



# **Sen. Haine discusses benefits extension for area steel workers**

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
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**ALTON - Illinois Senator Bill Haine (D-Alton)** was the chief sponsor of a bill in the **Illinois Senate**, which will extend the unemployment benefits of idled **Granite City** steel workers for an additional 26 weeks - just in time for the holiday season.

**Illinois Senate Bill 1941** was signed by **Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner** on Monday, Dec. 19. **Representative Jay Hoffman (D-Belleville)** was the bill's chief sponsor in the **Illinois House of Representatives**. The bill was in response to the temporary closure, or idling, of **US Steel's Granite City Works** plant in April 2015, which affected the jobs of as many as 2,000 workers. The mill and many of its workers are located within Haine's district. He said the legislation would help both the workers and the plant to continue.

"It's not just a good thing for these families and for Granite City," Haine said. "It's also a good thing for the steel mill, who gets to keep these men and women with tremendous skills. We don't want to lose them."

Haine said the measure would ensure workers currently collecting unemployment benefits since the idling of the plant would stay around the area. He emphasized the mill is not permanently closed, but is only idling. Because of this, the plant itself would benefit from keeping highly-skilled workers in the area so it can bring them back to work in such a highly-technical field. Haine said he spoke to some of the laid-off workers in Springfield. He said they were "hurting a great deal."

"This measure is so important to our community," Haine said in a release. "These individuals are facing a lot of uncertainty right now, and we need to do all we can to help them. We also need to get to the root of this issue and stop the flooding of cheap, low-grade Asian steel into the market. The steel industry was once a thriving industry in our area. We need to bring it back."

Representative Hoffman echoed Haine's sentiment in that release.

"It's unfortunate the U.S. steel market has seen such a decline over the past years," he said. "Granite City Works is a major part of our local economy. When these men and women are out of work, we all feel the burden. Although this measure will provide some much-needed relief to these men and women, we need to get that plant running at full capacity again."

Some workers have returned sporadically to the plant since the mass layoffs. Haine described the situation with recalling workers and letting them go as "fluid." The new bill will immediately extend the unemployment benefits for an additional 26 weeks for the steel workers laid off between April 1, 2015 and now. Current Illinois law provides unemployment benefits for 26 weeks during a one-year period.

In a release, Governor Rauner praised the bill. Haine described himself as "pleased and gratified" following the governor's signature.

"This legislation will help the hard working families of the **Metro East** who lost their jobs through no fault of their own," Rauner said in a statement. "While we are encouraged by the recent news that more than 200 jobs will return to the Granite City facility, we hope that by extending unemployment benefits we are able to help the other laid off workers bridge the gap until they are gainfully employed again. Our administration will continue to push to help the steel industry and other manufacturers create jobs through common sense reforms to grow jobs, lower property taxes, improve schools and enact term limits."

The money to fund these extended benefits will not come from the state's general revenue fund. It will be derived from the **Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund**, a special fund derived from a state unemployment tax paid by Illinois employers. Haine said he was grateful for the business groups, manufacturers, retail merchants, unions and other groups paying into that fund for their consent for it to be utilized by the steel workers.

A release from the **United Steel Workers Local 1899** also praised Rauner for his quick action in signing this bill into law.

"The Steelworkers wish to thank Governor Rauner for taking quick action in signing legislation today that will extend much needed unemployment benefits for hundreds of Steelworkers at U.S. Steel, Granite City Works adversely affected by the dumping of foreign steel," **Local 1899 President Dan Simmons** said. "Our members have been through a very tough period due to no fault of their own as a result of illegal dumping of foreign-made steel into this country. This assistance will help to make the holidays brighter for Steelworkers and their families knowing that benefits will be reinstated going forward. We are encouraged by the recent actions taken by U.S. Steel at our facility and are hopeful of a resumption of full operations in 2017."