



# AASRA Newsletter

All Arizona School Retirees Association  
affiliated with NRTA, a division of AARP

Winter 2020

Volume 58 No. 1

## Legislative Day – March 2020

### AASRA Legislative Day 2020



On **Tuesday, March 3**, your AASRA Legislative Team will be guiding you through AASRA Legislative Day for the fifth year.

- **8:45 a.m. sharp, Meet at the bell in front of the Capitol**
- **9:00 Go to the Historic Supreme Court Chambers, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Capitol Museum**
- **Sign in and receive a packet**
- **9:20-12:00 Hear from state legislators, lobbyists AND Secretary of State Katie Hobbs about important issues.**
- **12:00-1:00 Box lunch provided by AARP (if you RSVP by Feb. 27<sup>th</sup>!)**
- **1:15 Assemble in the House & Senate galleries. We will be introduced by a legislator. Wear your AASRA red shirts or other red shirts.**
- **1:15-2:00 Observe the legislative process in action**
- **2:00 Attend committee hearings at your discretion.**

#### Activities: (Tentative)

- Legislative update by John Moody, legislative consultant
- Group introduction by a state Representative and Senator
- **RTS:** Register at the kiosks at the House and Senate (Once registered at the Capitol, you can send emails from home commenting on different bills.)
- Visit any committees or caucuses if meeting that day

- Listen to Legislators address our group in the historic Supreme Court Chambers in the Capitol Museum

**Materials will be provided that day** telling you how to contact your legislators and in this newsletter. The packet will also have a list of AASRA Legislative Priorities, and talking points that you can use when contacting your legislators. Included will be lists of all senators and state representatives with their phone numbers and emails.

If you don't have an AASRA shirt, call AASRA member Mary Rogers at 623-979-3491. She can order one for you. The shirts cost \$10. **Wear red.**

**Looking forward to seeing you at the Capitol.**

### Our Partnership with DKG Continues

Since our partnership with Delta Kappa Gamma has been so successful, both organizations chose to continue working together this year. On March 3<sup>rd</sup>, be sure to look for many DKG members as well as AASRA members at the Capitol.

Carrie Snyder, DKG leader and Joe Carter are working to secure legislators and other knowledgeable speakers to address our group in the historic Supreme Court Chambers in the Capitol Museum. Please check your packets and look for any updates on March 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**There is always strength in numbers. The more individuals or organizations that you can rally to your cause, the better.** – Mark Shields

## How to Contact Your Legislators

If you want to know who your State Legislators are and how to contact them, do the following:

**Via the Internet:** The AZ Legislative website is easy to use! Follow the directions below and the prompts on the website pages.

1. Go to the website of the State Legislature at [www.azleg.gov](http://www.azleg.gov).
2. On the Homepage, click on "Frequently Asked Questions" OR in the color section on the Homepage, click on the word "Members" and follow the prompts.
3. Click on "How can I determine my district and legislator?" and follow the prompts. After entering your complete address, the screen will show your Congressional and Legislative Districts. Be sure to write down these numbers!
4. If you already know your legislator's name, click on "Members", then click on "Member Roster". From this page you can see the House or Senate Roster.
5. From these roster pages, you can email any Legislator by clicking on their name in the "Email" column. (Ex. "Email: SALLEN" to email Sen. Sylvia Allen)

### For those who do not use the Internet:

You will need to **know your legislators' names**.

#### **1. To call:**

Senate info desk – (602) 926-3559

House info desk – (602) 926-4221

Outside the Phoenix metro area:

1-800-352-8404

You can also find each Legislator's office number in the last column on the roster page. Be sure to add the 602 area code when calling. Their assistant will probably answer.

#### **2. To write: the Legislator's Name**

Arizona State Senate or

Arizona House of Representatives

Capitol Complex

1700 W. Washington

Phoenix, AZ 85007

## You Can Lobby from Home



For those of you that cannot come to the Capitol on Legislative Day, you can contact your legislators' offices a few days before March 3. **If you call**, you'll be speaking with their assistants. **If you email**, you are more likely to reach your legislator directly. Identify yourself as one of their constituents, and tell them what your concerns are (use the talking points).

