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**School Tax Plan Sends Pols Running for Cover**

By Dave McKinney and Rosalind Rossi

Staff reporters

SPRINGFIELD-Even before he announced it Thursday, Gov. Edgar's new school funding plan triggered angry phone calls from taxpayers and threw state lawmakers into an election-year panic.

The governor endorsed a task force's recommendation to even school spending across the state by raising state taxes by $ 1.9 billion and cutting property taxes by $ 1.5 billion.

The task force, headed by former University of Illinois President Stanley O. Ikenberry, recommended that lawmakers place a constitutional amendment on the ballot calling for:

-A "substantial" property tax reduction "in the aggregate" across the state.

-The establishment, every two years, of a "per pupil foundation level" of education funding. The report estimated the 1995 foundation level at $ 4,225.

-The state to bankroll "at least half" of the foundation level.

The task force suggested the $ 1.9 billion in state revenues to fund the plan could come from such sources as an income tax hike, an expansion of sales taxes and bureaucratic cutbacks. Edgar conceded an income tax hike "would have to be the major source" of funding, but said he expected the final solution to be a tax mix.

State income taxes would have to be raised from 3 percent to 4 percent to raise $ 1.9 billion.

Edgar planned a joint address to both chambers of the Legislature today to sell lawmakers on the idea of approving the amendment by May 5 so it can be put on the November ballot.

Edgar said the proposal "lets the people decide" how education should be funded.

"If we don't put a constitutional amendment on the ballot in the next six weeks, we will be looking at this issue in the 21st century," Edgar said.

But the idea of raising taxes by $ 400 million left many lawmakers cold, particularly those facing tough races in the fall.

"If you put it on (the ballot), it would be the whole issue for the whole campaign," said Senate President James "Pate" Philip (R-Wood Dale). "That makes some members nervous because it will be perceived as a tax increase."

Philip said that suburban lawmakers fielded dozens of phone calls Thursday morning, based on early reports about the plan. Said Philip: "The phone calls have been very negative in the suburban area."

House Speaker Lee A. Daniels (R-Elmhurst), an Edgar ally, declined to comment. Daniels already has begun to focus on retaining the Republicans' six-seat majority in the House this fall.

"This is the kind of vote that could cause Republicans to lose the majority in both chambers, and it's the kind of vote that caused Bob Kustra to lose to Al Salvi (in Tuesday's GOP Senate primary)," said State Sen. Peter Fitzgerald (R-Inverness).

House Minority Leader Michael J. Madigan (D-Chicago) predicted opposition from within the Republican party would make the bill dead on arrival.

"I think Edgar's own people, probably led by Salvi, will kill this," Madigan said.