

# NEA-Alaska/Retired

Fall 2017 • Volume XXXI No. 4

## NEA Representative Assembly 2017: Uniting Our Members and the Nation for Strong Communities

Barb Stek and I were NEA-Alaska/Retired members of the Alaska delegation at the NEA Representative Assembly. The annual meeting took place June 30 through July 5, at the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center in the great city of Boston, Massachusetts.

Alaska's delegation was one of 52 at the RA. With about 7,000 delegates, RA is the largest democratic, deliberative assembly in the world. It is similar to our Delegate Assembly (DA), but imagine DA on steroids. During the assembly, delegates vote on issues facing public education and set NEA's policies and priorities for the upcoming year. Think about it. 7,000 NEA members – representing diverse backgrounds, experiences, and political platforms, and coming from every region of the nation – gathered in a huge hall, vigorously discussing and debating issues that are important concerns to us all: public education, children and families, our schools, and our profession. NEA President Lily Eskelsen García artfully conducted this meeting. It was frustrating at times but always inspiring and invigorating.

Preceding the Representative Assembly, delegates attend committee meetings, special-interest caucuses and hearings, and visit the exhibits of NEA-approved vendors.

I attended the hearing on the revised NEA Policy Statement on Charter Schools.

The new statement was developed over the past year by a task force of about two dozen educators. The policy makes clear that NEA supports public charter schools that are authorized by public school districts and are held accountable for their students' success. NEA opposes privately managed, unaccountable charter schools. The NEA Board of Directors voted unanimously to recommend approval of this new charter policy by the Representative Assembly. After debate, delegates approved the Policy Statement on Charter Schools. To read more about the policy, go to [ra.nea.org/search/NEA+Policy+Statement+on+Charter+Schools/](http://ra.nea.org/search/NEA+Policy+Statement+on+Charter+Schools/)

A notable and moving highlight is the NEA Human and Civil Rights Awards Dinner. I had the privilege to attend the 50th anniversary celebration of this event, along with several other Alaskan delegates. The Human and Civil Rights Awards Dinner was hosted by NEA in the Grand Ballroom of the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center. This year's theme was "Living the Legacy: After 50 Years, Still We Rise." Twelve human rights and civil rights heroes were recognized for their inspiring contributions to building a more just society. To learn more about these 12 distinguished individuals, go to [www.nea.org/grants/HCR Awards.html](http://www.nea.org/grants/HCR Awards.html).

President Eskelsen García opened the NEA Representative Assembly with a strong and inspiring keynote address. She told delegates, "We have a president who

*Cont. on pg. 3*



*Beautiful Boston*

## In This Issue

NEA Representative Assembly 2017	1
President's Message	2
Alaska Retirement Management	
Board Update	4
NEA-Retired Annual Meeting	4
We Care About AlaskaCare	5
Election News	5
Health Care Stats	5
NEA-Alaska Board Meeting	6
A Blast From the Past	7
Volunteer Opportunity	8
Happy Birthday Hank	8
Calendar of Events	8

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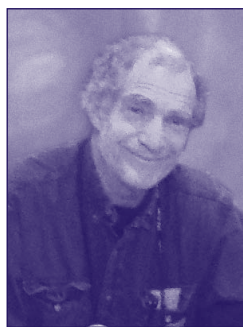
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# President's Message

## aka Kronberg's Corner



Every quarter the Department of Administration and the state's third party administrators for AlaskaCare sit down for a review of the number of people served and the costs of providing the various services to both active Alaska public employees who are covered by AlaskaCare and those retired public employees, including retired educators, covered by AlaskaCare. NEA-Alaska/Retired sends representatives to participate in the meeting and report back to our board of directors on important findings from the reviews.

Here, in summary, are a few of the important findings from the most recent quarterly review. Because the bulk of the medical costs of our members over 65 are covered by Medicare and AlaskaCare provides the secondary coverage for all of those retired employees, the costs for medical coverage are relatively small compared to the costs of prescription drugs. While medical care costs still outpace pharmaceutical costs for retirees the difference is surprisingly small. The costs of specialty and compound pharmaceuticals have risen sharply.

