

MFPE Advocate

mfpe.org

Summer 2021

MFPE Members Fought Like Never Before And Won

Montana's biennial legislative session is always a top MFPE priority because decisions made there profoundly affect members' pocketbooks, professions, and communities.

This year, nearly 3,000 MFPE members and staff joined the first-ever Rapid Response Team of member-lobbyists. They attended statewide virtual meetings throughout the session and sent tens of thousands of messages to legislators via texts, emails, and phone calls. These efforts were crucial in asserting MFPE's strength and reach.

Because MFPE members engaged like never before, we successfully beat back five union-busting bills all directed at undermining the ability of Montana workers to belong to and participate in a union.

Our collective efforts also secured several legislative victories including the quick and bipartisan approval of the state and university employee pay plan and funding for public education and services, state agencies, the Montana University System, and community colleges.

Through the Rapid Response Team, MFPE members successfully advocated for bills to stabilize the Sheriff and Highway Patrol pensions and fought to defeat an assortment of bills that would have destroyed the Teachers' and Public Employees' Retirement Systems.

MFPE members and staff mobilized to defeat a parade of bad ideas: a private charter school bill; private school vouchers to divert money from public schools to private schools; voter suppression; and



bad tax policies that defund public services while giving tax breaks to the ultrawealthy.

Despite our best efforts, some bills with harmful consequences for MFPE members became law. HB 102 circumvents the constitutional authority of the Montana Board of Regents by allowing concealed carry of weapons on Montana University System campuses and government offices. HB 279 siphons away tax dollars for public services and allows wealthy Montanans and corporations to forsake up to \$200,000 of tax obligation for contributions that fund private and religious institutions. HB 176 eliminates same day registration, undermining the ability of thousands of Montanans to vote.

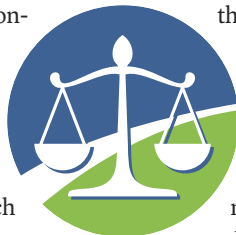
We're not done yet. Together, we will fight this harmful legislation in the courts and at the ballot box. Read on about some of the work we have already begun in this regard and please see our enclosed voting record for more detailed information about our legislative efforts. MFPE members are truly stronger together. ■

MFPE Fights to Preserve Montana Constitution

MFPE has filed suit in district court to challenge several bills passed by the Montana legislature, which blatantly infringe on the constitutional authority of the Montana Board of Regents.

"The people of Montana have spoken and they demand our constitution be upheld and respected," said MFPE President Amanda Curtis after the suit was filed. "House Bills 102, 112, and 349 and Senate Bill 319 are irresponsible and run afoul of the Montana constitution which has served our state well since 1972."

The MFPE suit follows on the heels of litigation filed by the Board of Regents over the constitutionality of HB 102. The Montana Board of Regents voted unanimously to litigate House Bill 102, which would have mandated concealed carry on college campuses beginning June



1. During the vote, every single regent spoke to the overwhelming public comment in favor of litigating the bill on constitutional grounds, citing thousands of messages including hundreds of handwritten notes.

As MFPE's filing argues, HB 102 and other legislative acts passed by the 2021 Montana legislature set a dangerous precedent for the legislature infringing on the Board of Regents' constitutional authority under Article X, Section 9 to "have full power, responsibility, and authority to supervise, coordinate, manage and control the Montana university system."

MFPE is proud to stand with faculty and student groups, former regents and commissioners of higher education, and individual faculty members and students in an effort to preserve Montana's constitution for generations to come. If you would like to get involved, please visit protectmtconstitution.com ■

Montana Professional Teaching Foundation Golf Classic



July 29, 2021
Fairmont Hot Springs,
Anaconda



The Annual Golf Classic is back in time to celebrate the Montana Professional Teaching Foundation's 25th Anniversary!

The Golf Classic is a fundraiser to support our Foundation's programs:

- Karen Cox Memorial Grants
- National Board Certification
- Presidential Awards
- Jim McGarvey Scholarships
- NEA Award for Teaching Excellence
- Montana Teacher Leadership Institute

Visit mfpe.org/mfpe-events for registration information



As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and recover from the 67th legislature it's appropriate to celebrate what we've survived and accomplished, but we must also collectively turn our attention to the future of this union.

In the last year, we have suffered some devastating losses and accomplished some unbelievable wins together. Two years ago, if you would have warned me that we would lose a beloved staff member, lose the 2020 state elections, and suffer a global pandemic, I might have waited to run for President. I'm sure every local president across the state can relate.

Pre-pandemic, we couldn't have guessed that in 2020 we'd be negotiating MOU's about wearing masks, working remotely, and social distancing. We couldn't have predicted the internal division among our members, the friction with employers, the pandemic-induced anxiety, and the struggles of learning to live (in one room with our entire family) on zoom. Prior to the 2020 general election, we hadn't planned to extend contract dates, steady ourselves for the loss of payroll deduction, and rally in such strength at the legislature.

