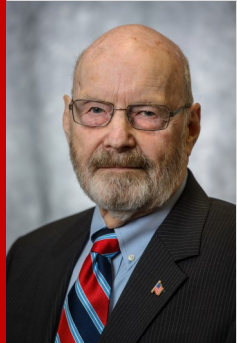


Insight From the Administrator

By William I Winegarner



2021 Another Great Year To Be Alive.

Having survived 2020, all of Ohio's retired public servants should receive a gold medal.

We actually made it through.

To start off this new year, I wanted to reflect a little on my life experiences and how they impact our advocacy on your behalf.

I was born in November of 1937. Experienced world wars, foreign wars, foreign police actions, cold wars, and spent time in the Army.

As a child, I remember having to dive under my desk when the air-raid sirens sounded, and having to use food and gasoline ration coupons. I remember being concerned about the Japanese being herded into camps and stripped of their constitutional rights. I was astonished at the ease with which Senator Joseph McCarthy was able to destroy lives by verbal innuendo with no facts to back his claims.

Growing up, I watched other kids in my neighborhood die from polio, and observed parents having health concerns over a myriad of worldwide pandemics like the Asian flu, H3N2, H1N1, SARS, SWINE, MERS, ZIKA and COVID-19.

I was raised to see the best in people, and was sickened by focused prejudice and injustice. Since my teen years I have been an outspoken critic of segregation based on color, not conduct; and was also blessed to be a real estate broker in a city where equal rights in housing was a priority.

I am proud to be a citizen of the United States of America with its history of self-correcting all the short comings that man brings to the table. A lesson I learned from my parents taught me that it is not so bad if at first you do something wrong; it is only bad when you learn better, and keep doing it.

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The Legislative Report

By Steve Buehrer, Esq.



New, Yet Familiar

Another new year has burst upon us. Not only do January and February bring cold weather to Ohio, they also bring a new session of the General Assembly.

On January 4th, the 134th General Assembly convened in Columbus with more than twenty brand new legislators, new leadership and the perpetual optimism that a new session brings.

Ohio's Constitution sets forth that the legislature will meet in two year sessions after which it must reorganize and begin with a fresh set of legislative proposals. Those bills not approved by the end of the preceding year have expired and legislative proposals to change Ohio's statutes must be introduced anew.

Along with these new beginnings at the Statehouse, the Governor also must bring forth his budget proposal to fund the next two years of the state's operations.

As you read this column, the House and Senate will be highly engaged in considering this budget submission as well as undertaking the hearing process for the hundreds of bills that have already been introduced in the opening days of the legislative session.

Although the beginning of an Ohio General Assembly brings new issues and ideas, many of the topics and proposals facing the legislature are quite familiar.

On the macro level, many legislative initiatives and debates as well as the budget itself will be shaped by the ongoing pandemic that has so dynamically impacted our world. Issues of government regulation, spending and the reordering of our lives in light of the

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2020 was one of the most disheartening years for me. Not talking about the politics or pandemic. It was my observations of the citizens of the country I love and fought for, blindly following the dictates of people we elected to run our state and local governments; who assumed the position of overlords. It wasn't necessarily the actions of the politicians that bothered me, it was the subservient actions of the US citizenry.

Why? Because history is consistent and clear on the growth of all dictatorships. Each began when their citizens became subservient to the fear mongering of their politicians.

So, what does all this have to do with protecting Ohio's public pension?

It is a historical record that even though there is evil in the world, that most people, but not all, are basically good at heart. They want to correct things that are wrong; however, they tend to over react, because they are most effectively motivated by fear.

It is the fear mongers that distract people from the real issues at hand. They focus on questions like: Loss or reduction of COLAs. Loss of spousal coverage. Reduction of health benefits. The unfairness of the Social Security GPO and WEP.

While many groups play on our disappointment and lack of understanding about these issues, they avoid the explanations, make villains of the decision makers, and knowingly promise empty solutions.

In the meantime they are missing the real issues that have a long-range impact on the survivability of our pension plans and systems.

Protect Ohio Pensions' responsibility is to educate and advocate. We have never and will never encourage potential members to join by playing on peoples' misunderstanding of the issues, or their fears of being cheated by others.

We want to help our members learn the whys and wherefores, develop a strategy, and then educate and advocate.

Our job is to work with you to shield your pension plan, so it will have the best-continued potential of providing you with the most benefits possible.



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COVID virus will be part of many conversations at the Statehouse this year and perhaps beyond.

Secondarily, a number of bills that ran out of time in the last session will be quickly re-introduced and pushed in this General Assembly. Education funding, minimum wage rates, constitutional freedoms and a host of other topics have been going on for years and yet are back at the Statehouse for renewed consideration.