One finding that was surprising was the data on calls to AlaskaCare's concierge service. The phone number can be found at the Division of Retirement and Benefit's website. If you have an issue with anything having to do with AlaskaCare, it ought to be your first attempt at resolution. Based on responses provided by retirees and dependents using the concierge service, about 23,000 people in the quarter being considered, more than 96% of those using the service found their issues were resolved on the first call they had to make. Based on that experience, we do not hesitate to recommend the concierge service to any member with a question about AlaskaCare.

A number of members contacted us about the verification of dependent form that was contracted to HMS Services in Texas. The way this was done raised more than a handful of questions in our minds. Was this really necessary? We all had to submit proof of the dependent status for our dependents when we retired. Just how many people changed that status since retirement? We were wondering whether the rules would be the same for dependents covered under the DVA plan, where dependent coverage must be purchased, as they are for major medical coverage that comes along with coverage for the retired public employee? Would the state refund the premium money paid for dependent DVA coverage if the coverage was found to no longer be valid? Anyone who has had their dependent status changed despite having submitted documents they felt were adequate to prove the dependent relationship should contact Barbara Stek or Judy Salo, from the NEA-Alaska/Retired Health Benefits Team, to discuss the issue.

Please make sure we have all your current information - phone numbers, email, etc. Contact Susie at the NEA-Alaska office to update our records. And, as always, keep track of all your dealings with Aetna.

We do want to express our collective thanks to Rod McCoy, who stepped down from his positions on the NEA-Alaska/Retired Board of Directors and as

*Cont. on pg 3*

Editor: Barbara Stek

*This newsletter is the official publication of NEA-Alaska/Retired, printed three times a year: October, February, and June. Retired members are encouraged to submit articles, as well as voice comments and concerns. Articles should be sent in Word via email to bwstekak@yahoo.com no later than the 1st of the publication month.*

*“President’s Message” Cont.*

co-chair of the NEA-Alaska/Retired Health Benefits Team. We are all indebted to Rod for his many years of service to active members when he was a leader in the Anchorage Education Association and his more recent years of service to retired members. Whenever there was a job to be done Rod was always willing to take it on. His advocacy will be greatly missed.

– *Rich Kronberg*

*“NEA Rep. Assembly 2017” Cont.*

resides at the dangerous intersection of arrogance and ignorance and travels with a moral compass that always points to his own self-interest.” She said, “We will find common ground with many Republicans and many Democrats on many issues. But we will not find common ground with an administration that is cruel and callous to our children and their families.” President Eskelsen García warned that the present administration attacks public schools and public school educators and works to take away our right to “organize and negotiate with a collective voice.” She forcefully stated, “They won’t succeed. We are the voice of education professionals. Our work is fundamental to the nation, and we accept the profound trust that is placed in us.” President Eskelsen García’s speech was received with thunderous applause and a standing ovation. To listen to her keynote speech, go to [ra.nea.org/](http://ra.nea.org/)

Other notable speakers at RA included:

The 2017 NEA Education Support Professional of the Year, Saul Ramos, works as a para-educator in Massachusetts. He is a self taught Brailist and advocate for the visually impaired. In his speech to the delegates, Ramos said, “It is more important than ever for all of us to unite and support public education. ESP members, NEA-retired members, teachers, higher education and student members, and parents - we must all stand strong together.”

The 2017 National Teacher of the Year, Sydney Chaffee, is a humanities teacher at Codman Academy public charter school in Boston. She talked about education as a transformative tool for social justice. Chaffee reminded delegates to listen to students: “Let’s keep our ears and hearts open to our students’ brilliance, even when it makes us uncomfortable.”

NEA presented the 2017 Friend of Education Award - the organization’s highest honor - to actor LeVar Burton for his leadership and positive impact on developing children’s literacy. Burton hosts the PBS children’s series “Reading Rainbow” and portrayed Lt. Commander Geordi La Forge in “Star Trek: The Next Generation” and the young Kunta Kinte in the award-winning miniseries “Roots” in 1977. Burton

## Thanks for Your Service, Rod

The NEA-Alaska/Retired Board of Directors regretfully accepted the resignation of Rod McCoy from the Board and the Health Benefits Team due to health issues. Rod has been a long-time activist for education in Anchorage and Alaska. Most recently, Rod has tirelessly advocated for retired members experiencing problems with health insurance coverage. Rod will be greatly missed by those on the NEA-Alaska/Retired Board, as well as the many members he has helped over the years.

called for adequate funding for public education and greater respect for educators. He said, “I believe that what you have to offer is essential to this nation.”