**Our main priority is keeping our Defined Benefit pensions.** Stress that the ASRS is a sound pension, is well funded and managed. **Another of our main priorities is adequate funding for public education.**

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call Joe Carter, Legislative Liaison, at (602) 206-2899, or email him at: [jl.carter@yahoo.com](mailto:jl.carter@yahoo.com). We hope you'll all come on March 3, and that our day will be as successful as it was last year.

## LEGISLATIVE TALKING POINTS

### 1. Pension System

- ◆ ASRS, as a Defined Benefit pension, provides economic security and financial stability for approximately 160,000 retirees and 212,000 active members.
- ◆ ASRS is one of the healthiest, most responsibly managed public pension funds in the country.
- ◆ ASRS members and employers equally share the funding costs of the Trust. Members of the other public pensions do not.
- ◆ The PBI (permanent benefit increase) is NOT a COLA and has not been paid since 2005. ASRS has never offered a recurring COLA (cost of living adjustment). The PBI has been eliminated for ASRS members who joined the System on or after September 13, 2013.
- ◆ Support any ASRS sponsored legislation which would hold government entities financially responsible for the liability created if they choose to withdraw from ASRS.

## 2. Education Funding

- ◆ Proposition 123 & 20x2020 was a good start towards restoring cuts to public education, but the Legislature needs to take the next step to provide a dedicated funding source to fully support public education now and in the future.
- ◆ Support proposals to restore funding for full day kindergarten for ALL children in AZ.
- ◆ Support legislation/initiatives that increase the oversight and transparency of funding for charter schools.
- ◆ Do not support expansion of vouchers and Empowerment Scholarship Accounts. These measures siphon much needed money away from public schools into private schools.
- ◆ Support legislation/initiatives that stipulate fully certified teachers in every classroom.

## 3. Other Issues

- ◆ Eliminate the predatory loan industry (e.g. auto title loans, payday loans) in Arizona. These lenders prey on the working poor, force them further in debt, often taking their only means of transportation, causing them to lose their employment and ultimately creating more burdens on Arizona's social services.
- ◆ Support legislation that promotes restoration and/or increases to Arizona's social services agencies.
- ◆ Support tax credits for family caregivers.

## 2019-2020 AASRA Legislative Priorities

1. Protect the defined benefit pension plan and work to strengthen and improve the Arizona State Retirement System (ASRS).
2. Oppose legislative or other efforts to weaken the ASRS or other public pension systems. Support the efforts of the Arizona Retirement Security Coalition (ARSC) and other organizations to protect our defined benefit pension plan.
3. Work to increase sustainable funding for public education and limit the expansion of Empowerment Scholarship Accounts (ESA's). Advocate for increased oversight of ESA's.

4. Support legislation/initiatives that increase the oversight and transparency of funding for charter schools, as well as their accountability to the public.

5. Work for issues that will improve the integrity and image of public education, including K-12, community colleges and public universities.

6. Promote restoration and budget increases for human services such as caregiving funds, healthcare and social services for children, seniors and families.

7. Work against any legislation that promotes excessive interest rates on consumer loans, such as payday and title loans.

These Legislative Priorities were approved at the Board's September meeting.

## AASRA Joins the AZ Retirement Security Coalition

We have **renewed** our membership in the Arizona retirement Security Coalition (ARSC) AASRA has made a financial commitment as well as a promise of time to be spent in support of the coalition. **Sources have informed the group that legislation will be proposed in this year's legislative session to alter the Arizona State Retirement System.**

**Our primary concern is that active employees of the state would be offered an alternative to the Defined Benefit (DB) program offered by ASRS that we currently enjoy. That alternative would be in the form of a Defined Contribution (DC) plan with lower contribution rates for employee and employer.**

Research studies have shown repeatedly that DB plans are much more cost effective and yield greater returns than DC plans. Actions such as this would affect the very structure of our retirement system and negate all the actuarial projections made by ASRS.

