

Debate on state backed sports betting heats up

By Norma Love
Associated Press

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — State sanctioned sports betting would compromise the integrity of games and cast suspicion on players who miss shots and referees who make errors that cost gamblers money, spokesmen for professional basketball and football leagues said Wednesday.

"Legalized, state-supported sports betting will threaten our bedrock, the public's confidence in the integrity of professional football," Jay Moyer, counsel for the National Football League, said at a House Regulated Revenues Committee hearing on legislation to allow the betting.

"When state government gets in the business, we really fear the long term consequences for our sport," he said. "People stop looking at games as games of sport and (look at it) as a betting vehicle."

Moyer warned the committee that should New Hampshire enact legislation allowing a sports betting game similar to one now in existence in Oregon, it

would put pressure on the NFL to take action to protect "the good names of our teams."

Moyer didn't elaborate, but the National Basketball Association filed suit last year to put a halt to the Oregon lottery.

James Wimsatt, executive director of the New Hampshire Sweepstakes Commission, characterized the proposal as "just another game to raise money" similar to the state's other lottery games.

Though the bill would grant authority to develop lotteries for professional football, baseball, basketball and hockey, Wimsatt said he would first copy the Oregon game based on picking winning professional football teams.

He said it would be "practically impossible" to fix the game because bettors must wager on at least four games. Bets would range from \$1 to \$20. He said New Hampshire would follow Oregon's lead and contract with a licensed odds maker to determine the weekly point spreads.

"It would be run with the utmost integrity as have all our games over the last 25 years,"

he said.

Wimsatt estimated that once the game was fully operating, it could bring in \$15 million in revenues, of which \$5 million would go toward education after prizes and administrative costs were paid.

Moyer challenged Wimsatt's revenue estimates as optimistic, saying Oregon, with nearly three times New Hampshire's population, may only realize half its lowest estimate.

Rep. Stephen Bucu, R-Salem, the bill's sponsor, said state earnings would help offset rising property taxes.

"Gambling is not a four-letter word," he said. "Tax, in my opinion, is a four-letter word."

Bucu and Wimsatt argued that billions of dollars already are bet illegally in the country each year. Wimsatt said a sports betting game in New Hampshire would not put bookies out of business, but could attract people who want to bet legally.

Bucu also argued that New Hampshire has relied on gambling revenues from the lottery and horse and dog racing for years and that a sports lottery

game would be an extension of that philosophy.

Though Bucu offered an amendment to limit betting to professional games, Moyer said all sporting events should be viewed in the same light.

"The same reasons apply," he said. Fans would no longer look at the outcome as "the breaks of the game. It's 'the fix was in.'"

Charles Grantham, executive director of the National Basketball Players Association, submitted written testimony that New Hampshire's proposal would put unfair pressure on players.

"When human error leads to point spreads not being covered and the resulting loss of a large payoff, suspicion will inevitably result," he wrote.

Gary Bettman, the NBA's general counsel, the New Hampshire attorney general's office and the state police also testified against the bill.

Maj. Ernest Loomis said criminals could use the game as a way of expanding illegal operations. He said bookies in Oregon are taking the state's betting slips and selling them to their customers for illegal bets, often for higher stakes.

Joseph Carney, an owner of Rockingham Park race track and Seabrook's greyhound track, said the competition could doom racing.

"There's only so many dollars out there," he said. "If you want to kiss the racing industry goodbye, that's your prerogative."

Education advocates support use of lottery funds to help children

(AP)— Backers of early childhood education for Oregon's needy say they support expansion of the program with lottery funds.

Directors of the Head Start programs said the top priority for money allocated would be to make the programs available to more children.

Gov. Neil Goldschmidt on Tuesday proposed expanding the programs by financing them with 30 percent of net lottery revenue.

The governor unveiled his plan at Bend in the first of four "state-of-the-state" speeches he scheduled in Oregon this week.

Head Start programs in Oregon serve about 3,000 children, 3 or 4 years of age, through federal funding and about 900 through money from the state Department of Education.

Goldschmidt said his goal is to make the program available to every eligible child in the state, a number estimated at about 15,000.

The cost of meeting that goal is estimated at about \$35 million a year, the governor's office said.

Goldschmidt said he would ask the 1991 Legislature to send voters a proposed constitutional amendment to allow using lottery proceeds for Head Start.

Olga Talley, director of Head Start programs for Portland public schools, hailed the governor's proposal. She said she would hope to serve all children in the Head Start age group, not just those meeting income guidelines.

State Rep. Jane Cease, D-Portland, said she supported efforts to bolster Head Start but had doubts

about the public's willingness to redirect lottery money from economic development projects.

A constitutional measure passed by voters to authorize the lottery in 1984 requires that 34 percent of the proceeds be used for economic development. Goldschmidt wants to use 30 percent of that amount for Head Start.

Oregon Senate Republican Leader C.T. "Cub" Houck of Salem described himself as a "very ardent supporter of Head Start" but questioned whether spending lottery money on the program was appropriate.

"The question I have is, can you say Head Start is economic development?" Houck said. "It sounds like he is reaching awfully far."

House Speaker Vera Katz, D-Portland, a long-time supporter of Head Start, said she was pleased that "the governor is finally willing to make a commitment" to the program.

She said, however, she was concerned that the public would not support reserving some of the lottery money for Head Start and that it could set off a "real free-for-all" among legislators who have different priorities for using lottery money.

Sen. Wayne Fawbush, D-Hood River, who has been chairman of the committee in charge of distributing lottery money, said he supported the governor's proposal.

Fawbush said the Legislature should use regular tax revenues to fund Head Start if it appeared that voters wouldn't support diverting lottery money from economic development.

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