

# RI CHAPTER 94 NEWS, OCTOBER 2023

## *Legislative and Executive Board Report By the Chapter 94 Leadership*



As we set our legislative priorities for the next session of the state legislature, Bob Jacquard of Capital Strategies, the lobbying firm

advocating our interests on Smith Hill, summarized what happened to the pension bills presented before the last General Assembly. While members of the legislature liked what we offered in our bill, competing proposals led to the passage of the fractional COLA legislation. Effective January 1, 2024, state retirees will receive 25% of the 4-year COLA annually, meaning that the COLA is divided into four parts, and retirees will receive one-quarter each year.

The 2023-24 state budget mandates that 50% of all general revenues received beyond the estimated amount for the completed fiscal year be transferred to the Employees Retirement System. The budget also instructs the Rhode Island General Treasurer to evaluate the 2011 pension “reform” and make recommendations.

The leadership agreed to re-submit our annual COLA bill when the 2024 legislature convenes in January. Mr. Jacquard will help us draft language to exempt retiree pension benefits from state income taxes. If both ideas gain traction and become law, public-sector retirees can expect to keep more of their hard-earned money.

### **Next Chapter Meeting**

**Tuesday, October 10 @ 1 pm**

RI Council 94, Lower Level  
1179 Charles St, No. Providence

### **Special Guest**

Gregg M. Amore  
RI Secretary of State

### **Food for Thought**

*Attending the October meeting in person?  
Join us for Pre-meeting light lunch  
and snacks, 12:30 pm*

### **Questions?**

Contact Chapter 94 Vice Presidents  
Russ Marsocci and Ron Pepin

### **Russ Marsocci, Muni VP**

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### **Ron Pepin, State VP**

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### **Cindy LeBlanc, Office Manager**

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### ***Can't attend meetings in person?***

*Join us via Zoom to attend meetings online.  
Email State VP Ron Pepin to receive monthly  
invitations and log-in instructions.*

### **Save the Dates**

#### **October 12**

Chapter 94 Day of Golf  
Louisquisett Golf Course

#### **November 7**

RI Special Election

#### **November 14**

Monthly Chapter Meeting

#### **December 12**

Annual Holiday Bash

#### **December 26 - January 31**

ERSRI Retirement Board Election

**(Leadership, cont'd)** How nice to see President Mike Connolly in action as he attended our September meeting. Keep up the good work, Mike, as you continue the success on your journey to good health. **Welcome Back, Mike!**

**State Report, Ron Pepin**

As stated in the Legislative Report on the front page, retirees will receive twenty-five percent (or 1/4th) of the annually determined COLA. This replaces the every 4-year COLA for most plans until those plans reach 80% funding level. This “fix” results from pension legislation passed by the General Assembly and signed by the Governor.

Before the pandemic, Chapter meetings were always held in person, and we kept members informed by sending a monthly newsletter. However, COVID-19 forced us to change. We started using virtual meetings through Zoom, which made it possible for members to participate, and it quickly became essential to the Chapter. Nowadays, even judicial proceedings, doctor appointments, staff meetings, and town council sessions are conducted using Zoom or one of its competitors. It's incredible how much things have changed, thanks to the technology that allows us to stay connected.

This is a long way to say this: if you can't make a meeting in person, join us by Zoom. You can use your desktop, laptop, tablet, or smartphone. Just email me; I send invitations and log-in instructions each month. Members participating online gives us a quorum, allowing the Chapter to conduct official business.

If you read the **Compass** or visit the ERSRI website, you know there is an upcoming

**(State, cont'd)** election for seven member seats on the Employees' Retirement System of Rhode Island Board. Those who are elected will serve a four-year term. The Retirement Board comprises fifteen members (eight are appointed) who oversee the state's pension system and ensure its proper administration. The Board approves and adjudicates disability and service pensions, votes on the target investment rate of return and other assumptions, and certifies employer contribution rates.

Members will vote for two retiree representatives on the board; the incumbents are retired teachers. Members, please take the opportunity to vote. **RP**

**Muni Report, Russ Marsocci**

We sprinkle our monthly Chapter meetings with special guests and presentations. Last month, Ted Nesi, a Channel 12 investigative reporter, shared his personal story and what it is like to work in media and cover state and local politics. Since Nesi started his career, how we get our news and information has changed dramatically. The **Projo** dominated local news and had reporters round the clock at the State House, but sadly, the “paper,” once home to good union jobs, became a shell of itself. Local television stations, such as Channel 12, have filled the void, using many outlets, including social media, to keep Rhode Islanders informed. Ted's talk (I know another group has grabbed that moniker) was so popular and engaging that we invited him back in June to assess the 2024 legislative session.

Let me stress the importance of staying engaged as we pursue our pension COLA legislation next year. We will need members to call legislators, appear at hearings, provide testimonies, and

*(Muni, cont'd)* support the work done by our lobbyists. During the last session, our COLA bill needed more members to weigh in. Getting our collective voices heard in 2024 is critical. The best way to stay informed on our legislative agenda for 2024 is by attending an Executive Board or Chapter meeting in person or by Zoom.

