



As we join together for our 107<sup>th</sup> Annual Delegates Meeting, I'd first like to thank everyone, especially our newer delegates and officers, for taking a leadership role in our union. Coming together for this meeting, for information sharing, learning, and networking, will help us be stronger as we move together into the future where we have huge challenges ahead of us.

Challenges such as when union membership becomes voluntary due to pending court cases. At that point -- whenever it happens -- there is one important thing union members should know... You and your co-workers hold the keys to protecting your own economic future. You have the power, *if* you choose to wield it.

This is really important. I know many union members disagree politically with each other and with some political positions taken by our union, but this isn't about politics, this is about what we all hold valuable, and despite our differences, I believe there are a lot of values we share.

We value the freedom to come together to support **fair wages**. We don't think people should be paid more just because they are someone's favorite. We believe that if the economy is doing well, everyone should share in that prosperity, and the workers doing the work should be paid a fair day's wage for a fair day's work. We don't begrudge managers for earning a decent living, but we also don't think CEOs should be pulling in wages that are hundreds of times higher than their average worker. We also value our ability to negotiate collectively to try and make wage gains.

We value the freedom to have legal and enforceable **job protections**, in writing in our union contract, that keep us from being employees-at-will who can be fired at any time without any due process or good reason.

We value the pensions we have earned through our hard work. We believe that **retirement security** from a defined benefit pension – one where we know how much we will be getting in retirement – is far better and more fair than a defined contribution pension plan that bases our retirement security on how well or poorly the stock market happens to be doing at the time.

We value **affordable health care** that covers us and our families without breaking the bank. We realize that health care expenses continue to rise, but we don't believe those increases should simply be passed on to the workers. We believe in working with management to collectively find solutions to limit rising costs, and making sure everyone carries their fair share of the burden.

Here's my point... All these things we collectively value, these things that go to the heart of our livelihoods and our ability to provide for our families, are at risk if we take our union membership for granted or allow ourselves or our co-workers to "opt-out" or quit our union.

You see, the people behind the attacks on worker unions, the people funding the "right to work" movement, are powerful people with very deep pockets. They have been waging a war against us, making the case to the public that our wages are too high, our benefits too costly, and our retirement security is unsustainable. While these "one-percenters" try to make more money at our expense, they play this smoke-and-mirrors game trying to deflect blame and criticism and make US the enemy. **They are trying to take away our rights, our freedoms and our power.**

**As union members, we continue to hold the key to our own personal prosperity and our collective ability to push back** to keep leveling the playing field against the elites, corporations and the CEOs – from rigging the system, and having all the money and all the power. We may never have the billions of dollars they have, but we DO have what makes the union movement worth anything at all – people power.

It's really this simple – **if you choose to quit or "opt out" of our union, you are essentially giving up on our people power, and in doing so, you are giving up on your co-workers and all those common values we share and the freedoms and benefits we value.**

We understand it's attractive to give up paying hundreds of dollars for union representation. In the short term, it would certainly be nice to have a few extra car payments, or money to spend on a vacation. But if you opt for that short-term savings, you had better understand the **significant cost to you and your family** over the long run.

If a small number of workers leave our union, we risk losing our strength and many of our union resources. If a greater number of workers leave our union (all it takes is 50% of any bargaining unit) then we can lose our union representation completely, and become at-will employees with no contract, fewer rights, and fewer benefits.

So your decision comes down to risk and reward. Are you ready to risk your livelihood, benefits, job protections and security for a short-term reward? Or do you value these important things enough to say that you'll Never Quit on your union and your co-workers? The choice will someday be yours to make. I hope you choose to keep our collective power going forward.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Colleen Wheaton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Colleen Wheaton, President  
CSEA Central Region 5