



Bits & Pieces

www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/ November 2024

Unit 28 of the Washington State School Retirees' Association
Serving retired and active school employees and our community.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Retirement can mean different things to different people. For some it is a time to travel, for others it is a time to spend with grandchildren, and for others it is a time to volunteer for the greater good. For retired school employees, political action is necessary to ensure that a COLA is available for all plans and to ensure that state-supported medical insurance continues to be funded. In addition, we must remain diligent to keep informed about initiatives, legislation, and policies that affect education, either positively or negatively.

For the upcoming election cycle, the WSSR-PAC donated to 28 legislators and 1 non-legislator with each donation being either \$600 or \$1,200 for a total of \$27,000. In the world of political donations, these represent the minimal level, and the hope is to have a program of monthly donations to the WSSR-PAC to which every member will be encouraged to participate.

We received good news from the Select Committee on Pension Policy (SCPP) that met September 17. There was a nearly unanimous decision to recommend that a permanent COLA for TRS 1 and PERS 1 move forward to the bill-writing department, setting the permanent COLA up for consideration this session. But there are no guarantees that the bill will make it through the many steps needed to be finally signed into law. Once the bill is written, then our hard work to communicate with our personal legislators or senator must begin to ensure that the bill doesn't get stuck at one of the steps. Our WSSRA Legislative Coordinator, Emmett Mills, will send out daily/weekly bulletins with contact information during the session.

AARP tip of the month:
Protect yourself from getting scammed. Use a two-factor authentication to log into all accounts.

Patty Gee TCSRA President

LEGISLATIVE REVIEW & PREVIEW

At every November luncheon we present a Legislative review and a preview of what might be ahead in the upcoming legislative session. We welcome WSSRA's new Legislative Coordinator, **Emmett Mills**, as our guest this November.

Spend any amount of time with him and you will know that Emmett Mills is a man of passion, conviction, and hope for the future.

Emmett was born and raised in Oregon. At Western Washington University, Emmett majored in political science with an emphasis on American politics. As a 2017 legislative intern, Emmett took his first steps into Washington's political scene, interning for Senator Linda Wilson, Vancouver.

In 2019 Emmett began working for the Retired Public Employees Council of Washington. He started on the front desk, became the Membership Coordinator, and then was named the in-house lobbyist, an assignment which included fundraising for their PAC. In June Emmett joined WSSRA as Legislative Coordinator.

Emmett believes that anything is possible when a group speaks with one voice and is dedicated to working tirelessly to make change. He will be reaching out for our support!

Bring a friend and be sure to make reservations for your entire party. [See page 2 for reservation information.]

Pat Slosson, Hospitality Committee

Friday, November 15, 2024 – 12 Noon
The Ember's Restaurant
Indian Summer Golf and Country Club

Menu: Turkey with mashed potatoes
and green beans

OR

Stuffed Squash (V)

Dessert: Chef's choice

(\$20 includes tax and gratuity)

LUNCHEON RESERVATIONS



I will be sending out emails to remind you of our upcoming luncheon. Please respond to that email if you plan to attend. We need our reservation count by **noon on Friday, November 8.**

If you **do not receive an email**, or if you **need to cancel** or if you **need to add** to your reservation, email me at dazicar88@gmail.com, or call me at **253-381-2592 no later than noon on Friday, November 8.** Please do not call the restaurant with reservation changes.

To be added to the email list for notification, please send me your email address.

ZiNita Carrell, Email Committee Chair

LEGISLATIVE REPORT



October 15, the Select Committee on Pension Policy (SCPP) reviewed, but did not vote on, a draft bill to restore an ongoing cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for TRS 1 and PERS 1 retirees. Due to logistical concerns raised by the Department of Retirement Systems (DRS), the SCPP opted to wait until the November 12 meeting to consider the proposal. In the meantime, committee staff will work with DRS to construct amendments to address the agency's concerns.

DRS cited concerns over two aspects of the bill draft. First, they did not feel that it would be possible to implement the bill between the mid-May bill signature deadline following the 2025 Legislative Session and the July 1 implementation date. Instead, DRS proposed amending the bill to delay the ongoing COLA mechanism until 2026 and to provide a one-time COLA in 2025. This would effectively provide the same benefit increase to retirees while simplifying the administrative process for DRS.

