**Legislative Action Report**

**May 2024**

By Dick Simpson

Our new legislative committee had its first briefing and committee meeting on February 16th to coordinate our legislative activities during 2024. In March and April, we began meeting with legislators. We have had meetings with Rep. Kelly Cassidy; Majority Leader Robyn Gabel; and Rep. Ann Williams. Michele Thompson had a meeting with Sen. Robert Peters’ chief of staff, and Carolyn Arnold is still trying to set up a meeting with Debbie Meyers-Martin.

Each meeting has included 2-5 UIC SUAA members and SUAA staff who met with legislators **by Zoom.** Bryan, Matt, and Thomas (SUAA staff) have been impressed with the impact of the meetings and plan to roll out the program to more SUAA chapters next year.

At each meeting, we have expressed our concerns. We stressed protection of Tier 1 pensions, better healthcare for members (many hospitals don’t accept Aetna/TRAIL), and improvements for Tier 2 to improve benefits at least to Social Security standards. The healthcare issue and Tier 2 problems have most grabbed the attention of the legislators with whom we have met. We should stress our advocacy in all communications to SUAA members and potential members in order to recruit new SUAA members.

I attended the Better Government Association meeting and luncheon on “PUBLIC PENSIONS: CAN THEY BE FIXED?”  I spoke during the Q&A period about our issues and met briefly with Sen. Robert Martwick afterwards. He is one of our best advocates in Springfield.

Earlier, Michele Thompson and I attended the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability pension conference and met with three legislators there. We also attended the SUAA-UIUC meeting with three downstate legislators.

Chris Keys and I have met three times by Zoom with the officers of the UIUC and the UIS Executive Committees to coordinate our legislative activities and other joint actions.

The pension debt is approximately $140 billion, and pensions across all State pension funds are only, on average, 40% funded. David Greising of BGA has changed his position to: we can fix the problem without changing the Constitution. The bottom line is that the idea of a Constitution Amendment has little support at the moment. The Governor’s budget proposal and the Civic Committee’s proposals have more support to fix the pension debt problem. At least Sen. Martwick and other legislative leaders recognize the Tier II problem and have some hope of doing more than a minimal fix (bringing it up to Social Security levels).

This may be a propitious time to fix the pension problem because there are realistic proposals to do so, and the Governor has political ambitions to run for President. Fixing pensions would be a good claim that he can be an effective chief executive.

At the April UIC SUAA Board meeting, it was suggested that we ask SUAAction to issue a scorecard on at least the State legislators who have responded positively to our issues. A letter should be sent to all SUAA members about our results, and we should make a special effort to send an email to Tier 2 members who have yet to join.

SUAA staff continue to monitor the situation in Springfield for us. However, SUAAction has lost members and funding. It is important to get new members and to increase our individual donations if we want to be effective in the fall and next year. Anyone who can attend fundraising events or town hall meetings by legislators should do so; SUAAction will reimburse any costs.

Altogether we have had contact with about 10 legislators, and the response has been positive and furthered our legislative agenda in Springfield.