



CAPITAL SPENDING PLAN PROPOSAL IS REPLAY OF 1999 SPENDING BINGE

By Jim Tobin

The current “Capital Plan,” languishing in the Illinois General Assembly, is reminiscent of the six massive “Illinois First” pork barrel spending bills of 1999. Three Illinois First bills increased Illinois taxes by \$16 billion, to be paid over 25 years, and three spending bills totaling \$12 billion were spent on a “five year plan” not unlike the famous Soviet plans of the same name.

Two-thirds of the Illinois First spending was earmarked for pork barrel projects in Chicago, even though less than a quarter of the state’s population lived in Chicago.

All the spending bills were signed into law by former Governor and convicted felon, George Ryan (R), the corrupt Republican party hack described by Chicago Tribune columnist John Kass as “The Jolly Beefeater who ruined the Republican Party in Illinois, the fellow who made the road-builders and the asphalt kings happy, the man who withdrew only \$70 in cash for a year, while gambling and steak-housing his way across the state.”

The current Capital Plan is an expensive replay of the 1999 spending binge. The proposed pork fest includes at least \$25 billion in new spending, and taxpayer dollars would be thrown at traditional special-interest pork barrel targets: Public schools, roads, bridges, and the black hole of partly redundant mass transit systems.

Bureaucrats at the RTA, CTA, Metra and Pace say they need at least \$10 billion over the next five years for capacity-expansion projects, despite declining ridership. The Illinois Taxpayer Education Foundation (ITEF) pointed out that the Illinois First expenditure of \$482 million, wasted on rebuilding a six-mile section of the Chicago CTA Douglas Pink Line, worked out to more than \$80 million per mile of track, and that the line’s ridership levels were 20 percent of the peak level reached in the 1920s. Furthermore, Chicago’s west side was already served by the Congress Blue Line, which ran a parallel line just 1.5 miles to the north. ITEF stated that using just \$20 million worth of express busses along Ogden and Cermak would actually provide better service.

Obviously, public transit bureaucrats and members of the Illinois General Assembly have not proved to have good judgment regarding the use of taxpayers’ money.

The Capital Spending Plan sequel of the notorious Illinois First spending plan promises to lose billions of dollars on useless pork barrel projects.

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