

University borrowing bill sits on Quinn's desk

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By Rob Crow, The Southern | Posted: Thursday, May 27, 2010 6:00 am | 1 Comment

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The university borrowing bill sitting on Gov. Pat Quinn's desk is likely to sit there for at least a few more days. And some of Southern Illinois' Republican state legislators aren't pleased that the bill is being used in what appears to be political gamesmanship.

During a news conference Wednesday in Springfield, Quinn said he won't consider signing the university borrowing bill until another borrowing bill is completed - one that would result in \$4 billion of state borrowing to make statewide pension payments.

"We're going to address that one, and we'll address it promptly," Quinn said of the university bill. "But front and center is the borrowing for the pensions, and we'll hopefully be voting on that (today)."

The pension bill narrowly passed through the state House on Tuesday night, and nearly had the university bill and another school bill attached to it, in what state Rep. Mike Bost, R-Murphysboro, said was an attempt to strong-arm him into supporting the pension bill.

Both of those bills - the university bill and one that would allow for more bonds to be issued to build a school in Okawville - had previously been passed by the House and Senate and are awaiting Quinn's signature.

On Tuesday, Quinn said in a statement he wanted the university borrowing bill to be included with broader borrowing legislation, namely the pension borrowing bill. Eventually, after some argument on the House floor, the pension bill was voted on Tuesday without the other bills attached, and passed without the vote of Bost or all but two Republicans.

"Is there wheeling and dealing that goes on in these situations? Yes, there is," Bost said. "But not with bills that have already been passed and are waiting on the governor's desk, and are sensible bills.

"They were threats," Bost added. "Just not very good threats."

State Sen. Dave Luechtefeld, R-Okawville, agreed with Bost's sentiments, and called Quinn's comments Wednesday "just another game."

"It's kind of like you're held hostage," Luechtefeld said.

Luechtefeld said he will vote against the pension borrowing bill. A Senate vote could come as early as today.

State Rep. John Bradley, D-Marion, admitted there was likely some strategy involved with Tuesday's proposed amendments to the pension bill, but shouldn't have changed anyone's vote.

"If you voting for one type of borrowing, but you're not voting for another type of borrowing, what is the difference in those things?" asked Bradley, who voted for the pension borrowing bill.

Bost, Bradley and Luechtefeld all said they hoped Quinn would sign the university borrowing bill soon, which would give the state's universities the authority to borrow money against what the state owes them.

Southern Illinois University President Glenn Poshard has said the borrowing bill could help the school make payroll in July and August, something local legislators all agree is vitally important.

Said Bost, "We're talking about people's salaries, and people's lives."

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Senate does not finish state budget package

Cullerton fails to have enough votes to approve \$4B borrowing plan

By Monique Garcia and Michelle Manchir, Tribune Reporters

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SPRINGFIELD

— The Illinois Senate left town Thursday without finalizing a key part of the budget package: borrowing \$4 billion to pay for government worker pensions and keep state government afloat another year.

The plan to take out a major loan failed to come together when Senate President John Cullerton could not get all of his Democratic troops in line, including one who didn't show up. Cullerton quickly sought to pin blame on Republicans who have resisted the expansive borrowing Gov. Pat Quinn wants and House lawmakers already approved.

Senators went home for Memorial Day weekend with plenty of time to think about how to resolve the latest budget breakdown, as Cullerton said it's unclear when they would return for a vote.

"It's not urgent like we have to do it in the next weekend, but it has to be done relatively soon," Cullerton said. He added that Quinn must work to build support.

Retiring Sen. James DeLeo, D-Chicago, was not in Springfield, but a Cullerton spokeswoman said that even if he was, there weren't enough votes to approve the borrowing. A handful of Democrats refused to sign on, including Sen. Heather Steans of Chicago, who said borrowing is not a comprehensive fix and would only push the problem down the road.

The Senate did send Quinn a tax amnesty measure that would allow delinquent taxpayers to pay their debt without penalty. That plan could raise up to \$250 million, though that figure likely will be partially undercut by another measure they approved to allow back-to-school shoppers in August to stock up without paying the state portion of the sales tax.

Quinn spent part of Thursday frantically lobbying lawmakers but could not sway enough senators to support the pension borrowing plan. Sen. Larry Bomke, R-Springfield, said Quinn called asking for his support, and Bomke said he's open to the idea because it's "a little less fiscally irresponsible" than skipping a pension payment. But senators did not end up voting on the plan.

