

Today

MEA-MFT

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SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE ISSUE

Newsletter for MEA-MFT Members in Montana Public K-12 Schools, Higher Education, State & Local Government, Head Start, & Health Care



'COURAGE *not* CUTS!'

500+ attend MEA-MFT's Rally to Save Public Services & Education

Undaunted by icy winter weather, Montanans from all over the state descended on the state capitol in Helena at the Rally to Save Public Services and Education February 1.

They called on the Montana Legislature to reverse its radical cuts to education, human services, and public safety.

Rally-goers also shouted out support for public workers in Wisconsin, where the Republican governor is trying to rob public-sector unions of their collective bargaining rights.

The rally, co-organized by MEA-MFT

and the Montana Organizing Project, included state employees, faith leaders, higher education faculty, small business owners, parents, teachers, firefighters, state employees, college students, and others.

MEA-MFT President Eric Feaver opened the rally, explaining that the Republican majority in the legislature's Appropriations subcommittees have cut hundreds of millions of dollars from Governor Schweitzer's already-austere budget.

The cuts make no sense, he said. Mon-

tana has enough revenue to fund state services and education at current levels, without raising anyone's taxes, and still have more than \$300 million in the bank.

Feaver called on the legislature to pass the governor's budget and the state pay plan negotiated between state employee union members and the governor.

(Continued on p. 4)



Our own Wisconsin?

BY ERIC FEAVER
MEA-MFT PRESIDENT



MEA-MFT President Eric Feaver addresses the Feb. 21 rally crowd.

‘The money’s there. If this legislature would rather spend the money on big tax cuts for big business than on HB 13 and vital public programs and services, it should say so out loud for all to hear. But no begging false poverty.’

Too much tea party testosterone flowed through too many legislator veins during the first half of the 2011 legislature. No question about that, but I am going to comment here about issues directly pertinent to our union.

State pay plan. To date, this legislature has yet to act on HB 13 – the state employee pay plan we negotiated with the governor. HB 13 increases state employee pay 1% effective January 1, 2012, and 3%, effective January 1, 2013. These modest increases in pay – that include no increases in state funding of employee health insurance – come on the heels of a two-year pay freeze... a freeze that helped our state through the darkest fiscal days of the great recession. You would think legislators would have expressed their gratitude by now.

The money’s there. To date, this legislature has yet to purchase the governor’s revenue estimates. Certain legislative leaders prefer to deny that Montana’s darkest fiscal days of the

great recession are over. We are in excellent shape to fund HB 13 and state government and public education at levels the governor has proposed. The money’s there. If this legislature would rather spend the money on big tax cuts for big business than on HB 13 and vital public programs and services, it should say so out loud for all to hear. But no begging false poverty.

Retirement. To date, this legislature has yet to decide what it wants to do about unfunded liabilities in our public employee defined benefit retirement plans. Two legislators have separately proposed to abandon TRS and PERS, cut them loose from employer and employee contributions, to aimlessly wander an actuarial wilderness, ultimately to fail to pay benefits some time down the road. But what do anarchists and those who already have their care about future public employee retirement anyway? There is a budding proposal to increase **current** as well as future employee contributions to our retirement systems. Hmmm...

Tenure. To date, the senate has decided that teachers can keep their tenure but with seriously truncated due process. I guess we should be grateful that threats to repeal tenure dissipated. It remains useful to know that as early as 1871 Montana territorial law required school trustees to have “sufficient cause” before dismissing a teacher under contract. In 1895, the Montana legislature granted teachers protection against unfair dismissal during a school year. In 1913, the legislature dared call it tenure apparently believing that “good teachers could not be procured and retained without the promise of permanence, income security, and academic freedom to teach.” Imagine that, 1913! When tenured teachers sometimes tell me they don’t need tenure, I marvel at how short their memories. Really, how hard is it to remember what it’s like to be without tenure? Ask a non-tenured teacher. It’s a three-year open door to nowhere for no reason whatsoever. Final note: For 100 years no tenured teacher in Montana has taught without it! Might we miss it when it’s gone?

Private schools. To date, this legislature like every legislature since 1993, has suffered bills to divert scarce public resources to private and sectarian schools. Public schools are the people’s schools, the root of our democracy, the promise of our social compact. Public schools teach all God’s children. The legislature has a constitutional obligation to “provide a basic system of free quality public elementary and secondary schools.” And the legislature must “fund and distribute in an equitable manner to the school districts the state’s share of the cost of the basic elementary and secondary school system.”

The legislature has NO constitutional obligation to fund private schools and is constitutionally prohibited from funding sectarian schools, money laundering schemes notwithstanding.

As for Wisconsin, it does matter who sits in legislative seats. For those who think there is no difference between political parties, please think hard about Wisconsin.

