

New Gaming Bill Will Create Jobs & Revenue

Written by Illinois Revenue & Jobs Alliance
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New bill addresses Governor's concerns

Monday March 11, 2013, Springfield, Ill.—Last week, Illinois moved a step closer to generating much-needed jobs and revenue after a Senate Executive committee approved Senate Bill 1739, a gaming solution that will help kick start the state's economic growth.

On Sunday, one of the bill's chief sponsors in the Senate, Sen. Terry Link (D-Waukegan), appeared on Chicago's ABC Channel 7's News Views, calling the bill "a windfall" for the state.

"We still have to give the money to education. We have to give money to the pensions," said Sen. Link during the Sunday morning talk show. "This [the gaming bill] is new money that will be added to those pots."

A gaming solution for more jobs and revenue has been the focal point of the Illinois Revenue and Jobs Alliance (IRJA) since last spring. The IRJA is a growing body of labor organizations, business groups, farming and agribusiness interests, racetracks and horsemen associations, and local municipalities, all committed to a gaming solution that will generate jobs and revenue.

"Nobody says gaming will be the ultimate solution for Illinois's economic woes," said former State Representative Bill Black, chairman of the IRJA. "But this bill opens up new markets, spurs new construction, puts people on a job and will lead to economic development. It will also produce new tax revenues for local municipalities and for the state."

The new bill addresses the concerns Gov. Pat Quinn outlined last summer by scaling back the total number of gaming positions, by including a provision to ban political contributions from gaming entities, and by assigning additional revenues to pensions and education.

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Under the new bill SB1739, riverboat or land-based casinos would be added to Danville, Lake County, South Suburban Cook and Rockford, with a land-based casino to be built in Chicago, too. Included is a provision that will allow for I-Gaming, or Internet wagering.

Also, each of the state's existing horse tracks will be allowed to install slot machines, a measure that will increase purses and provide a boost to the horseracing industry and to the state's agribusinesses.

An economic impact study conducted last spring based on a similar bill showed that encouraging more gaming opportunities in Illinois would create 20,000 jobs and raise more than \$200 million in new revenues. Last spring, an independent statewide poll showed that 62% of registered voters support gaming revenues as a solution to budgetary woes, a number that corroborates a similar poll conducted by Crain's Chicago Business wielding nearly-identical results (61%).

During his budget address Wednesday, Gov. Pat Quinn acknowledged for the first time that gaming revenue could help remedy the state's ailing finances.

In each of the last two sessions, a gaming bill has passed through both chambers of the Illinois legislature, only to be vetoed.