



For Immediate Release

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Recap, AAUP/AFT Lobby Day, Public Employee Collective Bargaining Act

Held Monday, March 21, Colorado State Capitol in Denver



Some of the Lobby Day participants pose in the Capitol Rotunda before heading home. Kudos to Lobby Day faculty participants Mark DuCharme (FRCC), Don Eron (CU), Tricia Jolly (UNC), Tyler Hopkins (CCD), David Klein (MSU), Kim Klimek (MSU), Steven Krizman (MSU), Ryan Lambert (CSM), Caprice Lawless, Marki LeCompte (CU), JoAnn McCarthy (CCD), Nick Morris (CCD), Melinda Myrick (FRCC), Aaron Schneider (DU), Craig Svonkin (MSU), Mary Van Buren (CSU), Joy Wagner (CCD), and Richard Wagner (MSU).

It was not boots on the ground, but rather Clarks on the marble Monday, March 21 at the Colorado State Capitol. Starting at 10:00 a.m. and continuing well into the afternoon, crowds of ruffled professors with fists full of fliers awaited lawmakers outside Senate and House Chambers. Organizers for the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) had identified ahead of time members of the group whose addresses linked them by district to specific lawmakers. As those lawmakers approached, organizers facilitated instant conversations about the bill that evolved into the lively, on-point, teachable moments educators are known for delivering. A few of the activists reflected on their work during AAUP/AFT Lobby Day:

"Meeting with Rep. Matt Gray gave me the opportunity to speak with someone who can directly affect change," said Melinda Myrick, who teaches English at Front Range Community College. "After years of meeting with people in advisory roles, this was energizing. I had the chance to tell my story, which put the larger problem in context, and, after two years of social distancing and digital communication, reminded me nothing beats the power of a face-to-face conversation and a handshake," she said. "It builds trust, addresses misconceptions, and, in the case of our elected officials, reminds them we are their constituents, and we are paying attention," she added. She and English department colleague Mark DuCharme are Co-presidents of the AAUP chapter at the College.

DuCharme had similar reactions to the day's event: "Lobby Day at the Colorado state Capitol was a great display of solidarity among faculty in support of the proposed collective bargaining bill," he observed. "Although I personally didn't get to talk to a lawmaker, what struck me most was this solidarity: faculty of diverse ranks, from different institutions and from different parts of the state coming together with one voice to support collective bargaining."

"It was enlightening and also disheartening," recalled Tricia Morarie-Jolly, who had driven through the snowstorm to Denver from Greeley where she teaches Anthropology and Social Studies at the Univ. of Northern Colorado. "There is more to do than I imagined, and yet, this is the stuff I am grateful to be made of. I am not going to back away. We have to ask people to pause and realize how interconnected we are," she added.

"I learned about the complexity of the negotiations that occur before a bill is even introduced to the legislature," observed Mary Van Buren. She teaches Anthropology at Colorado State University and is Co-president of the AAUP chapter there. "It made me realize the importance of organizing before that takes place," she said. "I also loved getting to know a great group of colleagues."

The tightly choreographed event signals the level of higher education labor advocacy ahead as the [AAUP and the AFT formally affiliate](#) in June. Just prior to the lobbying inside the Capitol, AAUP Pres. Irene Mulvey and AFT Pres. Randi Weingarten led a Press Conference Roundtable in a meeting room at nearby First Baptist Church. Joining them were Craig Svonkin of Metropolitan State Univ., JoAnn McCarthy of Community College of Denver, Caprice Lawless of Front Range Community College, and Mary Van Buren of Colorado State Univ. Reporters in attendance included Erica Breunlin of the *Colorado Sun*, Alex Burness of the *Denver Post*, and Marianne Goodland of *Colorado Politics*. Later, both [Breunlin](#) and [Goodland](#) filed stories, quoting the two presidents and faculty in attendance.



AAUP Pres. Irene Mulvey (left) with AFT Pres. Randi Weingarten, speak at the morning Press Conference Roundtable prior to the crowd of faculty then moving on to the Colorado state Capitol. Both organizations have made significant investments in the bill, mobilizing staff and volunteers to meet with faculty from Ft. Collins to Pueblo, and, on Lobby Day, to meet with lawmakers from literally every corner of Colorado.

As the Roundtable was underway, intensive training was being conducted in a nearby office building for faculty from eight Colorado higher education institutions who had braved a spring snowstorm and gnarly I-25 morning traffic to get to Denver for the event. Consequently, by the time their Clarks hit that historic Capitol marble, every faculty member had been adequately lobby-oriented, fact-filled, caffeinated, and Le-Mar-donut pumped to energetically lobby.

CCD faculty JoAnn McCarthy, Joy Wagner, Ryan Lambert, and Nick Morris, along with Craig Svonkin of Metro State Univ., listen while Sen. Janet Buckner (D-40), responds to their concerns about faculty working conditions. The final iteration of the bill, yet to be formally introduced in the General Assembly, is sponsored by House Majority Leader Daneya Esgar and Senate Majority Leader Stephen Fenberg. It would give higher education faculty across Colorado the right to collectively bargain for better working conditions, higher wages, and a voice in decision-making at their institutions.



Aaron Schneider, in the checked shirt, teaches International Studies at the Univ. of Denver and is president of the AAUP chapter there. Here he is engagingly discussing higher education with Rep. Dylan Roberts (D-26). In the background are faculty from Metropolitan State University. During the one-on-one conversations lawmakers heard from higher education's front lines about what the lack of collective bargaining is costing Colorado in terms of student learning, student outcomes, and both student and faculty retention.

While a few in the group did not connect one-on-one with their district representative or senator (due to pressing engagements those lawmakers had elsewhere in the building), organizers insist all who participated in Lobby Day played an important role in its success, even so.



“The event was powerful and very useful to our efforts as we continue to advocate for this bill and inclusion of higher education in this bill,” said Umesh Pakalapati, AFT national representative. He and Ellen Kress, AAUP’s national organizer for Colorado (both pictured at left), will be working with faculty across the state as the bill moves forward in the General Assembly.

Check this AFT website for updates on the legislation:

<https://aftacademics.org/higheredco/>

Scan this QR code to identify your local lawmakers, media contacts, and to use the letter template:

[PECB Actions to take](#)

Refer to this AAUP list of links to letters to the editor, related media coverage on the legislation:

<https://coloradoaaup.org/uncategorized/links-to-coverage-public-employees-collective-bargaining-act-of-2022/>

Follow the bill on social media:

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Colo. Gov. Jared Polis (center) met with AAUP Pres. Irene Mulvey (left) and AFT Pres. Randi Weingarten (right) during the historic AAUP/AFT Lobby Day at the Colorado state Capitol.

