

RETIREE NOTES



AFSCME retirees Terra Fairburn and her spouse Nance Kinley joined forces with fellow AFSCME retiree Kae Carroll to help seniors navigate the system and sign up to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

Retirees work to expand vaccine access

ROCK ISLAND SUB-CHAPTER 74 retiree Terra Fairburn and her spouse Nance Kinley were having a hard time getting themselves signed up for the COVID vaccine. Every time they tried to get an appointment online, the slots were taken.

others to do so.”

Fairburn, Kinley and their friend Kae Carroll quickly found themselves immersed for months in the efforts to help their community get vaccinated.

“We knew other people who were struggling,” Fairburn said. “Most retirees couldn’t stay up till midnight, and there were a great number who didn’t have computers or the Internet. As former employees

Carroll said.

On April 27 their local church provided more than 400 vaccines to the community. And as word got out, people started asking who these ladies worked for—finally dubbing them “the COVID Angels.” Together they have signed up more than 100 people and they’re still going, adding transportation for those who can’t drive themselves.

“We are all in this together,” Carroll said. “It is important that all of us get vaccinated and that all of us have the same access to the vaccine.”

If you haven’t yet had your vaccination, you can call the IL COVID Vaccine hotline at 833-621-1284.

American Rescue Plan benefits retirees

THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN Act of 2021 signed by President Joe Biden includes significant direct benefits for retirees and support for services and programs that are important to them.

Many seniors received the \$1,400 stimulus checks that the legislation authorized, and there are a number of

other ways that retirees benefited from the bill as well.

The Rescue Plan expands vaccine administration and purchases to increase access for nursing home residents and staff. It pays for the creation of nursing home “strike teams” in each state, to provide rapid response if a COVID outbreak occurs. And it funds testing and tracing so that outbreaks can be quickly identified and stopped, including frequent testing of nursing home residents and staff.

The law also expands financial benefits for working caregivers and gives money to states for services that support people in their homes and communities through state Medicaid programs including:

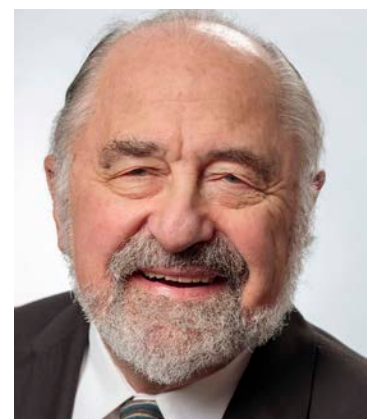
- An increase in the 2021 tax credit that can help with senior care expenses, to \$4,000 for one dependent from the usual \$1,050, and an increase in the share of expenses that can be applied to the credit to 50% from the usual 35.
- An increase in the 2021 amount a worker can contribute to a tax-free dependent care flexible spending account that can be used to pay for senior expenses from \$5,000 to \$10,500.
- Money for states to improve opportunities for Medicaid beneficiaries to receive services in their own home or community, instead of moving to a nursing home.

Retirees who are not yet Medicare-eligible and do not have health insurance coverage after retirement can get extra help when buying individual health insurance coverage through the Affordable Care Act in 2021 and 2022. Retirees who lost a job also are eligible for no-premium plans with very low out-of-pocket costs in 2021 if they receive unemployment benefits during any week. Retirees who lost coverage when they lost a job also may be eligible for no-premium coverage under their former employer’s plan from April 1 through Sept. 30.

Some other ways in which retirees can benefit from the American Rescue Plan include help paying housing costs, more support for senior programs in your community, more funding to fight elder abuse, and pension protections for certain private

pension plans.

For more information, visit AFSCME.org/Victory.



John Tilden (top) and Mitch Vogel (bottom)

AFSCME-backed candidates win pension elections

Two annuitant candidates supported by AFSCME Retiree Chapter 31 have won seats on the State Employees’ Retirement System and State University Retirement System pension boards.

AFSCME retiree John Tilden was re-elected to the SERS board. He is an experienced SERS trustee with more than 50 years of public service, having served the State of Illinois for four decades as a counselor and psychologist.

Mitch Vogel, a retired professor at Northeastern Illinois University, was re-elected to the SERS board. Vogel is a former president of the University Professionals of Illinois Local 4100 of the American Federation of Teachers and former vice president of the Illinois Federation of Teachers.

“Both races were tight,” said AFSCME Chapter 31 Retiree Coordinator Maria Britton-Sipe. “AFSCME retiree voters made the difference. By participating in the election, they helped protect a secure retirement for tens of thousands of retirees by ensuring we have a union voice on both the SERS and SURS pension boards.”

“It is important that all of us get vaccinated. We’re all in this together.”

They soon figured out that the new slots were added at midnight and were taken within minutes of being posted. They then tried to sign up across the border in Iowa, but people in Iowa were also having problems and didn’t want to compete with Illinoisans. Finally, they were able to get appointments in Peoria County, 90 miles away.

“During the pandemic, many of us felt so vulnerable,” Fairburn said, “so when vaccines became available, we raced to sign up. Unfortunately, what we found was a maze that was difficult to navigate. Once we figured it out, we knew we wanted to help

of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, we naturally fell into the role of assisting others, and we learned the tricks to get people signed up quickly.”

It was Carroll who told the couple that communities of color were having serious issues getting access. She joined them in the effort to get people vaccinated, and also reached out to her church and Congresswoman Cheri Bustos’s office.

“I was able to communicate the need for local distribution and transportation, as not everyone can get to the large vaccinations centers. Bustos’s office responded,”