

## **Gambling lobbyists want slots in bars**

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INDIANAPOLIS - A lobbying group will approach state senators today with a proposal: As long as they are considering allowing slot machines at horse tracks, then bars, taverns and fraternal clubs ought to be allowed to get in on the action, too.

The Indiana Licensed Beverage Association today will be lobbying state senators to amend House Bill 1835, already before the Senate, concerning slots-at-tracks.

It wants to allow electronic gaming devices at establishments that serve alcohol. Such a change would curtail underground illegal gambling while allowing state and local governments to reap hundreds of millions in new gaming revenue, said Brad Klopfenstein, executive director of the beverage association, which represents about 700 establishments.

Gaming devices would be linked electronically with the state, as lottery purchases are now, to track play and payouts, he said.

"Something more along the lines of an ATM machine," Klopfenstein said.

For-profit establishments that sell alcohol by the drink would be allowed to have up to five machines each under the proposal. Nonprofits, such as fraternal lodges and VFW posts, could have up to 10. After the establishments kept their cut, local governments would keep a third of the gambling revenue and the state two thirds, Klopfenstein said. He estimated the machines could generate \$300 million in tax revenue.

"There seems to be a lot of \$200 million to \$300 million proposals that are unfunded on the table. We've got a revenue source to fund one of your projects; use it if you will," Klopfenstein said.

The association is meeting with key senators today, just as the Senate Tax and Fiscal Policy Committee is hearing House Bill 1835. That legislation, already approved in the Indiana House, would allow Indiana's two pari-mutuel horse

tracks, in Shelbyville, Ind., and Anderson, Ind., to install up to 2,500 slot machines each. The struggling horse track industry has argued it needs the slot-machine revenue to remain afloat.

Rep. Trent Van Haaften, D-Mount Vernon, authored the slots-at-tracks bill in the House, but is not enthusiastic about an attempt to amend it to allow slots in bars.

"The underlying purpose of the horse track was gaming. The underlying purpose of opening a bar or tavern or restaurant, anything like that, is not gaming," Van Haaften said. "There's some significant philosophical differences there from a public policy standpoint."

One senator, Vaneta Becker, R-Evansville, said Monday she opposes both the beverage association's proposed amendment and the underlying slots-at-tracks bill.

"I think it's detrimental to our casino (Aztec), for one thing," Becker said. "I think we've gone far enough in the arena, if not too far, with gaming."

The Casino Association of Indiana, the lobbying group for 10 of the state's 11 riverboat casinos, including Aztec, has taken no position on the amendment, said its executive director, Michael Smith.

But the Indiana Coalition Against Legalized Gambling strongly opposes both bill and amendment. Such legislation would amount to acceptance of land-based casinos, coalition founder John Wolf said.

"They won't stop until they've got slots in every restaurant and every establishment in the state; and they keep at it," Wolf said. "We have to decide if we really want to be a Las Vegas state or an Atlantic City state, because that's the way it's going."

Gambling to excess while under the influence of alcohol is another concern if taverns and bars can operate gambling machines.

"I would think that it might not be a good idea, because if people have been imbibing too much, they may not be too thoughtful in their deliberations - which could jeopardize their family and their income," Becker said.

Van Haaften does not think the Senate will approve the beverage association's amendment. "When you get into these things, there are lines you have to draw, and there is going to be somebody just on the other side of that line that's going to make an argument moving the line in the sand," he said. "That's what we have."