At one point, Quinn Chief of Staff Jerry Stermer met with social service providers in an effort to persuade them to put pressure on lawmakers to vote for borrowing.

Senate Republican leader Christine Radogno, of Lemont, accused Quinn's office of unfairly manipulating providers by threatening payment delays of an additional 10 months if they did not help build support.

"Human service providers once again are being held hostage," Radogno said. "That's unconscionable."

Quinn spokesman Bob Reed said Radogno was distorting the meeting's intent, which he characterized as a broad discussion about the state's "serious cash-flow problems" that would get worse without pension borrowing.

Tribune reporter Ray Long contributed.

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Arne Duncan Is Still Angling to Reward Colleges for Better Results

By Goldie Blumenstyk

Washington

The Obama administration may have lost the battle in Congress for billions of dollars in new money to help improve college completion, but Education Secretary Arne Duncan said on Wednesday that the Education Department still hopes to find funds to help colleges put innovative ideas into practice.

He said his hope is to reallocate money from other federal programs, which he didn't name, and use it to offer financial incentives to colleges that show creativity in containing costs and improving their graduation rates.

"Stay tuned," said Mr. Duncan, who dropped the hint about the effort at an "Innovation in Education Roundtable" luncheon here sponsored by the Aspen Institute and Intel Corporation. The education secretary joined an eclectic group of more than three dozen policy leaders from higher education and elementary and secondary education at the event.

The higher-education program would reward colleges' advances in educational attainment, Mr. Duncan said. "Some do a phenomenal job of developing college-completion cultures."

It was unclear what sources of funds the Education Department could tap. In the federal budget, most of the money for higher education comes in the form of aid that goes to students, not institutions or states.

The Education Department won't be acting alone. Mr. Duncan said the department is already working with the National Governors Association and its next chairman, West Virginia's governor, Joe Manchin III, a Democrat, to develop college-graduation-rate goals for each state and eventually, for each institution of higher education. That kind of push is necessary, Mr. Duncan said, if the country is to meet President Obama's goal for the United States to have the world's highest proportion of residents with a college degree by 2020.

But William E. (Brit) Kirwan, chancellor of the University System of Maryland, said the financial problems afflicting public higher education could undermine those goals. "Who's worrying about the capacity" of higher education to take in those new students? he asked at the meeting.

He said the federal government needs to play a part in promoting innovative approaches, although he, too, said he wondered from where federal funds could be reallocated. "The country can't move forward," he added, "if we don't find some different models for delivering education at our best institutions."

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Views

Beware Higher Ed's 'Mad Men'

May 27, 2010

By Michael Armini



In 1981, Grey Poupon took the nation by storm. Although the little-known Dijon mustard had been manufactured for more than a century, in the early '80s it went from a minor six-figure business to a retail powerhouse.

Most people remember the famous TV ad in which one Rolls-Royce pulls up next to another. An aristocratic-looking passenger rolls down the back window to ask, "*Pardon me. Would you have any Grey Poupon?*"

In the cities where the ad ran, sales of Grey Poupon shot up 40 to 50 percent -- a remarkable leap in the largely static condiment sector. Today, the Grey Poupon success story is frequently invoked as a highly successful "rebranding," and an example of a singular advertising triumph.

Within the retail world, plenty of products have had their sales driven up, and their images buffed, through focused ad campaigns and catchy slogans: *Don't Leave Home Without It* (American Express), *Just Do It* (Nike), and *Got Milk?* (California Milk Processor Board).

These successes -- reinforced today by the hit cable TV show "Mad Men" -- have led to an onslaught of branding consultants currently setting their sights on American universities. Many of these firms, battered by the recession and seeing higher education as a wealthy untapped sector, are coming to a campus near you.

The primary problem with their pitch is that it undervalues the very essence of a large educational institution. Universities are, by definition, complex, decentralized, multidimensional places with many disparate audiences. To attempt to rebrand these institutions as if they are one-dimensional retail products is to misunderstand what makes them exceptional.

Some university leaders are eager to buy the promise of a quick fix. The branding consultants tap into a low-level frustration on nearly every campus -- "No one knows how great we are" -- and make flashy presentations that promise fast results.

These campaigns provide all of the trappings of success: highly varnished collateral materials and new websites, all stamped with a focus-group-tested tagline. Internal constituencies are put through a time-consuming discovery process, which helps achieve a sense of internal buy-in, even if the effectiveness of the "deliverables" is suspect. In the end, most of these efforts are like Chinese takeout: initially satisfying, but with no long-term nutritional value.

