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A casino 14 miles from the White House?

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ANNAPOLIS — *Casino gambling coming to Prince George's under Senate bill*

Prince George's County would be the first area in Maryland to offer casino games such as blackjack, poker and baccarat, under legislation being pushed by the state Senate president.

Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr., D-Prince George's and Calvert counties, has proposed adding gambling to Rosecroft Raceway with a bill that would create a commercial license for a casino at the location.



(photos.com)

The project would cost the state \$51 million in renovations to the Fort Washington harness-racing track and \$30 million to build a casino, according to study by the Innovation Group, a leisure and hospitality consulting firm.

"We're not talking about a casino, we're just talking about a card game," Miller, whose family built Rosecroft in the 1940s, told the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee on Thursday. "We should have moved forward on this six years ago. Everybody here knows that, and we didn't for the wrong reasons," he said.

Rosecroft is about a mile from the National Harbor complex and 14 miles from the White House.

Table games, currently illegal in Maryland, would bring nearly \$258 million in gross revenue in the first year, according to the study.

Gambling payout

» Gross revenue

"Frankly I do not support slots," said Sen. C. Anthony Muse, D-Prince George's, who is co-sponsoring the bill with Miller. "But people have spoken overwhelmingly in Prince George's County and -- to the extent of 62 percent -- have said gaming of some sort is how we choose to spend

2012: \$257 million
2013: \$277 million
2014: \$284 million

our entertainment dollars."

Maryland residents approved 15,000 slot machines at five sites in 2007, with lawmakers estimating at least \$600 million in revenue annually. None of the slots sites has opened, and only three of the five locations have been licensed. No slot locations are in Prince George's because of opposition from county lawmakers.

Muse said casino games would preserve 200 jobs -- as well as add 400 positions -- to the bankrupt track in his district. The Innovation Group estimated table games would bring as many as 1,500 jobs to the area.

"As all of our neighboring states begin to implement cards and table games, we shouldn't be behind the learning curve again," Muse said. "By waiting we are only putting more people out of work and falling further behind our neighboring states."

West Virginia and Pennsylvania are expanding their slots programs to include table games, and Delaware is well on its way, with approval from its legislature.

Former Rosecroft owner Mark Vogel, who wants to buy back the raceway, said Rosecroft generated nearly \$400,000 a night in its 1980s heyday.

"Is that what we have to look forward to at Rosecroft?" asked committee Chairman Ulysses Currie, D-Prince George's, adding that the state could use the revenue.

Sen. Donald F. Munson, R-Washington County, suggested expanding Miller's bill to allow for more licenses elsewhere.

"If we can do it in Prince George's County, why not in the rest of state?"

Prince George's County Executive Jack B. Johnson, who has opposed gambling in the county, is reviewing the bill, said spokesman John E. Erzen.

House Speaker Michael Busch is against any expansion of gambling until the state gets its slots program running, said spokeswoman Alexandra Hughes.

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2015: \$291 million

» Costs

Construction/renovation: \$51 million

Casino: \$30 million

Restaurants: \$5 million

Retail: \$280,000

Entertainment: \$1.4 million

Contingency of 10%: \$3.7 million

Pre-opening: \$2.2 million

Design: \$1.5 million

Source: Innovation Group

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