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Belvidere To Get New Christmas Decorations

By David Larson

In Belvidere, Christmas in 2025 looks to be the brightest since the 1970s. In a post-Christmas season sale, Belvidere has been able to save close to \$50,000 to update its holiday street decorations.

Belvidere has been shopping for new decorations, and as recently as last year, found the cost to be around \$80,000. Belvidere has had a budget austerity policy for some time and could never justify that expense. Comments from alderpersons ranged from “it is long overdue” to a desire to use the existing lights at least one more year.

One universally-shared sentiment was that Belvidere should work to maintain and improve the annual Belvidere Christmas Walk experience. That also underscored by Mayor Morris prior to the vote.

In a report by Director of Public Works Anderson, it was estimated that it had been at least 40 years since Christmas decorations had been replaced. Alderman Stevens followed up, commenting that he remembered seeing them in the 1970s. Stevens is a retired Belvidere fireman who served during that time, and had familiarity with them then, which would push the time closer to 50 years ago since Belvidere has had new decorations.

Anderson went on to report that the decorations are beyond their useful life. They have become a public safety hazard. Some don't work, some have frayed wires, and one caught on fire due to faulty wiring.

Morris said that as recently as last year the cost to replace them was in the area of \$80,000, but in this post-season sale the time to buy is now, giving his full support to the purchase.

The final vote was unanimous to replace Belvidere's Christmas decorations for Christmas 2025.

State Lawmakers Weigh TikTok's Value

Democrats, Republicans share insight into the app's current state

By Bridgette Fox and
UIS Public Affairs Reporting (PAR)

When shortform video platform TikTok shut down service earlier this month, the move surprised some Illinois politicians who use the app to educate, reach constituents and follow trends.

Others had abandoned the app months before it was shut down for less than 24 hours.

TikTok, a social media app owned by China-based company ByteDance, has been the center of political controversy since 2019 when a federal probe into its ownership began.

In 2022, a report from BuzzFeed News showed ByteDance employees based in China

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Illinois Students Remain at or Above National Average

'Nation's Report Card' shows achievement still not recovered from pandemic. (Boone County continues to lag behind the pack)

by Peter Hancock

Fourth and eighth grade students in Illinois generally scored as well or better than the national average in reading and math, according to results of the latest round of national test results. But their scores remain below pre-pandemic levels and, in the case of reading, continue to decline steadily.

The results also showed significant achievement gaps in Illinois between racial and ethnic groups, especially between white and Black students, which were among the widest achievement gaps in the country.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress, often referred to as the Nation's Report Card, is a set of standardized tests administered every two years to a representative sample of fourth and eighth students nationwide. The program is mandated by federal law and is managed by the National Center for Education Statistics, within the U.S. Department of Education and the Institute of Education Sciences.

Because the tests are administered uniformly nationwide, it allows for accurate comparisons between states and over time. However, because it is administered to only a sample of students, the results are subject to a margin of error and so minor differences between one set of scores and another are sometimes not statistically significant. In Illinois, the 2024 tests involved approximately 150 schools and 2,700 – 2,800 students per subject for each grade.

Eighth grade

Results of testing done in 2024, which were released Tuesday, showed that among eighth grade students in Illinois, the average math score rose two points, to 277 out of 500, compared to 2022. That was five points higher than the national average, which was down one point from the 2022 exam.

But both the state and national averages were lower than they were before the pandemic in 2019. The averages were also below their peak more than a decade earlier, in 2013, when the average score in Illinois was 285, one point above the national average at that time.

Illinois also saw an increase in the percentage of students scoring in the top two achievement categories in math, “advanced” and “proficient.”

Nearly one-third of those tested in 2024, 32%, scored at or above the “proficient” level in math. That's the level at which an eighth grader can solve Pythagorean theorem problems and solve problems involving capacity, area and weight, according to NAEP officials. That was 5 percentage points higher than in 2022 and 5 points higher than the national average.

The percentage of Illinois eighth graders scoring at or above the “advanced” level also rose to 11%. That's the level at which a student can perform tasks such as analyzing and critiquing “graphical displays to justify appropriateness and solve problems,” according to test officials.

The average Illinois eighth grade reading score, meanwhile, stood at 262, unchanged from two years earlier, and slightly above the national average of 257.

In a statement, Gov. JB Pritzker said those scores for eighth graders were cause for celebration.

“Illinois students are proving what we've always known – that when we support our schools, our kids thrive,” he said. “The 2024 Nation's Report Card shows our 8th graders outperforming the national average in both math and reading, a testament to the great strides Illinois students are making academically.”

Fourth grade

There was less cause for celebration, though, in results of the fourth grade exams where average reading scores dropped, both in Illinois and nationally, to 214.

That was a four-point drop over two years in the average Illinois score and a two-point drop in the national average.

Further, both the state and national averages have been on a steady, continuous decline since 2015, when the Illinois average was 222, one point higher than the national average.

According to the National Assessment Governing Board – which oversees the assessment – no state saw gains in NAEP reading scores in either fourth or eighth grade.

There was no change in the average fourth grade math score in Illinois, which stood at 237. Only 30% of those taking the test scored at or above the “proficient” level, down 3 percentage points from two years earlier.

