

SUAA Annual Meeting—Springfield, June 22 & 23, 2010

Annual Meeting Delegates and Speakers

CDAAs delegates to the annual meeting included Joe Rorke, Bob Sobie, and Steve Mansfield. There were over 100 attendees and 35 local chapters represented at the meeting. Presentations included a panel of well-respected lobbyist (one of whom was a former Speaker of the House); a House Representative (Jim Watson-R, Jacksonville); Gubernatorial candidates (Rich Whitney, Green Party, Quinn and Brady invited, but did not attend); SURS Executive Director William Mabe; Mike Lawrence (former Gov. Jim Edgar's press secretary); Membership and Development Committee; and Legislative Action activities and updates.

The resounding message was the same one you have heard and read about for the past several months. The State is broke. Not only broke, but in arrears for almost every financial obligation that is supported by the state's budget. Most of us are directly affected by the un/underfunded local school districts and community college appropriations from the state, along with the failure of the state to fully fund the pension systems, and, is currently up to six months behind in payments, while in some instances the state has failed to make any insurance claim payments.

The resounding message from the speakers was that the State will not be able to "cut" its way out of this fiscal crisis. Interestingly, it was reported that Illinois now has one of the smaller state workforces, per capita, of the major industrial states. Faced with a \$13 billion deficit, cuts will have to be made. However, to illustrate the gravity of the financial situation, one speaker noted that if Illinois fired every state employee, we would only trim \$2 to \$3 billion dollars from the budget. (Current budget appropriations for the General Fund are approximately \$ 25 billion.)

The "general" consensus among speakers was the only solution will be some type of combination of additional budget reductions along with, at least in the short-term, an increase in revenues. You may recall, the SUAA Executive Board composed the "SUAA 7-Point Program" (posted on codretirees.org) several months ago and presented the program to all of the state's leaders as a means of addressing the fiscal crisis. The "7-point" program advocated increasing revenue while freezing the State budget until the debt was eliminated. Although none of the state's leaders was prepared to support the SUAA program, it is becoming more evident that some type of plan similar to the SUAA proposal may be the only means of addressing the budget deficit.

Legislative and Membership Committee Reports/Recommendations

(Legislative)

As per SUAA Bylaws, SUAA does not officially endorse candidates. However, SUAA members are encouraged to support candidates for state offices who will oppose the reduction of retirement benefits for current and future retirees. The Legislative Committee expressed concerns related to the continued advocacy by the popular press and other organizations/associations to challenge retiree benefits currently guaranteed by the State Constitution. Recently, Colorado and Minnesota have reduced the cost of living adjustment for current retirees (see “Colorado/Minnesota Take Knife to Benefits”.) There are legal challenges to the reduction of earned benefits in Colorado and Minnesota, but there is no guarantee the benefits will be restored. Unfortunately, it is possible that there will be other states that will mount efforts to diminish retiree benefits.

The Legislative Committee recommended that all local chapters/members be actively engaged in contacting and communicating with all of their state senators, representatives, and candidates prior to the November 2 election. Dialoguing with members of the General Assembly may be one means of preventing the dire consequences of a legal challenge to our benefits assured by the state constitution.

(Membership)

The Membership Committee challenged each chapter to adopt a recommended strategic and tactical plan in order to grow SUAA membership. The committee report indicated that SUAA membership has not grown over the past four years. Select chapters have successfully increased membership (CDAA is one) over the past four years, but several chapters have either not grown or had a decline in members. Common problems shared with most chapters include the mortality of members, deceased member’s survivors not becoming members, failure of members to renew memberships, and the difficulty in contacting and recruiting recent retirees. Additionally, many chapters reported difficulty in recruiting current employees due to the misinterpretation of SUAA being an association of only retirees.

The goal for CDAA is 25 new members by June 1 of 2011. As noted in the meeting, each member of CDAA probably knows at least one retiree or current COD employee who not currently a member of our association. (a few years ago, Dixie Miller called/sent notes to several of her COD colleagues/friends who were not members of CDAA and asked them to join—almost everyone she contacted is now a member) If each us makes a concerted effort to recruit one new member, we will have a successful year. Increasing our membership does support and strengthen our lobbying efforts with elected officials. Had SUAA membership been

50,000, Governor Quinn, and Senator Brady would have been asking us if they could address our annual meeting attendees.

(Miscellaneous)

The newly elected president of SUAA is Leo Welch—(retired) Southwestern Illinois CC and current chair of EIU Board of Trustees. Jan Cook—(retired) ISU, was elected secretary/treasurer. Bonnie Henry—(retired) Wm. Rainey Harper, was elected as a member at large to the SUAA Executive Board. We also had an opportunity to tour the new SUAA office that is literally across the street from the State Capitol.

William Mabe, newly appointed Executive Director of SURS, spent his second day on the job attending and participating in the first day activities at the SUAA annual meeting. It may take him a few weeks to fully comprehend the intricacies of SURS and the history of funding and support from the state legislature. He is already faced with the failure of the general assembly to make this year's payment to the pension systems. SB 3514, which would provide for borrowing the money to fund the pension systems, has not passed the Senate. Borrowing isn't a good option, but skipping another payment to the pensions will only further burden the long-term debt problem and potentially lead to bankrupting the pension systems.