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Soldiers boarding the Belvidere train and families seeing them off at the train station in 1918. The photo below is the station as it looked in 1950.

Train Service Discontinued in Belvidere 73 Years Ago

By David Larson

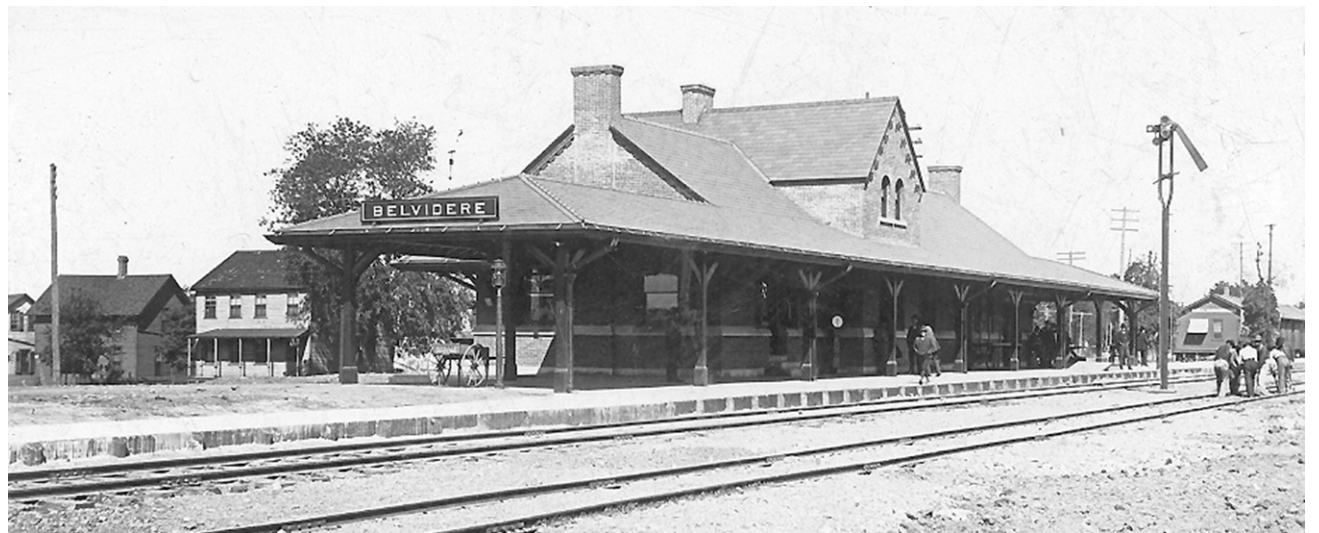
About this time of year in 1950, train service was discontinued in Belvidere. The only two trains, the No. 602 and No. 609 trains, by 1950, measured over a two-and-a-half-month period, served two-and-one-half riders per day on average. The Chicago and North Western (C&NW) Railway discontinued service because it was losing \$600,000 per year on the Freeport to Chicago passenger line that served fewer than 60 riders per day.

When the C&NW began service in 1917, about the time of the picture, it had nine passenger trains stopping in Belvidere. The Chicago to Freeport train originally had a dining car and first class service available in addition to coach. Advancing technology improved the automobile and bus system, which caused the C&NW to cut service.

One train came in the evening from the west and one came in the morning from the east. In the beginning, it was a profitable business. By 1932, during the depression, service was reduced to two trains per day.

Mail delivery provided 50 percent of the revenue for the route, which required the morning train to originate out of Chicago. When the C&NW on October 29, 1949 filed with the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) to discontinue the Chicago to Freeport passenger route, Belvidere

Continued on Page 4



House Panel Debates Ranked Choice Voting

Opinions vary about benefits, cost and complexity of multichoice ballots

By Peter Hancock Capitol News Illinois

Illinois lawmakers are debating whether the state should join a growing list of jurisdictions in the United States that allow voters to pick more than one candidate for an office, ranking them in order of preference rather than choosing just one.

Ranked choice voting, or as it's sometimes called, "instant runoff voting," actually has a long history in U.S. elections at the municipal level. But it has become more widely adopted in modern times, including in several states and dozens of municipalities.

"This is a better voting model to ensure all voices and choices are reflected in the election

Continued on Page 4

City Bids for a \$1.2 Billion Warehouse

By David Larson

At the March 20th Belvidere City Council meeting "Project Yukon," identified as a Fortune 500 fresh produce distribution company, was put on a fast track, with a letter of commitment to establish a new classification within the Enterprise Zone for projects over \$800 million and 400 new jobs.

The change would create a tier of abatement which expands the property tax abatement for new businesses that are larger than normal and meet the minimum criterion of an \$800 million investment and 400 new jobs. The present property tax abatement schedule in the Enterprise Zone is an abatement of 80 percent the first year then 60 the second, 40 the third, and 20 percent

Continued on page 8



Editor

Please join me in supporting and voting for Allison Reid-Niemiec, Misty Coryell & Tosca DeGennaro on April 4th.

The upcoming school board election is very important. My family has been part of this community for 100+ years. I've raised four boys who all attended the Belvidere School District. Even though my kids are no longer in school, I still have an interest in making sure our schools are a place where parents want to send their kids. We all as taxpayers and community members should share this interest. Our schools are vital to our community.

I believe it is important that we elect board members who embrace and value what they are elected to represent the students and community and not simply be advisors to the administration. The board members are elected decision makers. Decision makers that should be representing our students and the community's best interests.

The candidates I support want to make decisions based on what is best for our students. They want our schools to be a place where students learn, develop good habits and leave prepared for the real world. They want our district to focus on the basics, like math and reading.

Your vote is critical. Please join me in supporting and voting for Allison Reid-Niemiec, Misty Coryell & Tosca DeGennaro on April 4th.

