

# Senate passes bill to reopen State Museum, create fairgrounds foundation

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The Illinois Senate passed legislation Monday to reopen the Illinois State Museum and create a not-for-profit foundation to secure private funds for repairing the Illinois State Fairgrounds.

Both measures were included in an amendment to House Bill 5783 filed by Sen. Andy Manar, D-Bunker Hill.

Manar said the section that would reopen the museum, which has been closed since October due to the state budget impasse, includes language from Gov. Bruce Rauner's amendatory veto of a previous effort to reopen the Springfield attraction.

In his veto, Rauner proposed allowing the director of the Department of Natural Resources, which oversees the museum, to set a \$5 admission fee. Admission previously was required by law to be free.

"The concept is to try to take piece of what we passed and what the governor needs in an attempt to force a reopening of the State Museum," Manar said. "An issue not talked about is the dire need for the State Museum to be open so it can fulfill its accreditation requirement, which I'm told will be in danger of not happening in the next few weeks."

The museum must be opened for 1,000 hours in 2016 to receive accreditation.

Under Manar's amendment, the bill would also create a private fundraising foundation for the state fairground sites in Springfield and Du Quoin that would be subject to the Illinois Procurement Code.

Sen. Bill Brady, R-Bloomington, sponsored a similar bill creating a fairgrounds foundation but included language that would exempt private funds from state procurement.

“For the last 12 years, the (Gov. Rod) Blagojevich and (Gov. Pat) Quinn administrations have let the fairgrounds rot, and the great flaw in this piece of legislation is that contractors are reluctant to give when they know dollars will be dealt with under procurement,” Brady said.

Manar argued that state procurement should apply to the foundation to ensure contract bidders prove that they are qualified to conduct business in the state.

Sen. Sue Rezin, R-Morris, noted that procurement exemptions for private fundraising for schools such as the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy have passed unanimously.

“When someone is making a donation, they want to see whatever they donated for be done in a timely manner, and the procurement code increases the time for a project,” Rezin said.

However, Manar said that since the fairgrounds are overseen by a state agency under the governor, as opposed to a school board, they should be subject to state procurement.

The Illinois Department of Agriculture, which oversees the two fairground sites, estimates they've got a combined \$180 million in deferred maintenance.

Brady said the bill passed by the Senate Monday will face a likely veto from the governor, which will delay the necessary funding even further.

“We have an opportunity to recruit millions of dollars to rehabilitate the fairgrounds due to a lack of investment in the last decade or so,” said Sen. Dale Righter, R-Mattoon. “But if we apply the procurement code, we will lose money ready to be invested.”

The bill passed 38-18. Brady voted "no," while Manar, Sen. John Sullivan, D-Rushville and Sen. Sam McCann, R-Plainview, voted in favor of it.

The bill must also be approved by the House.

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