**Illinois Updates – April 28, 2023**

Jury Hears Closing Arguments in ComEd Trial

The prosecution and defense heard closing arguments early this week in the federal trial of former Commonwealth Edison lobbyists John Hooker, Jay Doherty and Mike McClain and former company CEO Anne Prammagiore. Known as the ComEd Four, the defendants are charged with bribery for providing no-pay contracts, internships and other benefits to former Speaker Michael J. Madigan to advance the utility’s legislative agenda in Springfield.

Madigan himself was indicted in relation to the ComEd case and along with Mike McClain will be tried on those and additional bribery charges involving other lobbying entities in spring of 2024. The outcome of this trial could be a predictor of how the once-powerful former Speaker and his close friend and associate will fare against the U.S. Attorney’s office.

Prior to being presented the case the jurors were given jury instructions that will be critical to their discussions. The panel of seven women and five men have met for 15 hours over four days and have requested transcripts of taped phone conversations and posed a couple of questions to the judge. The jury has not returned their verdict and will meet again on Monday to continue their deliberations.

Foxx Will not Run for Reelection

Cook County State’s Attorney Kim Foxx announced Tuesday that she will not run for a third term as the leader of the nation’s second-largest prosecutors office. Elected in 2016, Foxx’s time in office has been at times contentious. A progressive, she accomplished bail reforms, set higher thresholds for charging some crimes like shoplifting and vacated the convictions of hundreds of men framed by a crooked Chicago police sergeant. Foxx also dealt with multiple scandals including her handling of the case against actor Jussie Smollett, who falsely claimed to have been the victim of an attack. In announcing her decision, Foxx was critical of the media for dwelling on the Smollett case to the exclusion of other more important issues.

There will be no shortage of potential candidates to replace Foxx. Risa Lanier, a top deputy in the State’s Attorney’s office has indicated interest as has Alderman Bill Conway who lost to Foxx in the primary. Another previous candidate who may make a run is Donna More, who ran in the Democratic primaries in 2016 and 2020. Other names that have surfaced are former Chicago Inspector General Joe Ferguson, Dan Kirk, who served under Foxx’s predecessor Anita Alvarez, former Cook County Board member Richard Boykin and former Alderman Bob Fioretti.

Speaker May Put Abortion on the Ballot

In remarks during a lobby day panel discussion this week, House Speaker Chris Welch raised the possibility of putting a constitutional amendment codifying abortion rights on the 2024 ballot. While he acknowledged that the legislature has enacted many policies that protect abortion access, Welch said that putting the question to voters could increase voter participation, especially among Democrats and younger voters. During the same panel, the Speaker shot down any possibility of reviving the graduated income tax proposal and said that the push by municipalities to increase their share of the Local Government Distributive Fund may be considered but at a lower amount than requested by the proponents.

Backlog Lowest in Years

Illinois Comptroller Susana Mendoza announced this week that the state’s backlog of unpaid bills has the lowest balance in the past fifteen years. State accounts payable has dropped below $1 billion. In comparison, the bill backlog reached over $16 billion during the state budget impasse during former Governor Bruce Rauner’s administration.

The state’s relative fiscal health contrasts with information published by Crain’s Chicago Business that indicates businesses are anticipating a potential recession in the near future. According to the Chicago Federal Reserve Bank Survey off Economic Activity index, 65 percent of respondents expect a decrease in economic activity over the next twelve months, and the activity index decreased from March to April 2023. Bloomberg shared the results of a similar survey of 48 economists taken this month who state that they believe a recession is more likely than when asked the same question in March 2023.

DeSantis to Make Second Illinois Stop in Peoria

Florida Governor and likely presidential candidate Ron DeSantis will make his second visit to Illinois headlining a Lincoln Day Dinner in Peoria next month. DeSantis spoke to a gathering of police officers in Elmhurst this February at an invitation-only event that nonetheless drew many Republican notables including several state legislators. The Lincoln Day Dinner hosted as a joint event by the Peoria and Tazewell County Republican parties has a history of drawing high profile guest speakers, including former Vice President Mike Pence and former Texas Governor Rick Perry. DeSantis is expected to make his candidacy official next month.

Caulkins Will Not Run for Fourth Term

Representative Dan Caulkins (R-88, Decatur) announced this week that his current third term in office will be his last. Commenting on his decision, Caulkins cited three pledges he made when he decided to run for the House in 2017; to decline his pension and healthcare benefits, to donate his salary, and to limit himself to three terms. A former Decatur City Council member and Eastern Illinois University trustee, his district includes parts of five counties. The decennial redistricting drew the representative out of his current district, meaning he would have to move to a home in the new district to run again. At 76 years of age Representative Caulkins also mentioned his age as a factor in his decision.

Meet the Lawmakers

Each week we will profile two new members of the 103rd General Assembly. This week we meet Representative Norma Hernandez (D-77, Melrose Park) and Representative Jason Bunting (R-106, Dwight).

Representative Hernandez was elected to her seat after prevailing over former Representative Kathleen Willis in the primary election. Hernandez received a bachelor’s degree from Aurora University and a master’s from the University of Illinois Chicago. A member of the Triton Community College board of trustees, she is employed as an urban planner with the Great Cities Institute at UIC.

Representative Bunting was appointed to fill the seat of former Representative Tom Bennett, who was tapped to replace Senator Jason Barickman. He is a former member of the Livingston County Board and served as the Broughton Township Highway Commissioner. Bunting also previously served as Director of the Illinois Corn Growers Association. He lives with his family in Emington.

Dates to Remember

* April 28, 2023 – Senate and House Committee deadline, bills from other chamber
* May 11, 2023 – Senate Third Reading deadline, House bills
* May 12, 2023 – House Third Reading deadline, Senate bills
* May 19, 2023 – Scheduled Adjournment