachers with guns, Vermont’s leaders actually made a commitment today to start the hard work of making sure that what happened in Florida last week – and almost happened here a day later – never occurs again. I commend Gov. Phil Scott, Lt. Gov. David Zuckerman, Attorney General T.J. Donovan, House Speaker Mitzi Johnson and Senate President Pro Tem Tim Ashe for coming out strongly in favor of enacting common-sense measures to stem gun violence.

“By affirming support for measures that would strengthen background checks, ban the sale of devices that can convert legal firearms to illegal automatic weapons, increase the age requirement for the purchase of guns, and give law enforcement the tools to keep guns out of the hands of domestic abusers and other dangerous people, our officials are taking appropriate steps toward reducing the incidence of gun violence.

“Additionally, we welcome the governor’s proposals today to get at some of the underlying issues that drive some young people toward violence, and we commend his call for school security reviews, improved mental health services, and an expanded response to and treatment of adverse childhood experiences.

“Every day, the women and men who teach Vermont’s children strive to ensure schools are safe havens. On the same day that President Trump’s solution to gun violence was merely the presence of more guns in our schools, Vermont’s leaders showed that they actually take this issue seriously.

“Too many of our country’s children have been slaughtered in their schools over the last two decades of inaction on gun violence.

“I hope that today marks a retreat from that fatal do-nothing stance, and that here in Vermont we can actually make a difference. Our children are counting on it.”

Health Insurance Headaches: The Latest

We know that hundreds of you have experienced issues with your new high-deductible health insurance plans. We are on top of this ever-changing situation. For the latest, visit www.vtnea.org/healthcare2018.