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Moment to *define state's future* on horizon

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

When appropriately stern criteria are applied, moments that can be described aptly as "pivotal" to the future of a state are quite rare. In my view, the last pivotal moment for Illinois came in the spring of 1972. I believe another is on the way, and it is likely to be recognized, in the future, as having occurred in the fall of 2020.

There is a *connection between these two* pivotal moments, the one in 1972 and the one upcoming in 2020. The one that's distant in the past has had - and the upcoming one *will* have - deeper implications for public education, and for prospects of each citizen to have a chance to thrive, *than anything that's happened in between*.

Tall statement, I know, but to me it is clear. In March of 1972, lawyer Dan Walker upset the odds-on favorite, Lt. Gov. Paul Simon, for the Democratic nomination for governor. Walker went on to unseat Republican Gov. Richard Ogilvie in the fall and, years later, wound up in prison (for crimes unrelated his one term in office).

It wasn't *that* Walker beat Simon; it was *how* Walker prevailed. A reporter had asked Simon to comment on the income tax so recently enacted in Illinois. Thoughtfully and honestly, as always, Simon said a multi-tiered tax would have been better, so the wealthy would pay higher marginal rates than folks of lesser means.

Walker pounced. In a TV ad blitz too late for a response - the first such attack in Illinois politics - he warned Illinois voters that, if elected, "Paul Simon will triple your income tax." That lie spelled the end for Simon, the end of a race far closer than it should have been. Then Walker's attack *echoed through many election cycles*.

I covered that election as a reporter for the Edwardsville Intelligencer. Pat Quinn, who would later accidentally become governor, was organizing college campuses for Walker. He told me straight-faced what a "political hack" Simon was, what a "stooge for [Chicago] Mayor Daley." ([Harold Washington sure had Quinn figured.](#))

Walker was just one factor in Simon's loss that year. Simon's supporters were over-confident. Thinking he couldn't lose, they didn't do their jobs in the precincts. Some political envy may have been involved. But, all other factors aside, the politicians blamed Simon's honest talk about progressive tax systems.

For years, talk of tax system changes were off the table for candidates. Gov. Big Jim Thompson dared to propose raising the flat 2.5% rate then in effect, but *no one* had the timidity to talk of *graduated* rates. The state's pitiful revenue stream invited diversions of pension payments, led to debt that's still on the books.

You can see where this is heading. Walker not only derailed (temporarily) the greatest career of public service of any Illinois political figure in my lifetime, he derailed (for decades) realistic consideration of the progressive tax system Simon may have brought about. Illinois is much the poorer because of that.

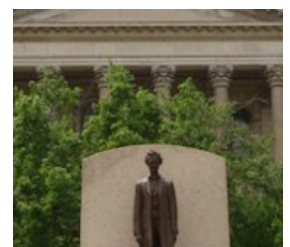
But now, because Gov. JB Pritzker was elected in November, consideration of progressive ways of funding public services (that is, ways that do not weigh relatively more heavily on the less affluent taxpayers) has finally been raised in realistic terms. It is a hot political topic - so hot that political careers are at stake.

But it's also a slow-materializing issue. As a constitutional issue, it cannot become law before November of 2020, in the next general elections. There is time to pass a resolution to put the question on the 2020 ballot, time to enact legislation to set the details in law pending ratification, time to educate the voters on the issue.

In my opinion, that's the only sequence - resolution this spring; details (brackets and rates) set *as contingencies* in law by spring of 2020; and a powerful process of public communication and education throughout the time period - that can see Illinois retrieve the momentum toward excellence that it lost in the spring of 1972.

ISNS will occasionally focus on this issue for as long as it is viable. Today's commentary is the beginning. Next week, we will dissect the truly goofy [HR 153](#) - co-sponsored by *every Republican* in the House - and show it for the heavy-handed exercise in pandering, for the shameful distortion of fiscal reality that it is.

I hereby *disclaim any personal interest* in the outcome of this issue. I'm not being paid by anyone to hold the beliefs that I hold in the matter. I have three adult children, but none reside in Illinois so they will not be affected. Finally, my income is so low - and my age number so high - that I feel personally unaffected.



I am also open to differing views. If you disagree with a point or assertion that I make or report - and if you anchor your views in demonstrable facts or rational analysis - I will share your opinion with other ISNS readers. [The comment link](#) at the bottom of this commentary will always connect to my email inbox.

I will confess to having strong opinions on this. I've often documented the fact that Illinois is a great state for the wealthy, but not such a good place for the poor or marginally affluent. I don't like being lied to, or even being subjected to obvious spin. An *important truth is at stake* here; I mean to explicate its details.

What about this week in the legislature? As the [ISNS bill-tracking page](#) confirms, thirteen non-shell education bills have reached "3rd reading" in the House or Senate. That is "passage stage." The bills will not be amended (unless they return to 2nd reading for that purpose). Their next action will be a vote, pass or fail.

For your convenience, the phrase "**3rd reading**" is printed **in red type** on the ISNS bill-tracking web page. This is just so you can easily find the bills that are moving quickly through the process. Later, in a week or so, there will be so many bills on 3rd reading that it would be meaningless (and troublesome) for me to color them.

Highlights: [HB 2100](#), the bill to abolish the State Charter School Commission, remains on 2nd reading - the stage at which it has been approved by a committee but it still can be amended. The only amended filed for the bill was tabled. It is dead. Even if the bill gets a new amendment, its primary purpose likely won't change.

[HB 2078](#), one of the bills setting a minimum salary for teachers, is also on 2nd reading, as are [HB 2668](#), a bill requiring ISBE to create a "Child Opportunity Zone" program, and [HB 190](#), the bill to require schools to connect "at-risk" students with programs to help them. (An amendment on this one is pretty certain.)

What's on next week's legislative agenda? The House [PK-12 appropriations](#) committee will meet at 2 p.m. Tuesday, as it has in recent weeks, but no bills are posted. It will be a hearing about state funding for [Regional Offices of Education](#), for the [Southwest Organizing Project](#) and for [Teach for America](#).

The House PK-12 committee on "[curriculum & policies](#)" is to convene at 10 a.m. Wednesday with 20 bills posted. Most seem to be tweaks of existing policy. The bill about "[hunting education instruction](#)" seems novel, but it is permissive for school districts, not a new mandate.

The House PK-12 committee on "[administration, licensing & charter](#) schools" is scheduled for 2:30 p.m. Wednesday, with a tidy nine-bill agenda. Except for a bill about [charter board member training](#), all charter-related bills have been assigned to subcommittees (means they're dead), to other panels or are on 2nd reading.

You may monitor House committee [hearings at this link](#).

The [Senate Education Committee](#) is to convene at 1 p.m. Tuesday with 24 bills and four resolutions posted. That's a large agenda with little time to address it; the Senate deadline for committee action on chamber-of-origin bills is March 22, a week earlier than the House committee deadline. Again, they need to talk fast.

You may monitor Senate committee [hearings at this link](#).

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