And for those who have not yet thought about the next election...are we only one governor away from Wisconsin? Are we? ■



Your say in your union: Representative Assembly

MEA-MFT is run *by* its members, *for* its members. So make sure *your* local union is represented at MEA-MFT's Representative Assembly, April 1-2 in Helena.

Representative Assembly (RA) is democracy in action. Each year, MEA-MFT's local affiliates elect local delegates to attend RA, where they discuss, debate, and vote on dues, constitutional amendments, legislative program, new business items, and much more. What delegates decide, happens.

Don't miss it! Make sure your local affiliate is sending all the delegates it is entitled to send. We want all of our 300 local affiliates to be represented.

April 1 rally: With the Montana Legislature poised to make huge cuts in state services and education, MEA-MFT aims to make sure your the Montana Legislature knows how our members feel about those cuts. We will hold a major rally at the capitol on Friday, April 1, as part of RA. (See page 12.) Make your voice heard!

Dues & constitutional amendments online: You can find the proposed dues and constitutional amendments on the MEA-MFT web site: www.mea-mft.org/about_mea_-_mft/governance/representative_assembly.aspx.

See you at RA! ■

Regional training April 29-30, Bozeman

MEA-MFT's next regional training takes place April 29-30, 2011, in Bozeman. Members state-wide have given these sessions big thumbs-up, as they learn skills in contracts and collective bargaining, dealing with disputes in the workplace, communicating, and much more.

Register online now for the Bozeman area training at www.mea-mft.org/Articles/mea-mft_regional_trainings.aspx. ■

Ethnic minority members encouraged to participate

MEA-MFT encourages ethnic minority members to enter election races this spring for National Education Association (NEA) Representative Assembly (RA) delegate positions. NEA Bylaw 3-1(g) asks that the delegation to NEA RA from each state include ethnic minority delegates in numbers at least commensurate with the population of the state. MEA-MFT is committed to achieving this goal in Montana's delegation.

Eligible locals may elect one NEA RA delegate for each 188 members or the greater fraction thereof. Locals with fewer than 95 members cluster by eligible governance districts. Ethnic minority members are encouraged to run for these positions.

MEA-MFT is further committed to greater involvement of ethnic minority members in all activities and programs.

MEA-MFT promotes the election of an ethnic minority member as the director-at-large to the board of directors and has an ethnic minority committee.

To learn more, contact your local union president or your MEA-MFT field consultant. ■

MEA-MFT Educators' Conference

Want to present at the 2011 MEA-MFT Educators' Conference, October 20-21 in Missoula? Sign up online at this site: www.mea-mft.org/educators_conference.aspx

Congratulations,

Paul Andersen! 2011 Montana Teacher of the Year Paul Andersen, an MEA-MFT member in Bozeman, is one of four finalists in the National Teacher of the Year event. The National Teacher of the Year will be announced at a White House ceremony in early May.

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Rally-goers set out from MEA-MFT headquarters for the Feb. 21 rally.

Rally to Save Public Services & Education

(From page 1)

Deficit envy: Rally speakers denounced the Montana Legislature's cuts as reckless, wrong, and unnecessary. Montana's best chance at building a positive future for our families, communities, and economy is to invest in public services and education, they said.

"I think some of these legislators have deficit envy," said MSU-Bozeman professor Kristin Intemann. "Montana is one of two states in the nation without a budget deficit, and some legislators can't stand being left out of the action."

Intemann said the legislature has not created a single job, "but their cuts will destroy hundreds of existing jobs."

She noted a recent poll showing over 80 percent of Montana voters oppose cutting education and other services. "We call on legislators to have the courage to face the facts: The money is there. We need courage, not cuts."

The cruelest cuts: Cheryl Parker, a state employee in Missoula, spoke against the devastating cuts to her agency, the Dept. of Public Health and Human Services. "These cuts will hurt the elderly, the mentally ill, the disabled, our kids, people who need Meals on Wheels, rural hospitals, and the Low Income Energy Assistance Program, she said. "It's cold out here, but it's a lot warmer here than it is in some of those legislators' hearts!"

True courage: Billings firefighter Joe Sands said public employees have dedicated their careers to "saving lives, educating our youth, and caring for our fellow citizens."

Speaking of the saga in Wisconsin, Sands said, "Wisconsin's Governor Walker made it brutally clear what he cares about. It is about crushing the one group that stands up for the middle class: the unions. Thank God we have a governor who believes in public services and public education, who stands with us!"

Jon Runnalls, 2003 Montana Teacher of the Year, noted the legislature's current gap of \$52 million in funding for K-12 schools. "If you are for jobs in Montana, how can you be against funding education?" he said, leading participants in the chant, "It makes no sense!"

"The state budget is not just a bunch of numbers," said Representative Edie McClafferty (D-Butte). "The state budget is all about people's lives. The cuts proposed so far have the potential to devastate Montana. It's not too late to reverse the cuts, "but we need your help."

