

NEA-Alaska/Retired

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We Need You to Stand Up for Education

Active and Retired education associations are under attack. Across the nation we are seeing attacks on pension plans, health plans, and collective bargaining, the use of public funds for private schools (voucher system), and reductions in school funding.

Legislation prefiled by Representative Wes Keller, an ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council) member, has been introduced to use public school funding for private and religious school vouchers. The ALEC legislative agenda on public education has made its way into our state.

Governor Parnell's proposed education budget maintains a flat Base Student Allocation. We have not seen an increase in student funding for 3 years and school districts can not keep up with inflation and classroom needs. Across the state we are reading about cuts in school district budgets that will cause layoffs, reduce classroom and student services, and increase class size.

Governor Parnell and his administration are exploring ways to reduce our health plan costs which may affect our benefits.

NEA-Alaska has developed a "Survive and Thrive" plan that needs you, your friends and family, and your community to Stand Up for Education. We need your support!

In order for NEA-Alaska's "Survive & Thrive" plan to be successful, your participation is more critical than ever. We need our members to engage in citizen lobbying in order for us to positively impact our education priorities, which are:

- increasing education funding,
- stopping anti-collective bargaining legislation,

- blocking school vouchers, and
- reinstating a defined benefit pension.

We are now a couple of weeks into a 90-day session. We will need to move quickly and answer this call for action. Please be talking with your fellow members to help ready them to respond as well. We are asking our members to commit by completing a pledge form that will help to organize activities and contacts. If you and your friends or family are ready to join us in this effort to protect public education, please complete and submit a pledge form.

Pledge Form Link:

<http://tinyurl.com/StandUpAK>



Delegate Assembly 2013

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President's Message

aka Bob's Blurb

**Delegate Assembly 2013**

This year's 57th Delegate Assembly was attended by 31 NEA-Alaska/Retired delegates. They were active in committees

and on the floor of DA to advance the needs of all our members. We worked to protect pension and health benefits, to lobby for a return to a defined benefit pension plan and for legislative support for the repeal of the Social Security pension offsets (GPO/WEP), and of course to support funding for public education. Our major issues were supported and action was passed at this assembly. Although we will experience a decrease in our funding from NEA-Alaska, delegates passed a budget supporting the work of NEA-Alaska/Retired.

Our caucus meetings were work sessions prior to attending and following the committee meetings. The retired team worked to draft language to take to the floor, assisted others in the process at DA, and committed to Stand Up for Education. During our caucus meeting, we also voted for our representatives to NEA-Alaska's Political Action Committee for Education (PACE). This year we voted to recommend Karen Eddy and Bill Bjork as our representatives on PACE. In the event Karen Eddy is elected to an NEA-Alaska Board of Director's Region R seat, Lucinda Folsom is our alternate replacement. NEA-Alaska President Ron Fuhrer makes the final appointments to the PACE committee.

We also saw an increased interest in members running for elected positions. We will be voting on the following: 2 seats for NEA-Alaska Region R Board of Directors, 1 Director-at-Large seat for

NEA-Alaska/Retired Board of Directors, and 2 seats for delegates to the Retired Annual Meeting and NEA Representative Assembly this summer.

Gayle Harbo presented our financial update to the caucus. We have seen a good return on our investments over the past year and as a result we will be able to continue the level of work we do as your board.

Rod McCoy gave us an update on the work the Health Committee has been doing to assist members who need support as they address AlaskaCare issues and to monitor the political comments and actions regarding our health benefit plan. Rod McCoy, Rich Kronberg, Barb George, and Bob Deitrick comprise the team with the addition of a new member, Trish Patterson.

Mary Bohanan updated us on the work of the Communications and Member Networking Committee. We have a web page dedicated to Pre-Retired and Retired members. A Facebook group is operating now as well. Please check out our web page by going to www.neaalaska.org and you will find us in the About Us section. You do not need to sign-in to access our page. I also encourage you to join our [neaalaskaretired](https://www.facebook.com/neaalaskaretired) Facebook page so you can connect with old friends and get updates from "Retired."

This DA we also enrolled 20 new pre-retired members due to the organizational efforts of Mary Bohanan and Steve Click. Delegates donated wonderful gifts used to say thank you to the new members. A hearty "way to go" to David Schwantes for his generous donation of \$150 used for three drawings.

We had a strong and vocal delegation this year. Thanks for all of your work!

Editor: Barbara Stek

This newsletter is the official publication of NEA-Alaska/Retired, printed four times a year: September, December, February, and May. 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.

Exercise Your Right to Vote

NEA-Alaska/Retired elections are underway. Voting is online through the NEA-Alaska web page. The NEA-Alaska statewide election goes live on Friday, February 8, 2013, at 12:01 AM.

