



Shelby County Retired Teachers Association Newsletter

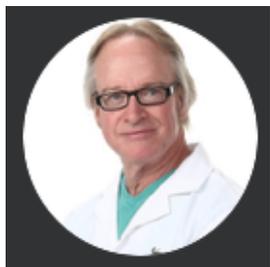


Shelby County Retired Teachers Association
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Jim Sparks, President
Nancy Wilhelm, Vice-President
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SCRTA News

A Note from the President



Greeting SCRTA members! I wish I could be greeting all of you in person but it appears that it may be a while before that happens. I am proud to be your new president and will do my best to represent, support, and promote our cause along with our other great dedicated officers that have been serving you for some time. It is my hope that those of you that have been scarcest at our quarterly meetings will consider joining us in the future. Our meetings bring you the latest news in our state and nation that affect our livelihood.

The more of us that join together the more powerful we are. Besides we have great fellowship, refreshments and camaraderie we wish you to be a part of.

I hope that all of you have been feeling well and following the “stay-at-home” & “social distancing” guidelines that have been mandated by our governor through the end of April. Do your best to make certain that our local state representatives are putting health & safety of our state and community ahead of all else. Support our local businesses by using the drive-up & curbside services that many of them have been providing. Richly reward those businesses for standing in harms way besides expressing gratitude to all the health care & first responders that are still on duty caring for the citizens of our communities. Thank you for being a dedicated member of IRTA with its focus on protecting the retired teachers of Shelby County and holding the torch high for quality education in our state.

IMPORTANT - PLEASE READ !

Probably the last thing you want to read more about is the coronavirus. Unfortunately, we can't avoid it.

Due to the Shelter-in-Place Guidelines, the April 8th SCRTA meeting has been cancelled.

Additionally, our next meeting (the Area Conference in Effingham) has also been cancelled.

Don't forget to visit the SCRTA website www.shelbycountyretiredteachers.com for state and local news that affects you.

In Memorium

Frederick Reed passed away on December 4, 2019 at the age of 96. A veteran of World War II, Fred moved his family to Shelbyville in 1951 to teach at the “new” Shelbyville High School. He retired from SHS in 1983 after 32 years of service.

A contribution will be made to the IRTA Foundation in his honor .



The following are excerpts from a March 30 letter to IRTA members from our President, John Flaherty:

Because this is a challenging time, we want to alleviate any concerns you may have regarding the protection of your pension and healthcare benefits. For more than 60 years, the Association has focused on protecting your pension and healthcare benefits. Be assured that the Association is continuing to fulfill that mission and in order to do so, we have implemented a business continuity plan.

The business continuity plan allows the IRTA to continue to deliver the lobbying protections, support and products you count on while at the same time ensuring the health and safety of IRTA's eight staff members and their families. Staff members are performing their jobs remotely, working from home or other office spaces. **Phone support at the office will be limited but you are encouraged to use email to ask any questions at irta@irtaonline.org. Staff will also be able to respond via live chat. Use the live chat feature on our website, www.irtaonline.org, Monday through Friday from 9am to 2pm.** This plan will be kept in place until school reopens or when the summer break officially begins.

Thank you for all that you do. Take care of yourself and your family first. We know from history that during times of greatest difficulty, we see the best of humanity. We are reassured to be able to put the health of staff and members first.

In a letter dated March 31, Jim Bachman, Executive Director of IRTA, wrote of changes due to the COVID-19 crisis.

- Considering the safety and health of all IRTA members and IRTA Staff, the decision was made to **cancel all Area Conferences that were scheduled to occur in June of 2020.**
- The Excellence in Education Active Teacher Grant application deadline has been extended until 10/1/20.
- The Executive Committee will conduct and make any decisions needed for the Association, the Foundation and the IRTPAC. As of now through April 30th, the IRTA Staff will continue to work from home and is maintaining all the IRTA Office duties.

IRTA Membership Committee Chair Mike Schmidt wrote in February about the importance of supporting IRTA and helping our membership grow. Here are some excerpts from his message

I'd like to point out that today is February 1st and all of us retirees know what that means. Today is the day that, if we are at least 62 years old, this year's pension payment increases by a compounded 3%. Hopefully your 3% increase will make 2020 that much more enjoyable than 2019 was. But just remember that we wouldn't have that increase in our bank accounts if the IRTA's instituted lawsuit, Heaton vs. Quinn, hadn't succeeded. Your membership in our association made that success possible, so please share the value of the IRTA with your retired colleagues who aren't members. Ask them to join the only state-wide organization that is dedicated solely to protecting the benefits of retired educators. It's easy to do if you just direct them to our website at irtaonline.org.

