

NEA-Alaska/Retired

Winter / Spring 2024 • Volume XXXVIII No. 2

Would You Like to Help Grow NEA-Alaska?



As an Active NEA-Retired member, you understand the value of Union Membership. When we build membership, we build power. This power allows us to be advocates for public education for each child and to advance the interests of public school employees.

The way we build our membership and increase our power is through one-on-one conversations with teachers and support staff from across the state. Every year, we train member organizers to go out into schools and speak with potential members. We visit communities all over the state, talk to teachers and support professionals, and ask them to be part of the Union. This past year, we recruited, 1128 new members to NEA-Alaska through these visits.

We are always looking for member organizers to help grow the membership of the union. As a retiree, you know the important work the organization does to support our educators and our schools. Who better to be involved in the recruitment of new members? Please join us and be part of the team!

If you are interested in being part of this recruitment process, contact Hedy Eischeid at hedy.eischeid@neaalaska.org

– Hedy M. Eischeid, State-Wide Organizer
NEA-Alaska



Waiting to board the plane, leaving one of the villages in the North Slope Borough School District

Retiree Health Plan Advisory Board

The Retiree Health Plan Advisory Board (RHPAB) continues to have limited function due to the pending appointments of several members. Despite those difficulties, the Modernization Subcommittee, which met in late January, continued to prioritize the proposed plan changes based on recommendations from the DRB (*Division of Retirement and Benefits*), ongoing analysis, and member feedback.

The last RHPAB full board meeting was on February 8th. We will meet next in early May and remain hopeful that the Boards and Commissions Office and the Governor have handled our reappointment issues by then.

– Judy Salo

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President's Message



As I look out my window at the heap of snow, I don't see spring around the corner. Alas, I'm reminded of the classic question: "What are the four seasons in Alaska?" The answer is of course "Winter, June, July, and August".

July 6, 2024, will mark the end of my term serving as your president. Being president of our local is work, but it's energizing work. It's been an honor to serve the members of NEA-Alaska/Retired. Thank you and congratulations to Joe Boyle for stepping up as a candidate for the office of president and earning the support of our members. Joe is a longtime member of NEA, NEA-Alaska, and NEA-Alaska/Retired and is an experienced leader.

The NEA-Alaska/Retired leadership team has accomplished a lot during the past few years. Here are some of the goals we achieved:

- Encouraged new members to participate in state and national leadership roles
- Funded new and different members to attend conferences
- Applied for and were awarded a grant to use for organizing our retired local
- Organized a retreat for the leadership team including committee members
- Revised and updated the Retired Bylaws and the Retired Policies
- Planned for a substantial delegate meeting prior to Delegate Assembly — which is now our official Policy Assembly
- Provided more members a voice in the governance and direction of our local
- Created and adopted a new logo — thank you NEA-AK staff, Laura Bartholomae and the first gentleman, Gregg Poppen 😊
- Structured a succession plan for the development of new leaders

Many people helped to realize these goals. Even though I brought leadership experience to the table, my first action as president was to ask Susan Stitham to help by mentoring me during my first year as I stepped in for the former president, Rich Kronberg. (Susan would be quick to delete this acknowledgment if I gave her the opportunity to edit this president's message 😊). Susan is a very dedicated retired member. She works tirelessly for our local and for NEA-Alaska to support public educators and public education. Her experience, insights and feedback are highly valued and very much appreciated. Thank you, Susan.

A heartfelt thank you goes to the many members and personal friends who provided support with messages, calls, cards, and emails during my time as president. Thank you to all those who called or wrote to legislators when we asked for help. Thank you to members who voted in our retired elections and on proposed revisions of our bylaws. Gratitude goes to members who completed our survey. We hear you and we will use your ideas and the results of the survey to plan priorities and programs for our local. We will continue to provide you with information in the president's email blasts, our newsletter, our retired Facebook page, and our website.

I thank the Retired Board of Directors and the committee members for their

Editor: Annie Baker

This newsletter is the official publication of NEA-Alaska/Retired, printed four times a year. Retired members are encouraged to submit articles, as well as voice comments and concerns. Articles should be sent in Word via email, with "Newsletter" in the subject line, to Annie Baker: annie_b@mac.com

“President’s Message” Cont.

time and their contributions to the vitality of our local. Thank you to the retired delegates who attended the Policy Assembly, Delegate Assembly, and Representative Assembly; your input, advocacy, and work are needed and important. NEA-Alaska/Retired has an excellent relationship with NEA-Alaska. We couldn’t do all that we do without the support of the NEA-Alaska governance team and staff. I’m honored to work with these folks and grateful for their support, energy, smarts, and good humor.