Achievement gaps

The 2024 results also showed significant achievement gaps among different subgroups of students in Illinois.

In fourth grade math, for example, there was a 32-point gap between the average score for white and Black students – 248 for white students versus 214 for Black students. Only Wisconsin and Washington, D.C., had statistically significant wider gaps.

Eighth grade math assessments had a similar 32-point gap between the average score for white students, 286, and Black students, 254. Only three other states and Washington, D.C., had statistically significant wider gaps.

The gap between white and Hispanic students, at 23 points, was slightly smaller but still significant. Only five other states and Washington, D.C., had statistically significant wider gaps.

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Lawmakers Introduce Bills to Punish Sexual Assault in Schools, End Fossil Fuel Investments

Bills are among more than 2,000 filed this month

by Ben Szalinski, Jade Aubrey

Republican lawmakers put forward a proposal to expel students who sexually assault another student at school.

Current Illinois law has no provisions requiring schools to expel a student who commits sexual violence or assault against another student at school. However, the law says that if a student brings firearms, knives, brass knuckles, or any other weapon that can be used to cause bodily harm into a school, they must be expelled for at least a year.

Sen. Steve McClure, R-Springfield, said the goal of Senate Bill 98 is to force schools to confront and deal with issues of sexual assault at a school or any activity or event related to a school.

He said this issue was brought to his attention when he caught wind of an incident that involved a 10-year-old girl in Taylorville.

The girl's mother, Ashley Peden, spoke alongside McClure at a Capitol news conference on Wednesday in support of the bill. Peden, who is a teacher in Springfield, said the way that the Taylorville school district handled the assault against her daughter caused her to rethink her decision to be a teacher.

"The lack for safety of all students has been a concern of mine from the very beginning, so much that at one point I was asked, 'are you worried about your daughter or the other students,'" she said. "To which I quickly replied, 'I'm worried about every single one of them, aren't you?'"

Peden said that between late January and early February 2024, her 10-year-old daughter was sexually assaulted by an older student who was 14 years old on their school bus and at their bus stop. The assaults increased in severity every day until the final assault, where her daughter was chased from her bus stop and raped.

After reporting the incident, Peden said she obtained an emergency order of protection for her daughter and brought it to the principal of Taylorville Junior High School, who made a "safety plan" for her daughter. Peden said the plan prohibited the accused student from coming into contact with her daughter at school, which the order of protection already called for.

"This safety plan was shared with the bus company, my daughter's fifth grade teacher and office staff," Peden said. "No one else knew of the assaults. No one else knew of the safety plan."

"As an educator myself, I have been a part of a situation where all staff needed to know about something about a student. It was as simple as an email saying, 'Student A should not be in the presence of Student B, we need to keep them apart.' I asked for it to be just as generic as that, and I was not granted that," she said.

Peden said after several meetings with the school board and multiple court orders, the student was removed from her daughter's school and sent to an alternative school for the rest of the spring semester. However, in August, she received a phone call about the student's reentry into her daughter's school and again asked the school to remove the student.

"We have laws where a student gets expelled for bringing a weapon on school grounds, but what about cases like this, when the student's body is the weapon?" Peden said. "This boy continuously brought his weapon to school on the bus and to the bus stop. This is not acceptable. This is not ensuring safety for all students."

McClure said the bill is aimed at stopping schools from sweeping issues of sexual assault under the rug.

"What's happening right now is silence in these schools," McClure said. "Because they're not telling the parents in some cases, and other students aren't even aware of what's happening. That's a danger to them as well."

Rep. C.D. Davidsmeyer, R-Murrayville, filed an identical bill in the House. He said this issue needs to be addressed in schools across the state.

"It's not punishment for the individual who committed the crime," he said. "It's to protect all of our kids and to ensure that the people who committed the crimes get the help that they need."

Divesting pensions from fossil fuels

Some Illinois Democrats are pushing the General Assembly to pass legislation that would

require the state's five pension systems to divest from fossil fuel companies.

Under Senate Bill 130, the pension systems for legislators, state employees, university employees, teachers and judges would be prohibited from investing in any fossil fuel companies or their affiliates. Pension systems would be required to complete divestment in fossil fuel companies by 2030 but would be prohibited from making any new investments in them once the bill is signed by the governor.

Fossil fuel companies covered under the legislation include subsidiaries, affiliates and parent companies of 200 publicly traded companies with the largest fuel reserves in the world, the 30 largest public companies owning coal-fired power plants and any company with fossil fuel operations at the core of its business.

Supporters of the bill said it is important Illinois not financially support fossil fuel companies as the state moves toward clean energy goals. Those goals include requiring coal and gas power plants close by 2045.

"It is really imperative for the state pension funds to be more mindful and aligned with the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act that we made a commitment to, and this will align with that," bill sponsor Sen. Adriane Johnson, D-Buffalo Grove, said at a news conference.


Rep. Will Guzzardi, D-Chicago, a budget leader in the House, said he believes divesting from fossil fuel companies will ultimately lead to better investment outcomes for pension systems as lawmakers search for ways to improve pension liabilities. Illinois has a \$143.7 billion unfunded pension liability, according to the Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability.

