

Item #7A:
Village President Underwood
Legislative Update - Income Tax & MFT Reductions

Resolution in Support of the “Turnaround Agenda” for Local Government Empowerment and Reform

WHEREAS, Illinois state law creates a "one size fits all" approach to collective bargaining for local units of governments. This approach creates added costs which are ultimately passed on to taxpayers; and

WHEREAS, voters and local officials should determine what is a subject of bargaining - not the State; and

WHEREAS, local control of bargaining would allow voters or local governments to determine if certain topics should be excluded from collective bargaining, including contracting, wages, provisions of health insurance, use of employee time, required levels of staffing, procedures and criteria for personnel evaluations; and

WHEREAS, state law sets thresholds for workers on state and local construction projects increasing costs significantly; and

WHEREAS, state law has increased utilization of Project Labor Agreements for construction projects; and

WHEREAS, repealing the Illinois Prevailing Wage Law and the requirements for Project Labor Agreements would allow local governments more control over construction and project costs; and

WHEREAS, more than 280 unfunded mandates have been imposed in recent years on communities across Illinois, costing those communities billions. Rolling back mandates will create more flexibility in local government budgets; and

WHEREAS, Illinois' workers' compensation costs are the seventh highest in the nation – and more than double the costs in Indiana; and

WHEREAS, updating how injuries are apportioned to ensure employers pay for injuries that occur on the job, a clarification regarding the definition of “traveling employees” to ensure a reasonable standard that excludes risks that would impact the general public, and implementation of American Medical Association guidelines when determining impairment would result in major cost savings for local governments; and

WHEREAS, voters in our community should be allowed to decide via referendum whether or not employees should be forced to join a union or pay dues as a condition of employment; and

WHEREAS, local empowerment zones will help attract jobs and make our community more attractive for businesses; and

WHEREAS, local governments face unfunded liabilities that threaten core services and functions of government. State action on pension reform for future work should provide local governments the ability to address pension reform for future work as well;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the (CITY/TOWN/VILLAGE) of (NAME) endorses major reforms in state government that will encourage local control, reduce costs on local governments, empower local voters, and increase competitiveness in our community.



Take Action Now to Spare Cities from the Budgetary Chopping Block

BY: JOE MCCOY, LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR, IML

We knew this day would come.

Years of irresponsible fiscal and budgetary neglect has left the State of Illinois in a bad way. State leaders have no viable alternatives other than to enact substantial reforms to reverse this unsustainable state of affairs.

The state is swimming in debt. The Fiscal Futures Project at the University of Illinois published some alarming numbers in a January report entitled *Apocalypse Now? The Consequences of Pay-Later Budgeting in Illinois: Updated Projections from IGPA's Fiscal Futures Model*. Consider the following:

- Illinois has been running annual deficits since the early 2000s
- The Fiscal Year 2016 state budget is projected to have a \$9 billion deficit
- Multiple bond downgrades have left Illinois with the lowest bond rating among states
- Unfunded pension liabilities are in excess of \$100 billion
- Unfunded state employee retiree health insurance liabilities of \$34.5 billion
- Unpaid backlog of state bills total \$6.5 billion

Governor Rauner and state legislators have their work cut out for them. Not only must they patch the immediate \$1.5 billion hole in the Fiscal Year 2015 budget, but they also have to enact the comprehensive revenue and spending reforms that will place Illinois on a path toward long-term fiscal stability.

Meaningful reform will be painful and politically tenuous. Very few interest groups and causes will be spared from examination and possible funding reductions.

LGDF ON THE TABLE

Among a litany of budget reductions, Governor Rauner is proposing that Local Government Distributive Fund (LGDF) revenue be reduced by 50 percent. LGDF is shared state income tax money. Municipalities presently receive 8 percent of total state income tax collections. The following is excerpted from the Governor's February 18 Budget Address:

"While the state tightens its belt, so too must local governments and transportation agencies.

The amount of money transferred to local governments has grown 42 percent over the past decade. The state currently transfers \$6 billion every year to local governments. Those governments are currently sitting on more than \$15 billion in cash reserves.

The reduction in local government sharing in this budget is equal to just 3 percent of their total revenue.

Along with this modest cutback, our turnaround reforms will reduce unfunded mandates, and give local governments and voters the tools to save hundreds of millions of dollars through consolidation, employment flexibility and compensation restructuring."

Reducing LGDF revenue by 50 percent would deprive local communities of over \$600 million in the aggregate. To calculate what a 50 percent LGDF reduction would mean to your community, multiply your population by \$99 (estimated Municipal Fiscal Year 2016 per capita distribution) and divide that number in half.

The IML has always been, and remains, a strong advocate for state-shared municipal revenues. We believe that LGDF revenue drives outstanding value for Illinois taxpayers and that this shared-revenue is the best return on investment that taxpayers will ever get. It is a direct return of their dollars to their communities.