There is more to do. We didn’t take the necessary time re-organizing our local these past three years just to look pretty. We organized and strengthened our structure because we are still fighting to protect benefits we’ve earned as retired public employees. The bipartisan *Social Security Fairness Act* – which now has 308 co-sponsors – would eliminate both the WEP and the GPO, two provisions of the *Social Security Act* that unfairly reduce or eliminate Social Security benefits for millions of Americans who have devoted much of their careers to public service – including federal employees, police officers, firefighters, and educators. WEP and GPO cut or eliminated the earned benefits of more than 2.5 million retirees! We are not giving up on this fight. These unfair provisions of the Social Security code must be repealed.

We continue to defend and fight for public education: our students, our schools, our profession. Attacks on public education are not only dangerous, they are spreading. We organize and fight for the freedom to teach the truth and for the safety and well-being of students, in particular our LGBTQ+ students and public educators.

The challenges are clear, but so is our collective strength. With resolve we must continue to stand strong for public education, democracy, and freedom.

As our next vice president, I’m committed to working with Joe as NEA-Alaska/Retired continues to: strengthen our local; protect our pension and health benefits; repeal WEP/GPO; support public education through advocacy and mentoring; and achieve legislative and political action goals for public schools and education employees.

Now about the long season of winter...time to shovel a path through the snow.

In solidarity,
– Roxanne Abajian



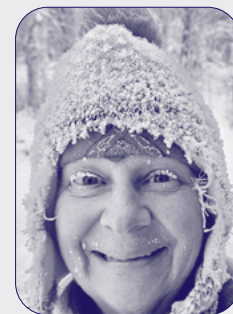
Judy Salo Receives the Gayle Harbo Award

Several years ago, NEA-Alaska/Retired established an award in honor of Gayle Harbo, one of our most dedicated members. The NEA-Alaska/Retired Board of Directors may award the Gayle Harbo Award to a member of our retired local who has provided distinguished and dedicated service to NEA-Alaska/Retired over a number of years. This year, the Retired Board of Directors decided to honor our friend, colleague, and longtime educational advocate, Judy Salo. Judy Salo was an active member during her teaching career. She served as an officer in her local association, KPEA. Judy was Vice President of NEA-Alaska and served as President of NEA-Alaska in 1989 and 1990, as well as representing Alaska on the NEA National Board as our NEA Director. Judy’s advocacy for education continued as she served in the State of Alaska Legislature. After her retirement, Judy continued to be active by serving as the Vice President of the NEA-Alaska/Retired Local. She currently serves as a Region R Director on the NEA-Alaska State Board, representing retirees as well as advocating for practicing teachers. She was appointed to the Retiree Health Plan Advisory Board (RH-PAB) by Governor Walker and has worked to protect and improve the health insurance of retired teachers. Thanks, Judy, for your devotion to students, teachers and retirees. This award is well deserved.

– Trena Richardson

Retirees’ Tips, Tricks & Tidbits

Snowshoeing is my winter fun! Good health is now my daily goal, my NEW job, you might say.



– Nancy Hummel

Why a Policy Assembly for the Retired Local?

NEA-Alaska/Retired, our local, is unlike all others in that we do not all reside in a single geographic area. Many members live in Alaska however, many also live in far flung places but all our members retain a commitment to the health of both Alaska’s public education and the Alaska PERS and TRS retirement plans.

In the past, the only members who had an opportunity to meet together a few times a year to discuss our local’s issues were our very small elected Board of Directors. In addition, the approximately 35-40 elected Retired delegates to the annual Delegate Assembly traditionally met on the Thursday afternoon before the start of DA. This meeting was more of a meet and greet and catch up with old friends, rather than a business meeting.

One of Roxanne’s goals, as the retired president, was to strengthen our members’ connection with our local, both through increased communication and through broadening the opportunity for active participation in local governance while also encouraging the development of new leadership. The Retired Board of Directors recognized the importance of this goal and approved the development of a Policy Assembly. With the leadership of Susan Stitham as chair of the Policy Assembly Committee and chair to revise the retired policies, we set about updating our retired bylaws and policies and structuring a Policy Assembly.

Our membership approved a revised and updated set of bylaws which included the establishment of a new governance body — a Policy Assembly to meet prior to DA with specific powers: (1) to submit motions and take positions on issues before DA, (2) to recommend bylaw changes to the membership, and (3) to recommend to the R Board policies, programs, and activities for our local.

Although for fiscal reasons the Retired Policy Assembly and the Region R caucus of Delegate Assembly consist of the same set of elected delegates, they are two separate bodies with two different purposes. Annually the Retired Policy Assembly will meet prior to Delegate Assembly and adjourn at the close of its business and prior to the first session of DA. The DA Region R caucus, like all DA regional caucuses, is focused on the specific business to come before the DA, will convene for its first caucus meeting after the first DA session.

