

Illinois Senate Minority Leader Bill Brady

Lifelong resident of central Illinois, and its 25-year legislator, cherishes opportunities to help solve problems little and big

by Katelyn Tye-Skowronski (ktye@csg.org)

Bill Brady's career in public service was forged in his hometown of Bloomington, Illinois, where he has been a lifelong resident.

After graduating from Bloomington's Illinois Wesleyan University, Brady and his wife, Nancy, decided to put down even deeper roots in the town, helping to run his family's home construction company and establishing their own real estate agency.

As a businessman and entrepreneur, Brady became involved in various community organizations, including the McLean County Chamber of Commerce and the boards of different local charities. Eventually, he took an interest in Republican politics, and when Brady was in his mid-twenties, he became the county's campaign manager for former U.S. Rep. Edward Madigan.

From there, his path to the Illinois General Assembly took form.

"When I was 30 or 31, some people convinced me to run for the Illinois House. I won the primary election by a whopping eight votes against a 14-year Republican incumbent," says Brady, who was sworn into office in 1993 and served in the House until 2000, when then-U.S. House Speaker Dennis Hastert encouraged him to run for Congress — a race that was unsuccessful.

Brady's absence from Illinois politics was brief, however. In 2001, his state senator and political mentor, former Illinois Sen. John Maitland, suffered a stroke and chose to leave office early. Brady was appointed to the open seat and has been the district's senator ever since.

In the General Assembly, Brady found it rewarding to pick up on work he had started in the Bloomington community as a private citizen. Before joining the legislature, he was part of a coalition of local business leaders that advocated in the late 1980s for a community college to be built in central Illinois. At the time, it was the only region of the state that didn't have one. The coalition's efforts were successful, and in 1990, Heartland Community College was established.

Years later, while serving in the Illinois House, Brady fought for the funding that allowed the college to move out of the rental facilities it had been occupying, and establish its own permanent campus.

Brady has remained an active member of the Bloomington business community while representing the people of his district. He and his family still operate a home construction company and several real estate agencies, in addition to property management and building restoration businesses.

His family also owns two Jimmy John's sandwich shops in Florida.

In a recent interview with CSG Midwest, Brady reflected on his work in the General Assembly, his experiences as caucus leader, and on legislative priorities for 2018.

Here are excerpts from the interview.

Q: In addition to providing funding for Heartland Community College, what are some of your

Bio-sketch of Sen. Brady

- ✓ Appointed to an open Senate seat in 2002, elected minority leader in June 2017
- ✓ Previously a member of the Illinois House of Representatives (first elected in 1993)
- ✓ Founder of several home construction and sales companies in central Illinois
- ✓ Lives in Bloomington with his wife, Nancy; they have three children and three grandchildren



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proudest legislative accomplishments?

A: It's kind of interesting, you run for the big-picture items — like you're going to cut taxes, balance the budget, and create jobs — but the most rewarding things that I've done are helping people in my district cut through red tape and get the government services they need.

When I was first elected to the legislature, I was made chairman of the House pension committee. At that point in time, there had been a ruling that [the state] could no longer use pension money to pay for retiree health insurance. I worked through the committee to create a retirement health insurance program for teachers. Later on in my career, I helped to pass legislation (PA 90-41) that allowed financial institutions in Illinois to sell insurance products to consumers.

Q: What prompted your decision to become minority leader and what have you most enjoyed about the role, so far?

A: Having run statewide [for governor in 2006, 2010 and 2014], I got to know the state pretty well. I was asked by [former Senate minority leader] Christine Radogno to serve on her leadership team and was serving as her deputy leader when she decided to resign [in June 2017]. I felt I had a very good relationship with almost every member of our caucus and understood the state and their districts very well.

I was honored to win the election for leader and I've especially enjoyed the process of negotiating and bringing the process of negotiations to a successful conclusion. Being leader has also provided the opportunity to interact with my caucus members at a more intimate level.

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Q: Looking ahead, what are your caucus' priorities for the upcoming legislative session?

A: I would say balancing the budget and rolling back the Democrats' income tax increase [which was passed in 2017]. The Democrat-passed [FY 18] budget was still, unfortunately, \$1.5 billion out of balance in our opinion.

We'd also like to tackle pension reform — to do what we can under the current constitution to protect people's pensions, but also rein in pension spending.

I would love to see legislative term limits. I think that would be a big win for the voters, not to mention fair [electoral] maps.

Another priority is job growth, which would come through business reforms and a reduction of the state tax burden.

Q: Because of legislative turnover, the Illinois General Assembly will be seeing a lot of new members after the 2018 elections. What advice will you give to newly elected legislators?

A: My advice is to get to know your district well and stay in touch with people in the district. Also, to work diligently and methodically with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to accomplish what you need for your district. And don't have thin skin. ★