

Update on 2021 Legislative Session

by Brian Thompson, AMRPE Lobbyist

The 2021 Montana Legislature concluded on April 29, 2021, after 80 legislative days. Over 1,700 bills were introduced and considered in the 2021 regular Montana Legislative session, and just over 700 of those became law.

This session was one of the more challenging in recent memory. Not only was COVID 19 top of mind in the Capitol hallways, but the political playing field was significantly different from the prior several legislative sessions. Democrats had held the Governor's office for every legislative session between 2005 and 2019. During those past sixteen years, Republican majority legislatures passed Republican priority legislation only to have some of those bills vetoed by Democratic Governors. Many of those sessions also saw a coalition of Democrats and some Republicans pass bills to a Democratic Governor. 2021 was a sea change. Many Republican legislative priorities were passed and then approved by the newly inaugurated Republican Governor Gianforte. While the past decade has seen significant infighting in the Republican party, the 2021 legislative session had significantly less intra-party squabbles. The primary disagreements were instead inter-party with Democrats and Republicans staying relatively united within their own caucuses.

Several public pension bills were considered and approved by the Legislature this year. This included an increase in funding for the Highway Patrol System (HPORS) as well as MPERA's own "clean-up" bill. HJ 8, a study of Montana's public pension systems, passed with enormous support from both parties. The passage of HJ 8 demonstrates how top-of-mind public pensions are for many Montana legislators. HJ 8 was one of 28 "study resolutions" passed and approved by the legislature. Once the session concluded, legislators were polled to determine which studies are the highest priority. After the conclusion of the 2021 session, legislators ranked HJ 8 as the #2 priority study out of the 28 that were passed and assigned the study to the State Administration and Veterans Affairs interim committee.

Keeping a close eye and closely participating in this interim study will be vital to protecting the future viability of public pensions in the state. Many legislators suspect pensions to be a significant risk to the state's fiscal health, and too few hear or understand the importance of public pensions to communities, families, and AMRPE members across the state. Rest assured that AMRPE will be at the table representing you and other members as this study moves forward.

The session also came with some important victories to protect public pensions. In particular, SB 387 and 389 were tabled in committee. These bills would have significantly threatened the long-term viability of both TRS and PERS by defunding each of these systems over time. Bills similar to SB 387 and 389 had advanced in previous legislative sessions, and it was an important and significant accomplishment to defeat these bills at an early stage in the legislative process. As always, it was a pleasure to represent AMRPE during the 2021 legislative session, and I look forward to continuing work to protect the interest of AMRPE members in the interim. ▣

Membership Report

by Patty Mott, AMRPE Board Member



New members join in 2021, payment and other membership updates.

We have 100 new members from our latest campaign drive bringing our current membership to just over 2,600. There were 2,071 PERS employees who retired this past year. Please mention to your retired friends and acquaintances who are not members of AMRPE to consider joining the group. We are the only organized entity specifically dedicated to supporting the interests of retired Montana public service retirees.

For existing members if your membership is due in 2021, notices were sent the end of January. Currently 80% of members (that were due in 2021) have renewed. It's not too late to get your dues in for 2021.

Just like you, the AMRPE board is adjusting to how we do business in a pandemic. We conducted our meetings on the internet using ZOOM

meetings. One positive outcome is that Zoom is a convenient forum for board members and others to easily participate from all parts of our great state.

Our Legislative Activities page at amrpe.org has a link to find your legislator and keep updated on current issues. It's a fast and easy way to stay informed on legislation that may impact your retirement benefits. The 2021 Legislative Session had a different look...allowing citizens to testify remotely without traveling to Helena.

As we approach summer, we wish you good health and encourage everyone to follow the recommendations of the health officials so we can all safely meet again. Remember to share the association information with any friends you know that may retire soon. ▣

(Photo Courtesy of Tara Comfort)

In Search of New 2022 & 2023 Board Members

AMRPE Board is searching for New Board Members to serve 3-year terms beginning January of 2022 and 2023.

The AMRPE Board is in search of potential new Board Members. In December of 2021, AMRPE will appoint 2 new members to serve beginning January 2022; and in December of 2022 we will appoint 3 new board members to serve beginning January 2023. **If you are interested in becoming an AMRPE Board member:** We are currently accepting applications for our upcoming board memberships (December 2021). Please send a letter of interest and your resume by July 30th, 2021 to the following: inquiry@amrpe.org. For detailed questions about the Board Member positions please call our administrators at 406-442-4934.

Did you Forget to Renew for 2021?

How to check your renewal year: Look at the address section of this newsletter for your renewal year. If it is an older year than 2021 (e.g., 2020, 2019) your membership is due!