DRS's second concern related to clarifying how the ongoing COLA would be implemented for the roughly 600 retirees who purchased the optional COLA offered to TRS 1 and PERS 1 members. The optional COLA, which fewer than 1% of retirees chose to purchase, was an actuarially neutral option offered at the time of retirement. Retirees who purchased the optional COLA had their initial pension amount reduced considerably in return for an annual COLA. DRS asked for time to study the best way to implement an ongoing COLA for these members.

Continued on page 4; see "Legislative Report."

LASER-FOCUSED ON THE MISSION

Last month I shared with you the culture shock I encountered while teaching at the private, religious-based middle school. They have a laser-like focus on their mission. They want their kids to become prosperous, happy adults who are fully members of their church. Academics are important, but the values of their church and membership and citizenship are first in everyone's mind.



What could that school possibly have in common with fixing the worst alternative high school in the state of Washington? When my colleague Ann, and I arrived, we found a school in chaos. Attendance was in the fifty percent range. There was a fight almost every week. Kids grabbed teachers by the shirt and nothing happened. Kids did drugs, and worse, on campus.

We turned our little school into one of the best alternative schools in the state. Twenty years after I was gone and the school had closed, I met with three staff members and asked them, what made the biggest difference as we turned that school around? All agreed that we did many important things, but the most important was to define our mission. It was simple and powerful. Our mission was to help our kids become productive, positive adults and help them graduate or move on to a positive plan.

We expressed that mission in our *Learning Community Contract*:

- I will respect myself and others.
- I will honor and appreciate diversity.
- I will diligently pursue my education.
- I will conduct myself with honor and obey the rules of this school.

Then to make sure it stuck, new students attended an orientation class for 30 hours of instruction centered on how to be a successful member of our community. The rest fell nicely into place once we started to live our values and mission. Attendance improved. Grades went up. Fights seldom broke out. We called the police a lot less. Graduation rates improved. Kids got their lives on track.

Purpose, vision, mission—the three keys to success in school, business, or life.

Jim Slosson, Education Chair

Each month we will randomly draw the name of one of our "active" (not-yet-retired) members, who will receive a Starbucks gift card in the mail.

This month's winner is:



Karey Richards
Rochester School District



Check this box each month to see if YOU are the lucky member.

HEALTH INSURANCE OPEN ENROLLMENT

Open enrollment for PEBB insurance plans begins **October 28–November 25**. For non-PEBB Medicare supplement plans, the open enrollment period is October 15–December 7. The single subscriber monthly premiums for the PEBB Medicare supplement plans are as follows:

Kaiser NW Senior Advantage with Part D	\$171.19
Kaiser WA Medicare Advantage with Part D	\$177.41
Premera Plan G (eligible by age)	\$114.80
UMP Classic Medicare with Part D (PDP)	\$419.36
United Healthcare PEBB Balance (MAPD)	\$153.56
United Healthcare PEBB Complete (MAPD)	\$181.55

If you missed the PEBB webinar on September 19th you can view it by visiting wssra.org and clicking on Webinars. The Healthcare Authority website (hca.wa.gov) has a tool allowing you to compare up to 3 plans. Virtual benefit fairs are also available 24/7 at hca.wa.gov/vbf-pebb. An in-person benefit fair will be held on Tuesday, November 5th, from 10 a.m.-6p.m. in the Capital Region Ballroom at the Capital Event Center at 6005 Tye Dr. SW in Olympia.

The UMP Classic Medicare premium decreased by changing from creditable drug coverage to a Part D plan. Members in UMP will automatically be enrolled in the Part D plan. This lowered the premium because Federal subsidies cover 75% of drug costs. It also takes advantage of the Inflation Reduction Act in which there is a maximum \$2,000 out-of-pocket expense for drugs and negotiated drug costs for 2026 and beyond. Moda will be the pharmacy benefit administrator for UMP. For this reason, Kaiser has also switched to Part D, and their members will continue to get their drugs through Kaiser. The United Healthcare plans also already included drug coverage. Those enrolled in Premera G will have to enroll in a stand alone Part D plan on the open market.