We held our first official Policy Assembly January 11, 2024. The PA delegates voted to recommended that the Retired Board of Directors approve the revisions to our retired policies. (Members have the authority to approve changes to the retired bylaws. The Retired Board of Directors has the authority to approve changes to the retired policies)

We heard reports from the retired president and treasurer, Region R Directors, and the committee chairs: Membership, Communication, PACE, Legislative, and the Retired Health Plan Advisory Board (RHPAB). Howard Maxwell and Steve Click shared information about the continued efforts to repeal WEP/GPO. We had a robust discussion about the eligibility requirements for membership in NEA-Alaska/Retired Bylaws, and necessary changes, in the grim reality of Tiers III and IV. A committee was appointed to draft a revision to our eligibility requirements to align more with the national NEA-Retired Bylaws. This will be a bylaw change and will be put to the membership to vote for approval. NEA-Alaska Government Relations Director, Matt Moser updated the PA delegates about the current legislative concerns and ways that retired members can support NEA-Alaska’s legislative priorities.

We are confident that we are stronger together and that the addition of a Policy Assembly to our governance structure will add “muscle” to our local and lead to the development of new leaders to join the dedicated corps of volunteers who have served us so well and so long.

– Susan Stitham and Roxanne Abajian

Election News

You Need to Know

NEA-Alaska Election Results

Tom Klaameyer *NEA-Alaska President*
 Laura Capelle *NEA-Alaska Vice President*

NEA-Alaska/Retired Election Results

Joseph Boyle *NEA-Alaska/Retired President*
 Roxanne Abajian. . . *NEA-Alaska/Retired Vice-President*
 Barbara Stek *NEA-Alaska/Retired Secretary*
 Gayle Harbo..... *NEA-Alaska/Retired Treasurer*

Annie Baker and Pamela Lloyd
NEA-Alaska/Retired Directors-at-large

Kristi McKwen and Barbara Stek
NEA-Alaska Region R Director

Steve Click and Howard Maxwell
Representative Assembly 2024

**The NEA-Alaska/Retired Board thanks you
 for taking the time to vote!**

Delegate Assembly 2024

Delegate Assembly (DA) is NEA-Alaska's highest governing body. Elected delegates, from across the state (some retired delegates travel from other states), meet in Anchorage at the annual Delegate Assembly to set the direction of NEA-Alaska by way of resolutions, new business items, legislative priorities, and approving the association's budget for the following year.

The 68th Delegate Assembly started January 11, 2024, and ended just before midnight Saturday, January 13. Traditionally at DA, the retired delegates hold a pre-retired membership drive, organized by Barb George, our membership chair; this year's theme was "Stand Tall With Us". New pre-retired members selected a gift from items that were generously donated by retired members. Retired members also donated items for the silent auction table, organized by retired board member Pam Lloyd. The proceeds from the auction went to the NEA-Retired Jack Kinnaman Scholarship Fund. We raised



\$1300! You can read about the Jack Kinnaman Scholarship [HERE](#). Encourage your children, grandchildren, and friends who are aspiring educators to apply for this scholarship!

Special Interest Caucuses this year included: Education Support Professionals, LGBTQ, Conservative Caucus, Black Caucus and Hispanic Caucus, Asian/Pacific Islander Caucus, Native American/Alaska Native Caucus, and the Educators with Disabilities Caucus.

During our first regional retired caucus, we unanimously approved submitting the New Business Item (NBI) written by retired delegate Steve Click – *NBI 24-40: Repeal of the WEP/GPO (Windfall Elimination Provision/Government Pension Offset)*. We also voted to support the issues presented by NEA-Alaska Government Relations Director, Matt Moser: *Better Jobs for Alaska and the Defense of Ranked Choice Voting*.

NEA-Alaska Uniserve Director, Hedy Eischeid, informed us about the statewide organizing program. You can read more about this program in Hedy's article, which is included in this newsletter.

The 2024 NEA-Alaska ESP of the Year Award was presented to Mandy Swarthout, and the 2024 NEA-Alaska Teacher of the Year Award was presented to Catherine Walker during one of the general sessions. Both awardees inspired the delegates with outstanding speeches.

Friday, delegates attended the committee meetings: Governance/Constitution/Bylaws; Communications; Government Relations & Community Outreach; Bargaining and Employee Rights; Building Locals and Member Engagement; Special Education; Leading the Profession; Education Support Professionals; Human and Civil Rights.

Members of the committees discussed NBIs and Resolutions that had been submitted by individuals or caucuses. If approved by committee, the NBIs move to the Delegate Assembly body for deliberation and vote.

Saturday, committee chairs gave their reports, and delegates debated and voted on over 60 new business items and resolutions.

