

October 5, 2021

Op-Ed: Who will teach our kids? Congress must help fix teacher shortage

A teacher shortage of epic proportion is raging across California, creating even more challenges for our already overwhelmed schools. Though the teacher shortage is a complex issue, Congress has a powerful tool that can attract second-career teachers: eliminating Social Security penalties.

For years California has recruited professionals from the private sector, particularly in science, engineering, technology and math, to serve as second-career teachers in high-need areas. While our schools have benefitted, there is a cost, and it's not to our students or schools. The federal government is penalizing second-career teachers by reducing the earned Social Security benefits they paid into during their time in the private sector. And forget survivor benefits. When a teacher's spouse passes, instead of receiving her partner's Social Security benefits like everyone else, those benefits will be either reduced or eliminated simply because she chose to become a teacher.

Both retired and active teachers have spent years urging Congress to eliminate the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and the Government Pension Offset (GPO).

While Congress acts on numerous stimulus packages for different groups, retired teachers have been left out. Inflation has been eroding purchasing power, while gaps in Medicare coverage have eroded savings. Many retired teachers no longer have a financial cushion and are forced to choose between paying for rent or paying for medication.

Many younger generations are watching how we are being treated. Is it any wonder the teacher shortage is growing? Why would anyone choose teaching when they know they will be penalized?

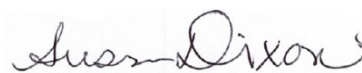
The good news is that Congress can remove the WEP and GPO penalties and ensure retired teachers receive the Social Security benefits they earned and paid into. This would not only benefit retired teachers, but it would also have a stimulating impact on the economy because retirees spend their money locally and create jobs.

Retired teachers, who are disproportionately women, have been waiting for our turn for a long time. We call on Congress to take action NOW to eliminate these unjust penalties and help ensure qualified professionals are eager to enter the classroom.

Sincerely,



Ron Breyer, President
California Retired Teachers Association



Susan Dixon, Chair
CalRTA Government Relations Committee