**AASRA has joined the coalition in order to more effectively battle against these efforts to diminish one of Arizona education's greatest assets – our pension system.** ASRS is one of the best public pension systems in the nation. They continually win awards for their effectiveness and have achieved the rare feat of having an investment return rate of over 10% since their inception.

Over time we will need you to speak out to legislators to let them know how valuable your DB pension is to you. We know that many legislators do not understand the importance of our current pension system. We will be asking for you to tell your personal story in video form so that we may share with legislators. **Please take some time to think about what life would be like for you with a less secure pension. Be prepared to share why ASRS is important.**

Toward that end, we are **asking members to sign up for the Arizona Legislature Request to Speak system.** Once signed up you can contribute your thoughts, via online comments, on any legislation in front of a legislative committee. Then any legislator, not just your district representatives, can learn how you feel about pending issues. You can do so from the comfort of your home any time of the day or night.

## **ASRS IS AN EARNED BENEFIT**

### **Jerry's Reflections**

As we embark on 2020, I am conscious of **two overriding emotions** that are in conflict with each other. The first is **gratitude**. The other is **anxiety**. Please allow me to explain the clash in my feelings.



**One of the reasons I stayed in education for my entire career was the promise of my pension.** Like you, I contributed money from my salary that was matched by my employer and deposited into my account at the Arizona State Retirement System.

Prior to my retirement, **ASRS told me that I would receive a defined benefit of \$X every month for the rest of my life.** There is no reason to doubt that ASRS has the intent and the means to meet their obligation.

I have been retired from education for eight and a half years. **My pension, that deferred compensation, allows me to be secure in my retirement.** I am grateful that the State of Arizona had the foresight to offer me the opportunity to stay in a career I loved and retain my independence and dignity as I age. Now I can do all

those things that I love to do and did not have time for when I worked. I am very grateful for that fact.

**Early in my retirement I joined AASRA when I learned of their long history of protecting our pension system from the nefarious desires of those that would try to usurp the system for their own gain.** I have had the good fortune to be a member of the AASRA Board of Directors for about six years.

As a Regional Vice President on the Board of Directors, I saw only the tip of the iceberg of AASRA's efforts. During my two plus years as President of AASRA I have had the good fortune to observe many more of our members' endeavors around the state. **Every day more people than I can possibly name in this column focus on how to improve the organization and the lives of our members.**

**The President and Executive Board of our local units plan activities to benefit their community and enhance experiences for our members.** As an example, I recently attended a presentation on homeless women. Our local unit was acknowledged by name for their ongoing contributions of supplies and volunteers for that effort.

**Individual state board members spend multiple hours every week on projects to further our mutual goals.** Committees at the state level **create opportunities to spread the word about our efforts and goals.** Those involvements include participating on ASRS Insurance Review committees, meeting with state legislators and power brokers, planning our convention, attracting new members, working with outside organizations, creating this newsletter and many more.

**I am grateful that so many retired educators share a vision that in some ways is quite self-serving. Each of us gains in many ways from our participation.** Yet, we all gain from achieving our mutual goals. And our communities gain as well because, like me, **we are secure enough in our retirement that we are an asset, not a burden, to our community through our independence.**

**Why the anxiety? Because there is a very real and concerted effort by those that hope to achieve personal financial gain by altering our pension system. The changes that they propose would dismantle the actuarial underpinnings of ASRS.** That would mean that you and I might never see an increase in benefits even as the cost of living increases annually. **It would mean**



that those currently active in education would have the security that we enjoy denied them.

