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# Devil's in the Details

As we move into 2017 we know change is coming. Will it be for good or ill? Will you accept whatever a large media outlet or millionaire tells you, or will you pay attention to the details? Because that is where you need to look to make sure that your work and your interests are protected. Let me give you some past and ongoing examples.

According to Governor Rauner, workmen's compensation is crippling our state budget and has to be changed. The detail is that worker's compensation law was changed significantly in 2011 and has resulted in lower claims. But the amount charged by insurers has not gone down. In other words, the money saved by reducing worker benefits did not translate into lower state expenses but into increased insurer profit. Now Rauner wants to take more away from workers, to what purpose? Improved returns for his investments in insurance companies?

"It isn't fair that someone who is not a union member has to pay a fair share fee to a union." The detail is that where there is a union contract, the union has to service and defend that contract including on behalf of the NON-union employee. Not paying a fair share fee would be like refusing to pay the portion of your taxes that cover fire protection, but then demanding that the fire department put out your house fire.

"Why should you have a defined benefit retirement, I don't." The detail is that Americans DO have a defined benefit retirement it is called Social Security. Teachers (and many other pensioners) do not qualify for social security. TRS is our social security. Employees pay 6.2% of their pay to Social Security, teachers pay 9% that is why TRS is a stronger benefit than SS.

"Unions buy politicians and spend way too much money on elections." The detail is in 2014 Rauner spent 26 million of HIS OWN money on the governor's race. The IFT on behalf of its 100,000+ members spent less than 5. In this past election, Steve Reick spent over 1 million while his opponent (endorsed by the IFT) spent less than 1/3 of that.

"Unions have negotiated too rich of retirement benefits." The detail is that the anecdotal evidence that goes with these statements is almost ALWAYS a non-union member/position. When you look closer, the example given of the person getting a \$150,000 retirement turns out to be a state, city, district administrative person retiring from a position that isn't part of the union. These are also outliers! Look at the averages within the system, teacher 46K.

Which brings me to another slippery detail, how to compare numbers and statements. Illinois is a large and diverse state. Taxes are high. Which ones? Yes my property tax bill is high, but my income tax bill compared to Iowa is quite a bit lower. Taxes are much lower in Colorado. I suspect we could lower our taxes in Illinois if we legalized marijuana. We pay too much for our schools, we should be more like Nevada – a state that ranks dozens of positions lower than Illinois on the quality of its schools.

It always comes down to the details. Illinois' economy is awful? What metric should we use to measure that? We are the 4<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the country by GDP. Taxes are better in Wisconsin, our overall tax rate is lower than Wisconsin (<https://wallethub.com/edu/states-with-highest-lowest-tax-burden/20494/>).

The history of unionism is aggregating the individual workers voice so that we can be heard above the din of power and money that backs business and politics. That is still our purpose, that is still our fight. Stay vigilant and dig into the details.

*Duane*

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