The Legislative Review Committee (LRC) gave the final report of the evening. Delegates discussed the recommendations from the LRC and voted to approve that NEA-Alaska focus resources on three priority-one items:

New Business Item 24-01: Public Education Funding: NEA-Alaska shall lobby for a comprehensive public education funding package that includes a permanent increase to the Base Student Allocation and a mechanism to adjust the Foundation Formula for inflation.

New Business Item 24-02: Defined Benefit Retirement: NEA-Alaska shall lobby for legislation that reestablishes a defined benefit retirement plan option for all Alaska public employees.

New Business Item 24-40: Repeal of the WEP/GPO (Windfall Elimination Provision/Government Pension Offset): NEA-Alaska shall collaborate with NEA to lobby the US Congress for the repeal of the WEP/GPO. NEA-Alaska shall provide tools and resources for member advocacy, and also educate members and the public about the adverse effects of the WEP/GPO, including the effects for all Alaska PERS and Alaska TRS tiers.

One of the highlights that made the news during DA was the Public Education Rally. During the lunch break on Saturday, delegates wore red hats, gloves, and scarves and joined educators, community members, and students at Town Square Park in Anchorage, for a Public Education Rally to support an increase to the Base Student Allocation (BSA). We need to continue to put pressure on our elected leaders to support public education and their educators!

DA is an opportunity for active and retired members to have a voice in their association! It is usually held in the second week of January. We encourage NEA-Alaska/Retired members to submit a self-nomination to be a candidate on the retired ballot for Policy Assembly and Delegate Assembly. More information about DA; the nomination form; dates for Policy Assembly and Delegate Assembly; and our election of delegates will be in the summer issue of the retired newsletter.

– Roxanne Abajian and Annie Baker

Did You Know?

I retired from my elementary school teaching career in the State of Alaska decades ago. I had been an NEA-Alaska member since my first year of teaching, and before retiring in 1997, I pre-joined NEA-Alaska/Retired with an automatic membership in the NEA-Retired life membership.

I moved back to my birth state of California in 2000, and tried to dual join with the California Teachers Association-Retired, but their state affiliate policy would not accept that kind of membership. For twenty-two years, I continued my advocacy for educators and public education with a stand-alone retired teachers association in California, along with my advocacy in Alaska.

Then, in 2022, I moved to Hawaii. Wanting to continue my local advocacy, I was able to join the Hawai'i State Teachers Association-Retired (HSTA-R), using the dual membership option with NEA-Retired and paying the annual, local HSTA-R dues. I am now a member of my resident state NEA association as well as continuing my life membership in NEA-Alaska/Retired.

It is important to me to continue supporting NEA-Alaska/Retired because I recognize that the affiliate, NEA-Alaska, carries a substantial obligation to protect my rights in retirement. These obligations are costly and absolutely critical to my retirement security.

Additionally, I have kept the “governance” part of life membership in NEA and NEA-Alaska/Retired. By doing this, I can provide my background and experiences in our union by being a delegate to our NEA-Alaska Delegate Assembly and as a possible delegate to the NEA-Retired Annual Meeting and NEA Representative Assembly. My thought is that you know me, and I know very, very few HSTA-R members.

Remember, you must maintain your membership in your pension state, regardless of your membership status in your residence state. Your membership resources help your pension state affiliate protect and improve your retirement benefits.

For more information, go to:

[NEA-Retired Frequently Asked Questions | NEA](#)

– Steve Click



You Have to Love Technology!

During the era of Covid, we saw a rise in technology, giving us numerous ways to connect with each other without having to meet face-to-face, attend meetings, or participate in other activities in person. Zoom was one of those options, and it is still used widely.

Our NEA-Alaska/Retired members live all over Alaska, and many of us live in other states; it's not always easy to meet in person. Zoom has become a useful technological tool for NEA-Alaska/Retired members. Recently, the NEA-Alaska/Retired Board had a short meeting after Delegate Assembly. Since all members were unable to attend in person, Zoom was utilized.

Pictured are the board members who attended the meeting: Trena Richardson, Pamela Lloyd, Judy Salo, Roxanne Abajian, Gayle Harbo, and Barbara Stek while Zooming with Susan Stitham and Marilyn Pillifant!

– Annie Baker



Trena Richardson, Pamela Lloyd, Judy Salo, Roxanne Abajian, Gayle Harbo, Barbara Stek Zooming with Susan Stitham and Marilyn Pillifant

Retired Health Benefit Contact Info ...

Division of Retirement and Benefits

Member Education Center: (907) 465-4460

Toll-Free: (800) 821-2251

Medical Benefits: Aetna

Member Services: (855) 784-8646

Long-Term Care Benefits: CHCS Services, Inc.

