Report of the Zone V Director
Sarah Wofford

Words elude me. Catch phrases escape my memory banks. Slogans are non-existent. Today all I have are a few words my Nonnie always said to me when things were rough, "Everything happens for a reason. It may take you 40 years to find that reason, but you will turn around one day and say to yourself... Oh, I see why that happened now and it all makes sense."

For the life of me, this is not the way I thought I would start my first end of the year zone report, but it is. I come to you from my bedroom where I’ve gotten a break from helping my teens remote learn, from the kitchen where I hold staff meetings on Zoom and from the laundry room which is now a make-shift office. I come to you from the new normal....

To my friends, my super awesome Zone V (live long and prosper) humans, this year started so great. HB 2016 passed allowing our members more rights in the workplace. We were able to get unemployment rights passed in the state Legislature for custodians and that was going to be just the beginning. We were getting our foothold again after the hit we took from Janus. We were rallying as a people, an organization and a family.

In September I attended my first AFL-CIO Convention and watched as our newly-elected OSEA President Lisa Gourley was elected onto the AFL-CIO board. It was the first real gathering of our executive team and it was such a bonding experience from flash mobs with Senator Merkley in support of UFCW555 equal pay to marching through the streets to support our union siblings at Oregon Nurses Association. It was a time that galvanized your Board to come back and be better, to rise up and bring that energy home to our zones, to you.

The Zone V meeting was held the following weekend and the joy from the weekend before was showing its flashy smile. We trained new worksite organizers, we studied how HB 2016 could help us in each chapter and we ate really good food. We laughed and of course we took a picture flashing our live long and prosper Zone V pride.

January brought the Leadership Summit which really turned into a worksite organizer/HB 2016 retreat that ROCKED! Oh MY Goodness so many newbies came to that event! There was a new excitement when we left that weekend. We were energized and we were ready to reach out and talk to our fellow employees about the benefits of joining our union family. We were on fire!

February came in with a bang and your Board traveled to Washington, D.C., where we met with legislators to remind them to support classified and to vote to support unions. No more union busting on our watch. There were contacts made for fighting the Freedom Foundation from the top down. Emails went back and forth and it felt like there was real progress happening. Maybe, just maybe, we could right this ship and take a breath of fresh air since Janus.

Then March came. You remember March... You know... That month that happened a dozen years ago, but really only happened just 60 short days ago. Yes, it is still 2020 not far off from March. Really, I swear. March came and changed our lives as we knew them to be in an instant. COVID-19 sent all our students home first and then shortly followed by classified. Suddenly, the world realized what we had always known; classified runs the world. We came back and started making
packets for students. We started packing lunches for hungry kids and we delivered those lunches to the bus stops. Those stops weren't just a drop off of lunches for our students, but a brief moment of hope for them and struggling parents as well. It became apparent there were many holes and inequities, but we stepped up to assist our students and our union siblings. We proved we are a family not just in our schools, but in our union, our chapters and our neighborhoods. We found small moments to share joy with others. We learned how to Zoom and have short little check in meetings wearing silly hats and to have birthday parades.

In two short months, we've completely changed how we live, how we work, how we learn and how we shop. But the one thing we haven't changed is how we care. We show up and we make it happen no matter what the circumstances and we stand together when the chips are down.

I am saddened we will not be seeing each other this year at Conference, but it just means next year will be that much sweeter. We will have so much to celebrate next year when we get to see each other again in person and we get to laugh those full belly laughs that bring tears of joy to your eyes. There are many more days ahead of us where we will need to lean on each other and that is why we have a union family. We will always have each other's backs and be there to pitch in at a moment's notice. We are a family and, while we don't get to hug and dance and sing together this year, I can promise you I will dance and sing and dress up when the school year lets out. I will take a picture and maybe even a video to share with you all... I'll be celebrating a million things. I'll be dancing for all my missed friends. I'll be singing for the freedom of distance learning being completed. And I'll dress up just to make sure my clothes still fit (quarantine baking has not been kind to my hips, but my lips are happy).

I leave you with one last quote my Nonnie used to tell me, "Sarah honey, you can do anything you want to with your hair. It'll grow back and it's never a mistake. It's just a detour." Until we meet again, enjoy the freedom of this detour and cut your own bangs and bleach your newly-permed hair... You've got a 'get out of pictures free' card. Use it! Just make sure to have it under control before fall school pictures — those things last forever....

I miss you all more than a million words. Until we meet again. All my heart.