

Hello to all our Essential Sisters and Brothers!! There has been a lot going on since our last in-person Membership Meeting back in November. With the ongoing pandemic we have unfortunately had to cancel our last few membership meetings. Due to the ongoing restrictions, we are once again forced to cancel the February Meeting. After another setback with the COVID numbers we slipped backwards into Phase 2 which has a restriction of group gatherings of 10 people. We have discussed several different options to convene but none are viable given the now even more restrictive mandate and our continued concern for everyone's safety. There seems to be some progress though with the numbers subsiding. I personally participated in several Zoom meetings with other labor leader in the Chicagoland area set up by the Chicago Federation of Labor with the Governor's Office. The calls included devising a plan to disseminate the vaccine to all our essential workers that so choose to be vaccinated.

Currently, Illinois is in Phase 1b which includes essential workers in education, food and agriculture, manufacturing for production for retail, postal workers, public transportation workers, grocery store workers and corrections officers. Several of our members have asked – when are we eligible? We are in the next phase which is anticipated to be around the end of March and the beginning of April based on the availability of the vaccine. We've lost some of our own members unfortunately as well as heard some family members have passed due to the virus. While we wait for the vaccine for our phase of essential workers, please continue to be diligent and work safe.

This unprecedented pandemic has caused us to cancel our Annual Car & Bike Show / Family Picnic. The Christmas Family Luncheon, the Retiree's Christmas Party, Retiree Meetings, the NASCAR discounted race event, the Interactive Health Fair as well as the cancellation of our Convention last year. It saddens us to have to cancel these events which brings our membership together but there is just no way we can hold these events that would comply with the Governor's mandates not to mention our concerns for your safety. Hopefully with the vaccine being administered we can turn the corner and get back to functioning normally.

With the newly elected Biden administration, we are encouraged with the steps being taken with his appointments into critical positions, that working men and women in this country will again be recognized with our voice. We are also optimistic that organized labor will have a seat at the table rather than being on the menu as we've seen in the last four years. We have already begun to see the difference. The fair share *Janus* dues objector lawsuit which we were party to for almost two years was deferred until just recently. This was a long-standing, roughly forty-year precedent, which was re-opened and attacked with the previous administration. It was deferred until now with the new administration and was dismissed. This case, along with several other anti-Union attacks over the past four years, was the reason President Biden offered the National Labor Board General Counsel Peter Robb an offer to resign or be fired. He was fired along with his second-highest-ranking attorney Alice Stock. The leadership of the Board's legal arm is now being headed by Peter Sung Ohr as Acting General Counsel of the National Labor Relations Board. This appointment by the Biden administration seeks to reorient the Board away from the Trump administration's business-oriented anti-Union concentration.

Biden recently appointed former Boston Mayor and former labor leader Marty Walsh to run the Department of Labor. He selected California's Labor Secretary Julie Su for the number two position under Walsh. Biden also appointed former Union Steelworker safety official to lead OSHA. Other improvements with President Biden include him recently signing an executive order bolstering the federal government's "Buy American" policy as well as the rate of unionization in the United States increasing for the first time in more than 10 years to 10.8% from 10.3%. These are all encouraging steps in the right direction and we are only a few weeks into him taking office.

Other Union news – as previously mentioned, our Local 701 Pension Plan went into the Green Zone status as of January 1, 2020. This year we had another good positive return of 13.2% on our investments resulting in again moving forward to being fully funded. We made some difficult changes initially with our Plan but the changes we made will ensure the Plan is there for our futures and continues to move forward. One of the first changes we made was replacing our Fund's investment advisors. The replacement with the new consultant, over the past five years, has yielded us to achieve going back in to green zone status, our Fund being over \$1B in net assets funded as well as their ranking being in the top 13% amongst their peers compared to other investment firms. Everyone's hard work - from the Fund Office to the Union Trustees, which includes Mark Grasseschi, Bob Keppler and I, as well as our Fund Professionals - is finally paying off. We will continue to monitor the Plan and work hard to ensure it remains solvent.

It would have been nice to see everyone and share these announcements in person at our Membership Meeting, but with the ongoing pandemic and the meetings being cancelled, it's good to keep in touch with our membership and share some good news. We all could use some - especially now. Every month that goes by without a Union Meeting, the Staff at Local 701 gets more eager to reconnect with our membership and get back to functioning in a normal manner. We are all looking forward to that day but for now, as I've said from the start of this pandemic, our priority is and will always be your safety.

Your Union is here to help you. We encourage our members to support each other, and if you need support, ask a fellow member and your Union. Our success is achieved when we lift each other up. Continue in this manner and we can continue to achieve great things for our Union.

United We Stand, Divided We Fall. Stay Safe and Healthy!

**In Solidarity,
Sam Cicinelli
Directing Business Representative/Organizer**