

GOP postpones overhaul until after '96 elections

Republicans fear angering business or labor over worker's compensation.

SPRINGFIELD (AP) — The Republican-controlled General Assembly won't try to overhaul Illinois' worker's compensation system until after the important 1996 elections, GOP House Speaker Lee Daniels says.

Daniels' decision would avoid alienating business and labor groups before the elections, but also is likely to result in a campaign cash frenzy as special interest groups back the party most sympathetic to their cause.

Illinois' worker's compensation system provides cash awards to employees who have been hurt on the job. The money is designed to cover the workers' medical bills and compensate them for injuries and lost productivity.

Republicans say Illinois' system is too liberal and it hurts business development in the state.

With the threat of changes to that system, labor unions will have a greater impetus to push for Democrats to reduce or overturn Daniels' 64-54 House majority.

"These are guys on the work

site that over and over again put their life on the line," said Margaret Blackshere, a top official with the Illinois AFL-CIO. "There are jobs out there that every day are dangerous, yet we're trivializing it by saying it should be part of politics and the campaign."

Business groups, meanwhile, are likely to pump even more cash into GOP campaigns as they seek greater changes than Republicans have been willing to make.

Legislators also will look at ways to combat worker's compensation fraud and attempt to ban injury awards for workers who were impaired by alcohol or drugs, he said.

Senate Republicans last spring approved a worker's compensation package that would have required injured workers to prove that alcohol or drugs weren't to blame for workplace accidents. It also defined more strictly repetitive trauma injuries and boosted, then froze, the top weekly benefit for permanent partial disability.

The package also include a controversial provision opening the injured workers' medical histories for inspection. In addition, it would have limited workers to one doctor and one course of treatment at the employer's expense.

2 Section 3 Chicago Tribune, Wednesday, September 10, 1997

INSIDE THE WORKPLACE/Stephen Franklin

Unsettled past leads to remarkable harmony

Consider this scenario. The new plant starts off with a bang, but the boss who put everything into shape moves on. Then a union election brings forward a bunch of new faces and philosophies of dealing with management. Finally the plant gets a new generation of high-tech equipment.

So what happens? Personnel problems. Technology mishaps. Production takes a dive and stays there.

This has not been so, however, at Miller Brewing Co.'s plant in Trenton, Ohio. Indeed, the southern Ohio plant has been quite a success in the eyes of the Work in America Institute Inc., a non-profit research organization in Scarsdale, N.Y., that fosters employee involvement efforts.

"It has one of the most successful labor/management partnerships that we have seen," said Marty Cohen, a Work in America Institute vice president.

The plant's birth was not very promising, however. It opened in 1981, but soon after was mothballed because of slumping sales. It reopened in 1991 with a high production system and extensive partnership between the plant's managers, local United Auto Workers union officials and workers.

Not only has the plant regularly exceeded productivity levels of most breweries, but it has managed to keep it up, Cohen said.

Besides loosely written agreements that let workers and managers resolve problems, the plant has a number of so-called star teams.

The teams do the work supervisors once did, and team members concentrate on different areas: personnel, safety, quality, administration, maintenance, continuous management. The team members, workers and bosses, also

rotate assignments. Many plants have similar set-ups, "but they (Miller-Trenton) are one of the best at this," Cohen said.

Uneven bounty: This is a miracle economy for workers, right?

Not so, say a number of female workers surveyed nationwide by the AFL-CIO. Indeed, most female workers in the recent survey said that making ends meet has become tougher for them in the last five years.

Among female workers in Illinois, more than 9 out of 10 said that earning equal pay is very important to them. Forty-four percent said that their job security has been getting worse. Only 5 percent of the women said child-care is available at their job.



Blackshere

Along with a poll conducted by telephone, the surveys were handed out at work sites, grocery stores, beauty parlors, soccer games, prayer breakfasts and other places.

One of the survey's more surprising results, said Margaret Blackshere, secretary-treasurer of the Illinois AFL-CIO, was the low priority female black workers gave to job discrimination issues.

Intrigued by the response, Blackshere talked with black workers. Many said low pay and other work difficulties are larger concerns.

