

MEA-MFTtoday

A publication for members of MEA-MFT

Pushing back the classroom walls

2016 Montana Teacher of the Year Jessica Anderson

Great teaching has a domino effect. So it's appropriate that Jessica Anderson showed up for school the day before Halloween dressed as a domino.

Anderson has no objection to fun and games in the classroom. In fact, she uses games extensively to teach science concepts. "Our entire classroom is a game," she said. Her students love it – to the point of not wanting to leave sometimes when class is over.

"Students who typically struggle in school frequently excel under Jessica's leadership," says her school principal, Kerry Glisson.

Anderson's innovation and non-stop energy recently earned her the title of 2016 Montana Teacher of the Year. She teaches earth science, chemistry, and physics at Powell County High School in Deer Lodge and oceanography through the Montana Digital Academy.

She says her inspiration to teach came from her grandmother, who taught in a one-room school on the North Dakota plains where she cleaned the school, tended to the wood stove, and washed down the outhouse, along with teaching stu- (Continued on p. 8)



Finalist Derek Strahn, Teacher of the Year Jessica Anderson, and finalist Shelly Stanton at the Teacher of the Year Celebration Oct. 15. All are MEA-MFT members.

MEA-MFT scores final victory in saving our retirement benefits

GABA preserved for employees & retirees in TRS & PERS

This August, MEA-MFT won the last round in its two-year legal battle to save public employees' and teachers' retirement benefits.

This latest victory came as welcome news to Montana's state, local, and public school employees, those

still working and those who are retired. It means the yearly cost-of-living increase they were guaranteed when they were hired – called "guaranteed annual benefit adjustment" (GABA) – will remain intact for those in Montana's Public Employees' Retirement System and Teachers' (Continued on p. 9)

Our Point of View

BY ERIC FEAVER
MEA-MFT PRESIDENT



Does it matter?

Does it matter if the next superintendent of public instruction...

- Is an accomplished, award-winning classroom teacher?
- Believes in and advocates for public education?
- Thinks teachers should be licensed and endorsed?
- Opposes tuition tax credits, pay vouchers, and charter schools – all intended to privatize our public schools?
- Believes teacher tenure – due process and just cause – must be maintained as it has been for over 100 years?
- Affirms our public schools must be gun free and safe?
- Believes early childhood education is the next best step toward quality education for all Montana kids?
- Believes that after a life-time career, teachers have more than earned a life-long supporting pension?
- Proactively follows in the footsteps of distinguished predecessors Nancy Keenan, Linda McCulloch, and Denise Juneau?

It matters to us. There are two announced candidates for Montana

superintendent of public instruction: Democrat Melissa Romano and Republican Elsie Arntzen. No other credible candidates are likely to file.

Romano, an award-winning classroom teacher, believes as we believe in things that matter. She will competently follow in the footsteps of her last three predecessors. MEA-MFT COPE has endorsed her candidacy.

As for Arntzen, she has a legislative record unbecoming of anyone who teaches or has taught in our public schools.

In the 2015 legislative session, Senator Elsie Arntzen voted NOT to fund Governor Steve Bullock's Early Edge proposal. She opposed state funding of 19-year-olds who maintain high school enrollment and opposed raising the mandatory school enrollment age to 18.

Worse, she voted for SB 410, the first public school income tax credit privatization bill to pass any legislature and slither into law without the governor's signature.

In addition, Arntzen voted for HB 322 to provide local and state revenue vouchers for a wide range of kids to enroll in private and sectarian schools. The governor vetoed HB

322. And she supported HB 596 to create a parallel universe of publicly funded but privately operated charter schools across Montana. The bill died in committee.

In 2015 and previous sessions, Arntzen has voted to weaponize k-12 public schools and college campuses. She has voted to bastardize the meaning of teacher tenure and end defined benefit pensions in the Teachers' and Public Employees' Retirement Systems. She has voted to require the election of the Montana board of public education and end election-day registration – a legislative referendum the people rejected in the 2014 general election.

It gets no better. Arntzen has voted to authorize anyone to teach, supported so-called "right-to-work," and opposed state employee pay plans. In 2015 she voted to close the Montana Developmental Center...a vote consistent with her 2011 vote to defund the Montana State Veterans Home.

Back in 2005, in a special legislative session convened expressly to meet Montana's constitutional obligation to adequately fund public education, Arntzen voted NO on the absolutely necessary k-12 school funding bill that featured first-time-ever funding of the quality educator payment, Indian Education for All, Indian achievement, and at-risk students.

