

# Rockford Register Star

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## Springfield session shows teamwork can make things happen for Rockford

**Tom McNamara**

Published 2:00 p.m. CT June 8, 2019 | Updated 12:45 p.m. CT June 7, 2019

Few among us can remember an Illinois legislative session that was more “sweeping and consequential,” as Gov. JB Pritzker noted, than the one just completed in Springfield. Most importantly for Rockford residents, the accomplishments of our bipartisan team will have a real and lasting impact on our community. Among the highlights:

- **Casino:** After literally waiting decades for a gaming expansion to include a casino in Rockford, our city now will have yet another attraction to add to our tourism and entertainment infrastructure. Most importantly, we’ll be able to attract visitors who might have been visiting casinos in other Illinois suburbs or Indiana and Wisconsin. Sen. Dave Syverson has worked for years to get a casino for Rockford and I thank him for his leadership and commitment, along with the work and support of Sen. Steve Stadelman and Rep. Maurice West II on this initiative.
- **Rail:** The capital bill specifically includes \$275 million for upgraded railroad service between Chicago and Rockford. While this project is still somewhat undefined and will take time to implement, I’m pleased our legislators, especially Sen. Stadelman, are seeing the economic development value of expanding rail beyond just suburban commuter rail or longer-route downstate rail.
- **Capital spending and appropriations:** The General Assembly passed a \$45 billion capital-spending plan to improve our state’s crumbling infrastructure. Our Public Works & Engineering departments are ready with a detailed and specific list of road, bridge and other infrastructure projects. We also provided our local legislators with our capital improvement plan and will be closely involved in the grant-making process that makes these projects a reality. In addition, numerous other organizations and projects received funding for critical projects that will have a positive impact on our region.

- **Airport:** A previous governor promised money for the AAR facility at the Chicago Rockford International Airport (RFD). When his successor failed to follow through on that promise, a local consortium of banks saved that project, costing the airport \$80,000 per month in interest. The approved state budget includes money to repay RFD the \$14.7 million it is owed.
- **Sex education bill:** We've been working diligently for 18 months to stem the impact of domestic violence, human trafficking and sexual assault in our community. A bill that passed both the House and Senate requires school districts that teach sex education to give a fuller definition of "consent." The bill specifies that consent is "a freely given agreement to sexual activity" that cannot be given if an individual "can't understand the nature of the activity" due to drug or alcohol use.

Serving on a transition committee for Gov. Pritzker and traveling to Springfield several times to testify on Rockford's behalf and build relationships with key legislators are important parts of my job. However, our work in Springfield is most definitely a team effort.

Our City Council Legislative & Lobbying Committee, led by Ald. Kevin Frost and Ald. Ann Thompson-Kelly, worked hard this session on our city's behalf. Mike Cassidy, our long-time lobbyist in Springfield, is a tireless and valuable advocate as well, working countless hours, especially over the session's final weeks, to keep us updated and to help bring home critical pieces of legislation.

Our work is not done. We have many things left to accomplish on a state-wide level that can have a positive impact on Rockford. I'm looking forward to continuing to work with our Governor, our local legislators and our City Council members to provide value to our taxpayers in the services, programs and projects we manage.

*Tom McNamara is mayor of Rockford*