

# WBEZ91.5

## Casino expansion in Quinn's hands

by Kristen McQueary  
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As one of its final acts, the Illinois Senate sent to Gov. Pat Quinn a gambling bill Tuesday evening that would add five new casinos statewide, including a super-sized facility in Chicago.

Three of Mayor Rahm Emanuel's lobbyists, seated in the front row of the Senate President's second-floor gallery, high-fived and shook hands as the roll call crawled toward 30 votes needed for passage.

The Senate debated the bill on the final day of the General Assembly's spring session. Their next scheduled action isn't until November.

The House and Senate also sent Quinn a scaled-down state budget for the fiscal year that begins July 1. The two chambers shaved more than \$2.3 billion from Quinn's proposed blueprint, which Senate Republicans criticized as too shallow. Both chambers continued to negotiate appropriations—and workers compensation changes—into the night.

Whether Quinn will sign, veto or change the gaming bill with his amendatory pen remains to be seen. He expressed distaste for the legislation in the past, but he also faces more than \$6 billion in past-due bills and no new revenue to pay them. The 67 percent personal income tax increase approved in January was not enough to cover operating expenses, plus the state's bill backlog.

Two years ago, Quinn signed legislation legalizing video poker machines in bars, restaurants and social clubs. That bill remains tied up in a legal challenge.

This bill—which authorizes the Illinois Gaming Board to issue five new gaming licenses for Chicago, Rockford, Danville, Park City and the south suburbs, creates a racing facility at the Illinois State Fairgrounds and permits slot machines at existing racetracks and Chicago's two airports — is the first major expansion of gambling since the act was created nearly 20 years ago.

Chicago would create its own Casino Development Authority Act and Chicago Casino Development Board to oversee development and management of its casino, although it would be operated by a private company. The city would own it. Mayor Rahm Emanuel would appoint the five-member development board.

The legislation allows Chicago and the other new casinos to open temporary facilities for up to 24 months until permanent sites can be built. It's unclear where Chicago's casino would go.

The bill passed the Illinois Senate with the bare minimum needed for passage.

"We are basically shaking down citizens for everything they've got. We're giving them false hope, and for what? So we can spend \$1 billion or \$1.5 billion more?" said Sen. Tim Bivins (R-Dixon) who said gambling creates addicts. "In government our first duty is to protect our constituents. This puts more citizens at risk. I urge a 'no' vote."

The casino bill marked a rare celebration for gambling supporters, dozens of whom gather at the Capitol each year to craft a bill with the right DNA for statewide approval, only to watch their agreement unravel by the time it reaches lawmakers' desks.

But it is Quinn's desk that may be the hurdle this time.

Not only has he expressed his opposition to widespread gambling expansion, the bill comes at an awkward time. Quinn has been criticized—including by Senate President John Cullerton (D-Chicago)—for introducing a budget in February that neither the House nor the Senate accepted as realistic.

That got the session off to a rough start with both chambers developing their own spending plans.

Some gambling supporters worried Quinn might remind the legislature of his relevance by vetoing the bill.

Cullerton softened his criticism Tuesday night, saying the governor “is always relevant. The governor is the one who has to sign these bills and if he doesn’t sign them, that shows you how relevant he is.”

Quinn’s office did not return calls Tuesday afternoon for comment on a variety of issues.

But lawmakers spent much of their spring session ignoring the agenda he unveiled in February.

Quinn asked legislators during his budget address to borrow \$8.7 billion to pay vendors owed state money. Members resisted. Quinn also hoped to save \$100 million by consolidating school districts, but he didn’t advance the idea in the legislature, lawmakers familiar with the subject said.

“No, I didn’t hear about it from him or his staff,” said state Rep. Robert Rita (D-Blue Island) who introduced a school consolidation bill but tabled it after opposition grew too fierce. “I don’t mean to be bashing the governor or anything, but I don’t even know who his people are.”

Quinn also asked lawmakers to slash school bus transportation costs by \$95 million and eliminate the General Assembly tuition waiver program. They did not.

**He wanted lawmakers to eliminate the state’s regional offices of education; lawmakers reduced the money appropriated toward the offices but did scrap them.**

**And to social service providers, Quinn asked lawmakers in February to eliminate the Circuit Breaker and Illinois Cares Rx programs, which help low-income seniors and the disabled with certain taxes and prescriptions. He introduced a proposal to cut Medicaid reimbursement rates by 6 percent, saving \$550 million.**

**But lawmakers didn’t follow Quinn’s plan.**

**“We took a different direction,” state Rep. Sara Feigenholtz (D-Chicago) said.**

**The House Human Services Appropriations Committee, which she chairs, reached some of Quinn’s proposed savings by “cutting the fat and making sure the money makes it to the street.”**