

Priority: PERS 1 and TRS 1 funding

by Lee Ann Prielipp, chair
WEA-Retired Legislative Task Force

Although the upcoming legislative session will be difficult for any items needing money in the new state budget, your legislative work team has determined that we should concentrate on the unfunded liability for Plan 1. Both the PERS (Public Employees Retirement System) and TRS (Teachers Retirement system) plans 1 are under funded. All other retirement plans are fully funded. In October, several of us attended a presentation by the State Actuary on WA retirement systems. PERS 1 is funded at 70% and TRS at 75%. The end result reported to legislators is that they must pay now or pay much more in the future. According to the actuary, Plans 1 are funded through 2030. Also, by statute, our basic retirement monies must be paid from the general fund if the plan runs out of money. Of course, that is just the basic retirement money, not

necessarily any increases that have been received along the way.

During this session it would be helpful if you would lobby your local legislators asking them to start



the process to eliminate the under-funding. As more money is funded, more interest can be earned through the investments by the State Investment Board. Lobbying can be done in person, by phone or e-mail. Contacting our legislators on the unfunded liability keeps this issue in the forefront.

Investments represent roughly 75% of pension income

when the pensions are pre-funded on a systematic basis. Returns need to hit or exceed the 8% statutory assumption and this is used when developing contribution rates. Over the last 20 years, investment returns were right at benchmark. It appears that the Legislature decided that since investment returns were satisfactory, or better, then monies normally added to fund the liability could be suspended. This happened in both good and bad times. Although TRS 1 was closed in 1977, there are about 5,000 people in Plan 1 still working in addition to those of us already retired.

We encourage all of you to lobby for the elimination of the unfunded liability of all Washington State retirement systems.

Our WEA-Retired lobby day will be posted on the WEA-Retired website and you are invited to join us. Also, the complete list of legislative goals for our retired group will be posted.

President's Message

Communication choices

While this newsletter provides a wonderful opportunity for me to share information and I enjoy writing my column, it isn't a good way to quickly communicate time-sensitive information to the WEA-Retired membership. We are fortunate to have another system that can complement our newsletter and get information out very quickly. That system is WEA's Convio system, which can send targeted e-mails to specific membership groups. About a month ago we used that system to send out an "elert" e-mail about changes in the PEBB program to WEA-Retired members. The "elert" header looked like this:



and generated a number of responses from members thanking us for sending out the information.

The good news is that we were able to send this information to about 1,500 members. The bad news is that the rest of our membership, about 3,500, did not receive this information because we either do not have an accurate e-mail address for them or, at some point, they have chosen to "unsubscribe" to e-mails from WEA. I know you're familiar with that old saying, "If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?" That saying stuck in my mind after that first e-mail "blast" to WEA-Retired members. If we can only get the information out to about a third of our members, are we really communicating?



Kit Raney, WEA-Retired president

We would like to be able to communicate important information to *all* WEA-Retired members quickly and cheaply. In order to do this we need accurate e-mail addresses and we need people who have "unsubscribed" to subscribe again to WEA e-mails. If you did not receive the "elert" please follow the directions in the column on the next page and you'll be back in the know.

Some of you who chose to "unsubscribe" probably did it because you didn't want to get all of the e-mails that go out to all WEA members. The cool thing about the Convio system is that once you have subscribed again and receive your first e-mail, you can go to the bottom of the e-mail and update your preferences. The system allows you to *choose* what you wish to receive. If you only want to receive e-mails that pertain to retirement, you can check the box for "Retirement Issues" and that's all you will receive. I hope that you will check some of the other boxes, too, because WEA sends out a lot of good information — but it's up to you and you can refine your choices at any time after you receive any WEA e-mail. Pretty cool system!

If you didn't get the "elert" please follow the instructions in the column on the next page and give WEA-Retired the ability to communicate with you in a timely manner. Of course real communication is two-way street so please feel free to e-mail me at WEARetired@washingtonnea.org.

