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THE INDIANA LEGISLATURE

## Effort to legalize video gambling is dropped

Rep. Moses says idea needs to be studied

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The Courier-Journal

INDIANAPOLIS -- A state lawmaker who favors legalizing and regulating the video gambling machines now common in bars and social clubs has decided against filing legislation to make that change.

Rep. Win Moses, D-Fort Wayne, said yesterday that he instead is seeking to create a committee to study the issue this summer and consider such matters as how much to tax the machines and how many should be allowed in a single location and statewide.

"It's very clear this is almost too complex at this time to write a single bill without more study," Moses said.

Brad Klopfenstein, executive director of the Indiana Licensed Beverage Association, called Moses' move a "hiccup" in the group's effort to legalize the machines, which many of its members rely on to make ends meet. But he said he was not disheartened.

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"We've known for a while that our primary supporters are in the Senate," Klopfenstein said. "And if any gambling legislation moves, we'll be part of the discussion."

The decision leaves the General Assembly without a bill to legalize the machines, although other gambling measures have been proposed.

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Bob Meeks, R-LaGrange, said last month that he planned to write video-gambling legislation, but he has been recovering from surgery and has not been able to file bills.

Yesterday, Senate President Pro Tem David Long, R-Fort Wayne, said Meeks might be back in time to file a bill before tomorrow's deadline or the measure could be amended into a gambling-related House bill later in the session.

A House committee is expected to have a hearing in the coming weeks on legislation that would legalize slot machines at Indiana racetracks.

House Speaker Pat Bauer, D-South Bend, said that bill would preserve the "destination" gambling that lawmakers have already established with riverboat casinos.

Bauer dislikes the idea of legalizing the video-gambling machines -- which often are called Cherry Masters, after the name of one of the games -- because he said it would create mini-casinos on "almost every block."

Moses said Bauer's concern about the video-gambling proposal influenced his decision not to offer it.

Don Marquardt, president of the licensed beverage association, said bars and restaurants "don't want to be mini-casinos" but simply want to add video machines to their existing entertainment options.



State Rep. Win Moses said yesterday that legalizing video-gambling machines is too complicated to settle the issue this session. (By Lesley Stedman Weidenbener, The Courier-Journal)

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"This is by far the weakest argument, but for some reason the most widely used and what seems to be the most effective for those against our legislation," Marquardt said in a letter responding to Moses' announcement. "We provide many forms of entertainment to attract customers. Pool tables, dart boards, juke boxes, pinball, etc. are commonly found in our establishments."

But Moses said he was frustrated by the inability of supporters in the alcohol industry to reach compromises with legislators who support the ideas. The most complicated issues, Moses said, include whether the state or private entities would own the machines and how to limit their number.


Yesterday, Klopfenstein said that he believed his organization had reached a compromise with Moses about how the legalization would be structured and that bar owners remained flexible about other issues.

He said the compromise included permitting five machines for every for-profit bar or restaurant with an alcohol license and 10 machines each for social, service or veterans clubs with alcohol licenses. He said the tax rate would be 25 percent to 30 percent and produce as much as \$300 million in annual revenue for the state.

Long said yesterday that he hopes lawmakers do something about the machines this year -- either legalize and regulate them or pass stronger enforcement laws to eliminate them.

"I feel strongly something needs to happen this year and the status quo is not acceptable," Long said. "What that means and how it shapes up in legislation ... I can't say."

Reporter Lesley Stedman Weidenbener can be reached at (317) 444-2780.

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