



# Laborers' International Union of North America

## Midwest Regional Office

John F. Penn, LIUNA Vice President and Midwest Regional Manager

### Illinois Legislative Update

May 8, 2015

As Illinois legislature's schedule is winding down, the activity is heating up. The Illinois House held an all-day hearing on the issue of workers' compensation, the Governor's office and legislative leaders are holding meetings on Gov. Rauner's wide-ranging "Turnaround Agenda," and the Illinois House announced it will hold a vote on the centerpiece of Rauner's anti-Labor wish list: a Right-to-Work (for Less) law. In breaking news, the Illinois Supreme Court rejected the law cutting retirement benefits for public employees this morning. The LiUNA family was also saddened to hear of the passing of great leader and member, Paul Penn.

#### **Right-to-Work (for Less) to Get House Vote**

For the first time in nearly 35 years, the Illinois House of Representatives will consider a Right-to-Work (for Less) bill. The vote is set for next Thursday, May 14.

"Taxpayers and their elected representatives need to see the details of Governor Rauner's plan so they can decide how it will impact Illinois' middle-class families," House Speaker Michael Madigan (D- Chicago) stated in a press release Thursday. "The financial security of middle-class families and others struggling to make ends meet will be affected by his proposal. We owe it to them to make sure the governor's idea gets a full hearing."

The reason opponents call them "Right-to-Work (for Less)" laws is because they weaken unions, which has the effect of lowering wages and benefits and lead to weaker protections for all workers. Some facts about states with Right-to-Work (for less) laws:

- Workers in Right to Work (for Less) states earn \$5,900 less per year than workers in states like Illinois
- Workers in Right to Work (for Less) states are 25% less likely to have health insurance than workers in states like Illinois
- States with Right to Work (for Less) laws spend 31% less on education
- States with Right to Work (for Less) laws are less safe; they have 54% more on-the-job deaths than in states like Illinois

Please call the state representatives in your area today and ask them to oppose any and all Right to Work (for Less) laws.

#### **State Supreme Court Strikes Down Pension Law**

The Illinois Supreme Court unanimously ruled the 2014 legislative changes to the pensions of state, university and K-12 education employees unconstitutional today. The Court stated that the state constitution is clear: public employee pensions are "an enforceable contractual relationship, the benefits of which shall not be diminished or impaired." The court also rejected the State's argument that the State's financial condition was so serious that it could invoke "police powers" that, in essence, override the Constitution's pension protections.

#### **Workers' Comp Discussed Before Entire House**

The Illinois House of Representatives held a rare "Committee of the Whole" meeting on Tuesday to hear, first-hand, from injured workers and experts in the field of workers' compensation laws. The last time the entire House met in this manner was in 2007 during the administration of former Gov. Rod Blagojevich to debate one of his tax proposals – right before they voted to reject it.

With workers' compensation "reform" a central part of Gov. Rauner's so-called Turnaround Agenda, the topic got special consideration. Injured workers from not only Illinois, but other states including Indiana and Oklahoma, talked about their experiences with workers' comp. Illinois' law is often compared to that of our neighbors to the east which is among the lowest cost states (and those with the lowest benefits) in the nation. The workers testified to delays in benefit payments and medical treatment under the Indiana system, some of which caused their conditions to worsen and become permanent.



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### *Father of VP Penn Passes*

Illinois Laborers lost a true friend and leader with the passing on May 7 of Paul Penn, retired business manager of Laborers Local 362 in Bloomington and father of LIUNA Vice-President and Midwest Regional Manager John F. Penn.

Paul was first elected to Local 362's business manager position in 1958 and served in that position until 1971. Until this past year, Paul continued to come by the Laborers Hall daily and served for many years as field representative and helped mobilize volunteers.

As local union business agent, Paul was most proud of establishing the union's hiring hall, pension and health and welfare funds. These were all done in partnership with signatory contractors. As a community leader, he led union volunteers in multiple donated labor community projects. And as a human being, Paul was a "big heart," who always responded to people in need and helped many individuals gain their second chance in life through a decent job as a Laborer. Our condolences go to the Penn family and his many friends -- we Laborers have lost a true friend and leader.