**This is the most dangerous time of year. The state legislature is in session.** The battle between those that would encroach on our security and we who enjoy the current system comes to a head. And the **saboteurs** have the benefit of dangling large sums of money as campaign contributions in front of legislators to accomplish their purpose. **They claim that their efforts will lead to more jobs for Arizona and a greater economy. What they really want is to line their own pockets with our hard-earned funds.**

**How can we oppose a well-funded machine like theirs? With the greatest asset we have – our voices.** It takes the combined efforts of all of us talking about our security to others and letting lawmakers know we will not tolerate changes to our pension. Please, make sure your legislators know that you regard any efforts by outsiders to change our system as political self-destruction for collaborating representatives.

Take some time to review the facts of ASRS at <https://www.azasrs.gov/content/facts-figures> before you make that contact. **The figures that are used by our adversaries are skewed to paint a deceiving picture.** Go to <https://www.azleg.gov/> to get the contact information for Senate and House members.

**Regardless of how you choose to make the contact – email, phone, letter, in person – the most important thing is that you do so.**

Maybe I should add the emotion of hope to those I am feeling at the beginning of this momentous year. **We are powerful as individuals and as part of our various groups including AASRA. Join the chorus of AASRA and other groups.** I believe our combined voices can lead to a continuation of the security we now enjoy. **Together we can make a change at a time when change is necessary.** At least, I hope so.

*Jerry Holmes, AASRA President*

**It's easier to be ignorant and say I don't know about the problem. But once you know, once you've seen it in their eyes, then you have a responsibility to do something. There is strength in numbers, and if we all work together as a team, we can be unstoppable.**

*-Craig Kielburger*

**Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.**

*- Nelson Mandela*

## AASRA 2019 – 2020 Goals

1. Advocate for ASRS and our defined benefit pension plan, healthcare accessibility and long-term disability for the benefit of current and future retirees
2. Promote widespread awareness of AASRA in an effort to expand influence and increase membership
3. Support legislation and initiatives that are beneficial to public education and public school employees including sustainable funding and stipulating certified teachers in every classroom
4. Champion accountability of all schools and individuals that receive any amount of public funding
5. Develop relationships and provide timely information to prepare AASRA members and potential members for retirement
6. Furnish opportunities and connections for community involvement by members

These goals were approved at the November Board meeting with suggested activities. Your unit presidents received them with the suggested activities.

## AASRA Awards

Units don't forget to get in your nominations for:  
**Outreach Award** – gives recognition to an individual who promotes educational and charitable projects in the community.

**Meritorious Award** – gives recognition to an individual who promotes and strengthens the status and advancement of AASRA.

**Unit of Distinction** – A Unit checks off on 21 items that it has accomplished during the year. All units should do this.

Forms for these three awards can be found on [www.aasra.org](http://www.aasra.org). Just click on "About" and then click on "Awards" and select a form.

Be sure all nomination forms reach the office by

**April 1, 2020.**

## Be a Part of AASRA's Convention

It's time to mark your calendar for AASRA's 2020 Convention **June 2nd and 3rd** at the Sheraton Four Points Phoenix North hotel. **Our theme this year is "2020: Our Vision for the Future".**

The Convention is a great time to reconnect with fellow AASRA members, meet new friends, learn about issues concerning retirees, hear enlightening speakers, and have fun! Our banquet entertainment this year will be our own Maria Robledo, entertaining us with her wonderful songs.



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This year our keynote speaker will be **ABC 15 news anchor, Steve Irvin**. Mr. Irvin is an Emmy award-winning journalist and a strong supporter of public schools. He is sure to delight us with his stories.

**Registration forms are available** at Unit meetings, with this newsletter and on the website. **The cost for the Convention is \$80.00 and includes 4 meals.** Hotel rooms will be available for the same price as last year, starting at \$79.00. **Please consider staying at the hotel, it will save driving time and you can continue enjoying time with your fellow attendees.**

More details about the Convention will be available soon. Monthly flyers will be sent to Unit presidents with updated information to share at meetings.

