The Vermont-NEA Board in June announced its support for Sen. Bernie Sanders’ bid for the Democratic nomination for president.

“We want to let the whole country in on what we in Vermont have long known,” said Martha Allen, a K-12 librarian from Canaan, Vt., who serves as Vermont-NEA’s president.

“Bernie’s core values are in line with ours: he is pro-family, pro-worker, pro-education and pro-labor and we believe the time has come for his vision to become a national reality.”

The union has long supported Bernie, citing his unwavering support of Vermont’s – and America’s – working class. His views on public education, economic inequality, and working men and women are in line with Vermont-NEA’s own values. With the board’s nod, members will begin to spread Bernie’s message, particularly to the state directly east of Vermont’s border.

“In Vermont, we’re very fortunate to have a senator who represents the middle class over the tints of Wall Street,” Allen said. “We believe that with Bernie in the White House, America’s

continued on p. 7

Vermont-NEA’s delegation to the NEA Representative Assembly may be among the smallest in number, but the 18-strong group had an outsized presence nonetheless.

The reason can be summed up in one word: Bernie.

“We absolutely respect NEA’s process for choosing a nominee in the presidential primaries, and we weren’t out to upset that process,” said Vermont-NEA President Martha Allen. “But we absolutely wanted the rest of our fellow members from around the country to know why we’re so excited by Bernie’s candidacy.”

(For the record, NEA’s process for determining presidential primary recommendations includes interviews, questionnaires and a vigorous debate among the NEA PAC Council representatives. Their recommendation is then forwarded to the NEA Board of Directors, which makes the final decision. The process of making a general election recommendation is simpler: it is put to the Representative Assembly in July 2016.)

If the reaction of fellow delegates was any indication, Allen’s message was well-received. The Vermont gang arrived with more than 40 pounds of Bernie swag – bumper stickers, posters, buttons – and, before the RA was even half finished, it was all gone.

“I’m proud of our union and what we do on behalf of students every day,” Allen said. “And I’m proud, too, that our board decided to back Bernie as he’s backed us throughout his career.”

The similarities in message between NEA leaders and Bernie were uncanny. NEA President Lily Eskelsen Garcia talked about the power of the people to lead change; NEA Executive Director John Stocks called on all members to be a part of an army for change. Both leaders – among the most powerful labor leaders in the country – laid out a vision where America’s children have a bright future; where economic inequality is replaced by economic opportunity; and where all Americans work to achieve the country we say we want.

“I believe the conditions are ripe for a movement of a new American majority,” Stocks told the 7,000 delegates gathered in Orlando. “This movement is fueled by growing income inequality, the scourge of racial injustice, attacks on our voting rights, a political system rigged to benefit the wealthy and powerful, the corporate takeover of our public school system, and the threat of global climate change.”

Two days earlier, Eskelsen Garcia made a similar observation:

“You—you—you are what democracy looks like. You are what power looks like. I am an empowered sixth grade teacher from Utah, and it wasn’t my superintendent who empowered me. It wasn’t the governor. It wasn’t the Secretary of Education. It was my union.

“My union saw me as a leader, and it was this Representative Assembly that put me up on this stage, as it will do for the next generation of leaders after me—and the next—and the next, for another 150 years. We are the circulating blood and the beating heart of the cause of public education.

“And, yes, we believe in ourselves, but not out of a sense of arrogance. If you don’t believe in yourself, you have not earned the right to ask anyone else to believe in you.”

“John Stocks asked us all to be warriors for justice,” Allen said. “I and my fellow delegates – and, I am confident, my fellow members – are willing and ready to answer his call.”

The Vermont delegation began its days at 7 am, frequently staying on the job until 8 pm (in other words, a typical work day for most educators). While in Orlando, the delegation voted on more than 100 new business items, including one that calls for the removal of the Confederate flag from all public schools and other public buildings and another calling on the union to devote resources toward ending institutional racism.

