



Winter 2020

Connections

NEWS TO KEEP YOU ENGAGED IN THE PROFESSION YOU LOVE

Online election in process

Online voting for the 2020 and 2021 NEA Representative Assembly delegates and NEA-Retired Annual Meeting delegates is Feb. 9-29.

The easiest and fastest way to vote is online by visiting <https://myassociationvotes.com/wea-retired/>.

Your USERNAME will be the first initial of your first name followed by your last name. For example, John Smith would have a username of jsmith. Your PASSWORD will be your five digit zip code as on file with WEA. For example, it might be 98290.

If you are unable to vote online, you may also contact 269-425-1030 to request that a paper ballot be mailed to you. Please leave a detailed message with your name and address to ensure that the company we have contracted with to run our elections can identify you and send the ballot. Please make sure to request your ballot early so that you have time to receive it by mail and get it back in time to be processed by the deadline.

WEA-Retired annual meeting nomination

Have you ever attended the WEA-Retired Annual Meeting? It is our version of the WEA-Representative Assembly and will be held at WEA Headquarters in Federal Way on June 3-4. Day one starts with the WEA-Retired Board meeting and is followed by the WEA-Retired Annual Meeting starting at 1 p.m. That evening is the WEA-Retired Scholarship fundraiser banquet and auction. Day two is a continuation of the annual meeting with business items and guest speakers. The meeting ends at 3 p.m.

The nomination form is included in this newsletter (page 3) and is due on March 18. You also received an online notification in the Feb. 1 e-Connections. You may nominate or self-nominate for the following positions: Annual Meeting Delegates, WEA-Retired Board Directors, or WEA-Retired Secretary. As you will see on the nomination form, each chapter has a specific number of delegates. Please consider joining us in June at the WEA-Retired Annual Meeting!

The President's Corner

By Mary Lindsey, 2019-20 WEA-Retired President



Our 2020 Lobby Day with Retired Public Employees Council (RPEC) was a success! We had wonderful weather, unlike last year when most of our members were snowed in at home. We had more members participate, some who had never lobbied before, and others who lobby at least yearly. Our task was to ask our legislators for their support with specific bills currently before the Legislature. These bills will help protect and improve our retirement benefits for ourselves and future retirees.

HB 1085/SB 5469. Supports increasing the Medicare benefit for retirees who have healthcare insurance through Public Employees Benefits Board (PEBB). This Medicare subsidy was previously \$182.50 monthly but was cut to \$150 during the recession. In 2019, it was restored to \$183 monthly, but with years of inflation, the Medicare subsidy now needs to be more than \$200 to maintain the benefit for all members. Sixty percent of Plans 1, 2, and 3 Medicare-eligible members are enrolled in the Uniform Medical Plan through PEBB that had premium increases from \$162.86 (2010) to \$320.54 (2020).

HB 1390/SB 5400. Supports a one-time COLA for TRS 1 and PERS 1 plan members. Since Plan 1 TRS/PERS are the only plans without an automatic COLA, the pension monthly payments for these members do not keep up with inflation. The Washington Office of the State Actuary says that members who retired in 1980 have lost 30 percent of their purchasing power. For Plan 1 members who retired when wages were significantly lower, or who have been retired for 20, 30 or more years, many are experiencing difficulties paying their monthly expenses as their health care needs increase. Our members should not have to choose between buying food or medication each month.

HB 1220/SB 5275. Supports adding a non-voting member from the Washington State Office of the Insurance Commissioner to the PEBB. The Insurance Commissioner office is nationally recognized as a powerful advocate for consumers, and retirees feel that its expertise would benefit the PEBB healthcare insurance program.

We have over a month until this regular short session ends on March 12. You can still help by contacting your legislators by phone, email, letter, postcards or by attending a town meeting. Share your story to allow your legislators to attach the name of a real person to a real-life situation. Your conversations with your legislators and others will help protect and improve our retirement benefits! We are truly in this together. Let's enjoy the journey.

