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The Gathering Storm in Belvidere

by David Larson

A group of men have gathered in a u-shape. At the right end is an individual who is sitting on an elevated chair. Why? Who is this person? Why a photograph?

The picture may have been taken on North State Street near Lincoln Avenue, then known as Mechanic Street. It was likely near the American House, a stagecoach stop, which gave Belvidere a place on the map, much like the Oasis on the Tollway does today.

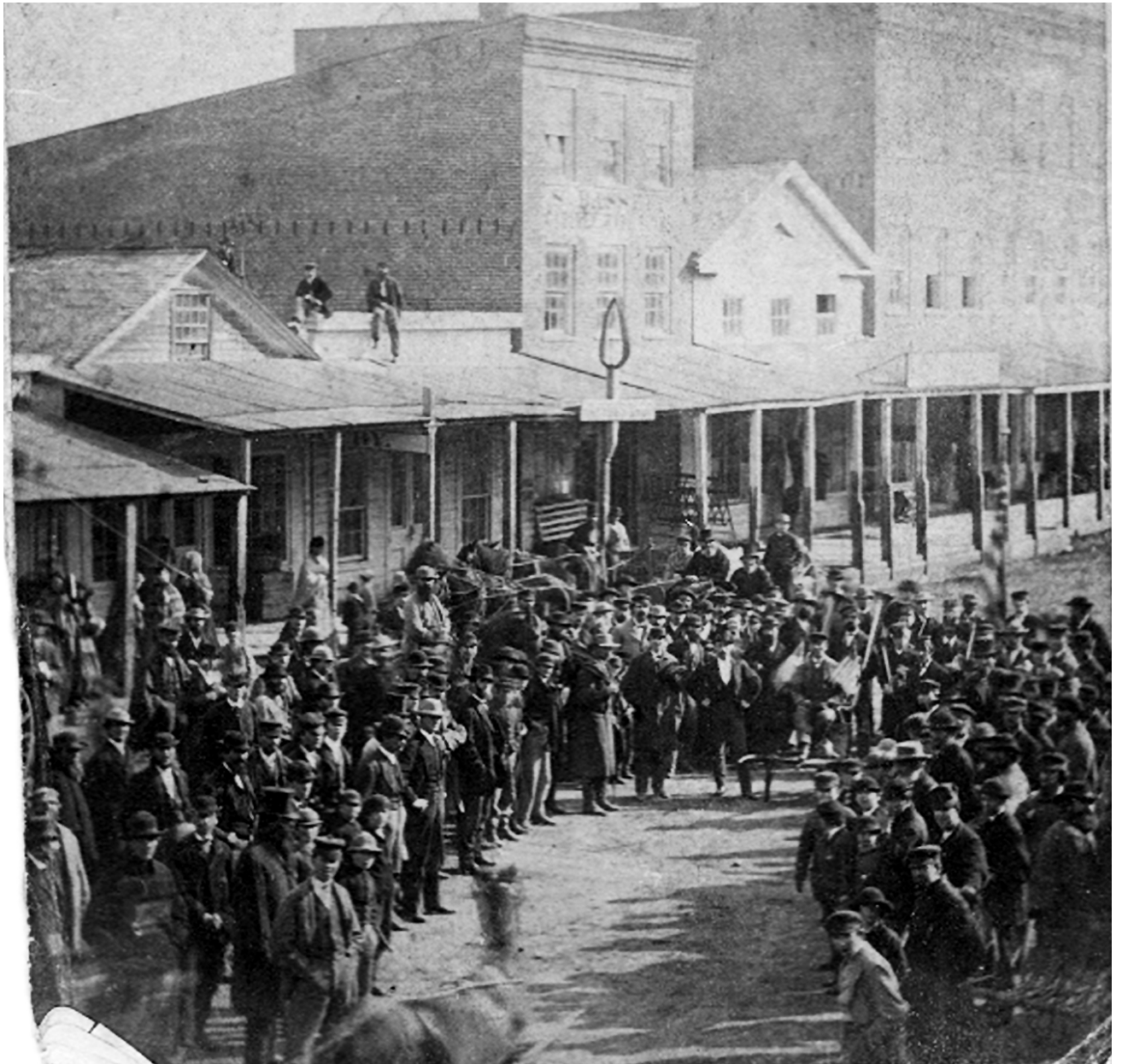
The American House was an oasis on the long journey by stagecoach from Chicago to Galena. The railroad arrived in Belvidere in 1852, a decade before the Civil War. It ultimately replaced the stagecoach.

This undated photograph shows a general mid-19th Century time period, as reflected by the buildings.

All of the wooden structures shown here were removed and replaced by brick buildings around the turn of the century by enterprising individuals. Many of these brick buildings remain despite the wear of time and change in taste.

It was a time when photographs were just beginning. (It was not a time of cellphone cameras!) It was a time when photo graphics

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A special event on the dirt street of North State Street in Belvidere

Lawmakers Give Small Boost to Renewable Developments, Delay Broader Reform

Energy policy likely to be revisited in spring legislative session

By Andrew Adams Capitol News Illinois

Lawmakers this week passed a bill aimed at boosting the development of renewable energy generation, but its proponents said the final measure was a “skinny” version of what they had hoped to pass.

The bill comes as several state officials warn that Illinois is falling behind on its clean energy goals. The state’s main funding mechanism for renewable energy projects also faces a potential \$3 billion budget shortfall in the coming years.

The legislation gives state regulators more authority to balance the budget for a key renewable energy financing tool, partially by shifting financial risk to electric utility customers. It also sets up a study of energy storage technology that is intended to form the basis of a new bill later this year.

“We’ve seen the effects of climate change. We’ve seen the effects on storms, extreme storms, extreme heat, extreme cold,” Rep. Robyn Gabel, D-Evanston, said during floor debate. “This is

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General Assembly Sworn in as House, Senate Take Different Tones

Lawmakers face potential budget shortfall as new legislative term begins

By Peter Hancock, Ben Szalinski & Bridgette Fox Capitol News Illinois

A new Illinois General Assembly was sworn in for the next two years on Wednesday, with the House and Senate ceremonies taking two starkly different tones.

