



Summer/Fall 2020



# Connections

NEWS TO KEEP YOU ENGAGED IN THE PROFESSION YOU LOVE

## My NEA-RA story, 46 years in the making

By Michael McSweeney, WEA-Retired Puget Sound



Student teaching year

Retirement year

Forty-six years ago, I attended my very first NEA Rep Assembly in the Los Angeles Sports Arena. I was not a delegate, but an education major from the University of Southern California, earning \$1.65 an hour passing out mimeographed copies of the daily RA newsletter. But when I walked onto the floor of that massive arena, the site of the 1960 Democratic National Convention that nominated John F. Kennedy 14 years earlier, I was hooked. The floor debates at that RA were historic and passionate — collective bargaining rights, merger with the American Federation of Teachers (AFL-CIO), and the very

definition of what it meant to be a labor union and not merely a professional association. I knew my desire to become a teacher was right; I knew I wanted to be a part of this, and I knew then and there that I would always affiliate myself with NEA.

My career began in the inner-city neighborhood surrounding USC and the Sports Arena. I married Diane, another passionate teacher, and in 1981 we packed up our Datsun and decided to see what living in Washington state would be like. We got jobs, bought a house, had babies, and kept focused on our wonderful careers. Whether we worked in Puyallup, Federal Way or Highline, we were active in our district WEA affiliates, but not at the national, NEA level.

In 2015, with retirement looming, we both got elected as delegates to the 2015 NEA-RA in Orlando and the 2016 NEA-RA in Washington, D.C. For me it was “dèjà vu all over again” walking onto the floor of the RA in Orlando. There we were, two of some 7,000-plus delegates, representing our beloved WEA, casting votes and defining what democracy is in America, proudly representing three million NEA members. In short: It was thrilling.

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# The President's Corner

By Mary Lindsey, 2020-21 WEA-Retired President



**Thank you for belonging to WEA-Retired! Sometime during your career, you made the decision to join us for a lifetime. We are so glad that you did! You most likely joined because someone told you that it would be a good idea to do so.**

**Maybe they shared with you that WEA-Retired is committed to promoting and protecting your pension and healthcare in retirement.**

We do have partnerships with like-minded organizations such as WSARA (Washington State Alliance for Retired Americans), Senior Citizens' Lobby, and RPEC (Retired Public Employees Council). Our impact is multiplied when we work together for our common good. We also have influence on state boards because our members serve on the Department of Retirement Systems Advisory Board and on the Public Employee Benefits Board. WEA-Retired also has a very

active WEA-Retired Legislative Work Team that meets monthly.

**Maybe they shared with you that you would continue to be eligible for NEA Member Benefits.**

Many WEA-Retired members take advantage of the credit card and insurance programs, including the \$1,000,000 liability insurance if you choose to work as a substitute educator, and WEA's Attorney Referral Program, which offers two free 30-minute consultations a year.

**Maybe they shared with you that WEA-Retired membership provides opportunities to continue advocating for the rights of retired educators, current educators, and public school students.**

Your voice will still matter! WEA-Retired has officers, an executive committee and board directors, and holds an Annual Meeting with delegates. The president also serves on the WEA Board and the WEA Legislative Strategy Committee. WEA-Retired has a representative who serves on the WEA-PAC Board. WEA-Retired has several committees, including membership, audit, elections, and awards. The Pre-Retired Seminar program includes a committee and 42 pre-retirement seminar presenters. There are also NEA-Retired appointments to NEA-PAC, and the communications, legislative, and membership committees. The WEA-Retired Scholarship Board is set up very similar to the WEA Children's Fund. WEA-Retired also has delegates to WEA-RA and NEA-RA, as well as the NEA-Retired Annual Meeting.

**Maybe they shared with you that membership offers involvement and camaraderie.** WEA-Retired members may choose to attend local chapter lunch programs, help at pre-retirement seminars, join current educators at events within UniServ Councils and WEA, and other endless opportunities. On Sept. 23-24, we held our first WEA-Retired Conference! (More about that in next month's e-Connections.)

