



Rebutting WEA's Charges Against NWPE

2002-2003

The Washington Education Association (WEA) has utilized e mail, the *WEA Action*, its website, and flyers to spread false information about Northwest Professional Educators (NWPE) and our national affiliate, the Association of American Educators (AAE). One would hope that WEA would honor all educators' freedom to think, speak, and associate in respect for our diverse and pluralistic school system. Instead, the WEA is using its members' dues to malign fellow educators whose views do not always match those of the union leadership. This offends educators' sense of fair play and respect for democratic principles.

Educators deserve honest, accurate information. Therefore, we provide answers to WEA's most recent accusations (spring 2003)—as printed in their materials and in their words. If you are interested in truth and accuracy, please read on. The information provided herein may surprise you . . . information near the end of the document may even shock you!

WEA: "Some critics of the WEA started NWPE in September 2001 as an alternative teacher association, one that purportedly was not involved in political activity. NWPE is one of 11 state affiliates of a national group, the Association of American Educators (AAE), which is promoted by conservatives and NEA critics as an alternative to NEA and AFT; membership in NWPE includes membership in AAE."

NWPE: Mostly true. NWPE is one of ten state affiliates of the AAE (visit AAE's website at www.aaeteachers.org for more information on AAE affiliates). The AAE does receive the endorsement of many conservatives and moderates across the nation who have been critical of the NEA's far left political agenda and its abuse of teachers' rights. We suspect the NEA and WEA know that many educators, including a substantial percentage of their own members, also disagree with the NEA's ideas about what is best for America's children (and teachers!). That is why the AAE and NWPE were formed—to give those teachers a forum to express different opinions about how best to improve our educational system.

WEA: "Nationally, these groups are growing in size and number. In 1996, there were four groups affiliated with the AAE. By 2002, there were 11 AAE state affiliates, and by 2007, AAE plans to have 17 state affiliates."

NWPE: Mostly true. Except for the WEA's "uncanny ability" to know what the AAE leaders are planning. The "plans to have 17 state affiliates by 2007" is news to the AAE Board of Directors. However, it is altogether possible that the AAE could start even more than 17 state affiliates by 2007 to accommodate the growing desire of teachers for a professional organization that respects their values while promoting innovation, commitment to children, and proven education practices.

WEA: "AAE/NWPE don't share NEA/WEA's commitment to public education."

NWPE: False! AAE and NWPE are as committed to educating the public as NEA/WEA are. We just don't always share the same vision for how best to do that. Holding ideas that differ from the teachers' unions does not automatically make one an "enemy of public education." Public education is not about fostering a monopolistic union and its viewpoint as the only legitimate participant in the marketplace of ideas. AAE and NWPE believe that providing educators an opportunity to express and consider differing opinions will help save public education rather than destroy it. No one organization can have all the answers.

WEA: "AAE member surveys show that most members favor private school vouchers. The AAE Foundation, which provides financial support to state affiliates, including NWPE, received all of its

recent funding from groups that oppose labor and public education and support private school vouchers.”

NWPE: False! The AAE Foundation has received some (but not even close to all) of its funding from public charitable foundations that wish to see significant improvement in the public education system. They support independent professional organizations for their work to re-invigorate education with common sense, proven practices, and innovative ideas. These same sources also oppose monopoly labor unions, forced dues, and exclusive collective bargaining representation. They believe that compulsory unionism in public education has been detrimental to the *education of students*.

Opposing compulsory unionism is not the same as being anti-union. Samuel Gompers, the founder of the American Federation of Labor, was deeply committed to unionism as a voluntary institution. Compulsion guts the union of its moral power while filling its coffers with dues for politics that work against those it is supposed to represent. Gompers noted that: "The workers of America adhere to voluntary institutions in preference to compulsory systems which are held to be not only impractical but a menace to their rights, welfare and their liberty."

NWPE states clearly in its materials that NWPE supports educators' collective bargaining rights—including the right and opportunity to belong to a local only teachers' union. (The NEA unified structure forces educators to belong to all levels of the NEA or none at all.)

Despite the fact that neither AAE nor NWPE has supported a school choice system that includes private schools (only a little over 50% of NWPE members support *public* charter school choice, let alone private school choice), those who choose to give to AAE believe that independent professional educator associations will help students because of their focus on students as their highest priority and the professionalism of education (as opposed to a focus on a political agenda funded by compulsory--not voluntary--dues, much of which has nothing to do with education). Nearly a quarter of a million public school teachers choose an independent, nonunion professional organization rather than a union for professional association and they receive the support they seek. This in and of itself is evidence of the support NWPE and our sister organizations give to public school employees.