The House inauguration ceremony, conducted in an auditorium on the University of Illinois Springfield campus, was at times boisterous, featuring speeches that were more politically divisive and sometimes led to jeering.

House Speaker Emanuel “Chris” Welch, who was reelected to his third term leading the chamber, tried to strike a chord of unity as he exhorted his colleagues to work together to meet the challenges of what he called a unique moment in history.

“The urgency of this moment shows that unity is our power,” he said. “Members of the 104th General Assembly, let’s rise to meet this moment together. Let’s use this time and all that has been given to us to do the work and move Illinois forward. Winners do the work.”

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Voting Open: Here’s Where to Cast Your Ballot for a New State Flag

Voters can choose from 10 new designs, 3 old ones

By Jerry Nowicki Capitol News Illinois

Illinoisans can now vote on whether they want a new state flag.

The Illinois Secretary of State’s office officially opened the voting portal on Friday, and votes will be accepted through Feb. 14.

Voters can choose from 10 designs for a new flag, the current flag, the 1918 centennial flag or 1968 sesquicentennial flag. Individuals can vote for one flag once every 24 hours and may select the same or a different flag each day.

To view the designs and vote, visit www.ilsos.gov/stateflag.

The online vote will be non-binding but will inform a report that the Illinois Flag Commission is set to release to the General Assembly by April 1. After the commission delivers its final report – with a recommendation as to whether the state should adopt a new flag – the Illinois General Assembly will have the choice to adopt a new flag or keep the old one.

The flag commission is made up of current and former lawmakers, representatives of state

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Peter Cowen

Peter Daniel Cowen, 72, of Belvidere, IL, passed away Wednesday, January 8, 2025. He was born October 29, 1952, in Berwyn, Illinois, the son of Theodore and Loretta (Gould) Cowen, Jr. He married the love of his life, Christine Elliott, on April 8, 2004, in Belvidere, IL.

Peter grew up in a family that loved words, books, and puzzles. He groaned at and tried to match his father's puns. He was an avid reader who wrote poetry and loved Shakespeare. After

graduating from Belvidere High School in 1970, he attended Southern Illinois University, graduating with a degree in English Literature. His artistic talent resulted in the painting of a smiling moon on a small barn along Route 20. He included his initials, but otherwise kept the project a secret until he was interviewed for a story in the BDR 15 years later.

He was an animal lover who enjoyed chess and spicy food. His companion cats Pip and Perry entertained and comforted him during his last years. He is loved and will be deeply missed by his beloved wife, Chris; mother, Laurie Cowen; siblings, Ted Cowen III, Marsha Hosfeld, Tony (Julie) Cowen, Martin (Traci) Cowen; numerous nieces, nephews, great-nieces, and great-nephews; cats, Pip and Perry. He was preceded in death by his father, Ted; brother, Larry Cowen; brother-in-law, Roger Hosfeld; sister-in-law, Lynn Cowen; and nephew, Drew Cowen.

There will be a visitation Friday, January 17, 2025 from 10:30 A.M. to 12:00 P.M. at the Belvidere Funeral Home & Cremation Service. A celebration of life will begin at 12:00 P.M. In lieu of flowers memorials can be made to the Boone County Animal Shelter. Condolences may be shared with the family at www.belviderefh.com.

Howard William Pearson

Howard William Pearson, 83, of Belvidere, Illinois, passed away on January 2, 2025. Born on March 19, 1941, in Belvidere, Howard was the son of Harriet (Hull) and Sigfred Pearson. He was a lifelong resident of Belvidere and cherished his deep roots in the community. Howard's journey was defined by a strong sense of duty, service to his country, and a deep love for his family and friends.

Howard's path began as a young man with an unwavering commitment to serving his country. After graduating from Belvidere High School, Howard proudly enlisted in the United States Air Force, where he served from 1959 to 1967. His years of service were marked by discipline, dedication, and a deep love for his country. After his honorable discharge, Howard returned to Belvidere, where he began a new chapter in his life.

In 1970, Howard joined the Belvidere Police Department, where he would go on to serve with distinction for 25 years. His commitment to keeping his community safe and upholding justice earned him the respect of his colleagues and the citizens he protected. After retiring from the police department in 1995, Howard continued to serve his community in a different capacity, spending many years working at Just Tires, where he built lasting friendships and continued to exemplify a strong work ethic.

Howard was a man of many passions. He was a regular at the American Legion, where he enjoyed the camaraderie of his friends, especially during their famous Friday fish fries. He had a lifelong love of cars, and his frequent visits to local car shows allowed him to indulge in his passion while reconnecting with old friends and making new ones.

In addition to his service and dedication to his community, Howard was also a man of impressive personal accomplishments. He achieved the rank of 3rd-degree black belt in martial arts. Howard was passionate about sharing his knowledge with others and taught swim classes and self-defense courses at the local YMCA. His teaching and guidance left a lasting impact on many, and he was proud to have helped countless individuals gain confidence and skills through his classes.

In August 2004, Howard found his true part-

ner in life when he married Wendy Trueblood. Together, they shared over 20 years of marriage. He leaves behind a legacy of love, service, and a commitment to making the world a better place.

He is survived by his wife, Wendy Trueblood-Pearson; stepchildren, Laurie (Carl) Kelsey, Daniel Wafford, Candice (Ruben Moore) Wafford; brother, Larry "Pete" Pearson; grandchildren, Alex, Lani, Katie, Sam, Sean, and Rubee. He is also survived by a large circle of family, friends, and colleagues who will forever cherish his memory.

Howard was preceded in death by his parents, Harriet and Sigfred Pearson, and sister-in-law, Bonnie Pearson.

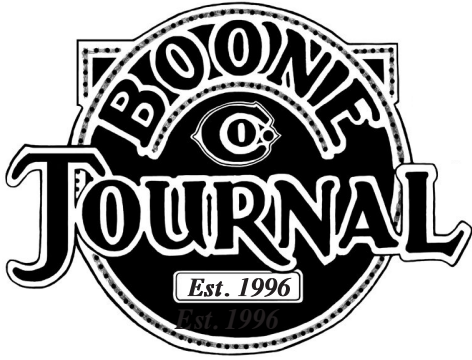
Howard's Memorial visitation will be Monday, January 13, 2025 between the hours of 10am-12pm at Anderson Funeral Home. Located at 218 W. Hurlbut Ave. Belvidere, IL 61008. Memorial service to follow at 12pm.