**Thank you,
Scott Fowler**



Rickey Cutts, 70, Harvard, March 17
Tina Martin, 45, Belvidere, March 15
Ralph Maynard, 89, Poplar Grove, March 19
Andrew Tworek, 47, Marengo, March 13

Dear Editor,

I want you to vote Tosca DeGennaro for the District 100 School Board. As a former President of the School Board, I can clearly see what an asset she will be to our district. Tosca is a problem solver. She uses a rational and methodological approach to her decision-making. Tosca expresses her ideas fluently and clearly. Additionally, her vision for District 100 will help build a strong foundation for our schools. District 100 has been suffering for years. Our student test scores are in decline and student participation in extra-curricular activities (like sports, Marching Band, the arts, etc.) have been reduced to about one quarter of what it was 20 years ago at Belvidere High School. Tosca understands how important extra-curricular activities are to our community.

Elect Tosca to the School Board because she supports the traditional values of our community, and she will be loyal to the voters of District 100. Her ideas focus on academic achievement that will benefit our students, in our district, whether they go to college, attend advanced technical/industrial trade school, or enter the general workforce. After high school, employers expect our students to be able to compete with their fundamental skills not just in reading, writing, math but also research and resource building. Almost every job opportunity these days, requires advanced training and strong professional development. Tosca understands that preparing our children for life through Experiential Learning is as important as preparing our students for college. Tosca believes we have the opportunities and resources here in our district that we need to encourage our students to use those tools for their educational journey.

Elect Tosca DeGennaro to School Board because she will bring our community a strong foundation which truly benefits our children. Join me in electing Tosca DeGennaro on April 4th.

Let's right this sinking ship,
Bob Walberg

Dear Editor,

We have the opportunity to elect three outstanding candidates to the District 100 school board: Sarah Brenner, Jorge Herrera, and Holly Houk. Holly and Jorge are incumbents who have an outstanding record and Sarah will add her experience as a past teacher and administrator to enable these three to set policy and pursue excellence for all of our students. They recognize the need to support our students from early childhood through the high school years. They understand the need for a high school program preparing students for success whether going on to college or pursuing non-college degree careers.

In my many years as a District 100 teacher and resident I have seen many school board members come and go. I firmly believe this election is one of the most important ever. We need these three to guide our schools and students in the challenging years ahead. Please ignore the hollow rhetoric and campaign tactics of others.

Please give your vote to the 3 candidates whose only interest is excellent schools for our children and our community.

Vote Brenner, Houk, and Herrera. Yes, it's that important.

Ken Swanson

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Re-elect Allison Reid-Niemiec.

Allison has demonstrated steadfast leadership as the current board President. As the President, the board has restored normal grading and brought in a new superintendent. Allison's leadership has kept the district on task to become stronger and on the mend. Allison works diligently to fulfill the role of an effective school board member. She is committed to providing the best educational opportunities for all our students. She respects the community that has chosen her to represent them. She feels honored to serve as a school board member of district 100.

Allison's opponent is very different and here are a few examples why. After being an administrative and Central Office employee for many years in our district, she just quit abruptly and left the district in September of 2022. The Illinois school code prohibits employees from serving on the school board. A possible conflict of interest? Her advertisement says "she will be a voice for the educators/students". Simply put school board members are elected to represent our community. School board members are the voice of the community, the voters, the taxpayers to provide a good education for our children. Allison's opponent is an insider, she is a full time administrator at Rockford Public Schools. Do we really want Rockford school administrators running Belvidere schools? Would Allison's opponent be conflicted representing the administration or would she represent our community? Would we be asking the fox to watch the henhouse? Vote for Allison Reid-Niemiec. Allison is a board member that really cares about the students and the community.

Bob Walberg

Pritzker: Tax Cuts On The Table If State Revenues Continue To Exceed Expectations

Forecasting commission last week upped its projections by a combined \$1 billion

By Jerry Nowicki Capitol News Illinois

With two months to go before the legislature adjourns and current-year revenues continuing to smash expectations, Gov. JB Pritzker said he and legislative leaders are considering tax cuts.

His comments came one week after the legislature's nonpartisan Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability, or COGFA, increased its revenue estimates by about \$1 billion for the current and upcoming budget years combined.

"I would like to see – as we feel comfortable with these new revenues coming in and their stability; and I think we're seeing a few years in a row now of the stability of that revenue – that we should be talking about whether there are tax cuts that we can implement," he said at an unrelated news conference at a Springfield community college.

The governor did not say whether tax cuts would be permanent or which taxes he and lawmakers are considering cutting.

And tax cuts were one of several potential uses of excess revenues the governor said he would like to consider. Others include contributions to the state's "rainy day" fund and added payments beyond required amounts to the state's pension system.

The conversation about what to do with excess revenues that show year-over-year stability is one

Continued on Page 3

REAL JOURNALISM FOR A REAL DEMOCRACY

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Richelle Kingsbury Aug. 1955 - June 2013

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Pritzker

from page 2

Pritzker said has involved both Democrats and Republicans.

House Minority Leader Tony McCombie, R-Savanna, told Capitol News Illinois in a statement that the House GOP stands ready to work with the governor.

“To hear the governor mention any tax cuts is an exciting prospect for families across our state. At the first meeting I had with Gov. Pritzker, we discussed the cumbersome franchise tax on small businesses and high estate taxes that unfairly target family farms,” she said. “The governor recognizing conversations with Democrats and Republicans gives me hope that we will reinstitute the bipartisan budget working group with our budgeteers and appropriation teams leading the way.”

McCombie also noted the House Republicans oppose a graduated income tax, which Pritzker has said he has no interest in reviving as a legislative proposal this year.

Senate Minority Leader John Curran, R-Downers Grove, referred to business-related tax incentives that Pritzker and lawmakers approved on bipartisan lines in 2019 but which Democrats froze in future budget years.

“Initial discussions on tax relief have been receptive,” Curran said in a statement. “We will continue to call for implementing the business incentives that the governor agreed to in the Blue Collar Jobs Act, along with additional tax relief for Illinois families and small businesses.”

