The Illinois House and Senate concluded veto session Thursday. For many legislators, it was their last time in Springfield as a General Assembly member. Resolutions were passed honoring Senator Forby, Representatives Bradley, Cloonen, Reaves-Harris, Jackson, and Verschoore as they complete their terms. The Illinois AFL-CIO would also like to acknowledge Representative Mike Smiddy (AFSCME member) and thank him for his service in the General Assembly. Many of the Governor’s vetoes from this year stood, with the General Assembly unable to override them. In the two years since Governor Rauner took office, he has vetoed nearly 90 bills, and the General Assembly has only overridden three of the vetoes. The General Assembly has passed 31 Appropriation/Budget bills to the Governor in two years – only six have been signed into law, the rest were vetoed by the Governor. Both the House and Senate (99th General Assembly) will return to Springfield on January 9th for two days. The 100th General Assembly will be sworn in on January 11th.

Future Energy Jobs Bill Passes House, Senate After Tough Negotiations; 4,200 Jobs Saved

The saying goes that in compromise, no one walks away with everything they want. This was certainly the case in the legislation enabling Exelon nuclear plants to remain open in the Quad Cities and Clinton. SB 2814 passed the House 63-38 and the Senate 32-18. A number of changes had to be made on Thursday to ensure passage. It should be made clear, Governor Rauner demanded removal of prevailing wage language for renewable energy projects in the bill. Taking money out of the pockets of construction workers. The bill will be signed into law by the Governor on Wednesday, December 7th in the Quad Cities. SB 2814 enables Exelon to collect $235 million from customers annually to preserve nearly 4,200 jobs in Clinton and the Quad Cities. It will keep $1.2 billion in economic activity in Illinois, with state and local tax revenue supporting school districts, police, and firefighters.

Exelon agreed to cap the cost to residential customers at 25 cents a month, while businesses will be limited to a 1.3 percent increase compared to 2015 rates.

The legislation was supported by a wide range of groups in Springfield. The Illinois AFL-CIO joined the effort with the IBEW, Exelon, ComEd and building trades unions working to gain passage. Environmental groups lobbied in tandem with labor representatives supporting good jobs now and investment in future renewable energy jobs. Environmental groups and consumer advocates were able to negotiate significant changes to Illinois’ energy policy, including updates to the state’s renewable portfolio standard (RPS), an expansion of efficiency programs, and a preservation of net metering for rooftop solar projects.

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After Gov. Bruce Rauner flip-flopped on his priorities again, House and Senate committees took up his most recent “top priority”– cutting Workers’ Compensation to benefit corporate Illinois.

Rauner has made a habit of changing his priorities that he wants the General Assembly to concede before he moves on discussing a state budget. He has been in office nearly two years and has yet to propose a legit budget proposal.

“While Rauner has played political games with his corporate wish list, people in this state are suffering,” Illinois AFL-CIO President Michael T. Carrigan said. “It’s beyond frustrating to deal with someone who refuses to do his job and cares little about the consequences.”

Taking into account Rauner’s most recent priority shuffling, House and Senate committees took up Workers’ Compensation for testimony this week during the veto session.

In the House Labor and Commerce Committee on Tuesday, working family advocates exposed the proposed cuts as furthering a race to the bottom for injured worker benefits and completely missing the real target of employer cost issues – insurance industry profiteering on the backs of employers and injured workers.

Among those testifying on the panel opposing cuts to Workers’ Compensation were: Fire Lieutenant Neal Jones of Schaumburg, David Menchetti from the lawfirm of Cullen Haskins Nicholson Menchetti), Illinois Trial Lawyers Association President Chris Hurley, Illinois AFL-CIO Legislative Director Jason Keller and LIUNA Midwest Region Director of Governmental Affairs Sean Stott.

Menchetti pointed out to lawmakers that the costs in Indiana are low because employers control medical choices for workers and pay “poverty level” compensation for injuries.

Rauner’s “list”

Rauner’s so-called priority list has proven to be an elusive target. He has held various proposals over his first two years as “top priorities” depending on who he is talking to and whether an election is around the corner.

