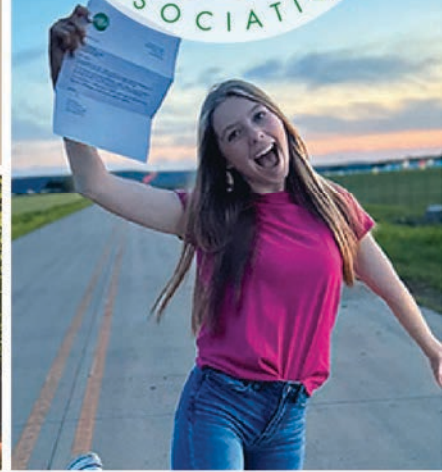


ASEA NEWS

Official Newsletter of the Arkansas State Employees Association



**Record Recipients
Receive JF Motes
Scholarship!** (Page 10)

President's Report

By Jeff Jackson – Board President

Spring is finally here which means it's time to get out and enjoy these wonderfully cool days as much as possible. The sweltering heat of summer will return before we know it! Just a few days ago, we wrapped up the 94th General Assembly. We were extremely disappointed in the outcome of the promised pay plan, but we did see several bills pass that will have a positive impact on state employees. (Please read the legislative summary below.)

Even though we didn't end the session with a new pay plan, I could not be prouder of the efforts of the ASEA staff this session. Rest assured, our work on the pay plan is far from over. John and Nick have been working with state leaders to find a way to implement a new pay plan and for any alternative methods to find a solution to state employee pay in the interim.

The work of ASEA is not done. We didn't stop fighting and will continue working to advocate for a new pay plan and work with our Governor and Legislators to ensure state employees are not forgotten.

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Director's Report

By John Bridges – ASEA Director

Disappointed. That sums up our feelings about the pay plan not being approved during the Legislative session. We still have hope. Our new Governor has requested a new workforce study to be conducted by her team and the deadline to present the report is this fall. ASEA will continue to communicate the importance of a new plan. Difficulties with retention and attracting new hires continue to be key workforce issues.

We did have some bright spots this session with the extension of maternity leave and creating new leave policy related to fostering and adoption of a child. We were also successful in passing a bill that would allow the state employees voluntary insurance products available via payroll deduction to be managed by state employees. The success of ARSEBA has allowed us to keep our membership fees the same for over a decade and has afforded us the opportunity to award \$140,000 in scholarships to our members and their families. This year we awarded a record-breaking \$41,000 in-state scholarships! The ability to give back to state employees is not limited to just scholarships. We continue to sponsor state employee continuing education conferences, give back to employee families in the form of benevolence payments, and purchase Christmas gifts for children in state foster care programs.

"The pay plan was not approved during the last legislative session. But we still have hope."



Extension of maternity leave



New leave policy related to fostering & adoption



Bill passed for voluntary insurance products to be managed by state employees



\$140,000 in scholarships awarded in the last decade



Governor Sarah Sanders signs the maternity and foster care leave extension bill into law alongside, L to R, DHS Secretary Kristi Putnam, Representative DeAnn Vaught, Senator Missy Irvin, and Laura Cima of the Department of Health.



Director of Governmental Affairs Report

Nicholas Poole, MPA

Each legislative session presents its challenges, and this session was particularly challenging due to high turnovers among legislators and a new governor. Governor Sarah Sanders introduced her signature legislation, The Learns Act, which aimed to completely overhaul the education system and provide higher pay for teachers. However, the bill for The Learns Act was released a month after the session had started causing a delay in all appropriations bills as legislators were uncertain about its financial implications.

One disappointing aspect of the session was the failure of the Legislature to pass the pay plan despite the state having a large surplus. During my conversation with the governor at the capitol, it was evident that she values the hard work of state employees and appreciates their efforts in providing services to all Arkansans. Former Governor Asa Hutchinson had made it a priority of his administration to pass a new pay plan for state employees; his administration drafted the proposal and allocated funds for it, and legislators seemed to be supportive as well. Governor Sarah Sanders has directed her administration to review the proposed pay plan to provide alternative options for sections of the pay plan that she would like altered. I have spoken with some high-ranking legislators, and they are optimistic that a new pay plan will be passed during the Fiscal Session which is scheduled to begin in January 2024. Rest assured, ASEA will continue to lobby and foster a strong relationship with the new administration to ensure the successful passage of a new pay plan and other initiatives to protect and to support state employees.

