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BondBuyer.com advises: on Illinois, be careful

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

There's every reason - politically and otherwise - for Gov. Bruce Rauner and the legislative leaders to reach agreement on a budget for FY 2019 that Rauner can sign into law. Most state officials are up for reelection this year. There's sufficient revenue projected for a balanced budget that pays down significant debt.

The ingredients for a not-too-painful budget are at hand, and no one (especially Rauner) wants to be blamed for a failure to put them in the pot and cook up an agreeable spending plan for the fiscal year that begins July 1. Still, the bond market seems skittish. Don't be too quick to invest in Illinois bonds, they say.

There was a time when it was unheard of for a state, a sovereign governmental unit that has the power to make revenue happen almost at will, to go a year without a statutory budget. But that was before Illinois did it twice, in the first two years of Rauner's administration. Could it happen again?

The finance web site BondBuyer.com won't discount the possibility. It's analysts quoted the Chicago Civic Federation's report last week that, in view of the unprecedented fiscal failure, "recent Illinois bond documents have warned potential investors that there is no assurance that budgets will be enacted in future years."

Despite such anxiety, I remain comfortable predicting that a budget for FY 2019 will be enacted by the end of the month. For one thing, I am not alone in seeing success in the tea leaves. Although the photo makes it look like he doesn't much care for [Rauner's hand on his shoulder](#), former Gov. Jim Edgar seems optimistic.

Edgar's optimistic, that is, about a budget being enacted. But he's not suggesting miraculous achievements such as the resolution of Illinois' massive unfunded pension liabilities, or even paying off the accumulation of bills owed to vendors of goods and services sold to the state in the last few years.

[As he told Illinois NPR](#), "I just hope we can get a budget agreed to and then whoever is the governor will have to come back to the General Assembly, and it has to start with the governor I think, and have some concrete long term solutions to these problems." (Whoever is governor? Edgar can't help being honest.)

Edgar continued: "We're a rich state. We've just had leadership that I kind of think has made some mistakes. I think with strong leadership we can get this state back on track." (What leader "made some mistakes"?) Negotiations are said to be slow, but they're always slow at this time. They'll speed up about May 27.

Of the bills posted for a hearing Tuesday in the [Senate Education Committee](#), all but one received an extension from its deadline for committee consideration. [HB 4193](#), to change the deadline for special education due-process hearing reports, was sent back in the Committee on Assignments, where it is dying.

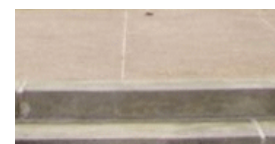
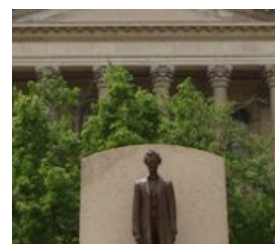
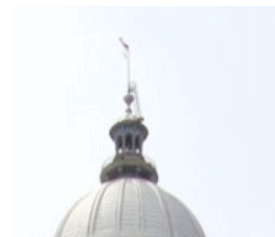
The other posted bills - [HB 4658](#), [HB 4768](#), [HB 4799](#), [HB 4860](#), [HB 5247](#) and [HB 5754](#) - now can be heard in committee as late as the day *scheduled for adjournment*, May 31. That makes them more interesting than most bills. That makes each of them a possible "vehicle" for some kind of an "adjournment-day surprise."

Why is that? Remember, a key function of a committee is to consider bill amendments, and any bill pertaining to the School Code can be amended to carry any School Code policy whatever, whether or not such policy has been discussed, or even seen, by anyone in committee or on the floor of the House or Senate.

So on May 31, one of those bills could be amended with hundreds of pages of new school policy, passed by the Senate on third reading, and the amendment could be concurred with in the House with lightening speed. Then the legislators could scramble for home, getting out of town while the getting's good.

What kind of amendment might become law in such a blindingly speedy way on May 31? I don't know. Probably none of these bills would be used. I think extending the committee deadline to May 31 was just being prudent. There are plenty of other ways to blindside the media and the public on adjournment day.

The House committees on PK-12 education are being kind enough this week not to meet *simultaneously* in different rooms, different buildings in the Capitol complex even; in this respect they'll depart from their usual practice. The panel on Licensing, Administration & Oversight is to meet in Room 115 Wednesday at 8 a.m., and the one on Curriculum & Policies is scheduled to convene in Room D-1, Straton Building, Thursday at 9 .m.



The [Licensing etc. committee](#) has nine Senate bills posted, and a House resolution sponsored by [Rep. Rita Mayfield](#) (D-Waukegan). The [Curriculum etc. committee](#) has 14 Senate bills posted, and another resolution filed by Rep. Mayfield. (I think she might have angrily put an end to those simultaneous PK-12 hearings?)

The bills in these two committees seem noncontroversial. Nothing particularly unusual about them. Except for one of them, [SB 2345](#), which would require a school's report card to say whether or not it has been a participant in the "Illinois Youth Survey." What's unusual? The sponsor is [Rep. Barbara Currie](#).

Barbara Currie is the House Majority Leader, second in command to Speaker Michael Madigan. She is most often called upon to carry the most difficult bills - but this one came out of the Senate *unanimously*. It won't happen, but if Rauner got his way on the pension "cost-shift," this bill would be the one so amended.

The Illinois Youth Survey asks kids questions that could be considered controversial, questions about how things go at home, about their feelings about themselves and about life. I think the questions are all needed, but others may not.

ISNS publication schedule for the week: *This is it.* I know these bills are important, but so is the graduation of my daughter Amy (many of you have met her at events I've attended) from the Washington University Medical School in St. Louis. Her graduate degree will be in Occupational Therapy.

Yes, it's a big deal. Her older brother is coming in from University of Wisconsin-Madison for the party and the ceremony; and her *way older* brother is also making the trip, coming in from New Mexico University at Albuquerque. On Friday night, or maybe Saturday, I'll update [this page showing the School Code bills' status](#).

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