So many bad votes, hard to pick the worst one, but what can be said about her 2009 vote asserting Montana's right to secede from the union?

Elsie Arntzen's record matters. If ever to serve as our superintendent of public instruction, she will promote outcomes similar to the legislative votes she has cast.

Elsie Arntzen is no Melissa Romano. 🗣️

AFT vice president visits Montana

Mary Cathryn Ricker, executive vice president of AFT, one of our two national affiliates, visited Billings this October. She met with many local MEA-MFT members in their workplaces, including state employee members working at the Montana Women's Prison and Probation and Parole, along with k-12 members at several Billings schools.

"It was a real treat for me to see our local members in action," Ricker said. "It was impressive."

Ricker is an award-winning English teacher in St. Paul, Minnesota, and a key union leader at the local, state, and national levels.

MEA-MFT board members Melanie Charlson, Amanda Curtis, and Rita Wells served as Ricker's tour



From left: Rita Wells, Billings Education Assoc. vice president; Mary Cathryn Ricker, AFT executive vice president; Billings teacher Craig Beals; and Amanda Curtis, MEA-MFT's NEA director, during Ricker's visit to Montana.



Rita Wells takes a photo with Ricker and Probation & Parole officers Brad Pinnick and Katie Weston.

guides. "Sharing the amazing work of our dedicated public employees and public educators with Mary Cathryn was a true honor," said Melanie Charlson, vice president of MEA-MFT. "I'm so proud to be a part of our union." 🗨️

Staff changes

Outgoing: MEA-MFT bid happy trails recently to Carol Gordon and Valerie Rahmsdorf, administrative assistants in MEA-MFT's Missoula

field office. Gordon has retired, and Rahmsdorf has taken a new job.

"Carol and Val were both very hard working and dedicated to serving our MEA-MFT members," said Dave Severson, a field consultant in the Missoula office. "Our members really appreciated Carol's calm voice and Val's upbeat optimism."

Gordon, who also worked several years in our Great Falls field office, is now enjoying travel and other hobbies. Rahmsdorf is working with a women's shelter through her church in Hamilton.

All the best in your new adventures, Carol and Val!

Incoming: Kate Satre is our new administrative assistant in the Missoula field office. She grew up in Helena and previously worked as the executive assistant in the Child Development Center in Missoula. Satre is a runner, currently training for a



Kate Satre

half-marathon. She and her husband like kayaking, snowshoeing, community events, and travel. 🗨️

Welcome, Corvallis Classifieds!

MEA-MFT welcomes the members of our newest local affiliate, the Corvallis Classified Employees Association (CCEA). These education support professionals voted overwhelmingly in October to form a union and team up with MEA-MFT. CCEA members recently ratified a constitution and elected officers, with Russ Caffee as president.


We're happy to have the Corvallis folks in our MEA-MFT family! 🗨️

MEA-MFT TODAY

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A photograph of a student walking on a path between dorms and tall grass. The student is wearing a white hoodie and dark pants, walking away from the camera. The dorms have red roofs and are situated on a hill. The grass is tall and dry, with some snow patches on the path.

“They’ve taken a machete to full-time faculty. There is absolutely no justification for the RIFs.” Maggie Copeland

A Dawson Community College student walks from the dorms to the campus. (Casey Page photo courtesy of Billings Gazette)



DARK CLOUDS OVER DAWSON

Some call it “Harvard on the Hill,” the small community college on the bluff above Glendive that has had a big impact on Eastern Montana for many decades.

Dawson Community College’s web site extols the college’s small class sizes and “sweeping views of the eastern plains and an endless blue sky.”

But storm clouds are brewing in Dawson’s skies. Claiming budget woes caused by declining student enrollment and the high cost of faculty salaries, the college, led by President Vincent Nix, announced plans this summer to start reductions in force (RIFs).

Dawson plans to terminate two full-time faculty, reduce three more to half time, and transfer one to “other duties” that the college has yet to specify.

“They’ve taken a machete to full-time faculty,” said Maggie Copeland, MEA-MFT’s field consultant in Eastern Montana. MEA-MFT represents faculty and staff at Dawson. Three staff positions are also included in the RIFs.

Meanwhile, Dawson has been hiring new administrators at higher salary levels. “The faculty payroll isn’t going up,” Copeland said. “The non-instructional payroll is. Not

one administrator was terminated.”

