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AFSCME wants step increases now

Hundreds of unionized state workers rally Thursday at Capitol

By Doug Finke
Staff Writer

Hundreds of unionized state workers descended on the Capitol Thursday calling on Gov. Bruce Rauner to make good on step increases that a

court said the state must pay. Members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Council 31 said the administration does not have to wait until the Illinois Labor Relations Board makes a ruling before paying the raises owed to thousands of the union's members. "Gov. Rauner, it is time to end the war on your own workers,"

said AFSCME executive director Roberta Lynch. "You do not need to wait for the labor board to act. You have the authority to act now, to put every single employee on the step where he or she belongs. Don't make employees' lives any more difficult." At issue are step increases that employees earn in the early parts of their careers.

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Depending on a person's job, they can receive step increases in the first seven to 10 years of their careers. AFSCME said

about 40 percent of the 38,000 state workers they represent qualify for step increases. Lynch said more than 13,000 AFSCME members in state government have been on the job for less than five years. She said suspension of the step increases hit hardest "newer, younger

See AFSCME, P6



The intersection of West Laurel Street and Illini Road in Leland Grove is being reconfigured to simplify traffic flow and improve safety. [RICH SAAL/THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER]

'Confusing' Leland Grove intersection gets makeover

By John Reynolds
Staff Writer

Leland Grove resident Brad Milliman is worried that a project designed to make the West Laurel Street and Illini Road intersection safer will have the opposite effect.

Milliman doesn't claim to be an expert in traffic safety, but he's concerned that a part of the project that calls for the elimination of a stop sign for northbound traffic on Illini Road will be dangerous to

pedestrians.

"I have three children and they cross that intersection multiple times a day during the summer, and that's what drove me to voice my opinion," Milliman said.

Leland Grove Mayor Jill Egizii said she doesn't think the removal of the stop sign will have a detrimental effect on the intersection. She added that the overall project will make the intersection safer because it will improve visibility for motorists heading west on Laurel.

"The pre-existing intersection... was confusing and dangerous," Egizii said.

Work on the intersection started Wednesday and it should be open to traffic by today. Egizii said it is a relatively small project that costs about \$32,000.

Under the previous configuration, eastbound motorists on Laurel encountered a Y-split as they approached Illini Road. Motorists wanting to continue east on Laurel

See LELAND, P6

Springfield to collect \$980K from Comcast

Auditing firm found cable company was underpaying franchise fees

By Crystal Thomas
Staff Writer

Springfield will collect \$980,000 from Comcast after an auditing firm found an underpayment of franchise fees.

Last year, Comcast paid more than \$1.6 million to the city. Under federal law, municipalities can collect up to 5 percent of the gross receipts the provider takes in for offering that service within a designated

area. The city of Springfield collects the maximum franchise fee amount.

In 2011, the city contracted with a private firm, Azavar, to audit all of its utilities, including its cable provider Comcast. Azavar determined Comcast was underpaying its share of franchise fees and spent the last couple of months negotiating a settlement with Comcast. Because Azavar worked on a contingency basis, it will get one-third of the settlement.

The city council must formally approve an ordinance that would accept the settlement.

See COMCAST, P6

Jury convicts Cosby of 2004 sexual assault

By Michael R. Sisak and Claudia Lauer
The Associated Press

NORRISTOWN, Pa. — After decades of whispers, lawsuits, investigations and close calls — and a multitude of women who lost hope anyone would ever believe their word against that of America's Dad — Bill Cosby could be headed to prison at age 80 for the remainder of his life.

The comedian was convicted Thursday of drugging and molesting Temple University employee Andrea Constand at

his suburban Philadelphia mansion 14 years ago in a verdict women's advocates called a turning point in the #MeToo movement that proved what Cosby's accusers had been saying all along — his nice-guy image was a sham.

Lili Bernard, who said Cosby sexually assaulted her before giving her a one-time role on

See COSBY, P4

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