Member Services: (888) 287-7116

Dental Benefits: Moda/Delta Dental

Member Services: (855) 718-1768

Pharmacy Benefits: Optum Rx

Member Services: (855) 409-6999

NEA-Retired Conference

March 3-5, 2024

This year's NEA-Retired Conference was held in Chicago, Illinois.

NEA-Retired members came together from across the US. The conference offered many informative sessions, for members to choose from, each providing a fantastic opportunity for professional learning, skill development, and networking. Each session helped us build skills needed to help build, strengthen, and make our NEA-Alaska/Retired affiliate flourish. We also made new friends and established lasting connections.

We heard from various current and former leaders during the conference. The underlying concern was that the upcoming November 2024 national, state, and local elections needed to be viewed as the most significant elections of our lifetimes. We must continue to support and elect pro-student, pro-family, and pro-public education politicians.



Steve Click, Pamela Lloyd, Dianne Shibe, Annie Baker, Roxanne Abajian and Barb George

In Memoriam

Remembering Our Retired Members
We Have Lost In 2023

Lettie Bartz
Fairbanks FEA

William Black
Nenana EA

Joe Floyd
Kodiak EA

Laraine Hanson
Kenai Peninsula EA

Mel Harvey
Nenana EA

Linda Hill
Fairbanks ESSA



Donna Holleman
Anchorage EA

Richard Kronber
Anchorage EA

Fred Oetzman
Anchorage EA

Pat Osborne
Ketchikan EA

Elizabeth Santoro
Kodiak EA

Ken Carr
Seward EA (12/2022)

Book Blast

The Women by Kristin Hannah (2024)



Frankie is a young, green, idealistic nurse who enlists for Vietnam after her brother, Finley, graduates from Annapolis and leaves for his first tour in Nam. Her heart is filled with honor and the desire to serve her country like the men in her family. As she leaves her home on Coronado Island, she wants to believe that “women can be heroes, too”. The Vietnam War comes to

life through her eyes. While the nurses and doctors struggle with blood, guts, and exhaustion to keep the FNG's alive, Frankie, Barb, and Ethyl become lifelong friends. Frankie finds love and experiences heartbreaking loss. She survives with the support of her fellow nurses and the doctors who train her in the skills needed to be a stellar surgical nurse.

When Frankie returns stateside and goes “back to the world,” her real struggles start. She is spat on as she tries to leave the airport. While the war was immediate and all-consuming, the changes in the United States were overwhelming, and the ground beneath her feet and those of her fellow vets was like quicksand. There was initially no support for vets and the nurses were not even considered vets, though they faced death, blood, and gore daily. Stateside hospitals did not recognize their skills and treated them as inexperienced ingénues. Frankie lets the reader into her life as a patriot, a medical professional and a young woman trying to come to terms with night terrors and anxiety in the years before PTSD was an actual diagnosis, as well as the impact of napalm and Agent Orange on cancer rates and miscarriages in people serving in Vietnam.

Through her characters, author Kristin Hannah takes the readers through the war years with the military, the radicals and the young women struggling to find a place in the changing social expectations. For decades, the struggles continued, surviving war but being destroyed by reentry into the US and the impact on the young Americans who served. The US was struggling with Civil Rights, Peace Protests, Kent State, and Women's rights, but there was no support for the vets returning from Vietnam. The slow recognition of the support needed for all the returning vets, combatants, and non-combatants alike unfolds in real time. Frankie's journey gives voice to the struggles faced by so many women vets and the decades it took to begin to find peace. Intense and heartfelt, historical fiction at its best.

– Kate Ortega

NEA-Alaska Board of Directors Meeting

January 9–10, 2024

Well, winter break flowed right into the January Board of Directors meeting held before Delegate Assembly. The Executive Committee met before the general meeting began and discussed, among other items, our strategic plans.

Region R - that's us - reported that we have been working on our bylaws and policies and preparing for our Policy Assembly. We will, of course, have our retired table at DA along with our silent auction table to raise money for the Jack Kinnaman Scholarship Fund.

The other regions gave their reports. As you can imagine, issues regarding staffing, budget cuts, class sizes, funding, and special education services were reported.

Zac Mannix, our interim Executive Director, gave his management report. He stated that this year we are only down 8 members - yeah!! We will be continuing our membership drives, which have had positive success.

Judy Salo was selected to be the chair of the Governance - Constitution and Bylaws Committee. I served as co-chair of the Special Education Committee again. We received training on our roles.

The PACE policy has been rewritten, and the Board moved to recommend passage of this rewrite. Our own Howard Maxwell served on that committee, along with Christine Villano.