He said the Senate GOP is hopeful Pritzker will “include Republicans at the table of substantive budget meetings,” and they are “willing to negotiate in good faith.”

In their budget approved last summer for the current fiscal year, lawmakers included an array of mostly temporary tax relief. That included direct checks of \$50 or more to most Illinoisans depending on income and number of children, a permanent expansion of the state’s earned income tax credit to 20 percent of the federal credit, a six-month pause on a 2-cent gas tax increase that ended Jan. 1, a one-year suspension of the state’s 1 percent grocery tax that ends June 30, and a property tax rebate up to \$300 for some Illinoisans.

The governor’s office estimated those measures amounted to about \$1.8 billion in tax relief overall. The state approved legislation bringing its rainy day fund balance to an estimated \$1.9 billion by the end of the fiscal year and contributing \$500 million beyond statutory requirements to its pension fund over the past two years.

The revenue update announced by COGFA last week represents just the latest in a remarkable stretch for state government revenues that have boomed nationwide over the course of the past two years. In Illinois, the growth has been driven by wage growth, corporate profits, inflation, changes to the corporate and online sales tax structures, revenues from marijuana sales and other factors.

“You can see in every single month so far this fiscal year we’ve actually had a gain where we’ve generated more revenue in this fiscal year compared to the same time a year ago,” Eric Noggle,

senior revenue analyst for COGFA, said at the commission’s March meeting last week.

COGFA’s new estimate of \$51.9 billion in revenues for the current fiscal year that ends June 30 is \$545 million beyond the amount assumed by the Governor’s Office of Management and Budget in Pritzker’s budget proposal. And its \$50.4 billion estimate for the fiscal year that begins July 1 is \$465 million beyond GOMB’s initial estimate.

All told, COGFA now expects the state to end the fiscal year with revenues surpassing their initial estimates by more than \$5 billion. While that’s partially because base sales and income

tax receipts continue to produce at record levels, it’s also because the state’s estimates approved last summer were conservative, Pritzker said.

The current fiscal year still has three and a half months left, so COGFA noted in its recent report that the revenue estimate could be bumped even higher if final income tax receipts are stronger than expected as taxpayers file their returns for the year.

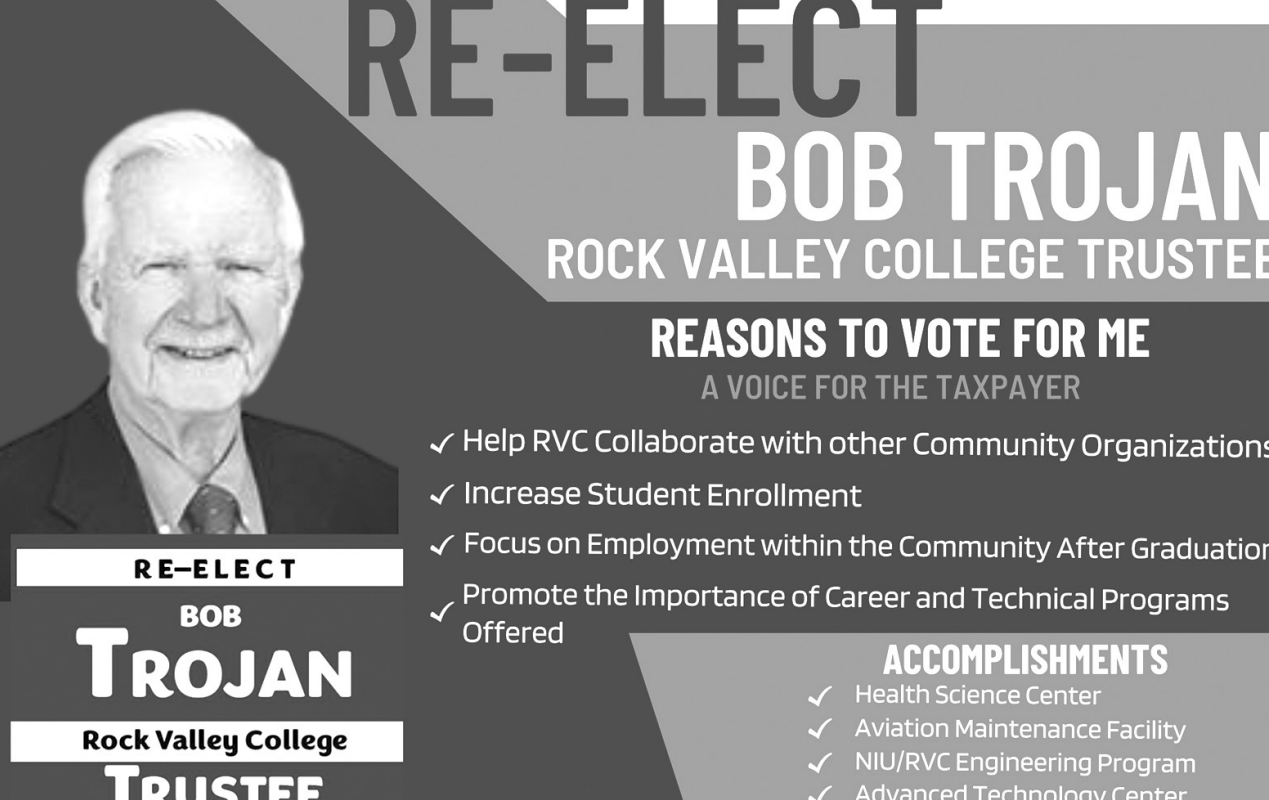
But it could also move downward, the

commission noted, if those revenues come in lower than expected due to weakening market conditions. They noted other factors could change the state’s revenue outlook, including the possibility of another COVID-19 resurgence, a worsening of the war in Ukraine, or a potential recession.

