



Legislative Report

By Taylor Anderson

Anderson Legislative Consulting, Ltd.

2018: A New Session but Old Issues Still Lurk

SPRING SESSION got off to a late start this year with legislators taking most of January off and the full General Assembly not present in Springfield until January 30th. Which is an unusually late start to the session even during election years, where the General Assembly normally considers fewer measures compared to odd numbered years. However, as we get deeper into session and a better look at how things will shape up, it appears many issues will feel very familiar to those we saw last year.

For instance, although the State made strides in getting its fiscal house in order (and no matter your political leaning we should all be happy about that) the State isn't out of the woods just yet. Our backlog of bills is down significantly, at the time of writing, the comptroller estimates the State has \$8.7 billion of unpaid bills still on the ledger. And though that is a considerable amount, remember it is a reduction and vast improvement from the nearly \$16 billion the State's debt ballooned to late last year. But trying to craft a budget that begins with an \$8 billion backlog of bills is a tough task for anyone.

Furthermore, reports are starting to come in that the State could potentially be looking at a several billion dollar hole that will need to be patched in next year's budget. It is still too soon to have exact figures but the early reports estimate the budget hole could be between 1 billion to 3 billion dollars, partially due to Medicaid and pension cost. Governor Bruce Rauner is scheduled to deliver his budget address on February 14th and by then we should have a clearer picture of the State's financial situation.

As the State deals with the continued stress on the budget we also expect local governments and, specifically, Townships to again be placed under the microscope and scrutinized via legislation. We have already received word of several potential legislative proposals that we fought against last year being revived. Including a potential property tax freeze bill and a measure that could further the efforts to target Townships for elimination. TOI

will be there to help push back against these measures as we have done in years past and pledge to work with all of you as we combat these pieces of legislation. To help counter some of these efforts TOI will be backing legislation to bring some common sense and accountability to the consolidation/elimination conversation, which we will highlight in next month's Legislative Report.

The remaining reoccurring issue is also the largest and most important one as it can determine nearly everything else; and that is the Madigan vs Rauner issue. Not much has changed on that front and most don't expect it to change at all. Quite simply the two men's dislike for each other has become historic and has the potential to grind Illinois to a pulp. The fact that Illinois finally has a budget and that both the Speaker and the Governor are up for reelection could either make things better or far worse. At this point it can be considered a toss-up. The real hope lies in the fact that right now no one in the General Assembly, including the other three leaders, appears ready to charge back into the abyss that created the two plus year impasse. So long as their mutual distain doesn't drag Illinois into another fiscal spiral, the State should continue on its path of recover.

In his Legislative Report last year, the late Tim Bramlet remarked that "2017 will prove to be a monumental year on all accounts" and he was right. Here's to hoping 2018 is a quiet, productive, bicentennial for Illinois and its citizens.



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