2020 WEA-Retired Annual Meeting Nomination Form

WEA-Retired will convene its annual meeting in Federal Way on June 3-4. This year delegates will elect a secretary as well as board directors.

Non-chapter units are: **Kent (2), North Central (3), Puget Sound (7), Rainier (4)**, Seattle (6), Soundview (2), **Spokane (3)**, Summit (3), **Vancouver (4), WEA Cascade (5)**, WEA Eastern Washington (6), **WEA Lower Columbia (4), WEA MidState (6), WEA Olympic (8), WEA Riverside (5)**, WEA Sammamish (10) and WEA Southeast (7). Board directors will be elected for the units in **bold print**. The number in parenthesis is the number of delegates the chapter is allowed in addition to the board director.

Chapter units are: **Pilchuck (9)**, Tacoma (4), WEA Chinook (12), and WEA Fourth Corner (9). The units in **bold print** will be electing a board director this year. The number in parenthesis is the number of delegates the chapter is allowed in addition to the board director. Chapter units should elect their delegates by **April 1**.

This form may be used for nominating delegates from ALL councils, board directors, and secretary. Nominees for chapter units will be forwarded to the chapter leader to be included when the chapter elects its delegates. Non-chapter delegates will be elected during a meeting of WEA-Retired Board of Directors on March 25.

All nominees must be WEA-Retired members. More than one name may be submitted for each position. You may nominate yourself and/or another retired member. If you nominate someone other than yourself, you must have the consent of the nominee.

Email the nomination form to Diane Kanda at mdkanda@yahoo.com or mail the nomination form to: Diane Kanda, 4595 Wynn Road, Bellingham, WA 98226. **Nomination forms must be received no later than March 18.**

COMPLETE THE NOMINATION FORM BELOW:

Your name _____ Retirement/separation date _____
Your email _____ Phone number _____

I nominate the following WEA-Retired members for:

DELEGATE & CHAPTER

1 _____
2 _____
3 _____
4 _____

BOARD DIRECTOR & CHAPTER

1 _____
2 _____
3 _____
4 _____

SECRETARY & CHAPTER

1 _____
2 _____

Connecting with representatives

Bridge-building reflection on Lobby Day

By Janis Swanson, WEA-Retired Fourth Corner



Rep. Dave Paul from the 10th Legislative District was in committee but I, along with Retired Public Employees Council (RPEC) members, were enthusiastically greeted by his assistant, Sarah. She listened carefully to our issues. We felt heard, and a bridge emerged. As we were about to leave, she said, "Wait, I really would like you to meet with Dave. This is important." Sarah set up appointments for the next day for the RPEC members, but because I wasn't able to make it, she insisted that I meet Dave between committee meetings.



I knew I had met the goal of making a connection from the moment he shook my hand and we discussed our concerns. Then, in the last bit of conversation, we made a personal connection about the dual language school where we have family in common. What I learned during Lobby Day was that making a connection and bridge-building with an elected official takes willingness on the part of both citizen and servant.



In contrast, my meeting with Rep. Norma Smith was hurried, as was made clear to us from the start. She briefly gave attention to our issues and then actually said, "What you should be paying attention to ..." and proceeded to speak about her current bill. Reflecting on this appointment continues to leave me feeling patronized. Our third meeting was with an assistant of Sen. Ron Muzzall who took notes and when asked if he knew where Sen. Muzzall stood on our issues, the response was a generic, "The representative is fiscally responsible." In other words, no real answer to our question.



We need to continue to build bridges with our elected officials and to deliver our message. If bridges are difficult to build, we need to remember why it is critical to elect officials who support WEA issues.



