

Smaller Nev. casinos say online poker will hurt - Washington Post

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Critics raised the concerns Wednesday at the Nevada Governor's Conference on Tourism, saying the only benefits would be to large corporate-owned casino companies in Las Vegas likely to secure the limited licenses.

"It may be the future ... but it is hard to regulate and I don't think it is good for Nevada," said Bill Hughes, marketing director of Peppermill Resort Spa Casino

in Reno.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., began pushing efforts last week to allow online poker games but restrict initial licenses to casinos and racetrack operators that have been in businesses at least five years.

Jonathan Halkyard, senior vice president and chief financial officer for Caesars Entertainment Corp., said he sees support in Congress for legalizing online poker but "not Internet gaming."

"There already is a large illegal online poker business in the United States," he said Wednesday during a panel at the conference with Hughes and other critics of online poker.

"We think legalizing online poker makes a lot of sense," said Halkyard, whose company until recently was called [Harrah's Entertainment Inc.](#) It owns or manages 52 casinos in 12 U.S. states and six other countries with revenue of \$8.9 billion in 2009.

Lt. Gov. Brian Krolicki said he thinks most casino operations in the state support legalizing online poker "as a practical move forward, not an aggressive move."

Krolicki, who oversees the state's tourism efforts, said in an interview he recognized the concerns that online poker could lead to an expansion of gambling on the Internet.

"Anything is a slippery slope," he told The Associated Press. "But I think there's also a reality

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check here - these things are happening already today."

Ryan Sheltra, general manager of the Bonanza Casino in Reno, said legalizing poker will "open Pandora's box" to other online gambling and "to think otherwise is ridiculous."

"It's like a Gold Rush for the stockholders of the international corporate casinos based on the Las Vegas Strip, but the other 16 counties in Nevada will not get to cash in on any of it," Sheltra told the AP.

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