

# Chicago Casino Bills Still Alive

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The Illinois legislature may have ended its regular session on May 31, but the debate on new casinos in Chicago and elsewhere in the state may be just beginning.

The Illinois House opened a special session last week and the Senate is scheduled to reconvene on Tuesday. The special session may continue throughout the summer as the Democratic-controlled legislature and Republican Governor Bruce Rauner try to resolve their differences on the state budget.

Still in play are **two gambling bills** that could provide a substantial share of the revenue necessary for a budget agreement.

Democratic state Representative Bob Rita told GamblingCompliance he is “very optimistic” that a hybrid version of the two casino bills he introduced in February will be passed before the end of the year.

One of Rita’s bills would authorize a casino in Chicago; the other would allow casinos in Chicago and four other Illinois communities.

The Chicago-only casino bill is projected to generate about \$445m annually in state revenues, while the five-casino bill is expected to generate \$451m.

Rita said he has had “a number of talks” with the governor’s staff and Democratic state Senator Terry Link, who is crafting a new version of his casino bill that **passed the Illinois Senate** two years ago but did not come up for a vote in the House.

“At the end of the day, we need a bill that will pass both the Senate and the House so I believe we have to come together in terms of what we believe would be the gaming bill that we would advance,” Rita said.

“Senator Link has ideas; I have ideas. It’s a matter of bringing those ideas together along with the governor’s office so the governor will sign the bill.”

In a swipe at former Democratic Governor Pat Quinn, who vetoed two gambling expansion bills, Rita said he has had productive meetings with Rauner’s staff, “which is the complete opposite of what we’ve

dealt with in the past.”

Another key player in the gaming expansion negotiations is Democratic Mayor Rahm Emanuel of Chicago, who is “a very integral, very important part of putting all of this together,” Rita said.

Emanuel, who has been trying for years to open a major casino in downtown Chicago, met as recently as last Wednesday with Rauner, although it is unclear if they discussed gaming legislation.

Link’s legislation has been dubbed “the kitchen sink” bill in previous years because it would authorize such a sweeping expansion of gaming in Illinois, and this year’s iteration might be the broadest proposal yet.

For the first time, Link plans to include in his bill “satellite” casinos in the central Illinois town of Decatur and the southern Illinois town of Carbondale. The satellite casinos would feature between 400 and 600 slot machines each.

This would be in addition to new casinos in Chicago and four other communities, more video gambling machines and slots at Illinois racetracks.

“He never introduced it (during the regular session), and I don’t want to speculate on why he chose not to, but I think it shows that the issue is still ripe,” said Chicago gaming attorney Adam Braun of law firm Greenberg Traurig. “People aren’t giving up on it because they’re still making requests for items in the bill.”

Gaming expansion continues to be one of the more palatable options to raise revenue to meet the needs of the state budget, according to Braun.

“It’s going to be such an interesting summer,” Braun said. “You probably have a majority of the legislature in favor of some form of [gaming] expansion. You have a governor who’s articulated reluctance towards raising the personal income tax. So, ultimately, something has to give.”

However, Cory Aronovitz, another Chicago gaming attorney, is not as bullish about the outlook for gaming expansion in Illinois.

It remains to be seen if Rita and Link can satisfy all the various gaming constituencies, according to Aronovitz.

“Some tracks want slots and table games when others just want slots. Video gaming wants increased wagering and units per location. Existing casinos do not want further competition. Getting everyone to support a single bill will be difficult,” Aronovitz said.

Nevertheless, if the budget impasse continues, a gaming bill could emerge sometime this fall, Aronovitz said.

**Geography:**

UNITED  
STATES

ILLINOIS

**Sectors:**

CASINO

HORSERACING/RACINO

**Content:**

REGULATORY  
NEWS