Stalled organizing: Before the Teamsters union's victory over United Parcel Service of America Inc. becomes the theme song for newly resurgent labor, it is worth noting what happened to the UAW's organizing drive at

Nissan Motor Manufacturing Co.'s plant in Smyrna, Tenn.

After a brief, intense effort, the union couldn't muster enough supporters and decided last week to call off the drive at the 5,000-worker plant. It's the second failed effort at the plant; another flopped in 1989, when the union could only garner 30 percent support.

Although the company quickly and publicly proclaimed its victory, union officials downplayed the results, privately saying it was not an all-out, make-or-break confrontation. Rather, they say, the drive got started when word got out that the union was closing its local office in Smyrna.

Still, the defeat is a reminder of the difficulties unions face in organizing high-paying blue-collar jobs.

It also is a measure of the UAW's failure to secure a toehold among foreign automakers: It has yet to sign up members at a foreign-owned auto plant not linked to a U.S. partner. The setback in Smyrna may have implications for the union's ability to organize at two plants it has had its eye on—BMW's Spartanburg, S.C., plant and the Mercedes-Benz plant in Tuscaloosa, Ala.

"These transplants are not bringing in a foreign labor philosophy. They are playing U.S.-style hardball," said Dan Cornfield, a labor expert and sociology professor at Vanderbilt University in Nashville.

One of the problems unions still face in the South, Cornfield added, is many workers' lack of familiarity with them.

MORE ON THE INTERNET: Find out what's happening inside Chicago's business sectors at chicago.tribune.com/go/insider

Voice of the people

Social Security gamble is not worth it

SPRINGFIELD—Contrary to the Tribune's Dec. 11 editorial, the main issue regarding the possible privatization of the Social Security system is not whether we can trust the public.

It is about whether it is wise to trade Social Security's guaranteed benefits for the possibility of higher benefits. What your editorial does not acknowledge is that gambling with Social Security in the stock market—especially in individual accounts—also leaves the possibility of lower benefits for many workers.

Currently, Social Security guarantees a retired worker a set benefit regardless of the rise and fall of the economy. Investing workers' contributions in the stock market would make their benefits dependent upon when they retire and individual luck.

While some savvy or lucky investors could come out ahead, many investors would see lower benefits and face poverty in their retirement. Consider that in 1973 stock prices tumbled by 48 percent before they finally bottomed out nearly two years later. The stock market did not reach the high 1973 level again for another seven years.

And none of this takes into account that Social Security is not a retirement program. It is a social insurance program, which insures workers and their families against the time when they will be unable to work, because of retirement, disability or death.

Privatization proponents don't add the cost of family, disability and death benefits into their rosy equations. Yet even without those programs, individual accounts will cost taxpayers more than the current Social Security program.

Not only will the administration costs soar—in your own editorial you admit that they will likely double or triple—but also privatization plans pay for additional costs by cutting benefits, cutting cost-of-living increases and raising the retirement age.

All of these options are unacceptable to the American public, as polls have shown. For example, in a July survey conducted by Peter Hart Research Associates, 81 percent of 1,090 adults polled nationwide said they did not want raising the retirement age to be part of any equation for Social Security reform, and 92 percent said Congress should maintain the annual cost-of-living adjustment in Social Security benefits equal to the inflation rate.

Working families can't afford privatization. They can't afford the risk that individual accounts substitute for Social Security's guarantees. That is why we need to strengthen and protect Social Security, not tear it apart by privatizing it.

Margaret Blackshere

Secretary-Treasurer
Illinois AFL-CIO

No. 2 official named state AFL-CIO chief

By Stephen Franklin
TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

Margaret Blackshere, a former kindergarten teacher from Downstate Illinois, was named president Saturday of the Illinois state AFL-CIO in the labor's group first-ever contested election.

Her victory in a hotly contested election marks a small but significant change in the leadership of state labor groups across the U.S. Only one other state labor group, Florida's, is led by a woman.

Blackshere, of Springfield, who has been secretary-treasurer of the state labor federation, won about 60 percent of the more than 400,000 votes cast by union members across the state. Balloting took place last month; results were announced Saturday afternoon.

