

Now we are one

Sometime around mid-afternoon, April 1, 2000, the Montana Education Association and Montana Federation of Teachers will effectively merge.

To arrive at this point has not been an easy, uneventful journey. But it has been exciting and extraordinarily rewarding. We have no space here to write the history and expectations of our new union, but to summarize:

Two years ago this spring, after several years of merger talk and action, the MEA Delegate Assembly and MFT Officers' Convention, meeting separately, overwhelmingly adopted a constitution for a merged organization.

At that time, we hoped our two national affiliates, NEA and AFT, would likewise lock themselves into a merger commitment and embrace MEA-MFT in one fell swoop. Unfortunately, in the summer of '98, national merger efforts collapsed at the NEA Representative Assembly.

A dark moment

To be blunt, it was a dark moment. Merger critics and fellow-traveling skeptics ruled.

Fortunately, when push came to shove, neither national affiliate really wanted to indefinitely or permanently crash our made-in-Montana merger.

Both recognized, respected, and valued our grassroots determination to pursue a merged union identity and purpose specific to our members and our issues right here in our place. Consequently, both national affiliates developed separate, but similar, guidelines for state affiliate mergers. MEA-MFT successfully meets the guidelines for each.

Nothing now stands in our way. Once delegates to our first annual MEA-MFT Representative Assembly in Missoula March 31-April 1 nominate officers, create governance districts, and adopt dues and a budget, they will have implemented the enabling provisions of the MEA-MFT Constitution. The deal will be done.

We represent the future

We are not alone. Come September 1, the date NEA and AFT officially recognize our new union, there will be three of us. Minnesota merged in 1998;

Montana; and Florida, which will merge on our heels.

We believe the three of us represent the future. We are as diverse as three states in the NEA and AFT families could be. Yet we have all come to the same logical, progressive, irrefutable conclusion – in these perilous times of anti-government, anti-public education, anti-public employee fervor, united is better.

Other states will follow. In time, a dozen or more.

And we believe NEA and AFT will eventually climb on board. God willing, sooner than later. When they do, they

need look no further than Montana to find a possible model to develop both a merger process and a merged product.

Meanwhile, back here

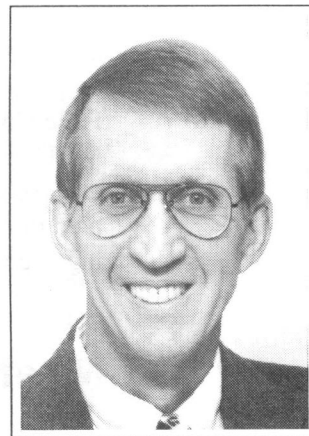
in Montana, we have a union of work to do. Our constitution outlines what we are about. Delegates to our first representative assembly will graft flesh to bone. Shortly thereafter, members will elect state officers and a board of directors. Once elected, governance will adopt policy and programs. Experienced, talented, dedicated staff will implement programs and deliver quality services to all.

Thanks to all

No doubt, the road ahead will provide plenty of potholes, fallen rock, deer crossings, and detours to occupy our internal energies. But externally, when we are one, we will be stronger, more resilient, more resolved than we ever could realize as separate entities.

Now we are one.

Thanks to all who have contributed time, enthusiasm, and commitment to our merger – an endless list of members, leaders, and staff all over Montana. Special thanks to MFT President Jim McGarvey, MEA Vice President Marilyn Ryan, and MEA-MFT Executive Director David Smith. Without their personal and professional determination and leadership, we would not be one. ■



BY ERIC FEAYER
MEA PRESIDENT

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