

One for all and all for one: The value of being a member

State Engineering Association of Wisconsin

YOUR WORKPLACE VOICE

Despite another year of political hostility toward Wisconsin's dedicated and talented public employees, the State Engineering Association is still here, fighting the good fight. SEA will remain an effective organization serving the interests of public employees, retirees and the public at large. **The best way to ensure that future is by supporting our efforts through your membership, either as an active employee or through the Friends of SEA.**

As you know, **the state's 2011 anti-union law has forced most public employees to contribute more to our pensions and health insurance premiums**, amounting to compensation cuts that for many of us over the

past few years have meant 8, 10 and even 12 percent cuts in our compensation. Years ago, SEA agreed in good-faith collective bargaining to accept pension contributions from the state in lieu of wages. Thus the new anti-union law amounted to the state unilaterally going back on past agreements. Meanwhile, the law all but eliminated what we are able to negotiate at the bargaining table going forward, essentially capping future wage increases at the rate of inflation. **The state's first compensation plan, issued under the new law, froze base pay for two years while taking away benefits and compensation. The latest plan, recently issued, offers up one percent annual raises but then takes some or all of that by again hiking benefits contributions.**



But the new law went much farther, threatening the economic well-being of current and future retirees, too. The law mandated a study to examine whether to change the Wisconsin Retirement System over from today's defined-benefit plan to a defined-contribution plan, despite the fact that WRS is one of the most secure pension systems in the US. **This unwarranted change would end up passing higher financial risks along to state employees and retirees. It would force workers to invest on their own in place of the current, secure pension system.** On the back burner for now, that threat is still real.

We all know that as a result of “budget repair” measures, many state employees including all of our members have been forced to tighten their belts. Thus, even members who continue to believe in the value of SEA might be inclined to drop their membership in order to save a few dollars a month. That's what the governor expects; he has said so.

Those and other reasons are why SEA, like many public employee unions, declined to play the governor's time-wasting re-certification game. Nevertheless, SEA has made a commitment to continue representing employees and retirees in every way we can. **SEA continues to make a difference. We are certain that maintaining our Association is the only way we will ever succeed in restoring fair workplace rules and legitimate collective bargaining. To do this we must remain strong, not just retaining our employee member base but expanding it.**

Besides benefiting our members and retirees through direct service, SEA also works hard to promote better, more efficient government. SEA has been very successful -- even more so in many cases than much larger public employee unions -- in making our views heard in news media and other public forums. SEA has proven expertise in spreading word of your individual and collective concerns, along with supporting data we have developed with citizens, taxpayers, the media, and elected representatives.

This ability to represent member interests operates on two levels:

First, our state board, elected from the membership at large by members, decides overall strategy and operations. **Second**, multiple sections, assigned to departmental, categorical and geographical interests, run their own meetings, elections and events. They set their own priorities and agendas, as well as taking the lead on annual meetings for each section and the entire membership.

The elected presidents of each section also serve on the board alongside the at-large executive officers, each of whom has an equal vote. We will continue to operate under this twin-level system so member interests, input and interaction will be similar to what it is today. Section presidents will remain key voices on the board. **And by the way, our elected officers are paid modest stipends and volunteer many hours of their time on behalf of members.**

Data collection

SEA's pool of talent has been an important source of ideas about improving state work processes and efficiency. SEA monitors relevant developments in Wisconsin and elsewhere, such as salary and benefit comparisons, working conditions, workplace safety issues, policy issues including privatization and outsourcing of public employee work to private consultants, and more. Few outside organizations share this responsibility or do this work. **Your low-cost membership will help us continue this good fight.**

Collective bargaining

Under the new law, represented employees still have an opportunity to discuss wage increases with the state, and to educate politicians and the public on the need for increases beyond the new cost-of-living cap, based on hard evidence and analysis. That said, the state now has essentially unilateral power to limit employee compensation. **The only way to improve working conditions and compensation going forward is to keep the lines of communication to management open, sitting down with them to vocally advance our issues and find potential areas of agreement.** History makes clear that individual employees could never hope to accomplish this on their own behalf.

