

Senate approves legislation that targets hatemongers

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The Illinois Senate on Tuesday approved a measure that would allow prosecution of leaders who inspire others to commit hate crimes.

The measure was inspired by the 1999 shooting spree of Benjamin Smith, who prosecutors said was motivated to kill blacks, Asians and Jews by self-styled white supremacist leader Matthew Hale .

"I think we've seen a proliferation of hate crimes," said Sen. Ira Silverstein (D-Chicago), who sponsored the bill in the Senate. "And we have to make them aware if they plot or want to cause harm, they'll be held accountable."

The measure now goes to the House for consideration, where supporters expect it to pass.

Later, on a 47-7 vote, the Senate sent a House measure to Ryan that would block a plan to privatize food and commissary services in state prisons. Ryan has called for the privatization of these services in the state prison system in an attempt to save money during the current budget crisis.

The bill would prohibit the state from entering into contracts with private food service companies that cater to prisons, a move expected to eliminate thousands of state jobs.

Sen. Carl Hawkinson (R-Galesburg), who championed the bill in the Senate, said he anticipates a fight between Ryan and Democratic House lawmakers opposed to the layoffs.

"He's opposed to [the bill], so I will expect a veto," Hawkinson, the GOP nominee for lieutenant governor, said of the governor.

Ryan spokesman Dennis Culloton said a veto was "possible."

Meanwhile, the governor began meeting with legislative leaders in an attempt to find some common ground on a budget solution. Ryan and lawmakers are trying to figure out if they can agree to cut spending or raise taxes or fees to help cover a \$1.4 billion shortfall.

Also sent to Ryan was a measure voiding tax breaks for participating in Illinois college savings programs if contributions are rolled over from similar programs in other states.

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