

CORRE Newsletter

SPRING-SUMMER 2025



Who We Are:

CORRE (pronounced “core”) is an acronym for the *Coalition of Oak Ridge Retired Employees*, which was established in 2002 to represent the interests of some 15,000 retirees and surviving spouses. CORRE is a not-for-profit (501 (c)(5) corporation, run by volunteers and managed by an elected board of directors. Our mission is to protect, preserve, and enhance the retirement benefits of its members and their surviving spouses. CORRE works with contractors, the Department of Energy, local and state officials, congressional representatives, and other related organizations to secure fair, just, and equitable retirement benefits for all eligible retirees. *All* retirees are automatically considered *de facto* (general) members of CORRE, and are welcome to participate in CORRE activities.

When we retire, ***we are all retirees***. It doesn’t matter whether we were formerly considered hourly, monthly, weekly, or management employees.

You can become a ***contributing member*** by making a one-time \$20 donation* to CORRE.

We encourage all members to provide your contact information to CORRE. We use your street address (zip code) to determine your congressional district. We may occasionally send you email to inform you of important issues that could affect your pension or healthcare benefits (or to remind you when a new newsletter is available on our website). ***We do not share your contact information with anyone in a way that identifies you by name.***

* Donations to a (501 (c)(5) organization are not tax deductible.

Why Publish a Newsletter?

Newsletters are time-consuming and expensive to produce, especially if they are distributed by postal mail. They require an ongoing commitment from CORRE volunteers to create interesting, informative, and useful content. We already have a very good website (<https://www.mycorre.org>), which is our primary means of communicating with our members and stakeholders. So, an obvious question is “Why bother with a newsletter?”

Although CORRE has been around for more than 20 years, many Oak Ridge retirees and current employees have never even heard of CORRE. We recently formed a communications task team to find ways to increase retiree awareness of CORRE so that we can better serve our members. We decided that we could create newsletters to keep members informed of potential changes to pension and medical benefits, and to draw attention to the need for cost-of-living adjustments to our pensions. Newsletters can also provide other fresh, compelling content that will increase traffic to our website. Due to high mailing costs, we have decided to distribute our newsletters through our website rather than by postal mail. (A few *printed* copies may be available at places like public libraries or credit union lobbies for retirees who do not use the internet or don’t have access to a computer.)

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A Message From Our CORRE President, Dave Whitehead

Welcome to the Spring-Summer 2025 edition of our CORRE newsletter, which is available for download on our [website](#). We hope you find it interesting and informative. We welcome your comments and suggestions. Please email them to: communications@mycorre.org.

CORRE is managed by a 22-member board of directors who are all Oak Ridge Reservation retirees. See our [website](#) for details. This year several board members plan to leave the board at the end of the year and new board members are needed. If you are interested in serving on the board, or if you know of other retirees who might be interested, please contact Paul Franco by email (pf.lakelife@gmail.com) or phone (865-293-6778).

Who's In Charge? O. R. Contractors Timeline...¹

Numerous Oak Ridge Operations contractor changes have occurred over the past 80+ years. Whether intentional or not, some of these changes contributed to the attrition and eventual disappearance of employee *ad hoc* (as needed) cost of living adjustments for Oak Ridge retirees. CORRE seeks to correct this inequity.

- In 1942, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began work on the secret facilities that comprise the Oak Ridge reservation. The three sites were designated K-25, X-10, and Y-12, and the history of Oak Ridge began.
- After WWII (by 1947), Union Carbide became the prime contractor and operator of the K-25, ORNL, and Y-12 facilities. Even though these facilities are owned by the federal government, Union Carbide was responsible for management and day-to-day operations, and its employees were *not* federal employees.
- 1950s — the Paducah and Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plants were constructed; Union Carbide operated Paducah; Goodyear operated Portsmouth.
- 1977— The U.S. Department of Energy was formed and was responsible for these government owned, contractor operated facilities.
- 1984 — Martin Marietta Energy Systems replaced Union Carbide at Oak Ridge and Paducah. (Proposals not include the operation of all four facilities were rejected.)
- 1986 — Martin Marietta Energy Systems replaced Goodyear at Portsmouth.
- 1993 -1995 — Uranium enrichment operations at Paducah & Portsmouth were privatized to United States Enrichment Corporation (USEC... later known as Centrus Enrichment Corporation).
- April 1, 1998 — The contract for Environmental Management and Operations activities at Oak Ridge, Paducah, and Portsmouth was spun off and awarded to Bechtel Jacobs. That date defines incumbent Environmental Management employees as “grandfathered” in pension and welfare plans.
- 1999 — The X-10 (ORNL) contract awarded to UT-Battelle. Oak Ridge Reservation Protective Force contracts were spun off and awarded to Wackenhut.
- 2000 — Y-12 contract was awarded to BWXT, now held by Consolidated Nuclear Security (CNS) since 2014.
- 2005 — Bechtel Jacobs’ role ended at Portsmouth, in 2006 at Paducah, and in 2011 at Oak Ridge, but the prime Oak Ridge Environmental Management contractor (now UCOR) remained the lead sponsor of multi-employer benefit plans at all sites.