Go to www.neaalaska.org and click on the “vote here” button. You will need your membership number which begins with “000” to log in. If you are unable to locate your membership card, please call one of the NEA-Alaska offices and ask an associate staff person to look up your number. If you have problems logging in, please contact barb.young@neaalaska.org.

Click here to **VOTE**

NEA-Alaska Office Numbers

Anchorage
274-0536 or 800-996-3225

Juneau
586-3090 or 888-478-3090

Fairbanks
456-4435 or 888-456-4435

Polls will close at midnight
on February 22, 2013.

Candidates listed on the ballot are...

(2) seats for NEA-Alaska Region R
Director:

Karen Eddy, Karla Griswold-Gallagher, Gayle Harbo, and Susan Stitham

(1) seat for NEA-Alaska/Retired
Director-at-Large:

There is a write-in line for this seat.

(2) seats for Retired Annual
Meeting and Representative
Assembly:

Steve Click, Don Hadley, and
Barbara Stek

Let's get out the vote on these positions. We do get updates on the numbers of members voting and it would be great to see that retired members have the greatest percentage of voters.

Did you know...

...about a rise in Medicare scam attempts? Medicare beneficiaries need to be aware of the following to protect themselves:

- #1. Do not give out any personal information by phone – Medicare does not initiate phone calls to beneficiaries. All correspondence is handled by mail.
- #2. Report the incident to your local Medicare Information Office, the police, and your bank, especially if you were coerced to give out banking information.
- #3. If possible, note the phone number on the caller ID of the caller.





Pensionomics – Alaska Style

The National Institute of Retirement Security has recently published an updated version of the very helpful Pensionomics, first published in 2009. The 2012 version presents key findings, state by state, so one can simply click on a state and view fact sheets regarding the impact

of pension dollars on that state's economy. You can also view the earlier version to note differences by going to the website nirsonline.org. There you will also find many well researched publications, including the most recent: The Pension Factor - The Role of Pensions in Reducing Elder Economic Hardships.

Some of the key findings in Pensionomics 2012 which pertain to the state of Alaska show how pension benefits received by retirees and spent in local communities ripple through, as one person's spending becomes another person's income. This rippling creates a multiplier effect of pension dollars.

In 2009 expenditures from state and local pensions supported over 9700 jobs that paid \$442 million in wages and salaries. There was a total of \$1.4 billion dollars in economic output, providing a source of \$234 million in federal, state, and local tax revenues.

Each dollar paid out in pension benefits supported \$1.16 in total economic activity in Alaska and each dollar "invested" by Alaska taxpayers in these plans supported

\$3.80 in total economic activity. Most people don't realize that investment earnings and employee contributions, not taxpayer money, make up the bulk of money going into pension funds. Between 1993 and 2009, almost 70% of money going into pension funds came from employees and interest earnings. *Printing out the two page synopsis will give defenders of the Defined Benefit pension system good information to share with detractors.*

Another interesting publication done for the Fairbanks Economic Development Council this past spring, and based on the most recent census, shows the number of seniors, age 60 and older, increased 62% from 2000 to 2010 and accounts for 11% of the Fairbanks population. The study titled "Retirees in Fairbanks - A Growing \$300 Million Annual Economic Stabilizer" provides many statistics about the growth of the senior population. Spending by local retirees creates more than 3000 jobs and the paychecks from these jobs, \$135 million, represent 4% of all personal income to Fairbanks job holders - as much as tourism!

This report concludes that retirees are an emergent economic driver, bringing in new outside dollars year round and providing stability and diversification to the local economy. Retaining citizens who retire in Fairbanks is becoming more critical and it is important to provide them a quality environment to encourage them to stay. There are many good graphs and charts and a copy may be obtained by contacting the FEDC.

— Gayle Harbo

Drink Your Water!

When I would complain about a headache to my good friend at school, her first response would always be, "Have you had enough water today?" My usual reply was, "No." Now I have come to understand that dehydration can also cause altered mood, impaired memory, trouble concentrating, and fatigue. Wow! So I try to make an effort to consume enough water every day.

Now, what does that mean because recommendations seem to change with the season? Your fluid needs depend on what you eat, your exercise patterns, medication you take, and even the weather. Some foods, such as rice and white chicken, are over 50% water. The best way to tell if you are well hydrated is to check the color of your liquid output - clear or pale yellow, super!! If not, better head for that refreshing glass of water.



AlaskaCare Update

Governor Sean Parnell has decided the state needs to rewrite the AlaskaCare medical insurance plan for Alaska's retired public employees. This rewrite will be implemented no earlier than January 2014 and possibly a year or more after that date. The Governor has made it clear in at least one newspaper interview that he will be working on significantly lowering the state's costs for medical insurance. We support lowering costs as long as the overall benefits of the plan to our members are not diminished. NEA-Alaska filed suit against the state the last time a diminished plan was introduced by the State of Alaska and we won a complicated victory. We maintained benefits that would have otherwise been lost. Our union was there to protect the insurance benefits of all retired public employees. To date, the state Department of Administration and the Division of Retirement and Benefits have worked well with NEA-Alaska. Commissioner of Administration, Becky Hultberg, and Director of Retirement and Benefits, Jim Puckett, have been open with us, and they have joined our board meeting, in person or by phone, with honest and candid information.



