

Legislative Interview with Illinois Senator Scott Bennett, 52nd District

League of Women Voters of Champaign County

Date of Interview: March 29, 2021

Interviewers: Theresa Michelson, Sara Kelley, Carol Bosley

Synopsis

Senator Bennett spent 30 minutes with us discussing three priority questions provided by LWVIL. Regrettably, there was no time to discuss additional questions.

“Will you work to increase education funding every year (as mandated by law in 2017) for evidence-based distribution to schools to improve extreme funding inequities that severely impact students in low-income neighborhoods? Why or why not?”

Senator Bennett stated that yes, he has and will continue to support the evidence-based funding model. However, the last time a similar bill was brought to vote, he voted ‘present’ on it versus ‘yes’ because some items were added to the bill that had to do with private school scholarships. The senator said funding public education is a priority for him - that private education is a separate ‘pod,’ hence, his ‘present’ vote.

Related to the budget recently proposed by the Governor, there are changes due to the billions of dollars that Illinois public schools will be receiving via the Economic Recovery Act. These federal dollars designated for Covid-related education needs may free up some other state dollars in the budget earmarked for education. A decision will soon be made about this.

“What measures do you support to make the redistricting process more open to input about district maps from individuals and communities.”

Senator Bennett feels that input from individuals and communities is important. However, this has been challenging during COVID, when public, face-to-face meetings are not possible. Although several virtual public hearings are scheduled throughout the state, many who want to give input are not comfortable with the use of Zoom. Another challenge because of COVID is that the census data will be available late - in August or early fall - and the maps must be completed by the end of June. The American Community Survey (ACS) is another source of data that is available to the public and would be useful for providing input. Senator Bennett said redistricting maps drawn up by individuals and groups (including groups like the League) are welcomed for submission even if public meetings cannot be held.

Senator Bennett said when approaching the redistricting task, it is important that we “don’t water down influence when redistricting,” - especially for community groups with common interests and identities such as the Asian or Congolese communities. As well, he said it is not realistic to think that we can take the politics out of redistricting. He ended by saying that unless the Constitution is amended, the current process is best.

“Illinois has the potential to lead the nation in cutting greenhouse gas emissions and developing new green jobs in the next few years. What do you see as the next steps for the Illinois General Assembly to make this a reality? Do you support the Clean Energy Jobs Act (CEJA)? Why or why not?”

Senator Bennett believes CEJA is an important jobs bill; in fact, he was a co-sponsor of the Act. There is a need to create more jobs in industries that are growing, not those that are antiquated such as the coal industry. He stated that there is a lot of misinformation circulating in the public, some of it generated by the power companies themselves. The challenge before us is how to supply Illinois with power in a way that remains viable. It’s important that we don’t give up the long-term health of the community for short-term interests and gains. Senator Bennett referenced the energy situation in Texas, saying that we are starting to see skyrocketing energy costs here in Illinois. Some municipalities and individual households will be paying higher energy bills in the coming months as has been shared in the media and by his constituents.

Senator Bennett believes that the League of Women Voters plays an important role in educating voters about these and other key issues.