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## Old gambling bill earns new foe

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By Michael A. Smith

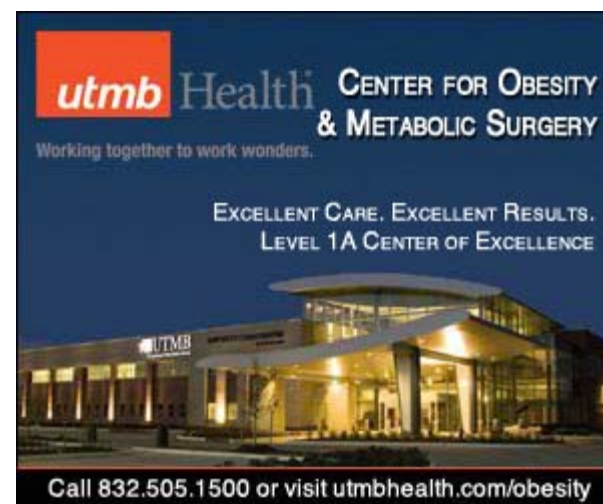
The first bill proposing the limited legalization of casino games, video slot machines and video lottery machines already has been filed more than six weeks before the 83rd session of the Texas Legislature is set to convene.

State Sen. Rodney Ellis, a Houston Democrat, filed Senate Joint Resolution 6 on Nov. 12.

The bill calls for a constitutional amendment authorizing casino games, video slot machines and video lottery systems at horse and greyhound racetracks and on Indian tribal lands.

Bills like Ellis' have been filed during most sessions over the past 10 years and typically make little headway against a large and diverse bloc of opponents covering the whole political spectrum and coming from angles outside politics.

Past bills have drawn fire from religious conservatives and from secular liberals who argue gambling breeds other social ills; from business people who'd like in on the game but don't own a horse or dog track and aren't members of an Indian tribe; and business people operating casinos



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Even Galveston leaders who support legalizing gambling in general oppose bills limiting it to horse and dog tracks. They have argued that doing so rewards a few business interests while undercutting other tourist destinations.

Ellis' bill already is being slammed by new players — groups opposed to horse and dog racing on ethical and humanitarian grounds who argue casino games would only subsidize the failed sports, which otherwise would, and should, die off.

The bill's language makes that clear in this passage — the “law must ... provide sufficient revenue to the horse and greyhound breed registries and the horsemen's organization to facilitate a nationally competitive horse and greyhound racing industry in this state,” said Carey Theil, executive director of Grey2K USA, a nonprofit organization working to end dog racing.

“We are very close to the end of greyhound racing in Texas, and it would be a tragedy if dog race promoters were bailed out now,” he said.

Gulf Greyhound Park is the only track left in Texas offering live races, Theil said.

“This would be a disastrous policy and would cause the suffering and death of countless greyhounds,” he said.

Ellis didn't respond to a request for an interview.

The 83rd Legislature convenes Jan. 8 in Austin.

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