Legislative Report

By Timothy S. Bramlet

TOI Legislative Consultant

Governor Rauner unveils budget with heavy cuts

FACED WITH DAUNTING red numbers for the State of Illinois for the remainder of this fiscal year and all of next, **Gov. Bruce Rauner** unveiled a stark budget plan before a joint session of the Illinois General Assembly on February 18. Budget projections point to a $1.5 billion shortfall for the remaining months of the current fiscal year and a $6 billion deficit for next fiscal year, which begins on July 1.

The Governor's budget includes $1.5 billion in cuts to Medicaid, $300 million to higher education and $600 million to local governments who receive Local Government Distributive Funds from the state income tax (not townships). It is also incumbent upon saving over $2 billion from a new pension reform plan he has put on the table. It boosts K-12 education spending by $300 million. The Governor also pushed for a two-year property tax freeze, but details are still forthcoming. It does not include any tax increases.

As would be expected, the proposals were met with opposition from legislative Democrats. But the Governor proclaimed that the day of reckoning had come for Illinois and that he had little choice but to make what he acknowledged would be unpopular budget cuts.

At any rate, as one state Senator told me, "this is just the first inning." Whatever the outcome is, the final budget is likely to go through an arduous negotiating session before final agreement is reached … whenever that might be.

Committees stay pretty much the same

There was very little turnover between the old General Assembly and the new, 99th session that was sworn in last month. The same holds true for assignments of leadership teams and committee chairs and memberships. In the Senate, **Sen. Emil Jones III (D-Chicago)** will continue to lead the Senate Local Government Committee; **Sen. Tim Bivins (R-Dixon)** will lead the Republican members there. **Sen. Toi Hutchinson (D-Olympia Fields)** will once again chair the Senate Revenue Committee, while **Sen. Pam Althoff (R-Crystal Lake)** will be the minority spokesperson there.

On the House side, **Rep. John Bradley (D-Marion)** heads the Revenue Committee once again; **Rep. David Harris (R-Arlington Heights)** is the ranking Republican. And **Rep. Eddie Lee Jackson (D-East St. Louis)** will once again lead an expanded House Counties and Townships Committee, while **Rep. Don Moffitt (R-Galesburg)** is minority spokesman.

Earlier in the year, all four caucus leaders were re-elected to their respective positions.

Legislative proposals trickling in

The TOI legislative agenda is slowly coming into focus as we monitor the introduction of legislation for 2015. The General Assembly doesn't really kick it into gear until next week, so bill introductions have still been rather slow in coming. But with next Friday's deadline for introduction of bills in the Senate, and a similar deadline in the House the following week, we can expect to see a whole lot of action in the next few days.

Sen. Althoff has introduced **S.B. 40**, which allows dissolution via referendum of a township that is coterminous with a city and shares the same executive or board. TOI is opposed. **Sen. Julie Morrison (D-Deerfield)** has again introduced a bill, **S.B. 30**, to do away with merit-based stipends for county and township assessors. TOI is also opposed to that. **Rep. David McSweeney, (R-Barrington Hills)** is offering **H.B. 174**, which allows for abolition by referendum of *any* non-home rule unit of government. And there are numerous bills in both the House and Senate which expand posting requirements for local governments and require use of websites for such.

Two bills in the House, **H.B. 1524 (Rep. Brian Stewart, R-Freeport)** and **H.B. 2580 (Rep. Jerry Costello II, D-Belleville)** restrict the ability of township road commissioners to post weight restrictions on township roads.

More bills are still being thrown into the hopper at press time. Next month's issue will feature a complete rundown of the TOI legislative agenda.