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SPRINGFIELD DISPATCH

A rep with 1,260 Twitter followers

Zalewski offers thoughts on concealed carry, pension reform and social media

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Last week's events surrounding the Boston Marathon were tragic, to be sure.

They also became a case study of the interplay between the worlds of social media and criminal justice.

To discuss that topic and pressing issues facing Illinois, the Daily Law Bulletin spoke with state Rep. Michael J. Zalewski, D-Riverside, an avid Twitter user and former Cook County prosecutor.

Law Bulletin: You were one of the speakers in the concealed carry debate last week who had reservations about (the National Rifle Association-backed bill, sponsored by Rep. Brandon Phelps, that ultimately failed). What were your issues with it?

Zalewski: First of all, I didn't vote "no." I only voted "present" and the reason I did that is because, at the end of the day, we are going to do a concealed carry bill that is "shall issue" in nature, that has exemptions in it for certain places, and is pretty comprehensive. So Brandon's bill aspired to be that, and I was not inclined to vote against it, but it just wasn't there yet.

In every question I asked, I was trying to explain why the bill needed to be amended.

LB: Are you guys waiting for Sen. Kwame Raoul's bill (which will likely allow local authorities in Cook County and Chicago to weigh in on whether people can carry weapons there)? Is that more of the direction you guys want to go, and do you think the votes are there for it?

Zalewski: I'll reserve judgment on the Senate version because I haven't seen the language. On this issue, until you see the language, you just can't make judgments on it.

I think it's a good sign that he's working with Sen. Tim Bivins (R-

Dixon) ... and they seem like they're making good progress, which is a good sign.

LB: Let's shift gears a little bit. You're on the Personnel and Pensions Committee — are we anywhere close to getting some kind of pension deal that can pass both chambers?

Zalewski: I don't know that we'll ever come to a deal with the unions, the We Are One Coalition. I just think they made a judgment that any changes to COLA (cost-of-living adjustments) or the retirement age or benefit changes to new employees are just completely not going to be acceptable to them.

I think ultimately we'll come to a conclusion that we just have to go and pass a bill and let the courts come to a conclusion as to whether it's constitutional or not.

If you believe that the (Illinois) Supreme Court won't make a policy judgment that we have to fix the system ... you probably should take a close look at the Senate president's (John J. Cullerton) language.

But if you believe they can make a judgment, that it doesn't make sense to raise taxes (enough to fund the pension systems and state operations), then you probably can find yourself supporting the Biss-Nekritz plan.

I think by the end of May, we need to have something that can pass both chambers.

There are a lot of us who like to pretend we know all the answers, but I certainly don't.

I think the real question is whether the Supreme Court makes a policy judgment — that the economic ramifications are such that we can make this change to an existing contract ... that sort of along the lines of what (Rep.) Elaine (Nekritz, D-Northbrook) and (Sen.) Daniel Biss (D-Evanston) want to do.

LB: You're one of the more active



Michael J. Zalewski

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- **Career:** Cook County assistant state's attorney, 2004-2007; Illinois House of Representatives, 2008-present; Chico & Nunes P.C., 2007-present
- **Age:** 34
- **Law school:** The John Marshall Law School, 2003
- **Interests:** Spending time with family, watching Chicago White Sox baseball, playing golf

Twitter users in the legislature — how many people have more followers than you?

Zalewski: (Rep. Ron) Sandack is pretty active. And he might have more followers. I would venture to say (current Cook County Board member, former state Rep.) John Fritchey when he was down there, he definitely had more followers.

In terms of being the most active, using the platform, it's probably me and Sandack in the House. I don't know about the Senate.

But the beauty of Twitter is that you can link to articles and rebut them within the same platform. So if there's something that an editorial board says or another member says ... you certainly can rebut it within the platform.

Twitter's becoming the language of our generation and a couple generations under us, and it helps in terms of reaching people who aren't typically engaged in politics.

And you get a little bit of interplay. People respond and engage.

There are so many good things about the platform to what we do, it's just such an invaluable tool.

LB: As an attorney who specializes in criminal law (and an active social media user) are we striking

the right balance in this country in terms of privacy and justice?

Zalewski: I think that we are. But I agree with you 100 percent — I think that this is the next wave of what we're going to be talking about in terms of the law and privacy and First Amendment and free speech.

For the most part, I think we've done a really nice job of striking a balance.

It's in companies' interest to self-regulate. To a certain extent, they need to self-regulate. But when it's clear there's a policy problem we need to correct, we can step in and make a judgment.

I can tell you the next thing we need to worry about is the next generation of apps. That's the wild Wild West. You can download any app at any time with a credit card, and I did a bill on an app last year that dealt with DUI checkpoints. You know, there was a real philosophical argument in committee. Some people said, "Do we want to stop a guy who's trying to make a buck on the Internet?" And my point was, "Do we really want to broadcast where police officers are?"

LB: You were following the Boston marathon bombing saga online and you compared the action in your Twitter feed on Friday night, when (Dzhokhar Tsarnaev) was arrested, to the night Osama bin Laden was killed. Both cases presented some interesting questions in terms of how we treat criminals: the *Miranda* rights exemption, being tried as a civilian instead of a combatant, etc. How do you think everything was handled?

Zalewski: In terms of the treatment, I think it's been appropriate thus far. The guy they got, he's a U.S. citizen. I think there's a very bright line in the Constitution with how we treat citizens versus non-citizens.

Now the brother ... that would've been a little grayer area, because he wasn't a citizen.

But I just think the way it's happened, you have to treat him as a U.S. citizen, and he's gotta have a hearing in a federal court. The punishment will be appropriate. I just don't see it being legal to treat him as an enemy combatant.

It's awful what happened ... it just breaks your heart.

But I thought the way people reacted ... the support, the way people came together and kind of dialed down their nasty partisan stuff as well for a while, that was nice to see.

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