The following Ballot Initiative Contributions were presented to us and subsequently passed:

- Better Jobs for Alaska - Minimum Wage: \$5000
- Campaign Contributions: An Act Limiting Campaign Contributions: \$5000
- Defense of Ranked Choice Voting: \$25,000

We approved the following nominations for the Professional Teaching Practices Commission (PTPC):

- Segue Grant
- George Cromer
- Ben Jackson
- Kathryn Baird

We approved the financial audit presented to us by Max Mertz.

We also passed the following motion:

NEA-Alaska shall support the National Indian Education Association (NIEA) regional meeting in January 2024 with a financial contribution of \$5000 to

support the advancement of our native education and quality services for our native students within the state of Alaska, as well as funding travel (according to standard travel reimbursement policies) for Kristen Dullen, who is serving as regional secretary, to attend the meeting.

Here are some of the results from the poll recently conducted by Patinkin Research Strategies:

- Mary Peltola most favorable elected person
- ESPs, teachers, and schools favorable to the public
- teachers' job performance ratings remain high
- generally favorable numbers for the union
- 57% of Alaskans believe that funding for public schools is too low, and 65% support increasing the BSA
- serious concerns from Alaskans about teacher shortages and non-retention
- voters are most supportive of education-related proposals that generally affect teachers
- 75% support a modest pension plan for educators

Hedy Eisheid spoke to us about continuing plans for year-round organizing, which has yielded excellent results. The organizing grant will begin on April 1 with the early enrollment campaign. We currently have 75 member organizers.

The Equity Audit was completed. We need to make sure that all our members feel that their voices are being heard.

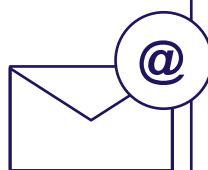
The Scholarship Committee met again to finalize the parameters of the program and prepare the documents necessary so that information can be distributed to seniors by the end of February.

The following motion is one that I am especially excited about:

- Move that Tom Klaameyer offer Zac Mannix the Executive Director position and negotiate his contract as long as NCSEA guidelines are met. Motion passed!

We then headed to Delegate Assembly itself!

— *Barbara Stek, on behalf of the NEA-Alaska/Retired Board*



Please make sure we have your current email address. Contact Makana Bender at (907) 274-0536 to make changes.

Alaska Retirement Management Board

The Alaska Retirement Management Board (ARMB) met in Juneau from March 5th to 7th. During the three-day meeting, meaningful information about retirement accounts, investments, and operations was shared.

A continued shortage of personnel is present, with some positions in retirement and benefits remaining vacant for up to a year. The need is impacting the timeline for retirement processing. Many operations are delayed due to these shortages. Processing for new survivor and death benefits that generally would take less than a week are now 12–14 weeks in processing times. A letter notifying retirees is sent to members who have begun the process.

Chief Pension Officer Kathy Lea reported the results of the first town hall meeting to discuss the ARM Board's resolution to suspend My Total Retirement Accounts for new participants. The approximate one-hour recording is available [HERE](#).



In summary, approximately 268 registered participants registered, with 136 answering the day of the call. The opening remarks covered many of the topics that had been pre-submitted. These included requests for a detailed explanation of the ARM Board's decision to suspend account enrollment in managed accounts and where to find advice on current investments.

During Tuesday's Defined Contribution Committee meeting, Empower Vice President Dan Morrison expressed concern about what he identified as a misrepresentation by some public figures and the "unions" in the media and their internal communications. He stated that when public figures say Empower is stealing from people or doing something illegal and want the attorney general to take action against Empower, they are operating on an incorrect set of facts. They were stating and promoting incorrect facts. There was even discussion about charges being brought against Empower, since this took the trustees by surprise. Trustees and the advisory firm contracted to do the work, Callan, repeatedly stated that the research for their findings was done WITH Empower's and Morningstar's cooperation. Both firms acted collaboratively in this ground-breaking work. The findings could only have been accomplished with their assistance.

NEA-Alaska President Tom Klaaymeyer responded to the comments the next day during public testimony and was very clear in his testimony that the information being

quoted by and the details being distributed to NEA-Alaska members were based on quotes from the report and actions taken by the ARM Board; the Union has officially released no other information. As usual, Mr. Klaaymeyer was timely and direct in his rebuttal to the unforeseen attack on our Union.

During the Actuarial Committee meeting, a detailed sensitivity analysis was reviewed by the actuarial firm Buck. The sensitivity analysis examines the effects of possible sustained adverse conditions on the pension and health trust. Both trustees and IAC members submitted possible situations for Buck to consider during the analysis. These were classified into four primary groups:

- Continued diminished loss in returns for five years (a drop from the projected 7.25% to 2.5%),
- A continued increase in liabilities (an increase of 1.5% for five years,
- Diminished returns and increased liabilities for five years, and finally,
- The impact of one-time funding from the state to decrease the unfunded liability for both PRS and TRS. (The increase in funding with the drop in returns and increase in liabilities is considered.)

