



Winter/Spring 2023

Connections

Save the date: Sept. 20-21, 2023: 4th Annual Virtual WEA-Retired September Conference

What a difference a year makes concerning PEBB

Exactly one year ago, the Washington State Health Care Authority made a soft announcement that they were going to eliminate the Uniform Medical Plan Classic-Medicare which was, and still is, the most popular plan being offered through Public Employees' Benefit Board [PEBB]. At their meeting in late June 2022, the HCA changed their tune when over 300 PEBB members showed up for their virtual meeting, and many more wrote emails and letters to express their thoughts. The PEBB monthly meetings last summer were well attended, with PEBB members signing in and speaking up about the HCA's plan to lose their preferred health care plan. The Health Care Authority then came up with a resolution that they were going to wait until January 2024 to make a decision. **Major point ... fast forward, it was decided that the UMP Classic Medicare was not going to be eliminated either then or in the future. The HCA staff has repeatedly stated that they have taken that idea off of the table. They heard loud and clear that PEBB members did not want to lose UMP Classic Medicare as an option for their health care.**

As a result of last summer's short-lived elimination plan, a PEBB Medicare Stakeholders' Coalition was formed with eight senior organizations including WEA-Retired, Retired Public Employees Council, Washington State Alliance for Retired Americans, Senior Citizens' Lobby, Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action, AFT Washington, Washington Federation of State Employees, Social Security Works, and Health Care is a Human Right. Having a common cause unites people, and working together to create and maintain a system of quality health care at an affordable cost is certainly a top priority for members and their organizations.

The PEBB Medicare Stakeholders' Coalition continues to meet at least monthly with HCA staff after having spent many meetings planning for the PEBB Listening Sessions and Public Forums that have taken place since late February. For the last three months, there have been multiple opportunities for PEBB members to participate in mostly virtual meetings to share with HCA staff and Coalition observers their feedback on how their PEBB plans have and have not worked for them and offer suggestions on ways to improve. The listening session participants have overwhelmingly expressed an appreciation for the opportunity to give feedback to the Health Care Authority concerning their PEBB health care plans and the service provided by PEBB. **(Cont. on page 3.)**

The President's Corner

By Mary Lindsey, 2019-25 WEA-Retired President



Welcome to our winter/spring edition of the *Connections*! We will once again have a summer double edition in August.

We started off the calendar year with our 7th annual legislative day with the Retired Public Employees Council (RPEC); it was our first in-person legislative day in Olympia since 2020. We had more than 50 members sign up to attend. As stated in our last *Actively Retired* email with our legislative recap, we had positive results for Plan 1, PEBB accountability, and access to PEBB for Plan 2 members who sever service. **For those of you who like to plan ahead, our 2024 legislative day with RPEC will be on Monday, Jan. 22, in Olympia.** I hope you will join us!

Membership recruitment and membership engagement are always critical to the health of any organization, and WEA-Retired is no exception. We had a successful membership drive during the month of April. We gained 145 members, with 48 joining on the last weekend! All councils increased their membership. Pilchuck Council was responsible for 1/3 of all new members statewide! **Thank you, Pilchuck!**

During August and September, WEA-Retired will be reaching out to retirees who were once WEA members but did not join us before retiring. **We will be inviting them to join us as members and attendees at our 4th annual WEA-Retired September Conference on Sept. 20 & 21.** We miss these former colleagues. They are also missing out on a lot of information about their pensions, health care, lifelong learning opportunities, supporting our public schools, camaraderie, and getting good deals through the NEA Member Benefits. Membership matters!

Do you know some former colleagues who you could invite to join WEA-Retired/NEA-Retired? They may join online on our webpage www.WashingtonEA.org/retired.

Retired members have three ways to join:

1. Ongoing monthly deductions through DRS pension (\$6.92 certificated or \$5.75 ESP/classified)
2. Ongoing annual membership from Sept.-Aug. (\$83 certificated or \$69 ESP/classified)
3. Life membership (one payment of \$550 certificated or \$430 ESP/classified)

What a difference a year makes concerning PEBB

(cont. from page 1)

A bill was passed during this past legislative session requiring the Health Care Authority to report their findings from the listening sessions to the state legislature.

The PEBB Medicare Stakeholders' Coalition of senior organizations and PEBB are continuing to work together to improve PEBB health care options as well as share detailed communication with members about these options. WEA-Retired will sponsor a PEBB Medicare virtual meeting next fall to present the health care options for 2024. Watch for the email to register.

Do you know?

