

Candidate Statement for Mel House

Hello, my name is Mel House, and I am seeking your endorsement for NEA Executive Committee!

Currently, I serve on the board of directors of the California Teachers Association, representing United Teachers Los Angeles. I previously served 6 years on the NEA board representing California. My background is in Elementary P.E., with a Kinesiology degree from Michigan State University.

Historically, higher ed has had to fight for inclusion in NEA programs and structures. It is important for NEA to address very real threats to higher education. I believe NEA must promote higher ed advocacy and awareness throughout our programs and structures. Higher ed *must* have a seat at the table, lest appearing on the menu.

My activism began in third grade, engaging in action against gender-themed stoles for confirmation mass. As life went on and my professional career progressed, I entered union work in typical fashion: I was pissed off and showed up at a meeting. In a similarly typical fashion, I acquired a steering committee position by being appointed while I was in the bathroom. My first four years on the NEA board were season 1 of the current POTUS. I realize that the sequel is usually worse, but I feel I have a unique experience that will be beneficial should I be elected. We have so much work ahead to save the very future of a free and public education!

In higher education, academic freedom is under attack. Faculty are entitled to deliver instruction in a manner that fosters critical thinking, without the fear of censorship or scripted content. Students should be able to debate and discuss, discover or reject, topics that may or may not be controversial. The juggernaut that is AI must be tackled, dissected, and tamed. We must harness positive use and implications, while forming consensus on policy language for application. AI must NOT be used for human replacement, nor the scraping of course content.

In addition, the federal government and states contributing less funding to higher education institutions means more top-heavy administration, and fewer tenure-track positions. The stability of tenured faculty and respect of contingent faculty, contribute to the integrity of any program. We must organize and support our adjunct colleagues who are dealing with a myriad of issues, not the least of which are wage theft and highly inequitable working conditions.

Given the current federal administration, NEA will need to provide guidance to state associations to support, if not author, legislation to protect both academic freedom and tenure.

It is always said: an organization shows its priorities through the budget. As your executive committee member, I will work to maintain or expand budgetary items for higher ed participation in NEA programs and initiatives.

Let me be clear – there are many other issues to tackle, such as the lack of access to higher education due to increasing cost through privatization. We must meet students where they are, as many are unhoused and unfed; choosing between tuition or rent. We must recognize the underpayment of faculty at HBCUs and of women. We must collaborate and share best practices that increase union membership. NEA must do a better job of recognizing ESPs in higher ed, and the dues structure therein. Our collective future is on the line. Let's DO this!