



WE...too

Washington Education
Association – Retired

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Risky times — An update

By Nancy M. Miller, WEA-Retired
Editor, We ... Too

Based on information made available
April 24, 2012 at WEA-Retired's
"Building Our Capacity" meeting, and
other sources

In this time of austerity, contraction, and uncertainty, changes to TRS (teacher's retirement system), PERS (state employees), and SERS (school employees) are sometimes hard to track. With one thing proposed one day and another set aside the next, where do we stand?

Washington State Teachers Retirement System

The 2012 Legislature considered skipping its annual payment to Plan 1. That bill failed. Plans 2 and 3 are funded at 100%; Plan 1 is funded at 75% because the Legislature has previously skipped payments.

"Washington is one of four states in the nation with 100% of our combined pension liability funded."

Passage of HB 2825 does not affect the options of current employees, but imposes a new alternative early retirement benefit on those hired after May 1, 2013. These new hires would be allowed retirement at age 55 after 30 years of service, but reduces the pension by 5% for every year before age 65. This is expected to reduce the state's pension liability. The bill also requires the joint Select Committee on Pension Policy to report by Dec. 15, 2012 on recommendations about employees who no longer have an early retirement option but whose jobs become more high risk for those over age 55.

Social Security and other national issues

In Congress, Sen. Bernie Sanders chairs "The Defend-Social-Security Caucus." Sen. Maria Cantwell from our state is part of this caucus.

"Social Security Works Washington" is a statewide coalition of labor and retiree groups lobbying to "scrap the cap." "The Cap" limits Social Security payroll taxes to incomes of \$110,000 or less. Closing this loophole so that wealthy people would pay on their incomes above \$110,000 would end any possible Social Security shortfall until the closing decades of the 21st century. See: www.ssworkswa.org

The budget proposed by Rep. Paul Ryan, the House Budget Committee Chair, proposes to partially privatize Social Security, lower its cost-

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President's Message

At random

By Kit Raney, President, WEA-Retired

I try to have a topic for my column. This time my topic is "random thoughts"...

- The Washington State Supreme Court ruled unanimously on Jan. 5, 2012, that Washington is violating its constitutional "paramount duty" to amply fund the education of K-12 students. Thank you to the WEA Representative Assembly for approving a special assessment to ensure that resources will be available



Kit Raney, WEA-Retired president

to make sure this happens.

- A coalition, including WEA and WEA-Retired, sued the state for eliminating the Uniform COLA for Plan 1 pensions. Washington State School Retirees' Association, the other retired educator organization which "aims to enhance the security and vitality

of your retirement years" is not a part of this coalition because they couldn't afford to be part of the lawsuit. Thank goodness WEA-Retired is part of the 82,000 member WEA, because the Uniform COLA is important to the security and vitality of our Plan 1 members!

- Many of us have worked on initiative campaigns as signature gatherers. This "grass-roots" process has been bought by those with a lot to gain financially. It is practically impossible to get enough signatures without an army of paid signature gatherers. Minimum cost? A million dollars. In 2010, Coke and Pepsi contributed almost all of the \$16.5 million spent to repeal I-1107's pennies-a-can tax. Costco spent more than \$24 million to dismantle the state liquor store system. Nick Hanauer has pledged at least a million dollars in an effort to put the charter schools initiative on the ballot.

- Voters rejected charter school proposals in 1996, 2000 and 2004. Very, very rich people whose children are most likely NOT in public schools, will be spending a lot of their money to take money away from the public education system, the same public K-12 system which the State Supreme Court just ruled was not being adequately funded. Go figure...
- Don't let Social Security be dragged into conversations about the federal budget deficit. Social Security is an independent, self-funding program. Workers and employers pay for all of it. There are good sources of information about Social Security: www.justfacts.com/socialsecurity.asp, <http://tllg.net/8VvL>, and <http://strengthensocialsecurity.org/>.
- The typical American worker would labor 244 years to make what the boss of a big public company makes in one year. (See *Everett Herald*, "Pay jumped for CEOs in 2011".) Pay was up by 6% as the head of a typical public company made \$9.5 million last year.

