

MEA-Retired Tribune

July 2017

MEA-Retired delegates in Boston

Thirty-seven elected delegates are representing MEA-Retired at the NEA Representative Assembly in Boston. On June 30 and July 1, caucuses were held for the entire Michigan delegation, totaling 500 delegates. July 2 - July 5 Michigan met with other states at the RA, which totaled more than 7,000 delegates and 3,676 guests respectively. Decisions were made about many new business items, constitutional amendments and standing rules. NEA officers will be elected, as well as other elections. June 27-29 delegates attended the NEA-Retired Meeting. Several business items were discussed.

At the NEA-Retired meeting, Sarah Borgman from Indiana, was elected President. Our own Barb Schram and Cleorah Scruggs-DeBose were elected as NEA Alternate Board members. MEA-Retired received the Runner Up Award for our website. Elected MEA-Retired delegates attending are: Judy Gail Armstrong Hall, Al Beamish, Geoff Blain, Sheila Blain, Linda Brunson, Elias Chapa, Judy Daley, Vivian Davis, Pam DeGryse, Judy Foster, Roger Foster, Stephen Franko, Catherine Frederick, John Frederick, Anne Good, Jeanne Hansen, Joanne Hoekstra, Kathleen Huey, Diana Irons, Sid Kardon, Millie Lambert, Sally McNamara, Elaine Miller, Betty Org, Susan Pegan, Bill Papo, Dan Rudd, Linda Russel, Iris Salters, Jack Schneider, Barb Schram, Cleorah Scruggs DeBose, Jim Sparapani, Randy Stone, Rita Vater Darnton, Kay Walker Telma, and Mary Yedinak.

U.S. Supreme Court deals setback to voucher proponents

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Missouri violated the constitutional rights of a church when it denied the church's grant application for a new playground surface. But the court's narrow ruling represents a setback for voucher proponents, who had sought to use the dispute to undermine state constitutional protections for public education and fuel the expansion of private school vouchers on a national scale, even for religious schools.

The court said it did not "address religious uses of funding or other forms of discrimination" in *Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia Inc. v. Comer*. The 7-2 decision leaves intact the Missouri constitutional provision prohibiting state funding of religious actions and leaves undisturbed the similar provisions of 38 other states. These "no aid" provisions were enacted to protect public schools and have been applied for decades to ensure that resources for those schools were not diverted to private religious institutions.

Reacting to the decision, Lily Eskelsen García, a Utah elementary school teacher and National Education Association president, said:

We applaud the Supreme Court's refusal to accept the invitation of voucher proponents to issue a broad ruling that could place in jeopardy the ability of states to protect their public education system by refusing to divert public school funding to private religious schools. . .

State constitutional provisions and decades of precedent protect our public education system from voucher programs. The court's ruling is a big setback for those who want to push voucher programs that take taxpayer dollars out of public schools to divert them to private religious schools.

The case stems from a program in Columbia, MO, that provides non-profit organizations with grants for playground rubber surfacing. Trinity Lutheran Church, which operates a pre-school and daycare, applied for

money for its playground but was turned down due to the state's constitution, which prohibits public aid going to religious institutions. The church sued.

The ruling is not likely to please voucher supporters such as President Trump and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos. They have put forth a budget proposal that includes a \$1.4 billion voucher program. (by Brian Washington)

Health care bill stalled in Senate – for now

After weeks of writing the legislation in secret by a handful of senators, followed by a Congressional Budget Office (CBO) report estimating that the Senate's health care bill would leave 22 million Americans uninsured, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell announced that he would postpone the vote on the bill.

The bill has so far failed to get the support of enough Republican Senators and is also deeply unpopular with the American people. Only 17% of Americans approve of the legislation.

The delay is at least a temporary victory for health care advocates who demonstrated strong, vocal opposition, but there is still reason for concern. McConnell does have leverage: the draft legislation provides nearly \$200 billion that he could add to the bill while still meeting the savings targets he must under the Senate's "budget reconciliation" rules. Late Wednesday, Senate Republican leaders agreed to add \$45 billion over 10 years in special funds to treat opioid addiction, at least partially addressing concerns of several senators who have withheld their support.

"We thought the House bill was bad, but the Medicaid cuts in the Senate bill are even more extreme, and they hit seniors, those with disabilities, and those in nursing homes especially hard," said Robert Roach, Jr., President of the Alliance for Retired Americans.

"The age tax, which asks older Americans to pay five times what younger people pay for the same plan, remains part of the Senate bill too," added Joseph Peters, Jr., Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance.

Republicans can only afford two "no" votes from their members, and as of Thursday, 12 senators either oppose or have expressed concerns with the Senate version. The bill's detractors among the Republicans include both moderates and conservatives, and it will be difficult for McConnell to appease both sides.

2017 Verification of Coverage

The Blue Cross Blue Shield 2017 Verification of Coverage survey was mailed to all contract holders in May. If you're the contract holder, you must complete this form for yourself and anyone else covered by your retirement system health plan. You must respond to the survey by July 15, 2017, even if you don't have other coverage. If you don't respond, your retirement system medical plan and prescription drug coverage will be canceled. The Verification of Coverage survey asks you to identify any other medical and prescription coverage you or your dependents might have in addition to your retirement system coverage. The information is used to determine your eligibility in the retirement system's health plan. If you DID NOT receive the form please call 1-888-231-0382 or go online to mpsers.coverageupdatecenter.com

"Let us not seek the Republican answer or the Democratic answer, but the right answer. Let us not seek to fix the blame for the past. Let us accept our own responsibility for the future."

John F. Kennedy