IML LEGISLATIVE UPDATE CONTINUES ON PAGE 6

We intend to work with the Administration and General Assembly with the goal of protecting this vital source of municipal revenue. This effort began in advance of the Budget Address, when IML Executive Director Brad Cole sent a letter to the Governor and members of the General Assembly to emphasize the importance of LGDF revenue to local communities. An informational document about LGDF accompanied that letter and is also included on page 4 of this magazine.

WE NEED YOU TO TAKE ACTION

As we continue to communicate with the Administration and General Assembly, we urge our members to calculate how a 50 percent reduction in LGDF would impact their communities. Please convey this impact to the Governor, your state legislators, and the four Legislative Leaders. To facilitate these contacts, IML has developed a tool that can be used by our members to quickly calculate the LGDF loss to your community and send the information to the aforementioned parties. This tool is available at www.iml.org.

It is also important to quantify the revenue loss by determining how much your municipality would need to increase taxes or fees, reduce head-count, or scale back services to offset the proposed revenue loss. Make sure that you share this information with your residents by discussing it at your board or council meetings, placing it on your municipal website, and publishing it in your municipal newsletter. We also encourage you to share the information with other groups and organizations in your community (i.e., local chambers of commerce and homeowner associations). Encourage these groups to contact the Governor and your legislators as well.

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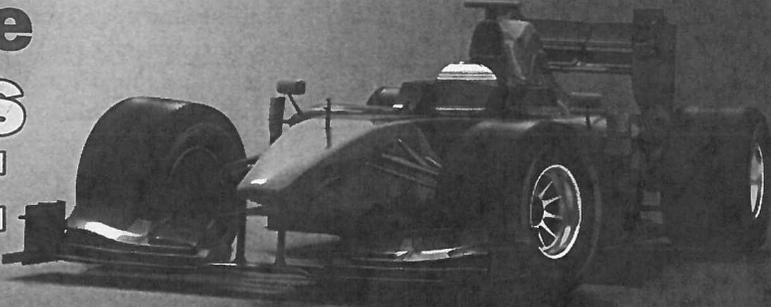
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FY2015 Budget Fix Signed Into Law

Published on Thursday March 26, 2015

The General Assembly sent two bills to the Governor that effectively closed the \$1.6 billion deficit for the FY15 state budget. This deficit was the consequence of a budget approved by the 98th General Assembly that did not properly align revenues and spending. In the absence of a timely fix, key state programs were set to run out of money and some state employees, such as correctional officers, were at risk of not receiving pay. Governor Rauner promptly signed the budget bills into law on Thursday.

The budget fix was included within two bills - [HB 317](#) and [HB 318](#). [HB 317](#) was an appropriation bill and [HB 318](#) included \$1.3 billion in special fund sweeps. The remainder of the revenue needed to balance the budget came from 2.25 percent reductions across state agencies and programs.

State-Shared Income Tax Revenue (LGDF) Safe, But Other Funds Swept

Although the legislation does not reduce the amount of LGDF municipalities will receive, there are a few provisions that could impact municipalities.

The budget fix includes a sweep of \$250 million from the Road Fund. Another \$50 million will be swept from the Motor Fuel Tax Fund (MFT). Since municipalities receive a percentage of MFT revenue through monthly disbursements based on a per capita basis, it appears that municipalities will see a reduction of \$13 million. This translates into a loss of approximately \$1.20 per capita. It is unclear when that reduction would occur.

The State and Local Sales Tax Reform Fund will also experience a \$40 million sweep. Municipalities receive a monthly disbursement from this Fund on a per capita basis. This disbursement occurs after a percentage of the funds collected are paid to the City of Chicago, the Regional Transportation Authority, and the Metro-East Mass Transit District. Additionally, \$3.15 million is disbursed monthly to the Build Illinois Fund.

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Report to the Local Government Consolidation & Unfunded Mandates Task Force

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Another reduction will affect the Personal Property Tax Replacement Fund. The amount that will be swept is \$14,114,300. This is a reduction of less than 1 percent. Also, the Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development Fund (OSLAD) will be reduced by \$220,000.

The legislation also includes a sweep of \$200 million from the Local Government Tax Fund. State-collected local sales tax revenue is deposited into this fund. It has been indicated that, because this fund is consistently replenished with millions of dollars, municipal governments may not experience any payment reductions. Therefore, this sweep, as well as the other sweeps, is alleged to not have any direct impact on municipalities because future collections will replace the lost revenue in time to make scheduled payments. Two years ago, the General Assembly swept \$6,600,000 from this fund to make-up for a shortfall in another fund used to administer and process medical licenses.

The list of special fund sweeps can be [viewed here](#).

Bipartisan Vote Required Strong Republican Support

The budget bills were approved by the House on Tuesday, with the Senate following suit on Thursday. In a departure from budget votes in recent years, Republicans were required to put the preponderance of votes on these bills in each chamber. The roll calls are available below.