February in Olympia

By Julie Salvi, WEA Compensation Lobbyist



The legislative pace quickens in February, with many deadlines and the budget releases scheduled later in the month. The first hurdle for bills is Feb. 7, when bills move out of the policy committees to keep moving in the process. Any bills with fiscal impact must have a hearing and be voted out of the fiscal committees by Feb. 11, unless they are deemed to be necessary to implement the budget. Bills must then be voted off the floor of the House of origin by Feb. 19. Then, the process will start over again, with the House considering Senate bills and vice versa.

On top of all the impending policy bill deadlines, the House and Senate are expected to release their budget proposals within days of the revenue forecast release on Feb. 19. The first indication on movement for a Plan 1 COLA may come around the time of the budget release. There are bills that can move if we are able to convince the legislature to fund the Plan 1 COLA in the budget. WEA-Retired and RPEC (Retired Public Employees Council) members were in Olympia on Feb. 3, continuing to elevate the importance of a COLA and other retiree priorities within the legislative debate.



So proud to be involved

By Dalice Snider, WEA-Retired Soundview

This was my first WEA-Retired Lobby Day.

My takeaway was a feeling of pride in myself for serving the public as a teacher — along with other public employees — and speaking out on behalf of all of us so that our legislators honor our service by fully funding our retirement.

I'm grateful to all the organizers and leaders who made the day possible.

100th WEA-RA this April!

Retirees, remember back when your local bargained its first contract?

How about when you first got personal leave, professional development time and funding, class size/workload language, and limits to bus or playground duty in your contract?

It's time to think back on our accomplishments as we get ready to celebrate our first 100 years at WEA-RA this year. Submit your pictures and stories to the WEA History Project at history@washingtonea.org.

We are all part of the history of WEA! Please share your stories!

Needs of fellow human beings

By Brenda Kirk, WEA-Retired Member



Immigration issues are very complex and controversial, but citizens of Tucson, Ariz., have come to a consensus that they want no more deaths in the desert that is their backyard. To this end, organizations have formed and banded together to see that refugees and asylum seekers have access to the water necessary to survive desert conditions.

More than 3,400 deaths have been documented since 1999, and all parties — border patrol, ranchers, Game and Fish, National Parks Service — agree they don't want anyone else to die.

I had plans to visit my son in Arizona for several weeks and went online to see if there was a way I could help the situation at the border. I signed up for a water run with an organization called Humane Borders. This group has more than 60 watering stations scattered throughout the Arizona desert bordering Mexico. Humane Borders makes regular water runs to refill the bright blue 50-gallon water drums at these sites marked by a 30-foot pole flying a blue flag. Humane Borders

has permission from all private, state and federal landowners to maintain these sites.

Unfortunately, two days of monsoon rains, the likes of which I have never seen, cancelled the water run I had signed up for. The large water trucks used by Humane Borders could not get to the remote sites until the ground firmed up again. The Humane Borders coordinator transferred me to another group, the Tucson Samaritans, that uses smaller vehicles and sets out gallon jugs of water at various locations.

From 7:30 a.m. until 5 p.m., I rode with Gail and two other volunteers as we bounced around off road, setting out water, picking up discarded items and looking for anyone needing help.

According to Gail, a longtime volunteer, anyone crossing the border has to pay the cartels. The cartels then provide the refugees with camouflage shirts, pants, hats, backpacks, slippers made from shag carpet to leave no footprints, and a black plastic jug of water (white plastic jugs show up under surveillance). A coyote (guide) leads the group across the Mexican side of the desert to the end of the border fence, and then the group is on their own. However, their payment to the cartels does give them three tries to successfully cross!

Once across the border, asylum seekers discard their camouflage clothing and put on the clothing they have brought with them. They want to be picked up by the border patrol so they can submit their petitions for asylum, be processed, and begin the wait back across the border for their number to be called. Tucson organizations also help with feeding those waiting in Mexico.

If a humanitarian organization comes across such a group, they check if water, food or medical treatment is needed. Foot injuries are a major issue. Everything in the desert is prickly. Then they call border patrol to let them know where to send a bus to pick up the group. Some groups have had up to 60 people. The volunteers also collect all the discarded items.

