

The National Education Association and Politics

Many political experts would say the NEA is the strongest political force in America. The sheer size of this union, coupled with its major shift in strategy aimed at becoming politically active from the local courthouses to the White House, has enabled the NEA to become the dominant force in American politics. Today, its structure and activities more closely resemble a political party than a professional teachers association.

Unfortunately, the NEA is not funding its new mission with voluntary contributions from its members. Instead it is diverting members' dues and nonmember fees to politics. This is called compelled political speech, something that is supposed to be unlawful in this country.

National Examples

- In 1967, Sam Lambert, then NEA Executive Secretary laid out the long-range vision of the teacher union saying, "Beginning now we are going to put our power and influence to work for the things that are really the most important. NEA will...become a political power second to no other special interest group....NEA will organize this profession from top to bottom into logical operational units that can move swiftly and effectively and with power unmatched by any other organized group in the nation."
- In 1973, Terry Herndon, NEA Executive Director, clearly stated his political goals for the NEA, "To tap the legal, political and economic powers of the U.S. Congress. We want leaders and staff with sufficient clout that they may roam the halls of Congress and collect votes to re-order the priorities of the United States of America."
- In the NEA Series in Practical Politics, *How to Participate in Party Politics*, page 15, the NEA clearly lays out its core function. "Through successful involvement, we can help the political community understand that the Association is a **permanent political force** to be reckoned with. This understanding will directly affect our ability to enact the Legislative program."
- In *Advancing the NEA's Legislative Program, July 1997*, page 8, the NEA stated, "NEA's Political Affairs program support the Association's capacity to wage effective, unified campaigns and to elect leaders, from the school board to the White House, who are committed to public education and the nation's children. NEA works with candidates, elected officials and the two major political parties, and coalesces with other organizations in support of a pro-education, pro-child agenda."
- The NEA Series on Practical Politics also has a publication on *How to Conduct Opinion Polls*. On page 1, the NEA states, "Polling isn't easy, and it can't be taken lightly, but it is an activity well suited to our members. It demands technical knowledge, attention to detail, political awareness, skill in communications, good management, and analytical ability. Few labor organizations could attempt it. None can do it better than the NEA."

This is consistent with the comment by NEA General Counsel Robert Chanin's statement, "So you tell me how I can possibly separate NEA's collective bargaining efforts from politics—you just can't . . . It's all politics."

2000 Elections - NEA Involvement

- Larry J. Sabato, Director of the Center for Governmental Studies at the University of Virginia said, "It's fair to say that the Democrats would be nowhere without them [referring to teachers' unions]. And in my view, the NEA and AFT are the most effective union-players out there, because they not only have the money and muscle, they also have a positive public image from representing teachers that much of labor lacks." *Education Week*, November 1, 2000, pp. 30-31.
- Mary Elizabeth Teasley, NEA Director of Government Relations said about the 2000 election, "In terms of the NEA, there's never been an election like this. It's because of what's at stake. Before you could either count on the Senate being pro-education or the House, or the presidency. This time, we don't know how it's going to turn out." (*Id.*)
- ~~The NEA is the largest~~ ~~single~~ ~~organization~~ ~~of~~ ~~employees~~, with 2.5 million members. Every congressional district in the country includes between 5,000 and 15,000 NEA members, and the union need not raise special political funds to get in touch with them or their immediate families. As a result, merely convincing union members of how to vote and making sure they get to the polls can make the difference when races are especially tight, as they are this year at both the presidential and congressional levels.

"As of late September, the NEA had reported spending more than \$1.1 million this year on communications to its members not just about who it believed should be president, but also about whom to elect to the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. Four years ago, the NEA reported no such spending on federal races, a change that reflects a clear shift in strategy." (*Id.* at 33.)