Michael Carrigan, business manager for Decatur Local 146 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and a Decatur City Council member, was elected secretary-treasurer.

Their opponents were George Machino, president of the Madison County Central Labor Council, and Joe Costigan, Chicago-based political director for UNITE, the Union

of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees.

Blackshere, who boasted that she began her union activism 38 years ago with a local chapter of the Illinois Federation of Teachers, said she was a new voice despite holding the second-highest job for the last few years with the state labor group.

"I am going to start talking to people. I am going to set forth some new ideas. I am not going to be somebody sitting in a fancy office making decisions," Blackshere said moments after results were announced at state AFL-CIO headquarters in Springfield.

Traditionally, the top jobs for the Illinois AFL-CIO, the nation's third-largest state labor group with about 1 million members, have been handed down with few complaints about the lack of choice. This time, everything was different.

The unprecedented election bat-



Blackshere

tle saw intense campaigning as union leaders quickly took sides. The candidates did not hold back unfriendly words about each other.

The key issue was a simple one: whether the state's labor establishment had stayed in touch with the changes within organized labor in the past few years.

Since John Sweeney's election as president of the national AFL-CIO in 1995, the first dissident upheaval in the top ranks, changes have slowly rippled across the nation's unions. One of these was more pressure on state labor organizations to bring together unions and to rally their ranks.

The problem with most state and local federations, AFL-CIO officials have said, is that they are seriously underfunded and rarely able to coordinate their efforts.

In Illinois, for example, AFL-CIO unions pay only 55 percent of the dues they supposedly owe to the state federation, based on the number of members in the state.

"We are going to start going out and organizing," Blackshere said.

Despite strong criticism during the campaign, she predicted both sides would soon come together.

First woman elected to head Illinois AFL-CIO

SPRINGFIELD (AP) — The Illinois AFL-CIO will gain momentum by involving groups it traditionally hasn't wooed, the labor organization's president-elect says.

Margaret Blackshere, elected last weekend as the first woman to hold the top spot of the state's largest labor organization, plans to tackle a ground-breaking agenda that reaches out to existing union members, would-be members, and even Republicans.

If she sticks to it, she'll be following the recipe that has made labor successful in recent years, said Ron Peters, chairman of the labor education program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

"They've been better listeners. It took them a long time to figure out this is no longer the 1930's ... (with) the idea of the boss being an S.O.B.," Peters said. "A number of people like their job, like what they're doing, but feel they should be getting a better shake, a better share of the profits, and the idea of having some say."

A 59-year-old former teacher from Niles, Blackshere on Tuesday said the AFL-CIO would take a more active role in helping member unions organize, broaden communications both in the unions and with community organizations, and supporting Republicans, traditionally considered anti-union.



Blackshere

"It's an ambitious plan; it's one I think we can get done," Blackshere said at a Statehouse news conference along with her running mate, newly elected secretary-treasurer Michael Carrigan of Decatur.

Recruiting until now has been left to the organization's 55 affiliated unions to sign up new members, said Blackshere, who served seven years as secretary-treasurer under retiring president Donald Johnson. She will set up a statewide organizing committee and a toll-free number will allow any worker in the state to call anonymously for help in forming a union.

The group will go after the child-care and health-care industries for new members, as well as computer operators and the banking industry, said Blackshere, who takes office April 1.

The group will also go after Republicans, traditionally seen as anti-union. For the first time, the AFL-CIO will endorse GOP political candidates in primaries, Blackshere said.

"This has raised a few eyebrows in the labor community," Blackshere said. "We know there are Republicans who support our agenda and care about working families."

She dismissed concerns that the first contested election in the organization's 102-year history has divided it. Blackshere defeated maverick Madison County labor leader George Machino Jr. after unprecedented support allowed Machino to challenge her.

Labor leader to address United Way

DECATUR — Margaret Blackshere, president-elect of the Illinois AFL-CIO, will speak at the 78th annual meeting of the United Way of Decatur/Macon County.



Blackshere

The meeting begins at 5 p.m. March 16 in the Decatur Club, with dinner at 6 p.m. Tickets are \$25 or \$200 for a table of eight. Call 422-8537 for reservations.