1. If you are on PEBB and Medicare, email HCAPEBBMedicare@hca.wa.gov to get answers to your questions. You may also call 800-200-1004, although there may be long wait times.
2. PEBB members may choose to change their health care plans every year. That is one of the benefits of being on the state plan.
3. Both WEA-Retired and the Retired Public Employees Council (RPEC) have voting representatives on the PEB Board. Our representative is WEA-Retired member, Tom MacRobert. You may contact the board by emailing pebboard@hca.wa.gov.
4. The PEB Board usually meets from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on the second Tuesday of every month from February through June (hybrid meetings). Three July meetings are scheduled for the 12, 19, and 26 from 9 a.m. - noon.
5. The Medicare retirees' health care subsidy is currently \$183 per month. Your PEBB Medicare premiums are automatically reduced by this state-funded amount. We continue to work with our allies to get the state legislature to increase this subsidy.
6. Starting in January 2024, Plan 2 members who separate from service without collecting retirement benefits will have access to PEBB if they enroll or defer their coverage within 60 days after employee coverage ends.

Great member response to the PEBB Survey!

More than 600 WEA-Retired members responded within nine days to our PEBB health care survey emailed in May! The questions were:

1. What do you care about most when judging if a health care plan meets your needs?
2. If you are considering switching plans, what questions do you need answered before you can make your choice?
3. Please comment on your usage of the HCA website.

How will these responses be used? WEA-Retired, Retired Public Employees Council (RPEC), and SHIBA are now working together to help members access, evaluate, and compare health care plans and programs.

What is SHIBA?

The Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors (SHIBA) provide free, unbiased, and confidential help with Medicare and health care choices. SHIBA is part of the consumer protection services of the Washington State Office of the Insurance Commissioner. To find out more, visit www.insurance.wa.gov/shiba or call 800-562-6900.

Department of Retirement Systems Advisory Committee

By Kim Mead, WEA-Retired Representative

The DRS Advisory Committee met on April 27. As a quick reminder, this committee is composed of members from associations and organizations representing active and retired members of public pensions administered by the Department of Retirement Systems. The committee meets twice a year. A new member was added to the committee representing active members for the teacher retirement system. WEA nominated Kelly Snow, a second-grade teacher from Lake Stevens. She has been an active leader for her local, council, and state association and will be a great representative for educators.

The advisory committee was provided with an update from the Washington State Investment Board. It included an overview of the market environment as well as a look at plan market values.

Looking at the plans' performances from the 2022 end of year and the first quarter of 2023 shows the effects of volatility in the market. Global equity markets experienced a 26% drop between the January highs and the October lows. They ended the year slightly better. High inflation, tight monetary conditions, and the war in Ukraine all contributed to this situation. At the beginning of 2023, inflation pressure eased up. This brought optimism that the Federal Reserve would stop increasing interest rates and liquidity conditions would improve, which led markets to rebound in the first quarter. Global markets ended the first quarter of 2023 going up 7% and down only 7.5% from the previous 2022 first quarter. Breaking down the markets by regional subcomponents, the U.S. markets had previously held the highest rate of return long term. This year mark, ending March 31, showed the U.S. markets behind non-U.S., with a loss of about 8.5% U.S. verses about 4.0% loss non-U.S. Bond markets fall when interest rates rise, so the past year has been a poor environment for bonds. The good news is that although inflation remains high, there is a clear downward trend.

The one-year mark shows a decrease, and the three- and five-year timelines show an increase. What is being seen quarterly now is a positive swing, except for small value stock, which saw a downturn.

It is expected that we will continue to see the significant ups and downs throughout this year. The continued great news is that people are not trying to pull their money out when the market is falling and put it back in when there is an upswing. The Washington State Retirement members are not trying to time the market day by day, but instead are wisely leaving their investments through this turmoil, which will leave them in a much better place overall. *(Cont. on page 5.)*

**Look for an article from Tom MacRobert, our PEBB Representative,
in the summer issue of *Connections*.**

The WSIB receives contract bids at regular intervals from investment management groups to manage different segments of the retirement portfolio. The Socially Responsive Investment (SRI) was the most recent contract sent out to bid. Prior to the bidding process, WSIB modified this investment option to better meet members' interests. In the past, this portfolio option was a balanced/multi-asset option. To better reflect interest, it will now be an equity only option. This portfolio's theme is split into three areas, which are Climate, Health, and Empowerment. This approach attempts to direct capital towards the richest investment opportunity set and ensures a minimum level of diversification across the themes. Those individuals currently invested in the socially responsive investment will receive information directly so that a better understanding of the changes made is provided.

The Department of Retirement Systems' budget was presented. It is a budget plan for 2023-25 and included the increases provided by the legislature to assist with the planning and implementation process to update the 30-year-old data system currently used so that it can be replaced by 2027.

Tracy Guerin, the director of DRS, updated the advisory board about filling DRS employee openings as well as the impact of the new data system being provided to replace the outdated one currently in place.

