



Budget delay could protect political hides

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Published: 7/14/2009 12:01 AM

SPRINGFIELD - In calling off any tax hike vote for at least five months, Gov. Pat Quinn could be minimizing the potential political fallout for himself and lawmakers who side with him.

Quinn wants to delay such a vote until November, which would also put it after the field of candidates for governor, state House and Senate is set and it would be too late for new candidates to get on the ballot.

Capitol conventional wisdom is that some lawmakers might be open to a budget-balancing tax increase but fear stoking anti-incumbent sentiments and handing a would-be challenger a key issue.

"A cynic would say that's what it's all about, and I'm sure that doesn't hurt," said Christopher Mooney, a professor of political studies at the University of Illinois' Springfield campus. "But in some respects I think it's a reflection of the natural human propensity to put off hard decisions until the last minute."

Unable to strike a budget deal that wipes out a more-than \$12 billion deficit over two years, lawmakers have now steered the state into a new budget year with no spending plan. They return to the Capitol today as pressure begins to mount. A state payroll is due this week that there's no authority to make. And despite the lack of a budget, there's been no shutdown, so at some point people told to keep working will need to get paid.

Quinn last week announced that he'd forgo the income tax hike and accept a temporary budget for five months. That'd put a tax increase vote after the Nov. 2 deadline for candidates' to turn in paperwork to get on the February primary ballot.

But not all lawmakers think the delay would help politically.

"I don't know how responsible people can do things this way. What difference is it going to make in November for raising the income tax or balancing the budget?" said state Rep. Rosemary Mulligan, a Des Plaines Republican. "So you know who you're running against, big deal."

It also remains to be seen whether lawmakers will go along with Quinn's five-month delay. The Illinois Senate previously voted for a tax increase that didn't advance in the House. And House Speaker Michael Madigan, a Chicago Democrat, had opposed a temporary budget.

"We'll see tomorrow," Madigan told the Daily Herald.

Another option for lawmakers would be to override the governor's veto of the budget they sent him at the end of May, one that doesn't raise taxes but also cuts billions of dollars in grant funding to local agencies that care for the elderly, disabled and needy. Quinn had argued that budget only had six months worth of spending and was "half baked."

An override would force Quinn to manage with that plan.

Key budget, political dates:

March 18: Gov. Quinn calls for tax increase.

May 31: Budget deadline.

June 1: Approval now requires 3/5ths majority.

July 1: Budget year starts.

July 16: State payroll due.

Aug. 4: Candidates begin passing petitions. Nov. 2: Last day to file petitions to get on ballot.

Feb. 2: Illinois primary election