

# Montana Federation of Public Employees

Publication for members of MEA-MFT & MPEA

December 2017 Vol 1 No 1

## A new union for Montana

BY QUINTON NYMAN  
AND ERIC FEAVER

January 20, 2018, MEA-MFT and MPEA member leaders will gather here in Helena and ratify a proposed constitution creating a new union, the Montana Federation of Public Employees.

A new union of state, county, and municipal employees. A new union of higher education faculty and classified personnel. A new union of public school classified, specialists, and teachers.

A new union dedicated to the state of Montana and all its local communities.

A new union with a long, distinguished history, that first took root in frontier Montana in 1882, seven years before statehood, and continued to thrive and realize significant union building events as in 1917, 1936, 1945, 1973-74, 1981, and 2000. So many to choose from.

A new union that has grown over time to faithfully represent and professionally advocate for the best possible public programs and services adequately and equitably provided through state and local government effort.

January 20, directed by our highest governing bodies to just do it, and guided by our new

constitution, MPEA and MEA-MFT member leaders will jointly dedicate themselves to:

(1) seize the opportunity to rethink, restructure, and repurpose what we do, with and for whom, and why;

(2) defend, promote, enhance, and grow the Montana labor movement;

(3) establish beyond any doubt who speaks for organized public employees across Montana;

(4) share resources and funding of those resources across a wider, larger array of members;

(5) establish and maintain quality, diverse professional development and leadership training across all membership categories;

(6) unite the legislative goals and lobbying efforts of all public employees;

(7) build a progressive, worker-oriented footprint in every Montana community; and

(8) send a message to and serve as a model of membership organizing and union density growth for our national affiliates NEA and AFT.

This is seminal stuff. Our own special creation as we face an uncertain, raw-edged anti-

(Continued on p. 2)



MPEA & MEA-MFT members at the Helena regional meeting, one of 10 regional meetings held across Montana this fall, learn about the proposed constitution for our new merged union.

# A new union for Montana

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government, anti-public employee, anti-union future.

So, if not already a delegate, get on board. Come to Helena, Saturday, January 20, Great Northern Hotel. Become part of the most consequential event in recent Montana labor history.

**April 6-7, 2018:** After delegates for both MEA-MFT and MPEA vote to adopt the proposed constitution January 20, the new union will hold its first joint annual meeting April

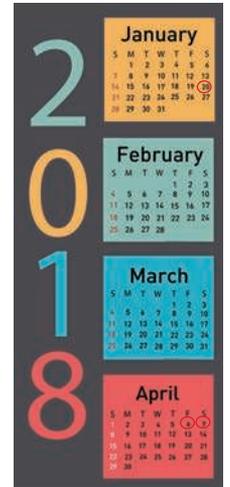
6-7, 2018, in Helena. The primary business for this meeting will be for delegates to adopt dues and budget and elect a board of directors and state officers.

**Spring regional meetings:** MEA-MFT and MPEA will hold more regional meetings around the state in February and March, 2018, so members have a chance to learn about the new union and the issues up for discussion and vote at the April 6-7 annual meeting.

All members are encouraged to attend one of these meetings. Regional meeting dates and locations are listed on page 8, along with the full merger calendar.

## MERGER CALENDAR

See the full calendar of merger events on page 8 of this newsletter.



From left, standing: MPEA Executive Director Quint Nyman and MEA-MFT President Eric Feaver talk to members and answer questions during the fall regional meetings held around the state. Hundreds of members attended these meetings.



Members of the joint MEA-MFT/MPEA merger task force meet to hammer out details of the merger.



## You're invited! Regional training • Feb. 9-10 • Missoula

All MEA-MFT members and MPEA members are invited to attend the next regional training at the Holiday Inn Downtown in Missoula, Feb. 9-10, 2018. These regional training sessions are fun, practical, and FREE to all members.

The trainings provide members and member-leaders with individualized, local learning opportunities that build the capacity of our union and help us achieve success for our members. All travel, lodging, and meals are provided. But register soon; space will be limited. Educa-

tors: Renewal units are available.

**Rave reviews:** Here are some of comments from past regional training participants:

"It has been so informative. It has fired me up to attend more. It has also made me want to become more involved above our local level!"

"It's great to meet the staff so we can make connections and put faces with names. Great food. It was a fun evening and day."

Agenda and online registration at [bit.ly/Westregiontraining](http://bit.ly/Westregiontraining) (case sensitive) and [mea-mft.org](http://mea-mft.org). Questions

about the regional training? Contact Kate Treib: [ktreib@mea-mft.org](mailto:ktreib@mea-mft.org), 406.721.2928, or 800.398.0836.

## Tax information for MEA-MFT members

You can deduct your MEA-MFT dues from your taxes, but only if you itemize deductions, and only if your dues plus other miscellaneous deductions add up to at least 2 percent of your adjusted gross income.