**Can you think of a person or two or three that you could ask to join WEA-Retired as a pre-retired or retired member? Join online at [www.washingtonnea.org/retired](http://www.washingtonnea.org/retired) or send an email to [wearetired@washingtonnea.org](mailto:wearetired@washingtonnea.org) for additional information.**

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## **My NEA-RA story, 46 years in the making**

Upon retirement in 2017, Diane and I both joined WEA-Retired and attended quarterly WEA-Retired luncheons. This year, we wanted to increase our involvement, so we were both elected to attend the WEA-RA in Spokane in April, and I got elected for a two-year term as a delegate to NEA-RA. Then the pandemic hit.

WEA and NEA never considered cancelling the 2020 RAs, either for the retirees or those members still working in the schools. They just figured out how to hold them virtually.

In April, the WEA-RA was held as a giant Zoom meeting. It was wonderful to get to know our new executive leadership, WEA President Larry Delaney and Vice President Janie White.

Nationally, NEA realized that the Zoom platform was not adequate for a meeting of more than 7,000 delegates, so the tech wizards figured out a way to hold the RA on another platform. On July 2, NEA President Lily Eskelsen García gaveled her last RA to order, and delegates sat at their computers in their homes all over the United States as the convention was streamed over the internet.

My Tacoma heart swelled with pride when none other than Tacoma's great retiree, Marilyn O'Malley-Hicks, gave the opening acknowledgement honoring America's native people and thanked them for sharing their land with all of us. After Marilyn, none other than Georgia's Stacy Abrams gave an invocation that lifted and inspired us. She thanked all school personnel (teachers, paras, bus drivers, counselors, nutrition staff, ESPs, principals) and graciously said, "I believe in public education because public education believed in me."

One after another, brief but powerful motivational videos filled our computer screens. We heard from First Lady Michelle Obama, comedian Trevor Noah, Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski, South Carolina Congressman Jim Clyburn, teenage climate activist Greta Thunberg, and Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden, who stayed online for a live Q & A session with NEA members all over the United States. We saw videos from state affiliates doing exactly what our own Washington schools have been doing since March: converting to online teaching, serving grab-and-go meals to children in need, and figuring out how to plan for some sort of school re-opening in September. We saw teacher rallies in Richmond, VA, that looked just like our rallies in Olympia. There were videos of needy children in Ohio with the same needs of many children in Washington. Passionate teachers in North Dakota who love their students and their jobs as much as passionate teachers in Washington all spoke with dedication and focus. It was moving to have confirmation that WEA and its members are an integral part of a nation-wide labor union, as well as a profession we all love.

We were reminded in no uncertain terms that voting is our No. 1 responsibility in 2020. NEA Vice President Becky Pringle gave a stirring address warning our association that the Trump/DeVos agenda to privatize everything, especially education, must be stopped. Unfettered corporate power, Pringle said, cripples our democracy and expands income inequality. Speaker after speaker talked about the Black Lives Matter movement and our responsibility as educators to join the vital fight to end institutional racism in our country, demand an end to police brutality, and to close the school-to-prison pipeline.

**Continued on page 5.**



# The case for unionizing substitutes

By Mike Acord, retired substitute and teacher

All substitutes including, but not limited to, certificated, paraeducators and clerical substitutes need to be part of the WEA. Substitutes play an important role in the education of our students, so it is important for them to be a part of a collective bargaining agreement. A strong contract gives protections and grants benefits to substitutes.

## The importance of substitutes

Sometimes when a teacher needs to take some time off, I am called to cover for a couple of weeks. When I am asked to teach a unit, I plan, teach, assess and score the unit for the teacher. If a teacher is terminally ill or passes, I step in to help students through the trauma and teach them gently to help them meet the expectations.

When a teacher is sick and leaves wonderful lesson plans for the first day, they may call and tell me that they are not able to return to class. I then rearrange my schedule to be available until the teacher returns to the classroom. We work together to keep students engaged and move the curriculum forward. When the teacher leaves me a note that they have a challenging student, I appreciate the heads up and use the information to keep them engaged and out of trouble.

