



the

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The Illinois General Assembly's Spring 2008 Session

Although legislators avoided another endless session like last year, the in-fighting that began in 2007 between the governor and legislative leaders carried over into the 95th General Assembly's 2008 Spring Session. With no agreement on possible new sources of revenue, efforts to find common ground on key issues such as education funding reform, public employee pension restructuring, expanded health care and a state-wide public works program failed. The slowing economy, and projected declines in state revenues greatly limited new initiatives.

The second year of the 95th General Assembly's two-year session is typically limited to budgetary and emergency bills. Out of a total of 3,641 bills introduced this spring, only 283 bills passed both chambers. While this represents two-thirds fewer bills sent to the governor than last year, and is one of the smallest number of bills to pass both chambers in recent history, the 2008 Spring Session was anything but uneventful and without controversy.

Mass Transit Doomsday Avoided

Facing new threats of a total shutdown of the Chicago area mass transit system due to lack of funding, the governor began the new year by convening the 19th Special Session on January 2, 2008 to ad-

dress the mass transit crisis. After rancorous debate, the General Assembly barely passed legislation providing much needed funding for the Chicago area mass transit systems by authorizing a combination of increases in the real estate title transfer tax within the affected service regions and allowing Cook County to increase its sales tax. Governor Rod Blagojevich surprised many by using his amendatory veto power to add free rides for senior citizens serviced by the majority of mass transit systems in Illinois. Although it

incurred an additional cost of \$15 to \$30 million, the General Assembly reluctantly accepted the governor's changes.

Fiscal Crisis

In February, Comptroller Dan Hynes revealed the state's revenues were lower than expected, and feared the state's increasing debt, combined with the growing demands for government services were stretching the state's finances. Shortly thereafter, Governor Blagojevich proposed a state budget that included a child tax credit, a one-time

business tax break, expanded health care coverage for adults, a public works program, a restructured public employee pension plan (to decrease the state's unfunded pension obligations), and increased money for education. However, the House of Representatives and the Senate each crafted their own state budgets.

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The Budget

The General Assembly passed a Fiscal Year 2009 state budget totaling a little more than \$59 billion, which was an increase of \$2.1 billion (about 6.7 percent) from last year. Due to the state's gloomy fiscal forecast, it was a limited growth budget and included no new taxes. Few of the governor's budget initiatives, with the exception of slight increases for education, were included in the budget.

The governor and many Republican lawmakers contend the FY '09 budget passed by the General Assembly was unbalanced and therefore unconstitutional. Governor Blagojevich used his item and reduction veto powers during the summer to cut \$1.4 billion from the General Assembly's budget bills (House Bill 5701, Senate Bill 1102, Senate Bill 1115, and Senate Bill 1129).

The House of Representatives and the Senate met after the governor's action on the budget. The House overrode several of the governor's reduction vetoes on HB 5701; however, the Senate chose not to address these overrides without the passage of a significant revenue enhancing bill. The parts of the budget that the governor did not veto became law.

Illinois Works

Citing the deterioration of roads, bridges and schools the governor launched an all out effort to secure passage of the first major capital works project in nine years. Enlisting the help of former Republican U.S. Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert and former Democratic Congressman Glenn Poshard, they attempted to build a coalition of business, education, labor, and hospitals to pass a \$34 billion capital works program during the waning hours of session. Funding sources included a sophisticated combination of fund sweeps, expansion of gambling, lease of the state lottery, and restructuring of capital bonds. Although this effort failed to pass this spring, the governor and legislative leaders will continue to negotiate towards the goal of a capital program.

Ethics Reform

Both chambers unanimously supported an ethics reform bill (HB 824) that would prohibit businesses that have more than \$50,000 in state contracts from making political donations to constitutional officers (or candidates for those offices) who award the contracts. The ban also applies to a company's

owners, top officials, and close family members. The approved bill was sent to the governor on June 30 and awaits his action. Many legislators refuse to vote on a capital works program until this ethics reform bill becomes law.

Education Funding Reform

While both chambers have introduced legislation that would revise the way education is funded in Illinois, no measures have moved significantly. Lawmakers will continue to debate this pressing issue until significant reforms are approved.

More to Come

At press time, the governor had called the 95th General Assembly into two special sessions in mid-August to consider education funding and a capital works program. This will mark the twenty-third and twenty-fourth special sessions of the 95th General Assembly. Already setting a record, the governor indicated he may call more special sessions until a capital works program is approved. Unless additional special sessions are called by the governor or each chamber's leader, the legislature will not meet again until the fall veto session. It is scheduled after the election (November 4, 2008) for November 12, 13, 14 & 19, 20, 21.



Springfield Marks Unpleasant Centennial

One hundred years ago, on August 14 and 15, Springfield, Illinois made national news. It was the home of race riots so shocking, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was organized in response.

On August 14, an angry white mob gathered at Springfield's city jail, demanding vigilante justice against two black men incarcerated for alleged crimes against whites. One was an alleged rapist and the other an alleged murderer. The crowd demanded their immediate lynching.