"Money" seems to be the theme of my random thoughts. A lot of it will be spent before the November election. Knowing where it comes from and why a person or company or PAC is spending all that money is important. Who funds a PAC? What do they have to gain? And what do you have to lose?

WEA President Mary Lindquist reminds us that we are one election away from becoming a Wisconsin or Ohio. That election is in November. Pay attention, and follow the money.

Contact Information:
WEA-Retired

E-mail:
WEARetired@washingtonea.org or raneyk@aol.com

Website:
www.washingtonea.org/retired

Mailing address:
P.O. Box 9100
Federal Way, WA 98063-9100

2012 Representative Assembly

By Kit Raney, President, WEA-Retired

Thirty-three WEA-Retired members joined over 900 other WEA members as delegates at the WEA Representative Assembly (RA) in May. Our WEA-Retired delegates were active participants in the RA: Maureen Ramos from Spokane, chair of Washington State Educators for Obama, helped sign up members to work to re-elect President Obama; Kathy Casey, a member of the Documents and Resolutions Committee, helped members write New Business Items (NBIs) they wished to submit to the body; Martha Reese helped the Host Unit (Eastern Washington) staff the doors; many WEA-Retired delegates spoke at the microphones on issues; and David Theisen, chair of Documents and



Bruce Williamson (in back left), John and Donna Mollan, Michael Comstock and Joe Ramos were WEA-Retired delegates at the WEA Representative Assembly in Spokane.

Resolutions, spent time at the podium leading the Assembly through the consideration of the Standing Rules, NBIs and Resolutions.

WEA-Retired submitted one NBI, "Social Security Education for Members," which was easily adopted by the RA. This NBI directs: *That the WEA annually provide the information needed to help members be aware of the history and importance of Social Security to them, their families, and their students now and in the future. Social Security solvency, independence from the general fund, and its connection to Medicare should be included in discussions and presentations about Social Security.*

The general theme of the RA was the importance of the coming elections highlighted by WEA President Mary Lindquist's speech and speeches by Jay Inslee, our endorsed candidate for governor; John Stocks, NEA executive Director and Ohio EA President Patricia Frost-Brooks.

Lead attorney Tom Ahearn made an impressive presentation about the Paramount Duty Lawsuit and recent State Supreme Court decision (a BIG win for public education). The Court decision was huge but there is work left to do to ensure that the Legislature implements the changes to meet their constitutional obligation and "Paramount Duty" to fully fund public education. To support the work to make sure this happens, the delegates approved a special assessment of \$1 per month. WEA-Retired delegates supported this special assessment, and even though we cannot be "specially assessed", we collected \$800 from our delegates as a token of our commitment.

After much debate and several moves to reconsider, the delegates approved 23 NBIs and referred three to committee. The RA is democracy in action and WEA-Retired members were proud to contribute to the process.

Member Activities

Go Bob, Go!

By Kit Raney, WEA-Retired President, and Eddie Westerman, WEA Communications Staff

Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving ~ Albert Einstein

By the time we retire, each WEA-Retired member has at least one story to tell. Bob Stidwell's story is about how the 80-year-old self-proclaimed "bicycle touring nut" is using his passion for biking to fulfill a dream that came from a different kind of passion – the passion he had for his wife.

Fifty-eight years ago, WEA-Retired member Stidwell pedaled 3,500 miles through several western states, British Columbia and Alberta. After that trip, he never stopped. He pedaled many miles during the 32 years he taught in Tacoma and long after he retired as well. Stidwell's loving wife, Pat, supported his mania for bicycling. She knew it was something that was part of what defined her husband. Over the years of their marriage, he continued his riding adventures.

