

Political Update September 2007

State Representative Franco Coladipietro is dishearten by the lack of progress in addressing the state's most critical issues including producing a fair and balanced budget. Governor Blagojevich has called the legislature into special session, prompting a Committee of the Whole to discuss budget proposals, including selling the lottery and taking out additional bonds to solve the crisis. Rep. Coladipietro believes that selling the lottery and signing a 75-year lease would result in a quick one-time infusion of \$10 billion to help pay down our pension debt, however the lottery produces a reliable, annual source of funding for education. Coladipietro says he's worried that if we sell off this asset we will end up digging ourselves a bigger hole in education funding.

Coladipietro also sent a message to Governor Blagojevich that raiding the states veterans' funds is not an option to balance the budget. HB 1232, co-sponsored by Coladipietro, would prohibit the governor from transferring dedicated veterans funds to the General Revenue Fund in order to defray operating costs. Coladipietro stated that one example of this raid was seen in the Illinois Veterans' Rehabilitation Fund. Over the last four budget cycles, the Illinois Veterans' Rehabilitation Fund had \$1,026,434 raided by the governor. The bill now advances to the Senate for further consideration.

The state has 900 veterans sitting on a waiting list trying to get into homes, Coladipietro says. He notes that empty beds are available to veterans, but the governor has not adequately funding the veterans' home operations.

Legislation sponsored by State Representative Dennis Reboletti cracks down on individuals who obtain prescriptions fraudulently.

Rep. Reboletti said that Senate Bill 705 would add a new offense for those found guilty of possessing an unauthorized prescription form. A person commits the offense when he or she knowingly alters a prescription, has unauthorized possession of a blank prescription form or possesses a prescription form not issued by a licensed prescriber. The first offense is a Class 4 Felony and subsequent offenses are punishable as a Class 3 Felony. First time offenders are eligible for probation if they have no previous record of drug possession or counterfeiting.

Reboletti notes that the number of Americans identifying themselves as victims of medical identity theft has nearly tripled in the last four years, to more than a quarter-million in 2005.

Reboletti says prescription drugs, such as OxyContin and Ritalin, when used in a manner counter to the prescriptions intended purpose, can quickly become dangerous and a threat to all users. SB 705 awaits the Governor's signature.

State Rep. John D'Amico is working to garner support for legislation that would prevent more teenagers from driving a vehicle while talking on their cell phones. The legislation will help ensure that teenagers will not be distracted while driving. D'Amico says that Illinois law currently only prevents drivers who are 18-years old and younger from using a cell phone if they have a driver's permit or graduated license. D'Amico's House Bill 559 is currently before the full House of Representatives for consideration.

The U.S. House of Representatives today approved legislation to help spur American innovation by creating a national database to make it easier for U.S. manufacturers to access government research and development programs and other types of assistance. Sponsored by Congressman Don Manzullo, the legislation calls for the National Institutes of Standards & Technology (NIST) to create software that for the first time tracks the hundreds of federal manufacturing programs and ongoing research and development projects funded throughout the federal agencies. Manufacturers could access the software through the Internet to find manufacturing assistance available to them. Manzullo's legislation was unanimously accepted as an amendment to the National Institutes of Standards & Technology reauthorization bill, which the House approved this afternoon. This legislation, for the first time, creates a national database of federal manufacturing programs that manufacturers can access to find out exactly what types of government assistance are available to them, says Manzullo, who co-chairs the Congressional Manufacturing Caucus. He notes that this amendment will also spur innovation by helping our manufacturers find research and development funding opportunities from the government.

This column is written by Nina Albano Vidmer, executive director of the Italian American Political Coalition. To submit information, please fax to 708-401-0360 by the first of each month for consideration in the following month's issue.