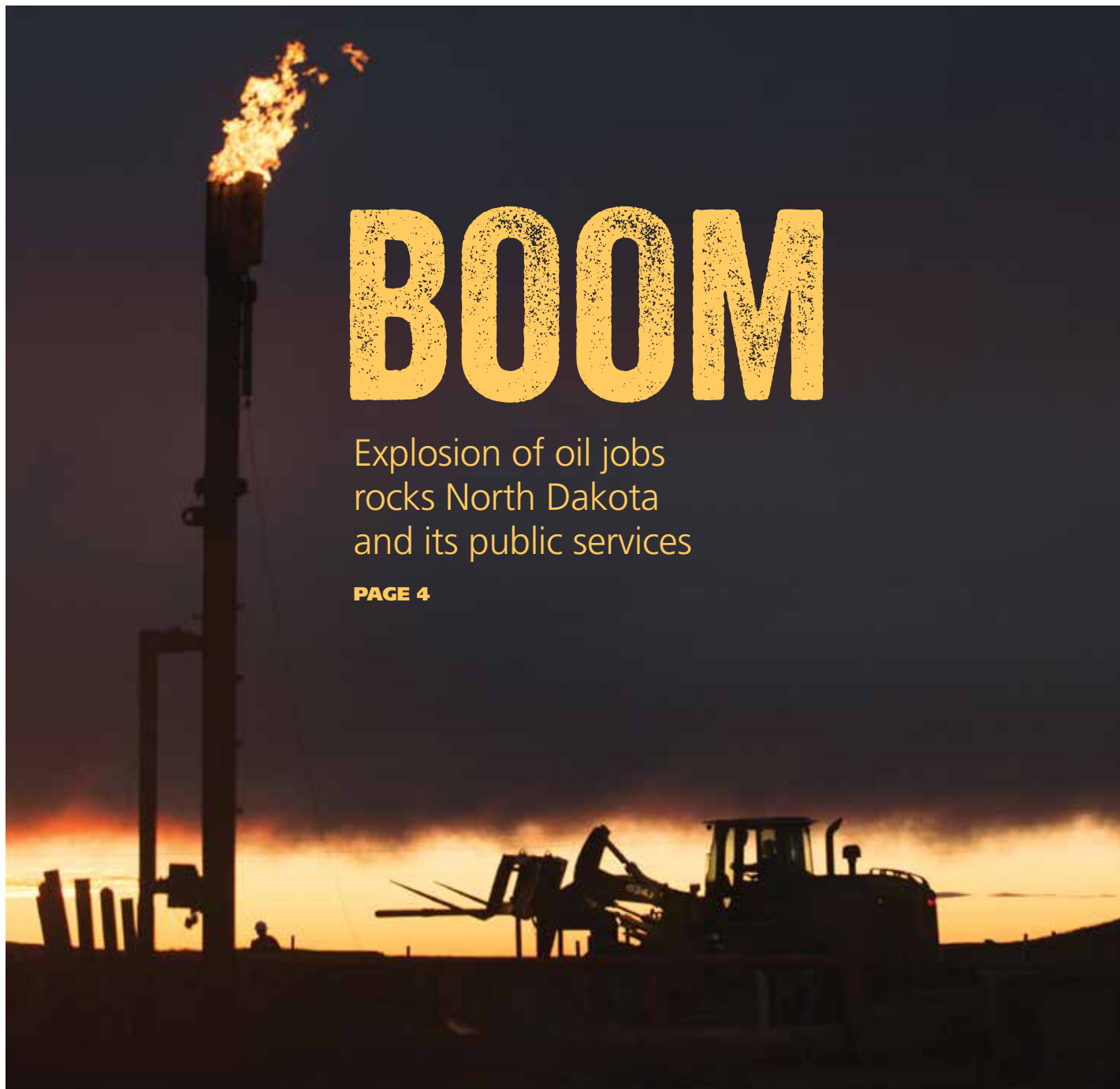




# PUBLIC EMPLOYEE Advocate

THE NATIONAL PUBLICATION OF AFT PUBLIC EMPLOYEES



# BOOM

Explosion of oil jobs  
rocks North Dakota  
and its public services

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AFT candidate wins with shoe leather and positive message **PAGE 2**

