

# Highlights of the 2024 SUAA Annual Meeting



The 2024 Annual Meeting of the State Universities Annuitants Association House of Delegates was called to order by SUAA President Steve Cunningham (NIU), who chaired the meeting. There were Seventy-one (71) Delegates, representing 30 Chapters. SUAA Staff member Kathy Walbert, Director of Member Engagement, acted as timekeeper. Also joining the SUAA House were SUAA Member(s) Collin VanMeter, Vice Chair of the State Universities Retirement System (SURS) Board of Trustees, and Steven Rock, SURS Board of Trustees member and SUAA Delegate (WIU). On behalf of the members, Delegates, and all attendees engaged in the work of SUAA, thank you for being a part of the solution, and please read on to learn more about the latest activities in support of you and your chapters.



The Annual Meeting began with a timely topic, having just missed the Juneteenth holiday. Dr. Christian McWhirter is the Lincoln historian and author at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum. His most recent publication is a *Civil War Monitor* article on what Lincoln's taste in music tells us about his worldview. His presentation "*The Roots of Juneteenth*" prompted several questions and resulted in a general discussion for a short time. The next presentation by Bank of Springfield shared important information and methods to keep financial information safe.



Just to mix things up a bit, one of the presentations was an "Influencers Panel." Panelists included (from left to right): Matt Maloney, SUAA Lobbyist; Kristen Houch, representing SURS; Thomas Martin – SUAA Lobbyist; and Drew Bodewes, representing the Illinois Retired Teachers Association. All speakers received high marks from attendees. Many indicated the panel as a high point. The biggest takeaway: **ALL SUAA MEMBERS ARE INFLUENCERS!**

After lunch, the delegation was joined by our keynote speaker, Eric Madiar, a well-known and highly sought-after legal and political consultant in Springfield. Eric is also especially and uniquely qualified to provide SUAA with advice and counsel on Illinois pension law and its proposed reforms. Madiar has published the first comprehensive analysis of the Pension Protection Clause of the Illinois Constitution and is viewed as a leading authority on public pension issues in Illinois. This Spring, Eric was hired by SUAA to file an Amicus brief in what is becoming the very first legal challenge to the "Tier 2 Plan."



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## **Special Thanks: Nominations/Bylaws Committee Members**

After an appeal to the SUAA Membership for interested parties, the 2024 SUAA Nominating Committee was appointed. This year, the committee was co-chaired by **Jillian Klean-Zwilling** of Governors State University (Region 1) and **Linda Harper**, who represents Community Colleges through her chapter at Richland Community College (Region 3). Additional members included **Marilyn Westerhoff** from Elgin Community College (Region 1), **Ruth Taylor** from Northern Illinois University (Region 2), and **Leslie Hofer** from Illinois Valley Community College (Region 2). Region 3 is served by **Jim Painter** of Eastern Illinois University, in addition to Linda Harper.

After a similar appeal to SUAA Membership, **John Prochaska**, from the UIC Chapter, stepped forward to act as the Interim Chair of the Bylaws Committee. Other members included **Jo Gibson and John Jennetten**, both SIUE chapter members.

Please join us in thanking them all for their contributions to SUAA.

## ***ACTIONS TAKEN – 1) Bylaws Amendments, 2) Fall Meeting Discussion, 3) Election of Board***

Two amendments to the SUAA Bylaws were adopted. Remember that it takes a two-thirds vote of the House of Delegates to adopt an amendment to the bylaws. The first amendment made a change to Article IV Officers & Regional Directors, (4.2.d Election of Officers, 4.2.d.1., 2<sup>nd</sup> sentence, and 4.4.b.2.), by striking the words “addresses”, “address” and inserting the words “contact information.”

## ***SUAA Bylaws are available to Members at [www.suaa.com](http://www.suaa.com)***

A more substantive amendment, amendment #2 to the SUAA Bylaws, amended ARTICLE VII “Board of Directors”, by inserting a brand-new Section 7.3.a. which reads:

“7.3.a. In between Board meetings the Board of Directors may use email voting for approval of budgeting changes and reserve fund use, committee nominations and Executive Director/Treasurer-approved contracts. At the request of any one (1) member of the Board of Directors, the Board of Directors shall hold a meeting according to Article XIV within 14 days to discuss and vote on the nomination(s)/motion(s).”

