

NEWS



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Agreement Reached on Pay-to-Play Ban

Legislation would prohibit contract holders from contributing to officeholders

CHICAGO – Several elected officials and reformers stood together today to announce a breakthrough agreement on legislation that will prohibit state contractors from contributing money to elected officials in charge of awarding or overseeing those state contracts.

The compromise legislation is modeled upon House Bill 1, which was unanimously passed by the Illinois House a year ago. It would prohibit businesses and their owners with more than \$50,000 in state contracts from making campaign contributions to the officeholders awarding those contracts, and would require bidders for state contracts to disclose previous contributions to those officeholders. New language also provides for such disclosures to be made available on the State Board of Elections website.

“Candidly, I wasn’t sure if this day would ever come. This is an historic opportunity for us to finally sever the ties between campaign contributions and doing business with the state,” stated Representative Fritchey, Chief House sponsor of the measure. “Many good ideas take time and effort to be realized, especially in Springfield. But Illinois will have a more honest and open government when this bill becomes law.”

Negotiations between the House and Senate had escalated over the last couple of weeks in an effort to agree on a proposal acceptable to both chambers. Senator Don Harmon, the Chief Senate sponsor, Senate Majority Leader Debbie Halvorson, a chief co-sponsor, Rep. Fritchey and reform advocates forged ahead with negotiations on the bill despite doubts by others that an agreement could be reached.

“This is the way the legislative process is supposed to work – legislators and advocates coming together, exchanging ideas and proposals, testing their relative strengths and weaknesses. The final product we have today is a synthesis of House and Senate proposals, and represents the best of both. It took a long time to ripen, but I’m pleased that we’ve reached a broad-based consensus,” Harmon said.

The measure originated as an initiative of State Comptroller Dan Hynes in February, 2005. Hynes praised the agreement, noting “(t)his was a very good idea when we announced it three years ago, it is

an absolute necessity now. I was proud to work with legislators on both sides of the aisle in order to accomplish this piece of landmark legislation.”

Cindi Canary, Director of the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform, had been directly involved in negotiations between the House and the Senate. Canary welcomed the agreement, stating, “(t)he reform community is very encouraged by this agreement to ban the pay-to-play practices which have for too long plagued Illinois. We commend all those who have worked towards consensus and we urge swift, unambiguous passage by the General Assembly.” Canary added that “(s)tate contracts should be awarded on the basis of low prices and high quality performance and not based on big bucks contributions to a political campaign.”

Concerns had existed that the two chambers would pass differing versions of the legislation, preventing either one to reach the desk of Governor Blagojevich. Supporters stated that the agreement should pave the way for quick passage of the bill, leaving the Governor’s signature as the last remaining step prior to its becoming law.

“I am really pleased that we were able to work together to reach a consensus that deserves, and should receive, overwhelming support in both chambers,” stated Senate Majority Leader Debbie Halvorson (D-Crete). “This bill in its present form is something that we can all be proud of, and we are committed to seeing it signed into law as is.”

The legislation has received bipartisan support from the beginning, and representatives from all four caucuses were present at the announcement of the deal being reached.

“We must make it crystal clear that government contract and jobs are not for sale in Illinois,” said House Republican Leader Tom Cross (R-Oswego). “Passing this legislation is consistent and builds upon the sweeping ethics reform we passed in 2003. I applaud Representative Fritchey and Senator Harmon for all their hard work and commitment to this important issue.”

The bill is scheduled to be heard in a Senate Committee this afternoon, and pending approval by the full Senate, may be considered by the House as soon as next week.

The measure is House Bill 824.