

PRINTER FRIENDLY[\[Print\]](#) [\[Close\]](#)**Ill gov., lawmakers blame each other***By Kevin McDermott and Kathleen Haughney**POST-DISPATCH SPRINGFIELD BUREAU**Thursday, Jun. 05 2008*

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. — You still can't play slot machines at horse racing tracks in Illinois. You still can't smoke in clubs or casinos. You won't be getting that fat state tax rebate that was once talked about.

And if you don't like it, you still don't get to recall elected state officials.

The state legislative session that ended late Saturday was notable less for what happened than for what didn't — a blow to Gov. Rod Blagojevich, a Democrat whose activist agenda was slapped down for the second straight year by a Democratic Legislature.

Blagojevich began this year with an ambitious wish list: He had called for a massive infrastructure program, universal health care and a \$300-per-child state income tax rebate. He suggested paying for it with a major expansion of gambling.

But by the time the Legislature adjourned for the summer late Saturday, virtually all of Blagojevich's agenda for this year had been ignored. Instead, the Legislature unanimously sent him a campaign ethics bill that clearly was a swipe at the governor's own fundraising methods.

Blagojevich's failure to win passage of his \$33 billion proposed infrastructure plan has been an especially bitter one. The program, the first of its kind in Illinois in almost a decade, would rebuild roads, bridges, schools and other infrastructure throughout Illinois.

Virtually everyone in state government agrees on the need for the program, and it passed the Senate this year. But House Democrats voted to table it, many of them citing complaints that they don't trust Blagojevich's office to administer the vast funding for it. Because the plan wasn't voted down, it could in theory be brought up again for a vote any time the Legislature returns to Springfield this year.

"I'd recommend to the governor that he change his method of governing," House Speaker Michael Madigan, D-Chicago, said shortly before the summer adjournment, laying blame for the various impasses squarely at Blagojevich's feet. Madigan bemoaned "a style which brings on conflict and confrontation rather than conciliation."

A Blagojevich spokesman on Wednesday disputed that characterization, noting that the governor is planning to meet with legislative leaders in Chicago today to talk about the state budget and the infrastructure plan.

"The governor is trying to make this work," said the spokesman, Brian Williamsen. He noted that Madigan hadn't yet agreed to attend the meeting.

One of Blagojevich's biggest successes this session was, arguably, not the passage of legislation, but the killing of it. With a handful of top Senate allies, he managed to stop a legislative attempt to create a recall election system in Illinois, a move that was aimed directly at him.

"I think it's safe to say there wasn't a lot accomplished this year," said Chris Mooney, political scientist at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

Bills that failed, or have stalled, this session, include:

— Gaming expansion. The Senate passed a massive expansion of gaming that would

have enlarged the state's casino industry and allowed slot machines at horse racing venues, as a means of paying for new infrastructure and other priorities. But the House never voted on the measure, in large part because lawmakers say they don't trust Blagojevich to spend the money fairly. (HB2651)

— Smoking ban exemptions. Several lawmakers tried to carve out exemptions in the state's new smoking ban. Among the proposals were exemptions for riverboat casinos, private clubs and veterans' halls. None of these proposals ever made it to a vote. (HB2035, HB4333, HB4104)

— Moment of silence. One lawmaker sought to change the new mandatory moment of silence for schools back to optional. But a parliamentary move left the lawmaker who proposed the mandatory moment of silence in control of the bill's fate, essentially killing the measure. (HB4180)

— Aluminum baseball bats. One lawmaker wanted to ban aluminum baseball bats in Little League, saying they were more dangerous than wooden ones. The measure was put on hold until Little League Baseball could conduct a study on the issue. (HB4140)

— Gas tax holiday. House GOP lawmakers pressured Democrats to vote on a measure to lift the state portion of the sales tax on gasoline. It never came to a vote. (HB6318)

Bills passed this session include:

— "Pay-to-play." (HB824) This would ban state contractors from donating to state officials who control their contracts. It passed unanimously, but Blagojevich is threatening to rewrite portions of it, saying it needs to be "stronger." Critics say he's actually trying to kill it.

— Cyber-bullying. (SB2426) The case of St. Louis-area teen Megan Meier, who killed herself after being harassed online, spurred Illinois lawmakers to pass a bill making such harassment a crime, punishable by one to three years in prison. Blagojevich is expected to sign the legislation.

— Levees. (SB2052) Blagojevich signed a measure that would permit county boards to raise the Metro East sales tax by a quarter-cent to pay for levee repairs estimated at \$180 million.

It remains unclear whether lawmakers will get a scheduled pay raise for all this non-activity. A state compensation board has recommended a \$7,632 increase in legislative salaries over the next two years, which would take their base pay to \$72,985 from \$65,353. Lawmakers get the raises unless they vote to reject them, and no such rejection has yet passed.

They still could reject the raises when they return to Springfield this year. But even if they don't reject the raises, they won't get them unless the funding is added to the new state budget, which doesn't currently contain that money.

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