

Morthland Files Bill to Block Pension Loophole

Written by Rich Morthland

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Springfield, IL...State Representative Rich Morthland (R-Cordova) filed legislation today that will close the pension loophole that allowed two teachers union lobbyists to earn huge state pensions once they served a single day as substitute teachers.

A Chicago Tribune/WGN-TV investigation found that two lobbyists with no prior teaching experience were allowed to count their years as union employees towards state teacher pensions after subbing for a single day in 2007.

"These guys were lobbyists masquerading as teachers," Morthland said. "They took advantage of a pension loophole that allowed them to receive a teacher's pension after subbing for just one day in the classroom. That's a slap in the face to hard working teachers across Illinois. We need to block this loophole so lobbyists cannot weasel their way into a pension plan for which common sense dictates they should not qualify."

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According to the Tribune report, Steven Preckwinkle, the political director of the Illinois Federation of Teachers, and fellow IFT lobbyist David Piccioli were the only people who took advantage of a small pension window opened by state lawmakers just a few months earlier. The law allowed union officials to get into the Teachers' Retirement System and count their previous years as union employees after quickly obtaining teaching certificates and working in a classroom. Preckwinkle and Piccioli could collect nearly \$3 million in pension payouts, based on their union salaries and years of union credit.

"Illinois' pension systems face serious financial problems, with more than \$85 billion in unfunded liability," Morthland said. "So while these lobbyists' pensions may only be a drop in the bucket, they are stinking up the whole bucket. What they did was shameful and I intend to put a stop to it."

Morthland's legislation, House Bill 3870, would require Preckwinkle and Piccioli to make their entire pension contributions immediately in order to receive their teacher pensions. The legislation is an effort to prevent the lobbyists from receiving the pensions they earned through the previously-established pension loophole.

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