Dawson isn’t suffering from too few students and too many faculty, said Copeland; it’s suffering from too many administrators. “We’ve analyzed Dawson’s budgets and that’s exactly where the problem lies,” she said. “There is absolutely no justification for the RIFs.”

When the RIFs are completed, the college will have just 12 full-time faculty, down from 26 in 2009-10, supervised by five administrators. That’s 2.4 faculty per administrator.

Dawson has indeed seen a drop in enrollment – it’s down 360 students since 2010. The drop has been attributed to high-paying jobs in the oil fields that have been luring students away.

But the number of faculty and the budget for faculty salaries at Dawson have dropped at the same time.

Copeland’s research shows Dawson lost only about 6 percent from its general fund due to the loss in student enrollment – around \$65,000-\$75,000. But Dawson claims a sudden loss of \$317,000. “They can’t tell us where that loss supposedly came from,” Copeland said.

National trend: Equally troubling, the college plans to replace full-time faculty with part-time adjunct teachers and online courses from out-of-state providers. “It’s a national trend,” said Copeland. “What Dawson’s doing is what we’re seeing across the country.”

“This issue involves more than just Dawson Commu-
(Continued on p. 5)

nity College," added MEA-MFT President Eric Feaver. "This is all about the quality of higher education in Montana and everywhere."

Union members fight back: MEA-MFT's faculty union, the Glendive Federation of Teachers, and the staff union, Dawson Community College Unified, filed two grievances and three Unfair Labor Practice complaints over the RIFs, saying the college failed to follow procedures in the contract and failed to provide information the union requested in a timely manner.

"The state has found merit with everything we've filed," Copeland said. She continued, "Dawson keeps claiming 'financial exigency,' like it's a magic spell that

will make the contract go away. If there is exigency, they are going to have to demonstrate it."

While claiming to be broke, she pointed out, Dawson built a coffee shop and hired a coffee shop manager. Plus, Copeland's research shows Dawson has oil and gas revenue available to fill the gap in the general fund but refuses to use it for that purpose.

"This story is not just about faculty losing their jobs," Copeland said. "We're losing the college itself if the administration's plan goes through. There will be no evaluation or accountability for adjuncts or online instructors. It'll hurt the quality of instruction, the students, the whole Glendive community." 🗨️



PAYING IT FORWARD

State employees giving campaign

Every year, state employees across Montana dig into their pockets to help fellow Montanans through the annual State Employee Charitable Giving Campaign. With two weeks left in the 2015 campaign as we go to print, state employees are closing in on their goal of raising \$600,000 for nonprofits across the state.

"All the money raised through the campaign goes directly into big and small communities all over the state," said MEA-MFT member Ashley Winchell, who volunteers as Giving Campaign coordinator for her agency, the Dept. of Public Health and Human Services.

Donations benefit about 400 nonprofits across Montana – everything from local Big Brothers and Sisters to food banks, family outreach programs to humane societies. Donors can choose which nonprofits they want to support, or they can check "undesignated" and let their donation go to the neediest nonprofits.

To qualify for donations, nonprofits have to sign up with United Way. Overhead for the campaign is extremely low because so many state employees volunteer to help, Winchell said.

In the campaign's 25 years, state employees have donated a total of \$7.2 million, according to Winchell.

"It's pretty amazing what state employees have given over the years," she said. 🗨️



MEA-MFT member Ashley Winchell, a volunteer for the State Employee Charitable Giving Campaign.

ABOVE & BEYOND

State employees awarded for excellence

From dealing with the oil spill in the Yellowstone River to helping Montana children get child support, state employees make a positive difference every day. This fall, many of them were recognized at the annual Governor's Awards for Excellence event.

Awardees included many MEA-MFT state employee members. Read about them at mea-mft.org. Click on "Public Employee News." Congratulations to all! 🗨️



Educators from across Montana register at our annual MEA-MFT Educators' Conference, Oct. 15-16, Billings.

Our union: helping us teach our best

Providing high-quality professional development for our members is a top priority for MEA-MFT.

Case in point: our annual MEA-MFT Educators' Conference. We pour tons of staff time and resources into giving all Montana educators this opportunity each year, working with 20 Montana curriculum groups to offer hundreds of workshops and keynote addresses. Dozens of local volunteers help out.