The Representative Assembly is the top decision-making body for our nearly 3 million-member national association. Delegates adopt the strategic plan and budget, resolutions, the legislative program, and other policies of the organization. Delegates’ work begins with state delegation meetings at 7 a.m. each day. If you are lucky and are appointed to the Alaska delegation’s Preview Committee, your work begins at 6 a.m. The Preview Committee does just what its name suggests: it previews the resolutions and new business items (NBI) that will come before the full assembly. The Preview Committee makes recommendations to the state delegation. During our state meetings, we discuss and debate, often passionately, the merits of the submitted resolutions and NBIs. Participating as a delegate at the RA requires a lot of attention and some homework. Delegates experience thought-provoking debates, many opportunities for networking and learning, and very little sleep. I can say with certainty that your Alaska delegates were diligent and responsible, taking the work of our association very seriously.

Before and after the daily business, I was able to explore a bit of Boston: eating lobster (yum!), enjoying “Alaska Night” with the Alaska delegation and our Trolley Tour of the city, dining at the top of the Prudential Building on the 52nd floor (yikes!), experiencing the architecture, delights and history of the North End, walking the historic Freedom Trail, and meeting new friends while standing in line at Mike’s Place for their renowned pastry.

NEA Representative Assembly was both exhausting and exhilarating. I was honored to represent you as one of the NEA-Alaska/Retired delegates.

– *Roxanne Abajian*



## Alaska Retirement Management Board Report – Fall 2017



The trust funds managed by the Alaska Retirement Management Board of trustees and the wonderful staff at the Department of Revenue, lead by Chief Investment Officer Bob Mitchell, experienced excellent returns for FY'17. Preliminary reports by Callan, our investment advisor, indicate a 13.35% rate of return for the PERS DB funds and a 13.36% return for the TRS DB funds. The Board and staff are committed to a diverse asset allocation that has served the funds well in different investment climates. The financial statement for the end of July, 2017 indicates \$31.3 billion invested in the 14 different trust funds and the individual accounts for members of the defined contribution systems.

In early August of 2017, the State of Alaska contributed \$72.6 million to the PERS DB pension and health trust

funds and \$111.76 million to the TRS DB pension and health trust funds. This money is contributed each fiscal year to make up the difference between the amount contributed by the employers and the amount the actuaries determine is needed to reduce the unfunded liability.

In mid-August, Commissioner Randy Hoffbeck resigned to pursue his preferred vocation as a minister. Commissioner Hoffbeck was an excellent trustee, with good instincts and common sense. We wish him well. Jerry Burnett, a long time state employee, who came out of retirement to serve as Deputy Commissioner, is now acting Commissioner until a replacement is named.

The ARM Board met in Anchorage on October 4 with four committee meetings scheduled that day. The regular meeting of the entire board was October 5 and 6. The ARM Board Trustees will attend an Education Conference to be held in New York City, November 9 and 10.

– *Gayle Harbo, ARM Board Trustee*

## NEA-Retired Annual Meeting

### June 27-28, 2017 | Boston, Massachusetts

Roxanne Abajian and I were your delegates to the 34th annual retired meeting. It is interesting to note that NEA-Retired was the only NEA membership category to show growth during Tom Curran's presidency these past six years. We have 316,000 members – up around 4000 since last year.

Lily Eskelsen García, NEA President, spoke to us about serious concerns regarding the Federal education budget. Many established, beneficial programs will be decimated, such as, career and technical grants, migrant education, after school programs, and loan forgiveness. If the 14% proposed cut, which amounts to \$9.2B, is successful, 22 Federal education programs will be eliminated and money will be diverted to vouchers.

