

Presidents Message
Michael K. Gruber

Once again, WILG's Annual Convention was an exceptional experience. Held at the beautiful Boulders resort in Carefree, Arizona, the convention featured outstanding educational programs presented by experts in the medical, legal, and academic fields. And while it is always fun to re-connect with old acquaintances, with a record number of new attendees this convention was also a great opportunity to meet new WILG Warriors. I hope to see everyone at next year's convention at the Breakers in Palm Beach, Florida or at one of our 2017 regional events in Atlanta, Whitefish Montana, or New York City.

At the Convention, I was installed as the President of WILG. Being elected to lead this incredible organization is a singular honor, and I thank you for putting your trust in me to lead this organization. I assure you I will work hard to keep that trust.

It has been an eventful beginning to my term as President. As I am sure most of you are aware, during my first week in office two reports focusing on the state of workers compensation were issued. In the first, the U.S. Department of Labor asked "Does The Workers' Compensation System Fulfill Its Obligations To Injured Workers?". Given the DOL's statement that "indemnity benefits are inadequate in many – perhaps most – states", the answer seems to be a resounding "NO". The second report was issued by the National Academy of Social Insurance (NASI) which found that benefit levels for workers injured on the job are the lowest they have been in 35 years.

The findings in the Department of Labor and NASI reports are echoed in the papers being issued from the Pound Civil Justice Institute Academic Symposium entitled "The Demise of the Grand Bargain: Compensation for Injured Workers in the 21st Century". The papers from that Symposium are incredible works of scholarship, and I urge everyone to read them, especially that of Emily Spieler from the Northeastern University School of Law. Dean Spieler notes the workers compensation system is flawed not only in the type and extent of benefits provided to injured workers, but also in how those benefits are delivered.

The conclusions of these reports and papers should come as no surprise to WILG members, or to anyone who has been paying attention to workers compensation for the past decade. One of our main missions over the past several years has been to warn both the public as well as governmental policy makers that workers compensation systems have been engaging in a "race to the bottom". The decline in benefits has continued so relentlessly that the fundamental nature of workers compensation in general is in jeopardy. Has the Grand Bargain between business and labor been breached? Can workers compensation survive constitutional challenges given the inadequacy of benefits being provided to injured workers? What will workers compensation systems look like in the next decade and beyond? These are among the questions being asked. And although these questions are difficult ones, I believe WILG is in the best position to answer them on behalf of injured workers. The depth and breadth of our collective knowledge is unmatched by any other organization.

Our immediate task must be to keep the momentum generated by the Department of Labor and NASI studies moving forward. Whether we are working in Washington or in our local communities, these reports, and the publicity that has accompanied them, are tools we can and must use in our efforts to reverse the diminution of benefits provided to injured workers. Each of you has dedicated your time and energy to these ends and to ensure that injured workers are treated with dignity and respect. I look forward to working with you as we continue our work towards our common goals.