The number one impact was a drastic decrease in the expected returns. Setting and maintaining those rates of returns are instrumental. As reported in the last newsletter, last year's returns were slightly above the projected 7.25% (7.6%, but the overall unfunded liability grew due to unexpected liability increases.)

During the last session on Thursday, the ARM Board passed Resolution 2024-1. The discussion was thoughtful and lively, with a final vote of 5-4 in favor. The board approved the following:

- The ARMB recommends that the Department of Administration discontinue the Managed Account service for all participants as soon as practicable.
- The ARMB recommends that the Department of Administration set an age-appropriate Target Date Fund as the default for future contributions for participants being removed from the Managed Accounts service.

The ARMB recommends that the Department of Administration take no action to change the existing asset holdings of the participants being removed from the Managed Accounts program.

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The ARMB recommends that all participant-directed plan members use the investment options most appropriate to their needs for both new contributions and existing investments.

Since this resolution is a recommendation to the DOA, a completion timeline is unavailable. Commissioner Vrana stated during the resolution discussion that the DOA contracted Buck Gallagher to recreate/examine the Callan findings. It is assumed that the research will be done before the DOA acts on the ARM Board’s resolution 2024-1. A recording of the Board discussion and the resolution can be found on the ARM Board website.

The next Alaska Retirement Management Board meeting will be in Anchorage, June 11th–13th.

– *Sandi Ryan*

Political Action Update

At DA, the assembly adopted an updated policy manual for the **PACE** statewide committee;

We reviewed the year’s budget and planned the FY25 budget. We reviewed the candidates we endorsed and the support that we gave to independent expenditure groups supporting important issues and regional municipal candidates. We’ve had great successes in Fairbanks and Anchorage electing pro-public education candidates who support academic freedoms and improved workplaces for educators. Likewise, we hope to build those successes for our statewide-endorsed candidates, with the achievable goal of returning the bipartisan coalition majority to the Senate. A motion to consider having an information table at Fall Event and DA presenting PACE information/literature regarding communications, donations and endorsed candidates/PAC endorsements to be displayed and staffed was also passed.

Important public education and labor issues affecting Alaskans, NEA-Alaska members, as well as our retired NEA-Alaska members, include:

- A) A voter initiative [likely on Fall ballot (2024)] proposing the repeal of the open primary and Ranked Choice Voting system that Alaskans adopted in 2020. PACE has been working to educate members and Alaskans about how valuable the new system is to pro-public education candidates. PACE has voiced support and has committed to some financial support for groups that are organizing to fight back against the RCV repeal efforts.

- B) A voter initiative, the Jobs Act [likely on the ballot in Fall 2024], proposing a livable minimum wage (increased to \$15 per hour in three years), the prohibition of so-called forced captive audience anti-union presentations, and a requirement that employers pay a modest amount of paid sick leave.

- C) Electing pro-public education candidates to the State House and Senate in the Fall of 2024.

During our February meeting, PACE approved a \$20,000 contribution to Putting Alaskans First Committee to help Anchorage with its local school board and mayoral elections.

NEA-Retired Legislative Committee

The national NEA-Retired legislative committee met through Zoom, a few times, focusing on the repeal of GPO/WEP. Signs are hopeful for the repeal. HR 82 has 300 co-sponsors and members of the Ways and Means committee.

The Senate companion bill S 597 by Brown, OH, has 49 co-sponsors. We discussed reaching out to other Senators to co-sponsor the bill. An NBI was passed at DA directing President Klaameyer to write to Senator Dan Sullivan, asking him to join Lisa Murkowski and Mary Peltola as co-sponsors.

Other State of AK Legislative Updates

AK state legislature passed the bi-partisan SB 140 education omnibus with \$680 in BSA. Unfortunately, Governor Dunleavy vetoed SB 140 on March 14, 2024. The Alaska Legislature failed to override the governor’s veto on March 18, 2024.

– *Howard Maxwell and Pamela Lloyd*

National Institute on Retirement Security

The National Institute on Retirement Security (NIRS) held its 15th Annual Retirement Policy Conference, **Uniting for the Future | Accelerating Retirement Policy Progress**, on Monday, February 26 and Tuesday, February 27, 2024, in Washington, D.C.

The Conference began with a reception on the evening of the 26th and continued the next day.

Attendees heard from leading experts on a range of key retirement issues, including the retirement savings shortfall, Social Security, new public opinion retirement research,

employers returning to pensions, the growth of state-facilitated retirement plans, municipalities joining state pension plans, and more.

