A lot has happened since our last Advocate Issue and my column. My previous article was written shortly after the November election and I’ll admit I did make some pessimistic predictions regarding our healthcare, pensions, civil rights, union rights…

The BAD News: Since the installation of new Congress and Administration we have witnessed the confirmation of an unqualified/anti-public education Secretary of Education, an anti-labor/anti-living wage Secretary of Labor, executive orders attempting to block immigrants and travelers at our borders because of their religion and removing protections for transgender students in our schools. ICE raids have also increased, bringing fear and uncertainty to many students in our schools.

In California, a lawsuit has been filed against CTA, and the state of California, to end “Fair Share” and cripple the union’s ability to collect dues. There are also rumblings from anti-public pension proponents and some school districts wanting to “revisit” the pension reform bill that stabilized CalSTRS funding just a few years ago. Active court cases, ballot initiatives, and legislative actions are in the works that could endanger our pension security.

The GOOD News: WE, NEA and CTA have been fighting back. Although we didn’t prevail, NEA’s campaign to block the confirmation of Betsy DeVos generated more 1.3 million e-mails, 80,000 phone calls and 125,000 new NEA “member activists” were identified. Many signed up to NEA’s “Legislative Action Center,” www.edadvocacy.nea.org, during the campaign. Our actions, including participation in many town halls, helped bring about the failed attempt to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act. AHCA or “Ryan/Trump Care” was so poorly written, even the most avid Congressional critics of “Obama Care” could see their constituents would not accept the cuts it would bring about, including in Medicare and Medicaid. The fight continues. Currently, NEA’s opposition to the confirmation of Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court and against the Trump/DeVos drastic budget cuts to education are explained in detail at this website and easy links to have your voice heard are available.

The fight also continues to repeal the Social Security Offsets (GPO/WEP), as the 180 member NEA’s Board of Directors lobbied Congress on April 27, NEA’s National Security Advocacy Day. NEA is supporting, looking for co-sponsors, and lobbying for passage of HR 1205, which would fully repeal both GPO and WEP. All Retired Members are urged to make appointment with members of Congress and their staff back home and to call Congress in support of this legislation. ASK IF YOUR REPRESENTATIVE HAS SIGNED ON AS A CO-SPONSOR.

CTA has also been ramping up its activities to support students and members. CTA State Council, CTA’s 800 member policy-making body, approved plans for a “CTA STATEWIDE DAY OF ACTION” May 1, 2017. Events were planned at school sites to promote educator/community actions to ensure our public schools welcome and include all children, provide safe learning environments, and serve as centers of communities. REGARDLESS OF FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCE, WHERE THEY LIVE, WHERE THEY WERE BORN, HOW THEY LOOK, WHO THEY LOVE, or THE LANGUAGE THEY SPEAK! More information on how to get involved can be found at www.cta.org/ForAllStudents.

I ask you to get involved, even if it’s just to send an email or postcard. There is so much at stake for students, retired educators, active members, and public education.

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PHOTOGRAPHS
Retired Members

NEA/CTA-RETIRED ELECTION RESULTS

Elections for CTA/NEA-Retired Delegates to the NEA-Retired Annual Meeting, June 27-28 and the NEA Representative Assembly, July 1-5 in Boston, MA were held by mail and the ballots were counted on March 27.

Congratulations to the 17 elected delegates: Ed Foglia, Alen Ritchie, Marc Sternberger, Bonnie Shatun, Lois Hale, Sharon Fitch Boudreau, Tony Diaz, Mary Rose Ortega, Arlene Pavey, Loretta Toggenburger, James Moore, Tony Duarte, Val Muchowski, Pam Baugher, Anna Paggi, Catherine Jeppson and Mike Weinell. Because of a tie, the 17th delegate seat was decided by a coin toss resulting in Mike’s election as a delegate and Emily Ettinger’s as 1st Alternate Delegate.

The delegates at the NEA-Retired Annual Meeting discuss the issues and concerns of our retired members, often propose changes in policy and rules, and generate new business items that are then presented at the NEA Representative Assembly (RA). The 8,000+ RA delegates then debate these and other proposals and vote whether they will become part of the governing documents and/or policies of the NEA, which represents over 3 million members.