NOTE: The portion of your MEA-MFT dues that goes toward our legislative activity is not deductible.

For 2017, the deductible amount equals 93.5 percent of your MEA-MFT dues, all of your local dues, and all of your national dues.



Merger task force members.



Above & below: merger task force members.



MPEA & MEA-MFT members at the Missoula regional meeting learn about the merger process.

### MT Federation of Public Employees

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# Special session: a perfect storm

The Montana Legislature met in special session in November to deal with the state's \$227 million budget shortfall.

It was a miserable three days that will have severe long-term impacts on MEA-MFT/MPEA members and the Montana people our members serve.

Instead of finding a balanced approach to deal with the state's shortfall, the legislative majority voted for \$110 million (counting lost federal matching funds) in permanent cuts to state services and made it more difficult to restore funding for services if revenue rebounds.

Instead of fixing Montana's tax structure to avoid revenue shortfalls in the future, the majority chose to kick the can down the road, guaranteeing we'll be fighting this budget battle again.

MEA-MFT/MPEA leaders and staff were at the state capitol throughout the special session, working to protect our members, state services and jobs, and public education.

In the "win" column, we helped stop some bad ideas, particularly HB 08 (Barry Usher (R-Billings), a mean-



Sign outside the MEA-MFT office displays our message: don't balance the budget on the backs of state employees and Montana people who need state services. MPEA and MEA-MFT members statewide put these signs in their yards.

spirited and illegal "furlough" bill that mandated some state employees be furloughed for an uncertain amount of time. HB 08 passed both houses of the legislature. As expected, Governor Bullock vetoed the bill a week after the special session concluded.

## How did we get here?

Montana has a serious revenue problem. It goes back to more than two decades of legislative decisions that reduced taxes for the wealthiest Montanans while leaving regular taxpayers to shoulder a heavier load. Sound familiar?

According to the Montana Budget and Policy Center, income tax cuts in the 2003 legislature alone have cost the state about \$1 billion over the past decade.

**Fast forward** to the 2017 regular session of the legislature. The legislative majority passed a state budget based on unrealistically high

revenue estimates, ignoring the real numbers that were coming in. When those estimates proved wrong, Montana was left with a gaping hole in our state budget.

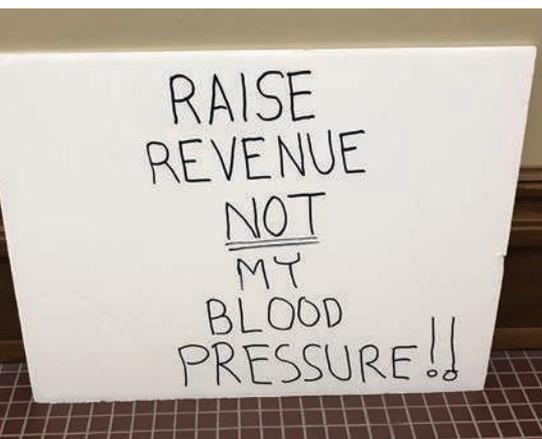
All this, together with the most expensive wildfire season on record, created a perfect budget storm.

## The three-part compromise

Governor Steve Bullock went into the November special session with a plan to fix the \$227 million budget shortfall with three equal measures: 1) temporary cuts to some state services, 2) temporary increases in some revenues, and 3) temporary transfers from some state accounts into areas worst hit by the shortfall.

Painful as his plan was, given the cuts to services and state jobs, it was better than patching the budget hole through cuts alone.

Two revenue proposals would have temporarily increased taxes on rental cars and lodging (motels, etc).



Sign outside a hearing room during the special session says it all.

These tax increases mostly affected out-of-state tourists.

A third revenue bill passed that charges a temporary 3 percent management fee for Montana State Fund assets over one billion dollars.

### The results

The legislative majority killed all revenue measures except the State Fund bill, leaving no option but more cuts.

**Worst of all**, the majority needlessly voted to make the cuts permanent instead of temporary.

"We're in the minority. We couldn't stop them," said MEA-MFT member and state Representative Moffie Funk (D-Helena).

The upshot: "We'll start the next legislative session trying to restore funding to the baseline it would have been at if the majority hadn't voted to make cuts permanent," said MEA-MFT Exec. Director Erik Burke.

Meantime, we'll see more state jobs lost, more state employees shouldering heavier workloads, and fewer resources for crucial services

MEA-MFT and MPEA members provide, including services for Montana's most vulnerable citizens – the elderly, folks with mental illness and disabilities, and children.

"All so Republicans can say they didn't raise taxes," said MEA-MFT member and state Senator Jill Cohenour (D-East Helena). "But apparently it's okay to harm children."