However, Springfield Sheriff Charles Werner sensed danger and arranged to borrow one of the town's few automobiles to secrete the inmates to Bloomington. He got the nearby fire department to create a false fire alarm as a distraction so the black men could flee.

When the mob realized the ruse, they erupted and ran to Loper's, the restaurant belonging to the getaway car's owner. Using bricks and other makeshift weapons, they destroyed the restaurant while Loper watched, then they burned his automobile.

As many as 5,000 people witnessed the mob's actions, according to historian Roberta Senechal de la Roche's book, "In Lincoln's Shadow: The 1908 Race Riot in Springfield, Illinois" (2008, Southern Illinois University).

Springfield's mayor, Roy Reece, arrived and tried to calm the rioters, but they attacked him.

Friends helped him escape.

After decimating Loper's, some rioters began to beat any blacks in the downtown area. Others ran toward African-American businesses to destroy and loot them, as well as some Jewish-owned businesses, according to de la Roche. Next, the mob ran to the east side of town, where many blacks lived, and burned their homes, beating some residents along the way.



The tree where the mob lynched Scott Burton. Photo courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

"At one o'clock this morning...the sky over the east end of Springfield was aglow, and it was reported that several houses in the east end, where the Negroes live, were afire," said the August 15, 1908 New York Times. At two in the morning, the mob lynched Scott Burton, a black barber defending his home and shop.

Illinois Governor Charles Deneen ordered militia to quell the mayhem and protect frightened blacks, sheltered in the State Arsenal

The next night, a mob tried to break into the State Arsenal but the militia thwarted their efforts. Instead, some sped to the nearby home of William Donegan, an elderly black man married to a white woman. The rioters beat Donegan, cut his throat, and hung him from a tree.

John and Hazel Wilson were 19-year-old African-Americans hiding near Donegan's house at the time, but they left when they learned the mob was coming. "So we all went out to Washington Park and stayed until morning," Hazel said. (The Wilsons' comments are part of the University of Illinois at Springfield's Oral History Collection.) "We couldn't take any belongings, couldn't take anything with you walking out to a park." They couldn't sleep either, she added. "We didn't know what to expect."

Her husbands' friends saw the mob. "(The mob was) coming right down the street like, you know how a crowd comes in a parade? That's how they come, breaking windows, going in, taking what they wanted. People were up there in the area of Washington Street shooting down on you as you was coming up. They never did tell you the truth about how many people were killed."

In an online article (www.lib.niu.edu/1996/iht329622.html), historian de la Roche wrote: "The riot's toll, for a city this size, was high: two blacks and four whites dead; hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of property destroyed; more than forty black families displaced when their homes were burned; and dozens of citizens of both races injured."

Newspapers around the country, which hardly noticed former race riots in the north, were shocked at Springfield's. How could this happen in the home of Abraham Lincoln, the man who freed the slaves? According to local papers, Springfield rioters even mocked the Great Emancipator, shouting curses at Lincoln for freeing the slaves.

Governor Deneen offered \$200 for evidence

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that would help convict murderous rioters. Police immediately began arresting dozens of suspects. (None were charged with rioting, but for crimes associated with the mobs' actions.) Only one person was convicted -- of petty theft. "Many persons who were known to have important testimony regarding the mob and its leaders have been deterred from offering this to the State's Attorney because of threats or violence made against them anonymously," said the August 18, 1908 New York Times.

Some northerners were so appalled by Springfield's riots, they formed what became the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Throughout this centennial year, Springfield is holding numerous activities to commemorate and discuss the race riots. On the 100th anniversary of the first day of rioting, Springfield Mayor Tim Davlin issued a formal apology for the riots.



The mob destroyed Harry Loper's restaurant and car after learning he loaned his car to the sheriff so the African-American inmates could escape the mob. Photo courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

The University of Illinois at Springfield's Oral History Project recorded several witnesses' and even a participant's recollections of the Springfield 1908 race riots. You can read their comments online at: www.uis.edu/archives/contents.htm.

Transitions

In mid-August, **Senate President Emil Jones**, a Chicago Democrat, announced his plans to retire after his term expires in January. He began his legislative career in the House of Representatives where he served 11 years. In 1983 he was elected to the Illinois Senate and was elected the Senate's Minority Leader after 10 years. In 2003 Jones was elected President of the Senate. He has served 35 years in the General Assembly.

Former Republican state **Representative Maureen Murphy** died on August 9. Murphy lived in Evergreen Park and served in the House from 1993 until 1997, during which she fought for reform of Chicago schools, among other issues. Afterward she served eight years on the Cook County Board of Review where she oversaw taxpayers' property tax appeals and educated taxpayers about their right to appeal. She was the first woman to chair the Cook County Republican Party.

On July 12 a former state lawmaker of 20 years, **Virginia Macdonald**, passed away at her home in Arlington Heights. Macdonald was a Republican and became a member of the House of Representatives in 1973, at a time when there were few women in the chamber. She joined the Senate in 1982. Macdonald was also a delegate to the 1970 Illinois Constitution Convention.



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