

NEWSLETTER

Washington State School Retirees' Association



In this newsletter you'll get a legislative update and details about our next event.

Inspiration from an Educator and Astronaut



Join us on Tuesday, February 18, 2025 for guest speaker, Dottie Metcalf-Lindenburger. Dottie is a retired astronaut and educator. She was one of the few women to visit the space station. Her presentation "Launching BIG Dreams" will outline her personal journey and deliver the message that setting high goals, and working every day to

achieve them, pays off. See more about Dottie in this newsletter.

We will have coffee hour starting at 10:30 AM and the presentation will start at 11:00 at our usual meeting place:

Our Saviors Lutheran Church
215 Mukilteo Blvd, Everett

We will not be serving lunch at this event but will have some treats. Please feel free to bring your own lunch.

The event is free and open to members and non-members. Please consider making a donation to our scholarship fund.

So that we will know how many to set up for, please call Marianne Harvey at 425-238-3124 or 425-348-4993 or email Ken Harvey at kenwes55@comcast.net and let us know if you plan to attend.

This would be a great event to invite a friend!

Dottie Metcalf-Lindenburger

Born on May 2, 1975, in Colorado Springs, Colorado, Dottie was raised by parents who were both educators, fostering her early interest in science and learning. She graduated from Fort Collins High School in Colorado and pursued geology at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, earning her Bachelor of Science degree in 1997. She later obtained her teaching certification from Central Washington University in 1999. In 2016, she furthered her education by earning a master's degree in geology from the University of Washington.

Dottie taught earth science and astronomy at Hudson's Bay High School in Vancouver, Washington, for five years. Her passion for space was evident in her teaching, inspiring many of her students. Her journey to becoming an astronaut began when a student's question about how astronauts manage basic needs in space led her to discover NASA's call for educator astronauts.

In 2004, Dottie was selected by NASA as an educator mission specialist, becoming the first Space Camp alumna to become an astronaut. She served as a mission specialist on the STS-131 mission aboard the Space Shuttle Discovery in April 2010, a 15-day resupply mission to the International Space Station. During this mission, the crew delivered over 27,000 pounds of hardware, supplies, and equipment to the ISS.

Beyond her spaceflight, Dottie commanded the NEEMO 16 undersea exploration mission in June 2012, living and working underwater for 12 days to simulate space exploration conditions. She retired from NASA in 2014 and relocated to the Seattle area.

After retiring from NASA, Dottie dedicated herself to promoting STEM education. Residing in Lake Forest Park near Seattle, she engages with students and communities to inspire interest in science and technology. Her experiences as both an educator and an astronaut provide her with a unique perspective on the importance of education and exploration.

Throughout her career, Dottie has received numerous accolades, including being an inaugural inductee into the Space Camp Hall of Fame in 2007. Her journey from teacher to astronaut exemplifies the power of education and the pursuit of one's dreams.

Dottie Metcalf-Lindenburger's story is a testament to the impact of educators and the boundless possibilities that arise from a passion for learning and exploration.

Today, January 10, 2025 is the Friday before the 2025 legislative session opens on Monday, January 13. This session will be one of intense struggle for every stakeholder with a claim on state money.

Last November 5, 2024 voters defeated **Initiative 2109** that would have repealed the **Capital Gains Tax**, a major fundraiser for the state budget. They also defeated **Initiative 2117** that tried to repeal Washington's **Climate Commitment Act**, a law that not only protects our environment but also raises significant funds for the state. Disaster averted- we thought!

Then on November 12 the **Select Committee on Pension Policy** finally endorsed a bill proposing a **permanent and ongoing COLA for PERS and TRS Plan 1 retirees**. Even budget conscious Senator June Robinson voted to endorse and send the bill to the full legislature, but she warned that it faced little success in the coming session because of an anticipated budget shortfall.

It wasn't long before we learned just how serious that shortfall would be. Even after saving the **Capital Gains Tax** and the **Climate Commitment Act** the state is facing a deficit of between \$10 and \$16 billion over the next four years.

This session the legislature must approve a balanced budget for the next biennium (two years). That budget was roughly \$72 billion last biennium. Take half of that four year shortfall and it's still over \$7 billion, a 10% cut in budget funding.

We will see new taxes and serious program and staffing cuts, the likes of which we have not seen since 2011; that's before the tenure of most of our current legislators.

How did this happen? The official line is that the needs of the state have grown and the anticipated income did not increase as rapidly as expected. Admittedly, the state has been on a spending spree in recent years. During Governor Inslee's long tenure the budget actually doubled from \$36 to \$72 billion. Some people say that we just got too comfortable spending federal Covid funds in interesting ways, and now they're gone!

What about our (almost) promised Plan 1 COLA? Hang on to your hats and your medical benefits because this session could be a lot like what happened in 2011!

There is one bright ray of light ahead. **Senator June Robinson** (legislative District 38) has filed a bill this session, **Senate Bill 5085**; it would create a new retirement program called the **Legacy Retirement System** that would combine the assets and liabilities of **LEOFF 1** (Law Enforcement and Fire Fighters) with those of the **PERS 1** and **TRS 1** Retirement Plans.

Each group's benefits would experience no negative change. LEOFF 1 retirees would keep their fully-paid medical and fully-indexed COLA just like before. However, since their plan is overfunded by about \$2 billion, that money would pay off the PERS 1 and TRS 1 unfunded liabilities and **allow PERS 1 and TRS 1 retirees to finally receive a permanent, ongoing COLA of up to 3%.**

Naturally, the 6,000 LEOFF 1 retirees want that money for another payout like they enjoyed in 2022 which averaged \$36,000 per retiree. If the whole \$2 billion was paid out, they would get over \$300,000 each.

But wait, that really isn't their money. 78% of the funds that created LEOFF 1 came from the state, and since the year 2000 no active LEOFF 1 members have had to pay anything toward their retirement!

Any number of legislators will want that money. There is no way that \$2 billion will be able to just sit around this session gathering interest. We say, **let's pass Senator Robinson's Senate Bill 5085**, and use that \$2 billion to provide some badly needed equity within the retirement system. **The amazing thing is that all this would not cost the state any money! The money is already there!**

During the week of January 27 through 31 the **WSSRA Legislative Team** will be holding video meetings with state legislators about our issues. If you want to attend as a constituent and add your two cents, please contact Tim Knopf at timknopf1@yahoo.com and give him your name, legislative district and email. He'll get back to you and arrange for you to join a video meeting from the comfort of your home.

Let your legislators know what you want to happen to that \$2 billion and how you feel about **Senate Bill 5085!**

In late February your legislative team will be in Olympia for face-to-face meetings with your legislators, and as the session proceeds we'll keep you posted on all that's happening. As **WSSRA Legislative Coordinator Emmett Mills** said, "It's going to be a wild ride!"

Sincerely,

Tim Knopf

WSSRAS Legislative Committee

**SNO-ISLE
WSSRA UNIT #22**

10715 Birch Drive NW
Marysville WA 98271

**RETURN SERVICE
REQUESTED**



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Scholarships—Liz Meisner

Legislative—Tim Knopf

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Newsletter—David Davis

Health—Open

Friendship—Brenda Leider, Sue Rookaird, Anne Spence

STATE REPRESENTATIVES

Legislative Committee—Tim Knopf

District 1 Representative—Ken Harvey

UPCOMING DATES

February 18—Dottie Metcalf-Lindenburger (Former NASA astronaut)

March 18—TBA

April 15—TBA

May 20—Scholarship Tea

June 2-4—2025 78th Annual WSSRA Convention in Yakima