The family would like to extend their deep appreciation to the nursing staff with Northern Illinois Hospice for their care and compassion.

In lieu of flowers donations can be made to the family for establishing a memorial at a later date.

OBITUARIES

- Roger Bruyn, 80, Rockford, Jan. 9
- Nancy Collins, 87, Caledonia, Jan. 10
- Peter Cowen, 72, Belvidere, Jan. 8
- Donald Dysarz, 87, Formerly of Harvard, Dec. 24
- Bonnie Eudy, 90, Cherry Valley, Jan. 10
- Nicholas Giamarese, 71, Belvidere, Jan. 10
- Linda Kilbarger, 71, Belvidere, Jan. 6
- Allen Stone, 89, Harvard, Jan. 11



Publisher/Editor Senior Writer/Editorial Photography	David C. Larson Charles Herbst Susan Moran
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David Grimm April 1938 - Dec. 2000
 Richelle Kingsbury Aug. 1955 - June 2013

Each week, the Journal seeks to present a variety of voices.
Letters. Every attempt will be made to print all letters received with the exception of those that are libelous or obscene. Letters should be signed and include an ID or phone number, so that we can contact the author prior to publication to verify authenticity.
Guest columns. Community leaders are encouraged to submit guest columns consistent with our editorial guidelines for possible inclusion in the Journal.
Opinions. The opinions expressed in the Journal are those of their authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of The Boone County Journal management or ownership.

Letters to the Editor

Below is my Statement on the Special Counsel Report.

"The Special Counsel Report confirms what my colleagues and I uncovered during our investigation with the January 6th Committee: Donald Trump lost a free and fair election."

"Rather than accept this truth, Donald Trump allowed his ego to override his duty to the American people. He lied to his supporters, lied to the country, and engaged in illegal acts in a desperate and dangerous attempt to cling to power and brought our democracy to the brink because of it."

"Let's be clear: Donald Trump is not facing accountability for his lies and crimes because he ran for president and was elected."

"I am proud of the work my colleagues and I did on the January 6th Committee to shine a light on the truth and hold Donald Trump and his enablers responsible for January 6th accountable. This report is a testament to the importance of uncovering the facts, defending the rule of law and upholding the constitution."

"While I welcome the release of the Special Counsel's report, I regret that the Justice Department did not act more swiftly in investigating these crimes."

"Most of all, this report highlights just how fragile our Democracy is. We live in a nation that has lifted millions out of poverty, triumphed over tyranny, pioneered groundbreaking medical advancements, and showcased the best of American values in times of profound need and we have done all that because democracy has enabled us to. We must remain vigilant in protecting it from those who seek to undermine it."

Adam Kinzinger
<https://www.country1st.com/>

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Potawatomi Land Transfer Clears General Assembly

Bill allows tribe to acquire 1,500-acre state park in DeKalb County

By Peter Hancock Capitol News Illinois

Nearly two centuries after losing its reservation in Illinois in a land sale that most people now concede was illegal, the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation could soon get its land back.

In the final hours of a lame duck session Tuesday, the Illinois House gave final approval to a bill authorizing the state to hand over to the tribe a 1,500-acre state park in DeKalb County, land that largely overlaps the tribe's original reservation.

"You know, this has been a struggle," tribal Chairman Joseph "Zeke" Rupnick said in an interview in the Statehouse rotunda while waiting for the House to take up the bill.

Senate Bill 867 is the culmination of nearly 20 years of negotiations between the tribe and the state. It authorizes the director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to deliver a quitclaim deed to the tribe for land that currently makes up Shabbona Lake and State Park.

The transfer of land, however, would be contingent on the state and tribe executing a land management agreement under which the park would continue to be operated as a park and open to the public.

"If there's no agreement, there's no transfer," Rep. Will Guzzardi, D-Chicago, the bill's chief House sponsor, said during floor debate. "The land does not get transferred with the passage of this bill. It is pending a land management agreement to keep the park a park."

The Potawatomi Indians once occupied much of the Great Lakes region, but they were gradually displaced by growing European settlements. In 1829, the Treaty of Prairie du Chien granted the Prairie Band Potawatomi two square miles, or 1,280 acres, in what is now DeKalb County.

According to Rupnick, Chief Shab-eh-nay – after whom the park is named – and several members of his extended family lived on that reservation. But after passage of the Indian Removal Act of 1830, many other tribal members left Illinois, eventually settling in northeast Kansas, where the tribe is now headquartered.

But around 1849, Shab-eh-nay traveled west to

Kansas to check on the status of tribal members there. While he was gone, the federal government declared the reservation land abandoned and sold it at public auction.

The legality of that sale, however, has always been in doubt because under federal law, tribal land cannot be sold except by an act of Congress. And since Congress never authorized that sale, and the tribe has never relinquished its claim to the land, all deeds and titles to that land have been legally clouded.

Most of the original reservation is now part of the state park, which the state acquired in the 1960s. But some portions of the original reservation are now occupied by private owners.

Rupnick said the tribe's efforts to reestablish a reservation in Illinois began in 2006 when it purchased about 130 acres of farm land that had once been part of the original reservation. It also began petitioning the U.S. Department of Interior to take the land into trust as reservation property, which the agency finally did in April 2024.

"Once we started meeting with lawmakers down here (in Springfield), they realized that a majority of the original reservation was a part of the state park," Rupnick said. "So DNR at that time said, 'Well, since this is part of the reservation, what would you guys do if we said, let's turn it over to you?' And I said, 'Well, we'll take it.'"

Rupnick said the state legislation will go a long way toward permanently satisfying the tribe's land claims in Illinois. In addition to pushing for SB 867, which now awaits Gov. JB Pritzker's signature, the Prairie Band Potawatomi are also seeking federal legislation that would settle the tribe's claims to remaining land on the original reservation site in exchange for a cash payment that would allow them to repurchase land currently in private hands.

Speaking on the House floor, Guzzardi said passage of the bill would be a small step toward correcting a historic injustice committed in America 175 years ago.

