SUAA Newsletter, September, 2026

Message from President Lisa Melz-Jenning

Welcome to another exciting year with SUAA!

Whether you've been with us for years or are just getting started, your presence and support are what keep this organization thriving.

The year ahead is full of opportunity – to grow our membership, strengthen our voice, and stand together on the issues that matter most to us.

Our mission depends on all of us staying engaged and connected. If you know colleagues, friends, or retirees who aren't yet members, please invite them to join.

Our strength comes from number, and every new member helps us protect the benefits and pensions we've all worked so hard to earn. This is a fight we can't afford to sit out – we need everyone at the table.

I'm honored to serve alongside such a dedicated group of members, and I'm looking forward to a productive year together. Thank you for everything you do for this organization.

Here's to another great year!

SURS Update by Steve Rock

For those in the Defined Benefit (DB) Plan, the preliminary one-year investment return for the portfolio as of the en of fiscal year 2026 (June 30, 2026) was +12.24%. This substantially exceeded the annual return goal of +6.5%. As of the end of June, plan assets totaled $27.25 billion, and the funding ratio was 49.6%.

Due to the low funding ratio, the portfolio is invested to provide downside protection. The required State contribution for FY 2026 was $2.32 billion, and has been received. The governor's budget request for SURS for FY 2027 was approved by the legislature and amounts to $2.366 billion. This is the full amount that is required under state law on the path to get the funding ratio to 90% by 2045.

As of the end of March, assets on the Retirement Saving (formerly Self-Managed} Plan totaled $5.224 billion. The average account balance was $205,702.

Three SURS Board positions will be up for election next spring. Nominating petitions will be available later in the year. The next SURS Board and committee meetings will be n Champaign on Sept. 10-11.

Membership by Linda Farr

Please talk to fellow retirees about joining SUAA! You can get information by going to the state website (suaa.org) or our chapter website (WIU.edu/suaa). Thank you!

SUAA Foundation by Judy Brown

The foundation still has two $1000 professional grants to be awarded for 2026-27 to be awarded to a SUAA, currently employed. The awards may be used for conferences, workshops, seminars or classes. Applications are available under Documents on wiu.edu/suaa.

All eight of the educational scholarships have been awarded.

Legislative Update by Nick Pano

Governor Pritzker signed the Fiscal Year 2027 state budget appropriation bill June 16. For the eighth consecutive year, the budget, as approved by the General Assembly, appears to be balanced with anticipated revenues of $56.2 billion and projected expenditures of $55.9 billion….

The FY27 budget does provide full funding for the state's share of the pension costs for the five public employee pension systems. It also includes adequate support for state employee and retiree health benefits. Additionally, it extends the pension buyout program for another two years. The state will also continue to deal with issues arising from Tier 2 Social Security Safe Harbor violations as necessary….

Again, this session, the General Assembly the Adequate and Equitable Public University Funding Act…. WIU is the most underfunded of the state's public universities…. The University of Illinois system led the opposition to this act.

Pritzker continues to advocate for allowing community colleges to offer degrees in certain areas: nursing, law enforcement, industrial technology and agriculture, which four-year schools generally oppose.

Pano will deliver his full comments at the WIU chapter banquet on Oct. 13.

Note: Tuesday, Nov. 3, is general election day. Early voting begins Sept. 24. Please vote!