Retired members have been asked to welcome the new generation into our ranks, to protect and defend the union, and to help build local, state, and national capacity through organizing and advocacy. To that end, 45 organizing grants were given in 2017.

The Jack Kinnaman Scholarship program was able to award three, \$2500 scholarships. Two of the recipients were able to speak to the group – we have some amazing, dynamic young people entering the teaching profession.

A new business item passed regarding a request for information pertaining to reduced dues for retired ESP members. A report will be presented at the 2018 annual meeting. Of the eight NBIs presented, four failed and two were referred.

Elections proved to be quite exciting. Three people ran for president: Ronald Burgess, Sarah Borgman, and John Jensen. When all was said and done after the run-off vote, Sarah Borgman won: Sarah 154, John 138. Later on in the day, both John, who is still the vice president, and Sarah took the stage and indicated they would work together as a team. Jon-Paul Roden and Julie Horwin were elected to the Executive Council.

On the break day between the end of the annual retired meeting and the start of RA, Mary Nibbelink and I set off to find the gravesite of Boston's Mother Goose who was wed to Isaac Goose. As many of you know, Mary is Anchorage's Mother Goose extraordinaire. We eventually located the right cemetery where we also found the gravesites of Paul Revere, John Hancock, and the parents of Benjamin Franklin. So much history, so little time!!

– *Barbara Stek*

## We Care About AlaskaCare

One of the important functions of NEA-Alaska/Retired is to monitor the benefits that you have earned during your career in education. Healthcare coverage for medical and prescriptions, and the optional coverage for dental, visual, and auditory, are offered through AlaskaCare which is currently underwritten by Aetna and Moda Health. Coverage under AlaskaCare is determined by your tier status, by options that you chose at retirement, and most importantly by your age. If you are over 65, Medicare is likely your primary insurance with Aetna as the secondary. To make matters further complicated you may have coverage for dependents and/or cross coverage between you and your spouse. It can all seem very complicated, so as an advocacy organization NEA-Alaska/Retired tries to help keep you abreast of changes and challenges that you might face regarding health care coverage.

One of the things the NEA-Alaska/Retired Health Team does is to monitor the AlaskaCare quarterly meetings where they review usage within the network, including the types of services used, the costs, and the current issues and initia-

tives. This past month the meeting was attended by Barbara Stek, Health Team Chair, and Val Baffone, our staff liaison. One of the major issues discussed was the Verification of Dependents that AlaskaCare is undertaking which left many scrambling to find their marriage certificates and additional paperwork before a September 8th deadline.

Many of you have probably used the Concierge service provided by Aetna (the number is on the back of your card). This past quarter 21,299 calls were received and 96.3% of the issues raised were resolved as a result of the first call. It is a good first step when you have a question regarding your coverage. Also, you can check the State of Alaska Division of Retirement and Benefits website to find general and more comprehensive information. Meanwhile, NEA-Alaska/Retired will continue to monitor the implementation of our health insurance program and share with you information through our publications.

– *Judy Salo, Health Care Team*

# Election News

## You Need to Know

**The following NEA-Alaska/Retired members will be representing you at Delegate Assembly 2018.**

<b>Delegates in alphabetical order:</b>	Pat DeSmet Karen Eddy Ron Fuhrer Barb George Beverly Goad Daniel Greer Dona Helmer Andy Holleman Nancy Hummel Mike Husa Faith Lee Rod McCoy Don Oberg Trish Patterson Sharon Penttila	Tom Richards Trena Richardson Judy Salo Kristina Tornqvist Chris Villano James Villano Stephanie Windsor
		<b>Alternates in order of selection:</b> Christine Scott Jim Lepley Cathy Carrow Bill Bjork

## Health Care Stats

- There is more in-network usage.
- 60% of claims are in-state.
- \$294M+ paid out in medical, \$221M in pharmacy.
- Under 65 retirees: pharmacy – 23%, inpatient facility – 16%, ambulatory facility – 15%.
- Lab and radiation up, pharmacy spending up
- Musculoskeletal – largest cost, then cancer and coronary artery
- First quarter concierge calls – 21,299, 96.30% of issues resolved on first call.
- Retirees only – \$7M+ savings by talking with the doctors about prescriptions.
- 113 individual providers (mostly for under 65) were added to the overall network.
- Problems or concerns: Go to DRB website, call concierge.
- Anchorage Office: 2525 C Street, Suite 205, 8-5 M-F, closed 12-1pm

## NEA-Alaska Board Meeting

September 21-22, 2017

### Executive Committee Meeting:

- Focused on Executive Director Glenn Bafia's evaluation as per policy; Glenn shared his goals for the year which are related to the three goals determined by the Board at the June retreat.