"I firmly believe that for all of our problems, America is the greatest country on Earth, and I'm proud to be American," he said. "But I also don't think that the answer is to turn a blind eye to the violence and the ugliness of our past, to rewrite the history books, to gloss over the unpleasant parts. I think the answer is to look our past square in the eye, the good stuff and the bad stuff, and when we recognize that we've done wrong as a nation, to see it, to own it, and to find some way where we can make it right."

Capitol News Illinois is a nonprofit, nonpartisan news service that distributes state government coverage to hundreds of news outlets statewide. It is funded primarily by the Illinois Press Foundation and the Robert R. McCormick Foundation.

Pharmacy Benefit Managers Create Crisis in Patient Care that Demands Immediate Action

By Garth Reynolds, BSP Pharm, RPh, MBA, FAPhA Executive Director, Illinois Pharmacists Association

The pharmacy profession is under siege. Community pharmacies (independent and chain) are closing at an alarming rate, leaving countless communities without access to essential medications and care. The culprits behind this crisis are pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs), whose opaque and predatory practices are decimating the very foundation of our health care system.

A recent Health Affairs study revealed that nearly 30% of U.S. pharmacies have closed since 2010, with closures disproportionately affecting rural, urban, and underserved communities. Illinois has seen this crisis firsthand (more than 80 pharmacy closures just in 2024), with closures leaving countless residents in "pharmacy deserts," where access to medications, vaccinations, and chronic disease management is severely limited; particularly in minority neighborhoods, exacerbating health care disparities and leaving vulnerable populations stranded without necessary pharmaceutical services.

The situation is dire. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has intensified its investigation into PBM practices, acknowledging their anti-competitive behaviors that harm consumers and drive pharmacies out of business. The Illinois Auditor General's report provides a damning critique of PBM management of Medicaid dollars (\$200 million in just 2 years), revealing waste, inefficiency, and inflated costs to taxpayers. Attorney General Kwame Raoul has taken decisive action, filing lawsuits against PBMs for deceptive practices and antitrust violations (more than \$100 million in settlements). These steps, while commendable, are insufficient to stem the tide of pharmacy closures and the resulting health care crisis.

Medicaid programs are particularly susceptible to PBM exploitation. Through a lack of transparency, PBMs siphon funds intended to support patients and providers, forcing pharmacies

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Storm from page 1

was just beginning. Taking a photograph on the frontier was rare. This event, was most likely very important...because the use of a camera was not common and required a specialist to perform. Shutter speeds were quite long and processing difficult.

To organize this group, the local newspaper and word of mouth would bring this organized group together.

We don't know what the precise circumstances were behind the picture, but we can make some conjecture:

Recognizing that the moment was significant, perhaps the start of Boone County's response to the bombing of Fort Sumter.. The Civil War was the single most important event of the day and remained so to the end of the Grant Administration in 1880. Behind the man on the elevated chair, while hard to see, is a band with horns and drums. Again, the event was clearly an important event for the community, especially to be enhanced with celebratory music.

The photographer was perched on a roof or at a second story window. He opened his shutter at the moment when a horse drawn carriage appears, in a blur, entering the circle, and proceeding toward the man in the elevated chair with the band behind him. Imagine patriotic music playing to calm and welcome this important event in the lives of those gathered, and the nation for the next five years. Blood was sure to flow (hopefully of the enemy) with a prayer of safety for the friends who had gathered.

All eyes are drawn to the blur entering the circle. What could this possibly mean for the future? The crowd looks serious, and rather excited, as would be expected. Perhaps war plans were arriving from Freeport or Rockford.

With the breakout of war and the attack on Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, news from the Army leadership on what action Boone County boys should follow to defend the Union was the message being delivered.

Perhaps it is the arrival of the district's Congressman delivering the news of war plans, having traveled all the way from Galena. Boone County's then Congressional district was much larger and included most of northwestern Illinois including Galena.

At that time, the Congressman was Elihu B. Washburn, of Galena, a very powerful member of the House of Representatives. He knew President Lincoln from their time together in the Illinois House. Washburn was the right hand of Lincoln in the House of Representatives, and the defender and promoter of U.S. Grant.

A key to Grant's rise in the ranks, Washburn always kept Lincoln informed of Grant's superior generalship. Grant entered the war as a captain with a West Point education and experience in the Mexican War. Washburn personally knew Grant when the general lived in Galena.

Boone County had a local militia called the Boone Rifles. Perhaps it was the Boone Rifles who were gathered in the photograph. Perhaps the man seated was Stephen Hurlbut, who became a colonel when the Boone Rifles folded into the Illinois 95th in Freeport, and moved to Missouri to encounter the enemy army defending slavery. Stephen Hurlbut may have been the seated man. Hurlbut entered the Army as an officer because he had learned how to march soldiers when he lived in Charleston, South Carolina, where he grew up.

We do know that these were rural settlers who believed that slavery was wrong, and willing to make sacrifices to defend their beliefs.

Energy from page 1

something we must do. We must move from fossil fuel, which emits carbon into the atmosphere, to renewable energy. This bill has a few small changes that will help us get renewable energy on the grid."

The measure passed in the Senate 39-16 on Monday, with the House passing it the next day 74-39. It will next head to the governor's desk for final approval before becoming law.

'A very skinny bill'

The bill makes several changes to how the state funds renewable energy developments. Sen. Bill Cunningham, D-Chicago, described these as "highly technical."

Existing law requires the state to purchase a certain amount of electricity from renewable sources. The Illinois Power Agency purchases this electricity using a system of financial instruments such as "renewable energy credits." These are tracked and budgeted using the state's renewable portfolio standard, or RPS.

But the IPA has struggled to find developers for some of these projects – particularly wind farms. One of the driving concerns that developers cite is whether the budget for the RPS, which is funded by a monthly charge to utility customers, is sufficient to fund renewable energy contracts approved by the agency.

This makes financing these large infrastructure projects difficult, as banks and other institutions worry about the risk of not being paid back if energy prices spike and the RPS budget falls short.

Over the past few years, the IPA has begun to raise alarms about the funding mechanism. In October, the agency said the RPS could face a \$3.1 billion budget shortfall by 2039, based on the agency's long-term renewable procurement plan.

The bill would guarantee that projects approved under the RPS will be funded in case of unexpected spikes in prices by allowing utility companies to charge consumers for the costs of any budget shortfall.

