

MiARA/Union Supporters Get Sworn into Office

The following statement was written by AFT Michigan President David Hecker in his President's Update, January 7, 2019.

Cold and Wonderful

It was rather cold in Lansing the morning of January 1st, but that didn't really matter, Gretchen Whitmer, Jocelyn Benson, Dana Nessel, Education Board members and new Supreme Court Justices were sworn into office. The incredible work you and so many others did paid off. We now have allies leading our state.

Governor Whitmer talked about building bridges with the Republican leadership of the House and Senate so that policies good for public education, working families and the people of Michigan can be developed and enacted. She has made a series of appointments to key positions, people essential to getting this work done.

Her Transition Team involved (many of) us in discussions throughout November and December. That hasn't happened since 2002 when Jennifer Granholm was first elected. Now we look forward to working with Governor Whitmer to move our state forward.

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MiARA Membership Meeting

Thursday, February 28th

11:00 A.M. – 2:00 P.M.

**UAW Region 1
27800 George Merrelli Dr.
Warren, MI 48092**

Lunch will be served

2018 MiARA Newsletter Highlighted Many Issues

What a year. Major headlines from 2018 included:

January: Detroit NAACP Head: Donald Trump How to Make America Hate Again.

February: MiARA Officers attend AFL-CIO Meetings.

March: Students Lead Nationwide Protests to End School Gun Violence.

April: Earth Day.

May: Important Elections Are Coming Soon.

June: MiARA Endorses Candidates.

July: Janus: An Attack on Labor.

August: Primary Results for MiARA Candidates.

September: MiARA Statewide Ballot Proposal Recommendations.

October: National Alliance Urges Change to SSI COLA.

November: Beware the Lame Duck.

December: Bob Sisler reports on Medicare for All at National Alliance Convention.

Trump Shut Down of the Federal Government Ends – For Now

More than 800,000 federal employees were laid off for nearly a month, and thousands more deemed essential, were forced to work without pay when President Trump announced that he would veto any spending bills that did not include funding for a border wall.

And, although they are back to work for the time being after a deal was struck to reopen the government temporarily, these same workers could be facing the same situation again, as President Trump continues to demand \$5.7 billion to fund a wall along the Mexican border, despite Democrats insistence that they will not pay for a wall, instead proposing to provide more funding for border security and technology, programs they say are proven to work, unlike a wall.

The impasse over the border wall affected a wide variety of safety measures and services, including food safety and airline safety inspections. Security and law enforcement personnel, including FBI agents and Transportation Security Administration employees, who were on the job without pay.

A rally outside the AFL-CIO in Washington, D.C. attracted more than 2,000 protesters, including Alliance Members, furloughed federal workers, contractors, union representatives, and others. Democratic members of Congress spoke and then joined the march to the White House. Congress members who participated included House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (MD), Senators Benjamin Cardin (MD), Chris Van Hollen (MD), Mazie Hirono (HI), and Mark Warner (VA).

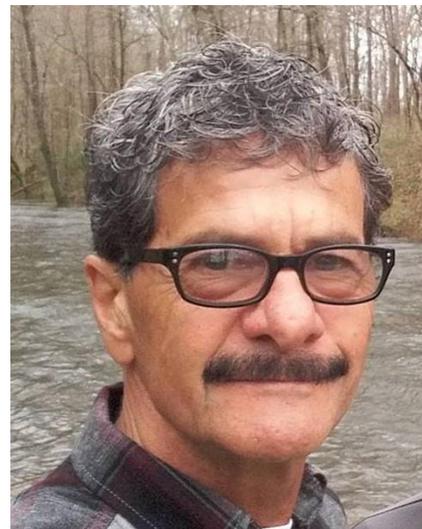
“We support the House Democrats’ bill to open the government, and we want all lawmakers and the President to come to an agreement to do that,” said Robert Roach, Jr., President of the Alliance.

MiARA Activist Spotlight MEA Retiree Tom Bousamra

Three summers as a camp counselor in the 60’s and a year of substitute teaching while finishing his B.A. were two experiences leading to MEA retired member Tom Bousamra becoming a teacher. For a moment before beginning his impressive career, he wasn’t so sure that would happen.

“I thought I was in trouble when the principal at the St. Henry’s parochial school in Lincoln Park where I was subbing asked me to see her at the end of the day. Uh-oh. Turns out she wanted me to sign a regular teaching contract for the second semester in fifth and sixth grades. And the rest, so they say, is history.”

