

# NEA-Alaska/Retired

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## OVERHEARD IN ORLANDO:

*“Right to Work... For Less,”  
“Toxic Testing,” “Don’t Mess with Granny,”  
“No Representation Without Taxation,” and  
“Point of Information... I Need to Give You!”*

### 2015 Representative Assembly, Orlando, Florida

After the two day annual meeting of NEA Retired, the RA began with the five hour first caucus of the Alaska Delegation, 58 educators from all over Alaska, including nearly a quarter first timers. As usual, the Alaskans were committed, intensely involved in fund raising for political action, following the action on the floor, and participating in microphone strategy for NCUEA and the NEA Board.

NEA Director Tim Parker prepared a very professional RA Report, which gives a great overview of this year’s experience (the comments from delegates will spark memories from the many of you who have attended RAs in the past), complete with photographs.

What follows are a few further insights from my own perspective.

#### 1. “Right to Work... For Less”

**Threats to public education and public employees:** As we know first hand from the hostile attacks by the leadership of the Alaska Legislature, public education is in dangerous waters, and this perilous state of affairs is national in scope. The expected but nonetheless disheartening US Supreme Court decision to take up the Friedrichs’ case from California which challenges our right to collect fair share (agency fee) from non-members was announced the day before the RA opened and set the tone for much of the debate. Delegates voted to continue the extra surcharge on Active dues to help states combat such attacks. If the Supreme Court rules against us, we will return to the days that many of us remember only too well, days before agency fee in Alaska, when we had to aggressively recruit members in each building. I believe the experience that we retirees had in that very environment will be a valuable resource to our active colleagues who know that we stand ready to help.

#### 2. “Toxic Testing”

**The Panacea of Corporate ‘Reformers’:** NEA President Lily Eskelsen Garcia spoke eloquently and often about NEA’s crucial role in promoting educators as the true leaders of the essential reforms of American education. What used to be the IPD pre-conference was called EMPOWERED EDUCATORS DAY, and the focus was on continuing to position our members to be ready to fill the void which will result from the inevitable collapse of NBTPS and Race to the Top.

#### 3. “Don’t Mess with Granny”

The NEA Board of Directors, after seeing the successful adoption of their two NBIs on anti-racism and accountability, at a cost of \$500,000, understandably worked the floor in an attempt to keep any further over budget costs as low as possible. The Rs had filed several NBIs, one in particular called for educating students about climate change. As often happens during floor debate, this NBI was improved and subsequently passed by the body, despite active opposition from NEA Board members. It turned out that a lot of delegations would rather go against their Board members than their retired delegates.

*“Overheard in Orlando...” Cont. pg 3*

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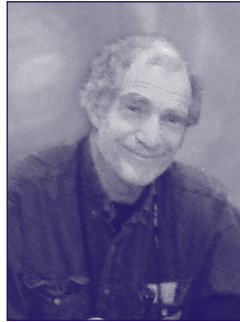
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# President's Message

## aka Kronberg's Corner



It seems that every day we are “treated” to new hit pieces on teacher unions. The corporate education reformers and their pets in the media are all about scapegoating teacher unions for the poor performance of students. The attacks on public pension systems make up just one part of this generalized attack on teacher unions. Here is a not-so-very brief response to any and all of these attacks.

My starting point is that there is an almost one-to-one correspondence between the strength of the teacher union in any given state and the academic achievement of students in that state.

The only tests that are taken by all students at all levels from all states are the NAEP and the International tests. When the scores are disaggregated by state the range of student performance is huge. We go from states like Massachusetts that would be in the top five in the world if it were a country and Mississippi with student scores barely above third world countries. Almost invariably, the states, like Massachusetts, with good or great student academic performance have strong teacher unions while the ones at the bottom of the barrel, like Mississippi and Idaho, are all right-to-work states with powerless teacher unions.

