

Republican Candidate for Illinois State Representative, House District 106

Tom Bennett's Platform – 2/16/2012

I have serious concerns for our state of Illinois. Many of the issues have been around for sometime. If there were easy solutions, they would have already been found. This situation has developed over several years and has not been addressed by state government.

We live in a global economy where jobs have moved to China and India and I don't see some of jobs returning. We need to look for ways to create a strong economy, build a strong business environment, encourage business growth and creativity, and to support free markets to meet consumer demand. We need to help people acquire the skills and training they need to adapt to a changing business world and that would support business development and entrepreneurship.

There are those that believe the government drives our economy. I disagree. Instead it is thousands of small business owners that work hard every day trying to minimize costs and maximize profits. They make daily decisions on work flow and appropriate business models.

Illinois has a rich diversity in rich farmland, strong towns and cities. It should be a strong economic powerhouse but because of an unfriendly business climate, it is not. Here are some surprising facts about Illinois from the Illinois Policy Institute and "Rich States, Poor States," authored by Steve Moore, Art Laffer, and Jonathan Williams. Out of the 50 states, Illinois ranks 48th in economic performance. According to the 2010 ALEC-Laffer State Economic Competitiveness Index, Illinois is doing better than only two states: Michigan and Ohio. According to this report, as well as government data, Illinois also ranks:

- 47th in economic outlook. Neighboring Missouri and Indiana rank well ahead in terms of future opportunity, at 15th and 20th, respectively.
- 44th in GDP growth, averaging only 4.95 percent per year from 1998-2008 while the U.S. average was 6.59 percent.
- 37th in debt burden. Illinois continues to spend government revenue growth on government expansion rather than funding past debt obligations, including pensions.
- 36th in personal income per capita growth, averaging 4.5 percent in 1999- 2008 while the U.S. average was 5.1 percent.

- 48th in employment growth from 1999-2008, ranking ahead of only Michigan and Ohio.
- 48th in absolute domestic migration, with 637,979 people leaving the state from 1999-2008.

Spending/Revenue Problem

We don't have a revenue problem. We have a spending problem. Like with any business, we can't continue to spend more than we take in. With our growing debt and increased obligations for our pensions, we need to seriously look at all options on how to reduce our debt. This issue affects every Illinoisan. This can't be done in a vacuum but will need input from all facets of business, unions, and state government.

In the fall of 2010, we raised our income tax and now the state is working to make it permanent. I do not support a permanent tax increase. This works against creating a positive business environment. Several major businesses have asked for and received exemptions. I would expect similar request to follow. Borrowing only adds to our debt and requires more money from state taxpayers. Treasurer Rutherford said in May 2011 that every family in Illinois now carries \$42,000 in debt.

To help create a better business environment, we need to balance the budget, modify our pension systems so that they are self-sufficient, reform workman's comp, support tort reform, lower taxes, and eliminate/modify regulations/restrictions on business that add additional needless burdens for business growth.

Pensions - There are five pension systems. They are the Teacher's Retirement System, the State Universities Retirement System, and State Employees' Retirement System, Judges' retirement System, and the general Assembly retirement System. Today, there is not enough money to cover liabilities. There were some changes to the state pension system in spring of 2011 but that was only for newly hired employees. Pension payments are required by law. Yet, there are some questions over the legality of changing the plans for current employees. However, the pension clause in the Illinois Constitution has been supported by the Illinois Supreme Court and does not seem to allow any pension changes for current employees without their involvement.

On January 4 the State Senate has talked about getting more involved with finding a workable long term solution. Today the pensions are around 83\$ billion dollars in the hole and growing. This has not been addressed for far way too long.

The Pension Funding & Fairness Act does create some interesting ideas around a possible solution. For one, we need to pay our debts. However, we also need to look at the whole picture. We need to look at all options around "defined benefits" and "defined contributions". As we look at pensions, we need to be very aware that the money that teachers and others have put into their system is their money. The pension system has to pay for itself. It cannot take additional funds from the rest of the state budget to balance.

The world is changing. Businesses are cutting benefits for their retirees and having them pay more of the expense for health care. Many people do not have pensions. Others may have a 401K or something similar that is defined contribution.

Workmans' Comp – Great start in Springfield this last session. However, this should be one of our top priorities to address in the near future. Missouri appears to have some good things for us to look at. This needs reform. Workman's Compensation should be paid when people are hurt on the job.

Agriculture - See my Ag White Paper

Health Care - See my Health Care White Paper

Education - We put more money into education than other countries but our results are less than many others. Our students are key to our future success as a state and as a country. We need to find ways to help our students learn better. What is the motivation of students, teachers, administrators, and family support groups? Teachers cannot do it by themselves. True student success requires support from families, teachers, and administration. Things are definitely not working the way they need to keep the United States the number one country in the world.

Unions were created at least in part because management did not provide a balance in the workplace. At times, they have helped and protected teachers when they were wrongfully accused. This gave teachers some place to turn. Yet, teacher unions are one of the strongest groups in Illinois and in the eyes of many have frustrated student progress. Yet, historically, administrators and teachers have often agreed to help move education forward.

I support competition in education. We have it in businesses and in colleges. Home school gives parents and students another option and I have seen it successful in our

district. I also support school vouchers. This approach creates issues but we need to find approaches that encourages new ideas and approaches, improves our school systems and helps our students be more adaptable and capable leaders.

Pro-Family - The family is the core strength of our society. Marriage is between a man and a woman.

Pro-Gun - Supports 2nd Rights Amendment. We have guns on our family farm. My dad competed in hand gun tournaments around the state. He took the time to show me how to treat guns with respect. I shoot shotguns on occasion with friends and family at the farm. I support and encourage gun safety programs. Support concealed firearms with appropriate permits. Oppose more stringent gun control laws.

Abate – believe in the rights of the individual. Don't believe that government should create laws to force motorcycle riders to wear helmets. Although having added protection makes sense, it is up to the individual to make that call. Individual accountability.

Pro-Life - yes

Government Transparency - More government transparency will bring more accountability into how spending decisions are made. Some strides have been made. Today, the state must now post all expenditures in an online database but more can be done. Provide more details in an easy-to-use format. Include salary and benefit information for all Illinois government workers as well as information on payouts to retired state employees. Consider putting bills on line and give the public an opportunity to weigh in before the vote is taken.

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