Gabel said during debate Tuesday that she doesn't expect the policy to lead to rate increases and that even if utilities needed to recover money from customers, it would only be a temporary increase.

But Republicans were skeptical of transferring risk to ratepayers.

"All we're doing here to add security to these failing projects is to transfer, to put the burden on taxpayers, on ratepayers, one way or another to make sure the creditors are going to get paid," Rep. Brad Halbrook, R-Shelbyville, said during debate Tuesday.

The bill also grants the agency more flexibility on the split between its wind and solar procurement. While the agency has failed to meet wind targets in the past, it often meets or exceeds its solar targets thanks in part to the booming solar industry in the state.

These provisions were negotiated and largely agreed upon by the agency and representatives of the renewable industry.

"We think this bill makes important and necessary changes, and we're looking forward to more robust discussions this spring," IPA Director Brian Granahan said in a statement Tuesday.

Revisiting the issue

The bill also requires the Illinois Commerce Commission to host a series of workshops exploring battery-based energy storage. Renewable energy advocates increasingly are looking to the nascent technology as a way to make wind and solar power more reliable.

Because wind and solar power often do not generate electricity at times of peak demand,

storing electricity generated at off-peak hours could keep electricity supplies affordable and reliable – at least according to battery storage's proponents.

Sen. Bill Cunningham, D-Chicago, has spent years advocating for more incentives for battery storage. Gov. JB Pritzker, whose office was involved in bill negotiations, in December said he supported the premise of battery storage.

"The price of electricity is going up because of the higher demands, and we have to have a strategy in place to deal with that," Cunningham said Monday.

A previous version of the bill would have set up a system of incentives and a funding mechanism for battery storage projects, similar to how the state handles renewable energy. That would have included allowing the IPA to "procure" energy credits from battery storage facilities.

The ICC's report on battery storage will be due to the General Assembly by May 1. That report will then be used as the basis of a future bill from Springfield, according to the bill's sponsors.

"Nothing in this legislation empowers the IPA to do a procurement. We would have to authorize that by state law," Cunningham said. "The intent is to come back in the spring and do that."

'Big year for climate legislation'

The bill passed Tuesday is also notable for what it didn't include. In addition to cutting out much of the battery storage policy, the final bill didn't include a set of provisions dealing with energy efficiency programs.

That portion of the bill would have updated the state's requirements for solar energy rebates and provided subsidies for consumers who buy efficient appliances.

Those provisions were cut after the governor's office "raised some concerns," according to Cunningham.



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Those portions of the bill were backed by the Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition, an influential group of environmental organizations that includes the Illinois Environmental Council.

“The bill that we’re going to see is not doing much,” IEC’s Executive Director Jen Walling said Monday morning, after the bill was finalized but before it passed.

The IEC, and the Clean Jobs Coalition more broadly, didn’t endorse the bill, taking a neutral stance. Kady McFadden, a lobbyist speaking on behalf of ICJC, said she was “disappointed” by the final bill, noting the elements that were cut out or pared down.

Walling and others expressed a desire for broader legislation in the spring.

“We’re setting up for a really big year for climate legislation,” Walling said.

The IEC and ICJC brought hundreds of people to the Capitol Tuesday to advocate for other climate- and energy-related bills, including bills limiting the use of natural gas for heating buildings and reforming the transit systems in the Chicago area.

Cunningham is also considering legislation that would boost incentives for transmission line construction, a critical step as the state increasingly relies on renewable generation.

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General Assembly from page 1

But there was less talk about unity and cooperation from Republicans who spoke at the ceremony.

Rep. Steve Reick, R-Woodstock, spoke to nominate Republican Tony McCombie as speaker. He said he agreed that cooperation and compromise are needed to solve the state’s problems. But he also criticized “people on both ends of the political spectrum” for pushing “ideas on which there is nothing resembling a social consensus.”

“What results are laws that offend the heartfelt beliefs of people whose voices are not being heard and toothless resolutions that call for us to separate this state from a world class city that’s being driven into the ground,” Reick said.

Meanwhile, McCombie, of Savanna, who was reelected to her second term as minority leader, used her speech to vent some of the frustration she and other Republicans have felt at being locked out of negotiations with majority party Democrats on major legislative issues.

“I, like many, were disappointed with our election outcomes and the ability for us to secure more Republican seats to bring some balance to the General Assembly,” she said. “However, this was not due to a lack of good candidates or hard work, but due to special interest in Illinois’

gerrymandered maps, the most outrageous maps in the nation.”

Senate inauguration

Senators from across Illinois were sworn in Wednesday in the newly renovated Senate chamber. The room had been closed for 2 ½ years while the Senate conducted business in a modified auditorium in a separate building on the capitol complex.

Sen. Don Harmon, D-Oak Park, and Sen. John Curran, R-Downers Grove, were reelected by their colleagues to their positions of Senate president and Senate minority leader, respectively.

The mood in the chamber, where bipartisan engagement has been more common in recent years, was far more reserved than in the House.

“While they may not always see eye-to-eye, they share a mutual respect for each other, our caucus and the constituents that allow them to work together for the good of Illinois,” Sen. Sue Rezin, R-Morris, said of the two leaders in her nominating speech for Curran. “This calm dialogue may not be the exciting drama that you see in D.C.”

Harmon is beginning his fourth term as the chamber’s leader after being elected by his caucus in January 2020 and serving in the Senate since 2003. His 2020 opponent in that contest, Sen. Kimberly Lightford, D-Westchester, gave the nominating speech for Harmon, saying the suburban Democrat has proven to be an effective leader.

“In an era of deeply political division, Don stands apart through his remarkable ability to unite people,” Lightford said.

Harmon’s acceptance speech had one overarching message: be kind. He asked senators to work across the aisle, including on behalf of their constituents who didn’t vote for them.

“Remember that your neighbors in this chamber are some of the only people in Illinois who can relate to what you’re going through,” Harmon said. “The Senate is an active laboratory for coalition-building. Forge those bonds and look out for one another.”

The messages from Harmon and Curran stood out in a week when the House has grabbed headlines for a caucus meeting that left a governor’s office staffer in tears while three of Welch’s senior staff members announced plans to resign.

