

## House agrees end to live racing, lower tax rates, and a new casino in Miami-Dade County



After years of impasse over how to update Florida's gambling laws to reflect the changing times, the Florida House agreed to a series of major concessions Wednesday, including bringing a new casino to Miami-Dade County, ending the mandate that horse and dog tracks conduct live racing and a willingness to give the Seminole Tribe the ability to offer craps and roulette.

"We know that time is running out, so we wanted to make a substantial offer to the Senate," began Rep. Jose Felix Diaz, R-Miami, the House's chief negotiator on the second day of a gambling conference between the chambers.

Sen. Bill Galvano, R-Bradenton, said the proposal "was a substantial offer that

(<http://miamiherald.typepad.com/.a/6a00d83451b26169e201bb0994e679970d-pi>)

tells me that you came in here ready to get the ball moving down the field."

The House proposal allows for an expansion of gambling in South Florida by allowing a new casino to open in Miami-Dade County -- as long as it is five miles away from an existing pari-mutuel, chosen by a competitive bid, results in the surrendering of an active pari-mutuel permit and operates no more than 1,500 slot machines. Malaysian company Genting has said it wants to build a full casino resort on Biscayne Bay on the former site of the Miami Herald building and the Fontainebleau in Miami Beach is also likely to compete for the slots license.

The House would also permit the Seminole Tribe to add craps and roulette at all seven of its casinos and allow greyhound tracks and Calder Racetrack to end live racing, with voter approval.

The House also agreed to a Senate conclusion that slot-machine look-alikes used in bars and convenience stores be designated as Class III games that are not allowed in Florida. The House agrees to lower the tax rate on slot machines as long as casinos reduce the number of slot machines they operate and authorizes designated player card games with strict new provisions.

The proposal brings the House farther than it has in years by agreeing to so-called "decoupling" -- the requirement that greyhound tracks, harness race tracks, quarterhorse and designated thoroughbred tracks no longer have to conduct live racing as a condition of their gambling permit. Of the three thoroughbred racetracks, only Calder Racetrack wants to stop racing.

A condition of the decoupling is that the track get local approval to end the racing through a countywide referendum. The House also scales back the Senate decision to authorize two new casinos, one each in Miami-Dade and Broward, by authorizing only one in

The offer, made on the second day of formal negotiations over gambling legislation aimed at renewing the state's gambling compact with the Seminole Tribe, brought the two chambers significantly closer after to each chamber passed two bills aimed at renewing the compact with the Seminole Tribe, but which had been dramatically different since the start of the session.

Still unresolved is the fate of the eight counties that have conducted voter referendums approving adding slot machines to their horse and dog tracks and jai alai frontons.

The House also agreed to a Senate proposal to negotiate with the Tribe a provision that the Legislature would be given two years to cure any alleged violation of the compact. The House proposed that if the state regulates Daily Fantasy Sports, the Tribe can offer it but it would not be considered a violation of the compact.

Galvano said the Senate will return later today with its counter offer.

Izzy Havenick, vice president of Magic City Casino which has lobbied for decoupling for years, was pleased with the development.

"We've been asking for eight years to give us a road map so we know what direction to go for our business," he said. He noted that they have 32 acres in the heart of Hialeah and the options for economic development are great.

"Retail, entertainment, David Beckham is still looking for a stadium – we just want to do something with the property," he said.

Winn Peeples, lobbyist for the Brunetti family which owns Hialeah Racing and Casino said the proposal is "progress, but we've got a lot to digest."

John Sowinski, president of No Casinos, criticized the compromise.

"This conference committee process is a prime example why gambling expansion should not be subject to legislative 'sausage making' as it results in gambling creep," he said. "It is clear that there needs to be a bright line in the Florida Constitution that gives Florida voters the exclusive right to authorize gambling in our state."

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