"Divesting our pension funds from fossil fuels will increase returns in the long run," Guzzardi said. "Not only is it aligned with our goals on climate, but it is aligned with our goals on guaranteeing a safe retirement for all public employees."

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OBITUARIES

- Shirley Arand, 89, Belvidere, Jan. 30
- Debbie Cole, 66, Belvidere, Jan. 30
- Pauline Drews, 75, Belvidere, Jan. 23
- Fred Eklund, 73, Belvidere, Jan. 30
- Daniel Evans, 73, Belvidere, Jan. 31
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- Lance Jacobson, 84, Cherry Valley, Jan. 31
- Charles Meyers, 79, Formerly of Belvidere, Jan. 26
- Lloyd Meyers Jr., 75, Poplar Grove, Jan. 31
- Henry Polz III, 70, Poplar Grove, Jan. 31
- Gayle Rees "Honey", 69, Formerly of Harvard, Jan. 27
- Patricia Sigh, 67, Belvidere, Jan. 27



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Bills from page 2

Fossil fuel investments underperform other types of investments, according to Guzzardi. A University of Waterloo study found American pension funds would see greater investment returns without investments in the energy sector.

It's not clear how much of Illinois' pensions are invested in fossil fuel companies, Guzzardi said, which is why lawmakers are using the bill to ask the pension systems to disclose their investments in fossil fuels.

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Letters to the Editor

Belvidere Wins Places!

Folks are celebrating Stellantis's most recent announcement to reopen the Belvidere Assembly - and I'm glad to hear it too. Regardless of the type of vehicle produced at the plant, having those union jobs back in Belvidere is a great thing. However, as someone who celebrated a similar win back in November 2023 can attest - it's not over till the cars roll off the line.

It feels good to take the win, to publish newspaper ads aligning your side with the exciting announcement. Finally "they" have seen the light and our side has won. Maybe we even feel a bit like our leadership and local efforts made the difference. That's how I felt when the first announcement was made and it was such a big deal that we got a visit from POTUS himself. No visit this time, alas. The reality for all of us who live here is this: billionaires and giant corporations will ultimately decide what happens to the plant, and 2027 is a long way off.

I congratulate those who worked in the interim between November 2023 and now to salvage a deal to open the plant. I got to meet several of them last year and have great respect for their efforts. I'll state again that getting those jobs back here for working families as soon as possible is something we all want. Since we're all speculating on future possibilities though, I would like to add one from my own imagination.

The year is 2035 and the plant has been operational now for a little over 5 years. There were some initial delays due to demand in the industry being soft. Now it is up and running, usually at full capacity. Demand for light gas trucks hasn't taken off as expected - but domestic sales are decent. Turns out the rest of the world believes climate change is real, and electric cars have continued to grow in popularity. The fallout from tariff wars has allowed electric vehicles from foreign competitors to gain a strategic edge on American companies. We're glad the plant is running now, our local economy depends on it - but the internal combustion engine is starting to feel like legacy technology. Plotted on a product life cycle chart, it is a product in decline. Conversely, electric vehicles are in their growth stage. Rather than

gaining a product whose viability stretches into the future, some feel that we've been saddled with technology at the end of its life. How long will we have until the billionaires and corporations return to upend our community again? Perhaps we didn't win back in 2025, but simply placed.

Michael Hart

Stadelman Says \$5.5 Million in Site-Readiness Grants Will Draw Businesses To Rockford and Belvidere

Press Release

Rockford and Belvidere are receiving \$5.5 million in Illinois site-readiness grants that State Senator Steve Stadelman helped secure, he announced today.

Rockford will get almost \$2.5 million for road construction and water main installation near the IL-2 and US-20 interchange. In Rockford, the investment is intended to attract industrial development to the area near Chicago-Rockford International Airport.

Belvidere's award of nearly \$3 million will be used to extend water and sewer to a 137-acre site on Chrysler Drive east of the Stellantis auto plant.

"These projects are critical to increasing the state's industrial and infrastructure attraction while helping secure future investments," Stadelman said. "I am thrilled to see the Regional Site Readiness Program come to life, and I am optimistic about the positive impact it will have on our local economies and the job opportunities it will provide for individuals across the state."

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TicTok**from page 1**

were able to access American users' data.

In early 2024, former President Joe Biden signed the bill that would force TikTok to either sell to a U.S. company or be banned in the U.S.

TikTok's lawyers claimed the government was infringing on its users' First Amendment right to freedom of speech. However, in January, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously in favor of upholding the law.

Of the 118 members of the Illinois House, 20 had verifiable, nonprivate TikTok accounts they used personally or as representatives as of Jan. 22. There were nine verifiable accounts found for state Senators.

Only 10 of the 20 accounts had any posts, and only seven of those accounts posted within the last three months.

Rep. Edgar Gonzalez Jr., D-Chicago, is an active TikTok user. The 28-year-old said he uses the app to educate people and keep up with local news and businesses.

"I had other colleagues say 'Oh, I saw this restaurant in your neighborhood, how is it?'" Gonzalez said. "I can just talk about it, and I ask them about other restaurants or businesses in their districts, so it (a potential ban) sucks because a lot of people use it for discovering new things."

Gonzalez and other representatives also worried TikTok is a national security threat.