This year's conference, held in Billings Oct. 15-16, saw record participation: more than 3,000 educators. Mark your calendar for next year's conference: Oct. 20-21, 2016, Helena. See you there! 🗨

Celebrating NBC

This fall, MEA-MFT and Superintendent Denise Juneau celebrated – and rewarded – Mon-

tana's seven newest National Board Certified teachers. These teachers recently joined the ranks of the nation's top teachers by achieving National Board Certification (NBC).

NBC is the highest level of certification a U.S. teacher can earn. Achieving it is no easy feat. MEA-MFT and our foundation, the Montana Professional Teaching Foundation, help by guiding teachers through the process.

"It's a big part of our mission," said Marco Ferro, public policy director at MEA-MFT. "We've trained 16 facilitators to work with NBC candidates across the state. We bring candidates together and follow up with them during the process."

Improving their teaching practice is what drives teachers to undertake this tough and expensive process.

There is a financial reward as well: Recognizing the value of encouraging teachers to achieve NBC, the State of Montana provides a one-time \$3,000 stipend to teachers who

succeed. MEA-MFT staff and Supt. Juneau traveled the state this fall to present the stipend checks.

Montana's seven newest National Board Certified teachers include the following:

- Craig Beals, Billings
- Georgia LaForge, Bozeman
- Kelsi Luhnnow, Seeley Lake
- Sharon Teague, Seeley Lake
- Anika McCauley, Boulder
- Christine O'Shea, Bozeman
- Nichole Sullivan, Boulder

Montana now has 148 NBC teachers. That's great news for Montana students, because National Board Certified teachers tend to become leaders, inspiring better teaching throughout the state. Want to know more? Contact Marco Ferro: mferro@mea-mft.org. 🗨

Presidential math & science teachers

Congratulations to Montana's latest two winners of the prestigious Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST) – Dan Bartsch of Billings and David McDonald of Sidney.

PAEMST is the nation's highest honor for U.S. mathematics and science teachers.

A committee of Montana science and math teachers selected four teachers from a pool of 10 applicants statewide. From these finalists, a national panel of scientists, mathematicians, and educators selected the two national award winners.

Teachers selected as Presidential Awardees receive a \$10,000 award and a trip to Washington, D.C. for a series of recognition and professional development events.

In Montana, the state recognition program is sponsored and administered by MEA-MFT's Montana Professional Teaching Foundation. 🗨

Karen Cox Memorial grants

**Grant application deadline:
December 2, 2015**

Educators: How many times have you thought, "If only I had a few more bucks in the budget, I could do (fill in the blank) for my students"? How many times have you raided your own bank account to pay for classroom supplies?

MEA-MFT's Montana Professional Teaching Foundation created the Karen Cox Memorial Grant Program to help folks like you.

Named for the late Karen Cox, a Billings teacher who spent her life teaching children and helping fellow educators, the grant program helps educators who reach into their own pockets for classroom supplies and other classroom needs.

To apply for a grant, visit mea-mft.org. Click on "Our Foundation" at the top, then "Programs," then "Karen Cox Memorial Grants."

You'll find links to download grant application information and an application form.

Questions? Call 406.442.4250 or 800.398.0826.

Recent grant projects

Here is what a few recent Karen Cox recipients did with their grants:

Teaching weather: Yvette Jordan of Vaughn School District purchased materials for "Tantalizing Temperatures," a district-wide math project that allowed students to learn about weather across the curriculum.

Basic supplies: Jessica Dufresne of Daly Elementary in Hamilton needed basic supplies like markers, crayons, child scissors, and construction paper. Her grant allowed her to purchase these, along with writing journals and books.

Humans and horses: Jeanne Cline of Custer County High School used the grant money to send several students to the Pivotal Movements Equine Therapy Center in Miles City for a day. "The goal is for students in the Emotional Education Program to develop healthy social and emotional skills," she said.

Document camera: Kati McCaslin



Learning healthy social skills with the help of four-legged friends.

of Thompson Falls purchased a document camera for 5th and 6th grades to share student work, project educational games, and more.

Dogs & calculus: Birch Fett of Hamilton High School bought five TI-84 calculators for calculus class for the project "Do Dogs Know Calculus." (Fett also recruited two Labrador retrievers, Bristol Bay and Kava, for the project.)



A Vaughn student reads about weather; other Vaughn students explore a Galileo thermometer as part of the district-wide "Tantalizing Temperatures" project.

Teacher of the Year (From p. 1)

dents in multiple grades.

