

# ASEA NEWS

Official Newsletter of the Arkansas State Employees Association



## President's Report

By Jeff Jackson – Board President

It has been a rapid start to 2024 and it is hard to believe that it is April already! The budget legislative session is starting and John and the ASEA staff have been working hard to be ready. In February, I had the privilege to attend two of ASEA’s legislative forums where our members were able to speak directly with their legislators about the challenges we face as state employees. At both meetings I was refreshed to hear feedback from legislators that they hear our concerns and are actively working to improve the evaluation system to ensure not only that we are evaluated fairly but also that our merit increases are applied fairly. I was also encouraged to hear that they know that there are issues with the current pay plan and will be working to make some much needed improvements. Be sure to read John’s article for an update on the new evaluation process, pay plan, retiree issues, and details on how to sign up for ASEA text alerts which we hope will be able to keep our members better informed!

Additionally, I am nearing the end of my term as ASEA President and it is time to elect a new team of Executive Officers and Board Representatives. Please take a minute to read about the candidates who are running for these positions. These individuals are your voice at ASEA and it is important that you reach out to us to voice your support for these candidates who have put themselves out there to lead ASEA in the future.

Lastly, I want to say congratulations to all of our John F. Motes Scholarship winners! I am proud to see ASEA investing in our members and potential future state employees!

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# Director's Report

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By John Bridges  
Executive Director

## Performance Evaluations

The framework for a new evaluation system was approved in February (the new evaluation system can be viewed via our blog) which needed to be in place for employee evaluations to commence. We were advocating for this policy to be implemented as there were some discussions on one rule that could have jeopardized the approval. Our full attention was to help this process along as we did not want to jeopardize the ability of twenty-eight thousand plus employees to receive merit pay this year.

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## Temporary Pay Plan

You heard the news of the Governor authorizing a 3% market rate adjustment for state employees. This is part of a temporary pay plan package that will be presented during the fiscal session that starts April 10th. We have seen the draft legislation at it does include the 3% salary adjustment along with increasing the maximum salary cap by 10%. This will allow those employees that are at their maximum to receive future increases into their salary instead of receiving it as a one-time bonus. There is also a special project bonus incentive, separate from your performance pay, and an easing of hazardous pay qualifications.

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## Big Picture

The temporary pay plan legislation must first be accepted as an agenda item, presented, and then voted on in order for it to be implemented this July. We feel confident of its passage. The groundwork has been laid and we are seeing support for state employees grow. See page 11.

Once this passes, just thinking positively, then somewhere around June we will get our first look at a new pay plan proposal. This will come from a consulting group that was recently hired by the state. I am sure this proposal will have many discussions and public opinion before it can be presented during the 2025 legislative session. This will definitely be issue #1 for ASEA going forward.

"Will there be no performance pay since we are getting the 3% market adjustment?" I cannot see that happening with how much effort went into reshaping the performance evaluation guidelines to have it in place for evaluations and that these are two separate sources of money. Maybe temper the expectations of how much you receive this year? We all know that you deserve these increases and it is very possible that you may get two types of raises this July.

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## Consulting Group

We have heard your concerns over the state hiring an outside consulting group to look at government efficiency. We are tracking this and would like to take note that in every discussion we have heard the areas of efficiency cited are fleet management, procurement, and information technology. Fleet management seems to be a hot topic in the capital lately as an area of immediate savings. This firm will also present a pay plan re-design in June for officials to consider. We will continue to monitor closely and report to our members.

"Thank you for being a member of ASEA, and if you have any ideas or suggestions, please drop me a line at [jbridges@aseaar.org](mailto:jbridges@aseaar.org)"



## Health Insurance Monitoring

We have received communication from both our retired and active members about a sudden increase in their normal pharmaceutical prescriptions. If we can get a conversation started about this issue, we would like to be prepared to present examples. Email me the name of your drug, the old price versus the new price, where you purchase your prescriptions, along with your name to [jbridges@aseaar.org](mailto:jbridges@aseaar.org). The discussion for 2025 will start going public later this year. For more insurance news related to retirees, please see our Retiree News section in this issue.