"This year, however, in an effort to be more focused, the NEA is going well beyond its regular publications by sending its members material that deal only with the federal elections. By using such targeted strategies as direct mailings, an organization like the NEA is able to better target its messages. 'Historically, the NEA at the national level has not communicated directly with its members in this way – our state and locals have,' said Mary Elizabeth Teasley, the NEA director of government relations. 'In this election, we made a decision in our planning two years ago to actually embrace national direct mail, and hire a national [direct mail] vendor to be more effective and more targeted.' (*Id.*)

"Consider the NEA's strategy this year in its effort to help the Democrats win back the House majority they lost in 1994. Over the summer, the union identified 27 competitive congressional races where opinion polls suggested that a Democrat candidate – either an incumbent, a challenger, or someone vying for an open seat – had a shot at beating a Republican. NEA headquarters in Washington state then dispatched one staff member to work full time in each of those districts, arming the employee with CD-ROMs listing all the NEA members in the district, their ages, their party affiliations, and where they work. (*Id.*)

"Then in late August, the organization carried out a round of telephone calls to its members in those districts to find out whom they supported, which members were undecided, and who

would be willing to volunteer – all of which was filed away on another set of CD-ROMS.
(*Id.*)

“While a total of 8,000 members in those 27 districts agreed to volunteer, the NEA by that time also had ample information about its undecided members. So as the new recruits got to work at phone banks and other campaign operations, the NEA was able to begin distributing direct-mail literature – matched to each member’s concerns – to those who still needed persuading. Some were also sent material via the Internet.” (*Id.*, pp. 33-34.)

“But this was no spectator sport for the 40-odd National Education Association officials who spent a long night watching election results at the group’s headquarters here last week. Along with the smaller American Federation of Teachers, the NEA has invested tens of millions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of hours by paid staff members and volunteers over the past several months to try to influence the outcomes of key contests November 7.” (*Id.*, p 26.)

“At the state level, meanwhile, not only did the unions contribute to the trouncing of voucher initiatives in California and Michigan, but they also helped persuade voters in Arizona, California, and Washington state to pass ballot measures aimed at insuring more state money for public education. Moreover, of the 11 gubernatorial races in which the NEA took sides, the union-backed candidates won nine.” (*Id.*)

“I think the unions overall did not have a good day, but I think the NEA and AFT were very successful in their efforts,’ said Amy Kauffman, who directs the Campaign and Election Law Project for the Hudson Institute, a conservative think tank. ‘And that’s because the education unions concentrated directly on what affected them. They had clear goals as to what they needed, and they put what money and resources they had into those races.’” (*Id.*)

“In the last few days of the campaign, the NEA shifted additional resources – adding more direct mail and phone-bank operations – into the Senate races in Florida, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri and Washington state. As of late last week the Democrats had claimed victory in all but Washington state, where election officials were still counting ballots.” (*Id.* at 29)

“As for the most important swing state of all, union leaders say they did their best to leave nothing to chance. Ms. Teasley says her union sent four staff members – instead of the usual one – to Florida to help work in support of the Gore campaign. Moreover, the NEA distributed seven to nine pieces of direct mail aimed at swaying Florida members toward the Democratic nominee, and the union added phone banks there in the final days leading up to the election. ‘We know we had to put everything in Florida, and we did,’ Ms. Teasley said.” (*Id.*)

- Bob Chase, in a Western Regional Leadership Conference Meeting speech said,
“Nearly one out of every 100 Americans is a member of the National Education Association. Let me repeat that: Nearly one out of 100 Americans is a member of our Association.

“By any measure this is power. We have the responsibility to use this power wisely and—I believe—much more assertively and ambitiously.

“But in the months ahead, we face the ultimate high-stakes test. It’s called Campaign 2000.

“This year in particular, our involvement must be very, very focused and aggressive. In the last election cycle, NEA showed its bipartisan clout as never before. We supported pro-public education stalwarts in the Democrat Party. We also helped to elect 18 Republicans to congress, plus three Republican governors—among them Jane Hull of Arizona.

“It’s time now—in the weeks and months immediately ahead—to back up that recommendation with a vigorous get-out-the-vote effort. And in looking ahead to the summer and fall, our threefold task is clear: (1) Keep a laser focus on our priority interests; children and public education; (2) identify the candidates—Democrats and Republicans—who measure up strongest on those interests, and (3) do everything in our power to see that those candidates are elected on November 7.”

