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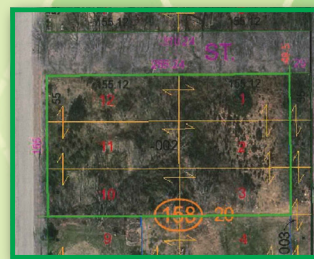
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# New taxes on sports bets, nicotine products as Democrats pass \$55.2B budget

By Ben Szalinski and Jerry Nowicki

Giving almost no time for public review, Illinois Democrats pushed through a \$55.2 billion budget for next fiscal year late Saturday, bolstering coffers with new taxes on sports bets, nicotine products and businesses.

The \$55.2 billion spending plan is supported by \$55.3 billion of revenue, including just over \$1 billion in new taxes and revenue changes.

The four bills making up the budget and capital spending plan, were part of a flurry of thousands of pages of legislation that went from introduction to passage in the final 48 hours of the legislative session.

The budget marked a roughly 3.9% spending increase from the current year, while Republicans criticized it for containing few cuts. It raises about \$500 million more in new revenue than what Gov. JB Pritzker proposed in February to make up for declining base revenues.

The minority party also aired frustration with supermajority Democrats for providing next to no time for public review of the massive spending plan and other major bills.

"We're rushing this process like we always do. 'Let's hide this stuff. Let's hide it so that the public doesn't see it until it's too late,'" Rep. John Cabello, R-Machesney Park, said.

Democrats said it was the best budget they could manage in a difficult year. To address potential uncertainties stemming from federal policy changes, they gave the governor authority over a new \$100 million "emergency" fund. And they frequently lobbed criticisms at President Donald Trump and Republicans in Congress.

"I am very pleased to be able to present a balanced budget crafted to be fiscally and socially responsible, because we see the decisions made in Washington right now are neither," House Majority Leader Robyn Gabel, D-Evanston said. "Erratic leadership in Washington has affected our economic outlook, our revenue projections, and even threatened federal funding for our most crucial services."

The GOP also took issue with

the tax increases, although the measure did not raise or create new sales, income or service taxes.

Instead, the measures expand state taxes on foreign and out-of-state income for businesses, raise tax rates on tobacco, vapes and sports gambling, and sweep fund balances from several lesser-known and utilized state funds.

The spending measure, Senate Bill 2510, passed the House 75-41 just before 10 p.m. The Senate followed around 11:30 p.m. with a 34-23 vote. The revenue and tax changes, House Bill 2755, and the budget implementation bill, House Bill 1075, both passed with relative ease before the constitution's midnight deadline and only Democratic votes as well. Gov. JB Pritzker issued a statement saying he would sign it.

Another spate of tax increases included in a transit governance overhaul bill surfaced late but sputtered. The failed measure would have added a \$1.50 fee on food and package deliveries and taxed electric vehicle charging statewide among other changes. Talks on that bill could resume later this year.

## New taxes on vaping, gambling, deliveries

The revenue bill creates a tax of 25 cents per wager for a sports betting licensee's first 20,000 wagers accepted, and 50 cents per wager after that.

Consumers will also see new taxes on tobacco products. The tax rate will rise to 45% from 36%. Vape products and nicotine pouches would also now be included under the tax.

The revenue plan amends state law to tax sales from all businesses that transact in the state, rather than only businesses with a physical presence in Illinois. The plan also eliminates a "safe harbor" exemption for businesses that move money outside the state.

Businesses that move profits to other countries would also be subject to the state's corporate income tax. The federal government currently taxes half of income moved offshore and Illinois would tax the other half under the revenue plan.

Businesses outside Illinois that sell \$100,000 or more to

people in the state must also collect Illinois sales taxes even if the business doesn't have a physical location in Illinois. This would apply to businesses like Amazon.

"I will not support this betrayal of hard-working Illinoisans," Sen. Don DeWitte, R-St. Charles, said. "And if you care about the people who sent you here, if you truly represent them, you'll vote no too. Enough is enough. It's time for this body to stand with taxpayers, not stand up against them."

Another source of new revenue is a delinquent tax payment incentive program designed to help the state recuperate overdue tax payments. It will generate \$228 million, Rep. Will Guzzardi, D-Chicago, said.

The state would also pause the final transfer of motor fuel sales tax revenue to the road fund in order to free up \$171 million, according to the governor's office's estimate.

A separate bill designed to lower prescription drug prices calls for levying a fee on pharmacy benefit managers based on the number of patients they insure. Money from that fee would go into a fund for the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to award up to \$25 million a year in grants to independent pharmacies and pharmacies located in rural counties. The remaining money would go to the state's general revenue fund.

The measure also extends the state's Hotel Operators' Occupation Tax to short-term rentals like Airbnb and Vrbo.