Again, NWPE has taken NO position on vouchers as we have not surveyed our members on that issue. (NWPE takes positions on education issues only after surveying members and receiving a supermajority vote.) In fact, it is the WEA and NEA officials who are obsessed with the voucher issue. A 2000 survey of NEA members revealed that the voucher issue is "not at all important" or "not very important" to three fifths of NEA membership. Yet, that very same year, NEA reported spending nearly \$30 million, most of which came from teachers' dues, to defeat voucher proposals in California and Michigan.

The AAE supports privately funded vouchers (which do not take one dime out of public school coffers) that allow the poorest in our society some of the same educational opportunities as the wealthiest. (For more information about this unfounded but persistent accusation that the AAE lobbies for private school vouchers paid for by public tax dollars, visit www.aateachers.org and click on "What the NEA Says About the AAE." Also, notice the WEA's attempt in the statement above to inextricably link "labor" and "public education" again as if they automatically go together.)

WEA: "AAE's staff and national board of advisors include figures in the voucher movement."

NWPE: False! Who are these "figures" they have in mind, and would someone, anyone, please provide some evidence for this claim?

WEA: "One AAE board member signed a proclamation that calls for the elimination of taxpayer-funded public schools."

NWPE: True. Dr. William Kilpatrick, an AAE Advisory Board member, signed the Separation of School and State initiative. He did so as an individual and not as a representative of the AAE. He personally believes (as many educators do) that the federal government has become too intrusive and influential in the operation of our public schools and that they could be better managed by the local communities they serve. For a clearer perspective on why Dr. Kilpatrick was persuaded to sign this controversial initiative and why he believes that our system will not change for the better without the threat of drastic consequences, order his best selling book "Why Johnny Can't Tell Right from Wrong" (a Simon & Schuster publication). Dr. Kilpatrick is one of the nation's leading experts on formal character education—that is why he was invited to serve on AAE's Board of Advisors. The AAE Board of Directors does not endorse a complete separation of federal involvement in

public education. Frankly, in some states the gap between urban schools, suburban schools, and the haves and have nots would be even wider if it weren't for past federal intervention.

WEA: "NWPE has a clear relationship with the Evergreen Freedom Foundation (EFF), even though NWPE tries to assure members that 'NWPE is not EFF.' (NWPE no doubt knows that associating with EFF raises questions about its support of public education, since EFF is hostile to public schools.)"

NWPE: True and False. Before NWPE existed, some teachers who are now NWPE members asked for EFF's assistance in protecting their rights not to be forced to fund politics with which they disagree with their mandatory union dues. NWPE members appreciate both the Attorney General's and EFF's work to ensure that union officials comply with state campaign finance law. EFF and NWPE do not necessarily hold similar views on various education issues, however. For example, EFF supports the public school charter bill. NWPE does not support it; because, although 51% of our members are in favor, nearly half of NWPE members either oppose or are unsure about the charter public school bill. NWPE supports educators dialoguing on the issue, however, and so provides a forum for both pro and con views on charter schools and other education reform ideas. EFF does not financially support nor direct NWPE activities. NWPE receives its support and guidance from our national organization, the AAE, and is directed by an independent board of educators in Washington State. NWPE members work in the public schools. To claim they are anti-public education is illogical and ludicrous! Also, remember that whether NWPE members are union members or not, they continue to be *members* of their bargaining units and *pay* union fees for collective bargaining services.

WEA: "EFF/NWPE share contributors. EFF receives more than one-third of its funding from out-of-state foundations that support anti-labor, anti-public education groups and causes. Three regular EFF funders—the Walton Family Foundation of Arkansas, the Randolph Foundation of New York, and the Jaqueline Hume Foundation of California—also fund the Association of American Educators Foundation, the arm of AAE that provides financial assistance to state affiliates including NWPE."

NWPE: True. We can't attest to the accuracy or inaccuracy of the first part of this statement regarding EFF, but the second part about the AAE is true. Again, this is just a partial list of

contributors to the AAE Foundation—along with others who think the AAE is on the right track toward improving the education of our youth and restoring the reputation of our nation's teachers. While these contributors support AAE's independence and innovation, they do not control or direct AAE policy or its affiliates. AAE and NWPE members join because we serve them well and respect their values.

