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Press Releases

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Statement from Jorge Ramirez, President of the Chicago Federation of Labor, Regarding State of the State Address

Today, we are disappointed that Governor Bruce Rauner's state of the state address used campaign rhetoric to continue his attack on working men and women across this state.



The labor movement has always been committed to raising people up, building strong communities, and creating a robust middle class. Unions are about protecting basic rights like a living wage, access to health care, and workplace safety. However, Rauner's proposals ensure the complete annihilation of the middle class and the elimination of the economic mobility that is necessary to continue to make Illinois a great state for all people.

Gov. Rauner said in his speech that he is here to serve all people of Illinois, the ones who voted for him and the ones who didn't. However, throughout his speech, he places the onus of Illinois' financial woes and the means to fix them squarely on the backs of working families. He vilified our public workers, the ones who care for our sick and vulnerable, the ones who keep our communities safe, the ones who teach our children, the ones who clean our streets after a snow storm and respond in emergencies. He recommended policies that weaken workers' voices in the workplace, drives down wages, reduces workers' ability to participate in democracy and guts education opportunities for our children, all while conveniently ignoring corporations' responsibilities to the state and our communities.

While Gov. Rauner suggests raising the minimum wage to \$10 per hour, he completely diminishes its significance by doing it over a seven year period. What does that say about Governor Rauner's perceived value of the hardworking men and women of Illinois? The problem is minimum wage workers are already living below the poverty level, earning around \$17,000 a year, when given the opportunity to work full-time. An increase like he proposed is not enough to lift these workers out of poverty. His statements on the minimum wage trivialize the single mothers, the recent graduates and the senior citizens who should be enjoying their retirement but are forced to continue working. These are members of our families, our neighbors and the people we see at church. They deserve the right to earn a living wage and to be able to provide for their families. If Governor Rauner is truly here to serve all the people of Illinois, why does he perpetuate the marginalization of minimum-wage workers?

Rauner's speech left no sector of workers untouched, besides wealthy corporations. Going after the men and women who construct our buildings and roads, and install our fire safety systems, is a misguided attack. He wants to eliminate prevailing wage laws that would in turn create policies that are more harmful to workers and

the state budget. According to a study out of the University of Illinois, the elimination of prevailing wage laws would cause the state to lose jobs, increase workplace fatalities, and result in the loss of millions of dollars of tax revenue.

Corporations have been trying to take away the rights of working families and the middle class, but we are going to fight like hell to make sure that doesn't happen. Workers across Illinois need to unite together rather than be pulled apart by Rauner's political wedge. It's one thing for him to say he wants to lead with compassion; it's another thing for him to actually be compassionate.

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