We have thrived together. Staff and members worked together to safeguard our workplaces, guarantee leave and differential pay for many, protect our contracts, educate our members, and build an unprecedented lobbying effort we dubbed the Rapid Response Team. Pandemic and politics be damned, we have organized new locals, shifted our training and meetings to virtual platforms, and continued to advocate for our professions without skipping a beat. Thank goodness we can now plan in-person conferences, fundraisers, board meetings, and trainings.

This union has been protecting worker's rights and defending the Constitution for over a century, and as we emerge from the filth of pandemic and politics, we each have an obligation to preserve this union for future generations of Montana workers and families. Looking to our next ten years, we have shared responsibilities to sign up new members in our current workplaces, organize new locals, identify and grow new leadership, and reevaluate what our workplaces look like post-pandemic.



Our Point of View

AMANDA CURTIS
MFPE PRESIDENT

And while we survived the 2021 legislature, we can all guess what will come in 2023. They failed at gutting pensions and slashing workers' rights, but they have two years to study up, and they'll be back with a vengeance. We must keep a vigilant eye on the interim committees and we must build our team for 2023, including member legislative candidates.

So, are you ready to run? We have the tools and training to help you find a winnable seat and do the work to win and legislate. More MFPE members in office means a stronger defense against our haters and a better offense for the values we share and the professions we lead.

This summer, I'll be traveling the state and meeting members. When I call or email asking you to meet up, please say yes. Let's have a cup of coffee and strategize for world domination together. After all, YOU are MFPE, past, present, and future, and we've got a lot of work to do together.

In solidarity,

Amanda Curtis

MFPE Legislative Scorecard Released

This issue of the MFPE Advocate includes our legislative scorecard for the 2021 Legislative Session. MFPE members should review the record to see how your legislators voted on issues critical to our jobs, our communities, and our families. After you've done so, we hope you'll agree to join our efforts! You can sign up to take action, get issue updates, and get involved in determining who represents you in the Montana legislature by going to mfpe.org/freedom.



MFPE Inducts four to 2021 Hall of Fame

The Montana Federation of Public Employees inducted Wayne and Karin Stanford, Jerry Rukavina, and Sharon Carroll into the MFPE Hall of Fame on Thursday, April 8th, 2021, celebrating their notable contributions to our union, the largest union in the state of Montana and the most professionally diverse union in America. MFPE honored the inductees in a virtual ceremony and celebration hosted by MFPE President Amanda Curtis.

As educators in Ravalli County and in the Lone Rock School District, Karin and Wayne Stanford were integral to organizing the Lone Rock Unit of the MEA after the passage of Montana’s Public Employee Collective Bargaining Act of 1974. This was only the start of their continued dedication to unionism in the Bitterroot Valley – Wayne became the vice-chair for MEA-MFT Region 2, served on the MEA-MFT Board of Directors and is now a Board Trustee for the Lone Rock School District. Karin served on the NEA Resolutions Committee and later became the NEA Director, serving from 2009 to 2012. In their retirement, the pair remain devoted to unionism – “we’re both retired, but that doesn’t allow us to retire from our responsibilities to advocate for our public schools, public services, and public servants.”

Inductee Jerry Rukavina got his start by teaching apprenticeship classes for the machinist union in Great Falls. Soon thereafter, he began teaching mechanics and related classes at Great Falls High School. As a member of the Great Falls Education Association, Jerry walked two picket lines—one

in 1975 and another in 1989—served as communications director, and was later elected president of the Great Falls Education Association, serving from 1989 to 1995. He retired from teaching in 1995 and later that year became a regional NEA UniServ Director. Those who worked closely with him recount his unique sense of humor and undying dedication to unionism— “He was a never ending source of humor and advice.” Upon induction into the Hall of Fame, Jerry said, “The union has made the last 50 years of my life very positive... There’s nothing like it. I love this place, and I love these people.”

As a middle and high school math teacher in Ekalaka, inductee Sharon Carroll is often described as a “bona fide soldier of the cause in her local union.” Under her leadership as both president and bargaining chair, the Ekalaka Teachers Association has rightfully earned a reputation as a fierce advocate for teachers and students in southeast Montana. Sharon was appointed to the Montana Board of Public Education in 2007 and served for 12 years. While her service on the Board of Public Education was cut short when the current Montana Senate refused to confirm her appointment by former Governor Steve Bullock, she continues to engage in local unionism – she was actively involved in bargaining a safe, effective return to learning in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Commenting on the challenges facing Montana, Sharon had this comment: “Teachers matter. They matter a lot...Elections matter...science and math matter, now more than ever.” ■



Top to bottom: Wayne and Karin Stanford, Jerry Rukavina, Sharon Carroll

On September 9th of last year, the MFPE family lost long-time union member, leader, and field consultant Scott T. McCulloch. Scott taught at Broadwater and Big Sky Elementary Schools in Billings before being elected as President of the Billings Education Association in 1995. In addition to teaching and unionism, Scott represented Billings in the 1993 and 1995 Montana Legislatures. Since 1999, Scott has served as a field consultant serving numerous MFPE locals in the Billings area and was vice-president of the Montana Staff Organization, the union representing MFPE employees. MFPE members from Absarokee to Sweet Grass County have been well represented by Scott and he will be missed by his union family.