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Train *from page 1*

protested. Hiring the local, firebrand attorney, A.J. Strom, to represent the community, motions were filed to block the C&NW, and to force it to make changes to the service.

Two major complaints were filed suggesting it was not as useful of a service when arriving from Chicago in the morning and return to Chicago in the evening. The mayor of Belvidere, Lester Cunningham, stated as a witness before the ICC, "The present schedule offered little advantage to the patrons in Belvidere...when the case was filed, many citizens called about the service and called attention the schedule. They demanded I do something about it... I was asked to switch the schedule to a train going to Chicago in the morning and arriving back in Belvidere from Chicago in the evening."

The Assistant General Solicitor for the railroad, D. J. Slater, remarked after one of the hearings on the matter, "...never heard so many people who liked the railroads and liked train travel, but there was so little evidence of their using it."

A second complaint was made that the track maintenance was not up to-date, and it took too long to get to Chicago. At the time, it was a two-hour-and-forty-five minute trip, despite a speed limit of 58mph established by the ICC to travel the 78 miles from Belvidere to Chicago. Maintenance, it was believed, would allow a train to reach a sustained speed of 70 to 80 mph, a speed that is for the most part consistent with Interstate 90 by automobile or bus today. Today, a bus has an advantage over the automobile with a reserved lane limited to bus traffic during rush hour, which was created in the latest rebuilding of I-90.

Today's Metra trains from Harvard and Elgin meet resistance to those pre-1950 speeds because of more frequent stops in a dense, suburban setting with crossroads and stops that didn't exist in 1950.

If it wants to revisit days gone by, perhaps Belvidere will have to settle for an improved historic district in lieu of an old-fashioned train station in downtown Belvidere..

In a general ranked choice voting system, voters mark candidates in the order of their preference in races with three or more candidates. The voter can rank as many candidates as they choose. In a five-person race, for example, a voter might rank one candidate first, another second and leave the sections of the other three candidates blank.

In the first round of counting, ballots are counted as they are now, with everyone's vote going to their first choice.

If no one has achieved a majority, the person with the fewest votes is eliminated and their voters' ballots are recounted with their votes going to their highest ranked candidate that is still in the race.

This continues until a candidate earns a majority of votes counted in a given round of tabulation. This may not mean a majority of all people who voted in the election, since a ballot isn't counted after all of their listed choices are eliminated.

According to the group FairVote, which advocates for ranked choice voting, there are 64 jurisdictions that allow that method of elections, including the states of Maine and Alaska, as well as two counties and 60 cities.

Colorado enacted a law in 2021 that allows municipalities to opt in to ranked choice voting in local elections. And Democratic parties in five states – Alaska, Kansas, Hawaii, Nevada and Wyoming – used it, wholly or partially, in their 2020 presidential primaries.

There are currently three bills pending in the General Assembly that would allow ranked choice voting in one form or another.

House Bill 2716, by Rep. Nabeela Syed, D-Inverness, would implement the system for elections for the General Assembly, governor and other statewide constitutional officers.

House Bill 2807, by Rep. Maurice West, D-Rockford, would establish ranked choice voting in presidential primaries in Illinois. And House Bill 3749, by Rep. Kam Buckner, D-Chicago, would allow municipalities to use ranked choice voting if the municipality's chief election authority submits a written statement saying they have the ability to conduct such an election.

Impact on elections

Supporters of ranked choice voting argue that it has several advantages over "plurality voting," in which the person with the most votes after one round of counting wins regardless of whether that person has a majority.

One, they say, is that it reduces the number of "wasted" votes – that is, votes cast for candidates who drop out of the race after it's too late to remove their name from the ballot. McReynolds said that is particularly true in presidential primaries in which a large field of candidates is winnowed down to just a few after the first few states cast ballots.

"In 2016, more than 2 million voters actually took the effort to vote for a candidate on the Republican side (after they had dropped out of the race). Their vote was lost," she said. "In 2020, around 3 million to 4 million of Democrats – that's the estimated (number) – had that same issue happen because lots of dropouts start happening

after Super Tuesday in those periods of time."

Under ranked choice voting, she said, even if a voter's first choice is no longer in the race, their second or third choice could still count in subsequent rounds of counting.

Some advocates also say it can reduce the overall cost of certain elections by eliminating the need for runoffs, like the one coming up April 4 in the Chicago mayoral race.

"There are estimates that runoff elections cost the city between \$25 and \$35 million each time," Buckner said. "And so this, if for no other reason, for financial reasons, being able to give us winners of both aldermanic and mayoral elections on the initial election date and to save some of those dollars and resources from the city and municipality."

But Boone County Clerk Julie Bliss, speaking on behalf of the Illinois Association of County Clerks and Recorders, said there would be significant upfront costs for local officials to buy the voting machines and software needed for ranked choice voting, as well as the cost of printing and mailing what would be much larger ballots.

"Expense and funding absolutely is going to be a question that all the local election authorities are going to have for you," she told the committee. "... The initial cost of implementing something like this is going to be higher."

Brian Pryor, deputy director of election operations at the Illinois State Board of Elections, said there are currently no voting systems in Illinois that could implement ranked choice voting immediately.

"Some systems are capable of conducting ranked choice voting but they require additional components or software, which would need to be certified for use in Illinois," he said. "There are currently 16 jurisdictions that have no capability of implementing ranked choice voting. These jurisdictions would need to procure new equipment."

The committee discussion of the three bills was "subject matter" only, meaning they did not come for a vote. They have been re-referred to the House Rules Committee, meaning they may face an uphill battle to be passed into law in the current General Assembly.

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voting *from page 1*

results," Amber McReynolds, an elections expert and former elections director for the city and county of Denver, Colorado, told a House committee Wednesday. "It prioritizes and expands voter choice, it puts voters first, and it improves the voting experience for all."

The proposals facing Illinois lawmakers are subject to change as they move through the legislative process.