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Public employee union shares major prize for innovation **PAGE 7**

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New Union Plus grants help tame tuition bill **BACK COVER**

**OUR MISSION**

The American Federation of Teachers is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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Cover photo: KEN CEDENO

# Positive campaign powers union leader to win in Montana Legislature

IT WASN'T OUTSIDE MONEY or nasty TV ads that carried Jill Cohenour to victory in the hotly contested Montana state Senate race in November. Instead, Cohenour, a state chemist and leader in the AFT Public Employees division, put together an old-school, door-to-door campaign that was long on listening, short on "speechifying," and finely tuned to the hopes and concerns of voters living in and around Helena.

Cohenour, who is co-chair of the division's program and policy council and president of the Federation of Public Health and Human Services, captured almost 54 percent of the vote in her district, despite facing an opponent who enjoyed substantial money from outside groups and wasn't shy about putting it to work in negative campaign ads. Cohenour deliberately shunned such tactics.

"Knocking on doors and talking to people is the way to win an election, and I must have hit about 10,000 of them," says Cohenour, a

Democrat who also has served in the state's House of Representatives and was making her second bid for the state Senate. "People want to know who you are, what your value system is and what you will do when you're in the Legislature."

Montana's energy riches have given it one of the stronger state economies of late, and a big part of Cohenour's campaign involved ways she could work in the Legislature to help invest those dollars in the future of the state and its people, rather than watch it go to tax cuts for large out-of-state companies and individuals. Her campaign showcased the need to fund essentials—from critical investments in the state's infrastructure to making sure that higher education was an affordable option for Montanans.

During the campaign, "I put much more into listening than talking," she says. "People kept asking, 'What are you going to do to keep my life, my job, my community and my school strong?'"

Also factoring into the race was the makeup of state Senate District 42, encompassing much of the state capital and surrounding areas. It's where many public employees call home, the place they work and raise families. "One of the reasons I wanted to run is because the Legislature has been so vicious and degrading in the way they talk about public employees," Cohenour says.

"There are so many people picking up slack [because of program cuts] and then, every two years, you hear about 'horrible government professionals.'" That has to stop, Cohenour says. "I've made a pact to myself that I am not going to allow one thing to be said against public employees without an answer—I'm going to call them on it every time."



AFT leader Jill Cohenour is Montana's newest state senator.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JILL COHENOUR FOR SENATE



## Worth fighting for

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

FROM CONNECTICUT TO ALASKA, Florida to Pennsylvania, our union engaged in the midterm elections big-time. I was proud to stand with our members as we knocked on doors, made calls, talked to our friends and neighbors, and cast our ballots on behalf of our families, our kids and our communities.

As the results came in on Nov. 4, we watched as many of the candidates we worked for lost. It was hard to see but, frankly, upon reflection, not hard to understand.

National elections inevitably turn on the choices voters make between the economy and national security, between hope and fear. This one turned on the economy, particularly people's fear and uncertainty about their future. Despite the fact there have been 54 months of private sector job growth, median family income has fallen during the Obama presidency, just as it did during the Bush (both) and Carter presidencies. As *New York Times* columnist David Leonhardt said: "When incomes, the most tangible manifestation of the economy for most families, aren't rising ... Americans don't feel good about the state of the country. When they don't feel good about the country, they don't feel good about the president, and they tend to punish his party."

According to exit polls, 63 percent of voters believe that our economic system generally favors the wealthy, yet virtually the same percentage voted with the party that is known to represent the interests of the wealthy. Those exit polls also showed that people want more public school funding and a higher minimum wage, yet they voted for candidates who oppose those things—out of frustration or a desire for change, or because they felt the Democrats didn't have a compelling economic message or solutions.

