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## The Grandstand Experience

By David Larson

Prior to the Civil War and until 1867, the Boone County Fair was held on the, at that time, undeveloped area north of the courthouse. In 1867, it was then moved to what is today Spencer Park.

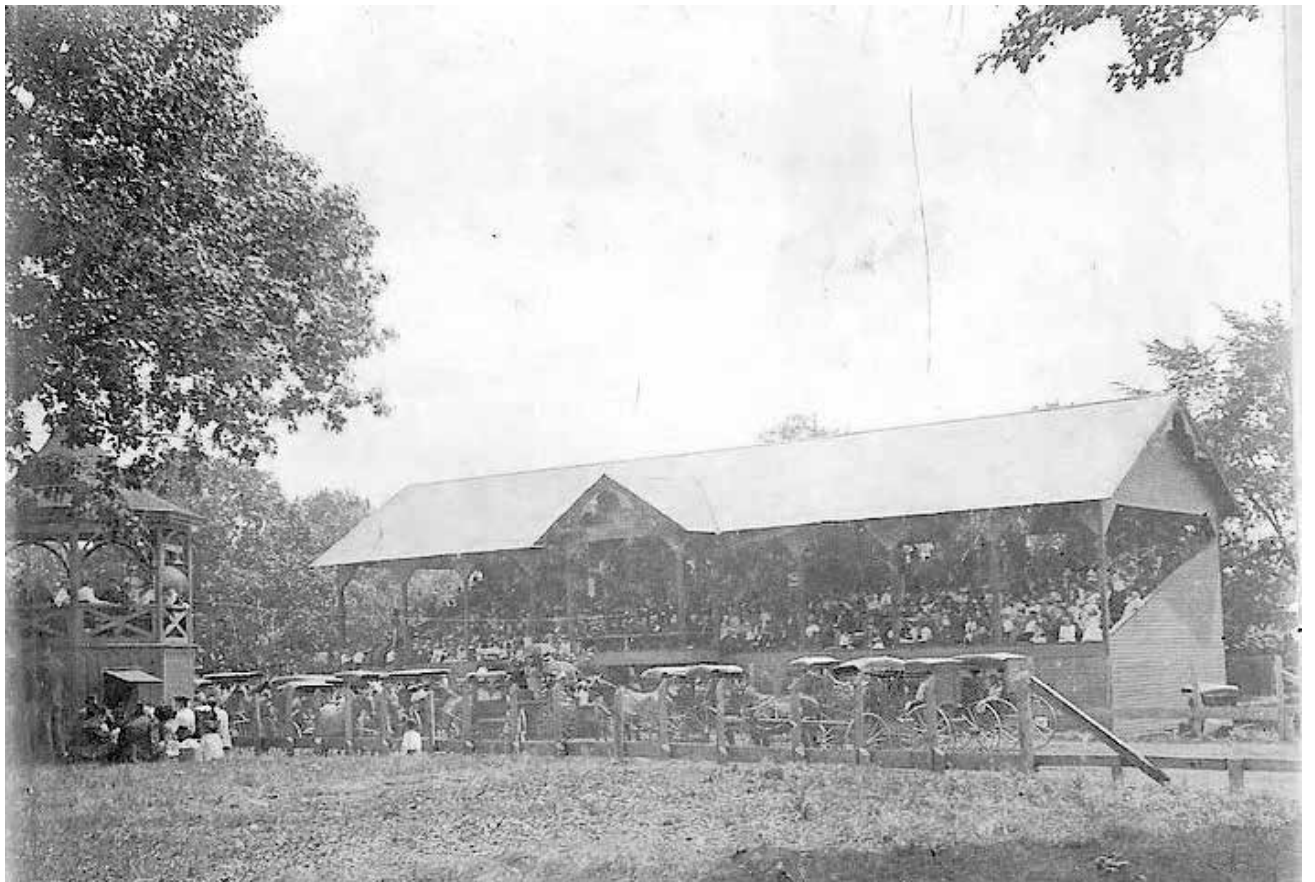
In 1900, the grandstand that we see in this picture was built there. The race-track used until then became more than a roped path to follow to the finish-line. Like the Derthick Opera House, it became another place—a summer place—for the community to gather.

In those early years, the economic opportunity that the country offered immigrants was exhibited in the products they produced both for amusement and for continued economic gain. One must remember that prior to the Civil War, immigrants, which was basically everyone, had very little sense of an American cultural heritage. Perhaps they were aware of the American Revolution, but not unless they went to a school in this country. James Madison or the Federalist Papers had no meaning in their lives. They did not believe that they were naturally endowed with wisdom as some might today. Their view was limited to the opportunity that the country provided: Allowing one to prosper with hard work. Immigrants came to America for the freedom to have that opportunity, as immigrants still do.