### The answer: raise revenue — and vote carefully!

The only way to climb out of Montana's budget hole is to raise revenue. We need to take a hard look at our state's tax structure and make sure out-of-state corporations, tourists, and our wealthiest citizens pay their fair share.

This will only happen if we elect a majority of legislators who understand that Montana can't thrive without strong public programs and services. **It matters who gets elected!**

### Thank you to our members

MEA-MFT and MPEA mobilized

hundreds of members to call and e-mail their legislators before the special session, telling them to raise revenue and not to balance the budget with more cuts to state employees, educators, and Montana's most vulnerable citizens. Others wrote letters to the editor talking about the severe impacts of cuts.

The outcome of the special session would have been far worse without our members and other Montanans who raised their voices.

### Thank you, member-legislators

Our 14 members in the Montana Legislature fought valiantly for the governor's balanced approach during the special session, just as they have fought for public services, education, and public employees every regular session. Our deep gratitude to these members for standing up for what's right. We need more legislators like these good folks!

The only way we will achieve better results in the legislature is to elect a majority of legislators who share our values.

Our member-legislators are listed below:

- Sen. Dick Barrett, Missoula
- Sen. Jill Cohenour, Helena, E. Helena
- Sen. Tom Facey, Missoula
- Sen. Edie McClafferty, Butte, Boulder, Clancy
- Sen. Mary McNally, Billings
- Rep. Jacob Bachmeier, Missoula (Rep. Bachmeier joined MEA-MFT student program during the special session. Bachmeier is currently enrolled at MSU Northern)
- Rep. Willis Curdy, Missoula
- Rep. Amanda Curtis, Butte
- Rep. John Fleming, Ronan, Arlee
- Rep. Moffie Funk, Helena
- Rep. Jean Price, Great Falls
- Rep. Marilyn Ryan, Missoula
- Rep. Casey Schreiner, Great Falls
- Rep. Tom Woods, Bozeman



Still smiling despite 17-hour days, MEA-MFT's lobby team, along with member and legislator Amanda Curtis (D-Butte), pause for a photo during the special session. From left: Diane Fladmo, Eric Feaver, Morgan Smith, Marco Ferro, Amanda Curtis, and Lauren Caldwell. Not pictured: Quint Nyman, Erik Burke, and Don Jones.



Melissa Romano confers with fourth-grade math partners.

## TEACHING PERSEVERANCE

### 2018 Montana Teacher of the Year Melissa Romano

Marias McDowell didn't start fourth grade as a big fan of math. "Nooooo!" she says emphatically.

A few months in Melissa Romano's classroom changed her mind. "She makes math really easy and fun," McDowell says. "And reading. She actually, like, tells you the deep details."

Romano, who teaches fourth grade at Four Georgians School in Helena, was selected as Montana's 2018 Teacher of the Year this fall.

It's the latest in a list of accolades Romano has earned in her 15 years of teaching. She received a Presidential Award for Excellence in Math and Science Teaching in 2012. She is one of 130 teachers nationwide

chosen this year for the BetterLesson website, where she creates math lessons to share with thousands of teachers nationwide.

Romano has worked as a master teacher in science and math and currently serves as an instructional coach for teachers nationwide.

While Romano excels at teaching all subjects, math is her passion. "She LOVES math," says McDowell.

"Mrs. Romano brought out a fierce love for math and inspired my daughter to continue to push herself," says parent Maureen Boyle.

"She does fun games to learn math," says student Max Christensen. "We solve story problems like saving Sid the gummy worm."

**Saving Sid** is all about teaching perseverance and teamwork, Romano explains. "I start the year building relationships with each student but also trying to build their math perseverance. Perseverance is a big topic in my classroom."

Students work in teams of four to rescue Sid, who is "trapped" under a "boat" (a clear cup) with a Lifesaver candy perched on top of the cup.

Armed with paperclips, the team has to get the lifesaver around Sid and get Sid on top of the cup, touching nothing but the paperclips.

"They figure out they have to work together, otherwise it's nearly impossible to save Sid," Romano says.

"It's about learning to work with a partner and a team. I tell students, 'We'll depend on our learning partners and groups all year.'"

Two weeks before Thanksgiving finds Romano's students engaged in spirited discussions with their math partners about how to calculate the cost of groceries for a turkey dinner.

Why partners? "It's really important that fourth graders, and students in general, learn to communicate their math thinking in word problems," Romano explains.

"Kids come to fourth grade kind of lost about real-world math and scared of word problems."

Having a partner and pal helps them overcome the fear, Romano says. "They bounce ideas off each other and listen to each other think through how to solve the problem."

Student Nora Dwyer explains that once the partners solve the problem, "we'll make a video of the answer and send it by computer to our pen pals" (fourth graders in another local school).

