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Fwd: It is October. Let the pandering begin!

1 message

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November Board Meeting

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From: **State School News Service** <j.m.broadway74@gmail.com>
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It is October. Let the pandering begin!

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

U.S. Sen. Paul Simon wrote books on many subjects. His examination of political pandering ([Our Culture of Pandering](#)) was published by Southern Illinois University Press in 2003, the year he died. It was among the last of the many profound ideas that Paul expressed to the nation he loved and served so well for five decades.

"Nobody could have delivered the message ... with more credibility than Paul Simon," wrote the great public broadcasting journalist Jim Lehrer in a blurb for the book's jacket. Author Studs Terkel asserted that "one of our most respected public servants, Senator Paul Simon, challenges us to *wake up and smell the coffee.*"

Paul's message, delivered in his straightforward journalistic style: "Pandering is not illegal, but it is immoral. It is doing the convenient when the right path demands inconvenience and courage. Leaders in all areas - including politics, media, religion and education - are guilty of pandering ... instead of fighting for what is right."

In his book, Paul cited then-current examples of clear and pure pandering (mostly in relation to the Clinton Administration) and contrasted them with leaders such as President Harry Truman and Secretary of State George Marshall, who educated the public about the initially most unpopular - but *vital* - [Marshall Plan](#).

Have we woke up and smelled the coffee? It doesn't seem so. It is not just that the Marshall Plan could never be passed today. Another indication is that our public

officials, people who are *elected to lead* us, are in fact *followers* of cult figures and opinion polls. And what do their own initiatives say about them?

Let's go to the fall "veto session" of the Illinois General Assembly. [Convening Monday](#), it's a misnamed event, this year more than most, because Gov. JB Pritzker [vetoed only eight](#) of the 599 bills that the legislators passed in the spring and delivered to his desk. Not much veto-related stuff to do.

Pritzker vetoed [SB 2124](#), a watered-down zero-tolerance bill requiring suspension for a student who brings a BB gun or other weapon "look-alike" to school, but lets the school alter or even eliminate the "requirement." Exclusionary discipline, which this bill seems to advocate, is not in vogue these days.

He also vetoed [HB 423](#), a bill to suspend until 2025 the basic skills test requirement for aspiring teachers - but only because he signed into law another bill that *erases the test permanently* from the School Code. No "override" motion's been filed. In fact, the legislators will most likely accept every action Pritzker has taken.

Regarding pandering, the season has arrived. Just review the bills filed in the House when the "perfunctory" session day (when actions may be read into the record but legislators need not be present) was held last week. Sixty-four bills that had been filed since the spring session were assigned to the Rules Committee.

Remember, elections are on the horizon in 2020. All House members, plus Senate members for Senate districts 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 19, 22, 25, 28, 31, 34, 37, 40, 43, 46, 49, 52, 55 and 58, will [file petitions of candidacy](#) starting at the end of next month. Many certainly will face opposition in the March 17 primary elections.

What do they want their "base" voters - those who pay most attention and care most about their positions - to think about them? Some of them answered that question with bills they filed to be put onto the record last week. Can these bills pass? Mostly, no way. But oddly, that's almost entirely beside the point.

All other considerations being equal, voters respond most favorably when they agree with you - but they don't much mind if you file a bill that they hate - as long as that bill *does not pass*. So you can *pander to your base* by filing bills only they could like; no one else will care, assuming the bills go nowhere.

Unconstitutional pension bills proliferated last week. They're DOA, of course, but there are bills to cap the amount of a retirement annuity ([HB 3854](#) and [HB 3859](#)); to reduce annuitants' benefit increases ([HB 3860](#)); raise the age of eligibility for retirement ([HB 3868](#)); and add a "Tier 3" plan to further cut benefits ([HB 3919](#)).

Which legislators would file such bills? Actually, all of the bills linked above were filed by [Rep. Allen Skillicorn](#) (R-Dundee). Except for the ill-conceived Tier 3 proposal, these bills would all alter the "contract" that the state constitution says exists between the state and all pension system members - which makes them all unlawful.

Skillicorn can brag about these bills to his "base" supporters. No one else will know about them - or care about them even if they do know, since they are all unlikely even to be heard in committee next year. Skillicorn also proposes to *require* all schools to display signs asserting, "In God We Trust." ([HB 3871](#)). Yes, *require*.

Sure, other legislators also filed bills. [Rep. La Shawn K. Ford](#) (D-Chicago) seeks to require all elementary and unit school districts to have preschool programs at least for at-risk and developmentally disabled children, with other toddlers to be enrolled into a program as space permits ([HB 3900](#)).

[Rep. Deb Conroy](#) (D-Villa Park) proposes to add absences resulting from behavioral and mental health illnesses to the exceptions from the Compulsory Attendance Article of the School Code ([HB 3876](#)). There are other bills, non-education initiatives. Some are serious proposals - [and some are just hilarious](#).