Pension changes and reforms will also reappear before the General Assembly as the new session begins. Even though no one has forcefully advocated for major pension reforms as a priority issue of this General Assembly, stability, sustainability and adaptability are all goals of the pension systems that garner consideration each year.

Last session, some of the retirement systems, most notably OPERS, pushed a package of reforms designed to bring long term financial stability into focus. Despite initial calculations that seem to suggest that 2020 was a successful investing year for the retirement funds, it is probable that each system will continue to bring forward ideas designed to protect pension funds from being prematurely depleted.

In addition to these system driven reforms, individual legislators will continue to champion changes to the system that are brought to their attention by constituents and other interest groups.

Last session, we tracked more than a dozen bills impacting the pension systems, and this session is likely to see many more. Already individual legislators have introduced legislation to change the governance structures of the boards and ultimately impact how pension benefits are delivered to Ohio retirees.

In these days of new ideas and familiar debates, POP 5 will continue to use our collective knowledge

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Maryfrances Kamyar
Chief Operations Officer

Through it All We Persevered

As we continue to speak to our family and friends concerning the ups and downs of 2020, and how it has impacted our personal lives; I would like to share with you what we at POP5 have been doing this past year during the pandemic.

In our quest to keep abreast of information on the pension systems in Ohio, POP5 staff had been attending in person board meetings of OPERS and SERS. In March of last year, after the pandemic “shelter in place”, we continued our rotation of board meetings along with the introduction of attending the STRS board meetings. Some days in the office, during the third week of the month, you could hear the SERS meeting in one office, STRS in another and OPERS in another.

Keeping informed with financial reports, discussions and the decisions these boards make each month is integral to being prepared for any action that is needed by POP5.

Each day in our office we were checking the Gongwer news for Ohio. Gongwer is the state's premier source for government news and information. POP5 can see every house bill and senate bill introduced so we may track them through the general assembly. We spent a great deal of time reading research papers presented by the National Institute for Retirement Security (NIRS) and the National Conference on Public Employee Retirement Systems (NCPERS), or listening to webinars presented by the National Public Pension Coalition.

There is indeed safety in numbers. Learning all we can from these organizations helps us in being prepared to take action to protect our defined-benefit pensions here in Ohio. To glean as much information as we can we also read articles in newspapers from all 50 states, a federal district and the five self-governing territories.

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This gives us insight to how other public pension systems are doing; and if they are considering moving to the devastating defined contribution (401k) type of pension for future generations and what took them down that path.

In reading the National Public Pension Coalition blog we came across this article:

Senate bill would end Florida’s state pension option for new employees by Jim Saunders. Saunders reports on the Florida State Senate’s Governmental Oversight and Accountability Committee passage of Senate Bill (SB) 84. SB 84 would close the Florida Retirement System (FRS) to all newly hired public employees as of July 1, 2022, and enroll them into a defined-contribution plan. This would be detrimental both to the state’s finances and to public employees’ retirement security.

We here at POP5, all through last year, the previous years and the coming year continue to keep ourselves informed through social media, research and webinars on the concerns of Ohio’s retirees, the pension systems and the General Assembly.

This kind of information from other states humbles us in the knowledge that we have great pension systems in the state of Ohio; and through careful advocacy we can be a part of keeping them great.



Endorsed Pension Board Trustees

Protect Ohio Pensions does not endorse candidates for any pension board of trustees election.

As you know, our purpose is to expose and stop those who want to convert Ohio’s defined-benefit plans to the less desirable defined-contribution type of plans. We are also here to explain the motives behind the movement (take money from you and give it to them), and how such a change would be detrimental to current employees, retirees, and taxpayers alike.

To accomplish our task requires your full focus and support. If we would support your chosen candidate, we would become your hero. If we supported the opposing candidate, we would become your enemy.

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Either way we would be harming our united efforts to accomplish the task for which you became a member.

We would, however, encourage you to do four things. 1.) Join the online access to your pension board's meeting. Watch what they do. Learn the legal requirement they must meet, and see how much knowledge and insight it takes to make the tough and proper-fiduciary decisions. 2.) Avoid one-issue candidates. The position requires a much broader scope of knowledge. 3.) Don't just pick a candidate because a group supports them. Take the time to study each candidate before you select one. 4) VOTE

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and experience to evaluate any proposals brought forward.

We will continue to be governed by our bedrock principles of the protection of defined-benefit plans and the freedom of duly elected boards to govern the retirement systems of the state.

Firmly planted in these familiar ideas, we will continue to participate in the work of the General Assembly in this new session.



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