- NEA Spokesman, Michael Pons said, “[O]ur government relations division and the executive committee [will] explore the feasibility of developing a regional cadre to help prepare people to run for office.”
- In a shocking move, in December 2000, the NEA Board of Directors voted to study plans for a more formalized political candidate recruitment and training program. (NEA Considers Running Its Own Candidates for Public Office, *Conservative News Service*, December 2000) **Note: this was not NEA-PAC this was the NEA Board.**
- The NEA was heavily involved in numerous, high-profile political activities during both major political party conventions.
 - ▶ **Democrat National Convention**—Bob Chase, NEA President was a featured speaker during prime time at the Democrat National Convention (NEA Election 2000 Convention Communique).
 - ▶ **Republican National Convention**—Bob Chase, Vice President Reg Weaver, and Secretary-Treasurer Dennis Van Roekel were on hand to welcome NEA Republican members to the Republican National Convention (NEA Election 2000, NEA Welcomes Member Delegates to Republican Convention).

All this activity would be admirable if the money to fund it came from voluntary sources. It does not. It is removed automatically and monthly from union members’ paychecks. No entity except the IRS has this kind of power.

2000 NEA Representative Assembly

- Dennis Friel, NEA’s Governmental Relations East Team (director) said that by relying on focus groups and members surveys conducted on likely presidential candidates, one of three of our

members can 'move.' "We can move 800,000 votes for Al Gore." Friel continued saying that support for Gore, while very broad, was very shallow. In fact, internal surveys revealed that a majority of NEA Educational Support Personnel (ESPs) supported Republican George W. Bush. (From the *Education Intelligence Agency Report* authored by Mike Antonucci, on the 2000 NEA Representative Assembly.)

- "Anticipating several close races, the NEA will dispatch its staff to 25 targeted campaigns from August 28 to November 7, including the Gore campaign." (*Id.*)
- From NEA Contingency Funds the NEA contributed:
 - \$200,000 at the December 1999 Board Meeting "to assist the California Teachers Association with the passage of Proposition 26, an initiative to reduce the supermajority requirement for local bond measures."
 - \$200,000 at the December 1999 Board meeting, "To assist the Wisconsin Education Association with its Great Schools Program Initiative."
 - \$750,000 at the February 2000 Board meeting, "To assist the Michigan Education Association with the All Kids Campaign."
- The "Reports on Implementation of Actions of the 1999 Representative Assembly" presented to the 2000 Representative Assembly in Chicago indicates that nearly 100% of the items in the 58-page report are political items requiring Congressional or state legislative action and, accordingly, are nonchargeable activities to teachers.
- Thirty-one of the 33 pages in "Reports of Committees 1999-2000, presented to the 79th Representative Assembly of the National Education Association" deal with political action (legislative or congressional) and under the law would be nonchargeable to teachers.
- News articles on the 2000 Representative Assembly report that nearly all of the RA activity was political. For example, "the 2.5 million-member labor union barred the use of merit pay or performance pay in teacher contracts, hiked union dues to expand its campaign against vouchers, and raised over \$1 million for its political action committee."
- The *RA Today*, an official NEA publication reporting on the convention, indicates that virtually 100% of the convention dealt with political activities affecting either the Presidential or Congressional races.
- Reporter Mike Antonucci of Education Intelligence Agency reporting on the Representative Assembly stated, "*In response to an inquiry, NEA President Robert Chase acknowledged that the NEA contributed to about 200 organizations from member dues. The following contributions have been budgeted by NEA for 2000-2001:*

Economic Policy Institute	\$90,000
Black Congressional Caucus	\$25,000
Hispanic Congressional Caucus	\$25,000
Center for Policy Alternatives	\$125,000
People for the American Way	\$200,000

- A printout from the NEA web page lists 26 pages of new business items for the RA. Virtually all of these items are political.
- The NEA Today Online report on the 2000 Representative Assembly is entirely political.

