

"END-OF-SESSION"

State Representative Dave Winters

NEWS



Dear Friend,

As you are probably aware, the Illinois General Assembly officially started the 2008 spring legislative session January 9th while the 2007 legislative session was still technically convening. The complete lack of leadership from the Democrats who control the House, Senate, and Governor's office delayed resolution to several important issues and pushed our state into a long and expensive overtime session.

Democrat infighting prevented the General Assembly from passing a state budget before the new fiscal year began on July 1st. To avert a government shutdown, the House Republican caucus led the charge for a temporary budget to keep vital services running in July. A full year's budget was finally passed on August 10th without the Governor's involvement. In addition, a necessary budget implementation (BIMP) bill was enacted 5 months late because the Democrats could not agree on details, and the Governor sat on the legislation for 2 months. Plus, a solution to Chicago's transportation funding issues was only recently passed.

The Democrats' failure to get along has resulted in 8 months of overtime session with 19 special sessions. The cost of these additional legislative days has totaled more than \$1 million at a time when our state can't even afford to make payments to healthcare providers on time.

While it appears the 2007 session has now been put to rest, it is my hope that this year's legislative session will not be plagued by Democrat disagreements so that we can do the work of the people in a timely manner. If you have any questions, please call my office at 815-282-0083.

Sincerely, *Dave Winters*

Winters Calls for Capital Plan to Address Transportation Concerns Statewide

Rep. Winters said political game playing among Democrats caused numerous expensive special sessions to be called last year and the beginning of this year to deal with Chicago area mass transportation funding.

Rep. Winters voted against House Bill 656 in January which raises a total of \$500 million in Chicago area taxes for mass transportation. Winters said the law will affect local residents because it increases the state's financial obligation to the transit systems during a tight fiscal climate. In addition, it provides free rides for some senior citizens.

The lawmaker said the entire state's transportation needs could be solved through a state capital plan.

"Illinois has not passed a capital plan in 7 years," said Winters. "Rockford area roads and bridges need repair and our bus systems need new equipment. And local residents could certainly benefit from a commuter train system. Instead of implementing a bill which only addresses the concerns of the Chicago area, we should be focusing on a capital plan which will tackle the transportation needs of the entire state."

LEGISLATION PASSED BY WINTERS IN 2007

Public Act 95-0635

The new law bans the act of possessing or being under the influence of alcohol or drugs while working on a public works project and requires contractors to institute an employee drug testing and discipline program.

Public Act 95-0299

Under the law, credit for high school graduation is extended to 7th and 8th grade students who successfully complete course work that is similar to coursework offered at the high school level. This law encourages students to enroll in advanced classes.

Public Act 95-0416

The new law requires schools requesting a state school construction grant to receive certification from a federal or state environmental committee. This provision ensures newly constructed schools save energy and are better for the environment as well as the health, comfort, and productivity of students and staff.

Schools Finally Receive Promised Funding



Illinois schools will begin to receive a boost in state education funding with the recent approval of the budget implementation (BIMP) bill. The BIMP bill authorizes the \$560 million increase in funding for elementary and secondary education approved in the FY08 budget. The General Assembly passed the legislation in early November, after House Speaker Mike Madigan sat on the bill for nearly 4 months. Then the Governor took 60 days to review the bill, only to make two technical changes.

"The BIMP bill is essential for releasing vital state dollars our schools depend on to educate our students," said Winters. "I am sincerely disappointed that we are more than 6 months into the schools' fiscal year and are just now releasing these substantial increases in student funding."

GENERAL ASSEMBLY SCHOLARSHIPS

Rep. Winters is offering General Assembly Scholarships to eight local students who have been active in public and civic affairs and who are in need of scholarship assistance. The scholarship pays for one year of tuition and some fees at any one of Illinois' public universities. Scholarships are extended to students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Qualifications of the scholarship include:

- Must be a resident of the 68th Representative District during the time of application and selection.
- Must be accepted to a state university as a full-time student.
- Must have evidence of activity in public and civic affairs.

Applications may be obtained by calling the district office at 815-282-0083. The deadline for returning the application to the district office is April 30th.

Education Increases in the New State Budget

- Raises the foundation level by \$400 to \$5,734 per student.
- Boosts funding for mandated categorical programs by \$136.8 million.
- Increases the special education personnel reimbursement rate by \$48.7 million.
- Enhances the Early Childhood Block Grant by \$25 million.
- Dedicates \$5 million to Gifted Education programs.