

Special Feature Exclusive to *TRUNK TALK*: Diary of a Republican Educator Pat Schmidt of Wautoma, Wisconsin

NEA-REC 2010-2011

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TRUNK TALK

Editor- Jerome Hoynes

Feb. 9, 2011-Attended an informational meeting about the Bold Reforms for education proposed by the Wisconsin Education Association. These reforms included such things as the right to negotiate merit pay and new teacher evaluation language. We also discussed Governor Scott Walker's new Budget Proposal. We were told we may have to pay as much as 12.5% towards our health insurance and 5.6% towards our retirement benefits. In my district we pay 5% towards health insurance but the district pays both employee and employer portion of retirement. The tone of this meeting was very serious and our leaders were very apprehensive about what the future would bring for us.

Feb. 11- Today the Governor announced his budget repair bill and our worst fears became true. We were being asked to make huge monetary concessions which would amount to a cut of about \$500.00 a month for my members.

Feb. 12- Went to Mosinee, about 70 miles away, to our UniServ office to man the phone banks to call our members about the budget repair bill and the monetary effect it will have on them. Made calls from 10:00 until 5:00 and called about 150 members. WEAC President Mary Bell was there too calling members just like me. My president stayed home and started a phone tree to call our own members. I drove home in an ice storm and saw many cars in the ditch.

Feb. 14- Valentine's Day. I received a valentine from one of my students that said "Give Peace a Chance!" I gave her a hug and said, "Oh honey, you have no idea how much I needed this today!" I didn't know it would have so much meaning in the days to come!

Feb. 15- My association president Shari Weiss and I drove to Madison for the first Rally and Candlelight vigil. We knew we just had to be there! Stood outside the Capitol building and shouted "Kill the Bill!" and sang "Solidarity Forever" with WEAC President Mary Bell. The crowd surged forward and the next thing we knew we were in the Capitol Rotunda holding signs that said, "Care for educators like they care for your child" and "Stop the Attack on Workers Rights". What a scene looking down at the rotunda floor from the balcony. We knew we were witnessing the start of something big! We drove home very happy that we had participated. A long day! The first of many!

Feb. 16- WEAC President Mary Bell issues the call for WEAC members to come to Madison for a peaceful demonstration. We decided to tell our members to go but only if they had a personal day and not chance disciplinary action. It was becoming clear this fight was not just going to be about wages, but about saving our union!

Feb. 17- All 14 Democratic Wisconsin State Senators flee to Illinois so there would not be a quorum in the chamber to vote on the Governor's budget repair bill. Wisconsin State Troopers could not cross the state line to bring them home because they have no jurisdiction in Illinois. These brave ladies and gentlemen would soon become known as the "Fab 14" and in the coming days would risk everything to keep the legislative process intact! Many school districts close due to teachers calling in sick or using personal days to go to Madison.

Feb. 18- Dennis Van Roekel, NEA President, marched alongside our members and spoke to the crowd in Madison. We stayed home and staged a peaceful rally in our hometown of Wautoma. We had 85 people stand in the snow and line both sides of the street holding homemade signs. We had teachers, prison workers, and county workers standing together chanting and getting people to honk their horns in support of our efforts. Many of my

younger members came and I told them they weren't just standing in the snow they were standing in the footprints of those who had fought for their union rights for so many years.

Feb. 19- Many of my members went to Madison for the first time. What an inspiring experience for them! They are beginning to understand what this fight will be about! I went to Wausau for a news conference featuring our Democratic senators and representatives who are fighting for us. I did this with 1 hour and 15 minutes notice and made it just in time. I now know how the minutemen must have felt when they had to be ready to fight with very little notice.