You only have to remember the law of supply and demand to see this makes logical sense as well as being empirically observable. Those states with strong unions have higher compensation, better benefits, and better working conditions for teachers. Teachers with marketable skills, i.e. the best teachers, can find work anywhere. It should be no surprise they gravitate towards better compensation and better working conditions. The kids in strong union states generally have access to better teachers than those in states like Idaho and Mississippi. The quality of teaching is the only school variable that has statistical significance when it comes to student performance, but even that variable pales in comparison to the quality of parenting. All these yahoos who want to blame teacher unions for student failures are making excuses for societal failure.

Public neighborhood schools are the best mirrors we have to the rest of society's institutions. They reflect all the good and all the bad of our society. They do not exist in vacuums, and it is impossible for schools to undo all the damage caused by poverty, dysfunctional families, the gun culture, gangs, ghetto housing, and all the rest of the litany of ills our students bring with them to public schools every day. The New York Times and the Wall Street Journal are unwilling to acknowledge there are social ills of such magnitude in this country that the wealthy ought to pay more taxes to assist those who try to cope with the impact of these ills every day. Sadly, there are plenty of willing fools who will go to great lengths to help the rich avoid dealing with the causes of student failure, which, by and large, are not teacher unions or “bad teachers” or low standards, but the environment surrounding the school where too many students do not succeed.

— Rich Kronberg

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.*

*“Overheard in Orlando...” Cont.*

#### 4. “No Representation Without Taxation”

**AFT-NEA Merged States:** Montana, Minnesota, New York, Florida and North Dakota submitted a bylaw change and accompanying NBIs to change the formula determining their delegations at the RA from the proportion of their membership paying NEA dues (based on their pre-merger affiliation) to a delegation reflecting the number of the entire state membership. In New York, for example, where only 8% of their members’ state dues are transmitted to NEA, they currently have around 200 RA delegates. If this bylaw change were to pass, their delegation would increase to 2000, twice that of California, with no commensurate increase in revenue to NEA. All of these items were resoundingly defeated, but the issue of our relationship with AFT will return in the near future. NEA-Alaska, via Delegate Assembly, has a strong position in opposition to any merger, but it’s clear that some kind of cooperation is in everyone’s interest.

#### 5. “Point of Information... I Need to Give You:”

**The Continuing Saga of The RA Standing Rules.** Some of you may recall that at our last DA, Alaska endorsed the submission of a change to the RA Standing Rules which was an attempt to curb the abuse of a suspension of the rules to “bundle” and refer unrelated NBIs, which had become a too frequent RA practice, as I discovered when I attended RA 2014 after a ten year absence. There were five proposals to end the practice submitted after last year’s RA, each taking a slightly different tack, but Alaska’s was the only one to have the NEA Board’s approval, thanks to the leadership of our NEA Director Tim Parker.

At the Retired Annual Meeting, I asked for and received support for the SR change, which was enthusiastically given, particularly since apparently several NEA Retired motions had been the victims of such indiscriminate bundling in previous years. Our amendment, which required that all motions to suspend the rules (except for the purpose of limiting debate) be debatable passed overwhelmingly, and was immediately put into effect. The impact of this change meant that when a maker moved to do such bundling, he/she had to give rationale and then others were able to argue against the disposal of their NBI in this way without any debate. The change worked exactly as its supporters had hoped: there was just one effort to bundle 7 unrelated items. When the maker gave his rationale, “they are not controversial and I support them all,” it went down to resounding defeat. Several speakers made the arguments Alaskans have always made - we are sent here at great cost to our members to do their business so we need to hear the debate and then make an informed vote. The second such motion to bundle did

pass because the maker was able to make a case for connecting the NBIs and the body agreed with their referral.

The requirement that suspension of the rules be debatable worked to the advantage of the delegates in an unexpected way when someone moved to eliminate the lunch break on the second day of RA which, without debate, would probably have passed. However, since members of various NEA national caucuses who had invited guest speakers from around the South were able to speak against the elimination, the body agreed to take the break.

