



## Open Letter to TOTEM Members

Last week, the TOTEM Board and APEA Staff (among others) received an email signed by eight TOTEM Members. This email accused the TOTEM Board of election tampering and violating the bylaws. The TOTEM Board believes it is time to answer the accusations directly and transparently.

The letter contained four major accusations and referenced the TOTEM Bylaws, the APEA Constitution and the Office of Labor Management Standards (OLMS). These accusations and TOTEM's responses are noted below. Please note that accusations have been shortened to a readable length.

**Accusation #1:** The TOTEM Nominations/Elections Committee was not composed correctly. According to the Bylaws, *"The Nominations/Election Committee shall consist of five (5) Members who are not concurrently serving on the Board."* The 2023 Election Committee contained 4 members, one of whom was concurrently serving on the Board and one who was an APEA staff member.

**TOTEM's Response:** *This is true. The Board acknowledges that the committee was not consistent with the Bylaws. In future elections, we intend to be sure Bylaws procedures are followed much more closely. It must be noted that no candidate from this election served on this committee and no candidate had access to communications about the process.*

**Accusation #2:** The Board held a flawed and incomplete "membership meeting" at the TOTEM Spring Conference. To be official, this meeting should have been called to order, minutes read, roll taken to ascertain quorum for voting on proposals, and an annual budget presented to the membership. These things did not happen.

**TOTEM's Response:** *This is also true. The TOTEM Bylaws do require two (2) membership meetings to be held during the fiscal year. However, our bylaws only contain two (2) requirements for a membership meeting. The first is that nominations will be announced, and members can be nominated, after which nominations will close. The second requirement is that an annual budget be presented by the treasurer. For over 18 years, the TOTEM Board has considered a Spring Conference lunch where nominations are closed as a membership meeting. This has been the standard, but they have never presented a budget. This means the TOTEM Board has not been fulfilling the requirements of the Bylaws. Although we cannot go back and change this error, the Board acknowledges it has not followed these bylaws correctly and has scheduled three (3) membership board meetings during the 23/24 school year. During the first of these meetings, on October 19, a budget will be presented to the membership. There will also be designated times during these meetings for members to share questions and concerns. The dates for the membership meetings can be found on the TOTEM website.*

**Accusation #3:** Union voting procedures were completely ignored. Because the March meeting was not an official membership meeting, the slate of Directors was never officially presented, and nominations could not be considered closed. TOTEM did not adhere to the OLMS standards and mail a notice of election to every member at least 15 days prior to the election. In addition, TOTEM refused a request to send campaign literature through the ASD or TOTEM email systems. The letter states that this is a violation of OLMS, Chapter 6: *"Generally, if the candidate's request for an alternative method of distributing campaign literature is a reasonable one, the union is required to make the distribution."*

**TOTEM's Response:** *The fact that the Spring Conference meeting was not an official membership meeting did not change the fact that members were notified in advance of the opportunity to be*

nominated or to nominate themselves. This notice also included clear instructions that nominations would be closing on that date. TOTEM is completely unaware of any member who was denied the opportunity to be nominated or to nominate. As for violating OLMS, it must be noted that TOTEM has moved to an electronic ballot. This change has saved TOTEM upwards of \$4K per election. The OLMS standards apply when mailing through USPS, but not when voting by electronic ballot. Finally, the request to disseminate information through the ASD or TOTEM email system was denied because it would look like the union was endorsing a particular candidacy. To protect our members' privacy, TOTEM provided names and addresses to a trusted company where the candidate could send their campaign literature to be mailed. TOTEM has never sent campaign literature by email on behalf of any candidate that is running and does not consider this a "reasonable request." TOTEM followed procedures that had been in place for more than 17 years and while this is not an excuse, it is important to understand that nothing was handled differently this year.

**Accusation #4:** Four specific Board members controlled the election and ran the Spring Conference gathering in a disgraceful way. These four (4) Board members all failed to follow protocol and violated the TOTEM Bylaws, APEA Constitution and OLMS. Their resignation letters must be delivered to the APEA Business manager within five (5) business days from receipt of the letter.

**TOTEM's Response:** *This letter states no specific reasons or proof why the four named board members are the ones to blame for all the above actions. In fact, the entire letter only mentions a few names, and specifically accuses APEA Staff, not Board members. This is a clear attempt to target these four Board members. It is a bullying tactic, and they will not be resigning.*

The TOTEM Board wants to be clear: there were errors made, but these errors were not the result of nefarious planning or election tampering. Instead, they were results of the status quo that has been followed for years. We know this is a reason, not an excuse, and we are committed to changing this status quo going forward. A Bylaws committee is currently being formed to revamp our bylaws, so they better clarify and reflect practice. In addition, we are excited to announce we are in the process of designing a mobile app so we can better reach our members. We want to do better, and we will do better.

This year we head into contract negotiations where we will have to fight hard for the money that our members rightly deserve. There are those who seek to divide TOTEM, but we must be a united front and show ASD that we can stand together. It is no secret that TOTEM needs as many members as it can get. Will you help us with the battle?

Finally, we know there is more misinformation out there and we would love an opportunity to help clear it up. Please, contact any member of the Board with questions or concerns. It is our pleasure to continue to represent you, our members.

Sandy Thompson  
President  
Wallace

Felicia Wood  
Secretary

Member at Large

Member at Large

Alicia Woods  
Vice President

Treasurer

Member at Large

Member at Large