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Welcome to *Fiduciary Insights*, our monthly newsletter that keeps you in touch with issues, trends, events, and insights of significance to individuals connected with the retirement plan industry. The articles have been carefully selected from a variety of high-quality sources.

2026 IRS Limits for Retirement Plans have been Released, Please See Link Below

"2026 IRS Limits for Retirement Plans"

Reminder:

Please contact us to schedule enrollment/update meetings and plan level review meetings. Also, we would like to schedule retirement planning sessions with your near retiree employees.

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[Pension Funding Levels Start Strong in 2026](#)

January's rise builds on gains made in the last three quarters of 2025. Pension finances started 2026 strong, as the funded status of the largest 100 corporate defined benefit plans rose to 109% in January from 108.1% at

[Workplace retirement plans can be a pipeline for wealth clients](#)

Financial advisors are finding growing success in transforming workplace retirement plan participants into full-service wealth management clients.

year-end 2025, according to Milliman's Pension Funding Index.

January's rise built on gains made in the last three quarters of 2025. Milliman's PFI showed funding dipped to its lowest point of last year in March 2025 (102.7%) before increasing for 10 consecutive months to reach its current level. Source: plansponsor.com

[Rising Demand Pushes NQDC Plan Participation to Record High](#)

Participation climbs to nearly 70% as employers expand education, continue contributions, and integrate financial wellness programs. PSCA's 2025 Nonqualified Deferred Compensation (NQDC) survey revealed strong growth in executive participation and continued evolution in plan design as employers compete for and retain highly compensated talent. Source: napa-net.org

[Super Catch-Ups Lead Optional SECURE 2.0 Features](#)

A report from Vanguard found that the most popular optional feature from SECURE 2.0, by far, was the super catch-up contribution provision, whereas others, especially liquidity-oriented features, were not very popular at all. A report from Vanguard found that the most popular optional feature from SECURE 2.0, by far, was the super catch-up contribution provision, whereas others, especially liquidity-oriented features, were not very popular at all. Source: psca.org

[DOL Proposal Requires Retirement Plans to Offer Yearly Paper Statements](#)

Plan administrators would need to mail annual paper benefit notices and allow more paper opt-ins in compliance with the SECURE 2.0 Act. The U.S. Department of Labor proposed new rules Tuesday requiring retirement plans to provide workers with periodic paper benefit statements, implementing a mandate in the SECURE 2.0 Act of 2022 that modifies long-standing electronic disclosure standards for retirement plans. Source: planadviser.com

[The 401\(k\) Takeover: Private Equity Muscles In on Retirement](#)

Wall Street power players are squeezing into the US retirement industry. Its gatekeepers are succumbing. Every time the phone rings, Erik Daley can practically hear private equity coming for America's 401(k)s. The line has been ringing a lot lately at his modest consulting business in Portland, Oregon. For at least the past year he's been getting a half-dozen calls a week from private equity and other firms interested in his company, and even more since the start of 2026. Source: wealthmanagement.com

[What's on Our Benefits Watchlist for 2026](#)

Believe it or not, we're already two months into the new year! Between the hustle and bustle of the holidays and

A new study indicates that 62% of surveyed advisors convert at least 6% of the defined contribution plan participants they work with into ongoing wealth management relationships. The findings highlight how advisors are leveraging retirement plan access to deepen client ties and drive organic growth. Source: investmentnews.com

[Comparing 7 Defined Contribution Plan Designs - 2026](#)

We are often asked to help companies design their retirement programs, given certain goals and objectives. Usually, we find the employer is willing to spend a certain amount on staff, assuming sufficient company profits. Then a frequent question pertains to how much can be deferred for the owners, or other highly compensated employees, on a pre-tax basis. When we help design a plan, we look at objectives, the need for flexibility, ages of the key personnel, salaries of everyone involved, total budgeted dollars, the advantages of adding 401(k) features, etc. Source: consultrms.com

[How to Strengthen Fiduciary Oversight in Your Retirement Plan](#)

Fulfilling fiduciary duties is the cornerstone of responsible retirement plan sponsorship. Under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA), plan sponsors are legally obligated to act in the best interests of participants and their beneficiaries. Failure to meet these obligations can lead to personal and plan sponsor liability, significant penalties, and costly litigation. With regulatory focus increasing, particularly concerning fee transparency and investment performance, a proactive, documented approach is essential. Source: planpilot.com

[What Was the Impact of EBSA Enforcement in 2025?](#)

The Employee Benefits Security Administration reports that in FY 2025 it restored almost \$1.4 billion to benefit plans as well as participants and their beneficiaries. What about the results concerning retirement plans and their participants? EBSA ultimately exists to protect the financial security of workers, retirees, and their families. Source: napa-net.org

[How MEP, PEP Growth Influences Retirement Industry Roles](#)

As pooled plans become less niche, recordkeepers, advisers and TPAs have started working together more than ever before. When pooled employer plans were authorized under the Setting Every Community Up for Retirement Enhancement Act of 2019, much of the attention focused on how PEPs could expand retirement access for small employers. But several years into their growth, a different story is coming into focus: Pooled plans are not just changing who gets coverage—they are quietly influencing competition. Source: plansponsor.com

getting back in the swing of things this January, you might have missed key industry updates or are curious about what's coming next. In a recent episode of Talking Benefits from the International Foundation, "The 2026 Benefits Watchlist," our hosts recapped last year's big benefit news and took a look at what's ahead for the industry in 2026. Source: blog.ifebp.org

[Emergency Savings Tools Linked to Higher Plan Participation](#)

Yet only 18% of plans offer emergency savings withdrawals, reports T. Rowe Price. Emergency savings benefits, along with workplace features dedicated to financial and retirement wellbeing, are linked to stronger plan participation. T. Rowe Price's benchmarking report, "Reference Point," finds that plans offering emergency expense withdrawals have a participation rate of 76%, compared to 67% in plans without the features. This is as the findings show that 69% of workers have less than six months' worth of emergency savings, and 47% say they can't cover a \$1,000 expense. Source: 401kspecialistmag.com

[Offering Student Loan Benefits Could Add \\$200K to Retirement Savings](#)

More employees look to plan sponsors for help in paying down student loan debt while saving for retirement, reports Fidelity. Employees who receive employer matches from student debt repayment programs are on track to gain thousands in retirement savings. The 2026 State of Student Debt study from Fidelity Investments finds that these employees will see an additional \$200,000 in savings for retirement, as their company helps pay down debt and offers an opening to save for long-term needs. Source: 401kspecialistmag.com

[DC Participants Evince Support for AI](#)

A comprehensive survey that looks at defined contribution plan participants' views on alternative investments and the use of artificial intelligence to bolster financial decision-making finds that they support both. Source: asppa-net.org

Western Benefits & Pension Council

Please visit westernpension.org for all current and upcoming programs.

Small Business Council of America

Please visit the Small Business Council of America (SBCA) website at SBCA.net. The SBCA is the only national organization whose sole purpose is to represent the interests of privately held businesses in the areas of federal income and estate tax, retirement, pension, healthcare, and other employee benefits concerns.

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Online Resources

Our company website is filled with resources for your financial planning needs. Please visit: lwarner.com.

WPBC

Please find all the upcoming panel and speaking events for Western Pension and Benefits Council at: westernpension.org.

Editor

This newsletter is compiled and edited by Ala Smochinsky. Please direct any comments to the Editor: asmochinsky@lwarner.com.

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