The fair was where a mixture of ideas about agriculture and commerce took place. Belvidere was merely a settlement, despite attempts to form a government, which did not happen until 1883. Boone County furnished a political structure to provide law and order.

With a central theme of agricultural advancement, the fair served as a catalyst for many other purposes, including social, political, and economic development.

The first president of the fair board, Allen Fuller, was a lawyer and banker who often brokered land deals. Allen Fuller established the first successful bank in Boone County in Belvidere. He was not a farmer, yet he served as the head of The Boone County Agricultural Society, the body which produced the Boone County Fair until 1938. The community was small, and the fair represented a time to celebrate the end of the production year, being held in early October. It was a time to rub shoulders and do business. In those early days of Boone County, things moved at a quicker pace. The pioneering spirit quickened the time between events, things changed rapidly, and growth followed. In less than 50 years, Belvidere went from nothing to most of what it is today. In those early years, those who rested lost, rather than being admired. After the Civil War, the sense of franchise took on a visceral meaning, particularly in Boone County, where so many



*The Grandstand at the Fair Grounds at the end of West Lincoln Avenue.*

young boys lost their lives in the war. The Union seemed more real than before. Government represented a greater purpose than regulating commerce. Slavery had ended, which many here strongly opposed. The idea of owning another person was incomprehensible to people who had no experience with it, and had based their whole lives on freedom of opportunity. There became a pride of belonging. News came in bits and pieces in newspapers and while nationalistic chauvinism did still ring out; but, by and large, the idea of a nation was an inter-community and personal emotion.

By the time this grandstand came into existence, the feelings of loss had calloused over - just as many a few weeks ago felt similar feelings of remembrance at the memorial renaming of Logan Avenue for Jeff Smith. Jeff lost his life in Vietnam in 1968.

Horse Racing was the main event at the fair. In the early 1950s, a match race is what saved the fair from going under.

It is impossible to know what for nearly 100 years, Boone Countians felt and experienced in this grandstand. If their experience was different than ours is today we can only guess. Nostalgia has told many lies, but one cannot help but be somewhat envious of the simplicity and closeness to nature that one must have felt living in this community.

The opening of an occasion in the grandstand with a brass, percussion, and string bands of local musicians playing the Battle Hymn of the Republic gave peace and purpose. Oratory without a microphone, where everyone expected quiet as an understood social courtesy.

The characters whose personalities bonded the community and lead the transitions into different events before the grandstand during fair days remain with us today.

## County Considers Measures to Preserve Fresh Water

By David Larson

On August 10th, The Boone County Board Finance Committee discussed the long-term supply of water in Boone County. Jason Thomason from the Illinois State Geological Survey, which is a part of the Prairie Research Institute at the University of Illinois, presented a project for the county to consider in order to preserve fresh water for Boone County.

Boone County has experienced a drop in the water level of its aquifer. This aquifer reaches from Wisconsin to Joliet. It is shaped like a cone, with its deepest level at Joliet.

At Joliet, the water level of the aquifer has dropped 800 feet. Joliet, which is heavily industrialized and uses a lot of water, and has been forced to spend several billion dollars to begin pulling water from Lake Michigan.

The outflow of water from Boone County through the aquifer is around 6 million gallons per day. Water that recharges the aquifer in Wisconsin eventually reaches Joliet. It is a matter of physics, according to Thomason.

In the last 100 years, the the aquifer has gotten smaller and smaller. The aquifer cone looks like a 400-foot-deep valley that flows southeast toward Joliet, according to Thomason.

Thomason proposed that Boone County consider doing a 3D geological survey of the county at a cost of \$450,000. This would provide the information the county needs to make critical decisions. Thomason explained that the work on the study would take a minimum of two years beginning with an aerial electromagnetic striping

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- Charles Dunbar, 78, Caledonia, August 13
- Ronald Ender, 79, Harvard, August 14
- James "Jim" Etes, 81, Poplar Grove, August 13
- Harold Knaack Jr., 83, Harvard, August 15
- John Meyer, 90, Harvard, August 18
- Janis Nimtz, 74, Belvidere, August 17
- Maurice "Morey" Palmer, 74, Harvard, August 14
- Penny Richardson, 79, Kirkland, August 12
- Paul Slabaugh, 87, Caledonia, August 12



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Each week, the Journal seeks to present a variety of voices.

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**Guest columns.** Community leaders are encouraged to submit guest columns consistent with our editorial guidelines for possible inclusion in the Journal.