Amy Girardi, AFL-CIO community services liaison, said Blackshere was asked to speak because she is an inspiration to working people everywhere. "Margaret is a person who does not know the meaning of the word quit," Girardi said.

The first woman elected president of the organization in its 102-year history, Blackshere will take office on April 1. Currently the secretary-treasurer of the Illinois AFL-CIO, she has served on all levels of the labor movement from president of her local union to statewide vice president of the Illinois Federation of Teachers.

Blackshere, a former classroom teacher, lives in Niles. She serves on various boards throughout the state, including United Way of Illinois.

The United Way of Decatur/Macon County each year provides more than \$2 million to 18 agencies who work through four vision areas: Promoting health and healing, providing basic needs and self-sufficiency, strengthening youth and families and nurturing children and youth. Ninety-nine percent of all money received remains in the Decatur area.

JOBBS & MONEY

Editor

AFL-CIO leader graces Q-C

By Jonathan Turner
Staff writer

MOLINE — When Margaret Blackshere was growing up in southern Illinois, she noticed how every part of her hometown supported the steel mill and its workers — from the bakery to the church.

As incoming president of the Illinois State AFL-CIO, the 38-year union veteran wants to see that solidarity and cooperation again.

"We're going to reach out to civic groups, churches, anyone that cares about working families," Ms. Blackshere said Thursday at the Quad City Area Labor Management Council's annual spring conference.

In recent decades, the union movement has been mainly internal — protecting its own interests — and has not done very well at communicating its goals to the public, she said.

One misconception people have about unions is that they only back Democratic political candidates, Ms. Blackshere said. "We care about people who support our issues," she noted. Those issues include saving high-wage, high-quality jobs.

"There are Republicans in various locations that do care about working families," Ms. Blackshere said, citing, for example, a race in Aurora where the AFL-CIO is supporting a female GOP candidate in Tuesday's primary.

A former schoolteacher, Ms. Blackshere gained national atten-

tion in January, when she was elected the first woman president of Illinois' largest labor group. Planning to take office April 1, she has been AFL-CIO secretary-treasurer and one of just two women on a 28-officer board.

"We have a whole new executive board, a whole new energy," Ms. Blackshere told union and managerial workers at the Moline Holiday Inn.

Among her other goals are to:

- Form a solidarity committee, to better inform unions in one city about action in others statewide.

- Expand efforts of an organizing committee, to increase union membership.

- Establish a toll-free 800 number in Springfield, which workers could call anonymously and obtain information on unions.

- Improve school-to-work and job-training programs statewide.

Ms. Blackshere also is on a state committee defining skill standards high-school and community-college graduates should meet before entering the work force.

"We don't have enough skilled workers for entry-level jobs," she said. Such people must not only have good math, reading and writing skills, but a strong work ethic, be flexible and adapt well to change, Ms. Blackshere said.

She also noted too many students have no workplace experience before graduating and too many school-to-



Todd Mizener / staff

Margaret Blackshere, secretary-treasurer of Illinois State AFL-CIO and incoming president, speaks Thursday afternoon at the Holiday Inn Convention Center, 6902 27th St., Moline. Ms. Blackshere was the keynote speaker for Quad-City Area Labor Management Council's 14th annual spring conference. A former schoolteacher, Ms. Blackshere will become the first female AFL-CIO president in the century-old history of the labor organization on April 1.

work programs are geared just to students who don't go to college.

Ms. Blackshere also is working on a training institute to boost skills for workers in the hotel, candy and auto manufacturing industries. Too often, entry-level jobs don't pay a living wage, which leads to high turnover, Ms. Blackshere said.

She stressed the importance of labor-management cooperation and noted unions support capitalism and profits if that money is shared

in good wages for workers.

Dale Loff, a Black Hawk College professor and executive member of the American Federation of Teachers Local 1836, was enthusiastic about Ms. Blackshere's style and ascension.

"She's very dynamic, very open. She has a great sense of humor, a great common touch," he said. "She's a very bright person, with years and years of experience both in the classroom and in unions. I'm glad she's president."

"I think she's going to be a breath of fresh air. A women brings sometimes a different perspective. In any organization, you've got a 'good old boys' system."