Special Thank You to our Elections Committee Members, Maria Little, Chair, Misao Brown, Rick DeFrancesco, Jean Fisher, Nancy Hammer, Ramona Lancaster, David Nigel, Carolee Padgett, Connie Roos, and Nancy Scheppeler for finishing the tough job of tabulating the results of close to 3,000 ballots in ONE DAY!
THE ELECTION AND CALSTRS

By Ed Foglia, District 2 Director

The results of the November election are not boding well for CalSTRS or CalPERS retirees. With Republicans in control of legislative and executive branches of the federal government, there is very little support to strengthen Social Security and Medicare. Quite the opposite, the Congressional leadership is on record with their goals to weaken or abolish Social Security and replace it with vouchers and/or defined contribution plans, along with huge tax cuts for the wealthy.

Currently, the majority in Congress is steadfast in the belief that we are able to have “less government” and increase expenditures, not by increasing revenue, but by cutting funding for existing programs. For example, President Trump wants to increase the military budget by $54 billion funded by cuts in social, environmental, and arts programs. The President’s educational budget has an overall 15% cut, while $54 billion funded by cuts in social, environmental, and arts programs.

The President’s educational budget has an overall 15% cut, while $54 billion funded by cuts in social, environmental, and arts programs. In spite of this seemingly uncompromising mood in Congress, there has been a bipartisan bill proposed in the House of Representatives which would completely repeal both GPO and WEP if passed and signed into law. Despite bipartisan support for repealing the offsets, the principal argument against this unjust provision is that the federal government can’t afford it. To fix GPO/WEP, every wage earner must pay their fair share into Social Security without any caps on contributions. Unfortunately, the current Congressional majority views this as a tax increase.

Social Security Fairness Act of 2017, HR 1205

Tax cuts greatly diminish the chances to repeal the offsets to Social Security (GPO/WEP). Despite bipartisan support for repealing the offsets, the principal argument against this unjust provision is that the federal government can’t afford it. To fix GPO/WEP, every wage earner must pay their fair share into Social Security without any caps on contributions. Unfortunately, the current Congressional majority views this as a tax increase.

In spite of this seemingly uncompromising mood in Congress, there has been a bipartisan bill proposed in the House of Representatives which would completely repeal both GPO and WEP if passed and signed into law. **NEA is actively supporting the Social Security Fairness Act of 2017, HR 1205 (Davis, R-IL)** with a companion bill in the Senate in the works. As of this date there are more than 90 co-sponsors signed on.

**We need your voices to be heard** in DC by calling or visiting your local member of Congress or attend one of their town hall meetings. Ask your Representative to co-sponsored this bill. It’s time for these unfair laws to be repealed! The fight must go on!
UNITE, INSPIRE, LEAD; STILL DOING IT: DALLAS HOSTED THE NEA-RETIRED ORGANIZING CONFERENCE

By Gretchen Lipow, Region 1 Representative

The 2017 NEA-Retired Organizing Conference, held March 21-23 at the Renaissance Hotel in Dallas Texas, was attended by over 200 NEA-Retired members from across the nation. Its focus was to train participants to organize their communities and champion support for public education. Another thread that ran through several general sessions and electives was the importance of mobilizing to fight threats to Social Security, Medicare and the Affordable Care Act. During one session, participants pulled out their cell phones, called their members of Congress and asked them not to repeal the ACA.

A very important and well attended workshop was conducted by Al Campos, a seasoned NEA lobbyist deeply involved in the fight for Social Security fairness. He shared insights about what’s really happening in the West Wing as well as the new challenges now facing the Congress. Al is still leading the efforts to repeal the unfair Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP). He explained that NEA strongly supports the Social Security Fairness Act (H.R. 1205 introduced by Rep. Rodney Davis (R-IL)). It is the only bill that would fully repeal both the GPO and WEP.

Another popular workshop was on Member Benefits. From autos to airline tickets, hearing aids to the new pet insurance or Identity Theft protection, the list is endless and it’s all available to retired NEA members. NEA continues to improve its delivery system expanding their very popular “Click & Save” purchasing discount program. For more information go to www.neamb.com.

A new addition to the conference was a workshop on “Discovering Your Family Tree”. With the growing interest around DNA family revelations, this was a topic well received. It turns out that not only can you discover where your ancestors originated, but you can now learn about how your inherited biological traits can impact your health. Presenter Susan M. O’Connor also provided search techniques and information on how to protect your identity. She suggested using a separate email just for genealogy to prevent the outside world from viewing your surfing activity.

NEA staff organizer Lee Hedgepeth gave a workshop on organizing: “How to get started and how to focus on your own school community”. He was promoting getting involved and building a relationship with your school board and elected officials in your own home town. He also encouraged retirees to consider running for a school board position themselves. We possess a wealth of knowledge on how schools operate. Why not step up? Another NEA staff member, Linda Cabral, emphasized organizing for social justice activism in our communities.

