



Jil's Statehouse Report

News from Springfield from State Rep. Jil Tracy
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July 01, 2008



END OF 2008 SPRING SESSION AND FISCAL YEAR

I waited awhile to do an end of session newsletter after leaving Springfield on May 31st; it just didn't feel like the House was truly finished with the budget for the coming year. However, now that the State's fiscal year is passed, we really are into the new fiscal year without an operating budget.

It's true, the General Assembly passed a budget that is out of balance by over \$2 billion dollars. The Senate passed a couple of bills that were designed to bring state revenue in line with spending, including a \$16 billion dollar pension bonding bill. That bill was never let out of the House Rules Committee by Speaker Madigan. It's just as well; because borrowing and bonding is very much the same thing, and it doesn't make sense to continue borrowing to get the State out of debt (using new debt to pay existing debt equals fiscal irresponsibility). The Senate also planned to pay for the budget with \$530 million in fund sweeps. This manner of balancing a budget doesn't make sense either, since hindsight should tell us this isn't good public policy. It becomes too easy to balance a budget by having Peter borrow from Paul, and then Peter falls behind in his obligations when Paul can't pay him back.

Speaker Madigan orchestrated a series of early Spring budget hearings throughout the state to hear from different social service agencies as to needs or wants. The "out of whack" House budget was then based on these hearings. Now the House passed a budget that doesn't balance by at least \$2 billion dollars and sent it over to the Governor leaving him three options. First, the Governor can do a total veto, next he can balance the budget as he sees fit with amendatory line item vetoes (simply striking out state funding he does not favor), or finally he could sign an unconstitutional, unbalanced budget.

I didn't vote to pass the "final" budget because I believe it is terribly flawed. My job, as a state legislator, is to serve the people by putting together a budget that funds the state's obligations, pension funds, and existing agencies and services. None of my fellow House Republicans voted for the budget because of the same reasons. While Speaker Madigan turned down a possible vote on a capital program because he doesn't trust our Governor with power to properly spend so much money, he passes over to the Governor a budget (mind you this is a \$60 billion spending proposal) that will have to be severely "whacked" at some point. Should it be the Governor who ultimately decides what agencies or programs end up with the short stick? This is no way to run a State.

Whether running a business or raising children, an executive or parent has to lead by taking the hard line of saying "no" and making the tough decisions. It shouldn't be any different with state government. We can't fund everything. I start with the basic premise of what the role of state government should be. I feel a top priority of government should be to provide equal access, for all citizens, to a quality public education. If government provides superior infrastructure and quality education, then the American dream should be possible for all who want to make it happen. I know this is a simplistic view of government 101, but when I see some of the programs government has created or funded

I know we've gone to the extreme. Worse yet, we've hurt or crippled many of those we've tried to help. Abraham Lincoln was wise in his view that government should only intervene in those areas where the individual cannot absolutely do for him or herself. I would say Lincoln's motto definitely needs to be revisited here in Illinois.

CAPITAL BUDGET

Aside from the annual operating budget, the General Assembly debated whether to pass a Capital Works budget and funding stream for the first time in nine years. Our State's infrastructure and capital needs have been neglected for nearly a decade. Funds for routine maintenance have been swept for other uses and have left annual repairs lacking.

For the last two years, serious consideration and debate has been given about how to pay for such a program. The State's capital needs have been put on the back burner for so long that now the cost of such a program has soared. The Senate passed a large, \$22 billion program with the revenue coming primarily from gaming expansion. The bill was not called for a vote in the House due to a procedural motion that was upheld by the House Democrats.

At this point, no one is clear which direction the Governor will take on the operating budget or whether the General Assembly will be called back into session. If session is called, the infrastructure bill will likely get more attention. This is about the only thing anyone can be sure of, except that the residents of Illinois, once again, get the short end of the stick from the three Democrat leaders.

7/7/2008 Update:

Special Session was called by the Governor for July 9th and 10th. Speaker Madigan convened Committee of the Whole for July 9th.