Join ASEA Today, or Refer a New Member!

Receive a YETI for every six new members you refer!

Who wants a free Yeti tumbler? For every six members you recruit to join ASEA, we will let you pick out your own color and ship it to your office! You can use the traditional yellow paper enrollment forms, or sign them up super-fast via our website. Just don't forget to submit a yellow form with the new member's name and your name on the "referred by" section. To request additional yellow cards please contact Sharon at sbuckholts@aseaar.org.

HOW TO QUALIFY

Go to www.aseaar.org to start signing up new members. We will keep track of your progress and notify you when you qualify. All active and retiree members qualify for recruiting.



"I have spoken with some high-ranking legislators, and they are optimistic that a new pay plan will be passed during the Fiscal Session which is scheduled to begin in January 2024."



Legislative Session Review

PAY PLAN

Article from the Arkansas Democrat Gazette

STATE EMPLOYEE PAY

Sanders announced Wednesday that she will not support a broad-based pay plan increase in state government's employee classification and compensation bill.

In a letter to state Transformation and Shared Services Secretary Joseph Wood, the governor wrote that Arkansas taxpayers should not be saddled with the \$80 million price tag for such a proposal that doesn't consider the strategic needs in education, public safety, health care and corrections.

"Today, I am directing the Department of Transformation and Shared Services to review and rework the existing classification and compensation structure of the state," Sanders wrote in her letter. "Arkansas should not have more state employees per capita than all our surrounding states. It's long past time to reduce the size and scope of government, identify efficiencies, and responsibly phase out the income tax."

John Bridges, executive director of the Arkansas State Employees Association, said Thursday that "we are very discouraged to learn that Governor Sanders has declined to implement the reevaluation of the state employees' pay plan, which is estimated to cost \$41 million" in general revenue.

"It has been seven years since the last time the salary ranges for state employees have been adjusted and our members have been anxiously awaiting the announced revised pay plan, which was developed after a comprehensive study by the Office of Personnel Management," he said in a written statement.

"We hear from agency managers that the failure to update the pay plan has made it difficult to recruit and retain talented employees, especially when the pay is already much lower than private business," Bridges said. "We look forward to working with Governor Sanders to find solutions that will fit with her strategic priorities while recognizing the hard work of 23,000 state employees all over the state."

The state's unallocated general revenue allotment reserve balance is \$1.34 billion, according to Hardin. The state's catastrophic reserve fund balance is \$1.36 billion, he said, and the state's restricted reserve fund balance is \$55.37 million.

In addition, the state Department of Finance and Administration's Nov. 10 forecast projects a general revenue surplus of \$598.1 million at the end of fiscal 2023.

In 2022 former Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson directed the Office of Personal Management (OPM) to develop a new pay plan for state employees. The director of OPM presented the plan to legislators, and it initially seemed like it would pass. However, the plan ultimately failed to pass, much to the surprise of the Arkansas State Employees Association (ASEA). Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders had different priorities at the time, including education, criminal justice, and tax cuts bills.

Recently, Sanders announced that she will not support a broad-based pay plan increase for state employees, citing the high cost of such a proposal and the need to focus on strategic needs in education, public safety, health care, and corrections. Instead, she has directed the Department of Transformation and Shared Services to review and rework the existing classification and compensation structure of the state. John Bridges, executive director of ASEA, expressed disappointment with Sanders'

ASEA remains committed to working with Sanders and other state leaders to find a solution that addresses the needs of state employees while also considering the state's budgetary constraints.

decision, noting that it has been seven years since the last time the salary ranges for state employees were adjusted. He added that failing to update the pay plan has made it difficult to recruit and retain talented employees.

Despite Sanders' concerns about the cost of the proposal, the state has significant reserves, including an unallocated general revenue allotment reserve balance of \$1.34 billion, a catastrophic reserve fund balance of \$1.36 billion, and a restricted reserve fund balance of \$55.37 million. Additionally, the state Department of Finance and Administration projects a general revenue surplus of \$598.1 million at the end of fiscal year 2023. ASEA remains committed to working with Sanders and other state leaders to find a solution that addresses the needs of state employees while also considering the state's budgetary constraints.

Nationwide Discounts Are Available to Our Members!

ASEA members get access to exclusive discounts on amusement parks, dining, retailers, and much more. You will receive a lot from your ASEA membership! Visit www.aseaar.org to learn more.




