



United Voices for
NDU-
Retired

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A Call to Arms. Too Soon?

By Dakota Draper, NDU-Retired Advisory Board Southeast Member

If you are like me, a retired educator and/or public employee, with the end of the North Dakota Legislature a few months ago, you have had more than enough of politics. But unfortunately, now might not be the time to look the other way.

Our elected politicians might have done some good in few areas in the last session; but that is being overshadowed by the harm that will probably be inflicted upon the very people who unselfishly serve and have served North Dakota's children and public. This piece will center on one particular issue that all retired, both present and future retirees, need to put on our collective "radar screen."

The recently passed legislation (HB 1040) that closes the ND Public Employees Retirement System (NDPERS) to new public employees should be of major concern to all of us currently retired or about to be retired. Our defined benefit pension plans depend heavily upon the resources provided by the new hires and their employers going forward. Without that major source of revenue for retirees and if nothing else is done in a big way, NDPERS current and soon-to-be retirees will face an uncertain future. Please let me explain.

While HB 1040 maintains that the North Dakota Legislature and Governor are committed to protecting the existing responsibility to members of NDPERS, we have only the word of these elected officials, officials who can be here today and gone tomorrow. And while HB 1040 commits to injecting \$200 million into the fund and increasing that amount by one percent each year going forward to take care of current retirees, we have only the promise of those who passed HB 1040, a promise that can be here today and gone tomorrow given the uncertainty of state government's finances and political climate. It should also be noted that it was pointed out by many during the session, that the \$200 million annual commitment would not be enough to take care of the plan going forward without the new hires. This inconvenient fact was virtually ignored, even when stated by many impartial experts. That in itself should give us great concern.

A few states have already done this in our nation, only to come later to regret it and try to reverse the damage. Damage such as the huge additional cost and the loss of valuable employees moving out of state to other states providing defined benefit plans. We should be asking why would our elected politicians, who profess a wish to make North Dakota a great place to live and work, trash one of the main reasons why people might wish to come to North Dakota to live and work, namely defined benefit pension plans. HB 1040 does not achieve that goal; and in all, probably will drive away appreciated current state employees (and perhaps educators), both now and going forward into the future.

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For those of us currently retired and invested with ND Teacher's Fund For Retirement (TFFR), we are by no means safe believing HB 1040 only targeted public employees. Many legislators made it abundantly clear in the last session that if HB 1040 were to pass (which it did), TFFR would be next to suffer the same fate that NDPERS has, probably in the next session. And I, for one, have no doubt that is one promise the current Legislature intends to keep.

The title of this piece is "A Call to Arms. Too Soon?" I don't think so. The North Dakota United – Retired Board of Directors doesn't think so. They have asked me to write this piece on their behalf.

The time is now. We need to start informing our members, both active and retired, that this is very important to their future. We need to let our legislators, both current and future, know that HB 1040 is a big mistake and needs immediate rectifying sooner, not later. We need to let our elected leaders, both now and going forward, know that we are holding them accountable on this central issue. We need to encourage all of our NDU members to take the opportunity when it presents itself, to question the legislators and our Governor who passed and signed HB 1040 into law, as to why they did this, and/or why they're going to do this, to us. If this sounds personal, well, it very much is.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this issue. Together, we can make a difference.

Meet the newly elected member of the NDU-R Advisory Board



*JoNell Bakke, Northeast Member
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JoNell Bakke was born in Bottineau, ND, but raised in Minnetonka, MN. After high school graduation, she returned to ND to attend UND, where she got a double major in Elementary and Special Education. JoNell taught for the Grand Forks Public Schools starting in 1983 and received her master's degree in Special Education at UND in 1991. She is the mentoring coordinator for the Grand Forks School District and has served as a trainer of mentors for Valley City State and the North Dakota State Mentoring Programs. She currently supervises student teachers for UND. JoNell has been active in union work since the 1980s serving as the president of the Grand Forks Education Association for six years, on the negotiation team for 14 years, and various other local offices. She served on the NDEA Board of Directors representing the northeast for many years. JoNell was elected to the North Dakota Senate and served for 8 years. JoNell was a foster parent for 11 years and currently trains foster and adoptive parents for Grand Forks County. She has four children, one son-in-law, one daughter-in-law, three grandsons and three granddaughters. In her free time, she enjoys traveling, movies, doing needlework, playing cards, and watching sporting events.

