

Truth & Fairness

In a recent article Carbondale Mayor Brad Cole claimed that, " local taxpayers clearly lost when the Illinois General Assembly failed to pass meaningful public safety pension reform." The truth is, the taxpayers lose whenever they vote in officials, at the State or local level, who chose to avoid their duties as fiscal managers.

Instead of being good stewards of community resources, many mayors and city managers have not done the jobs they were hired to do. They haven't paid all the bills. They hid some bills and played with the numbers. They have even tried refinancing schemes to "kick the can down the road". To make things look good, so they could get voted back in office. All the while, the debt piled up onto the unknowing backs of those same taxpaying voters.

Now they are playing the blame game and spinning the facts. They even formed a club and made up a name that sounds like they are the obvious good-guys: "The Pension Fairness Coalition". So anyone who disagrees with them would be what... the Un-Fairness Coalition?

This "Fairness Coalition" plays loose with other numbers too. In press releases and in testimony before legislative committees, they claim to be the voice of "hundreds of communities and businesses across Illinois". A check of their own website lists sixty-eight... if you count the local chambers of commerce and their host towns twice, as they do. They have presented numbers and data that legislative committee members discovered were inaccurate. Senator Terry Link (D) Lake Bluff, sponsor of the reform bill said, "they were disingenuous."

Allegations of "last-minute provision that gave into unreasonable demands" to the reform bill "without any fiscal checks or balances simply outweighed the potential benefits" are simply not the true. Representatives from downstate local police and fire departments offered a full 50% reduction in contribution for cities, and only asked in return for a mechanism to insure that employers made their payments to the pensions. What was, word for word, the same enforcement mechanism in the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund; the retirement plan for mayors and members of the so-called "Pension Fairness

Coalition". However, they would not commit to make the payments, not even when cut in half. Is that fair?

The target was a plan to bring both sides to 50/50 contribution levels, but after an all-night negotiation session, Senator Link concluded, "They don't want to do what needs to be done, they don't want to pay into the system." That is why there is no pension reform right now. That is why Mayor Cole feels swamped right now. Municipalities across the state need to look closer at who is claiming to represent them and how they are doing it.

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