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Internship Summation including Department of Education Examination

Jamie Brown
Government Affairs Specialists Inc. (Placement)
4/27/04

Internship Summation

Beginning on January 13th I began interning for Government Affairs Specialists Inc. (GASI) a lobbyist firm investing its services for numerous clients ranging from American Lung Association, Eastern Illinois University, Structural Engineers Association of Illinois, to Voices for Illinois Children and Metropolitan Planning Council. The diversity of their clients was equivalent to the diversity of their workmanship, relationships, and expertise. I resided in a moderate size office with two primary supervisors, Loretta Durbin and Alice Phillips, while maintaining minor responsibilities from the office secretary, Bonnie Ettinger. Loretta Durbin could be characterized as a hard-nosed democratic woman who seems as if her ability to please has turned into her ability to succeed. She is a very successful leader and role model for all Democratic women. After daily conversations, interactions, and observances I am pleased to say that what I found most admirable was her character. Her persona as a public figure was one of ethics, class, and grace. And her ability to juggle numerous organizations, including being President of Illinois Women's Institute for Leadership (IWIL), is admirable to say the least. My other employer, Alice Phillips, who presides in Oak Brook, IL on non-session days, exhumes confidence, respects those well-deserving, and has the ability to provide wisdom at hierarchical levels. She is an esteemed Republican advocate, which created a keen bi-partisan firm, who seems issue driven but not unrealistic in her visions. My most discernible co-worker was office secretary, Bonnie Ettinger. In my twenty-two years I have yet met a woman with as much elegance, as calling her remarkable would be an understatement. I enjoyed her company as she typically spent numerous hours per day

responding to emails and taking care of her Illinois Women's Institute for Leadership responsibilities.

At first, working in an all women firm created much apprehension and quizzical thinking as most career women I have known tend to be overly competitive to the extent of insanity, overachieving to the point of disdain, and simply put, rude. In spite of this, I am not saying that I have roots mollycoddled in sexism rather; I can exceedingly observe beyond what is needed. However, my hesitance soon changed, almost immediately, after meeting my three co-workers.

Analyzing my experience, the tasks in which I performed were intern suited and comprehensive. I attended to typical office duties including answering phones, faxing documents, memos, and client bills, making copies, and office maintenance as the hectic schedule can create a messy working environment. Beyond clerical work, I did my fair share in the lobbyist process. I ran position papers, invitations, and miscellaneous letters to State Senators and Representatives, tracked client-affected pieces of legislation through a GASI maintained database, accomplished adequate research projects, followed the rules committee and its undertakings, and attended and monitored legislative dealings through committee hearing attendance and awareness. In highlighting many of my experiences up to the end of April, the most fascinating day in and day out experience was the ability to meet legislatures through running items to their Springfield offices, which goes to show that even small responsibilities create some of the best reminiscences. Another related practice included attending committee hearings while filing witness slips and testimony for GASI. The ability to attend these hearing gave me first hand knowledge, practicality, and vision into legislative functions, and from debate

to the process itself, state legislatures can be adjudicated as role models, admirable individuals, or just diverse citizens in the public limelight, all envisioning common goals to achieve true democracy, justice, and equality. Over the weeks this task seemed to be most intriguing, as tackling the committee conferences involved a very up-tempo and eye-absorbing schedule. Media crews, photographers, lobbyists, testimonial witnesses, concerned citizens, and yes, interns were among the daily masses gearing for legislative satisfaction. Another benefit of attending these meetings was that I saw examples of legislative nuances. One of which involved subtle differences in the way order of business between House hearings and Senate hearing was accomplished. The House seemed to be more discussion motivated and seemed more interested in general by their mannerisms and level of involvement while the Senate was fast paced with mostly sparse debate geared towards very specific, yet daunting, questions. For instance, during one entire Senate hearing the only bill that I can remember going into real discussion was Senate Bill 2988, which basically stated that if landlords did not repair a specific problem within fourteen days then the tenant may go ahead and hire someone to make the repairs, and upon presentation of the repair bill, the tenant may take the amount of money spent on the repair and deduct it from their rent. Obviously this was a very controversial bill as it was slated towards many proponents as well as its obvious opponents, landlords. Among the other bills being heard that day affecting GASI, SB2378 and SB2379, which would strengthen childcare issues, were two bills quickly motioned in and motioned as approved without discussion. So it was obvious that Loretta and Alice had previously searched out the committee members and pleaded their case to much approval.