Feb. 20- As a member of the Republican Party I am invited to the Waushara County Republican Caucus. I hope to talk to my State Senator Luther Olsen and my State Representative Joan Balleweg. I want them to know how I feel as a member of the Republican Educators Caucus. I want them to know how this fight in Madison is affecting me. Before the dinner I stand in a blizzard outside the building where the Caucus is to be held with about 85 people. Today we are joined by United Steelworkers local 128 from Ripon. We can hardly see and we are soaking wet and cold and the snow is piling up fast. One young man is so frozen he is red in the face and shivering with cold, but he tells me he wants to see Luther Olsen. However, Senator Olsen doesn't come due to the weather. I offer the man my coat as I am going inside to attend the dinner but he declines and tells me again "I just want to see Luther!". At the dinner I get to speak to Joan Balleweg and explain to her that out of the 3.2 million members of NEA 1 million of them are registered Republicans. As a Republican educator I am willing to due my part to be fiscally responsible, but I don't understand what that has to do with giving up our collective bargaining rights. We have been told to make the monetary concessions the Governor requested but now he is stripping us of our collective bargaining rights and those we will NOT give up. I am very confused by all this. She really has no answers for me. She just tells me that the state is broke and everyone has to tighten their belts. I give her my valentine and tell her that I am proud that my school didn't close and that all of our members were at work for the children. She told the crowd that no schools in her district closed and she was proud of that too. Afterward she stood out in the snow and talked to the demonstrators and listened to them tell their stories. I really appreciated that gesture. Good for her!

Feb. 21- Snow Day today. Thank God! When the weather cleared up I went to Ripon to speak at a town hall meeting which Senator Olsen is to attend. It is at the United Steelworkers union hall. There are about 65 people in attendance and but not Senator Olsen. So I spoke to the crowd and told them that I was a Republican Educator and explained the same things about our group as I had the night before. One lady led us in singing "We Shall Not Be Moved". Our group had our picture taken by the little white schoolhouse in Ripon which is the birthplace of the Republican Party. Efforts to recall State Senators, both Republicans and Democrats begin.

Feb. 23- Got a call today to be in Waupaca at 4:30 to speak again at a rally in front of the Waupaca Library where Luther Olsen is to hold a town meeting. This time more than 500 people show up chanting and carrying signs. However, we find out later that it is a scam and Senator Olsen was never coming at all. I gave my same speech and was joined by a nurse from the local veteran's home who spoke about her concern that the cuts Governor Walker is going to make in the state budget will affect her patients. He is going to make cuts to Medicaid and Badger Care. These are programs many of our low income families and many of her patients participate in. This fight isn't just about teachers and public workers anymore! We ended by having all 500 of us recite the Pledge of Allegiance in front of the town square flagpole. Quite a moment!

Feb. 24-It is becoming clear that I will have to retire this year. I love my job and I don't want to retire but I will lose about \$500.00 a month with the concessions we will be making. If I retire this year I can still take advantage of a negotiated benefit that a retiree receives help with health insurance premiums for 5 years. I can't risk that benefit being taken away if collective bargaining is abolished and our contract is null and void. Almost 4500 people have applied for retirement in the last six weeks alone according to the Wisconsin Dept. of Employee Trust Funds. I've never cried so much in my life!

Feb. 25-State Assembly passes the Governor Walker's budget repair bill including provisions to strip workers of their collective bargaining rights. Called Senator Olsen to tell him about my retirement and that I would appreciate him voting against the budget repair bill. Almost all of our Republican legislators haven't answered any emails or phone calls since this started, but it was worth a try!

Feb. 26- the demonstrations continue in Madison. Estimates are at least 85,000 people attend the rally. Demonstrators even sleep overnight in the Capitol Rotunda. Senator Olsen called me back! We talked for about 45 minutes and he was a very good listener and very sympathetic about my retirement. He told me that he would like to compromise and work out a settlement. It meant a lot to me that he would return my call.

Feb. 28-preliminary layoff notices were issued today for our Title I teachers. We were able to extend the deadline for them to May 1 to see how things play out with the budget repair bill. They have a good chance of getting called back because federal money usually comes in to fund this program.

March 8-WEAC Vice President Betsy Kippers addressed the Wautoma Education Association. We had more than 80 members in attendance and we usually only have about 25. Betsy explained what the bill actually meant for collective bargaining and if it was abolished how we would go about re-certifying our union.