"The point is to talk about math thinking and hear how other fourth graders are figuring out the assignment," Romano explains.

"It makes them aware of their community and schools in this community. Math is bigger than this classroom."

**Going beyond the classroom** is key to Romano's teaching. She aims to bring the whole world to her students through field trips and hands-on experiences.

Technology tools like Google Earth and ProjectExplorer allow her to connect a wide range of subjects: U.S. and world history, literature, music, language arts, social studies, science, and of course, math.

"I've been kind of a dive-right-in-and-ask-questions-later person when it comes to technology," Romano says. "As teachers, we need to be willing to say to our students, 'I don't exactly know how to do this, but I know how to figure it out.' It's impor-

tant for them to see their teacher wanting to learn."

**As the 2018 Montana Teacher of the Year**, Romano will serve as an ambassador for public education and represent Montana in the National Teacher of the Year program.

**Finalists** in this year's Teacher of the Year program include Romano, Judy Boyle, k-8 teacher at Divide

School in Divide; and Judy Vincent, first-grade teacher at Shields Valley School in Wilsall. All three were honored at a celebration October 19 in Missoula, held in conjunction with the annual MEA-MFT Educators' Conference.

Congratulations to all three excellent teachers, all of whom are MEA-MFT members. 🗨️



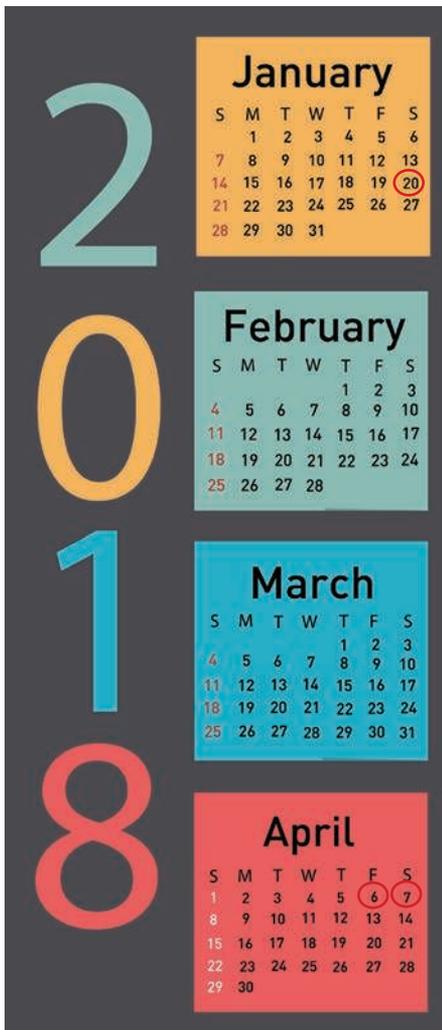
From left: finalist Judy Vincent, Teacher of the Year Melissa Romano, and finalist Judy Boyle all were honored at the Teacher of the Year celebration.



Romano's students learn to communicate their math thinking.



# MERGER CALENDAR



## JANUARY 20, 2018

### Special MEA-MFT Representative Assembly & MPEA Annual Meeting • Helena

Delegates at their respective special meetings will consider and vote on the proposed constitution.

## FEBRUARY & MARCH, 2018

### Regional Meetings • all MEA-MFT & MPEA members invited

|             |           |          |            |                              |
|-------------|-----------|----------|------------|------------------------------|
| Kalispell   | Tuesday   | Feb. 27  | 6:00 P.M.  | Kalispell Labor Temple       |
| Missoula    | Wednesday | Feb. 28  | 5:30 P.M.  | UM - UC Theatre              |
| Bozeman     | Monday    | March 5  | 6:00 P.M.  | Bozeman Library              |
| Helena      | Wednesday | March 7  | 5:30 P.M.  | Helena College               |
| Great Falls | Saturday  | March 10 | 10:30 A.M. | Great Falls Education Assoc. |
| Havre       | Tuesday   | March 13 | 6:00 P.M.  | MSU-Northern SUB             |
| Wolf Point  | Wednesday | March 14 | 6:00 P.M.  | Sherman Inn                  |
| Billings    | Thursday  | March 15 | 6:30 P.M.  | Billings Education Assoc.    |
| Miles City  | Saturday  | March 17 | 5:30 P.M.  | Rib & Chop House (tentative) |
| Butte       | Tuesday   | March 20 | 6:00 P.M.  | Carpenters Union Hall        |

## APRIL 6-7, 2018

### First Joint Annual Meeting • Helena

Delegates will adopt dues and budget and elect a board of directors and state officers for our new merged union.

More about the unification of MPEA and MEA-MFT and what it means to you inside this newsletter and at [mea-mft.org](http://mea-mft.org)!