The final wrap up was given by NEA Vice President Betsy Pringle who delivered a dynamic and very moving presentation on creating schools and communities which provide the best learning opportunities for all our students and strive for inclusiveness and equal access to justice. Becky reported that the “NEA’s Center for Social Justice” was established as a result of the 2015 Representative Assembly unanimously passing a New Business Item addressing Institutional Racism and its effect on our communities, our students and their families. For the latest updates on this work and how you can participate, visit www.neaedjustice.org.

FRANK TARANTINO RECEIVES THE ELLEN LOGUE WHO AWARD

It did not take the CTA/NEA-Retired WHO Award Committee very long to come up with a unanimous decision to name Frank Tarantino the recipient of the 2016-17 Ellen Logue WHO Award for Outstanding Retired Educator.

Soon after retiring in 2009, he became the Secretary/Treasurer of South County CTA/NEA-Retired and continues to hold that position. Three years later, he stepped up and was elected to the statewide position. In 2014 Frank ran and was elected to the Sweetwater Union High School Board of Trustees, the district he had taught in and was a counselor in for 35 years.

Frank served as our statewide organization’s Secretary/Treasurer from 2012-2016. It was apparent at Board of Directors and General Meetings that he handled both his Secretary and Treasurer positions with professionalism and conscientious care. For four years Frank kept the organization on track and our membership informed with meticulously prepared and clearly presented minutes and accurate financial reports. During his tenure as a CTA/NEA-Retired Officer, he often shared his expertise by mentoring many local chapter Treasurers throughout the state. He doesn’t ever seek attention or credit, but calmly and very professionally has been the backbone that has helped enable CTA/NEA-Retired provide outstanding programs and protections for our members.

Last year, when he was termed out as Secretary/Treasurer, he decided not to seek another “time consuming” statewide position. Now, when he’s not attending School Board and South County-Retired meetings, he can spend more time at his favorite position, Grandfather.

THANKS AND CONGRATULATIONS, FRANK!
ACCESS TO SAVINGS PROGRAM INCLUDES RETIREES!

By Orval Garrison, Vice President

CTA Member Benefits has been advertising one of its newest Member Benefits programs in the California Educator—and with good reason! The Access to Savings Program enables members to connect to a network of over 350,000 merchants and service providers across the country. Active members are learning more about this program daily; retired members should do the same.

Categories to “access” and explore include everyday retail shopping, entertainment, recreation, travel, dining & food, home & garden, health & beauty, car rental, and others.

Retired members who have registered with CTA Member Benefits may go directly to CTAMemberBenefits.org/Access and log in. If you are not registered, you will need to, using your CTA/NEA ID number (which can be found on the address label of your CTA or NEA Newsletters) and other information. Once registered, you search for ACCESS through “Discounts.” Access is available at MY DEALS app (Apple Store/Google Play).

When you get into the Access system, your residence ZIP Code immediately highlights those “deals” available in your area. If you change the ZIP Code, you can find out what is available elsewhere—such as places you may be visiting.

The system will give you mobile, online, call, or print options to access the discounts. The print option allows you to print a coupon to take with you to a participating merchant. Whether the “Discount” is a percentage discount, or a dollar amount is indicated before you “access.”

The ACCESS to Savings Program will seem similar to NEA Member Benefits “NEA Click & Save,” but ACCESS is different. It produces discounts but does NOT earn “WOWPoints,” redeemable rewards dollars on future purchases. “WOWPoints” are only available through NEA Click & Save. ACCESS is new, but both programs offer significant savings to members for goods and services.

Check out the Access to Savings Program! There is no question that it could save you money!

WE ARE A SAFE HAVEN FOR EQUITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

By Harris Kight-Moore, Minority-at-Large Director

The CTA Equity and Human Rights Conference was held in San Jose, March 3-5, 2017. The attendance included twice as many of our Retired members as last year’s conference. The conference offered dynamic speakers and more than 40 workshops which provided the attendees with a greater understanding of the issues of diversity, equity and social justice.

A keynote speech and presentation from photographer and social documentarian Matika Wilbur opened the Conference. Matika, a Native American woman of the Swinomish and Tulalip Tribes (Washington), shared her insights and Native American experiences through the impeccable artistry of her photographs. She currently is working on “Project 52”, a national documentary project gathering original photographic images and oral narratives from ALL Tribal communities throughout the United States.