¹ Note: Some of the above information was obtained using artificial intelligence search tools and may contain errors or inconsistencies in some of the contractor names and dates.

Spotlight on Cost of Living Allowances (COLAs)

The article on page 2 (*Who's in Charge*) points out that there have been many changes and transitions in operating contractors at the Oak Ridge facilities since the days of Union Carbide. Both Union Carbide and Martin Marietta Energy Systems had provided *ad hoc* COLAs, which means that they monitored consumer price indices and made periodic increases in retiree pensions on an *as-needed* basis to at least partially offset the effects of inflation. In 1995 Martin Marietta merged with Lockheed to become Lockheed-Martin Corporation, the nation's largest defense contractor, Martin Marietta Energy Systems was renamed to Lockheed Martin Energy Systems. The practice of providing *ad hoc* COLAs was still in effect.

Between 1987 and 2000, the Department of Energy was engaged in contractor transitions as the missions of Oak Ridge reservation sites were changing. Uranium enrichment at the K-25 site was discontinued in 1985 and the K-25 site was decommissioned in 1987. Extensive environmental cleanup was in progress as the site was transformed to a multi-contractor, multi-purpose industrial site known as the *East Tennessee Technology Park*. UT-Battelle became the contractor for ORNL, and Lockheed Martin Energy Systems (formerly known as Martin Marietta Energy Systems) continued as the managing contractor for Y-12. Security and protective forces contractors were addressed separately from facility operations contractors.

During these tumultuous contractor transitions, provisions for ad hoc retiree COLAs were not addressed. As a result, COLAs have essentially "disappeared" for Oak Ridge retirees. There have been numerous contractor changes since 2000, and none of the current contractors have provided COLAs for retirees since that time. Furthermore, the features and administrative details of pensions, medical benefits, and Medicare supplemental insurance plans vary among contractors and are no longer consistent among the Oak Ridge Reservation sites. This affects thousands of retirees who retired with the expectation that their pensions would continue to include ad hoc COLAs. CORRE's primary objective is to work with the Department of Energy and its Oak Ridge Reservation contractors, and elected congressional members to correct this inequity.

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) measures the average change over time in the prices urban consumers pay for a market basket of consumer goods and services, essentially tracking inflation. It is a key economic indicator used to assess the cost of living and the purchasing power of money, and it applies to more than 90 percent of the U.S. population.

The cost of living has almost doubled since Oak Ridge retirees received an ad hoc COLA. One of CORRE's top priorities is to persuade our elected congressional members to work with the Department of Energy, to correct this inequity.

In researching this topic for the CORRE newsletter, the author discovered that there are several different versions of the Consumer Price Index, which focus on different groups. For example, the Social Security Administration uses the CPI-W to make COLA adjustments. For more detailed information, refer to this website link:

<https://inflationdata.com/articles/2023/07/19/what-is-the-difference-between-the-cpi-u-and-the-cpi-w/>.

New Requirements for Defined Benefit Pension Plan Annual Funding Notices

Around the end of four months into each year, participants and beneficiaries receiving pensions from the Oak Ridge Department of Energy contractors receive an Annual Funding Notice. This document is a legally required notice that provides information regarding the plan's funding percentage, a statement of the value of the plan's assets and liabilities, a description of how the plan's assets are invested as of a specific date, and other details about the plan. You probably receive no other document with such an amount of confusing information but with a bottom line that you are not required to respond.

The SECURE 2.0 Act made changes in the requirements that defined benefit (DB) pension plans must satisfy, making the existing model Annual Funding Notices outdated. For single employer DB plans, the funding target attainment percentage was replaced by a new funded percentage as of the year end. The new funded percentage is based on market value of assets rather a value smoothed by actuarial calculations. Liabilities for purposes of reporting the funded percentage are determined using current market interest rates instead of average historical interest rates. Prefunding and carryover balances, which represent previous contributions saved so that less than the minimum for a future year would be required, must be included in the market value of assets. Demographic information (participant counts) is now reported as of the last day of each plan year, along with average return on assets for the plan year. Employer contributions, however, are still determined as before using smoothed interest rates over a 25-year period. This results in different measures of plan's funded status being reported for different purposes.

