

RI CHAPTER 94 NEWS, NOVEMBER 2023

Legislative and Executive Board Report By the Chapter 94 Leadership



The State General Treasurer, James Diossa, announced the Pension Advisory Working Group members. Created by the legislature, the

Working Group has been tasked to review and analyze the impact of the 2011 “pension reform” on the state's public retirement system. The group is responsible for publishing a report on March 1 of their findings and making recommendations to the Governor, Speaker of the House, and President of the Senate. The first meeting is November 2, at 4 p.m. in the State House and is open to the public. We're curious how the Working Group will address COLAs. You can find the Treasurer's complete announcement at <https://treasury.ri.gov/> by following the press release link.

Our November special guest is Cheryl Tucino from the local office of the Social Security Administration. So, it's timely that we discuss Social Security and Medicare this month. The Social Security Administration announced a 3.2% COLA for 2024, a significant drop from the 8.7% received in 2023. Retirees can also expect an increase in Medicare Part B premiums in 2024, usually announced in November. Part B premiums are automatically deducted from Social Security benefits before being paid out. Monthly Part B premiums are expected to rise to a minimum of \$15 per month.

Next Chapter Meeting

Tuesday, November 14@ 1 pm
RI Council 94, Lower Level
1179 Charles St, No. Providence

Special Guest

Cheryl Tucino
Social Security Administration

Food for Thought

*Attending the November meeting in person?
Pre-meeting light lunch and snacks, 12:30 pm*

Questions?

Contact Chapter 94 Vice Presidents

Russ Marsocci, Muni VP

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Ron Pepin, State VP

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ron.pepin.chapter94@gmail.com

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

November 7

RI Special Election

December 12

Annual Holiday Celebration
**Reservation form included
in this newsletter.**

December 26 - January 31

ERSRI Retirement Board Election

January 9

Monthly Chapter Meeting
Special Guest James Diossa
RI General Treasurer

During a recent visit to Washington, DC, Ron Pepin and Russ Marsocci lobbied for Chapter 94 and AFSCME Retirees, as mentioned in the October newsletter. Ron and Russ had the opportunity to speak to Rhode Island's elected federal officials and receive their complete support for our union's efforts to protect Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. They urged our Congressional delegates not to cut these critical programs. Additionally, Ron and Russ asked our Congressional representatives to oppose any task force or budget commission aimed at cutting these programs. They asked our delegates to support House Bill HR82 and Senate Bill S597, the Social Security Fairness Act. These bills would repeal the Government Offset Pension and the Windfall Elimination Provision, two programs that reduce Social Security benefits for many public sector retirees.

State Report

State Vice President Ron Pepin took a much-needed mini vacation. Look for state updates in the next newsletter.

Muni Report, Russ Marsocci

We're proceeding with our planned litigation to fight unilateral changes to disability retirement benefits affecting West Warwick police and firefighters hired before September 2021. Also, our lawsuit against West Warwick Schools to restore retiree spousal health care benefits is ready for court, as the depositions and affidavits have been completed.

The Newport School Committee (NSC) made plans to change the health benefits of retired teachers and municipal employees. However, a lawsuit was filed to stop the changes, and over several years, negotiations with the NSC resulted in the transition of the group to Medicare. In

Changes Coming to our Vision Care Benefit

Delta Dental is the new administrator for our vision care benefit, formerly called VSP. The program, with a new moniker, **DeltaVision**, (yes, it is one word), may help members save even more. You may have already received a mailing with information about DeltaVision that includes an enrollment form.

If you subscribed to the old benefit and want to continue vision coverage, you must complete a new DeltaVision enrollment form. Failure to complete and return an enrollment form will end your vision benefit. Your current membership will not automatically rollover to DeltaVision.

Chapter 94 membership is a prerequisite to obtain DeltaVision. Contact the Office if you have questions about your membership status.