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Madigan Looms Large In Trial of Ex-ComEd Lobbyists, Exec

Trial's second day included hours of opening arguments, first witness

By Hannah Meisel Capitol News Illinois

Former Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan isn't set to go on trial for racketeering and corruption charges until next summer, but his decades of power in Illinois government and politics loomed large Wednesday as opening arguments got underway in a related case.

Madigan's name was uttered hundreds of times as a federal prosecutor laid out the government's case against the former speaker's longtime allies – three ex-lobbyists and a former executive of electric utility Commonwealth Edison – who are alleged to have orchestrated a yearslong bribery scheme to influence the powerful former speaker.

Madigan's many mentions continued as attorneys for the four defendants narrated their clients' version of events, and as the government called its first witness, a former Democratic state representative who served for a decade in the Illinois House under Madigan.

For most of the last three years, Madigan has also been known by a different name given to him by the feds in charging documents: "Public Official A." And as Public Official A, prosecutors allege Madigan was the central figure in ComEd's eight-year effort to curry favor with the speaker, trading jobs and contracts at the utility for Madigan's political allies in exchange for lucrative legislative wins.

Madigan's longtime close friend and ComEd lobbyist Mike McClain, his co-defendants and fellow former lobbyists Jay Doherty and John Hooker, along with ex-ComEd CEO Anne Pramaggiore, maintain their actions on behalf of the utility were merely part of perfectly legal, business-as-usual lobbying efforts.

McClain's attorney, Patrick Cotter, accused the government of carrying out "an exceptionally goal-driven investigation," focused on the outset to "find something to get to" Madigan.

"This investigation was about him," Cotter said. "And that zealotry – what I would characterize as overzealousness – led the government to see what they wanted to see...everything begins to look like a crime."

Over the next six to eight weeks, jurors will hear from approximately 70 witnesses, and hear more than 100 recordings from wiretapped phone calls and secretly taped meetings, prosecutors said Wednesday. Both the government and defense attorneys previewed how they would use those recordings to prove their arguments and mentioned a few key witnesses they're eager for the jury to hear.

Also on Wednesday, jurors became familiar with the faces of central figures in the case, including Madigan and the defendants, all pulled from their driver's license pictures kept on file with the Secretary of State.

McClain's attorney jokingly declared the public display of the typically unflattering photos as among the many "hard consequences" of getting charged with a federal crime.

"I mean those photos, holy cats," Cotter said. "That's a real penalty."

Bribes or 'real-world' lobbying?

In the summer of 2020, ComEd entered into a deferred prosecution agreement with the government. It allowed the utility to avoid direct charges if it paid a \$200 million fine and cooperated with

the feds' investigation of the alleged bribery scheme. But the jury won't be told of that deal during the trial in order to not bias their judgment of defendants' actions.

Instead, prosecutors must prove their case from the ground up. In the government's opening statement Wednesday morning, Assistant U.S. Attorney Sarah Streicker characterized the case as open and shut.

"It's just that simple," Streicker said repeatedly, parroting McClain's own words from a recording made on his wiretapped cell phone in the course of the government's investigation.

"Madigan wanted, defendants gave and defendants got," Streicker said, summing up the feds' theory.

Beginning in 2011, ComEd successfully pushed through a trio of major legislation. First up was the utility's so-called Smart Grid law that established what would prove to be lucrative "formula rates," the profits from which ComEd used to update its aging electricity delivery infrastructure.

Then in 2013, ComEd went back to Springfield with another legislative proposal after the Illinois Commerce Commission proved a roadblock in fully implementing the Smart Grid law. Then-Gov. Pat Quinn vetoed both of those measures, but the Democratically controlled legislature overrode his veto both times.

And in 2016, ComEd and parent company Exelon pushed for the Future Energy Jobs Act, which provided state subsidies to Exelon in order to keep two of the company's nuclear power plants open.

Streicker tied the passage of those major pieces of legislation to the timing of key ComEd contracts for Madigan's political allies.

From 2011 to 2018, four of those allies received lobbying subcontracts through defendant Doherty, who had long lobbied for ComEd before the Chicago City Council and in Cook County. They included former Chicago Aldermen Frank Olivo of the city's 13th Ward and Mike Zaleski Sr. of the 23rd Ward. Those districts made up much of Madigan's state legislative district on Chicago's southwest side. The other contract recipients were Ed Moody and Ray Nice, two of Madigan's top precinct captains for the 13th Ward where he still serves as Democratic Committeeman in the local party.

Those subcontracts were worth between \$4,500 and \$5,000 each month, but the feds allege the four did "little to no work" for that money.

Additionally, Streicker cited as a key part of the alleged bribe a 2011-era ComEd contract for the law firm of longtime Madigan ally Victor Reyes, which McClain intervened to have renewed, as well as directives for the utility's intern program to always set aside 10 spots for young people from the 13th ward.

Madigan's nearly two-year push for business executive Juan Ochoa to be placed on ComEd's board of directors – the eventual 2019 appointment itself a favor to another politician – is also part of prosecutors' central theory of the bribe.

But defense attorneys had alternative explanations for what the government deemed "corrupt acts."



"Mike (McClain) and these other defendants – they live in the real world, not the world of the government's theory," Cotter said. "The government's dark, dark theory where everything is explained by a few jobs."

Anne Pramaggiore's attorney, Scott Lassar, sought to prove his client couldn't have been engaged in bribing Madigan, as she never had confidence any of the ComEd-pushed legislation would pass. She knew, Lassar said, Madigan was never a fan of utilities, and so ComEd's legislative strategy was not to influence Madigan but to "box him in" by lobbying rank-and-file members of the General Assembly.

In order to do that, ComEd invested millions of dollars for dozens of both in-house and contract lobbyists. Lassar said that all that work doesn't square with the government's theory that the utility "had Mike Madigan in their pocket."

"Did Anne forget that she was bribing Madigan and forget to ask for help?" Lassar quipped.

