

Government Affairs Report

We have a budget! Celebration, not so much!

by Jim Owen and Scott Meyers

The State of Illinois has a budget for fiscal year 2018 that began retroactively on July 1, 2017 – the first budget in two years. Three if you count 2018! While hospitals were happy because their funding didn't get cut and universities were happy because they actually have some funding, the overall concern for Illinois is "This is business as usual!" The 2018 budget will spend more than the 2015 budget (the last one we actually had) and leaves a backlog of bills to be paid at nearly \$8M. While the backlog was up to \$15M before this agreement was reached, the loans to pay it down to the nearly \$8M will be interest only loans for the first 12-years. Which means the can got kicked down the road quite a ways!

Most State agencies received a 5% cut in their funding and higher education is to receive a 10% cut, but 90% of the previous budget is much better than nothing. The Illinois Pharmacy Disciplinary Fund will be raided to the tune of \$2M, just when we had built up some reserves from the previous raids. That money will go into the General Revenue Fund to be used on everything from healthcare to pensions to State Police. It is a wonder the General Assembly didn't dissolve all the dedicated professional funds in this year's process; they've raided them all so many times.

No major reforms were included in the budget bills, so the rumblings of businesses moving out of State have amplified in July. Many look at this budget as a defeat for Governor Rauner, and the other half of the pundits believe these votes will come back to haunt the democrats in next year's election. One thing is for sure, if this doesn't fire up the voters for one cause or the other, then democracy as we know may be doomed in Illinois.

On to a cheery note, the Pharmacy Practice Act extension was finally passed by both chambers in June and should soon be sent to the Governor for signature. This extension is for two years, not the normal 10, and will undergo some significant tailoring over the next year and a half. The extension calls for the creation of a Pharmaceutical Task Force to hammer out the details of what could be a major revision. The Chicago Tribune's series of articles including the most recent in the Sunday, July 9th edition has continuously fueled an effort to establish workload rules for community pharmacists. The initial bill introduced by Rep. Mary Flowers, D-Chicago, was written in whole by the Teamster union that represents the Chicago-area CVS pharmacists in labor negotiations with CVS. The bill was unrealistic and so restrictive that by the end of the first year after implementation, more than a million prescriptions would have gone unfilled because of workload limitations. Of course the first draft of language introduced for the purpose of starting a conversation is often at the furthest end to reality with the knowledge that compromise will have to take place if you want to accomplish anything.

ICHP will be participating on the Pharmaceutical Task Force and will work to make sure that logical and fair workload requirements for all parties are established. We will make sure that the patient remains in the center of our focus. We will keep you informed as discussion moves forward and will welcome any member input. We hope that common sense and reasonable negotiations will produce a new Practice Act that serves the citizens of Illinois best.