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By Jim Witt

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With the Legislature in session, the question of legalizing casino gambling returned like clockwork.

With the lottery, bingo and betting on the horses and dogs all legal, why doesn't Texas allow casinos or at least slot machines? After all, supporters say, look at all the money flowing out of state to our neighbors in New Mexico, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana? We're building their roads and schools for them. Do a quick license plate check at WinStar near Gainesville, Okla. It's the second-biggest casino in North America, and you'll find it's 90 percent Texan (even the workers). The same goes for Shreveport (except for the workers). Nobody enjoys a casino more than I do; my vacations usually involve a visit to a casino at some point. A few hours at a blackjack table or the slots are entertainment to me. During the 30 years I've been visiting casinos, I figure I'm at least a little bit ahead. My wife and I have won several jackpots ranging from \$1,500 to \$10,000. I'm an Elvis fan and once won \$2,500 playing quarters at an Elvis-themed slot machine in Biloxi, Miss. So you'd think I'd be on the side of legalizing casinos in Texas. But I'm not. It's not that I fear having a casino nearby will be too tempting, and that I'll go more often. It's just that I look forward to doing it a few times a year, and having it too close will make it less special. I'm a golfer, too, and it's kind of the way I feel about that. When I retire, being able to play golf any time I want will make it less fun. Part of the enjoyment of golf is looking forward to it. And very few casinos other than "destination" ones in places like Las Vegas or the Bahamas are fun. They are usually pretty depressing. If you've been to Shreveport, you know it's pretty much like Atlantic City, only without the ocean. Shreveport's casinos haven't attracted other development and have ruined business for other restaurants and entertainment venues in the city because they can't compete. The casinos can use artificially low prices at their nongambling attractions because they make it up at the tables and slot machines. I do believe, however, that the issue of casino gambling should be put before Texas voters, like the lottery and horse-racing bills were. But legalizing casino gambling in Texas is a high fence to jump, and with the economy turning around, I don't see it happening. It takes voters approving a constitutional amendment, but first, two-thirds of the Legislature has to agree to put something on the ballot. A majority in the Senate and House will not take that chance absent some special reason that I don't see right now. As for casino supporters who point to all the money from Texas gamblers going to other states, wouldn't that same argument apply to marijuana? After all, Colorado just legalized the consumption of pot. All our Texas smokers are going to be traveling up there pretty soon to spend their money! Gamblers spent \$33 billion in U.S. casinos last year, while estimates are that if marijuana were taxed it would raise \$31 billion. You've got to figure legalizing marijuana here would raise as much for the state as legalizing casinos, don't you? Jim Witt is executive editor of the Star-Telegram. 817-390-7704

## I like casino gambling, but not so much in Texas | Other voices

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