**Opinions.** The opinions expressed in the Journal are those of their authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of The Boone County Journal management or ownership.

**Aquafer**

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of the counties surface by helicopter to collect an image much like an MRI used in medicine. The image would measure to a depth of 500 meters. He said that it would take a year to interpret the data and an additional year to create a comprehensive report.

The report would aid Boone County in developing a comprehensive plan to engineer a system of land usage that recharges, rather than diminishes, the aquifer. Boone County would be able to understand what it uses, loses, and contributes back to the aquifer. "This is a regional problem," Thomason said. In response to Board Member Ryan Curry, he stated that the Federal government has had its eye on the issue for a long time and, recently, both Illinois senators have earmarked funds to expand this kind of research.

Sherry Branson, District 3, commented that she has learned that Boone County is one of three of the most sensitive areas for ground water contamination in the State according to the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency. She noted

that, with several contaminated sites and a soil that radically recharges the aquifer, the county has, over a 5-year period, paid over \$310,000, for just one of the contaminated sites, to comply with IEPA testing requirements. She said that there was no end in sight to those recurring costs. It is her hope that R1 request and coordinate with McHenry and Winnebago Counties to expand the analysis of the aquifer.

Dave Wiltse, District 1, commented, "It was clear to me in the suburbs in the 70s that water was going to be an issue...It is astounding (that Joliet's water level has dropped 800 feet)." Wiltse also complained that the county has no way to dispose of sensitive material like batteries, which are very bad for the environment.

Karl Johnson, District 2, while asking what is the purpose of the study was, expressed his judgement that what we do here to recharge the aquifer is for the benefit of Joliet, which is experiencing hyper-industrial growth.

No motion was made on the issue.



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**Pritzker Signs Bills Expanding Protections For Native Americans**

*Signing ceremony takes place on land that could return to tribal hands*

By Peter Hancock Capitol News Illinois

Gov. JB Pritzker signed a package of bills Friday extending cultural protections to Native Americans in Illinois and requiring the teaching of Native American history in public schools.

At a bill signing ceremony in Schaumburg, Pritzker highlighted three historic sites that were significant in Native American history in Illinois – the Buel House along the Cherokee Trail of Tears in Pope County; the Pierre Menard Home in Randolph County; and the Kincaid Mounds that contain the remains of a Native American city – and said Illinois needs to acknowledge its role in a dark chapter of history.

"All three of these sites are located within our state's borders and they represent some of the ugliest parts of our history," he said. "It's up to us to right the wrongs of the past and to chart a new course, one that educates our people so we won't repeat the sins of the past."

House Bill 3413, the Human Remains Protection Act, establishes procedures for handling human remains and gravesites that are uncovered in Illinois. It also authorizes the Department of Natural Resources to work with the Illinois State Museum and representatives of tribes with historical ties to Illinois to establish a cemetery for the reburial of repatriated Native American remains and materials.

Illinois has the second-largest collection of unrepatriated Native American remains in the U.S., housed by the Illinois State Museum. The museum holds that collection despite the 1990 passage of the federal Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

Senate Bill 1446 requires school districts to allow students to wear items of cultural, ethnic or religious significance at their high school graduation. It was prompted in part by an incident in 2022 when a Native American student, Nimkii Curley, at Evanston Township High School was told he could not walk across the stage to receive his diploma with an eagle feather and bead work on his cap and gown.

And House Bill 1633 mandates instruction

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**Pritzker**

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in Native American history in all social studies courses that teach American history and government.

Among those attending the bill signing Friday was Joseph “Zeke” Rupnick, chairman of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation. That nation was once based in DeKalb County, Illinois, but the U.S. General Land Office seized that land in 1849 and sold it at a public auction.

The nation is now headquartered in northeast Kansas where it operates a hotel and casino, but legislation pending in Congress would return more than 130 acres to the Potawatomi and provide them with about \$50 million in settlement funds that could be used to reacquire additional land on or near the original reservation.

“The bills signed here into law today make it clear that Illinois understands, it is not enough for us to merely exist in a country, in a state built on Native American land, but we must be included as part of the society with equal rights and respect,” Rupnik said.

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## As Perjury Trial Draws To Close, Ex-Madigan Aide Leans on Memory Science, Wife In Defense

*Closing arguments expected Wednesday in trial of Tim Mapes*

*By Hannah Meisel Capitol News Illinois*

In more than two weeks of his obstruction of justice and perjury trial, one fact about the long-time chief of staff to former Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan came up time and again: Tim Mapes was detail-oriented.

