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Senate debate and vote dramatic - not final

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

[Watch [District U-46 CEO Tony Sanders' message](#) on SB 1.]

The Senate's hour-long debate of a motion to override Gov. Bruce [Rauner's amendatory veto](#) of the evidence-based school funding reform measure, [SB 1](#), was revealing. The [38-19 vote](#) against the governor's action was dramatic. But all of it was just prelude to the performances to be played out in the House this week.

The House will convene Wednesday to consider a motion to override Rauner's veto. Any other action, or no action at all, would just kill the bill. At that point, there would be no legislation pending that would, if enacted, permit the distribution of state funds to schools in an "evidence-based" manner, as the law now requires.

But before the House votes on its override motion, it seems some complications in the plot may be forthcoming. I believe House Speaker Michael Madigan may be planning to force the Republican caucus to vote against the governor before it votes for the governor - to demonstrate how irrational Rauner's position is.

How is that? The [House PK-12 appropriations committee](#) is to hold a hearing at 9 a.m. Wednesday on [House Amendment 3](#) to [SB 1947](#). The bill began life as a measure relating to chronic truancy, but HAM 3 would turn it into Rauner's preferred version of SB 1. How many votes would that get in the House. I think we may find out.

Sunday's floor debate featured some amazing GOP mendacity. [Sen. Jason Barickman](#) (R-Bloomington) led it off and set the tone. It was clear from his comments that no Republican was going to purport that Rauner's rewrite of SB 1 was sound policy; the whole point of opposing the override was to "start over."

Barickman somehow kept a straight face as he asserted that Rauner's veto "made a bad bill just a little bit better," implied that the underlying SB 1 is a Chicago bailout that no one outside of Cook County supports and begged the majority caucus Democrats to "negotiate" a solution - as if no negotiations had been held.

SB 1 sponsor [Sen. Andy Manar](#) (D-Bunker Hill) said he had held up filing his override motion until just before the Senate convened Sunday, in hopes of hearing that ongoing negotiations resulted in a breakthrough. [Sen. Kimberly Lightford](#) (D-Westchester) seethed at the assertion that the GOP voice was stifled.

Lightford, a veteran of many school policy negotiations, characterized Republican tactics during SB 1 talks that have been conducted as (1) always bringing "one more thing" to every meeting and (2) not allowing questions, but rather just saying "these are our terms." Vouchers were the latest "one more thing" demand, she said.

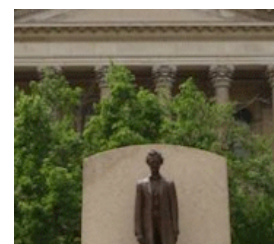
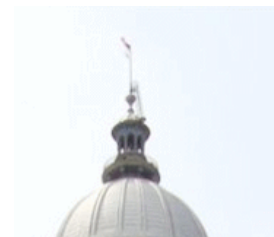
Most of the senators who spoke at length on the bill were Republicans. [Sen. Dale Righter](#) (R-Mattoon), the GOP caucus weasel-word specialist, tried to bait Manar by pointing out that their legislative districts are similar and that the schools in both would get more state support under Rauner's veto than with SB 1 as passed.

Manar pointed out that making sure there were "no losers" had been a requirement from the start (as it was for Rauner, at the start, as well) and that Rauner's changes would result in all public school districts receiving less state support as time passes, since the governor removed indexing to economic indicators.

[Sen. Kyle McCarter](#) (R-Vandalia) assumed his "common, unlettered man" posture, asserting that SB 1 was supported only by Chicago interests and some school superintendents who believe, with their "masters degrees and PhDs" that they know more than the rest of the public. That act by McCarter is wearing thin.

[Sen. Toi Hutchinson](#) (D-Chicago Heights) pointed out that, like her non-Chicago educators, every statewide and regional public education advocacy group in Illinois supports - and were instrumental in shaping - SB 1. Every school funding reform effort in the past "has come to just this point," she said. "To just this point."

Not every Republican opposed the override. As you could tell by the 38-19 vote, at least one GOP caucus member sided with the Democrats in Sunday's roll call. That Republican was [Sen. Sam McCann](#) (R-Jacksonville), who said his criterion for the override vote was whether he could look himself "in the eye" while shaving.



"I intend to look myself square in the eye (after voting for the override motion, not because the bill is perfect but because) the children, the families, the people of this state deserve better than they've been getting in the last several years." Will any House members apply the same rationale Wednesday? Possibly.

When will this end? In my last message, I mildly predicted that enough GOP defections would cause the House override motion to succeed in enacting SB 1 as it originally passed. An esteemed former Republican office holder emailed to tell me that I was overly optimistic - although he strongly hoped I was correct.

The reality is, the odds are stacked against the House override motion. But it is not impossible. Contacts with the same House Republicans who helped pass the budget bills - which included the provision that no school can get its funding until an evidence-based system is in place - *need to be contacted again*.

Meanwhile, I want to say how impressive it has been for me to witness the comprehensive support of a unified public education community - teachers, administrators, superintendents, board members - advocates statewide who invested time and energy and passion in crafting and pushing for the passage of SB 1.

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