WEA: "EFF/NWPE figures have long worked together. NWPE's president, classroom teacher Jeff Leer, was plaintiff in a 1996 National Right to Work class-action suit handled by attorneys that included EFF lawyer Steve O'Ban. Leer was involved in Teachers for a Responsible Union, a group promoted and aided by EFF. EFF promotes NWPE in publications such as *Professional Choices* and says it has provided "publicity advice" to NWPE. NWPE Executive Director Cindy Omlin has shared EFF communications with teachers to challenge the WEA."

NWPE: True. When the Public Disclosure Commission and the Attorney General's Office would not investigate the WEA (after teachers shared clear evidence of union officials' law-breaking with union dues), Sedro-Woolley teacher and former NWPE President Jeff Leer went to EFF's President Bob Williams to see if his concerns were valid. (Williams had helped write the campaign finance law passed by 72% of the voters requiring that corporations and unions get their members' prior written approval before extracting additional political money from their paychecks.) He investigated and presented evidence that persuaded Attorney General Christine Gregoire to file suit against the WEA. Her lawsuits resulted in WEA being found "guilty" of numerous violations of the law.

EFF did publicize a number of professional educator organizations in its publication *Professional Choices*. One of them was NWPE. EFF's "publicity advice" to NWPE that WEA refers to was providing NWPE with the names and addresses of various media. Executive Director Cindy Omlin shares information with educators from a variety of sources if they would help answer teachers' questions—including communications from EFF and the WEA.

By the way, NWPE's current president is Mr. Ed Dawson, a high school German and Spanish teacher in the Battle Ground School District, Vancouver, WA. Dawson also has a law degree from Western State University, College of Law, and

taught Personnel Management at Yavapai College, Prescott, AZ.

WEA: “Political Involvement: YES—NWPE claims no political involvement or activity outside of education and purports to taking positions on education issues only after receiving a supermajority vote from its members. Yet, AAE and affiliates have clearly been involved in political/policy issues outside of education. Generally, they hope to exert more influence.”

NWPE: True and False! NWPE and AAE have never claimed we would not be politically involved. Indeed, we do hope to “exert more influence” as we continue to grow (See pg. 3 of the February 2003 issue of AAE’s *Education Matters* newsletter at www.aaeteachers.org/newsletters/februarynews03.pdf). NWPE surveyed our members on numerous education bills and provided the survey results to state legislators and the media. Unlike the NEA/WEA, however, AAE and NWPE do not contribute any of our members’ dues to political candidates or parties, nor do we endorse political candidates. WEA has not cited any issue that AAE or NWPE have been involved in “outside of education” because there are none. In fact, it is the NEA/WEA’s involvement in issues outside of education that has caused many teachers to seek another professional organization that doesn’t advocate views that violate their political, moral and religious beliefs. Many educators do not want their union dues funding NEA causes such as national gun registration, socialized medicine, abortion on demand, gay marriage, distribution of contraception and abortion counseling in schools, D.C. statehood, and a ban on space-based missile defense systems. Our members appreciate that NWPE and AAE do not engage in nor spend their dues on controversial social and political issues unrelated to education. This is one reason NWPE can provide such great services (such as legal assistance, professional liability insurance, guaranteed job protection benefits for legal fees, teacher scholarships and classroom mini-grants, educational resources, newsletters, conferences and more) for annual dues of only \$169—versus approximately \$800 per year for union dues.

WEA: “In addition to supporting vouchers, AAE members support character development and alternative teacher certification.”

NWPE: True and False! It is absolutely true that AAE members support “Character Development.” That is one area where we do have an official position because over 90 percent of our members respond positively on the subject in our annual

surveys. The NEA supports the so-called values-neutral education model which has proven to be a monumental failure. We believe this has contributed to much of the public’s negative opinion of our public schools. One of the most recognized “fathers” of the values-neutral movement in the 1960’s, Dr. William Coulson, has since declared the experiment to be a disaster. Coulson admitted in 1995 that the “values-free” education model he designed with colleagues Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers “turned out to be a deadly scheme.” He added, “Youthful experimentation with sex, alcohol, drugs, or whatever is popular at the time, has been shown to follow value-free education quite predictably.” Finally, he stated for the record, “I and our project teammates owe the nation’s parents an apology.” Under Secretary Richard Riley, a Clinton appointee, the U.S. Department of Education began calling for character education to be stressed once again in our public schools.