Mapes not only served as Madigan’s top aide for more than 25 years, but he also worked for two decades as executive director of the Democratic Party of Illinois under Madigan’s chairmanship. He also spent the last seven years of his career – until it abruptly ended in 2018 after sexual harassment allegations against him – as clerk of the Illinois House, making each day of legislative session run in the manner Madigan wanted it.

Seven witnesses who worked with Mapes in Springfield testified that he was an incredibly detail-oriented person; a former state representative who served for 31 years described his attention to detail as “meticulous.”

Federal prosecutors asked that question of their witnesses as a way to bolster their case that Mapes lied to a grand jury in 2021. The grand jury was investigating Madigan and his inner circle, including Mike

McClain, an influential former lobbyist and a close friend of the former speaker.

Mapes – who was testifying under an immunity order – repeatedly told the grand jury that he either couldn’t recall or didn’t know that McClain was working on Madigan’s behalf after he retired from lobbying in late 2016.

After eight days of the prosecution making its case – including playing the two-plus hours of Mapes’ March 2021 grand jury testimony and dozens of wiretapped calls that seemed to contradict his answers – the defense on Tuesday tried to cast Mapes’ detail-oriented reputation in a new light.

Mapes’ attorneys hired an expert witness in learning and memory, who told the jury that factors like stress or busyness can negatively affect a person’s ability to encode and store memories.

Illinois State University psychology professor Dawn McBride said that a person who is detail-oriented probably has a good short-term memory, but that has no bearing on the person’s long-term memory.

“Having a good working memory may mean you are paying attention to many things at once, so more things get caught up in that bottle neck and not make it into long-term memory,” McBride said.

On cross-examination, however, Assistant U.S. Attorney Julia Schwartz asked McBride if forgetting the specifics of a conversation is “different than forgetting what your best friend was doing three years ago?”

“Yes, that’s different,” McBride acknowledged.

McBride also acknowledged it was possible for someone to “fake memory loss,” as Schwartz put it, but declined to answer questions the prosecutor posed about a psychological concept known as “malingering,” repeating that she was not a clinician and didn’t have expertise about that subject. The fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disease defines malingering as “intentional production of false or grossly exaggerated physical or psychological symptoms, motivated by external incentives.”

The jury has heard McClain and Mapes on many wiretapped calls from 2018 and early 2019 – both before and after Mapes’ abrupt departure from his jobs – discussing what was on their professional to-do lists.

McClain told Mapes about how he was helping Madigan, and even consulted with Mapes in late 2018, roughly five months after Mapes was forced to resign, about House committee assignments.

On one wiretapped call from May 2018, McClain told Mapes about an “assignment” he had to get the General Assembly to approve a land

transfer from the state to the city of Chicago so a developer could buy the parcel and build a hotel in the city’s Chinatown neighborhood.

In another call from October 2018, McClain told Mapes that his “assignment is to tell Lou Lang he has no life in the House anymore,” referring to former state Rep. Lou Lang, D-Skokie. Lang testified last week that after a conversation with McClain the following month, he decided to retire, as he understood McClain’s message that he “really oughta move on” to be coming from Madigan.

“Mr. McClain was the person who was dispatched to tell members things that (Madigan) didn’t wanna tell them,” Lang said.

The obstruction of justice charge alleges Mapes gave false testimony about more than a dozen topics, including whether he knew McClain communicated with Lang in 2018, with some of those communications at Madigan’s direction.

“I have no knowledge or recall of that,” Mapes told the grand jury when prosecutors asked if he knew whether McClain was in contact with Lang.

Prosecutors cited Mapes’ answers to seven questions during his grand jury testimony as the basis for the single count of perjury. That included his answer to a question about whether he knew McClain “acted in any capacity as a messenger for (Madigan)” from 2017 onward.

Mapes answered that he was “not aware of any” such circumstances.

The defense on Tuesday also called a former Democratic Party of Illinois employee to testify. Emily Wurth served as the state party’s operations manager and later the chief financial officer after Mapes’ departure. She testified that she did not believe a fundraising program Mapes and McClain had started for politically vulnerable Democratic candidates was an assignment from Madigan.

“I had always understood it to be something that Tim and Mr. McClain did in support of the speaker, but not for the speaker,” she said.

After Mapes’ ouster from Madigan’s orbit in early June 2018, Wurth said she was worried about his mental health “because mine wasn’t good.”

Another person who was very worried during that time: Mapes’ wife, Bronwyn Rains. Rains testified on Tuesday about the severe depression she watched her husband fall into after he was “ejected” from his job, as she put it.

“He was in a dark place,” Rains said. “I was working during the day, so when I would come home, he was still in the same position, more or less, in the darkened basement than where I left him in the morning. That speaks volumes, both as a wife and as a practitioner.”

