

President's Message for September 2017 by Richard C Warbrouck

As far as I am concerned the Coalition's refusal to share in the cost of retaining a contract lobbyist to assist us during the special session and in the formation of the state budget was the last straw. As the final special legislative session was coming to a close no retirement system merger bills had been introduced, TRS I-LEOFF I or LEOFF I – LEOFF II. We were fully aware that a merger could be addressed in the budget, as an NTIB (necessary to implement the budget item). As you remember, this is the way they created the Contribution Holiday, the termination of the mandatory employer and member contributions to the LEOFF I Retirement System.

We wanted to purchase a little extra insurance by retaining a contract lobbyist to assist in our efforts to stop or defeat such a budget proposal. We wanted to hire a contract lobbyist who was a former legislator who knew the system, was respected by both Democrat and Republican legislators, who may be able to open some doors and secure some inside information.

We had a meeting with four groups, actually five groups but one group is, I believe, the only group that is a member of the Coalition. I explained why I thought we should retain the contract lobbyist, shared my research on the candidate and the relationship we had with him when he was in the legislature and a member of the House leadership. Three of the four groups were in agreement to retain the candidate and share the cost. The Coalition and the WSRDSPOA (Washington State Retired Deputy Sheriffs-Police Officers Assoc.) that I believe is the only group in the so-called Coalition wanted more information. I explained how they could get more information, where to go, who to talk to and offered to set up a meeting with the candidate as they had mentioned they would like to do. They were to get back to me to schedule the meeting. After 10 days without a note, email or phone call I emailed Andy Wilson, the President of the Coalition. Time was of the essence if we wanted to take action. After a couple days Andy called me to tell me that they were opposed to hiring the candidate and would not share the cost.

We believe the Coalition has about \$900,000 to \$1,000,000 in reserves, no one really knows however, as they don't issue a financial statement. If they will not spend any money on this, what are their spending priorities for the money that is donated particularly when they report that they don't have any paid officers and their contract lobbyist, Joyce Willms, reports no salary and no other clients on her Public Disclosure (PDC) reports? They don't have meeting expenses or clerical expenses as they don't maintain a membership list or put out a monthly newsletter or financial statement. Their postage should be a minimal amount without a regular newsletter. I have never seen a single letter they have sent to a legislator, requiring postage or copying. After their refusal to share in the expense of hiring a special short term lobbyist and with a reserve of maybe \$100,000 I was surprised to receive a "so called" newsletter requesting donations. As a newsletter it didn't even mention the LEOFF I-LEOFF II merger proposal being discussed in the budget committee. I don't believe the Coalition or their lobbyist Joyce Willms were even aware this merger was being discussed by the committee.

As we had anticipated, we were notified that the budget committee was in fact discussing an L-I - L-II merger. Dennis Lawson, President of the WSCFF (Washington State Council of Firefighters) also contacted us and explained the items in the merger proposal being considered by the budget committee. We went to Olympia, contacted some legislators and President Dennis Lawson WSCFF. With the help of Dennis Lawson we were later notified that the budget proposal was dropped. Now, let's stop for a moment and consider: if the merger had been passed in the budget and if hiring the contract lobbyist would have caused it to be deleted, it would have been money well spent or cheap insurance. If the merger was included in the budget we would be on our way to the courts, which is as you know very expensive.

A little history:

The Coalition was formed in about 2000 when Senator Lisa Brown (Spokane) sponsored SB 6166. SB 6166 would have closed the LEOFF I Retirement system and transferred any surplus to the State General Fund. The LEOFF I groups decided that if the bill passed we would have to turn to the courts and maybe go all the way to the US Supreme Court.

The cost would have been tremendous. We knew that we would have to raise money, but how? We were aware that out of the approximately 9000 plus LEOFF I members at that time, only about 50% belonged to a retiree group, so we had to reach out to those independent members for donations. We knew that some would not donate to a fire organization and some would not donate to a police group so we developed a neutral LEOFF I Coalition or organization to collect his donations. The Coalition would have no individual members only LEOFF I organizations as members and each group would have a director. The directors would make all the decisions and set the agenda. The Coalition would collect the donations from individuals and each L-I group would make a donation for their members. The Coalition was never meant to be a lobbying group only an umbrella group of LEOFF I organization. Some feel that the Coalition and our lawsuit caused the Senate to drop the bill. I personally feel that it was the IRS ruling that said if they close the LEOFF I Retirement System they will have to leave twenty-five percent above the reported liabilities to pay the benefits for the members in the closed system. So in essence, if they had closed the system that had a hundred and twenty-five percent surplus there would have been no money left to transfer to the General fund.

