

Pritzker activates National Guard members for Presidential Inauguration

Illinois Governor JB Pritzker has ordered the activation of approximately 200 Illinois National Guard members in support of the 59th Presidential Inauguration. The District of Columbia requested additional support from the Guard in advance of the upcoming event. "In the wake of the recent incident at the Capitol, ensuring a peaceful transfer

of power to the Biden administration is of the utmost importance," said Governor JB Pritzker. "The Illinois National Guard is renowned for its exemplary soldiers and airmen and I am proud to have them represent Illinois alongside other service members during the upcoming presidential inauguration." "Supporting the presidential inauguration is a great

opportunity for the Illinois National Guard to be part of history and represent the state of Illinois," said Maj. Gen. Richard Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. "Our Soldiers and Airmen are highly trained and I have full confidence in their abilities to support local and federal agencies as needed."

Approximately 100 Illinois Army National Guard Military Police Soldiers from the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade's 33rd Military Police Battalion will support the inauguration. The battalion is based in Bloomington with subordinate units in Springfield, Freeport and Fort Sheridan. In addition, a small medical team is being activated to support the Mili-

tary Police. About 45 Security Forces Airmen from the 183rd Wing based in Springfield, the 126th Air Refueling Wing based at Scott Air Force Base, and the 182nd Airlift Wing based in Peoria, will be activated to support the Presidential Inauguration. Another 30 Airmen from the Illinois Air National Guard will be activated to provide

communication, logistics, and religious support. About 10 Soldiers with the 5th Civil Support Team, based in Bartonville, will support the District of Columbia National Guard's 33rd Civil Support Team. The Illinois National Guard will assist federal and local agencies to ensure safety and security during the inauguration.

Lake Land College BOT approves ERCA Intergovernmental Agreement

At the January Lake Land College Board meeting, trustees approved an intergovernmental agreement with 14 area school districts to formalize the role of the Effingham Regional Career Academy (ERCA) in providing specialized career and technical educational programs for students residing within the member districts. The intergovernmental agreement demonstrates the commitment of all involved to propel the Effingham Regional Career Academy forward and outlines the roles and responsibilities involved in delivering the programs. Lake Land College will administer career and technical education programs that allow students at the member districts to earn high school

and college credit simultaneously. As part of Lake Land's commitment to the agreement, the director of the Effingham Education Center will serve as the vocational/technical director of the ERCA program. In addition, the agreement outlines usage of facilities, indicating Lake Land's plans to construct a new facility near the Kluthe Center for Higher Education and Technology in Effingham that will provide training opportunities for incumbent and adult learners to advance their skills, as well as expose high school students to high-demand careers. The college is working with area partners to submit an application for a \$7.5 million grant from the

Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity to fund phase one of the construction project. "The Lake Land College Board of Trustees, faculty and staff look forward to working with our educational and community partners to provide new pathways for high school students, incumbent workers and area residents through the Regional Career Academy," Lake Land College President Josh Bullock said. "We are proud to take the lead in developing an educational training program that will benefit area businesses and communities by creating a highly skilled workforce through the expansion of career and technical skills training." The area districts in-

involved in the ERCA Intergovernmental Agreement are Altamont High School District 10, Beecher City High School District 20, Dieterich High School District 30, Effingham High School District 40, Teutopolis High School District 50, St. Anthony High School District, Stewardson-Strasburg High School District 5A, Neoga High School District 3, Cumberland High School District 77, Louisville North Clay High School District 25, Jasper County High School District 1, Cowden-Herrick High School District 3A, Brownstown High School District 201 and St. Elmo High School District 202. This intergovernmental agreement is just one component of the Effingham Re-

gional Career Academy. The ERCA's mission is to attract, retain and grow area businesses by providing sustainable pathways to high-skill, high-demand careers for high school students, adult learners and incumbent workers. Regional data found in Lake Land College's Data for Decision Makers study indicates a need for advanced training among residents of the area. The study examined the educational attainment of the residents of the region by school district and found 60 percent to 80 percent of the residents in this area did not have a college degree. By creating targeted educational opportunities and a pipeline of skilled individuals for area employers, the ERCA will positively im-

