The Challenges – the Work – of 2017

With publication of the governor’s Initial Proposed Budget, and realization of the terrible cuts, reductions and insults to public employees contained therein, we realize (if we were previously uncertain) that 2017 will be another year of struggle, of defense of our working benefits and conditions and of the integrity of our jobs, as well as the integrity of our state.

Others will be advising you of APEA’s plans and efforts to resist destructive state decisions and policies, and please understand that you – each of you, individually or as a group from your own Local Union – is invited and urged to bring your ideas and suggestions to staff, to the Board of Directors, to your coworkers and fellow members. This struggle must be undertaken cooperatively and collectively, and we urge you to assist, to participate and to help our efforts on behalf of all our jobs and livelihoods, and for the recuperation and well-being of our state.

Remember, please – these efforts are part of our society’s political process, and we are working to build strength, coalition, consensus for constructive repair and rebuilding.

To succeed, we must be strong and firm, but civil. We will not succeed if we vilify those who have not decided or do not yet agree – be passionate, be forceful, be strong, but be civil, be inclusive, remain available for further discussion.

Thank you, in advance, for your support and participation!

Wishing all of you a Joyous Holiday Season and a Wonderful New Year!
This month the APEA/AFT Spotlight shines on Sherie Fryxell, an incredible supporter of her community, Seward Alaska. Sherie Fryxell is an Administrative Officer at the Spring Creek Correctional Center and is an active member of the APEA/AFT Supervisory Unit.

The program she volunteers her time, energy and financial support to is Young Life, a non-denominational ministry committed to making a positive difference in the lives of kids through friendship and influence of caring adults. Young Life is fairly new to Seward (2011), but the impact of the program has had on the community has been great. There are currently over 20 kids that meet every other week to enjoy fun games and develop positive friendships. Young Life in Seward is helping to fill the need for an activity for youth in a positive and productive way.

Sherie has been the Co-Chair Young Life for a year after being a Committee member for two years. Recently, they had their yearly banquet, which was a great success, raising the funds to support sending interested kids to summer camp and the continuation of running the Young Life program in Seward. Sherie also shared that two other SU members are also actively and financially support Young Life in Seward; Marianna Miranda, the Assistant Correctional Superintendent of the Spring Creek Correctional Center and Rex vonBorstel, a Correctional Officer IV at the Spring Creek Correctional Center.

A big “THANK YOU!” to all three of these SU members for the support they provide to their Seward community.

Local 6070 Begins Contract Bargaining

6070 Negotiation Team led by President Charles Silva and APEA/AFT Northern Field Manager Michael Koskie met with the University Negotiation Team on 11/17 and 11/18 in Anchorage and December 1 and 2 in Fairbanks.

The team is optimistic that with continued effort we will find solutions to the challenges we face in future because of a ongoing fiscal climate.

Bargaining Team members are: Charles Silva, Jeff Culley and Jeff Pruss from the Northern Region; Robert Askew and Ryan Leary from the Southcentral Region and David Behrends and Ned Chapman from the Southeast region; along with Michael Koskie and Jason Roach APEA staff.
New Southeast Staff Bio

By Gabe Hargrove, Southeast Field Representative

My name is Gabe Hargrove and I am the new APEA/AFT Southeast Field Representative, based here in Juneau. I have been actively pursuing my passion for social, economic and environmental justice and equality issues for over 16 years. Most recently, I worked with the Washington Federation of State Employees, AFSCME Council 28, in Seattle, WA, as a Council Representative for the past six years.

As an former staffer (and dedicated follower) of the late Senator Paul Wellstone, my compassion and empathy toward working with and helping other people (particularly the underdog) become empowered has remained at the top of my priority list.

After the devastating loss of Wellstone’s US Senate seat to Norm Coleman in 2002, I knew there was much work to be done and I’ve been doing it ever since. I became the Field Director for a progressive political organization in Minneapolis, MN, and successfully led the effort to get mandated living wage laws passed in both cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, MN. Shortly thereafter I was recruited by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) as an Organizer and I have continued to maintain membership status and work directly with and for labor unions ever since.

Through my life experience and goals, I am more than excited and full of optimism to hit the ground running with APEA/AFT here in Southeast Alaska. I’m proud to be the new Southeast Field Representative and look forward to working together!

By Gene Christian, South Central Field Associate

This month Alaska Higher Education Crafts & Trades, Local 6070, is entering contract negotiations with the University of Alaska. In the capable hands of APEA Northern Regional Manager, Michael Koskie and APEA Field Representative Jason Roach, the team sat down this week to review member surveys and discuss subjects of/bargaining.