HB 317 (Appropriation Bill)
[House](#)
[Senate](#)

HB 318 (Fund Sweeps/Budget Cuts)
[House](#)
[Senate](#)



DRAFT - March 24, 2015

The Honorable Bruce Rauner
207 State House
Springfield, IL 62706

Governor Rauner:

The Associations signed below have concerns over the proposed sweep of dedicated transportation funds from the Road Fund, State Construction Account Fund, and the Motor Fuel Tax Fund. Our Associations have consistently held a policy that opposes any sweep of these funds. The motoring public, from all walks of life, pay into these funds with the expectation that their user fees will in fact go back into maintaining and improving Illinois' transportation infrastructure. In fact, voters in other states are so adamant about protecting infrastructure funding that they have supported, by large majorities, ballot initiatives that "firewall" these funds from sweeps by government officials. Perhaps a similar ballot question should be posed to the voters of Illinois.

For the past several years, our Associations have fought to eliminate diversions from transportation infrastructure funds that were made by previous administrations. These proposed sweeps will erode the progress that we have made on eliminating past diversions. Diversions from transportation infrastructure funds result in deferred system maintenance which leads to higher design and construction costs to rehabilitate highways and bridges back to acceptable condition. Ultimately, diversions require increasing taxes and user fees on the middle class citizen commuting to work, driving children to school and activities, and transporting food and goods to market.

Leaders in the transportation industry understand the dire situation that the Illinois budget is facing. We applaud your efforts to turn the State of Illinois around in a fiscally responsible fashion. It is our understanding that your administration is looking into a long-term sustainable funding plan for Illinois infrastructure. This will provide our industries with the confidence to invest in hiring employees and upgrading equipment. While you have held office for just a few months, such a plan is long overdue. We urge you to expeditiously move to improve Illinois' all-important transportation network to the forefront of your administration. Those of us who promote, design, and build it will enthusiastically assist in those efforts.

Sincerely,

David L. Bender
Executive Director
American Council of Engineering
Companies of Illinois

William R. Frey
Executive Director
Associated General Contractors
of Illinois

Kevin Burke III
Executive Vice-President
Illinois Asphalt Pavement
Association

John Henriksen
Executive Director
Illinois Association of Aggregate
Producers

Michael J. Sturino
President & CEO
Illinois Road and Transportation
Builders Association

Ecc: Aaron Winters
Brian Oszakiewski

David Lothspeich

From: IML Legislation [IMLLegislation@iml.org]
Sent: Friday, March 27, 2015 3:30 PM
Subject: Illinois Municipal League Statehouse Briefing - March 27, 2015

IML Statehouse Briefing



On the ground news and insider information!

March 27, 2015

The first deadline to move legislation out of House and Senate Committees has been reached. While the General Assembly had until today (March 27), both chambers concluded business on March 26 and legislators have returned to their districts. Legislators will take a two-week break and return during the week of April 13.

Governor Signs FY2015 Budget Fix into Law

The Governor and Legislative Leaders struck a deal to close a \$1.6 billion hole in the FY2015 state budget. Two budget bills were approved by the General Assembly and promptly signed into law by the Governor. Local government shared income tax revenue (LGDF) was fully protected, but several funds that affect local governments were included among \$1.3 billion in sweeps. [Click here for more information.](#)

Firefighter Pension Increase Approved by Senate Committee

[SB 817](#) (Sen. Tom Cullerton, D-Villa Park) would entitle a firefighter to a 65 percent of salary disability pension if the firefighter sustained an injury while performing any task assigned by the chief. Under current law, a 65 percent of salary disability benefit is awarded when a firefighter is injured while performing an "act of duty," which is associated with an elevated risk. Injuries that occur while performing low-risk and routine tasks around the firehouse would entitle the firefighter to a 50 percent of salary disability benefit. Such tasks would include maintaining and cleaning equipment, preparing food for the shift, and keeping the firehouse clean and orderly. These tasks are not presently considered to be "acts of duty," but would become so if SB 817 were enacted into law. The end result is that a firefighter would receive an additional 15 percent of their salary in the form of a disability benefit.

This increased disability benefit would also apply if a firefighter was injured while attending a voluntary training session on their own personal time. The training could involve a classroom activity.

The IML testified against this pension increase, but it was approved by a vote of 7-4 in the Senate Licensed Activities and Pensions Committee. The roll call is [available here](#). We have published a [fact sheet](#) to more fully explain the bill. **IML OPPOSES**

Water and Sewer Connection Charge Restrictions Remains in Subcommittee

[SB 1815](#) (Sen. McCarter, R-Lebanon) would greatly restrict the amount municipalities could charge for connecting to their water and sewer systems. The result of this legislation is that, if municipalities are forced to decrease the connection fees, water and sewer rates will have to be raised. This legislation received a subject matter hearing, but remains in committee after not being called for a vote. The IML and the Township Officials of Illinois testified against the bill. **IML OPPOSES**

Bills Approved by Committee This Week

The following bills were approved by committees over the past week and will next be considered on the House or Senate Floor. Some of these bills require further work and may receive amendments.

