

Written by Administrator
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INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — A shake-up of Indiana’s gambling laws being debated could see two new casinos being built and allow legalizing sports betting to start as early as next year.

The proposal cleared a state Senate committee last week and comes as Indiana’s 13 casinos have largely seen years of declining revenue amid [increased competition](#) from surrounding states and tribal casinos.

The plan centers on moving Gary’s two riverboat casinos off Lake Michigan, with one going to an on-land site elsewhere in Gary and the other possibly moving to Terre Haute. Lots of debate could still come as some other casinos worry the moves will hurt their business and the plan will face questions among legislators of whether it is an expansion of gambling.

Here’s a look at some of the issues involved:

POSSIBLE BUMPS AHEAD

So many gambling-related issues are [wrapped up in the bill](#) that Senate Public Policy Committee Chairman Ron Alting of Lafayette calls it the biggest overhaul since the Legislature voted in 1993 to allow riverboat casinos on Lake Michigan and the Ohio River.

Each casino company and their host cities are looking at how the proposed changes could impact their bottom lines. So even though the Senate committee unanimously endorsed the bill, plenty of changes could come before the legislative session ends in late April. Less complicated casino proposals have previously been scuttled or taken multiple years to win approval.

Republican House Speaker Brian Bosma critiques the plan as “a very large expansion of gaming.”

The state gets big paydays from all the casinos, but that impact has been shrinking. Casino taxes made up nearly \$680 million, or about 5.5 percent, of the state revenue during the 2010 budget year, according to state figures. That revenue dropped to \$442 million last year, for about 2.8 percent of state revenue.

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Bill sponsor Republican Sen. Mark Messmer of Jasper says the plan aims to help the casinos be more competitive and increase state revenue. “With no additional licenses and no additional table games, I don’t know how you can call it an expansion of gaming,” he said.

GARY CASINO SHUFFLE

The proposal would allow the company that’s buying the two Majestic Star Casino boats in Gary build a new on-land casino in the city and set up a process for shifting the second boat’s casino license to Terre Haute.

The [company buying the Gary riverboats](#) is Spectacle Entertainment. It is led by former executives of Centaur Gaming, which sold Indiana’s two horse track casinos in Anderson and Shelbyville to Las Vegas-based Caesars Entertainment Corp. last year for \$1.7 billion.

Spectacle says it’s planning a \$300 million project building a new casino and 200-room hotel along Interstate 80-94 in Gary. John Keeler, Spectacle’s general counsel, told the Senate committee that it expected to add about 400 jobs to Majestic Star’s 800 employees if the new casino is built.

Gary officials say the casino move would also allow development of a cargo hub, with a Lake Michigan port and nearby railroads and highways to attract shipping business now going through Chicago.

TERRE HAUTE PLAN

Terre Haute and Vigo County (total population about 110,000) is the choice for a new casino site over much larger locations without casinos — including Indianapolis (population 950,000) and Fort Wayne’s Allen County (370,000) — simply because leaders there are asking for it and potential rival cities have shown little interest.

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A Spectacle co-owner is from Terre Haute and the company touts a casino project of at least \$100 million that would have 300 to 400 workers.

At least one other casino operator in the state wants a chance to grab the Terre Haute action, so the proposal allows companies to submit proposals for the new casino to the state gaming commission. Full House Resorts, which owns the riverboat in southeastern Indiana's Rising Sun, has sought permission for the last several years to expand operations elsewhere in the state.

Messmer, the casino bill sponsor, says Terre Haute is far enough from other Indiana casinos that it won't hurt them much while potentially attracting gamblers from eastern and central Illinois as none of that state's casinos are nearby.

HORSE TRACK CASINOS

Caesars Entertainment, which owns the Hammond casino and another just across the Ohio River from Louisville, Kentucky, gets a boost from the plan for the two horse track casinos near Indianapolis that it bought last year.

The bill would allow those two casinos to offer table games with live dealers beginning later this year. Current law doesn't let them do so until 2021.

Those casinos can now only offer electronic games and expect live dealers will attract more gamblers.

SPORTS BETTING

The proposal would allow the state's casinos to start sports betting in person or online starting in 2020 after receiving approval from the Indiana Gaming Commission. Wagers could be made on professional or collegiate sporting events, but not on high school or youth games. Those

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placing bets would have to be 21.

The step comes after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled last May that all states are free to legalize sports betting. Eight states currently accept bets with many more expected to follow suit.

No big state tax revenue boon is anticipated from sports gambling, as other [states have seen modest results](#)

Bill co-sponsor Sen. Jon Ford of Terre Haute says tax revenue estimates range from \$3 million to \$18 million a year, but sports betting will be an important marketing tool for Indiana's casinos.

Officials from the Indianapolis Colts and Indianapolis Motor Speedway were among those professional sports representatives backing the proposal.

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