For additional information you can call PEBB Customer Service at 1-800-200-1004, Monday-Friday, 8a.m.-4:30 p.m. There is also lobby service from 8a.m.-4p.m. Another option is to email PEBB at HCAPEBBMedicare@hca.wa.gov

Gail Feagins, Health and Member Services Co-Chair

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Last month I suggested that people whose lives revolve around education tend to plan and live by the school year calendar, not the year beginning in January. I now suggest that there is another year that has become thoroughly and unwittingly entrenched in our lives. I call it the “the retail over-eating-and-drinking” season. It begins with excessive amounts of candy at Halloween and stretches through Valentine’s Day. Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s are the main holidays known for over-indulgence, but Super Bowl Sunday and Kwanzaa also fit into the over-eating tradition. Election Day (which has passed as you read this) is not an occasion I would include in the annual sequence of gluttony, but this year it could be an occasion for over-drinking. Winners toast with champagne and party long into the night, while losers drown their sorrows in less celebratory fare. Should the outcome be unfavorable to my way of thinking, other losers and I may start looking for our passports.

If overindulging in food and drink during the holidays is something we might do well to curb, indulging in our



most charitable impulses is a hallmark of TCSRA’s holiday. We traditionally collect monetary donations for the food bank in November and for the

Salvation Army in December. Additionally, this year on November 18 we are scheduled to spend the morning working at “All Kids Win” filling bags with weekend food for teens in need. We will meet at 10 a.m. at the Umqua Bank Building in Lacey, just off College Street. The actual address is: 665 Woodland Square Loop SE.

Plans are underway for our fourth year of assembling “mom bags” for the moms of the Salvation Army Adopt-a-Family program. These bags contain about six small personal items meant to celebrate moms who often get short-shrift in the gift department in favor of their kids. Please bring items to the November luncheon this year because the bags need to be ready before the December luncheon. Suggested items include special lotions and bath products, calendars, notepads, journals, tea towels or festive hand towels, potholders, mugs, special non-perishable food or candy items, gloves, mittens, scarves, socks, or slippers. I have found that paperbacks and jewelry are not great choices because of the matter of taste. Votive candles or tea lights should be in a container for display. Notepads or items with advertising don’t feel very “gift-y” either.



If you can’t make the November luncheon, there will be a collection box at the WSSRA office, or contact me to arrange pickup at 360-866-8039, text 360-480-0972, or email sljonz@gmail.com.

Sally Jones, Community Service Chair

Thurston County School Retirees' Association
P. O. Box 3051
Lacey, WA 98509-3051

**PRSRRT STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
OLYMPIA, WA.
PERMIT #107**

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



REMINDER: LUNCHEON MEETING

The Ember's Restaurant
Indian Summer Golf and Country Club
5900 Troon Lane SE

Friday, November 15
LUNCH AT 12 NOON

LEGISLATIVE REPORT (Continued from page 2.)

DRS Director Tracy Guerin, who sits on the SCPP and voted last month to have the ongoing COLA bill drafted, made it clear that DRS fully supports restoring a COLA for TRS 1 and PERS 1 retirees. WSSRA Executive Peter Diedrick thanked the committee for their desire to get the bill right and said it was better to "measure twice and cut once".

Between now and November 12, voters will decide the fate of two initiatives that will have catastrophic consequences for the state budget if they pass. Initiative 2109 would repeal the capital gains tax and Initiative 2117 would repeal the Climate Committee Act. If either funding source is eliminated, there will be little to no hope of restoring an ongoing COLA in 2025. For this reason, WSSRA officially opposes both initiatives, as well as Initiative 2124, which would repeal Washington's long-term care benefit. The passage of either I-2109 or I-2117 could negatively flavor the SCPP's perspective when they vote on the ongoing COLA proposal in November.

Emmett Mills, WSSRA Legislative Coordinator

***DONATIONS TO THE
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION***

At this time of the year you may be looking for a nonprofit 501(c)(3) to donate part or all of your required minimum distribution to. Our TCSRA Community Foundation spendable fund is used to fund mini-grants to public school employees for special projects. We are building this fund so that it can be sustainable long term, and we welcome your contributions.

For more information, go to our website: <https://www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/>

BITS & PIECES, the newsletter of the Thurston County School Retirees' Association, is published nine times a year, September through May, as a membership service.

Editor: Pat Slosson, 360-561-3232.

Information for the December 2024 issue is due by November 11.

Please email copy to pslosson1@comcast.net