While voters want an economy that works for everyone and not just the wealthy few, in many of the highly contested races

they didn't believe that those we endorsed would get them there. They didn't see that the candidates we supported were the ones who are in it "for the nurse on her second shift, for the worker on the line, for the waitress on her feet, for the small-business owner, the farmer, the teacher, the coal miner, the trucker, the soldier, the veteran," as Hillary Clinton famously said in 2008.

It's critical to remember that, in these elections, not everything was washed away. In fact, in places where voters were given the chance to weigh in directly on their values, they resoundingly sent a message that they are on the side of working families. Alaska, Arkansas, Illinois, Nebraska and South Dakota increased the minimum wage. Massachusetts granted workers paid sick leave.

In California, voters re-elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson over a candidate backed heavily by Wall Street interests intent on gutting teachers' union rights and worker protections. In Pennsylvania, union-busting Gov. Tom Corbett lost badly after battling a multiyear community groundswell resisting his attempts to destroy the state's public schools.

Poll after poll has shown us that people actually want high-quality public services for strong communities. People believe that a strong public education system fills an essential role as an anchor of democracy, a propeller of our economy and the vehicle through which we help all children achieve their dreams.

But we face a new reality where right-wing, anti-worker interests won big, and their No. 1 target will be unions. We know their playbook. We know that even though the labor movement doesn't have the density or power by ourselves to change the trajectory of our economy, we are still the firewall that thwarts complete control of our economy and democracy by the anti-union,

free-market ideologues and oligarchs. And they will do everything in their power to take us out, dismantle our infrastructure, divide us from the community and consolidate their power.

We are going to face some real attacks and challenges, but we can't just go into defensive mode. We faced a lot of these attacks in 2010, but we didn't hunker down; instead, we were solution-driven and community-engaged, and we became a stronger union.

We need to think about everything we do through the lens of whether it's good for working families and our communities. And our job is to keep communities and voters with us on the values, issues and solutions we share.

**We must engage more of our members—because our members are the union.**

We must be solution-driven, by being willing to solve problems, to innovate to make things better, to find common ground when possible, and to engage in conflict when necessary. We must connect with our community and make community our new density. And we must engage more of our members—because our members are the union.

The next few years won't be easy. If there's one thing we know, it's that power never yields without a fight. To change the balance of power, we must fight harder and smarter, and stand together.

We will never stop fighting to reclaim the promise of an America where, if you work hard and play by the rules, you can support your family and ensure that your children will do better. I think we can all agree that is a promise worth fighting for.

# The Oil Patch

FAST FACTS ON THE BAKKEN

## WHAT IS IT?

The **Bakken** is an underground geologic formation containing billions of barrels of oil trapped tightly in shale.



## WHERE IS IT LOCATED?

The Bakken sprawls across western **North Dakota**, northeastern **Montana** and into the Canadian province of **Saskatchewan**. The most productive portion is in North Dakota.

## WHEN WAS IT FOUND?

In the **1950s**, oil companies began drilling in the Bakken, but the current boom started in **2009**, with hydraulic fracking and horizontal drilling.



## HOW MUCH OIL IS THERE?

In five years, oil production in the Bakken has shot up from **200,000** barrels a day to **1.1 million** a day.

■ = 100,000 barrels of oil/day

**2009** ■■

**2014** ■■■■■■ ■■■■■■

## WHAT'S WITH THE NAME?

It is named for **farmer Henry Bakken**, who owned the land where the deposit was discovered.

# BOOM

## Oil makes an impact on North Dakota and its public services

**YOU MAY THINK** that the oil boom in North Dakota is all good news: Ever since a wide swath of the state's western plains was loosened up with hydraulic fracturing (fracking) five years ago, production has gone from about 200,000 to 1.1 million barrels every day. There are so many well-paying jobs, people are flocking to what's called the Bakken oil patch to make more money than they could dream of earning just about anywhere else in the country.

