



Jil's Statehouse Report

News from Springfield from State Rep. Jil Tracy
jiltracy@jiltracy.com



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More Special Sessions

In what has become one of the Governor's favorite festivities, he once again summoned members of the General Assembly back to Springfield for yet another special session. It is fair to say that anything remotely "special" has been lost in these frivolous attempts to punish his rivals and push his failed agenda. It must be remembered that Governor Blagojevich had the entire spring session to work for the passage of issues important to him, but his failure to lead and lack of ability to compromise have jeopardized the approval of essential proposals, take for instance a statewide jobs and infrastructure program.

Although the call for last week's special sessions did not necessarily focus on the items outlined by the Governor, some issues were resolved. Tuesday's session was intended to deal with the education funding reform. This obviously was a sham, being the Governor never introduced any bills or even suggested a possible solution that would address the issue. Also, this has been such a contentious issue for decades, how could the legislature possibly resolve it within one day? The one positive from Tuesday's "not-so-special" session was the Senate's action to reject a seven and a half percent pay raise for legislators and other constitutional officers. I do not want to consider this an accomplishment, simply because this action should have been taken months ago, but instead was stalled until the last possible moment.

Wednesday's session brought with it more movement. In an unexpected turn of events Speaker Madigan decided to allow for a vote on a drastically scaled down capital program, as well as two of the Governor's controversial amendatory vetoes (more on these vetoes below). We have heard repeated calls from almost every member of the legislature that an infrastructure program to build schools, repair roads and upgrade bridges is vital. These constant attempts at passing a statewide jobs program have been scuttled by the House Democrats, who continue to say they support capital but have done nothing to back up their words with action.

In somewhat conciliatory fashion Speaker Madigan allowed for a vote on a capital spending proposal, albeit drastically smaller than any of the original plans. Senate Bill 1460 will allow for the sale of \$360 million in general obligation bonds that will be used for road and mass transit projects, thus allowing Illinois to secure matching federal dollars bringing the total capital spending to \$1.2 billion. This is far from a true statewide infrastructure program, as it does nothing for higher education facilities, public schools or our states hospitals. It is, however, a first step in the right direction and should help propel discussions on a true infrastructure program that will provide much needed jobs and improvements across the state. I voted in favor of the legislation, which now moves to the Senate for further consideration.

Governor's "Rewrite to Do Right" Outright Wrong

A few weeks ago Governor Blagojevich announced his new plan to push his personal political agenda, which he creatively titled "Rewrite to Do Right." I can't help but think that if the Governor spent as much time actually governing as he does coming up with

these catchy jingles state government might progress beyond a battle of egos amongst Democrat leaders. Either way, Blagojevich's "Rewrite to Do Right" campaign essentially amounts to, "I didn't feel like going through the normal legislative process of debating bills in committee and then in each chamber, so I figured I would just tack on my new programs to already approved legislation." This is not what was intended in the constitution, where a governor was granted authority to make minor changes to bills using the amendatory veto (adding completely unrelated policies to bills is a definite abuse of power).

The House took action and concurred (or approved) on two of the Governor's amendatory veto actions Wednesday. House Bill 5285 would have required health insurance companies to continue coverage for a dependent college student who takes a medical leave of absence or is forced to reduce their course load due to illness or injury. The Governor's changes would extend coverage to any unmarried dependent under the age of 26 and any Illinois resident who is under 30 and has served in the military. The new language never defines dependent, potentially creating numerous inconsistencies for insurers, and these are no where near "minor changes" but completely new healthcare policies that should be thoroughly vetted in committee.

The second amendatory veto changed legislation that would have extended the life of a Tax Increment Finance district for the Village of Downs. With the Governor's changes House Bill 4201 would eliminate property taxes on homes with a market value up to \$1 million owned by disable veterans, regardless of income. I have always supported property tax relief for all veterans and will continue to do so, but the process by which these policies are enacted needs to be challenged. When the Governor changes legislation in such dramatic fashion there is the potential for numerous unforeseen consequences. Bills are studied and debated in committee, and important impacts such as costs and long term outlook are brought to the attention of members during this time. What the Governor has done is disregard this, setting a dangerous precedent which takes away the voice of Illinois residents who elected Representatives and Senators to express their views at the state level.

I want to be clear, it is not the merits of the amendatory veto language I am questioning (although I do have questions about both proposals and that is the problem because I was not able to get answers to these questions before a vote was taken), it is the process by which they were sent to the General Assembly. The Illinois Constitution is very clear in that legislation must be approved by both the House and Senate **before** it is taken up by the Governor, Blagojevich clearly disregarded this. Keep in mind the Governor is not making small changes or rewriting legislation, he has gone beyond his duty and is now creating policy outside the constitutional process and I can in no way support that action.