*Continued on page 4*



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## Mapes

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Rains is both a clinical psychologist and professor in Springfield, but the judge told the jury to disregard her reference to her career, as she was not on the stand as an expert witness.

Eventually, Mapes established his own consulting firm, though he only ever got one contract, Rains testified. So she urged him “to do something that was completely out of his wheelhouse,” she said.

Mapes got a part-time job at UPS filling the gas tanks on trucks at night so they’d be ready to go for the next day, and then a job as a driver transporting workers to and from barges on Illinois waterways.

Rains also testified that the Mapes family was not as close to the McClain family as the prosecution had portrayed them to be. Later, however, the defense played a wiretapped call in which McClain told Wurth that the Mapes family visited the McClains in Quincy “at least once every summer.”

The defense also produced a chart summarizing the most frequent callers to and from McClain’s wiretapped cell phone in 2018 and 2019. Defense attorneys sought to show that the 60 calls – which included a few voicemails – between McClain and Mapes paled in comparison with the number of times McClain spoke to others on the phone.

Former state Rep. David McSweeney, R-Barrington Hills, was the most frequently listed contact on McClain’s list with 622 calls between the two men, although the vast majority of them weren’t actually answered. Number one in completed and recorded calls with McClain was John Bradley, a former Democratic House member-turned-lobbyist. Madigan also made the top 10, though his son Andrew ranked higher in the number of calls both made and recorded by the FBI on McClain’s wiretapped phone.

The trial continues at 9 a.m. Wednesday, when the jury will get their instructions and sit through several hours of closing arguments before being sent off to deliberate.

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## State to Put \$20 Million Toward Grants for Grocers, Research into Food Insecurity

*New law aims to alleviate ‘food deserts’ throughout the state*

*By Andrew Adams Capitol News Illinois*

Communities across Illinois that lack access to nearby stores that sell high quality food may soon see that change.

Gov. JB Pritzker on Friday signed a bill that sets up a program to distribute \$20 million for grants and technical assistance for grocery stores as well as funding research into food insecurity.

The grants will go to grocery stores that are independently owned, including for-profit and nonprofit organizations, co-ops and grocery stores owned by units of local government.

The program’s proponents say supporting gro-

cers with state funds will be a boon for residents and struggling local economies.

“When our residents struggle to keep a roof over their head, can’t put food on the table, or have to choose between paying for basic medical care and keeping the lights on – that’s a failure of the system,” Pritzker said in a Friday news release.

According to 2021 data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, at least 3 million Illinois residents live in food deserts as defined in the new law, although the state’s Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity can designate additional areas as food deserts.

Data collected this spring by the U.S. Census Bureau also revealed that food insecurity affects multiracial, Hispanic and Black households at higher rates than white households.

Officials declined to announce a specific timeline for when the grants will become available but said that updates would be published on the DCEO website when about the grant application process is finalized.

“We’re moving as fast as we can because we know there’s a need across the state,” Pritzker said at a Friday news conference.

One of the bill’s chief sponsors, freshman state Rep. Mary Beth Canty, D-Arlington Heights, said in an interview with Capitol News Illinois that she also views the bill as a step toward reducing violence.

“When there’s a lack of investment in communities, that’s when you start to see incidents of violence rise,” Canty said.

She also noted that she hopes to revisit food availability through further legislation or other state programs.

“Some of the things we’ve talked about are looking at this from a public health perspective,” Canty said. “On the business side of things, we’re looking at our licensing structures.”

While the Grocery Initiative originated among Democrats, it passed the Senate unanimously in May, something Pritzker credited to Sen. Dale Fowler, R-Harrisburg. Fowler noted that areas of his rural district struggle with food access.

“An entire county in the 59th district that I represent does not have one single grocery store,” Fowler said on Friday.

In the House, however, there was more conservative opposition leading to a 96-17 vote, splitting the Republican party.

Among the dissenters was Rep. Martin McLaughlin, R-Barrington Hills, who took a hardline stance against the bill, saying the proposal was a “horrendous idea” during floor debate on the bill in May and likening government support for grocery stores to socialist countries like Venezuela and Cuba.

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## Unity – Not Trump – Is the Message at Illinois State Fair Republican Day

*Former president present on signage, rarely in speeches*

*By Jerry Nowicki Capitol News Illinois*

During Republican Day at the Illinois State Fair Thursday, state party leaders sought a message of unity ahead of the 2024 presidential election.

One apparent strategy in driving home that message was to not mention former President Donald Trump, who is facing four criminal indictments. While Trump’s name and political slogans were visible on signage and clothing at the fair rally, the speakers generally kept their focus on the policies of Democratic Gov. JB Pritzker.

