

# Dingell Loses Battle with Conyers on Gambling Bill

The Hill

By Susan Crabtree

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Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.) suffered a stinging defeat Wednesday when an Indian gambling bill he's been pushing for more than a decade was handily defeated in a lopsided vote of 121-298.

The floor fight pitted Dingell, the longest-serving member of the House, against fellow Michigan Democrat John Conyers Jr., its second-longest serving member. Dingell, the chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, is serving his 25th House term, while House Judiciary Committee Chairman Conyers is in his 22nd.

Dingell's bill would have settled a century-old land dispute between two tribes and paved the way for them to build casinos in cash-strapped Michigan districts. Detroit-area lawmakers led by Conyers argued the land claims by the two tribes were illegitimate and would undermine the revenues of existing gambling operations that are a major source of tax revenue for the city.

Opponents argued that the bill would have designated land to the tribes 350 miles away from their reservations, setting a congressional precedent that could have led to dozens of other actions by tribes interested in opening up casinos.

This vote marked the first time Democratic leaders dealt with the contentious issue of Indian gambling since the fall of Jack Abramoff, whose corrupt lobbying on the issue helped propel Democrats to power in 2006. Abramoff spent years fighting efforts similar to Dingell's as a lobbyist for the Saginaw Chippewa Michigan tribe, which opposed the bill.

Debate before the vote was intense, with Dingell railing against the tactics of his opponents. "If you're concerned about voting with Jack Abramoff, the Abramoff vote is a 'no' vote," he bellowed.

Conyers was equally aggressive. At one point, he turned to the back of the room and yelled at one member making comments to "sit down and shut up!"

Before the vote, Conyers appeared confident his furious whipping against the measure would lead to its failure.

"When they tell you it's not about casinos, it's about casinos," he quipped.

Democrats were divided, with 96 voting with Dingell in favor of the bill, and 131 siding with Conyers in voting no. Only 25 Republicans voted in favor of the measure.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) didn't vote, while Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (Md.) and Democratic Caucus Chairman Rahm Emmanuel (Ill.) voted against it.

Eighteen members of the Energy and Commerce Committee voted with Dingell, their chairman, including ranking member Rep. Joe Barton (R-Texas) and Reps. Jane Harman (D-Calif.), Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.) and Ralph Hall (R-Texas).

The issue divided the Congressional Black Caucus. Majority Whip James Clyburn (D-S.C.), Ways and Means Committee Chairman Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.) and Reps. Alcee Hastings (D-Fla.), Lacy Clay (D-Mo.) and Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-Ill.) voted with Dingell. Rep. G.K. Butterfield (D-N.C.) changed his vote from no to yes.