As a substitute teacher, I have been requested to take over a classroom in which the teacher has abandoned or has been removed from the classroom. It can be challenging when there are no classroom norms, and the classes are behind in the curriculum. The students may need to be assessed to determine what concepts are missing. To move forward, I may need to decide which concepts are required now and which concepts can be taught with other parts of the curriculum. I work with the administration and counselors to bring students in to create a workable teaching and learning environment. Within three weeks, the classroom is a functional environment with student learning on track.

## When things go wrong

Sometimes things do not go right in substituting, as in teaching. Students may take the opportunity to act out or to strike out at another student with a substitute in the classroom. They may not follow directions, and some students, despite multiple interventions, might disrupt the educational progress. The substitute may need to ask for help. A few years might go by, and the substitute teacher could be dismissed or disciplined for past incidents that they were not even aware of.

The substitute teacher may not realize there are no contract protections: no timely notification of discipline concerns, no rights for representation, and no grievance process. Substitute teachers need the protections and benefits of a union contract: timely notification of discipline concerns, representation, professional development for substitutes, access to their personnel file and removal of out-of-date letters, contract pay and benefits for long-term positions, half-day pay and full day pay, and they need to receive an annual COLA. As a substitute teacher, I have teachers' backs. Do teachers have substitutes' backs?

Your help is needed! The unionizing of substitutes is a local by local choice. Would you be willing to help me unionize substitutes? If so, email: [mwacord@gmail.com](mailto:mwacord@gmail.com) or call 206-501-9992. Warm appreciation for the support of the following ... Holly Gramm; Gery Gerst; Art Segal; Peter Henry, Seattle Substitute Association vice president; Mary Lindsey, WEA-Retired president; Larry Delaney, WEA president.

**Continued from page 3.**

## **My NEA-RA story, 46 years in the making**

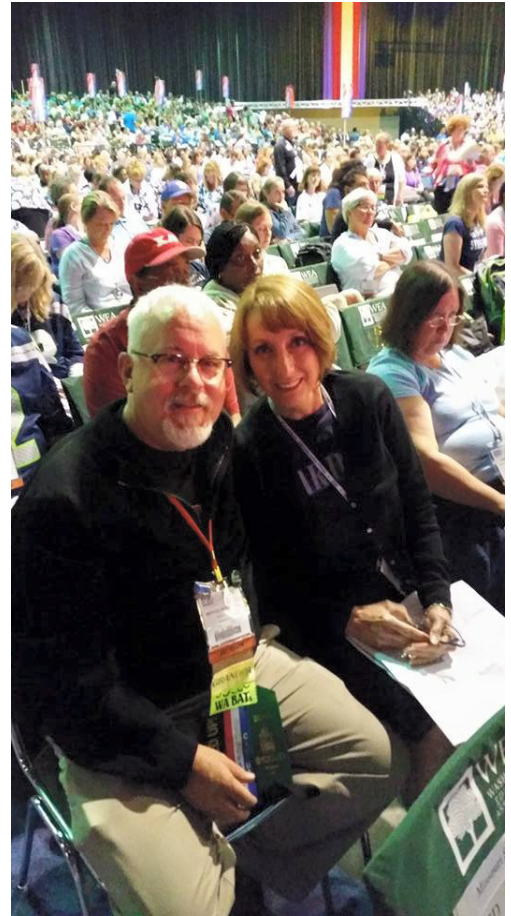
All NEA members, including NEA-Retired members, are asked to make cash donations to the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education. This money is raised to support political candidates, both local and nationwide, who understand that unions strengthen the U.S. economy, that Black Lives Matter, and that the corrupting influences of overboard standardized testing must be scaled back in America's public schools. We are all asked to go to <https://educationvotes.nea.org/donate/> to participate in NEA-PAC.

Joe Biden directly told our membership that he will fire Betsy DeVos on his first day in office and replace her with a K-12 public education professional. He said he will divert public funding into public schools, doubling the number of school nurses, counselors and social workers, and he pledged to support universal pre-K nationwide. "NEA holds the future of the United States in its hands," Biden said.

It was thrilling to hear the speakers and watch the videos of the RA. If you are interested, go online to [www.nea.org/ra](http://www.nea.org/ra) and see every one of these remarkable speeches, motivational videos, and special RA events. You will find them on that page under the "RA Media" and "Speakers & Speeches" dropdowns.

