

## SUAA-UI Fall Meeting Report

### ***Election Insights and Constitutional Amendment Discussion Highlight Meeting***

The UIUC Chapter of SUAA held its fall meeting on October 21. The afternoon's main speaker was Professor Robert Rich, recently retired as the UI's Director of the Institute of Government and Public Affairs and widely respected for his expertise in public affairs, health law and policy, science policy, energy policy and leadership and public service. The proposed Constitutional Amendment was another topic receiving considerable discussion.

### **National Election Review**

Professor Rich set the context for his discussion by noting the extraordinary partisanship pervading almost every facet of the campaign and of political activity – or the lack of it – at every level of government. “Compromise is a dirty word,” said Rich. “Facts don’t matter; ideology trumps ideas.” He suggested the harsh attack-style campaign ads for both major parties obscure a substantial difference in approach between the two presidential candidates and lamented the lack of attention on substance instead of political advantage in this year’s campaign. Rich also commented on two important demographic trends: the steady rise of the Latino population in the U. S. in general and among voters in particular; and the aging and rising life expectancy for the population.

Rich noted that most polls suggest a very close election and suggested that 2012 may produce another presidential outcome in which one candidate wins the popular vote but the other secures the 270 electoral votes necessary to become president. With each of those electoral votes so important, most of the activity leading up to November 6 will be in nine “swing” states: Florida; North Carolina; Virginia; New Hampshire; Ohio; Michigan; Wisconsin; Colorado; and Nevada.

Looking ahead ten to twenty years, Rich identified five critically important areas of national concern : (1) Medicare funding; (2) Medicaid coverage and funding; (3) Social Security solvency; (4) Addressing the budget deficit and the “fiscal cliff” that lack of compromise on difficult budget questions has produced; and (5) foreign policy issues in the Middle East and Iran.

He also noted that the next president may have the opportunity to replace between 2 and 4 Supreme Court Justices – which could have an enormous impact on a wide range of social issues.

Finally, Dr. Rich forecast that in the absence of some new substantive issue, President Obama will win a second term; that the Congress will remain divided (making continuation of the current policy gridlock likely); and that both houses of the Illinois General Assembly will remain in the hands of Democrats.

### **Constitutional Amendment**

Professor John Kindt outlined considerable concerns with the proposed Constitutional Amendment in general and as it relates to benefits for state employees in particular. Not one of the many attorneys he has consulted has been able accurately to describe the intent or impact of the proposal. Its 700- word length is confusing, and not remotely similar to the clear, concise wording of, say, the Bill of Rights at the federal level or most of the other amendments to the Illinois Constitution.

In summary of Professor Kindt's presentation and his response to questions, there are at least five serious problems with the amendment:

1. Its language is murky, its purposes uncertain, its impact unknown.
2. It does nothing to solve the real problem that produced Illinois' severe pension funding problem, which is the failure of the General Assembly and Governor over many years to meet the State's employer funding obligation.
3. It reduces representative government – to the extent that the Illinois League of Women Voters formally opposes the amendment.
4. It falsely conveys the idea that earlier benefit improvement legislation passed by narrow margins, when in fact the vast majority passed overwhelmingly, often unanimously.
5. It threatens educational quality at all levels by pushing current employees to retire or relocate and making it far more difficult to recruit top-quality replacement.

SUAA has led the statewide fight to oppose the amendment and all SUAA members are urged to communicate broadly with friends, acquaintances, neighbors and others about the negative impacts of the amendment. UI-SUAA board members can provide sample letters to the editor or other materials to those who wish them.

### **UI-SUAA President's Report: Dues Increase; Health Insurance**

President Tom Conry reported to the group that based upon the report of an ad hoc finance committee established last spring, statewide SUAA Directors approved a dues increase

of \$6.00 at the Fall Meeting on October 10. That amount was deemed necessary to keep SUAA operating at current levels in the face of severe and prolonged attacks on public employee benefits, including those for retirees.

He also commented on two important aspects of our health insurance. First, the “temporary” extensions of health insurance coverage programs implemented in July of this year – including that for Health Alliance – have been further extended until June 30, 2013 or until Central Management Services (CMS) completes its final review of the most recent contract proposals from health insurance carriers. When that review is completed, it is expected that a new “open enrollment” period will be set to allow those covered to change insurance carriers if they wish to do so.

The second concerns the new cost structure for retiree health insurance which will mean that all annuitants, even those with 20 or more years of service, will pay some share of their health insurance. Staff at CMS are determining the details as part of the overall contract negotiations with AFSCME. According to the report from CMS at the Annual Meeting of the SUAA Directors in June, the cost to annuitants will be inversely related to length of service and age at retirement and directly related to the amount of the annual annuity (those with larger annuities will pay higher insurance costs).

The SUAA-UI Board is monitoring the health insurance situation closely, and will post updated information as soon as it becomes available. President Conry also urged any retiree with a specific question about his/her individual circumstances to contact the State Universities Retirement System Office, since SURS operates as the formal insurance representative for retirees. He urged all who have Internet access to monitor the web sites of both SURS ([www.surs.org](http://www.surs.org)) and Central Management Services ([www.benefitschoice.il.gov](http://www.benefitschoice.il.gov)) for updates on health insurance issues.