If you are not receiving our emails, it means we do not have one on file. Simply email Sharon at [sbuckholts@aseaar.org](mailto:sbuckholts@aseaar.org) and we can get you added to our list.

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## Retirement Plan Monitoring

Our monitoring of both the APERS board meetings (Arkansas Public Employees Retirement System) and the Joint Public Retirement Committee in recent months have brought us to the consensus that the plan is stable. We do not expect any retirement plan related bills to be filed this session (see above). A popular question we receive this time of year is whether the COLA that retirees receive will be approved this year. The answer is yes. The 3% COLA that retirees receive each June is set in Arkansas code and would take legislation to get it changed. The legislation to keep the COLA intact (2019) was a benchmark victory for ASEA.

Thank you for being a member of ASEA, and if you have any ideas or suggestions, please drop me a line at [jbridges@aseaar.org](mailto:jbridges@aseaar.org)

Exceptions for Certain "Group Medicare Advantage" Members: While the network changes will apply to all United Medicare Advantage plans, some "Group Medicare Advantage" members- including those with coverage through the Arkansas Retired Teachers and Arkansas Retired State Employees- should not experience any changes in their out-of-pocket.



# How to Stay Connected and Informed... *faster!*



## STATE EMPLOYEE NEWS BLOG

Official Blog of the Arkansas State Employees Association

### Subscribe to our Blog!

Don't wait for our newsletter to get informed. Sign up to have our blog posts emailed to your inbox.



### Receive Text Alerts!

Just in case our emails get lost our text alerts wont.

### How Can I sign Up?

Visit [www.aseaar.org](http://www.aseaar.org). Click the "Members Only" button. Use passcode "123456" to unlock the members only section. Scroll down just a little and you will see the subscription prompts. Takes about five seconds!



Mobile Friendly!



You will still receive your ASEA News, but sometimes you need the news a little faster!

## Keeping Members Informed

ASEA has adapted and modernized our methods of keeping members informed and I implore you to take a minute and make sure you are receiving your updates. This newsletter is the slowest of our communication outlets. We are now quickly getting you updated on state employee news through our State Employee blog via our website. Those are then emailed to members, if we have your email, and even those can get lost in your clutter. To combat that problem, we have a new text alert system that will get sent to your phone when a new blog is posted, or when we have breaking news.

We do not post our research on our Facebook anymore, only notices. The passcode to unlock the Members Only portion of our website is "123456" and from there you can sign up for text alerts, read our blog, peruse past newsletters, and get retail discount codes.

If you are not receiving our emails, it means we do not have one on file. Simply email Sharon at [sbuckholts@aseaar.org](mailto:sbuckholts@aseaar.org) and we can get you added to our list.



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# ANNOUNCEMENTS & EVENTS



## Welcome to the Board of Directors

Welcome to the board of directors Brandy Watkins. Brandy works for the Health Department and will represent District 8 which includes Crawford, Franklin, Logan, Scott, and Sebastian counties.

## Save the date!

August 17th | 10:00 a.m.

As an ASEA member you are encouraged and welcome to attend our annual business meeting. This is the only meeting where proposals to amend our by-laws may be discussed and adopted, swearing in new officers, and most importantly having an open conversation in planning ASEA's goals for the upcoming year.

Members may join by Zoom or reserve a seat to attend in person. Seating is limited! Please request an RSVP or future Zoom link to [dmccutcheon@aseaar.org](mailto:dmccutcheon@aseaar.org) or 501-378-0187. Ask for Dana.

## HALF PRICE COLLEGE FOR STATE EMPLOYEES

East Arkansas Community College is offering a 50% tuition waiver to state of Arkansas employees in support of our colleagues in state government.

- No Credit Hour Requirement or
- Limit Waiver can be granted more than one academic year and in summer

**We welcome our fellow state employees to EACC!**

To receive the waiver, contact EACC's Financial Aid office at 870-633-4480, ext. 224 or email [jwallace@eacc.edu](mailto:jwallace@eacc.edu).