Speaking of \$\$\$ - According to the Illinois Constitution, public pensions are protected and cannot be reduced. Back in 2014 the Illinois Supreme Court ruled that state retirees' health insurance was a part of their pension so it also could not be reduced.

Governor Pritzker's **fiscal year 2021 budget**, released in February, included something you may not be aware of. It proposes that the state's **contribution to the TRS health insurance program be reduced by over \$51 million**. TRIP and TRAIL are underfunded in this budget while several other state retiree health insurance programs are fully funded. The IRTA will be keeping a close eye on this. Watch for emails from IRTA or visit shelbycountyretiredteachers.com regularly for updates, then contact your state senator and representative to protest this.
Do not let the state take away our promised and protected benefits!

TRS has been designated an "essential" state service in Gov. Pritzker's COVID-19 Executive Order and will continue to provide a measured level of services to members. Ensuring that all benefits are paid to retired members and beneficiaries is our number one priority. The System's emergency procedures, now in place, allow staff to process benefit payments from remote locations as we practice social distancing.

All of us at TRS thank you for your patience during this unprecedented global challenge. In particular, we appreciate your understanding that our **Member Call Center is off-line. TRS staff are responding to emergency situations from members via email.** You may reach the Member Services Department at **members@trsil.org**. However, you may experience a slower response than you are used to from TRS during the duration of the work-from-home order.

TRS began organizing its response to COVID-19 on March 3rd, when only four cases of the virus had been identified in Illinois. As concerns about the pandemic increased, TRS established "paying member benefits in full and on time" as its top priority if the System's offices were closed.

After closing its offices to visitors on **March 13, TRS completely closed the office on March 15, implementing its "work from home" procedures.** The payment procedures normally conducted in the office were tested several times within the remote network before the actual benefit "payroll" was processed.

Working from home, TRS staff processed and certified payments for 124,853 retired members and beneficiaries and sent the payment requests to the Illinois Comptroller's office. The Comptroller's office then transferred the funds on time to the bank accounts of all eligible members. The benefits paid totaled \$586 million. **All TRS member benefits for April were paid in full and on schedule April 1, despite coronavirus restrictions**

Are you missing out on money owed to you?

113,940 recent retirees helped to fund the Early Retirement Option offered by TRS, but then didn't participate in the ERO. **Those members are due a refund of the salary contributions they paid. At this point \$44 million has not been claimed.** If you believe you are owed a refund, visit the TRS website (<https://member.trsil.org/subsections/secureaccountaccess/security/signin.aspx>) and login. Then select "Available Refunds" on the left side navigation area to begin the ERO Refund process

TRS has recently won two awards. The Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada awarded a Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting to TRS for its Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2018. This was the 30th consecutive year that the System has achieved this prestigious award. In addition, TRS received the Recognition Award for Administration in 2019 in recognition of meeting professional standards for plan administration as set forth in the Public Pension Standards of the PPCC. The award is presented by the PPCC, a confederation of the National Association of State Retirement Administrators (NASRA), the National Conference on Public Employee Retirement Systems (NCPERS) and the National Council on Teacher Retirement (NCTR). Learn more about these awards on the TRS website.

Don't Forget. . .

The next two SCRTA meetings have been canceled:
(April 8 and the June Area Conference in Effingham.)

As of now, our next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 2 at the Lake Shelbyville Visitor Center. Hopefully we will be able to gather together then.



Legislative News

Senator Chapin Rose and Representative Brad Halbrook have kept busy in 2020 despite legislative sessions being canceled due to the coronavirus. Below are some excerpts from their websites and email newsletters.