We anticipate that our dispute with West Warwick Schools on spousal health care will soon be filed in court. Our legal team has completed all the necessary pre-trial legwork. We await the Town's response to our planned litigation involving West Warwick police and fire disability. Members seeking updates on these matters can reach out to me directly.

The Coventry Town Council established an OPEB trust to set aside funding for retiree post-employment benefits, such as healthcare. Last year, we shared information about the importance of funding OPEBs. West Warwick has an OPEB account, but it requires additional funding. We hope other cities and towns will follow suit and establish and fund OPEB Trusts. Otherwise, OPEBs are line items in local budgets, a pay-as-you-go system that can lead to financing anxieties in the future.

When you read this, Ron Pepin and I will have completed our trip to DC, where we lobbied our Congressional delegation to support legislation to repeal the WEP/GPO. These two programs unfairly penalize many public sector retirees by reducing or eliminating their earned Social Security benefits. While in DC, Ron and I had the opportunity to interact with other AFSCME retirees to share best practices on member engagement and meet with AFSCME leadership.

**RM**

**Etc.**

**Medicare Open Enrollment  
October 7 through December 15**

It's the time of the year to evaluate, renew, or select new health care and prescription drug coverage. Plans selected during open enrollment take effect January 1, 2024.

**Changes to VSP on the Way**

Delta Dental will now administer VSP, a vision care benefit offered by the Chapter. Watch your mail box for information on how this may affect your coverage. It could save you money!

**Update Your Contact Information**

Lately, we've received mail returned by the US Post Office. If you've changed your postal or email addresses, please contact Cindy Leblanc, our office manager, to update your information. Also, provide the best phone number to reach you.

**Amos House**

More than a Meal, a catering business for good run by Amos House, provides the October pre-meeting light lunch. Visit [amoshouse.com](http://amoshouse.com) for more info.

**ERSRI Election Update**

State worker and union member, Yan Li, a candidate for the ERSRI Retirement Board, stops by our October meeting to present why she is running for the Actives seat.

**Newsletter Help Needed**

Show off your writing and editing skills by volunteering to help produce the newsletter. Email [editor94news@gmail.com](mailto:editor94news@gmail.com) if interested.

**Dolores Bresette on...**

So, I started a new job. I'm not one to sit at home watching reruns of **Murder She Wrote** or **The Golden Girls**. I work at the Pro Shop at a local golf course, Button Hole, on the Johnston/ Providence line. My co-workers are retirees like me or college kids.

No, I don't know much about golf. One of my co-workers showed me how to hold a club. But, working the register, the phones, and the POS has come quickly.

Did you know a wedge can be a pitching wedge, sand, or lob? Or, engraved with the letters P, W, PW, G, A, U, or L, or numbers such as 48, 50, 52, 54, 56, 58, 60, or even 64? Please don't ask me to explain the difference. They all look the same. It's like learning a new language or trying to decipher a code.

Button Hole is a teaching facility that offers group and private lessons for kids and adults. On Wednesdays, veterans can play golf for free or hit buckets of balls on the range at no charge. Plus, the course offers discounted rounds of golf for kids and seniors. I've seen a few state retirees using the range, honing their skills.

So, what am I saying? Try something different! Never did I think I would have a job working at a golf course. My next part-time gig may be at an ice rink or an axe-throwing sports club. It's never too late to explore new challenges. **DB**

**On Strike!**

AFSCME President Lee Saunders released the following statement after the United Auto Workers (UAW) announced plans to expand their strike: "UAW workers are striking for all working people. For decades, insatiable corporate greed has driven billionaires to take

**(Strike, cont'd)** and take from hardworking Americans. It's never enough for them, and we're sick of it. Recalling the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Strike, when AFSCME and Dr. King marched with workers for fair pay and justice, we know that job actions, such as the **Stand Up Strike**, can improve the lives of working families. That is why we stand with UAW in this fight, and we will continue to be by their side until they get the dignity and respect they are owed."



Show your support for the striking auto workers by signing the "Are You All in Petition?" found here: <https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/big-3-ceo-petition-1?source=standwithuspage>.

As we finalize this newsletter, negotiations between the Writers Guild of America and the "Hollywood Studios" continue; this is a fight over residuals. Streaming has made watching movies and TV shows easier, but it has led to writers getting paid less due to shorter seasons and residuals.

**FORE!**

*There's still time to register for RI Chapter 94 Day of Golf at Louisquisett Golf Course on Thursday, October 12. The \$20 per golfer fee includes, 9 holes of golf, cart, and lunch. Remit your registration fee to RI Chapter 94 Retirees, 1179 Charles Street, North Providence, RI 02904. Minimum of 36 golfers needed or the event is cancelled! Shotgun start at 10 am, lunch at noon. Volunteers needed to work the event. Email [editor94news@gmail.com](mailto:editor94news@gmail.com) if interested.*