## ***The Amendments to the Bylaws are adopted***

John Prochaska (Interim Bylaws Chair) then led a discussion, on behalf of the SUAA bylaws committee, of the value of the Fall SUAA Meeting to the SUAA membership. Input from the membership was gathered and appreciated by the committee. No actions were recommended at this time. The 2024 SUAA Fall Meeting is unaffected.

## ***SUAA BOARD OFFICERS & MEMBERS ELECTED:***

Randy Dunn of SIUE is elected to the Office of President, and Larry Kloc of the UIC chapter is re-elected to a second term as SUAA Treasurer. Marilyn Westerhoff of Elgin Community College is the elected Region 1 Director for Community College. Diane Koenig of Rock Valley College is the elected Region 2 Director for Community College. There is still an opening for the Region 3 Director for the University seat now vacated by Mr. Dunn.

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Here is a note from our new SUAA President:

Dear SUAA Members:

Summer Greetings to you! I'm sending this in my new role as the incoming president of the State Universities Annuitants Association. In this, my first message to the full membership of our association, I want to extend my appreciation to several individuals and groups.

To begin with, I am grateful to the 2024 Nominations Committee and the House of Delegates for selecting me for this position. Colleagues on the SUAA Board of Directors and in my local chapter at SIU Edwardsville have been valuable not just in terms of their personal support but also given their collective knowledge and unwavering dedication to SUAA. Finally, I have learned a great deal from my predecessor in this role, Steve Cunningham, and will strive to fill his shoes as admirably as possible.

I look forward to joining with all members to strengthen and expand SUAA's mission and scope. Indeed, the "power of effective advocacy" around our pensions, retiree healthcare, and public higher education generally is more important now than ever in Illinois. Ongoing funding for the State Universities Retirement System and Tier II reforms are moving front and center in statewide policy and political conversations. During my tenure as president, I want to capitalize on these opportunities within SUAA by focusing on strategic planning and increased member communications and engagement--as many of you know, Executive Director Bryan Soady has already made some great inroads on these goals on our behalf.

In closing, please know that I will work to stay in touch with you, particularly through reports following our board meetings or whenever other significant events warrant. And to SUAA chapter officers: If I can do anything to add value to your critical local efforts to build SUAA, please do not hesitate to reach out. Feel free to contact me via email at [rjoed58@gmail.com](mailto:rjoed58@gmail.com). Thank you for everything you do--and contribute--to make SUAA the most powerful organization possible to advance our shared interests.

**Randy Dunn**

## ***REPORTS Round Out the Day -***

Reports and updates were provided to the SUAA Delegates by a host of individuals engaged in every aspect of the operation. SUAA President Steve Cunningham remarked on the progress made and the goals accomplished by SUAA despite very challenging headwinds. Under his leadership the organization has steadied itself financially and implemented strategies to impact membership trends in a positive way. This was followed up by the Treasurer's report, given by current and future SUAA Treasurer Larry Kloc. One of the key initiatives Larry has been leading is the work of the Finance committee. The SUAA Finance Committee was suggested at a previous Annual Meeting. Larry provided an update of the completed work of this committee and how it has already impacted how we operate. This work has resulted in updates to the SUAA policy & procedures manual and will positively impact our ability to support the SUAA Mission for years to come.

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Additional reports were provided by SUAA Membership Committee University Co-Chairman Andy Small and Pat Asher, Community College Co-Chairman. The SUAA Legislative Committee Co-Chairs Bill Peterman, University, and Gary Davis, Community College followed them with information about a recent editorial from the SUAA Board of Directors that was published in the Chicago Tribune and how our work continues with the creation of the 2025 SUAA Legislative platform. The new Executive Director/CEO, Bryan Soady, provided the day's final report.

## *Wrap-up -*

To sum up, attendees and delegates responded with more than 40 evaluations, providing staff with a great deal of amazing feedback to build on for the future. Most of the comments and input indicated a positive experience at the Annual Meeting and were very supportive of the organization's current direction. This information will also be incorporated into the data utilized to support the strategic planning process currently in progress.

THANK YOU!

## ***EVENT PHOTOS:***



Jan Cook – longtime SUAA member and Foundation Director-at-Large, and Elliott Dudnik – Foundation Chair



From Left to Right: Sponsors from American Senior Benefits; Betty Zeedyk – Parkland College (left)



W. Bryan Soady - SUAA Executive Director/CEO; Gary Davis – HLC; Bill Peterman – CSU

**We sincerely thank our sponsors, speakers, and attendees for making this year's annual meeting successful. Your support and dedication are greatly appreciated.**



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