

Legislative and Regulatory Update–November 7, 2010

The Illinois General Assembly is still in recess, but is coming back mid-November for the Veto Session. We hope to bring you good news on current legislation that we have been tracking being passed into law. So please look to the next Legislative Update coming in December.

November Spotlight: Sustainability on the Campaign Trail-A Conversation with Representative Karen May

Being in the midst of a brutal campaign season, this may be an appropriate time to consider the role of sustainability on the campaign trail and how our elected representatives would like to incorporate sustainability in their policy strategy. In order to get an understanding of these issues, we sat down with Illinois Representative Karen May-D) 58th District. In office since 2001, she currently serves on a number of committees tackling crucial environmental issues including: Environmental Health (Chair), Environment & Energy (member), and Renewable Energy (Chair). She also collaborates with the USGBC-Illinois Chapter on HJR 45 which creates a LEED Task Force tasked with making recommendations to the Illinois General Assembly on a prospective state program for greening existing schools and potential funding sources for such a program.

Speaking generally about this last election, Karen was disappointed that so many candidates and the media focused solely on fiscal matters and the political culture of corruption in Illinois, leaving little room for issues regarding the environment and sustainability. Despite this focus, she cited polling data that suggests constituents are strongly interested in green collar jobs and energy independence. There is the belief that green collar jobs may prove a significant boost to rural and conservative areas where employment is desperately needed. In addition, there is a great hope that a new vibrant green economy will benefit a number of minority groups that have been left out of previous economic expansions in Illinois in the past.

So what will help bring about this change to a greener economy? Business entrepreneurs speak to her about their interest and motivation to create green collar jobs, but they claim there is a lack of seed money and incentives to help propel this movement forward. And of critical importance is certainty in public policy that they can rely upon when deciding whether to commit themselves and their resources to bring about such change. As an example, Representative May describes a long-term policy on feed-in tariff, an above-retail rate ("tariff") paid for renewable energy-generated electricity that producers "feed" into the grid, that would allow for longer renewable energy contracts and provide a huge boost for this industry here in Illinois.

Creating green business incubators which assist local and start-up businesses in developing Green Economy opportunities through training, business planning, and grants writing services is also key in Illinois. Bringing new products to market, opening new

markets for green products, and adopting green practices are all part of this transformation of the 21st century marketplace. For example, according to a September report by The Center for American Progress Retrofitting 40 percent of the residential and commercial building stock in the US would create over 625,000 full-time jobs over a decade, spark \$500 billion in new investments, and generate as much as \$64 billion a year in cost savings for ratepayers. <http://www.americanprogress.org/aboutus>.

We all can agree steps toward improving the economy and environment will bode well for Illinois. But bringing about such change will take incredible political and business determination. But it is possible. It will take leadership and solid data to make it so. With the great efforts of members of the Illinois General Assembly like Representative May, it could eventually become a reality, and we all hope to benefit by such a change.

For more information about Representative May, please visit <http://www.ilga.gov/house/Rep.asp?GA=96&MemberID=1392>. And for more information about the Legislative Update and Spotlights please contact Sean Ziadeh at seanziadeh@hotmail.com or by calling (248) 320-3208 for any other information.