

President's Message for April 2019 by Richard C. Warbrouck

I am very happy to report that our Vice President Jim Fossos has made a tremendous improvement in his recovery from a major stroke. I visited Jim in Harborview Hospital about three days ago and was delighted to see his improvement since my last visit about a week ago. Jim is more alert, can whisper more than two words, almost a complete sentence and is receiving food and water by mouth. When I told him that he looked good and twenty years younger he whispered "you look good Dick." I was told that he was holding a pencil in an attempt to scratch something as he often did when sitting at a table during a meeting. His doctor said that he anticipates Jim to make a complete recovery. Megan, our Administrative Assistant who works at Seattle Children's in the Neurosurgery Department said that doctors don't usually say that unless that are quite positive as they don't want to give false hope.

I am saddened to report that we have to say goodbye to Megan as our very capable and appreciated Administrative Assistant this month. This will be Megan's last Newsletter. Megan has been with us for six years. She accepted a promotion at Seattle Children's Hospital as Manager of Surgery Coordination and is in charge of fifteen people which can be quite stressful at times. Megan has taken us into the twenty-first century in record keeping. She has all the computer programs set up to handle all of the business and retain all necessary records. Megan informed me last November that she would stay until we found a replacement. To tell you the truth I didn't look very hard. Finally, feeling a little guilty I mentioned this in the Newsletter and began looking around. It's a hard position to advertise as it's only part time work and you have to find someone who can work from home, is qualified, a self-starter and lives near the President. The last time we advertised on Craigslist we received responses from as far away as Bellingham to the north and Chehalis to the south. I was a little worried at first because of some past experiences but happy to report that we have found an excellent replacement for Megan. I truly believe another Megan!

When visiting an office near my home in Edmonds about two weeks ago I met a very pleasant mature lady named Linda. I noticed her name plate on her desk and the title "Administrative Assistant." She had a lovely appearance, a pleasant personality and her desk was clear of any clutter with only the paper she was typing from. I asked her if she was the Administrative Assistant for the whole office. She said no that she only worked two days a week and another lady works three days a week. I asked her if she would be interested in a part time position working at home for a senior retiree group. She asked the name of the group and I introduced myself as the President of the Retired Firefighters of Washington. She

smiled and said oh my, in my younger days I worked for the City of Seattle for City Councilman Wayne Larkin. I knew Wayne Larkin early in my fire service career as a member of the Executive Board of the Seattle Firefighters Union Local 27. Wayne Larkin had been a Seattle firefighter and transferred to the Seattle Police Department early in his career. He was President of Seattle Police Officers Guild when he retired from the police department and ran for the Seattle City Council. In fact, I was appointed to Wayne's City Council campaign by the President of the Seattle Firefighters Union. We then shared names, places, events and old stories. After we talked for about thirty minutes Linda said that she may be interested but that she would have to think about it. She said that if she didn't apply she had two girlfriends who were well qualified and may be interested in the position. I asked Linda to forward her resume which she did the next day. As I read the resume I was very impressed with her education, qualifications and work experience. Megan and I met with Linda at Megan's house to explain the work, history of the RFFOW and our responsibilities. Linda said that she would enjoy working with us, was satisfied with the time required and the salary. She called back in two days and said that being that she had just retired she wanted to continue in her current job two days a week and was a little apprehensive in taking on the responsibilities at this time. She did stress that she was sure she would enjoy working with us and our group of retired members and if we didn't find someone she wanted us to call her. She said that if we didn't object she would share the information, old Newsletters and other examples of the work that we had given her with her two girlfriends.

Linda called me the next day to tell me that when she told her girlfriend Laurie Campbell about the position and the Retired Firefighters of Washington she showed her surprise and said that her dad and her uncle are both Seattle retired firefighters. I worked and socialized with Laurie's dad Dave Campbell when he worked downtown at Station 10 fire headquarters and her uncle Doug Campbell when he worked at Station 2 in downtown Seattle. I am very pleased that they are both members of the RFFOW.

