

Shadowy corporate group fighting to gut workers' comp laws

By Kenneth Quinell
AFL-CIO NOW blog

Nearly two dozen major corporations have joined together in recent years in an effort to gut workers' compensation laws in the states. Walmart, Lowe's, Macy's, Kohl's, Sysco Food Services and others formed the Association for Responsible Alternatives to Workers' Compensation (ARAWC) in 2013, and the organization already has had a bill introduced in Tennessee.

The bill would let employers opt out of the state's workers' compensation program and allow them to set up their own plan, as long as it met minimum requirements.

Mother Jones magazine takes a look at ARAWC's methods:

"Now, ARAWC wants to take the Texas and Oklahoma model nationwide. Tennessee, where Lowe's, Walmart and Kohl's each have about 20 locations, is the only state where the group has pushed legislation so far. But ARAWC is already considering its next targets.

"ARAWC hopes to see some

neighboring states take up legislation this year and we're ready to assist those legislatures as well," [Richard] Evans, the group's executive director, writes in an email.

Conservative Southern states where ARAWC's corporate funders have major operations—including Florida, Georgia and Alabama—are on the group's short list. And ARAWC already has hired lobbyists in North and South Carolina. The group has written model legislation, but ARAWC intends to work closely with lawmakers to adapt its model for individual states.

When ARAWC targets a state, it moves aggressively. In Tennessee, the group has spent more than \$50,000 deploying lobbyists to push its legislation. Evans says that state senator Mark Green, who introduced the opt-out bill, was already working on the legislation before ARAWC started pushing for it. But a February blog post written by an executive at Sedgwick, an insurance company that helped found ARAWC,

suggests the group played a more active role. In the post, the executive boasts that ARAWC "secured a highly respected bill sponsor" — presumably Green—to introduce the bill, which the group "assisted in drafting."

Green's proposal, which supporters are calling the Tennessee Option, bears many of the hallmarks of the Texas and Okla-

homa system: It allows businesses to place strict spending caps on each injured worker and to pick and choose which medical expenses to cover.

"We took the best of both and put it together to make it work for Tennessee businesses," Green told an insurance trade magazine. The bill as introduced does not require employers to pay for artificial limbs, hearing aids, home care, funeral expenses or disability modifica-

tions to a home or a car for injured workers. All of these benefits, notes Gary Moore, president of the Tennessee AFL-CIO Labor Council, are mandated under the state's current workers' comp system. "This piece of legislation is designed as a cost-saving measure for the employer," Moore says. "Anywhere they save a dollar, it costs the employees a dollar. It's just a shift in costs."

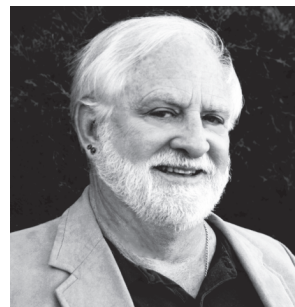
Trumka to attend organizing summit in Vancouver May 19

National AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka will join some of the most talented union organizers across the country in Vancouver, Wash., Tuesday, May 19, for the 2015 Organizing Summit.

The summit, presented by the Oregon AFL-CIO, also will feature national AFL-CIO Organizing Director Elizabeth Bunn. It Participants will learn about the state labor federation's collaborative approach to building worker power.

The summit will be held at the Vancouver Hilton from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Registration is \$25. For more information, go to www.oraflcio.org/organizing-summit/.

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