

www.chicagotribune.com/news/politics/chi-reform-bills-edit-bd02aug02,0,2262979.story

chicagotribune.com

Quinn may tinker with reform bill

State of Corruption

By Ray Long and Monique Garcia

Tribune reporters

August 2, 2009

SPRINGFIELD -- Gov. Pat Quinn is dropping hints he may rewrite a bill to limit political donations despite hailing it as historic just two months ago -- a risky move that could anger fellow Democrats while appealing to good-government groups who say Springfield hasn't done enough to reform itself.

The campaign finance legislation is at the center of a midsummer lobbying blitz by competing lawmakers and interest groups to reshape key ethics and good-government measures sent to the governor this spring.

Quinn negotiated the campaign finance bill with Democratic legislative leaders and testified in favor of it in May, calling it "landmark" legislation even though critics said it was riddled with loopholes. The bill was the centerpiece of a series of ethics measures pushed by Democrats looking to insulate themselves from the fallout of ex-Gov. Rod Blagojevich's corruption arrest and ouster.

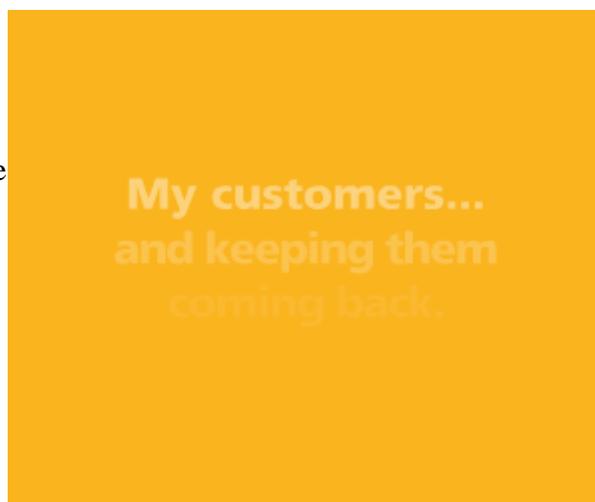
But Quinn has repeatedly hedged on his intentions since the bill was sent to him in June for his signature -- even as Republicans and other critics continue to blast the bill as far too weak.

"Well when I testified for it I said it's a good bill, but it's not a perfect bill and I suppose you want to get as close to perfection as we can," Quinn said late last week. "So, I certainly want to strive toward that goal and by working as a team I think we can go pretty far."

Quinn has repeatedly pointed out to reporters that he has the power to strengthen the bill by rewriting it -- a so-called amendatory veto. Pushed about whether that's his plan, he said "that could be."

A veto would send the bill back to lawmakers, where it would face an uncertain future amid competing political agendas. The bill would die if lawmakers don't vote to agree to the changes or else override the changes with a supermajority vote that would require help from Republicans -- who refused to support the bill the first time.

While the governor is under pressure to strengthen the campaign finance law, he also is getting lobbied



hard by local prosecutors and others who want him to weaken another high-profile bill -- a rewrite of the state's open records law. Also on Quinn's desk for review are less controversial ethics bills, including creating an Internet portal aimed at making access to government records easier and tightening rules on state contracts and purchasing.

The ethics measures aren't the only high-pressure decisions that are testing the new governor's leadership since he replaced Blagojevich in January. Handed a recession-mired state budget deficit exacerbated by years of heavy spending, Quinn is making deep spending cuts while pressing for an unpopular income tax hike.

If Quinn decides to rewrite the campaign legislation, he could jeopardize an already rocky relationship with Senate President John Cullerton (D-Chicago) and House Speaker Michael Madigan (D-Chicago).

A wary Cullerton, looking for leverage, has held off on a Senate vote on Quinn's populist proposal to allow voter recall of the governor until Quinn promises to sign the campaign finance bill.

Senate Democrats are trying to persuade Quinn to sign the bill by saying they will follow it up with another measure that tightens fundraising restrictions again.

The proposal on Quinn's desk would restrict political contributions from individuals to \$5,000 a year, \$10,000 from corporations, unions and third party groups -- an attempt to curb the influence of big money donations such as the frequent \$25,000 contributions Blagojevich received from people who got state business, jobs and appointments.

Reform advocates say the bill is riddled with problems, starting with donation limits that are too loose and don't even take effect until after the November 2010 election. They also cite provisions allowing House and Senate leaders to give up to \$90,000 every year from their huge war chests to rank-and-file legislative candidates.

Sen. Don Harmon of Oak Park, Cullerton's point man on the issues, is preparing a possible follow-up bill that could add more teeth to the law in the fall veto session -- if Quinn signs the current bill. Harmon said he and Cullerton have met with reform groups about potential changes, from year-round real-time reporting of contributions to possibly setting different contribution limits for candidates running for local or lower-ranking state offices.

Republican leaders, Rep. Tom Cross of Oswego and Sen. Christine Radogno of Lemont, want the campaign finance reforms to go much further and are calling for Quinn to veto the current measure.

"It doesn't do a whole lot," Cross said. "It keeps the status quo."

The changes that are needed in the legislation require the governor to either veto the bill entirely or use his rewrite powers extensively, said Jim Bray, spokesman for CHANGE Illinois!, an umbrella group for reformers. Even so, Bray said he is encouraged by the willingness of lawmakers in both parties to continue talking about revisions, leaving reformers hopeful of reaching a "better, final resolution."

For Quinn, who built an image as a government reformer, the decision is fraught with political peril. He'll be criticized regardless of what he does, even as he prepares to run for a full term as governor. Quinn has a month to mull options before the bill becomes law without his signature.

"He really does have a dilemma on this," said Kent Redfield, a campaign finance expert at the University of Illinois Springfield. "There's a bunch of outcomes that are not particularly good for him. ...

He wants to have credibility as a reformer, and he's got a bill that has some really serious problems."

That image may also be tested by Quinn's choices on the open records bill, a product of lobbying between his blue-ribbon reform panel, Atty. Gen. Lisa Madigan, media organizations and local government officials.

Madigan and media groups have urged him to sign the bill, which would give the attorney general new power to decide what records are public. But the Illinois State's Attorneys Association wants Quinn to rewrite it.

The prosecutors group has raised complaints including suggesting the new legislation could lead to the inappropriate release of some crime victim information and the exposure of secret informants that could jeopardize cases. Prosecutors are also leery of granting the attorney general new powers to enforce the Freedom of Information Act.

rlong@tribune.com

mcgarcia@tribune.com

Copyright © 2009, [Chicago Tribune](#)