

A Few minutes with the Boss

By: Joseph Andalina

They seem to like to eat each other

Well, that's what it looked like as you watched or read about our leaders in the Illinois legislature go after each other like packs of wild dogs.

The pension crisis that they all created has caused some great disharmony in the ranks, to be sure. Politicians pounding each other as to how best to screw over teachers, state workers, and retirees. Does anyone think that this mess being played out in the state will not eventually work its' manic way into all our Illinois pension systems, affecting all of us in the public sector (as well as retirees) at some time in the future?

Republicans are most upset by the Democrats, especially Mike Madigan for instigating that teacher pension costs be absorbed over time by individual school districts. Little doubt here that the plan is to remove that taxing albatross from the state to the municipalities or school districts who employ them. Probably means the onus of tax increases will fall directly on the towns who have teachers. The Republicans just want their bourbon straight—no chaser.

Also in the mix is to change the pension benefits by cutting a yearly cost of living pension increase for current and future retirees. The annual constitutional mandate of 3 percent a year would be 3 percent or one-half the urban cost of living index, whichever is lower, starting five years after retirement, or at age 67.

If workers kept the 3 percent compounded yearly increase, they would lose retiree health care benefits. Maybe the Republicans really want people to vote for Obamacare by taking away those of you affected by state health insurance.

In return, they promise to make all future payments to the pension fund. How generous.

So watching Republicans sneer at Madigan and Madigan responding like...well, Madigan, was fine entertainment.

But he pulled his demand for local school districts to cough up the pension money because Governor Quinn asked him to. He's the governor, Madigan says. Wow—can you believe that? Mike Madigan bowing out to the governor? I don't for a minute. Not like the Little Big Man at all. But in the spirit of cooperation, maybe he is showing a softer side. Who really knows what they are up to in Springfield?

But the Speaker is a magician. We will just have to see what comes out of the hat. Could be nothing and pension legislation dies this year. It could be his way of not having Quinn order the legislature to convene all summer long. Or it could be a whole new agenda. We shall see.

Madigan had a rough ride and he was accused of deep-sixing diabetes money because his Republican adversary, Tom Cross, has a family member with diabetes. And I'm thinking after all the sabre rattling over the pension crisis, where did a comment about diabetes funding get into the picture? Like I said, they enjoy eating each other, but I don't believe that even Mike Madigan is that brutal. Enjoy the show; it may go on for a while. But keep in mind this is your pension and your retirement that could be at stake.

Call your legislators. Freezing your retirement benefits won't be pretty and neither is the hostility of our fine leaders.

Vita è bella