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**The rich get richer;**

**'Big guys are partying' after spring session**

BYLINE: BY DAVE MCKINNEY AND FRAN SPIELMAN

By Dave McKinney and Fran Spielman

Staff reporters

SPRINGFIELD-Parochial school parents and HMO users got a cut of the pie during this spring's legislative session -- but "rich guys" seemed to have secured a spot at the head of the table.

"I would say it's been the session of the millionaires, and a little bit for others," said Sen. Miguel del Valle (D-Chicago).

"The big guys are partying, and the rest of us are going to have to pay for the party," said Jim Howard, executive director of Illinois Common Cause, a government watchdog group. That theme of the fat getting fatter is an undeniable part of a session that proved wildly successful for Gov. Ryan, who pushed through his $ 12 billion Illinois FIRST program, tuition tax credits, tougher gun penalties, HMO reforms and new livestock regulations.

Ryan, however, insisted, "I think there are a lot of things there for people who aren't millionaires."

Yet, road contractors, racetrack owners, riverboat investors and wealthy soda and liquor distributors all figure to profit after using their political clout to muscle through an array of legislation.

Ryan's $ 12 billion public works program figures to be a boon for the construction industry and bond houses as the state's largest borrowing program takes off during the next five years.

A gambling package passed last week could mean a windfall for Arlington International Racecourse owner Richard Duchossois and the community of Rosemont Mayor Donald Stephens, who spent over a week at the Capitol to lobby for the bill.

That legislation also could mean big dividends for such riverboat investors as Amalgamated Bank Chairman Eugene Heytow and former Waste Management Inc. executive Donald Flynn, major stockholders in the dormant Silver Eagle license that soon could be headed for Rosemont.

And wealthy beverage distributors Harry Crisp, of Marion, and William Wirtz, owner of the Blackhawks, arguably improved their financial futures with legislation making it more difficult for wholesalers to yank product lines from their companies.

Mayor Daley on Friday shifted the focus from individuals who may have profited this spring to what Ryan's Illinois FIRST plan will mean for Chicago's schools, mass transit and highways.

When asked whether a lot of people wouldn't wind up rich as a result of this spring's legislative session, Daley replied: "Ask them. I don't know anything. I don't know about them. I'm just looking at education, roads and bridges, mass transit and community projects. This is very important for Chicago."

For Chicago, Illinois FIRST also will include a half-million dollars for reforestation because of Asian long-horned beetle infestation, $ 1.5 million for Bronzeville Children's Museum and $ 500,000 to beef up security at O'Hare.

In the suburbs, $ 750,000 was allocated for a DuPage County veterans memorial, $ 1 million for a performing arts facility in Evanston and $ 100,000 for restoring Ernest Hemingway's Oak Park birthplace.

In a twist of irony for Chicago's first family, the mayor's brother, U.S. Commerce Secretary William Daley, could have been among the investors in the Silver Eagle casino, which could soon be transformed from a riverboat industry doormat to the most profitable gambling venue in the state.

In the late 1980s, when William Daley was president of Amalgamated Bank, he was offered a chance by Heytow to invest in the Silver Eagle. But he steered clear to avoid any conflict of interest that might harm Richard M. Daley's political career.

"The story of my life," William Daley joked after the gambling legislation passed. "Oh, man, I'd be very wealthy. I wonder if it's still open at the same price."

Some area gaming observers are predicting that the new casino will be the busiest in Illinois. In 1998, the Grand Victoria in Elgin was the state's top-grossing casino, with more than $ 243.6 million in revenue.

House Speaker Michael Madigan (D-Chicago) also deflected any questions about whether the session did more for the rich than the middle class or poor.

"Certain people who have done fairly well in life came to the General Assembly advancing legislation, and they were successful," Madigan said. "But they're citizens of the state, too."

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