

Time for a change!

The next election—less than one year away—will provide us an unprecedented, long-timecoming opportunity to move our agenda forward, or failing that, to fall miserably and inexorably further behind in our mission to defend and enhance public service and public education.

One new governor

For sure, we will have a new governor. But change in the person without change in the new governor's perspective and policies will be no good at all. My last editorial laid out the questions we expect gubernatorial candidates to answer. You may revisit that editorial at www.mea-mft.org/povdec.html.

To rephrase our message, it serves no useful purpose for us to condone or tolerate a gubernatorial candidate who does not forthrightly dedicate himself to support what we do everyday for the people of this great state.

Early next year, the MEA-MFT Committee on Political Education (COPE) will interview and perhaps recommend the gubernatorial candidate or candidates COPE feels are honestly determined to promote quality public programs and services. COPE will be particularly interested in the candidate or candidates who have articulated a comprehensive plan for doing so. Stay tuned.

By the way, MEA-MFT COPE is one and the same as the MEA-MFT Board of Directors—the 34 elected representatives of all our members across Montana.

Just say "NO" to one-party rule

MEA-MFT COPE will remain nonpartisan. COPE will recommend Republican friends of public service and education. But we could not be more certain that Montana voters absolutely must elect a new legislature—a legislature dramatically different from the overwhelmingly Republican legislature first elected in 1994 and then, despite modest Democratic Party gains, re-elected every two years thereafter.

For the last 10 years, every Republican dominated legislative session has been for us a mad dash 24/7 through the valley of fear and disappointment. Yes, we have enjoyed a handful of leg-

islative victories, but nearly every victory was a fourth down, goal line stand.

We have lost one good government idea after another at the hands of predominately majority party legislators who prefer to devalue government employees, besmirch public schools, and cut taxes.

These same legislators care more about slashing corporate property and big income taxes than they do about maintaining adequate and equitable revenue streams to assist the less fortunate and other peoples' children and to provide competitive public employee salaries and benefits.

Once again, read the 2003 legislative voting record we published in the May-June issue of MEA-MFT TODAY. Or you can find the same at www.mea-mft.org/03voterecord.htm.

Now, for the first time in 10 long years, legislative redistricting and a resurgence in the Democratic Party give us hope that with our assistance, Montana voters might deliver at least one house into the hands of a new majority and end uncompromising one-party rule.

Then maybe we can worry less about privatization and outsourcing, so-called right-to-work and paycheck protection, emasculation of legitimate government regulation, and one inequitable tax cutting scam after another.

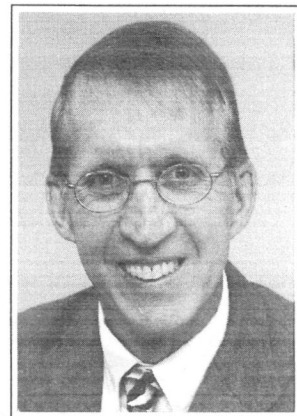
Then maybe we can get on with the work of caring for the health, welfare, safety, and education of all our people. Then maybe we can put some real money into state, university, and school employee salaries and benefits.

The process is necessary, inevitable, and eternal

Not all MEA-MFT members invite political confrontation. Who among us would not prefer to go fishing?

But it is as true today as it has ever been that those of us who work in the public sector are—with or without our explicit consent—subsumed under if not consumed by the political process. We cannot escape our duty to proactively engage and impact that process.

Between now and November 2004, we will make the time for a change. ■



BY ERIC FEAVER
MEA-MFT PRESIDENT

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