CORRE's position on this anomaly is that there is no longer any rationale, if there ever was one, for citing funded percentage as an obstacle for considering badly needed benefit improvements. The information required in Annual Funding Notices for multiemployer DB pension plans was not as affected. However, these plans are now required to also report demographic data as of year end and average return on assets for the plan year.

Among the Oak Ridge Department of Energy contractor sponsored DB pension plans, those by UT-Battelle, Consolidated Nuclear Security, and Simmons and Golden Security are considered single-employer plans while the Oak Ridge Reservation Cleanup Contract Pension Plan for Grandfathered Employees is multiemployer. The reason for that was probably not fully understood by those affected when the plan was spun off from Lockheed Martin Energy Systems on April 1, 1998, and became a multiemployer plan effective October 1, 1998. The Management and Integration Contract awarded to Bechtel Jacobs Corporation was based on a proposal to subcontract about 90 percent of the work and reduce staff by about 80 percent by transitioning staff to subcontractors.

CORRE is still analyzing data from the annual funding notices and other demographic data from the contractors on retirees and will be reporting findings and conclusions. We encourage everyone to thoroughly read your annual funding notice and submit questions and comments to CORRE's website: <https://www.mycorre.org/contact>.

What CORRE Does for Our Members...

In our effort to safeguard and improve retiree pensions and medical benefits for our members, CORRE communicates with human resources staff members and management from Department of Energy (DOE) Oak Ridge contractor facilities. We communicate with retiree organizations at other DOE sites throughout the nation. We also monitor and review proposed contract, pension, and benefit changes at those facilities. Last but not least, we communicate with Tennessee's Senators and Congressional Representatives. Congress controls the funding for all DOE facilities, and they have some control over how those funds are used. We have access to staff members of senators Blackburn and Hagerty, and congressional representatives Burchett (District 2) and Fleischmann (District 3).

What CORRE Wants for Our Members...

CORRE's most recent presentation to the Tennessee's Congressional delegation requests the following:

- One-Time Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) to correct pension payment inflation losses incurred since 1998.
- Mandate future year annual pension payment COLAs to be the same each year as those received by DOE Federal retirees. (Since 1998, Civil Service Retirement System retirees have effectively received 95% COLAs and Federal Employees Retirement System retirees received 75% COLAs.)
- Extend the 2% flat-rate reduction to obtain the Surviving Spouse Option to apply to *all* Oak Ridge contractor retirees.
- Reinstate lost health care benefits to a small group of "ProForce" retiree spouses.
- Provide full funding (100% of liabilities) to DOE's Oak Ridge contractor retiree pension fund obligation within 5 years.

CORRE Serves as an Advocate for ALL Oak Ridge Reservation Retirees

Since 2002, CORRE has worked to ensure and safeguard fair and equitable retirement benefits for all Department of Energy-owned, contractor-operated Oak Ridge Reservation retirees and their survivors.

CONSIDER BECOMING A CONTRIBUTING CORRE MEMBER

Contributing members have made a one-time contribution of \$20 (or more) to help defray CORRE's operating expenses. CORRE board members and advisers are not compensated for their work, but we still have operating expenses such as maintaining a website, a post-office box, and printing and distributing brochures.

Whether you are ready to become a contributing member or not, please help us by making sure that we have your correct contact information. This information is helpful when we meet with contractor HR representatives and elected congressional members on your behalf. We can use your zip code to determine your congressional district. (We will never share your contact information with other organizations in a way that identifies you by name.)

Name: (First, middle name or initial, Last)

P.O. Box or Street Address

City, State and Zip Code

Phone (Please include area code)

Email

Retired From:

☐ Y-12 ☐ X-10 ☐ K-25 ☐ ProForce

Year you Retired: _____

NOTE: Even if you worked at more than one site, we only need to know the site you actually *retired from*. This helps CORRE determine the total number of retirees from each site when we are working on issues that are specific to one contractor.