Truck drivers make \$90,000 a year. Unemployment, at 2.8 percent, is the lowest in the nation. The average wage increased a whopping 44 percent between 2007 and 2013. Landowners are raking in revenues from mineral rights at thousands of dollars per acre, plus royalties for the oil. "If you're getting those royalty checks, it's like winning the lottery every day," says Gary Feist, president of North Dakota Public Employees, and vice president of public employees for North Dakota United.

While other states are still suffering through the recession, North Dakota is flush with taxes on an industry projected to generate \$9.78 billion

in revenue for 2015-17. Big Oil is also donating to universities, hospitals and museums like the North Dakota Heritage Center, which recently financed a \$52 million expansion.

Even Feist, a tax auditor who works in Bismarck, 230 miles from the Bakken oil patch, has felt the impact of the oil.

But it's not all good.

### Mixed blessing

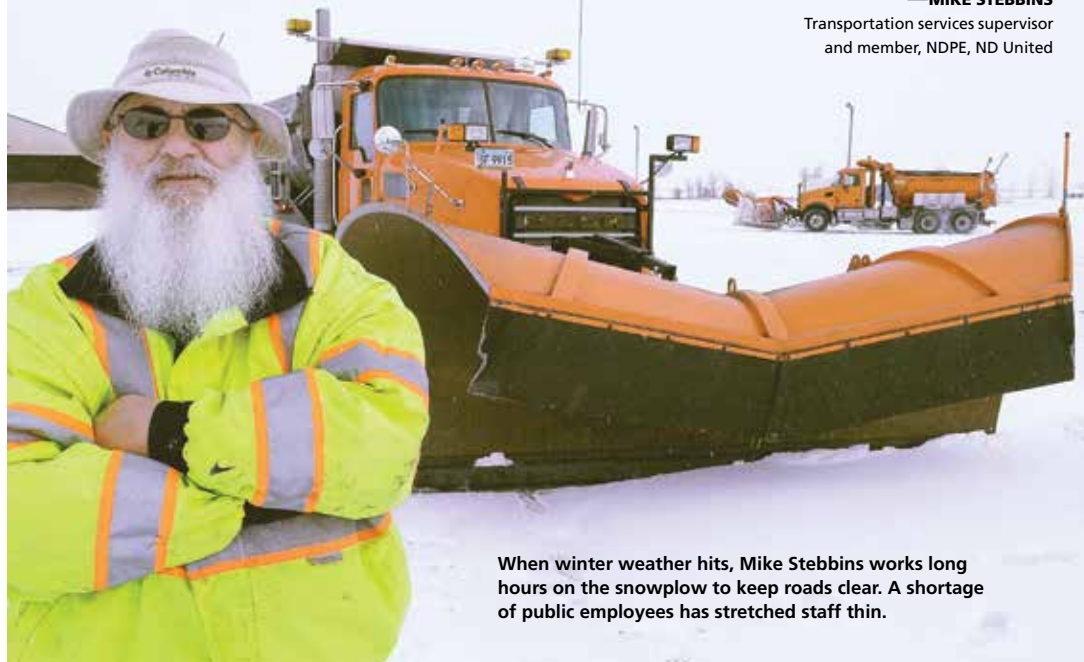
Across North Dakota, salaries have increased, but the cost of living has soared. Crime has moved in with an overwhelming influx of transient people looking for work. Feist still lets his daughter walk home from school, but many of his neighbors are afraid to let their children out of sight, in a state once known for its friendly appeal.

"There's a real mix," says Feist. "People have become millionaires overnight," but "other people are caught up in low-paying jobs. With the rising cost of everything, they are struggling." Rents in Williston, at the center of the oil patch, have qua-

"We're not our rural little peaceful state anymore. ... We've got big-city crime now."