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Continued from page 6.

Other undocumented immigrants who are trying to avoid discovery — mainly single men who have no basis to seek refugee status — can still legally be offered water by the volunteers, but no refugee can be transported by a humanitarian organization. We met other volunteers throughout the day, and they were all excited by the recent ruling of not guilty for Scott Warren. Scott is a volunteer with No More Deaths and had been charged with harboring undocumented refugees who had stopped for supplies at a staging area run by the organization.

We drove to the border crossing at Sasabe, Ariz., and viewed the border fence that has been there for decades. New concertina wire has been added to the U.S. side of the fence. Then we drove a few miles to the end of the fence where Normandy fencing continues to the foothills of the nearby mountains. Normandy fencing looks like what was on Normandy beaches in World War II, and this is where the coyotes bring their clients to crawl under the fence.

Gail has taken government officials and journalists from several countries on this same run to view conditions firsthand. The two Toyota 4Runners they use are named Joe and Josephine in honor of journalists who were sued by a sheriff for a story they wrote about his mistreatment of immigrants. The sheriff lost the lawsuit, and the money awarded to the journalists was given to the humanitarian organizations. Thus, Tucson Samaritans was able to buy their two vehicles.

Gail also speaks to civic and school groups. Her message focuses on seeing the humanity in these refugees by showing the personal items they brought to look their best as they came to ask the U.S. to take them in. One backpack she displays had two sets of clothing, one adult-sized and the other set for a child. Gail doesn't know why this clothing was not put on. Several times during the day, Gail mentioned how proud she was of Tucson's response to this problem. Some have accused these humanitarian groups of pulling money away from organizations helping U.S. citizens, but records show that even these organizations have seen an increase in giving in the Tucson area.

Several of the groups mark the sites where deceased immigrants have been found. One white cross marks where the body of an infant had been left by the parents along a paved road, hoping someone could offer the baby a decent burial. The site has become a shrine as passersby leave items on the cross. The undocumented immigrants usually carry no identification as per cartel instructions.

Many volunteers, such as Gail and me, believe Jesus would do this. Volunteers come from many religions and denominations, along with those having no religious affiliation, but they see the issue as simply addressing the needs of a fellow human being in need. There is a militia group in the area, and there has been the destruction of water barrels and jugs. However, this group has been held in check, and many of the small stores scattered throughout the area post signs stating militia are not welcome.

The day was quite moving and emotional — and it put a personal face on the issue.



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Important dates

Feb. 9-29: Online Election for WEA-Retired delegates to the NEA-Representative Assembly/NEA-Retired Annual Meeting
March 10: WEA-Retired Scholarship applications are due. For further information go to www.washingtonea.org/retired.
March 18: WEA-Retired Annual Meeting delegate nominations due
March 24: WEA-Retired Executive Committee
March 25: WEA-Retired Board Meeting
April 16-18: 100th WEA-Representative Assembly in Spokane
May 7: WEA-Retired Executive Committee
May 27: Washington State Alliance for Retired Americans (WSARA) Annual Convention at the WEA Headquarters in Federal Way. If you are interested in being a WEA-Retired delegate to the convention, please send an email to mlindsey@washingtonea.org.
June 2: WEA-Retired Executive Committee
June 3-4: WEA-Retired Annual Meeting at WEA Headquarters (Nomination forms are due by March 18.)
June 3: Annual WEA-Retired Scholarship Fundraiser Banquet and Auction at WEA Headquarters
June 28-July 5: NEA-RA/NEA-Retired Annual Meeting in Atlanta
September 23 & 24: First ever ... WEA-Retired Membership Matters Conference in Federal Way. Event is for WEA-Retired members only.

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Connections is published by Washington Education Association-Retired four times a year. We invite your comments and contributions. During other months, a newsletter is sent to your email address. If you're not receiving those, please send an email to WEARetired@WashingtonEA.org.

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