The negotiating team, consists of primary and alternate negotiators from the Northern, Southeast, and Southcentral regions.

Your negotiators are: Charles Silva, Statewide/President; Jeff Cully, Northern Region; Jeff Pruss, Northern Region (Alt.); Robert Askew, Southcentral Region; Ryan Leary, Southcentral Region (Alt.); David Behrends, Southeast Region; Ned Chapman, Southeast Region (Alt.)
From Johanna Herron, SU 4900 Member

I have never been the employee that expected to need or use the union services to look out for my rights. In late August of this year I found myself in a situation that was very disheartening and thanks to the guidance and assistance of Annie Knight from my union I was able to navigate the system to be heard.

Many state employees work because they are passionate about the success of Alaska and end up going above and beyond the call of duty. With the current budget crisis and hiring freeze there are a lot of state employees who find themselves serving in a capacity that is much more intense than they signed up for. This past year has certainly been one of those for myself.

After the departure of my supervisor in 2015 a decision was made to not replace her position. Her duties were taken over by someone that did not have the skills to do the job and a lot of her workload fell on my lap. Nearly a year of serving in that capacity and being refused for a reclassification I applied for her position. I got the job and moved from the GGU to SU and without knowing it lost all my flex leave from my previous flex agreement.

I worked 213.5 hours over my regular scheduled work week and accrued 134.5 hours in flex leave. All of it was gone instantly in addition to dropping 3 steps in my new position which equated to a $1/hour raise after all was said and done. I was devastated. My goal was not to ever work that much but being so short staffed I did my best to keep the essential programs up and running.

My first step was to see if there was any way to recover some of what I lost and I approached both unions. The issue was complicated because it was an issue that occurred between unions so it was difficult to figure out who was the right person to represent me. Annie Knight was the one who took the case on and started the conversation with the right people. Early on I was warned that when these things happened there had never been an instance that the person reclaimed any of the lost flex. At the end of September, I was notified that my request was denied.

I pursued the issue anyway and submitted a personal statement about my situation and after 2 ½ months I got notice that a letter of agreement was approved to regain 60 of my flex hours. I was so grateful not just for the hours but for the chance to explain my situation and break new territory with agency policy that allowed for mutual understanding. I am hopeful this does not happen to anyone else and am excited to share my story so others learn from it.

I recommend the following: Read your flex and union contracts so you are knowledgeable about the rules and potential pitfalls. Make sure your HR staff takes their time with your paperwork to explain some of the rules in detail. Don’t give up if something negative happens, react professionally and exhaust your options to be heard in a proactive way. Last but not least work with the union to express your needs and viewpoint regarding fairness in contracts.

An enormous thank you to Annie Knight for helping me resolve this issue and being a voice for me.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Johanna Herron
By Jenn Madsen, South Central Field Representative
Bartlet High School Army JROTC Presenting at APEA/AFT Caucus

Retired Colonel Tyler Harder is a member of the Anchorage Council of Education and an Army JROTC instructor at Bartlett High School.

Colonel Harder and one of his color guard units graced the APEA/AFT and Anchorage Mayor Ethan Berkowitz with the presentation of colors to open the 2016 APEA/AFT Biennial Caucus.

We thank these students, Colonel Harder and all 19 of our JROTC instructors for what they do for our schools and community.

Pictured: Kong Yang, Anne Dela Cruz, Cory Bassett and Kang Moua

Goals & Priorities for APEA-AFT

One of the responsibilities of the Local Delegates at the APEA/AFT Caucus is to set the goals and priorities for APEA/AFT. APEA/AFT Board of Director member, Chris Clark was the chair of the Goals and Priorities Committee. The Committee discussed a number of issues, including communication and organizing. Ultimately four goals/priorities were developed and all four were passed by the Delegates on the convention floor.

1. The APEA/AFT Board of Directors will submit suggested state federation goals to be reviewed by the Goals and Priorities Committees at Caucus. The committee wanted to hear from leadership their vision for the future of APEA/AFT prior to setting the next set of goals and priorities.

2. The APEA/AFT Board of Directors will submit a progress report of the previous set of goals, to be included in the Delegate packet at the next Caucus. The committee wanted the delegation to know if the previous goals were met by the Board of Directors.

