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**Pension crisis;**

**Political payback: Quinn keeps lawmakers from getting paid**

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Staff reporters

SPRINGFIELD-Gov. Pat Quinn tried to bounce back off the ropes Wednesday, boldly denying state lawmakers their paychecks because of their failure on pension reform - a move that puts a chief adversary of the governor in a political trick bag but could also force a constitutional battle.

The perhaps unprecedented maneuver came one day after the Democratic governor took a beating from a Legislature that refused to do his bidding on pensions or concealed-carry legislation.

"This is an emergency," Quinn said at a news conference called the morning after lawmakers blew another deadline to come up with a pension overhaul. "This is a crisis."

Quinn repeatedly stated that he couldn't in good conscience allow legislators to get paid when they hadn't done the job.

"We want to have an alarm bell for our legislators so they understand this is an emergency that deserves their undivided attention," said Quinn. "They need to have the alarm bells ringing in their ears. The best way to do that is to hit them in the wallet."

Quinn said he's authorized the state comptroller to withhold his salary as well, though Comptroller Judy Baar Topinka later questioned if that is constitutionally allowable and asked for a legal review.

An effort to override Quinn's salary freeze would begin in the House because the budget bill Quinn wants to modify originated in that chamber.

House Speaker Michael Madigan (D-Chicago), as the lead House sponsor of the bill, has 15 session days to decide whether to mount an override effort of Quinn's veto. But on Wednesday the speaker issued a curiously conciliatory message, making no mention of his intentions with the bill but expressing empathy with the governor's inability to pass pension reform through his chamber and the Senate.

"I have been working for many months to pass real, comprehensive pension reform. During the first Democratic Caucus of this General Assembly, I admonished our members that doing nothing or passing only a half measure on pension reform was not an option," Madigan said in a statement. "The Governor's decision follows my efforts and I understand his frustration. I am hopeful his strategy works."

It was unclear if the tone of Madigan's statement was crafted to deny Quinn the political mileage he had been seeking or if it was a reflection of the fact that Madigan didn't have enough votes - 71 are needed - to outfox the governor and restore lawmakers' salaries. In May, the House passed Madigan's bill by 70-47 margin, with Republicans voting against it.

It's a political trick bag for Madigan to force every member of his caucus to vote to override the pay suspension, especially going into the 2014 elections.

Madigan's Senate counterpart, Senate President John Cullerton (D-Chicago), issued a much more biting assessment of the governor's move, saying Quinn's Tuesday midnight deadline to resolve the pension crisis was artificially set to begin with.

"The governor's actions today are as unproductive as yesterday's arbitrary deadline," Cullerton said. "Responsible leaders know that unworkable demands will only delay progress."

State Sen. Matt Murphy (R-Palatine) said if the move was meant to motivate lawmakers, it wouldn't work.

"It's somewhat irrational to say that the executive branch is going to tell a co-equal branch they're not going to get paid," Murphy said, questioning whether the comptroller had the authority to take such an action. "It's a stunt. He knows it's a stunt."

Murphy then launched a salvo back at Quinn, saying he failed to show up to a recent conference committee on pensions and instead sent a staffer.

Quinn said he thinks Illinois residents will back him in his showdown with lawmakers.

"I think the taxpayers are on my side here. ... They get paid when they do their job," he said. "Every day there's a new excuse."

Quinn's move against $13.8 million in annual legislative salaries and bonuses represents a jolting escalation of the tensions that have existed between the General Assembly and governor as a rift over pensions and guns has deepened, with Quinn taking severe lumps on both issues.

On Tuesday, the House and Senate overwhelmingly struck down the governor's proposed changes on concealed-carry legislation and ignored his midnight Tuesday deadline to get a pension-reform bill to his desk.

Legislators' base pay now stands at $67,836 per year, with the four legislative leaders each getting a $27,477 premium on top of that.

Depending on their individual rank, members of the House and Senate leaders' leadership teams get premiums of between $18,067 and $23,230 on top of their base salaries.

Quinn's attack on legislative salaries is a reprise of a tactic used by the governor's predecessor and one-time running mate, Rod Blagojevich, who in 2003 attempted to deprive state lawmakers, statewide officeholders and judges of pay raises as part of a sweeping attempt to keep state salaries in check during a budget crisis.

Quinn's office was calling the governor's pay suspension unprecedented.

It has the potential of getting lawmakers' attention. In Illinois, 47 percent of lawmakers don't have outside jobs, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The legality of Quinn's move was already being questioned because of language built into the state's Constitution. Legislative pay cuts can't take effect during a lawmaker's term in office under the Constitution, setting the stage for a possible legal battle.

Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan said no one has formally sought an opinion on Quinn's move yet, though a spokeswoman acknowledged late Wednesday that her office had "talked informally with the comptroller's office about questions pertaining to today's actions."

In a statement Madigan issued Wednesday the attorney general voiced qualms about the constitutionality of Quinn's move.

"The Governor's actions raise a series of constitutional and procedural issues that have never been resolved by the courts," said spokeswoman Natalie Bauer. "We're looking closely at them."