After retiring in 1992, Stidwell took a part-time job as an Albertson's courtesy clerk. The job suited his welcoming nature and it allowed him to continue biking. In summer

2007, he stopped riding. He gave up what he loved for the one thing he loved more – his wife. Pat was diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma that summer and he lovingly cared for her through the 47 months she battled her illness. Nearly four years of being off his bike gave him time to nurture a dream.

"My dream developed nightly, as I cared for my Pat. I finally realized a "calling" was to be carried out," Stidwell says.

After Pat died last December, Bob

decided to raise awareness and money for Multiple Myeloma Research in her memory by cycling to each of the 11 Albertsons grocery stores in the Tacoma



Bob Stidwell, with his faithful companion, his bicycle.

and Olympia area, beginning in May and continuing through the summer until he reaches each store. Upon reaching each of the 11 Albertsons destinations, he plans to hand out materials and collect donations for the cause. His goal is to raise a million dollars but his first goal is \$10,000. While he says he is not particularly tech savvy, he knows that fundraising takes a village. He

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Member Activities

Bicycling Bob

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has a website where people can make donations to help Stidwell reach his dream: www.active.com/donate/2012mmrfYOR/YORBStidwe.

Losing his wife after such a long battle gave Stidwell a long time to think about the next chapter of his life. Pedaling a bicycle to get where he wanted to go was natural to him, but pedaling for the purpose of raising money to help extend the lives of those who are stricken with this kind of cancer — pedaling to make others aware of the disease — is something that feels like a mission he must make.

Charles M. Shultz said, “Life is like a 10-speed bicycle. Most of us have gears we never use”. Stidwell has never tried to raise a large amount of money before. He is learning to use gears he never knew he had.

Bob knows it won't be easy to journey to each store, but he is doing it because it is time for him to return to an activity he loves so that he can honor the memory of the love of his life. Your WEA-Retired colleagues remind you, Bob, that we know you can do this. It's just like riding a bike. We are behind you as you follow your next calling.

Like so many of our members, you are doing amazing things every day.



Karla Kragelund and Judy Wooten tend the WEA-Retired booth at the WEA Rep Assembly, May 2012.

Help support pro-public education candidates in the fall 2012 election

Current WEA-PAC members can donate “\$20.12 for 2012” (or more) safely and securely by [clicking here](#).

Not a member? Please join WEA-PAC today! Keep up-to-date with WEA-PAC endorsements and the latest news at www.ourvoicewashington.org.

Member Activities

Elevator Talks

by Nancy Miller, WEA-Retired
Editor, WE . . . Too

We used to call them “elevator talks”: 27 words, 3 points, 9 seconds: something you could say when a chance encounter, an offhand remark, or a casual question gave you the opportunity to plant a seed in a citizen (voter/colleague/parent/neighbor/constituent/representative/total stranger)’s mind.

The idea is to have thought about the issues ahead of time, to have rehearsed (in the shower is a great place, or Fido is a great audience), and to have something short, memorable, and ready to say. Always tailor the “elevator talk” to the moment: who you’re talking to and what the context is. Your script is your own!

Other person: Aww, elections don’t mean anything anyway.

Your response: Make sure your vote is a vote to protect your pension, public education and the rights of workers. We are one election away from becoming a Wisconsin.

OR

The district cut all-day kindergarten and the county eliminated the well-baby clinic. Make sure your vote

tells the officials what you think of that.

Other person: We’ve got to cut taxes on the wealthy so that the job-creators can succeed.

Your response: Business can’t succeed without customers to buy their products, and these tax cuts



just lead to more layoffs and less buying. Tax cuts are job destroyers.

OR

Small businesses rely on workers in their communities to be their customers. When tax cuts lead to layoffs, small business is hurt too. Tax cuts hurt small business.

Other person: I just want to teach; I don’t care about politics.

Your response: The Legislature controls school funding, which means classroom supplies, class size, and the length of the school year — your entire teaching environment — is controlled by politics. Let your vote support what you need in your classroom.

OR

Programs that take an underprivileged child and show them a way to a better life, like music, art, special ed, PE or counseling, all get cut by politicians. You need politics to protect the vulnerable kids in your classroom.

