

Dear CREA brothers and sisters,

In planning for my first address of the CREA rep council, one of my themes is *Membership in Crisis*. National and local events over the past few weeks have motivated me to reach out to the entire CREA membership ahead of the school year. My commentary is heart-felt, experience-motivated, and based in current reality.

In recent weeks, Union-Busting organizations have ramped up efforts to encourage hard working Americans to leave their colleagues behind and sever ties with their bargaining units. Much of this comes in the form of predatory solicitations with sponsorship from legitimate organizations, most notably *Americans for Prosperity* and the *Freedom Foundation*. David Koch is one of the billionaires funding these organizations and serving as a board member for the former. He is a billionaire and makes some of his fortune by keeping the profit margin for his businesses high. A high profit margin is accomplished, in part, by keeping wages as low as possible. In the simplest of terms, unions get in his way. His solution? Create division in labor unions so they “take care of themselves...” (dissolve.) Want to check one of my sources? <https://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-freedom-foundation-20180628-story.html>

These “worker advocacy” groups pay top dollar for mailing lists linked to professions where unions exist, particularly public sector workers. All of you should have received at least one solicitation this summer. Please, ignore it. They do not have your best interests at heart. They will tell you how you can benefit yourself (financially) by opting out of your union. They will not tell you how it hurts your union’s ability to negotiate a good contract. They will not tell you how it can hurt you, your co-workers, and friends professionally. They will not tell you how it benefits the political agenda of union-busters.

Teaching is and has always been a political job. If you don’t believe this to be true, someone did you great disservice. There is no avoiding the politics of teaching; participating in *OptOutToday* brings you closer to the center of the political quagmire that is teaching.

I am respectful of the fact that our membership sits on both sides of the political aisle, and in near-equal numbers. The executive board is investigating how to set up caucuses in my first term, ensuring all members are heard. In the past we used the expression, “Vote with your paycheck.” If a political candidate is for vouchers, charters, or anything that takes public money away from public school kids, look to the other candidate. Your livelihood is at stake. The dollars used to vet and support political candidates are collected on an optional basis through PACE, the Political Action Committee for Education. We remind members of this all the time, but the anti-union groups are better at spreading fake news than we are at spreading the truth. Fake is easy because it tells you what you think you want to hear. It looks to validate a simplistic view of our relationships with each other across our entire political spectrum. The truth honors differences and the difficulties in negotiating a peace between disparate points of view to enhance all our lives. By being an advocate for truth, I hope bridge these points of view in our collective effort to better our lives as educators and the lives of the students we are charged to protect and prepare.

If you are concerned about what is happening at our State and National levels (PSEA/NEA), good. I am, too. Just like in Washington DC, there are elections at every level, and we participate in that process. Join us at the table with the PSEA house of delegates, I will save your seat. Leaving CREA because the NEA published a website you dislike is like quitting America because you don't care for Joe Biden. How do people "quit America?" Outside of a dramatic move to Canada, I am unsure. Some folks have heard me point out that local elections have more bearing on our daily lives. The same holds true for us. CREA has more bearing on our daily working lives than does the NEA. That is, in part, why the bulk of your dues support our work right here in Council Rock.

To explore additional ways to combat misinformation campaigns that prey on the post-pandemic, exhausted educator, I will be appointing a task force on Membership Recruitment, Retention, and Morale. Ben Lebofsky from Holland Middle has agreed to take this on. Our solidarity is in crisis; we cannot survive in a business-as-usual mode. Ben and I are attending some workshops next week on this issue. You'll be hearing from us.

Finally, I want to thank you once again for your work last year. It was herculean to say the least. As we enter this next phase there will be the loud minority of voices that look to undermine these latest and constant efforts to better the lives of our children. Do not let them take away from all that you have done and all you will continue to do. By my reckoning we are an outstanding learning community, and we should be proud of these efforts in the fights ahead.

In Solidarity,
Mark ME Dolan, CREA President