On the flip side, Anderson teaches in a high-tech world, harnessing digital tools to personalize learning for her students.

While her grandmother likely had little contact with teachers outside her area, Anderson is connected globally, sharing her lessons with teachers around Montana and the world through online communities like BetterLesson. Her students collaborate with students from across the world on real-life topics like hydraulic fracturing.

Yet her grandmother's passion for children and learning inspires everything Anderson does, she says. And her first teaching job was not unlike her grandmother's: she taught pre-K through 8th grade in Montana's tiny Gold Creek School. "It was one of the most influential experiences of my teaching career," she says.

The technology tools she uses today help Anderson "engage with every student every day, helping them self-manage their learning," she says.

She is also a co-founder and moderator of #MTedchat on Twitter, helping Montana educators connect, share, and challenge each other.

Anderson believes in pushing back the classroom walls. Her students work with the Clark Fork Coalition to analyze stream quality of the Clark Fork River, plant vegetation along the banks of tributaries, and help discover new bacteriophages. Her students don't just learn science, they become scientists.

Anderson will spend the year as an ambassador for teaching and represent Montana in the National Teacher of the Year event.

Finalists in this year's Montana Teacher of the Year program are

Shelly Stanton, technology integration and business teacher in the Billings schools, and Derek Strahn, social studies teacher at Bozeman High School.

Stanton, Strahn, and Anderson, all MEA-MFT members, were honored at a gala celebration October 15 in conjunction with the MEA-MFT Educators' Conference in Billings.

Selection process: Teachers nominated as Montana Teacher of the Year go through an exhaustive application process. Three finalists are chosen for interviews; one of them is selected as Montana Teacher of the Year.

This year's selection committee included representatives from the Office of Public Instruction and School Administrators of Montana plus four educators, a parent, and a high school student.

The Teacher of the Year program is sponsored by the Montana Professional Teaching Foundation. 🗨️



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Retirement victory

(From p. 1)

Retirement System (PERS and TRS). GABA is a modest cost-of-living increase, but for many retired folks it can mean the difference between making ends meet or not.

"Saving GABA is a huge victory for our members, both retirees and those still working," said MEA-MFT President Eric Feaver.

"This means the legislature can't take away increases that public employees and teachers had already earned," said MEA-MFT Research Director Diane Fladmo. "GABA increases in both TRS and PERS are assured for employees who were hired on or before July 1, 2013."

Background: The battle to preserve GABA began in the 2013 Montana Legislature. During that session, MEA-MFT worked tirelessly with Governor Steve Bullock and others to save and amortize TRS and PERS. We succeeded, against all odds. We got two bills passed to save TRS (HB 377) and PERS (HB 454) and get them on financially sound footing.

However, the legislative majority insisted on adding amendments to the bills that reduced GABA payments for PERS and TRS.

"MEA-MFT repeatedly told legislators that fiddling around with GABA was unnecessary to amortize PERS and TRS," said Feaver.

"Plus, the amendments were

contrary to contract law. They broke promises made to employees in TRS and PERS when they were hired."

MEA-MFT vowed to file suit if the legislature passed the GABA-reducing amendments. The amendments passed, and MEA-MFT began its legal action.

Legal angle: First, MEA-MFT asked for a temporary injunction stopping the state from enforcing the GABA reductions. We won: In December 2013, district court granted the injunction, so retirees in PERS and TRS got their GABA increases as scheduled.

MEA-MFT hired two attorneys, recruited plaintiffs representing employees of all sectors in the PERS and TRS pension systems, and went to work to overturn the GABA cuts permanently. "We poured major time and resources into this fight," Feaver said.

In July 2015, district court ruled in MEA-MFT's favor in our case to preserve GABA for TRS retirees.

We were prepared to move forward with the PERS case we had filed, but in August, MEA-MFT and the State of Montana negotiated a settlement: The state agreed not to appeal its district court losses to the state supreme court, and in return MEA-MFT agreed not to ask the state to pay our legal expenses incurred defending GABA in court.

"With this agreement, these cases

Bottom line: GABA increases in TRS & PERS are assured for retirees & active employees hired by July 1, 2013, thanks to MEA-MFT.

are now settled once and for all," said Feaver.

"GABA is protected for both TRS and PERS. I applaud the State of Montana for the agreement. And I am proud of our union. Working with Governor Steve Bullock and several key Democratic and Republican legislators, we did what we promised to do: Save and amortize Montana's two primary public employee retirement pension plans."