1999 NEA Representative Assembly

- The 2000 RA was not unusual. A summary of the 1999 RA by the Education Intelligence Agency, page 8 includes a statement, “But while the business of America is business, the business of the NEA is politics.” A few line items from the budget shows just how much it permeates the union’s activities:
 - ▶ \$1,121,452 for “financial and technical assistance provided to state affiliates for the purpose of advancing public support for pro-education measures and defeating anti-public education measures.”
 - ▶ \$872,535 for “comprehensive coordinated state specific campaign developed and implemented aimed at electing bipartisan pro-education candidates in the 2000 election-cycle.”
 - ▶ \$540,000 for “state affiliate polling assistance and support for unified PAC fundraising efforts provided.”
 - ▶ \$430,968 for “financial and technical assistance provided to state affiliates for the purpose of passing or defeating state legislation.”
 - ▶ \$265,000 for “political data systems and services maintained and enhanced to effectively assist state affiliates political programs.”
- During his 1999 Keynote Remarks at the 1999 NEA Representative Assembly, NEA President Bob Chase specifically singled out NEA State affiliates for their role in Senate campaigns: “You know, I’ve been waiting eight months to say this: NEA-New York, you did the whole country a favor by helping to defeat Al D’Amato and replacing him with Chuck Schumer. Thank you! Thank you North Carolina Association of Educators for giving the boot to Lance Faircloth and electing Senator John Edwards. Jesse Helms, you’re next!”
- Chase went on to congratulate the NEA on its role in Congressional Elections. “For Congress, we supported pro-public education stalwarts in the Democratic Party – the folks who have helped Bill Clinton become the best ‘education president’ in history.”
- “In 2000, the NEA raised dues by \$5 to create a predesignated fund for countering attacks on public education and to better promote the good things happening in public schools. (NEA Bylaw 2-7.n). Sixty percent of the funds raised by this increase will go to help NEA state affiliates fight back against the proposals to enact private school tuition vouchers and other attacks on public schools. The rest of the funding will finance new media campaigns to help create a better image for public education and the men and women who work in America’s public schools.” **(All of these expenditures are wholly nonchargeable.)**
- “From this newly enacted member dues special assessment of \$12.5 million for its ‘Contingency Fund’ the NEA will contribute substantially to defeat the tuition voucher initiatives in various states.”

- The following political expenditures were made from the contingency fund in 1999-00:
 - ▶ \$500,000 to support Arizona's Proposition 301, which would increase school funding through a hike in the state sales tax.
 - ▶ \$450,000 to support Washington's Initiative 732, which would ensure annual cost-of-living adjustments to teachers salaries.
 - ▶ \$350,000 to fight Massachusetts Question 4, which would reduce state income taxes, and to fight Question 6, which would reduce related taxes and fees.
 - ▶ \$25,000 to oppose Arkansas' Amendment 4, which would reduce the state sales tax.
 - ▶ \$5,000 to support South Dakota's Amendment E, which would allow for the investment of the states 'permanent school fund' – an endowment created by sale and leasing of state-owned lands – in higher-yield, higher-risk securities.

Evidence of Extensive Political Activity by the NEA in Washington State

- May 17, 1995: Letter from Sondra Williams (NEA West) to Kris Hanselman and Bob Maier at the Washington Education Association (WEA). Discusses political strategy session for “planning, preparation and implementation of two broadly-based, unified strategic plans for at least the next eighteen months for dealing with legislative and political issues.”

The discussion included political races in Washington state including the governor; congressional; legislative; other statewide races; ballot initiatives; and the Presidential race.

The two-pronged plan: “The first prong must be to develop an internal plan to educate, agitate and ultimately mobilize the WEA membership and their families to follow the organization's recommendations of support or opposition on issues and candidates. The second prong is to develop a complimentary plan for an external campaign that addresses the need to cooperate and coalesce with other groups at the state level. This coalition approach is necessary to raise the funds and develop the campaign(s) needed for elections in both 1995 and 1996.

“The ‘external’ proof should also include plans to organize and mobilize communities at the local level for the preservation of public education in Washington. Each prong should be accompanied by a budget and timelines. The WEA should be clear as early as possible on whether it is willing to commit to a coalition both in cash and in-kind and also what is expectation are from NEA. Nineteen ninety six is a presidential election year and NEA staff and resources will be targeted early in accordance with the association's top priority of re-electing Bill Clinton.”

- August 1995: NEA assigned Eric Wilson (a political consultant) to work with the WEA, and the WEA placed him on their existing Initiative and Political Action Work Team.
- September 8, 1995: Letter from WEA Executive Director to Nelson Okino at NEA requesting financial assistance. Then-Executive Director Seibert complains that the number of members contributing to the Political Action Committee has declined from 44,785 to 9,756.
- October 6, 1995: WEA Executive Director met “with Nelson Okino and Bob Chase regarding financial assistance for initiative work. GR requests a total strategic plan that incorporates all activities relating to Election 1996 including initiatives and electoral politics.”

