

March 22, 2012 Thursday

House votes to yank scholarships

By Dave McKinney and Andrew Maloney

Staff reporters

SPRINGFIELD-The Illinois House moved Wednesday to strip state lawmakers of the perk that allows each of them to award college tuition waivers - a savings of thousands of dollars - to whomever they want under a program that has been repeatedly abused.

By a 79-25 vote, with two members voting present, the House sent HB3810 to the Illinois Senate, marking the second time since 2010 the House has voted to abolish legislative scholarships.

Rep. Fred Crespo said part of the reason the bill passed the House with a healthy margin was because of reports by the Sun-Times and Better Government Association detailing how lawmakers routinely award the waivers to Illinois' public universities to children of friends, family or campaign donors and to students who live outside their districts.

"It really burns me when I hear these reports that we have the most corrupt city in the country and one of the most corrupt states," Crespo (D-Hoffman Estates) said. "People look at this and it's beginning to look more and more like a program that you maneuver to help people you like."

But opponents of ending the program, including Rep. Monique Davis (D-Chicago), said the scholarships have been abused by only a few lawmakers and should be preserved so needy students can benefit.

"We have two governors serving time for corruption. We have not eliminated the governor's office," she said.

The bill faces an uncertain fate in the Senate.