- from: senchapinrose.com

== Rose Proposes \$100 Million ‘Rainmaker Fund’ to Boost U of I Recruitment of “Best and Brightest” Next Generation Faculty
“I recently had a very interesting meeting with Urbana campus Chancellor Robert Jones and Provost Andreas Cangellaris where they brought up efforts in other states to create ‘Rainmaker Funds’ to recruit the next generation of top-tier research faculty talent. They impressed upon me the enormous start-up costs involved in such world-class recruitment efforts due to the lab equipment necessary to get people interested. They estimated it would take \$100 million to really get in the hunt for top-shelf talent and put Illinois at the head of the pack. “

== Chapin Rose Recognized for his Support of Manufacturing Jobs

State Senator Chapin Rose has again been recognized for his work in the Illinois Senate to protect and grow high-paying manufacturing and tech jobs. Senator Rose was one of only four Senators to receive a rating of 100 from the Technology and Manufacturing Association (TMA), an organization which represents manufacturers and their employees. The ratings are based on the voting records of lawmakers and their support for the sector and jobs in the Illinois General Assembly.

Both Senator Rose and Representative Halbrook have worked to improve safety at the intersection of Route 32 and the Findlay-Bruce Road.



- excerpts from **Rep. Halbrook’s** March 27 newsletter

This week’s email report focuses on a **letter I sent to the Governor’s office**; the **extension of the tax filing deadline** in Illinois and **the Governor’s refusal to pull the plug on the Progressive Income Tax ballot question**.

(The opening of the letter to the governor from Halbrook and several colleagues)

Governor Pritzker,

There are a series of serious structural reforms that should have been in place before this crisis that would have given both state government and Illinois citizens much more resources and flexibility to weather this emergency. Correcting that is a conversation that we will be having in the weeks and months ahead. Today, regular citizens and small businesses across Illinois need immediate help.

We are calling on you and the Legislature to take the following immediate action:

1. **Freeze Unemployment insurance rates** for 12 months and provide assurance that rates don’t reflect claims due to coronavirus shutdowns and layoffs
2. **Freeze the minimum wage** for the next 18 months
3. Return the **light trailer license fee back to \$18** from \$118
4. **Sales tax holiday** for the entire duration of any work restriction or stay at home order
5. **Prorated abatement of property taxes** across the board equal to number of days of work restriction or stay at home order

- excerpts from **Rep. Halbrook's** April 2 newsletter

Illinois has 102 Counties. In 96 of those counties, the number of COVID-19 virus cases represents just 5 percent of the total cases in Illinois. **I have been asking the Governor to consider a different approach in downstate.** Obviously, I have no desire to put people in harm's way but are there some things we can do differently in the parts of the state where so far, the coronavirus is a nonfactor? Can some of the restrictions on businesses be relaxed in areas not as impacted?

People who live in urban areas often use public transportation, ride elevators to get to work and are generally more at risk for a disease like this simply because of the population density. Here in the middle of the state, we are spread out. We drive our own cars to work and live miles away from our neighbors. It is not unreasonable to ask questions about why the whole state is being treated the same as Chicago during this crisis.

Halbrook and (Rep.Chris) Miller's request included a change on the 2020 November election ballot that would dramatically change the state's constitution:

"...We are calling on Gov. Pritzker and our colleagues in the House and the Senate to **suspend the upcoming vote on the progressive income tax ballot question,**" they said. "The last thing our businesses need is a massive tax increase after being shut down through no fault of their own."

They also called on the Governor to issue a statement promising to veto any legislation allowing the Chicagoland three cents per gallon **tax on motor fuel** for infrastructure to be applied statewide.

Last, they asked Gov. Pritzker to **leave gun stores open** and to make it clear that local municipalities cannot and should not make those determinations on their own. "The people of Illinois should have the right to defend themselves during a time of crisis. These stores should remain open," they said.

Find out more about these topics and others on the legislators' websites.

You can also let them know how you feel at senchapinrose.com and rephalbrook.com

Volunteer Opportunities during Quarantine

Senior Services of Central Illinois currently has a waitlist of 216 seniors who need meals delivered to their homes and not enough volunteers to make the deliveries. Healthy individuals who want to help should email Jennifer Hopper with Area Agency on Aging for Lincolnland (jhopper@agelinc.org) or call her at 217-787-9234, ext. 115



If you're willing to volunteer and to set-aside a small amount of time per week, the IRTA will match you with an Illinois student who is interested in being mentored and tutored during this time of shelter-in-place. You will meet virtually using a cellphone, tablet or computer. You can set your own curriculum; set your learning schedule, determine your method of communication and set your own frequency for communication. Mentorships will last until the end of the 2020 school year or June 1, 2020. To volunteer simply fill out the form: <https://form.jotform.com/200924431914046>