"Data has become its own currency and its own weapon," Gonzalez said. "But I think that in the same way that we worry about foreign countries trying to harvest that data, we should also worry about the folks in the states."

In 2022, BuzzFeed News reported Chinese-based employees at ByteDance had accessed American users' data. That same year, company officials admitted in leaked emails to spying on the author of that story in an attempt to identify her sources, according to Forbes.

Rep. Patrick Sheehan, R-Lemont, posted his only two videos to TikTok in January. He said he likes comedy, recipe and workout videos, and he wants to reach out to his constituents.

"My kids are on the platform, and they kept saying 'Hey, you know, RFK Jr. is on the platform, and we see his videos everywhere. Now President (Donald) Trump's on the platform, he's everywhere, Joe Biden's everywhere,'" Sheehan said. "So, I got kind of interested in seeing how they were reaching out to a whole different type of audience, so I decided to get on."

Sheehan said he wasn't concerned about using TikTok right now, despite the national security concerns.

"Data has become its own currency and its own weapon," Gonzalez said. "But I think that in the same way that we worry about foreign countries trying to harvest that data, we should also worry about the folks in the states." — Edgar Gonzalez Jr.

"I'm not too worried about it, I'm very hopeful that this whole situation is going to be resolved," Sheehan said. "I really feel like a lot of, you know, stakeholders that are at the table want to make this work — I'm just really hopeful that it's just a matter of time and negotiating a number."

The app was initially required to be sold by Jan. 19 by an approved buyer or be banned in the U.S. Trump extended the deadline for this enforcement by 75 days.

Rep. Barbara Hernandez, D-Aurora, who last posted on Jan. 15, said she's weighing the value of using TikTok if it gets bought by a company like Meta.

"Like every bill, I would like to learn more about the transaction. What is it going to entail, who's actually involved and being able

to figure that out first," Hernandez said. "But I don't know. I guess that's my recent conflict — I don't know what I'm going to be able to do and not do on a social media platform."

Rep. Dave Vella, D-Rockford, who last posted to TikTok in 2022, said the app's security risks and the low reach to constituents made his campaign stop posting on it.

"I know my daughter and her friends love it, so I'd prefer that it stay open but just not owned by China," Vella said.

While Vella said any company that isn't based in China would make him less nervous about posting, there are worries about other companies who might buy TikTok.

"I do worry about one conglomerate of four or five people having all that information, all that control, all that ability to decide what is or is not truth or what is and is not dispensable," Vella said.

Rep. Travis Weaver, R-Edwards, hasn't posted to TikTok since March 2024 because of how little engagement he got there. However, he said his communications team isn't done using the app.

Like most representatives, Weaver is watching for what happens next.

"I think it makes a lot of sense for it to be sold," Weaver said. "I have serious concerns about the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) having so much influence on what American citizens see, especially what the next generation sees."

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Illinois Lawmakers Revive Push To Create Prescription Drug Affordability Board

Panel would help set caps on excessively priced prescription drugs

by *Ismael M. Belkoura and Medill Illinois News Bureau*

With prescription drug costs soaring, Illinois lawmakers announced legislation this week reviving efforts to create a prescription drug affordability board with the goal of capping the growing cost of medication.

Legislators and medical policy advocates revealed the proposal at a press conference Wednesday at the capitol in Springfield. The measure, House Bill 1443 is backed by Sen. Robert Peters, D-Chicago, and Rep. Nabeela Syed, D-Palatine.

"This bill creates a board, it meaningfully engages a stakeholder council that is appointed in a bipartisan manner and puts people, puts our constituents, over profits," Syed said. "Because at the end of the day, this is a bipartisan issue that affects all Illinoisans."

No Republicans had joined on as cosponsors of the legislation as of Thursday.

The proposed board would be an independent body that would review and set upper payment limits in each step of the supply chain, said Anusha Thotakura, the executive director of Citizen Action/Illinois, a progressive lobbying organization.

The board would decide which prescriptions would be subject to price caps. Those could include drugs for cancer, autoimmune diseases and diabetes, according

to the Citizen Action/Illinois website.

Rep. Will Guzzardi, D-Chicago, first proposed the idea for a drug affordability board in 2019. The proposal ended up stalling in committee after receiving pushback from pharmaceutical and insurance companies. Last year, Syed pushed for the board's creation, but the bill did not receive enough legislative support and was never voted on.

Gov. JB Pritzker did not say if he would specifically support the proposed board when asked at a news conference in Springfield on Thursday.

"We're all dedicated to that, whether it comes in the form of a board that might pass on the pricing of drugs, or in the form of PBM reform — pharmaceutical benefits managers — and the profits that they're taking, which ultimately are taking out of pockets of all of us," Pritzker said.

Citizen Action/Illinois has held several town halls in cities across the state last year to gather support for the plan, including in Peoria, Chicago and Rock Island.

"The work has been done here — meeting with stakeholders, having those conversations" Peters said. "We need to put people over greed. We need to put healthcare over cost."

A Reuters analysis found new U.S. drug prices increased by 35% from 2022 to 2023. That same year, the United States Department of Health and Human Services reported 4,200 drugs had price increases over a one-year span, with 46% of those increases greater than the rate of inflation.

