

Regulatory Oversight Podcast**12 Days of Regulatory Insights: Day 9 – The Economic Development Edge****Speakers: David Dove and Kirk Dillard****Aired: December 16, 2025****David Dove (00:04):**

Welcome back to the special holiday edition of our *Regulatory Oversight* podcast series, the 12 Days of Regulatory Insights. This 12 episode series is focused on key highlights and trends from this past year in various areas and designed to keep our listeners informed and engaged during the holiday season. I'm David Dove, a partner in the firm's regulatory investigation strategy and enforcement practice, and leader of the firm's regulatory and economic investment practice in Georgia. Before we get started today, I wanted to remind all of our listeners to visit and subscribe to our blog [RegulatoryOversight.com](https://www.regulatoryoversight.com) so you can stay up to date on developments and changes in the regulatory landscape. Today I'm joined by my colleague, Kirk Dillard, to discuss updates in economic development spaces in 2025 and what we expect to see in 2026. Kirk is a partner in Troutman Strategies and is the current chairman of the Regional Transportation Authority in metropolitan Chicago, overseeing the second largest public transportation system in the United States. Kirk brings extensive experience in business and government relations in Illinois and across the US and he has a deep understanding of infrastructure and transportation issues. Thank you, Kirk, for joining me today.

Kirk Dillard (01:31):

Thank you. It's great to be with everybody. And I'll add, I used to be the chief of staff of an Illinois governor, top aid to another one and a longtime member of the Illinois State Senate, and I also chair the nation's first private tollway called the Chicago Skyway. And then very importantly, I've joined recently the Illinois Economic Development Corporation, where I've seen firsthand many of the topics we're going to discuss today.

David Dove (01:59):

Well, that's fantastic. And as our listeners know, that government experience lends directly to helping them see trends and understanding where the regulatory environment is going. I really appreciate you taking the time to be on the podcast today. And as we look towards 2026, 2025 has been an interesting year from a regulatory standpoint. We've seen not only a change in government, but also a proliferation in regulations from the federal level, both increasing regulation in some areas while dialing it back in others. As you think about 2026 and you think about what our listeners and our clients are going to experience in 2026, what are you paying attention to

Kirk Dillard (02:43):

While I'm still paying attention to tariffs in a state like Illinois where we have agriculture and steel production and manufacturing, tariffs are still a topic that makes some of our businesses happy

and some very nervous, let's put it that way. So there's the regulatory climate, including the political ones, are very, very, very concerning to the kinds of clients we have, at least in the Midwest, heavy manufacturing, agriculture, agribusiness, clean energy, and the new kinds of developing emerging businesses like quantum computing and microelectronics, which also pans into artificial intelligence.

David Dove (03:26):

Sure, absolutely. And obviously some of the policy ends behind tariffs is getting back to Onshoring manufacturing in particular back in the United States. Are you seeing that in the Midwest and West? Are companies moving to the area to grow their business in that way?

Kirk Dillard (03:44):

Absolutely, and we're lucky in Illinois and in the Midwest we have advanced manufacturing, but we also have very traditional manufacturing. We're very heavy into tool and dye manufacturing, and we're also into pharmaceutical manufacturing, life sciences with companies like Abbott and Pfizer and others that are here. So it is always a changing environment. The beauty, as you know David at our firm is we're a major firm that does all sectors of anything that anybody is looking to relocate or expand. We're here to help you

David Dove (04:21):

Through it. Absolutely. Note in talking about that, I generally refer to it as positive lawyering, right? Lawyers get retained a lot to deal with complex issues for clients, but particularly when a client is growing their business and making an investment in their supply chain or growing their business, it's actually a lot of fun to come alongside as their lawyer and help them think through what tax incentives might be available, what other government grants may be available. So they can do that in a very strategic way and add dollars

Kirk Dillard (04:55):

To their bottom line. No doubt about it. And when you're a full service law firm, and it's one of the things that makes it interesting working at a firm like Troutman is that I get to meet many of you who I might not meet in the traditional normal practice of law, but when it comes to retaining or expanding business, we get to work with so many different departments at the firm. I will tell you, when I was in the state legislature, I was the sponsor of the law that lured the Boeing headquarters from Seattle to Chicago. And it's amazing from who's going to do their catering operation to what the CEO's needs were. And you and I, when we were preparing for this, I've done a couple of Fortune 500, although we are bread and butter, small and medium size manufacturing representatives or counselors as well.