So, if empty branding campaigns aren't the answer, what is? For most institutions, a sustained and thematic flow of credible messages to your key constituencies will produce real results. Three principles should drive this approach:

Build on strong facts: Bob Dylan said, "*All I got is a red guitar, three chords and the truth.*" Without denigrating Dylan's guitar chops, it's fair to say that he relied primarily on the truth. University marketing and communications programs should do the same.

Effective marketing (or public relations -- the terms mean different things to different practitioners) should be thought of as an accelerant. It's the lighter fluid we pour on a fledgling fire to create a full-blown blaze. As a result, even the strongest communications program will fail if it is not built on strong facts -- on the *truth*.

Within your institution, find three to five strong institutional assets -- the ideas, initiatives, and people that differentiate you from the rest. These could be research programs, student successes, or an innovative approach to admissions. The point is, you should fan the flames where you have the potential to outshine others.

In the late 1990s, I was appointed director of communications at Harvard Law School. At the time, Harvard Law was viewed by many

as an elite institution coasting on its laurels. There were those who believed that Harvard Law, arguably the largest law school in the country, was too big and impersonal. The faculty considered shrinking the size of the student body; ultimately that proposal failed, and we decided that the school should embrace its bigness. A "legal metropolis" and "the New York City of law schools" were messages we began promoting. These efforts, combined with a public-service renaissance and tremendous fund raising success, helped Harvard Law reassert its preeminence. (Some might argue that a trained chimpanzee could enhance Harvard's reputation. The truth is that it can be even *more difficult* to shift and update the image of an institution that is so deeply marbled in the public's consciousness.)

Don't give up on the press: A popular joke in media circles today is: "*What do pimps and the newspaper industry have in common? Both are being put out of business by Craigslist.*"

While it's true that the financial model of the commercial media is being severely tested, many traditional news organizations still maintain significant readership. (The problem is that online readers don't translate into the same kind of revenue that print readers do.)

For example, *The New York Times* actually has *more* readers today than it did a decade ago, if you consider print and online readers together. In 1998, the *Times* had 1.06 million readers of its print edition. Today, in part due to a top-notch web presence, the *Times* has more than 1.5 million print *and* online readers.

Even *The Boston Globe*, viewed in recent years as a news organization in serious trouble, has maintained approximately 460,000 daily readers when combining print and online.

Most important is that these and other news organizations remain credible sources of information. New research by the Nielsen Company shows that people have become increasingly savvy consumers of information. In a recent credibility-of-sources survey, Americans placed many forms of *direct communication* -- advertising, printed materials, mailings -- well below media coverage in terms of what they believe. The concept of "third-party validation" is still compelling.

Put in simple terms, a good article about your university in a national newspaper is worth more than a dozen paid display ads in the same paper.

Persistence pays off: When it comes to reputation-building, patience is indeed a virtue. So is persistence. An old rule in political campaigns is that voters should see or hear something about a candidate *at least seven times* between Labor Day and Election Day -- the homestretch of any election. The truth, for better or worse, is that most audiences require a steady drumbeat of consistent information to shape their perceptions.

In addition to sustaining the flow of information, use the "show, don't tell" rule. Instead of producing print materials and web pages that *tell* the world how strong your programs are, *show why* this is true.

At Northeastern University, where I currently oversee marketing and communications, we are a leader in experiential learning, anchored by our renowned co-op program. Showcasing real students in experiential learning programs around the world will move the needle far more than dispensing platitudes about our leadership position. We have used this principle in recent newspaper ads designed to build awareness about our expanding research enterprise.

This steady, brick-by-brick approach has been used by a broad range of American universities (Duke, Emory, and Washington University in St. Louis, to name just a few) that have moved dramatically up the academic food chain. These institutions and their leaders made many tangible, undisputed good moves. But they are also each known for complementing these good moves with strong, sustained communications efforts.

To be fair, there are plenty of thoughtful, idea-based communications firms out there doing good work across different sectors. I differentiate these firms from the bumper-sticker branding agencies that focus solely on the sizzle, not the steak.

Whether or not your institution relies on outside counsel to promote itself, remember that you're not selling mustard, Big Macs or running shoes. Your university is a churning, diverse and complicated place. Tell this story in a smart and truthful way -- with unrelenting persistence -- and you will succeed.

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