

Voices of Experience

Newsletter for OEA-Retired

Omaha Education Association–Retired is an affiliate of NSEA-Retired and NEA-Retired
Roger Rea, Editor – email: rrea68154@yahoo.com www.OEAretired.org May 2023

Fraud attacks, Cybersecurity and Elections on agenda for May 18 meeting

Nebraska seniors over age 60 are twice as likely to be the victim of fraud as the rest of the population. The fraud attacks may come from your smart phone, your social media account, using your computer/internet, or spoofed phone calls asking for money. The Nebraska Office of the Attorney General keeps track of fraud attacks, and has prepared fliers on what you can do to safely use your electronic media and phones to avoid fraudsters who might call, email, or send you letters at home.

Ryan Sothan, Outreach Coordinator for the Nebraska Department of Justice, will come to the Thursday, May 18th meeting of OEA-Retired to share tips on how to safely navigate our digital world. He will address safety with your smart phone; how to create

safe passwords for your various on-line accounts; how to stop unwanted phone calls, surf the internet and make on-line purchases safely; and more! Attendees will get useful handouts about the topics discussed.

Also on tap at the May 18th meeting will be elections of OEA-Retired officers. More details on that election can be found elsewhere in this newsletter. A brief update on the status of bills under consideration by the Unicameral will also be on the agenda.

The Thursday, May 18th meeting will begin at 10 a.m. at the OEA Office, 4202 S. 57th Street. Following CDC guidelines, facemasks are optional for this meeting. Call the OEA office at 402.346.0400 if you need driving directions.

LB 753 circumvents the Nebraska Constitution, sets a bad precedent

President's Message

By: Walta Sue Dodd, OEA-Retired President

Article VII, section 11 of the Nebraska Constitution states: "Notwithstanding any other provision in this Constitution, appropriation of public funds shall not be made to any school or institution of learning not owned or exclusively controlled by the state or a political subdivision thereof."

LB 753 circumvents the Nebraska Constitution by allowing individuals and corporations to use dollar-for-dollar tax credits to give money to "scholarship granting organizations." The money is then given to private schools to allow students to attend private schools using what would have been public tax dollars.

This bill does not create any oversight or policies/guidelines for institutions of learning that receive these funds. There are no restrictions on how these tax credit funds are spent. In other words, there

are no checks and balances; and the institution receiving the money can deny admission to students without repercussion.

The tax credit given by an individual or corporation using this scheme will effectively cheat the public schools out of tax dollars that would otherwise go to public schools. This is not a school choice issue. Instead, it's a scheme to take money from public coffers and give it to private schools. Look for ways you can help fight LB 753 elsewhere in this newsletter.

Your help may be needed to repeal LB 753, the "Voucher Scheme" bill

By: Roger Rea, NSEA-Retired Vice President

LB 753 would give millions of dollars in taxpayer money to fund unaccountable, private schools. At the time this issue of *Voices of Experience* went to press, the bill was on Final Reading before the Unicameral.

LB 753 does not help all children, and in fact subsidizes discriminatory practices! The initial cost is \$25 million, and the bill provides that the cost can grow to \$100 million annually. Further, LB 753 would fund private school voucher schemes that are unaccountable

to the public. Nebraska currently ranks 49th in the nation for state support of K-12 education. The state should be investing more in public education, not diverting millions of dollars to a tax voucher scheme.

If LB 753 passes, a number of groups will join together to repeal the bill so that public funding is preserved for public schools. A scheme similar to LB 753 was adopted in Kentucky recently, and the courts ruled that the law was unconstitutional. In Nebraska, legal experts have expressed the opinion that any court

challenge will not be “ripe” until the bill takes effect in January 2025. That may be too late to stop the initial implementation of the bill.

A second, faster method to stop LB 753 from being implemented is to put it before the voters in the 2024 election. To do that, we would need to file petitions the day the bill is signed by the Governor, and collect 60,000 signatures and qualify in 38 counties before the first week of September 2023.

Sign up to gather signatures, and get your

friends and family members to help gather signatures where they live, by going to the Support Our Schools Nebraska website, www.supportourschoolsnebraska.org to become a petition circulator. All individuals who sign up will receive two petitions to circulate as soon as the petitions have been printed.

By working together, and working quickly, we can stop this bad idea. We need your help on this project. We’ve done it before – let’s do it again!

OEA-Retired meeting calendar

OEA-Retired will have one more general meeting this year. The meeting will be held at the OEA office, 4202 South 57th Street, from 10:00 – 11:45 a.m. The date for the 2023 NSEA-Retired Fall Conference has also been set. The calendar of scheduled meetings is:

May 18, Thurs. – Cybersecurity for Seniors, (Ryan Sothan, Nebraska Attorney General’s Office); OEA-Retired elections

Oct. 18, Wed. – NSEA-Retired Fall Conference, Stuhr Museum, Grand Island

The full calendar for OEA-Retired meetings for 2023-24 will be set in August, and will be printed in the fall newsletter.

