



Committee on Political Education (COPE)

The Committee on Political Education is members' venue to build our collective voice in the state's political arena. COPE builds relationships with political candidates and officeholders and communicates to our fellow members and community allies which political leaders share our values and will fight with us to realize them. We endorse those candidates, we support their efforts to win office, and we co-govern with them when they win office. Last but not least, we participate directly in the political process on the issues that matter to us most.

Helping local unions build strength and increase member engagement is at the heart of how AFT-Wisconsin approaches these efforts. COPE focuses on providing resources and support to help members collectively engage other members, co-workers, neighbors, friends, family, and others in their relational network around political issues. It ensures that locals have the information (including tactics) they need to advocate for worker-friendly budgets and other legislation.

Over the past two years these efforts have paid off. Legislative allies have advanced progressive legislation around issues our members have advocated for, including education funding, collective bargaining rights, and economic equality. After a groundswell of opposition from UW locals helped defeat Jim Johnsen's candidacy for President of the UW System, our relationship with Governor Evers and his appointees to the Board of Regents have assured that the new Presidential search will have representation from faculty, academic staff, and graduate workers—including AFT-Wisconsin and COPE member Jon Shelton.

As we look to the fall of 2022, locals have an opportunity to organize and grow by engaging in key state-wide races centering around the Governor, Lt. Governor, and U.S. Senate. It's important to remember, however, that some of our most important work will begin in the spring. This year especially, school board elections around the state will see candidates clashing over lightning-rod issues like school COVID policy. COPE members are thus building a program that supports local engagement on both school board elections and statewide offices.

Overview of AFT-Wisconsin Political Programming

Strategic Goals

Entering 2020, AFT-Wisconsin had three internal strategic goals. They are listed below, along with their results:

1. Create and Implement a Layered Communication Campaign

- AFT-Wisconsin hired a consultant to work with our traditional and digital comms staff internally to better amplify and engage members and the general public as well as create a layered, online to offline approach for our organizing efforts.

2. Increase Member Engagement and Organizing Efforts

- Hired 4 political field organizers.
- Created AFT-Wisconsin Empower app and recruited 103 relational organizing leaders since August 2020. 219 new AFT-Wisconsin members signed up from August 2020 to November 2020.
- Created a Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 local union Toolkit for members.
- Implemented a vote by mail and early vote (safe voting) program. The program included communication and events to drive motivation around the issues and candidates, and provided trainings focused on relational organizing and the election.

3. Strengthen COPE Structure and Participation

- AFT-W COPE recruited 9 new members and activated 8 previous members from May 2020 to November 2020. Beyond full committee meetings where COPE interviewed 36 state legislative candidates this Fall cycle, 3 working groups within COPE helped build structure and increase the committee's efforts beyond just endorsements.
- AFT-W COPE also helped AFT-Wisconsin build our Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 Political Toolkit with various resources, tools, and best practices for members across the state.
- AFT-W COPE working groups met and developed planning around: candidate/elected official outreach, local organizing efforts, and internal committee improvements.

Partner Organizations

To accomplish these strategic goals, AFT-Wisconsin leaders, staff, COPE, and local unions worked with a long list of partner organizations that helped us push our issues and a broad progressive agenda. Some of these partners can be found below:

- Elected Officials – Local, State and Federal
- America Votes and C4 Partners such as A Better WI Together, For Our Future, WI Conservation Voters, Progress North, Black Leaders Organizing for Communities (BLOC), All In Wisconsin, Human Rights Campaign, Citizen Action, GSAFE and many more
- Candidate recruitment and training with organizations such as WI Progress and Emerge WI
- WI AFL-CIO, labor councils, other labor unions and affiliates
- AFT national, specifically the Rural Task Force and Programming and Policy Committees
- Organizing Empowerment, whose partnership around relational organizing at the worksite and in the community is vital important to our success

Member Candidates

One way we build our capacity to make progressive change is by encouraging our own members to run for office, and assisting them when they do. Over the past two years AFT-Wisconsin members have won in a variety of elections across the state: see the list below. In addition to these members, AFT-Wisconsin boasts a network of elected officials who are part of an AFT-Wisconsin household, politically active members who have run strong campaigns, and former members who now hold office.

