



It's now **Representative Dennis Paul,** **Representative Wayne Faircloth** and **Congressman Brian Babin.**

The votes have all been counted and we now have two new representatives and a congressman in our area. **Dennis Paul** who will represent the Webster/NASA/La Porte area was elected by more than 2 to 1 and **Wayne Faircloth** who represents the Bacliff/Texas City area won a tight race against Judge Susan Criss.

In the District 36 Congressional race **Brian Babin** won with almost 76% of the vote. Congressman Babin, a retired dentist from Woodville, now represents a sprawling and diverse area that stretches from Highway 3 almost to Lufkin and De Ridder, La. He has served in Woodville for 35 years, as mayor, city councilman and a school board member. Mark Jones, a political science professor at Rice, has predicted that this suburban/rural dichotomy could produce a conspicuous "Houston vs. East Texas" contest.

Our role now is to foster empathy and educate a professional engineer (Paul), a State Farm insurance agent (Faircloth) and a retired dentist (Babin) about the world in which retired educators inhabit. In last week's *Inside Line* Tim Lee explained the problems facing TRS retirees. He suggested that we share with legislators our TRS-Care stories. As Lee put it, "Legislators need to know why TRS-Care is a priority to you and why it should be a priority for them in the 84th Legislative Session. Without legislative action, TRS-Care premiums will double! A solution must be found and NOW. We need every member of TRTA involved in making sure TRS-Care is not ignored in 2015!"

Last Spring Dennis Paul wrote of his support:

"I will support the current defined benefit plan for all current personnel... This is not negotiable![W]e are open to working with TRTA and the TRS in developing a workable plan that will meet TRTA's and any future TRTA member's needs...."

I favor a health plan that meets the needs of our public servants. It is difficult to say where Health Care will end up in today's environment. I would support a plan

that would be equitable to both the membership of the ERS and TRS systems....

As your representative I would want to work with you and your group to come up with solutions to all of the issues concerning your membership....

The TRS-Care program is at a critical state....

I need you and the TRTA to work with me in identifying what solutions will work for your members...."

Senator Taylor, Rep. Thompson (Pearland/Alvin) and Dr. Bonnen (League City, Friendswood and Dickinson) had no contests this election but all three have indicated support for TRTA issues.

A TRS-Care Deficit Menaces

Tim Lee, *Inside Line*, 11-5-14

Legislators who have served before and those who have just been elected are now shifting from campaign mode into **policy mode**. There is no time to waste; the 84th Legislative Session is less than two months away! In fact, our members are ready to start protecting their benefits and getting the word out that their health care and pensions should be top priorities in 2015!

Our health insurance is facing a huge funding shortfall that has been projected to be as high as \$1 billion by the end of the 2016-17 biennium, and has fluctuated to a low of \$750 million. Legislators must work in 2015 to resolve this issue as they plan budgets for the 2016-17 fiscal year.

Retirees should not be subject to this financial uncertainty! The shortfall, regardless of its size, is a significant hurdle that MUST BE OVERCOME. If nothing is done during the next session to protect TRS-Care premiums could DOUBLE.

With only one permanent cost-of-living increase passed since 2001, retirees have carefully budgeted their finances to include access to this affordable program. TRTA does not know of any public education retiree in Texas who can afford to pay twice as much for their health care.

TRTA asks for your TRS-Care Story

Tim Lee, *Inside Line*, 11-14

TRTA is still in need of personal anecdotes from our members who use the TRS-Care health insurance. We know that protecting this program shortfall will be a top priority for TRTA in 2015, but starting to share this message with legislators in January is too late! Let's get the word out NOW that TRS-Care is vital to our livelihood and that retirees should not shoulder the entire burden of the financial crisis!

Share your story by sending an email to us at info@trta.org, subject line My TRS-Care Story. We want to know the following from you:

1. How would losing your TRS-Care health insurance impact you?
2. How would you be impacted if your premiums increased by up to 135%?
3. Why is TRS-Care important to you?

Be sure to include your name and address so that we can ensure your legislator hears it from you!

Now you can Watch TRTA TV

Tim Lee, *Inside Line*, 11-5-14

Find TRTA TV on YouTube and watch our informative videos, including legislative training features! This brand new way to receive information from TRTA about your pension and other retirement benefits provides quick, accessible updates! We will be using videos throughout the 84th session to inform you about pending bills and votes and to let you know how you can help.

There is a helpful tutorial showing how to sign up for Tim Lee's *Inside Line*. Make sure you stay informed by receiving these regular updates. We use the *Inside Line* for email **action alert campaigns**, which helps us contact legislators when urgent matters—such as a bill going up for a vote—happen!

The video also shows you how to read The VOICE online and where to find legislative fact sheets, as well as how to find out who your legislators are and their contact information. Share this video with your fellow retirees!

TRS Board Reviews Options for TRS-Care Funding Crisis

Tim Lee, *Inside Line*, 10-17-14

The Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS) Board of Trustees met October 17 to discuss findings from the recently finalized sustainability study of the TRS-Care retiree health insurance program.

TRTA members attended the meeting, and Executive Director Tim Lee provided public comment regarding the imminent billion dollar funding gap. The TRS-Care study expanded upon the options for helping to resolve the funding crisis that were presented earlier this year. TRTA will provide a new, full review of each option and the changes again in coming weeks.

In their appropriations request made earlier this year to the Legislative Budget Board (LBB), TRS asked for a supplemental appropriation of nearly

\$900,000,000. This is in addition to the 1% of active teacher payroll that is commonly provided to TRS-Care during each fiscal year.

TRTA supports full funding of the statutory requirement of 1% in both years of the biennium. Additionally, TRTA supports the full funding of the TRS-Care supplemental appropriation request (which equals \$875,000,000), preferably from the state's general revenue fund.

TRTA is not opposed to the idea of supporting the supplemental appropriation with resources from the state economic stabilization fund (the rainy day fund); however, we contend that if the Legislature does not adopt a long-term view of solving the TRS-Care funding issue, we will be back next session requesting an even higher supplemental appropriation.

The state's funding structure for TRS-Care, which is in no way tied to the actual costs of the program, must be addressed. Sustaining TRS-Care by basing funding on the payroll for the active educator community is a broken funding methodology. TRS has administered a health care system to the best of its ability with a revenue stream that is incapable of keeping up with medical cost inflation. As Tim Lee stated during his public testimony, **"it's a funding problem--not a benefits problem."**

The state has been very efficient in delivering support to the retirement system, but TRS-Care has been woefully underfunded for years.

Temporary savings measures have maintained this vital program over the years, but these mechanisms have all been exhausted! Significant changes will need to be made to the retiree health care program to make it viable in the future. However, our concern is that retirees already are paying a significant share of the total health care costs. Absent additional funding sources in the future, our retirees will no longer be able to afford adequate health care.

This cannot happen! TRTA is seeking support from the state for our dedicated public education retirees. Now is the time for the Legislature to revitalize their commitment to TRS-Care. It is vital to the retirement security of our education retirees! Doing anything less will expedite the move towards welfare for our current and future state public education retirees.

The TRS-Care crisis is twofold: we must fill the immediate funding gap of nearly \$1 billion AND fix the revenue structure so TRS-Care can continue to provide health care benefits for our public education retirees for years to come!