*Barbara Weber, Convention Com. Chairperson*

## Call for Nominations



This year's AASRA Convention on June 2 & 3, 2020, will feature an election for the **offices of District Vice-President of Regions 1, 3A, 3B, 5, and 7**. The offices are two-year terms, representing the local units in the

respective regions throughout the state. The **District Vice-Presidents** have, as their **responsibilities**, attending state board meetings, the annual convention, and communicating with local units and/or attending local unit meetings. Travel expenses are reimbursed by AASRA.

The regions include the following local units:

- Region 1---Kachina-Sedona
- Region 3A---a) Saguaro-SW Valley and b) Phoenix-Scottsdale
- Region 3B---a) Westside and b) Northwest Phoenix
- Region 5---Kingman Area
- Region 7---a) Huachuca-Sierra Vista and b) San Pedro-Benson

Current officeholders in these positions have been notified and their re-election plans questioned.

**Also to be elected at the 2020 Annual Meeting are 4 representatives on the Nominating Committee.** These positions are elected every even-numbered year for a two year term. The four reps **MUST** come from four separate AASRA regions in the state. These reps **help to find and vet candidates for the various AASRA offices up for election each year.**

If you are interested in, or want more information about these elected positions, **contact the Nominations Committee Chair, Steve Poe**, at 623-810-5228 or [sshermanpoe@gmail.com](mailto:sshermanpoe@gmail.com). **Deadline for declaring for these offices is March 25, to allow info to be published in the final newsletter of this membership year.** Nominations will still be taken from the floor at the convention, as the AASRA Constitution allows.

## Scholarship Raffle Fundraiser

**Units are planning their gift baskets and bringing other high value items** to participate in the fundraising event. There will be a 50/50 drawing again. **This is the biggest and only fundraiser for the Scholarship Foundation.**

The scholarships go to education students – one at each of the three state universities. Wouldn't it be wonderful to break last year's amount of \$1,432?



**If every AASRA member donated \$10 a year, the Foundation would have enough funds for three scholarships of \$2,500 and may be able to raise the amount even more. Be generous.**

**Your donations are welcomed all during the year.**  
**Support a future teacher.**

## Around the State

**Northwest Unit** - Last January, NW Unit heard from Lin Sue Cooney about Hospice of the Valley. Lin Sue gave us a way to help. She said there was a need for ponchos made from beach towels. These would give modesty to patients receiving care. At our AASRA State Convention, Robin Brin, at the Hospice of the Valley vendor table also said there was a need for these ponchos and provided the pattern. NW took the challenge! At our September and October meetings, members brought in about 50 beach towels. Then the seamstresses got busy. Robin



Brin attended our November meeting and accepted the ponchos. Pictured are NW President Marge Threewit and Robin Brin. Seamstresses were: Alice Reule, Lori

Good, Sue Mueller, Mary Rogers, Linda Danielson, & Marge Threewit. Also pictured are a few of our seamstresses/models of the ponchos.



**Saguaro Unit** had Hospice of the Valley speak in January on How to talk with your doctor. December's meeting was holiday music.

**Huachuca Area Unit** presentations focused on local events and activities in the area or in Arizona. In November, Heidi Blankenship talked about the history of the Arizona Trail and added some of her own stories of hiking that trail. The Christmas luncheon was a potluck, with several members noting this should be started earlier to enjoy the various Christmas recipes of the members. Gifts were collected to present to the Forgash House, a safe house for abused women and children. We collected products and monetary contributions for the Good Neighbor Alliance Samaritan Station in Sierra Vista. In January we had a pancake breakfast to generate funds for our May contribution to the Sierra Vista Elementary Summer School Scholarships program and the Senior Nutrition Center.

**Phoenix-Scottsdale Unit** had speakers Russ Levine, ASRS Health Insurance Advisor and Dan Cadriel with United Health care. December, they had their traditional holiday luncheon at Christo's Ristorante. Jerry Holmes spoke on defined benefits in January.

