

Governor Should Lead, Follow or Get Out of the Way

By Senator Bill Brady

After 71 days of impasse and gridlock, the General Assembly has done its job and approved a \$59 billion state budget that allows the state to fulfill its mission and serves the people of the State of Illinois.

Now it's time for the Governor to do his job.

There's an old saying that people should lead, follow or get out of the way. It's time for Governor Blagojevich to heed that advice.

His endless special sessions have become irrelevant, he has lost respect of Republicans and Democrats alike, and the needed state dollars for our schools to open are still at risk.

The budget overwhelmingly approved by the House and Senate on Friday is not perfect, no budget is. But it is a budget that meets the overwhelming majority of the needs of the people of Illinois within the state's available resources.

It puts an additional \$600 million into education, more than half of the natural revenue growth available. It funds our requirement to pay down the state's embarrassing unfunded liability in its public pension funds. It provides overdue cost-of-doing-business increases for social service providers. And it accomplishes those worthy initiatives without asking more from taxpayers.

The General Assembly defeated the governor's proposal for a \$8 billion gross receipts tax, the largest state tax increase in the history of this country. We rejected his payroll tax to fund his broad new plan to extend health insurance to every resident of Illinois at a cost of billions of dollars to Illinois taxpayers.

We did our job, matching spending pressures against revenues. Now it's time for the Governor to quickly sign that budget, amendatorily veto it or resign.

The state cannot continue to operate without an operating budget fully in place. Leaving the budget approved by a super-majority of the General Assembly sitting on his desk while school districts cannot finalize their budgets and while state employees fret about their paychecks beyond August is not an answer. Calling special session after special session is not a solution. Turning a 12-month budget into a one or two-month budget while he continues to press for bigger government and costly new programs is not leadership.

A real leader would recognize the revenue estimates in this budget may be greatly inflated and manage state spending within more realistic estimates. A real leader would line-item veto the well-intentioned but really unaffordable community initiatives offered by legislators, as well as the \$50 million lump sum appropriation demanded by Senate Democrats, to balance the budget.

If the governor doesn't have the ability or determination to make those kinds of leadership decisions, maybe it's time to turn the reins of state government over to someone who does.