But I always say, know your client, know what they do, know what they want. And while the data, and we're very good at helping the client analyze data, even working with some consultants, they may have know what the CEO or the board of directors or the committee that's making these decisions at the client knows and wants. Because the two major ones I did, including Boeing, the CEO themselves, while data is going to drive their decision making,

they've got certain needs that they want themselves, including at the time the CEO of Boeing liked to sail Puget Sound, but we had Lake Michigan and Chicago and said, Hey, bring your big old sailboat here and sail the Great Lakes. So just know your client personally as well as most importantly their business.

David Dove (06:35):

No, absolutely, and you brought up two really good points that I think are worth highlighting. And the first is that when a client retains a law firm like Troutman with the scope of services that are provided, there's really a lot of savings in the sense that once you are a client of the firm, we know your company, you know the team that's going to be working directly with you. It's not a matter of bringing in these multifarious lawyers from across the country to do one deal because there's collaboration and teamwork and a cohesion internally that really helps deliver better results for the client. And then secondly, it's important to have people that have been in the room, and you talked a lot about your experience with economic development in Illinois. Similarly, we've talked about this before, but you and I had somewhat similar positions in governor's administrations.

I was in Georgia and worked as the general counsel to the Georgia Governor, one of two direct reports there. And as you know, Kirk, when you're recruiting a company to a state, you get down to those final meetings and you're sitting in the room with a CEO talking through things like you just mentioned, sailing Puget sound, understanding how some of the small but yet important details, how that can be highlighted and enhanced in your state or your region. Those small things is what matters at the end. And I think it's really a great leverage piece that we bring for clients, and that's having the experience of folks that have been in the room and that know how to have the conversations to close the deal.

Kirk Dillard (08:17):

No doubt. And from our size, we are major players in state capitals, obviously Austin, Atlanta, Boston, Providence in Richmond. I don't want to go through the whole list, but in Illinois, many people don't know. We have a Springfield, Illinois office headed up by the state's former banking commissioner and also the head of all healthcare benefits for the state Mike Manion. And we're in the state capitals just seconds away from the regulatory decision makers that are so critical to our client's success, right?

David Dove (08:53):

And those regulatory officials, I mean, nine times out of 10, we have a client dealing with a regulatory issue. Not only do we have a relationship with the office, but there is a strong relationship with the individuals leading those offices and having that dialogue early with the government about what are they seeing from their perspective that needs to be addressed by a client and then working collaboratively to hopefully bring those regulatory enforcement issues to a close quickly is I think one thing that we really provide a great service for our clients. That was one thing that I've said throughout my career. The best thing that the government can provide to business is predictability and an understanding of what you can expect around the curve in the economy and in the regulatory environment. And that's something that particularly when you have either state administrative changes or federal administration changes that can get lost and

it can be unpredictable and those sight lines get shorter, and I think that's where our regulatory group provides a great service to clients to step in because as you mentioned, Kirk, you've been there before.

Kirk Dillard (10:07):

We also, it's very important to know the locality of where the client may want to expand or move. We work very well with local chambers of commerce. One of our partners used to be the chairman of the Austin Chamber of Commerce, not to brag on our firm, but we have the mayor of Houston and Dallas currently our Troutman folks, and whether it's local governments, which are just as critical because the whole picture, it is federal, state, and local, and then the local chambers of commerce or community, sometimes we may represent a client that needs to inform the local community of what a benefit it would be to have them. We're working on one of these now an agriculture business in downstate Illinois, and we need to convince the farming community and AG community as well as the local bankers, what a big benefit it would be to have this corporation locate and they're taking an old industrial site. So obviously we have some issues with respect to the Environmental Protection Agency, but it's the full service picture that's critical to our counseling of clients.

