

# The Detroit News

THE FINAL WORD

## OPINIONS + EDITORIAL

### Getting free from the MEA

By Rob Wiersema

As the general public becomes more acquainted with stories and statistics about the growing disconnect between teacher labor unions and real life educators, I can't help but think of my own personal story here in Michigan.

As a veteran teacher and concerned citizen, my priorities and interests have not been accurately represented by the National Education Association or its local cohort, the Michigan Education Association for years.

My dues money has been air-dropped directly into the pockets of political candidates. The money has been spent on costly and economically unsustainable collective bargaining practices that, as an economics educator, make me cringe. And it's been wasted on advancing controversial agendas that I not only don't support, but that have nothing to do with education.

In December of 2012 I had hope that the practice of compulsory unionism would be a thing of the past in my state. Michigan became the 24th right-to-work state, meaning that teachers like me would finally be given a choice in selecting an association that best aligns with their beliefs and budget.

Gone were the days of being slung around as a pawn in the high-stakes and big money political game of the MEA. Gone were the days of answering to power-hungry union bosses who dictated what causes my money would go to support.

Immediately I called and sent letters to the MEA. I followed

up with emails asking about next steps. Come June, when I didn't hear back, I sent a letter to both state and local branches of MEA as well as to my school. But the MEA had other plans. That July, union dues somehow found their way onto my credit card statement.

When I tried disputing the charges, I learned the MEA was sending collections officers after teachers like me who didn't pony up.

After an intense investigation into what I needed to do simply to exercise my rights, I finally discovered that I was only able to leave the union during a small, arbitrary, unpublicized, unforgiving "opt-out" period in August.

The process was laborious, convoluted and often misleading. They threw every roadblock at me they could to keep union dues flowing.

That's why I'm supporting National Employee Freedom Week initiatives this week as an effort to educate teachers across the country on the facts about their union membership. According to their polling, nearly 72 percent of Americans support the principles behind right to work.

And that's why I'm encouraging everyone to talk to the teachers in their lives about their options by visiting [augustoptout.org](http://augustoptout.org).

*Rob Wiersema is a public school educator in Allegan County.*