

Statement

P E N N S Y L V A N I A S T A T E E D U C A T I O N A S S O C I A T I O N

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Members, Wolf bring pension law a long way

Earlier this month, lawmakers passed and Gov. Tom Wolf signed a new pension law.

For PSEA-Retired members, there are three important points to remember about the law.

One, there are no changes to pensions for retired or active members.

have put new employees entirely into a 401(k)-type plan, threatening both the employees' future retirement security, and the PSERS' solvency.

PSEA President Jerry Oleksiak said the Association has opposed changes to the current pension system, but noted that the new law close-

Positives for Act 120 employees

Not only does the law include no negative changes for active employees, there are two positive aspects for members hired after June 30, 2011:

- Upside risk sharing. If PSERS' investment returns exceed targets, these employees will play less into

WHO CHANGED THE CONVERSATION ON PENSIONS? YOU DID!



You participated in thousands of meetings



You sent nearly 1 million email messages



You worked with Gov. Wolf and our bipartisan allies

Two, it doesn't threaten the security of the Public School Employees' Retirement System.

Three, strong member advocacy and having a pro-public education governor pays huge dividends.

Thanks in large part to retired and active members' advocacy, and the governor's leadership, the new law reflects PSEA's pension principles: no negative effects for current employees; protect the defined benefit pension system; and protect the retirement security of future, current, and retired PSEA members.

This comes a long way from pension proposals debated over the past four and a half years. Some would

ly matches PSEA's pension principles.

For that he credited active and retired PSEA members for their relentless advocacy over the past four and a half years – 1 million emails, letters, and phone calls to legislators.

Oleksiak also thanked Wolf for the role he played in standing up against bad pension proposals.

"This new law certainly isn't perfect, but one thing is clear, it does not include the harmful provisions and deep benefit cuts that were in previous bills," Oleksiak said. "Why? Because of the advocacy of our active and retired members, and the work of Gov. Tom Wolf."

their retirement. This will balance out the current downside risk sharing.

- Option four withdrawal. Employees will have the ability to withdraw what they paid into their retirement in one lump-sum upon retirement.

Cuts minimized for new employees

While the new law will mean changes for employees hired after June 30, 2019, previous proposals would have cut their retirement benefits by as much as 70 percent. They will now see as little as a 9 to 11 percent benefit reduction, depending which plan they select.

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Members, Wolf bring pension law a long way

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They will have three retirement options:

- A traditional defined benefit plan with a 1.25 percent multiplier, along with a 5 percent 401(k)-type account. This would result in a 9 to 11 percent reduction in future benefits. This is

the default option. If new employees don't select a plan, they will be enrolled in this one automatically.

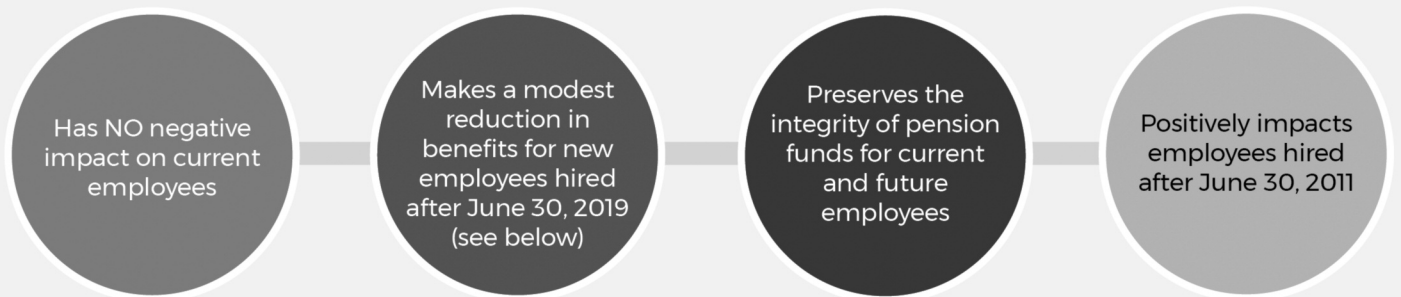
- Another defined benefit plan with a 1 percent multiplier and a 5 percent 401(k)-type account with lower personal and employee contri-

bution rates. This would result in a 21 to 24 percent cut in future benefits.

- A full 401(k)-type account with higher employee contributions. This would mean a future benefits' cut of 44 to 49 percent.