**EACC.edu**

# JOHN F MOTES SCHOLARSHIP FUND



John F. Motes Educational Scholarship

## Congratulations to Our Scholarships Winners!

Congratulations to the following applicants who were awarded \$1,000 from the John F. Motes scholarship fund to seek a higher education degree. Remember that active and retiree members can apply on behalf of themselves, family members, and grandchildren. The next application period is during the month of January 2025. The application, rules, and submission form can be found on [www.aseaar.org](http://www.aseaar.org).

- **Grace Allen** - Wooster, University of Central Arkansas
- **Grace Atchinson** - Fort Smith, University OF Arkansas - Fort Smith
- **Addison Bartley** - El Paso, Arkansas State University - Beebe
- **Emily Berry** - Cabot, Lyon College
- **Natasha Vault Booth** - Little Rock, Arkansas Fashion School
- **Emily Brock** - Russellville, Arkansas Tech University
- **Kora Carter** - Mena, University OF Arkansas - Fort Smith
- **Ashlyn Crawford** - Warren, University of Arkansas Community College Morrilton
- **Dylan Drury** - Malvern, Henderson State University
- **Tyler Fleming** - Stafford, Texas Lutheran University
- **Deryck Flower** - Harrison, University of Arkansas
- **Kaci Flower** - Harrison, University of Arkansas
- **Laci Garner** - Batesville, Arkansas State University
- **Sarah Hester** - Lonoke, University of Central Arkansas
- **Landon Holcomb** - Pine Bluff, University of Arkansas - Pine Bluff
- **Kallie Hudnall** - Mayflower, University of Central Arkansas
- **Maleah Johnson** - Springdale, University of Arkansas
- **Josie Jones** - Cabot, Arkansas State University
- **Kelsey May** - Cabot, University of Arkansas
- **Sophie Savin** - Little Rock, University of Nebraska - Kearney
- **Taylr Nelson** - Pine Bluff, University of Arkansas
- **Logan Revalee** - Texarkana, Henderson State University
- **Terence Roberson Jr.** - Warren, Ouachita Baptist University
- **Toniesha Sargent** - Pine Bluff, Southern New Hampshire University
- **Suzanne Sorrells** - Amity, University of Arkansas - Medical Sciences
- **Carson Taylor** - Hot Springs, University of Central Arkansas
- **Tristen Thompson** - El Dorado, Florida A&M University
- **Adelene Westfall** - Nashville, University of Arkansas
- **Amaya Whitmore** - Jacksonville, University of Central Arkansas
- **Kaden Williams** - Sherwood, University of Arkansas
- **Anna Wimberley** - Little Rock, University of Arkansas
- **Landry Wimberley** - Searcy, University of Arkansas
- **Jacob Woodfield** - Mount Ida, Ouachita Baptist University



## Officer Elections

The ASEA board will hold elections for officers (President, Vice President, and Secretary) on April 20th, 2024, during its regular board meeting. To hold office as an officer you must currently serve on the board for at least two years. The following board members requested and qualified to have their name added to the officer ballot. If you would like to offer support for any of the candidates, you may email it to [sbuckholts@aseaar.org](mailto:sbuckholts@aseaar.org).

### PRESIDENT

**Dona Bowry**

**Years on the Board: 16 years**

**Agency and Years of Employment: Arkansas Ethics Commission for 14 years. Currently retired.**

My name is Dona Bowry and I am running for President of the ASEA. I feel that I am more than qualified to carry out the duties assigned to this position. After working for the state for fourteen years I retired from the Arkansas Ethics Commission. Currently, I serve as the Vice President of ASEA and have served on the board since 2008.

My passion for state government and ensuring that state employees are receiving the benefits they are entitled to speaks for itself. Working alongside our ASEA staff to see that employees are represented to our legislators is of utmost importance. We have a bright future with some of the issues that are happening, and I strongly feel that ASEA is well represented in these discussions.

