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Quinn's veto pen not packing permanent ink

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SPRINGFIELD — Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn has been busy with his veto pen, although it likely won't be permanent.

Quinn issued his second veto of July this week, adding a provision to an ethics law that would allow voters to petition lawmakers for a vote on dormant legislation. Quinn said he's right by both the state Constitution and by voters.

"(Amendatory veto) is a power that can be used to perfect bills," said Quinn. "Legislators didn't — didn't like amendatory veto, they didn't like the governor having that power. The people rejected that in 1974. They said, 'No, we want the governor to have this power.'"

Quinn said he is using his power to empower the people of Illinois. But University of Illinois at Springfield professor Kent Redfield said Quinn more likely is playing a bit of politics.

"These are pure posturing-before-the-election (vetoes)," Redfield said. "When we get to veto session it's unlikely that either would pass on their merits."

Redfield said Quinn is correct that he has the power to use a veto pen to change proposed laws. But the professor is quick to note Illinois judges have never clarified "changing" and "re-writing."

"What (the courts) are saying is, you can go too far and they haven't defined what too far is. But my guess is, if it ever got that far, the Supreme Court would say this is unconstitutional," said Redfield.

Quinn insists he is only trying to give the voters a voice on many proposals that die in the General Assembly.

"There ought to be a process where citizens can be a petition for roll call votes for the General Assembly," he said. "I think voters ought to have a safety valve to go around the legislative process, and get direct action."

Redfield said that is clearly stretching the governor's power.

"You can't add an initiative by statute."

The professor points to the battle over the proposed recall amendment as an example of how

it's supposed to work. Redfield again said he doubts either of Quinn's veto moves will survive a vote this fall. But he added no one should be surprised that Quinn is using his amendatory veto power to try and create voter initiatives or open primaries.

Quinn said the same thing.

"I think those are paramount subjects, priority subjects," he said. "How does government of the people operate? If it isn't operating properly for the people, then I think we need to step-in and use the tools of democracy to improve our democracy."

In the past, lawmakers have said they expect to act quickly and overwhelmingly override Quinn's vetoes. But those votes won't come until after voters have their say in this November's elections.