SENATE BILL 1: PUBLIC EMPLOYEE PENSIONS

After four years of bad bills, legislative debates, and unprecedented PSEA member advocacy, PA state lawmakers passed a pension bill that:



LOOK HOW FAR WE'VE COME

A timeline: Senate Bill 1 contains none of the worst elements included in several pension bills introduced over the past four years.

JULY 2013	JULY 2014	JULY 2015
SB 922 reduces benefits for current employees and puts new hires in a DC* plan, cutting benefits by 70 percent.	Gov. Tom Corbett and Rep. Mike Tobash advance a stacked hybrid plan, cutting benefits by 40 percent for new hires.	SB 1 creates a hybrid DC/cash balance plan, cutting benefits by 70 percent for new hires. Gov. Wolf vetoes it.
DECEMBER 2015	OCTOBER 2016	JUNE 2017
SB 1071 creates a side-by-side hybrid plan, cutting benefits by 18 percent for new hires. The PA House votes it down 52-149.	The final version of SB 1071 cuts benefits by 21 percent for new hires but fails to get a vote in the PA House	SB 1 has no negative impact on current employees and cuts benefits by 9 to 11 percent for most new hires after June 30, 2019.

* DC = Defined contribution plan with 401(k)-type individual accounts



The President's Message

by Mary Moran
President, PSEA-Retired

National issues worry retirees

I am hoping that some if not all of these pressing issues will have been positively resolved by the time this reaches you. They are matters of great concern to retirees and to public educators.

To begin with, the repeal and replacement of the Affordable Care Act has serious consequences for many Pennsylvanians.

The Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center, a nonpartisan policy research organization, warns that "Pennsylvania's rural communities already face a lot of challenges, and policymakers in Washington, D.C., shouldn't make life harder for people who live there."

The American Health Care Act, passed by the U.S. House, would effectively end the Affordable Care Act's Medicaid expansion, under which more than 85,000 rural Pennsylvanians have gained coverage.

The Medicaid expansion has also increased access to substance abuse treatment at a time when many of Pennsylvania's rural communities have been ravaged by the opioid crisis. In addition, the bill also would dramatically cut and radically restructure the entire Medicaid program through a per capita cap or block grant, putting average seniors, people with disabilities, and families with children at risk across the state.

"Although Trumpcare has passed

the House, it still must be considered by the Senate. As the Senate considers changes to our health care system, it is time for the majority to get serious, end their obsession with repealing the Affordable Care Act, and work in a bipartisan way to keep what is working and fix what is not," said U.S. Sen. Bob Casey Jr.

Betsy DeVos, U.S. education secretary, continues to demonstrate her

tors of student debt from charging high fees on past-due loans. She also proposed a \$9.2 billion cut to education.

Of particular concern to seniors are property tax "reform" proposals in our state. A recent communication from the Pennsylvania School Boards Association points out some serious flaws in the proposals.

"While described as a way to protect senior citizens and

low-income families from losing their homes, the bill has far greater implications," PSBA said. "In truth, the issue is being introduced in many states by owners of large apartment complexes and 'big box' commercial properties who believe that they are over-assessed. They want to create a loophole enabling them to more easily and successfully challenge their assessments and pay significantly lower property taxes."

This could limit a school district's ability to appeal assessments and will have funding consequences, especially in urban districts.

We must pay close attention to any alerts coming from PSEA; the Government Relations Division monitors all pending legislation and will issue timely advice and warnings to members.

Feel free to contact me with any comments and concerns at mary-math@ptd.net.



PSEA-Retired raffled gift baskets at the spring House of Delegates to raise money to donate to the NEA Jack Kinnaman Fund. Kinnaman was known for portraying the "Cat in the Hat" at the NEA Representative Assembly each summer. Student NEA members who need financial help for college are granted scholarships in his name.

unsuitability for her position. Her lack of knowledge has been evident in her mischaracterizing historically black colleges and universities as "pioneers of school choice." She compares school choice with choosing an Uber over a taxi.

One of her recent actions was to revoke a federal policy barring collec-



What am I willing to fight for?

Are you a member of the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, a member of third parties, or unaffiliated? Do you vote? Do you like politics? Is there anyone or anything in life that you care for?

When asked questions like these, we usually give an answer. I've been asking myself the question, "What is so important that am I willing to fight to keep? Would I fight for my family? Absolutely!

What about my job? No, I'm retired; however, I would fight for the right of children to learn in free, well-funded public schools. Endanger my retirement security, and I'm ready to put on my boxing gloves. Pension, Social Security, Medicare: My savings are how I support my life with my husband and live with self-respect and dignity.

Would I fight for the right to vote? Yes, and since I value voting as a right and a privilege, I vote every election. With pride, I claim to be a super voter. What about my party of affiliation? Hmmm.

