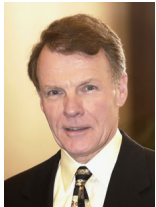


## Madigan Triumphs Again on Workers' Comp Bill

Written by Rich Miller  
Sunday, 05 June 2011 05:42

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In all the years I've covered Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan, he has never allowed his chamber's Republican minority leader to best him. A minority leader might score a win here and there, but those victories are always short-lived. The wins are almost akin to a challenge to Madigan's manhood itself, and they are never allowed to stand.

And so it was yet again with workers' compensation reform. House Republican Leader Tom Cross locked his caucus into a position against the bill the Sunday before the spring session adjourned, and the bill appeared to die.

Indeed, the House Republicans surprised many by making no attempt whatsoever to even try to hide their real motives for voting lockstep against the workers' comp bill. Simply put, the proposal harmed the interests of the Illinois State Medical Society by mandating a 30-percent cut in medical-reimbursement rates. Republican after Republican rose during debate to decry the proposed medical-reimbursement cuts. The Medical Society has historically given a ton of campaign cash to the House Republicans. If the Democrats simply reduced the cuts down to the Medical Society-approved 20-percent level, the Republicans more than implied, there'd be a deal.

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The speaker was in no mood for a deal. Instead, he pulled out all the stops, as only he can. The legislation wound up passing with 62 votes on the last night of session, even though two of Madigan's 64 members were out of town.

The bill also picked up a lone House Republican supporter. Representative Chris Nybo (R-Elmhurst) had wanted to vote for the bill on Sunday but was browbeaten into submission the first time around.

The House Republicans might ultimately regret their political maneuver. While the Republican leadership managed to keep all its other members off the legislation, support for the bill by most Senate Republicans undercuts its "official" position that the reforms don't go nearly far enough.

Illinois Chamber President Doug Whitley didn't have many kind words for the bill in the days leading up to the vote, but he showered praise on the legislation after it cleared the House on the second try.

"I'm glad it passed," Whitley said after the bill was finally approved, running through several positive aspects of the legislation. Whitley's group has been pushing workers' comp reform for more than two years, and the obviously exhausted business leader said he was relieved this phase was finally over.

Whitley said it would probably take two years for the reforms to work their way through the system. By the next gubernatorial election, he said, the results should be clear. If they work, then that's great. If they don't work, then he vowed to make workers' comp reform an issue in the 2014 campaign.

Whitley singled out Senate President Cullerton as the "hero" of the moment. Cullerton has been pushing to reform the system since last fall.

While Cullerton certainly deserves praise for his persistence, he wasn't alone. Both sponsors, Representatives John Bradley and Senator Kwame Raoul, guided the talks to a conclusion. Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel helped flip some recalcitrant Democrats, and Governor Pat

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Quinn's administration never let up on the pressure.

Illinois Manufacturers' Association CEO Greg Baise and Illinois Retail Merchants Association President Dave Vite rolled with the punches, never panicked, and always stayed focused on reaching an agreement that could realistically pass both chambers, even when other business leaders abandoned the quest. Both Baise and Vite have a policy of creating majorities in both chambers that support their groups' interests, rather than backing a single party over the other. It worked again.

It's also difficult not to point out that if the House Republicans, doctors, unions, and trial lawyers had agreed to a compromise proposed back in January, they would've taken a far lighter hit than they did last week.

That earlier proposed compromise cut medical-reimbursement rates by just 15 percent (half the final total) and included few of the other reforms contained in the current bill. The groups thought they could fight off any changes at all if they held together.

The problem with their logic is they failed to consider that Speaker Madigan would make passing a reform bill a point of honor. His personal constitution does not allow him to be bested by the GOP. And in the end, he won again.

*Rich Miller also publishes Capitol Fax (a daily political newsletter) and [CapitolFax.com](http://CapitolFax.com).*