“Whenever I’m at RA, I’m overwhelmed by the power each of us has,” Allen said. “One in ten Americans belongs to our union. We are in the nation’s classrooms every day. And we want what I think everybody wants: great public schools that give America’s kids the start in life to become healthy, happy and productive.”

Several delegates had special roles at the Representative Assembly. Teri Vest, a member of the Twintfield Education Association who is a long-time delegate, was part of the national credentialing committee. That group is charged with ensuring all 7,000 delegates are properly registered.

April Morse, a Pownal Teachers Association member, was part of the NEA Chorus, which serenaded the delegates with a July 4 concert.

Darcey Fletcher, a former Vermont-NEA ESP of the Year who belongs to Lamoille Union Education Association, ushered her fellow Vermonters to exceed their targeted donations to the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education.
Why the Board Gave Bernie the Presidential Nod

Martha Allen

Why Bernie?
When the Republican Party has at least 15 candidates for president, and Hillary Clinton is the current front runner of several candidates from the Democratic Party, is Bernie just in the race to add to the confusion, move Hillary to the left, or is it something else?

From a Vermont's perspective, Bernie is the obvious choice. He understands the challenges working families face. He knows the value of excellent public schools in our communities. He is a firm believer of unions and realizes the importance of a strong labor force in our state. His support for veterans and their families is unwavering.

How would this translate in other states, though? We all know that Bernie says what he believes and works hard to make positive changes in Washington. But, would someone from Utah or Mississippi or Pennsylvania or Kansas take a chance on him? I think so. In recent weeks, thousands of people have attended his rallies all over the country. It seems the campaign can't find big enough venues. What a great problem to have!

I think that there are millions of disenfranchised voters in our country who just can't believe that they may have to make a choice between a Bush and a Clinton in the next election. They would rather sit it all out because there most definitely won't be any kind of positive change for the majority of the country if one of them should become president.

Now don't get me wrong, I will vote, even if it is a Clinton - Bush race. There are distinctions between the parties that keep me firmly on the Democratic side of a race such as that. As a union president representing thousands of middle class workers and their families and a strong advocate for public schools, I think the Democrats most definitely have the better platform.

But, my fear is that it isn't enough to have a "D" beside your name. You really have to make commitments and promises and then stick to them. Bernie keeps his promises.

Bernie is running as a Democratic Socialist. I love that! Unfortunately, the right-wing media will probably have a heyday with that label. Rather than looking further and actually learning about his platform, they will immediately jump to the conclusion that he is practically a Communist and we don't want Putin or Castro running our country! It is my belief that once people actually listen to what Bernie has to say, they will discover he is speaking to their issues and will want to listen a little more.

To Bernie's credit, he isn't taking any Super Pac money. This gives him a huge disadvantage when it comes to funding his campaign. He is running his campaign the good old fashioned way where people are actually people and donors are actually human beings. Amazing!

So, here we are, at the beginning of a very exciting race with a terrific candidate. We need to support Bernie in whatever way we can. The Vermont-NEA Board of Directors took a bold step and recommended Bernie for President, making yours the first union in America to give a formal nod to Bernie. We hope that other unions will join us in our support. Meanwhile, you can help. Sign up on Bernie's website. Volunteer when you can. Let us know that you want to help and we will keep you up to date on our campaign work on Bernie's behalf.

We all know that Bernie will do fabulously here in Vermont. Help to get the word out in other states. Talk to your relatives and friends outside of Vermont and ask them to take a serious look at what Bernie stands for, because he is fighting for all of us, and not the 1 percent. Check out some of his pledges we are hearing about from the campaign trail:

- Raise taxes on the rich and on corporations, closing all loopholes.
- Introduce obligatory paid sick and holiday leave, including 12 weeks paid maternity/paternity leave.
- Offer free tuition in public colleges and universities, funded by “speculation tax”, essentially a Wall Street levy.
- Put a break on all future free trade deals.
- Introduce a federal minimum wage of $15 an hour and end the pay gap between men and women.
5 Ways to Effectively Use Humor in Your Classroom

By NEA Member Benefits

Done right, laughing along with your students can lower stress, reinforce lessons and boost student engagement.