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Hard Working Retirees

By Toni Gumeringer, NDU-Retired Advisory Board Southwest Member



On June 29 and 30, I had the privilege of representing the ND retirees at the NEA-Retired Representative Assembly. There was so much energy in the room of retired members! I was able to listen to some great speeches about how retirees are engaging across the nation. From leading rallies to lobbying in DC and their home states, from legislative actions to mentoring and assisting in classrooms retirees are active and energized.

The body of 325 delegates from across the nation considered new business items, elected new officers, and considered new business items. In addition, many awards were presented, scholarships were awarded and plans were developed to help strengthen the NEA. Especially the retired faction. The new business items should result in a more user-friendly website for the retired and continue to promote an initiative to have retired members contact and encourage active members to continue their membership.

Anita Gibson was elected as the new NEA-Retired president and will take over later this fall. I was confident that we can look forward to great things under her leadership.

The delegates celebrated the 40th anniversary of the NEA Retired. Listening to how retirees have gone from “observers” to full voting members of the representative assembly was a tribute to how far we have come. The retiree membership increased by 8,000 last month and currently is 323,000 members strong.

So, retirees, now more than ever your commitment to NDU/NEA should continue. Be a retired member that is active and energized. The students and the community need you and you have so much to contribute.

Imperative to Stay Engaged

By Gale Haug, NDU-Retired Vice President



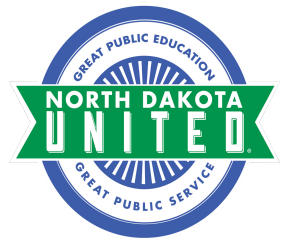
Greetings, NDU-Retired members and thank you for the opportunity to attend the national NEA Representative Assembly July 1-7 in Orlando, FL among approximately 5,000 delegates. It was the first in-person national assembly since 2019. One of the highlights of the conference was the rally held outside the Orange County Convention Center, calling for an end to banning books, silencing educators, and taking away the freedom to learn from students.

Elections were held for NEA officers where Becky Pringle was re-elected president and Princess Moss was re-elected as vice president. President Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden spoke to the delegation via Zoom and reaffirmed their commitment to increasing funding for education.

It was indeed uplifting to be among enthusiastic educators who are so passionate about their work. When retired educators work together, their accomplishments can be amazing. I spoke with several retired delegates all over the country who have worked on: (1) projects within their public schools, (2) campaigns opposing book banning, (3) get-out-the-vote efforts, and (4) membership drives including engaging team-building activities. Now that we are past the Covid restrictions, it is my hope that we can start doing more in person pro-education and membership activities within our local communities. At this time in our history, it is imperative that we stay engaged in educational issues that affect all of us. Attending the NEA delegate assembly was a huge “shot in the arm.” reminding me that we as retired members can and should be an important contributor to promote our public schools nationwide.

Retired & Energized

By Karen Askerooth, NDU-Retired President



Greetings NDU-Retired members! This newsletter is dedicated to WHO WHAT WHY HOW!

WHO? WHO are we? We are North Dakota United-Retired Members. Write down the names and email addresses from page 2 as you will be seeing these representatives in your area with some exciting regional informative meetings.

WHAT? YOU belong to the only official retired organization of the National Education Association. NEA-Retired membership enables you a continuation of NEA Member Benefits and fulfilling retirement while maintaining a lifetime commitment as a champion for public education and public service.

WHY? NDU-R is a strong voice for creating opportunities for retirees to meet and protect our rights.

HOW?

- We are planning regional meetings to educate and inspire your participation in your retired concerns and rights.
- Participate in the NDU Delegate Assembly and make your retired voice heard.

- Participate in the NEA-R Representative Assembly and the NEA Retired Leadership Conference to make your state's voice heard.
- Partner with NEA Aspiring Educators with intergenerational projects-bringing our NEA/NDU family together.
- Participate in local and state election quorums and town halls to determine which candidates are for our retired rights.
- Participate in contacting our legislators on bills and concerns that affect our memberships.

NOW MORE THAN EVER, THE COMMITMENT CONTINUES..." WITH YOUR HELP!

I leave you with this quote to ponder: "Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The important thing is not to stop questioning." - Albert Einstein

My HOPE to YOU, our NDU-Retired members, is to see you INVOLVED. As we all know: "YOU are the U In NDU- Retired.

In Solidarity...



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