

Illinois Legislature Cancels Next Week's In-Person Session

by Greg Bishop
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(The Center Square) – Eight of nine session days for the Illinois Legislature so far this year have been canceled as lawmakers don't plan to return to the capitol next week. Some speculate they won't return until March.

In a joint statement from Illinois House Speaker Emanuel “Chris” Welch, D-Hillside, and Illinois Senate President Don Harmon, D-Oak Park, the leaders said the rise in COVID-19 cases drove the decision.

“e cannot put lawmakers, staff, the press and members of the public at risk by bringing them back to the Capitol,” said Welch. “We have the capability to complete committee work remotely for the immediate future and we will continue to closely monitor the COVID-19 situation.”

Harmon echoed that.

“Through our remote committee process we have proven that we can get work done, protect people’s health and at the same time expand the legislative process to people who might want to testify but wouldn’t have the time or resources to come to Springfield,” said Harmon. “We’ve set the legislative process in motion for this session and will be prepared for final debates and action when we return to Springfield.”

Acknowledging the ongoing pandemic, state Rep. Tim Butler, R-Springfield, told The Center Square “it’s unfortunate.”

“This is the schedule that the Democrats put together, the Democrats were the ones that changed the primary date which prompted our schedule to be frontloaded,” Butler said. “And now it looks like, it seems to me, that we’re probably, other than the session day we were in last week, it seems to be going toward we’re probably not going to be in session until after the month is over, maybe into February. I’ve heard rumors we won’t come back until March as well.”

"The latest surge certainly poses many challenges for the legislature, but the Senate Republican Caucus is committed to ensuring the people's business is accomplished," said Ellie Leonard, spokesperson for Senate Minority Leader Dan McConchie's office. "In an effort to mitigate exposure of the latest variant, the Senate Republican Caucus will continue its testing regimen for staff and limit in person interactions as needed to mitigate exposure and ensure safety of all involved."

Lawmakers were scheduled to be in this week, but canceled. They also canceled two of three scheduled days last week, marking eight of nine days scheduled this year that have been canceled.

Lawmakers have various remote committees scheduled throughout the rest of this week and next week covering a variety of issues and legislation.

The governor’s State of the State and Budget Addresses will be on the same day, scheduled Feb. 2. It’s unclear if that will be in-person, or remote as last year’s presentation was.

Spring session is set to end April 8.

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