Where do legislators get their bills? Very often, they are asked by interest groups to sponsor them. Every major player in healthcare and manufacturing and farming and advocacy for human services and, yes, for education - all have ideas that would make things better for the constituencies they represent.

Legislators often get information from the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#), a national organization to which more than 7,000 of them hold memberships and attend briefings and are advised on governance issues of every kind. Veteran legislators acquire expertise and develop policy "niches" over time.

Often, as a legislator is presenting a bill, you'll hear her say it was suggested by a constituent, maybe a businessman or a barber or a neighbor or a family member. Sometimes, a bill is drafted as a legislator's intuited response to a situation that occurred in his district, or just something he read about happening somewhere.

Some legislators tend more than others to initiate policy proposals. [Rep. Mary Flowers](#) (D-Chicago), for example, thinks all the time and - as she has often reported - her husband jokes that she has a bill drafted every time an idea occurs to her. Some legislators initiate little, but carefully help shape others' ideas.

Got an idea? Your senator is [on this list](#), and your representative is [on this one](#).

Apparently it doesn't help just to say "stop scaring the kids." Here are some news notes associated with the start of the 2019-2020 school year:

Colorado schools [received buckets and kitty litter](#) for kids to use if they have to "go" during a prolonged school lockdown; a black-clad person posed as a school "intruder" for an unannounced lockdown [drill in South Carolina](#), sending children, parents and teachers into a panic; blank [bullets were fired](#) in an Ohio active shooter drill.

Such examples were cited by [Sergio Pecanha](#), a journalist who uses graphics extensively to tell [the stories he produces](#) for the Washington Post and the New York Times. In his writing, he notes that "school shootings are rare," and that "Our reactions to them could be causing kids more harm than good."

Yes, you've read similar scribbles from me. As Sergio reports, a child is 10 times more likely to die traveling to or from school as she is in the school. She's 1,500 times more likely to die in a fire, "but we don't overreact." More kids have died from lightning strikes than in school shootings in the last 20 years.

In 2017, the number of school-age children dying in [suicides](#) by gun was 729; in 2017, the number of school-age children dying in *homicides* by gun was 863; since 1999, the average number of children dying in *mass school shootings* was *three*. Are our priorities right? Are we protecting kids from the most likely danger?

On a related note, this just in from Bob Haisman, a retired teacher and former Illinois Education Association president whose passion for his profession and for the well-being of students has never dimmed:

I'm not sure how you feel about teachers carrying guns or having easy access to a gun in the class room. But after teaching for 35 years in a high school, all I can imagine is how carrying a gun could go so wrong, so quickly in a busy school setting. Worse yet would be a situation where panic has set in.

To be honest, I can't believe anyone would think teachers "packing heat" would be a good idea.

This is why I was honestly shocked when I learned what will be happening on November 23 at the annual meeting of the Illinois School Board Association. They will be debating a proposal which would train classroom teachers to carry a gun during the school day.

A similar proposal came up at last year's ISBA Convention of more than 1000 delegates, and it was defeated by only 24 votes!

My ask is a simple one. As an experienced classroom teacher and a concerned member or your community, please contact a member of your local school board (or several members). Ask them to urge your school board members to take a stand against any proposal to arm your school's teachers! Please spread the word to other teachers and retired teachers in your community and other communities around Illinois.

It's me, Jim, again, here to say - I concur.

Maybe the banana pellets made the difference. Monkeys beat human graduate students in a computer game recently reported in the journal [Scientific Reports](#). It began with a simple task of *choosing three icons in a sequence*. Later, an icon shortcut was offered, leading directly to a reward for solving the game.

Humans were slow to use the shortcut, preferring to stay with the sequence they had "learned." The monkeys mostly took the shortcut *as soon as it appeared*, rather than "blindly following a strategy" they had learned. What was the reward? All received "auditory feedback" (a whoop), but the *monkeys also got banana pellets*.

That wasn't the only way the monkeys were given an unfair advantage. There was training phase in which the humans were given just 8 trials, but the monkeys got 24. It's no wonder that four humans "failed" to advance from "Training 1" while only one monkey had to retire from the game at that stage.

The point? The researchers "assessed the ability of three primate species [capuchin monkeys; rhesus monkeys; humans] to break a cognitive set bias in order to use a shortcut." The monkeys joined "the ranks of baboons and chimpanzees in outperforming humans." Yes, it was just a demonstration of [cognitive biases](#).

Yeah, but it was rigged.

Chicago Public Schools strike continues: As you can learn from the continually [updated WBEZ public radio](#) blog, Windy City schools remain closed today as negotiations between the CPS board and the Chicago Teachers Union continue. Today will be the fifth day that the strike has kept CPS from holding classes.

If you clicked the WBEZ link, you might have seen a photo of presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren, accompanied by American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, making a drop-by speech Tuesday at the Oscar DePriest Elementary school in Chicago's Austin neighborhood.

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