**Illinois Updates – March 1, 2024**

Judge Rules Against Bring Chicago Home Initiative

A circuit judge this week has ruled against Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson’s initiative to generate revenues for homelessness prevention. The Bring Chicago Home Initiative would put a ballot question to voters regarding an increase in the city’s real estate transfer tax. Opponents of the initiative led by the Building Owners and Managers Association of Chicago claim that the ballot question is in violation of state law and the Illinois Constitution because it asks voters questions regarding both a tax increase and tax cut. Supporters of the initiative say the increased tax on high-dollar real estate transactions would raise $100 million for services including mental health treatment and rent subsidies. While the question remains on the ballot, votes on the referendum can only be recorded, not counted, until the status of the court challenge is determined. The Chicago Board of Elections intends to file an appeal of the ruling before the Illinois Appellate Court.

Trump May Be Off Ballot

A Cook County Circuit judge ruled this week with the plaintiffs who are seeking to remove former President Donald Trump from the Illinois primary ballot. The ruling referenced both the findings of the Illinois State Board of Elections as well as the recent and related ruling in Colorado in determining that Trump had violated the insurrection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The judge put the ruling on hold until March 1st anticipating an appeal from the Trump campaign, which was filed on Wednesday. The ruling will also be held if the U.S. Supreme Court issues an order that is substantially different than the Cook County opinion. The SCOTUS is expected to rule on the Colorado case soon, but it is still uncertain what impact the Illinois case will have on early voting.

Ameren Right of First Refusal Bill Back in Play

Representative Larry Walsh (D-Joliet) has filed a new bill to provide electric utility Ameren with the right of first refusal to construct transmission lines throughout the state. The bill would allow the utility to bypass a bidding process required by the Midcontinent Independent System Operator, or MISO, to perform construction before December 31, 2024. Governor JB Pritzker filed an amendatory veto of a similar bill that passed the General Assembly last spring, and the sponsor did not attempt to override the Governor’s changes. A subject matter hearing was held on the bill recently in Springfield. The current version of the bill would grant right of first refusal to any utility and is backed by labor organizations including the IBEW International. Opponents claim the measure would not necessarily reduce consumer costs and argue that the bill is premature because the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission is currently examining the issue.

Pritzker Says Sox Stadium Not Priority

In response to the Chicago White Sox appeal to legislative leaders last week in support of public funding for a new stadium, Governor JB Pritzker during a press availability said a new facility for the team is not one of his legislative priorities this spring. The ball club is seeking $1 billion in public funds, which could include refinancing existing bonds issued by the Illinois Sports Facilities Authority to build the current facility, Guaranteed Rate Field. Pritzker said he was reluctant to support the endeavor unless the proponents could provide evidence that the new stadium would bring long-term financial benefits to taxpayers. Many studies regarding use of public funding to construct private sports facilities show that revenues that are predicted to be generated by such development fall far short of actual gains.

Speaker, Unions Spend Big Against Flowers

Candidate Michael Crawford who is running against forty-year incumbent Representative Mary Flower in the 31st House District reported campaign contributions this week from House Speaker Emanuel “Chris” Welch as well as members of Welch’s leadership team. Collectively the campaign funds from House Democratic leadership totaled $560,000 and come in addition to over $500,000 from unions including IBEW Local 399 and LiUNA. While it is unusual for leadership to work against an incumbent colleague, Welch cited Flower’s behavior and concern for the long-term growth of the caucus in backing Crawford. Crawford currently serves as the dean of The Chicago School, a private university.

Governor Announces Jobs Program for DOC Inmates

Governor JB Pritzker this week announced $6 million in funding from the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) to support the Illinois Returning Residents Clean Jobs Training Program. As part of the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA), the program will provide training and education to incarcerated individuals within 36 months of release to assist them in finding employment in the clean energy sector. Grant will be made to four organizations to provide the training and support services to residents of DOC facilities in Kewanee, Decatur, Western Illinois and Vienna. Training opportunities include solar PV training and HVAC with an energy efficient focus. Support services that will be provided to trainees upon release include transportation and childcare.

Garcia/Lopez Primary Heats Up

The primary for the 4th Congressional district between incumbent U.S. Representative Jesus “Chuy” Garcia and Chicago Alderman Ray Lopez represents a battle for the Democratic party between the old guard and the new progressive wing. Garcia leads the progressive side, and has focused his work in Congress on immigration and transit issues. His endorsements of other progressive candidates for both state and local offices is highly sought. Alderman Lopez came from former Congressman Dan Lipinski’s organization and represents the traditional Chicago “machine” who are typically more moderate on social issues. Garcia has the fundraising lead in the race. Both candidates ran for mayor of Chicago in 2023, with Garcia being eliminated in the first round of voting and Lopez dropping out prior to the election.

Illinois FOP Endorses Hall

The Illinois Fraternal Order of Police State Lodge endorsed Matt Hall in the Republican primary for the 110th House District on Wednesday. Hall is challenging incumbent Blaine Wilhour for the seat with strong backing from unions. Wilhour has targeted organized labor as part of the Freedom Caucus, a group of downstate conservative Republican lawmakers. Wilhour reported contributions this week from his fellow House Republican Chris Miller, which appear to be pass-through funds from Republican heavy-weight Richard Uihlein.

Recent Gubernatorial Appointments

Governor JB Pritzker has made appointments to the following boards and commissions:

* Jerry Davis is appointed to the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority

All appointments are subject to Senate confirmation.

Upcoming Meetings and Hearings

* March 12, 2024 – Joint Committee on Administrative Rules
* March 28, 2024 – House Appropriations – Higher Education Committee – Subject Matter: Procurement in Higher Education

Election Calendar

* March 19, 2024 – General Primary Election
* November 5, 2024 – General Election

Dates to Remember

* March 15, 2024 – Senate Committee deadline
* April 5, 2024 – House Committee deadline
* April 12, 2024 – Senate Third Reading deadline
* April 19, 2024 – House Third Reading deadline
* May 3, 2024 – Committee deadline for bills from other chamber, House and Senate
* May 17, 2024 – Third Reading deadline for bills from other chamber, House and Senate
* May 24, 2024 - Adjournment