Although this might seem like a happy ending to the story, the standing rules saga is, alas, not quite over. At this RA, a new abuse emerged: the Point of Information, what we in Alaska refer to as abuse of the White Card. This privileged motion is always tempting to those wishing to jump ahead in the speaking order, as we know only too well. At past RAs, we’ve seen debate get bogged down in points of information, all of which must be recognized before the chair is able to return to those speaking for and those against. On NBI 11, a motion calling for the removal “of the Confederate flag and other symbols of the confederacy from public schools and public places,” we had 54 points of information, most of which were thinly disguised efforts to debate by asking rhetorical questions. The discussion on that NBI took nearly two hours, and another item shortly after saw 34 points of information. We ended the day seriously behind, and by the time we arrived at the fourth and final day, we were facing 100 NBIs. You can imagine the frustration and anxiety of the leadership and the delegates about our ability to complete the task and get to the adoption of the budget which, by our rules, is the last item and must be accomplished before we can adjourn. I was happy to see, however, that despite the growing anxiety, the body did not limit debate despite three motions to do so.

At this point, Lily, chairing her very first RA, showed a leadership that, to my mind, verged on brilliant. For the first three days, she had led with a light touch and appropriate humor, while being focused on the business. But as we began the final day, facing that mountain of NBIs, she addressed the 7,000 plus delegates as the master teacher that she most clearly is. She asked the delegates to accept the following changes to the standing rules: (1) she would rotate the speakers one for, one against, and one point of information; (2) speakers for the delegation would no longer get an extra minute so all speakers would be limited to two minutes; (3) she would follow Robert’s Rules of Order, rather than NEA past practice, and only ask for a standing vote “if the chair is in doubt about the outcome of the voice vote.” Each of these

*“Overheard in Orlando...” Cont. pg 4*

*“Overheard in Orlando...” Cont.*

changes streamlined the process without interfering with the quality and freedom of debate. Lily then went on and asked each delegate to exercise self-discipline with points of information, to only ask for information he/she was unable to get through other sources and said that their point must begin with “My question is...” without preamble. She further asked makers of NBIs to see whether their issue had been already addressed or could be combined with another and to work with other delegates on the floor before debate to make these combinations happen. The body overwhelmingly and with great relief agreed with her requests and then set to work, finishing all our business by 7:30 p.m. It is clear that the Standing Rules would be helped by a firm definition of Points of Information. We will be bringing that amendment to Delegate Assembly for submission to NEA for RA 2016.

I have seen some excellent chairs in my twenty-nine RAs, but I don’t believe any of them could have pulled off what Lily did on that last day where a heavy handed imposition of restrictions on debate or panicked irritation from the chair would have created a hostile backlash in many delegates (which I’ve seen happen in the past.) Her leadership tapped into the trust she had earned from the body by her fairness, her deft hand, and her obvious respect and love for the process of Representative Assembly. I am very grateful for the privilege of having been a part of this RA.

On July 7, I headed home via Salt Lake City, and Lily happened to be on the flight. She was exhausted, but obviously buoyed by the remarkable success of getting through the

business, which we agreed no one but educators could have pulled off. She indicated that she intends to introduce the changes she put in place on the last day as amendments to the Standing Rules for future RAs, which I think will continue to improve the work of the largest deliberative body in the world; it’s definitely messy and often frustrating, like all democracy, but it’s absolutely glorious and what I really love about Lily is that she clearly thinks so too.

— *Susan Stitham*



*Susan Stitham and Bill Bjork  
NEA Retired Auction*

## 2016 Delegate Assembly Nominees

We are entitled to 34 delegates in 2016, one of whom is the president, Rich Kronberg. We will hold an online election in mid-October. There will be a place for write-ins. The following list comprises the nominees for Delegate Assembly 2016:

|                       |                 |                  |                    |
|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Cindy Lou Ailluad     | Steve Click     | Hank Harrison    | Judith Salo        |
| Henry Anderson        | Katie Curtis    | Verna Henkel     | Kristina Tornqvist |
| Bonnie Barber         | Bob Deitrick    | Patricia Hiatt   | Steve Toth         |
| Sherry Barrett        | Pat Desmet      | Nancy Hummel     | Gary Vanhooser     |
| Mary Ann Bensur-Adams | Karen Eddy      | Rod McCoy        | Mary Vanhooser     |
| Bill Bjork            | Cheryl Emerson  | Don Oberg        | Ed Viscardi        |
| Cindy Blase           | Karla Gallagher | Trish Patterson  | Jody Viscardi      |
| Joseph Boyle          | Barb George     | Sharon Penttila  | Graham Ward        |
| Bryant Christensen    | Daniel Greer    | Angela Phillips  | Donna Williams     |
| Loretta Christie      | Don Hadley      | Trena Richardson | Stephanie Winsor   |