Doug House, Moline's municipal services operations supervisor, said Ms. Blackshere has "broken another glass ceiling."

"She'll take that initiative to be a leader, to organize other women. She's a good example to other women," he said.

State AFL-CIO endorses mainly Democratic slate

By KURT ERICKSON

Springfield bureau chief

SPRINGFIELD — Illinois' largest labor organization endorsed a Democrat-laden slate of candidates for the November general election Wednesday, including 15th Congressional District candidate Mike Kelleher of Normal.

Some Republican lawmakers did manage to crack the endorsement list.

The Illinois AFL-CIO's backing of Kelleher came with little surprise. Not only has the union routinely overlooked his Republican opponent, state Rep. Tim Johnson of Sidney, but the organization's delegates shunned all GOP congressional candidates as they kicked off what they called their "pro-worker" campaign for the 2000 election season.

Unlike 1998, when the group announced it would spend \$1 million to get their chosen candidates elected, A F L - C I O spokesman Bill Looby said a final dollar figure had not been determined.

But, he said, "whatever we do will be substantial." Looby added the backing of the organization will mean thousands of union workers will work for the Democratic ticket on Election Day.

Illinois AFL-CIO President Margaret Blackshere said the first step will be a voter registration drive.

"We have a tough battle this year in motivating voters because there are no statewide candidates, though we do have an endorsed presidential candidate in Al Gore," Blackshere said.

Joyce Harant of Peoria, who is running against Republican U.S. Rep. Ray LaHood of Peoria for the 18th District seat, also received a nod.

Among Republicans winning union endorsement was state Sen. Robert Madigan, R-Lincoln, who is

not facing any opposition in his re-election campaign.

In the 103rd House District, Democratic challenger Tod Satterthwaite of Urbana received an endorsement over incumbent state Rep. Rick Winkel, R-Champaign.

The union did not endorse candidates in several contested Illinois House districts. In the 88th House District, neither McLean County Coroner Dan Brady, a Republican, nor his challenger, Democrat John Owen of Stanford, received the nod.

In the 87th House District, where incumbent Republican state Rep. Dan Rutherford of Chenoa is challenged by Democrat Dan Elsey of Dwight, the union made no endorsement.

Nor was an endorsement made in the 90th House District, which is represented by state Rep. John Turner, R-Atlanta.

Kelleher said his family's strong union ties may have helped him win the endorsement. His grandfather, both his parents and a brother

all are union members.

"These are folks who care about the same things that my parents and family do," Kelleher said.

Johnson ranks in the upper tier of House Republicans in terms of voting in favor of key union issues.

According to an AFL-CIO ranking of votes he's cast during his 23 years in office, he has voted with the union 40 percent of the time. Most of his GOP colleagues fall below that percentage.

Kelleher and Johnson are battling to replace retiring U.S. Rep. Tom Ewing, a Pontiac Republican, who never received the AFL-CIO's endorsement.

According to the union, over the course of his political career Ewing voted with the union 2 percent of the time. LaHood has voted with the union 19 percent of the time on key issues.

"We have a tough battle this year in motivating voters because there are no statewide candidates, though we do have an endorsed presidential candidate in Al Gore."

— Margaret Blackshere, Illinois AFL-CIO president

We should be protective of workers' rights to unionize

By Margaret Blackshere

ILLINOIS AFL-CIO

In recent years thousands of workers in Illinois have been illegally intimidated, harassed and even fired for attempting to form unions. It's a practice that must be exposed and stopped.

Workers try to form unions because they want a say in their working conditions. But when they try to exercise their legal right to form a union, they often face a wall of employer re-



Margaret Blackshere

sistance and rarely enforced labor laws.

Historically, when workers' basic right to form a union is honored, the entire community benefits from good jobs and a strong working class.

Unions ensure that the wage and benefit floor is lifted for everyone, and union workers are more likely to earn health and pension benefits, as well as job safety standards.

Consumers benefit as well, because workers win a voice in making decisions that affect the quality of the products they make and the services they deliver.

This is especially important given the current Bush job re-

cession, as workers' benefits and wages are shrinking, and many feel that their work is not adequately rewarded or recognized by their employer.

