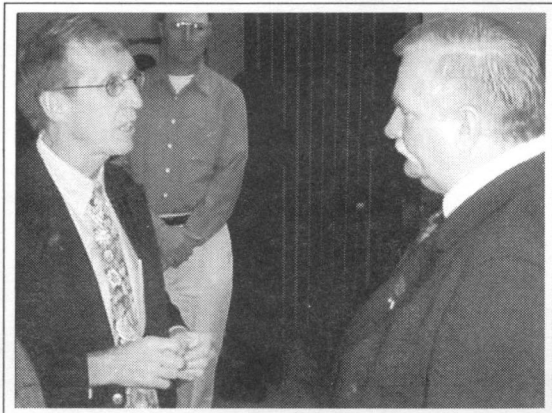


Hope, gratitude, and solidarity

BY ERIC FEAVER, MEA-MFT PRESIDENT



Eric Feaver greets Lech Walesa, former president of Poland (right) following Walesa's speech in Bozeman October 17. Walesa led the 10-million-member Solidarity movement, eventually ousting the communist government from Poland.

Events of the last month beg hope. So permit me to list a few good things for which I am grateful, things specific to MEA-MFT, who we represent, and what we do.

Linda McCulloch, Superintendent of Public Instruction. We have a new public school champion. No fooling, all doubts anyone may have had dissipated in the courageous, impromptu exchange of school funding points of view Linda shared last

September with Governor Judy Martz at the Montana Teacher Forum. You had to be there.

Bob Brown, Secretary of State. Bob wants to improve nearly intractable bad school funding. Bob and Linda pushed through the last legislature two complex school funding bills, one that provides more money now for k-12 and the other, a proposed constitutional amendment that promises more dollars in the future. Of course, we will all have to help come November 2002 by voting "YES" for C-39 that will authorize the Montana Board of Investments to invest in equities a prudent portion of our school trust fund.

Don't you wish all politicians could work together for the future as positively as Bob and Linda? We are enriched by their commitment to doing the right thing. We are delighted that both have long been and continue to be MEA-MFT members!

MEA-MFT Educators' Conference. If you missed this year's conference, you missed the best. MEA-MFT staff, Belgrade Education Association, Belgrade school district, cooperating curriculum groups, keynote speakers, individual presenters, and conference participants hit a rhythm that would

not stop. Next year, October 17-18, Missoula. Be there.

The Educators' Conference may be the showpiece of our historic commitment to teacher professional excellence, but it is not the only evidence. Be it the Montana Professional Teaching Foundation, or Teacher Forum, or Education Research and Dissemination, or National Board Certification, or a dozen other programs we design and deliver each year to provide quality professional development, MEA-MFT remains dedicated to what teachers and kids should know and be able to do.

Judie Woodhouse and Robin Zeal, Teachers of the Year. Each year in the early evening of the first day of our Educators' Conference, we honor Montana's Teachers of the Year through a simple yet sensational reception. This year, Robin Zeal, 2001 Teacher of the Year, moved us with her outspoken dedication to the political necessities of public school teaching. And Judie Woodhouse, 2002 Teacher of the Year, challenged everyone to join her as she addressed our crying need for competitive salaries to guarantee the best teachers possible to present and future generations of public school children.

MEA-MFT public employee members, everyday heroes. In the aftermath of September 11, as we honor firefighters, police, and rescue workers for doing their jobs, so should we honor all employees who everyday deliver quality programs and services in state, county, municipal government, and health care. In Montana, many of these folks are our members. And like teachers, they deliver at salaries far below market.

MEA-MFT staff. Without our incredibly competent staff, there would be no organizing, no membership drives, no professional development, no collective bargaining, no contract maintenance, no member communication, and no political action. Governance gives shape and direction and
(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

leads cheers, but staff does the heavy lifting. Staff delivers.

Solidarity. Our new union will see us through. We are teachers and support personnel in public schools. We are caregivers and security guards at Warm Springs State Hospital. We are faculty in the Montana University System. We are correctional officers and teachers at the state prisons. We are Head Start teachers in Butte, Helena, Great Falls, and Missoula.

We are chemists in the Department of Public Health and Human Services, biologists in Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, historians at the Montana Historical Society, commercial appraisers in the De-

partment of Revenue, and caregivers at the Montana Veteran's Home.

We are probation and parole officers. We work at Flathead and Dawson Community Colleges. We are alcohol and drug abuse counselors. We are telecommunications and computer experts. We are Jefferson, Missoula, and Silver Bow County employees. We teach at the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind. We are nurses, librarians, and archivists.

We are 16,000. We are everywhere. We own enormous opportunity to do better than ever by our members and the government, public, parents, students, and communities we serve.

As our new union – our solidarity – grows, good things are bound to happen. ■