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Public Television Multi-Platform Initiative Examines Public Pensions in America's Cities and States

*As fiscal crises loom, **The Pension Peril** shines a spotlight on the deficit in funding for public employees' retirement benefits*

New York, NY - With the recent bankruptcy ruling in the city of Detroit and the aggressive action implemented by the state of Illinois, the complicated issues surrounding funding for public pensions have been catapulted into the headlines and to the forefront of a national debate.

Across the nation, many cities and states are facing fiscal crises, in part due to overpromising and underfunding their retirees' pensions and benefits. Communities struggle to walk the tightrope between cutting essential services to pay for pension benefits, overhauling their pension systems, raising taxes – or all three. There is great debate over the nature and scale of the public pension shortfall, its culprits and causes, and above all, who should bear the cost of setting it right.

But this public policy challenge was foreseen by many. A major report authored by Former Lt. Gov. Richard Ravitch and former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker recently put the crisis into stark focus – and drew public attention to its scale. Which is why in September of 2013 WNET, New York's flagship PBS station, launched **The Pension Peril**. This two-year, local and national multiplatform reporting initiative will shine a spotlight on an expected \$1 trillion-plus shortfall in funding for public employees' retirement benefits, and what it means for cities and states, retirees and current workers, and taxpayers. **The Pension Peril** will introduce millions of Americans to the tough choices ahead and possible models of reform.

"This is the type of complex public policy story that only public television covers in an in-depth and ongoing way," said Neal Shapiro, president and CEO of WNET. "WNET is poised to lead and further the dialogue about this challenging situation all across public media, on PBS, public radio, and online."

As part of the initiative, segments have appeared on the [PBS NewsHour Weekend](#) and [Long Island Business Report](#), covering a range of stories from a model pension system in The

Netherlands to the current pension concerns in Illinois and Long Island, New York. A website will serve as a focal point for debate, an aggregator of print and video content, and "virtual meetinghouse" for citizens to share stories, videos, and information about the pension challenges in their cities and towns will launch in February, 2014.

Over the course of the next two years, a dedicated editorial and production team at WNET will be reporting on ***The Pension Peril*** throughout the country, producing news stories for the PBS NewsHour Weekend, collaborating with local public TV station producers, commissioning both radio and television documentaries for national distribution, gathering all the material onto a single unified website – a go-to public resource for comprehensive information, data and analysis.

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About WNET

As New York's flagship public media provider and the parent company of [THIRTEEN](#) and [WLIW21](#) and operator of [NJTV](#), WNET brings quality arts, education and public affairs programming to more than 5 million viewers each week. WNET produces and presents such acclaimed PBS series as [Nature](#), [Great Performances](#), [American Masters](#), [PBS NewsHour Weekend](#), [Charlie Rose](#) and a range of documentaries, children's programs, and local news and cultural offerings available on air and online. Pioneers in educational programming, WNET has created such groundbreaking series as [Get the Math](#), [Oh Noah!](#) and [Cyberchase](#) and provides tools for educators that bring compelling content to life in the classroom and at home. WNET highlights the tri-state's unique culture and diverse communities through [NYC-ARTS](#), [Reel 13](#), [NJTV News with Mike Schneider](#) and [MetroFocus](#), the multi-platform news magazine focusing on the New York region. WNET is also a leader in connecting with viewers on emerging platforms, including the [THIRTEEN Explore iPad App](#) where users can stream PBS content for free.