On the subject of “alternative teacher certification,” AAE has not taken an official position as yet. However, membership continues to lean more in favor than against as they learn more about some of the state plans in practice (e.g., New Jersey’s).

WEA: “AAE distributes a ‘books to beware of’ list—provided by the right-wing Focus on the Family—of books that promote homosexual lifestyles. ‘Stay aware of what may be entering your schools or public libraries,’ the national newsletter advises.”

NWPE: False! The AAE does not distribute a “books to beware of” list. Like some other accusations, WEA gives no evidence for this claim. Although AAE has not advised educators to “Stay aware of what may be entering your schools or public libraries,” it sounds like pretty prudent advice no matter who gives it.

WEA: “AAE leaders are also running for office: the former director of the Georgia affiliate won the Democratic primary for state school superintendent on September 10, 2002. Barbara Christmas, who worked for the alternative group for six years, beat the Georgia Education Association-endorsed candidate in a runoff for the party nomination. She lost the general election.”

NWPE: False! Dr. Barbara Christmas would be surprised to read that she was a leader of the AAE as alleged by WEA. The state-based group the WEA is referring to is the Professional Association of Georgia Educators (PAGE). PAGE is not now and never has been an affiliate of the AAE. PAGE is, however, an independent nonunion professional association that has grown larger than the NEA

affiliate in Georgia. Obviously, Dr. Christmas garnered more support from voters than did the NEA's financially backed candidate to win Georgia's Democratic Party primary. But how does any of this relate to AAE?

WEA: "AAE leaders in 2000 endorsed California Proposition 22, the so-called Knight Amendment, that banned homosexual marriage. AAE's Gary Beckner signed a voter guide statement supporting the measure."

NWPE: True and False. AAE "leaders" did not endorse Proposition 22. However, Gary Beckner, the founder and executive director of AAE, did endorse the measure as a private citizen.

Proposition 22 did not ban homosexual marriages as stated by the WEA. It did, however, prevent "married" homosexuals in California from receiving the same tax benefits afforded traditional heterosexual married couples. WEA's accusation implies that it is sure WEA members would have voted against Prop. 22. Interestingly, the California Teachers Association (which opposed the measure) would not reveal its internal membership survey on the measure.

WEA: "AAE National Projects Director Tracey Bailey persuaded the American Legislative Exchange Council to adopt 'equal access' legislation to give AAE the same access to teacher mailboxes and payroll deductions for dues that NEA affiliates have; conservative state legislators are introducing these bills in state legislatures. And AAE claims a growing membership: AAE affiliates in Georgia, Missouri, and Texas claim more members than the NEA affiliates."

NWPE: Mostly True! The statement is absolutely true up until the aforementioned Georgia, Missouri, and Texas groups. They are not affiliates of the AAE. They are, however, members of the Coalition of Independent Education Associations (CIEA)—as are the AAE and NWPE. And independent educators' organizations in Georgia, Texas, and Missouri don't just *claim* more members than the NEA; they indeed *have* more members than the NEA affiliates. In fact, NEA membership has declined so dramatically in Texas that the NEA has been forced to close its regional offices across the state. The NEA affiliate in Missouri recently released a warning of upcoming layoff notices to many of its paid staff.

WEA: "Anti-union: YES—AAE figures are wired into the anti-public education, anti-labor movement, although NWPE claims in its literature that it's not 'anti-union.' Consider these facts: La Rae G.

Munk, AAE's director of legal services, is a former staffer at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, the Michigan think tank that has been one of the most vocal advocates of 'paycheck protection' legislation and tuition tax credits and vouchers. Munk's articles include "School Unions Shortchange Students" and 'Contract for Failure,' an anti-union 'study' of collective bargaining. AAE's National Projects Director Tracey Bailey was director of charter schools and public school choice in Florida when that state implemented its first voucher program."

NWPE: False! Again, AAE and NWPE are not anti-union, we just oppose monopoly unionism, forced dues, and exclusive representation—a situation which has allowed WEA officials to avoid accountability for their actions and exorbitant union dues. There is no way members can rein in corruption or exploitation of members' dues under the current system. Think about it. A person who evaluates and criticizes our government (and who even files whistleblower lawsuits against government corruption) is not anti-government. Rather, this person is a *good citizen* seeking integrity and accountability. Likewise, those who seek higher levels of accountability and integrity from union officials or who refuse to put up with and fund illegal activities or those activities which violate their constitutional rights *are not anti-union*. Educators joining NWPE are not anti-union! They merely want to ensure that the union conducts itself honorably and that the union dues that teachers are forced to pay in order to hold a job in the public schools are used fairly and specifically for collective bargaining that is focused on wages and working conditions. They do not want their mandatory dues used for political spending and activities that have nothing to do with education and which violate their personal political, moral, or religious beliefs. (Teachers who have challenged union spending in the past received 70% and 50% reductions in dues for activities not related to collective bargaining.)