There are two ways to update your contact information:

- If you would like to become a *contributing member*, provide the information shown in the form at left. Clip the form and mail it along with a check for \$20 to:

CORRE Treasurer

P.O. Box 4266

Oak Ridge, TN 37830-4266

- If you're not ready to become a *contributing member*, You can still email your updated contact information to:

communications@mycorre.org

- (You can also use the online fillable form on our website to update your contact information:
mycorre.org/contact .)

Prepare and Send Emails or Letters to Your Congressional Members

In your request for their support for adjustments to our retiree benefits, **letters in your own words are the most effective. Your letter should express how inflation has impacted your finances and quality of life in retirement.** (If you prefer, you can also use the template form letter below.)

The Honorable Marsha Blackburn
357 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D. C. 20510
<https://www.blackburn.senate.gov>

Representative Tim Burchett
1122 Longworth House Office Bldg.
Washington, D. C. 20510
<https://burchett.house.gov>

The Honorable Bill Hagerty
248 Russell Senate Bldg.
Washington, D. C. 20510
<https://www.hagerty.senate.gov>

Representative Chuck Fleischmann
2187 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510
<https://fleischmann.house.gov>

(Template/Form Letter)

Dear (Representative or Senator followed by Last Name),

Our Coalition of Oak Ridge Retired Employees (CORRE) board of directors recently submitted a request for legislative corrective action concerning needed improvements to our pension and health care benefits for retired Oak Ridge nuclear workers. There are about 15,000 former Department of Energy (DOE) retirees and spouses, most of which live in Tennessee and are your constituents.

Our retirement and health benefits have eroded significantly over the past several years due to ever increasing inflation. No cost-of-living adjustments have been made since 1998 for those who worked for many years for the DOE as contractor employees at the Oak Ridge nuclear complex. The cost of living has nearly doubled since then!

(Add anything you wish regarding how inflation has affected you personally here.)

It is my request that you please be a champion and sponsor for this legislative corrective action request from our retiree organization (CORRE), which represents your Oak Ridge nuclear worker constituents. This legislation, if passed, will honor those who have worked for the DOE as contractors for so many years and made sacrifices for the country we have served.

Thank you so much for your support on this issue and for your service to our country and our state.

(Retiree signature and address)

Some Oak Ridge retirees live outside Tennessee congressional district 2 (Burchett) or district 3 (Fleischmann). If you don't already know your representative's name, you can determine it by visiting [this web site](#) and entering your zip code. In some cases, you will also need to enter your street address.

Laughter is the Best Medicine...

.Always Check the License Plate

Imagine walking into the grocery store on an overcast, cloudy day to buy some milk, orange juice, and a loaf of bread. Just before you head out the door to your brand new car, there is a sudden “cloudburst” and of course you don’t have your umbrella. (It’s in the car.) You wait in a covered area in hopes that the rain will let up, but after five minutes, you decide to make a run for it. You can’t see your car but you remember that it was three or four spaces away. You run toward the car, open the driver’s door, and jump in—wet, but not soaked to the skin. You feel your cell phone vibrate, so you take it out of your pocket to see who’s calling you. Suddenly, you see a stranger knocking on your driver’s side window. (He forgot his umbrella too.) You say “can I help you?”

He answers “You’re in my car...!”

You look carefully at the car and see that it’s the right color... same floor mats, same instrument panel, etc., and you respond with “What’s your license plate number?”

He quickly replies with a tag number as the rain continues. (**At this point, you realize that *you may have made a small mistake.***)

You respond with “Do you see another Honda nearby that looks exactly like this one?”

He looks and says, I think your car may be two spaces down this row.

By now, you’re beyond embarrassed. You open the door, apologize profusely, and head for your car. You confirm that the car is yours, get in, start the motor... and there’s another knock on your window.

The stranger smiles, hands me a bag of groceries, and says with a grin “**Do you need any help getting home?**”

Questionable Words of Wisdom for Seniors

Always Check the Label Before Using...

Just because *Toothpaste* and *Preparation H* both come in a squeezable tube does *not* mean they are used for the same purpose! Remember to never squeeze that tube in a dark room! (OK... maybe this one is of questionable *taste*. ...pun intended ☺).

Sometimes the issues we discuss in our newsletters are complex and difficult to understand. (Sometimes we also struggle to have an *even number* of double-sided pages in our newsletter and just need something trivial to make that happen.) It’s been said that *laughter is the best medicine*, and according to the Mayo Clinic and other sources, that is true!

If you would like to see more brief but possibly humorous stories in future CORRE newsletters, you are invited to submit your own “words of wisdom” for possible inclusion in future newsletters. Send your story by email to: communications@mycorre.org.