Rich Kronberg

The state is creating an additional insurance option, a plan for retiring public employees under TRS Tier III and PERS Tier IV, who have only their savings for retirement. The state has said they will allow any public employee to choose the new plan, but the employee's decision to change plans is likely to be irrevocable. Since there are no prospects for TRS Tier III or PERS Tier IV employees to be retiring anytime soon, it is fair to say the new plan will be marketed primarily to employees in the "older" tiers. *Your rights under the current AlaskaCare health plan are protected by both the state constitution and contract law. Based on conversations with counsel, we do not believe the new plan will have the same protections.*

The NEA-Alaska Health Committee wants all our members to be informed consumers. If and when an alternative health plan is offered, it may be heavily marketed. We hope the state will not be providing a two-choice option as a way of lowering their costs by enticing some members to choose an insurance plan that significantly shifts costs from the state to retirees. At the recent NEA-Alaska Delegate Assembly, the delegates overwhelmingly approved a motion to have NEA-Alaska contract with expert consultants on insurance plans to help provide members with the information each of us will need in order to make good decisions about insurance plan options. We will collect the facts and figures and the plusses and minuses, so our members can make informed choices.

The state is also collecting bids for another third party administrator (TPA). In the past four years or so it has been either Wells Fargo or HealthSmart who administered AlaskaCare. HealthSmart may win the bid again or it may go to another company, such as Blue Cross or Aetna. The new TPA will likely take over sometime this year. We can expect some confusion during the transition. Each TPA seems to interpret the plan differently and problems will need to be worked out.

Changes to our health insurance are rightfully disturbing. As we get older, some of us are increasingly dependent on access to quality medical care. *It is time to take a more cautious interest in AlaskaCare publications sent to you.* We will inform you about changes before they occur so seek our input before making any choices about benefit plans.

If you are having current problems with insurance coverage, feel free to contact rodmccoy123@gmail.com or phone 907-337-6138 and one of us will contact you. Hopefully, we will be able to provide answers and point you in the right direction.

— *Rod McCoy, NEA-Alaska Retired Health Committee*

This & That

You may find this website useful. It is a free site with information on wise food choices, health and wellness, fitness, and more. Check it out and see what you think at Sparkpeople.com.



NEA-Alaska Board of Directors Meeting

Board Members: Don Oberg, Bill Bjork, Nancy Allen

The NEA-Alaska Board meeting was held January 16-17, 2013, at the Captain Cook Hotel in Anchorage. This is the meeting that is held prior to Delegate Assembly.

Motions and Recommendations:

- Approved the reduction of the interest rate on the Juneau office building from 6% to 4.95%.
- Approved the crisis funding assistance request for KPEA and KPESA.
- Approved the NEA-Alaska audit for 2011-12 fiscal year.
- Tabled the approval of a new Executive Director Evaluation process until the March 2013 Board meeting.
- Approved PACE nominations and the seating of alternate delegates.

The PACE committee met on Saturday, January 21, 2013, and approved the early recommendation of Senator Mark Begich for his re-election in the 2014 US Senate campaign.

The next Board meeting will be in Juneau, March 24-26, 2013.

Respectfully submitted by Nancy Allen



Some meetings are more fun than others.



The Two Dons

Medicare Enrollment

Retirees and actives approaching age 65 need to pay attention to the “enrollment periods” for Medicare coverage. For retirees, AlaskaCare becomes supplemental to Medicare at age 65. If you do not enroll in Medicare at age 65, you will pay a larger part of your medical bill and you may pay a higher Medicare premium.

There are 3 different enrollment periods, but for most retirees, the best is the “Initial Enrollment Period.” This is a 7 month window which begins 3 months before your 65th birthday month and ends 3 months after. The other two periods, the Special Enrollment and General Enrollment, will be explained if you call Medicare Information at 800-478-6065, or in Anchorage, 907-269-3680.

You will also be offered Medicare Part D, prescription drug coverage. You are not required to enroll in this plan since the AlaskaCare coverage is the same or better than Part D.