Curran is beginning his second term as Senate minority leader after being elected by his caucus in 2023. A former Cook County prosecutor, Curran was elected to the Senate in 2016.

“It’s easy to insulate ourselves with people who look, live and think like us,” Curran said. “But if American democracy has taught us anything, it is that real progress comes from stepping outside of your comfort zone and building a coalition of different viewpoints to craft policy for the greater good.”

Of the 59 Illinois senators, three sworn in Wednesday were non-incumbents: Graciela

Guzmán, D-Chicago, Liandro Arellano, R-Dixon, and Chris Balkema, R-Channahon.

Pritzker on upcoming challenges

The 104th General Assembly has a lengthy to-do list, ranging from eliminating a projected \$3.2 billion budget deficit to reforming transit in the Chicago area.

In a news conference following inauguration, Gov. JB Pritzker spoke about the budget challenges he faces this spring ahead of his late February budget address.

“When we talk about priorities, prioritizing the fiscal health of the state has been, you know, among the most important things that I’ve, I think, achieved and will continue to prioritize,” Pritzker said.

Pritzker also faces a reemerging challenge from his first term as governor: a Donald Trump presidency.

Pritzker said he has general concerns about Trump’s plans, particularly as they pertain to health care. But he is taking a wait-and-see approach before deciding specific actions to counter the Trump administration’s initiatives.

He noted Trump is often “unpredictable.”

“There’s not a specific thing that I can point to though because he hasn’t taken office yet,” Pritzker said, adding he’d remain “on guard” for what actions may be needed in the future.

Capitol renovations

Wednesday’s inauguration also served as the reopening of the Illinois Senate chamber following renovations to the space that began over two years ago.

The north wing of the Illinois Capitol remains in the middle of an expansive \$350 million renovation that began in 2022.

Much of the project on the interior of the Capitol is designed to restore the building to how it looked centuries ago. The building was constructed in the late 1800s in the decades after the Civil War and has undergone numerous renovations that have changed its appearance and layout.

In the Senate specifically, construction included restoring the room’s original laylight and making safety upgrades. The stained glass laylight is designed to resemble the chamber’s original look before it was damaged by fire decades ago. Renovations also added more stalls to the women’s restroom to make it comparable to the men’s bathroom.

The project is also aimed at modernizing the capitol complex and includes construction of a new public entrance and visitor center on the north wing. The addition is also designed to improve security at the complex and funnel visitors in through a single space.

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Name Change

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or safety.” The bill lays out several categories of people that could apply for impoundment, including trans people, adoptees, survivors of domestic abuse and human trafficking, refugees and others.

“We are forcing survivors of domestic violence, of human trafficking, people who are trans to out themselves for what?” bill sponsor Rep. Kevin Olickal, D-Chicago, said Tuesday. “It doesn’t serve a public safety purpose. It only seeks to serve predators and violent extremists who want to find victims, track them down. People want to live in peace. This bill is about privacy and protection.”

House Bill 5164 passed the state Senate 33-16 on Sunday and passed the House 71-38 two days later. The bill still needs a signature from the governor to become law, but if approved, it will go into effect on March 1.

The bill was an initiative of Equality Illinois, Planned Parenthood, the Coalition Against Sexual Assault and the Coalition Against Domestic Violence, according to bill sponsor Sen. Ram Villivalam, D-Chicago.

Mike Ziri, the public policy director for Equality Illinois, said his organization “regularly” hears from transgender people in Illinois who fear publishing details about their name change.

“In fact, having to publish your name change in a newspaper creates a public list of trans people and puts them at real risk for harassment and harm,” Ziri said in a statement after the bill passed. “We know this bill will help people and is consistent with our state’s values of equality and the freedom to live our lives without harassment or harm.”

The bill also reduces the residency requirement for changing one’s name from six months to three.

The lowered requirement will make it easier for people moving to Illinois from “states that have hostile, dangerous, and discriminatory laws,” according to Avi Rudnick, director of legal services at Transformative Justice Law Project of Illinois, which helps transgender people change their names.

Other proponents say that name changes can be a way for individuals to either protect themselves or move on from domestic violence situations.

Under current law, when someone changes their name due to marriage or divorce, they do not have to publish a notice in a newspaper.

Republicans cited concerns over how the process could be used by immigrants or criminals. Sen. Steve McClure, R-Springfield, said the bill did not contain strong enough language to prevent the possibility of “whitewashing of criminal backgrounds.”

Sen. Sue Rezin, R-Morris, criticized the fact that the law only requires “self-attestation” to demonstrate that name change records should be impounded. That process allows individuals to self-attest to hardships and says they may – but are not required to – submit documentation.

“This allows for extraordinary potential to abuse the system and manipulate the process and evade federal immigration authorities,” Rezin said.

Villivalam rebutted several of those arguments Sunday, noting that criminal records and debts are tracked through means other than names, such as social security numbers, tax identification numbers and fingerprints.

The measure also requires courts to notify the Illinois State Police of name changes. ISP must then “update any criminal history transcript or offender registration” to include the new and former name of anyone with a criminal history who is over the age of 18.

Bills Addressing Warehouse Quotas, Nursing Homes, Prostitution Pass in Session’s Final Days

Measures among 24 bills passed before new legislature sworn in

*By Jade Aubrey & Bridgette Fox
Capitol News Illinois*

Lawmakers in Springfield approved a measure that aims to protect warehouse workers whose workdays center on hitting quotas.

House Bill 2547 states employees are not required to meet quotas that would prevent them from eating lunch or using the bathroom. The bill prohibits an employer from firing someone for missing quotas because of these bathroom and meal breaks and ensures that if the employee believes they’re wrongly disciplined, they have a right to sue.

HB 2547 would also require employers to provide new warehouse employees with a written description of their quota requirements when hired, as well as any “potential adverse employment action,” essentially disciplinary actions, that they may face if the quota is not met. The employer must give the employee a written update within five days if they make any changes to quotas.

Bill sponsor Rep. Kevin Olickal, D-Chicago, said some warehouse employees are given such large quotas that they are unable to take breaks to rest, eat or use the restroom.

