New Leadership in House of Representatives in Springfield

Members of the Illinois House of Representative recently elected Rep. Chris Welch (D-Hillside) as the new Speaker of the House. Welch first became a State Representative in 2013, representing Maywood, Hillside and other nearby Western suburbs. He had previously served as president of Proviso Township Board of Education. He is a graduate of Northwestern, holds a law degree from John Marshall, Welch first took office in the Illinois House in 2013. Welch now becomes the first Black speaker of the House in Illinois history.

Welch takes the gavel from Speaker Madigan who was the longest-serving leader of a state legislative body in the country, having served as House speaker in 35 of the last 37 years.

Busy Lame Duck Session

The Legislature convened into lame duck session in the second week of January. Twenty-three bills passed both houses and were sent to the Governor.

Three of the four pillars of the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus (ILBC) agenda were advanced during the brief session.

- Criminal Justice Reform [HB 3653]
- Education & Workforce Development [HB 2170 -]
- Economic Access and Equity [SB 1480 HA 2 & 3, SB 1608 HA 2, SB 1792 HA 3 & 4, and SB 1980]

It is anticipated that the Governor is likely to sign these bills. Due to the feverish pace of the short session, there is discussion of trailer bills to follow up and make minor tweaks to these bills.

Lead Service Line Replacement Act language ended up being removed from the legislation introduced by the Illinois Black Caucus during the lame duck session. This proposal ignored the significant work stakeholders have made towards lead line replacement. Water Utility Council members and ISAWWA members reached out to
members of the General Assembly and Ted Meckes testified on behalf ISAWWA’s position. This issue will be reintroduced in the spring 2021 legislative session and ISAWWA will continue to work with stakeholder partners to develop meaningful legislation.

**Covid-19 Update**

Illinois has marked the one-year anniversary of the state’s first known diagnose of COVID-19 and recently surpassed one million cases. With the decline in case numbers most regions are returning to some indoor dining and a return for many youth sports. To see the IDPH Covid site visit [here](#).

Illinois is now in phase 1B of the vaccination phase which include persons over 65 and frontline essential workers. There has been frustration and confusion regarding the rollout of the vaccination.

Governor Pritzker is excited about the Biden administration’s commitment to get more doses along with the state of Illinois build out of facilities to deliver the doses. The National Guard is getting involved and other medical professionals will be available to administer. The federal government has committed to telling the states 3 weeks in advance how many doses they will receive. This will allow the state to plan accordingly. Many mass vaccination sites are planned for the near future as more vaccine is available. A consistent supply and regular communication will ease some concern regarding future scheduling challenges.

Local health departments have a considerable role in the administration of the vaccine. Many of the pharmacies have been playing a role in vaccination especially in the administration to long term care facilities. These entities have been hampered by limited supply of vaccine. You may wish to check with your pharmacy. Hope is on the horizon and patience is urged.

**Economic News**

There is still not a clear picture of how the budget will continue to play out during this pandemic. Illinois lawmakers must figure out how to not only fill the budget hole but also pay for debt incurred in 2020. Lawmakers hope for more answers when Governor Pritzker delivers his budget address on February 17th.

Previously, Governor Pritzker has announced $700 million in cuts and has requested that the General Assembly in $1.3 billion in additional cuts. Some potential good news was contained in a recent study from the University of Illinois which indicates the pandemic’s impact on state revenue not as severe as feared.
As the state looks at cuts, municipalities are concerned that the state may decrease the percentage of this revenue that goes back to them. The state collects income tax and other types of revenue for municipalities and distributes it via the Local Government Distributive Fund.

There has not been any additional public discussion on new revenue sources including an increase in the income tax or service taxes. Also, the state is still waiting to see what kind of funding will be received from the federal government to support states and municipalities.

**Illinois Unemployment Numbers**

The Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) reported 95,481 new unemployment claims were filed during the week of Jan 18 in Illinois. For comparison, during the same timeframe last year 9,762 people filed claims in Illinois. That’s an 878% increase. In addition to the large number of claims IDES Security said it has caught or stopped nearly one million fraud cases since March 2020. IDES is warning that if you receive a 1099-G form but didn’t file for Illinois unemployment benefits, you may be a victim of fraud.

**Governor Seeks Decoupling of Illinois Tax Code from Federal Legislation**

Governor Pritzker is seeking to block a federal tax code change in a coronavirus relief plan from applying to state tax bills. The administration said that bill would prevent the loss of up to $1 billion in revenue. The measure failed in the Illinois House earlier this month during the legislature’s lame-duck session but the legislature may still take up the issue when they reconvene.

**Bill Backlog Improving**

The state borrowed money from the federal government. Much of that money went to pay the back log of bills. The Comptroller recently announced the current backlog of state bills $4.8 billion. Believe it or not that is headed in the right direction making it the lowest it has been in 5 years.

According to the Commission of Government Forecast and Accountability, Illinois borrowed $2 billion from the Federal Reserve’s Municipal Liquidity Facility in mid-December. The proceeds were used for the payment of Medicaid related bills which will generate approximately $1 billion in federal matching funds. The state previously borrowed $1.2 billion in General Obligation certificates in June 2020 for a failure of revenues what was also used for Medicaid related vouchers awaiting payment at the Comptroller’s office.
State to Vacate the Thomspn Center

The state of Illinois announced the purchase of a 17-story west loop office building. The new building will house persons currently working at the state owned Thompson Center as well as state employees who work at seven leased locations throughout downtown Chicago. Speculation for years has focused on the sale of the Thompson Center. Officials stated this will save a significant amount of money in the long run.

General Assembly Update

Sally Turner has been chosen to represent the 44th Senate District to fill out the rest of state Sen. Bill Brady’s term. Turner served six terms as Logan County clerk and now works in government consulting. The 44th Senate District includes parts of Bloomington, Morton, Washington, and Lincoln.

State Senator Andy Manar of Bunker Hill and State Senator Heather Steans of Chicago have both announced their retirement. Manar will work in Governor Pritzker’s administration. Appointments to their positions will likely occur in the next few weeks.

The Illinois Senate has announced the membership of their committees for this session. The House is expected to announce their membership soon.

Legislative Calendar

The House will return on February 10th to approve rules to allow them to vote remotely. They have cancelled all session days in February and plan to return to in person meetings in early March. The Senate cancelled session this past week and will reconvene on February 9th. They have not yet announced a revised schedule.

House Calendar
https://www.ilga.gov/senate/schedules/2021_Session_Calendar.pdf
Bill Introduction Deadline is February 11th

Senate Calendar
https://www.ilga.gov/senate/schedules/2021_Session_Calendar.pdf
Bill request deadline is February 5th
Bill introduction deadline is February 19th