MEA-MFT member John Fleming of St. Ignatius, whose WWII veteran father-in-law resides in the state Veterans Home in Columbia, spoke passionately against the Republican plan to close the home.



Billings firefighter and rally speaker Joe Sands, flanked by fellow firefighters, told the cheering crowd, "Instead of having the courage to properly fund public services and education, this bunch, the Montana legislative majority, is trying to scapegoat public employees. They've declared open season on our retirement, our benefits, our pay, our rights to organize and negotiate, our very jobs. To the middle class in Montana and Wisconsin: we will not be broken, we will not give up, we will fight back and we will prevail."

Dr. Walter Gulick, a faith leader at 1st Congregational Church in Billings, asked, "What is the purpose of the state government? Is it not to provide the resources and protections for the state's citizens that are difficult for the typical citizen to provide alone?"

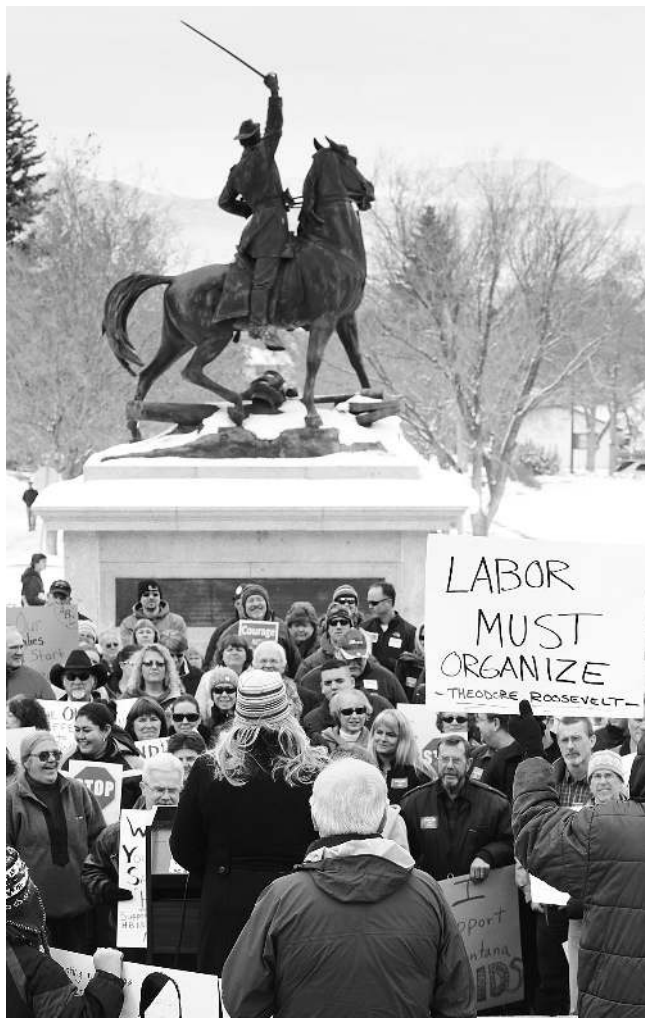
Following the rally, participants went into the capitol to talk to legislators, asking them to reverse the cuts and pass the state pay plan.

Second in a series: The Feb. 21 rally was the second in a series of events organized by MEA-MFT to stop the legislature's radical budget cuts. The first event took place Jan. 17. More than 100 higher education and state employee members attended.

See photos, videos, and news coverage from both events at www.mea-mft.org. ■



Get ready to rally again! April 1 • 12:00 Noon • State Capitol • Helena





Battle of the budget

‘The cuts are **completely unnecessary.** Montana has enough revenue to fund state services & education at current levels and still have more than \$300 million in the bank. The governor’s budget is austere, balanced, and won’t raise taxes.’

Most Montanans want to live in a state we can be proud of — a state with educated citizens, safe communities, and decent roads, a state where neighbors help each during tough times.

But the majority party that swept into power in the November 2010 elections clearly does not value the public services and employees that make Montana a good place to live.

When the Montana Legislature convened in January, Republican legislators wasted no time. By January 11, ignoring revenue estimates that show Montana has enough money to fund Governor Schweitzer’s proposed budget, they slashed \$500 million from the governor’s budget, making radical cuts to all state agencies and education.

The cutting didn’t stop there. At one point, the Republican dominated Appropriations subcommittees cut \$1.5 billion from the governor’s budget, including \$78 million from k-12 schools, \$38 million from higher education, and \$500 million from the Dept. of Public Health and Human Services — all gone with little public input and no consideration of the real cost.

MEA-MFT fought the cuts and has managed to restore some of them. But as this newsletter goes to print, the state budget remains in tatters,

with hundreds of cuts to the core public services that make it possible for families, communities and businesses to thrive.