He reported that this year is off to a strong start with a commitment to the strategic plan by the entire staff, a significant number of whom are relatively new to NEA-Alaska. His calm, creative, and organized management style is exactly what we'd hoped for when he was hired last spring.

- NEA-Alaska is placing a strong emphasis on changing from the service model of the past few decades to the organizing model which sounds a lot more like the state association that we remember from the 1970s when we had only three staff and an exec.

### Board Meeting:

Glenn reported on the results of a comprehensive survey of NEA-Alaska members especially focused on the "state of the union" in anticipation of the loss of agency fee in June 2018. Conclusion: members who feel connected to their state and local and who understand the benefits of association membership are most likely to continue their membership in the absence of agency fee.

80% of current state membership is in the nine large agency fee locals. He reported on the four takeaways from recent member polling: most important elements in loyalty to the association are feeling connected and supported, understanding both the benefits of membership and of the cost to our effectiveness and power with a loss in membership.

Glenn presented the strategic plan which was developed by staff around the goals and outcomes written by the Board at the June retreat and adopted today:

- **GOAL 1.** NEA-Alaska will maximize our capacity to achieve our mission through an organized, engaged membership.
  - Outcome 1A: All educators entering the profession will become actively engaged in the Association.
  - Outcome 1B: Train and support locals to organize at a grassroots level.
  - Outcome 1C: Increase membership statewide by 10% per year.

- **GOAL 2.** NEA-Alaska will engage in all aspects of the political process to promote and protect public education.

- Outcome 2A: NEA-Alaska will achieve a secure retirement for all members.
- Outcome 2B: The Alaska Legislature will provide public schools with all the forward-funding necessary to support a quality education.
- Outcome 2C: Actively recruit and encourage friends of public education, including NEA-Alaska members, to run for public office and hold them accountable for actions, decisions, and consequences.
- Outcome 2D: Build coalitions with like-minded, pro-education partners.
- Outcome 2E: Influence, inform, and engage the voting public on our education issues.
- Outcome 2F: Continued success in influencing DEED personnel and appointments.

- **GOAL 3.** NEA-Alaska will ensure that working conditions, salaries, and benefits attract and retain quality educators.

- Outcome 3A: NEA-Alaska will achieve a secure retirement for all members.
- Outcome 3B: NEA-Alaska will form partnerships with other stakeholders to create a recruitment and retention plan.
- Outcome 3C: Bargain competitive and enforceable contracts.
- Outcome 3D: Help to secure the repeal of GPO/WEP (Government Pension Offset/Windfall Elimination Provision.)

Glenn reported on a recent attack from a group called Alaska Policy Forum, partially funded by the Koch brothers, who just mailed an attack on AEA to all the Anchorage teachers who received a pink slip last spring, telling them that the AEA contract is to blame for the pink slips and the district's budget deficit, and urging them to become agency fee payers and "give themselves a mini-PFD." This group is virulently anti-public education. There is no doubt that they will emerge again in June when we anticipate the US Supreme Court decision outlawing agency fee.

Approved a new policy in response to NBI 17-40 which directed NEA-Alaska to fund a one day meeting each fall to allow local presidents within Regions 1, 2, and 4 to meet with their regional directors. The motion passed

*Cont. on pg 7*



*“Board Meeting” Cont.*

unanimously in light of the key roles played by local presidents in member organizing, particularly in response to the assumed loss of agency fee in June. This policy will address the long-standing difficulties with communication in the rural locals, and our increasing awareness of the importance of face to face meetings in establishing the connecting relationships that hold the association together.