Senate Republican Leader John Curran, R-Downers Grove, criticized several Pritzker policies, alluding to the passage of a criminal justice reform law that eliminated cash bail and the governor’s recent veto of a bill that would have allowed construction of new nuclear power in Illinois.

“Gov. Pritzker thinks he, not judges and our heroes in law enforcement, should decide which victims deserve justice and which criminals walk free,” he said, later adding Pritzker is “more concerned about special interests than reducing energy costs for families and businesses.”

Curran’s Senate Republican Caucus holds just 19 seats compared to 40 for Democrats. The state House has a 78-40 Democratic majority, and Democrats hold all statewide elected offices.

Curran contended that the way to turn the tide in the General Assembly is “one seat, one door, one new voter at a time.”

“We don’t need everyone to agree with us on every issue. We just need them to vote Republican,” he said. “Because the only way to really change anything is by winning general elections and getting more people, good people in our Statehouse.”

With “better teamwork and less infighting,” state Republican Party Chair Don Tracy said during a speech to the Republican State Central Committee prior to the rally at the fair, the GOP can be “the voice of fiscal sanity, common sense and reason.” He contrasted that to Democrats, who he claimed are touting an “exceedingly radical agenda.”

House Minority Leader Tony McCombie, of Savanna, echoed that sentiment.

“I think it’s extremely important that Republicans don’t spend time beating up on other Republicans,” McCombie said at the committee meeting.

But the minority party is navigating a political landscape that, for many voters, still revolves around Trump, who is once again seeking the GOP presidential nomination – and leading in many polls.

The former president was most recently indicted this week in Fulton County, Georgia with 18 other individuals for allegedly leading a criminal conspiracy to overturn the 2020 presidential election.

While the GOP General Assembly leaders didn’t mention Trump in their speeches, they were asked about the former president’s role in the party by reporters.

Regarding Trump’s indictments, Republicans often pivoted to corruption charges faced by Democratic Illinois politicians. Former House speak-

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**GOP**

from page 4

er and Democratic Party chair Michael Madigan awaits trial on charges that he ran a criminal enterprise through his various positions of power, exchanging legislative wins in Springfield for benefits to his law business and his associates. His chief of staff, Tim Mapes, is currently on trial in Chicago on perjury and obstruction of justice charges.

“It’s gonna play itself out in the court system,” Curran said of Trump’s legal cases. “Like we’re seeing the corruption trial coming out right now with the Madigan machine. So, I mean, that’ll play itself out. We have a process going on right now, in the primary, you know, we’ll see where that ends up.”

Tracy questioned the timing of the Trump indictments and the party of the prosecutors that brought them.

“I can’t figure out what these Democrat prosecutors are trying to do with Trump,” Tracy said. “I can’t figure it out. They’re trying to take him down or promote him by helping him raise money and be in the news all the time.”

But he appreciated the prosecution of Illinois Democrats.

“With Madigan and Tim Mapes, you know, I’m so grateful that they are doing that prosecution, which was started by a Republican appointee, a Trump appointee, John Lausch, started all that and fortunately, it has continued. But it sure does seem to make a difference if you’re Democrat if your last name is not Biden.”

President Joe Biden’s son Hunter is facing criminal charges for firearm possession and receiving more than \$1.5 million annually in 2017 and 2018 on which he did not pay income taxes. U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland appointed a special counsel in the case last week.

U.S. Rep Darin LaHood, who hails from the Peoria area, suggested the younger Biden received different treatment in the legal system than Trump has.

“I’m not in the business of saying who should run for president and not run for president,” he said when asked if the party would have a better chance with someone other than Trump as nominee. “I will say this as a former federal prosecutor, I believe in the rule of law, but I don’t believe in the unequal application of the law.”

Other party leaders also deflected on the question of whether Trump’s presence on the ballot would hurt the party in 2024.

“That remains to be seen,” Tracy said curtly.

Illinois’ National GOP Committeewoman Demetra DeMonte, meanwhile, strategized on how to deal with the issue of abortion.

“Abortion is a topic that kind of sounds tough to talk about,” she said. “And that’s pretty much what our candidates did in 2022.”

While the U.S. Supreme Court overturning Roe v. Wade put the decision on abortion rights back to the states, DeMonte said, Republicans should push back against claims that it did more than that. And they should pressure Democrats to define the acceptable limits for abortion, she said.

“The Democrats won by spewing lies in 2022,” she said. “Make no mistake, abortion will be their number one on their playbook in ’24. Why change a winning strategy? We are the ones that must change – we Republicans must put Democrats on the defensive on abortion.”