Pasquale Gianni of the Teamsters Joint Council 25 union in Chicago said his union was made aware of non-unionized warehouse employees that reported they’ve had to urinate in water bottles in order to hit their quotas. Gianni said he heard these employees were afraid that the time it would take to commute to and from the bathroom would prevent them from hitting their quota, which may result in them losing their job.

Gianni also said the bill would “help create a floor” for non-unionized warehouse settings throughout Illinois - as these issues mainly plague warehouse employees who don’t have a union to represent them. He said these non-unionized warehouses have higher employee turnover rates, which make it hard for employees to unionize.

The Illinois Manufacturers’ Association and Illinois Chamber of Commerce opposed the bill, arguing that the terminology of “adverse employment action,” which the bill defined as “an action that a reasonable employee would find materially adverse,” is too broad. They aired concerns that employees could claim any disciplinary action taken against them by their employer falls under this term, which may make employers afraid to take disciplinary action.

Many Republicans voted against the bill after airing similar concerns. It cleared the Senate 35-15 and the House 79-34.

Olickal said, “the idea that we’re going to see frivolous lawsuits is unfounded.” He said that other states including Minnesota, California and New York have adopted similar bills and have not run into those incidents.

If signed by the governor, the bill would take effect Jan. 1, 2026.

The measure was one of 24 that cleared the legislature during its four-day lame duck session this week before a new General Assembly was inaugurated Wednesday.

Nursing home protections

Lawmakers also approved a bill aimed at

protecting nursing home residents from retaliation if they report violations at the facility.

House Bill 2474 aims to prohibit nursing home staff from taking “retaliatory actions” against residents who engage in protected activities, such as speaking out about rule or law violations in their facilities.

The bill specifically protects residents who: talk to a supervisor of the facility, the public, or to an outside authority about a rule or law being broken by the facility staff; give information or testimony during an investigation of a facility; or seek help to leave the facility. It gives residents a private right to sue if they believe the facility broke the law.

The bill would also require nursing home facilities to file any resident complaints that they’ve been improperly retaliated against with the Illinois Department of Public Health and to give a brief description of any complaints filed to the resident’s next of kin once a year.

The measure passed 48-2 in the Senate and 89-16 in the House.

Prostitution laws

Police departments across the state may soon be required to start working on policies that prohibit their officers from having sex with any person they are investigating for prostitution.

Under a measure that cleared the General Assembly this week, departments would have until July 1 to put the new rule in place. It still needs a signature from Gov. JB Pritzker to become law.

House Bill 4410 passed Tuesday with a vote of 73-38 after clearing the Senate 43-10.

The bill also changes existing law’s reference of “juvenile prostitution” to “commercial sexual exploitation of a child.”

On top of that change, the term “juvenile prostitute” in existing law will be replaced with “sexually exploited child,” and the word “prostitute” in reference to adults will be replaced with “person engaged in the sex trade.”

State law enforcement agencies must also seal their records about a person’s Class 4 felony conviction for prostitution by Jan. 1, 2028, if the person’s charge is eligible.

For example, a person’s charge might be eligible if they were a victim of human trafficking, along with other circumstances laid out in the bill.

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Madigan Leaves Witness Stand Expressing Regret for ‘Any Time Spent with Danny Solis’

Longtime law partner testifies to firm’s policy of ‘disqualifying’ potential clients with state business

By Hannah Meisel *Capitol News Illinois*

After Michael Madigan spent several hours facing blistering cross-examination in his federal corruption trial, the former Illinois House speaker on Tuesday made a rare candid remark about the yearslong investigation that landed him on the witness stand in a Chicago courtroom.

“We all have regrets in life,” Madigan said. “And one of my regrets is that I ever had any time spent with Danny Solis.”

Longtime Chicago Ald. Danny Solis’ cover was blown nearly six years ago, when the Chicago Sun-Times revealed him to have been cooperating with the government since 2016. Less than a week later, a second bombshell dropped: Another FBI mole had secretly recorded Madigan at his law office in 2014 during a meeting with a potential client that was arranged by the alderman. Solis had been chair of the Chicago City Council’s zoning committee, while Madigan had for decades been a partner of a law firm that specialized in property tax appeals.

The full extent of Solis’ cooperation against Madigan – including his own secret recordings of their meetings – wouldn’t become known until much later. But the former speaker now faces 23 counts of bribery and other public corruption charges.

In the 1 ½ years leading up to the revelation about Solis’ double life, Madigan and the alderman had gotten closer after decades of a more casual political alliance. In June 2017, the speaker made an out-of-the-blue phone call to Solis asking for an introduction to the developer behind a proposed apartment complex in Chicago’s booming West Loop, part of Solis’ 23rd Ward.

Unbeknownst to the speaker, Solis had been cooperating with the feds for the past year and the call reignited the FBI’s interest in Madigan, which had been mostly dormant since 2014, according to prior testimony from an agent in charge of the investigation.

‘Just leave it in my hands’

The gradual uptick in Solis’ phone calls and meetings with Madigan – including his solicitation of the speaker’s assistance with an ultimately doomed land deal – was orchestrated by the FBI. So too was the alderman’s eventual request that Madigan help him get appointed to a lucrative state board position.

While Madigan projected an air of relaxed confidence under questioning from his own attorney last week, the former speaker’s answers didn’t come as easily during cross-examination Monday and Tuesday, including on questions about his dealings with Solis.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Amarjeet Bhachu grilled Madigan about why he’d agreed to forward Solis’ name to newly elected Gov. JB Pritzker in the fall of 2018 for consideration to a high-paying state board. Bhachu pointed out that the speaker asked Solis to send him a resume even after the alderman repeatedly insinuated that he viewed the favor as an exchange for introducing Madigan to more potential law clients.

“And you say, ‘just leave it in my hands,’” Bhachu asked the former speaker of an exchange during his meeting with Solis in August 2018 where the pair went over a list of state boards and commissions.

“I would put it in my file and potentially give it to Pritzker,” Madigan replied, softening what Solis had characterized as a promise during his time on the witness stand in November.

Madigan never made the recommendation before the January 2019 revelation about Solis’ FBI cooperation.

“So this is after repeated statements by Solis where he’s tying you – doing something for somebody in your official capacity – to you getting law firm business,

right?” Bhachu asked.

“That’s what Mr. Solis was doing and I was just carrying along the conversation,” Madigan said.