## 2015 NEA-Retired Annual Meeting – Orlando, Florida

### A Running Commentary

Susan Stitham and I attended the 32nd Annual meeting of the NEA-Retired in Orlando, Florida. The meeting is one of the pre-conferences held prior to the NEA Representative Assembly.

### The First General Session

President of NEA-Retired, Tom Curran (Maine), called the 317 registered delegates to order on Sunday morning, June 28. Much of the First General Session included opening remarks and introductions by President Curran, the pledge led by Agnes Chavez (North Carolina), and the National Anthem performed by Ernest Holley (Virginia). Next came adoptions of the Agenda, the Minutes of the 2014 Annual Meeting, and the Standing Rules. Election procedure for NEA-Retired office was also reviewed. NEA-Retired Vice-President John Jensen (Nebraska) chaired the effort to raise money for the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education.

Following a short break, Retired President Curran moderated a panel discussion by officers of NEA: President Lily Eskelsen Garcia (Utah), NEA Vice-President Becky Pringle (Pennsylvania), and NEA Secretary/Treasurer Princess Moss (Virginia). President Curran noted that he believed this was the first time in NEA-Retired history that all three executive officers of NEA spoke to the Retired Annual Meeting. He also mentioned all three executive officers were women—another first for NEA.

The officers spoke about the future of NEA-Retired. President Eskelsen Garcia spoke about the critical need for NEA-Retired to lobby for the repeal of the unfair GPO/WEP. She also asked directly for the assistance of NEA-Retired in moving the re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), a new version of ESEA that allows true decision-making by school staff. President Eskelsen-Garcia answered many questions from the floor until time expired.

Becky Pringle spoke about the leadership opportunities for retired members in mentoring and lobbying. Princess Moss said NEA needs the NEA-Retired to work with NEA to advance our united agenda. She also said NEA looks to the retired organization for expertise, wisdom, and caring.

### The Second General Session

After President Curran's remarks, the report of the Resolutions Committee, a grant report, and the Kinnaman Scholarship Overview, we heard from Mary Kusler, Director of NEA Government Relations. Mary immediately addressed the need for the repeal of the GPO/WEP sections of Social Security. She reported that H.R.973 had 106 cosponsors in the US House of Representatives and companion bill S.1651 had 27 cosponsors in the US Senate. She also mentioned Rep. Kevin Brady (TX) had submitted H.R.711 that repeals only the WEP section of Social Security. Director Kusler spoke about the need for 2015 to be the new 1965 (a superb year in Congress) because the country needs a new Voting Rights Act, new ESEA, and attention paid to Higher Education and Medicare.

She spoke at length about S.1177, the Every Child Achieves Act (re-authorizing ESEA and renaming the No Child Left Behind Act). It was exciting to hear the inside scoop on this important piece of legislation. NEA is counting on our retired members to help move S.1177 through Congress. The bill provides more time to learn by deleting some required testing. It also de-couples high-stakes testing from teacher accountability and creates an "opportunity dashboard" to assist students, teachers, and parents as learners move through the school curriculum. S.1177 passed the Senate HELP Committee (Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions) 22-0. Senator Lisa Murkowski serves on the Senate HELP Committee. The US House is debating the Student Success Act H.R.5, a much inferior re-authorization bill. NEA hopes that the Senate version (S.1177) will prevail. Mary mentioned that NEA-Retired was the most active affiliate in lobbying ESEA! Way to go NEA-Retired!

(After the NEA-Retired Annual meeting, the US Senate passed their version of ESEA reauthorization 81-17, and the US House passed their version. Both bodies then adjourned for summer break. The scene is set now for dueling versions of ESEA. The conference committee will attempt to iron out the differences with an eye toward getting a bill to President Obama's desk this fall.)

