

State House axes half of veto session

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SPRINGFIELD — Saying it already completed much of its work, the Illinois House of Representatives on Tuesday canceled half of its six-day veto session next month.

That means state representatives won't be in Springfield on Nov. 12-14, but they will return for the second half of the veto session on Nov. 19-21.

The Illinois Senate also could alter its 2008 veto session schedule, but no decision had been made as of Tuesday afternoon, said Cindy Davidsmeyer, spokeswoman for Senate President Emil Jones, D-Chicago.

Veto sessions traditionally are when lawmakers take action on bills that the governor vetoed during their summer hiatus away from Springfield. They also can take up other pieces of legislation.

This year, because of multiple calls for special sessions, lawmakers have returned repeatedly to Springfield since they adjourned the spring session at the end of May. They've spent part of that time voting on what to do about bills that Gov. Rod Blagojevich vetoed.

Lawmakers overrode the governor on 10 of the 11 bills on which he used his total veto power. They also overrode his amendatory veto on 14 bills that he wanted to revise, and they accepted his amendatory veto on seven other bills.

Blagojevich has used his amendatory veto power on two additional bills this month. Any legislative action on them would have to start in the Senate because that's where the measures originated.

House Speaker Michael Madigan, D-Chicago, told House members about their new schedule in a memo on Tuesday. The memo included no explanation, but Madigan spokesman Steve Brown said, "We dealt with all of the bills that normally would be considered in the first week, so there was no point to be there."

The Blagojevich administration wasn't pleased with the cancellation.

"We are disappointed by this announcement because there are real issues out there that are still unresolved, including autism," said spokesman Brian Williamsen.

Blagojevich supports a plan that would require insurers to provide coverage for autism treatment.

Other items of business that lawmakers still could take up during the veto session or later include:

- Several bills that incorporate changes the governor tried to make by using his amendatory veto power on an ethics bill. Lawmakers ultimately rejected his revisions to that bill, and it is taking effect without them.

But House Bills 6700, 6701, 6702, 6703 and 6704, all filed in September by Democratic Rep. John Fritchey of Chicago, would implement the changes Blagojevich sought. They include overhauling the way lawmakers vote on pay raises, prohibiting them from holding most other government jobs and requiring them to provide more information about any lobbying they may do.

- A proposal that would let Peoria County ask voters to approve a special sales tax for the long-sought Peoria Riverfront Museum. Senate Bill 1290 already passed in the House and needs Senate approval before it can go to the governor.

Lawmakers who were contacted on Tuesday said they think it makes sense for the House to call off part of the fall session.

Rep. David Leitch, a Peoria Republican who has been in the House since 1989, couldn't think of any time when half of the veto session has been canceled.

"I don't recall a time when you dealt with veto session issues in September, either," he said.

Rep. Raymond Poe, R-Springfield, said that lawmakers still would have time to take any necessary action either later this year or in early 2009 before a new General Assembly gets sworn in and starts work.

Chris Mooney, a political science professor in the Institute of Government and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois at Springfield, said the scheduling change could be related to the political battle between Madigan and Blagojevich.

"On the one hand you might take it on the face of it, right? They did already go through a lot of these vetoes early on," Mooney said. "But nothing can be taken on its face in this conflict."

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