



## Illinois Legislative News

# Vaccine mandate withdrawal should help construction sector

Construction employment in December remained below levels reached just before the start of the pandemic in more than half the states as firms struggled to find enough workers to hire, according to a new analysis of federal employment data released in late January by the Associated General Contractors of America.

But the Biden administration's decision to withdraw its emergency vaccine mandate for firms that employ 100 or more people will help firms avoid losing workers unwilling to comply with the new measure.

The decision by the Occupational Safety & Health Administration to withdraw its emergency temporary standard requiring workers at firms that employ 100 or more people to be vaccinated or tested weekly comes after the Supreme Court signaled its strong support for legal challenges filed by the Associated General Contractors of America and other entities against the measure.

The association challenged the rule late last year noting that the measure was unlawful and would do little to boost vaccination rates among construction workers, citing the fact that 64 percent of the

construction industry works for firms that employ 99 or fewer people. With nearly 90 percent of construction firms having a hard time finding workers to hire, the rule would simply have encouraged vaccine-hesitant workers to move to smaller firms.

"The Biden administration is right to abandon its misguided vaccine emergency rule and we encourage them to do the same with a similar measure affecting federal contractors that we are also challenging in court," said Stephen E. Sandherr, the association's chief executive officer. "At the same time, we will continue to work with the administration to ensure its planned permanent vaccine rule applies only to workers in industries like healthcare that OSHA deems at high risk from the coronavirus."

From February 2020 — the month before the pandemic — to last month, construction employment declined in 26 states, rose in 23 states and D.C., and was flat in Montana. New York lost the most construction jobs over the period (-42,000 jobs or -10.3 percent), followed by Texas (-30,200 jobs, -3.9 percent) and California (-22,300 jobs, -2.4 percent). The largest percentage



Construction labor should be easing up with the withdrawal of the Biden administration's vaccine mandate. File photo

losses were in Louisiana (-12.6 percent, -17,200 jobs), Wyoming (-10.9 percent, -2,500 jobs), and New York. Illinois gained 1,900 construction

workers, or 0.8 percent, in the month-to-month comparison, while it gained 12,900 jobs, or 5.8 percent in the previous 22-month period, the report said.

Utah added the most construction jobs since February 2020 (10,000 jobs, 8.8 percent), followed by Washington (8,200 jobs, 3.7 percent) and North Carolina (7,900 jobs, 3.4 percent). The largest percentage gains were in South Dakota (10.5 percent, 2,500 jobs), followed by Utah and Idaho (8.2 percent, 4,500 jobs).

From November to December construction employment decreased in 16 states, increased in 32 states and D.C., and was flat in Nevada and South Dakota. Florida lost the most jobs (-3,400 jobs, -0.6 percent), followed by New York (-2,900 jobs, -0.8 percent) and Pennsylvania (-1,200 jobs, -0.5 percent).

Texas added the most jobs from November to December (10,400 jobs, 1.4 percent), followed by Ohio (5,700 jobs, 2.4 percent) and Missouri (3,700 jobs, 2.9 percent). West Virginia had the largest percentage gain (4.6 percent, 1,500 jobs), followed by New Mexico (3.2 percent, 1,600 jobs) and Louisiana (3.0 percent, 3,500 jobs).

# Senate GOP wants voters to have more in legislative process

By **PETER HANCOCK**  
Capitol News Illinois

SPRINGFIELD — Republicans in the Illinois Senate have again introduced a package of proposed constitutional amendments that they argue would give voters more of a direct say in the legislative process.

"We're reintroducing these constitutional amendments in order to really put the people back in charge again," Senate GOP Leader Dan McConchie, of Hawthorn Woods, said this past month during a virtual news conference.

The package includes a renewed call for an independent redistricting commission. Other amendments would give voters greater power to amend the Illinois Constitution, as well as the power to repeal legislation and the power to recall elected officials at all levels of government.

Specifically, Senate Joint Resolution Constitutional Amendment 13 would remove the current requirement that each Senate district be divided into two House districts and would incorporate provisions of the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 into the constitution while requiring that districts be compact and contiguous.

It would also establish a 17-member

Independent Redistricting Commission to redraw legislative and congressional district lines starting in 2023. The commission members would be drawn from each of the state's 17 congressional districts and would be made up of seven Democrats, seven Republicans and three unaffiliated voters.