Now we are getting to the reason that I began to question myself. As a PACE director, I often hear that PSEA only recommends Democratic candidates. I know that is wrong. I have personally delivered checks to both Republicans and Democrats.

As a member of various PACE teams, I have interviewed and recommended in a bipartisan manner. My party affiliation has never influenced my decisions. I have always looked at the candidate's positions on the things

that I believe are important.

My recommendations have always come from the answers given on the PACE questionnaire, the interview, and my understanding of the performance of the candidate's votes or what they have done in their life.

I have never understood why the candidate's party or my party should make a difference. If the person believes in quality public school edu-

recommend candidates who will not value us and our ideals and who will not talk to us.

I do not believe my party is worth a fight. I do not understand those who tell me that they vote straight party. Those who vote only for party rather than candidates' beliefs surrender their vote to the party leaders.

I do not understand legislators who only listen to their leaders and not to

their constituents. Don't they have any values and opinions of their own? Why are so many people willing to vote against themselves just to support their party?

As your PACE director, I distributed my report of the PACE interviews regarding the spring primary election recommendations for statewide offices. I hope it was helpful as you went to the polls. I

tried to give you information based on knowledge, not party.

In July, the PACE Board will make recommendations for the Nov. 7 general election. I ask you to consider the efforts of PSEA-PACE to interview and inform you regarding our recommendations. Party affiliation should not be important; however, the candidates' beliefs regarding our important issues will be the basis of the recommendations.

I am ever grateful to those who generously donate to our PACE campaigns. Without you we would not have the necessary tools to battle those who want to take away the things we value. Thank you.

"I do not understand legislators who only listen to their leaders and not to their constituents. Don't they have any values and opinions of their own? Why are so many people willing to vote against themselves just to support their party?"

cation for all children, if they will vote for better funding, I probably would recommend them.

If they believe in protecting families and especially our most vulnerable citizens, they're my kind of person. If they will work to strengthen the security of seniors and our fellow Pennsylvanians, they'll likely have my vote.

A problem arises when candidates refuse to interview with PSEA-PACE. Most often, it is our Republican candidates who would rather go without our support than be tainted by our recommendation. I believe that Republican advisers are telling candidates to keep us at arm's length as though we are a plague. We cannot

Are you moving forward? Or sitting on your behind?

by Joanne Alaica

Reaching 65 brings more than new aches and pains.

You may continue to work without a pay limit if you choose to start collecting your Social Security. You are eligible for Medicare. And if you get a supplemental policy to your Medicare, you will likely receive “free” with your plan an invitation to enroll in an eligible SilverSneakers plan provider. (There must be a better term, but then, again, there are probably much worse.)



SilverSneakers is a comprehensive program that improves overall well-being and strength and offers social aspects as well. Designed for all levels and abilities, this program is gen-

“There are things we can’t escape healthwise, but if you’ve dodged the health bullet or survived one, then you owe it to yourself to get yourself in the best shape you can be.”

erally provided by your health plan at no additional cost.

It provides access to fitness equipment, group exercise classes, social networking, online education, and a sense of community. With more than 13,000 locations nationwide, you can visit any one of its locations at any time. Visit SilverSneakers.com.

But there is no denying that keeping active means more than volunteering and traveling and belonging to clubs. It is vitally important to keep yourself as physically fit as you possibly can be. Being physically fit often translates into being mentally fit as well.

While we can’t stop encroaching arthritis or deteriorating hips and knees, we may hold off some of their more damaging effects. There is proof that regular exercise can benefit people with conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, balance issues, difficulty walking, and arthritis.

If you have not been into regular exercise, don’t continue to avoid it because you’re “too old.” You probably aren’t. Check with your doctor about your abilities and limitations; he or she can probably help you find a program that can meet your needs.

You’ve worked hard and provided Pennsylvania’s children with your knowledge and care; please enjoy your retirement. There are things we can’t escape healthwise, but if you’ve dodged the health bullet or survived one, then you owe it to yourself to get yourself in the best shape you can be.

Don’t be like me. I stopped my regular walking. I cut my activity level way down. Next thing you know, I’m depressed, up a size, and my knees were killing me (frankly, I attributed the crummy knees to jumping off and on all those educational bandwagons!), and my chiropractor was becoming my new best friend.

Learning that I had “end-stage osteoarthritis” in BOTH knees scared me off my sofa, and I went to rehab and am working on strengthening all those diminished capacity muscles in preparation for my new knees. I had intended to exit with my original parts, but I am hoping the medical anatomy students won’t be disappointed in me.