3. By January 17, 2017, the APEA/AFT Board of Directors will develop a plan to educate legislators on the value of public and non-profit employees and the serves they provide. January 17 is the beginning of the legislative session. The committee felt the public and legislators need to connect the services provided by employees to the employee. Further cuts of staffing will directly affect the services the public receives.

4. APEA/AFT Board of Directors will continue to advocate for the return to a defined benefit retirement system.

This committee wanted to confirm the return to a defined retirement benefit as one of the top priorities for APEA/AFT.
The ballots have been counted and the contract for the 
APEA/AFT Supervisory Unit has been ratified!

A big thank you goes out to Christina Strahm, a PFD Specialist for the Department of Revenue, Tina Cochran, an Administrative Officer for the Department of Labor & Workforce Development, Ann McPherson, an Accounting Technician for the Department of Natural Resources, and Liam Carnahan, an Engineer/Architect for the Department of Transpiration & Public Facilities who spent the majority of October 18, 2016 opening and counting ballots.

Those of you who have participated in a ballot count understand the process and how grateful we are that these four SU members volunteered their time to complete this important count.

We wish to thank the numerous SU members who took the time to vote, and to affirm, and/or critique, the work of the Negotiating Team. Legitimacy is contingent on member involvement and participation.

The new contract is being finalized now and will be posted to the APEA/AFT Supervisory Unit website as soon as possible. http://su.apea-aft.org/

Christina Strahm, Tina Cochran, and 
Ann McPherson

Thank you Jeff! And Happy Retirement!

32 year FNSB employee Jeff Goldsmith’s retirement Party was held on Friday October 28th at the Borough building.

Many showed up to wish Jeff a happy retirement and enjoy some cake and ice cream. It was fascinating to hear Jeff describe some of the first Borough computer systems and how far technology has come.

APEA/AFT would like to wish Jeff a happy and peaceful retirement filled with great hunting and fishing adventures.

Thank you Jeff for your accomplishments and dedication to our organization! You will be missed.
2017: A Year of Challenge & Trial

We are all well aware of the difficult and precarious status of our state’s income and finances, but I think we were still disappointed at the draconian measures proposed by Governor Walker in his Initial Proposed Budget, introduced last week.

The unilateral freezing of non-represented employees’ pay at their existing dollar value (the same concept we fought so hard at the end of the last legislative session), announcement of the intent to freeze the existing wages of all state workers as new contracts are negotiated and the rush to contract out services performed by state personnel to private industry are severe and destructive overreactions, which are more likely to delay, compound and complicate the state’s ability to address and begin to manage the financial situation than to “fix” the financial situation. Destroying the state’s ability to function effectively by undermining and destroying its own workforce is not a logical solution or management technique for an entity which intends to continue in operation and existence. And there is little likelihood that the state of Alaska will close its doors and revert or slip to some kind of non-state status – we do need solutions, but can’t we please work on feasible, future-focused solutions!

Obviously, these proposals are merely part of the governor’s initial budget – they are, and will be, subject to discussion, amendment, negotiation and modification…but those processes will likely be challenging and will require another year of determination, focus and activism by APEA, APEA’s members and the rest of Alaska’s progressive community and citizenry that want correction, but correction without destroying the future. In response to these actions, especially the contracting out threat (remember how we resisted the state’s efforts to weaken our contract language during negotiations?), we are in the process of forming a member committee which will develop arguments, assemble histories and demonstrations of past contracting fiascos, and will monitor and engage the feasibility and rebuttal processes which must precede any privatization of state services. Our Fairbanks Office will be the center of that committee’s work; Administrative Assistant Al Agee and Field Rep Jason Roach will be immediate staff support to the committee. Jason’s personal experience at the closure of his own manufacturing plant in WA, before joining APEA, will be an invaluable asset to the work of the committee.

DOT&PF engineering supervisors from around the state are already joining the committee and doing research and advocacy preparation, but every interested member is welcome to join and lend their knowledge, skills and energy to the committee. Obviously, SU and CEA members are most directly affected by the budgetary contracting proposals, but every APEA Local, every APEA member, every APEA staffer, is directly impacted by the specter of these destructive, ill-advised contracts, and participation on the committee is open to all.

In addition, to working with the committee, we must also be prepared – individually and collectively – to engage our legislators, to become involved in the legislative process and to advocate on behalf of the kind of state, the kind of society, the kind of community in which we wish to live and raise our families.

Please continue to follow our efforts, and please commit yourself to provide as much help, as much support and as much energy as you can to 2017’s campaign to save our state and correct the course of state management.