



State should quit playing games with legal bill

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The governor might be able to ignore the General Assembly. The state may be able to shrug off prompt payment of bills from Medicaid providers.

But neither Gov. Rod Blagojevich nor any other state officials can ignore federal judges and the Constitution - at least, not for long.

So the governor should hurry up and find a way to pay the more than half a million dollars in legal fees a federal judge ordered the state to pay more than three months ago after striking down an attempt to regulate violent and sexually-explicit video games.

The state should pay before the bill climbs much higher and a federal judge intervenes.

The law was tossed out last December. It had been scheduled to take effect Jan. 1 of this year. The state was ordered to pay more than \$510,000 in legal fees in August. The state appealed the ruling on sexual content and lost that, too.

Now the law firm that represented the video-game industry is asking the federal court to give the state a deadline to pay up.

The governor and attorney general have been passing the buck over who must find the money to pay it, but the governor should have the primary responsibility.

The Legislature isn't blameless.

Lawmakers voted overwhelmingly for the measure in May 2005, approving it 52-5 in the Senate and 106-6 in the House. All Pantagraph-area lawmakers voted for the bill.

Perhaps those who were so eager to vote in favor of this troubled measure should give up their "legislative initiatives" to pay for the legal judgment.

Even as lawmakers voted in favor, several acknowledged the law had constitutional problems.

That was obvious, since nearly identical laws already had been struck down in other states.

But Illinois proceeded, despite the highly accurate warning from state Sen. John Cullerton, D-Chicago - one of the five "no" votes - that the law would be found unconstitutional and the state would be stuck with a big legal bill from its opponents.

Many may have had a genuine desire to protect minors from violent and sexually explicit video games. Others seemed at least equally concerned about their political careers.

"I know if I vote against this bill, it could end up on a mail piece that I'm somehow for violent and crazy video games," state Sen. Mike Jacobs, D-East Moline, said at the time.

It's too bad lawmakers weren't more worried about campaign mail saying they wasted taxpayers' money by voting for an obviously unconstitutional law.

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