First they came for the music department, but I wasn’t in the music department, so I didn’t speak up; then they came for the librarians, but I wasn’t a librarian, so I didn’t speak up; then they came for the school nurses, but I wasn’t a school nurse, so I didn’t speak up. When they came for my pension, there was no-one left to speak up. (Thank you, Pastor Niemoller.)

Got a good idea for an elevator talk? Send it in to the editor at WEARetired@washingtonea.org or njmcmiller@hotmail.com with “for the newsletter” in the subject line, and we’ll publish another collection of pithy comebacks when we get them.

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of-living adjustments, and cut benefits.

The Budget Reduction Commission authorized by President Obama (so-called Simpson-Bowles Commission) recommended increasing retirement age, reducing cost of living adjustments, and reducing benefits for future retirees with incomes at \$42,000 or more.

The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a recently controversial group which advises state legislators and drafts template legislation, has made “state public employee pension reform” a top

priority with two goals. One goal is to “equalize” public and private pensions; the other is to eliminate defined benefit plans and move all employees to defined contribution plans.

Recent studies show that defined benefit pension plans are not only preferred, but can be more efficient than defined contribution pension plans. For more information on that, take a look at:

<http://www.institutionalinvestor.com/Article/2910814/Public-Employees-Prefer-Defined-Benefit-Pensions-Says-Study.html> or <http://www.pensionrights.org/report-topic-areas/defined-benefit-vs-defined-contribution-plans>

The record? From 2001-2009, nine states decreased benefits, two states increased employee contributions, and six states did both. From 2009-2011, 43 states “reformed” public employee pensions by increasing the contribution rate, increasing retirement age, increasing the service requirement, or a combination of all three.

What Can I Do?

If anything that you have read so far disturbs you — either because you think the contract that was made with you as a teacher to defer some of your pay into a pension program is threatened, or because you are concerned about the future of our teaching corps — now is the time for political participation. Our state Legislature, our governor, one of our U.S. senators, and the president and vice-president of the USA are up for election, and voting day is a scant six months away.

Contact your local political organization or interest group and volunteer to help! Contact your friends here and in other states and make sure that they vote! If you haven’t chosen your candidates yet, attend community rallies and forums where the candidates will appear, ask them questions, read up on national issues, make your judgment, then contribute your time and money.

Without you, the people’s voice cannot be heard.

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*Editor: Nancy Miller
editor.WE.To@hotmail.com*

Editorial Board: Lee Ann Prielipp, Kit Raney, Jean Savidge, Sandy Kokko and Stacia Bilsland

Mailing Address: WEA-Retired, P.O. Box 9100, Federal Way, WA 98063-9100



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“The only effective
answer to organized
greed is organized labor.”

—Thomas R. Donahue,
SEIU, AFL-CIO, Assistant
Secretary of Labor
1967–1969

The only retired organization affiliated with WEA and NEA

WEA-Retired Election Results

Officers:

President Kit Raney; Vice President Ken Mortland

Executive Committee:

Sandy Kokko, Neva Luke, Karle Warren

Board of Directors:

North Central: Doug McComas; Rainier: Kathy Wallentine; Spokane: Maureen Ramos;
Vancouver: Sandy Kokko; Cascade: Jeanette Marquardt; Olympic: Virginia Smith; Pilchuck:
Johnnie Tucker; Puget Sound: Michael Comstock; Soundview: Ann O’Connell; Riverside: Evelyn
Horne

Continuing on the Board of Directors (term ends next year):

Sammamish: Neva Luke; Summit: Pat Roberts-Dempsey; Tacoma: Gayle Hazen; Chinook: Sam
Hayes; Eastern Washington: Martha Reese; Fourth Corner: Carl Taylor; Lower Columbia: Bruce
Williamson; Southeast: Karle Warren

As this newsletter goes to press, Kent, MidState and Seattle positions are vacant.