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## EDITORIAL

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### Legalize video gambling? It's worth debate

Many people who play video poker might want more than amusement for their quarters, but they don't become rich, any more than many people who play the lottery.

One form of gambling has the player matching wits against a machine. The other lets players daydream what it would be like to be rich. The former is illegal, usually tucked in the corner of bars and clubs, while the latter is advertised heavily and is available at almost every gas station and convenience store in Indiana.

Proposals to legalize video gambling in Indiana, the most recent from state Sen. Robert Meeks and Sen. Dan Moses, have merit.

We're not ready to give the proposal our whole-hearted support. We don't want to see the state using video gambling, not the steadiest source of revenue, as a crutch. And some gamblers don't know when to stop, and it can hurt their families' finances.

But whether to legalize video gambling is worthy of debate and discussion.

The group holding meetings across the state, the Indiana Licensed Beverage Association, has some concerns. If the machines are legalized, a bar owner or nonprofit serving alcohol could make money from the machines, but they also fear a raid.

Regardless of who is sponsoring the discussion, the central question remains: Is it better to put public safety manpower into raiding bars, night clubs and nonprofit groups or is it better to regulate the use of the machines and tax the revenue?

Hoosiers decided the moral questions about gambling in 1988, when they approved a lottery referendum by a 60 percent majority.

Other legalized forms of gambling, including casinos, have followed since then, and objections to expanding video gambling in Indiana are valid.

But how far should the state go to protect people from their own reckless behavior? Other things that are legal, regulated and taxed, such as health or finances -- such as cigarettes and alcohol -- are legal, regulated and taxed, since it would be difficult to ban them.

And we have a hard time seeing the difference between video gambling and gambling on the lottery, where tickets and the office pools for NCAA men's basketball. We wonder how much worse video poker is than eating arcade games at shopping malls.

As long as the potential for profit outweighs the risk of a raid, video gambling machines will continue to cast long shadows. If they are made legal, they should be taxed, with a portion of the revenue committed to gambling addiction treatment.

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