MLOs Help Make Our Voices Heard

A select few MFPE members rose to face the challenges of the 2021 Montana State Legislative Session by offering up their time as Member Legislative Organizers, or MLOs. MLO’s organized MFPE members to contact legislators through email, handwritten postcards, and phone calls to defeat right-to-work legislation, efforts to privatize Montana’s public education system, pension attacks, and massive power grabs in the judiciary. MLOs made thousands of phone calls and sent tens of thousands texts, and aided in recruiting writers for letters to the editor during the legislative session.

After the legislative session, MLOs redirected their energy toward urging the Board of Regents to challenge the constitutionality of House Bill 102, which infringes on the Board’s authority to govern Montana University System campuses. To this end, MLOs made 887 phone calls and sent 13,783 text messages urging members to contact the Board and urge them to litigate the bill. These efforts proved successful, and on May 19th the Board of Regents decided unanimously to file a lawsuit contesting the legality of House Bill 102.

Thanks to the dedication and passion of our Member Legislative Organizers, MFPE members across the state were able to make our voices heard in Helena during the session and beyond. With the help of our amazing MLO’s, we protected our pensions, paychecks, and professions.



Maureen Driscoll



John Wood



Julie Hippler

MFPE Hosts 4th Annual Conference

Over three hundred delegates from across the state joined together via Zoom on Saturday, April 17 to conduct the Montana Federation of Public Employees (MFPE) Fourth Annual Conference. The Annual Conference is MFPE's highest governing body and is charged with electing officers, approving dues and budget, and establishing organizational and legislative priorities.

MFPE President Amanda Curtis kicked off the conference at 9 am by welcoming delegates and delivering introductory remarks. Montana AFL-CIO Executive Secretary Al Ekblad addressed the delegates, applauding MFPE's work during the 2021 Legislative session and imploring delegates to continue their advocacy and actions on behalf of Montana's labor movement.

Delegates reelected Dr. Glen Southergill to the position of NEA Director, one of MFPE's five statewide offices. An assistant professor of writing at Montana Tech, Dr. Southergill represents MFPE on the NEA's Board of Directors. Following his reelection, Southergill told delegates, "We all do the work that matters, and this last year, we did it when it mattered most... I thank you for your vote of confidence."

Delegates then broke into district caucuses, where all districts elected delegates to the annual NEA Representative Assembly and five districts elected district chairs and vice-chairs to serve on MFPE's Board of Directors.

The assembly adopted three new business items by sizable margins. First was the creation of the Eric Feaver Distinguished Leadership Award, an annual recognition of the accomplishments of MFPE members. New Business Item #2 calls for MFPE to endorse the Protecting the Right to Organize Act of 2021 and advocate for its passage. Finally, New Business Item #3 directs MFPE to prioritize its continuing effort to increase the number of MFPE members running for office at

all levels of government.

In the midst of conference votes and business, President Amanda Curtis provided a legislative update and call to action. Curtis thanked MFPE members for their energetic activism, and recounted how MFPE has defeated numerous pieces of legislation that would have ended union rights, eliminated member jobs, and threatened Montana public employee pensions. Curtis also celebrated legislative victories to secure a state employee pay plan, increase school funding, and create mechanisms to increase pay for public safety workers. The

update culminated with Curtis asking all delegates to engage in legislative action during a short break in the conference. Delegates barraged Montana legislators with hundreds of messages to reject HB 588, a bill that would have allowed the governor to fill over one thousand existing public employment positions with political appointees, regardless of qualifications or experience.

Delegates once again proved that collective action works: two days following the conference, the Montana Senate defeated HB 588 on a 30-20 vote!

MFPE Treasurer Michelle Wheat and Executive Director Erik Burke presented

delegates with a proposed budget and dues policy for the 2021-2022 fiscal year. Delegates approved both the dues and budget proposal overwhelmingly, maintaining MFPE's current dues levels with no increase. The adopted budget will allocate additional funds to organizing and communications efforts next year, as MFPE continues to grow our voice and engage our members. President Curtis delivered closing remarks, stating, "We stood together in this legislature, and we stand together in this union. This union is us. It's about what we can do ourselves through our own collective action." ■



MFPE President Amanda Curtis gavels in the conference