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Excerpts from recent Illinois editorials

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Blago's King George impersonation.

News flash to Rod Blagojevich: For a died-in-the-wool Democrat, you're acting an awful lot like President Bush. Indeed, whether he's demanding special summer legislative sessions or disemboweling the state budget, the governor has copied a page from "The Decider's" playbook, taking executive privilege to new levels. And he has Bush-like disapproval ratings to show for it. Blagojevich's latest power play came last week after a bipartisan legislative panel turned down his proposal to dramatically expand the state's FamilyCare health insurance program.

On Nov. 7, the Blagojevich administration filed an "emergency" rule that sought to add 147,000 adults to FamilyCare's rolls. Days later the Legislature's Joint Committee on Administrative Rules (JCAR) -- which has oversight on rules promulgated by state agencies, in this case the Department of Healthcare and Family Services -- voted it down. Undaunted, the governor forged ahead. An internal memo obtained Friday instructs state caseworkers to start enrolling the additional adults. It's as if the state lawmakers who said no don't exist.

In the governor's eyes they don't, at least in any official capacity. "JCAR's role is merely advisory -- it does not have the constitutional authority" to block the rule, contends Blagojevich spokeswoman Abby Ottenhoff, citing case law in this and other states. Why, then, make panelists, including Rep. David Leitch and Sen. Dan Rutherford, bother to vote? For "their input and advice," says Ottenhoff. The governor "appreciates their advice."

Whether or not his administration can supersede JCAR - we expect a legal challenge - Blagojevich sure has an odd way of showing his appreciation. Had he truly listened to those lawmakers, he would have heard their concerns about the wisdom of expanding state health care, to the tune of \$225 million to \$360 million a year, when Illinois can't keep up with the \$1 billion in bills it perpetually owes to health-care providers.

Furthermore, given the uncertainty of federal dollars upon which the state relies to pay for adults in FamilyCare, it's madness to expand the program.

(Peoria) Journal Star. Nov. 21.

Addicted to gambling.

Gambling has come a long way in Illinois.

When the first riverboat opened in Alton in 1991, it was required to cruise. Back then, Illinois politicians still were floating the facade that riverboat casinos somehow were different than land-based casinos.

When the state Legislature first approved gambling here, they did so under the guise that riverboats somehow were historic a throwback to yesteryear. That made it more palatable to a public rightfully concerned about the downside of gambling: Crime, bankruptcy, substance abuse and destroyed lives and families.

Today, the facade about gambling in Illinois has all but fallen away.

The casinos don't pretend to be riverboats. They simply are casinos that, strangely, have to sit on the water. Dockside gaming was approved years ago. And the differences between riverboats and land-based casinos are hard to identify.

The state Legislature now, once again, is considering a major expansion of gambling. Why? Because our state government is borderline incompetent and is incapable of resolving budgetary issues without turning to gambling. The state is unable to pass a capital-improvement program to fix roads without gambling. Mass transit remains another unresolved issue. Let's not even talk about education. The list of failures goes on and on.

But hey, at least we are going to get some new casinos, right?

It is clear that our state government is addicted to tax dollars. And it is clear that our Legislature's answer to problems simply is to issue yet another gambling license. Worse, however, is the fantasy that gambling has no cost. It has a cost. A high, societal cost. It is time for Illinois to find another way.

The (Crystal Lake) Northwest Herald. No. 24.

Changing Constitution won't resolve power struggle.

The Legislature's special sessions are losing their "special-ness" with Gov. Rod Blagojevich calling a record-tying number.

Lawmakers are losing their patience.

And the taxpayers of Illinois are losing something else: the extra expense money paid to lawmakers for these special sessions.

The next special session is scheduled to convene Wednesday. It will be the 17th special session the governor has called.

As noted by state Sen. Bill Brady, R-Bloomington, that will tie the record for most special sessions called in one year. The holder of that record: Rod Blagojevich, who set it in 2004.

Before Blagojevich became governor, the Legislature had been called into special session 34 times in just over 30 years. This time the topic is the Chicago-area mass transit system.

We don't blame state Sen. Brady for being upset and saying lawmakers see the repeated special sessions as a way for Blagojevich "to pressure and harass them."

Clearly, pressuring lawmakers is the governor's intent. The harassing has been directed more at House Speaker Mike Madigan. Blagojevich even filed a lawsuit against Madigan for not convening the sessions at the precise time Blagojevich said they should be called to order.

Most of the special sessions have been called with dim prospects of action being taken and little direction from the governor -- other than a directive to show up.

It's no wonder that many lawmakers started skipping recent special sessions on the budget when there was no budget agreement on the table.

(Decatur) Herald & Review. No. 25.