None of the LEOFF I group representatives wanted to serve as President or Secretary including myself or Jerry Taylor. We also thought the two officers should be more neutral so we elected a deputy sheriff as President and a representative of a deputy sheriff's organization as Secretary. Neither of the two had ever served as chair or president of a LEOFF I organization, had little to no legislative experience, had never negotiated a labor contract, chaired a meeting or were familiar with Robert's Rules of Order. As a result, due to the lack of leadership, the organization began to deteriorate before the ink was dry on the bylaws. One by one the LEOFF I groups began to drop out:

- WSCFF (Washington State Council of Firefighters)
- WACOPS (Washington State Council of Police)
- RFFOW (Retired Firefighters of Washington)
- SRPOA (Seattle Retired Police Officers Association)
- Local 2w7 (Seattle Firefighters Union)

To my knowledge there is only one of the original groups remaining in the Coalition, the Washington State Retired Deputy Sheriffs and Police. Currently the WSRDSP has three members on the Coalition board; one serves as President, one as Vice-President and one as a member at large all appointed by one another.

The Coalition:

- Have no members
- They do not represent LEOFF I members
- They have seven directors all self-appointed
- They at one time advertised for a President
- They have had no elections since 2000

They currently have a President and a Secretary who have not been elected, who occasionally travel to Olympia. I don't believe either one has ever chaired a meeting, negotiated a contract or has any legislative experience. They have a volunteer lobbyist who has never been a firefighter or law enforcement officer, knows little about the retirement systems, L-I Disability Boards or Prior Act Pension Boards.

It's one thing when a group does very little to help you but it's another thing when they hinder you. For example: Dave Peery going to Olympia and when testifying to a committee, arguing with the Senate Majority Leader and later to be escorted out of his office is not in our best interest. Testifying at the SCPP Committee Meeting that they want to negotiate the surplus funds in the pension system when two LEOFF I representatives just testified that there is no surplus at this time, and disregarding the fact that they have no authority to negotiate for LEOFF I members. When they contact a legislator to pass legislation to divide the surplus not knowing how they want it divided, their bottom line or what they would be willing to give up in the negotiating process. The Coalition was opposed to the bill we passed in 2001 or 2002 allowing LEOFF I members who married after retirement to select a survivor option for their current spouse. Please see in this Newsletter my article from June 2001 that relates to this issue.

I will post some previous articles on this subject on our website. The point I am trying to make is that it's time for a change. We are swinging at the legislature with an open hand when we should be holding up a clinched fist. It's time to look to the future. A small group like the RFFOW can no longer and should not be expected to fund our entire legislative program. Each member should pay their fair share to protect or enhance our retirement system. Now we must provide the opportunity for them to do so.

Options for your consideration:

- Develop a state-wide police-fire retiree organization with elected officers, regular meetings around the state; elected district representatives, by-laws, financial statements, minutes of meeting, proper funding.
- Develop a state-wide firefighter association RFFOW and a state-wide police officer association with elected officers at large, elected district representatives, by-laws, regional meetings, meeting minutes, financial reports, proper funding.
- Provide an opportunity for retired firefighters who don't want to join the RFFOW and maybe police officers to make an annual contribution to the RFFOW as a social member and make any necessary changes to our by-laws for social members to accomplish this.
- Develop a state-wide law enforcement group or organization that could collect social membership donations from any law enforcement retiree who didn't want to join as a member
- Develop a LEOFF I and maybe LEOFF II retiree association in where individuals or organizations can join with by-laws, elected officers and directors, proper funding, proper reporting as necessary where social members who didn't want to join could make donations.
- Become a division of the WSCFF as retired firefighter members.
- Become a division of WACOPS for retired police officers and deputy sheriffs
- Support a merger with the LEOFF II system, both funds and governess.
- Support a merger with LEOFF I funds going to LEOFF II and governess under the SCPP Committee with a payment to LEOFF I members.

Let us know what you think or how you would like to be represented. Also email us if you have made a donation in the past year to the LEOFF I Coalition. We are now receiving requests from candidates and legislators who are campaigning for election or reelection. We will soon be making as many campaign contributions as we can to those legislators who are sympathetic to our needs. Now is the time to make a small donation to a candidate, host a coffee hour or attend a fundraiser for a candidate of your choice. If you know of someone running for office whom you feel deserves our support, please let us know.