

MEA-Retired Tribune

September 2015



Medicare Reminder

If you live abroad, or are planning to travel abroad for an extended period of time, it is important to understand how Medicare works. Medicare does not typically cover medical care you receive outside of the United States. However, if you do not maintain your Medicare coverage while you are abroad (i.e., by paying your Part B premiums), you will usually be subject to gaps in coverage and Medicare penalties upon your return. Therefore, you may find it more cost-effective to maintain your Medicare coverage while living abroad if you plan on returning to the US in the future. Before making any decisions about your Medicare coverage, you should contact Social Security or the United States Consulate or Embassy in whichever country you reside to ensure you fully understand the rules that apply to your specific situation.

Educator tax deduction up for renewal again

The U.S. Congress is working on extending and expanding the 2002 educator tax deduction, which allows educators to deduct eligible unreimbursed expenses-like classroom supplies-up to \$250. Last year, Congress renewed the educator tax deduction retroactively for 2014, but that extension has since expired. Educators who made purchases in 2014 can take the deduction, but the deduction has to be renewed for 2015 and beyond. The full Senate is expected to take up the issue later this year.

The Senate Finance Committee approved a bill that would extend the deduction for two years, indexes the deduction to inflation, and includes professional development as an eligible expense.

The House also has a bill that would expand the deduction, but it would make it a permanent deduction. NEA is supporting this bipartisan bill and is asking members to urge their Representatives to support it also.

A survey by the National School Supply and Equipment Association showed that 99.5 percent of all public school teachers spend their own money for classroom supplies. The same survey also found that during the 2012-13 school year, all educators spent \$1.6 billion of their own money on supplies and instructional materials. The average teacher spent \$485, and 10 percent of teachers spent \$1,000 or more.

Welcome Paul Helder

Paul Helder has been awarded the Retirement/Field Services Consultant position effective 8/17/15. Paul will be working with MEA-Retired. We welcome Paul and look forward to working with him.

DID YOU KNOW:

- The Social Security Expansion Act (S.743) would, among other things, use the Consumer Price Index to calculate cost of living increases in Social Security payments, extend the tax on earners making more than \$250,000 annually, increase the amount paid on lifetime low earners based on years in the workforce. If this legislation passes, some of its provisions would not take effect until 2021.
- The five week summer break for Congress ends September 8. When members return to Washington there will be only 10 “work days” before the 2016 fiscal year budget should take effect.
- The Michigan criminal justice system could be headed for an extraordinary shift after the appeals court said juries have the power to sentence teens convicted of murder. The court recently said juries must decide whether someone under 18 gets life in prison. An appeal to the Michigan Supreme Court is certain. Associated Press.
- The first MEA-Retired Board Meeting of the year will be held September 16.

DEALING WITH ROBOCALLS

More and more telephone customers are being plagued with unwanted robocalls. There are several devices which block incoming robocalls. One of those rated well by Consumer Reports is Nomorobo which is free; however, it is not available everywhere. You can find information about this at <https://www.nomorobo.com/> If this service is not available in your area, the site provides toll free numbers that you can call. It is to your advantage to call the number/s provided; because that will motivate your provider to install the free service in your area. (When you complain it ties up their paid operators, so it is to the company’s economic advantage to put in the robocall blocking service and allow the paid operators to take care of customers with other problems.)

There are devices which block robocalls that can be purchased through Amazon. These are:

- Digitone Call Blocker Plus (\$110) 18 of 24 reviewers gave it a positive rating.
- HQTelecom.com Landline Call Blocker (\$59) six of thirteen reviewers gave it a positive rating.
- Sentry Dual Mode Call Blocker (\$59) 27 reviewers gave it a positive rating; 28 reviewers gave it a negative rating

For a more detailed account of all aspects of robocalls, consult the September 2015 issue of Consumer Reports which is probably available at your local library.

“The most valuable resource that all

Teachers have is each other.

Without collaboration our

growth is limited to

our own

perspectives.”

-Robert John Meehan

Cook: Schools Cannot Be Open Carry Zones

Imagine walking into your child's elementary school and seeing someone with a pistol strapped to his belt. Not a police officer or school security employee, just a citizen. Parents at Edgerton Elementary in Clio didn't have to imagine it, they saw it.

You may think, "that can't be legal." But it is. And, a recent Genesee County Circuit Court decision affirms the legal right of Michigan citizens with a concealed pistol license to openly carry firearms in Michigan public schools.

In response to this court decision, you may also think, "there ought to be a law against that." The MEA and the public school employees we represent agree.

The decision was the result of a Clio parent's court challenge to Clio Area Schools' denial of his right to openly carry his pistol inside the elementary school when he came to pick up his daughter. The circuit judge based his ruling on a 2012 Michigan Court of Appeals decision which held that Lansing Public Libraries cannot prohibit citizens from openly carrying guns onto library property.

In the Clio case, the district argued that state law allows school districts to enact policies to safeguard students. Schools already prohibit students from bringing *toy* guns onto school property. The Clio school board felt that banning open carry of real firearms was certainly within their right to protect their students. The judge disagreed. In his decision, he ruled that the ban intruded upon the lawmaking authority of the state, which created laws to allow open carry of firearms on school grounds.

Michigan legislators have repeatedly relaxed restrictions on gun owners over the last several years. However, some legislators, including state Rep. Andy Schor, D-Lansing, feel they have gone too far. Schor is the sponsor of [House Bill 4261](#), which would ban openly carrying firearms in schools, saying, "we want to make sure our youth are not encountering guns in schools. It's not part of the educational process." Schor, a father of two and a gun owner, expressed his fear that "allowing openly-armed civilians to roam the halls of our schools is a recipe for disaster."

The recent court decision, allowing those with a concealed pistol license to openly carry, presents problems for both school employees and students. School employees do not know if someone openly carrying a firearm into the school building has a concealed carry permit, or what their intentions are. When they see someone entering the building with a firearm, their training and instincts tell them to protect their students by getting them out of the building or locking down their classrooms. Both school employees and school administrators support passage of legislation banning open carry of firearms in public schools.

It should be clear that with tragedies involving mass shootings in schools across the country, schools are not a place for gun owners to exercise their 2nd Amendment rights. The only people who should be allowed to carry firearms in public schools are police officers and school security personnel who are trained in the use of weapons for school safety. Allowing guns to be openly carried in public schools only exacerbates the fear and uncertainty of both staff and students and does not provide students with the safe environment they need to focus on learning and exploring.

Enacting legislation banning guns in public schools would help provide that safe learning environment. Republicans and Democrats should agree that House Bill 4261 is a sensible fix to a dangerous loophole.

Steven Cook is President of the Michigan Education