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Legislators want casinos, tracks to open their books

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Two suburban legislators said Tuesday they will renew their push for greater public disclosure of riverboat and racetrack financial dealings. The comments come in the wake of reports that two veteran DuPage County Republicans worked a deal to collect \$20 million if they produce a riverboat license for a Nevada gaming company.

Court documents showed that Addison Township Republican Committeeman Patrick J. Durante and Itasca attorney James Schirott worked a deal with **Primadonna** Resorts Inc. to receive about \$10 million each over 20 years if the firm they represent secured a riverboat casino license in Illinois, a report published this week said.

Durante, an aide to Rep. Henry J. Hyde of Wood Dale, and Schirott, who represented Senate President James "Pate" Philip during legislative remap battles several years ago, confirmed the payment arrangement.

But some state legislators and gaming officials said Tuesday they were disturbed at the appearance of the influence-purchasing the arrangement suggests.

No gambling licenses can be awarded in Illinois unless the legislature, led by Republicans Philip and House Speaker Lee A. Daniels of Elmhurst, authorizes them.

Sen. Steven J. Rauschenberger of Elgin said, "The outside industry already perceives us to be influence driven. I don't think you can write enough disclosure laws to stop this."

Still, Rauschenberger said some form of competitive bidding for any future gambling licenses might cut down on such deals.

"It would serve to squeeze out some of the excess profits that make these things worth \$20 million of influence buying," he said.

Sen. Peter Fitzgerald, an Inverness Republican, also is sponsoring a bill that would require both riverboat and racetrack owners and operators to reveal financial audits for license holders and any affiliated entities; any affiliated contracts with directors or top executives; and salaried and non-salaried compensation for a firm's top executives as well as any government officials and directors connected to the companies.

"It's just a sunshine bill. Sunshine is the best disinfectant," Fitzgerald said. He said the potential still exists in Illinois for "a handful of insiders to get very rich very quick."

But Sen. Thomas Dunn, a Joliet Democrat whose district takes in the Empress riverboat, said Tuesday he found no fault with the deal struck between **Primadonna** and the two Republican insiders.

Lobbyists representing gambling interests should have to operate under the same rules as those who represent doctors and other groups in Springfield, he said.

"I don't know why you'd penalize one of them over the other," he said.

Durante and Schirott's deal still could serve as grounds to deny **Primadonna** a license, Michael Belletire, head of the Illinois Gaming Board, said.

"Any organization that believes we're selling licenses - and that they ought to pay for it - doesn't deserve to be licensed in this state," Belletire said.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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