

NEA RA Chicago 2022

Change, Motivation, Action

“Change is good!” How often does one hear that? Is there agreement with that statement? This year there were many changes at the RA (Representative Assembly). First, an elected delegate could participate in the hybrid model and do everything online. Out of five Mideastern retired delegates, only one participated in person. Additionally, only eighteen retired PA delegates participated in person. There were many rules and guidelines – wear a mask at all times, unless eating. These masks had to be N95. Every three days delegates had to do a COVID test and register the results on a program called Return-Safe. If the phone registered green, the delegate received a sticker on their name badge for the day. This allowed entrance in to the PA Caucus and RA. No negative test, no entrance! Delegates also had the opportunity to select wearing green, yellow, or red rubber bracelets. The colors symbolized preference for proximity to other delegates. Chairs on the RA floor were paired two by two and three feet apart. Voting occurred with a “button” on the phone (note photo). No voice votes or roll calls! A specified amount of time was set aside for NBI’s (New Business Items). If the RA did not get to all 85 NBI’s in that amount of time, the NBI would not be referred to the appropriate committee as in the past. It was “dropped.” NBI “makers” were encouraged to bundle items with other items in order to have discussion. Many makers did bundle their item so the topic would be debated.

President Sara Borgman dropped the gavel for NEA Retired with, “We are NEA Retired and we are committed, our commitment continues. If you’re not, why not? Are you signed up to get involved? What have you

committed to do?” She reminded us of Jimmy Carter’s philosophy. “If a person makes up their mind to do their best each day, they will succeed. Have members done their best? If not, why not? Winston Churchill believed the price of greatness is what you’re willing to do. It is more important at this time in our lives to worry about issues: voting, democracy, social security, Medicare, prescription costs and more.” PSEA Retired responded to the call. We received the award as the state with the largest increase of NEA Retired membership. The recognition is for 1,128 new members. (Note the photo of Sara Borgman presenting the award to PSEA Retired President Mary Moran and Vice President Patsy Tallarico.) Other states met calls, too. “Thank you for all you have done, all you do, and all you will do,” encouraged NEA Vice President Princess Moss.

Prior to the RA, Congress unknowingly addressed some of our NBI’s (New Business Items). One of these dealt with gun violence. This is the first time in decades gun violence has been addressed and NEA helped lead the movement. Our NBI continued with a call to action so that all students and educators are safe. This action is to be a unified response to the rise in violence affecting our children and families. It would be with joint organizing partners in communities across the country. Another topic of concern is the federal social security offset that prevents members from living with independence and dignity in retirement. Fifteen states reduce retirement benefits for public service pensions. Fortunately, this is being addressed and PA is not one of the states. Another hot topic was defense of abortion and reproductive rights. NBI’s continued to cover a wide range of topics: teaching financial literacy, the environment, School Board training, ESP (Education Support Personnel) substitute shortage, mental health services, suicide, LGBTQ+ legislation, bereavement leave for pregnancy loss, COVID, human trafficking, and many more.

One activity that did not change was special speakers with motivating speeches. First, President Joe Biden addressed delegates through video. He and Vice President Kamala Harris appreciate us and understand our needs. “We heard you about students falling behind cause of COVID, lead out of water, high speed internet, and we have more to do,” Harris related. She continued by talking about “teachers being able to teach with safety, resources, and the respect they deserve...much of this is not accepted by the extreme leaders. These leaders are taking our freedom away. Teachers are essential to the future of democracy. The fight for justice is not linear, it must be fought for each generation. It won’t last, it won’t be permanent.” NEA President Becky Pringle continued with, “We cannot accept the banning of books, turning back the hands of time stripping the right to vote, disrespect in our careers. We need to be bringing joy and justice. Never, ever accept the unacceptable!” Other speakers included the Teacher of the Year, ESP of the Year, Higher Educator of the Year, the NEA Executive Director, the Governor of Illinois and many more. All presentations were memorable. The most unique were some cast members from Abbott Elementary. They recognize how hard teachers work. For more information about speakers and New Business Items, go to nea.org/ra. The synopsis here is only part of an enriching NEA RA!

Political power is how we change. NEA members are called on to help save the freedoms we have. It is time... what is the verdict? Is change good?

Lynne Kelly