

\$21 million Centerpoint bill passed

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By [CINDY WOJDYLA CAIN](mailto:ccain@scn1.com) ccain@scn1.com

A bill that could generate \$21 million for the Centerpoint North intermodal project in Joliet was signed into law Friday by Gov. Pat Quinn.

The Intermodal Facilities Promotion Act, which was sponsored by state Sen. A.J. Wilhelmi, allows state taxes withheld from future Joliet intermodal employees to be used for road and rail infrastructure improvements at the facility.

"It's a very creative approach to a public-private partnership," the Joliet Democrat said.

The amount of money that can be put into the intermodal infrastructure fund is capped at \$3 million a year for seven years, Wilhelmi explained. The bill was needed to make sure the Centerpoint Properties project went forward, he added.

"There was a fear this project would stall given the economy," he said.

Discussions about the need for such a bill started about nine months ago and included representatives from Centerpoint, the Will County Center for Economic Development, the Will-Grundy Building Trades and the Will County Governmental League, Wilhelmi said.

"It was embraced by everyone," Wilhelmi said of the legislation.

Wilhelmi said the bill, which goes into effect immediately, will help Centerpoint get its facility built and it will help provide thousands of jobs in a city where unemployment reached 14.3 percent in June. The facility is expected to create 6,000 construction jobs and 9,000 permanent jobs at full build out.

"Really, this is about economic development and jobs," he said. "Now more than ever we need creative approaches for economic development and job creation."

The bill also will add tax revenue to state coffers from the jobs created at the intermodal, which is a facility where cargo containers are switched from one mode of transportation to another.

"Once that intermodal is built, the state will reap about \$10 million a year in revenue," Wilhelmi said.

A ground breaking for the 3,300-acre intermodal, which will be located south of Laraway Road and west of Route 53, is scheduled for Sept. 3. Gov. Quinn is expected to attend, along with U.S. Rep. Debbie Halvorson, D-Crete; state Rep. Careen Gordon, D-Coal City, who is a bill co-sponsor; and local officials, Wilhelmi said.

"This project will also solidify our region's position as the distribution hub of North America," Centerpoint CEO Michael M. Mullen said in a press release issued by Wilhelmi's office.

Wilhelmi said getting the bill passed is one of the highlights of his 4-½-year-career in the Senate. The measure was approved unanimously in both chambers. And there was applause at the end of the bill debate session.

"It was one of those moments I won't forget," he said. "Those are the moments you remember and remind you why you're there."

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