It is not anti-union to assess the labor movement's success—especially since we pay so much in dues! In fact, the union has not done that much good for teachers' salaries over the years. Alveda King, niece of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., writes that "From 1970 to 1995, when adjusted for inflation, the mean teacher salary actually declined by a little more than 1 percent. And it was in the early 70s that the unions infiltrated the teaching trade. Meanwhile, education spending boomed. However, we didn't share in the boom. In fact, teacher pay indexed to per-pupil expenditures in the public schools declined by nearly 50%! . . . Had the NEA and AFT simply kept our share of the education pie

where it was in 1970, then today, the average teacher salary would exceed \$65,000!" See <http://www.aateachers.org/newlabor.htm> for more perspective.

Regarding WEA's point about AAE's Director of Legal Services, Ms. La Rae Munk, it is true that Ms. Munk did work with the Mackinac Center. She was also a public school teacher and a local teacher union president as well as a negotiator of union contracts. It was that unique background that enabled her to expose how poorly most NEA negotiated contracts support teachers and student achievement. In "Contract for Failure—The Impact of Teacher Union Contracts on the Quality of California Schools," Ms. Munk's research demonstrated that the more restrictive the contract, the worse the school performs. For example, in the cases where the California Teachers Association (CTA) strayed from the basics of a contract (teacher salaries and working conditions) into decision making areas that should be the domain of the state or local school board (i.e., curriculum, pedagogy, etc.), the school's students demonstrate poorer achievement when compared to schools with less encompassing contracts. Clovis Unified is one of California's most respected and highest academically rated school districts. In Clovis, local teachers bargain collectively without the "assistance" of the union's "professional negotiators." Only 10 percent of the teachers in Clovis belong to a union. Yet through their "faculty senate committee," the teachers themselves have negotiated contracts that are the envy of the state. To review Ms. Munk's informative study, see www.pacificresearch.org/pub/sab/educat/contractforfailure/index.html.

Additionally, the March 25, 2003, Nashville *City Paper* reports, "A new study reveals that traditional negotiations might not be the best route for teachers to get consistent and favorable salary increases." The study comparing systems in Tennessee that negotiate and those that don't shows "teachers in the non-negotiating systems now receive an average of \$1,444 more per year than teachers who chose to negotiate" and that "after two decades of 'successful negotiation,' teacher pay has reached the lowest standard of living in the last 40 years." Read this eye-popping study at www.teacherspet.com/Library/study.pdf.

Finally, Tracey Bailey was indeed the director of charter schools and public school choice in Florida. Bailey's department had no involvement in the state voucher program. It was only coincidental that Governor Jeb Bush also initiated the state's first voucher program during Bailey's tenure.

NEA/WEA leaders continue to try to link independent educators' groups to vouchers as a way to deflect attention from the dissatisfaction its own members are expressing.

In conclusion, WEA claims that NWPE "doth protest too much" as if this means we are somehow guilty of its charges. NWPE responds to the misinformation and propaganda because we believe that educators have an obligation to seek and impart accurate information. We will live up to our responsibilities.

WEA is spending *your* union dues and the union dues of NWPE members on a misinformation campaign aimed against your colleagues. Many NWPE members have worked side by side with you in your classrooms and in your local unions. They support and appreciate your contributions. Many NWPE members have been, and some currently are, leaders in their local unions. They have not joined NWPE because they are anti-union, but because they want a professional association that provides excellent services that they can count on and which respects their values by not using their dues on politics that may violate their political, moral or religious beliefs.

Many educators would love to continue to contribute their efforts to their unions. Unfortunately, union leaders shut them out. Sadly, the union has lost many good and talented people because union leaders place their politics above the participation of the people the union represents.

With courage and justice, educators must seek honesty, account-ability and integrity at all levels of the education system. We must stand against tactics of intimidation, coercion, harassment, and bullying. Our students, after all, deserve role models who practice what they preach.

If you find the union's misinformation campaign to be an inappropriate use of your union dues, please let WEA President Charles Hasse know (chasse@WashingtonEA.org).