In another apparent shift from past elections, Republican rallygoers embraced vote-by-mail strategies – a component of recent elections that Trump has repeatedly cited in his debunked voter fraud claims.

“We will be working hard to bank as many

pre-Election Day votes as possible next year, because the political party that votes for weeks and months will mathematically beat the party that only votes for one day,” Tracy said.

Later he contended it wasn’t a shift in party strategy and Republicans had embraced vote-by-mail in previous elections, even though “it’s really hard to have a safe or secure election vote by mail.”

“But that is the rule in Illinois,” he said. “We gotta live by the rules before we can change it to a more fair, secure election system.”

*Capitol News Illinois is a nonprofit, nonpartisan news service covering state government. It is distributed to hundreds of print and broadcast outlets statewide. It is funded primarily by the Illinois Press Foundation and the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, along with major contributions from the Illinois Broadcasters Foundation and Southern Illinois Editorial Association.*

## Trump, Rauner, Policy Wins on Democrats’ Minds During State Fair’s Political Festivities

*Pritzker calls Illinois a ‘beacon for national success’ when it comes to 2024 elections*

By Jerry Nowicki Capitol News Illinois

Donald Trump and Bruce Rauner remained popular punching bags for Illinois Democrats as they rallied in Springfield Wednesday, while the party also touted a long list of recent policy wins.

“Illinois Democrats have done more in the last five years to push back on the wave of authoritarian, anti-democratic MAGA Republican nonsense than in any other place in the country,” Gov. JB Pritzker said at an Illinois Democratic County Chairs Association event.

The annual brunch is one of the largest gatherings of state Democrats, which takes place prior to Governor’s Day festivities at the Illinois State Fair. Republicans will have their own rally on Thursday.

Democrats highlighted that Trump is currently facing four criminal indictments, including allegations that he tried to overturn the 2020 election after he was defeated by President Joe Biden. On Monday, a grand jury in Georgia charged Trump and 18 others on racketeering counts, alleging that the effort to overturn the election in that state were part of an organized conspiracy.

“Let me make one thing clear: Everyone indicted or accused in America is entitled to a presumption of innocence and every right under the due process clause of our Constitution,” U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Illinois, said at the IDCCA event. “But having said that, the charges against Donald Trump are not just another political wrinkle in the campaign – the charges against Donald Trump are the most serious charges ever made against a public official in America.”

Pritzker said Illinoisans rejected Trump and statewide candidates that associated themselves with him because Illinoisans “have a low tolerance for bullshit,” riling up the crowd at

the Bank of Springfield convention center.

“You know the old story about the emperor who had no clothes?” Pritzker said. “Well, he couldn’t get 10 feet in the South Side Irish Parade or in the Bud Billiken parade or at the State Fair without someone here telling him he’s naked.”

Pritzker contended that Illinois’ rejection of Trump, along with its actions to bolster unions, protect abortion rights and control guns, all contributed to Illinois being chosen as the site of the 2024 Democratic National Convention.

“We are a beacon for national success,” Pritzker said. “We are Barbie when everyone else is just Ken.”

As for Rauner, Pritzker referred to his predecessor’s administration as “co-conspirators of incompetence.” And Senate President Don Harmon, D-Oak Park, recalled “the bad old days when Gov. Rauner was here and everything was broken,” referring to a line often used by Rauner to describe state government.

Harmon and House Speaker Emanuel “Chris” Welch, D-Hillside, took the stage together, listing off Democratic policy wins, from increased education funding to balanced state budgets to energy reforms aimed at creating a carbon-free energy grid by 2045.

“You won’t hear anything of substance from the Republicans tomorrow,” Welch said. “And that’s because they want to take us back. But we refuse to go back.”

Still, the speeches were shorter and milder than previous iterations of the State Fair’s political days, as the next general election is 15 months away.

The IDCCA event’s featured speaker was U.S. Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto, D-Nevada. Her narrow reelection in 2022 helped Democrats keep a majority in the U.S. Senate.

She said her constituents were motivated by the U.S. Supreme Court overturning the landmark Roe v. Wade decision, which had for nearly 50 years protected access to abortion care nationwide. Even though Nevada codified Roe v. Wade in state law in 1990, Cortez Masto said she heard from constituents who were concerned about a potential federal ban on the procedure.

“Everywhere I went around the state – I don’t care if you were Democrat or Republican, non-partisan, I don’t care if you’re from an urban area or a rural area – everyone in Nevada was concerned,” she said. “They knew this was a threat to our freedoms.”