The former speaker had already claimed twice during Bhachu’s questioning Monday and Tuesday morning that he knew what Solis was insinuating on multiple occasions in 2017 and 2018 but opted to give non-answers to what he deemed inappropriate questions instead of confronting him.

The one instance in which Madigan did confront Solis in 2017 was after one of their first phone calls about the West Loop developer. In that June 2017 call, Solis explicitly used the phrase “quid pro quo” when trying to explain that the developer understood he’d approve the zoning changes needed for the project contingent on becoming Madigan’s client – a lie directed by the FBI.

Still, Bhachu pointed out, the speaker went ahead with arranging the meeting with the developer, and in a short confrontation with Solis before the meeting began a few weeks later, Madigan admonished him for using the phrase “quid pro quo.”

“You shouldn’t be talking like that,” Madigan said on Solis’ secretly recorded video. “You’re just recommending our law firm because if they don’t get a good result on the real estate taxes, the whole project would be in trouble. Which is not good for your ward. So you want high quality representation.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. Yeah,” Solis said in reply.

The former speaker testified that he believed Solis had “gotten the message” that “there was not gonna be a quid pro quo” and was chastened by his rebuke.

Read more: ‘You shouldn’t be talking like that’: Madigan scolded alderman-turned-FBI mole for bringing up ‘quid pro quo’

‘That was a lie, wasn’t it?’

Prosecutors have long maintained Madigan was giving Solis a “false story” as cover. Bhachu on Monday accused the former speaker of cooking up the rationale.

“That was a lie, wasn’t it?” Bhachu asked. “You knew on that day there was no threat to the project.”

Madigan exhaled in a sort of laugh after having explained that property taxes are “an important element of development,” prompting Bhachu to ask: “Is there something funny about my question, sir?”

Returning to the subject on Tuesday morning, Madigan insisted this week that property taxes were always a legitimate concern for a large development. In fact, the former speaker’s firm had represented the property’s previous occupant when it was an addiction treatment center whose not-for-profit status exempted it from property taxes. Because the project was a tear-down development in an up-and-coming area of the city, the eventual cost of those taxes was less certain than comparable properties.

When Madigan attorney Dan Collins got another chance to question his client after Bhachu’s initial cross-examination, he also asked the former speaker why he’d continued interacting with Solis after the “quid pro quo” episode in 2017.

“I felt I had been effective in delivering a message that there would be no ‘quid pro quo,’” Madigan said. “And then and over time, I gave him the benefit of the doubt.”

After a pause, he added that having spent any time with Solis was “one of my regrets.”

Also on Tuesday, Madigan’s longtime law partner Vincent “Bud” Getzendanner took the stand, his sharp memory for exact dates and other details demonstrating why he and the former speaker were well-matched. His dry commentary also mirrored Madigan’s as he answered Assistant U.S. Attorney Sarah Streicker’s question about having “worked together for decades” with a caveat that drew titters from the courtroom.

“Decades is such a harsh word, but yes,” Getzendanner replied.

Madigan and Getzendanner formed their firm of the same name in the early 1970s after having met at Chicago’s Loyola Law School the previous decade. At first, their practice was more general, but over several years the pair began to specialize in property tax appeals.

In his testimony, Getzendanner described the firm’s conflict of interest policy that Madigan and previous

defense witnesses described on the witness stand. To avoid even the appearance of a conflict, Getzendanner said, he and Madigan would have “at least one or two annual meetings” with top lawyers from the speaker’s office to identify and protect against any existing and potential clients who might have significant business with the state.

Many things, according to Getzendanner, would be an automatic disqualifier for a potential client. Getzendanner testified that when he learned in 2015 that nursing homes got significant Medicaid money from the state – and not just from the federal government as he’d long thought – the firm stopped representing nursing homes.

Beyond that, there was a wholesale ban on the firm accepting business that had anything to do with land transfers from the state. The jury has already heard days of testimony about one such proposed land transfer with which Solis had sought Madigan’s help.

The Illinois Department of Transportation has long owned a parcel of land in Chicago’s Chinatown neighborhood and leased it to a nonprofit that operates it as a parking lot. In 2017, Solis asked Madigan for guidance on how the state might transfer the land to the city of Chicago so the city could sell it to a developer interested in building on the land.

Madigan recruited his friend and longtime Springfield lobbyist Mike McClain – now his co-defendant – to help, though Madigan stayed abreast of how the ultimately failed effort was progressing.

Nine months after Solis asked for the speaker’s help, he finally explicitly told Madigan that the developers would “appreciate it and sign you up” for legal work after the legislation authorizing the land transfer passed the General Assembly.

In the wiretapped call, Madigan replied, “Okay, alright, very good.” But just like the prior interactions with Solis, the former speaker testified last week that he was simply trying to move past that part of the conversation because he never intended to meet the developers or seek their business.

Madigan also didn’t vote on land transfer bills, he and other witnesses testified, and the Chinatown transfer was never included in the annual land transfer legislation that did eventually pass in 2018.

Getzendanner on Tuesday said it was a “nonstarter” when prospective clients were dealing with land transferred from the state.

But under questioning from Streicker, Getzendanner acknowledged the firm did do business with some of the other developers Solis brought to Madigan. Streicker also pointed out that in an interview with the FBI in February 2021, Getzendanner claimed he only remembered one of the five meetings Solis had arranged to meet potential clients at the law firm. After reading the FBI report about the meeting on the stand, Getzendanner said he didn’t remember saying that to the FBI.

Getzendanner also agreed with Streicker’s characterization that the former speaker “focused on client acquisition and business development” for the firm made possible by his wide network built over a career in public life.

“Fair to say Mr. Madigan was the rainmaker for the firm?” Streicker asked.

“Yes,” Getzendanner answered.

Flag

from page 1

agencies and other advocates appointed by current state officials. It was created in the previous General Assembly by Senate Bill 1818, sponsored by State Sen. Doris Turner, of Springfield, and Rep. Kam Buckner, of Chicago. The commission selected the 10 finalists in December from 4,844 entries.

The possible new flags come from a variety of designers, including born-and-raised Illinoisans, students and other young people, longtime residents and the great-grandchild of James McCartney – a Civil War veteran and past Illinois attorney general.