2023 Discounts Available!

2023 Concert Series	2023 Special Events
June 3 We the Kingdom June 10 Fuel and Vertical Horizon June 17 Tesla June 24 Joe Nichols July 1 Hanson July 8 Skillet July 15 Clay Walker July 22 Smash Mouth July 29 Crowder August 5 GINUWINE August 12 Queensrÿche w/ special guest Winger August 19 Cooper Alan w/ special guest Alexandra Kay August 26 Dylan Scott September 3 Hispanic Heritage Concert	June 4 Superhero Day July 7 Foam Party July 10, 17 & 24 Mermaid Mondays July 14 Luau Party July 21 Birthday Bash Sept 30 - Oct 29 Magic Screams

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 SEASON PASS 2023 \$64⁹⁹ each	 GOLD SEASON PASS 2023 \$139⁹⁸ each
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- Scan the QR code on this page or visit MagicSprings.com and click the "Discount Partner Store" button at the top of the page
- Click "BUY NOW"
- Enter your access code in the box
- Choose the ticket or pass you want and click BUY NOW

ACCESS CODE: Call 501-378-0187

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Retiree News



United Healthcare has upcoming telephonic educational seminars this spring along with another slate of townhall meetings this fall. Be sure and save the date when they are scheduled to come to your town.

As always thank you for being a member of ASEA. If you have any questions or comments, you can call us at 501-378-0187 or email me at jbridges@aseaar.org.

Important United Healthcare Information for Retirees:



ARBenefits Group Medicare Advantage (PPO) Members - First a little health, then a little wealth

Complete your annual physical or wellness visit with your primary care provider (PCP) and earn a **\$50** reward¹.

Live healthier. Start now.

Preventive care can help detect problems early when they may be more treatable. With your plan, you don't have to wait a year between your annual physical or wellness visits. We recommend you schedule as soon as possible to get a time and day that fits your needs. And, you can combine your annual physical and wellness visits into a single convenient appointment.

A physical exam includes:

- Head-to-toe examination
- Blood sugar test
- Cholesterol test

A wellness visit includes:

- Blood pressure check
- Height and weight measurement
- Body mass index (BMI) test

Schedule today and you're on your way to earn at least **\$50** in rewards.

1. Call your provider and schedule your annual physical or wellness visit
2. Once completed, visit myuhcmedicare.com/retiree/rewards or call **1-844-488-3953**, TTY **711**, 8 a.m.-8 p.m. local time, Monday – Friday, to report and earn at least **\$50** in rewards

¹ This reward only applies to getting an annual physical or wellness visit. Your annual physical or wellness visit must be completed and reported by December 31, 2023, to be eligible.

ARBenefits Group Medicare Advantage (PPO) Members - Make sure your contact information is up-to-date

It's important to have your current phone number and email address on file so you can be connected to additional programs and services offered by your plan, such as:

- UnitedHealthcare® HouseCalls
- Fitness program
- Online access to your:
 - Claims, prescriptions, and Explanation of Benefits (EOBs)
 - Benefit information, including the provider search directory
 - Health & Wellness content, such as:
 - Renew magazine and Renew rewards
 - Recipes, brain games and learning courses
- Plus, receive exclusive emails about your plan throughout the year⁷

It's easy! You have the option to update your contact information in 2 ways:



Online - Register or log-in to your plan website and go to Account/Profile → Account Settings. To register, have your member ID card handy and follow these 3 simple steps:

1. Visit retiree.uhc.com/ARBenefits and click "Register Now"
2. Enter your member ID exactly as it appears on your member ID card, and your date of birth
3. Enter your email address and create your username and password



By Telephone - You can also call UnitedHealthcare at **1-844-488-3953**, TTY **711**, 8 a.m.-8 p.m. local time, Monday – Friday.



ARBenefits Group Medicare Advantage (PPO) Members – UnitedHealthcare® HouseCalls

What is HouseCalls?

HouseCalls is a yearly in-home preventive care visit* from a UnitedHealthcare health care practitioner at no additional cost to you.

HouseCalls is all about you

A HouseCalls visit is optional and designed to support, but not take the place of, your regular doctor's care. Your visit focuses on your overall well-being and is intended to be an extra layer of care, providing you valuable 1-on-1 time you don't always get in the doctor's office.



