



Illinois officials await construction money

Mike Riopell | Posted: Monday, July 13, 2009 6:00 pm

SPRINGFIELD - Gov. Pat Quinn on Monday approved \$31 billion in construction spending that comes with new taxes and hope of new jobs and an improved Illinois economy.

Now, local officials who have been waiting for state help for their construction projects will wait for the money to be sent their way.

"This is a crucial economic recovery initiative that will generate what's needed most in Illinois: jobs, jobs, jobs," Quinn said.

The plan contains hundreds of projects around the state, from upgrades to local schools to major highway plans. Richland Community College in Decatur is one of many waiting for money for one of the projects, a \$3.5 million expansion of its Student Success Center.

Richland Vice President of Finances and Administration Greg Florian said news of Quinn's action is greatly appreciated, but that construction won't begin until money begins flowing from the state.

Illinois State University officials echoed that sentiment. President Al Bowman said the spending plan was "encouraging" news.

"Given the poor condition of Illinois' economy, it may be quite some time before any capital funds are actually released for use," Bowman said. "Still, the renovation has been a top state capital priority for more than half a decade."

Of course, big projects come with a price.

To pay for the construction effort, lawmakers and Quinn raised several taxes and fees on Illinoisans. Taxes on liquor, beer and candy will go up in September, and vehicle registration fees will jump by \$20 per year.

Also, video poker machines might start popping up in bars across the state in the coming months, a controversial proposal that could make the state lots of money but has drawn scorn from anti-gambling advocates.

In the meantime, local officials will eventually have a chance to tout the fruits of the spending.

Western Illinois University has been waiting for money to expand its Quad-Cities campus in Moline. Vice President Joe Rives said Monday that a couple new buildings could go up over the next couple years.

Southern Illinois University spokesman Dave Gross said the school already has planned its \$56 million Transportation Education Center, so the school can start construction as soon as the money shows up.

Quinn spokesman Bob Reed didn't immediately respond to a message asking when the money might begin to flow.

"Our job does not end with signing these bills into law," Quinn said. "The General Assembly must pass a balanced budget."