Chapter leaders, members, and Board officers also experienced riveting personal stories of the horrific damage inflicted upon our people of color by a culture of power maintained through White (Male) Privilege, Gender and Un-Conscious Bias, and Xeno-Homo Phobia.

One workshop revealed the World War II Supreme Court decision in “Korematsu, Hirabayashi, and Yasui”, which allowed the internment of American Citizens of Japanese decent. Although the decision was eventually vacated, it was not overturned, and it still allows, even a current President, to detain and imprison American Citizens of a particular origin country or religion, who are considered potential national security threats due only to such origins. Our CTA and the Northern California ACLU, were the ONLY State groups to organize protest efforts against this at the time of the internment order.

We witnessed eight Human Rights Awardees share their passions. One of those recognized, Reagan Duncan, began, with her 4th graders, a women’s personal care products project. Initially the recipients, in the Orange County area, were very poor women of color. The students have now expanded to a nationwide outreach!!!!

We were uplifted by a dominant theme of human triumph as we face adversity in our common searches for ways to give a hand up, not a hand out, to our folks in dire circumstances. This inspiring conference will be in southern California next year and members are encouraged to attend.
CARA continues to advocate for issues that are important to seniors and retirees. With the changes in Washington, DC, CARA scheduled many statewide events. The events were planned in response to the stated goal of the Administration and leaders in Congress to repeal Affordable Care Act and replace it with a health care system that threatens Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

Seniors were asked to call the White House. It was so successful that the White House closed its switchboard and refused to take thousands of our calls! Our calls were diverted to our members of Congress and we told them we wanted and needed them to protect and adequately fund Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security, not reduce support or privatize these programs.

Another event was Friday, January 27, held at the Bakersfield office of U.S. Representative Kevin McCarthy (R), the House Majority Leader, who is in favor of reducing funding to Medicare and Medicaid. Close to 1,000 people from all over the state and his district rallied outside of his office expressing concerns about his positions on these vital programs. The reaction of the Congressman’s staff was to lock the doors and later claim that the demonstrators were “paid agitators”.

During the Week of Feb 17 – 24th, CARA sponsored or participated in dozens of events at key Congressional offices to protest GOP proposals to cut and privatize Medicare, Medicaid, the ACA, and Social Security. Some events drew hundreds, like the candlelight vigil at McClintock’s office, the march to Representative Rohrabacher’s office, and the rally in front of Rep. Denham’s office. Other CARA folks held meetings with Congressional staffers, like those at Rep. LaMalfa’s office, one with Rep. Khanna’s staff, and a meeting with Senator Feinstein’s staff. There was an informational picket line in front of Rep. Issa’s office and flyers distributed to the offices of Rep. Valadao, Rep. Nunes and Rep. McCarthy.

We are going to have to stay prepared to make phone calls and attend meetings and rallies to make our voices heard now that there is a new administration and Congress.

Thank you to everyone who attended these events around the State. If you were unable to go to an event, you can check out some of the photos, videos and press on the CARA website at www.californiaalliance.org.

UPCOMING CARA EVENTS:

Thursday, MAY 25TH: CARA LOBBY DAY – Sacramento
10:30AM - 2:30PM

Thursday and Friday, MAY 25TH & 26TH: CARA LEADER SHIP ACADEMY – Sacramento

CALIFORNIA ALLIANCE OF RETIRED AMERICANS (CARA) UPDATE

By Pat Ryan, CTA/NEA-Retired Liaison to CARA

On April 27, National Retirement Security Advocacy Day, more than 150 members of the NEA Board of Directors and the NEA Retired Executive Council went to Capitol Hill to build support for the Social Security Fairness Act of 2017 (S. 915/H.R. 1205). Members of Congress with whom they met included Representative Rodney Davis (R-IL), lead sponsor of the bill in the House of Representatives. The bipartisan Social Security Fairness Act would fully repeal the unfair Government Pension Offset (GPO) and Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP). Together, the GPO and WEP deprive nearly 9 million educators and other dedicated public servants of Social Security benefits they have earned.

Take action and tell your senators and representative to cosponsor and support the Social Security Fairness Act.

Pictured left to right are Rep. Rodney Davis, Karen Solheim (Georgia NEA-Retired President), NEA-Retired Executive Committee Member Alen Ritchie (California), Mary Moran (Pennsylvania NEA-Retired President) and NEA-Retired Vice President John Jensen.