Increasing costs often leads to patients rationing drugs and not taking their medication in prescribed accounts, according to Dr. Anthony Douglas, a general surgery resident at the University of Chicago.

"The lack of prescription drug affordability leads Illinois residents to being hospitalized for conditions that could be effectively treated and controlled at home if they could just afford their medication," Douglas said.

Pharmaceutical company lobbyists have argued that while there are individual examples of drug prices spiraling out of control, prices overall — and the total amount spent on drugs nationwide — have risen only modestly in recent years. Insurance company representatives have said the small-group and individual plans that would be covered by the bill make up only a small segment of the private insurance market.

Since Maryland approved the creation of one in 2019, 10 other states have created prescription drug affordability boards.

State lawmakers and consumer advocates are also looking at other methods to combat rising medication costs. In 2023, Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul was one of 23 attorneys general to push for reform of the 340B Drug Pricing Program. The program requires drug manufacturers participating in Medicare and Medicaid to discount certain drugs at eligible hospitals and healthcare centers.

Citizen Action/Illinois also plans to hold a lobby day in Springfield on Feb. 25 to call on lawmakers to support the board.

The bill's sponsors are hopeful that enough legislators have shifted their views for the bill to succeed.

"I believe, especially now more than ever, we have the ability to get more than enough members on board to get legislation like this across," Syed said. "Because I can guarantee you, coming off of election season, many of my colleagues have heard at the doors that people can't afford groceries, they can't afford their mortgage and they can't afford their prescription drugs."

Ismael M. Belkoura is a graduate student in journalism with Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated

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Drugs

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Marketing Communications, and a Fellow in its Medill Illinois News Bureau working in partnership with Capitol News Illinois.

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Campaign Cash Flows From Ethanol and Corn Sectors as Illinois Lawmakers Weigh Carbon Capture Regulations

Backed by the powerful corn lobby, Marquis Energy's push to bury carbon emissions underground has sparked a fierce debate in Illinois politics. The ethanol plant is banking on carbon capture technology to secure federal tax credits.

by Jennifer Bamberg, Investigate Midwest

Backed by the powerful corn lobby, Marquis Energy's push to bury carbon emissions underground has sparked a fierce debate in Illinois politics. The ethanol plant is banking on carbon capture technology to secure federal tax credits.

Nestled along the curves of the Illinois River just outside the town of Hennepin is the country's largest dry-mill ethanol plant, where a network of pipes, grain elevators and exhaust towers rise like a mini-city. Surrounding the plant are hundreds of acres of corn, the state's top crop often used to make ethanol fuel.

The plant's owner, Marquis Energy, processes 360,000 bushels of corn each day, making it an important customer for the state's nearly \$21 billion corn industry. A third of Illinois corn is used to make ethanol fuel.

Marquis Energy plans to build a new carbon capture and sequestration project — which would bury millions of tons of the ethanol plant's air pollution underground — allowing it to expand its ethanol production and secure lucrative federal tax credits.

But the proposal has drawn opposition from some farmers and state lawmakers who worry carbon capture could pollute a nearby aquifer and disturb topsoil as new pipelines are built.

Marquis Energy, along with the state's corn lobby, has responded with millions of dollars in campaign contributions to state lawmakers, an Investigate Midwest analysis has found. Some of its largest recipients have pushed for pro-carbon capture policies and opposed new regulations.

Last year, the Illinois General Assembly approved a temporary ban on carbon capture projects and introduced a new bill to ban the practice around the Mahomet Aquifer in Central Illinois, which is the water source for over half a

million people.

However, Senate President Don Harmon, an Oak Park Democrat, used his position as a committee chairman to table the Mahomet Aquifer bill during a November hearing. Multiple observers attending the hearing told Investigate Midwest they believe the bill would have passed if Harmon had allowed for a vote.

Since 2021, Harmon has received \$147,500 from Marquis Energy, according to the campaign finance database Illinois Sunshine.

Since 2020, Harmon has also received \$17,500 from the Illinois Corn Association, which also opposed the bill.

A spokesman for the Senate said Harmon was unaware Marquis Energy opposed the bill to protect the Mahomet Aquifer.

"I support additional safeguards to protect our drinking water and the Mahomet Aquifer specifically," Harmon said in a written statement to Investigate Midwest. "Given the moratorium that's already in place and uncertainty of the new federal administration, I think it makes sense to pause and see what shakes out in D.C., and then consider our options. Our only priority is protecting clean drinking water."

Overall, Marquis Energy, a private company, contributed \$248,000 to state lawmakers last year, most of which went to Illinois' four most powerful legislative leaders.

But last year's contributions are just the latest in a decade-long effort by Marquis Energy and its CEO to shape policy at the Illinois statehouse. Since 2008, the company has spent \$1.2 million on state lawmaker campaigns.

Investigate Midwest attempted to contact Marquis Energy by phone and email several times. A spokesperson for the company said they were not interested in commenting at this time.



The Marquis Biocarbon Project site sits on the northern edge of the Illinois Basin. The Mt. Simon Sandstone in Hennepin, Illinois has been identified as the target injection zone for CO2 storage. Also shown are the FutureGen2 and the Illinois Basin - Decatur Project sites, which have demonstrated the capability for CO2 storage in the Mt. Simon Sandstone. This map was listed in Marquis Energy's biocarbon energy project narrative submitted to the EPA.