OEA-Retired elections set for May 18

OEA-Retired officers serve for three-year terms, with a maximum of two consecutive terms in any one position. The OEA-Retired officers for 2022-2023, and their terms of office, are:

President = Walta Sue Dodd (2022-2025)

Vice President = Cheryl Richardson (2022-2025)

Secretary = Ruby M. Davis (2020-2023)

At-large Directors = Sue Kalina (2020-2023); Doreen Jankovich (2020-2023); Deborah Pauley (2022-2025); Sherry Brodkey (2022-2025)

Bookkeeper and Newsletter = Roger Rea

OEA-Retired elections for the officers whose terms expire in 2023 will be held at the May 18th meeting. The offices that are up for election are: Secretary and two At-large Directors. Ruby Davis is the current secretary and is term limited. Doreen Jankovich has indicated that she intends to run for secretary. Sue Kalina is one of the current At-Large Directors and she has indicated that she intends to run for a second term. The second At-Large Director is Doreen Jankovich, who is term limited. Ruby Davis has indicated that she intends to run for this At-Large position on the Board.

If you are interested in becoming a candidate for one of these positions, please send an email to Cheryl Richardson, OEA-Retired Vice President, at crichardson.omaha@gmail.com, or call her at 402-681-9788. Additional nominations may be made at the

May 18th meeting.

OEA-Retired website to get new look

The website for OEA-Retired will get a fresh, new look soon! A redesigned website is being worked on now, with the expectation that it will “roll out” either this summer or early next fall. At the current time, the position of webmaster is vacant. If you would like to take training on how to use and maintain the website, please let us know! The training will be provided by the individual who is helping design the website, and will likely take place by Zoom. If you want to be part of this new effort, and possibly become either the webmaster or assistant webmaster, please send an email to OEA-Retired President, Walta Sue Dodd at WSDodd@aol.com. Become active in your retired organization!

NSEA-Retired Election Results

NSEA-Retired recently held elections for general officers and delegates to both NSEA Delegate Assembly and NEA Representative Assembly. OEA-Retired had several members involved in those election races. Roger Rea was re-elected as Vice President of NSEA-Retired.

OEA-Retired members who were elected to NSEA Delegate Assembly were: Roger Rea, Walta Sue Dodd, Susan Kalina, Liz Rea, Ruby Davis, and Carol Krejci. Sue Kalina was unable to attend Delegate Assembly, so Jan Elliott replaced her to represent Metro District. Metro District will be represented at NEA Representative Assembly in July by: Roger Rea and Walta Sue Dodd.

Reminders

This is the last issue of *Voices of Experience* for this school year. You will receive the next issue of the newsletter prior to our first meeting (which will be sometime in October 2023) for the 2023-24 school year.

If you change addresses for next year, be sure to contact the OEA office at 402.346.0400 with your

new mailing address. Keep your address up-to-date, and you will not miss out on any of our newsletters!

Annual dues for OEA-Retired will be billed in the fall. If you are not a life member of the association, be sure to return your dues notice with the proper

payment to ensure that you are not “dropped” from our mailing list! About 95% of OEA-Retired members are life members who do not receive dues notices every year.

Happy News from the OEA Foundation!

By Liz Rea, OEA Foundation President

The OEA Foundation Board of Trustees met on Thursday, April 13th, to select the 2023 honorees for each of the scholarships offered by the Foundation. The seven trustees who serve on the board are Mary Moberg, Walta Sue Dodd, Carol Krejci, Susan Kalina, Bob McCune, Doreen Jankovich and Liz Rea. All are past OEA Presidents or Vice Presidents. Our administrator is Linda Richter.

After much debate and discussion, the trustees made their selection of the honorees to be awarded scholarships valued from \$1,000 to \$15,000 each. This amounts to a grand total of \$391,300! The majority of the 93 scholarships will be awarded to graduating seniors from metro area high schools during their school's honors night.

We are thrilled to honor very qualified and deserving 2023 graduates in this way! Watch for a ½ page ad in the **Sunday, May 14th Omaha World-Herald** listing the scholarship honorees and the scholarship(s) they were awarded. Some honorees received more than one scholarship.

The scholarships are supported by contributions to the OEA Foundation from members of OEA-Retired like you as well as from members of the public. A complete listing of the Foundation scholarships can be found on the OEA website, www.omahaoea.org. Click on the “OEA Foundation Scholarship” link in the upper right corner of the page. Scroll down the page to find details about the various scholarships awarded each year. Generally, students can begin to apply for scholarships in November or December of their senior year.

You are encouraged to make a tax-deductible contribution to the OEA Foundation by sending a check (payable to the OEA Foundation) to OEA Foundation, 4202 South 57th Street, Omaha, NE 68117. If you wish to contribute to a specific scholarship, write the name of the scholarship on the “Memo” line of the check.

For additional information, please contact Linda Richter, Administrator, at oeafoundation@gmail.com. All contributions are welcome and greatly appreciated.