Approved a Budget Committee request to establish a new line item for \$50,000 called “Local Community Outreach” which will be available to fund projects proposed by locals.

The Board broke into committees (aligned with Delegate Assembly) to develop charges within our three strategic goals and to report to the Board by March 2018.

Interesting idea the emerged from the committee on Collective Bargaining, chaired by Rich K: explore options to end the requirement that we provide the same benefits to non-members as to members. Success would mean clear benefits to membership and the elimination of freeloaders.

The Leading the Professions committee will be preparing a comprehensive motion for DA to address the “transformational proposals” which the State Board will be bringing forward from the work of the five statewide committees engaged in the Alaska Educational Challenge. It is our hope that we can support all their recommendations because we want to say “yes” to everything that falls within

what NEA-Alaska believes supports student learning.

The Board spent some time discussing the newest “thing” called Personalized Learning. The Fairbanks and Kenai districts have spent over three million dollars to implement this program sold by a for profit company, much of which has been poorly rolled out in Fairbanks with a lot of ambiguity and consequent teacher frustration. It is apparently being better received in Kenai due to more clarity. It appears to consist of four strands: targeted instruction, data driven instruction, integrated digital content, and student reflection. As the Board agreed, these have been the elements of good instruction for eternity. There may be some NBIs related to this issue at DA.

Teachers across the state, but especially in Anchorage, are feeling enormous pressure on their instructional time from legislative and regulatory mandates for curricular units. There was considerable discussion of Bree’s Law, which mandates annual training for all students on sexual assault, and which is being implemented in Anchorage by teachers in many disciplines, such as social studies, without training and without regard to their ability or background to successfully handle such topics. Time to teach is the primary issue in the current Anchorage bargaining impasse.

– *Respectfully submitted, Susan Stitham*

## A Blast from the Past

### Compliments of Dr. Merritt C. Olson, March, 1987

As I was preparing for a garage sale, I came across a rather old AEA Teacher Advocate. The information in it reminded me of how far we have come with our association. Between the years of 1933 and 1945, there were no teacher pensions – paychecks ceased with retirement at the mandatory age of 65. Even when the Teachers’ Retirement System was established in 1945, gains were quite meager with no medical benefits. A new joint contributory system came into being in 1955. However, still no medical benefits.

It was not until:

- 1966 that health benefits for those not covered by Medicare were established;
- 1966 that the 10% COLA was instituted;
- 1966 that the post retirement pension adjustment was adopted;
- 1970 that the normal retirement age was reduced from

60 to 55;

- 1970 that the multiplier for retirement benefits was increased to 2%;
- 1972 that health benefits were available to retirees under 65;
- 1975 that normal retirement was available at any age with 20 years of service;
- 1978 that retirement credit was given for unused sick leave;
- 1982 that the optional Dental, Visual, and Auditory plan came into being.

We thank the many educators, past and present, who worked then and continue to do so, so that our active and retiree benefits and advantages remain strong.

– *Barbara Stek*



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**Check out the results of the recent election for Delegate Assembly!**

## Volunteer Opportunity

If you are interested in calling up to ten (10) NEA-Alaska active members with regard to joining NEA-Alaska/Retired, we would love to have you onboard. You will be provided with a script and any other assistance as needed. Please contact Val Baffone at the NEA-Alaska office, 274-0536, or email Rich Kronberg at richkronberg@gmail.com.

Thanks for your support!!

## Happy Birthday, Hank!!

Please join us at the NEA-Alaska office as we celebrate Hank Harrison's 90th birthday!!! The party will be an open House from 3-6pm on October 27. See you there!!



## Calendar of Events

### November

- 3-4 Board of Directors Meeting
- 15 National ESP Day
- 17 Substitute Educator Day
- 23 Thanksgiving

### December

- 22-31 NEA-Alaska Offices Closed

### January

- 1-2 NEA-Alaska Offices Closed
- 10-11 Board of Directors Meeting
- 12-13 Delegate Assembly
- 14 NEA-Alaska/Retired Board Meeting
- 16 Legislative Session Begins

### February

- 16 Elizabeth Peratrovich Day