Get moving, now, my friends!

Wisconsin: what happens when anti-union forces destroy bargaining

Once upon a time, Wisconsin was one of the strongest collective bargaining states in the nation for public school employees. Contracts between districts and WEAC (the Wisconsin NEA affiliate) local associations were similar to those in Pennsylvania: They bargained reasonable wages, hours, and working conditions, and the state provided a good pension system.

Then Gov. Scott Walker came along. In his controversial 2011 budget, he and the Legislature set out to eliminate most collective bargaining rights for Wisconsin state employees.

The response to Walker's policies, you may remember, included protests at the Wisconsin State Capitol and an effort to recall Walker. In the 2012 recall election, Walker won again, becoming the first American governor to survive a recall effort. And his draconian policies went into effect.

Teaching in Wisconsin today is very different from just a few years ago. Barry DeWitt, PSEA UniServ representative in Eastern Region, recently spent a week there with four

other PSEA staff volunteers to help with internal organizing efforts. "Not surprisingly, when the law devastated WEAC bargaining rights, membership in NEA and the state organization dropped drastically," DeWitt said.

The group was sent to Kenosha, a city of approximately 100,000 on the shores of Lake Michigan and about an hour from Milwaukee. There the PSEA team saw the aftereffects of Act 10 which contained "one union-busting provision after another," according to DeWitt.

Wisconsin school employees no longer have payroll deduction or fair share. Worse, collective bargaining has been reduced to "meet and confer." And of course, salaries have been frozen at their 2011 rate. To top it all, each local must recertify every year. Fifty one percent of members must show up in person to vote for the recertification to pass. "You know how difficult it is to get members to attend meetings near the end of the year. That provision has had disastrous effects," DeWitt said.

"A lot of associations dissolved

right away," he said. "Especially the smaller ones. The larger urban ones still exist, but they are ghosts of their former selves. In Kenosha, a good, comprehensive contract has been reduced to one page." DeWitt added that the passage of the law caused a great number of mid-career teachers to leave the profession. Now there is a shortage of teachers, and no one in education programs to replace them. Class size is skyrocketing, a record number of emergency certifications are being issued, and daily subs are trying to cover classes instead of certified teachers.

All of this is also undermining the pension system. Fewer contributors means a less stable system down the road. DeWitt added, "I'd urge retirees in Pennsylvania who value their former profession and their pensions to stay involved and to vote to prevent Wisconsin shenanigans from being repeated here. Several prospective gubernatorial candidates would like to do more damage here than Act 10 did in Wisconsin. Elect the right governor in 2018."

NEA-Retired Advocacy Day Once again, PSEA comes through

*by Susan L. Jones, member
NEA-Retired Executive Council*

The first NEA-Retired National Advocacy Day began as a new business item at the NEA-Retired Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. last July. Upon approval it was taken to the floor of the NEA Representative Assembly where it passed unanimously.

The NBI said: "Working with the NEA-Retired Executive Council, the Center for Advocacy will plan and hold a national retirement security advocacy day in the spring of 2017.

The purpose of this one day on Capitol Hill would be to focus on effective and beneficial Social Security Reform including the repeal of the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP), opposition to mandatory coverage of Social Security, and opposition to privatization. Activities for this day would include visits to Congressional offices and a national call-in effort."

Over the following months the NEA-Retired officers and Executive

Council kept talking about the project, and during our February virtual meeting we decided it was time to get the project moving. Personally, I was excited by the chance to get retired members involved in an NEA project about issues so important to many of them.

The date was set for April 27 since the council and the NEA Board would be in Washington for their spring meeting, and most importantly Congress would be in town.

Al Campos and Jacob Dowd, NEA

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Thinking out loud

by Philip Russo

Thinking about retirement, one more time

Most retirees regularly re-evaluate the future. So, has anyone asked you lately, “How do you like retirement?”

How do you answer a question like that? Some of us might say without hesitation, “Great. Couldn’t be better. What’s not to like?” Don’t know how I got everything done that I need to do while I was working. Life is good, and we’re really enjoying our family and friends.”

Some might say, “I’m bored, not enough to do. Miss my job, the kids, and my colleagues. Really having a hard time living within my income level.” I hope this is not you.

The state of public education in Pennsylvania and nationally is scary and relentless. Concerns about health care and pension reform are stressful. Many are having difficulty coping with the new economic realities that retirement creates. Some have found our new life to be overwhelming.