Retirees already enrolled in Medicare may have noticed

an increase in the monthly Part B premium which is now “means tested.” There has been an increase each year for the last 3 years. Added to the premium is an income related adjustment, based not only on your tax filing status, but also on your adjusted gross income plus any tax-exempt interest income. For 2013, a single head of household will pay the *standard monthly premium of \$104.90*, plus an additional monthly amount from \$42 to \$230.80, depending on how much income you receive in excess of \$85,000. Check the Social Security statement mailed in November for an explanation of your 2013 premium and make sure you are not being charged for Medicare Part D if you receive your prescriptions through AlaskaCare. If you receive a Social Security check, Part B is deducted from your check. If not, you must send in the payment. *Call Medicare if you have questions, but DO CHECK your statement.*

— Gayle Harbo

Spotlight On...



Mr. Pot o' Gold

Alaska Teacher of the Year – 1990

David Schwantes was born in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, and grew up in Spencer on a little farm. He attended a one room school for eight years - shades of Hank Harrison - but by the 5th grade, the school had indoor plumbing.

Ten days after graduating from Spencer High School, David moved to Alaska. He had aunts and uncles here and his plan was to do carpentry work with his uncles. When the carpenters' union went on strike, those plans turned into David working for the aunt and uncle who were building their own house. As a thank you, they offered to pay his first year of college tuition and David went to the University of Alaska which at that time was only in Fairbanks.

David stayed in Fairbanks and worked for Northern Commercial Company to finance the rest of his education. David graduated in 1964 with a Bachelor of Education. In 1972, David received his Master's Degree in Education from UAA. His first teaching assignment was in Sitka - junior high math. He then taught in Bethel and Adak before coming to Anchorage and teaching at Mt. Spurr on Elmendorf Air Force Base for the next 25 years. David was named Anchorage Teacher of the Year in 1989 and was selected as Alaska Teacher of the Year in 1990.

David's collecting bug caught him at an early age - he first started collecting candy wrappers. He is a huge Ken Griffey, Jr. fan. Ken will be inducted in the Seattle Mariner Hall of Fame on August 10, 2013. David has over 1000 of his baseball cards. David's political collection of buttons includes over 700 different Nixon buttons. His curiosity was sparked by his 6th grade teacher who encouraged an interest in politics. At that time, Nixon was running as Eisenhower's vice president.

David has been a stamp collector since he was a senior in college. His collections include special envelopes called cachets. He likes to make them honoring events in Alaska history, such as the Iditarod and the 100th Anniversary of the Governor's

Mansion. Recently the USPS issued a puffin stamp and David worked on that project.

David is going into his 24th year of going to Nome to witness the conclusion of the Iditarod. Every year the mushers carry a packet of Iditarod collector envelopes on the trail. Each is signed by the musher who carries them. David's job is to cancel them when the envelopes arrive in Nome. He figures he has cancelled by hand over 100,000 envelopes. The mushers may use them as gifts to sponsors and other supporters while some are sold to Iditarod fans. When the time comes - which we all hope will be in the very distant future - David plans to have his ashes sprinkled on the Iditarod Trail.

David is still active in political campaigns and keeping in contact with his legislators. He has attended many Delegate Assemblies and Representative Assemblies and just finished serving on the PACE committee. At several DAs including

this last one, David has helped to secure pre-retired members by offering his own funds for a drawing. He remains very interested in retirement issues.

This is David's 45th year bowling with the Elmendorf Bombers which started out as a league of Elmendorf teachers. (Yours truly was on that league with the Corset Busters.) The league has dwindled a bit in size and now has members who may not have any connection to Elmendorf schools.



Signing up for pre-retired.

David has had three special dreams on his bucket list. Two of them have been realized - being in Philadelphia on July 4, 1976, and watching the 4th of July fireworks from the Washington monument. The last one is for the future - being in Times Square on New Year's Eve to watch the ball drop.

David plans to remain in Alaska but often travels outside. Every summer David returns to Spencer for the Schwantes Family Reunion. There are usually from 100-150 relatives there.

Now, we haven't put this mention in the story and if you are new to the ranks of the retired or are pre-retired, you may not know about ye olde pot o' gold. But the next time you run into David, be sure to ask him about his freezer!

— *Barbara Stek*

NEA-Alaska/Retired

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email: info@neaalaska.org

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Look inside for information on current online voting and information on our website and Facebook page! Do we have your current email address?

ATTENTION!

HELP WANTED!!

We are looking for some folks who would be willing to be part of a Speaker's Cadre in connection with
"Survive and Thrive."

Organizations will be identified by NEA-Alaska and the cadre would do the presentations regarding vouchers. If you are interested, please contact Keri Clark at NEA-Alaska, 274-0536.
For additional information, be sure to read the front page article.

Calendar of Events

February

- 8-22 NEA-Alaska/Retired voting for Board and RA
Ongoing – contact Districts for names of upcoming retirees

March

- 22-24 NEA Retired Organizing Conference
25-26 NEA-Alaska Board Meeting – Juneau

May

- District retiree contact follow-up
Newsletter submissions due
NEA-Alaska/Retired Board Meeting