When Gary Rubinstein, a New York City high school math teacher who has dabbled in stand-up comedy, wanted to teach his students about symmetry, he showed them two pictures of movie star Angelina Jolie—one with just the left side of her face reflected back on itself, and one with just the right side reflected.

The two images were remarkably similar, denoting a high degree of facial symmetry—a supposed marker of beauty.

Rubinstein showed the two images himself, each reflecting a different half of his face. The first depicted him as bloated, balding and slyly smiling, while in the second he appeared purse-lipped, mop-headed and thin.

“As you can see,” he told the class, “these pictures are pretty similar, so I guess I’m very good looking.”

His students erupted in laughter.

Such moments aren’t mere indulgences or distractions from learning, says Mary Kay Morrison, a former classroom teacher and author of “Using Humor to Maximize Learning.” She points to research showing that laughter reduces stress, and says humorous moments increase student engagement and help embed learning in the long-term memory.

“The number one quality that high-school kids want in a teacher is a sense of humor,” Morrison says. “They remember those teachers, and they will become more engaged with those teachers.”

Follow these tips to leave ’em laughing—and learning.

1. Laugh at Yourself

Short on material? Look inward. Kids love to laugh at their teachers.

In addition to mocking his looks, Rubinstein sometimes plays up the image of himself as an out-of-touch math nerd, pretending that he thinks “Hannah Montana” is currently topping the pop charts.

Michael Lovorn, a former K-12 teacher who now researches humor and teaching as an assistant professor of education at the University of Pittsburgh, also favors self-effacing humor in the classroom. “If a student got something right, I would act like I was going to dance, and they were all gleefully horrified,” he says.

2. Plan the Fun

Humor doesn’t have to mean quick wit. Teachers can bake laughs into their lesson plans by incorporating funny materials like silly word problems, political cartoons or satirical literature.

Barbara N. Miller, who teaches graduate classes and professional development sessions about humor in the classroom, says that patents for seemingly absurd inventions can help students learn more about different eras of the past. She points to one patent from 1869, for a device to prevent people from peeking into the next outhouse stall.

“It’s a funny way to jumpstart looking into something,” Miller says. “You get an idea of what the culture was like.”

3. Get Students in on the Act

Morrison says teachers can have students demonstrate their knowledge through parody songs, riddles or funny tweets. One middle-school teacher she worked with gave each of his students a small section of a social studies chapter and asked them to write a content question using a joke, pun or riddle. The teacher then incorporated the funny questions on the unit assessment. “The kids absolutely loved taking that test,” Morrison says.

4. Toe the Line

If you’re in doubt about a joke, bite your tongue. It’s better to miss a few laughs than to risk offending or insulting your students. “Even if you intend for the humor not to be hurtful, if it impacts the child in a negative way, then it’s inappropriate,” says Morrison.

Lovorn also warns teachers to steer away from any sort of R-rated innuendo, even if it appeals to older students’ sense of humor. “If you engage in that, you very well may lose the authority you’ve built up,” he says.

5. Don’t Try Too Hard

Humor isn’t something to stress out over—it should be light and fun! So don’t feel like you have to put on clown shoes and take pratfalls. “People think that they’re going to have to become a stand up comic, and that’s not true,” says Miller.

For Galeet Cohen, a high-school science teacher in Philadelphia, humor usually comes in the form of playful banter between her and her students. The repartee isn’t over-the-top, but it signals that her classroom is a place where students can be themselves, and where it’s okay to laugh while they learn.

“If you don’t invest in building a classroom environment that’s happy, it’s not productive,” Cohen says. “The humor is such a tiny percentage of what’s happening. But if you take that out, the rest of the class just doesn’t work anymore.”

