



Chicago News

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IS A CHICAGO CASINO IN THE WORKS?

By Sarah Schulte

Monday, May 04, 2015

CHICAGO (WLS) -- Could a casino in Chicago be in the works?

Two bills have been introduced which include plans for a Chicago casino, and a third is being discussed. The mayor wants the city to own it, while some lawmakers would rather have state ownership. With big budget deficits looming over both, we may know how it will all shake out soon, as the legislative session wraps up at the end of May.

Rahm Emanuel has been pushing for a casino for some time, and he came close to getting one last year. Then-governor Pat Quinn vetoed the bill, but Emanuel hopes to have better luck with Gov. Rauner.

"I'm very open to considering that," Rauner said. "I want to make sure it is good for all the taxpayers and all the citizens both of Chicago and the state of Illinois."

So far, there are two bills Springfield is considering. One calls for a state-owned Chicago-only casino. The other calls for five new casinos: one each in Chicago, the South Suburbs, Lake County, Winnebago County and Vermilion County. The second bill also includes slots at horse racing tracks.

"I think both options are viable," said State Rep. Bob Rita. "We need to look at both options, which is best for the state, which is best for each area."

Rita, who is a sponsor on both bills, held hearings Monday about the pros and cons of Illinois casino expansion. Experts warned lawmakers about saturation, especially since the state now allows video gambling machines. The state predicts a Chicago casino could bring in over \$450 million a year in revenue. However, industry expert Joseph Weinert says there is no guarantee for success.

"A lot of it is going to depend on where it is located, what's it going to be tied to, is it tied to McCormick Place, tourist attractions," Weinert said.

While supporters say a casino would be good for tourism and attract more convention business. Gambling opponents disagree, saying locals are more likely the customers that will fill the Chicago casino.

"The majority of revenue will come from the lower income wage earners, minorities and senior citizens," says Melinda Litchfield of Stop Predatory Gambling.

Casino opponents say for every dollar in revenue, it costs \$3 in social problems from the negative consequences of gambling.

State Senator Terry Link and Senate President John Cullerton are discussing a bill that also includes a Chicago casino. While Governor Rauner is open to the idea, he did not give any specifics.