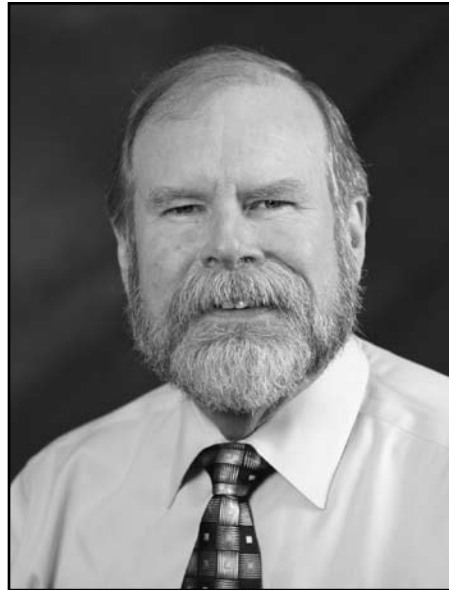
Protecting pensions

by Mike Ragan
WEA Vice President

The elections are almost over. Most of them are settled, but a few are still up in the air. There has been an unprecedented amount of money spent this year. It shows that there are funds available if the cause is the right one. And yet, our unemployment rates remain high apparently because helping the middle class recover from the recession is not the right cause.

Kit Raney and I just returned from the annual NEA Retirement and Benefits Forum. The topic of the forum was the challenges that face public pensions. In some states, the economic conditions have highlighted the underfunding

of public employee pensions, which has been used as am-



Mike Ragan, WEA Vice President

muniton by those who oppose pensions. As a result, not only

are new employees seeing a smaller retirement benefit, but in some states, current retirees are having benefits reduced.

So far, we have been fortunate in Washington State in avoiding major attacks on our pensions. But with the continued revenue shortfall, our pensions will be seen as a significant source of available funds. Our only chance is to stick together. NEA is coordinating efforts to fight privatization of Social Security, and elimination of our pensions. We all need to be part of that fight. When the call goes out to contact your legislator, or your member of congress, it is a serious request. As was discussed at the NEA forum, our only chance at success is if we all work together.



Stay Connected

Don't miss out on important news and issues your Association is working on for all members. In order to reduce our carbon footprint and cut costs, we will be using our website and sending periodic e-mail to members on news related to retirement. The best way for you to get the scoop first is to make sure we have your e-mail on file.

If you have not received any e-mail from WEA or WEA-Retired, we don't have your e-mail address. To be in the loop, send an e-mail to member.records@WashingtonEA.org with "E-mail subscription" in the subject line, or call the Membership Hotline at 253-765-7105 (or toll-free at 800-622-3393, Ext. 7105). Whether you call or write, please include your name, address, phone number, e-mail address and WEA Membership ID number, if you have it handy.

Once you start receiving e-mail from WEA, you can control what type of e-mail messages arrive in your inbox. You can update your "interests" by clicking on the link at the very bottom of every e-mail message you receive. You also can unsubscribe, too, but we'd hate to lose out on connecting with you.

State Government

Public Employee Benefits Board

by LeeAnn Prielipp, WEA-Retired
Legislative Task Force chair

The Public Employee Benefits Board (PEBB) is created within the Health Care Authority (HCA) and its function is to design and approve insurance benefit plans for State employees and school district employees. Only a few school districts have elected to cover their active employees through PEBB, but all of their employees are offered PEBB coverage at the time of retirement.

Members of the PEBB are appointed by the governor and serve two-year terms. There are nine members of the PEBB; seven of them are voting members. I represent K-12 retirees as a voting member.

The purpose of the PEBB program is to provide high quality benefit options and customer service to employees and retirees while striving to control cost increases for members and the state of Washington. Insurance coverage is purchased through competitive bids and is available through a number of private insurance companies, such as Secure Horizons and Group Health. In addition, the HCA self-

insures and administers the Uniform Medical Plan.

Recently, members of the UMP received a notice indicating that their plan would now be administered by Regence Blue Shield. The UMP is still the self-insured plan for HCA. The difference is that a company has been hired to administer the plan details, such as bill paying, and answering members' questions. The vast majority of doctors are still in the plan and many more have been added. You may check on the list of providers by going to the PEBB website at www.hca.wa.gov and clicking on the appropriate link. When you call the Regence Blue Shield center, a person will answer and direct your call. There will be no extensive button pushing!