Every visit includes tailored recommendations on health care screenings and a chance to:

- Receive education, prevention tips, and care
- Get advice and ask questions on how to manage your health conditions
- Review your current medications

Help get referrals to other health services, and more



At the end of the visit, your health care practitioner will leave you with a health checklist. They will also send a summary to your primary care provider (PCP).



Earn a **\$50** Visa Reward card when you complete your visit in 2023.

Get started today. Schedule a visit.

Call toll-free **1-844-488-3953**, TTY **711**, 8 a.m.-8 p.m. local time, Monday – Friday. You will receive an appointment reminder with tips to help you prepare for your visit.

You can also learn more about HouseCalls and other programs available to you as an ARBenefits Group Medicare Advantage (PPO) member online at uhcvirtualretiree.com/ARBenefits.

*HouseCalls may not be available in all areas.





Grant Wallace

New Director of the Employee Benefits Division

Meet the new Director of the Employee Benefits Division Grant Wallace. Director Wallace and his team oversee the administration and management of the active and retired state employee health insurance plan. ASEA sat down with Grant to discuss his vision for EBD and learn a little more about him.

Grant was born and raised in Little Rock, graduated from Texas Tech, and has served in high-level government positions in Washington DC and most recently served as Chief Deputy Treasurer for former Arkansas Treasurer Dennis Milligan.

How would you describe your leadership style?

As a leader, I believe in empowering people both to succeed and to fail. Empowerment means providing all the tools and supports needed for you to be successful however you define success while accomplishing the mission and goals of our work. It also means understanding failure is where we learn, grow and better ourselves. As long as the failure was not malicious, illegal, or unethical, then there is nothing that cannot be corrected. This allows for the space necessary for people to innovate and find better solutions to the challenges we always face in doing work.

What are your immediate priorities and long-term goals for the Employee Benefits Division?

My immediate goals are to focus on preparing the Plan for the 2024 coverage year; study the current operating model for EBD; meet as many of our partners as possible; and listen more than talk.

My long-term goals are to build an organization that is driven to be the best service organization in state government leveraging technology, training, communication, and relationships. We will have a member first approach in all we do and be as transparent as possible in all aspects of our work.

I am hyper focused on communication, education, and consistency. I feel if we can do those things correct everything else will fall into its proper place.

Are there any new projects or services on the horizon that you would like to let us in on?

As you can imagine with any new leadership there is always a lot going on. We are in the process of implementing a new Pharmacy Benefits Manager, which will only impact members who are active or are enrolled in the traditional employee coverage. It will not impact anyone enrolled in the UnitedHealthcare Medicare Advantage Group PPO plan.

We are going to start working with the leadership of AESA and ARSEBA to develop the rules and processes around the voluntary products being offered. We are really excited to be able to build a new level to our existing relationship.

Finally, we are starting work behind the scenes to make our member experience better; creating self-service opportunities where possible; designing a more user friendly ARBenefits portal for members and benefit coordinators; and launching new communication tools to help educate and inform all our members.

What's the best advice that someone has given you, and why was it so helpful?

I have been very fortunate to be the recipient of a lot of good advice, but the one that is sticking out in my mind recently is, "we have all we need."

It has been so helpful in managing my stress and anxiety in my work and personal life because we truly do have all we need. Sure, we may want more time, money, or whatever, but if we focus on what we do have and manage those resources to the most effective and efficient manner possible we have all we need. Stop focusing on what we don't have and focus on what we do.

What do you like to do when you are not leading EBD?

When not at EBD, I love to spend time with my family, friends, and do work at my church.

Announcements & Events

Performance Pay Update

As of the writing of this newsletter we have not seen an official memo nor heard if the pay has been approved. We see no reason that it will not be approved. Last year each agency could use up to 5% of their respective payroll budget to fund the performance increases. As soon as we get official information, we will post it to our State Employees News blog and email to our members.

Meet newly appointed board member

Curt Carson

Mr. Carson works in law enforcement with DHS. He will represent District 7c (Saline, Clark, Garland, Grant, and Hot Springs.)



Save the Date!

The annual meeting will be held in person and via Zoom on August 19th at 10AM. Request a Zoom link or RSVP to sbuckholts@aseaar.org.

Join ASEA Today!

Scan the code to visit www.aseaar.org and join online! After joining, members can request a "Members Only Password" by emailing to sbuckholts@aseaar.org to gain access to password-protected portions of the website.