READ ACROSS AMERICA

For the fourth year, Northbay Retired has brought Read Across America to Bellevue School District in southeastern Santa Rosa. This year they had seventeen readers who read to forty-eight classes for a total of seventeen hours. Pictured are Northbay member Jill Humrich and prior RAA Coordinator Santa Rosa City Councilman Chris Rogers.

CTA/NEA-RETIRED ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Meeting for CTA/NEA-Retired is scheduled for June 2, 2017 at 3:00 pm at the Westin Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles (probably in the Santa Anita Room). All members are invited to attend. You are also welcome to attend the Board Meeting which precedes it and will start in the same room at 1:30 pm.
At the 2016 CTA/NEA-Retired Issues Conference in San Jose on March 2-3, attendees had the opportunity to hear political updates on state and federal legislation affecting retirees, CalSTRS and “pension reform”, HICAP and Medicare, Wills and Trusts, Investment Strategies, computer/internet safety and security and more from a cadre of expert presenters. For those looking for less serious sessions, workshops were offered in “making a difference when you travel”, new programs and discounts from CTA/NEA Member Benefits, “Spring cleaning and organizing your life”, meditation techniques, and navigating social media. There was also an exciting session presented by our own Ed Foglia and StudentCTA leader Miyuki Manzanedo about the intergenerational mentoring program we’ve establish with SCTA. Those up for breakfast Friday morning heard a rousing keynote address from CTA President Eric C. Heins. President Heins shared early teaching experiences that had motivated him to enter education as a profession, triggering remembrances among retirees who had their own motivations. He lamented the confirmation of the new U.S. Secretary of Education and that the Administration’s “plans” for public education include threatening cuts in funding, touting voucher schemes, and a push for more privatization. He also warned the audience of impending legal challenges to “Fair Share” and the Association’s right to collect dues and have a voice in the political process.

Guest speaker, CA Assemblyman Ash Kalra (D., San Jose), the newly appointed Chair of the Assembly Committee on Aging and Long-Term Care, spoke about his first few weeks in office and his views on social justice, education, and retirement security. In the question and answer period after his speech, he graciously fielded members’ questions about his introduced legislation calling for divestment of CalSTRS funds from the Dakota Access Pipeline.

A General Membership Meeting followed the afternoon sessions. President Marc Sternberger reported on the “State of the Association” and shared that we are growing with current membership at 16,849. We also applied for and received two NEA Grants. One is for support of our intergenerational mentoring “Teach to Teach” Program and the other for establishing retiree-hosted preretirement workshops. On the California front, we are facing attacks on our pensions and must stay vigilant. Vice President, Orval Garrison, awarded the Membership Incentive Award to Redwood Service Center, North Bay Retired. The chapter welcomed 122 new members this year! Congratulations!

The generous CTA/NEA-Retired par-ticipants raised $2,450 for the NEA Fund and over $800 for the “CTA/NEA-Retired Scholarship in Memory of Sharonlynn Gardella Russo.”

Before adjournment, local chapter presidents gave updates on their chapter happenings.

Do put next year’s CTA/NEA-Retired Issues Conference on your calendar. It will be March 1-2, 2018 at the Torrance Marriott, Redondo Beach.

The next general meeting will be held at the June CTA State Council meeting on Friday, June 2 at 3:00 pm at the Westin Bonaventure in Los Angeles. All members are invited to attend.
NEWS FLASH:
GOVERNOR APPOINITS RETIRED MEMBER TO CALSTRS BOARD

On April 17, 2017, Governor Jerry Brown appointed Karen Yamamoto to fill the Retired position on the CalSTRS Board ending the six year vacancy in that position. Ms. Yamamoto is a member of CTA/NEA-Retired and served as a second grade teacher for the Washington Unified School District. She is a member of the California Department of Education’s Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission where she was chair in 2003. She is also a member of the Japanese American Citizens League and the Asian Pacific Youth Leadership Project. Congratulations to Karen and thank you to all who contacted the Governor urging him to fill the vacancy.

ASK YOUR FRIENDS TO JOIN
Talk to your friends who are former CTA members about the benefits of being a member of CTA/NEA-Retired. Encourage them to check out our website which provides information about our Association and current retirement issues. It is important that we all:

• STAY CONNECTED  • BE PROTECTED  • ENJOY BENEFITS

We look forward to hearing from your friends!

For more information, please contact:
CTA/NEA-Retired 650-552-5439 www.cta.org/retired

Members of Bay Valley-Retired posed for a picture in the Oval Office during their field trip to the Richard M. Nixon Presidential Library in Yorba Linda.