



Jim Broadway

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Sharon, didn't Will Davis do a great job?

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

[Note: As you know, a House amendment to SB 1947 was [approved in the Senate yesterday](#), ending the school funding stalemate, allowing the flow of FY 2018 funds to schools, and bringing to an historic end the decrepit former funding system with its annually widening disparities in resources per student from district to district. But the achievement, while appreciated by most educators, was also [seen as a bit of a mixed blessing](#).]

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Not long after I started ISNS as a fax-delivered newsletter in 1995, I met Sharon Voliva. She was the volunteer legislative liaison for the Illinois Parent Teacher Association. A resident of Dolton, she made the trip down to Springfield regularly to attend and participate in education committee hearings and such.

We became good friends. I shared her goal of seeing school funding reform happen in Illinois, of seeing the quality of any child's education depend on factors other than the affluence of her parents, on the zip code of their residence. For Sharon, it was more than a goal; it was an abiding passion.

She co-founded a non-profit organization called "Better Funding for Better Schools" in 2003. Educators and others who also wanted a rational school funding system met in forums she was able to arrange regularly, almost monthly. I drove up from Springfield as often as I could, just because Sharon asked me to.

It was at one of Sharon's meetings that I first met a young rookie legislator, [Rep. William Davis](#) (East Hazel Crest), who impressed me with his eloquence. He seemed to become infused with Sharon's fierce determination to see Better Funding for Better Schools become more than just an ad-hoc committee's name.

It took a long time, far too long, and [we lost Sharon along the way](#) in 2008. But her influence has remained. When a former senator, the Rev. James Meeks was appointed chairman of the Illinois State Board of Education in 2015, he spoke of fixing school funding as "something we ought to achieve in the [memory of people like Sharon Voliva](#) [and others who] died trying to obtain equitable funding for all of our children."

So I know I was not the only one who was thinking about Sharon on Monday while Will Davis stood at his desk in the Illinois House, explaining complicated legislation to his colleagues, cajoling them, appealing to the better angels of their nature, imploring them to cast the most important vote for education of their careers.

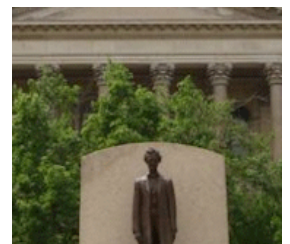
Gov. Bruce Rauner achieved nothing this week. Benefits to Illinois schools and schoolchildren came about in spite of his amateurish interference which led to a virtual voucher program - as Sen. Daniel Biss (D-Evanston) called it, the start of a "backdoor privatization of public education." Sharon would not have liked that.

But setting that aside, the achievement brought about by Will Davis in the House and [Sen. Andy Manar](#) in the Senate was nothing short of monumental. That part of SB 1947, the part that promises to grow eventually to "adequacy" the level of support that every child's education deserves, that part I see as a monument to Sharon Voliva.

ISNS will take a bit of a break now. What with all these extra legislative days, with medical procedures mixed in, I've not been able to take my usual summer break. I'll resume writing in a couple of weeks - or sooner if needed. And now that I know state funding will flow, I'll probably deliver a few invoices.

When I return, among other chores will be to begin the ISNS education-focused political coverage with an endorsement for gubernatorial and other candidates on the ballot for 2018. Will it matter what ISNS says about a candidate? Well, it sure made a difference for U.S. Senate candidate Barack Obama in September of 2003.

Does education policy become partisan like other topics of concern to legislators and governors? We used to be able to say "no" to that, to say that policymakers of both parties seemed to share similar views on the importance of public (as opposed to private) education as one of our society's foundational strengths.



But as the rapid emergence of the voucher program that became a part of SB 1947 demonstrated, that is no longer the case. An attack on *public* education [was launched in 1983](#) (April 26 of that year, in fact) by business and other Republican constituencies, and public education-bashing has continued to this day.

The political divide on education was recently illustrated by Gallup polling research. The question was about the level of "satisfaction" with K-12 education in the U.S.; it was [measured annually since 1999](#). Briefly, Republican satisfaction levels soared with the Bush Administration and plummeted in the Obama Administration.

The gap has not been very consistent in recent years. In fact, positive Republican and Democratic views of public education were "tied" at 48% as recently as 2014 - but a rise in Democrats' satisfaction and a deep (Common Core-driven) plummet in Republican's satisfaction created "record political polarization" in 2016, Gallup said.

The top office on the ballot next year, of course, will be that of the governor. The Republican nominee seems not to be an open question; Gov. Bruce Rauner has already opened his checkbook. But there's some rich guys in the other party who are vying for the opportunity to oppose Rauner. We'll look at them all a bit.

Have I made up my mind as to whom ISNS will endorse in the Democratic primary? Of course, I have. And I'll tell you who that would be, and why I've decided the way I have, when I return to the writing routine. Meanwhile, email any questions or comments and I'll respond as expeditiously as possible. - Jim

ISNS archives back through 2015 are available again for subscribers. You remember the process. Go to [this web page](#), click the "Subscribers-only" link and type the secret password - which has been changed to: madigan (yes, all lower case). Remember, this is a secret, just between us insiders, so don't go blabbing it around. Thanks. - Jim

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