prove future access to a skilled workforce, and the region's agility in adapting to forthcoming industry trends. In 2018, the state of Illinois recognized the ERCA as one of the Top 20 examples of local government groups sharing resources and expenses. The 14 school districts and Lake Land College are joined in the ERCA by the Effingham County Chamber of Commerce, the City of Effingham, the Effingham Regional Growth Alliance and numerous area community and business leaders. For more information about the ERCA or to find out how to get involved, visit www.effinghamregionalcareeracademy.com/.

Welch unseats Madigan, capping historic week for Black Caucus

New Democratic speaker ends Madigan's House leadership run

By Jerry Nowicki
Capitol News Illinois

One of the most transformative six-day periods in the history of Illinois government came to an end Wednesday with the election of Rep. Emanuel "Chris" Welch, D-Hillside, as the state's House speaker – the first Black man to hold the title. Equally groundbreaking was the fact that Welch unseated Rep. Michael Madigan, D-Chicago, the nation's longest-serving legislative leader who had been speaker for all but two years since 1983.

Welch sought a unifying tone in his first floor speech as speaker, telling his fellow lawmakers "today will be the last time I talk about us as Democrats or Republicans." "We will need to work together to make difficult decisions, folks," he said, receiving applause from Republicans. "Let's get ready. Because we are going to have to make some difficult decisions to control spending while we protect our most vulnerable residents and while we ensure schools receive the funding that they need."

After the floor speech, Welch said during a news conference he had not had time to digest the historic events that led to his speakership. The House adjourned its Tuesday session at 4:14 a.m. Wednesday morning and reconvened to pass a massive criminal justice reform bill and certify Welch as speaker just hours later.

The 22 members of the House Black Caucus urged him to run for speaker in a closed-door caucus Tuesday, Welch said, and he had no plans to do so before their urging.

All but one of those members – Rep. Maurice West of Rockford – had supported Madigan on the first closed-door ballot between Democrats over the weekend. In the end, they provided the backbone for Welch's late push after Madigan suspended his campaign and Welch built a broader support coalition than three other challengers – Reps. Ann Williams, D-Chicago, Stephanie Kifowit, D-Oswego, and Kathleen Willis, D-Addison.

West rose to nominate Welch for speaker on the floor of the Bank of Springfield Center, which served as the House chamber this week amid COVID-19 concerns.

"We are walking in uncharted territories, with COVID-19 still running rampant through our communities, a major budget crisis, a (legislative) remap, all while immediately following the huge footsteps and monumental legacy of Speaker Madigan," West said, later calling for a standing ovation for Madigan. "But I firmly believe that Welch did not choose this moment. This moment chose Welch because he has the wherewithal to convene the great minds within this caucus, so that we could tackle these issues together."

But Welch's election did not receive the backing of every Democratic member in the House. Rep. Kelly Cassidy, D-Chicago, and Lance Yednock, D-Ottawa, voted present. Cassidy later issued a statement saying diversification of leadership in Illinois should be celebrated, but she called for a "vigorous review" into allegations against Welch that were outlined in a Chicago Tribune article in the waning hours of his run for speaker.

The Tribune cited a 2002 police report from west suburban Hillside that accused Welch of slamming an ex-girlfriend's head into a kitchen countertop numerous times after she called him "a loser." The Tribune said the woman elected not to press charges after talking it over with Welch's relative, according to the report.

Welch denied the allegations at the time, according to the Tribune report. He also issued a statement this week when confronted with the past allegation.

"This verbal argument occurred nearly two decades ago," he said in the statement. "I will be honest that I have reconciled with the individual since that night. In fact, after our dispute we sought out the authorities ourselves. Their family lives in my district and are proud supporters of my public service and work."

