

Chicago Casino Bills Coming Down To The Wire

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Momentum continues to grow for a casino in downtown Chicago but Illinois lawmakers have only 19 days to pass a gaming expansion bill before this year's legislative session ends.

On Monday, the Illinois House Executive Committee met in Chicago to conduct its **second hearing** in the last eight days on two bills — one that would allow a mega-casino in downtown Chicago and another that would allow casinos in Chicago and four other Illinois communities.

Perhaps more significantly, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel held three meetings within the last 17 days at his office on the fifth floor of Chicago's City Hall to present his case for a downtown casino, according to the Chicago Tribune.

One of Emanuel's meetings was with Republican Governor Bruce Rauner, who is facing a \$6bn state budget deficit and has said he is open to proposals for a Chicago casino.

The mayor also had a joint conference with Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan and Illinois Senate President John Cullerton and a third meeting with Republican legislative leaders.

Adam Braun, a gaming attorney in Chicago who served as legislative counsel to former Illinois Governor Pat Quinn, said the May 31 deadline for a casino bill may not be as imposing as it appears.

"Time's never running too short in the General Assembly when everybody wants to get something done," Braun said.

"When the leaders decide that things are ready to move, they can move quite quickly," he said. "If the powers that be want to do this, they'll find a way."

Casino expansion may not be such a tough vote for Illinois lawmakers since they passed similar gambling measures in 2011 and 2012. Both **bills were vetoed** by Quinn.

"Any revenue generator is going to be controversial to a certain extent, but if you've already voted for

something twice, you've already passed judgment on it," Braun said.

During Monday's hearing at the Bilandic Building in Chicago, local tourism executives urged the House Executive Committee to pass one of the **two casino bills**, both of which were re-introduced in February by Democratic state Representative Bob Rita.

Of the 105.7m tourists who visited Illinois in 2014, 2.2m were international visitors and 50m came to Chicago, according to Marc Gordon, president and CEO of the Illinois Hotel & Lodging Association.

Gordon said tourists spent \$13.7bn last year in Chicago alone.

"I can tell you every day buses come to our downtown hotels, pick up our conventioners from our hotels downtown and take them over to Indiana," Gordon said.

"So our tourists and conventioners go to Indiana every day because we have no casino options here for them in Chicago."

Casinos in Michigan and Wisconsin also are pilfering visitors to Chicago, according to Sam Toia, the president of the Illinois Restaurant Association.

"A world class casino in Chicago would be an additional draw for tourists and conventioners to visit and stay in Chicago which would put more heads in beds in hotels and butts in seats in restaurants which will generate millions in sales and tax revenue for the city of Chicago and the state of Illinois," Toia said.

Democratic state Representative Luis Arroyo, a member of the committee, said it may be time for Illinois to assess a surcharge on out-of-state casinos for sending buses to Chicago to pick up tourists.

Geography:

UNITED
STATES

ILLINOIS

INDIANA

MICHIGAN

WISCONSIN

Sectors:

CASINO

Content:

REGULATORY
NEWS