[HB 166](#) (Rep. Flowers, D-Chicago) would create the Family Leave Insurance Program Act. The bill requires the Department of Employment Security to establish and administer a Family Leave Insurance Program that provides family leave insurance benefits to eligible employees who take unpaid family leave to care for a newborn child, a newly adopted or newly placed foster child, or a family member with a serious health condition. The program is funded through employee contributions, but the legislation imposes another mandate on municipal employers. The bill was approved by the House Labor and Commerce Committee and is now on Second Reading. **IML OPPOSES**

[HB 1320](#) (Rep. Wehrl, R-Naperville) would provide that when a person receiving a police pension becomes employed as a chief of police, the person must so notify the pension fund paying the pension and any other fund in which the person has service credit, and the pension shall be suspended until the employment as chief terminates; if the person elects to participate in IMRF, the person must also notify IMRF of those police pension funds. Additionally, the bill provides that, if a person who is receiving a police pension enters service as a police officer with a different municipality, the person must so notify the pension fund paying the pension, and the pension shall be suspended until the service terminates. The bill applies to persons who first enter service after the effective date of this amendatory Act. The intent of the bill is to prevent "double-dipping." The legislation was approved by the House Personnel and Pensions Committee and is now on Second Reading.

[HB 2717](#) (Rep. Ives, D-Wheaton) requires units of local government to place an extensive list of information on their website if their overall budget exceeds \$1 million. For those units of local government that do not have websites, the creation of a website would be required. Several items on the list may be difficult to disclose simply because units of local government do not collect the information. For example, one required category of information would be the total campaign contributions provided to local governmental officials when the contributor has a contract with the unit of local government.

The legislation was heard in the House Counties and Townships Committee. The IML would like to thank Kip Kolkmeier, who represents libraries and other units of government, for presenting excellent testimony on behalf of the opponents. During the discussion, it was pointed out that the State should be obligated to adhere to the same mandate that the bill would impose on local governments. The bill was approved by the slimmest of margins and will be forwarded to the House Floor for their consideration. **IML OPPOSES**

[HB 2745](#) (Rep. Andersson, R-Geneva) would create an alternative proceeding that would take place after the expiration of the period in which judicial review may be sought for a final determination of a code violation. The bill provides that if a defendant has failed to comply with a judgment to correct a code violation or pay a fine, any expenses incurred by a municipality to enforce the judgment shall be a debt due and owing the municipality by the defendant. The bill sets forth notice and hearing requirements to determine whether the defendant has failed to comply with the judgment. The bill also authorizes the municipality to impose a lien on the real estate or personal estate of the defendant in the amount of any debt due to the municipality. The bill permits a hearing officer to set aside any judgment entered by default and set a new hearing date if the hearing officer determines that the petitioner's failure to appear was for good cause or because the municipality did not provide proper service of process. The bill was approved by the House Executive Committee and is now on Second Reading.

[HB 2916](#) (Rep. Martwick, D-Norridge) would permit IMRF to begin the process of enforcing employer contribution payments after 60 days instead of 90 days. The Fund indicated that it uses such authority about 8 times each year and that most of these instances involve units of government other than municipalities. The bill was approved by the House Personnel and Pensions Committee and is now on Second Reading.

[HB 3303](#) (Rep. Nekritz, D-Northbrook) would provide that law enforcement records relating to a juvenile victim or defendant remain permanently exempt from inspection and copying. The bill also provides that all other records shall be made available for inspection and copying after a period of 5 years from the date the record is created, unless the record is otherwise exempt from inspection and copying under another provision of the Act. The disclosure of any information that would violate a Supreme Court Rule is exempt. The bill was approved by the House Judiciary – Civil Law Committee and is now on Second Reading.

[HB 3554](#) (Rep. Guzzardi, D-Chicago) includes provisions authorizing an employee to request changes in work schedules and locations. The bill also establishes procedures for the request and responses to the request. Employers would be required to engage in an interactive process with employees to establish work schedules. The bill was approved by the House Labor and Commerce Committee and is now on Second Reading. **IML OPPOSES**

[HB 3592](#) (Rep. Tryon, R-Crystal Lake) would amend a provision concerning payment for the purchase of service credit under an early retirement incentive program by changing the required contribution rate from a specified percentage to the total employee contribution rate in effect for the applicable plan at the time the member purchases the service. The bill was approved by the House Personnel and Pensions Committee and is now on Second Reading.

[HB 3757](#) (Rep. Andrade, D-Chicago) would amend the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund (IMRF) Article of the Illinois Pension Code to provide that if an employer fails to notify the Board to suspend the annuity of an annuitant who returns to service as a participating employee, the employer may be required to reimburse the Fund for an amount up to the total of any annuity payments made to the annuitant after the date the annuity should have been suspended.

The IML has concerns about the language and believes that some reasonable standards are needed to clarify when an employer is actually at fault. We want to extend our appreciation to Jason Anselment with the Illinois Association of Park Districts for testifying about these concerns on behalf of local government employers.

IMRF stated that there are about 3-5 instances each year where an individual returns to service without issuing the proper notice to direct the Fund to suspend the annuitant's pension. According to IMRF, this most frequently happens with school districts. The bill was approved by the House Personnel and Pensions Committee and is now on Second Reading.