“The bottom line is that he is finding any excuse to keep from doing his first and top job as Governor – keep the state running and put together a budget with the General Assembly,” Carrigan said. “The one common thread is that his many and varied priorities don’t have anything to do with the budget and he wants to starve the people of Illinois until he gets his way. He has yet to figure out that he is not the boss of Illinois, he is the Governor. That is a job not a bestowed title.”

Other items now on his priority list include term limits, education “improvements”, pension reform and a property tax freeze. He does not spell out how he would increase funding to education while advocating a property tax freeze (K-12 education is primarily funding through property taxes), nor how pension reform would work given recent Illinois Supreme Court decisions affirming that pensions cannot be diminished, or how term limits are related in any way to the budget. In fact, his top GOP lieutenants in the House and Senate Rep. Jim Durkin and Sen. Christine Radogno have a combined 37 years served in the General Assembly.

Laid-off Steelworkers fight for extended UI Benefits

Nearly 1,800 United Steel Workers (USW) laid off from Granite City Steel in Granite City may become eligible for extended unemployment benefits under the Illinois House and Senate passed legislation last week. The lay-offs at Granite City Steel in were due to what U.S. officials charged were unfair trade practices by China dumping foreign steel illegally in the United States.

Because of the nearly year-long duration of the layoff, USW Local 50 President, Jason Chism, contacted State Rep. Jay Hoffman, State Rep. Dan Beiser and State Sen. Bill Haine to pass legislation modeled after a Minnesota bill to grant workers who were laid-off from a steel manufacturing facility due to unfair trade practice an additional 26 weeks of extended unemployment insurance benefits.

With high unemployment in Granite City and the longer than expected lay-off Hoffman and Beiser were joined by other Metro-East legislators to put forth SB 1941 which grants the extended benefits. The legislation now moves to the Governor.
A bill widely heralded as an opportunity to allow more voters easier access to participating in elections failed to pass a Rauner veto override in the House this week. Needing two-thirds majority, or 71 votes, the bill (SB250) failed 67-47.

The bill passed with 86 votes in May, including 15 Republican supporters. House GOP members that switched their votes to side with Rauner include: Rep. Thomas Bennett (R-Pontiac); Rep. Terri Bryant (R-Mt. Vernon); Rep. C.D. Davidsmeyer (R-Jacksonville); Rep. Tom Demmer (R-Rochelle); Rep. Norine Hammond (R-Macomb); Rep. Chad Hays (R-Danville); Rep. Sara Wojcicki Jimenez (R-Springfield); Rep. Mike McAuliffe (R-Chicago); Rep. Don Moffitt (R-Galesburg); Rep. Robert Pritchard (R-Sycamore); Rep. Ed Sullivan (R-Mundelein); Rep. Michael Tryon (R-Crystal Lake); and Rep. Michael Unes (R-Pekin).

Under the bill, people seeking to update or receive a driver’s license or state ID would be registered to vote or have their information updated unless they chose to opt out. It would also streamline functions, eliminate redundancy, clean up the voter rolls, saving taxpayers money.

Two weeks ago, the Illinois Senate voted to override the veto over Republican defections there as well. Senators that switched to support Rauner veto were: Neil Anderson (R-Moline); Jason Barickman (R-Bloomington); Sue Rezin (R-Peru); and Chapin Rose (R-Champaign). The only Republican to stick with his vote supporting AVR was Sam McCann (R-Jacksonville).

“While many states are seeking ways to restrict voter access, this legislation encourages maximum participation in elections,” Illinois AFL-CIO President Michael Carrigan said. “It’s disappointing that those Republican representatives voted one way before an election, then caved to the Governor after the election. Rauner even said he was for AVR before he stopped it with his veto pen. It’s just more politics and games for them.”

Lawmakers File Suit Challenging Munger For Withholding Pay

A group of state legislators filed suit in Cook County Friday over Comptroller Leslie Munger’s decision to withhold their pay since June.