## Immigrant health cuts

A controversial program that provides health insurance to more than 30,000 noncitizens between ages 42 and 64 will be cut in FY26. The program's elimination saves the state \$330 million, but a \$110 million program for seniors will remain in place.

Together, the two programs have cost the state at least \$1.6 billion, according to an audit released in February, far exceeding budgeted costs for the program.

"We had to make some tough decisions here. That program grew at greater rates, financially, than we thought it would,

and we had to make some hard decisions," Gabel said.

Federally Qualified Health Centers are set to receive \$40 million in the budget. The centers provide health services to low-income and uninsured people. Democrats touted that increase to provide care for immigrants who would have qualified for the health care program. Illinois still risks losing some Medicaid funding under a proposal in Congress that threatens to slash reimbursements for states that provide health insurance to people illegally in the United States. But Gabel noted it's possible those reductions won't take place until 2027.

The budget also increases funding for safety-net hospitals with federal Medicaid funding cuts possible.

## Education spending

The state's evidence-based funding model for K-12 schools calls for \$350 million in additional funding each year, with a portion of that going to a property tax relief fund and the rest directly to schools. The proposed budget fully funds the K-12 education portion at \$307 million but does not add \$43 million in property tax relief funds, according to Democratic leaders.

Funding for the Illinois Community College Board would also decrease by \$24 million, mostly because lawmakers reduced spending on a workforce development grant that Democrat leaders said was not being fully utilized.

Funding for state universities would only increase by 1%. Pritzker proposed a 3% increase for higher education even as most other areas of his budget would've increased by 1%. Senate Democrats' budget leader Sen. Elgie Sims, D-Chicago, said the budget allows for an additional 2% increase in FY26 if the federal government eliminates substantial funding.

## Pensions

Despite more than a year of discussions, Illinois lawmakers did not tackle pension reform this spring. Illinois' Tier 2 pension system is likely out of compliance with Social Security's "safe harbor" law that requires pension benefits to be at least equal to Social Security.

Part of the budget package created a new Tier 2 reserve fund that can be accessed if there are violations of the "safe harbor" law. Lawmakers appropriated \$75 million for the fund this year, in line with Pritzker's proposal.

"Emergency" fund, raises, more

Notably not in this year's budget is an increase to the "rainy day" fund. Pritzker has taken pride in the fund's increases in recent years, as it's grown to a balance of \$2.3 billion, up from less than \$60,000 when Pritzker took office. The FY26 budget would suspend the monthly transfer for one year, freeing up \$45 million for general fund use.

The budget package also establishes a new \$100 million fund that the governor can tap into "in the event of unanticipated delays in or failures of revenues." The measure, an apparent nod to the uncertainty of federal funding amid ongoing congressional budget negotiations, will come from money swept from other funds.

"That will allow us to respond to actions by the federal government and challenges that present themselves and costs that have been diverted from the federal government to the state government," Sims said in a committee hearing.

The attorney general's office would get \$116 million from the general fund. Attorney General Kwame Raoul asked lawmakers to boost funding for his office as he engages in a growing number of lawsuits against the Trump administration. Raoul was hoping to receive \$120 million in funding.

Direct service providers are in line for an 80-cent per hour wage increase, but Republicans said calling it a funding increase is "sleight of hand," because the measure would also reduce work hours for DSPs by the hundreds of thousands. That makes the increase negligible, Sen. Chapin Rose, R-Mahomet, said in committee.

## Chapin Rose

State Sen. Chapin Rose, R-Mahomet, criticizes Democrats for not including more funding for care providers for people with developmental dis-

abilities in a committee hearing on Saturday, May 31. (Capitol News Illinois photo by Jerry Nowicki)

"It's not a great budget, but it is a good budget and it is the budget we need for this very difficult moment," Rep. Lindsey LaPointe, D-Chicago, said.

Lawmakers will see their salaries rise as part of the budget, going to a \$98,304 base salary from roughly \$92,000. That's an annualized rate of increase that is set by law.

"You raised our pay, you gave yourselves hundreds of millions of dollars of our taxpayers funds to spend on your pet projects," Rep. Amy Elik, R-Godfrey, said. "So I simply don't believe you anymore that you ever intended to be fiscally careful."

## No Bears stadium funding

Lawmakers did not appropriate funding for the Chicago Bears to build a new stadium. But NASCAR would be the recipient of a \$5 million grant ahead of the sport's third downtown Chicago race in July, and the PGA Tour would receive a \$1 million grant as part of hosting the 2026 President's Cup in DuPage County. Those were two economic development measures criticized by Republicans during the Senate committee hearing.

The budget also contains \$200 million to prepare unused state properties to be repurposed for development, Sims said. Lawmakers removed another \$300 million that Pritzker had sought in spending aimed at offloading surplus property.

