



Jim Broadway

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## Illinois School News Service

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### Illinois reported as 'America's failed state'

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

The online news magazine "Politico" summed up Illinois' financial situation in an [issue published over the weekend](#): bills unpaid, \$14.6 billion; running deficit, \$6 billion; unfunded pension liability, \$130 billion; all worsened by failures to pass a budget for two years; bond rating down eight notches, nearly "junk" level.

(Actually, unpaid bills [now exceed \\$14.7 billion](#).)

Senior political reporter Natasha Korecki ([you can comment to her](#)) goes farther than mere fiscal failures. Universities enrollments are "plummeting"; "large scale social service agencies [are] shuttering"; Chicago Public Schools are borrowing just to finish the school year; Illinois is looking like a "banana republic."

She quotes [Civic Federation](#) president Lawrence Msall (who, I think, is quoting me) saying: "There is permanent damage that is being done that will take decades to repair." Politically (it is Politico, after all), Gov. Bruce Rauner is taking a big hit, Korecki reports; his "unfavorables" are up 26 points - from 32 to 58% - since 2015.

To fix the fiscal problem, Rauner "laid out a list of policy demands that initially included right to work elements, as a condition of signing a budget into law." But House Speaker Michael Madigan "was loathe to condition the passage of a budget on the governor's political agenda. Each side dug in ...."

**I'll leave it there. ISNS readers are familiar** with the story anyway. But you are encouraged to click the first link and read the article. Kornecki is an excellent writer, and it is often instructive to review a version of even a familiar story when it is told from the perspective of a publication with a national audience.

Back home in Illinois: The 5/31 budget deadline was missed; now it takes three-fifths majorities to pass a budget, or any other bill, in either chamber; the fiscal year begins in less than three weeks; if negotiations are taking place, they are done in secret; the only apparent efforts under way are of the public relations variety.

Madigan's appropriations committees are holding "hearings." The budget committee on [General Services](#) meets at noon Wednesday to talk about the budget. The Nielson ratings for this one will likely be pretty low.

The one on [Higher Education](#) meets Thursday to take about the "impact on local communities and the Illinois State budget." (Since communities of universities located outside of Chicago are represented mostly by Republicans, I think this could be an unusually high-impact hearing, politically.)

Then on Friday, the budget committee on [Public Safety](#) will take testimony on the subject of the "Metropolitan Pier & Exposition Authority and Illinois Sports Authority Bond Rating." This is about public safety? Go figure.

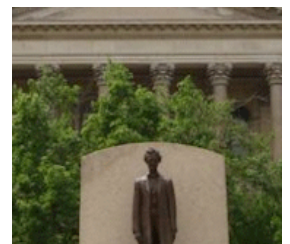
The above hearings are to be conducted in the Bilandic Building in Chicago. Then next Monday the budget subcommittee on [Substance Abuse](#) will take testimony on "Issues Facing Mental Health and Substance Abuse Providers," not in Chicago but in the Old Lee County Courthouse *in Dixon!* This will be worth attending.

**Although these events are PR-related**, you can expect the witnesses to be telling pretty much the truth about some horrific situations that are consequences of the state's failure to have an actual budget for more than 700 days. Folks who "wonder what the state actually does" might want to pay attention to them.

The hearings in the Bilandic Building can be [monitored at this link](#). (I don't know if the Old Lee County Courthouse has a link for audio/video webcasts. Perhaps not. You may just have to be there.)

Meanwhile, it did not go unnoticed last week that, while the House was holding its first post-session budget hearing in Chicago on Thursday, [Rauner was touring an Amazon](#) "fulfillment center" in Romeoville. (I use Amazon, but it is surely a phenomenon that puts a lot of local retail establishments out of business.)

In the WLS-TV article linked above, Republicans talked of a "special session" and why doesn't Rauner call one. It could be that he doesn't call one because he doesn't like to initiate a process that's sure to fail - which would be the result of a budget special session if he keeps clinging to his "Turnaround Agenda" demands.



**Ordinarily, if you "like" 90% of what's in a complex bill**, you feel pretty good about it. You are happy about getting so much of what you wanted. But Rauner is not happy about getting just 90%. According to Illinois Secretary of Education Beth Purvis, [Rauner will veto SB 1](#) because of the 10% he doesn't like.

Rauner thinks the school funding reform measure gives too much state money to the Chicago Public Schools - where 20% of Illinois children attend public schools - by giving the CPS funds to cover the "employers" share of pension contributions (as the state has done for its other 855 school districts for many years).