March 9-My Birthday! I had a very nice day and then went home to the news that the Senate Republicans passed the Budget Repair Bill by taking out all of the fiscal references. By doing so they did not require a quorum so they bypassed the 14 Democratic Senators who were still in Illinois. They only held the vote open for 14 seconds until they had the number of votes they needed for passage. All of our collective bargaining rights were gone! I was so depressed I went to bed at 8:30, slept until 2:00AM and cried until 5:00AM. I have been involved in my union for 35 years and have held every leadership position you can think of. My students are singing a song for our spring program entitled 'The Worst Day All Day Long'. How appropriate! By the way, Senator Olsen voted in favor of the legislation. Very disappointing for me!

March 12-meeting in Wausau to discuss re-certifying our union. One member looked at all the sad faces and commented that it was like going to a wake. Saw a very moving video about what has been happening to us the last few weeks. Everyone in the audience cried. We have to get re-energized somehow!

March 17-Michael Walsh from WEAC Government Relations asked me to testify in front of the State Senate about a bill expanding the number of independent charter schools in our state. I've never done that before so it should be interesting.

March 23-Testified in Madison today in front of the State Senate Education Committee. It will be the first time the Committee is hearing testimony since the passage of the budget bill. My senator, Luther Olsen, is the chairman of the committee. Security was very tight and there was a sign at security that stated the items that weren't allowed in the Capitol. #1 said, "No firearms" and #2 said, "No crockpots"! This was a reference to the nights the demonstrators stayed overnight in the Capitol rotunda. My testimony went well but I registered at 9:00AM and didn't testify until 4:30. It was interesting to note that the senators were still sniping at each other across the table and openly criticized each other. The Republicans chastised the Democrats for leaving the state and the Democrats chastised the Republicans for bypassing the open meeting law and passing the bill before everyone had a chance to vote. Overall it was a terrific experience and I felt like I did my part to help protect our great public schools!

March 27-Attended a rally in Wautoma in support of workers' rights. Rally was attended by about 150 people. A great turnout for a town our size! WEAC President Mary Bell attended and spoke to the crowd. I got to lead the crowd in singing 'Solidarity Forever'. That was really something! Some of our members got to ride the AFL-CIO bus to the rally. It was decorated with a picture of union workers next to a sign declaring "This is What Democracy Looks Like!"

March 28-our school board refused to consider our request to extend our contract as it is still unclear whether the collective bargaining law is still in effect or not. A Dane County judge has issued a restraining order preventing the Secretary of State from publishing the bill so it can become law. However, Governor Walker found a way around that and had an independent agency publish the law. The judge has now found that the Governor was in violation of her restraining order and has declared that the law is not in effect until further notice. This is good news for us as we may be able to extend our contract while it is still legal to do so.

I have met many of you at the NEA Republican Leadership Conferences. As a Republican educator the last two months have been very confusing to me because I thought it was OK to be a teacher and a member of a union and still hold Republican values. I wrote this diary to show my frustration at trying to live in two worlds while mine was falling apart. Thanks for taking the time to read it.

Editor's Note: If you would like to respond to Pat, please contact her via e-mail at schmidt-pax@gmail.com

RNC Chair Steele visited NEA-HQ in 2009 for NEA's Republican Leaders Conference; will we welcome new RNC Chair Priebus at the RLC-V in D.C. this summer?

Elephant Educators across the country must attend local and state party functions and gatherings to announce that they are indeed **"good Republicans AND good union members"** as well. If new RNC Chair Reince Priebus were aware of the numbers would he agree to alienate GOP Union voters with websites that are so blatantly hostile and opposed to union members? Take a look at this: <http://www.gop.com/obamasunionbosses/email>. We can make a difference if we all speak up this spring.

Message from NEA-REC National Chair Davina Keiser

It's spring, and that means that the NEA Representative Assembly is just around the corner. Our own Michele Bowman has been working overtime to plan a social activity for our caucus members. Our hope was to coordinate it with July 4th, but the cost was prohibitive. Stay tuned for the latest on our upcoming plans.

Due to the condensed scheduling of this year's RA, we will have only 30 minutes for each of our morning meetings, so our Day 1 90-minute speaker's block is gone. If you haven't done so already, be sure to sign up for the NEA Education Votes program, advocating for education activities during their Spring Recess in the District offices of your Congressional and Senatorial legislators. I am looking forward to hearing from all of you who attended your NEA Regional Leadership Conferences.