- October 1995: Seibert reported to the WEA Board, "The NEA has developed, with the input of state affiliates including the WEA, an extensive plan for a joint campaign in 1996 to elect pro-public education candidates at all levels of government from school boards to the White House. Several WEA leaders and staff have been briefed on Campaign 96 and WEA will need to develop its own state version of the campaign together with local and council leaders and staff. Washington has been designated by NEA as a targeted state in the race for the White House."
- December 11, 1995: Meeting including WEA staff/managers and Eric Wilson -NEA with consultant (Les Francis) to discuss planning and strategy for the initiative campaigns.
- February 5, 1996: Letter from Kris Hanselman and Rod Regan to WEA President; WEA Vice President and WEA Executive Director requesting immediate staffing for political work. "First, the anti-initiatives effort will need a significant field operation which only the WEA, because of its existing statewide infrastructure, will be able to deliver. Second, the WEA will want to provide this field operation because it gives us an opportunity to reconnect with our members on political issues which they care about: Initiatives 173 and 177."

The immediate needs were described as five staff. "These five staff people would be assigned to field operations, member education and communications, candidate research, and long-term coalition organizing." The long-term coalition organizing is described as "reassign one WEA HQ staff person to organize outreach efforts to communicate to communities of color, the church community, senior organizations, and the business community."

- March 8, 1996: WEA's executive director, Jim Seibert, (who was on the NEA payroll) wrote to Uniserv Council Presidents about the WEA's campaign plan for the year. His letter outlined staff reassignments for political work that would take place in preparation for the elections.

Seibert's letter describes this as an ambitious political plan. "It is an ambitious plan requiring a significant commitment of Association resources both financial (\$1.5 million) and human (25/30 full time by September)." Of course, Seibert's statements did not take into account his own work or that of the other highly paid union officials who coordinated the political activity. Nor did his letter reflect the impact of part-time staff and year-round activities. Even so, by conservative, estimates the 1996 staff costs in his letter meant expenses in excess of \$300,000.

- April 4, 1996: Seibert wrote to the NEA Western Regional Director and the NEA Government Affairs Director-WEST. He asked for \$400,000 from the NEA to fight two initiatives – Initiative 173, school vouchers, and I-177, Charter Schools. In his letter he stated, "NEA and the Democratic Party have identified Washington as a target state for the reelection of President Clinton. Additionally, WEA is facing a hotly contested Governor's race, a wide open contest for Superintendent of Public Instruction, a struggle to maintain a one vote Democratic majority in the state Senate, the challenge of reducing the two to one Republican majority in a conservative anti-public education state House of Representatives, six additional statewide office races and the hope of reclaiming at least a few of the six seats in Congress lost to Republicans in 1994. We are requesting NEA provide an additional \$257,763 to assist WEA with a coordinated campaign."

Seibert went on to state, "NEA staff has been directly involved and fully informed of the planning of WEA's campaign for the 1996 elections. We have endeavored to keep NEA

informed on every aspect of our plans and this request for financial assistance is consistent with information we have shared with NEA staff and managers on a continuing basis.”

- April 9, 1996: The Western NEA Government Affairs Director wrote to Seibert and included an NEA assessment of the campaign to defeat Initiatives 173 and 177. What is remarkable is the level of NEA involvement in a state initiative campaign. “Finally as Fieldman Research for Campaign ‘96 has shown, members unite around issues, not partisan labels or necessarily even candidates.... Both the WEA and NEA have been involved in strategy and planning.... The NEA will serve as an on-going advisor to the Management Committee of the ‘No on 173/177’ campaign.... “The NEA has been welcomed and included in the campaign planning, to date. This recommendation is based upon an agreement with the affiliate that NEA will be included in the planning and strategy of all phases of the campaign and will serve as a consultant to the Association and advisor to the external campaign management team.”
- April 24, 1996: Letter from Don Cameron to NEA Executive Committee recommending, “that the NEA Executive Committee recommend to the Board of Directors that up to \$250,000 be allocated from the NEA contingency fund for the purpose of assisting the Washington Education Association in defeating the two statewide initiatives on the ballot in November 1996.”
- May 1996 WEA RA Speech by Executive Director Jim Seibert. “Between now and Election Day, the education community—including the WEA—must set aside many of our routine and traditional activities and focus our energies and resources on electing officials who share our vision for public education. We also must defeat those candidates and initiatives that ultimately could destroy the institution of public education.”
- June WEA Board Meeting
 - ▶ Communication Division: “Writing, graphic design, PR consultation, media relations and many other tasks are occupying virtually every member of the Communications Division as they serve on the Political Action and Initiatives work Team and/or contribute to projects. The Division is taking seriously WEA’s designation of the 1996 elections as top priority and has temporarily suspended some routine activities, among them video production and the annual WEALA Communications School.”
 - ▶ Instruction/Human Resource: “Staff has been assigned on a temporary basis to the Initiatives Work Team and will serve full time in that position until after the November election. Staff assignments have been shifted so that no program losses will occur.”
 - ▶ Technology and Research Division: “Research Division staff continue to serve on and provide support to the WEA Political Action Work Team.”
- July 24, 1996 WEA-PAC Board Meeting Minutes: Kris Hanselman “distributed the Election ‘96 Campaign WEA/UniServ Council Planning Worksheet and reported on how it will be used by the membership.

