

President's Message for June 2017 by Richard C Warbrouck

As I write this article on June 11, 2017 we are approaching the end of the second special session on June 21, 2017. State government will shut down on July 1, 2017 if they have not passed a budget bill. The problem is how to raise the additional three billion dollars in the next two- year state budget mandated by the Supreme Court's McCleary decision.

The court ruled in the McCleary decision that the state's current school funding policy is unconstitutional and perpetuates education inequity across the state. The court ruled that the legislature must fully fund K thru 12 education and has since imposed a fine of \$1,000 a day until education is fully funded. As of June 11, 2017 the fine totals \$76,800,000. The saving grace is that the fine can be included in the amount needed to fully fund education.

The dilemma facing the legislature is how to pay the bill. They are counting on increased revenue from a better revenue forecast due on June 20, 2017, closing tax loopholes, increased property taxes, a new tax on internet sales and/or a real estate excise tax. The State's fiscal year ends on June 30, 2017, a target date to reach a consensus. As of Friday, June 9, 2017 there has been no indication of a LEOFF I merger to create a small savings in the General Fund thereby creating a pension unfunded liability and perhaps a US Supreme Court lawsuit. In consideration of a LEOFF I merger the legislature would be looking for additional revenue from the comingled pension fund investments that may never come forth.

In the 2016 session of the legislature we were successful in passing a bill ESB 5873 to reopen the window to allow those who married after retirement to select a surviving spouse benefit. This was about the fourth time the LEOFF I Retirement System was amended for members to exercise this option. In passing the 2016 legislation we were able to secure a pension for a King County Deputy Sheriff's widow and re-open the filing period for those who said that they were not notified of the previous opportunity to select a survivor option. Both of the individuals who requested our help were from law enforcement, one a widow of a King County Deputy Sheriff and the other a retired Pierce County sheriff. As I stated, when I testified on the bill all of the members of the Retired Firefighters of Washington were fully aware of the previous opportunities for those who married after retirement to select a survivor benefit through our regular meetings and monthly Newsletters. Unfortunately other retirees were not aware of this opportunity.

It's only been one year since we passed a bill to reopen the filing period which is now closed and I just received a call from the wife of a LEOFF I retiree, in this case a firefighter from Snohomish Fire District 1 who is not a member of the RFFOW, asking for our help. My point is, if her husband had been a member of the RFFOW he would have signed her up for a survivor benefit and a pension for her upon his death.

The RFFOW is looked upon by the legislators and by the LEOFF I members as the main lobbying organization for the LEOFF I Retirement System, why don't all or at least the majority of the members belong to the RFFOW or a similar state organization? Why does the majority sit back and allow a handful of firefighters from across the state to pay the full cost of educating and lobbying for all members of the LEOFF I Retirement System? Any bill that is passed that improves the LEOFF I System or any bill or action that is defeated that has a negative impact on the system affects all members.

This chapter and practice is coming to a close. Our numbers in the LEOFF I System and in the RFFOW are on a decline. We must build a LEOFF I and LEOFF II retiree association to protect the LEOFF I members as the numbers decline and more importantly the surviving spouses of the LEOFF I System, the members of the LEOFF II System, and the spouses of those LEOFF II members who have died in the line of duty. This will become more important if there is ever a LEOFF III Retirement System created. When the 2017 legislature finally comes to a close, I hope to have some meetings across the State to discuss our future and the type of organization we want to leave as our legacy. One of the immediate issues we have to discuss is the current problem of staffing Prior Act pension boards and LEOFF I Disability Boards. In some areas it's becoming more difficult to find members, police and fire, who are under the jurisdiction of a pension or disability board to serve on the board. Your suggestions and comments are welcome.

I received a note and a \$1,000.00 donation to our legislative fund yesterday from a member of the Retired Firefighters of Washington. This is a very generous donation and another example of how important our members feel it is to protect the retirement system that so many of us worked so hard to get. Like it or not, political action is part of the game. You can't continue to ask legislators to help you if you're not able to help them in some way:

- Make a small donation to their campaign
- Attend a meeting and introduce yourself
- Put up a yard sign
- Work on their campaign
- Forward a letter, email or make a phone call to thank them for their help
- Contact them in Olympia to assist in what you ask them to do
- Testify on a bill to educate or inform them of an issue

I received another note and a \$100.00 contribution to our legislative fund. The note was in reference to my comment in a recent Newsletter: "I believe we are the only group that makes large donations to candidates and legislators running for office." The note states: "Donating large amounts of money to candidates and legislators ends up in a corrupt system. Spend the money wisely." I can assure you that we don't make contributions large enough to corrupt the system. Our donations are usually minimal except for a few that seem large in our world but nothing that compares to donations from larger groups, businesses and corporations.