

December 6, 2013 Friday

**State pension crisis;**

**Quinn signs pension overhaul into law**

By Dave McKinney

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SPRINGFIELD - In a private bill-signing ceremony, Gov. Pat Quinn on Thursday quietly enacted a newly passed, $160 billion pension-reform package in a move certain to launch a lengthy round of litigation from labor unions challenging its constitutionality.

Quinn's office announced his move in a prepared statement and without any of the fanfare that accompanied his signing last month of legislation legalizing same-sex marriages - an event staged at the UIC Forum before hundreds of gay and lesbian activists and with Quinn handing out dozens of ceremonial pens to mark the occasion.

The muted way the governor enacted the pension bill undoubtedly is rooted in the political realities of his tenuous 2014 re-election bid, where he needs to make peace with the same public-employee labor unions whom he outraged with his stroke of the pen Thursday.

The bloc of labor unions that fought Senate Bill 1 reacted bitterly to the governor's move and vowed to wage a legal fight all the way to the Illinois Supreme Court to test protections in the state Constitution that bar public pensions from being "diminished or impaired" and grant public pensions the same legal safeguards as a contract.

"It's a very disappointing day," said Dan Montgomery, president of the Illinois Federation of Teachers. "The governor likes to say: 'Let the will of the people be the law of the land.' We like to say that the Illinois Constitution is the law of the land."

The We Are One Illinois coalition, of which IFT is a part, called the law "attempted pension theft."

"Gov. Pat Quinn has given hundreds of thousands of working and retired teachers, nurses, police, caregivers, first responders, and others no alternative but to seek justice for retirement security through the judicial system. Contrary to his belief, every Illinois citizen loses today," the group said in its statement.

"It didn't have to be this way. Bipartisan majorities in both chambers could have passed a much fairer, legal, negotiated solution - with real, substantial savings - in Senate Bill 2404," the labor-drafted bill that passed the Senate but was killed in the House, the group said.

"Instead, leading politicians and their followers chose to violate their oaths of office, trample on the Illinois Constitution, and willfully ignore the plain letter of the law. In abandoning their constitutional duties, they've voted to slash the retirement benefits of senior citizens and working families by one-third or more.

"Senate Bill 1 is attempted pension theft, and it's illegal. Once overturned, its purported savings will evaporate, and the state's finances and pension systems will be left in worse shape," the union coalition said.