



# Letter to the TRIBUNE EDITORIAL BOARD - PRINTED APR 22

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Jane Artabasy's letter copied below appeared in THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE today. Congratulations, Jane!!!

Dear Tribune Editorial Board: Please consider this reply to your Sunday editorials for inclusion in your voice of the people section? Many thanks. Jane Artabasy

As a retired public school teacher dependent on the promises inherent in our Illinois pension system, I have watched with equal parts incredulity and horror as the Tribune's editorials on teacher pensions have taken on the emotional intensity of a petulant two-year-old kicking and screaming in the middle of the street. Your monomaniacal obsession regarding our pensions is embarrassing, given what you must know about the outsized influence of wealthy corporations, banks, and individuals in Springfield, their abilities to shape tax policy and garner lucrative tax breaks, and the barely concealed disdain and revulsion such parties show toward public service employees and their unions. Your indignant pleas for pension "reform" from a dysfunctional legislature would be more credible were they not mere echoes of Big Money--corporate board rooms, banks, and lobbying firms.

I believe our Mayor once famously opined, "Never let a crisis go to waste." The rich and powerful understand how to use their money and power to get their way, to turn the distress of a multi-year recession to their own advantage. They conjure up fake villains (i.e., greedy teachers) while conveniently ignoring the carnage born of their own reckless speculation (2007 and '08, anyone?). But even as your editorial pages demand that legislators "get serious" about pension reform, you yourselves fail to make serious, in-depth editorial observations about the complexity of Illinois' governance and the ridiculously antiquated nature of our tax laws. Instead, you persist in cruel, one-note tirades against the long-honored state contract with teachers.

Yes, the courts may rule against our pension security ("Crises and judges," 4/14/13). But despite your suggestion to the contrary, that would serve no "higher purpose." The wording of Article XIII, section 5, protecting our benefits is clear. Your convoluted verbal acrobatics, suggesting that it might be judicially defensible to ignore that clarity, remind me of Bill Clinton's famous struggle to define "what is is." We all know what "is" means, even if Michael Madigan and his minions say "is" isn't. You urge the reasonableness of choosing to truncate pensions, even as you must know that doing so would barely scratch the surface of our state's solvency issues. Yes, our judges may decide to make end runs around the pension security defined in our Constitution. If so, they will be complicit in further severing the bonds that connect us to each other and that reinforce our trust in government. If our Constitution isn't worth the paper it's written on, then what is real, or worth defending? When we reach the very soul of government, its reason and practice, there really is no higher purpose than integrity, that commitment to honoring our word, to sustaining the social contracts and promises that ensure civilized interactions.

We Illinoisans aren't naive--not after watching politician after politician sent off to prison. Surprisingly, we still hope for the best. Illinois history suggests that our judges are probably just as political, if not as corrupt, as our other branches of government. But we citizens also understand that governing is complicated--a difficult dance with competing agendas and interests. No one is happy with what Illinois has been or what it is becoming. But playing games with the Constitution? In your own words, get serious.