The defense also defended ComEd's key legislative wins, saying they weren't just good for ComEd's bottom line, but also good for ComEd customers, who have seen fewer power outages after the Smart Grid upgrades took the utility's electricity infrastructure from one of the nation's least reliable to a model.

Hooker's attorney, Jacqueline Jacobson, used some of her opening statement to go after government cooperator Fidel Marquez, who had been ComEd's senior vice president of external and governmental affairs – the same job Hooker held prior to his retirement to contract lobbying in 2011. In that job, both Marquez and Hooker before him were tasked with overseeing the dozens of lobbyists employed by and contracted with the utility.

After federal agents approached Marquez in early 2019 with some preliminary evidence they had found when looking into lobbying subcontracts under Doherty, Marquez agreed to cooperate and wear a wire, which continued for months. But Jacobson said Marquez took the government's deal after learning he could face years in prison "even though he didn't think he'd done anything illegal."

"Marquez took the sure thing, the get-out-of-jail-free card," Jacobson said. "Marquez is a man who lies to benefit himself."

Doherty's attorney, Gabrielle Sansonetti, took that theory further, acknowledging to the jury that "there should've been more oversight" on the lobbying subcontracts – not from Doherty himself, but ComEd.

"The one guy responsible for all this oversight? You might have already guessed: Fidel Marquez,"

Continued on Page 6

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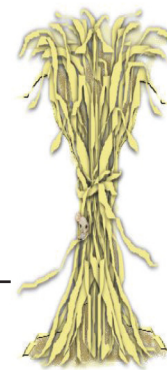
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Wiretaps Show Madigan, Forced Ally Out Of Legislature To Protect Himself

Government uses recordings, witnesses to portray ex-speaker as all-powerful in Springfield

By Hannah Meisel Capitol News Illinois

In fall 2018, longtime former State Rep. Lou Lang, D-Skokie, received a phone call from Mike McClain, who had spent decades lobbying for electric utility Commonwealth Edison after 10 years in the General Assembly.

McClain was delivering a message from House Speaker Michael Madigan, who was worried Lang was becoming a liability to his Democratic caucus – a liability the now-former speaker would rather not deal with after the year he'd already had.

Earlier in 2018, a former campaign staffer publicly accused Madigan of failing to address her complaints of sexual harassment by her colleague in the speaker's political organization. And a few months later, Madigan was forced to axe his longtime chief of staff over his alleged harassment of subordinates.

Read more: One year after Madigan's indictment, former speaker's allies prepare for trial

Lang had already been publicly accused of harassment and bullying in May of that year, although the allegations proved thin. Lang came out of the experience mostly unscathed, hoping for a quick comeback after giving up his House leadership position – a face-saving move he expected to be only temporary.

But McClain called Lang with some bad news: Another woman was threatening to come forward with harassment allegations if Lang was reinstated to a leadership position. What's more, Madigan wanted Lang to resign from office to become a lobbyist.

"So this is no longer me talking," McClain said in that Nov. 2018 call. "I'm an agent of somebody that cares deeply about you, who thinks that you really oughta move on."

"Agent," as used by McClain, is exactly how federal prosecutors want the jury to think of the defendant in the trial where he and three others stand accused of bribing Madigan with jobs and contracts for the speaker's political allies in exchange for legislation favorable – and lucrative – to ComEd.

Read more: Madigan looms large in trial of ex-ComEd lobbyists, exec

Government lawyers played several other recordings of calls from McClain's cell phone that they had wiretapped in 2018 and 2019. They included a call where his directives from Madigan were confirmed by the speaker himself.

"You know, I think the guy's going to be a continuing problem, that's my expectation," Madigan said of Lang. "And I mean, you can understand my position, right? I have to sit and think...do I appoint him to the leadership or not?"

In federal court Thursday, Lang testified that after McClain's call and a subsequent meeting with Madigan, he understood that he'd never achieve his ultimate ambition in his legislative career: rising from third-most senior leader in the House to deputy majority leader and eventually House speaker.

"It was very clear to me that there had been a decision made by the speaker that I was not going to move up in the ranks, and the reputation I had built over 32 years was not going to avail me to

much progress in my career," Lang said Thursday during government questioning.

During cross-examination, McClain attorney Pat Cotter said it was understandable that Madigan wouldn't want "someone in leadership who was at that point facing a second sexual harassment claim."

But Lang declined to acknowledge he was facing harassment claims at the time, employing the line "just because someone says there was an allegation does not make it true." He especially chafed at Cotter's later use of the word "charges."

"I was not facing sexual harassment charges," Lang said testily. "And I'll tell you right here in federal court that I resent the allegation and the inference."

Calls between Madigan and McClain mentioned they'd been informed of the harassment claims against Lang by the former top attorney in the speaker's office at the time, Heather Wier Vaught. Wier Vaught on Thursday confirmed the existence of those 2018-era harassment claims surrounding Lang.

"I don't dispute that more than one person came forward with allegations against Lou," she told Capitol News Illinois, noting those individuals whose claims never were made public had a right to privacy.

Lang eventually resigned from the House in January 2019, shortly before taking the oath of office in what would have been his 17th term in the legislature. He immediately began lobbying his former colleagues – a long-common practice in Springfield.

Cotter did get some favorable testimony out of Lang when he affirmed that he was not "punished" by Madigan because he didn't vote for ComEd's signature legislation in 2011. He also said he never saw Madigan do "anything special" to ensure that bill or the utility's two other major legislative priorities pass in 2013 and 2016.

"In my entire 32-year career, Mike Madigan never ordered me to do anything," Lang said of his experience with the speaker.

In playing other snippets of McClain's calls, the government sought to discredit the arguments made in the defense's opening statements the day prior, in which Cotter said McClain's and Madigan's close relationship wasn't evidence of any conspiracy.

"Do you call your friends for advice?" Cotter asked the jury Wednesday. "Do you call your friends at work? When you do that, are you entering a conspiracy or is that friendship? I'd argue it's the very nature of friendship."