- Satya Rhodes Conway – UFAS #223, Mayor of Madison
- Patrick Heck – UFAS #223, Madison Alder
- Lindsay Lemmer – UFAS #223, Madison Alder
- Bryan Kennedy – TAUWP #3535, Mayor of Glendale
- Steven Shea – MATC #212, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

- Pablo Muirhead – MATC #212, Shorewood School Board
- Sherry Jasper – Chippewa Falls #1907 (retired), Chippewa Falls School Board
- Bruce Fischer – McFarland #3497 (retired), McFarland School Board
- Ruth Ludwig – Superior #202 (retired), Superior City Council

2020-2021 COPE Endorsements

ENDORSED CANDIDATES IN STATE RACES 2020					
Candidate	Office	When	Contribution	Incumbent	Won
Jill Karofsky	Supreme	Spring	5000	No	Yes
Nada Elmikashfi	SD	Primary	1000	No	No
Lindsey Lemmer	SD	Primary	1000	No	No
Tyrone Cartic Williams	AD 76	Primary		No	No
Kristina Shelton	AD 90	Primary/Fall	1000	No	Yes
LaTonya Johnson	SD	Primary/Fall	1000	Yes	Yes

Patty Schachtner	SD 10	Fall	2000	Yes	No
Paul Piotrowski	SD 24	Fall	2000	No	No
Jonathon Hanson	SD 30	Fall	2000	No	No
Brad Pfaff	SD 32	Fall	2000	No	Yes
Emily Siegrist	AD 24	Fall	1000	No	No
Steve Doyle	AD 94	Fall	1000	Yes	Yes
Mason Becker	AD 33	Fall	1000	No	No
Kriss Marion	AD 51	Fall	1000	No	No
Deb Andraca	AD 23	Fall	1000	No	Yes
Robyn Vining	AD 14	Fall	1000	Yes	Yes
Nick Milroy	AD 73	Fall	1000	Yes	Yes
Kristin Lyerly	AD 88	Fall	1000	No	No
Chris Kapsner	AD 67	Fall	500	No	Yes
Beth Myers	AD 74	Fall	1000	Yes	Yes
Lee Snodgrass	AD 57	Fall	500	No	Yes
Sarah Yacoub	AD 30	Fall	1000	No	No
Sara Rodriguez	AD 13	Fall	1000	Yes	Yes
Katrina Shankland	AD 71	Fall	1000	Yes	Yes
Emily Berg	AD 68	Fall	500	No	No
Erik Brooks	AD 21	Fall	1000	No	No
Greta Neubauer	AD 6	Fall	1000	Yes	Yes

Federal Races 2020					
Amanda Stuck	US Congress	Fall		No	Loss
Tricia Zunker	US Congress	Fall		No	Loss

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Gwen Moore	US Congress	Fall	Fed PAC	Yes	Won
Mark Pocan	US Congress	Fall	Fed PAC	Yes	Won

ENDORSED CANDIDATES IN STATE RACES 2021					
Candidate	Office	When	Contribution	Incumbent	Won/Loss
Dr Jill Underly	State Superintendent	Spring	10,000	No	Yes

Local and State Actions

Working with our partners, our strategic goals were carried out in an inspiring number of actions and activities, chiefly led by local unions and AFT-Wisconsin members across the state. These actions were not only around candidates, but directly around our issues, including LGBTQ+ rights, racial justice, and the state budget. Below is an incomplete list.

Spring 2020 Political Efforts Around COVID Pandemic and UW System President Search

- AFT-Wisconsin and WEAC joint Wisconsin Technical College System Council [“Safe Return to Work” statement](#), and Town Hall with Senator Tammy Baldwin
- AFT-Wisconsin [State Employee Council statement](#). Advocacy with the Governor’s office around this statement yielded paid sick leave for Limited Term Employee state workers
- AFT-Wisconsin Higher Education Council [“Future of the UW” Town Hall](#) (April 21, 2020), featuring Governor Tony Evers, U.S. Representative Mark Pocan, State Representative Katrina Shankland, and UW Regent Karen Walsh. Attended by over 500 UW faculty and staff
- UW System Presidential search – after an undemocratic search process that excluded faculty and staff from the search committee, strong member pushback led by AFT-Wisconsin higher education locals resulted in the withdrawal of Jim Johnsen for the role of UW System President
 - [Higher Education Council statement on search](#)
 - [AFT-Wisconsin press release on Johnsen withdrawal](#)

Fall 2020 Local Union Election Efforts

- Superior #202, Ashland #1275, UW-Superior #6511 – texting and calling potential voters with partners in Progress North, around Fall 2020 election
- TAA (UW-Madison) #3220 and SPARC (UW-Stevens Point) #6505 – texting and calling potential voters with Rep. Katrina Shankland
- TAA #3220 – Fall 2020 Voter Guide
- MATC #212 – “Facebook Fridays” with Lt. Governor Mandela Barnes, County Executive David Crowley, and local union leadership throughout Fall election cycle
- MATC #212 – candidate forum for all MKE area AFT members, featuring 5 state assembly candidates in the region
- MATC #212 – texting and calling members, potential members, and community around Fall 2020 election
- UWGB #6511 – candidate forum with 3 area state legislative candidates, and a training around relational organizing, Empower, and the Fall 2020 election
- UW-Stout #6503 – “The WI Idea and Rural Wisconsin” forum with WI Farmers Union and Sen. Patty Schachtner
- MATC #212 – candidate forum with State Superintendent candidate Jill Underly
- MATC #212 – texting and calling both members and potential members around Spring Election 2021

