

STATE SENATOR CRAIG WILCOX

32ND DISTRICT LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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From the desk of

CRAIG WILCOX

STATE SENATOR | 32ND DISTRICT

Dear Friends,

It was an unusual session, and one I hope is never repeated. Because of the Governor's Executive Order, virtually the entire state was on lockdown for two months. The Legislature suspended its activities from mid-March to mid-May, coming back to the Capitol for one final week of session.

As we all know, we are still dealing with restricted levels of economic activity and social interaction. For all intents and purposes, the final few days of activity became the focus of the entire 2020 legislative session.

Citing the coronavirus pandemic, the majority party suspended much of its legislative work. However, the abbreviated spring legislative session presents the opportunity to give you a complete rundown of the major legislation that made it to a final vote. Any measures passed by the General Assembly will need the Governor's signature to become law.



I hope you will find the newsletter helpful and interesting. Also included is a short survey for you to fill out and send back.

Sincerely,

State Sen. Craig Wilcox
32ND District



LEGISLATIVE SURVEY QUESTIONS

Save a stamp! Fill out the survey online at www.senatorwilcox.com.

1. Would you favor or oppose ending automatic pay raises for Illinois legislators?

- Favor
- Oppose
- Undecided/No opinion

2. Should the Legislature take an active role in reviewing, and then endorsing or rejecting Executive Orders issued by the Governor after a period of 15 days, 30 days, or should they have no role at all?

- 15 days
- 30 days
- No role at all

3. Shall the State Supreme Court be petitioned to automatically weigh in on the constitutionality of Executive Orders following the Legislature/General Assembly's vote on those orders?

- Yes
- No
- Undecided/No opinion

4. Would you favor increasing criminal penalties (jail time and fines) for vandalism and looting?

- Yes
- No
- Undecided/No opinion

Please put completed survey in a stamped envelope and return to: Senator Craig Wilcox, 5400 West Elm Street, Suite 103, McHenry, IL 60050

Survey Participant: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Cell Phone #: _____

Email: _____

Yes, please add me to Sen. Wilcox's e-newsletter.

2020 SESSION

The spring legislative session concluded in the early morning hours of Sunday, May 24. There was a flurry of last-minute action, after a delay of two-months or more. There literally was no true public debate on critical issues this year. The last few days and hours leading up to the May 24 finish centered mostly on the state budget.

State budget package (SB 264), (HB 357), (HB 64), (SB 2099) – Fiscal Year 2021 Budget: Takes effect July 1, 2020.

It's a budget that's \$6 billion out of balance. While some people will blame the lockdown and the COVID-19 pandemic, overspending is quite common in Springfield. Despite GOP warnings for years, the "spend now-worry later" attitude threatens the livelihoods and well-being of future generations who will be the ones worrying and paying for the overdue bills.

The plan passed by the majority party will require federal borrowing, potential federal aid or backlog borrowing in order to be balanced, and it factors in \$5 billion in loans from a Federal Reserve program designed to help states during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Incredibly, the budget includes allowances for cost-of-living (COLA) pay raises for legislators. Even knowing the economic struggles of millions of Illinois, including those without jobs, there was no attempt to remove the pay hike. My legislation (see page 3) would have stopped COLA's permanently. Sadly, it was never given a public hearing this spring.

Key Budget Notes

- Assumes projected revenues (tax dollars) of \$36.9 billion and General Funds expenditures (spending) of nearly \$43 billion.
- Appropriates more than \$50 billion for roads, bridges, and other public construction projects.
- Authorizes the State to borrow up to \$5 billion from the U.S. Federal Reserve or other U.S. federal lender to meet revenue shortfalls because of the COVID-19 shutdown.

Obviously, the COVID-19 pandemic has played a huge role in all our lives this year, including impacting the work of the Legislature. Its effects can be seen throughout the budget documents.

Public Education (Pre K-12)

COVID Education Response (SB 1569):

- Allows schools to create remote and blended (remote and classroom) learning days; eases red tape regulations on teacher licensing and evaluation to help keep more teachers available; and allows for remote completion of graduation and coursework requirements.
- Gives schools authority to transfer funds within their various accounts until June 2021, so they can better manage their finances.
- Adds district intervention funding to the base funding minimum of the evidence-based school funding formula.

Health and Human Services

Healthcare (SB 1864):

- Authorizes the IL Departments of Healthcare and Family Services and Insurance to expand telehealth, and allow for phone or verbal approval by an applicant in lieu of a signature. Eases eligibility guidelines for assistance.
- Provides for COVID-19 testing for the uninsured and noncitizens

The COVID-19 pandemic also drove the passage of legislation affecting the operations of state and local government.

Local and State Government

Local Government COVID Response (HB 2096):

- Allows annual township meetings to be held the third Tuesday, after 6pm, in the month following the expiration of a disaster declaration by the Governor.
- Allows electronic competitive bidding for school construction, and also allows construction bids in the School Code of more than \$25,000 to be agreed to electronically.
- Stipulates that stimulus checks from the CARES ACT cannot be counted toward eligibility for township general assistance and township emergency general assistance.