[SB 1](#) passed the [Senate with 35 votes](#) and got a [bare 60 votes in the House](#). Even though it was a product of significant bipartisan efforts and consensus over the last couple of years, and even though it was [designed by educational leaders](#) who compromised, individually, a great deal - it got not a single Republican vote.

If Republicans vote in the best interests of their school districts on a motion to override Rauner's veto, an override seems almost certain. But if they vote out of fear of Rauner's political retribution inclinations, there will be no override. Years of intense meetings and study and negotiations and compromises will be for nothing.

**Grossly oversimplifying**, SB 1 is an "evidence-based" school funding system that directs support more to school districts who need it most, based on their ability (or lack of it) to generate local property tax dollars, the demographics of their students (poverty, disabilities, English language learners) and other factors.

No district would see a decrease in state support. Increased funding for needy districts would be phased in over ten years, based on their local property tax efforts, the nature of their students and their implementation of certain "best practices" identified by the educational organizations that guided the bill's drafting.

SB 1 is not just the highest-priority achievement of [Sen. Andy Manar](#) (D-Bunker Hill), its Senate Sponsor. It represents an historical moment for public educators and advocates who have tried *every year*, for more than three decades, to fix the nation's most broken, most inequitable public school funding system.

Rauner may believe the bill is too generous to CPS, but it actually provides more state support per student in 268 other districts. For him to veto this bill - and for GOP legislators to oppose an override motion - will be devastating for schools throughout southern and central Illinois (mostly represented by Republicans).

It is *important to remember* that the bill is being *held by a parliamentary maneuver* in the Senate (motion to reconsider the votes on concurrence with House amendments) indefinitely. Perhaps that's to give time for Republican legislators to learn more about the bill's importance to their schools. Yeah, it's a squeeze.

**At this writing, only 14 bills have been delivered** by the legislature to the governor for his consideration, out of nearly 500 bills that were passed in both the House and the Senate. In reviewing the [bills now on Rauner's desk](#), you will see that four of them would amend the School Code in some ways:

[HB 1264](#) would add to the current list of allowed partial-day school closures the use of school facilities for funeral services or memorial services honoring members of communities. An amendment limits that use to two days per year. This bill was passed unanimously in both chambers of the legislature.

[HB 2369](#), which also passed with overwhelming bipartisan support, would require public school districts to allow lactating students to "express breast milk, breastfeed an infant child, or address other needs related to breastfeeding." It's a bit of a complicated bill, and it applies to charter schools as well as non-charters.

[HB 3012](#) was drafted in a way that it applies to a single school district, allowing its board to make a one-time transfer of "excess" funds from the Operations and Maintenance Fund "by proper resolution and following a public hearing." The bill passed easily but did face significant opposition in the House.

[HB 3869](#) requires school personnel to undergo "bias training." The bill has a strange vote profile. Despite an amendment in the House that clarified it dramatically, the chamber passed the bill [with only 60 votes](#), the bare minimum, on a partisan roll call. Then later, the Senate [passed it unanimously](#) (with 10 senators not voting).

**Is it too early to talk about the 2018 elections?** Of course it is, but it's being done anyway. Citing his high unfavorable numbers, Natash Korecki reported in the [above-cited Politico article](#): "One of just five blue-state Republican governors, Rauner is widely viewed as the most vulnerable incumbent in the nation."

That may be. He's pretty unpopular. But belief about Rauner's political vulnerability needs to be balanced by knowledge of his most powerful political asset - campaign cash. As Tim Jones of the [Better Government Association](#) reports, Rauner has money by the ton, and is getting more of it all the time:

*"Rauner, a wealthy investor who reported income of more than \$188 million his first year as governor, has already chipped in \$50 million of that into his re-election coffers. His friend Ken Griffin, a billionaire hedge fund founder, gave another \$20 million to Rauner." Rauner's friends may be few, but they are the right kind.*

Total gubernatorial spending, just in the general election of 2014, was about \$91 million (60% of that by Rauner). With fellow gazillionaire J. B. Pritzker in the race on the Democratic side, Jones sees it likely that the 2018 general election, just for governor, will be the most expensive such election in U.S. history. (The 2010 California contest between Democrat Jerry Brown and Republican Meg Whitman holds the record at \$252 million. Brown won.)

University of Illinois at Springfield expert Kent Redfield opined: "We're getting awfully close to a plutocracy." (Finally, someone besides me has scoured his thesaurus and located the P-word.)

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