Feaver added, "I hope all retirees in PERS and TRS and all state, local, and public school employees employed before July 1, 2013, will breathe more easily. The guaranteed annual benefit adjustments in their pension plans will be there for them throughout their retirement years. They've lost no money. That's our union at work." 🗨️

Protecting our retirement benefits: MEA-MFT's victory timeline

MEA-MFT's recent GABA victory is just the latest in our decades-long effort to protect and improve public employee and teacher retirement assets and benefits.

Despite constant political pressure, we have maintained and improved defined benefit plans for the vast majority of folks who work

and retire in Montana's public sector.

Here's a look at our successes:

1993 ▶ MEA-MFT helps write and lobby through the legislature a proposed constitutional amendment securing public employee retirement assets for public employee retirement only, meaning the money

can't be used to fund anything else. The amendment also requires that Montana's defined benefit retirement systems (PERS & TRS) must be actuarially funded (kept fiscally sound).

1994 ▶ MEA-MFT wins overwhelming voter approval of this constitution
(Continued on p. 10)



MEA-MFT COPE endorses Melissa Romano for superintendent

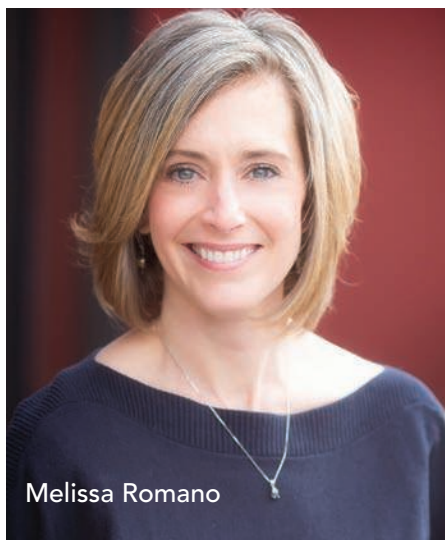
The 34 members of MEA-MFT's Committee On Political Education (COPE) have endorsed Melissa Romano for Montana Superintendent of Public Instruction.

COPE members represent all MEA-MFT member types and live in communities across Montana. They voted to endorse Romano after an extensive candidate interview.

Romano, a 4th grade teacher in Helena, has won numerous accolades for her leadership and teaching excellence. She is running for the office that will be vacated by current Superintendent Denise Juneau. Juneau can't run for re-election due to Montana's term limits.

"COPE members were impressed with Melissa's intelligence, commitment, and energy," said MEA-MFT President Eric Feaver.

"She knows all Montana kids, regardless of their ZIP code, deserve the tools to learn. She knows teaching is more than a career; it's a calling. Melissa will work to give educators the support, professional



development, and resources they need to help our children succeed."

Romano has vowed to fight efforts to siphon taxpayer dollars from our public schools for the benefit of private and religious schools that have little or no accountability to Montana taxpayers. "She knows public schools are the cornerstone of our democracy, a crucial engine of our economy, and the heart of our communities," Feaver said.

Guns in schools initiative – don't sign!

Heads up! You may be asked to sign a petition for a ballot initiative requiring school districts to allow guns in schools. The initiative, I-175, has qualified for signature gathering in Montana.

MEA-MFT opposes the initiative because it will make schools less safe. "The gun lobby has been pushing these kinds of bills in the legislature session after session," said J.C. Weingartner, MEA-MFT director of member rights.

"Responsible Republican and Democratic legislators continue to vote these bills down," he said. "Now the gun lobby is trying to put this bad idea on the ballot. The initiative would take away local school boards' rights to make decisions about guns in schools."

Please decline to sign I-175, and pass the word to friends, family, and colleagues.



Retirement victories

(from p. 9)

tional amendment. The amendment becomes Article 8, Section 15 of the Montana Constitution. Huge victory for teachers & public employees.

1997 & 99 MEA-MFT leads two successful legislative efforts to secure a guaranteed annual benefit adjustment (GABA) for retirees in PERS and TRS, respectively.

2007 MEA-MFT wins a 1% increase in university contributions to retirement accounts for faculty in TIAA-CREF – a defined contribution plan. We have a lot more to do here. University faculty, condemned to a grossly under-contributed 401(k) plan, graphically illustrate why we fight so hard to preserve our defined benefit plans in PERS and TRS.

