

Unions, Democrats promote deal to suppress struggle by Colorado teachers

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The Colorado Education Association (CEA) is collaborating with the Democratic-controlled state government to suppress the resistance of teachers in the state and prevent them from uniting with striking educators in neighboring Arizona.

Last week, rolling sickouts and protests led to the shutdown of dozens of school districts, including the 10 largest, and rallies by thousands of educators at the state capitol in Denver. Like their counterparts in other states, Colorado teachers are demanding higher pay, improved pensions and the restoration of school funding cuts.

Unlike West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona, where teachers confront Republican-controlled state governments, in Colorado the Democratic Party is spearheading the assault on public education. Colorado teachers are among the lowest paid in the nation and the cost of living is driving many teachers and other workers to seek less expensive places to live and work.

During the protests, one teacher held up a sign reading, “After 15-years of living in Colorado I can no longer afford to stay. Eight-years of teaching and my 2017 salary was less than my first year of teaching. The cost of living in St. Paul, MN is 26% less than Denver. I have accepted a job there (in the same position) and will make a 41% increase in my salary. Colorado we need to change.”

During the protests in Denver the CEA paraded several Democrats before teachers echoing their false claims to be defenders of public education. This included current governor John Hickenlooper—a multimillionaire proponent of charter schools—along with Cary Kennedy, another supporter of charter schools who is the union-endorsed candidate to succeed Hickenlooper. Outgoing CEA President Kerrie Dallman urged teachers to volunteer to campaign for

Kennedy.

Jenny, a teacher in the Jefferson County system, derided the spectacle in a Facebook post. “The superintendent of our district cancelled school today, so all of our teachers could attend a campaign rally! Pathetic. So here we have it—The 4/27 teacher walkout / Capitol rally is a Cary Kennedy for Governor campaign rally. It was never intended to be anything more. The two pro-charter Democrats are the enemy of the protestors. Why?”

Since 2008, the Democrats have slashed an estimated \$8.6 billion from school funding. Addressing the teachers, Hickenlooper said during the Great Recession the state borrowed over a billion dollars from the education fund under Amendment 23 and was greeted with boos from the gathered teachers.

“Over the last seven years we’ve put over \$1.8 billion dollars back into the schools and over the last two years we’ve increased K-12 by nine percent. I know that’s not enough.”

The funding scheme that passed the Democratic-controlled House 54-7 on April 20 is currently in the state senate’s appropriations committee and has been referred to the Senate Committee of the Whole. The Democrats control the House holding 36 seats. Eighteen Republicans crossed over to pass the bill.

House majority whip Democrat Brittany Pettersen along with Republican James Wilson sponsored the bill in the House and Republican Owen Hill sponsored the bill in the Senate. The Republicans control the Senate with 18 members while the Democrats hold 16 seats and only one Independent is seated in the senate.

The scheme is a move by the political establishment to pacify the teachers’ anger by increasing per-pupil funding by either a positive addition of funds or by removing less from the education budget for the

2018-2019 school year.

The 2018-2019 school year will see an increase of 500 additional students in the funded pupil count from 870,641 in the 2017-2018 school year, to 871,141 for the 2018-2019 school year. The total program costs will see increased funding from \$6.9 billion in 2017-2018 to \$7.1 billion in the 2018-2019 school year, an increase of \$154 million. Per pupil funding will increase \$172 from \$7,965 to \$8,137.

The meager increases do little to make up for more than a decade of funding cuts. In addition, the deeply underfunded pension plan is opening teachers in Colorado, like their counterparts in Kentucky and other states, to cuts in retirement benefits.

The teacher unions and mouthpieces for the Democratic Party such as the *New York Times* have tried to portray the teachers' rebellion over the last two months as a revolt against Republicans in the so-called "Red States." In reality, these struggles have erupted in these states chiefly because the unions have a far weaker grip and therefore have been incapable of suppressing the resistance of teachers to the decades-long bipartisan assault on public education.



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