If elected as your ASEA President, I will continue to support state employees, our members and our ASEA staff. I look forward to serving.

### PRESIDENT

**Janice Griffin**

**Years on the Board: 13 years**

**Agency and Years of Employment: Department of Human Services, Craighead County Administrator, for over 40 years.**

I have been a state employee for over 40 plus years. I am currently the county administrator for Craighead County Department of Human Services where I supervise a staff of 150 people. As an active state employee myself with nine different divisions of DHS located in my office, I have my finger on the pulse of active state employee issues. I am very active in the Jonesboro and Craighead County Community. I have contact with several legislators who can provide guidance and influence regarding pay plan matters. Furthermore, I have several retirees in my office that I have rehired in part time positions which allows me to stay actively informed regarding retiree concerns such as healthcare and retirement benefits. If elected, I pledge to stay as an active state employee until the end of my term because I feel that it is integral as a President to be engaged with active state employees daily as well as retired state employees. I want to work to better the lives of state employees by focusing on current and future pay plans and other state employee benefits such as insurance for active and retired employees alike.

We're looking forward to serving with these distinguished colleagues in 2024!

## VICE PRESIDENT

Holli Patrick

Years on the Board: 8 years

Agency and Years of Employment: Arkansas Department of Health for 28 years

I've greatly enjoyed serving on the ASEA Board for the past eight years. I look forward to continuing to serve in the capacity of Vice President so we can continue to work on membership as well as the new pay plan to be implemented in 2025 for State of Arkansas employees.

I started with the State of Arkansas on November 6, 1995, as a computer analyst with the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality in Little Rock. I transferred in June 2002 to Northwest Arkansas with the Arkansas Department of Health as a field computer support technician-I support 19 counties in Northwest Arkansas with all their computer related issues. This November I will have 29 years of service with the state of Arkansas!

I joined the Arkansas State Employees Association board in October 2016 representing district one. I had previously served as president for the Razorback chapter in Fayetteville, Washington county and I have served a secretary on the ASEA board and the executive board the past four years.

I'm married to my husband Sean, and I have a son John who is a junior at the university of Arkansas-Fayetteville

I look forward to continuing to represent state employees in Northwest Arkansas and keep them aware of changes and issues affecting state employees.

## VICE PRESIDENT

James Scott

Years on the Board: 6 years

Agency and Years of Employment: Arkansas Department of Human Services for 31 years

Why Pick Me: I have been a state employee for over 31 years. I have been a member of ASEA for most of those years. During my tenure in different leadership roles and as I have visited with many state employees across South Arkansas, the consensus is that state employees aren't valued for the work that they do. Salaries aren't equivalent to the private sector and although a college education is required for most of our positions employees aren't rewarded for their degrees. There is also a cap of \$7500 on sick leave payout when an employee retires. This cap should be removed or at least doubled to \$15,000. I believe that if an employee earns the leave, they should be compensated for it because the state will end up paying someone else for the time that should have been rewarded to the retiring employee. If elected, I will continue to push for these changes and be a voice for those employees who aren't at the table.

## SECRETARY

Chasity Lucas

Years on the ASEA Board: 19 years

Agency and Years of Employment: Arkansas Highway Police for 22 years

I was first appointed to the board in 2006 by former ASEA President Sam Miller. Since that time, I have served as District 15 Director for all but 1 year.

Throughout the years I have attended every conference and all board meetings either in person or via zoom. I have also served on the Membership and Pay Plan committees in the past. I have enjoyed my time on the board helping bring concerns from other state employees across the state to the table.

Please consider me when making your vote.





# Board Term Expirations

The following board members have terms expiring August 17th, 2024. All have expressed interest in continuing to represent their respective districts for an additional two-year term. Per the ASEA by-laws you may challenge the incumbents if you submit your application by May 2nd, 2024. Full details are available at [www.aseaar.org](http://www.aseaar.org).