2011 With help from Gov.

Schweitzer, MEA-MFT defeats two tea party bills meant to terminate defined benefit plans in PERS and TRS. Both bills would have condemned our existing defined benefit plans to actuarial death and significantly reduced retirement benefits down the road for new public employees and teachers.

2013 With help from Gov. Bullock, and with major MEA-MFT leadership

Denise Juneau wins national civil rights award

MEA-MFT member Denise Juneau, Montana Superintendent of Public Instruction, was honored recently with NEA's prestigious national Leo Reano Memorial Award for Human and Civil Rights.



Denise
Juneau

The award recognizes her ground-breaking impact on American Indian students. Through initiatives such

Graduation Matters and Schools of Promise, Juneau has shone a beacon of hope to the bleak reality of struggling schools, poverty, and high rates of Indian student suicide and dropouts.

Juneau started her own journey in public education as a Head Start student. She attended Montana public schools and universities, eventually earning her law degree.

In 2010, she was the first American Indian woman elected to statewide office in Montana and the nation.

Juneau's mother, Carol Juneau, also won an NEA Human and Civil Rights award in 2006 for her advocacy of Montana's Indian Education for All. 🗣️

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and collaboration with stakeholders, two landmark bills are passed to save TRS (HB 377) and PERS (HB 454) and get them financially sound. But the legislature needlessly amends both bills to include reductions to GABA for both PERS and TRS. MEA-MFT takes legal action.

2013-15 MEA-MFT wins repeated legal victories. GABA increases in both TRS and PERS are now assured

for retirees and active employees hired on or before July 1, 2013.

Next? With thousands of Montanans in the private sector having little in the way of secure employer-provided retirement benefits, and with even Social Security under attack, it takes concerted work to justify and fund the retirement plans Montana public employees and teachers have

earned and deserve as a partial reward for the work they do, work that matters.

"We will see more tea party bills challenging our ability to protect and enhance public employee and teacher retirement. But we will NOT surrender the security and core benefits they provide," said MEA-MFT President Eric Feaver. "We will need the help of all MEA-MFT members, working and retired."

Amazing Members

Justice for all: Josh Racki

It's a story right out of a "Law and Order" episode: A Great Falls man named Adam Sanchez, high on meth, gets into a high-speed car chase with law enforcement in 2014. He hits and kills a sheriff's deputy, nearly side-swipes a young family with an eight-day-old-baby, tries to run down a police officer, and punches another officer in the face.

Enter MEA-MFT Josh Racki, a deputy county attorney for Cascade County. Racki's job was to help prosecute the case and paint a compelling picture for the jury in the trial that took place this fall.

Racki succeeded: in October, the jury found Sanchez guilty on all counts, including deliberate homicide, criminal endangerment, assault with a weapon, and assault on a peace officer. Thanks to Racki, working with County Attorney John Parker, Sanchez is likely off the streets for good.

Racki is president of his local MEA-MFT affiliate, the Cascade County Deputy County Attorneys.



Josh Racki



Josh Racki in court during the Sanchez trial. (Rion Sanders photo, GF Tribune)

We caught up with him for this interview just as he was heading into the mountains for the opening day of deer hunting season. Here's what we learned about Racki and his fellow deputy county attorneys:

What we do: The vast majority of us prosecute criminal cases. We prosecute all the felony criminal cases in Cascade County, along with misdemeanor crimes. We also work on youth neglect cases.

Why it matters: We're part of the law enforcement team that keeps people and communities safe. Like the show "Law and Order," once the

police arrest a criminal, it's up to us to get them convicted. We also work on rehabilitation of criminals. Most of the people we work with will get out of jail or prison at some point. The hope is that with rehabilitation, they won't hurt people again.

Toughest part of the job: My inability sometimes to help people. It happens to every prosecutor when you don't have enough evidence to convict a criminal. It's hard to tell that to victims and their families.

Best part of the job: I really like helping victims. In the Sanchez case, I couldn't cure Robynn's pain (the widow of the slain deputy), but I could at least bring justice to her husband's killer.

I deal a lot with child victims. It's rewarding when I can tell them, "So-and-so will never hurt you again."

Why I belong to MEA-MFT: Our union is a lot of the reason we're treated as well as we are in the workplace. MEA-MFT has been very supportive in our contract negotiations.

What I do for fun: Hunting, hiking, fishing, four-wheeling.

My family: My wife and I have two daughters.

Thanks, Josh, to you and your co-workers, for keeping Montana's people safe! 🗣️