—MIKE STEBBINS

Transportation services supervisor and member, NDPE, ND United



When winter weather hits, Mike Stebbins works long hours on the snowplow to keep roads clear. A shortage of public employees has stretched staff thin.

dripled, surpassing every other city in the U.S. Homelessness has tripled throughout the state. People sleep in their vehicles, at campgrounds and even churches. “There are a lot of people who are not working, and the homeless situation is unreal,” says Kari Shea, an NDU member and occupational rehabilitation counselor in Dickinson. “It’s too cotton-pickin’ cold in North Dakota to be homeless for very long. You just leave.”

And crime is on the rise. One street has turned into “a kind of drug alley” where Shea’s colleague, a worker at the Human Services Center, watches police cuff people on her front lawn. “You just don’t go out after dark anymore,” says Shea.

“We’re not our rural little peaceful state anymore,” says Mike Stebbins, a snowplow operator at the edge of the Bakken. “We’ve got big-city crime now. There’s a lot of drugs up in the patch. We used to watch the evening news and [hear about] somebody getting shot in Washington, D.C. Now it’s an hour up the road.” Reports of violence, prostitution and human trafficking are common.

### Straining public services

It’s tough keeping public services in place, too. Roadways built for farm travel are being destroyed by thousands of heavy oil and water trucks; one researcher estimates fixing them will cost \$900 million over 20 years. Small towns like Dickinson and Minot identify tens of millions of dollars needed for infrastructure like a fire substation, a truck bypass and wastewater treatment. Even in Bismarck, two new elementary schools were already beyond capacity when they opened; they serve many families whose fathers live in “man camps” in the patch, while the children attend school in the city.

State salaries can’t keep up with oil money. “In a town that used to have five addictions counselors, we now have one,” says Shea, noting that the number of people in need of their services has mushroomed. Grafton, 330 miles from the Bakken, had 41 vacancies among caretakers in a facility for people with lifelong disabilities, says Feist. Williston posted 15 vacancies on its city website in November, including ambulance operator, water plant operator and sewage collection foreman. Wages are high everywhere you turn, so competition for workers is stiff. Even McDonald’s is paying its employees \$15 an hour and can’t keep them—at least one location closes at 4 p.m. because there aren’t enough employees to keep it open.

“They’re having a hard time keeping us opera-

“There’s always good with the bad. ... When you look at the bad, you can’t forget the blessings.”

—KARI SHEA

Occupational rehabilitation counselor and member, NDPE, ND United, Dickinson, N.D.



tors out there,” says Stebbins, who maintains roads when he is not plowing snow. When there’s bad weather, he starts work at 4:30 a.m. and continues until 7 or 7:30 at night, he says, for as long as the storm lasts—sometimes several days.

### Spilling oil

Then there’s the environmental impact of fracking. The practice, which involves loosening oil trapped in shale by forcefully pumping a saline solution into the ground, is controversial; some people argue it contaminates groundwater and otherwise destroys the environment, while others say that accessing U.S. oil is good for the economy. North Dakota has for the most part welcomed the industry. It is loosely regulated, and a recent report in the *New York Times* reveals that even when companies are fined, large portions of the fees are suspended. The Industrial Commission of North Dakota has collected \$1.1 million in fines since 2006, a fraction of what Texas, the only state with more oil than North Dakota, collected—\$3.3 million over the same period, for four times the amount of oil.

Doubts are creeping in, however. In October

*Continued on page 6*

## BOOM OR BUST

IT DEPENDS.

### BOOM

**Unemployment** in North Dakota is the lowest in the U.S., at **2.8 percent**.

Oil field **jobs** pull in big **money**, and **wages** statewide have increased.

Residents are **profiting** by **selling** mineral rights and **collecting** royalties.

State tax **revenues** have **increased**.

Some oil companies are **contributing** to **community**, **arts** and **educational** institutions.

