

BAN TARGETED: House Panel OKs Internet Betting Bill

Measure seeks to define unlawful gambling

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WASHINGTON -- The House Financial Services Committee on Tuesday voted 30-19 to require federal agencies to define unlawful Internet gambling before completing regulations to enforce a ban against it.

The question now is whether the margin of Tuesday's vote will persuade House leaders to schedule a vote on the House floor before Congress adjourns in the next few weeks.

Even if the bill does not pass this year, it is expected to provide momentum to efforts to roll back the Internet gambling ban next year in a new session of Congress.

Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., the committee chairman and an aggressive foe of the 2006 ban on Internet gambling, said he plans to continue efforts to repeal it.

"I still want to change the law. This isn't everything I want," Frank said.

The vote Tuesday could be a rebound for Frank following a defeat in June.

A 32-32 committee vote then stopped an amendment to block the Department of Treasury and the Federal Reserve from finishing the regulations by the end of this year.

Among other things, the bill that passed committee on Tuesday would prohibit sports betting on the Internet by exempting such wagers from the regulation process.

Frank joined Rep. William Lacy Clay, D-Mo., in expressing dismay that the bill still wasn't good enough for the National Football League and other professional sports leagues that opposed it.

"I'm trying to figure out what the difference is between Internet gambling and legal sports books run by all the major casinos in Las Vegas like Caesars, like Tropicana, like all of the others," Clay said.

"I think it's kind of disingenuous on the part of major league sports in this country, and sometimes we should be willing to admit when we, as lawmakers, make a mistake and pass a law that is really unimportant," Clay said, referring to the Internet gambling ban.

The bill also would require the Treasury Department and the Federal Reserve to consult the U.S. attorney general's office in developing a formal process to define unlawful Internet gambling.

Rep. Spencer Bachus of Alabama, the committee's ranking Republican, again led efforts to oppose Frank's bill, calling it "the latest attempt to derail" the Internet gambling ban.

Rep. Dean Heller, R-Nev., was one of seven Republicans who voted for the bill.

Several committee members switched votes they cast in June. Republicans Judy Biggert of Illinois and Christopher Shays of Connecticut voted against the amendment in June but in favor of the new measure.

Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., who voted against the amendment in June, was one of 23 Democrats who voted for Frank's bill on Tuesday.

Two Democrats, Gregory Meeks of New York and David Scott of Georgia, opposed it.