Health care costs continue to rise, which means our premiums continue to rise. The PEBB and the HCA are working on the coordination of the plans offered and the new federal laws on health care as well as a redesign of the programs. Many of the federal changes will be in effect in 2014. The HCA website has added a new page to provide information about the PPACA (Affordable

Care Act) and initiatives in Washington state related to national health care reform. New FAQs related to health care reform are also linked.

If you have questions on UMP you may call 1-800-762-6004. Questions or comments for the Board may be made at 1-800-200-1004.

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Should you be on Facebook?

by Nancy M. Miller
We...Too Editor

What do you find on Facebook, besides your grandchildren?

For those of us not in the know, Facebook is the wildly popular social networking site that began as an electronic “hang-out” for Harvard students and recently has become very popular with the older set (that’s you and me, dear Reader). If you’ve never been on Facebook, let me take you for an imaginary tour.

Your starting point on Facebook is called your Wall (imagine writing messages on a chalkboard: should be familiar to us). Here you post messages and comment on messages your friends have written. Like anything written on your blackboard, it can be read by anyone who happens by. By writing a name in the search box at the top, you can go to that person’s Wall, and read or write messages there. By scrolling, you can read older messages. You can delete anything from your Wall, or prohibit people from writing on it or reading it (de-friend them). You can “hide” messages from a chatty friend who is overwhelming your Wall, and call them up later, or not at all. At the top of your Wall is your status line: if you wish, you can

write a sentence there for your friends to read. (“It’s raining today; I’m fine.”) From anywhere within Facebook, you click on “Profile” at the upper right of your page to return to your Wall.

From your Wall you can click on tabs for Info (your name, birthday, high school graduation year, and the like); Photos (where you’ll share



Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook. Photo from WikiCommons.

your adventures); and you can create personalized areas. I’m an avid reader: I have a link an app (jargon for “application”) called Visual Bookshelf; I like to travel, and dream of traveling, so I have a Travel app that has links to maps, and has cute little pins I can put in places that I’ve been or hope to be. You can subscribe to magazines

and news-services by “liking” them (I take Slate, some columns from CNN, NPR’s Birdnotes).

Like your classroom bulletin boards, you can post many things on your Wall besides messages. Anything that has a URL can be posted. Magazine articles, videos, notes, photos can all be shared. You can put up a photo, or albums of photos. You can write notes and post them too.

At the upper right of Facebook is a button called “Home.” When you click on “Home” you get to your Newsfeed. In the Newsfeed are the status lines and postings from your friends. “Home” has two parts: “Top News” and “Most Recent.” “Top News” is from folks you communicate most with; “most recent” ... well, you get it. The Newsfeed is the heart of Facebook: here are the picture albums of trips to the beach, birthday parties, and backyard projects. Here are the grandchildren! Here are the status lines posted by your friends.

Facebook is, in a way, like a small town where everyone encounters everyone else a couple of times a day and exchanges a few words — or lots of words. Facebook tries to bring people together.

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Impact of health care reform

SHIBA HelpLine News Flash — from the Office of the Washington State Insurance Commissioner.

What federal health reform legislation means for Washington state:

The health care reform bill passed by the U.S. House on March 21 will cut the number of uninsured in Washington state by more than 500,000, provide better coverage to those with insurance, and save \$500 million in uncompensated care – health care that’s delivered in Washington state but not directly paid for. The law includes many reforms that will take place quickly:

- No more denying coverage for children with pre-existing conditions.
- No more \$1 million lifetime cap on benefits.
- Gives Medicare clients a \$250 rebate to help pay prescription drug costs once they hit the “donut hole,” a gap in coverage after the first \$2,830 a year in benefits. Starting next year, seniors will get a 50 percent discount on name brand drugs. Also, the bill removes the gap by 2020.
- Extends dependent coverage to age 26.
- Provides \$5 billion to make coverage for people in high-risk pools more affordable, likely in the form of subsidies.

