

Commentary

Anderson: Celebrating 40 years of regional unity and growth, launching strategic plan for the future

The Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois is celebrating its 40th year of 'Uniting the Region for Growth' assisting government and business leaders to grow our region. Over the course of this time, the Leadership Council has worked diligently on regionally significant projects and continues to do so. In an effort to coalesce the region once again and focus our efforts, the Leadership Council is releasing its 2023 Southwestern Illinois Today and Tomorrow Strategic Plan.

The Council hired the economic development consultant Steadfast City, led by Doug Rasmussen and Allison Gray-Gunsten, to lead the plan's development charge. Steadfast City started by conducting an existing conditions analysis focusing on the region's demographics including population change by age and education attainment. In addition, they conducted an economic and industry assessment focusing on the workforce, current business anchors, and momentum makers.

Once a baseline of current economic conditions was established, our team conducted one-on-one interviews with key community stakeholders including

county officials and business leaders from across the region. The Leadership Council strives to work with county and government leaders to help realize the vision they have for their respective county or city. As a result, their input was vital to ensuring our vision was in alignment with theirs.

With Southwestern Illinois covering a wide array of industries and business sectors, we met with business leaders from across the spectrum to discuss their businesses, what they anticipated in the short and long term, and what types of actions needed to be taken to address those issues.

The entire plan will be presented to our Board of Directors in February, and from there will be sent to all stakeholders and published online. The Leadership Council will also present the plan to each of our nine county boards and host regional events to lay the groundwork to ensure Southwestern Illinois moves forward. With the plan in place, the real work begins now!

*KYLE ANDERSON, Executive Director
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POINT/COUNTERPOINT: The Protect Illinois Communities Act - A much-needed law of protection for the people, or a direct violation of the Constitution's Second Amendment?

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Illinois Business Journal has summarized reactions to recent actions regarding the Protect Illinois Communities Act, signed into law by Gov. JB Pritzker on Jan. 10, 2023. An Effingham County judge issued a temporary restraining order on Jan. 20, blocking the newly enacted Illinois law. Other suits have been filed, and at press time, the Illinois State Police was looking to consolidate several federal cases challenging Illinois' gun ban into one as an appellate court upheld the temporary restraining order on Jan. 31 while rejecting several arguments regarding the legislative process.

The Protect Illinois Communities Act bans the manufacture or possession of dozens of brands and types of rapid-fire rifles and pistols, .50-caliber guns and attachments that enhance a weapon's firepower. Merchants federally licensed to sell such weapons would be required to remove them from their inventory.

Those who currently own such guns would not be required to surrender them but would have to register them with the Illinois State Police — including serial numbers, a provision initially removed by the Senate but restored after House proponents' objections.

Illinois is the ninth state to legislate for a ban on semi-automatic rifles — often referred to as assault weapons.

The Illinois Senate approved the ban on the described semiautomatic weapons on Jan. 9, hours after Gov. J.B. Pritzker was sworn into a second term. The Senate plan differed slightly from the House-passed version.

The governor signed the final version of the bill into law on Jan. 10. A

ban on semiautomatic weapons had been a campaign priority for Pritzker after a gunman killed seven and injured 30 during a July 4th parade shooting in Highland Park, a Chicago suburb.

"I'm tired of living in a world where a mass shooting needs a title so you know which one we're referring to," said Gov. **JB Pritzker** in reference to the measure following his Jan. 9 inauguration. "Hospitals, high schools, homes, parades, offices — there is no place, geographic or otherwise, that has been spared from the threat of gun violence."

Following the decision by Effingham County Judge Morrison, Pritzker issued a further statement on Jan. 20:

"This decision is not surprising. Although disappointing, it is the initial result we've seen in many cases brought by plaintiffs whose goal is to advance ideology over public safety. We are well aware that this is only the first step in defending this important legislation. I remain confident that the courts will uphold the constitutionality of Illinois' law, which aligns with the eight other states with similar laws and was written in collaboration with lawmakers, advocates, and legal experts.

Illinoisans have a right to feel safe in their front yards, at school, while eating at bars and restaurants or celebrating with their family and friends. The Protect Illinois Communities Act takes weapons of war and mass destruction off the street while allowing law-abiding gun owners to retain their collections. I look forward to the next steps in this case and receiving the decision this case merits."

Here's more of what is being said from both sides:

Sen. Julie Morrison, the Lake Forest Democrat who sponsored an earlier 2018 law and participated in the Highland Park parade, had urged support for the legislation: "Gun violence has been normalized. The callous murder of our children and teachers in our schools, our neighbors in grocery stores, or our friends and family celebrating our nation's birthday at a parade must end."

Senate President Don Harmon, a Democrat from the Chicago suburb of Oak Park who also sponsored the legislation: "We've been dealing with gun violence in all fashions for far too long. We have many laws on the books, but in the end, the proliferation of high-powered weapons whose original basis was in military combat have no place in common commerce or on our streets."

House Speaker Emanuel "Chris" Welch: "These are weapons that belong on a battlefield, not at parades, or parks, or schools or churches."

State Sen. Christopher Belt (D-Swansea): "We can't sit back and hope mass shootings will stop. I would not have supported other proposals that take away rights from law-abiding gun owners."

State Reps. Katie Stuart (D-Edwardsville), **Jay Hoffman** (D-Swansea), and **LaToya Greenwood** (D-East St. Louis), also supported the bill.

Meanwhile, Republicans predict the law will ultimately be overturned in the courts as unconstitutional.

Illinois State Representative Amy Elik (R-Alton): "The bill approved will hinder the right to keep and bear arms for law-abiding gun owners," she noted. "The legislature should get tough on crime and stop punishing law-abiding citizens."

State Rep. Charlie Meier (R-Okawville) said people in southern Illinois do not trust the bill or its backers: "They believe next year you will change this bill again," he said during debates. "You won't leave it the way it is. You will take more of our rights away, rights guaranteed to us by the U.S. Constitution."

Also following its passage, **sheriffs of more than 80 Illinois counties** released statements questioning the law's constitutionality and declaring a universal refusal to enforce it in most circumstances, including **Madison County Jeff Connor**, who had issued a joint statement on Jan. 12 with **Madison County State's Attorney Tom Haine**.

Alton's **Piasa Armory** owner **Scott Pulaski**, in a story published by The Telegraph, noted that the ban will have both an immediate and large effect on his business: "Sales are halted effective immediately. That's going to have a pretty solid impact on us. That was probably about 25 percent of our business." Pulaski further noted that the new legislation "is unconstitutional" and that there would "absolutely" be legal challenges.

Richard Pearson, executive director of the Illinois State Rifle Association, said in a released statement: "Gov. Pritzker and the legislators who voted for this law did this for self-serving political purposes and are not upholding the United States Constitution. The Second Amendment is fundamentally about self-defense, and the 14th Amendment is about not having our rights infringed. This new law makes criminals out of law-abiding citizens."

One thing seems abundantly clear: The battleground is still hot, and the fight is far from over.