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Fwd: Haisman wants whole pension story told

1 message

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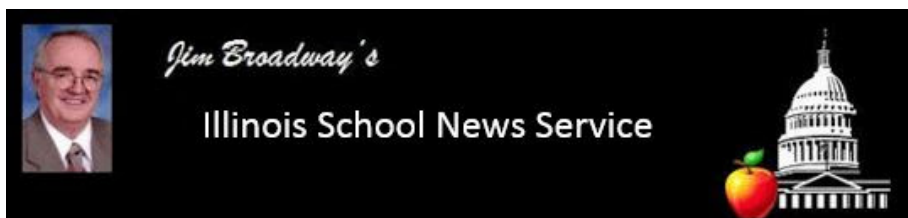
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[We regret that this issue cannot be posted to the web at this time.]

Haisman wants *whole* pension story told

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

[It's good to be back. No problems, just took a break.-Jim]

Adam Andrzejewski has apparently irritated Bob Haisman, and probably not for the first time. You know Bob. He's a retired teacher, former President of the Illinois Education Association and current (and forever) advocate for public education and children and teachers and the retirement system on which they rely.

Bob is a living confirmation of the observation that the best among educators never truly retire. They don't know how. I'll be Bob Haisman doesn't even own a fishing pole.

You have probably heard of Andrzejewski (pronounced, he says, Angie-eff-ski), too. He's the Tea-Party conservative who waged a comical candidacy for governor in 2010. I'm sure you remember. He claims he was endorsed by Lech Walesa and by Rush Limbaugh. Now Bob thinks Adam wants to torpedo educators' pensions.

And Bob is correct about this of course. Andrzejewski has made his living of late getting right-wing donors to support his OpenTheBooks.com web site on which he posts cherry-picked data about public employees' salaries in order to infuriate easily-angered conservatives who think teachers should teach for free.

Andrzejewski recently was able to get an opinion piece published at Forbes.com (which hastens to advise site visitors that "Opinions expressed by Forbes Contributors are their own.") linking readers to an [exclusive club of 30,000 Illinois educators](#) who receive at least \$100,000 in pension benefits or salaries per year.

The article is essentially just a rant about educators' salaries and pensions. The most culpable school boards, he notes, govern districts in the property tax-rich collar counties. He calls out the 10 districts with the most six-figure salaried staff. (But in those districts anyone called a "professional" earns in the six figures.)

Andrzejewski was particularly strident in denouncing the superintendents - calling them by name - who are more highly paid than he thinks they should be considering the low socioeconomic status and low academic performance of most of their students. (These would be the state's hardest-to-educate children.)

He also linked readers to [an interactive map](#). You can click on a "pin" to see how many high-rollers work at, or are retired from, districts and agencies statewide. (The ISBE pin is among those in Springfield, of course. I was pleased to learn how well so many of my friends have been faring. Next time, *they* buy *my* lunch.)

Bob Haisman pulls no punches. He's been in the trenches, he says, for 50 years, seeking fair compensation and pension benefits for educators, pushing to have the state actually fund the promises it makes to educators, and fighting against erosion in the pension benefits - as guaranteed by the Constitution.

Who's working the other side of the street? "Right-wing groups [that] philosophically oppose pensions" have long been engaged, he said, in "a well-funded, super-sophisticated effort to undermine public support for government employee and teacher pensions." The Andrzejewski article in Forbes is just one example.

The Teachers Retirement System filled in some gaps in that article: The 30,000 active and retired educators receiving at least \$100,000 per year represent just 11.4% of the 268,600 active and retired TRS members last year. The average TRS pension last year was just \$54,180, far less than Andrzejewski implies is typical.

[Where did Andrzejewski get the information for his interactive map? He got it from the TRS. Like any other governmental agency, the TRS is required to respond with the information demanded under the Freedom of Information Act, with some exceptions. No contact information or retirees' personal information was included.]

Is Bob right? Are the pensions in peril? He's right about the attack. The efforts of former Gov. Pat Quinn and some poorly informed legislators in 2011 - those who thought the burdens of state fiscal mismanagement could be just heaped upon the pension system members - got shot down by the Supreme Court, of course.

But that was just the first round.

Creation of a "tiered" system, under which new hires can be given pension security of far less value, has been enacted, as you know, but the impact of that will just slowly emerge over time. Some consideration is still being given to the "consideration model," a proposal under which retirees would be asked to give up their guaranteed 3% annual COLA or lose their health coverage - which is said not to be guaranteed.

I can see the possibility of that being tried, but litigation would follow that might take years to play out. To some extent, the outcome of the [November gubernatorial election](#) may tell the tale. If Gov. Bruce Rauner loses to Democrat J.B. Pritzker, I think the attack on public pension systems will end.

Pension debt has been due to underfunding, not to golden parachute pensions. Reasonable revenue streams abound. The graduated income tax proposal would actually reduce most taxpayers' burdens. The sales tax base can be broadened to be more like the average state, with internet sales added. Marijuana can be taxed.

But if Rauner is reelected (unlikely), gridlock could return to Illinois.

Nothing yet on the Supreme Court's decision regarding *Janus v. AFSCME*, the Illinois case that most observers agree is likely to "[kneecap public sector unions](#)" in the 22 states that still prevent "free riders" from receiving the benefits of union-negotiated contracts without contributing to the cost of the negotiations.

The arguments were completed long ago, and a decision was expected by most observers of the high court last week. This is the last week of the court's session, so a decision on *Janus* - likely an anti-union decision that would overturn a 40-year-old precedent - is [almost certain to be handed down](#) this week.