Our entire NEA executive leadership was up for re-election this year. (Voting was not possible online at our virtual RA, so NEA-RA delegates elected a new slate of NEA officers in a Vote by Mail election.) A particularly poignant moment came at the end of RA when NEA's charismatic and highly regarded NEA President, Lily Eskelsen García, gave her farewell address. You can watch it on the NEA-RA website I have referenced above. My personal guess is we will be hearing from this powerful education leader again, perhaps sooner than we think.

COVID-19 did not force the NEA to cancel the 2020 RA, which was originally scheduled to take place in Atlanta. Using typical educator resourcefulness, our union used the finest technology to make it happen virtually. The association saved over \$5 million doing it this way. I was honored to sit at my computer, participating remotely, representing WEA-Retired. I was just as proud to do so as I was back in 1974 when I was a paid college kid passing out NEA newsletters at the 53rd NEA-RA all those years ago in Los Angeles.



## **We want to hear your stories!**

Please consider submitting an article of interest for publication in an upcoming *Connections*. Send stories to [wearetired@washingtonea.org](mailto:wearetired@washingtonea.org).

# Virtual NEA-Retired & NEA-RA still inspirational: Our Democracy. Our Responsibility. Our Time!

By Pam Fuelling, WEA-Retired Pilchuck

Every NEA-RA brings its own uniqueness, but this year was far different from any other we have ever experienced. Regardless of what meeting I joined, from WEA work team and caucus Zoom meetings to the NEA-Retired Annual meeting or the NEA-RA, it all seemed to work, no matter what devices and programs we were asked to use. Although we met virtually and each day looked vastly different from years past, there were several speeches that inspired me, as always.

In her introduction of NEA President Lily Eskelsen García, Vice President Becky Pringle reminded us of Lily's goals and accomplishments these past six years. Becky recalled that in August of 2014 when Lily discussed her transition into the presidency, she said one of her goals was to get rid of No Child Left Behind. Becky remembered the expression on Lily's face as she stood beside President Obama when he signed Every Student Succeeds Act into law, knowing the difference that NEA had made. Lily has focused on opportunity, equity and excellence for students, and she has empowered educators to have a voice about what happens with their students. Becky also reminded us that Lily set out to lead NEA in taking on the responsibility of doing the work required to move this country toward the systemic, fair treatment of people of all races; she committed NEA to taking on institutional racism. As Lily ends her six-year term, Becky pointed out that we can now pick up the torch that she has carried, and we can devote our leadership to ensuring every student has what they need, when they need it.

Lily followed with her speech about this year's theme: Our Democracy. Our Responsibility. Our Time! She began by saying America was never America for too many Americans and that exclusion was, and continues to be, intentional. She then went on to give a history lesson about inequality. Except it wasn't really a history lesson; it actually was current events. It was about how, for the Koch brothers and the DeVos family, freedom means their ability to make more money. Limiting their ability to exploit workers, harm consumers, and dirty the environment means limiting their freedom to make more money; for them to have more, everyone else needs to have less. She explained how she taught her sixth-grade students that they have to fight for this democracy to become real, that if they want to be a patriotic American, they shouldn't hide their eyes. Lily has said we must decide where to put our voice and our power. We are educators. We are in public service. We are unionists. We are activists. We are patriots. All of us are called on, both those who have had to demand their rights and those whose rights have never been questioned. We have a patriotic responsibility to demand that all of us be included in this imperfect democracy. And it is especially our time because we are the educators in public service in America.

I have watched as Lily has served as both NEA president and vice president over the last 12 years. She has continued to show up time and time again, and although she will be missed, there is much more work to do!

# Washington State Senior Citizens' Lobby and WEA-Retired working for you

By Phyllis Farrell, WEA-Retired Representative to Senior Lobby

The Washington State Senior Citizens' Lobby is a coalition of 37 public service groups, nonprofit and private groups and government agencies striving to advocate on senior issues. The Senior Lobby has been in existence since 1977. WEA-Retired has member representation; Phyllis Farrell represents WEA-Retired as one of the seven members on the Board of Directors. The Senior Lobby has monthly meetings at the Panorama Retirement Center in Lacey. Meetings generally have reports from DSHS (Aging and Long-Term Support), the Office of Insurance Commissioner, federal and state legislative updates, as well as other member organization reports relevant to seniors. Frequent guests are legislators, judges, and agency directors.