The first thing that Laurie told me when I talked with her was "I remember those fire department union picnics at Norm's Resort when I was a little girl." I was pleased to hear that as I chaired the picnic committee for several years. Laurie is well educated with a Master's degree. She has held very responsible positions and has an excellent work history. She was very complimentary of the work Megan has done and she has accepted the position. Laurie is currently working part time by choice and lives in the city of Edmonds. Based on her previous experience she is going to be able to help us with the special DRS mailing to recruit the 7,300 LEOFF I police and firefighter members into one statewide organization. I apologize that due to

the recent LEOFF I – LEOFF II pension fund merger attempt and other legislative issues we had to put the mailing aside until the end of the legislative session.

I was surprised how fast our members mobilized after I put the notice of the LEOFF I/LEOFF II Fund merger in the newsletter and notified the other retired organizations of the merger proposal. I want to thank those of you who sent letters, emails messages or made phone calls to Senator Van De Wege to register your opposition to the merger. Your efforts had a real impact on the Senator's decision to cancel the proposed merger. I also want to thank the members who forwarded copies of the email and letters to us to make us aware of the messages the Senator was receiving. Unfortunately we could only post a few of those messages in this Newsletter as an example of what you can do in the future, if needed. We did send a list of comments or talking points you could refer to when writing or emailing to our email list as requested.

On March 14, 2019 Senator Van De Wege held a one hour meeting of the LEOFF I and LEOFF II stakeholders to discuss the merger proposal. We were pleased to learn that the WSCFF and WACOPS had sent a letter in opposition to the merger proposal as it failed to meet the merger principles adopted by both organizations in 2016. The Association of Washington Cities and the Association of Washington Counties registered their opposition. Jerry Taylor, retired Seattle Police Officers Association, Ken Crowder and I had a chance to make several remarks in opposition to the proposal and asked several questions that the Senator could not answer. One question that was asked was why are you promoting this merger? The Senator's answer was something like "if we don't do it now when we can give the LEOFF I members something, someone else will take it all later." I asked if the so-called fund merger would violate the Backenhus court decision and the IRS Exclusive Benefit Rule. I also stated that we would perhaps like to see any surplus go to LEOFF II when the last LEOFF I member or surviving spouse dies but that will be up to the legislators. When I asked the Senator what right or claim does the LEOFF II Retirement System have to the \$1 billion two hundred eighty million dollar LEOFF I surplus. We didn't receive any answers to the above questions.

A second meeting was held on Friday March 22, 2019. The employers expressed their opposition stating no benefit and increased contributions in the future. There was an increase of \$5,000 in the benefit to the LEOFF I members. Bill Dickinson, President of the LEOFF I Coalition asked the Senator why when both systems are funded with a surplus are you considering this merger. The Senator gave the same answer as he gave the week before "if we don't do it now someone will do it later." I suggested

that the real reason may be to fill the hole created by the \$300 million dollar transfer from the LEOFF II Retirement Fund to the LEOFF II Benefit Enhancement Account. Andy Wilson asked if this merger would end the LEOFF I Retirement System. The answer was "no." Joyce Willms of the Coalition said that she was receiving a lot of letters against the merger. One would have to ask why those letters were not sent to Senator Van De Wege?

The Senator asked for the answers to three questions he had asked in the meeting notice. Apparently no one had submitted the answers to the questions in advance except for Jerry Tylor, Ken Crowder and myself. I informed the Senator that Jerry and Ken were not able to attend the meeting but they both forwarded a letter with their answers. I reminded the Senator that I also had submitted my answers in a letter. He allowed me to read my letter which allowed me to make some additional remarks. See Jerry, Ken and my letters in this Newsletter.

Shortly after the second meeting we received the email from Senator Van De Wege notifying us that the merger would not be moving forward for the 2019 session and that there will be no more stakeholder meetings. See letter in this Newsletter.

Our other two bills HB 2051 to expand the eligibility to serve on LEOFF I Disability Boards and Prior Act Pension Boards and SB 5894 to extend the funding for Prior Act Pension Funds after the last Prior Act member dies until the last LEOFF I member dies are both in their final committee before advancing to the House and Senate for the final vote. I will report in detail on these two bills next month.