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High court charts path to Illinois budget?

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

Haven't seen any amendments yet, but the huge piece of news is the United States [Supreme Court ruling Monday](#) that a law banning sports gambling, passed by Congress in 1992, is unconstitutional. Now maybe Illinois can pay down its debts and still provide a solid menu of state services (such as education) for its citizens.

All the state has to do is (1) legalize sports betting and (2) tax it.

Background: Betting on sports games is illegal except in Nevada and, to a lesser extent, in three small states. All other states failed to become eligible to do so by a deadline set in the bill that sailed through the U.S. House and Senate in 1992. The Supreme Court now says Congress should have acted less cowardly.

The national legislative branch could have established statutory regulations for sports gambling nationwide, but chose instead to block most states' entry into that activity, the ruling asserts. Some states, notably New Jersey, expect to have lucrative sports gambling programs enacted within a few weeks.

Illinois is almost certain not to be one of the early states in this regard. As [The State Journal-Register reported](#), there are details to be decided before a complicated program like sports gambling can be enacted. Translation: The clout-wielding horse racing and casino gambling "industries" will have something to say about it.

After discussions over the summer, there could be a proposal in the works for the fall veto session, horse racing lobbyist Steve Brubaker reportedly told the J-R, but more likely it will be January. (It is unclear if that means enactment in early January by the current General Assembly, or later by the 101th GA.)

Gov. Bruce Rauner, seeking reelection, took his usual position. He's no fan of gambling, which he (accurately) sees as a losing proposition for those "who can least afford to lose their money." But he notes that gambling is already being done so he plans to "support those communities that would like to see [it] expanded."

How big can sports gambling be for Illinois? Nevada aside, experts say just the *illegal* sports betting in this country causes about \$150 billion per year to change hands. Rule of thumb: Illinois totals are usually 4% or so of national totals. So that means sports betting in Illinois could total maybe \$6 billion yearly.

Taxed at 20%, that's about \$1.2 billion in new state revenue. That would be more than enough for the legislature to appropriate an annual increase in school funding that would truly (*truly* takes \$650 million per yer more, not \$350 million) be on track to *make good on their promise* of educational adequacy for all by 2027.

What would be so bad about that? Well, there are always a few objectors (count ISNS among them) to such ideas. Counting lotteries and video gaming (now on every city streetcorner in Illinois), the least affluent (as Rauner suggests) and the least educated folks gamble - [and therefore lose](#) - the most.

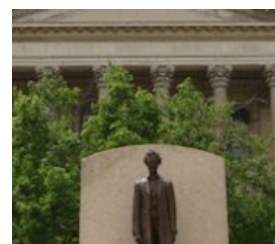
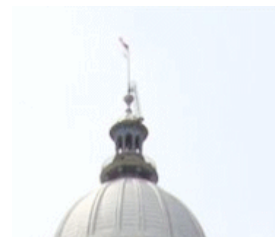
Defenders of gambling taxes claim they are paid voluntarily. But for the problem gamblers that's not actually the case. As the neuroscientists now know, the brain's "reward system" responds to gambling experiences exactly in the same ways that it does to addictive drugs. The dopamine is, for many, [impossible to resist](#).

The American Psychiatric Association classified problem gambling as an addiction in a landmark decision two decades ago that "followed 15 years of deliberation [that] reflects a new understanding of the biology underlying addiction and has already changed the way psychiatrists help people who cannot stop gambling."

One major problem is that, despite the fine-print cautions that gambling establishments are generally required to give customers, and the hotlines for troubled gamblers to call, an estimated 80% of problem gamblers never make the call for help. But they are *20 times more likely than the rest of us to try suicide*.

One more issue: [As NPR reported](#), the sponsor of the 1992 law that effectively banned sports betting did so because "betting on human beings" would be very wrong, that it would be like turning "every baseball player, basketball player, football player into a roulette chip."

And he said that with this ruling, there is "nothing to prevent *betting on high school or even grade school games*." [ISNS emphasis.] Who is that sponsor? Former [U.S. Sen. Bill Bradley](#) (D-New Jersey), who was also a star basketball player for the



New York Knicks. (ISNS supported him for president in 2000.)

Corruption is the fear. John Wolohan, professor of Sports Law at Syracuse University, told NPR professional players make too much to risk throwing a game, but a college athlete with no money might be tempted by a line such as, "You guys are favored by 20 points. Here's \$5,000. Make sure it's under 20."

Would it be the worst thing in the history of America. Of course not. We've had slavery, with vestiges remaining still today. We've had flagrant child labor. We've had [forced sterilization](#) ordered by Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes himself. Worst thing ever? No. But a big step backward? Yes.

House bills are moving smoothly through the Senate. School Code-amending House bills that were still in committees two days ago reached third reading in the Senate by Tuesday - and may have been passed by both chambers by the time you read this, soon to be on their way to Rauner for his consideration.

[HB 5195](#), a bill to allow a district to give a ride to schoolchildren who live close to their school but would have to walk through dangerous, perhaps even gang-controlled territory to get there, was ready for a passage vote before the chamber convened on Wednesday; so was [HB 5196](#), a bill to reduce the certificate fee for paraprofessionals, and [HB 5247](#), a bill codifying a registered apprentice program for children 16 or older.

[HB 5481](#), a bill setting forth class size goals to be achieved by 2021, and requiring school districts to report data relating to those goals to ISBE, for publication on their web site by December of 2019, was also on third reading in the Senate, just a floor vote away from passage. (Proponents [far outnumbered opponents](#).)

[NOTE: I will be in St. Louis for a couple of days, participating in activities relating to my daughter's graduation from Washington University School of Medicine (occupational therapy), but I'll monitor legislative activities and report to you Friday if anything exemplary happens between now and then.]

Just one more item, about the future obsolescence of teaching. Scientists have now been able, according to a report [published this week](#), to transfer what a trained animal has "learned" to other animals of the same species that have not been trained, just by injecting them with RNA from the trained animal.

The abstract is pretty technical. [Livescience.com](#) makes it more understandable. Sure, the animals are not humans, not even mammals. Okay, they are sea snails. But you get the point. Train one animal and then transfer the learning of that one into the memories of countless others via RNA injections.

So one great teacher teaches one great student - [Aristotle teaches Alexander](#) - and the experience is transferred to other students via the great student's RNA. All the students would then be prepared to conquer the known world without having to go to all the trouble of getting an education on their own.

Don't discount the possibility, although it doesn't seem likely to become reality any time soon, not in my lifetime, not even in your lifetime. Although this may not be the best example available, ISNS supports true science (not fake science). There will be further observations on this (pro-science) theme in the future.

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