[HB 3983](#) (Rep. McDermed, R-Mokena) would provide for a public policy recital concerning the reasons for regulating adult entertainment facilities. The legislation provides that provisions requiring a one-mile separation between an adult entertainment facility and other specific land uses shall not be enforced if enforcement would fail to allow adult entertainment facilities reasonable alternative avenues of communications. The bill further states that adult entertainment facility ordinances may be enforced in the circuit court by the State's Attorney, Attorney General, and persons authorized to bring an action to enjoin zoning violations. The legislation includes a home rule preemption. The bill was approved by the House Judiciary – Civil Law Committee and is now on Second Reading.

[HB 4009](#) (Rep. Hoffman, D-Belleville) would set forth provisions regarding arbitration proceedings for security employee, peace officer, and fire fighter disputes before an arbitrator (rather than an arbitration panel). The bill would delete an existing provision stating that within 10 days after a request for arbitration has been made, the employer shall choose a delegate and the employees' exclusive representative shall choose a delegate to a panel of arbitration. Under the bill, the arbitration hearing shall be held at a location determined by the parties or, if the parties are unable to agree to a location, the offices of the Board. Additionally, the bill deletes a provision that the delegates, if public officers or employees, shall continue on the payroll of the public employer without loss of pay. The bill was approved by the House Labor and Commerce Committee and is now on Second Reading.

[SB 728](#) (Sen. Stadleman, D-Rockford) would provide that a municipality that has acquired real estate following demolition shall, prior to disposing of the property, publish notice or may post such notice on

its website not less than 30 days before the day provided in the notice for the opening of bids for the real estate. The bill was approved by the Senate Local Government Committee and is now on Second Reading.

[SB 764](#) (Sen. Mulroe, D-Chicago) would require AEDs to be located at all police stations, and that an adequate number of personnel trained to administer the defibrillator are present. The IML met with the sponsor to raise concerns about how the bill might affect smaller police departments that do not experience much foot traffic. As a result of our discussions with Senator Mulroe, he has agreed to limit this requirement to only those police departments that employ over 100 police officers. This is a somewhat similar standard to that which exists for facilities already required to have AEDs. We greatly appreciate that Senator Mulroe was open to addressing our concerns.

[SB 1206](#) (Sen. Tom Cullerton, D-Villa Park) amends the Tax Increment Allocation Redevelopment Act of the Illinois Municipal Code to provide that where a school district includes all or part of one or more municipalities, a municipality so situated may not implement a redevelopment plan or redevelopment project unless each municipality which shares a school district with the municipality implementing the redevelopment plan or redevelopment project has approved that plan or project by a majority vote of its corporate authority. The bill was approved by the Senate Local Government Committee and is now on Second Reading. We are presently seeking to ascertain the impact of this bill.

[SB 1526](#) (Sen. McGuire, D-Joliet) would provide that in all cases where a change in assessed valuation of \$100,000 or more is sought, the party filing the petition must state the valuation that is sought within the initial complaint. The bill requires the board of review to notify municipalities, school districts, park districts, forest preserve districts, conservation districts, fire protection districts, and community college districts of petitions seeking a change in assessed valuation of \$100,000 or more and provides that the board of review shall also provide notice of the petition to any other taxing district that has a revenue interest in the property, so long as the district files a written request to receive such notice with the clerk of the board of review. The bill was approved by the Senate Revenue Committee and is now on Second Reading.

[SB 1547](#) (Sen. Hutchinson, D-Olympia Fields) would prohibit all units of local government from enacting or enforcing ordinances or regulations that penalize tenants who contact police or other emergency services if (1) the contact was made with the intent to prevent the perpetration or escalation of domestic violence, sexual violence, criminal activity, or any other emergency situation; (2) the contact was made with the intent to respond to domestic violence, sexual violence, criminal activity, or other emergency situation; (3) the intervention or emergency assistance was needed to respond to the perpetration or escalation of domestic violence, sexual violence, criminal activity, or other emergency situation; or (4) the contact was concerning an individual with a disability. The bill requires any ordinances inconsistent with this Section to be repealed or modified. The bill provides that a landlord or tenant may bring a civil suit seeking to invalidate the ordinance, compensatory damages, attorney fees, court costs, and other equitable relief. The bill preempts home rule. The IML is assessing this bill to determine the impact on existing crime-free housing ordinances. The bill was approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee and is now on Second Reading.

