

## **A Few Minutes with the Boss**

By: Joe Andalina

### **Baby, it's cold in Springfield**

Well, here we are in Illinois. End of January and having the crappiest weather since the late 70's. I remember that year or two working out of my barn, endless days of pushing cars, digging citizens out of snow, and generally freezing my butt off. A lot like many of you are doing this past month, I'd gather.

So it's below zero, wind chills are murder, and then snow. Then it all repeats itself. That it does it again. And again. And to add insult to injury, the lower half of Alaska is in the mid 30's—warmer than in our fine state of Illinois.

All I know is that it's cold. And speaking of cold, our next General Assembly begins in February. That happy time of the year when our politicians convene in Springfield with their per diem meals, lodging, gas, salaries, and pensions to make laws and muck up benefits for public employees.

Talk about cold. Cold hearts, I'd say. It wasn't enough that they dismantled state workers' and teachers' pensions and retirements last Christmas.

Now I read that many do not think the "reform" went far enough. All kinds of nonsense that the numbers were wrong for savings and liabilities, and that they may need to do more, so in 30-35 years they are just not kicking the can down the road.

Who knows what the truth is with these people anymore. They are just cold. How do you trust them not to further diminish workers' benefits? I hear the local municipalities are starting the fire to reduce retirements and pensions for municipal workers in the future, too.

I heard one mayor in a local town tell the public how tax levies could go up due to the hiring of fire and police workers and the tie-in of pension payments. He actually had the gall to say that the average fire fighter and police officer in his town received a pension of \$100,000 a year. Then he changed it, he said "to be fair," to \$75,000. "To be fair" are the code words to interpret that maybe he was not being completely truthful.

Well, I'm sure the *brass* are getting big pensions, but not the grunts without rank. Nowhere near \$100k, or "to be fair," \$75k. But a gullible public and press only hear the whining and the mayor just pile it on because they are **cold!**

This can be a real problem to fellow coppers in the future for your pension. Do not think that you are immune. Local politicians want to see you get what the state workers got—scrooged! Please don't be naïve. Things can so south rapidly.

Also interesting was a January 9, 2014, editorial in the *Chicago Tribune* which told us a story about how the Speaker of the House gets his way (in Illinois politics) and how you pay. The article took a deep look into the Speaker's "patronage web." How has he become so powerful? "Favors, leveraging government to build a political and personal empire" according to the story. You have to

read the editorial to get a full picture. A real eye opener for those who don't know this is how it all really works here. Cold.

They provide many examples and two powerful antidotes to correct this political mess. I doubt many are listening. These guys and gals just keep rolling along.

And remember the latest pension bill was partially crafted by the Speaker's people and allies, and he supported it. As a Democrat, it was disappointing. A part of me and some who follow this stuff more than I sometimes feel that it is simply a gambit to get the lawsuits rolling and leave it up to the courts to decide. Out of their hands, so to speak.

But then you read that the politicians think they have the courts in their hands and they will win. Really cold.

All we want is a fair shake. To come in from the cold and have a retirement where we can go somewhere warm. Some integrity, decency, and empathy to see how valuable public sector workers really are.

Just look at all this cold and snow. I don't see any politicians out there, do you? Politics is everywhere, but not in a snow storm, an armed robbery, a 911 center, an ambulance, or anywhere that real work for the public is done.

I guess we can be thankful for that.

Vita é Bella