



TRS Board Authorizes 3% COLA Beginning September 30

Tim Lee, *Inside Line*, 7-26-13

The Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS) Board of Trustees met in Austin for their regularly scheduled meeting July 26. Numerous items relating to the TRS pension fund, its investment performance, TRS policies and more were discussed.

Perhaps the most significant action taken by the TRS Board was the approval of a resolution directing the TRS staff to implement the cost-of-living increase for qualifying retirees in accordance with the passage of SB 1458 this last legislative session. Retirees who retired as of August 31, 2004 or before will receive a 3% increase (not to exceed \$100 per month by statute). The increase is projected to be effective for the end of September annuity payment.

The TRS Board also adopted a resolution that maintains the TRS-Care health insurance plan and its benefit structure for the coming fiscal year. In addition, the TRS Board is maintaining premiums for all TRS-Care participants. TRTA has worked hard to ensure that the TRS-Care program is an affordable, quality benefit for participants. We have worked with the TRS Board and the Legislature to maintain this plan and safeguard the premium structure. The July decision by the TRS Board marks 9 years that premiums have not increased. This would not have been possible without the hard work of our TRTA members!

The 83rd Sessions Come to an End

Borrowed from texasmonthly.com/burka-blog, 8-7-13

“The third and final special session of the 83rd Legislature is over, and the result is an opportunity for voters to approve \$1.2 billion in additional funding for roads in November 2014.... It was one of the most productive regular sessions in a long time: lawmakers restored deep cuts to education and Medicaid; allocated \$2 billion for water projects pending voter approval, reworked the fundamental aspects of public education accountability, and gave a funding boost for highways.

What's next? The focus of Texas politics will soon turn to elections and the upcoming races for statewide offices. The horserace is on.”

TRS-Care to become Focus for 84th Session

Tim Lee, *Inside Line*, 7-26-13

It was also reported at the July TRS meeting that TRS-Care will have exhausted its reserve funding completely sometime in FY 2016. Projections are that the plan will experience a near \$1 billion shortfall in FY 2017. Tim Lee, TRTA Executive Director, addressed the TRS Board on this matter. “We can all agree that we enjoyed a successful 83rd Legislative Session, but TRTA’s attention is turning to the TRS-Care program and what may come in the 84th Legislative Session,” Lee said. The TRS-Care program covers over 235,000 TRS retirees and dependents. “We must be proactive and begin discussing the various proposals to our TRS-Care funding issues. TRTA is ready to work on these issues now and to bring stakeholders together to address them in advance of the next legislative session,” he concluded.

TRTA will continue to monitor the implementation of the TRS cost-of-living adjustment and the issues surrounding our TRS-Care program. While we have accomplished much, there is still more we must do! Your dedication is the reason TRTA is successful.

SB 1458 is Law Because of the Doggedness of TRTA Members

Tim Lee, *Inside Line*, 6-15-13

TRTA members sent over 115,000 emails in support of this legislation during the regular session. Tens of thousands of phone calls, and hundreds of personal visits to legislators have helped carry this legislation through to its final step and become law.

Your TRS fund will now be actuarially sound!

TRS is already working to implement the 3 percent cost of living increase for over 195,000 TRS retirees whose retirement date was August 31, 2004 or before. That programming could be done late this summer so that retirees will see the increase in their September annuity payment (received around the first of October 2013).

Those TRS retirees not receiving the annuity increase as part of this legislation should know that the fund's improving actuarial condition will help pave the way for future increases for all retirees. TRTA will

continue to fight for all TRS retirees to receive an increase in their annuity!

These actuarial soundness measures make your TRS Texas pension fund one of the healthiest, best funded, and most solid defined benefit plans in the country! The work done by TRTA, our friends in the Legislature, and our partners in the active educator community will have generational impact for the benefit of all current and future TRS retirees!

Now, let's tell our story! Let your friends, former colleagues, and everyone know that TRTA fought for them this session. We did not give up!

Let's all take a moment to thank our friends who made this possible and take the time to recognize what a great accomplishment this is for all TRS members.

Let's also reflect on all those TRTA members who worked so hard to help us get to this moment and may no longer be with us to enjoy the victory.

Texans as Citizens

By Robert Garrett, *Dallas Morning News*, 6-4-13

AUSTIN — Texans are not highly engaged voters and citizens — and, by some measures, not very active members of their communities, a nonpartisan study has found.

In 2010, the state ranked 51st among the states and the District of Columbia in voter turnout, 49th in the share of its citizens who contacted public officials, 47th in how many trust most of their neighbors and 43rd in the percentage who give to charities.

The study, released in June, is the first-ever Texas Civic Health Index, a joint effort by the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life at the University of Texas at Austin and the National Conference on Citizenship, a congressionally chartered group that tries to evaluate civic participation.

Regina Lawrence, the UT journalism professor who runs the Strauss Institute, said the findings should alarm Texans. She noted that just 36 percent cast ballots in 2010.

“A good definition of democracy is not one in which two-thirds of voters don't show up,” Lawrence said.

“What we saw was a very active minority of citizens really determining the future of the state in that election.”

...The study mostly relied on data compiled by the Census Bureau. Its authors recommended improving civic literacy through the schools; increasing the supply of nonpartisan information about public issues and elections; and boosting Texans' access to higher education.

People who have attended some college show much higher levels of electoral and civic involvement than those who have not, Lawrence said.

State GOP Chairman Steve Munisteri chided the authors for overlooking important considerations, such as the choice by nearly half the U.S. electorate not to vote in last year's presidential election and the lack of competitive statewide races in Texas.

“Texans are not a bunch of aloof folks that don't like their neighbors,” he said. “People are generally happy. We just haven't had some huge crisis in the state that would engage people.”

Area Legislators Unanimously Support Retiree 3% COLA

It's time to call or email your local legislator and express appreciation for supporting SB1458. For almost all of us it's Senator Taylor; for members living north of Clear Creek it's Rep. Davis; for those south of Clear Creek it's Rep. Bonnen; for those in Bacliff/Texas City/LaMarque it's Rep. Eiland and for those in Pearland/Alvin it's Rep. Thompson. All these lawmakers and their staffs worked to achieve TRS soundness and first cost-of-living adjustment in twelve years.

We look forward to the October 8 meeting when Sen. Taylor and Representatives Davis and Bonnen will be giving us a report on the 83rd Session.

Contact Your Legislators

Sen. Larry Taylor - 512-463-0111

Local - 381-332-0003

Rep. John Davis - 512-463-0734

Local - 281-333-1350

Rep. Greg Bonnen - 512-463-0729

Local - 281-338-0924

Rep. Ed Thompson - 512-463-0707

Rep. Craig Eiland - 512-463-0502

A friendly legislative aide will answer the phone and deliver your message to your representative or senator.

You can also type **“Texas Legislature Online”** on your search engine and a host of information is available including things like the progress of bills, committee meetings and even the text of specific legislation. **If you click on “members” a website for each legislator can show committee memberships, a map of the district and a form for sending an email.**