In addition to his experience at St. Henry’s, Tom taught in the Southgate Public Schools, where he walked the picket line with his colleagues early in his career. A layoff sent him looking for another job, so with his wife a now-retired teacher, Mary, and three young children in tow, he ventured North seeking employment, and Traverse City was quick to hire the talented educator.



MiARA Member Tom Bousamra has influenced the lives of his students and the incarcerated and their families.

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MiARA Activist Spotlight

MEA Retiree

Tom Bousamra

Continued

“As a teacher at Traverse City West Junior High, I was on the committee interviewing candidates for a couple of communication arts positions and Tom rose above the rest from dozens of applicants, both on paper and in the interview,” said Kay Walker Thelma, MEA Retired member. Tom did not disappoint. His years as an awards-winning teacher, coach and publications adviser impacted the lives of thousands of students. Countless freshmen enjoyed and understood short stories, classic books and Shakespeare under his tutelage, along with getting the tools to be effective writers.

“I occasionally run into a former student who surprises me with the news that I had a big effect on their formative years. Who knew, right? Recently one told me that she became an English major because of ninth grade honors English and Romeo and Juliet which we moved through together,” Tom said.

During his tenure in Traverse City, Tom’s career-long union activism included involvement at the local, state and national levels. He served as Traverse City EA President for eight years, MEA and NEA Representative Delegate, NEA Resolutions Committee member, and both MEA and NEA Board of Directors member.

Following his retirement from teaching, Tom taught several ethics classes at Northwestern Michigan College, worked full time as deacon at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church and chaired non-profit Family Partnership Grand Traverse, which mentors individuals and families struggling with poverty. He recently formed the Saint Francis Justice and Peace Commission, which is active on the parish level and is collaborative with other churches in Traverse City.

Tom’s teaching has reached far beyond the walls of the classroom. He was assigned by the Bishop of the Diocese of Gaylord to the Grand Traverse County Jail as Catholic Chaplain and he continues in this position today. Why? “It’s good work. The people I lead in worship on Sunday mornings or see in counseling sessions on Sunday night are ready and open to change in their lives. Frequently, in my counseling work there I encounter a former student who is surprised to see me in this other role. ‘Mr. B, what are you doing here,’ they may be saying to themselves. I chide them by saying hey, didn’t you know that Traverse City is a full-service school system? I’m here to help.”

Related to this is a non-profit Tom co-founded and now chairs called Before During and After Incarceration (BDAI), which seeks to provide help to the incarcerated and their families.

When he isn’t serving community members who are facing challenges, Tom alternates between running and swimming throughout the week. He finds time to read, sing with the NMC Chorale, travel, stay active with church and community projects, putter around the house and enjoy time with his grandkids.

Tom continues his union activism by staying connected through the Michigan Education-Retired group. Tom has been active with the Traverse Bay Area chapter and involved members in the “Voters not Politicians” anti-gerrymandering initiative. He knows that being connected to the organization is crucial.

“Being a member keeps me informed on the issues about which I cyber-lobby, helps me know the candidates. I need to promote and vote for, and keeps me in touch with my teaching colleagues.” After yet another session of cyber-lobbying, playing a game of catch with his grandchildren or swimming a few laps, Tom might be seen—guitar in hand—helping to change the lives of incarcerated at the Grand Traverse County Jail.

L.A. Teachers Strike

Members of the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) have overwhelmingly ratified a new contract, bringing to close a six-day strike of over 30,000 educators that took place in the nation's second largest school district in December.

The new contract addresses important staffing and funding issues. The new contract won.

- A salary increase for teachers;
- A reduction in class sizes;
- A smaller school counseling ratio in Jr. High and High Schools;
- One nurse for every school;
- An increase in special education funding;
- A decrease in random searches of students;
- Help for students and staff dealing with immigration issues; and,
- Increased funding in high-needs schools, protection against takeover by charter schools.

The issues brought to light by the UTLA reach across all of America's public school districts, which have seen several high-profile teacher strikes in the last year.

The national Alliance for Retired Americans supported the striking teachers. According to Richard Fiesta, Executive Director of the Alliance, "Last year Alliance members cheered and supported striking teachers in places like Arizona, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and West Virginia, all of whom won hard fought victories that will strengthen schools and local communities."

As in Los Angeles, educators throughout the country are calling for smaller class sizes; more nurses, librarians, counselors and psychologists; less testing and more teaching; safer schools; and, stronger oversight and regulation of for-profit charter schools. States must begin to address the inadequate state of school funding, as well as ensuring competitive wages for school employees.

MLK Day January 21, 2019 Honoring his Legacy

"I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality."

Martin Luther King, Jr



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