



WIU Chapter - SUAA Newsletter

Serving the interest of the annuitants and survivors of Western Illinois University

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Fall 2021

Moving Forward in 2021

Message from the President

We were all hoping that we would be way past COVID-19 by now but that is not the case. We will not be having our Fall luncheon but still have high hopes for the ability to gather for future events. Your SUAA chapter has continued to meet in person and on Zoom. We want all our members to have the information they need to stay informed and make decisions regarding their benefits. We would encourage all of you to look at the state SUAA page at suaa.org and add it to your phone, your laptop, or your personal computer. There is a lot of information on this site that you would find helpful. I would also encourage anyone that does not have an account with the State Universities Retirement System (SURS) to create an account. It is a very valuable website that provides information and answers questions you may have.

One of our board members, Patti Jones attended a Blue Cross/Blue Shield meeting that was organized by Springfield Clinic. It was announced that as of October 1, 2021, Springfield Clinic will not be a preferred provider for Blue Cross/Blue Shield. We sincerely hope that all our members are aware of this but if not, you should contact Springfield Clinic or your account with my benefits at mybenefits.illinois.gov.

Your local SUAA board appreciates the support you have given and looks forward to seeing you all in the future. Please take care and stay safe.

—Linda Farr
President, WIU SUAA

Legislative Update

Following a hectic marathon session, the Illinois General Assembly passed a \$42.3 billion FY22 budget in the early hours of June 1. Governor J.B. Pritzker subsequently approved this measure which reflects his spending and policy priorities for the current fiscal year.

Owing to better-than-expected state revenues, the availability of federal stimulus funds and the elimination of some corporate tax loopholes, the budget appears to be balanced. Furthermore, because of a variety of initiatives pursued by the Pritzker administration, they have been able to reduce the \$17 billion state debt they had inherited from the Rauner regime to approximately \$3 billion. This positive development has resulted in a slight, but encouraging, upgrade in Illinois' credit rating by two (Moody's and Fitch) of the three major U. S. financial rating services.

The FY22 budget maintains operations funding for public higher education at the FY21 level of \$1.2 billion. Additionally, state support for the Monetary Award Program (MAP) will be \$479.6 million, an increase of \$28.2 million over the FY21 appropriation. And, \$35 million has been allocated for the AIM-HIGH initiative, a merit-based scholarship program designed to stem the outmigration of outstanding Illinois high school graduates. Also, Illinois public universities and community colleges will be eligible to receive direct financial assistance from the COVID-19 relief programs administered through the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund.

Again, this year, the FY22 budget provides for full funding of the state's share of pension costs for the five public employee pension systems. The budget also includes adequate support for state employee and retiree health benefits.

The General assembly also approved legislation that will enable collegiate-level student athletes to be compensated for merchandise and other promotional endorsements and to employ agents to assist in various aspects of these activities.

The departure of long-time House Speaker Michael Madigan did little to ease the ongoing tensions between Republicans and Democrats in Springfield. Indeed, the GOP delegations in both chambers of the General Assembly strenuously opposed such key elements of the governor's agenda as clean energy initiatives, ethics reform, and COVID-19 regulations. But the most bitter disagreements between the two parties centered on issues relating to reapportionment.

The battle lines between the two parties were drawn when Gov. Pritzker repudiated his 2018 campaign position to support a "fair map" process for non-partisan redistricting. Given the united stance of the governor and Democratic legislative majority on this issue, the 2021 redistricting process would again this year be conducted by a legislative commission dominated by Democrats. As has been the case in the past in Illinois and in other states where reapportionment decisions are made by majority party rule, the resulting legislative maps are generally designed to ensure or enhance the power of the majority party. And this reality is reflected in the new legislative maps approved by General Assembly and governor.

Under this new arrangement, it is anticipated that the Democrats will be able to increase their current 73-45 House majority to at least 80-38. It appears, however, that there will be little, if any, change, in the partisan composition of the Senate which is now comprised of 41 Democrats and 18 Republicans. It also appears that the Illinois Supreme Court districts have been configured to ensure a Democratic majority on that body. Although the details regarding the makeup of the new Illinois Congressional districts will not be announced until October, Illinois' delegation to the U.S. House of Representatives will be reduced from 18 to 17 because of the state's population decline. The delegation, now comprised of 13 Democrats and five Republicans, will likely consist of 14 Democrats and three Republicans following reapportionment.

WIU and Macomb will also be affected by the new state legislative map. Both Macomb and Western will now be part of the 71st House district represented by WIU alumnus Dan Swanson(R) of Alpha. The new 71st district extends in a narrow 10-15-mile-wide strip from Macomb to the southern Moline suburbs. Representative Norine Hammond will now represent

a much enlarged 94th House district that includes rural areas of McDonough County. WIU and Macomb have been assigned to the newly redrawn 36th Senatorial district which is identical to 71st House district plus the city of Moline. The district was drawn to exclude its present Senator, Neil Anderson(R), who will presumably seek election in the district in which he will reside. The Democrats hope to transform the 36th district into reliable constituency for their party. A popular Democratic state representative from the Quad Cities area has already announced his intention to run for this seat.

Gov. Pritzker announced in July that he will be seeking reelection and has already donated \$35 million to his campaign fund. There are already six announced Republican gubernatorial candidates--three of whom might be considered as serious contenders for their party's nomination at this time. This trio includes: State Senator Darren Bailey from Southern Illinois, Gary Rabine, a suburban Chicago businessman, and Jesse Sullivan, a former San Francisco businessman who returned to his native Illinois to run for governor. Bailey and Rabine have each raised about a million dollars in campaign funds while Sullivan already has \$11+ million. It is interesting to note that both state and national political pundits have already projected that, barring any unforeseen developments, Gov. Pritzker can look forward to a second term.

— Nick Pano

Bookmark Western's SUAA Website

Be sure to bookmark Western Illinois University's SUAA Website at wiu.edu/SUAA.

Information includes membership and benefits, a list of the Board of Directors, and a page of clickable resources.

The site also includes documents from board meetings, With minutes and financial reports. Newsletters are also posted.

Membership Information

A reminder for those who may be considering retiring this year: If you are currently a dues deduction member, please remember to contact SURS (surs.org) and provide them with the signature to withhold the dues from your retirement benefit. That is not automatically done for you when you retire, and while you are an active employee the university does the deduction. If you know of anyone who is interested in joining SUAA, please contact Maureen Marx (M-Marx@wiu.edu). Also, a downloadable membership form is available on Western's website at wiu.edu/suaa, click on "Membership."

Member Information Changes

If you have a change in your home address, email, or telephone number(s), please contact the Alumni Office with this information so that you continue to receive newsletters and other updates from your WIU SUAA Board. Inform the Alumni Office at: Tel. 309-298-1914; Email: A-Association@wiu.edu; or complete the online form at: wiu.edu/alumni and click on "Update us" in the left column.

Information

State University Annuitants Association (SUAA)
217 E. Monroe Suite 100
Springfield, IL 62701
Website: suaa.org

State Universities Retirement System (SURS)
1901 Fox Drive
Champaign, IL 61820
Website: surs.org

My Benefits
Administered by the State of Illinois
Website: mybenefits.illinois.gov



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