

Legislative Interview with State Senator Julie Morrison, March 6, 2015

Fiscal Policy

1. The revenues collected as a result of the temporary income tax increase of 2011 were used to pay pension costs, the interest on the state's debt, and past-due bills. How do you plan to deal with these obligations when this money is not collected from taxpayers?

A: We have all read a lot about the cuts Governor Rauner has proposed. That is going to be a big part of the answer. However, there will also be additional revenue that will have to be collected. Among the proposals currently circulating in Springfield are:

- 1) Increased gambling – such as a new casino in Chicago
- 2) Gas tax – maybe
- 3) Closing corporate loopholes
- 4) Graduated tax – not sure if want a graduated tax or a millionaire's tax – but the millionaire's tax passed in the district, so I feel I can support that
- 5) Taxing retirement – no
- 6) Sales tax extension to services – maybe; this was discussed during a constituent meeting in Deerfield, and the participants seems to think they would be okay with it.

Follow-up

Q: Would this services sales tax also apply to big-ticket items like lawyers or construction?

A: One of the proposals is to tax professional services, but I don't think there's support for that one.

Q: If voters see the effect of the income tax rollback, will they support reinstating the increase?

A: We are going to get a chance to live through the effects of the rollback, and see how voters respond to the cuts.

Q: One of the Governor's proposed cuts concerns cutting services to 18-year-olds who age out of the foster home system. What is your view on that?

A: On paper this cut sounds good: these kids are 18, they can support themselves, and it's better to use the money for infants and toddlers, but in reality these are people, for example teen mothers who will lose housing services, who we will end up seeing on the streets homeless or in jail. These are kids who already have low self-esteem because they haven't been adopted; we want to see them be educated and contribute to society, but 18 is too early to cut their services. There are states, like Indiana and Michigan, and some on the coasts that provide services to kids from 18-21 to support them.

2. Appropriations for Human Services have been reduced or held flat for many years. Should this continue or should spending on these services be increased and by how much?

A: Human services is my big thing, especially DCFS and DHS, but we have no money. My goal is to keep funding flat rather than have cuts, but an increase is unlikely. The Governor's budget is a starting point, and then the House and Senate versions will come out; I don't think we will see all the cuts proposed by the Governor – or else we will be in Springfield all summer.

Education Funding

1. What steps would you take to increase equitable funding for Illinois schools, closing the gaps in funding between high-income and low-income communities in the state?

A: That's the hardest thing in the world. Andy Menard's bill crucified our District; all school districts in my [legislative] district were losers, and that's why I voted against the bill. This bill has come back as Senate Bill 1; Senator Menard is trying to make it something people in the suburbs can support. But I wish we had enough money to support the goals of the bill. The bill raises the foundation budget to 95% -- and increased education funding is great, but how are we paying for it? The bill proposes to cut higher education by 30%, but then that will make college unaffordable for some, and will also impact the ability of the U of I, our crown jewel, to recruit and retain professors.

Follow-up

Q: Can we cut costs by eliminating state mandates, such as PE 5 days/week?

A: Yes, probably some unfunded mandates but not sure off-hand where they are. I believe that decisions about education should be local decisions, and the State shouldn't impose mandates on the local districts.

Q: Any ideas on how to make education funding more equitable?

A: Can't rely on property tax and will have to change the whole system for educational funding. But I can't make this up on the fly. Need to preserve special services.

2. Now that the income tax level has decreased to 3.75%, how will you ensure our public schools and universities receive the funding they need to educate Illinois' children adequately?

Criminal Justice

1. Will you be inclined to vote for the legislation to be recommended by the Joint Criminal Justice Reform Committee?

A: I haven't seen any legislation yet.

2. Do you feel that the chief goals should be relieving the overcrowding of our prisons and removing barriers so that people returning from prison are more likely to find employment? If not, why not?

A: Jails are overcrowded, and the conditions are almost inhumane, and the prisoners are provided with almost no services. I believe that prisoners should be kept in the least restrictive manner, but dangerous people need to be kept away from the population. At the same time, we need to work with them while in jail to improve the outcomes when they are released.

Follow-up:

Q: Do you support decriminalizing or not having jail time for marijuana possession?

A: I'm not sure that [imprisonment for marijuana] is happening in Lake County.

Q to LWV: Have you taken a position on medical marijuana?

Her position: This is going to be rolled out, and I'm concerned with the amount being dispensed. There are movements to add more chronic conditions, including PTSD, to the list; this is going to be a huge business, and there will be a lot of money; Highland Park will have a dispensary. There are also questions of enforcement, including driving while under the influence.

Redistricting

1. *Do you support these principles for redistricting?*

- *Strong consideration of the Voting Rights Act? Yes.*
- *Districts drawn should not dilute or diminish the ability of a racial or language minority community to elect candidates of its choice? Yes – that's important*
- *Districts drawn should follow visible geographic and municipal boundaries? This would really help people; the Cook County part of my district is in pieces and no one knows who represents them.*
- *Districts should not be drawn to favor one political party over another? Good luck on that front; but I did sign a petition for redistricting being done in a non-political manner by an independent third party. But I don't expect to see this in my lifetime.*

2. *Do you support changes to the way state legislative districts are drawn in Illinois such as supporting greater transparency in the process and/or having an Independent commission draw the maps?*

A: Yes.

3. *What other changes would you support?*

A: A way to prioritize that communities are kept together.

Election Laws

There have been election day reports of long lines at polling places. What changes in the election process would you support to alleviate this situation?

A: I haven't heard of long lines on election day, but I have heard of long lines for early voting. Some of the newly passed laws will alleviate this situation, such as the fact that no reason is now needed to vote early, and registration on day of election will be great. Carla Wyckoff [Lake County Clerk] has called me and wants to tweak these changes, she says they are too onerous and will have to be implemented too fast, and the local governments won't have the ability to deal with the changes. I want to make as easy and fast to vote as possible.

Environment

Are you supportive of the Clean Power Plan for Illinois, and will you vote for legislation that advances the State Implementation Plan (SIP) due June 30, 2016? If not, why not?

A: Yes, I am favor of the bill and I will support it.

Fracking

In light of growing scientific, medical, and media findings demonstrating the risks and harms of fracking (unconventional gas and oil extraction) as well as increased opposition to fracking, nationally, internationally and throughout Illinois - Would you support a moratorium/ban on hydraulic fracturing/unconventional drilling? Why or why not?

A: Yes, I would support a moratorium. I have voted against fracking and continue to be a vocal opponent. I have a bill that prohibits fracking in national and state Parks (although currently it is running into legal problems). I am working with the Sierra Club.

Gun Violence Prevention

1) Do you support requiring a state license to sell multiple firearms in Illinois?

A: Yes.

2) Recently, California enacted a Gun Violence Restraining Order law that would allow for the courts to temporarily limit an individual's access to firearms when there are warning signs or indications that that person is at risk for violence. Would you support similar legislation in Illinois?

A: Yes, and I am a co-sponsor on this bill.

Healthcare

1. Do you agree with the plan, presently in progress, to move all Medicaid patients into managed care, including the approximately 342,000 added through Illinois Medicaid Expansion?

A: Yes, I support this plan, I think it will save lots of money, and it will be good for participants to have a “Medicaid home”; and this will be paid for through the savings from improved outcomes.

2. If the Supreme Court rules this spring to allow subsidies only to those getting private health plans under the Affordable Care Act from a state-based marketplace, how would you assist the 80% of Illinois citizens who applied this year and are eligible for these subsidies?

A: This is a really tough question. Why don't we have a state exchange? We started with the federal exchange, but we should transition to a state-based program.