### BUST

**Rents** in the center of the oil patch are the **highest** in the U.S.

**Crime** across the state has increased, and **skyrocketed** in the patch.

**Homelessness** has **tripled**.

**Schools** are **overcrowded**.

**Infrastructure** is **strained** and in need of **repair**.

**Public employee positions** are **vacant** and **hard to fill** as oil money lures workers away.

Leaks and spills are **threatening the environment**.

Oil and saline **spills** are **destroying farmland**.

## On the right track

### GPS technology helps officers map a safe transition for offenders

WE ALL KNOW technology has come a long way. From smartphones to tablets to computers, you can do just about anything digitally—pay bills, keep in touch with friends and family around the world. You could probably do most of your holiday shopping without ever leaving your desk. And now, that same technology is helping social workers and probation officers keep our communities safe.

from incarceration to help them transition back into society and keep the community safe. One new way they're monitoring these cases is through the use of GPS technology.

Every case is different, and the needs vary depending on the circumstances, but Vincelette's unit now uses these helpful tools for all probation cases. GPS monitoring assists in tracking a person's movement; helps enforce curfews; keeps registered sex offenders

Vincelette describes one case where an offender who had been incarcerated for more than two decades was transitioning into a residential housing program. This was the first time this person had not been in a full-time staffed housing arrangement, and they were able to use GPS to monitor his movements and keep him out of trouble. "One officer cannot know where every case is all the time" says Vincelette, "but GPS monitoring allows officers to better track all of their cases," and it makes former offenders "think twice about where they're going and what they're doing because they know they're being monitored."

Vincelette and his colleagues have seen the positive impact GPS monitoring has had on their cases.

"Without a doubt, victims and the community feel safer because of the GPS monitoring systems in place in Connecticut," adds Vincelette. So, the next time you fire up your computer, remember that across the country probation officers are using similar tools to ensure the safety of communities across America.

—HAILEY SNOW

**"GPS monitoring allows officers to better track all of their cases," and it makes former offenders "think twice about where they're going and what they're doing because they know they're being monitored."**

—SHANE VINCELETTE, member, Judicial Professional Employees Union (Connecticut)

Shane Vincelette is an adult probation officer II with the Connecticut Judicial Branch Court Support Division and a member of the AFT-affiliated Judicial Professional Employees Union. Vincelette and his partner work along with treatment providers, victim advocates, social workers and their chief to monitor sex offenders after their release

away from schools, parks and playgrounds; and has even assisted in solving robbery and larceny cases by placing suspects at the scene of the crime or ruling them out based on their recorded location. And, even if the tracking device loses service, it stores all of the recorded data so it can be retrieved when the device is back online.

# BOOM

*Continued from page 5*

2013, the largest spill of fracked oil in U.S. history, about 20,600 barrels, began to raise awareness of frequent oil spills and leaks that had previously gone unreported. Some 33 acres of farmland soaked from that spill are still cordoned off for cleanup a year after the incident.

According to the *Times* report, oil companies have "spilled, leaked or misted into the air" more than 18.4 million gallons of oil and chemicals in North Dakota from 2006 through early October 2014. Controversies over fracking in state and national parks have surfaced. Flares like giant torches burning natural gas have been criticized as wasteful and hazardous. And illegally discarded oil

filter socks have focused attention on hazardous radiation waste.

For the many people like Feist, Shea and Stebbins, public employees who grew up in North Dakota, the oil boom is a mixed blessing. Oil impact money, the \$485 added to monthly paychecks for state employees living in or close to the oil patch, has helped smooth the edge off the rising cost of living. Employers who provide a housing allowance, or build housing for their new staff have made a small difference in the housing crisis. New roads to reroute traffic around the busiest parts of the oil patch may alleviate congestion.

New retail establishments and restaurants in Dickinson mean residents no longer have to drive 100 miles to go out to dinner. College grads are finding work and staying in their home state. Encouraging stories from those who have hit it big—like the Arizona man Shea knows who made \$1,000 a day at his food truck in the Bakken—are gratifying. "It's unbelievable the amount of money you

can make if you are ambitious and have the ability to do things," says Shea.

