

Presidents Message

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Since November, many have been wondering what impact the outcome of the elections would have on the rights of workers. Unfortunately, our fears are being realized on both the national and local levels. Federally, Andrew Pudzer, Donald Trump's nominee for Secretary of the Department of Labor, has a long history of opposing regulations for businesses, including regulations designed to protect the health and safety of workers. The mission statement of the Department of Labor is to "foster, promote, and develop the welfare of the wage earners, job seekers, and retirees of the United States; improve working conditions; advance opportunities for profitable employment; and assure work-related benefits and rights". Given that there have been numerous allegations of wage theft and other labor violations made against Mr. Pudzer's various companies, it seems ironic that he has been tapped as the person to "protect the health and safety of workers". Mr. Pudzer is also an outspoken critic of unions. In a 2011 book he co-wrote entitled "Job Creation: How It Really Works and Why Government Doesn't Understand It", Mr. Pudzer stated that "empowering unions can increase labor costs to the point of putting employers in or near bankruptcy. This is in the best interests of neither employees, employers nor our potential for economic growth". Events in 2016 had brought hope that the federal government had recognized the inadequacies of the state workers compensation systems and might take steps to restore the balance of the "Grand Bargain". It seems clear that injured workers can expect no help from Washington in the near future.

Similarly on the state level, we have already begun to see how conservative legislatures and state executives are working to strip away the rights of labor. On Monday February 6, 2017 Missouri became the 28th "right to work" state in the nation. In the past such legislation had been blocked by Missouri's Democratic Governor Jay Nixon, but Governor Nixon could not run for re-election due to term limits. Republican Eric Greitens was elected and one of his first acts was to sign the "right to work" bill. Conservative business interests have a new sense of empowerment across the country and it must be our mission to oppose them whenever they seek to threaten the rights of workers.

As advocates for the rights of workers, this is truly becoming "the winter of our discontent". As I have done in my past Presidents messages, I urge all WILG members to be proactive. Identify potential issues in your state. and prepare the necessary research to counter that of the business council. Make appointments with your state legislators, either at the Capitol or in district, so that you can make them aware of how the continuing decline in workers' rights is personally affecting their constituency.

As always, WILG is here to help. In addition to our research capabilities, we have Regional Conferences scheduled for Montana and Atlanta in March. These conferences are not only helpful in improving our practice skills, they are also a great opportunity for us to share information and ideas as to how to combat workers compensation "deform". I look forward to seeing everyone at these fantastic events.

The more potential roadblocks we face, the harder we must fight. We must remember that, as Mahatma Gandhi said, "a small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history".