David Dove (11:19):

Absolutely, and I think you brought up a really good point, something that the Wall Street Journal actually touched on several months ago, which is some of the challenges that companies can see with investment in rural areas, whether that's in the southeast, the Midwest, the northeast. There's somewhat of a growing trend that the journal highlighted around, not necessarily opposition, but the change to look and feel of a community where you may have an agricultural based community, but you have a manufacturing operation looking to locate there. You have a renewable energy project looking to locate there, and there seems to be kind of nationally, this trend of headwinds for that type of investment. Have you seen that in anything that you've worked on, and if so, what were some of the strategies that you employed to help the client walk through

Kirk Dillard (12:15):

That? We meet with the local chamber of the local bankers. We've also redesigned some areas where a manufacturing facility is going to go in by moving roads away from the downtown community away from schools. So we're looking at literally how trucks might get in and out of facilities. So we brainstorm very well. We're very practical, we're very nimble and in downstate areas, in places like Illinois or northwest Indiana, there's all kinds of emerging businesses that are going in these areas. It's not always agriculture data centers, which require a lot of electricity and a real fresh supply of water and to try to tell the communities, wow, this is new sort of white collar emerging in the area that you may have never thought of for a rural area. So we're very nimble and we work with the community and the partners very well, and that's where the local chambers come in.

David Dove (13:19):

Yeah, no, it's important to have the folks on the ground that are allies of a project. We've certainly seen that in Georgia where we have clients across the southeast as well. We were actually dealing with an issue in Mississippi not that long ago where something that you mentioned truck counts came into a higher level of concern that what we anticipated, but it's having those relationships with people in the community that can have conversations not only with the company but also with the decision makers at a local level to help bring those concerns to a rapid close. You also mentioned data centers. Kirk and I know this is the conversation that everybody's having nationally right now, and even zooming back a little bit from data centers, just the growth of AI in our economy, tools that were not available to clients and even to law firms just a few short years ago are now dominating the landscape and it's bringing up issues related to the location of these data centers for the storage and processing of information. Also, the energy to power those data centers and then the relative component suppliers that are a part of the supply chain that's needed to stand up these facilities around the country. I know we are seeing a lot of investment in the southeast, not only in growing data centers, but also growing the capacity of the grid. What are you seeing in terms of trends nationally around that space as well?

Kirk Dillard (15:01):

Growing. You have to have the electric supply, and let me tell you, one of the beauties of a firm like ours is whatever city we're in, we have very good relationships with the utility companies, whether it's electric or natural gas, you're going to run into utility problems or issues with anything you are doing, but water and obviously sewers and curbs and just the mundane kinds of economic development. We're very good at data centers in the Midwest, can be anywhere. There's a big one going in. It's sort of a rural part of Illinois, but a major state universities right there, and they do have the electric and they do have the water capabilities to put in a data center. So data centers can go anywhere and so can the new types of things we are seeing in economic development today that 20 years ago we never dreamt of.

David Dove (15:57):

Yeah, it's really an unbelievable sea change in terms of what the economy is going to look like not only in the next five years, but the next 10 and 15 years as we trend more and more towards this type of investment. I know labor is also something that's been front and center for a lot of our clients, having a skilled workforce. When you grow your business by adding jobs, by expanding a facility, what are you seeing in the labor market dynamics right now as it relates to skilled labor, being able to come in and staff these jobs that are getting created? Great minds must take a,

Kirk Dillard (16:38):

