



# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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**PUBLISHED FOR LABOR ACTIVISTS BY THE ILLINOIS AFL-CIO**

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*The Illinois General Assembly has completed their business for the week. Both chambers are scheduled to return at 12pm on Tuesday, February 26. Both chambers will continue holding hearings on newly introduced legislation this year.*

## GENERAL ASSEMBLY

### Conservative Opinion Tanks and Business Leaders Continue To Bash Illinois

There is a saying that if you repeat something enough, it can somehow become the truth. Or “truthiness”. This is what conservative opinion tanks, like the Illinois Policy Institute, base their whole philosophy on. You don’t need to cite statistics, just keep saying that Illinois is lagging behind other states in unemployment, workers compensation costs, and population growth. In essence, they are saying the very state they live in is a bad place.

Republicans and Business Leaders are once again calling for another round of workers’ compensation reform. The Workers’ Compensation system in Illinois has been “reformed” three times in the past nine years. All three times, business leaders have sat at the table to negotiate.

The Illinois Chamber continues to believe that the 2011 workers’ compensation reforms have not saved enough money for businesses. Despite the Chamber’s assertion, the 2011 workers’ compensation reforms have reduced insurance rates for employers by 14.1% or over \$315 million per year and in total have reduced WC costs by at least \$500 million per year, yet employers have not realized those savings.

It should be pointed out that several of the Chamber’s largest members are insurance companies, so it may be the Chamber is protecting its insurance company members, by saying that workers’ compensation costs are too high. When in reality it is just that the insurance companies have kept the financial savings from the 2011 reforms.

Perhaps Republicans and business leaders could stop blaming workers in our state for all of their problems, and look at ways to invest in our state and its people. For example, drafting a Capital Bill, worker training, stocking their stores with American made goods and actually going out to promote the items that are manufactured in our state.

The Senate Republicans continued to berate our state at a press conference earlier in the week. They said they will not work toward forming a FY15 budget until their demands are met. And wouldn’t you know, most of their demands are to place more burdens on working families and the poor.

The Republicans want:

- The temporary income tax increase to be allowed to phase out.
- A proposal to amend the state’s Constitution to allow for a graduated income tax to be taken off the table.
- The approval of a workers’ compensation reform bill that includes a requirement that employees prove they were hurt on the job.
- A prohibition on new programs and any expansion of existing programs in the FY 15 budget.
- Attorney General Lisa Madigan to request that the Illinois Supreme Court speed up its ruling on the pension changes that were recently passed into law.
- More aggressive implementation of the cost-saving Medicaid reforms approved in 2012.

## Items that saw action in the General Assembly this week:

- HB 3672 (Riley) - Requires open meetings of the Chicago Transit Board, the Regional Transportation Authority Board, the Commuter Rail Board, and the Suburban Bus Board to be broadcast to the public and maintained in real-time on the Board's website using a high-speed Internet connection. Passed House Mass Transit 19-0. Second Reading.
- SB 2791 (Hutchinson) - Provides that members of railroad police forces may issue administrative citations in accordance with the provisions of local law. Provides that passengers may be removed from a train or boat for conduct or language that annoys or vexes employees. Passed Senate Judiciary 12-0. Second Reading.
- AM 301 – D. Douglas McCarthy to be Arbitrator of the Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission. Annual compensation is \$115,840.
- AM 302 – Molly Mason to be Arbitrator of the Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission. Annual compensation is \$115,840.
- AM 303 – Robert Williams to be Arbitrator of the Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission. Annual compensation is \$115,840.
- AM 304 – Kurt Carlson to be Arbitrator of the Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission. Annual compensation is \$115,840.
- AM 305 – Gregory Dollison to be Arbitrator of the Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission. Annual compensation is \$115,840.
- AM 306 – Jeffrey Huebsch to be Arbitrator of the Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission. Annual compensation is \$115,840.
- AM 307 – Barbara Flores to be Arbitrator of the Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission. Annual compensation is \$115,840.
- AM 308 – Deborah Simpson to be Arbitrator of the Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission. Annual compensation is \$115,840.
- AM 309 – Brian Cronin to be Arbitrator of the Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission. Annual compensation is \$115,840.
- AM 320 – Deanna Glosser to be Member of the Pollution Control Board. Annual compensation is \$117,043.
- AM 342 – Jennifer Lee to be Member of the Mid-Illinois Medical District Commission.
- AM 365 – Diana Alvarez (Business position) - Member of the Workers' Compensation Medical Fee Advisory Board.
- AM 366 – David Menchetti (Labor position) - Member of the Workers' Compensation Medical Fee Advisory Board. Expenses paid.

The following executive appointments passed the Senate Committee on Executive Appointments unanimously:

- AM 294 – Michael Brennan to be Commissioner of the Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission. Annual compensation is \$119,840.
- AM 295 – Ketki Steffen to be Arbitrator of the Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission. Annual compensation is \$115,840.
- AM 296 – Edward Lee to be Arbitrator of the Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission. Annual compensation is \$115,840.
- AM 297 – Carolyn Doherty to be Arbitrator of the Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission. Annual compensation is \$115,840.
- AM 298 – Joshua Luskin to be Arbitrator of the Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission. Annual compensation is \$115,840.
- AM 299 – Molly Dearing to be Arbitrator of the Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission. Annual compensation is \$115,840.
- AM 300 – William Gallagher to be Arbitrator of the Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission. Annual compensation is \$115,840.

# Illinois' Economy Continues to Improve

**MYTH:** Illinois isn't attractive to business and companies are leaving the state.

**FACT:** Following the worst recession since the Great Depression, Illinois' economy is growing and the state remains one of the most appealing to new and existing businesses.

- Nearly 9,000 more businesses are registered in Illinois today than in 2011. (Illinois Department of Employment Security)

**MYTH:** Illinois unemployment is the worst in the nation and hopelessly high, while job opportunities are scarce.

**FACT:** Unemployment is heading in the right direction. While there is more work to do, Illinois is making steady progress creating jobs and reducing unemployment from the height of the Great Recession.

- Recent job numbers show that Illinois' unemployment rate has reached its lowest point in almost five years. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics )
- Illinois has added 281,400 private sector jobs since the recovery began (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics)
- Since May 2013, Illinois has created more private sector jobs than any other state in the Midwest. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics )

**MYTH:** The Illinois economy isn't growing and the future economic outlook is bleak.

**FACT:** Illinois' economy is seeing consistent signs of growth, and reputable future growth projections are extremely promising.

- According to the Philadelphia Federal Reserve, which has historically provided an accurate barometer of state growth- Illinois will have the largest economic growth among the five biggest states over the next six months. According to the Federal Reserve's projections, the Illinois economy will increase by 2.67 percent during the first half of 2014. (Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, "State Leading Indexes")
- The Illinois Economic Review- published by the Regional Economics Applications Laboratory (REAL) at the University of Illinois- found that the employment growth rate in Illinois has begun to exceed that of the nation and the rest of the Midwest. (Illinois Economic Review)