The lengthy and intense City Council debate this week over the future of ShotSpotter, the heavily hyped and deeply flawed policing technology, came at a fitting time: just before Memorial Day weekend, when the summerlong fight against violent crime begins in earnest.

Summer is when the Chicago Police Department is put to the test, and ShotSpotter has been a key tool since 2018, when then-Mayor Rahm Emanuel signed the contract.

The 34-14 council majority who voted to take authority to cancel ShotSpotter out
of Mayor Brandon Johnson’s hands paid little mind to the steady stream of research — focused on ShotSpotter’s performance in Chicago, Boston, Kansas City and elsewhere — that exposes ShotSpotter’s unreliable performance.

Never mind that three U.S. senators this month called for a Department of Homeland Security investigation into alleged racial bias in how ShotSpotter is deployed nationwide. Never mind reports from the city of Chicago’s inspector general and Cook County State’s Attorney Kim Foxx that raise serious questions about the reliability of ShotSpotter’s technology and its usefulness in prosecuting crimes.

Read more at chicagotribune.com

Greising: Bears Pitch for a Lakefront Stadium Fizzled. Here’s How They Can Move Forward.

May 24, 2024
The Chicago Bears’ epically inept unveiling of plans for a new indoor stadium to replace Soldier Field will go down in Chicago lore as one of the loudest backfires in the history of the city.

The initially stated $3.2 billion stadium budget turns out to be less than half the cost of the complete project. The promise that Chicago taxpayers wouldn’t pay a penny was far from true. And giddy cheerleading by Mayor Brandon Johnson did more harm than good.

The whole matter unraveled soon after the Bears concluded their hourlong dog-and-pony show filled with more razzmatazz than a Blue Man Group performance. Illinois House Speaker Emanuel “Chris” Welch said he couldn’t get votes for their stadium project even if he tried. Gov. J.B. Pritzker declared the plan a nonstarter.

A cardinal rule in any negotiation is to avoid getting to “no.” Once that word slips out, getting to yes gets much harder. Pritzker hasn’t entirely written off the possibility of a stadium deal, perhaps somewhere down the road, so the question now is what it might take to resuscitate an idea that nearly died on arrival.

Read more at chicagotribune.com
In the debate over how to fix Illinois’ worst-in-the-nation pension problem, the people who argue that retirement pay and benefits need to be protected at all costs have always held the high ground.

The law is on their side: Pensions are a contract, the benefits of which “shall not be diminished or impaired,” the Illinois Constitution says. Some go a step further. Protecting pensions as promised, they say, is a moral imperative, too.

Gov. J.B. Pritzker has staked out that argument.

But lest we forget: A contract is an agreement between two parties, and both parties are entitled to the rights granted under the terms of their compact.
Greising: ShotSpotter Missteps Could Be Turned to the City’s Advantage

May 24, 2024

ShotSpotter is the technology that just won’t go away. At least not yet.
Mayor Brandon Johnson intended to allow the city’s contract with the gunshot-tracking system to expire last month, but then remembered — whoops — the Democratic National Convention was coming to town. Maybe ShotSpotter wasn’t so bad after all. He renewed the contract through November, paying a premium $8.6 million price for nine months of additional use.

The flipping and flopping on ShotSpotter, over a period of weeks, was hardly Johnson’s finest episode as mayor, to put it mildly. But just as good intentions sometimes go awry, bungled missteps can turn to the city’s advantage. Perhaps that could still happen with ShotSpotter.

ShotSpotter is designed to use microphones in city neighborhoods and computer algorithms sourced from strategic response centers to “hear” gunfire in the streets and dispatch police to the scene. Chicago police Superintendent Larry Snelling continues to back it — bravely so, given that his boss campaigned on a promise to kill the contract.

Read more at chicagotribune.com

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Greising: Gov. J.B. Pritzker’s Willingness To Tackle Pension Problem Is a Breakthrough

May 24, 2024
Perhaps the most lasting and important part of Gov. J.B. Pritzker’s financial plan for Illinois was not even included in his budget address last week.

For far too long, Illinois has held a shameful worst-in-the-nation status for protecting retirement income for thousands upon thousands of state workers and retirees. The $142 billion in pension debt — unfunded liabilities — means the state has only 45% of the resources needed to cover its obligations.

Pritzker does have a plan, and that makes him the first Illinois governor in 30 years to propose a way out of this seemingly insurmountable pension problem. Nationally prominent pension experts I talked to over the last week expressed pleasant dismay that an Illinois governor at long last is taking on a problem that for decades has ravaged state budgets, driven away investment — and damaged Illinois’ credit ratings, too.

The idea does not come in a vacuum, it’s worth noting. Alternative options are out there, highlighted by one put forward by the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago a year ago.

Read more at chicagotribune.com
Greising: Local Officials Keep Proving Why Distrust in Government Is High in the Midwest

May 24, 2024

One my favorite rites of midwinter is when Richard Edelman, chief executive of the Chicago-based global public relations firm that bears his name, returns to town to report on whom we trust and whom we distrust.

Lo and behold, we don’t trust government much. Not just here in Illinois — which gives us good cause for distrust seemingly sometimes by the day — but globally
Government is regarded both as the least ethical and the least competent among four major categories. The media is next in line as the least trusted. On the other end of the barometer, business and nongovernmental organizations enjoy substantial respect for ethics and competence.

Coming over the horizon is artificial intelligence, a disruptive technology of great potential that nevertheless is shaking the foundations of trust around the globe. Edelman told a packed room at the Executives’ Club of Chicago last week that AI could be at an inflection point.

Read more at chicagotribune.com

Greising: Public Disciplinary Hearings Are Crucial to Regaining Trust in Chicago Police

May 24, 2024
Chicago police disciplinary hearings must be held in public

Greising: Mayor Brandon Johnson Appears To Be Learning As He Goes

May 24, 2024
Mayor Brandon Johnson has shown a willingness to change gears. But the need for him to do so twice in as many weeks is concerning.

Greising: Mayor Brandon Johnson and Gov. J.B. Pritzker Can Be at Odds — As Long as They Do Their Jobs

May 24, 2024
Most Chicago mayors are motivated to find ways to work with the governor. It’s the straightest line toward getting the resources they need.

Greising: As Ex-Ald. Edward Burke Faces Trial, Chicagoans Are Told Yet Again That It Was ‘Just Politics’

May 24, 2024
Former Chicago Ald. Ed Burke’s casual, corrupt contempt toward public duty is a not surprising result of such lax standards for public service.