- Free preventive care under new private plans and under Medicare.

Additional reforms to take place Jan. 1, 2014:

- We’ll receive almost \$13.8 billion in federal assistance to help Washingtonians afford coverage.
- It covers childless adults by Medicaid for the first time.
- Individuals buying their own health insurance will no longer have to take a health screen for pre-existing conditions – they’ll be guaranteed coverage.
- Provides limits on what insurers can charge for out-of-pocket costs.
- Small businesses will get tax credits to help them buy health care.
- It will improve Medicare reimbursements to doctors and other providers.

For more information about health care reform, check out the Office of the Insurance Commissioner’s website at www.insurance.wa.gov/consumers/reform/national_health_care_reform.shtml.

Insurance Commissioner warns people about health insurance scams:

As the economy sours, Washington state Insurance

Commissioner Mike Kreidler warns consumers to be on the lookout for health insurance scams. The things to watch for include:

- Unreasonably low costs. Be cautious about plans that promise very low rates for a lot of benefits. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.
- Unusual marketing, such as unsolicited phone calls, and fax or email messages.
- High-pressure sales tactics, such as suggesting there’s a special rate that expires unless you sign up immediately.
- Companies that want money up front before they will send you information about their products.
- Companies that offer little contact or local information. Be very cautious if the only contact information is a toll-free number and the person on the phone seems vague about details.
- People posing as federal agents who call or come to the door to sell health insurance as part of health care reform.

If clients suspect an offer is a scam, have them call the Insurance Consumer Hotline at 1-800-562-6900 to verify the company is legit before they sign up.

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Facebook, continued

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It notices people who have friends in common, for instance, and suggests that you, too, might like to be friends. You can search for people from your high school graduating class, or be contacted by folks you haven't heard from for years. As we age, the convenience of communicating widely from the comfort of home can keep us in touch when otherwise we might feel isolated.

Besides being able to share the activities of grandchildren and distant friends, many groups create public pages for organizations; you can join and chat with people about mutual interests. There are hobby groups, political groups, mutual support groups for those experiencing illness, business pages, genealogy ... anything that someone wishes to create.

Facebook has privacy settings. When you post a picture album, for instance, you can

choose who can see it: "friends only", "friends of friends", or "everyone". When I post a status line, I don't say, "Leaving town for four weeks". Even though only my friends can see my page, who knows who might look over their shoulders? I use the same caution on Facebook that I would in the rest of my life. I publically announce my absences and the joys of my vacations AFTER I've had them. And I keep my passwords to myself.

Why wouldn't you want to be on Facebook? The first reason is the one we give our kids: it takes as much time as you will put into it, and asks for more. (You'll have to judge this one for yourself.) You might re-find some annoying people – or find that, upon closer acquaintance, some people are truly uninteresting. (Use the "hide" or "ignore" control.) You don't trust Facebook's privacy controls. (Don't post things you

wouldn't have posted in the faculty room.) It's new technology. (The grand-kids will help you.)

Now that you're familiar with Facebook, you can stroll on down to the local theater and see Facebook's birth portrayed on the silver screen in the current movie, *The Social Network*. I can't testify to its accuracy, but I can testify to its energy. And you can drop Mark Zuckerberg's name into your next conversation with those grandchildren, and watch their jaws drop.



Facebook logos are trademarked.

Health care reform

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VA warns U.S. veterans about phone prescription scam:

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is telling veterans not to give credit card numbers over the phone to callers claiming to update VA prescription information. Some callers are

misrepresenting the VA to gain personal information over the phone. They say the VA recently changed procedures for giving out prescriptions and ask for the Veteran's credit card number. Veterans with questions about any VA services should contact the nearest VA

medical center or call, toll-free, 1-877-222-8387.

Also, remember SHIBA is Washington state's Senior Medicare Patrol project. We can help clients prevent, detect and report Medicare and Medicaid fraud and abuse. Encourage clients to contact 1-800-562-6900 if they have questions.



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*city: you can hear the sound
of studded tires crossing the
parking lot*

*country: every fifth pickup
truck has a snow blade*

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