



Legislative Report

By Taylor Anderson

Anderson Legislative Consulting, Ltd.

Old Sayings for a New Fiscal Year

THE FIRST TIME reattempting an action after a traumatic event is usually the most difficult and important. Getting back on a horse after being bucked off or back in the ring after a knockout are two commonly used examples. It's why the saying 'it's not whether you got knocked down; it's whether you got back up' is a favorite of teachers, coaches and parents everywhere. It is an essential life lesson and for Illinois it's an important question.

After a historic budget impasse that was ended by a gubernatorial veto override during the summer, the General Assembly is tasked with trying to answer that very question. Can Illinois get back up and pass a full 12-month budget before their adjournment on May 31st?

Rank and file legislators from both parties agree that it would be detrimental for the State to slide back into the habits they formed over the past three years and all seem to want to pass a budget. They are aware of the damaging results the impasse created both to the State's infrastructure and reputation; none are eager to revisit those times. While there have been rumors about a possible six-month budget the reception from most legislators on the idea have been cold. Which is a good start. For a budget to pass legislators will need to be on the same page in order to reach an agreement between Republicans and Democrats. If Illinois is going to get back up, legislators and the Governor will need to work together. What remains to be seen, however, is if there is enough will for the two parties to agree on a full budget especially during a particularly heated election year. With so much at stake in November there is a chance that politically weaponizing the budget may take priority over actually passing a one.

Even with politics and the election aside there are still major hurdles that will need to be overcome in order to craft a budget. The financial woes of Illinois were obviously made much worse by the impasse. So much worse in fact that even with the estimated \$5 billion brought in by the income tax

increase this current fiscal budget is short to the tune of about \$1.7 billion. Add to that another \$2.3 billion or so in unappropriated liabilities from the various state agencies and you can see that Illinois is behind and in a deficit before we even begin. Now couple those figures with the nearly \$8 billion in unpaid bills and another billion in late payment interest fees and the complicated budget process turns into one heck of a three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle even without all of the political gamesmanship.

Which isn't to say a budget can't be put together but it will take a considerable amount of effort and corporation to do so. At the time of writing this article the budget negotiations have been ongoing for the past month. All appearances seem to indicate that head way is being made. Although details have been few, progress does seem to be happening, which as described above, is no easy task. But turning that progress into a budget bill, then votes and a signature is the real challenge. Without an agreement the budget is little more than ink on paper and without a budget Illinois is a state on its back in the mud. The hope now is that by the time this article finds its way to you Illinois has picked itself up, dusted off its pants and found a way to get back to doing its job; passing a state budget. Because it's the getting back up that really counts.



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