

## **Union doesn't speak for all state's teachers**

**By Larry Sand for the LA Daily News, 11/20/08**

In an election season full of surprises and headline-grabbing stories, none may have been more polarizing than the \$1 million donation that the California Teachers Association gave to the No on Proposition 8 campaign in October.

Proposition 8, which passed Nov. 4, will return the state to a place where only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized. The union had become concerned that the pro-8 forces were receiving more in donations and decided to rectify that situation.

While a prior \$250,000 donation from the CTA to Equality for All (a coalition of gay advocacy groups which opposed Proposition 8) got some media attention, the general response from the public was mild. However, something about the \$1 million infusion seemed to galvanize many, especially teachers.

It seems that the public has awakened to the fact that teachers unions donate millions of dollars of their members' dues to issues that have nothing to do with education on a regular basis.

According to teachers union watchdog Mike Antonucci, the CTA spent up to \$5 million on five of this year's 12 state ballot measures, none of which had anything to do with education.

What makes all this even more egregious is that these monies come from members' dues. The CTA does not poll its members on how it spends its political money; nor does it care that many of its members are outraged by its spending habits, which run consistently to the left.

The recent outpouring on this issue suggests that teachers think that the union has no business spending their dues on issues unrelated to education, but if they must, union political spending should at least reflect the diversity of its membership. And teachers are in fact all over the political landscape.

At the same time that teachers are angry, there are many who are angry at teachers. The public seems to think that it is teachers who gave the money to the Proposition 8 campaign. In a recent commercial, state Superintendent of Education Jack O'Connell said "California teachers and every major newspaper say no on Proposition 8." Sounds as if the 335,000 teachers who make up the CTA are in lock step, when nothing could be further from the truth.

It's the 800 members of the CTA State Council who make these political decisions. And, as a body, their politics run way to the left of the average teacher. So what is a teacher to do? Unbeknownst to many, there are options.

Most teachers in California are led to believe that they are forced to join a union when they are hired. Well, yes and no. While one can never fully escape the burden of living in a non-right-to-work state, the effects can be mitigated. In our state, a typical teacher has to fork over about \$1,000 every year to the union. However, if a teacher applies for agency fee status, he or she will get a yearly rebate of about 30 percent, or \$300 -- the amount the union claims to spend on non-collective-bargaining-type (read "political") issues. Hence, agency fee payers still have to pay the union \$700 apiece for the right to teach in California, but they at least have the peace of mind that comes with knowing that their dues are not going to support causes they are against. And there are other organizations they can join if they are concerned about any loss of protections typically offered by the union.

Those of us who have differences with our union can reclaim a part of the money taken from us and spend it as we choose, perhaps in ways that are in line with our moral, ethical and political beliefs.

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