



Nicole Blodgett &lt;nbloodgett@panaschools.com&gt;

## Fwd: Pritzker era starts with sharp contrasts

1 message

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To: Nicole Blodgett <nbloodgett@panaschools.com>

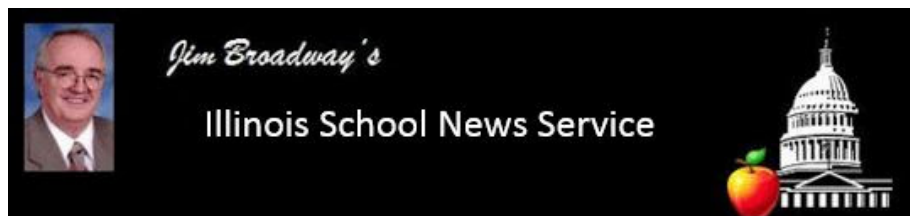
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## Pritzker era starts with sharp contrasts

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

Four years ago, a Republican billionaire who never held elective office before was sworn in as Illinois' governor. This month, a Democratic billionaire who's never held elective office before will be sworn in as Illinois' governor. The similarity ends there. The differences go far beyond party affiliation.

Republican Bruce Rauner, whose reelection hopes were dashed in November by Democrat J.B. Pritzker, had swept into office in 2015 as a raging "reformer." He pronounced Democrats "corrupt" and had little good to say. He demanded that the Democrats learn the steps to his "[Illinois turnaround](#)" dance.

Pritzker's residency in the Governor's Mansion ([restored to its former architectural glory](#) by Rauner and his friends) begins next week. He has thanked Rauner for his public service. He's called no one "corrupt." He's added high-profile Republicans to his transition team - and even, meaningfully, to his cabinet.

In naming veteran Republican legislator David Harris to the key position of Director of the Budget, and former Gov. Jim Edgar and former Senate GOP Leader Christine Radogno to his transition team, Pritzker has acknowledged that there are huge challenges ahead, challenges one political party cannot address alone.

**What kind of challenges are they?** As usual, they are mostly financial problems. They've been outlined nicely by an old friend - author, academic, former legislator, and

adviser (as he says) "to three unindicted governors," Jim Nowlan. The bloom will quickly fade from the transition rose, Nowlan says, [or words to that effect](#).

In spite of the income tax increase enacted over Rauner's veto in 2017, the state's spending commitments for the current fiscal year exceed projected state revenue by about \$3 billion, he notes. A graduated income tax, such as Pritzker proposes, could not take effect before FY 2022, three years down the road.

Current pension obligations consume \$9 billion per year, about 25% of total state general revenue, essentially hamstringing state efforts to meet squarely its other obligations - including public education. Unfunded pension liability has risen to a total of \$133 billion. Unpaid invoices now on the Comptroller's desk total \$8 billion.

Is this the reason for the "lame duck" session days? Will taxes be raised like they were in 2011, like some Republicans are warning? No, that won't happen. Remember, any bill passed today or Tuesday will be dead on Wednesday if Rauner does not quickly sign it into law. The lame duck session has another reason.

**Surface-level events in Springfield will be largely ceremonial** for the next couple of weeks. The 101st General Assembly, with 37 members who were not in office at the start of the 100th, will be sworn in (and then go to parties) on Wednesday. Pritzker and the rest of the executive branch folks take office next Monday.

I'm not good at reporting ceremonial, "society page," events. Back in 1983, at Gov. Jim Thompson's third inaugural ball, I described a woman's dress as looking like she was being attacked from behind by a giant butterfly. I think that was what got me bumped off the political society page beat.

So we'll just let all that stuff happen and you can read about it in publications of general circulation. I'll just write about the process for a while, giving you a look over the horizon so you can know what to expect and when to expect it.

The first session of the 101st GA starts Wednesday and will end May 31. There is a tempo to this process. Once you are acquainted with it, you will better understand the what and the why of legislative events, you will be able to plan for - or even to play an influential role in - the outcomes of pending policy.

**Let the civics lesson begin:** The [session calendar](#) is most important. The House and the Senate each post one on the legislature's web site. They are almost identical. I've linked you to the House version because it also indicates (with a red S) each day when the Senate is also scheduled to convene.

Only a "bill" can become a new law or amend an existing law. There are just two kinds of bills; there are "House bills" (filed originally in the House) and "Senate bills." To reach the governor, a bill must be approved by a committee in the chamber of origin, pass on the floor, and repeat all that in the "second chamber."

Exceptions are possible, but that path is almost always required.

*Why should you care?* Because you cannot talk intelligently about a bill - with a policymaker or anyone else - unless you know (1) where it originated (HB or SB) and its number, (2) where it is at the time of your chat, and (3) where it is going from there. (We will see how you can know these things in the next lesson.)

Deadlines are the key. No more bills may be filed in either chamber after February 15. Bills must pass out of committee by March 22 in the Senate, or March 29 in the House - *or they die*. Bills must get majority votes on the floor of the House or Senate by April 12 - *or they die*. Then there's a two-week break.

**Second-chamber bills:** House bills that pass on the floor of the House and Senate bills that pass out of the Senate, all by April 12, then switch chambers and begin the

process again on April 30. House committees must act on Senate bills, and Senate committees on House bills, by May 10; the passage deadline is May 24.

What happens between May 24 and adjournment on May 31? There will be budget negotiations. There will be action on bills that received deadline extensions, and votes in a bill's chamber of origin on whether to concur with amendments that were tacked on in the second chamber. (It looks more chaotic than it is.)

There will be many bills. [More than 9,600](#) were filed by the current General Assembly. In the coming biennium, probably about the same. But take comfort in knowing that more than 90% of them will die before reaching the finish line. All the bills currently pending will vanish from the legislative agenda on Wednesday.

But you care only about bills that would amend the School Code or otherwise affect public education, right? There will be hundreds of them, of course, but most will be "shell bills" sponsored by the caucus leaders. Relatively few of them will ever carry substantive policy proposals - and even most of them will die.

**Do you have any questions?** This is a seminar, after all. In the coming days we will look at how you identify a bill that you may care about, how to track it through the process and how to express your opinions about pending bills - and when, and to whom - so that your opinions can be taken into account.

Meanwhile, if you have any questions or suggestions that I expand upon any particular aspects of the policy process, use the form below to contact me. ISNS has been guided by reader input since 1995.

**Did you notice the "Volume" number** at the top of this document? Yes, this is the 25th year of ISNS. Thursday is the 24th anniversary of "Volume 1, Number 1" of ISNS. It was delivered - by fax - on January 10, 1995. Tens of Illinoisans (not tens of hundreds, or tens of thousands; just tens) read that issue with their morning coffee.

**The only way to contact me:** Use the link below. As soon as you "submit" your message, it is sent to me by email. Your message may be complex and "attached" to a document, or it may be as simple as "call me."

IF YOU NEED TO SPEAK WITH ME directly, leave a phone number for me to call and tell me what would be a good time to converse. I am always connected to my email, and I promise to respond to you as soon as possible.

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**Your inputs - questions, comments, suggestions** - are valued. For twenty-three years ISNS has been guided by wisdom "from the field." To contribute in this way, just [click this link to our contact form](#).

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State School News Service, [347 S Durkin Dr, Springfield, IL 62704](#)

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Mr. Jason Bauer  
Superintendent - Pana CUSD #8  
14 E. Main Street  
Pana, IL 62557  
Phone: (217) 562-1500  
Fax: (217) 562-1501