Like I was just looking at my notes and I have workforce development triple exclamation point next to it. Obviously you need a skilled workforce, and one of the things that we can help with too is job training. In a place like Illinois, we have grants from our state government for workforce development, a very important component. We work very well with the Illinois Manufacturers Association on making sure that we know and don't leave any stone unturned for

workforce development, for tax credits, for doing that. Obviously, we're very challenged in the IT field. The demand for certain types of IT workers is really critical and wherever you're going to go, I think you need to look at what types of community college systems they have to help retrain your workers or to find workers. We're very blessed in a place like Chicago, not only to have a great community college system, but to have the University of Chicago, the University of Illinois, as well as Northwestern University. We have some of the big guys too, and you do, you're down in Georgia, you've got 'em as well. But workforce development is a major issue and we work very well with the local chambers, as I've mentioned before, as well as the manufacturing groups if you're in manufacturing or agribusiness if you're looking to do something ag related.

David Dove (18:00):

No, that's a great point. And I know we, in Georgia, it was a program that started several years ago, if not decades ago now through our technical colleges system where when we have companies that are locating the Georgia that have a very specific type of skill that's needed, particularly in the manufacturing space, our technical colleges will stand up a quick start center adjacent to these facilities that focus on training employees for those jobs. And I know that's not unique to Georgia. We've worked with several clients across the country that are leveraging that same type of benefit for their business, and that's not necessarily a traditional tax incentive, right? Money on the table in terms of abatements or credits that a business might take advantage of, but certainly over the life of a project, when you can outsource your training for free to the government to be able to provide that service for your business, it's an unbelievable cost savings and a way to expedite delivery of workforce to your company.

Kirk Dillard (19:13):

I think it's also important to mention in cities like Chicago where there is a strong organized labor presence, we work well with labor unions and their apprentice programs to help find the appropriate workplace, but depending upon what city or where you're located, organized labor may be an issue and we're well suited in places like Boston and Chicago to help with any concerns with respect to organized labor.

David Dove (19:41):

That's a really great point, and I hate it, Kurt, but it looks as though we're bumping up on time. Any final thoughts for our listeners before we wrap up today's episode?

Kirk Dillard (19:50):

Do your homework. We're here to counsel you in any way possible. It's a changing very interesting environment, but I'm bullish on where the American economy is going, no matter where you live geographically, and we're here to help. You can't all do it on your own, and we know our clients very well, and we love doing and working with our clients. That's why practice A law is interesting because we love working with people, and again, it all comes down to people you can analyze and do whatever you want, but in the end, you got to have the personal touch, and I believe we offer that, and you're most successful when the personal touches are at all stages of whatever transaction you're working on.

David Dove (20:37):

That's a really great point, Kirk. I appreciate you joining me today. Thank you. I'm sure our listeners enjoyed your valuable insights, and I want to thank our audience for tuning into this special holiday series. Tune in for our next episode as we continue our 12 Days of Regulatory Insight series. Please make sure to subscribe to this podcast via Apple Podcast, Google Play, Stitcher, or whatever platform you use, and we look forward to next time.

Copyright, Troutman Pepper Locke LLP. These recorded materials are designed for educational purposes only. This podcast is not legal advice and does not create an attorney-client relationship. The views and opinions expressed in this podcast are solely those of the individual participants. Troutman does not make any representations or warranties, express or implied, regarding the contents of this podcast. Information on previous case results does not guarantee a similar future result. Users of this podcast may save and use the podcast only for personal or other non-commercial, educational purposes. No other use, including, without limitation, reproduction, retransmission or editing of this podcast may be made without the prior written permission of Troutman Pepper Locke. If you have any questions, please contact us at troutman.com.

DISCLAIMER: This transcript was generated using artificial intelligence technology and may contain inaccuracies or errors. The transcript is provided "as is," with no warranty as to the accuracy or reliability. Please listen to the podcast for complete and accurate content. You may [contact us](#) to ask questions or to provide feedback if you believe that something is inaccurately transcribed.