Alaska was mentioned in the opening remarks by Gerri Madrid-Davis, Chairperson of the NIRS Board, because of our bill in the Alaska Legislature to return to a Defined Benefit (DB) option. Several other speakers addressed Pensions vs. 401K Defined Contribution plans. Although recent polls show that over 80% of workers would prefer a pension plan, and that retirement insecurity is a major concern, any move to return to DB plans has been slow and almost requires a crisis for the impetus to do so. Our crisis in retention and recruitment in education (and other public) employment seems to be that type of situation.

Teresa Ghilarducci, a professor of economics and policy analysis in New York, had a very interesting presentation on the importance of retirement security as part of the American dream. All conference attendees received a copy of her books entitled: WORK, RETIRE, REPEAT. I am currently reading and enjoying it. She challenges the belief that working is better for people than retiring, especially for those in lower income brackets. Her work is a frightening analysis of an impending disaster for those who are financially unprepared to retire. She asserts that for the vast majority of people, working longer does not make up for low retirement savings. She, along with several other speakers, said that planning for a comfortable retirement must begin when your working career begins and must be consistently managed throughout those years.

It is always interesting to hear about the many ways that public employee retirement systems have been developed in states and how they are managed. It is also sad to know that Alaska went from the top to the bottom of that ranking after 2006. The main takeaways for Alaska are: We must continue to fight for a return to a Defined Benefit pension plan. We must also help our Defined Contribution members by making sure they are informed about retirement planning.

The Conference closed with remarks from Sen. Bill Cassidy about the bipartisan efforts to fix Social Security.

– Judy Salo

Wishing Everyone A Happy Spring!

“You are never too old to set another goal or dream a new dream.” — C.S. Lewis

Membership

Delegate Assembly, 2024 was held January 11–13. The retired recruiting table was present during all of DA, inviting the active pre-retired members to join the lifetime retired. This year’s theme, “Stand Tall With Us,” was represented by a “Unique Giraffe.” We signed 10 new members.

Retired members assisted in occupying the table and provided answers to inquiries. They reminded active members that, as lifetime NEA-Alaska/Retired members, they will have the opportunity to collaborate with and advocate for active members, and stay connected and involved with education by participating in legislative and political action. Encourage your pre-retired friends to join NEA-Alaska/Retired.

Thank you to everyone who gave their time to help recruit new members during DA 2024. You did a fantastic job! See you next year at DA 2025!

– Barb George



Bee Lawns & Wildflower Meadows

Changes in climate and land use are combining to reduce the number of insect pollinators. Even as we watch the snow fall we can dream of our spring plantings and our flower gardens. It is more enticing for retirees, tired of mowing lawns and pulling weeds, to consider more carefree yards.

To be ready for a “bee lawn” this coming spring you do not even have to remove existing turf, but simply mow the lawn as low as possible, scatter seed, rake in and water. One of the best is a clover lawn. You will have to water less, mow less often (or at all) and eliminate the use of commercial fertilizer. The bees and butterflies will come and gather pollen and the clover will add nitrogen to the soil.

Wildflower meadows are an alternative and work for larger areas or for the perimeters of bee lawns. This may involve plowing or digging up a larger area, raking and then sowing a commercial mix of wildflower seeds with as many as 27 varieties. Some seeds may be planted in the fall and you can watch the first pops of color as the snow melts and the days warm. The meadow can be mowed, once established, to help the flowers come back in abundance.

Either of these choices will result in less yard work, more pollinators, and a colorful source of enjoyment.

– Gayle Harbo



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Look inside for the “Election Results” and see who won the prestigious “Gayle Harbo Award.”

Calendar of Events

April 2024

- 4/15 NEA-Retired Candidate filing deadline - Filing deadline for:
NEA Retired Secretary (3 year term)
NEA-Retired Executive Council (2 positions, 3 year terms)
NEA-Retired Members on the NEA Board of Directors (2 positions, 3 year terms)
NEA-Retired Alternates to the NEA Board of Directors (2 positions, 3 year terms)

May 2024

- 5/1 Candidate filing deadline for NEA-Retired seats on the
NEA Resolutions Committee
(6 positions, 1-year terms)

5/6-5/8 Retired Executive Council Meeting

5/13 Candidates Meeting

5/31-6/1 NEA-Alaska Board of Directors Meeting

June 2024

6/5 NEA-Alaska/Retired Board Meeting

6/30-7/1 Retired Annual Meeting – Philadelphia, PA

July 2024

7/3-7/7 NEA Representative Assembly – Philadelphia, PA

7/30-8/1 Candidate expense reports due to Retired Election Chair
Steve Gorrie

Help Us Find You!

Please make sure we have your current mailing address, phone number, and email address.

Contact Makana Bender at (907) 274-0536 to make any changes to your information.