Over a handful of recordings, the government let McClain's words speak for themselves as the former lobbyist explained who his true client was.

"I finally came to peace with that maybe 20 years ago when I convinced myself that my client is the speaker," McClain said in a call to a top staffer in Madigan's office, who said he was struggling with always making decisions with Madigan's best interest in mind.

"My client is not ComEd, my client is not (the Chicago Board Options Exchange), my client is not Walgreens, my client is the speaker," McClain said in the call. "...If that's the way you think, if that's the way you frame your talking points, (Madigan will) never second-guess you."

Other recordings included McClain referring to an increase in "assignments" given to him by Madigan after

his official retirement as ComEd's top contract lobbyist in 2016. McClain thereafter became a consultant for the utility instead.

Earlier on Thursday, the jury heard testimony from former State Reps. Carol Sente, D-Vernon Hills, and Scott Drury, D-Highwood, both of whom said they were punished by Madigan when they refused to go along with their Democratic colleagues. Drury had refused to vote for Madigan when he ran for a 17th term as House speaker in 2017, an intra-caucus vote that for most of Madigan's career had been both unanimous and a foregone conclusion.

Drury has loudly – and sometimes proudly – complained that after his refusal to vote for Madigan the speaker declined to send him a custom engraved clock given to all the other members of his caucus commemorating Madigan's tenure. Neither prosecutors nor defense attorneys asked Drury about that episode on Thursday, but Drury testified that he'd not been given any sort of committee chair assignment and none of his bills passed during that two-year term.

Sente testified that she believed a committee chairmanship role – which included a stipend – was taken away from her in 2015 as punishment for things like pushing for term limits on legislative leaders and voting against a Madigan-proposed constitutional amendment to allow a "millionaires' tax."

After Sente agreed with Cotter's question that it was "reasonable" for members of the Democratic caucus to vote with generally Democratic policies, he asked if it was "reasonable for there to be consequences for members who don't go along with their party."

"I'm not sure I agree with that," Sente said.

Cotter pointed out that Sente's committee chair job was restored 10 months later.

"This is all politics, isn't it Ms. Sente?" Cotter asked.

"So I learned," Sente said.

Trial will resume at 10 a.m. on Monday.

Capitol News Illinois is a nonprofit, nonpartisan news service covering state government and distributed to more than 400 newspapers statewide. It is funded primarily by the Illinois Press Foundation and the Robert R. McCormick Foundation.

'You're A Street Fighter,' Madigan Confidant Counselor Former Speaker: Wiretapped Call

Jury hears 16 more recorded calls; Rep. says Madigan ruled 'through fear and intimidation'

By Hannah Meisel Capitol News Illinois

Facing a perceived betrayal during a make-or-break election season in 2018, former Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan called the person he often sought counsel from: longtime friend and confidant Mike McClain.

Several Democratic candidates running for the

Continued on Page 8



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Trial Day 4

from page 7

state Senate were using lines in their campaign ads explicitly calling for “term limits for leaders like Mike Madigan.” The candidates all used that same exact phrase in materials paid for by a fund run by Madigan’s counterpart in the other chamber of the legislature, then-Senate President John Cullerton.

McClain advised Madigan to not do anything – at least for 24 to 48 hours, while the speaker’s “agents” stepped in to “give (Cullerton) body blows,” according to a September 2018 recording of a wiretapped phone call that was played for a federal jury on Monday in a case where McClain and three others stand accused of bribing the former speaker.

As one of Madigan’s “agents,” he’d already sent Cullerton a text, he told Madigan. But he advised Madigan to approach Cullerton about the ads “sooner rather than later,” and gave him a vote of confidence.

“I mean, I know you got a law degree but you’re more of a street fighter than anybody knows, except for maybe guys like me,” McClain told his friend. “And if you want to put the squeeze on the guy you could hurt him pretty badly.”

Eventually the ads were nixed from the air after pressure from Democrats’ most consistent campaign funder, organized labor.

McClain, a longtime contract lobbyist for electric utility Commonwealth Edison, is facing bribery and racketeering charges along with two other former ComEd lobbyists – John Hooker and Jay Doherty – and the utility’s former CEO, Anne Pramaggiore.

On Monday, jurors in the case heard 16 more recordings from McClain’s wiretapped phone in 2018 and 2019, along with testimony from one of the FBI agents charged with investigating Madigan as far back as 2014. They also heard lengthy questioning of a ComEd executive not involved with the alleged bribery, and a current Democratic House member.

State Rep. Bob Rita, D-Blue Island, testified that in the 18 years he and Madigan overlapped in the House, he’d been loyal to the former speaker. But he also pulled no punches when describing how the former speaker exercised his power over both the Illinois House and through his vast political reach as chairman of the state’s Democratic Party.

“Through fear and intimidation,” Rita said.

And when asked by Assistant U.S. Attorney Sarah Streicker if he’d personally experienced that aggressive tactic, Rita responded, “yes.”

Rita, who was first elected to the House in 2002, now serves as the chair of the House’s powerful Executive Committee, and in 2016 he sponsored the Future Energy Jobs Act – one of ComEd’s signature legislative initiatives at the heart of the government’s case against the utility’s ex-lobbyists and CEO.

Prosecutors had also wanted to question Rita about his sponsorship of major gambling expansion legislation, and in court filings had contended Madigan once pointed to McClain in a meeting and told Rita, “he will guide you.”

But Judge Harry Leinenweber prohibited the government from introducing the gambling legislation issue to the jury, siding with the defense that the testimony would be “prejudicial.”

Rita testified that Madigan “had total control” over both the Illinois House and the state party, and one of the reasons for that political control was that the speaker “was very good at raising money.”

Without Madigan’s political help, “it could be very, very difficult” for a Democratic candidate to win a seat in the House, Rita said.

