

July 23, 2024

Dear Becky,

Hope all is well with you. I'm writing to urge you to reconsider the lockout of NEA employees represented by NEASO.

I'm not familiar with any of the details of the current NEA-NEASO bargain and I imagine that there might be NEASO positions that I would disagree with. And having been an NEA Board member and also having participated in bargaining from the WEA Board side of our most recent bargain with our staff union, I know that negotiations with staff who often enjoy better wages and working conditions than many of our members can be difficult and tricky.

From the six years that I spent on the NEA Board, I am also well aware that NEA has long been more than just a union. Our central role in Democratic Party politics and our many corporate entanglements put a variety of pressures on you as our president and create interests and contradictions that go well beyond wages, benefits, and working conditions. I'm not writing to tell you that NEASO is right and NEA is wrong, or to berate you about "union values."

I'm writing to say that I think NEA has lost its way when it locks out its employees and says that it's for the benefit of our members. None of my members benefit in any way from a lockout. We've lost sight of the fact that the only real power that labor has is withholding that labor, while we in management have nothing to lose but our equivalent of corporate profits. Yes, the NEASO strike was strategic and meant to disrupt RA. Yes, it led to the president canceling his speech. But, as intoxicating as it is to rub shoulders with the ruling elite, we shouldn't forget that our staff will always be much more on our side than any president will ever be. Not getting to hear from Joe Biden in Philadelphia was surely a disappointment, but it does not warrant taking away our colleagues' wages and health insurance. The NEASO picket was meant to apply pressure at the bargaining table, and it may have weakened our power in the Democratic Party, but it didn't prevent anyone from paying their mortgage or from getting their insulin. It is important for us on the management side to negotiate a contract that is a responsible use of our members' dues, but a lockout is a tactic provided by a governing class that has always been hostile to labor, meant to bust solidarity and take away the only power that labor has. RA is certainly important to those of us in the NEA political class, but the overwhelming majority of our members never have and never will go to RA. But all of us will ultimately feel the effects of a damaged and demoralized staff.

I very much hope you will end the lockout now. It's mean and it is materially hurting people who are dedicated to our members. And as bad as that is, the spiritual damage it is doing to you and the rest of us in NEA leadership is probably worse.

Sincerely,

Bill Lyne
President, United Faculty of Washington State
WEA Board Member
Former NEA Board Member