

Vote Ahead on Bill for Net Betting

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By TONY BATT

WASHINGTON -- A House panel is scheduled to vote Tuesday on a new bill that would require federal agencies to define unlawful Internet gambling so banks and other financial institutions can comply with the ban against online wagers.

Just introduced late Thursday, the bill calls for the Department of Treasury and the Federal Reserve to consult the U.S. attorney general's office in creating a formal process to make the definition.

The bill is the latest move by Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., the chairman of the House Financial Services Committee, to clear up confusion about how to enforce the ban since President Bush signed it into law in October 2006.

Frank strongly opposes the ban.

Federal officials have told lawmakers they are having trouble enforcing the ban because the law does not clearly define what constitutes illegal gambling over the Internet.

"Chairman Frank is doing the right thing by saying it is unfair to burden U.S. financial service companies with the job of Internet gambling police at a time when their undivided attention ought to be on the economy," said Jeffrey Sandman, a spokesman for the Safe and Secure Internet Gambling Initiative, a coalition of online companies that opposes the ban.

In April, Frank introduced legislation to prevent the Treasury and Federal Reserve from crafting the gaming regulations entirely.

That bill stalled on June 25 after the committee deadlocked on a 32-32 vote.

Frank spokeswoman Heather Wong said the new legislation differs from the previous bill by:

- Permitting a ban on sports betting without a formal rule-making process.
- Condensing the process of defining the ban into a single stage.
- No longer requiring the Treasury Department to compile a list of unlawful Internet gambling businesses.