I attended the Pacific Regional in Portland, Oregon, and was treated to below freezing weather, including snow; I kept asking myself why I was in Portland when the weather in sunny Southern California was a balmy 70 degrees. It was a great conference, complete with a rally, in below freezing weather, supporting Wisconsin teachers. Now I know I'm crazy! I know we're all busily working in our respective states, so please plan to have a verbal (or written, if you prefer) report on those activities ready for our meetings at the RA. Until our next news update, I thank you all for everything you do. We are moving forward and getting notice, so keep it up!

Thoughts from National Vice-Chair Kathy Gann

I'm Looking for the Bright Side [from Inside a Black Hole]... Do you know what would happen to you if you came too close to a Black Hole? You would instantly become 'spaghettified'! Yep! Because of the extreme gravity increase, you would literally be pulled apart and stretched into a thin stream of disconnected atoms...like miniscule spaghetti.

Okay. What does this have to do with us as Republican Educators? Well, if you are like me, you have been stretched and pulled in every direction! You have been asked to do more...with less! There are constant demands to reach higher and then stoop lower.

You are experiencing spagettification! The outcome is often gloomy, but I always look for the bright side [even when I feel as if I have been sucked into a proverbial Black Hole]!

As your Vice-Chair, I constantly can see the bright side. I feel the connection of all the Republican Educators in the NEA. We are able to reach across the United States and place a thumb on the true pulse of what is important for our fellow teachers and our students!

We are able to define the issues of our peers and then legislate before the NEA-RA. We are able to bring both Republicans and Democrats to see what is important. We also connect across our state legislatures and all the way to Washington, D.C. As we come together in Chicago, we must build on the foundations of all those who have gone before us. We can see beyond the edge of our own Black Hole as we continue our work. Bring your sunglasses because I can already see the light!

NEA-REC Caucus Membership

Please consider joining our organization. Membership forms are available on our caucus website.

Comments from the Midwest Chair E-Ben Grisby

Hello members of the Republican Educators' Caucus! The Midwest Region had the pleasure of convening at the Westin Crowne Plaza in downtown Kansas City on this past MLK weekend (Jan. 14-16) for the Regional Leadership Conference. In spite of the cold, blustery winds both literally and politically, there was a warm reception across the board at the Conference.

This past January, it was great seeing a GOP majority in the US House of Representatives, as well as Republican majorities at both state and local levels among our region. In states such as Wisconsin, Republicans took the helm at the gubernatorial level, with strong majorities in both the State Senate and the Assembly. However, as educational professionals who proudly identified as Republicans, it was a positive, yet challenging experience as we embark on finding out more about this new crop of politicians, especially those who are public education advocates within the GOP.

On January 15th, the NEA-REC met for a breakfast meeting, with yours truly as Moderator. There were about two dozen people from throughout the Midwest Region, along with Merwyn Scott from the National Educational Association (NEA). Merwyn's colleague, Erin Duncan was unable to attend, but was there in spirit. Merwyn explained his role as advocate for the Republican Educators to have the access to lobby for members of the US Senate and House of Representatives who have a proven track history of supporting public education from grades Pre-Kindergarten through College, as well as currying favor with politicians who value public education as a conduit for citizenship, advancement, and community building.

Also, we gave highlights of 2010 NEA-Representative Assembly in New Orleans, which included concessions of maintaining the Annual Republican Leadership Conferences held after the RA. There was additional discussion regarding the renewal of the Early and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and Race to the Top and their respective impacts on our region and our nation. Later that morning, several REC members attend a seminar on the political climate with the November 2010 elections. The impact of new blood among the GOP, mainly from the Tea Party has made issues with public education as being as a lobby for the Democratic Party and as tied up in too much red tape. Unfortunately, the jury is still out on many of the new members of the Congress. However, there is a dire and urgent need for need to remain active in our communities as Republican/Independent education professionals and stress the importance of having a centrist to center-right to independent voice in the quest of ensuring high quality public education for all, not simply the privileged few.