Mary reported that NEA is supporting H.R.2050 to repeal the Excise Tax on Individual Health Care Plans paid for by the employer that cost more than \$11,000 (the so called Cadillac plans.) H.R.2050 has 116 cosponsors in the US House.

*"2015 NEA-Retired Annual Meeting..." Cont.*

Thanks to Director Mary Kusler for a rousing summary of the legislation important to NEA.

The day ended with speeches from candidates for NEA-Retired office and another push for fund raising.

### The Third General Session

The Third Business Session began Monday morning with secret ballot voting for NEA-Retired candidates. Susan Jones and Allen Ritchie were elected to the NEA-Retired Executive Committee. Stephen Gorrie (Massachusetts) and Daniel Rudd (Michigan) were re-elected to two seats on the NEA Board of Directors.

The remainder of the morning was filled with pleas for donations and action on New Business. Here is a brief summary of New Business items that passed.

- NBI 3:** Susan Stitham received support for her Standing Rule Amendment #3: N. Suspension of a Standing Rule. Any such motion will be debatable, except for motions to limit debate.
- NBI 6:** NEA-Retired recommends to NEA that it publish an article that deals with the economic value of defined benefit pension plans compared to defined contribution plans. Sid Kardon (Michigan)
- NBI 9:** The NEA-Retired requests that the NEA support continued education about climate disruption. Nancy Porter (Iowa)
- NBI 10:** NEA-Retired encourages and supports greater national visibility and involvement by NEA in vital retirement issues, including educating all active members on these issues. Crystal Wood (Maine)

### The Fourth General Session

The Fourth Business Session convened with the presentation of awards including:

#### Most New Members

|          |                         |
|----------|-------------------------|
| Kentucky | 816 new retired members |
| Michigan | 649 new retired members |

#### Largest Percentage Growth

|              |              |
|--------------|--------------|
| Rhode Island | 6.85% growth |
|--------------|--------------|

The meeting ended with many announcements, points of personal privilege, and candidate announcements.

I want to thank NEA-Alaska/Retired members for the opportunity to participate in this conference. This was my first opportunity to attend the NEA Representative Assembly as a retired member.

— *Bill Bjork*



*Brinna Wojtalewicz, Anchorage  
The first delegate in the 2015 RA Alaska  
Caucus to join pre-retired.*



*Christopher Benshoof, Fairbanks,  
and Marnie Schlaht, Anchorage  
Pre-retired Members*

## Alaska Retirement Management Board Update

In February 2015, an Actuarial Committee was appointed to examine, in depth, actuarial practices, medical data, and recommendations from the two actuaries. Legislative action in the spring of 2014 significantly impacted previous assumptions. Buck Consultants, employed since the fall of 2005, has yet to receive good medical data on current retirees, particularly the numbers eligible for Medicare. After repeated questions, the representatives have finally started to fine tune the data and made requests of the Administration to require that any third party administrator, such as Aetna, be able to provide such data to Buck and that the ability to do so be part of the bidding RFP. The reason this is critical is because health care costs drop considerably when retirees reach age 65 and Medicare becomes the primary provider. Then, the third party administrator, Aetna, becomes secondary. Health care is a significant part of the unfunded liability.

The Actuarial Committee has had 3 meetings, April, May and August, and in each meeting with both actuaries, GRS and Buck, areas of concern have been outlined and prioritized. Legislative action in 2014 requires the use of Level Percent of Pay liability calculation for the pension, and extends, by almost 8 years, the time to pay off the unfunded liability, thus adding cost to the state and the municipalities. The Committee is concerned about the

imposition of requirements on what they see as the ARM Board's fiduciary responsibility. The past meetings have afforded the opportunity to question both actuaries in a less formal setting and to relay concerns to both the actuaries and the administration.