Submission Instructions: Cut out the section to the right on the dotted line and send your renewal to: **PO Box 603, Helena, MT 59624.** If you have questions about your renewal or submission details please call: (406) 442-4934. ▣

Please select a membership option below:

- New Member Renewing membership

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

- 1 year for \$20
 2 years for \$39
 3 years for \$58

LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP

- \$225 if 60-70 years of age
 \$175 if 71 or older

Member Information (please print)

FIRST NAME		MI	LAST NAME	
ADDRESS		CITY	STATE	ZIP
TELEPHONE		*EMAIL (REQUIRED)		
YEAR BORN	YEAR RETIRED	RETIRED FROM		

*Membership updates and Association action requests will be sent through email periodically. Please make checks payable to AMRPE.

A Message from AMRPE President, Lyle Manley

The AMRPE Board hopes this message finds you and your families well during these uncertain times. Since March of 2020 we have continued to work on public pension issues by conducting our monthly meetings via telephonic and online means. This has worked reasonably well, but we all missed the in-person gatherings. However, as always, there is work to do. The 2021 Legislature recently adjourned, which means we closely follow those bills with potential impact upon your public retirements. To help AMRPE do this, the Board has engaged the services of Browning, Kaleczyc, Berry and Hoven, P.C. Brian Thompson, of that firm, followed pertinent legislation and presented our position to the Legislature. Fortunately, none of the bills with negative impacts on the various pensions made it into law. This is a result, at least in part, of Mr. Thompson's able efforts. As always, one of the best ways to impact legislation is for our members to call, write, e-mail or text their local representatives. They sometimes need to be reminded that retired public employees live in every county of the state and spend their retirement dollars in nearly every community, both large and small.

Occasionally it's important to look back on our accomplishments in order to understand where we are today and why. It's difficult to believe that it's been over seven years since Judge Reynolds of Helena issued a ruling maintaining our 3% GABA, and finding the Legislature's attempt to reduce it to be a violation of law. The fact that AMRPE had to take this matter to the Courts shows we cannot be complacent in the face of each new Legislative session.

Several years ago, AMRPE amended its bylaws to provide that a Board member may only serve three consecutive three-year terms. This was an attempt to ensure the Board has an infusion of new blood from time-to-time. As a result, in December of 2021 two new Board members will need to be appointed. And in December of 2022, three Board positions will need new members. We are particularly interested in appointments from outside the Helena area in order to more closely represent our membership and diversify our Board. As noted above, we've found that having our meetings via online means has worked reasonably well. If you are interested in serving, please see the Board Membership Article inside if you are interested in serving on the Board.

Our meeting minutes, as well as legislative information, are posted at www.amrpe.org. Despite the ups-and-downs of recent days, you can count on AMRPE to protect your public retirement. As always, the Board thanks you all for being members. ■

AMRPE

Association of Montana Retired Public Employees

PO Box 603, Helena, MT 59624

www.AMRPE.org

(Photo Courtesy of Tara Comfort)



2021 Interim Study of Pensions

by Mike O'Connor, Legislative Committee Chair

The 2021 session has approved a study group to take an in-depth look at our retirement systems. AMRPE will be monitoring the actions of this study group to ensure our benefits remain protected.

The 2021 Legislative Session passed House Joint Resolution 8 which establishes an interim study of the Montana Public Employee Retirement Systems, including Teachers' Retirement System, and the development of recommendations for a long-term strategic approach to funding the retirement systems. AMRPE was asked by Representative Garner to provide input on the draft legislation and we will also be involved in the study as a stakeholder.

(Photo Courtesy of Tara Comfort)



The State Administration and Veterans' Affairs Interim Committee will complete the review of the pensions by September 2022 and may draft legislation for the 2023 session. AMRPE members should follow this study because it could potentially affect your retirement benefits. To review House Joint Resolution 8 go to the AMRPE website and click the Legislation tab. ■

Credit Card Payment Options & Communication Update

The AMRPE Board is committed to using the most up-to-date and efficient ways for maintaining memberships and communicating with our members.

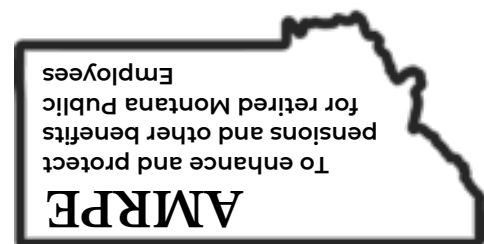
Recently we have updated our membership forms to require members' email addresses, to help us keep in contact with you via our email blasts.

Additionally, the AMRPE website has been updated for members to make payments online through the Paypal application. This system no longer requires a Paypal membership so now members may choose to pay online as a guest using a credit card.

If you have questions or require assistance with paying online, contact our administrators at 406-442-4934. ■

- A Message from AMRPE President, Lyle Manley,
- Updates on 2021 Legislature,
- Recruiting New AMRPE Board Members,
- And many other Legislative details...

Association of Montana Retired Public Employees 2021 Newsletter



AMRPE Member