Over the last few months, it has been a wild and bumpy ride with state level legislators within the Midwest region attempting to uproot union-related instruments such as collective bargaining and pensions. Protests were in force between mid-February and late March in Wisconsin as well as in Indiana, Michigan. Politicians as well as both public and private union members congregated in our respective statehouses with relentless fervor, fear, and anguish. Politicians, mainly state senators from both political parties were being recalled via constituent-based petitions across the Badger State. It truly has been eye-opening, yet a real opportunity to see democracy in action. However, as professionals, it has been a wistful experience to see veteran teachers seek early retirements, while nascent teachers question remaining in the teaching profession and perhaps seek employment in other career fields. The effects from state leaders who may be Republican, but are anti-public education will be lasting for years and possibly decades to come.

As Republican and Independents, it behooves us to make a concerted effort to network in our respective local and state-level GOP and tell these men and women that we are taxpayers, voters and residents of our communities. We also raise households and volunteer in grassroots organizations. We are willing to work with civic-minded politicians, especially in the Grand Old Party to help see their constituents in

bold and living color. We must live out and proudly as republicans, regardless of identity or ideology and speak in defense of strengthening public education across the board!!!! 2012 is near and we must think forward while not forgetting the action of the past year or so. Additionally, as members of the Republican Educators' Caucus, it will be a daunting task in growing membership, given the political climate, but we must press forth with collective force among our regions because in the prophetic words of Abraham Lincoln "a house divided against itself cannot stand."

Now we move onward to Chicago between June 30th and July 6th, 2011 for the 2011 National Education Association-Representative Assembly. Members from the Midwest region will have a great opportunity to learn more about the Republican Educators' Caucus with members from throughout the nation, including our awesome board and constituents. Whether you are present at the Assembly or you are unable to attend, please contact anyone from the caucus and we would be willing to lend support!!!! Remember—Trunks Up!!!!

Greetings from Southeast Co-Chair Michele Bowman

Greetings from the soggy Southeast! We have had to deal with not only torrential rains, but also torrents of legislation pertaining to Association activities. Alabama was the first to be engulfed in the battle to retain the right to continue payroll dues deductions in December when the first of our wild winter storms began. Tennessee was the next state in the eye of the storm. When the legislature convened in January, legislators filed a flurry of anti-union bills. As I write this, there are bills in committee that could take away collective bargaining rights, payroll dues deductions, representation by the Association on the state retirement board and even the right to contribute to political campaigns. Members of the Tennessee Education Association responded by inundating lawmakers with e-mails, telephone calls and letters before more than 4,000 people marched in Legislative Plaza in Nashville on March 5. NEA President Dennis Van Roekel braved the elements along with supporters from other unions to show solidarity. Bills will be coming up for voting soon and we will see how TEA weathers this storm.

Encouragement from Western Chair David Gould

Get to know your legislative representative. The 2011 legislative session is over. It's time for us to take stock, find an issue from this past session. The issue may be a piece of legislation that you agreed with or disagreed with. Find a legislator to become best friends with and make plans for next year. We'll see all these same people this fall/spring, and we need to be proactive this summer.

The school year's winding down for some, over for others and summer should be a time for us to make plans. Try to meet with legislators in your district. Ask to have breakfast or lunch with them. Ask your local or state Republican caucus to pay for the meal if you need to.

Please consider talking with a state legislator this summer over one bill or law at a time and meeting with the authors to try and give them your input. It's also worth noting to consider meeting with their staff who play an active role in the legislative process. Even if the bill has already passed and is law, we can try to get them changed so that they can be better. Many of these laws are not flawed in the idea, but the execution. We can help make them better. We can also pick legislators and meet with them to address other issues that haven't been considered yet. As teachers we need to get meetings with these people, because that is the best way to get things done this summer.

Please don't be the lone ranger but go in with a friend or two. As teachers we will stand together, be supportive and come to agreement on key issues. Don't wait till a new session starts to make a relationship with a legislator or staff member.