Pension related legislation included a one-time 3% benefit increase for TRS Plan 1 retirees up to a maximum of \$110 per month. This will go into effect on July 1 of this year. To be eligible for the increase, the member must be retired on or before July 1, 2022. This increase only applies for members who are not receiving a minimum benefit. The Select Committee on Pension Policy is directed to study and recommend an ongoing COLA for Plan 1 retirees. (Opinion from your representative ... it would be great to see a permanent fix come out of this committee as well as be passed by the legislature. Our Plan 1 retirees should be able to count on a COLA.)

The meeting finished up by hearing from the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Consultant, Rocky Dimico. He provided an update on the Pro-Equity Anti-Racism Plan. A training plan for the agency is being created along with the implementation of a more inclusive hiring practice to be put in place.

The next advisory meeting will be in November 2023.

Rainier chapter does lunch and the Highline Heritage Museum

By Joanne Glasgow, WEA-Retired-Rainier Board Director



Thanks to a grant from WEA-Retired, a number of the Rainier Chapter members got together for lunch on April 27 at Classic Eats in Burien and then toured the Highline Heritage Museum just a block away. It was our first in-person event since Sept. 2022, so the conversations around the table were lively, and laughter rang out on several occasions as we all reconnected.

After lunch, we walked to the Highline Heritage Museum for a guided tour and individual exploration of the small, but important, community resource. Since more than half of the members present are former Highline School District educators, it was easy to connect with the various exhibits in the museum. One member, Alice Hammond, is a graduate of Glacier High School and was able to spot herself in the senior class picture that was part of the Highline Schools' exhibit!

It was truly great to get together with all of these folks, to explore these two community favorites, and to cheer on Sandy Hunt's transition from being a pre-retired member to a full-fledged retired member come July. If you haven't looked into a chapter grant for your local chapter, I encourage everyone to do so!

WEA-Retired-Sammamish tours the Village Theatre in Issaquah

By Michael Coleman, WEA-Retired-Sammamish Board Director

On March 9, twelve members of WEA-Retired-Sammamish took a backstage tour at the Village Theatre in Issaquah. The hour-long tour was conducted by Bobbi Kotula, who is playing Dolly in the upcoming Hello Dolly musical. (Issaquah: May 24-July 2, 2023, and Everett: July 7-July 30.)

The group visited backstage, the orchestra pit, dressing rooms, upstairs lighting, and sound rooms. Afterwards, the group enjoyed a lunch across the street at the Japan Ginger restaurant. We all enjoyed the informative tour and the chance to catch up with each other over lunch!



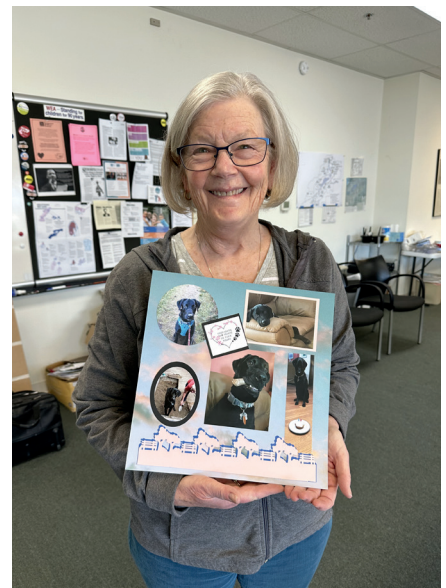
WEA-Retired-Soundview art events

By Quincy Cook, WEA-Retired-Soundview Board Director



The Soundview chapter of WEA-Retired is a creative group. On December 7, we got together at Uncorked Canvas in downtown Tacoma for refreshments and painting. The instructor led us through the steps of creating a winter barn scene. On March 8, we got together to create memory

collages. Each person brought 3-5 photos of a special memory. Quincy Cook, WEA-Retired board director for Soundview, showed them how to enhance their photos by matting, cropping and adding embellishments. When they were finished, they had a 12x12 frameable memory.





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Does WEA-Retired have your current email and phone numbers? If not, please update at <https://forms.WashingtonEA.org/forms/memberupdate>

Important dates

June 29-30: NEA Retired Annual Meeting
July 2-6: NEA Representative Assembly

Save the dates

Sept. 20-21: 4th Annual WEA-Retired Virtual September Conference

Ally Organizations' Events

Sept. 12: Washington State Alliance for Retired Americans (WSARA) Annual Convention
Oct. 19: Senior Citizen's Lobby Annual Fall Conference

Do you know that WEA-Retired members also belong to a WEA-Retired chapter within the UniServ Councils? You belong to the chapter where you last worked or where you currently live. If you would like to make a change, please send an email to WEARetired@WashingtonEA.org.

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.

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