Social Security Tax bill folded into LB 754

The Social Security tax exemption included in Legislative Bill 641 to phase out the state income tax on benefits by 2025 has been amended into a larger, omnibus tax bill, LB 754. The measure would exempt 70% of Social Security income from Nebraska income tax for the 2023 tax year (the tax return you will file in 2024), and 100% exemption for the 2024 tax year (the tax return you will file in 2025). In essence, it eliminates the state taxation of Social Security income one year sooner than the law that was passed last session.

As of 2020, 345,725 Nebraskans received Social Security benefits. Of that number, more than 250,000 are retirees. Nearly 55% of Nebraska beneficiaries rely on Social Security for half or more of their income, and about 28% rely on Social Security for at least 90% of their income.

Learning for ALL – Achieving Literacy Together

By: Kerry Ecklebe, LFA volunteer

Do you speak English? Do you enjoy meeting other people? If so, you are the PERFECT candidate to become a mentor for *Learning for ALL*, a non-profit

organization whose mission is to support adults in our community acquire literacy and language skills necessary for them to succeed and attain their life goals.

Learning For ALL offers three main programs: English as a Second Language; Adult Basic Education; and the General Education Diploma (GED).

Mentors set their own schedule and can devote as little as an hour a week in any of LFA's programs at a convenient location that you choose!

Help change someone's life! To become a volunteer, register at: www.golearnall.org. You can call 402-502-0698 for more information.

You can make an incredible difference in someone else's life and help build a more literate community! Join *Learning for ALL* today to share your skills for those who truly benefit!

OPS Phase 2 Bond Update

By: Cheryl Richardson, OEA-Retired Vice President

While writing this report on Omaha Public Schools' 2014 and 2018 Bond Programs, I realized that this is my final report on the bonds. The work for the 2014 Phase 1 Bond has been completed. The work for the 2018 Phase 2 Bond will be completed in

August 2023, thus completing the contract between Jacobs Project Management Co. and the Omaha Public Schools.

The Program Budget for the 2018 Bond was \$409.9 million. Jacobs' wise use of money and earned-interest resulted in an additional \$3.4 million, making the total bond worth \$413.3 million. The extra money can only be used for improvements on schools listed in the 2018 Phase 2 Bond, including Buena Vista and Westview High Schools, Blue Stem Middle School, and Pine and Forest Station Elementary Schools.

The Phase 2 Bond provided money for additions and capital improvements to these elementary schools: Highland (11 room addition), Spring Lake (10 room addition), Edison (3 room addition), Masters (4 room addition), King, Conestoga, and Adams. Middle School improvements were made at: Morton (7 room addition), and Lewis & Clark (15 room addition). Updates were made to existing high schools: Benson, Bryan High, Burke, Central, North, Northwest and South.

Jacobs did a great job overseeing the 2018 Phase 2 Bond's construction, solving problems, managing money, and numerous other things. They really shined when it came to student engagement.

OEA-Retired

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They offered presentations, student internships, classroom lessons, tours/field trips, Career Day, and a variety of other activities to 7,407 Omaha Public School students. These opportunities were remarkable for the students of OPS. As the 2014 Phase 1 Bond and 2018 Phase 2 Bond close down,

I feel privileged to have been part of the Citizen Bond Oversight Committee. It has been an honor to share information about much-needed construction and improvements with you.

Pre-retired membership promotion

You don't have to be retired to join the retired organizations! Lifetime members pay dues only once.

Since lifetime dues have a tendency to go up over time, the sooner you become a lifetime member, the cheaper it will be! Current combined lifetime dues for all three organizations is \$600 (combined NEA-Retired and NSEA-Retired dues = \$500; OEA-Retired = \$100). The dues can be paid either in one lump sum, or in monthly deductions from your checking account.

OEA-Retired is currently conducting a lifetime membership campaign. Any current OEA member who is also a lifetime member of OEA-Retired received information on the membership promotion. Current pre-retired lifetime members will get a check for \$50 if they recruit five new lifetime members, and \$100 if they get ten or more lifetime members.

Be sure to send in your list of new members so that you will receive the "thank you" gift from OEA-Retired. The completed forms should be sent to the OEA Office or emailed to WSDodd@aol.com. Your check will be sent when the new memberships have been verified. The campaign ends on June 1, 2023.

EHA Health Insurance changes for 2023-24

Public school retirees aged 50 to 64, who have been insured through the Educators Health Alliance (EHA) for five years immediately prior to their retirement, can continue their EHA coverage in retirement (prior to signing up for Medicare) through the EHA Direct Bill Plan. The premiums for 2023-24 for this coverage will go up an average of 6.87% on September 1, 2023. There are no benefit changes for the renewal period.

Current premiums and deductible options can be found on the EHA website, www.ehaplan.org. A 40-minute video explaining retiree coverage can be found by clicking on the *RETIREE* tab at the top of the EHA website.

These changes only affect retirees younger than 65 who are still insured through EHA. Subscribers to Educators' Medicare Supplement received notice of the rates effective January 1, 2023 in December 2022. The Medicare Supplement rate changes are on a calendar year basis. Premiums for the Medicare supplement are stable for several years unless you are moving to a different age band (at 67, 70, 75, 80, & 85).