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## Quinn dismisses gambling as 'shiny' distraction

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Rebuffing talk of new legislation that would expand gambling in Illinois, Gov. Pat Quinn urged the legislature Monday to pass bills to restructure the state's Medicaid and pension programs, two of the largest drains on Illinois' budget.

"I'm not going to get distracted by that subject. Sometimes, down here, shiny objects can distract people," Quinn said. "We don't want any of that this week."

According to the political newsletter Capitol Fax, the governor did not rule out slot machines at the state's horseracing tracks when he met privately with lawmakers last week. Quinn was asked whether he could support a gambling expansion bill that barred campaign contributions from gambling interests if it also allowed slot machines at the state's horseracing tracks.

The two Democratic lawmakers who have led efforts on gambling expansion predicted legislation would surface before the General Assembly is scheduled to wrap up its work on May 31. Rep. Lou Lang, D-Skokie, and Sen. Terry Link, D-Waukegan, said last week they do not know what his position is now on slots at tracks but believe his position is softening.

At a news conference in his statehouse office Monday, Quinn was asked whether he still opposed having slot machines at the racetracks. He did not say yes or no.

"Read the framework. You'll find out where I stand, and I think it's a very important stand," Quinn said.

The framework Quinn proposed did not include slot machines at racetracks.

On his two favorite subjects, Quinn predicted that any pension restructuring plan would not include 401(k)-style accounts for state workers, and he endorsed a proposal to restructure Medicaid introduced by state Sen. Heather Steans, D-Chicago, and state Rep. Sara Feigenholtz, D-Chicago. The governor said pension legislation will surface "pretty soon."

"We're in the red zone. We can score a touchdown on two very important subjects," Quinn said.

Quinn reiterated his call for an increase in the cigarette tax to help reduce the number of Medicaid cuts that need to be made to balance the budget. Steans and Feigenholtz's proposal calls for \$1.9 billion in cuts and roughly \$700 million from a cigarette tax. Senate Republicans are staunchly opposed to the cigarette tax, saying that more taxes should not be a part of Medicaid restructuring. House Republicans are considered to be more persuadable but they are facing pressure from conservative groups not to go along with a tax increase.

"This is not only a revenue measure but it's also a public health measure," Quinn said. "It'll prevent many, many young people ... from ever beginning to smoke."

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