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Madigan pushes look at state-owned poker

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State lawmakers want to look at whether state government should get into the video poker ownership business.

House Speaker Michael Madigan, D-Chicago, today filed House Resolution 736. It calls for the auditor general to survey how other governments run their video poker systems to see the feasibility of state government owning and operating the machines.

Under the resolution, Auditor General Bill Holland would have 150 days to complete the survey and submit his findings to lawmakers and Gov. Pat Quinn.

The resolution could be voted on later today. If it's approved now, the results would be due back in mid-spring.

Lawmakers earlier this year approved legalizing video poker to help pay for a major construction program. But since then, several snags have popped up.

Local governments throughout the state have been opting out of having the machines in their areas, potentially creating a money shortfall later on. The Gaming Board has said it will take months to get licenses for private operators approved and get the machines operating and producing the tax revenue expected to help pay for the construction program.

Madigan spokesman Steve Brown said Oregon has state-owned video poker machines and Holland can look at other jurisdictions that might have that setup. Brown said the idea is to make the entire system for licensing and operating machines smoother than what's in current state law.

"We want to see if that is a logical way to proceed with video gambling," Brown said.

He said he does not believe state-owned video poker machines were considered when legalization was approved in the spring.