Rita’s testimony began late Monday afternoon and is expected to continue Tuesday morning.

Earlier in the day, the jury heard lengthy testimony from Scott Vogt, ComEd’s current vice president of

strategy, energy policy and revenue initiatives.

Prosecutors questioned Vogt to establish basic history for the jury about ComEd’s business over the last two decades. Vogt went in depth about how the utility had been preparing for possible bankruptcy in 2006.

ComEd’s financial position had been “dire,” Vogt said, as a result of a rate freeze put into place alongside Illinois’ electricity deregulation law in 2007. Because ComEd couldn’t increase what it was charging customers in accordance with the cost of energy the utility was buying, Vogt said ComEd couldn’t make investments necessary to improve reliability for customers.

In 2006, ComEd executives were worried that a bill to extend the rate freeze would pass the legislature. But the utility scored a win in Springfield and ComEd was allowed to seek a rate increase in 2007, after the original 10-year rate freeze expired.

But just because the rate freeze was over didn’t mean the utility could get the rate increases it was seeking. ComEd went before the Illinois Commerce Commission three times in the next five years and each of the 11-month processes yielded a rate increase far short of the \$300 million hike the utility requested.

ComEd’s 2007 rate increase case, for example, ended with the ICC only approving an \$8 million increase in electric rates – less than 3 percent of what the utility said it needed. Their next attempt yielded \$73 million in rate increases, still far short of the figure ComEd believed was necessary.

ComEd’s lobbying efforts scored the utility a few more wins in the next few years. Those included laws like the Illinois Power Agency Act in 2007 and a 2009 law that allowed the utility to recoup the costs of “bad debt,” where ComEd had given up on trying to chase payments from customers who hadn’t paid their electric bills. Both laws helped improve ComEd’s bottom line.

But the utility’s fortunes really turned with the passage of the Energy Infrastructure Modernization Act in 2011 – another of the laws central to the government’s theory of ComEd’s alleged bribery scheme. Included in that law, also known as “Smart Grid” legislation, was an overhaul of the way consumer electric rates were calculated. The new process, known as formula ratemaking, created a new tool for ComEd to recoup what it said was the true cost of running and improving electric service for its customers in northern Illinois.

Formula ratemaking, unlike traditional ratemaking, provided for more stable revenues for the utility, Vogt said, and allowed ComEd to massively upgrade its infrastructure and save customers money. Watchdog groups dispute the utility’s claim and say the cost of energy has come down across the board in the last decade.

Even so, Vogt touted formula ratemaking as having “tremendously improved” ComEd’s financial picture and having allowed the utility to invest in infrastructure and technology that has improved both costs and reliability.

However, the 2011 law included a provision that automatically “sunset” the formula rates a few years after they first took effect, necessitating ComEd to go back to the General Assembly to ask for the renewal of formula rates.

Toward the end of Vogt’s lengthy testimony on Monday, Assistant U.S. Attorney Julie Schwartz asked Vogt “what control” the sunset provision gave Madigan “over ComEd’s financial future.”

“A fair amount,”

Vogt said.

Defense attorneys, however, tried to zoom out on the government’s narrative, pointing to those earlier legislative wins in 2007 and 2009 that came before the formula rates in 2011 – when ComEd is first alleged to have bribed Madigan.

Daniel Craig, an attorney for Pramaggiore, asked Vogt why Madigan didn’t kill those earlier wins for ComEd.

“After scoring those big wins in the Illinois House in 2006 and 2007, can you think of any reason why anyone at ComEd would think they needed to start bribing Mike Madigan in 2011?” Craig asked Vogt.

Government attorneys objected to his question, and Leinenweber sustained the objection.

“Nothing further,” Craig said.

The trial continues at 10 a.m. on Tuesday.

Capitol News Illinois is a nonprofit, nonpartisan news service covering state government. It is distributed to more than 400 newspapers statewide, as well as hundreds of radio and TV stations. It is funded primarily by the Illinois Press Foundation and the Robert R. McCormick Foundation.



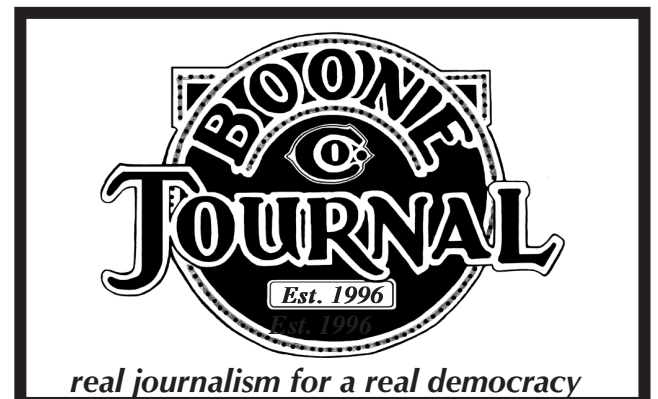
Yukon

from page 1

the final year. The abatement will be enhanced to 10 years and be 85 percent for the first 5 years, and 50 percent for the second 5-year period. After 10 years, the property owner will pay 100 percent of assessed property taxes with no abatement.

The purpose of the letter of commitment puts the project on a fast track, should Belvidere be chosen for the new site. This will speed up the construction schedule, because the legal process of the abatement change will take 3 to 6 months and involve the State of Illinois. This way, the company can feel confident that this benefit will be established at some point in the future and will not need to wait for final approval, according to Mike Drella, Belvidere City Attorney. “Project Yukon” is to make a decision on a location by June and begin construction by the fall of 2023. Belvidere is one of three cities being considered. The others being Beloit and Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

A representative of the Fortune 500 company, in a presentation to the city council, promised that the \$1.2 billion project will have 450 new jobs. 410 of these jobs will pay \$55,000 per year, and 40 will pay \$110,000 per year. These projections exceed the minimum criteria required to benefit from the second tier Enterprise Zone property tax abatement program.





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