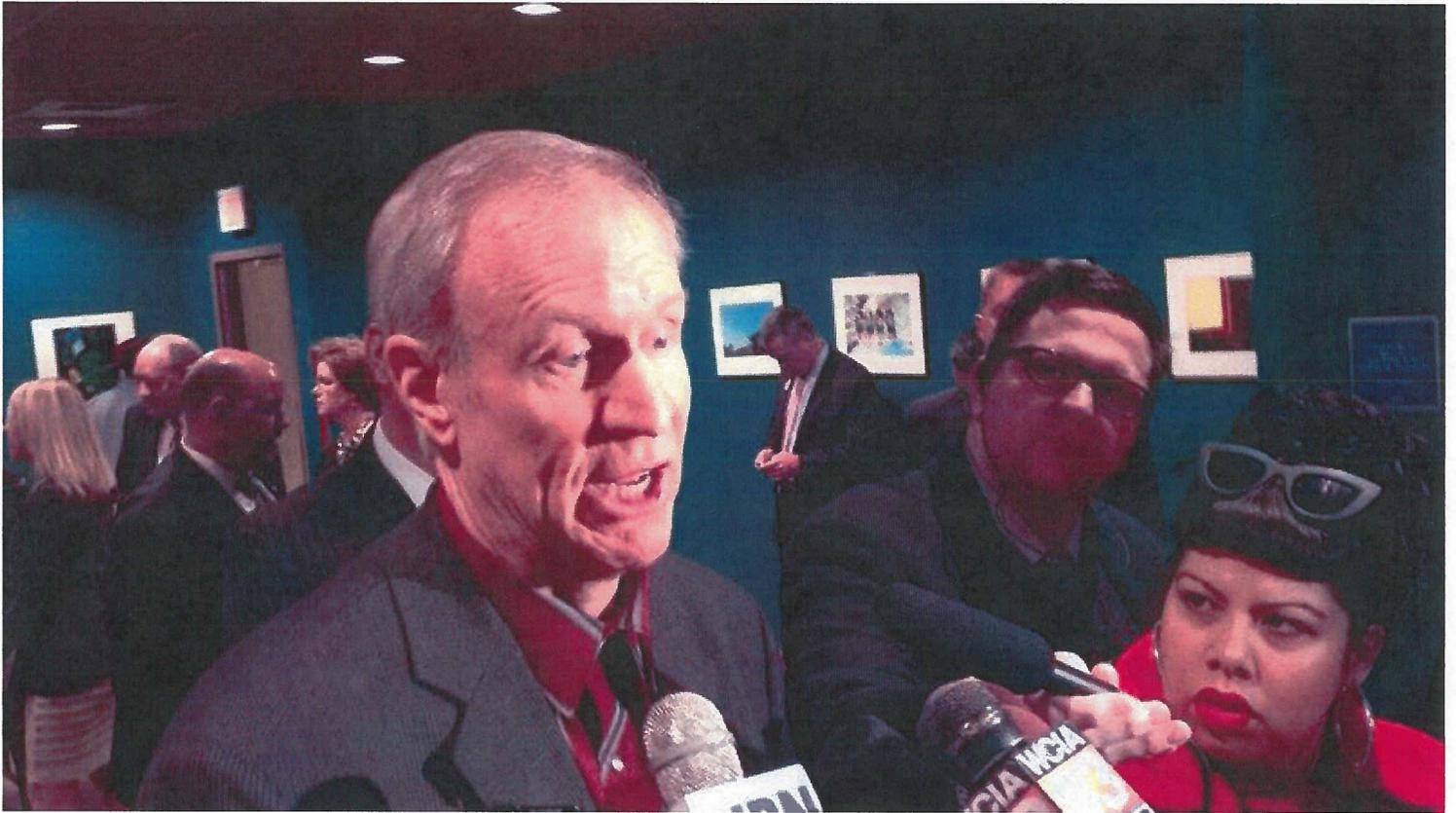
IML Tracked Bills

Over the next few days, we will be reviewing our [list of tracked bills](#) and removing those bills that did not make it beyond the initial committee deadline. As a result, the number of bills that either affect, or are of interest to municipalities will diminish substantially.

If you do not wish to receive information from the Illinois Municipal League via e-mail, please reply to this email include the words "Please remove from list" along with your name, municipality and email address included in the message.

Politics | updated: 3/19/2015 1:10 PM

Conservative push to back Rauner agenda on tap in suburbs



Gov. Bruce Rauner's agenda could get a boost from a conservative group this spring.

Mike Riopell | Staff Photographer



Mike Riopell

As the Springfield budget battle brews, conservatives are planning to put the pressure on in the suburbs.

Americans for Prosperity, a national conservative organization with an Illinois arm, plans an "aggressive" advertising and mail push this spring to try to influence suburban Democrats, in particular.

Illinois Director David From says the campaign will likely focus on budget and tax issues largely in support of Republican Gov. Bruce Rauner's proposals. The ads likely will

urge voters to contact their representatives to push those views.

"We want to really be kind of aggressive," From said.

In previous years, From has run TV ads and mailers to pressure lawmakers to oppose an income tax hike and a plan to tax Illinoisans at different rates depending on how much they make. Americans for Prosperity also will organize a door-knocking campaign.

"That's a dimension that's really important," From said.

The effort will be statewide, but From said he thinks about 75 percent of resources will focus on the Chicago area. That's because the suburbs are home to the state's largest number of swing legislative districts, where Republicans need to make inroads in 2016 if they want to cut Democrats' majorities in Springfield.

Last November, Democrats managed to hold on to all their local seats in the Illinois House and Senate in spite of Rauner's victory.