You and your fellow members across America made history last month as the Senate overwhelmingly passed the first renewal of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in the post George W. Bush-era. Over the summer, House and Senate negotiators will iron out differences that we hope put kids first.
Your Power
Lily Urges NEA Members to ‘Go, Fight, Win!’

from p. 8

Lily Eskelsen Garcia, NEA President, addresses the opening of the 2015 NEA Representative Assembly in Orlando last month.

you, you know, a lot of things have changed. I’ve changed a lot in 28 years. When I started doing this, right out of high school, I was the lunch lady. That’s padding my resume. I was the salad girl. Not up to hot foods yet; really cool hair net and then there was an opening and I got hired at the teacher’s assistant in a head start program. And then I was a university student and then I was an elementary teacher, and now I’m President of the National Education Association.

But, you know, some things haven’t changed. I’ve never lost that feeling that we are powerful and that we use that power in the service of our students. I know so many of you in this room. I can’t walk ten feet without wanting to hug people. And I know from a thousand conversations and arguments and motions and debates that whatever journey brought you to this room, I see the same thing. I see your hearts wrapped around your students. The ones you drive to school, the ones you feed, the ones you teach and scold and counsel and heal and save their lives and love. And from the very beginning, our mission has never changed. We wake up every day set on doing whatever it takes to make sure that our students have every opportunity to learn and grow and to succeed. That’s why we gather here, to carry out that mission. This is mission control in this room for so many of us. For those of us who have been here ten years or more, for those of us who are first-time delegates, we will not make it stop. We won’t let the actions that we take at this RA end at the end of this RA.

You’re going to see something when you get back home. You’re going to say something that I passed here at the RA is what I am supposed to do with my circle of influence when I get back home, because I am the NEA back home. And that’s the essence of who we are. We truly, truly are the NEA. We are the rabblerousers. We are the activists. We are those true believers, and this is how we decided to make our mark on the world, as educators who understand the fearless power of collective action.

Parents are with us. Researchers are with us. Enlightened business leaders are with us. Common sense is with us. But we are being called on to lead, as we’ve led for 150 years. Now is our moment. You have a circle of influence waiting to hear you.

Did you know that one in every 100 Americans is a member of the National Education Association? Mother Jones did what she did without a Facebook page. She didn’t have a Twitter account. What are you going to use to reach 100 people with the truth? You can speak that truth in a way no one else can, in a way no one can silence you. The people who know you, they trust you. They are going to listen to you. That’s the power you already have in your hands. Imagine three million NEA members simply telling the truth to people who will listen to them, people who will trust them.

I was sitting right there 28 years ago. I was a new delegate. Twenty-eight years from today, it might be one of our first-time delegates sitting in this room right now who can stand up here. Twenty-eight years ago, no one would have picked me. I was annoying to my delegation, Now I’m annoying to the Koch brothers.

You—you—you are what democracy looks like. You are what power looks like. I am an empowered sixth grade teacher from Utah, and it wasn’t my superintendent who empowered me. It wasn’t the governor. It wasn’t the Secretary of Education. It was my union. My union saw me as a leader, and it was this Representative Assembly that put me up on this stage, as it will do for the next generation of leaders after me— and the next, and the next, for another 150 years.

We are the circulating blood and the beating heart of the cause of public education. And, yes, we believe in ourselves, but not out of a sense of arrogance. If you don’t believe in yourself, you have not earned the right to ask anyone else to believe in you.

After 28 years, I still believe in you as much as I did the first time I walked into this room. I am still electrified by the power waiting to be unleashed. I still get that feeling that nothing can stop us.

Nothing can stop the mission that’s written in our hearts the way it’s written in my favorite poem:

Give me your hungry children,
Your sick children.
Your homeless and abused children.
Give me your children who need love as badly as they need learning.
Give me your children who have talents and gifts and skills.
And give me those who have none.
Give them all to me, in whatever form they come, Whatever color their skin, Whatever language they speak, Wherever they find God.

And the people in this public school will give you. The doctors and the engineers, and the carpenters.
We’ll give you the lawyers and ministers And the teachers of tomorrow. We’ll give you the mothers and the fathers, The thinkers and the builders, The artists and the dreamers.
We will give you the American Dream We will give you the future.

