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Chicago

## Rauner Open To Chicago Casino As Lawmakers Weigh Gambling Expansion

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**CHICAGO (CBS)** — Unlike his predecessor, Gov. Bruce Rauner isn't slamming the door on a proposed casino for Chicago.

After Mayor Rahm Emanuel successfully lobbied lawmakers to authorize a casino deal three years ago, then-Gov. Pat Quinn later vetoed the measure, calling it "excessive," as it would have allowed a total of five new casinos in Illinois – in Chicago, an unspecified south suburb, Danville, Park City, and Rockford.

Now that Emanuel has begun a new push for a Chicago casino, Rauner said "I'm open to considering gambling expansion; and whether it's for the city of Chicago, or other places."

At the same time, Rauner has reservations about expanding casino gaming in Illinois. "I'm not a fan of gaming," he said. "I think it causes some negatives in our communities, as well as positives. It certainly can be a job creator, and a tax [revenue](#) generator, so those are both two good things."

Two new bills under consideration in Springfield include a Chicago casino that would be owned by the state, but [profits](#) would be split 50/50 with the city.

The mayor has begun lobbying the General Assembly for a new government-owned casino to boost tax revenues at a time the city is facing a \$430 million operating deficit, \$550 million in increased payments to police and fire [pensions](#), and \$1.1 billion in deficits at the Chicago Public Schools.

The state needs to fill its own \$6 billion [budget](#) hole.

“Desperate times demand desperate measures, and I think those that might have had hesitancy with respect to gaming enterprises entering our city, and furthering the expansion of gaming in our state, would probably think about it differently,” said Rep. Dan Burke (D-Chicago), who chairs the House Executive Committee, which is considering the two new gambling expansion proposals.

The committee’s vice chairman, Rep. Robert Rita (D-Blue Island), said the new proposals are different from previous efforts to bring a casino to Chicago.

“All have been scaled back. All the revenue going into different directions has all been pulled back, and put into either education, capital [construction projects], or pensions,” said Rita, who is vice chair of the House Executive Committee, which is considering the gambling expansion plan. “The alternative version is a Chicago-only, with no additional gaming throughout the state.”

Anita Bedell, a longtime opponent of expanding gambling in Illinois, said counting on revenue from a Chicago casino to fund public pensions is “a terrible idea.” “It’s an unstable source of revenue, and you have to count on people losing money to get any revenue,” said Bedell, executive director of the Springfield-based Illinois Church Action on Alcohol & Addiction Problems.

Mayor Emanuel is hoping the casino will draw players from not only existing casinos, but video gambling and Conventioneers, like those gathering today for the start of a Microsoft trade show.

Mylna Litchfield with the organization Stop Predatory Gambling disagrees. “By and large the players at a Chicago casino will not be here for a trade show,” Litchfield said. “The majority of the revenue

will come from those lower income wage earners, minorities and our cherished senior citizens.”

One other dissenting vote comes from progressive caucus Alderman Ameya Pawar, “A city that acts as the house is a city that bets against its own people,” he tweeted this afternoon.

But what would be the nation’s biggest casino in Chicago would gross between half a billion and a billion dollars a year.

But it may take several casinos in outlying areas and slots at racetracks to put together the coalition needed to pass a bill, and perhaps a quid pro quo for the governor on his turn around agenda to get him to sign it.

Lawmakers said the bills could get a vote before the end of the spring session, which is schedule to wrap up at the end of the month.