Who knew that I could continue to belong to AFT 2121 after retirement? Now I feel so very privileged to have the honor of representing our progressive local and our wondrous retirees. Being one of the two members of the CFT Retiree Division Council to attend these national meetings created double honors and obligations.

Two delegates from UESF, Doug Orr and I arrived together and shared a taxi for the long congested ride into Pittsburgh with a most delightful self supporting, self described, single-parent driver. Our ride was filled with personal accounts of struggles for working people in Pittsburgh and some of her own successes.

Our very central and massive hotel was built by Henry Clay Frick. Times have changed and the hotel employees, with whom I had some terrific union discussions, now all belong to unions. The east side of the hotel was constructed in 1916 and provided us with a walk in the shade to the convention hall only 5 blocks away. After Prohibition became the law of the land, the second larger section of the hotel was built with a grand entrance on the west side and two basements to obscure location of the very active speakeasy. To this day there is no easy connection between the first 6 floors of both sides, though exodus from the basements is amazingly swift. Another Frick trick was the construction of a massive building (by 1920’s standards) to cast shadows over the previous Carnegie office building.

Knowing how many US cities have suffered from jobs being moved to other countries and then the banking crash of 2008, I was pleased to see so much business downtown, in Southside and around the University of Pittsburgh. Education is a thriving business. We were so fortunate to meet with other delegates at the many cafes and restaurants in the many repurposed buildings. The theater district offered outdoor concerts, some for free as well as performances in the air-conditioned halls. The public transportation system is massive, speedy, and cheap. My return trip to the airport cost $2.75 for the almost 30 mile scenic ride.

Doug, Joe and I were registered for both the National AFT Retiree Conference and the National AFT Convention. Doug invited us to attend the AFT Pension Fund Board of Trustees Meeting which started before the Conference. Several of the trustees are active retirees who are well-known union leaders. Some of them had to leave the Trustee meeting to conduct their own workshops during the Retiree Conference. Discussing health care for all produced questions from some retirees of disbelief that universal health care could work. The Retiree division sponsored a reception that provided networking opportunities with a conference slogan: Activists Never Retire.

Much of the National convention was spent in the convention hall with great air-conditioning. Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren were the outstanding guest speakers. Randy Weingarten lead speeches and marches. We had one division council to attend and one committee meeting. I attended the International Committee meeting where the resolutions were prioritized quickly, discussion was limited, and we were invited to a reception hosted by US Labor Against the War for very good networking and great t-shirt purchasing.

The organizers dedicated some convention time to a march through the downtown. I spoke with employees of the few shops that were open. They asked many questions, seemed
thankful to hear the reasons for the march, and said their businesses did not allow employee unions.

For me the floor debates are the most important aspect of conventions. For this convention several delegates consistently stood up to close debate very early. Luckily both Doug Orr clearly presented the issues of the dangers of hedge funds and Jessica Buchbaum clearly presented the only descent uttered before they could be silenced. Both were appreciated and Jessica became an instant hero.

AFT 2121 obviously has strategies that expand unionism and the democratic process. In the future I hope more of our clever AFT-CCSF faculty can participate in these national forums to spread ideas and hope.