Will you unite our members and the nation? Will you inspire them to see that we are being called on to end toxic testing that has poisoned what it means to teach and what it means to learn? Will you lead to a future that respects that whole child and the whole community and respects the men and women who know the names of the students and who know what they’re talking about?

Crae pues, Adelante! NEA, we have work to do. Go, fight, win. Mil gracias de mi corazón.
Your Power

Stocks: ‘A New American Majority’

This article was written by NEA Today’s Tim Walker. Get all the RA news at ra.nea.org

In a speech to the 2015 NEA Representative Assembly on July 4, NEA Executive Director John Stocks said a “grand alliance” of Americans is coming together to demand action on social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.

“I believe the conditions are ripe for a movement of a new American majority,” Stocks told the 7,000 delegates gathered in Orlando, FL.

“This movement is fueled by growing income inequality, the scourge of racial injustice, attacks on our voting rights, a political system rigged to benefit the wealthy and powerful, the corporate takeover of our public school system, and the threat of global climate change.”

Already these powerful voices have been heard and were instrumental in recent victories for health care and marriage equality.

We have much to celebrate on July 4, Stocks said, but “we do so with our eyes wide-open, for we know that all is not well in our country.”

Stocks saluted the Assembly for passing a new business item that addresses the issues of institutional racism. This measure calls for a coalition of partners to work together to eradicate policies that perpetuate institutional racism in education and expand educator-led professional development in areas of cultural competence, diversity, and social justice.

“I am deeply proud of this Assembly... for recognizing that institutional racism lurks in the shadows and taking responsibility to bring it to the light,” Stocks said.

“Your action yesterday is a courageous expression of this organization’s values and character and...its aspirations for our society... particularly for our students.”

But every educator has a unique contribution to make to the new American Majority Movement, Stocks said.

The test, label, and punish regime of the so-called education “reform” movement is collapsing. But what will replace it? A different set of equally narrow and destructive policies or a vision of public education that is created and cultivated by educators?

It is a vision, Stocks said, rooted in serving the needs, wants and desires of the whole child, that models and fosters equity and justice, that cultivates life-long learning for college and career in a prosperous and fair economy.

“We want public education to foster collaboration...where parents, students, communities, and educators. We demand that all of our students have an opportunity to learn! We want all of our students, regardless of their zip code, to receive the support, tools and time necessary to learn!” Stocks told to cheers from the assembly.

The three million members of the NEA are pivotal to this effort, Stocks said. “Our union ought to be indispensable to our members’ success... in their practice...in their professional development.... and in their careers.”

Educators know what must be done for every student to succeed and there is no one else more qualified to lead public education into the future and be an indispensable part of the new American Majority Movement.

“Not just any educator,” Stocks said in closing. “Educators who are trained as advocates, who are organized, who are empowered to take the lead and who belong to the N—E—A!”

Vermont-NEA delegates, including, from bottom left clockwise, Chris Guras, Molly Pratt, Christie Theriault and Cathy Mander-Adams applaud as NEA ED John Stocks calls members to take the lead for justice.
Vermont Delegation Takes Orlando for RA 2015

Scenes from NEA RA 2015

Teri Vest, top left, is recognized for her role on the credentials committee; below, President Martha Allen and VP Alison Sylvester take part in an empowered educators program; and at left is the view from the Vermont seats as the RA got underway.
working families will be able to flourish and grow. His ideas around banking reform, student debt, and public education are refreshing and exciting.”

Allen noted that the rest of the country is paying attention to Bernie. “Everywhere Bernie goes, he attracts over-capacity crowds,” Allen said. “His message – the same one he has had for decades – is resonating far from Vermont’s borders.”

Bernie’s political career has been in defense of those who aren’t represented by the powerful: rural people living in poverty, people of color discriminated against for centuries, and those Americans who have been consigned to the margins for far too long.

Bernie is with us...

As Union Members

All of Bernie’s top non-individual contributors are labor unions.