Cassidy said in her statement she respects Welch and considers him "a good man" but she reserved her vote "because, at the same time that we're ending years of scandal over allegations of sexual harassment and corruption, we have also just been made aware of troubling allegations from Speaker Welch's past."

"He has denied each allegation, and we certainly have

seen plenty of examples of Black men being wrongfully accused," she said. "I feel strongly that I have been too outspoken on issues of sexual harassment and domestic violence to simply ignore these questions."

Asked about the allegations Wednesday in a news conference after his election, Welch said he did not see a need to go beyond the statement and he respected the privacy of the individuals involved.

"And I think my life's work here in the legislature shows my respect for women," he said.

As Cassidy referenced, Madigan's decades-long vice grip on power as House speaker and Democratic Party of Illinois chairman was weakened in 2018 amid a sexual harassment scandal that led to the firing of several top aides from his administration, including his longtime chief of staff.

Madigan was further weakened last year when he was named in a court document by utility giant Commonwealth Edison. The company admitted to a yearslong bribery scheme aimed at influencing Madigan by providing jobs to his associates.

Welch and Minority Leader Jim Durkin, R-Western Springs, both made statements Wednesday that they were willing to reach across the aisle, and they noted they live about five miles from one another.

But rifts in their relationship scratched the surface Wednesday in their floor remarks and in news conferences following the vote.

Durkin, prior to Welch's election, accused Welch of being an extension of Madigan, and he has been critical of Welch's handling of a House Special Investigating Committee into Madigan's ComEd ties. Republicans called that legislative committee after accusing Madigan of conduct unbecoming of a legislator. Welch chaired the committee, not requiring Madigan to testify and voting to end it after only three hearings in four months.

Durkin repeated again Wednesday that Welch, as chairman, "did a disservice to the body" and called the process "an embarrassment."

While Welch thanked Madigan, Durkin, who is now the longest-serving legislative leader in Illinois hav-

Illinois Federation of Teachers applauds Educational Equity Bill

Westmont, IL – Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT) President Dan Montgomery released the following statement after the passage of HB 2170.

"Structural racism has been a part of our education system with especially detrimental effects on communities of color; today's passage of HB 2170 will help address the inequalities that exist in all levels of education. The bill will help bridge the educational gaps that have existed for Black and Brown chil-

dren from early childhood to higher education. Resources to close the digital divide, provide Social Emotional Learning (SEL) supports, and strengthen post-secondary transitions will promote equity and help bring real justice to education.

"Thank you to the bill sponsors Senator Kimberly Lightford, Representative Carol Ammons, and the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus for addressing systemic racism and advocating for our children.

"The IFT looks forward to continuing the work that the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus has started in order to transform our education system into one that centers and prioritizes Black and Brown children, families, and communities.

"We look forward to working with Governor Pritzker and the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus to help move forward with these important initiatives."

Farm Bureau Foundation scholarships available

The Douglas County Farm Bureau Foundation is a private foundation dedicated to the youth of Douglas County.

Up to \$3,000 in scholarships are available to assist students pursuing a college degree in Agriculture. Interested students may apply each year for consideration.

Applicants can receive up to one award per year of school; however, the applicant must re-apply every year.

Applications are now being accepted at the Douglas County Farm Bureau for consideration and are due by Friday, February 19, 2021. Applications are available at the Douglas County Farm Bureau office or on their website, www.douglascfb.com

under the Foundation tab. **Successful applicants will meet the following requirements:**

- * Enrolled in an Agriculture related field of study.
- * Completed one semester of college course work.
- * Submit a copy of college transcript
- * Submit a letter of application telling about yourself (500 word maximum)
- * Parent or applicant must be a member of the Douglas County Farm Bureau

For more information about Douglas County Farm Bureau Foundation Scholarships, contact the Douglas County Farm Bureau office at 217-253-4442 or douglasmgr@douglascfb.com.

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