

Taxes top action during session's final days

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SPRINGFIELD — Illinois lawmakers didn't give Gov. Pat Quinn his income tax increase, but they did push tax "reforms" as the legislative session winds down.

General Assembly members rushed through a back-to-school sales tax holiday and a measure of property tax relief for residents in Cook County. While the tax issues are not all of what Quinn wanted, they will give him some sense of victory for his legislative agenda.

Just this week, Quinn also asked for a back-to-school sales tax holiday. Parents could use the help, he said, and the state could use the boost in business. State Rep. Jack Franks, D-Woodstock, said stores should start planning now for what could be a very busy August.

"It's creating sales. This helps school children and their parents," Franks said. "I can tell you when (your kids go back to school), you're buying jeans, you're buying gym shoes, you're buying all these supplies. The average family is paying about \$400 per child before they go back to school."

Families can expect the sales tax holiday in early-August. While State Rep. Bill Black, R-Danville, said families will save on the \$400 usually spent, the tax break will cost the state.

"The estimates are \$20 to \$50 million in lost revenues to the state treasury," Black said. "Would it benefit sales? I think it would. Would it benefit to the point where the volume would make up some of the difference? I don't think so."

Quinn is expected to quickly sign the sales tax break. He's also expected to sign the so-called "7 percent solution." The property tax relief measure would cap the growth of tax bills in Cook County.

Lawmakers have grappled with the same idea for years, and the current cap was set to expire. State Rep. John Fritchey, D-Chicago, said he'll take what he can get.

"I won't say that it's too little or too late," he said. "I will say it's not enough."

Fritchey said he hopes lawmakers will continue to push for a solution, but it won't be his job anymore. The end of the session will be the end of his time in Springfield; Fritchey is headed to the Cook County Board.

State Sen. Matt Murphy, R-Palatine, agreed with Fritchey. Murphy said if lawmakers and local leaders in Cook County can't find a solution for sky-rocketing tax bills, there will be a day of

reckoning.

"It's a ticking time bomb, this whole system," Murphy said. "And this is again a band-aid that's not big enough."

The end-of-session rush also saw lawmakers approve a resolution to lingering questions about lobbyist reforms in Illinois. Lawmakers created new rules and a new fee last year regarding lobbyists, but part of the law was struck down. The legislature's fix this spring would roll back the lobbyist registration fee from \$1,000 to \$300 a year.

Lawmakers hope to be finish the session by the weekend.