Words from Northeast Co-Chair Laura Bochner

The Northeast Regional Conference was held this year in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on January 21-23, 2011. It was held at the Lowe's Hotel on Market Street. This year the conference was hosted by the Pennsylvania Education Association and the conference theme was "Turning Action into Power." Various student oriented workshops were presented on topics such as The Smart Board and Helping Students to be Safe Online. Leadership training on topics such as Healthcare Reform, Bargaining, and the State Budgeting Crisis were very informative.

On another note, the state budget crisis continues to threaten the education systems in many states like New York and New Jersey. Specifically in New Jersey, Governor Christie threatens serious changes to employees' healthcare and benefits by the end of June. He is refusing to come to the bargaining table with the NJEA and claims he will get the changes passed with the help of the legislature.

Report from the Mid-Atlantic Chair David Kinsella

Mid-Atlantic Republican Educator Caucus met on 1-29-2011. David Kinsella – Caucus Chair led the meeting. Attendees picked up a copy of Trunk Talk from the NEA-Republican Caucus and signed in 10 people attended the meeting.

Mid-Atlantic moved to support endorsement of Princess Moss for NEA Executive Committee

Ted Payne moved to support endorsement and Sandra Hatley seconded the motion

Motion passed unanimously

Mid-Atlantic States that have a Republican Caucus

WV – no; OH – no; VA – yes; KY – yes; NC – yes; MD – no

West Virginia does not have 'score cards' anymore. Issues:

- a. Educating our Republican officials about public education issues
- b. Talk to candidates and hand them the NEA for to fill out personally for endorsement possibilities
- c. Work on building relationships with Republican leaders.

Summer 2011 – David is going to contact Erin Duncan about who attended summer 2010 from Ohio and let Connie Arnold know.

North Carolina – Actively identify Republican members having small grassroots meetings with members and legislators. Issues – vouchers, k-3 issues, increase in class size. Notes- Renee' Yates, KY; typed by Ted Payne, MD.

On April 8th, the Mid-Atlantic Chair met with the Virginia Republican Educators Caucus at the VEA Convention in Roanoke, VA. Two people were selected to attend the NEA Republican Leadership Conference in Washington, DC. There was also a discussion of the U.S. Senate race and whether the VEA would endorse Tim Kaine as a candidate for the office. The Virginia Caucus did not support this possible action as they did not feel that Tim Kaine had done enough for educators as governor and that his recent experience as DNC Chairman did not necessarily qualify him for a run for the U.S. Senate. The option of making no endorsement in the Senate race was also considered. Dialogue with the George Allen campaign was also mentioned as possible way to open some doors and to at least develop a relationship with a man who could very well be the next Senator from Virginia.

The Mid-Atlantic Chair placed a great deal of emphasis on being involved with their local PAC committees and being on candidate interview teams. Republican members of the NEA should always be part of all endorsements during any campaign year. It was also stated that members should give the maximum to the VEA and NEA Fund to ensure their legitimacy as members of the National Education Association.

Illinois Education Association Republican Activist Joyce Bailey elected to NEA Board of Directors

Joyce Bailey of Illinois was elected to a three-year term as an NEA-Director at the March 2011 IEA Representative Assembly. The addition of Bailey will assist our already effective group of openly Republican NEA Directors including: Leslie Dake of Iowa, Ron Edwards of California and Ginny Evans of Texas. These leaders continuously stand up for political liberty and diversity within the NEA; their efforts are sincerely appreciated. Good luck Joyce and thank you for stepping forward to serve!

Elephant Educator selected to serve as a Delegate to 2011 Education International World Congress

David Gould, a teacher from Tulsa, Oklahoma, has been selected to attend the Education International World Congress, serving as a member of the NEA delegation. The World Congress, held every four years, is the supreme governing body of Education International. The World Congress will be held in Cape Town, South Africa, in the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC) from July 22nd to July 26th, 2011. The Congress provides an opportunity for representatives of all EI affiliates to meet and strengthen the bonds of solidarity between teachers and education workers throughout the world. Delegates consider the major contemporary issues affecting their organizations, the international teacher trade union movement, and the ongoing struggle to achieve quality public education for all. He will have a full report of his activities in the fall issue of the *TRUNK TALK* newsletter.

TRUNK TALK

NEA-REC Newsletter

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