The Administration has been working diligently to put into place the health care plan for current active members in the Defined Contribution program. June 30, 2016 marks the end of 10 years for the DCR program. Access to medical coverage for those of Medicare eligible age is available with 10 years of service and allows the use of a Health Reimbursement Account, in the retiree's name, to be used to pay health insurance premiums. When the fund runs out of money, the cost will be out of pocket. In 2014 the annual cost for a retiree for medical coverage was \$9876. As of June 30, 2014, only 1340 of the 3547 TRS DCR members had worked five years or more and of these, 126 were over age 60. For PERS, only 3226 of 15,800 had worked five years or more and only 903 were over age 60.

The next meeting of the ARM Board will be in Fairbanks, September 24 and 25, and the Real Assets portfolio will be the focus of the presentations.

— *Gayle Harbo*

## Health Benefits Committee

The Explanation of Benefits (EOB) is the form insurance companies use to send out what they will and will not cover for each medical billing. These statements have been notoriously poorly written and hard to understand. Sometimes I think they are purposely confusing. Recently, I have seen a draft of a new design for the Aetna AlaskaCare EOB. It is actually an improvement – such wonderful things as putting cost analysis on the front page. We will see if the draft goes next to their legal team where common sense goes to die.

At Delegate Assembly last year we passed an action item calling for reinstatement of the PERS/TRS Board which was an advisory oversight committee for State of Alaska retired health insurance issues. We are seeing some hope that at least something similar will be realized. There was a meeting in July with the Commissioner of Administration Sheldon Fisher and the Deputy Commissioner John Boucher, organized primarily by RPEA. They met with representatives from NEA-Alaska/Retired, RPEA, and AF-SCME. All have retired members with AlaskaCare health insurance. The administration would like to see us broaden

the membership in the committee to include administration, an active employee, a person who is also on the ARM Board, and a public member. There would still be a majority of retired members. There was some talk of having members selected from each of the three groups. Now, more likely, members will be chosen without regard for their retirement organization. We expect a draft responding to the discussion at this meeting from the administration soon.

There are provisions in the draft proposal that require the commissioner to make timely responses to the board, and provide copies of bid request documents and bids provided by insurance companies. These will allow the board at least some input into the bid selection process.

We do not expect the administration to advance this to the legislature so it will be state code. It will not be required of future administrations. The PERS and TRS board was not required by statute either and Governor Murkowski simply ordered it shut down. We hope to get this plan or a similar one submitted and passed into law by the legislature.

— *Rod McCoy, Chair*



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## Voting for Delegate Assembly 2016 representatives goes live online October 7, 2015.

### Calling All Retirees!!

NEA-Alaska is interested in recording some oral history interviews during Delegate Assembly this coming January. We are particularly interested in folks who were involved in the mid '70s in the establishment of the new rural locals and their first contracts after the dissolution of SOS and DOEA and the establishment of the REAAs. (Which, as I like to point out, was accomplished pretty much within one year and with the help of only three statewide staff. An incredible story of volunteer effort at a commitment level that the Association urgently needs to reach again now.)

If this is you and you're willing to participate, or if you have names and contact information of others you think might be interested, please let me know at omm1961@gmail.com. If you are or can be in Anchorage at that time, that would be great since we'd like to film as many folks as we can, although we can also do audio recordings.

I look forward to hearing from you as we need to get this project off the ground as soon as possible.

— Susan Stitham

### Are You Prepared?

A free Personal Planning Guide may be downloaded from the NEA Members Insurance Trust site. It is entitled: *What You Need to Know About Final Arrangements*. You will know more about funeral costs, licensed funeral directors, cemetery plot options, and estate taxes.

## Calendar of Events

### October

- 7-21 Delegate Assembly Online Election
- 16-18 NEA-Alaska Fall Event

### November

- 6-7 NEA-Alaska Board of Directors Meeting
- 16-20 American Education Week
- 18 National ESP Day

### December

- 24-Jan. 3 NEA-Alaska Offices closed

### January

- 13-14 NEA-Alaska Board of Directors Meeting
- 14 PARSA
- 14-16 Delegate Assembly
- 17 NEA-Alaska/Retired Board Meeting
- 19 Legislative Session begins

### February

- 16 Elizabeth Peratrovich Day

### March

- 11-13 NEA ESP Conference