The cuts will destroy hundreds of existing jobs across the state, from teachers to state employees to private businesses with state contracts. This will have ripple effects throughout Montana’s economy.

A few of the cuts as we go to print:

K-12 schools: Cuts stood at \$52 million until March 5, when the House Appropriations Committee restored much of the original cuts. All good, but the money depends on a couple of extraordinarily complex bills passing this legislature that have not yet been introduced, widely read and analyzed, heard and debated.

Higher education: \$32 million cut, including \$3 million from community colleges alone. Results: layoffs, loss of quality faculty and programs, and double-digit tuition increases for students, making higher education even less affordable and accessible, and derailing the economic engine that provides the highly educated workforce that businesses say they need.

Health & Human Services: \$131 million cut. Results: Huge cuts to Big Brothers and Sisters, prescription drugs for low-income seniors, various disability services, heating assistance for low-income folks, children’s mental health, rural hospitals, Meals on Wheels, and closing the Montana Veterans Home in Columbia Falls. That’s just the tip of the iceberg.

Dept. of Corrections: \$16 million cut. Result: Loss of public safety, plus greater risk for our correctional officers and probation and parole officers. MEA-MFT was able to restore 19 positions at the state prison and women’s prison. But the cuts will still force layoffs of 44 positions.

Dept. of Revenue: \$6 million cut. Results: Hamstringing the ability of DOR employees to collect revenue for essential programs and services and go after out-of-state tax cheats. The DOR estimates that \$6 of state revenue is lost for every \$1 cut from the department. So the \$6 million cut could cost the state \$36 million in revenue



over the next two years.

We can afford a better future! If the Republican majority's extreme cuts remain, they will cause irreparable harm to our children, seniors, neighbors, and Montana's economy as a whole. And there is no need: Montana has the revenue to fund services at current levels.

Gov. Schweitzer is confident enough in his office's revenue estimates that he is willing to stake a special session on it. He told the *Helena Independent Record*, "If this Legislature continues to deny the money that we actually have, then I really don't have any choice but to say to them, 'Why don't we just come back at the end of June so there's no more guessing going on?'" ("If money is there, fund our services," 3/6/11 editorial)

MEA-MFT fighting back:

MEA-MFT continues to fight the senseless cuts with all the might we have. Our lobbyists continue to testify about the real impacts the cuts will have on the people, communities, and economy of Montana.

Our members have pitched in as never before, attending our Day of Action Jan. 17 and rally Feb. 21, contacting legislators, and writing letters to the editor.

MEA-MFT member John Fleming speaks at the Feb. 21 rally against the majority party's vote to close the Montana Veterans Home in Columbia Falls, where his father-in-law, a WWII era vet, resides.



And MEA-MFT is working with a broad and growing statewide coalition of concerned citizens and organizations — including other unions; clergy; small business owners; and groups that advocate for seniors, children, people with disabilities, and many others — to reverse the cuts.

"We're keeping the pressure on," said Feaver. "We want legislators to look citizens in the eyes when they tell them their schools and services are being cut."

How you can help:

- **Stay informed:** Follow issues at the MEA-MFT web site: www.mea-mft.org. E-mail MEA-MFT President Eric Feaver and ask to join his list serve for the most up-to-date legislative information. efeaver@mea-mft.org
- **Contact your legislators.** They need to hear from their local voters. Look for action messages at www.mea-mft.org. (Click on the "Legislative Action" tab.)
- **Tell your friends:** Talk with family, co-workers, and friends about these issues.
- **Speak out:** Write a letter to the editor of your local newsletter calling on legislators to reverse the budget cuts.

KEY FACTS

► The state services that keep our roads plowed, criminals off our streets, our school doors open, and much more are funded in **House Bill 2**, the General Appropriations Act.

► Nonpartisan legislative staff and the governor's office agree: Montana's economy is recovering. We have enough revenue to fully fund the governor's proposed budget.

► The legislature is now \$224 million below the governor's proposed budget, with hundreds of radical and unnecessary cuts.

► Many of the legislature's choices will cost the state millions of dollars in federal funds for education and health care, pulling much-needed money on the state's economy and increasing the effects of the budget cuts on children, families, businesses, and communities.

MEA·MFT

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We need **YOU** here **April 1!**

MEA-MFT's Feb. 21 rally was just the beginning. We will hold another major rally at the state capitol in Helena April 1st to:

- ✓ **Save K-12 & higher ed funding**
- ✓ **Save state agency funding**
- ✓ **Stop attacks on teacher tenure**
- ✓ **Pass the state pay plan**
- ✓ **REVERSE THE BUDGET CUTS**

'No Fooling with our Future' Rally

**12:00 High Noon
State Capitol, Helena**

JOIN US! Bring your friends, family, & children!

Scene from MEA-MFT's Feb. 21 rally