2021, a consent judgment was entered, requiring NSC to continue providing benefits that matched what the retirees had before the changes. However, during the transition, the school department stopped paying healthcare buybacks to some retirees with spouses who also retired from the school department. The NSC believed the buyback was inconsistent with the contract language, even though it had been agreed upon for many years. A second lawsuit was filed in 2021 by five couples with unpaid buybacks, as the school department stopped paying upon the death of their spouses. Our legal team is on top of this. I'll provide more information next month. **RM**

ICYMI, That's Amore, the RI Secretary of State

Members attending the October meeting were delighted to hear Gregg Amore, the RI Secretary of State (SOS). What an excellent presentation. Amore, a former educator and state legislator, spoke passionately about civic education and

his plans to bring civic education to schools, teachers, community groups, senior centers, and others interested in civic responsibility. He believes the program will create a new generation of knowledgeable citizens. Amore lamented that the polarization of our society means that we no longer listen to opposing points of view; it has become easier to yell and scream. Lessons in civics and civic engagement could help erase this divide and allow us to take individual and collective actions to benefit our State. A healthy democracy depends on civic education and engagement.

Amore also explained the problems with false signatures that surfaced during the lead-up to the primary election for the CD-1 seat.

The RI Board of Elections is separate from the Office of the Secretary of State, and according to Amore, this separation is crucial to election integrity. The SOS handles voter information and mail applications while the BOE counts and certifies results.

Amore suggested that retirees may want to opt for a Voter ID card to use at the polls, especially if they are weary of identity theft or no longer have a driver's license. Members can call the SOS office at 401-222-2340 to request a voter ID. ***(Recap by Mary Jane Anthony).***

Holiday Party

At our annual holiday party, as we celebrate the season of giving, we take the opportunity to recognize activists for their extraordinary work on behalf of retirees and labor by presenting the John H. Slaven Jr. Award. Previously, we honored labor leaders, senior and retiree advocates, and public officials. The award keeps the memory of John Slaven alive. He was a

founding member of Chapter 94 and the national retiree program at AFSCME.

Three years ago, we created the Bronstein-Gillis Award to recognize members' work on behalf of the Chapter. This award salutes one of our own and memorializes the late Milton Bronstein and Jim Gillis, beloved Chapter 94 leaders. Under their watch, the Chapter grew, becoming a formidable voice for retirees. Contact Ron Pepin or Russ Marsocci if you want to help the Executive Board identify candidates for future awards.

Reservations and payment for the 2023 Holiday Celebration and Awards ceremony are due December 5. No payments will be taken at the door.

Dolores Takes on Halloween

As Halloween quickly approaches, memories of my childhood come flooding back. I recall my father not allowing my brother and me to go trick-or-treating. Instead, we would hand out candy to the local kids who came to our house. Although it was amusing to see our friends and neighbors dressed in their costumes, I couldn't help but wish I could join them in their door-to-door adventures.

When my first son was born, we dressed him up at eight months old and went trick or treating. You could say it was more about showing him off than receiving treats, but maybe not.

Maybe I wanted to relive my childhood, which lacked the excitement of Halloween and the thrill of collecting candies. However, I enjoy driving around the neighborhoods today and appreciating the spooky decorations. I have even

visited haunted mazes and enjoyed them thoroughly. I saw one in nearby Seekonk and had a fantastic experience. I often wonder what my father would have said about that. **DB**

Bake Sale to Benefit Veterans

The local office of the Veterans Health Administration, is holding its 2023 Bake Sale and Raffle on **Friday, December 8**, at the VA Hospital, 830 Chalkstone Avenue, Providence, RI 02908.

Want to help?

The VA needs baked goods, pizza, gift certificates, giftware items, even cash contributions to seed the bake sale and/or use for raffle prizes. Proceeds from this fundraiser will directly benefit Veterans seeking services at the Providence VA Medical Center.

For more info, contact Donna Russillo, Chief, VA Center for Development and Civic Engagement, at 401-273-7100, ext. 12023, Monday through Friday.

Swing and Miss

We canceled the Chapter 94 golf outing due to the low number of registrations. We will try again next year and look for a late Summer date. Please send course suggestions and format ideas to editor94news@gmail.com.

