

*The following is a Letter to the Editor we prepared in response to the Pantagraph.com article “**Third of Ill. worker comp awards in 12 facilities**” from December 4, 2011. Unfortunately, Pantagraph.com only accepts Letters to the Editor of 250 words or less. We found that we could not fully express ourselves within such limitation, so we wanted to get our full opinion out here. To read the text of the article, visit http://www.pantagraph.com/news/state-and-regional/illinois/third-of-ill-worker-comp-awards-in-facilities/article_aa49a064-1d6b-11e1-b8ef-001871e3ce6c.html#ixzz1gM4NXq9w.*

I am concerned over the growing “outrage” over workers’ compensation benefits from a few select downstate newspapers. In your article “Third of Ill. worker comp awards in 12 facilities,” your organization proffered some explanations for this alleged abuse. Those explanations ranged from ‘the arbitrators were corrupt’ to ‘the attorney general’s office was not adequately prepared.’

My question is, where are explanations like ‘these claims were legitimate?’ Why is it not reported that the State’s own medical expert found the carpal tunnel syndrome claims to be related to the employment at the prison? Why is it not reported that adjusters from CMS investigated the claims, including a trip to Menard Prison, and found the claims to be compensable? Instead of focusing on the ‘corrupt arbitrators’ what about the panel of 3 Commissioners that confirmed the rulings of the cases? If curious minds want to know why none of these three questions were answered, like all political issues, you just have to follow the money.

Insurance companies and the business community want to lower the cost of workers’ compensation because “it hurts business.” In fact, the workers’ compensation system is costing so much business in Illinois that it has the second highest number of insurance companies in the nation! If it was so expensive, why are so many insurance companies flocking to handle workers’ compensation? Oh, and this was prior to the “reforms” of 2011. Thanks in part to the quality reporting of The Pantagraph and the Belleville News-Democrat, the legislature passed reforms in 2011 that cut payments to doctors that treat injured workers by 30% and cut the amount of compensation injured workers receive. With these cost savings, insurance companies then asked to raise their premium rates that businesses have to pay! Now is also a good time to mention that filings have dropped about 30% since 1995.

So to recap, insurance companies and business groups (i.e., Chamber of Commerce) were successful in pushing through cost savings on the backs of injured workers and doctors so that they could increase their profits all while claiming fraud on the part of the injured worker. Oh, and here’s another little secret that tends to be unreported by these newspapers, of the 5 convictions for workers’ compensation fraud in 2009, 3 were committed to the employer/insurance company.

From Wisconsin, Indiana, and Ohio, to Illinois, the middle class and working families are under assault. Unfortunately, aside from Plaintiffs Trial Lawyers and Unions, there are no lobbyist groups for the people. Whether it be through the Occupy Movements or simply voting, I urge everyone to make their voice heard. Money talks, but people can speak louder.

