

The Association of Montana Retired Public Employees (AMRPE) is a group of 2,500 individuals whose sole purpose is to protect the retirement rights of public employees in Montana. Our organization went to court in 2013 to preserve Montana retirees' Guaranteed Annual Benefit and prevailed. But once again, the retirement funds and benefits that Montanans have paid into, invested toward, and earned, are at risk from individuals and organizations using propaganda and partial information to influence decision-making by the Montana Legislature in 2021.

AMRPE's goal is to provide facts and encourage honest, critical thinking and discussion among Montanans and decision-makers.

First the facts. There are 43,500 Montanans currently receiving benefits from the Montana public retirement systems. And there are another 51,000 Montanans who are not yet retired but are making contributions to the retirement systems. In total, there are almost 95,000 Montanans or about 10% of the state's population covered by these public retirement systems. Their retirement dollars stay in local communities buying groceries and gas, supporting main street businesses, and contributing to the local economy.

To get any retirement benefits, these folks must first put their own money into the systems (roughly 8% of their paychecks currently) and the employer matches that amount (or that amount plus 1%) for a minimum of five years. Full retirement benefits require 30 years of paying in for most jobs (with certain jobs eligible at 20 years due to the nature of the work). Unlike many 401K plans, Montana public employees don't get a choice about contributing – that money is withheld from their first paycheck to their last. Those funds are then professionally invested and managed by the Montana Board of Investments on behalf of the retirement systems.

You can see that the retirement funds for 10% of Montana's citizens is a tempting target for out-of-state organizations and individuals who would like to re-direct the money or avail themselves of the opportunity to profit personally by changing the systems. These people do not have the interests of Montana citizens, taxpayers, and certainly not Montana public retirees in mind. What they do have is a strong desire to create a narrative claiming that the state retirement systems are in dire straits and they need to be "studied" or "fixed". Their goal is to convince lawmakers and politicians to "change" the way the retirement systems are managed, thereby creating an opportunity for these entities to access those funds directly or indirectly.

The truth is the retirement system is sound and will serve the state well for the next 75 years as documented by the Montana Board of Investments and the Montana Public Employee Retirement Board. When you read newspapers and media articles using the words "study", "fix", "reform", "underfunded" – be skeptical. Montana historically has been very cautious and conservative in setting up its public retirement systems (unlike other government entities across the nation who grossly over-promised without an ability to pay for those benefits). Contact the Montana Public Employee Retirement Administration and the Montana Board of Investments to get facts. Ask legislative

candidates, the Governor's Office (or gubernatorial candidates) what changes to the systems will do to retirees, your community, your local economy, and you.

It takes all of us working together to keep Montanans secure, safe and healthy. Visit our website, www.amrpe.org for more information.

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