

Teachers union not working for education

By Angie Dorman, March 7, 2007, Page A-9

I love being a teacher and with all my heart I believe in the beauty of our political system. Every day I walk into my classroom and try to spread my enthusiasm for our great system to young people. One thing I emphasize when teaching high school students is that throughout our history, rules and laws have been put in place to protect the rights of citizens. When citizens are in danger of being taken advantage of by large, powerful organizations, there are laws on the books to prevent it. Many of those laws were put in place by the initiative process.

The history of the initiative has been for the people to speak and act in the closest form of direct democracy possible and the people speak clearly. The majority of more progressive environmental laws, tax reform and labor reform have been created through the initiative process. Washington state lawmakers are in the process of turning that system on its head.

Washington voters passed Initiative 134 in 1992. The Washington Education Association has been fighting ever since to overturn the will of the voters. I-134 requires employers and unions to get permission from employees before making political deductions from an employee's paycheck.

Just over a month ago, the U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments from the WEA defending their right to use nonmember representation fees for political purposes in contradiction to I-134's requirements. In the face of a possible decision against them, the WEA has decided to circumvent the Constitution and the people of Washington state by drafting legislation that, if passed, will ensure their ability to intimidate and control teachers all over the state.

House Bill 2079 Regarding Use of Agency Shop Fees (nonunion member representation fees), currently under consideration in the state House, is indicative of the kind of government the WEA would have us live under, one that can be manipulated, one that does not believe in the processes of our republic. WEA has no faith in the system, much less classroom teachers. This bill is an example of why I am not a member of the WEA and chose Northwest Professional Educators as my professional association. I trust the system. This piece of legislation makes it obvious that the WEA does not believe in our system.

To illustrate this point, simply consider the "emergency clause" included in the bill. Preserving this union's coerced political funding is not a state emergency. To me, it is much more of an emergency when children start school unprepared to learn, when we don't fund the underrepresented and underprivileged. When did waiting for a Supreme Court ruling become a state emergency? Will our state shut down if the bill is tabled until the Supreme Court justices have made their decision?

Major players in education reform, from Steve Jobs to Bill Gates to Michael Dell, agree that to improve education there needs to be a fundamental change in the way we pay teachers. Every single time the issue comes up in my district or in any other, the WEA is the roadblock to needed change. The passage of this bill will increasingly empower the union to stand in the way of change. The history, even recent history, is for this union to fight to protect bad teachers and big labor at the expense of students and their education and against the wishes of the people. This bill will empower them to do more of the same by giving them a lock on the tool they find most advantageous - money. That money will be used to keep legislators up to their eyebrows in doublespeak and lobbyists, and stand in the way of real education reform.

As it now stands, the amount of money the WEA is fighting so hard for is no more than \$10,000 of their \$25 million intake. You have to ask yourself why? Why did they draft the legislation under consideration? Teachers in Washington who choose not to join the union are already at a disadvantage. They are required to pay an equal amount as union members but are not afforded any of the same benefits and are often ridiculed and harassed for standing up for their beliefs. As Justice Samuel Alito asked during the Supreme Court hearing, "Why would I choose to give up the benefits of union membership and yet want to allow the union to spend my money for its political purposes?" These teachers need their First Amendment rights protected, and yet the WEA would rather protect its own pockets and political interests at the expense of the teachers it is supposed to be representing.

If this bill passes, the WEA's power will continue to grow, with Washington's teachers footing the bill whether they support the WEA's agenda or not, and Washington's education system and the children it serves will be the ones paying for it.

* **Angie Dorman** is a high school teacher in Warden. She received the U.S. Department of Education's American Star of Teaching Award for Washington State in 2006. Write her at angiedorman@gmail.com.