“The following staff assignments have been made for the Political Action Program this fall: Maureen Ramos and Debbie Rose (assigned to Spokane, Eastern Washington, North-Central and

Mid-State): David Struthers (assigned to Lower Columbia, Vancouver and Riverside); Gary King (assigned to Chinook and the Bergeson campaign); Linda Pearn (assigned to the Tacoma area); Peter Aiau (assigned to Seattle, Sammamish and Mercer Island) and Judy Hartman (assigned to Cascade). Staff training for political action staff is July 29-31, 1996.

“The following headquarters staff members have been assigned to assist with the campaigns this fall: Paula Malone, Eddie Westerman, Frieda Takamura, Rod Regan, Paige Foy and Rosemary Wolfe.”

- July 25, 1996 Board of Directors Meeting: “The three lobbyists will begin working part time on political assignments through the General Election. Bob Maier will be working with the Seattle Education Association and Sammamish Uniserv Council. Judy Hartmann will be working with the Cascade Uniserv Council. Karen Davis will be the WEA contact for the gubernatorial election.”
- September 2, 1996: The NEA gave the WEA \$250,000 to fight two initiatives, however, the \$250,000 never showed up in any NEA accounting documents. Again, this shows the near impossibility of accurately determining the correct amount of expenditures for challengers. Following is a summary of a letter from NEA Executive Director Don Cameron, to Evelyn Temple, Assistant Executive Director.

“Rather than tapping the contingency fund for the remaining \$250,000, the Executive Committee, agreed to fund that amount directly from year-end accruals in the 1995-96 budget. Consequently, it will not be necessary to go to the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors for contingency fund approval. Evelyn [Evelyn Temple], please send the \$250,000 to WEA as appropriate. I am forwarding Nelson’s memo [Okino-NEA Western Region] of August 26 to you for your records. Contact Wayne Diviney to determine which 1995-96 budget accounts to tap.”

- September 14, 1996 WEA/ESP Executive Committee: “Jim Seibert discussed general reengineering concepts but pointed out that few details are known because the major focus of the WEA presently is directed toward the defeat of Initiatives 173 and 177 and upcoming legislative races.”
- September 20-21 Board Meeting:
 - ▶ Learning & Instruction Report. “Two of our four full-time Level 5 staff have been assigned on a temporary basis to the Initiatives Work Team and will serve full time in that position until after the November election.”
 - ▶ Government Relations. “The three WEA lobbyists continue to work part time on political assignments as part of our involvement with recommended legislative candidates and our efforts to defeat the two education initiatives. Staff are spending time helping their assigned councils develop information on recommended candidates and their opponents, and planning GOTV activities for the primary and general elections.

- October 1997: A letter from NEA Attorneys Robert Chanin and Richard B. Wilkof to the Washington State Public Disclosure Commission stating, "...one of the many reasons that WEA and other associations affiliate with NEA is to obtain financial and other types of assistance on an as-needed basis. In this regard, one type of financial assistance provided by NEA is to assist state affiliates participating in referenda and ballot initiatives. Any state affiliate, such as WEA, can request financial assistance from NEA for this purpose."

This well-ordered and successful political activity would be something to admire were it not for the fact that it is funded by many unwilling teachers and other union members.