

JO DAVIESS COUNTY
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
JULY 10, 2025

I. Call to Order

Committee Chairperson Lang called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM on Thursday, July 10, 2025 in the Jo Daviess County Board Room, Jo Daviess County Administrative Offices in Galena, Illinois.

II. Roll Call

Roll Call was answered as follows: Present – John Lang, Peggy Bastian, Michael Dittmar, John Schultz, LaDon Trost. Present: 5. Present electronically: 0. Absent – Lynn Gallagher. Absent: 1. Vacant: 1.

III. Approval of Minutes

A motion to approve minutes of the May 8, 2025 Legislative Committee meeting was made by John Schultz and seconded by Peggy Bastian. The motion carried by voice vote.

IV. Citizens' Comments

There were no citizens' comments.

V. Unfinished Business

VI. New Business

Representative Tony McCombie, House Minority Leader, joined the meeting and shared updates from Springfield. She has represented the area for three years and has a background in real estate.

Rep. McCombie gave some updates and her thoughts on the past legislative session. The state's \$55.2 billion budget includes \$1 billion in new taxes affecting large companies, nicotine products, and sports betting. She raised concerns about fund transfers and the lack of long-term financial planning. Rep. McCombie also noted that Chicago's transit system faces a \$600 million deficit. Proposed fixes include a delivery tax and new service taxes. She also emphasized fair funding for rural areas. In regard to schools, they have received \$350 million more, but a \$50 million property tax relief program was cut. Property taxes also remain a major concern. Funding for undocumented adult healthcare was reduced by \$110 million. \$370 million was redirected to a new fund, and \$40 million was allocated for immigration services. Also, a proposed bill could raise costs for high-usage businesses. Rep. McCombie supports expanding nuclear energy but criticized regulatory delays. She supports repealing lease and franchise taxes and increasing small business credits, while opposing the real estate transfer tax and Airbnb tax hikes due to their impact on tourism. For homeschooling, a proposed bill received over 51,000 objections. Rep. McCombie noted strong opposition to increased regulation.

Regarding UTV legislation, McCombie said efforts to legalize UTVs statewide are ongoing, though the

Secretary of State has expressed safety concerns. There was discussion about shifting oversight to the Department of Agriculture.

McCombie touched on the taxation of recreational land, warning that it could unintentionally affect farmland assessments and burden local landowners.

The conversation turned to conservation easements. Committee members expressed concern about land being taken out of agricultural production and placed into conservation programs, which can significantly reduce tax revenue. One member noted that some conservation easements are permanent and lack a sunset clause, suggesting that even a 100-year review would be more reasonable than indefinite tax breaks. The group agreed that while preserving farmland is important, there should be mechanisms to reassess whether conservation designations still make sense over time.

Rep. McCombie touched on structural tax reform aimed at increasing productivity and growing the state's tax base. She emphasized the importance of broadening the base rather than raising rates, suggesting that more contributors could generate greater revenue without increasing the burden on individual taxpayers. She referenced several proposals from fellow legislators, including bills to eliminate taxes on tips and overtime, create tax credits for small businesses, and repeal anti-business policies such as the franchise tax and lease taxes.

McCombie discussed SB2504, a bill aimed at consolidating township governments across Illinois. She explained that while townships already have the ability to consolidate voluntarily, this legislation would have pushed for broader, state-driven consolidation. The bill saw significant opposition, not only from all Republican legislators but also from several Democrats, particularly those representing suburban areas where townships provide essential wraparound services. McCombie emphasized that the bill failed to account for the efficiency and low cost of township governance and criticized the lack of provisions for counties to absorb the additional responsibilities and costs. She warned that consolidation could lead to increased expenses, especially due to unionization of highway crews and the need for more equipment and workforce. Though the bill was shelved for the year, she noted that the governor remains committed to reducing the number of government units, and the issue may resurface in future sessions.

McCombie addressed the ongoing frustration with Illinois' gas tax, which is now the second highest in the nation. She explained that the initial 19-cent increase was distributed among state roads, townships, municipalities, and counties, while the second 19-cent hike went primarily to the state. Despite the revenue generated, the state has struggled to spend the funds efficiently—\$5 billion currently sits unused due to staffing shortages and delays in rulemaking. She noted that residents near state borders often cross into neighboring states to buy gas, groceries, and other goods, resulting in lost revenue for Illinois. McCombie and her colleagues are advocating for changes to the distribution formula and considering options like repealing or incrementally lowering the sales tax on gas, which she described as a "double tax." She also mentioned the growing inequity as electric vehicle owners do not pay road use taxes, prompting discussions about a mileage tax or licensing fee to address the gap.

Committee members referenced several articles included in the meeting packet, sparking a thoughtful discussion. One article highlighted a surprising statistic: 21.7% of income in Jo Daviess County comes from government programs, compared to only 15.6% in Cook County. This prompted questions about whether the data included Social Security and how the aging population in Jo Daviess might influence those numbers. Members expressed interest in seeing a regional breakdown of the data and comparing it across counties. The article also noted that the highest county had over 50% of income from government programs, while the lowest was just over 9%, though the specific counties weren't recalled. The committee agreed it would be worthwhile to track down the full study for further analysis.

Looking ahead, Rep. McCombie forecasted several major issues likely to dominate the next legislative session. Transit funding will be front and center, especially the proposed delivery tax and service tax aimed at closing Chicago's \$600 million transit deficit. She expects renewed debate over energy policy, particularly the controversial "bring your own energy" bill that could dramatically increase costs for high-usage businesses. Homeschooling oversight remains a hot-button issue, with strong grassroots opposition likely to continue. Additionally, McCombie warned that the real estate transfer tax could resurface, posing a threat to counties like Jo Daviess. She stressed the importance of structural tax reform to grow the state's tax base rather than increasing rates, and expressed concern that mandates without funding will continue to burden local governments. Political timing will also play a role, with legislators unlikely to support tax increases before the August petition filing deadline for elections.

VII. Legislative issues Committee Members or County Officials want the Committee to be aware of and take action on at another meeting

There was nothing discussed.

VIII. Citizens' Comments

Rep. McCombie thanked everyone for having her and expressed that it was a very good meeting.

IX. Committee Member Concerns

There were no member concerns.

X. Adjourn

Lang felt that the August meeting may be canceled, but it will be decided closer to the meeting date. A motion to adjourn was made at 7:18 PM by John Schultz and seconded by Peggy Bastian. Motion carried by voice vote.