

The LMEA

Apple Core



The officers publish the Apple Core
for LMEA members.

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The Question That Matters: Will we sit back and let it happen here?

Headlines from around the country...

Badger Rebellion; Wisconsin's Next Governor Takes on Collective Bargaining

Wisconsin governor-elect Scott Walker has laid out an ambitious agenda, such as lifting the cap on school vouchers and rescinding the right of government employees to collectively bargain. Walker would be following the lead of Indiana and Missouri which revoked collective bargaining in 2005. Research shows that the average teacher salary in the twelve states that have outlawed collective bargaining is 31% lower than the average salary in states with that right.

New GOP-controlled Alabama Legislature Moves to Rein In Political Activity of Teacher's Lobby

The bill passed by the new legislature ends state paycheck deductions for membership dues and campaign contributions for employees groups to engage in political activity. Both parts are designed to weaken the union by making it harder to collect dues and fund political action. A similar law passed in South Carolina in 1984 contributed to a 70% drop in membership since then.

Government Unions vs. Taxpayers

In the December 13, 2010, edition of the Wall Street Journal Minnesota governor Tim Pawlenty (R) panders to the conservative base by arguing that it is now time to do away with public sector unions: "Unionized employees are making more money, receiving more generous benefits, and enjoying greater job security that the working families forced to pay for it with ever-higher taxes, deficits and debt."

Florida Planning Expansion of School Voucher Program

Governor-elect Rick Scott is preparing a plan that would expand the existing voucher program into what the Florida Education Association has described as "vouchers for all". Under the plan, parents would be able to create an education savings account for their children in which they can request and receive funds equal to 85% of what the state earmarks for students in the public system. The money could be used for private school tuition and fees, tutoring, online courses, or textbooks and curriculum for home schooling.

New Guidelines Make Teacher Tenure Less Automatic in New York City

Under new guidelines that come out last month, principals in NYC must now base their evaluations of new teachers on an elaborate system that measure teacher's success in and out of the classroom, including student performance on standardized tests.

Illinois Legislative Leaders Are Taking Aim at the Teachers Union

Among the proposals in a new package of reforms expected to be passed this year by Republicans in Springfield: Making it easier to fire tenured teachers; layoffs based on "quality rather than seniority"; and tight constraints on the ability of teachers unions to strike.

...and what to expect in the coming months here in Pennsylvania

Governor Corbett and the \$4 Billion Budget Gap

With a campaign promise not to raise any taxes of any kind (including tobacco or natural gas extraction), Gov. Corbett will attempt to balance the state's budget without federal stimulus money by eliminating "waste, fraud, and abuse" such as the fleet of autos used by state employees and selling off the state liquor stores. Assuming he is successful in those areas, he will still have at least a \$2 billion gap to fill. That is where public education comes in. Expect drastic cuts in funding from the state thus forcing districts to scramble to keep programs running. Thousands of teachers and support staff will likely lose their jobs.

Here Come Vouchers

There will be a bill introduced in Harrisburg in the first week of the new legislature that proposes to create a pilot voucher program in Pennsylvania. Aimed at schools persistently failing to meet AYP, the law would give parents the financial support to take their children to private schools, charter schools, or neighboring districts. It will be popular with communities that do not have the tax base to invest in proven reforms such as full day kindergarten and smaller class sizes in the elementary grades. Once up and running it will then expand to all communities (see *Florida*, above).

Teacher Evaluations Expanded to Include Student Performance on Tests

This will be agreed to as a “compromise” by legislators desperate to see any increase, no matter how small, in state funding for education. The increases in funding that Governor Rendell was able to accomplish by arguing that it is common sense to invest in Pennsylvania’s schools will now come at a price: we will allow our jobs to be judged by those factors we have less and less control over.

Pension Attack 2.0

The recent reform law will save the Commonwealth billions over the long haul, but a spike in employer contributions still looms large for 2012-13. As the legislature addresses it expect to hear the same arguments again about defined pensions and how we are “out of touch” with the rest of America. A state constitutional convention would be necessary to alter the plan we now contribute to, but that will not stop our opponents from urging that one be called – and with the 2012 elections approaching the timing would be, unfortunately, perfect.

Revoke Our Right to Collectively Bargain and Strike

This is the BIG ONE, expect legislation aimed at this. In the state that gave birth to unionism more than 130 years ago it’s hard to fathom the loss of a right so basic. But teachers have only had this right for about forty years, and other states have already found ways to pull it claiming that our desire to bargain collectively for a living wage puts society in “eminent danger”. A loss of this right and we will race states like Mississippi and South Carolina to the bottom in teacher and support professional compensation.

Why is this happening now?

At first glance the answer would be: The Great Recession. The country is hurting, American workers are hurting, and people need to wake up and realize that we just cannot continue “business as usual”. A favorite term of the politicians is *unsustainable*, and it is used to lump us in with all the things people are hearing about government. To be educated about what is going on everyone reading this newsletter should also read Robert Reich’s column “The Shameful Attack on Public Employees” (Jan.5, 2011 Huffington Post – limited copies available from your building rep). It will explain who and what is behind this attack on us, and refute one of the most common myths out there: that public sector employees make more money than their private sector counterparts. Anyone making this argument throws in all private employment, including minimum wage jobs, and is not comparing workers with similar college education (a higher percentage of public employees have college degrees). When that is taken into account, the data shows that over the past fifteen years public sector employee pay *has actually dropped* relative to private sector workers with the same level of education. So why perpetuate the myth? Read the piece to find out.

Hopefully, we now have your attention. Despite how grim it looks out there you must understand that we can turn this around. But not if we don’t wake up and realize that we must act, that simply voting for the “right” candidate isn’t enough, that we must be ready to answer the call to save our jobs through more direct action. Over the next few months you will find out what you can do now to save your future. This doesn’t have to happen to us, not here, not now, not ever. Stay tuned...