

# The Coeur d'Alene Press

## The Truth About Teacher Unions

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Do Idaho teachers know how their union dues are spent?

New federal rules pushed by Labor Secretary Elaine Chao have lifted the veil on labor union spending and exposed the National Education Association (NEA) for what it really is – a cash cow for America's far left.

It's no secret that the nation's largest teachers' union is closely aligned with the Democratic Party. What wasn't clear until now is the staggering amount that is spent on liberal causes, and how much it overshadows legitimate representation of teachers.

A recent *Wall Street Journal* expose', "Teachers' Pets," outlined some of the \$65 million that the NEA spent last year on contributions to left-leaning groups, while using only \$25 million to lobby for teachers. Talk about mixed-up priorities.

Equally shocking is the amount the NEA spent on payroll. For example, NEA President Reg Weaver's annual salary is \$439,000, which is more than the President of the United States makes. The average salary of an NEA employee is almost \$97,000, which means they take home more than twice as much as Idaho teachers who help foot the bill. About 46 percent of NEA staff members (not including elected officers or state executive directors) receive salaries in excess of \$100,000.

But what should really rankle teachers, especially in a red state like Idaho, are the outside groups that get a slice of teacher paychecks. NEA funnels thousands of dollars to Jesse Jackson, Amnesty International and a wide array of organizations that promote

abortion and homosexuality. What do these groups have to do with education? Not much.

When the numbers are added up, it equals obfuscation at best and deception at worst. The union claims to fight for higher wages and better working conditions, but the checkbook register proves otherwise. That's exactly why NEA sued to keep the records closed. But Chao won the fight, and now we can see the union's agenda more clearly.

NEA's own surveys reveal that teachers run the political spectrum, so why do so many continue to bankroll its ultra-liberal political bills? Perhaps they stay in for the liability insurance that the union offers. But that answer can't suffice when a less expensive alternative exists.

Northwest Professional Educators provides double the liability coverage with guaranteed legal fees for an independent attorney of the member's choice for job protection issues. It is well known in the profession that the union can choose to represent its members or not, and often does so only if the case advances the organization's goals. Because NWPE doesn't donate or organize for partisan political causes, dues are substantially less, under \$15 a month.

The Idaho Education Association is pushing a controversial tax increase petition to provide more money for teacher salaries. Certainly most teachers deserve higher pay but many, including teachers, question if this is the best way to raise teacher salaries. Forcing the issue through higher taxes has not earned teachers the respect or even the lasting pay hikes they sought through similar measures in other states.

The quickest way for teachers to put more in their pockets is to stop paying their free-spending union.