We must shine a light on local companies that are circumventing the law by denying workers the basic right to form unions. When a company gets away with such tactics, it sets lower standards for the whole community. And we must call on our public officials to defend our right to pursue equality, opportunity and a voice on the job.

The fact is that more than 40 million Americans say they would join a union tomorrow if given the opportunity. But

too few will ever get that chance. Most employers routinely block workers' efforts to choose a union, often waging a secret campaign of terror behind the closed doors of the workplace.

Cornell University research shows that a quarter of employers illegally fire workers for supporting a union. Employers routinely hire security guards to spy on workers, force workers to attend closed-door meetings where they aren't allowed to speak and harass union supporters at every turn. Three-quarters of employers use the workers' own supervisors to pressure them in meetings. Half of employ-

ers illegally threaten to shut down if their workers come together in a union.

This is not the way America is supposed to work. The freedom to choose a union is every bit as much an American right as freedom of speech and freedom of religion. Yet, unless community members shine a light on unfair and illegal practices, many employers will continue to deny our basic freedoms and rights.

We must come together and support workers' rights to organize. Let's recognize what the Labor Movement has done to improve our standard of living by helping to set high standards in terms of wages,

health insurance; retirement benefits and job safety and for creating the eight-hour day, the five-day workweek, and holiday and overtime pay.

Protecting the basic right of workers to form unions is a matter of necessity.

We must ensure that the basic human rights of our neighbors are not eroded the minute they step through the door of their workplace. All of us will benefit — as workers, consumers, families, and community members; and as Americans.

Margaret Blackshere of Chicago is president of the Illinois AFL-CIO, which represents 1 million union members statewide.

Unions have A+ clout

Big-spending teachers unions find money talks in Springfield; 'no one can beat us'

► Teachers unions are active in school-board elections, in effect campaigning to elect their own supervisors. **A5**

By Scott Reeder
sreeder@qonline.com

Illinois AFL-CIO President Margaret Blackshere stood at the podium at the Illinois State Fair and repeatedly hollered, "Don't believe the bullshit."

Ms. Blackshere's 2002 barnyard expletive for Republican and big-business criticism might well have blended in at a union hall, but it raised a few eyebrows at a Democratic Party family picnic at the fair.

Ms. Blackshere is not a steelworker, truck driver or backhoe operator.

She was a kindergarten teacher.

But she's every bit as militant as her blue-collar brethren. And her ascent to power is indicative of the rising clout teachers have within the labor movement.

In fact, two of the most powerful interest groups in Springfield are the state's teachers unions — the Illinois Education Association and the Illinois Federation of Teachers.

During the past 12 years, the IEA has contributed \$10.5 million to statehouse candidates, while the IFT has donated \$5.5 million, according to records filed with the Illinois State Board of Elections.

Of all political contributors during that period, the IEA ranked first and the IFT ranked third, outpacing traditional political heavyweights such as power companies, manufacturers and trial lawyers.

But the donations only tell part of the story.

While the money gives the two unions the political brawn to be major behind-the-scenes players in any education legislation, both organizations have mastered a softer sell.

Rank-and-file teachers from legislators' hometowns are routinely brought into the Capitol to



submitted

Margaret Blackshere, Illinois AFL-CIO president, is a former kindergarten teacher. She came up through the ranks in the Illinois Federation of Teachers, which is affiliated with the AFL-CIO.

personally lobby for matters important to their union.

Sandy Hovonick, a fifth-grade English teacher from Rock Island is one of them. She traveled to Springfield twice this past year to lobby Sen. Mike Jacobs, D-East Moline, and Rep. Patrick Verschoore, D-Milan.

"I talked to them about school funding and funding equity between school districts," Ms. Hovonick said. "They both have been supportive of education and were very attentive to what I had to say."

See ► **Clout**, A5

The Hidden Costs of Tenure



Dispatch/Argus Springfield Bureau Chief Scott Reeder takes an in-depth look at accountability issues in the Illinois education system.

Coming tomorrow:

How much does it cost to remove an ineffective teacher from the classroom? Some teachers are paid to quit their jobs and others are not warned of their shortcomings when seeking a new job in another school district.