Thank You, Yan Li

Yan Li, candidate for the “actives” seat on the ERSRI Retirement Board, joined us at the October meeting and talked about running. Her focus is investments. Encourage your active state worker friends and family members to vote in the ERSI election and urge them to cast their ballots for Yan Li, a proud member of the DEM local at Council 94.

Lunch by Amos House

As part of its business for good program, Amos House runs More than a Meal, a catering service that provides great food and creates second chance opportunities for Rhode Islanders entering or re-entering the workforce. That’s why we’ve asked Amos House and its More than a Meal program to cater the light lunches served at our monthly meetings this Fall.

This Providence based non-profit provides shelter, food and nutrition programs, transitional housing, and other support services to Rhode Islanders struggling with homelessness and poverty. Its motto, “Helping People Help Themselves,” is ingrained in the initiatives that provide pathways toward self-sufficiency and stability. Go to amoshouse.com for information.

Chapter 94 Helps

Chapter 94 made a generous donation to our national union’s disaster relief fund, to help members of our AFSCME family who lost their homes and their livelihoods due to the Lahaina, Maui fire. These funds provide assistance in the immediate aftermath of a disaster or emergency when resources are really needed. Being in a union means having each other’s backs, and that is why we made this donation.

Good and Welfare Committee

The Executive Board is seeking one or two members to head a newly formed Good and Welfare Committee. This committee will be responsible for reaching out to Chapter members during good times and in times of difficulty. If you're interested in being a part of this committee, please contact Russ Marsocci. Let’s work together to support our members!

Hello, My Name is....

We have some extraordinary Executive Board members, all involved in the community. We asked Chapter 94 Executive Board members to share an experience so that retirees can learn more about them. Read on!

Linda Folcarelli, Chapter 94 Treasurer

As an Italo-American Club of Rhode Island member, I marched in the Columbus Day Parade on Sunday, October 8th. Along with three other Club members, we carried our banner with pride. The Italo-American Club has a long-standing tradition of participating in this parade, and it was an honor to continue that tradition.

As a Johnston Councilwoman, I attended the unveiling of the Columbus Statue at Johnston Memorial Park's Island on October 9th. Johnston is known for its Italian-American heritage, boasting the second-largest Italian population in the country.

The City of Providence initially owned the Columbus statue until former Providence Mayor Joseph R. Paolino, Jr. purchased and stored it. Later, Paolino offered the statue to Johnston, and Mayor Joseph M. Polisena, Jr. announced that the statue would be relocated to the island at the Johnston War Memorial Park. **LF**

Donna Folcarelli, Chapter 94 Secretary

I was privileged to participate in last month's Columbus Day Parade in Federal Hill with the Italo American Club of Rhode Island. It was a memorable experience to ride in my cousin's vintage Volkswagen Beetle convertible with my name and title on both sides of the car. I am proud to be the first woman serving on the Board of Directors for the Italo American Club.

Also, I hold the position of Secretary to the Club, which is the oldest Italian-American club in the United States, founded in 1896. The Club is still going strong. If you want to learn more about the Italo-American Club of Rhode Island, visit <https://italoamericanclubofri.com/>. You can complete a membership application on the Club's website.

Jamie Reilly, Chapter 94 Exec Board Member

I've been a long Chapter 94 activist, a current Executive Board member, and a former trustee. I've been told my voice is often heard. But I do have a fun side. **DF**

Two weeks ago, my husband and I drove to the Big Apple Orchard in Wrentham on a Sunday. Fall is the ideal time to visit a local apple orchard. Living in southern New England gives us many choices. We bought locally grown apples, fresher because they were not trucked from the Midwest or Northwest. They were crispier, juicier, and more flavorful than apples harvested from far away. I can attest to the flavor. Of course, I couldn't resist donuts and a caramel apple.

So what happened to all the apples that we brought home? Made apple crisps, which were quite tasty! Next weekend, weather permitting, take a leisurely drive to a local orchard. Most are open until Thanksgiving. **JR**

Mary Jane Anthony, Chapter 94 Trustee

She's too shy to brag about her baking prowess, but if you have attended a meeting in person, Mary Jane is the woman behind the snacks most of us eagerly consume. While at the Holiday Party, say hello to Mary Jane. She may share her recipes.