

A Few minutes with the Boss

By: Joseph Andalina

The pension bill has passed

The pension bill has passed the Illinois House and Senate by big margins. What's in it? We'll keep you advised in our next piece, but first, some commentary on the bill and the pension article, which appeared most recently in the **Chicago Tribune**.

As most of you probably have seen, on November 28th, the Tribune published a long article on the "evil pensions" that we all have, and how FUBAR'd it is supposed to be.

I was interviewed for the article, along with another union and Jim McNamee from the IPPFA. Thirty minutes on the phone and I told the reporter I was sure he would do a good job, but I would guess that out of this entire interview, maybe one or two quotes would make it. He agreed, but said he was going to use some stuff from me and the others. However, the only guy that made it was one sentence by Jim McNamee.

This reporter, however, didn't seem to grasp how the cities really screwed up the pensions by not paying over the years as mandated, which we all know is the reason this problem exists. I explained how many towns have diverted funds to pay for other things—sometimes just pork barrel stuff. Other times, the cities used actuarial firms to reduce their 9% commitment, whereby some towns are now paying 3, 4, or 5%, based on the "belief" that the funds were heading to full funding.

I pretty much went after the municipalities, but he seemed more interested in the spiking of pay. He was stuck on the fact that "longevity" was a "spike," especially when some towns and "other" unions (not MAP) negotiated spikes for the final year of an employee's career—like in Countryside or Barrington. Those are his beliefs, not ours. He knew that we couldn't comment on contracts we didn't negotiate.

I tried to explain, however, that if true, it still is not a true spike because it was a negotiated benefit for **all** the employees. Sometimes longevity is in the 5th, 10th, or 15th year. It is another ploy by municipal leaders to stigmatize longevity so they won't have to pay this benefit. I believe it is another long term plan by management to get this benefit taken away from you.

I explained that longevity is a reward for seniority and if everyone gets it, it is a negotiated benefit. Yeah, it's borderline if it's in the final year of an officer's career, but I said true spikes are when the police brass or politicians are getting a "bump" in pay, or "spike" just before they retire. If you look at that, you will see what I'm saying.

He still didn't fully grasp this, but if you read the article, you can see that he mostly mentioned individuals who are—yep—brass. Sometimes these hypocrites get double pay and serious increases. No police officers were mentioned, except for those receiving "longevity" in those contracts from other unions, allegedly just before an officer retires.

I've been pounding home time and time again that management is attacking our contracts and collective bargaining in general. "Longevity" is one of those items they want "chopped" from our contracts.

What was really surprising in this article is the condition of some of these funds. They are so bad now from just a few years ago that I think maybe you all know that what I have been saying will come to pass. The intention of our leaders is not only to get pension changes for newbies, but their real intent is to have **all current** coppers convert to a 401(k) or similar. Only in that way, within the next few years will government/management get out from under their pension liabilities. They save nothing now for any new legislation that affects only new employees.

The cat finally came out of the bag when in the same Tribune, under the editorial op-ed piece titled "*The Suicide Pacts*" they call for "having it out," I guess with us, because that's who this is going to hurt. They didn't demand that the municipalities repay the pension system. Nope, they said that Governor Quinn and the General Assembly should reject borrowing \$4 billion to cover their pension contributions.

They also talk about voting to reduce benefits for future state and municipal employees. They add "but reducing benefits only for employees who have not yet been hired won't be enough." They call for Madigan, Cullerton, and Quinn (I guess they put the most powerful in chronological order and not by position) "need to unwind the unsustainable retirement deals for *current employees*."

Some Democratic leaders believe that doing this is wrong, as it violates the state constitution. The Trib's advice? "Illinois is too broke to keep hiding from that fight. Let's cut benefits and have it out in court." There, it's been said and I've been saying it for a year—that's what this is all about. Bit by bit, this will be the new bandwagon. The public does not get the true story from us—only soundbites.

Our members and others need to go to their reps and demand that the politicians not massacre our pensions. The coalitions coming to some agreement is a start, but it's still an agreement to change our pension. Getting the law enforcement provision to force the municipalities to pay up is very important, and we are checking the bill to see if it is in the final draft. The IML will really fight this now and in the future.

In closing, I'd like to see all of the State's pension boards collectively stand up and write, call, or fax. We need to do this on an individual basis as well.

Newbie pension reform is a forgone conclusion, but it will take a lot of coppers in a tea-party like movement to avoid disaster for those cops currently employed as police officers in order to keep your pension through retirement. The attack is many-sided now and the writing is on the proverbial wall. It will take an effort by all the unions, all the pension groups, and **all** the individual employees to make a difference.

Vita é bella
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