Carbon capture proponents claim it fights climate change, expands Illinois corn market

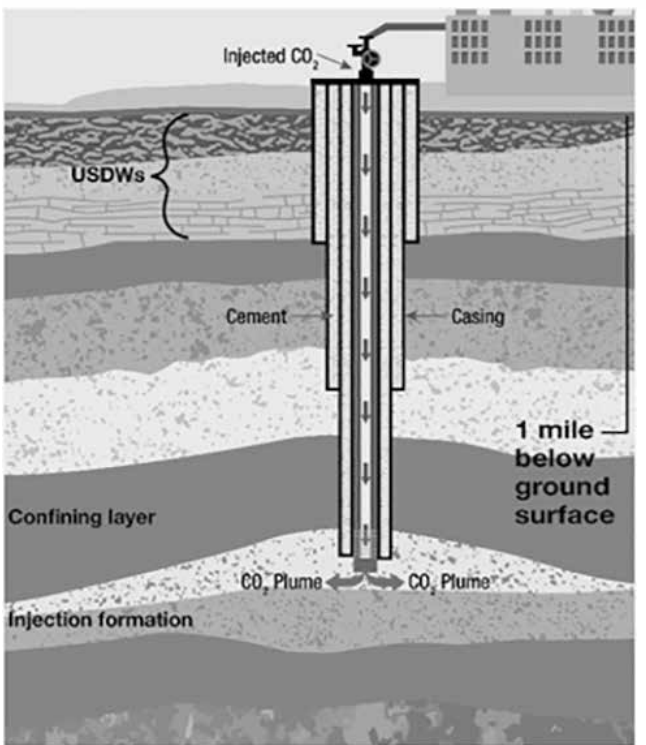
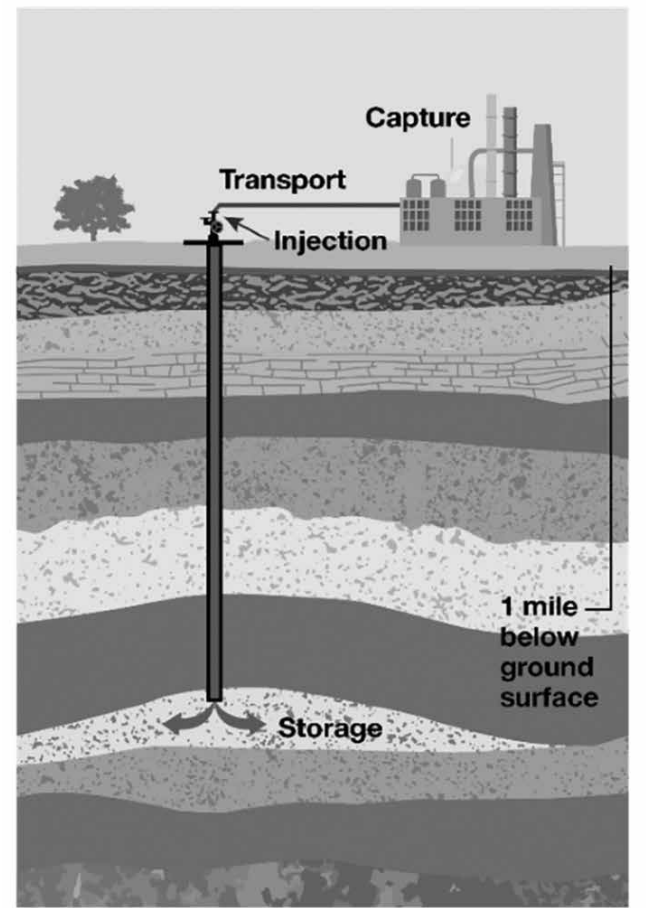
Based on technology originally used to squeeze oil out of nearly depleted fields, carbon capture is the process of converting carbon dioxide pollution into liquid, sending it through a pipeline, and then pumping it nearly a mile underground.

Marquis Energy's specific plans are to inject CO2 over a five-year period to only about half a mile underground, according to the Illinois State Geological Survey.

Carbon capture and sequestration may someday be considered a normal part of waste management, like garbage removal or sewage treatment, said Holly Jean Buck, a climate politics sociologist at the University at Buffalo in New York.

Some see carbon capture as an answer to climate change. Storing carbon dioxide emissions

underground can prevent the gas from warming the atmosphere.



From top to bottom: The first diagram depicts the carbon capture and storage (CCS) process, from capturing CO2 at industrial facilities to its transportation, injection, and long-term storage in underground formations with depth of storage approximately one mile underground. The second diagram shows the structure of a Class VI well used for geologic sequestration of CO2. It includes safeguards like cement and casing to protect underground drinking water sources (USDWs) and illustrates the CO2 plume within the deep injection formation. charts by EPA

However, expanding Marquis Energy's use of carbon capture, which in turn increases the use of ethanol fuel, means continued use of the fossil fuel industry at a time when Illinois and the federal government are trying to incentivize electric vehicles as a way to fight climate change, said Silvia Secchi, an economist and geographer at the University of Iowa.

"It's a really big problem that we have essentially obsolete Big Ag still driving climate mitigation policy in 2024," Secchi said. "It's very much the power of a lobby against the power of science, the way I see it."