Gabel said the state's employee management department has negotiated more than \$100 million in health care cost savings as well.

Any remaining federal pandemic relief funding would also be sent to recipients that have not received payments in previous years before the funding expires in 2026.

## Jade Aubrey contributed.

Capitol News Illinois is a nonprofit, nonpartisan news service that distributes state government coverage to hundreds of news outlets statewide. It is funded primarily by the Illinois Press Foundation and the Robert R. McCormick Foundation.

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							1	
				6	3	4		
	5	4		8				9
					5	3	4	
					9			2
7				9				
8				7				1
3		2	9	1				
	7			5				

Level: Intermediate

**Here's How It Works:**  
Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve a sudoku, the numbers 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. You can figure out the order in which the numbers will appear by using the numeric clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets to solve the puzzle!

3	6	9	2	6	5	2	8	1	7	4
8	5	8	1	4	7	5	8	2	9	3
1	2	1	3	4	2	1	3	4	2	1
6	1	6	7	3	4	9	5	8	1	6
2	7	2	5	4	8	3	6	1	9	7
4	3	4	5	3	4	5	6	1	9	2
9	8	9	2	8	7	5	3	4	5	6
5	1	5	4	7	3	8	2	6	9	8
2	9	2	6	3	4	5	6	7	1	2
7	4	7	1	2	6	3	4	5	6	7

ANSWER:

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Find the words hidden vertically, horizontally, diagonally, and backwards.

**WORDS**

BONBON	GUMDROP	NOUGAT
BUTTERSCOTCH	GUMMY BEAR	PRALINE
CANDY	HONEY	SUGAR
CARAMEL	LICORICE	SWEETS
CHOCOLATE	LOLLIPOP	SWEET TOOTH
DRAGEE	LOZENGE	SYRUP
GLAZE	MARSHMALLOW	TAFFY
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# USDA policy targets small family farms

By TAMMIE SLOUP  
FarmWeek

USDA released a new policy agenda outlining actions aimed at ensuring the profitability and prosperity of small family farms.

Dubbing it the Make Agriculture Great Again initiative, Ag Secretary Brooke Rollins introduced the first set of proposals that address a number of issues for farmers, including reliable access to credit; access to farmland; transitioning farms to the next generation; access to markets and infrastructure; access to reliable agricultural labor; and access to appropriate risk management and business planning tools.

In 2023, based on the USDA Economic Research Service report titled "America's Farms and Ranches at a Glance," about 86 percent of all farms were small family farms. These farms, which have a gross cash farm income below \$350,000, operated on 41 percent of U.S. agricultural land, while producing just 17 percent of the total value of agricultural production.

"To ensure small family

farmers can start and stay in business for generations to come, USDA is placing specific emphasis on understanding the barriers to starting and keeping small family farms viable — especially for the next generation," according to the policy.

As USDA implements its action plan, ongoing assessment of gaps in service and support will occur.

Some of the actions outlined in the agenda include:

Reforming the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Rural Development (RD) loan programs to streamline delivery and increase program efficiencies, and disincentivize the use of federal funding for solar panels to be installed on productive farmland.

Calling on Congress to ensure most farms are protected from an increase in the death tax. The administration is also urging Congress to expand Section 179, which allows eligible small businesses to deduct the full purchase price of qualifying farm and business equipment upfront and restore 100% bonus depreciation expensing. USDA will also be

engaging with agricultural tax and legal professionals across the country to identify ways the department can assist in developing tools that help to facilitate the orderly transition of agricultural operations from one generation to the next.

Leveraging USDA's agricultural labor affairs coordinator in actively working with other federal agencies such as the Department of Labor and the Department of Homeland Security to address the critical issue of labor access for agricultural producers. USDA is aggressively exploring coordinated solutions with agencies and Congress to ensure a stable, reliable and legal workforce for agriculture.

Reviewing farm size definitions to ensure they adequately reflect modern-day realities while also helping to ensure resources are appropriately tailored to the needs and size of farms.

Evaluating new shared services platforms for the FSA and RD programs to streamline delivery and increase program efficiencies.

The policy rollout builds on the Farmers First Roundtable

event recently held at the USDA headquarters in Washington, D.C., where the secretary met with more than 20 farmers and ranchers from 11 states who run smaller-scale, family-owned operations, as well as Nebraska Gov. Jim Pillen and the Board of Directors of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture about challenges facing smaller-scale family farms across America.

"America's family farms help feed, fuel and clothe the world, but they also face some of the greatest challenges in getting their farms started and keeping them running. Putting farmers first means addressing the issues farmers face head-on and fostering an economic environment that doesn't put up roadblocks on business creation but removes them," Rollins said.

Read the full policy at [bit.ly/44MO10y](https://bit.ly/44MO10y).

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