

## Pension matters

1. It's important to understand who the actors are in this drama:
  - a. **ATRF** = Alberta Teachers Retirement Fund, your retirement fund, which is managed by a board composed of 4 government and 4 ATA appointed representatives
    - i. NOTE: it's important to understand that the [ATRF board](#) is responsible to the HEALTH OF THE FUND, not to the government, the ATA, or to teachers.
  - b. **AIMCo** = Alberta Investment Management Corporation, a crown corporation of the province which manages public funds like the Heritage Trust Fund, the Local Authorities Pension Plan (LAPP), etc.
2. **Long version of what has transpired:**
  - a. [ATRF has posted a comprehensive account of the issue.](#)
  - b. Former AB civil servant Bob Ascah has also written [an excellent overview of the politics of the matter.](#)
3. **Short factual version:** back in 2019 the Alberta Government tabled (and later passed) Bill 22, which legislated the transfer of investment management of teacher's pension funds from ATRF to AIMCo. That legislation compelled ATRF to negotiate an investment management agreement (IMA) with AIMCo; those negotiations were meant to be completed by the end of 2020, per the legislation. After much to and fro, ATRF and AIMCo could not agree on the terms of an IMA by the deadline. As a result, the Minister of Finance temporarily imposed an IMA via a 23 December [Ministerial Order](#) which effectively granted AIMCo with a veto over the investment priorities of ATRF "if, in the sole opinion of AIMCo, it would threaten to compromise AIMCo's economies of scale or operational efficiencies. Such decisions by AIMCo are not subject to appeal or arbitration." Ouch.
4. **Slightly shorter analogy-driven version:** In 2019 Bill 22 forced ATRF into a shotgun marriage with AIMCo for the management of our pension funds. The marriage date was set for the end of 2020, during which time ATRF and AIMCo were told to reach agreement on their marriage vows. But on the 23rd of December - with the "big day" nigh - ATRF and AIMCo hadn't reached agreement, prompting AIMCo's "dad" (Travis Toews) to IMPOSE temporary marriage vows! The imposed vows have a distinct "ATRF shall obey AIMCo" flavour. Not a great way to start a marriage.
5. "I see. **How should I feel about this?**"
  - a. **You should be ANGRY.** These are your hard-earned pension dollars. Your ATRF board should not be subject to having their investment

directions and priorities overridden by AIMCo because of “economies of scale” or “operational efficiencies.” One wouldn’t accept that from an RRSP fund manager. Why would we accept it from our pension fund manager?

- i. **NOTE: the primary issue to be angry about is CONTROL.** As of this date, no one has been financially harmed by this decision. Retirees are still getting their pay. Teacher’s pension dollars remain safe and secure. No one has lost a dime. But, in the future, the ability of ATRF to manage our pension is constrained by the “economies of scale” and “operational efficiency” interests of AIMCo ... and it's AIMCo that gets to make the decision on that.
- ii. **Another issue is that the government has betrayed their promise to protect and respect ATRF’s control over the investment direction of pension funds.**
  1. On 7 November 2019 Finance Minister Toews told the Legislature that *“The ATRF board will remain in control of determining how the pension funds are invested at a strategic level as well as retaining ownership of the plan’s assets. That is, AIMCo will invest according to the policies set by the ATRF board.”*
    - a. He neglected to add “unless, of course, AIMCo determined that doing so would ‘compromise AIMCo’s economies of scale or operational efficiencies.’”
    - b. Not exactly the whole truth from Minister Toews
- iii. **Be angry, but don’t turn to the dark side ...**
  1. Some people have suggested on social media that “teachers should strike!”
    - a. NO! Pensions aren’t in collective agreements. Strikes are specific to collective agreement disputes and are subject to a specific process in labour law.
  2. Some people want to pull their money from the pension.
    - a. NO! Don’t do that. Firstly, you can’t do so while employed (i.e. you’d have to quit your job to withdraw your funds) and you’d only get YOUR portion of the funds ... not the government dollars.
      - i. While you have the right to withdraw your funds, and there’s a way to do so and even, arguably, reasons for taking that step ... the AIMCo situation **isn’t** a good reason.

## 6. So what should I do?

- a. Contact your MLA
  - i. <https://www.handsoffmypension.ca/>
  - ii. Also call your MLA, reach out to them via social media, etc. You'll note that the link above has been "social media optimized" to target individual MLAs.
  - iii. Do the above repeatedly and professionally. Be firm and insistent.
    1. Some teachers have reported that MLAs have become unresponsive. While MLAs are not compelled by law or statute to respond to constituent concerns, they have [a democratic obligation to respond](#). Some teachers have begun posting "I contacted my MLA 20 days ago and I'm still waiting to hear back" updates on social media.
    2. Some MLAs are suggesting that the ATRF board was being difficult during the negotiations over the IMA. Nonsense. The ATRF board was simply trying to hold the government to their promise that ATRF would maintain control of the investment direction of the fund.
    3. Other MLAs are gaslighting the issue by claiming that the pension is fully funded/backstopped by the government. NO, it isn't. The money paid to retirees comes from 2 sources:
      - a. Investment income (which ATRF just lost some control over, thanks to Minister Toews)
      - b. Monthly contributions to the plan from teachers, which are matched on a 51-49 basis by the government.
      - c. If the fund's investment portfolio performs poorly - because of, say, a global pandemic or just [bad investment decisions](#) - it's teachers + government who make up the shortfall. If AIMCo does a bad job of investing our money it will come from YOUR pocket ... twice (because you are a taxpayer)!
7. On top of everything else, [the government's caps on compensation](#) may have made it MUCH harder to keep good people working for us at ATRF and AIMCo!
8. There! That only took four freakin' pages!

