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**Illinois House approves Chicago gun bill, immigrant protections**

The Illinois House approved measures to increase penalties for repeat gun offenders, automatically register people to vote and protect immigrants in the face of a federal crackdown during a busy Memorial Day that provided plenty of distractions from the state's most pressing issue: the lack of a budget.

Lawmakers are supposed to go home for the summer after Wednesday, and it remains unclear how Democrats who control the General Assembly, plan to move forward on the state's annual spending plan. Illinois has gone without a complete budget since July 2015 amid a stalemate between Democrats and Republican Gov. Bruce Rauner, who has insisted on various political and economic changes before he'd cut a deal.

While Senate Democrats approved a budget blueprint last week that relies on an income tax increase, sales tax expansion and new levies on satellite and streaming services, their House counterparts have been reluctant to embrace the plan. They note Rauner already has threatened to veto the package because it does not include a property tax freeze. Some worry about getting attacked politically for voting for tax hikes that don't even end up becoming law.

House Democrats are privately weighing alternative proposals, but the same concerns persist. Even so, they gave initial approval to the Senate tax plan during a committee hearing late Monday. Still, sponsoring Rep. Will Davis, D-Homewood, would not say whether the bill will be called as-is or if there will be changes before a House vote.

Many House Democrats are opposed to the bill being retroactive to Jan. 1. The Senate-approved version would raise the personal income tax rate from 3.75 percent to 4.95 percent. But the Jan. 1 provision means that rate effectively would be about 5.8 percent for the rest of this year. Others oppose extending the sales tax to services or imposing taxes on satellite TV bills.

"It's an ongoing conversation as to exactly where we are going to land," Davis said.

As negotiations continued late into the evening Monday, questions remain about whether the House will choose to take up an annual budget at all, or if there will be a repeat of last year when the chambers couldn't agree on a plan to send to Rauner. Negotiations continued throughout June, resulting in a temporary budget that ensured schools opened on time and universities and social services were funded for six months.

"What good is it to pass a budget that doesn't go anywhere?" said Rep. Fred Crespo, D-Hoffman Estates, who serves as an appropriations chairman. "Really the endgame should be, 'How do we keep government running to help the people we are supposed to help?' Whether it's at 100 percent, it's at 80 percent, it's at 50 percent. To me, that's the fundamental question that we are losing sight of. We are spending a lot of time on a budget that might not happen."

Crespo noted that even if Democrats did pass a budget, they would not be able to override a possible Rauner veto. That would take 71 votes, but there are just 67 Democratic members. He said if lawmakers blow past the Wednesday deadline, it'd put pressure on Republicans to cut a deal.

Rep. Greg Harris, who serves as a budget point man for House Speaker Michael Madigan, said Democrats will "cross that bridge as we come to it."

"The governor, as he has shown, has no concern about just vetoing any budget and driving the state further into ruin. That's what he's done in the past, but we can't fail to do our jobs and send him a responsible budget," Harris said.

Still, Harris noted that Wednesday is merely a parliamentary deadline, not a budgetary one. That's when the threshold to pass legislation jumps from a simple majority to a 3/5 majority. Harris said the true pressure point is July 1, when the new budget year begins.

For his part, Madigan issued a statement calling on Rauner to "immediately focus on working with House Democrats to find common ground and pass a budget for our state."

The speaker pointed to the House's passage of legislation to change how the state buys goods and services as proof the sides can negotiate. The issue has long been pushed by Rauner, but his office issued a statement saying the bill alone doesn't go far enough.

"Tiny, incremental steps to change our broken system are better than nothing, but what the House passed today is far from what is needed," said spokeswoman Eleni Demertzis. "While Speaker Madigan's Democrats continue to argue over how big of a tax hike to impose on the people of Illinois, the governor remains focused on enacting real and lasting property tax relief."

Democrats and Republicans did find a few areas of agreement Monday. They teamed up to overwhelmingly approve legislation that would bring automatic voter registration to Illinois, and members of both parties voted in favor of a measure that would allow judges to give repeat gun offenders longer sentences.

The measure is backed by Mayor Rahm Emanuel and Chicago police Superintendent Eddie Johnson, and was negotiated with the help of House Republican leader Jim Durkin and Democratic Sen. Kwame Raoul. Instead of a range of three to 14 years, judges would hand out sentences in the range of seven to 14 years. If they wanted to depart from that guideline, they would have to explain why.

Opponents, including members of the Black Caucus, argued there is no proof tougher sentences do anything to drive down crime, saying the proposal would lead to a spike in arrests of African-American and Latino men. Durkin sought to address the concerns of some lawmakers by offering changes that establish a trial program for first-time, nonviolent offenders charged with certain weapons crimes that is focused on rehabilitation and keeping them out of the prison system. He also changed the bill so it would expire in five years, at which point lawmakers would have to review its effectiveness.

While the legislation passed on a vote of 70-41, Rep. Thaddeus Jones, D-Calumet City, used a procedural maneuver to keep the legislation from going back to the Senate for final approval. Durkin said he hopes to overturn that motion Tuesday.

Meanwhile, the House passed legislation that would prohibit state law enforcement agencies from enforcing federal civil immigration laws. Under the measure, police wouldn't be able to stop, arrest or search people because of their citizenship status. It also would ban officials from detaining someone solely based on an immigration detainer. Neither provision would apply if there's "a valid, enforceable federal warrant."

The House made several changes to the proposal to try to win support from law enforcement. That included removing provisions that created safe zones and would have forbidden communication between state law enforcement and federal agencies.

Republicans argued the state should leave immigration reform to Washington and shouldn't pick and choose which federal laws to follow. Proponents contend the bill would assuage fears in the immigrant community and protect them from unfair searches.

"There's this notion at the national level about law and order. And yes, we should have law and order, and we should have law and accountability," said Rep. Litesa Wallace, D-Rockford. "However, that typically refers to criminal offenses. Simply existing without a piece of paper is not a crime."

The legislation passed 62-49, largely along party lines. It returns to the Senate for lawmakers there to weigh in on the changes.

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