Early scramble

This week's news that Democratic U.S. Rep. Bill Foster of Naperville is eyeing a challenge to Republican Sen. Mark Kirk in 2016 has some local leaders watching the race closely.

And not just because the Senate race will be among the tops in the country.

But if Foster or U.S. Rep. Tammy Duckworth -- or both -- join the fray, that means they'd abandon their seats in the U.S. House.

And that would turn either district into a seat with no incumbent, drawing a lot of interest from candidates of both parties who have just been waiting for a clear shot to run for Congress.

When one of them makes a decision either way, it could set off a domino effect through the suburbs of officeholders or would-be lawmakers hoping to move up.

On the other hand ...

Cook County Clerk David Orr said this week about 63 percent of suburban local elections in his county are uncontested.

Other numbers from his analysis: 2,080 candidates total are bidding in April's election, 19 mayoral races are uncontested, 60 percent of races were uncontested in 2011, and 699 total races are being run in suburban Cook County.

In-person early voting starts Monday.

The fire hose

Shortly after covering U.S. Rep. Aaron Schock's first campaign for Congress, I had the chance to ask longtime suburban congressman and former U.S. House Speaker Dennis Hastert what advice he'd give to freshmen lawmakers.

Hastert's advice: Learn the rules. Pay attention.

"I just went to the chamber floor and watched, watched the procedures, watched how people spoke, who talked to who, how deals were put together," said Hastert, of Plano.

"Get back home, listen to your constituencies and try to serve them and the needs that they have," he said.

Schock, of course, announced his resignation this week after questions arose about his travel expenses.

At the time, Schock had just wrapped freshman orientation, a time when rookies learn the rules and how Congress worked. It's a lot to learn.

"It's been like drinking from a fire hose," he said.

Politics | updated: 3/12/2015 2:15 PM

Judge: 'Impending sense of doom' could force budget fix



BRIAN HILL/bhill@dailyherald.com Kane County courts and others across the suburbs will feel the pinch if funding for court reporters runs out, judges say.



Mike Riopell

Time is running out for lawmakers and Gov. Bruce Rauner to find a budget fix that will allow the state to keep paying for court reporters across the suburbs.

The money for their salaries runs out at the end of the month, raising big questions about how courts will continue to operate without reporters tapping away during hearings the law requires them to attend.

Kane County Chief Judge Judith Brawka said this week that one thing is clear: The courts won't close down completely. Judges won't allow it, and the state's more than 20 chief judges have been told by the office that runs the state court system to each come up with a path forward for their individual areas. They're set to meet March 20 to talk about those ways forward. There are a lot of options, none easy, she said.

Brawka says she remains hopeful Rauner and top Democrats will cut a deal before funding runs out. Deadlines, she says, and the "impending sense of doom" that come with them, tend to motivate deal-making.

"At a crisis point, they find a solution," Brawka said.

Not just courts

The state is set to run out of money for all kinds of things before its budget year ends June 30. The budget made by Democratic lawmakers and approved by former Gov. Pat Quinn already has run out of money for the program that helps low-income parents pay for day care.

It will run out of money to make payroll at some of the state's prisons.

This particular money crunch is different from the Rauner budget proposal mayors and human services providers are protesting. That is far from being approved by lawmakers and won't take effect until July 1.

Why the state?

I asked the attorney representing the court reporters why the state pays their salaries, rather than counties.

He didn't know.

I asked Comptroller Leslie Munger's staff the same question. The money comes out of her office's budget, but the comptroller doesn't coordinate the program and has no part in managing it.

"It's pretty walled off," spokesman Rich Carter said. "And I don't know why."

What's next ...

House Speaker Michael Madigan's spokesman says top Democrats and Rauner met this week and could be on the way to solving the funding shortfall next week or the week after. They would let Rauner move money around to plug some budget holes, potentially cutting spending of other programs in the process.

The deep cuts in the budget for next year Rauner proposed had some Democrats feeling skittish about giving the new governor broad powers to move money around, Madigan spokesman Steve Brown said. They want to know precisely what he plans to do.

"The more specific the governor will be, the easier it is to pass that bill," Brown said.

Politics | updated: 3/17/2015 8:00 PM

Suburban mayors protest Rauner cuts, learn they might lose funding sooner



Video: McLeod on depth of proposal



Melissa Silverberg



Mike Riopell

Suburban municipal leaders upset with Gov. Bruce Rauner's plan to cut their share of state income taxes now fear they'll lose the money even sooner.

About a dozen mayors and trustees met with Rauner in Springfield Tuesday afternoon to explain their opposition to slashing their share of Local Government Distributive Funds in half.

Instead, they discovered Rauner wants to move up the effective date from July.

"He wants it to happen right away," said Mount Prospect Mayor Arlene Juracek, one of the delegation. Alongside her were the mayors of Schaumburg, Hoffman Estates, Des Plaines and Evanston, and trustees from Mount Prospect and Arlington Heights, among others.

The cuts would mean millions of dollars lost for suburban towns, many of which have already set their budgets for the year.

"I'm concerned there's a real danger we're going to lose a chunk of funds between now and the end of June," Juracek said.