- UFAS (UW-Madison) #223 – texting and calling both members and potential members around Spring Election 2021
- TAA #3220 – Spring 2021 Voter Guide
- McFarland #3497 – local school board campaign including candidate recruitment, member engagement, community forums, and voter contact
- A Better Wisconsin Together (ABWT) Progressive Voter Guide, which included AFT-Wisconsin and COPE Fall 2020 endorsements
- AFT-Wisconsin digital efforts – South Central Federation of Labor digital ad program around targeted Madison local elections (McFarland Federation of Teachers for example)

2020 Presidential Election

- AFT Votes Presidential Town Hall with AFT President Randi Weingarten and presidential candidate Tom Steyer at MATC. (Hosted by MATC #212)
- Democratic Party of Wisconsin press call – AFT-W President Kim Kohlhaas as a speaker
- AFT “Public Education Forum 2020: Equity and Opportunity for All” featuring Michael Bennet, Joe Biden, Pete Buttigieg, Amy Klobuchar, Bernie Sanders, Tom Steyer and Elizabeth Warren – attended by Karly Caven (Superior Federation of Teachers #202)
- AFT-Wisconsin Political Toolkit with resources for locals regarding issues and candidates

2021-2023 Wisconsin State Budget Efforts

- AFT-Wisconsin State Budget Member Survey
- Lobbying efforts around collective bargaining rights, salary increases for state workers, funding the tuition freeze (Representatives Dianne Hesselbein and Katrina Shankland both use AFT-W slogan “Fund the Freeze” during debate), and funding for educational systems
- AFT-Wisconsin Spring 2021 Local Union Political Toolkit – based on member survey feedback, COPE members and local members created supporting documents and resources for local leaders to use in advocacy around the state budget
- AFT-Wisconsin Budget Kickoff Event – featuring special guests Lt. Governor Mandela Barnes and State Representative Greta Neubauer
- Literature:
 - [“Understanding the 2021-2023 Wisconsin Budget Proposal”](#) (summary by constituency, 3/2/2021)
 - [“What’s at Stake: State Budget Items Proposed for Removal by the Joint Finance Committee”](#) (5/4/2021)
 - [“The 2021-2023 Wisconsin State Budget: Summary”](#) (7/9/2021)

Local Union Engagement Around the Budget

- Superior #202 – member meeting on the Evers budget with Lt. Governor Mandela Barnes
- Superior #202 – Governor Tony Evers classroom visits with local union leaders
- WITC #395 – Budget Forum (for members and potential members) with State Senator Janet Bewley
- UFAS #223 – State Budget Forum with State Representatives Francesca Hong and Dianne Hesselbein, and State Senator Kelda Roys
- Madison College #243 – meeting on the state budget and walking tour with Governor Tony Evers
- UW-Green Bay #6511 – State Budget Event with State Representative Kristina Shelton
- UW-Stout #6503 – Budget Forum with State Representative Evan Goyke
- UW-Parkside #3535 – State Budget Forum with State Representative Tip McGuire
- WPEC #4848, WSP #3732, PERSA #4999 – State Budget Forum with State Representative Francesca Hong
- Chippewa Falls #1917 – leader meeting with State Treasurer Sarah Godlewski around federal and state funding
- MATC #212 – Local COPE meetings with area state legislators on the state budget

- UW-Whitewater #6510 and UW-Stout #6503 – coordinated faculty and academic staff testimony at Joint Finance Committee in-person hearings

Other Political Efforts

- [AFT-Wisconsin Fair Maps Statement](#) (January 2021 statement, submitted to [People's Maps Commission](#))
- UWGB #6511 – [“Open Letter: Green Bay’s Free and Fair Elections”](#) (public petition letter promoting voting rights and supporting Mayor Eric Genrich against right wing attacks regarding Green Bay election integrity)
- AFT-Wisconsin Virtual Townhall and Webinar: “Federal Funding and Your Worksite and Community” with special guest U.S. Representative Mark Pocan
- [“Support and Stand With Solon Springs Teachers”](#) (petition in support of LGBTQ+ students and allies)
- AFT-Wisconsin [ULI sessions](#) on many important issues that connect to our legislative and electoral efforts, from the local to federal level