Individual experiences have to include an A+ rally, which I attended during the fifth week of session, and a morning I spent tracking Loretta as she scuttled through the Legislative offices. The rally consisted of teachers, miscellaneous school members, and a few concerned state legislatures gearing towards ensuring quality education, delivering lasting property tax relief, and protecting vital services to students, parents, and teachers. Bus loads of these supporters gathered and administered agendas in hopes of spreading and infecting their message to the General Assembly. The day I spent following Loretta, while short, created insider knowledge of a lobbyist. Specifically, she met with a few legislatures and convinced them to be co-sponsors on the particular bills in which GASI was hoping to pass. One such legislature, Rep. Bill Black, met with Loretta and quickly came to terms that the bill she was endorsing would benefit all, including his constituents. What made this encounter so beguiling was the disparity in partisanship between the two. Rep. Black was a stout conservative while Loretta Durbin was a realistic Democrat. To me, this example illustrated that when a well-rounded bill presents itself during session, it circumvents typical factions of partisanship.

Soon after January 15th, after the Governor's State of the State address, which he ripped apart the current Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), I conveyed to my employers that I wanted to do independent research on the Illinois State Board of Education's current and future status and, as a result, I have geared a large amount of my internship document towards the Governors plan for Education reform.

Synopsis of the Governor's Education Reform Package

January 15th inaugurated the State of Illinois's uphill battle in education reform. During Governor Blagojevich's annual State of the State address he confronted the

Illinois State Board of Education and identified it as "an old, Soviet style bureaucracy, it's clunky and inefficient, it issues mandates, it spends money, it dictates policy, and it isn't accountable to anyone for anything." He further demonstrated that the ISBE needs to be accountable to the people that really matter: students, parents, teachers, principals, and taxpayers. As a solution, he outlined a bold agenda including a seven-part plan and presented nine innovative programs to improve education in the State of Illinois.

The seven-part plan is outlined in the creation of a new Department of Education.

1. The Department and local educators will streamline the 2,800 pages of rules governing the current education system.
2. The Department, Regional Offices of Education, and local districts will provide better administrative services for a fraction of the cost, as compared to current costs.
3. A "statewide educator benefits purchasing center" will be created to lower the current costs of health care for school districts and their employees.
4. A "state center" will be created to enable school districts to purchase products at negotiated prices.
5. The Department and the Capital Development Board will work to lower construction costs of school construction.
6. School district requests for state assistance will be streamlined by rewriting programs to cut bureaucracy and by simplifying the process.
7. All services mentioned above will be provided for less than 80% of ISBE funding and with 60% of ISBE's current headcount.

Also included in his call for education reform were nine different education motivated projects.

1. Imagination Libraries: initiative would provide twelve age appropriated books a year for all Illinois children from birth until the age of five.
2. Project Success: a revived initiative originally implemented by Jim Edgar, which provides families with a "comprehensive, systematic delivery system that responds to the needs of children and their families by using the school as the hub of service."
3. Reading Specialists: the Department would provide reading specialists to Illinois elementary schools that are failing to meet reading achievement standards.
4. Community Service: would require all Illinois high school students to perform forty hours of community service in order to receive their diploma.
5. Unhealthy food ban: would require that all school districts and school boards ban soda and junk food from its vending machines starting January 1, 2005.
6. Illinois Hunger Relief Act: In support of SB1400 which would require schools with forty-percent of the student population eligible for free or reduced lunches to also offer breakfast.
7. Teacher Certification and Preparation: would create a statewide task force to help analyze alternative routes for teacher certification, would require all K-8 teachers with a standard of master certificate to complete 50% of their renewal requirements by taking courses in reading strategies by Universities, or by participating in various professional development opportunities, and would create a Professional Teacher Standards Board which will administer certifications.

8. Student Preparation: would expand the Illinois Tech Prep Program to prepare those students not planning on attending a four-year institution.
9. Early Childhood Block Grant: would increase funding into this grant program to help send 25,000 more at-risk children per year to preschool.

The Governor essentially outlined total reform for the current Education system starting from the top and trickling down to the bottom of the foundation. In implementation of his "near-education-utopia" he began by proposing increases in elementary and secondary education funding by over $400 million for FY05 programs, in addition to $65 million for Chicago public schools retirement. Following his budget recommendations he also made proposals involving transferring some education programs to agencies under the Governor's review, which include Regular and Special Orphanage initiatives to the Department of Child and Family Services (CFS); Early Intervention, Truant Alternative and Optional Education program, and Regional Safe School programs to the Department of Human Services (DHS); General Equivalency Diploma to the Illinois Community College Board; and Agricultural Education to the Department of Agriculture.

