

## Larry Sand: Time for a representative teachers union

By [LARRY SAND](#)

2013-09-18 14:42:39

### Political pandering?

A 2005 internal NEA [survey](#), consistent with earlier ones, found that members of the National Education Association "are slightly more conservative (50 percent) than liberal (43 percent) in political philosophy." However, their dues overwhelmingly favor left-wing causes.

As we begin a new [school](#) year, it's a good time to examine the relationship that teachers have with their unions. Much has been written about these powerful entities. A strong case has been made that they rarely act in the best interests of children because of their vehement opposition to reform – teacher accountability, [vouchers](#) and charter schools – and their advocacy for seniority and tenure. The unions, of course, claim to represent teachers, but their support is costly and anything but universal.

In a tribute to Labor Day, the California Teachers Association erected a web page as a paean to the labor movement, the ironic title of which is “Organized Labor – Proud and Free.”

Free? Hardly.

A union's political might exists only because of the coerced generosity of its membership. Since 2000 CTA has spent over \$290 million on candidates and causes, making it the biggest political spender in the state by far.

In California, teachers are forced to pay union dues as a condition of employment and, on average, fork up over \$1,000 to state, national and local affiliates. In 2012-2013, teachers gave \$647 to CTA, \$180 to the National Education Association and the rest to their local affiliates. CTA claims that 34.6 percent – or about \$224 – of a teacher's dues share goes to politics.

CTA president Dean Vogel recently claimed that the union's membership is about two-thirds Democrat. But for an organization that is supposed to represent all teachers, he doesn't explain why none of his union's lavish political gifts go to conservative candidates or causes. Since he insists that CTA speaks for all its teachers, why not respect right-leaning members by using their dues to fund conservative efforts? The union does not poll its members on how it spends its political money, nor does it care that many of its members are outraged by its spending choices. It's the 800-member CTA State Council that makes these political decisions and, as a body, its politics run way to the left of the average teacher.

In 2008, CTA fought to successfully defeat Proposition 4, a measure prohibiting abortion for minors until 48 hours after a physician notifies their parent or legal guardian. The same year, the union spent over a million dollars to fight against Prop. 8, which stated that marriage should be between a man and a woman. In 2010, it successfully fought Prop. 23, which would have suspended Prop. 32, the “Global Warming Solutions Act,” thereby imposing harsh environmental job-killing restrictions on Californians.

The National Education Association is no better. The 3-million-strong national teachers' union reports that in 2012-2013, 60 percent of a teacher's \$180 dues went for political largess, with virtually all of it going to Democrats and liberal organizations. According to OpenSecrets.org, in 2012, 33 candidates were given over \$10,000 each by the union. All were Democrats. At the same time, NEA gifts went to left-wing outfits like People for the American Way, Media Matters and the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network. But interestingly, as teacher union watchdog Mike Antonucci reports, a 2005 internal NEA [survey](#), which is consistent with earlier ones, found that members “are slightly more conservative (50 percent) than liberal (43 percent) in political philosophy.”

The good news for teachers is that they have options. By becoming “agency fee payers,” they can withdraw their support for the unions' political agenda. (They are still forced, however, to pay for “chargeable expenses” – those that the union says are germane to its “representational functions.”)

By sending a one-time opt-out letter and submitting an annual request form, most teachers can get a yearly rebate of \$350-\$400 – the amount their three unions say they spend on politics – and have peace of mind knowing that none of their union dues will go toward politicians and issues that conflict with their political, moral or ethical beliefs.

If you are a teacher in the Golden State, the California Teacher Freedom Project has resources that will answer your questions about opting out, including step-by-step directions about how not to subsidize the unions' political spending.

*Larry Sand, now retired, was a teacher in New York and Los Angeles for more than 28 years. He is president of the California Teachers Empowerment Network.*

© Copyright 2013 Freedom Communications. All Rights Reserved.

[Privacy Policy](#) | [User Agreement](#) | [Site Map](#)