The Senior Lobby sponsors an Annual Fall Conference in October and a Lobby Day during the legislative session. It also sponsors an Age Wave Briefing breakfast reception for new legislators early in the legislative session.

The Senior Lobby Legislative Agenda and Priorities are presented to new and returning legislators. Senior Lobby meetings were paused at the beginning of the COVID-19 restrictions in mid-March and resumed in July on Zoom; in person meetings will resume when it is deemed safe for participants.

In 2020, the Senior Lobby advocated for bills to protect seniors in the areas of pensions, health care, medical debt, prescription/drug costs, housing, guardianship, long-term care, and environmental protections.

## A few major bills impacting seniors that passed the 2020 legislative session:

**HB 1390** COLA for Plan 1 Retirees

**SB 6417** Allows retirees to change survivor option after retirement for Plans 2 & 3

**HB 2380** Changing home care agency vendor rates and repealing electronic timekeeping

**ESHB 8212** Proposing constitutional amendment allows long-term care funds to be invested by law

**ESHB 1023** Increasing certain adult family home capacity to eight beds

**ESHB 1608** Protecting patient care

**EHB 1694** Allowing tenants to pay deposits, rents and fees in installments

**HB 2512** Interest and penalty relief for qualified mobile and manufactured homes

**ESSB 6287** Concerning guardianship and conservatorship

**SSB 6074** Reauthorizing financial fraud and identify theft investigation and prosecution program

**SSB 6319** Concerning administration of the senior property tax exemption

**E2SHB 2311** Amending state greenhouse gas emission limits for consistency with the most recent assessment of climate change science (affecting air quality impacting respiratory related health diseases)

**ESSB 5323** Reducing pollution from plastic bags

**SB 5811** Reducing emissions by making changes to the clean car standards and clean car program

**ESHB 2421** State reimbursement of election costs

**SHB 1251** Concerning security breaches of election systems and data

**ESHB 2535** Grace period before late fees may be imposed for past due rent

**ESSB 6378** Concerning residential tenant protections

**ESSB 6617** Concerning accessory dwelling unit regulations

**SHB 2384** Concerning property tax exemptions for nonprofit organizations providing rental housing/mobile home park spaces

**SHB 2634** Concerning real estate excise tax on affordable housing



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## Important dates

Oct. 20: Virtual WEA-Retired Executive Committee Meeting  
Oct. 21: Virtual WEA-Retired Board Meeting  
Oct. 22: Washington State Senior Citizens' Foundation 2020 Virtual Fall Conference, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m., no registration fee for this virtual event. Conference topics to include: long term care, senior demographics, budget, Impact of COVID-19, health care, and aging long-term support. Speakers to include: government directors, legislators, policy makers, and the WA State Insurance Commissioner. For further information go to their website at [www.waseniorlobby.org](http://www.waseniorlobby.org). Please register by emailing your name and organization (WEA-Retired) to [info@waseniorlobby.org](mailto:info@waseniorlobby.org).  
Jan. 27: Virtual WEA-Retired Executive Committee Meeting  
Jan. 28: Virtual WEA-Retired Board Meeting  
Feb. 8: WEA-Retired/RPEC (Retired Public Employees Council) Lobby Day  
March 24: WEA-Retired Executive Committee  
March 25: WEA-Retired Board Meeting  
April 15-17: WEA-RA

## Connections

NEWS TO KEEP YOU ENGAGED IN THE PROFESSION YOU LOVE

*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](mailto:WEARetired@WashingtonEA.org).

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### Agency contact information

Department of Retirement Systems  
[www.drs.wa.gov](http://www.drs.wa.gov) or 800-547-6657

Health Care Authority (PEBB)  
[www.pebb.hca.wa.gov](http://www.pebb.hca.wa.gov) or 800-200-1004  
Medicare

[www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) or 800-633-4227

Social Security

[www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov) or 800-772-1213

SHIBA (Statewide Health Insurance  
Benefit Advisors) 800-562-6900