Retirement system watch

One important reason SEA will remain relevant and perhaps assume greater importance is that the initial battle over worker representation is not over. **Increased employee contributions to health insurance and retirement are only the first phase of the anti-union, anti-worker agenda. Assaults on the Wisconsin Retirement System clearly are in the sights of some lawmakers.** SEA has a history of standing up for the

Thank unions for:

Weekends

All Breaks at Work, including Lunch Breaks

Paid Vacation

FMLA

Sick Leave

Social Security

Minimum Wage

Civil Rights Act/Title VII prohibiting employer discrimination

8-Hour Work Day

Overtime Pay

Child Labor Laws

Occupational Safety & Health Act

40 Hour Work Week

Worker's Compensation (Worker's Comp)

Unemployment Insurance

Pensions

Workplace Safety Standards and Regulations

Employer Health Care Insurance

Collective Bargaining Rights for Employees

Wrongful Termination Laws

Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967

Whistleblower Protection Laws

Employee Polygraph Protection Act

Veteran's Employment and Training Services

Compensation increases and Evaluations

Sexual Harassment Laws

Americans With Disabilities Act

Holiday Pay

Employer Dental, Life, and Vision Insurance

Privacy Rights

Pregnancy and Parental Leave

Military Leave

Public Education for Children

Equal Pay Acts of 1963 & 2011

Laws Ending Sweatshops in the United States

value and integrity of the retirement system. **The Association twice has legally challenged moves by the governor and legislature to raid our retirement funds, and we succeeded in saving retirement dollars.**

Legal counsel

SEA's legal counsel and our knowledgeable retirement and benefits consultant represent the most valuable pools of expertise we offer members. **Forthcoming battles will be fought increasingly over post-career benefits, involving a significant portion of retirement income.** The Association has and will continue to serve as a collective watchdog over WRS on behalf of its members.

SEA retains a skilled, experienced, and proven attorney who can interpret the law, challenge the law in courts or administratively, and bring other resources to the table. Our legal counsel is also indispensable in pursuing workplace issues including resolution of grievances.

SEA means having at your disposal a legal team that understands state civil service rules, collective bargaining law and the retirement system. Our legal counsel has argued in front of the Wisconsin Supreme Court on behalf of SEA and its members' interest in WRS. The legal counsel also provides our collective membership with other resources to assist with such issues as needed – such as an accountant, analyst, and legal interpretations of rules and laws.

SEA's legal counsel will continue serving as before, with issues selected, debated and assigned by your elected board. SEA will continue to use legal counsel in the manner we always have, discussing issues that need legal input and getting board approval to employ the counsel on an as-needed basis.

An information exchange for employees, retirees, engineers and citizens

Through its web site, newsletter, meetings and direct communications, SEA serves as a forum among its members, sharing news across departments that include our members; monitoring state policies and management issues, and exchanging information, opinions and ideas with similar organizations in Wisconsin and across the nation.

SEA is an important conduit, but it's also a great networking and social organization for engineering and technical professionals looking to meet others and advance their careers. SEA also has worked to promote engineering as a profession. SEA supports programs, classes and other vehicles that will attract future college graduates to our discipline.

Institutional history

Collective bargaining as we have known it can be restored, but it will take a consistent, continuing and active effort that is well organized and coordinated with other groups who agree with us. **Building up an organization from scratch is very hard and takes years; maintaining an organization is much easier.** Our records, methods and skill set will remain current and available to current and future members.

IN CONCLUSION

Your membership and your dues are a modest investment in an important cause. They also have represented a very good return on investment to our membership over the decades, and will continue to do so, even when times are lean.

Please contact a SEA officer if you have further questions. Visit www.wisea.org to find out more.

Respectfully,
Board of Officers
The State Engineering Association