But state Sen. Sue Rezin, a Republican from Morris, believes carbon capture is needed to offset climate change while still being able to meet energy demands.

"In order to reduce our carbon footprint, to achieve our goals that were signed by the state of Illinois, we will have to have carbon capture;

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Carbon

from page 5

otherwise the numbers simply won't add up," she said.

Rezin has received \$76,100 from Marquis Energy since 2011. In 2021 and 2023, she proposed bills to grant the company pipeline access through public land along the Illinois River. The bills were unsuccessful.

In a written statement provided to Investigate Midwest, Rezin stated that one of her top priorities as a senator is to advance laws "that create jobs, support economic development, and help the industries that are vital to Illinois and my district

She wrote that the legislation she introduced "was aimed at expanding opportunities for our state's agribusiness, utilizing the ethanol industry to its fullest potential, and helping to reduce our carbon footprint."

The Illinois Corn Growers Association has supported Marquis Energy's carbon capture push, promoting it as a way to increase the market for Illinois corn.

"With the severe downturn in the ag economy happening today, Illinois corn farmers need additional market demand," said Brad Stotler, director of public policy for the Illinois Corn Growers Association.

Marquis Energy employed 49 people in 2019, according to Bloomberg. As a private company, it is not required to disclose financial information, such as annual profits or CEO pay.

Opponents worry about water pollution, pipeline leaks

STATE OF ILLINOIS COUNTY OF BOONE COUNTY
ASSUMED NAME CERTIFICATE OF INTENTION
No. DBA4220 - The undersigned person(s) do hereby certify that a MAKING SHIRTS ETC.. AND SELLING AT CRAFT FAIRS business is or is to be conducted or transacted under the name of FIRBRAE ART that its location is or will be 2405 RANDOLPH ST, in Caledonia, in the County of Boone County, State of Illinois, and that the true or real name(s) of the person(s) owning, conducting, or transacting the same with the post office address or address of said person(s) is shown below.
Phone Number: 815-988-1233
Rae Duncan 2405 Randolph St., Caledonia, IL 61011
I, Julie A. Bliss, County Clerk And Recorder of Boone County, in the State aforesaid, do the hereby certify that the within is a true and correct copy of an Assumed Name Certificate on file in my office. Dated: January 24, 2025.
Julie A Bliss, County Clerk and Recorder
Published in Boone County Journal 01/30 02/06,13 - P

CHANGE IN CERTIFICATE OF OWNERSHIP OF
BUSINESS PUBLICATION NOTICE
Public Notice is hereby given that on JANUARY 28th A.D. 2025, a certificate was filed in the Office of the County Clerk of Boone County, Illinois, concerning the business known as KASSANDRA'S BEAUTY SALON, located at 145 S. STATE ST., BELVIDERE, IL 61008, which certificate sets forth the following changes in the operation thereof: THE BUSINESS WILL BE DISSOLVED.
Dated this 28TH day of January, A.D. 2025
Julie A. Bliss
Boone County Clerk
Published in the Boone County Journal 01/30, 02/06,13 (P)

Some Illinois farmers worry that buried carbon dioxide could leak into groundwater, which prompted the Illinois General Assembly to impose a moratorium on CO2 pipeline construction until July 2026, or until the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration comes up with new safety standards.

In March 2024, a leak occurred at one of Archer Daniels Midland's carbon dioxide wells in Decatur, prompting lawmakers to introduce additional legislation prohibiting carbon sequestration activity over, under or through any sole-source aquifers.

That bill was stalled during its November hearing by Harmon, the Senate leader.

Some witnesses at the hearing questioned whether the ban was necessary.

*Marc Miller, deputy director of the Prairie Research Institute at the University of Illinois, which has studied ADM's carbon dioxide well since 2011, said future projects would store carbon dioxide more than a mile underground, while the Mahomet Aquifer is just 500 feet below the surface.

"To date, PRI has found no evidence of negative impacts from carbon storage to the groundwater supply," Miller testified during the hearing.

But state Sen. Rachel Ventura, a Joliet Democrat, is still concerned.

"Even though we have maybe a limestone shale there, there are cracks in it. We have our own holes for things like wells and other pipes," said Ventura, who co-sponsored the aquifer ban bill. "So the reality is that the gas, over time, will come back to the surface."

Ventura also co-sponsored a bill last legislative session to ban the use of eminent domain for carbon dioxide pipelines. The bill did not pass.

There's also concern about leaks along the pipelines transporting carbon dioxide throughout the state. While Marquis Energy's proposal would sequester its emissions on site, other proposals from out-of-state companies would require hundreds of miles of pipelines carrying carbon dioxide to wells in Illinois.

In 2020, a CO2 pipeline burst in Satartia, Mississippi, sending 45 people to the hospital. Within minutes, carbon dioxide overwhelmed residents, who collapsed in their homes and outdoors.

The dense fog of CO2 also displaced enough

Uncertainty over Trump's plans for carbon capture tax credit

As the Earth's surface temperature continues to rise from the use of fossil fuels, Marquis Energy says its plant can achieve "net zero production" through carbon capture.