But some folks would give back all of their royalties if they could return to the North Dakota they once knew, says Feist. "I think it's a good thing for the economy, and the opportunities it's provided," he says. "The downside for me is North Dakota is never going to be the same."

In other words, it's not all bad, and it's not all good. It's now being called an "oil play," rather than an "oil boom," signifying that it is no longer considered temporary; and people are adjusting. "There's always good with the bad," says Shea. "You can't sit on one side of the road and say 'wow, what a great thing,' but when you look at the bad, you can't forget the blessings."—VIRGINIA MYERS



GARY FEIST

**PEF RECOGNIZED FOR INNOVATION AND COLLABORATION**

The New York State Public Employees Federation, along with United University Professions, was honored as a first-prize winner in October when the AFT announced this year's recipients of the second annual Prize for Solution-Driven Unionism, designed to highlight innovative, inspiring and collaborative solutions to tough problems. The two New York affiliates were recognized for their successful campaign to save Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn from privatization and to promote investment in the facility and actually expand healthcare in Brooklyn. The other first prize went to Milwaukee Technical College Federation, AFT Local 212, for its solution to lagging graduation and course completion rates. The prize comes with \$25,000 for each of the winners. "These unions thought outside the box and worked with community partners to come up with innovative, and ultimately successful, solutions to seemingly intractable problems," says AFT President Randi Weingarten.

PEF was recognized at an AFT award ceremony, inset, for helping keep Downstate Medical Center open. Strong community support, including large rallies, helped make the effort a success.



DAVID GROSSMAN



RON AIRA

**TIME MAGAZINE COVER TRIGGERS**

**BACKLASH** A recent cover of *Time* magazine, which reads, in part, "Rotten Apples: It's Nearly Impossible to Fire a Bad Teacher" and shows a gavel about to smash an apple, generated an outpouring of anger and activism among AFT members and the

public at large. On Oct. 30, the AFT delivered a petition with more than 100,000 signatures to *Time's* editors demanding an apology for the magazine's incendiary treatment of a major educational issue. "This *Time* cover isn't trying to foster a serious dialogue about solutions our schools need—it's intentionally creating controversy to sell more copies," remarked AFT President Randi Weingarten, who personally delivered the signatures. The petition ultimately attracted more than 125,000 signers.

AFT President Randi Weingarten, "both from the banks that continue to peddle these toxic deals, and from those officials who locked communities into spiraling debt and fees."

**A KNOW-NOTHING STATE LEGISLATOR**

Here's what can happen when voters elect the state chair of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) to the state legislature. In fact, Kansas Rep. Ray Merrick is speaker of the state House of Representatives. In an interview shortly after the election, Merrick said: "Government employees produce nothing. They're a net consumer. And you got that cost forever and ever and ever because they're on the KPERS [pension] plan, they're on all the government insurance and everything."

Merrick's uninformed comments were quickly criticized, including by Yael T. Abouhalkah in the *Kansas City Star*. "Those employees doing 'nothing' are the schoolteachers, firefighters and police officers employed by governments across the state," Abouhalkah wrote. "These are the hardworking employees who make it possible to educate Kansas children and protect Kansas families. That Kansas Public Employees Retirement System you are sneering at? It's something that government employees contribute money to, so they can have a halfway decent retirement. Meanwhile, state leaders like yourself have not adequately funded it for years. Oh, and those employees doing 'nothing' also are paying taxes, buying homes, going to the furniture store, eating out and basically spending money to keep the Kansas economy going, day and night."



BRUCE GILBERT



# Education Benefits



**Union membership** provides a way for working families to increase their opportunities and economic security. That's why **Union Plus** is committed to helping union members and their families fund their college education. Now we have a new program to help you pay down your **student loan debt**.

## NEW \$500 Student Debt Eraser

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## \$3.6 million in scholarships and counting!

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- Computer Savings
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- And More Savings!



A Union of Professionals

**AFT +**  
Member Benefits

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