ASEA Board

There are positions expiring which if you are interested you may apply to challenge the incumbents. To learn the rules of serving on the board, how to apply, and to access the application please visit aseaar.org and go to the "About" menu. There also a few vacant board positions.

Passing of Long Serving Board Member

Helen Emerson resided in Pine Bluff and worked for the state for over 30 years. She was an active member of the United Methodist Church - Southeast district and served on the ASEA board both as an active and retired state employee. Her dedication and presence will certainly be missed.

Scholarship Winners!

We are pleased to announce the winners of the **John F Motes scholarship program** for the upcoming 2023 academic year. This program aims to support students who demonstrate exceptional academic merit and community involvement. Arkansas State Employees Association (ASEA) is awarding a record forty-one thousand dollars in scholarships. Each recipient will receive one thousand dollars. Interested candidates can visit our website at aseaar.org for more information on eligibility criteria and the application process.

- Arielle Appleby from Conway, AR, attending Arkansas Community College - Morrilton
- Cassidy Ashcraft from Cove, AR, attending Ouachita Baptist University
- Grace Atchison from Ft. Smith, AR, attending University of Arkansas- Fort Smith
- Katelyn Bennett from Benton, AR, attending Arkansas State University
- Emily Brock from Russellville, AR, attending Arkansas Tech University
- Maven Cauthen from Atkins, AR, attending Arkansas Tech University
- Chandler Cheek from England, AR, attending Arkansas Tech University
- Alexandria Collins from White Hall, AR, attending University of Arkansas Pine Bluff
- Jarah Cox from Conway, AR, attending University of Central Arkansas
- Easton Cusick from Heber Springs, AR, attending University of Central Arkansas
- Jenna Daniels from Hot Springs, AR, attending Southern Arkansas University

Scholarship Winners

- Sharyssa Davis from El Dorado, AR, attending Southern Arkansas University
- Brock Devorak from Conway, AR, attending University of Central Arkansas
- Deryck Flower from Harrison, AR, attending University of Arkansas
- Kaci Flower from Harrison, AR, attending North Arkansas College
- Laci Garner from Batesville, AR, attending Arkansas State University
- Talia Gill from Little Rock, AR, attending Pulaski Technical College
- Alayna Glover from Ft. Smith, AR, attending University of Arkansas- Fort Smith
- Nicholas Hazeslip from Cabot, AR, attending University of Central Arkansas
- DeKerrion Kendrix from Camden, AR, attending University of Central Arkansas
- Madleyne McGrew from Casa, AR, attending University of Central Arkansas
- McKenzie Miller from McCrory, AR, attending University of Arkansas
- Katelyn Mitchell from Bradford, AR, attending Arkansas State University
- Lyric Nichols from Lamar, AR, attending University of the Ozarks - Clarksville
- Monica Rayburn from Bismarck, AR, attending Pulaski Technical College
- Evan Reel from Texarkana, AR, attending Southern Arkansas University
- Richard Rumpf from Paron, AR, attending University of Arkansas at Little Rock
- Madison Runyan from Arkadelphia, AR, attending Southern Arkansas University
- Darby Sawyer from Doddridge, AR, attending University of Arkansas
- Jordan Scott from Little Rock, AR, undecided
- Han Siew from Little Rock, AR, attending University of Arkansas
- Caiden Sisson from Bald Knob, AR, attending Arkansas State University
- Michaela Stanley from Warren, AR, attending Southern Arkansas University
- Ashton Toland from Hot Springs, AR, attending University of Arkansas
- Ashlyn Tucker from Charlotte, AR, attending University Community College - Batesville
- John Wells from Paris, AR, attending Northwest Arkansas Community College
- Amaya Whitmore from Jacksonville, AR, attending University of Central Arkansas
- Joseph "Kole" Williams from Sherwood, AR, attending University of Arkansas
- Ashley Wimberley from Little Rock, AR, attending University of Arkansas
- Landry Wimberley from Searcy, AR, attending University of Arkansas
- Walker Wood from Hot Springs, AR, attending Ouachita Baptist University
- Jacob Woodfield from Mt. Ida, AR, attending Ouachita Baptist University

We are thrilled to support these talented and deserving students in their educational pursuits. We wish them all the best in their academic and personal endeavors.

Are You a New State Employee?

Did you know you can have insurance benefits payroll deducted?



Ask for your new hire booklet!

Contact your advisor at
501-224-5234
 or email us at
Service@ARSEBA.com





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