Cortez Masto said in 2024, “Democrats need to show up and stand with working families. We need to continue to work to protect our reproductive freedoms to fight for our democracy.”

Durbin, meanwhile, said when it comes to Democratic enthusiasm for 2024, “a great deal depends on the Republican nominee.”

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## Democrats

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“If it turns out to be Trump, trust me, we’ll be fired up and ready to go.”

He later clarified that he expects enthusiasm regardless of the candidate, but he acknowledged, “Trump takes us to a different level.”

The Democrats’ fair festivities in Springfield were ongoing at the same time as the federal perjury trial of the party’s longtime executive director, Tim Mapes, who left that post in 2018 amid harassment allegations.

Mapes also served as the chief of staff to former Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan for more than 25 years, and his perjury charges pertain to the alleged wrongdoing of his former

boss. Madigan faces his own federal trial in April 2024 on allegations that he ran a criminal enterprise through his various positions of power, exchanging legislative wins in Springfield for benefits to his law business and his associates.

Asked about those indictments, the party’s current leadership has largely said they are looking forward, not backward, and that all bad actors should be held accountable.

“I’m not gonna deny we have our, you know – is there corruption? It’s there, but they’ve got their day in court,” Democratic Party of Illinois Chair Lisa Hernandez said in an interview. “My concentration is bringing this party to another level. It’s a new chapter.”

Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias said he

didn’t ever consider Madigan among his fans, and the former speaker’s name “doesn’t really come up” as his office is looking for ways to increase transparency.

“Yeah, I think people are sick and tired of scandal corruption,” he said. “So anything we can do to increase transparency and let people know exactly what happens at every level is important.”

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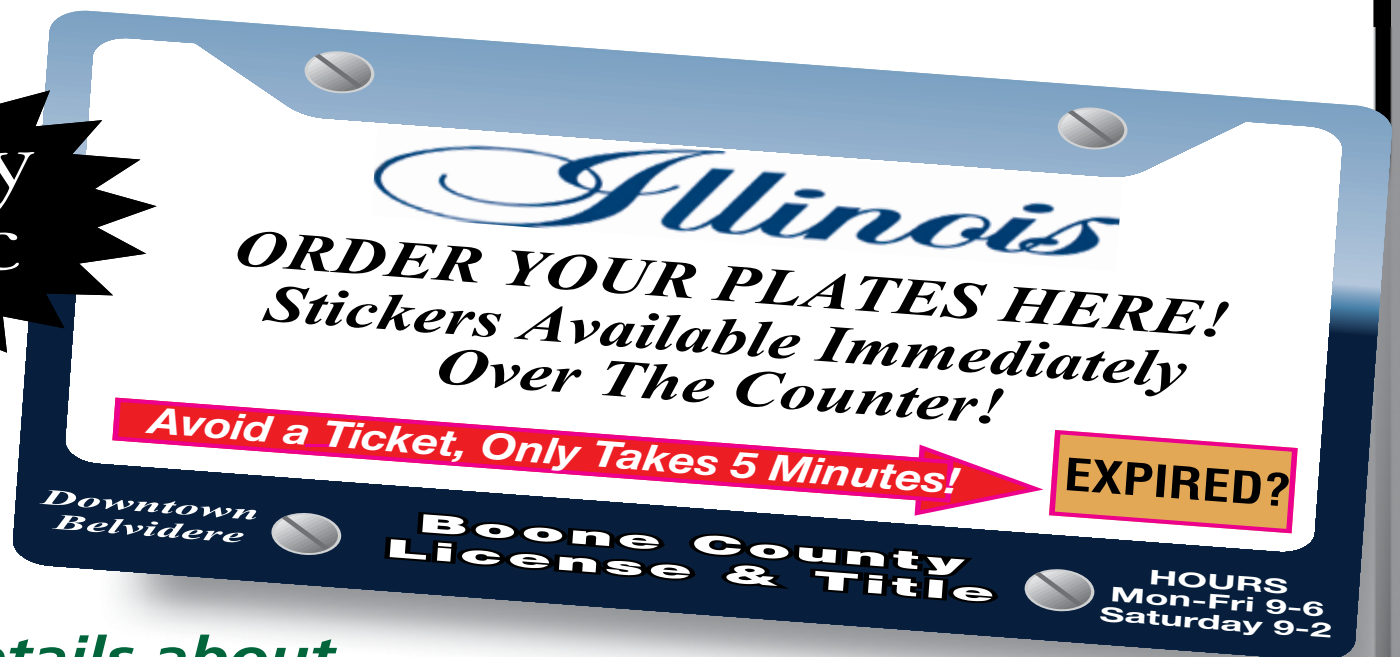
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