



## Professional Protection and Support, Not a Union or a PAC

By Deborah D. Thornton

“To compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves, is sinful and tyrannical.”

— Thomas Jefferson<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Jefferson, our third President, was a prolific writer and commentator with strong opinions on many topics. I often wonder what he, and other Founding Fathers, would think of our world today. For example, the Iowa State Education Association (ISEA) is a union representing those employed by our school systems. The ISEA claims over 34,000 members statewide, not only teachers but also support staff.<sup>2</sup> It not only charges state membership dues, but also requires, as a condition of membership, that dues are paid to the National Education Association (NEA).<sup>3</sup> ISEA dues for a full-time, licensed teacher are \$368 per year, plus the required membership in the NEA — an additional \$162 — plus local union and UniServe dues estimated at an average of \$116 more, for a grand total of \$646.<sup>4</sup> Jefferson would probably not have agreed with this approach.

In contrast, the Professional Educators of Iowa (PEI), a non-profit education association that provides educator-support services, only charges \$198 per year for a professional membership and does not require membership in any other organization.<sup>5</sup> This is a savings of almost \$450 per year, a significant amount to a teacher on a budget.

What does the ISEA provide for the additional \$450? It provides an extensive statewide staff of over 70 people, based in a state headquarters and 19 UniServe units. The 47 UniServe staff are “on-call to help with individual contract problems, negotiations, membership development, political action, or training activities.”

ISEA also has one of the largest Political Action Committees (PAC) in the state. Though ISEA stresses that its PAC donations are separate from regular dues and that these contributions are voluntary, note that one of the duties of the UniServe staff is to help with political action activities. Presumably they are paid from regular dues. In addition, there are several interesting aspects of the ISEA-PAC Campaign Ethics and Disclosure forms. For example, in the “donations received” category for the December 2009 filing, over \$108,000 of donations were reported in a lump sum as, “Unitemized Contributions...Payroll deduction.”<sup>6</sup> The July 2009 filing reported an even larger amount, \$199,335.<sup>7</sup>

In the expenditure category, \$138,000 in contributions was made to political candidates and committees from January to July 2010. Of that, \$135,000 went to either the Iowa Democrat State Committee or Democrat Governor Chet Culver. The remaining \$3,000 went to Democrat State Legislative candidates.<sup>8</sup> In earlier reporting periods, large (five figure) contributions also went to House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (House District 67, Des Moines), Speaker of the House Pat Murphy (House District 28, Dubuque), and Senate Majority Leader Mike Gronstal (Senate District 50, Council Bluffs), all major Democrat office holders.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, since contributions to the PAC are voluntary and since the ISEA would certainly not be “sinful and tyrannical,”

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nical” in Thomas Jefferson’s words, ISEA members must be 100 percent registered Democrats and 100 percent in support of Democrat candidates. Without checking the voter rolls against the 34,000-membership list, it’s impossible to verify this fact, but it seems highly unlikely. Wonder if the ISEA leadership has read any Thomas Jefferson? As educators, we would hope so.

In contrast, PEI has a staff of only six and no PAC.<sup>10</sup> What PEI offers instead is a much stronger package of benefits.<sup>11</sup> For an educator working with children, personal liability protection is important. The PEI package of personal protection coverage provides \$2 million in protection, including \$3 million in civil rights claims protection. The ISEA member benefits package provides only \$1 million in coverage, and only \$300,000 in civil rights coverage — a significant difference. The PEI coverage also includes \$40,000 in coverage for attorney’s fees in a criminal case; even if a loss, PEI coverage will pay \$10,000 for the case. The ISEA coverage is only \$35,000 and only occurs if the insured is exonerated or the charges are withdrawn or dismissed. The PEI coverage for attorney fees in wrongful dismissal or licensing/credentialing claims is also significantly better, as ISEA does not cover the insured educator for those issues.

Because Iowa is a right-to-work state, an independent professional association such as PEI has the opportunity to present its program and options to our children’s educators, without requiring them to support a specific political party. It would be nice if the members of the ISEA had that opportunity too.

#### (Endnotes)

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Jefferson Quotes, Brainy Quote, <<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/t/thomasjeff122833.html>> (September 8, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> “Who we are,” Iowa State Education Association, <<http://ia.nea.org/about/index.html>> (September 8, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> “Frequently Asked Questions, Question #6,” Iowa State Education Association, <<http://ia.nea.org/about/faqs.html#6>> (September 8, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Professional Membership, Iowa State Education Association, Professional Membership, <<http://ia.nea.org/join/professionals.html>> (September 8, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Professional Educators of Iowa, <<http://www.peiowa.org/>> (September 7, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Disclosure Summary Page, Iowa State Education Association-Political Action Committee, December 31, 2009, <[https://webapp.iecdb.iowa.gov/PublicView/statewide/2010/Period\\_Due\\_Date\\_19-Jan/PACs/Iowa%20State%20Education%20Association%20PAC\\_\\_6086\\_\\_scanned.pdf](https://webapp.iecdb.iowa.gov/PublicView/statewide/2010/Period_Due_Date_19-Jan/PACs/Iowa%20State%20Education%20Association%20PAC__6086__scanned.pdf)> (September 8, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Iowa State Education Association Political Action Committee Report, July 19, 2009, <[https://webapp.iecdb.iowa.gov/PublicView/statewide/2009/Period\\_Due\\_Date\\_19-Jul/PACs/Iowa%20State%20Education%20Association%20PAC\\_\\_6086\\_\\_scanned.pdf](https://webapp.iecdb.iowa.gov/PublicView/statewide/2009/Period_Due_Date_19-Jul/PACs/Iowa%20State%20Education%20Association%20PAC__6086__scanned.pdf)> (September 9, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Iowa Ethics and Campaign and Disclosure Board, Contribution Search, ISEA-PAC, <[https://webapp.iecdb.iowa.gov/publicview/ContributionSearch.aspx#ctl00\\_cph1\\_gvList](https://webapp.iecdb.iowa.gov/publicview/ContributionSearch.aspx#ctl00_cph1_gvList)> (September 8, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Contact List, Professional Educators of Iowa, <<http://www.peiowa.org/contact/contact.html>> (September 7, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> “Frequently Asked Questions,” Professional Educators of Iowa, <[http://www.peiowa.org/about/pei\\_faqs.html](http://www.peiowa.org/about/pei_faqs.html)> (September 7, 2010).

*Deborah D. Thornton is a Research Analyst with Public Interest Institute, Mount Pleasant, Iowa.*

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