

## PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

MICHAEL GRUBER

The mission statement of the United States Department of Labor states that the Department “seeks to foster, promote and develop the welfare of 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”. According to “A Brief History: The U.S. Department of Labor” by Judson MacLaury, the Department of Labor “was the direct product of a half-century campaign by organized labor for a “voice in the Cabinet””. Unfortunately, the recently proposed Federal Budget seems ill-equipped to further the mission of protecting the welfare workers and assuring workers’ rights and affirmatively seeks to reduce the influence of organized labor as an effective voice in Federal policy.

As expected, the budget calls for an overall \$2.4 billion reduction in funding for the Department of Labor, a cut of approximately 20% from the 2017 budget. One of the programs completely eliminated in the proposed budget is the Susan Harwood Training Grant Program. According to the DOL website, the purpose of this program is to “provide training and education for workers and employers on the recognition, avoidance, and prevention of safety and health hazards in their workplaces, and to inform workers of their rights and responsibilities under the OSH Act. Target audiences include underserved, low-literacy, and workers in high-hazard industries”. Additionally, the proposed budget seemingly seeks to re-allocate OSHA resources away from enforcement of workplace safety regulations which will result in fewer OSHA inspections of workplaces that ensure employers are providing safe work environments.

Protections for injured workers also are put in jeopardy by the proposed cuts to the National Labor Relations Board. Funding for the NLRB would be cut approximately 6% with an accompanying 17% reduction in NLRB staff.

Reductions in federal funding for programs designed to make workplaces safer increases the odds for the occurrence of workplace accidents. It seems ironic that at the same time the Federal budget is seeking to make workplaces less safe the States are continuing their push to reduce benefits to those workers injured on the job. WILG’s dedication to ensuring reasonable and adequate benefits for injured workers becomes even more critical if the cuts to worker safety programs are included in the final Federal budget. WILG will continue to work to swiftly identify initiatives which impact workers’ rights on both the Federal and State levels. We will continue to work diligently not only to prevent further reductions in benefits, but also to expand benefits to those injured at work. We cannot solely be defensive when it comes to our mission, for if we are only reactionary we will surely suffer “death by a thousand cuts”. We must seek to take the fight to the employers, insurance carriers and state compensation systems. Our success

in this endeavor, as always, depends on the willingness of our membership to join in the battles that must be fought. Our membership has never been lacking in this determination in the past, and I am certain we will not be found wanting in the future.