SJRCA 14 would expand the ability of voters to amend the constitution by initiative, by deleting current language that limits such amendments to "structural and procedural subjects" while adding language that would prohibit initiative amendments from altering the Bill of Rights.

In 2016, a sharply-divided Illinois Supreme Court blocked a proposed amendment calling for independent redistricting from going on the ballot, ruling that it changed some of the duties of constitutional officers and therefore went beyond "structural and procedural subjects."

SJRCA 15 would give voters authority to repeal legislation by referendum. Voters could call for a referendum on any public act, except appropriations measures, by gathering a number of petition signatures equal to 5 percent of the total votes cast for governor in the last gubernatorial election. Today, that

threshold would be 227,383 signatures.

And SJRCA 16 would expand the authority to recall elected officials, which is currently limited to the governor. It would allow for the recall of all constitutional officers, state lawmakers, the auditor general and local elected officials. It would also allow voters statewide to remove a speaker of the House or president of the Senate from those posts.

"Over the past year, we've seen the majority party use its supermajorities in the General Assembly, not only to push through controversial and extremely partisan legislation, but sometimes do it with little or no notice, and sometimes to do it in the middle of the night when nobody, including the members that are voting on it on the floor, have any idea what's actually in the legislation," McConchie said.

Many other states allow for initiatives, referenda and recall petitions. They were especially popular during the Progressive Era of the early 20th Century as a way to combat political corruption. But in more modern times, and with the advent of professional signature gathering firms, they have been criticized for giving special interest groups too much ability to bypass the legislative process to push their own agendas.

McConchie, however, said the GOP's proposals for Illinois do not go as far as some other states.

"We've tried to model this on the way other states have done it successfully," he said. "For example, in the ability to amend the state constitution, we didn't go as far as California has, which certainly you could argue has special interests dominate the putting of constitutional amendments on the ballot. We didn't go that far. We didn't make it quite as open as that."

McConchie also noted that many Democrats, who hold supermajorities in both chambers, have supported an independent redistricting commission, although they did not consider one in the most recent redistricting cycle. And it remained unclear whether Democrats would consider any of the GOP's proposals this year.

"I'm sure they will get the appropriate, thorough review," John Patterson, a spokesman for Senate President Don Harmon, D-Oak Park, said in an email.

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# Midwest's biggest cities among poorest financial performers

By **GREG BISHOP**  
The Center Square

The finances of two of the largest cities sandwiching Illinois are among the worst performers in the nation, despite having been sent billions of dollars in federal taxpayer funds for COVID-19 relief.

Truth In Accounting's Financial State of the Cities report that came out in January looked at the largest 75 cities across the United States and found Chicago's finances were the second worst.

TIA founder Sheila Weinberg said federal COVID-19 dollars to

the tune of \$1.9 billion for Chicago didn't reverse the trend.

"They increased the debt by \$2.3 billion, so they're just continuing a downward spiral of debt," Weinberg told The Center Square.

The burden per taxpayer in Chicago is \$43,100. That's the amount every taxpayer in the city would owe to pay off Chicago's public debt. Only New York City's \$71,400 per taxpayer is higher.

"Chicago's numbers in their financial statements does not include entities like their school district, so that's additional money that tax-

payers owe," Weinberg said.

She expects a forthcoming report highlighting all taxpayer costs in Chicago will put The Windy City at the bottom of the pack, even further down than New York City.

Despite getting \$500 million in COVID-19 relief from taxpayers, the city of St. Louis was eleventh worst with \$17,500 of debt per taxpayer.

Weinberg said every taxpayer, whether they live in Chicago or St. Louis or elsewhere, should be concerned.

"The pandemic proved something

that we were nervous about at Truth In Accounting that when these governments get into trouble, guess who they go to, friendly Uncle Sam," Weinberg said.

But not all cities fared poorly. The top 13 largest cities show taxpayer surpluses.

"The 'Sunshine Cities' have a tendency to balance their budget a little better," Weinberg said. "They don't incur as much pension and retiree health-care debt. Some of them don't even have retiree health-care debt."

More information can be found at [TruthInAccounting.org](http://TruthInAccounting.org).