- Heinz Braun - District 9B, Pulaski
- Jennifer Siccardi - District 9C, Pulaski
- Alyssa Duggan - District 11, Howard, Montgomery, Pike, Polk, Sevier
- Judy Beatty - Retiree At Large
- Jacqueline Caradine - District 10, Stone, Van Buren, Cleburne, Faulkner

## BOARD RE-APPLYING APPLICATION

Name: Charles Elliott

Position you are applying for (district number, retiree, or at-large): At-large

Agency: Department of Human Services

Job Title: Ouachita County Administrator

Years of Service to the State: 26

Years of ASEA membership: 20

Previous years of service on the board: 6

Describe some issues or projects that the board faced that you are most proud of? I was on the board when the last pay plan was passed.

What are your goals for the future as a returning board member? My goal is to get a new pay plan passed for state employees.

### 2024 - First quarter employee numbers

	Average for Current Quarter	Last Month of Current Quarter	Last Month of Previous Quarter	Last Month of Same Quarter of Previous Year
	First Quarter FY2024	(Sep 2023) First Quarter FY2024	(Jun 2023) Fourth Quarter FY2024	(Sep 2022) First Quarter FY2023
Full-Time Positions	36,082.88	36,008.00	35,863.00	36,446.00
Full-Time Employees	28,503.00	28,383.00	28,710.00	28,798.00
Vacant Full-Time Positions				
Budgeted	6,192.32	6,212.00	5,236.00	5,953.00
Non-Budgeted	1,389.63	1,413.00	1,917.00	1,705.00
Extra Help Positions	4,412.95	4,408.00	4,341.00	4,366.00
Extra Help Employees	1,379.77	1,315.00	1,508.00	1,311.00
Vacant Extra Help Positions	3,033.79	3,093.00	2,833.00	3,065.00
Overtime Paid	\$ 3,093,247.62	\$ 3,506,619.63	\$ 3,787,860.87	\$ 3,118,974.87
Straight Time Paid	\$ 33,444.99	\$ 52,058.73	\$ 68,417.56	\$ 56,231.17
Compensatory Time Taken (hours)	12,143.75	10,851.25	20,043.67	10,070.25



# RETIREE NEWS

## Drug Price Increases

We have been contacted by several retirees and have seen Facebook conversations asking why their prescription prices have recently increased. Those increases seem to be coming from the members of the Health Advantage plan.

- What we would like to do if you are one of those affected is to email us the following information so we can be ready to present it to the proper legislative committee if we can get a conversation started.
- Email John Bridges at [jbridges@aseaar.org](mailto:jbridges@aseaar.org) and include your name, hometown, pharmacy name, prescription drug name, old price, and new price.

## United Healthcare and Local Hospitals

United users should not have experienced any changes in co-pays as area hospitals opted out or continued negotiations. We are happy to report that Baptist Health Systems and United have come to an agreement on a long-term contract and we continue to monitor developments with St. Bernard's, Sharp, Five Rivers, and Methodist.

## Benevolent Fund Reminder

Remember that as a tenured member of ASEA you may have accumulated as much as \$1,000 in your benevolent fund. We advise that you ensure your paperwork is with your other important papers. Check it to make sure your address, phone number, and home phone are correct. You may also change your beneficiaries and even designate percentages to certain persons.

- Contact Sharon at [sbuckholts@aseaar.org](mailto:sbuckholts@aseaar.org) or 501-378-0187 to request a new beneficiary form. You may also download a form at [www.aseaar.org](http://www.aseaar.org) under the Membership dropdown menu.

## Retirement Update

With the upcoming session focused only on building and approving the states budget we do not foresee any bills being filled that would be related to the states pension system.

- This time of year, we receive many questions wondering if the 3% cost of living adjustment you receive in June will be approved. The answer is yes!

## In Memoriam

One of your fellow retirees that was continually active with the ASEA Retiree Benefits Sub-Committee passed away last month. Stormy Smith, ADH, Benton, was a strong voice for retirees in protecting your health insurance and we will miss his wisdom and advocacy work.