The company can also receive \$85 for every ton of carbon it sequesters through federal tax credits that could total millions of dollars annually. Without the tax credit, companies have little incentive to invest in carbon capture, said Scott Irwin, chair of the University of Illinois' agricultural marketing department.

President Donald Trump has repeatedly called climate change a hoax, but his picks to lead the Environmental Protection Agency and his proposed National Energy Council have been vocal in their support for carbon capture.

Darrell "Mark" Marquis, CEO of Marquis Energy, spent \$110,000 last year on several pro-Trump campaigns, according to federal campaign finance records.

Still, uncertainty surrounds the Trump administration's plans for the 45Q tax credit for carbon capture. The president has promised to end EPA rules limiting power plant emissions, which may affect whether those industries proceed with their carbon capture plans. However, if the current credit of \$85 per ton remains, ethanol companies may still want to cash in.

Some say carbon capture should be focused on more difficult to decarbonize industries, like cement and steel plants, which produce more global carbon emissions.

"Ethanol is the low-hanging fruit. They aren't really solving a difficult problem," said Tracy Fox, who is with the Coalition to Stop Predatory Pipelines, an Illinois-based group opposed to CO2 pipelines.

But beyond the science and environmental arguments over carbon capture, many see ethanol as purely a local economic issue.

Reducing Marquis Energy's ethanol production would be detrimental to many Illinois farmers, said Betsy Rowland, who farms 8,000 acres of corn and soybeans in Bureau County.

"If something were to happen to those ethanol plants, they wouldn't just be the farmers that were hurting," she said. "There's not a lot going on in Bureau County job-wise besides agriculture, and to have something happen to those plants would really hurt the community."

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oxygen to choke car engines. Cars stalled in the middle of the road as people tried to evacuate. Some drivers who left their cars became disoriented and lost, and others lost consciousness. There were no deaths.

Susan Adams operates a corn and soybean farm in southwest McLean County, about 300 feet from a proposed carbon capture injection well.

"We will be in the immediate vicinity of the pipeline and well when farming that field, and I think that gives us, if there's a rupture, we would have two minutes to evacuate," Adams said.



Consolidated Primary Election Notice

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT ON TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 25TH, 2025 at the usual polling places in the various precincts in the County of Boone and State of Illinois, a Consolidated Primary will be held for the purpose of electing candidates for the following offices:

REPUBLICAN PARTY TO BE NOMINATED:
BELVIDERE CITY MAYOR- 1 to be nominated
BELVIDERE CITY ALDERPERSON WARD 4- 1 to be nominated
BELVIDERE TOWNSHIP SUPERVISOR- 1 to be nominated

AT THE FOLLOWING PRECINCTS AND POLLING PLACES:
BELVIDERE 1 COMMUNITY BUILDING - 111 W First St, Belvidere
BELVIDERE 2 COMMUNITY BUILDING - 111 W First St, Belvidere
BELVIDERE 3 COMMUNITY BUILDING - 111 W First St, Belvidere
BELVIDERE 4 COMMUNITY BUILDING - 111 W First St, Belvidere
BELVIDERE 5 COMMUNITY BUILDING - 111 W First St, Belvidere
BELVIDERE 6 FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH - 1255 W Jackson St, Belvidere
BELVIDERE 7 BOONE CO CONSERVATION DISTRICT - 603 N Appleton Rd, Belvidere
BELVIDERE 8 COMMUNITY BUILDING - 111 W First St, Belvidere
BELVIDERE 9 BOONE CO ADMINISTRATION CAMPUS/Board Room- 1212 Logan Ave, Belvidere
BELVIDERE 10 FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH- 221 N Main St, Belvidere
BELVIDERE 11 BOONE CO ADMINISTRATION CAMPUS/Board Room- 1212 Logan Ave, Belvidere (temporary location)
BELVIDERE 12 KEEN AGE CENTER- 2141 Henry Luckow Ln, Belvidere
BELVIDERE 13 POPLAR GROVE AIRPORT (EAA HANGAR)- 5151 Orth Rd, Poplar Grove
BELVIDERE 14 VFW POST 1461- 1310 W Lincoln Ave, Belvidere
BELVIDERE 15 KEEN AGE CENTER- 2141 Henry Luckow Ln, Belvidere
BELVIDERE 16 SWAN HILLS GOLF COURSE- 2600 Gustafson Rd, Belvidere
BELVIDERE 17 HAMBLOCK FORD/LINCOLN- 1800 N State St, Belvidere
BELVIDERE 18 CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH- 425 Riverside, Belvidere
FLORA 1 AMERICAN LEGION BOONE POST 77- 900 W Chrysler Dr,
Belvidere
BONUS 1 BONUS TOWN HALL- 9015 Marengo Rd, Garden Prairie
BONUS 2 CROWN POINT BUILDING- 925 Belvidere Rd, Belvidere

The polls of said Consolidated Primary Election will be open continuously from 6:00AM to 7:00PM on February 25, 2025, at which the Unisyn Voting System, including OVO Optical Scan will be in use.
*This Primary is only a Republican Primary.
Dated this 29th day of January, 2025 LAURA BETTIS, CHIEF DEPUTY CLERK - OFFICE OF THE BOONE COUNTY CLERK.
Published in The Boone County Journal February 6, 2025

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