



April 2, 2019

Illinois' State Budget

In Illinois, as in other states, lawmakers and public officials are elected in part to manage the state's finances. This includes generating revenues (money coming into the state from various sources) and approving expenditures (the money spent on governmental functions and servicing state debt). State budgets are complex and can change over time, as they depend on anticipated revenues and planned expenditures, which may alter over the course of a fiscal year. If revenues do not keep pace with expenditures, states generally have to raise taxes, cut services, borrow money, or a combination of the three. State budget decisions are also influenced by policy decisions at the national level, such as the Affordable Care Act or energy and environmental regulations; and issues at the local level, such as crime and the quality of education.

Illinois is faced with a \$3.2 billion budget deficit and a \$15 billion debt from unpaid bills. Last year, Illinois paid out more than \$700 million in late payment penalties. Illinois' already huge unfunded pension liability grew even larger in fiscal 2018, rising to \$133.5 billion from \$129 billion at the end of fiscal 2017, mainly due to inadequate state funding, according to a legislative report released in 2018. The state legislature's Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability also projected the liability would increase to \$136.8 billion when fiscal 2019 ends on June 30 and reach \$139 billion in fiscal 2020.

Since being in Springfield, I have taken on issues of social justice and changing our criminal justice system in Illinois. I have fought to Ban the Box on employment applications, seal non-violent criminal records, expand screening for HIV, address the heroin crisis, promote restorative justice practices, provide additional funding for our schools, restore funding for childcare, and hold financial institutions more accountable.

My current goal is to work for a strong fiscal 2020 budget that will put us on a path that begins to restore Illinois over the next few years as a place of fiscal and economic health. Budgets are actually declarations of policy, and I look forward to helping to create better policies through responsible budgeting.

According to the Constitution of Illinois, the governor must send the General Assembly a budget, and then the General Assembly tries to use the governor's proposed budget as a starting point. The governor's budget can't be realized without the cooperation of the General Assembly. Governor JB Pritzker has proposed a budget that will require increased spending for Higher Education, K-12 education, veterans, homeless services, birth to 5 year old, child care, and capital improvements. The successful accomplishment of the governor's budget will require new revenue to be generated. This is why it is important that both the General Assembly and the governor work together on budget items. The long budget impasse between Gov. Rauner and the General Assembly was a difference in priorities. Gov. Rauner proposed a budget that cut human services, higher education, child care, senior services and other programs in Illinois that help its most vulnerable populations.

The Illinois budget impasse during the prior administration was a 793-day-long budget crisis in the state of Illinois. From July 1, 2015, to August 31, 2017, Illinois was without a complete state budget for fiscal years 2016, 2017, and part of 2018. As a result, many state agencies had to cut services or continue borrowing to operate. The budget impasse adversely affected Illinois' economy, its credit rating, and public confidence in Illinois' state government.

We must restore economic and budgetary stability - that's why I am honored to be appointed Chair of the Illinois House Higher Education Appropriations Committee, and to the budget team. With pension problems facing Illinois, it is also an honor to have been appointed to the House Personnel and Pensions Committee. It is my goal to work with both Republicans and Democrats to stabilize the pension fund, eliminate the structural deficits in Illinois, and create better policies for all of us.

The General Assembly must pass a balanced budget and send it to the governor's desk to sign before the beginning of the new fiscal year on June 30th. It is our goal to send Governor Pritzker a balanced budget to sign on time this year. I will dedicate many of my next "As I See It" columns to our budget process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Ford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District