**WE REPRESENT RETIREES.**

We monitor and advocate to protect retirees most important assets:  
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Are you a retired state employee? Join ASEA today for as little as \$24 a year.

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# STATE EMPLOYEES IN THE NEWS

## From KATV News....

"State employees are some of the best public servants in the country—really good people from all 75 counties. They deserve this three percent raise. So, I think this is a right step in the right direction," said Nicholas Poole, director of government affairs at the Arkansas State Employees Association.

There's good reason behind the planned raises—the state, like the private sector, has struggled to find and retain employees in post-Covid times.

"You do have a high turnover rate due to Covid. Inflation is extremely high right now. So, it's always a balancing act of trying to make sure that the pay of state employees aligns with the private sector as well," Poole said.

"A lot of it is some people say, 'I don't have room to grow,' well, the 10 percent addresses that. The three percent, people say 'I need some help because of inflation'—the three percent helps with that," said Scott Hardin, a spokesperson for the Department of Finance and Administration.

## From Governor Sanders...

"State government is only as efficient and effective as the people who staff it," Sanders said. "I believe this plan strikes the balance between spending Arkansans' tax dollars wisely, increasing competitiveness, and rewarding our best state employees. I look forward to the legislature's speedy review and approval of these proposals."

## From Talk Business...

While lawmakers and Gov. Sarah Sanders negotiate over \$6 billion in state spending priorities in the fiscal session, Hester thinks there are two issues that may arise as non-fiscal items to explore. Changes to policy to realign the state employee pay plan have been discussed for months. Also, many lawmakers want a change to further regulate the crypto mining operations that have become a noise nuisance in parts of rural Arkansas.

"I think we're going to have two topics. One is going to be the pay plan. I think that's probably going to receive almost unanimous consent from the House and Senate. We know that we're going to make some adjustment for the hardworking people that work for the state of Arkansas and serve the people of Arkansas. We've got to do better and we will do better," Hester said.



Nicholas Poole, Representative Bart Schulz, and Representative Shad Pearce speaking to members at the Batesville town hall meeting.



# Town Hall Meetings Report

By Nicholas Poole, Director of Governmental Affairs

ASEA conducted Legislative Town Hall meetings across the state in Jonesboro, Fayetteville, Monticello, and Batesville. The primary objective of these gatherings was to provide ASEA members with the opportunity to engage with their state-elected officials and gain insights into the challenges confronting state employees. ASEA extends its gratitude to the numerous state employees who actively participated in these meetings, showcasing their dedication and concern for the issues affecting their community.

These town hall sessions served as a platform for state employees to not only express their concerns but also to educate elected officials about the hardships they face. The low morale within the state government, attributed to the performance evaluation system and the absence of an updated pay plan, prompted ASEA to strategically choose the locations for these meetings. The success of these events led to requests from legislators in other districts, prompting ASEA to expand its reach. While ASEA regrets not reaching every area, plans are in place to address this in the near future, as the organization remains committed to hosting Legislative Town Hall meetings regularly.

The discussions during these Legislative Town Halls primarily centered around the pay plan and the merit performance evaluation system. However, other pertinent topics were brought to the attention of legislators. These included the safety of state employees involved in child removal from homes, the lack of state vehicles for fieldwork, and issues within the Department of Corrections. ASEA acknowledges the engagement of state elected officials who attended these meetings, recognizing their busy schedules.

The active participation of state employees and the dialogue between them and elected officials during these events have proven beneficial. As a result of state employees advocating for improved pay and a revamped merit performance system, there are positive signs that their efforts are gaining traction. ASEA looks forward to continuing these Legislative Town Hall meetings, fostering collaboration between state employees and elected officials for the betterment of the entire community.

ASEA would like to thank Senators Bart Hester, Ben Gilmore, Dan Sullivan and Representatives Jack Ladyman, Jon Milligan, Shad Pearce, Johnny Rye, Bart Schulz, Trey Steimel, Jeff Wardlaw, and Jeremy Woodridge for participating.





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