As [The American Prospect](#), an online publication, reports: "Wealthy donors and corporations backing the plaintiffs have little stake in the public education, social welfare, and other municipal systems that they largely do not use." Who might these "wealthy donors" be? One of them, of course, is Gov. Bruce Rauner.

It has been one of Rauner's top goals since he took office in January of 2015 to make public employee unions irrelevant, not just those representing state employees but bargaining units representing all school districts and municipalities and counties as well. The "fair share fee" issue is the [crux of *Janus v. AFSCME*](#).

Union members pay dues to their unions. This covers many things - the cost of contract negotiations is the big item, but dues-payers also cover such things as community relations and political engagement. But there is no requirement under Illinois law for a state employee to be a due-paying union member.

What is required, however, is that employees whose jobs are covered by union-negotiated contracts must pay the union an "agency fee," also called a "fair share fee," to help defray the actual costs of those negotiations. Even though they benefit from the negotiations, some employees just don't want to pay their share.

What happens when the statutory agency fee requirements are repealed? It remains to be seen, of course, but when the Wisconsin legislature turned red in the election that made Scott Walker its governor, agency fees were outlawed and union membership immediately began a steep decline, [dropping by 40%](#) within a few years.

Public [education took a particularly hard hit](#). As union membership fell, so did salaries and benefits. Veteran educators retired as soon as they could. Benefits designed to attract "the best and the brightest" into the profession were eroded as Walker's party tightened the purse strings. *Don't go their to teach*.

"Yes, I did that. It was embarrassing. I don't know what I was thinking." Sometimes it's best to just say something like that. When you're in a deep hole, digging it deeper won't get you out of it. Consider the case of Edwardsville Mayor Hal Patton, who [hopes to be elected to the Illinois Senate](#) in November.

Someone - possibly someone who would not like for Patton to be a senator - leaked a photo to the media, a photo of Patton while he was having a drink at a Halloween party a decade or so ago, in a blackface costume. "I never imagined it would be viewed as a racial image," he [explained, actually in writing](#).

It's not as if he was a teenager back then. Patton's been a politician for two decades. A dentist, professionally, he's been on the Madison County Board, was an Edwardsville alderman before becoming mayor. Why the blackface?

His wife attended the party costumed as a piece of chewing gum, so he went as the "wrapper." (Get it?) He told the media his costume was "not as a racial statement, but due to the fact that most rappers are African-American."

Most, perhaps, but certainly [not all rappers are African-American](#). Patton thinks the photo-leaker is a supporter of his election opponent, Democrat Rachele Aud Crowe, an

Assistant Madison County State's Attorney. "So nothing really surprises me in terms of the nasty tricks opponents will try. Typically, the more desperate the opponent, the lower they will go." (So partying in blackface is not "low," but *calling him out for it is?*)

Patton was kicked off the Republican primary ballot because he had signed reelection petitions for a local Democrat, [as the Associated Press reported](#). (He's a dentist, not a lawyer.) Now he's formed a new party (Downstate United) and is begging for enough petition signatures to get on the November ballot.

Crowe's chances in November are looking pretty good. From Patton's failure to know the law well enough to stay on the ballot as a Republican, and his failure to know that a blackface costume might be seen as a "racial image," you wonder if he's either not smart enough, or racially too insensitive, to be a senator.

[Speaking of Crowe](#), she is endorsed by the current occupant of the Senate seat she seeks, [Sen. Bill Haine](#) (D-Alton), who is retiring after a long and distinguished career, first as Madison County State's Attorney and, since being elected in 2002, as a member of the Senate. Haine is a powerful argument against term limits.

This year's elections are labeled "off-year" events because there's no presidential contest. But all constitutional offices in Illinois are to be decided, as are all 118 seats in the House of Representatives and 39 of the 59 seats in the state Senate. Many legislative candidates, of both parties, are unopposed, of course.

Couple of weeks ago, the Parent Mentor Program of the [Logan Square Neighborhood Association](#) conducted a graduation ceremony. It is what it sounds like, only better. Parents undergo a training program, after which they and their children's teachers learn from each other, help each other, and the trained parents also engage with other children's parents in the community - resulting in a robust process of parent engagement with education.

In all the years that I have been a journalist, and especially in the more than two decades that I have published the ISNS newsletter, I have been told that a student's academic success soars when her parents are involved in the education process. But such involvement so often seems hard to stimulate.

Logan Square, in affiliation with the [Southwest Organizing Project](#) (SWOP), has had exemplary success with its Parent Mentor Program. It is one of many creative projects to energize schools and communities supported by SWOP, a non-profit organization funded through the ISBE budget.

Dignitaries were invited to the Parent Mentor graduation program. Pritzker and his running mate Juliana Stratton, candidate for Lt. Governor in November, [participated in the program](#). Rauner was invited, but he did not participate. (The SWOP appropriation was \$2 million this year, but *Rauner had recommended zero.*)

Whether or not the parents of a teen suicide victim win their lawsuit [against the school he attended](#), school officials should learn from this case (if not just by common sense). If someone other than the child's parents participates in the interview, it should be a school psychologist or someone who is actually trained to work with young people in emotional situations; the interview *should not become a police interrogation*.

It's probably a good thing that President Trump studied business - avoiding the humanities - when he attended college to avoid being drafted and sent to Viet Nam. Can you imagine the consequences if he had been exposed to Dr. Jonathan Swift's "[A Modest Proposal](#)"? He might have thought it was a great idea.

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