The Governor's ideas brought immediate indignation and skepticism among some while appealing to others as new hope in their eyes of a failing Illinois education system. While most agreed that Illinois was failing the majority of the controversy surrounded the assumption that the governor would now be directly responsible for public education. In an initial response to the Governor's plan, State Superintendent Robert Schiller stated, "[the core problem is] the state's failure to fund public schools adequately [and] the [constitution] establishes a State Board of Education. This is a back-door approach to

highjack the constitution." Taken from the Springfield Journal Register newspaper, "to me, it just seems like a loss of accountability and usurping local control, and we're very much concerned about that. And we're very much concerned about swapping nine people for one," stated board chairwoman Janet Steiner of Carlinville.

In the first public response to legislative committee members, State Superintendent Robert Schiller attacked the Governor in his committee statement, "Our schools are not failing." In his testimony (subject matter only) to the Elementary and Secondary Education Committee he outlined the ISBE's 2003 Condition of Education report and its long-term goals. Highlighting some of ISBE's positives he remarked, "not all of our schools are failing [in fact] many are excelling," graduating seniors who took the SATs scored seventy-six points higher in verbal skills and seventy-seven points higher in math than the national average, graduation rates are up 86%, and dropout rates dropped to 4.9%, its lowest in five years. After the committee hearing ended State Superintendent Schiller further responded to the media claiming that "consolidating power is not what good government's about." Further, "he, [the Governor,] has been given distorted and incomplete data and I stand ready to refute and demonstrate separating fact from fiction."

Education Bills

This session the House of Representatives proposed 2,515 new laws while Senators proposed only 948. Among the 3,463 proposals, hot button reforms were in the areas of health insurance, medical malpractice, prescription drugs, methamphetamine (used to make drugs like ecstasy), sex offenders, gun control, obesity, and education reform. However, for this synopsis education reform is what we are focusing on. There

were many House bills (HB) bestowing education reform but the bills that I found most attractive were HB3970, HB3974, HB4167, HB4058, HB5041, and HB5887. As there were numerous Senate bills (SB) introduced: SB1074 (reintroduced from last session), SB2431, SB2941, SB3000, SJRCA 44, and SJRCA46. To start at the summit of education reform SB3000 would create:

> "The Department of Education, with a Secretary of Education as its head. Provides that all of the rights, powers, duties, and functions vested by law in the State Board of Education or the State Superintendent of Education (except the State Board of Education's duty under the Illinois Constitution to appoint a chief State educational officer) are transferred to the Department of Education on July 1, 2005. Provides for the transfer of personnel and property. Requires the Auditor General to conduct a financial audit of the State Board of Education. Provides that the State Board of Education's powers and duties are limited by law, as provided in the Illinois Constitution, to only the following: (i) the State Board of Education shall research current educational best practices and policies and shall report its findings to the Department of Education, (ii) the State Board of Education shall provide suggestions to the Department of Education as to the long-range implications of the practices and policies, and (iii) the State Board of Education shall consult with the Department of Education on all matters related to education-related topics. Makes other changes. Certain provisions effective July 1, 2004; other provisions effective July 1, 2005. of Education, (ii) the State Board of Education shall provide suggestions to the Department of Education as to the long-range implications of the practices and policies, and (iii) the State Board of Education shall consult with the Department of Education on all matters related to education-related topics. Makes other changes. Certain provisions effective July 1, 2004; other provisions effective July 1, 2005 (SB3000)."

This bill has served as the cornerstone of education reform for the Ninety-third General Assembly as it directly displaces the current hierarchy of power into direct state control. Introduced to the Senate on February 6 it has filed two amendments while

receiving no hearing date as it is stuck in the rules committee. SJRCA44 is another necessary piece of education reform legislation which would amend Section Two of Article X of the Illinois State Constitution:

> "Provides that the State Superintendent of Education shall be nominated at the general primary election and elected at the general election to serve a term of 4 years beginning on the second Monday of January following his or her election. Establishes eligibility criteria for the office and ballot placement for the election (SJRCA44)..."

To continue the path towards near-utopia the Governor's office, along with Rep. Bill Brady, as the sponsor, proposed SJRCA46 which,

> "Proposes to amend the Education Article of the Illinois Constitution by repealing the Section (i) that creates the State Board of Education and (ii) that requires the State Board of Education to appoint a chief State educational officer (SJRCA46)."

As of mid-April both of the solicited constitutional amendments have remained trapped in the rules committee.