AFT-Wisconsin Issue Advocacy

- “Reaching Higher for Higher Education” bill package that would fund the UW tuition freeze – support via online petition, local advocacy, and AFT-Wisconsin President [op-ed](#). 2019-2020.
- [Letter](#) opposing C3 partner WI Voices’ [antiunion actions](#). November 13, 2020.
- [Press conference](#) on the [Economic Bill of Rights](#) sponsored by State Representatives Francesca Hong and Kristina Shelton. AFT-Wisconsin President Kim Kohlhaas spoke, and was joined by Reps. Melissa Agard, Chris Larson, Christine Sinicki, Sue Conley, and Lee Snodgrass; and AFSCME Communications Director Valerie Landowski. March 3, 2021.
- Opposition to AB266, that would have eliminated some restrictions on curricular planning between the UW and Technical College Systems – AFT-Wisconsin leaders sent a [letter raising concerns](#) as the bill was being drafted (March 29, 2021); members testified in opposition May 20, 2021
- [Letters opposing legislation that would prevent transgender students from fully participating in sports aligned with their identity](#). May 25, 2021
- [Letter opposing bill targeting gender identity and sexual orientation programs in public schools](#). September 17, 2021
- [AFT-Wisconsin Executive Board Statement on Waukesha teachers told to pull down antiracist and pro-LGBTQ+ signs](#). September 17, 2021

Public Statements

- Op-Eds
 - Kim Kohlhaas, [“Keep the flowers and give public service workers real respect year-round”](#) – *Cap Times*, May 9, 2019 (support for state employees)
 - Kim Kohlhaas, [“Legislature Must Repair Damage to the UW System”](#) – *Urban Milwaukee*, October 17, 2019 (supporting the “Reaching Higher for Higher Education” bill package in state legislature)
 - Kim Kohlhaas, [“Celebrate National Public Schools Week by committing to fund education”](#) – *Cap Times*, February 20, 2020.
 - Kim Kohlhaas, [“Jill Underly will give all students a chance to succeed”](#) – *Cap Times*, April 2, 2021.
 - Neil Kraus (UWRF #6504) and Jon Shelton (UWGB #6511, AFT-Wisconsin VP for Higher Education), [“As a new academic year begins, the state should recommit itself to the Wisconsin Idea”](#) – *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 10, 2021
- [“Teachers, farmers, activists, business owners call for rural broadband investment”](#) – Joint Press Release and Op-Ed September 29, 2020 – by AFT-Wisconsin, WI Farmers Union, IBEW, Progress North
- [Press releases](#) advocating for UW System, Black Lives Matter, the state budget, and more
- Racial justice advocacy:

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- Kim Kohlhaas letter to members after the killing of George Floyd. Excerpt: “Those of us in the labor movement have an important role to play. Racial inequality and economic inequality go hand in hand, and we have to fight both to make progress on either.”
- Wisconsin organizations in support of Black Lives [resources page](#).
- [Press release following the verdict in the Derek Chauvin trial](#).
- [AFT-Wisconsin Executive Board Statement on Waukesha teachers told to pull down antiracist and pro-LGBTQ+ signs](#).
- Members quoted in press stories:
 - Jon Shelton (UWGB #6511, AFT-Wisconsin VP for Higher Education) in October 25, 2019 *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*: “[Ray Cross to retire after five years leading UW System, 42 years in higher education](#)”
 - Jon Shelton (UWGB #6511, AFT-Wisconsin VP for Higher Education) in May 7, 2020 *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*: “[UW System leader calls for academic cuts, layoffs, online advances to survive in post-pandemic world](#)”
 - Kate Diamond and Dianne Farsetta (UFAS #223) in April 13, 2020 *Cap Times*: “[Working off-campus, UW staff request delay on title, pay review discussions](#)”
 - Alejandra Canales (TAA #3220) in June 6, 2020 *Cap Times*: “[UW staff demand improved pandemic response to job insecurity, health insurance](#)”
 - Hanna Eldridge (UFAS #223) in January 27, 2021 *Cap Times*: “[One More Campaign: Tommy Thompson Leads the UW System at a Critical Time](#)”
 - Kim Kohlhaas in February 9, 2021 *Wisconsin Examiner*: “[What you need to know about the candidates in the 7-way school superintendent primary](#)”
 - Jon Shelton (UWGB #6511, AFT-Wisconsin VP for Higher Education) in February 18, 2021 *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*: “[As COVID-19 vaccines roll out, Thompson sets goal of 75% of courses in person on UW campuses in fall](#)”
 - Jeff Myers (WSP #3732) and Karly Caven (SFT #202) in March 2, 2021 *Wisconsin Examiner*: “[Public employees seek a voice at work that they’ve lacked for 10 years](#)”
 - Jon Shelton (UWGB #6511, AFT-Wisconsin VP for Higher Education) in May 5, 2021 *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*: “[If we started from scratch, is this the way we'd structure the UW System? A leading Wisconsin Republican doesn't think so](#)”
 - Jon Shelton (UWGB #6511, AFT-Wisconsin VP for Higher Education) in August 2, 2021 *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*: “[This is madness!: Between politics and public health, UW schools work to adapt for fall](#)”