In a statement to the Chicago Sun-Times, Rep. Chris Welch (D-Chicago) noted that wealthy office-holders like Gov. Bruce Rauner and Munger can forego salary, but to keep legislators from getting paid amounts to political coercion.

“The decision by multimillionaire Comptroller Leslie Munger and billionaire Gov. Bruce Rauner was a thinly veiled attempt to force their political opponents into taking positions in support of the governor’s positions and against the beliefs of their constituents,” Welch said.

The pay issue came about after Munger, who was appoint-ed by Rauner following the death of Judy Baar Topinka, made the decision to stop paying legislators in the middle of a battle over the state’s budget between Rauner and General Assembly Democrats. Rauner refuses to negotiate a budget until his anti-worker and political agenda items are put on the table.

“Withholding legislators’ paychecks amounts to political arm-twisting,” said Illinois AFL-CIO President Michael Carrigan. “That is a terrible precedent to set for the executive branch to arbitrarily decide if and when the legislative branch gets paid depending on political whims. It is coercion, and it has no place in government.”

Munger lost her election for State Comptroller to Susana Mendoza in November. Mendoza told the Sun-Times she plans on continuing to delay payment to legislators, “unless instructed by a court to do otherwise.”
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It included common sense reforms in the RPS that will free up funds for renewable energy projects to be used in Illinois – creating local jobs and economic growth.

“The bill protects workers at current plants, while simultaneously moving our state forward in terms of clean energy and energy efficiency,” said Illinois AFL-CIO President Michael T. Carrigan. “The labor and the environmental movements worked hand-in-hand throughout this process to push for a bill that was both fair to workers and forward-thinking when it comes to addressing climate change.”

Legislators from both political parties and from all regions of the state supported this legislation that not only protects existing jobs in Clinton and the Quad Cities, but is an investment in good-paying, middle class jobs in years to come.

The Governor is expected to sign the bill this week.

Rauner Prevailing Wage Veto Stands; Override Falls One Short In House

SB 2964, an initiative of the Operating Engineers #150 and LIUNA Midwest Region, passed both chambers in the Spring with supermajorities. The Governor and the IL Department of Labor have stopped posting the prevailing wage rate in Illinois – in an attempt to suppress wages for construction workers.

The bill, as approved by the General Assembly, would have allowed for local bodies to ascertain the proper prevailing rate by using wages in collective bargaining agreements in their area.

The Senate overrode the Governor’s veto in the first week of the Veto Session. The House fell one vote short, getting to 70 votes, needing 71. Representative Thapedi (D) had an excused absence, and Representatives McAuliffe and Cabello switched votes after initially supporting the legislation, to not voting to override the veto.

Rauner Vetoes Chicago Public Schools Funding

Governor Rauner vetoed SB 2822 on Wednesday, November 30th. The legislation would have provided nearly $215 million for Chicago Public Schools. This is another instance where children are collateral damage in the Governor’s war on the middle class. Rauner continues to demand things that are unrelated to the real issues facing the state, meanwhile children, seniors, and people with disabilities are facing the consequences of his scorched earth strategy.

The Senate voted to override the veto on December 1st by a vote of 36-16-2. Leader Currie did not file a motion to override the veto in the House.

Chicago Firefighters, Paramedics Override Veto

One of only three vetoes overridden by General Assembly in Two Years

The General Assembly overrode the Governor’s veto of SB 440 last week. The new law, despite the Governor’s objections, provides a modest annuity of no less than 125 percent of the federal poverty level to widows and widowers. It also clarifies the benefits for Tier II firefighters and police officers who are killed in the line of duty to ensure that their family is entitled to a death benefit. Lastly, it provides a cost-of-living adjustment to police officer and firefighter annuitants.

SEIU Passes Overtime Protections

The General Assembly passed SB 261 during the two week veto session. The legislation sets up protections for overtime worked by home healthcare providers. The Senate passed the bill 38-18 in the Senate, and 68-42 in the House. The bill was transmitted to the governor on Friday, December 2nd.