The tracking of our life savings can be volatile and uncertain. The worry about funding a catastrophic health care issue is ever-present.

Long-term care is a fleeting but worrisome thought. Pension concerns and the lack of cost-of-living increases compound our economic insecurity. We finally understand the meaning of “living on a fixed income.”

We’re all in the same place, but is it really a place we want to be? If it isn’t, we are duty bound to do something about making things better. We know from our professional career that we are limited on what we can do on our own to make improvements. We are experts in balancing our individual skills and our collective strength to get things done.

How we adjust to our many new roles and responsibilities will be as varied as there are retirees. What will define comfortable in this new life stage will vary. One thing does remain constant: The support system that we have relied on as professionals and sometimes have taken for granted remains.

PSEA-Retired provides its members with many outlets of activity and is a place where those of us with similar interests and concerns can meet

and share ideas. My advice to you is to remain a member of PSEA-Retired and get your friends to join, participate in region and state activities, share your concerns, and join old and new friends to share experiences.

When someone asks how retirement is going, you’ll be able to answer with a new vigor that things are great, and if they aren’t, you have the means to work to make things better. It is up to you to take the initiative so you will be able to say proudly, “I love my life.”

See you at a PSEA-Retired meeting, and we’ll share some stories about our grandchildren, highlights of a recent adventure, or some fish stories, our most recent hobby, or the pleasure gained from volunteer activities. We can discuss, plan, and prepare for the next challenge.

Until then, keep smiling. No one said it would be easy. Retirement is reserved for the courageous.

Comments or thoughts can be sent to: PTRussoSr@aol.com

NEA-Retired Advocacy Day Once again, PSEA comes through (continued from Page 6)

lobbyists, were assigned to work with NEA-Retired officers and Executive Council members plus any Retired state presidents who could come. These would be the people going in person to the Capitol.

Emails, phone calls, etc., would be done by those back home. PSEA-Retired President Mary Moran attended. Barbara Matteson, North Carolina-Retired president, and past NEA-Retired president, joined the group in D.C. to lobby in person. As

PSEA-Retired past president and current Executive Council member, I was there.

PSEA was supportive of our efforts to make this day a success. When I spoke to PSEA President Jerry Oleksiak about our efforts, he immediately agreed to put the message out – not only to our retired PSEA members but to our active members as well.

All of you who get PSEA emails, as well as those who are on social

media, received my message, which I shared with NEA staff. They were amazed at our efforts and by the number of Pennsylvania members who read and responded to our message. By late afternoon, more than 33,000 people had opened that email.

So, our Washington adventure ended, and Pennsylvania’s participation in it was part of its success. Thanks to all of you who helped make it so!

Statement

www.psea.org/retired

PSEA PENNSYLVANIA
STATE EDUCATION
ASSOCIATION

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Touring, lunches keep retired regions busy

In case you haven't noticed, PSEA-Retired locals and regions are busiest in the spring and fall.

The weather usually cooperates (the rainy spring this year was probably an exception to the rule), and the lunches keep us updated on pension and public education issues.

Members in the Eastern Region are lucky enough to live two hours from Broadway and make a tradition of seeing two shows a year. Last fall, two busloads saw the famous Radio City Music Hall Christmas Show and took a special tour of Radio City after the show.

Eastern also traveled to New York City to see "Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812" before Josh Groban leaves the show.

Of course, everyone would really, really like to see "Hamilton," but

that's out of the question for now.

Instead, the region enjoyed the clever staging, the terrific cast – many, including Groban, have Tony nominations – and the music of "Comet."

Northwestern Region held its fall luncheon and business meeting in September. Jeffrey Young spoke about estate planning and how to be best prepared for the changes in the law that took place over the last few years. The annual January Thaw at the region office was a success as usual. Members enjoyed lots of games and activities and forgot about all the weather outside. After all, "We live where it really snows," NW Region President Ron Bennett said.

The region held its spring luncheon and business meeting in May. Guest speaker Steve Eugene talked about the changes in NEA member

benefits and how to access them.

After lunch, Northwestern Region elected new officers: Richard Eberlin, president; Janet Peterson, vice president; and Kevin Kantz, secretary/treasurer. Outgoing president Ron Bennett received a big thank you for his leadership over the past four years.

In the Midwestern Region, President Ed Zipay said locals heard the daughter of a Battan Death March survivor, watched a marijuana-sniffing police dog, and met Judge Deborah Kunselman, our successful PSEA-PACE recommended candidate for the Pennsylvania Superior Court. And members are looking forward to September when we will have our first annual region retired "Back to School – but not for us!" picnic.