"We could see some immediate revenue loss, but we can't really pin anybody down on specific numbers."

Rauner first proposed halving municipal income tax receipts out of the state budget starting July 1, but several state programs will run out of money sooner than that.

Now, he is looking to plug more immediate holes, and suburban mayors are more worried than they were before.

"It's definitely on the table," Hoffman Estates Mayor Bill McLeod said after the meeting. "We're just making the best case we can."

Juracek said the governor has two problems to fix: the \$1.6 billion hole in the budget for the rest of 2015, and the budgets for 2016 and beyond.

Still, "We explained to him the difficulty we'll be in if revenues are cut," she said.

Juracek said Mount Prospect, like some other towns, could use cash reserves to cover the cuts in the short term, but not if the 50 percent cut becomes permanent.

While she said the 30-minute meeting with Rauner went well, the problems are far from solved.

"The proof is going to be in the pudding," she said. "This is not going to get fixed in one visit."

Several suburban village boards and city councils have passed resolutions against the cuts.

"We do not have another 30 people that we can afford to let go," Mount Prospect Trustee A. John Korn said Monday night. "We're desperately short in several departments. We need all the people that we have to ... do the job."

In lieu of cutting staff, he said, the village may have to cut services or possibly raise taxes.

Mount Prospect Trustee Paul Hoefert said it would be a good thing for the state to get its financial house in order.

"When the state gets better, we're all going to get better. But this isn't the way to do it, to take it away from communities," he said.

Buffalo Grove stands to lose nearly \$2.1 million each year, according to Finance Director Scott Anderson.

"It's a significant hit to our revenue," he said.

Wheeling, meanwhile, would lose \$1.86 million each year.

"The minute we start depleting our core services, the minute we start depleting our reserve funds, it affects our bond funds, our bond ratings and everything else," Wheeling Village President Dean Argiris said Monday night.

"This is a huge problem. It's not just taking the money away. It's the long term. How dare you take half of it!" he said.

Covering the loss would equate to raising the village's property tax levy by 14.7 percent or laying off about 17 employees.

Argiris called the Rauner's proposal a "Band-Aid" fix for the state's fiscal problems and urged lawmakers to tackle pension reform.

"Start there. I mean that," he said. "Leave us alone."

- Daily Herald staff writers Katlyn Smith and Steve Zalusky and correspondent Tracy Gruen contributed to this report.

Dean Argiris**Katlyn Smith**

Wheeling leaders joined many of their suburban peers Monday in condemning Gov. Bruce Rauner's proposal to slash in half their share of state income tax revenue.

The village board adopted a resolution urging Rauner and state lawmakers to keep the full funding Illinois towns receive from the tax. Arlington Heights passed a similar measure earlier this month denouncing the 50 percent reduction, and leaders in towns including Palatine and Mount Prospect also have spoken out against the plan.

The move is expected to save the state as much as \$600 million a year.

Wheeling receives about \$3.7 million in state income tax a year, Finance Director Michael Mondschain told village trustees Monday night. Under the governor's plan, village would lose about \$1.86 million. The village has relied on the money since 1969, when the state created the tax, prohibiting municipalities from creating their own.

"I think we send a message here: 'You want to do this, this is the impact.' And it's more than that," Wheeling Village President Dean Argiris said. "The minute we start depleting our core services, the minute we start depleting our reserve funds, it affects our bond funds, our bond ratings and everything else. This is a huge problem. It's not just taking the money away. It's the long-term.

"How dare you take half of it," he added.

Covering the loss would equate to raising the village's property tax levy by 14.7 percent or laying off about 17 employees. More than 80 percent of village's operating costs are related to public safety and public works, so "there's really no way to cut that amount of money out of the budget without impacting those departments," Mondschain said.

Some Wheeling officials particularly took offense to Rauner's call for local governments to share in the pain of fixing the state's dismal finances. They noted that the village eliminated 40 positions and reduced its budget by \$3.4 million in the Great Recession.

"We've done more than our part, and I think we continue to work hard to do that," Argiris said.

But Trustee Dave Vogel echoed Rauner: "We're all going to have to step up and share the pain, so to speak."

"In the long run, by being frugal and cutting back, we're all going to benefit, including us as a municipality," he added.

Vogel and Trustee Joe Vito were the only trustees to oppose Monday's resolution. They weren't convinced that the Democrat-controlled legislature would approve the full cuts.

Vito also said the village should look to the "more productive" example of Lake County Chairman Aaron Lawlor, who sent Rauner a list of ways to relieve the county from unfunded state mandates.

"(Lake County) used it more as an opportunity," he said.

Rauner also has suggested towns can afford the loss by using reserves. Since 2007, the village's general fund reserves has fallen by \$6.7 million, or 33 percent. Today, reserves stand at about \$12.2 million.

Argiris called the proposal a Band-Aid fix for the state's fiscal problems and urged lawmakers to tackle pension reform.

"Start there. I mean that," said Argiris, who will join suburban mayors meeting with legislators and the Republican governor this week. "Leave us alone."