

MORRIS DAILY HERALD

Eggs & Issues: Dahl, Weller aide provide legislative updates

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By Jo Ann Hustis

A graduated state income tax is enough to scare anyone, says State Senator Gary Dahl. "Luckily for us, the bill was defeated," the Granville Republican said Monday, during the annual legislative breakfast by the Grundy Economic Development Council and sponsor John Quinn of AT&T.

"I think that issue is dead," he added. "However, I want to warn everyone we have 14 more days in Springfield before the deadline on the state budget, and no negotiations yet this year by the four (House and Senate) leaders and the governor.

"It scares the heck out of me what's coming out in the budget in the last three days after we get it."

The deadline for passage of the fiscal 2009 budget is Thursday, May 29. A supermajority of 60 percent, or three-fifths of the General Assembly, is required for passage after the deadline. Passage last year dragged well beyond the May deadline into August, with the governor calling legislators back into Springfield in a series of special sessions at taxpayer expense.

Reed Wilson, 11th District representative for Congressman Jerry Weller, R-Morris, spoke in the absence of Weller, who is retiring at the end of his term in January.

Also absent was State Representative Careen Gordon, D-Morris, due to a personal emergency. About 125 attended the event at the Morris Country Club.

Dahl noted the Illinois Department of Transportation is spending \$11 million on a complete rebuild of the Marseilles exit on Interstate 80, while the Brisbin Road interchange proposal west of Minooka remains dormant.

"I suggested (to IDOT) that project be put on hold and the money transferred to the Brisbin Road project," Dahl said.

"The Brisbin Road interchange will pay for itself in time. Hopefully, they'll take a serious look at this."

Dahl said the Brisbin Road proposal has the potential to bring business to this section of the 38th Legislative District, while there are virtually no business prospects at the Marseilles interchange.

On the recall measure, Dahl said the amendment was set to fail. He said Senate President Emil Jones, D-Chicago, opened and closed the bill for vote "in one-fifth of a second."

Dahl cannot see the state reinstating the Structural Work Act, which makes the third party responsible in Workman's Compensation claims.

Repealed in 1995, the act allows third parties to be sued for workplace injuries, such as suppliers, contractors, subcontractors, architects and retailers.

Dahl said Jones has 35 years seniority in Springfield. His retirement was 85 percent of his salary at 20 years, and increases 3 percent annually for each year thereafter.

"He's now qualified for 120 percent of his pay in retirement," the senator said. "Senate Minority President Frank Watson qualifies for 107 percent. This, folks, is just plain wrong. This has everything to do with retirement, and we're all paying for it."

Dahl noted the General Assembly went nowhere with trying to substitute a 401(k) retirement plan, or the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees plan.

"It's just plain wrong, and until we get things done, it'll stay that way," he said.

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"We had no chance to look at the vote," he noted. "One of the usual scams the Senate leadership is pulling. Right after, he told a reporter, 'I need a pay raise.'"

The recall amendment would have gone on the November ballot. Eighteen other states have similar options to remove constitutional officers and lawmakers they think are not doing their jobs.

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to be sued for workplace injuries, such as suppliers, contractors, subcontractors, architects and retailers.

Dahl also supports lifting the moratorium on constructing new nuclear plants in Illinois. The most serious issue, he said, is the ultimate disposal of nuclear waste, which currently is stored on-site.

He said Illinois, however, tends to string out projects with regulations until such proposals go to other states.

With only 19 percent of energy used in the United States generated by nuclear power, Wilson said waste disposal is not a scientific issue.

"More a political problem," he noted, mentioning U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, R-Nevada, who opposes the proposed Yucca Mountain depository for nuclear waste, has stalled the legislation in the Senate. Wilson believes the issue of recycling nuclear waste will be left up to the nation's next president.

He also noted the No Child Left Behind Act, which is up for reauthorization, probably by the next administration.

Wilson spoke of healthcare insurance, saying a great number of the uninsured work for small businesses unable to afford health insurance. He said healthcare insurance pool legislation passed the U.S. House, several times, but never made it through the Senate.

Noting he and his wife donated \$20,000 to start an

autism clinic in Ottawa, Dahl said Gov. Blagojevich cut the amount budgeted by the state for autism research from \$10 million to \$5 million.

"And, he hasn't paid the money yet," Dahl noted. "We're going to force more and more businesses to drop health insurance."

On other issues, Dahl said:

€ The state probably cannot afford to drop the 19.5-cent per gallon sales tax on gasoline.

"It's a windfall for the state every time it goes up. It's probably what we're living on in Springfield at this time."

€ "Don't spend it until you get it," on ag funds being released by the governor. Wilson said:

€ "The business climate in Illinois needs a lot of work. Lower taxes, for one. Other Midwest states are doing much better than Illinois."

€ "Very little can be done in the short term. Buying less gas probably won't reduce the price," he said on the retail price of gasoline, which he can see doubling in the years to come. "Greater reliance is needed on alternate fuels, including biodiesel."

€ Completion of the Illinois Valley Commuter Railroad effort is many years away. There is a provision for the railroad in the federal Transportation Bill.

GEDC Executive Director Nancy Ammer gave the welcome and introductions. GEDC spokesman Mike Finnegan introduced Dahl and Reed, and posed written questions from attendees.