Government

1. **PEC Elections/Aclamations:**

- a. **Acclaimed:** President – Jason Schilling, Calgary District – Karen Nakaska, Central – Brenton Baum, Central East – Murray Lalonde, Central North – Richard Kremp, North West – Peter MacKay, South East – Heather McCaig, South West – Katherine Pritchard
- b. **The following positions are contested:**
  - i. Vice President – Greg Carabine, Donnella Perkins, Jennifer Regal
  - ii. Calgary City – Richard Bieche, Kathy Hoehn, Kevin Kempt, Darren Moroz
  - iii. Central South – Don Brookwell, James Gascoyne
  - iv. Edmonton District – Carryl Bennett, Paul Froese
  - v. Edmonton McMurray – Nancy Ball, Darrin Bauer, Carmen Glossop, Michelle Prinsonsky

2. **The ATA’s “pulse” surveys will be paused until the spring because of the annual member survey.**

3. **The ATA’s draft budget will be coming to locals PDQ. At this time there is NO proposed change to the levy.**

- a. Don’t forget to read the introduction. There’s important info in there.
- b. Predicting the number of teachers year to year is tricky under this government. For instance, we know that divisions won’t have the federal funding this time around. As such the budget folks are being conservative, predicting a very modest increase of just 200 teachers relative to the last budget (33,300 to 33,500).
  - i. If you’re wondering whether that last budget estimate was accurate or not, we should know by February.
- c. **The provincial budget (expected in March) will tell us a LOT.** School divisions are nervous about it because of COVID effects: e.g. MANY students just haven’t registered with a school division this year, which reduces enrolment and means fewer dollars. Many divisions have dipped into their reserves (which is probably long overdue), and all the boards are lobbying the government HARD to be “held harmless” financially due to COVID effects. We shall see ...

4. **The Annual Representative Assembly (ARA) will be virtual.**

- a. Keep an eye out for a revised emergent resolutions process; we don’t want to see those pile up at the end the way that they did last time.

- b. Also keep an eye out for resolutions. One will be a recommendation urging locals to have a school leader position on their local council (which many locals already have).
- 5. **Summer conference** will be a two day virtual event.
- 6. The ATA, along with pretty much every other education stakeholder group (school divisions, CASS, ASBA, etc) **continues to advocate for education workers to be prioritized for [vaccine distribution](#)** (probably in Phase 2) because teachers and other education workers will be working with the largest unvaccinated population. Fingers crossed.

### **Professional Development (PD)**

1. **We continue to await the release of the new K - 6 Program of Studies.** We expect to see it in the next few weeks (of course I wrote the same thing in December, so don't hold your breath)
  - a. The [leaked curriculum documents](#) looked adequate ... for a pre WWI program of studies (they are very "rule Britannia!"). Also, they contained "standardized test friendly" elements such as lists of facts and dates.
  - b. Everyone who has clapped eyes on the new draft curriculum is bound by a strong confidentiality agreement, so we don't know any details. Some eye-rolling and OMG-fish-lipping has been reported, however. Bad signs!
    - i. Some teachers (about one-quarter of the old working groups) have been consulted on the new draft curriculum, many of them from central office/learning support positions (probably because of the ongoing and wide-spread substitute teacher shortages). *It's important to note that consultation does not equal endorsement, nor does it mean that AB Education heeded their advice.*
2. **[Conventions](#) are all online.**
  - a. **Get the new version of ZOOM;** you'll be glad that you did.
    - i. Note that all visual cues are not in "reactions" in the new ZOOM.
    - ii. If you are using a chromebook you're advised to uninstall the app, search the web store for the latest version of the app, and install that.
  - b. There won't be any PEC electioneering at convention this year.
  - c. [Convention attendance remains mandatory, but it's a bit different.](#)
3. Most post-secondary education programs (except for the U of L) have **ceased the practice of providing honoraria to cooperating teachers.** This was communicated to school division superintendents but, in some cases, the news did not make it to principals or to teachers.

4. Upcoming and recorded ATA PD sessions can be found here:  
<https://atapdwebinars2020.sched.com/>
5. The [Alberta Teachers Institute](#) gives teachers a chance to learn about the nuts and bolts of our provincial government's processes from the people in the Legislature.
6. The [Northwest Regional Learning Consortium](#) continues to provide PD content as well.

### **Teacher Employment Services (TES)**

1. Teachers are encouraged, always, to call TES at 1-800-232-7208 for advice, help, and support!
2. **Central Table Bargaining** is about to resume with a second session of list bargaining. COVID restrictions have caused some delays but we are hoping to get the list bargaining phase completed.
  - a. Note: if there are any matters that the ATA and the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association can't agree upon, those items will be submitted to an arbitrator to rule on.
    - i. The arbitrator decides based on cost (high cost items are central) and scope of application (province-wide or almost province-wide issues are also central).
    - b. Once that's done ... well, we'll see. We may proceed. We may pause.
3. The **"Worth Knowing"** series has been very well received. New articles are posted regularly, including a recent piece on Home Office Expenses and another one on travel (Aloha!).
4. Local bargaining 2018-2020: just a handful of agreements are still open, and none in the NW (well done GP Catholic and High Prairie!).
  - a. **Keep the teachers of Sturgeon in mind.** They are under considerable stress. A strike authorization vote has been taken.
5. [If you want to see how other bargaining is shaping up, check here.](#)
6. Teachers are STILL advised to "save up for a rainy day" if at all possible. COVID has slowed the progress of collective agreement negotiations, but it hasn't stopped it. We may have some difficult times and discussion ahead: **better to have money on hand and not need it than to need it and not have it.**
  - a. Happily, [many people have been able to put some bucks away.](#)

### **Other Stuff**

1. [My District Representative Calendar](#)