

NEWS: LOCAL

Chicago Jewish leaders discuss funding concerns on annual Springfield mission

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Part of the group of Chicago Jewish leaders on the Jewish Federation's annual Springfield mission.

Thirty-nine Chicago Jewish community leaders and professionals boarded a bus early Wednesday morning for a two-day mission in Springfield organized by the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago to advocate for the issues that matter to their respective organizations and constituents.

“The power of collaboration among the Jewish Federation agencies is highlighted on the Springfield mission, particularly when we bring our message directly to the legislators,” said Wendy Abrams, vice chair of the Federation's Government Affairs Committee and State chair.

Participants came from CJE SeniorLife, HIAS, Jewish Child and Family Services, Jewish Vocational Service, and Sinai Health System as well as the Jewish Women's Foundation, the Health and Human Services Commission, JCFC and the Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago Board of Directors in addition to the Government Affairs Committee.

“In private meetings with the leaders, we talked about the critical need to fully fund health and human services and the imperative of understanding the short and long-term consequences of failing to do so,” said JUF Chairman of the Board David T. Brown.

Deep cuts in every area – health, education, human services, and public safety – are being proposed for the 2015 State Budget in the event that the temporary tax increase – scheduled to expire in January 2015 – is not renewed. The network of agencies within the Jewish Federation receive over \$300 million a year in government funding, most of which, including much of the Federal funding, comes through the State.

“After focusing for many years in fundraising for JUF, after being involved in the Government Affairs Committee missions, I have a far greater appreciation for the role that government funding plays in supporting the critical work done by our agencies,” said Andy Hochberg, chair of the Government Affairs Committee. “I was very glad to have the opportunity to talk with our state officials who grant extraordinary access to our mission participants.”

There were 18 meetings held with legislators including Senate President John Cullerton, Senate Republican Leader Christine Radogno, House Republican Leader Jim Durkin, and House Majority Leader Barbara Flynn Currie. Participants felt that the legislators listened carefully to their message, even if the interaction was a bit challenging at times.

That evening, Governor Pat Quinn, Comptroller Judy Barr Topinka and various legislators joined the mission participants for cocktails at the Governor’s Mansion reception. After dinner, freshmen members of the Jewish Caucus, Representatives Scott Drury and Laura Fine and Senator Julie Morrison, called up the more senior members of the Caucus, Representatives Sara Feigenholtz, Robyn Gabel, Lou Lang, and Elaine Nekrtiz and seniors Daniel Biss and Ira Silverstein, for a tongue-in-cheek question-and-answer session.

On Thursday, Mission participants returned to the Capital for more meetings and then ended their visit by participating in the State of Illinois Holocaust Memorial Observance at the Old State Capitol.