There were three more significant proposals that generated high debate with reference to education reform. HB5887 would mandate that "the State Board of Education consist of nine members, who shall be appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate (HB5887)..." SB2431 would "terminate the terms of current members of the State Board of Education on July 1, 2004, and provides for new members to be appointed by the Governor, with the advice and consent of the Senate (SB2431)." The last interesting bill reasoned by the Governor is SB1074. The Senate Bill, which has twenty-three Senate sponsors and forty House sponsors, would create "an independent Professional Teacher Standards (Certification) Board appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate (SB1074)". The main concern floating around this particular piece of legislation was that the eleven member board

heavily favors teachers' unions because it would only contain two administrators and one business or community member. In terms of technical and administrative changes these six chief pieces of legislation provide the initial groundwork for education transformation.

Beyond the underpinning of the Governor's gleaming flag of reform there is also a wide variety of legislation that would contour the current way elementary and secondary schools operate. HB3974, HB4058, and SB2941 all deal with "unhealthy food bans," which was priority five on the Governor's list of education motivated project developments. HB3974 amends the school code by "mandating all school boards to prohibit soft drinks and candy from being dispensed to students by school vending machines (HB3974)." A related bill, HB4058, amends the school code by,

> "prohibits a public school from selling, offering for sale, or otherwise offering or providing soft drinks to pupils at school at any time, with exceptions; prohibits a public school from maintaining or allowing to be maintained a vending machine that is located at a school or on school grounds, that sells soft drinks, and that is accessible to pupils, with exceptions. Provides for a penalty (HB4058)."

The third bill, SB2941, adds the language that attempts to address the conundrum surrounding obesity among children, which would "set requirements for all food and beverages sold in school vending machines." For instance, "beverages sold must be at 50% fruit juice with no added sweeteners and a snack must have 30% or less of its total calories from fat, 10% or less from saturated and trans fat, and must contain less than 35% of its weight from non-natural sugars" (SB2941).

There were two additional contours seeking to mandate physical education and community service among children in schools. HB3970

"provides the provisions concerning the waiver of mandates within the School Code and administrative rules, provides that an approved waiver from or modification to a physical education mandate may remain in effect for a period not to exceed 2 (instead of 5) school years, and must not be renewed (HB3970)."

To further advance physical education HB4167 would require daily engagement of physical education by all students. So in another response to the obesity problem the Governor sees a revolutionary step could be to not only regulate particulars in food sales sold to students but to also encourage and instruct rules regarding physical activity as a need to keep kids healthy.

Closing Statement

For the most part, from the beginning of the legislative session to the end party lines polarized over the Governor's education plan. Republican House of Representative Bill Black called the Governor's plan "excessive micromanaging" while Democratic Representative Kevin McCarthy, during a House Education committee hearing, displayed the 2,800 pages of ISBE administrative rules and demanded explanations from ISBE board members, including State Superintendent Robert Schiller, in response to the Governor's negative statements concerning K-12 education. However, there were a few Democrats who publicly spoke as critics to the plan. Democratic Senator Miguel del Valle accused the governor of not offering a complete picture of school financing during his State of the State address and House Speaker Michael Madigan has put high disregard on the Governor's plan through the public forum.

If signed into Illinois law I feel one of the deepest impacts would be in the loss of jobs. Current ISBE employees and members of the board would be fired and for those remaining, it could result in, at worst, loss of power and, at best, reallocation of power.

For instance, SB1074 proposed the creation of a Professional Teacher Standards Board, which would be appointed by the Governor and would give the board all powers and duties formerly held by the ISBE and thus, would abolish the system's current Teacher Certification Board run by the ISBE.

In the end, education reform boiled down to partisan politics, administrative firings, and change in the balance of power and authority. As it is almost the end of the legislative session only one of the Governor's education bills has carried enough legislative support to be sent to the next chamber, HB4167. While the only other bill, HB4058, to get to a third reading failed with only twenty-eight yes votes out of 114 present members. So it is clear that while education was a hot topic during the beginning of the legislative year the legislation presented before the General Assembly hardly mustered any approval down the homestretch.

My personal convictions tell me that what the Governor is trying to doing could, ultimately, save millions of dollars each year, significantly increase the quality of education, and provide better regulation over a mismanaged system. And with an increase in the need for Illinois jobs, protection from international and domestic threats, and health care coverage it would be hard to overlook what the governor is trying to do in terms of providing monetary breathing room.

After this semester, I have realized that working in government is not all about procedures, rules, and regulations but also involves listening, compromise, networking, conversation, and even learning. Therefore, for the Governor to succeed in his gleaming flag of reform he needs to be more accessible to the people, more diligent in his words,

and more productive in his meanings. Overall, this experience was truly a remarkable benchmark in all the good things meant in any government.