**Kristi Koziol**, Co-Executive Director, and **Mary Henderson**, District 3A Vice-President, attended the AMBA conference in San Antonio November 6-9. They learned more about AMBA and met many state association leaders from around the USA.

One of **East Valley Unit's** community projects was packaging feminine hygiene items for the homeless and for some high schools. They made 166 bags for Women 4 Women.



**Pinal County Unit's** theme this year is "Discovering the World". The fall meeting was at the Central Arizona College's Natural Resource Education Center learning about the elementary school program on "Farms". Pinal County Unit visited June Graber's "Christmas House". They admired the outstanding decorations. June entertained with piano music from the Nutcracker Suite.

State Senator Kate Brophy McGee spoke to the **Phoenix-Scottsdale Unit**. She shared her background in the legislature and some of the issues coming up in legislature session.



**Westside Unit's** October meeting AZ Representative Paul Boyer, a ranking member of the Education Committee, spoke on several education issues: Federal court decision on Proposition 123 and charter school accountability. He teaches at a charter school high school.

In December Jesse Ramirez talk about the Valley View food Bank at 107th and Peoria that we support and it's Thrift store helps fund its



services. **Maria Robledo** sang and got the group in the holiday spirit. January had President Margery Webb helping the members start their ancestor family tree.





AASRA  
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## ASRS Report

### ASRS IS AN EARNED BENEFIT

**Retiree Tax Reminders** - Your tax statements, including the 1099s were mailed to you no later than January 31<sup>st</sup>. You may want to review your withholding for the next year.

**Health Committee** - Barbara Weber, Jerry Holmes and I have been attending the ASRS Health Committee. Health and dental care will be going out to bid for the 2021 year. ASRS is holding a series of meetings to allow us input into the process.

ASRS is looking at self-insuring some of the plans to help with the cost of the premiums. You will hear more about this during the Legislative session.

**ASRS Phone Scam Warning** - It's been brought to ASRS attention that imposters are impersonating the ASRS, calling members and requesting information from them. This type of scam tries to manipulate you to let your guard down by pretending to be a trusted source, such as Social Security or the ASRS.

**BE ADVISED** - The ASRS will never call you to collect data from you over the phone unless you called them first and it is returning your call.

Learn more about ASRS at its website: [www.azasrs.gov](http://www.azasrs.gov).

*Janet Fee, Liaison*



The AASRA Newsletter is published three times a year. AASRA, 7250 North 16th Street Suite 302, Phoenix, AZ 85020-5279.

President-Jerry Holmes, President-elect-Joanna Haspels, Secretary-Pearl Nancarrow, Co-Treasurers-Sue Secrest & Katie Elgar, Co-Executive Directors-Janet Fee & Kristi Koziol, Newsletter Editor-Annji Craig-Wooten.

[www.aasra.org](http://www.aasra.org)

**Facebook – All Arizona School Retirees Association**

## Life-Style Habits

Researchers have found **five** simple habits that reduce Alzheimer's risk by 60%.

1. Eat a diet rich in leafy greens.
2. Increase your physical activity.
3. Don't smoke.
4. Limit alcohol use.
5. Engage in brain games.

To sharpen your focus by 45% is to switch hands! Try using your non-dominant hand to eat dinner, brush your teeth, write a list, etc. Using the "wrong" hand encourages the brain to produce a focus-enhancing chemical to improve alertness.



Thanks, Barb Weber, for these tips.



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**To find out more, visit**

**[www.myAMBAbenefits.info/aasra](http://www.myAMBAbenefits.info/aasra)**  
**or call 800-258-7041**

Please send your information and photos about your Unit and members to: [azredsunset@cablone.net](mailto:azredsunset@cablone.net).  
**Deadline by Friday, March 27 for the Spring Issue**  
Send in an email or attach items as a Word or PDF document and photos in JPG format as an attachment.

**Do it as it happens!**