

## Casino smoking bill on hold in Senate - Chicago Tribune

Written by Administrator  
Thursday, 12 May 2011 12:35 -

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SPRINGFIELD -- Legislation to allow smoking again on Illinois casino boats will have to wait until next week for a showdown vote in a Senate committee.

Sponsoring Sen. Martin Sandoval, D-Cicero, chose to hold off calling the bill for a vote today in the Senate Executive Committee, where the fiercely anti-smoking Senate President John Cullerton will try to snuff out the legislation.

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The bill would allow casinos to have special gaming rooms where smoking is allowed as long as casinos in neighboring states allow smoking. Supporters contend Illinois casinos have been losing hundreds of millions of dollars to gambling palaces in Indiana, Missouri and Iowa due to the Illinois ban. The legislation passed the House last month.

Cullerton, the North Side Democrat, said he would vote "no" on the bill but he is "eager" for a full debate -- even if he has to wait.

"I told him I'm against the bill," Cullerton said. "That was a very brief discussion."

Sandoval said he thinks he can gin up enough support from Republicans and Democrats to clear committee next week, and then take it up in the full Senate.

"I have a significant number of supporters on lifting the smoking ban, and I just want to work over the weekend to continue to solidify those votes," Sandoval said. "I never underestimate the power of the Senate president. This is his committee. Nonetheless, at the end of the day, we may be able to find a balance."

Sandoval pointed out that the other chamber's leader, Speaker Michael Madigan, D-Chicago, voted for the measure when it passed the House.

"If it's good enough for the speaker, it's good enough for me," Sandoval said.

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Rep. Dan Burke, the Chicago Democrat who chairs the House Executive Committee, said the Illinois smoking ban hurts the casinos and the state coffers because gamblers are fleeing across the borders.

“We have limited opportunities to raise new revenues, and why not take advantage of what we have at our disposal,” Burke said.

Burke said he is concerned about the health of casino workers who would be exposed to second-hand smoke, but he said he believes accommodations could be made to help them.

The advantage of letting patrons of Illinois casinos smoke is that they would return to Illinois boats instantly and “the money would start flowing,” Burke said.

[xcxtwilson@tribune.com](mailto:xcxtwilson@tribune.com)

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