Bernie’s support of unions has spanned his entire political career: he walked picket lines as recently as this winter in support of our brothers and sisters of the Communications Workers of America and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers in their strike against Fairpoint Communications.

He outright opposes fast-track trade authority and the Trans Pacific Partnership. He opposed the disastrous North American Free Trade Agreement signed by President Bill Clinton, which led to the evaporation of millions of American jobs – many of them union jobs.

As Educators

He is a firm supporter of NEA’s Degrees Not Debt agenda, and has also proposed making our public colleges and universities tuition-free for middle class families.

He decries the relentless emphasis on over-testing America’s K-12 students, and is calling to get ESEA right by limiting the role standardized tests play in evaluating educators, schools and students. He has long been a critic of the test-and-punish regime instituted in NCLB. He believes our public schools should be the foundation of a strong middle class.

He opposes the privatization of America’s public schools, and is a strong supporter of the millions of men and women who work with our country’s public school students.

As Working Americans

Bernie’s call for a shift from Wall Street to Main Street is something he actually believes in, fights for, and works toward.

Bernie’s donor base is mostly made up of middle class Americans. Bernie is not beholden to the “establishment,” and he eschews corporate and Wall Street money.

As Bernie himself says: “We live in one of the wealthiest countries on earth, yet children go hungry, veterans sleep out on the streets and senior citizens cannot afford their prescription drugs. This is what a rigged economic system looks like.”

Bernie’s political career has been in defense of those who aren’t represented by the powerful: rural people living in poverty, people of color discriminated against for centuries, and those Americans who have been consigned to the margins for far too long.

She said yes!

Almost every year, at least one couple gets engaged during RA. This year was no different. As the news unfolded, left, on the big screen, Vermont-NEA President Martha Allen watches with surprise.
NEA’s Lily Eskelsen Garcia: We Are ‘Part of Something Big’

In opening the 94th NEA Representative Assembly in Orlando last month, Lily Eskelsen Garcia addressed 7,000 of her fellow members for the first time as the president of the nation’s largest union. Below are excerpts of her speech; for the full text, and a video, head over to vtnea.org/nea15.

Twenty-eight years ago, I was sitting right here as a first-time delegate when I was 12. I had on my official Utah T-shirt with our state motto, “Stack ‘em deep, teach ‘em cheap.” I had been elected AR of Orchard Elementary that year because I went to the bathroom during the faculty meeting. That was how we got our AR, then when you came back, you’ve been unanimously elected. We had an AR system based on weak bladders. And I had my local president, Alan Rasmussen at Orchard Elementary, second grade teacher, and he said, you know, we’ve got some at-large seats for our local. You should run for something. You have so many opinions about things.

And so I ran. And I lost. And they put me on this list because then you could be an alternate. I was the alternate, alternate, alternate. And two people, like, I think got the flu, or somebody’s mother-in-law died, and I got to go. It was my second plane ride in my life. And they handed me this packet of like 3 million pieces of paper as I was getting on the plane: resolutions, policy statements, new business items. I read every single word. That was the last time I read every single word. Don’t tell anybody.

But I walked into this room, and it took my breath away. Do you remember the first time you walked into this room? Do you remember? And you thought, how in the world are they going to do this? We’ll probably just listen to speeches. And then I found out, oh, my gosh, they’re debating things. We’re going to decide things, and here I was this little sixth grade teacher from Utah, and I was really powerful in my classroom. I could make those kids stand on their heads. But I sometimes felt really powerless when I left that room.

All of a sudden I walked into this room and I said, “I’m a part of something big, I’m a part of something that is powerful enough that they might do something good for my kids back in Utah.” My 39 kids in my classroom. Mary Hatwood Futrell was up here–Mary Hatwood Futrell, the voice of the

continued on p. 4

Drop us a line...

Did you know that we don't automatically know when you change your email, phone number or address? If any of your information changes, please head over to vtnea.org and give us the skinny. It's fast, easy and the best way we have to keep in touch with you.