



Cole's Clipboard

STATE REPRESENTATIVE SANDY COLE

This past week, the first Legislative Session of the New Year was as unpredictable as our January weather! Starting with the good news...

Education Funding Dollars Finally Set to Be Released

By unanimous support, the House of Representatives approved the Governor's recent amendatory veto to the budget implementation bill, a move that would authorize the disbursement of \$560 million in long-overdue state aid to local school districts throughout the state. The legislation also contains the \$400 per pupil increase in general state aid as well as an increase in the special education personnel reimbursement.

Governor Blagojevich held up approval to release these funds for months, jeopardizing our schools' ability to provide quality education services to our children. House Republicans are proud to have fought for the release of these funds from day one, and we are pleased that our schools will now be getting the funding they were promised months ago.

Suburban Taxpayers to foot the bill for Mass Transit

Unfortunately, House and Senate Democrats managed to push through legislation this week that hits Lake County (and other suburban) taxpayers with a ½ cent sales tax increase intended to bail out the bureaucratic mess of the Chicago mass transit system. A ½ cent sales tax increase in Lake County amounts to approximately \$120.00 per person annually.

After careful consideration and fiscal analysis, I voted against this proposal because the majority of my constituents who voiced their opinion on the subject informed me that they would rather see a modest increase in transit user fares than face another tax hike, particularly following a huge increase in local property taxes. In addition, this legislation overrides the will of Lake County voters who defeated two countywide referendums that asked for sales tax increases in 2004 and 2005 for road improvements.

Also, HB656 now gives Lake County officials the ability to use their half (1/4 percent) of the sales tax monies generated by this bill on any expense related to public safety and transportation projects. It bothers me that the bill does not include language to ensure that these new funds will be used in addition to county funds already allocated for these projects. So, theoretically the county board will receive an additional \$30 million annually of your hard-earned money to spend at their discretion.

I am shocked that Democrat leadership "bought" votes for this bill by increasing funding to downstate mass transit by \$26.8 million – without raising the sales tax in downstate areas including Springfield, Rockford, Peoria and DeKalb!

The Governor has issued an amendatory veto of the legislation, adding language that provides for senior citizens to ride public transit FREE of charge. Noble as it may be, this action leaves another \$12 million dollar deficit to tack onto the additional \$435 million that the RTA now says it will need for replacement of wheels on all of its trains in 2008.

The General Assembly will have to approve the Governor's changes prior to January 20 in order to avert the fare hikes and service cutbacks threatened by the CTA. I have been assured by my Democrat colleagues that this is indeed a "done deal."

I will continue to keep you informed of progress in Springfield as developments occur.

*** *As always, thank you for the honor and the privilege of serving you,*



137 Center St., Suite 2A ♦ Grayslake, IL 60030
Phone: (847) 543-0062 ♦ Fax: (847) 543-8862
E-Mail: RepresentativeSandyCole@comcast.net