State Government Emergency Administration Act (SB 2135):

- Establishes a commission to advise and review efforts to revive the economy with members appointed by leaders of the four caucuses of the General Assembly.
- Allows for a study about providing free broadband Internet access to all Illinois residents.
- Under certain circumstances, allows for remote witnessing and notarization.
- Gives the Secretary of State the power to extend various expiration dates if there is a statewide disaster declaration based on a pandemic or similar emergency.
- Creates a task force to study the impact the COVID-19 pandemic on businesses.
- Allows for municipal appropriation deadlines to be extended during an emergency.

One of the more controversial proposals to come before our abbreviated spring session was “vote-by-mail.” There are serious concerns about ballot integrity for this fall’s election, the only election the measure impacts. While additional legislation was passed to address some security concerns, others remain. For example, during very limited public debate, concerns were raised about whether the legislation could allow ballot box stuffing, unsecured ballot boxes, and increased opportunities for fraud by sending mail-in ballots to everyone who voted in recent elections, even those who may no longer be a citizen of Illinois or who may have died.

COVID-19

Vote-by-mail (SB 1863):

- Makes Election Day 2020 a state and legal school holiday.
- Stipulates that vote-by-mail applications will be sent to everyone who applied for a ballot in the 2018 general election, the 2019 consolidated election, or the 2020 primary.
- Requires that ballots be mailed no earlier than Sept. 24, and that any voter submitting an application on or before Oct. 1 will receive their ballot no later than Oct. 6. This is one month prior to the November General Election. How will the mailed-in ballots be secured? Can authorities ensure ballots cast will be counted on Election Day?
- Allows 16-year-olds to serve as election judges.
- A special panel of three election judges, including no more than two from the same political party, will conduct a signature review of ballots submitted by mail.
- Allows curbside voting.
- Allows vote-by-mail ballots to be returned by mail or to a secure postage-free drop box.



Sen. Wilcox is a member of the Senate Human Services Committee, one of the busiest legislative panels in the Senate. This picture was taken during a hearing on March 3, 2020.

Earlier this year, I had the privilege of honoring two local Boy Scouts who achieved the rank of Eagle Scout. Only about 4 percent of Boy Scouts earn the Eagle Scout rank each year, so it’s a phenomenal achievement.

Conor Rada of Boy Scout Troop 679 in McHenry is pictured left. Landon Simecek of Boy Scout Troop 340 of Spring Grove is pictured right:



The presentation included Senate Resolutions for each of these young men, recognizing their hard work and accomplishments. These are future leaders for our communities, and their efforts give me great hope for the future of Illinois.

DISAPPOINTMENTS

Bloated, out-of-balance state budget

Simply put, legislators failed to act like they expect Illinois taxpayers to act. Illinois taxpayers lost more than \$50 billion in hard-earned income through two tax increases in 2011 and 2017. Taxpayers sacrificed, but state government has not. The biggest example of that is the new state budget that is billions of dollars out of balance, and will only add to our multibillion dollar debt.



Good Government/Redistricting Reform

A constitutional change to reform the way political boundaries are drawn was ignored. Despite bipartisan sponsorship of Redistricting Reform, the majority party’s leaders didn’t let the pandemic crisis go to waste, using an abbreviated session to run the clock out on the deadline to get the measure on the November ballot. Instead of the voters deciding if they’d like a system that puts them in charge of selecting their representatives, the current system will stay in place, which puts a majority party in a backroom to plan which voters they want in their districts.

Regional approach to the \$15/hour minimum wage

Senate Bill 3396, which I cosponsored this year, would set a minimum hourly wage depending upon the region of the State, ensuring an economically-balanced approach for both employees and employers. The adjusted minimum wage would provide a sliding scale rate – so areas with historically-low unemployment or higher costs of living would have reduced rates. The regional minimum wage would follow the original law’s six-year schedule of rising wage rates. While the goal of \$15 an hour may be appropriate for Chicago, it could very well be an unaffordable wage for employers in smaller communities. I’m also concerned about whether our businesses are able to remain competitive with counterparts in neighboring states, such as Wisconsin, which have a lower minimum wage.



Prohibiting Legislative Pay Raises

I introduced legislation (Senate Bill 3607) to permanently end automatic cost of living adjustment (COLA) pay raises for state lawmakers. The measure was introduced February 14 of this year, so there was plenty of time to settle the issue before the General Assembly suspended the session because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Legislature had an opportunity to do away with speculation and political arguments, and deal with the question of pay hikes – for one of the highest-paid state legislative positions in the United States – once and for all. Unfortunately, the measure was never allowed to be publicly debated.

Veteran vehicle registration fees

Another measure I sponsored this year (Senate Bill 3480) would waive car and light truck registration fees for veterans with a service-connected disability. The veteran who holds proof of a service connected disability from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs would qualify for the waiver. This proposal was also not given a public hearing.