

A Few minutes with the Boss

By: Joseph Andalina

The mid-terms are over, and it couldn't come sooner. But is it too late for pensions?

Had enough politics for a while? I'm sure you have—I know I am so happy that I don't have to grab my remote and change the channel away from the political ads that included everything from “Buddhism” to “submit to me” to “witchcraft.”

The big picture is the President and the Senate still reign blue, while the House is now colored deep red—at the Federal level. So in sum, no cap and trade tax, maybe Obama-care repealed or modified, and the Bush tax cuts may stay. In other words, a gridlock. And that's good!

Sometimes I prefer a House divided on politics, because little gets done and that is usually the best for us as a people, as well as the individual taxpayer. But our primary success, as regards unions, is here in Illinois, where the Democrats won the whole enchilada.

Dems still reign in the Senate and the House, and as Tribune columnist John Kass is prone to say, “Governor Jell-O” reigns supreme in the Springfield mansion. So we as government workers will most certainly see increased taxes, our pension system might take a while to get dismantled by the threat of right-wing politics and our collective bargaining rights will be protected.

Now the Fall Veto Session begins. Top on the agenda is the Illinois Municipal Mayors' League, many local leaders (both left and right) and the public's desire to “reform” our pensions. Don't be fooled folks—there is a lot of red and blue trying to destroy your pensions. After all, both sides of the political spectrum have participated in the near bankruptcy of various towns where they avoid any blame and instead choose to scapegoat our pensions.

So you have to be wary and diligently notify your leadership and individual House and Senate representatives that you don't want your current pension system dismantled.

That you don't want a defined contribution.

That you don't want to be a cop until you're 67 before you can even envision retirement.

That you don't want a cap on our paltry pension. (It is not the grunts in police work whose pensions got spiked, is it? Know any chiefs or deputy chiefs who got this, however?) It is not the grunts who get a fat payback even after 30 years of service.

That you don't want your pension connected to a 401k along the way, either.

You must make your voice known, because the “sky is falling” politicians are both red and blue. Cop pensions are their manna from heaven. Even though the Dems lead the way, the party lights have already been dimmed. Just read all the pension reform referendum issues out there. The press and the public have, and 80 percent of the public want pension reform. In fact, 44 Illinois communities have approved advisory referendums calling for reform.

But we may get some respite, as Quinn wants to borrow money to pay the state’s annual obligation to retiree pension programs. But the Republicans are not on board and neither are all Democrats, even though I feel it is the right thing to do.

Also, the IML is panicking that public safety reform may not happen this Veto Session. They are urging municipal leaders to act now! They are advising local officials to let their representatives know what the financial consequences of inaction might be if pensions are not reformed. Read more “Wolf” crying, people.

So we have to get past the Veto Session to avoid “reform” being stuffed down our throats and give us time to come up with additional recommendations to keep our pensions as viable to us as possible.

Keep those cards and letters going to your reps, folks. The battle lines have been formed.

Vita é bella

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