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Gambling Bill Approved By State Legislature
Staff
State Capitol

The state's racinos will soon have another tool to compete with out-of-state gambling interests following the approval Saturday of a bill by state lawmakers.

The measure changes several individual wager limits and provides a funding source for the four tracks and the Greenbrier Resort to purchase new video slot machines and make other improvements.

State Racing Association President John Cavacini says the bill for the first time "gives us the opportunity to compete on a level playing field and now we're down to the point of customer service."

The racinos, particular those in the northern panhandle, have been hit hard by competition from Pennsylvania in recent years. There will be further competition soon from Ohio and Maryland.

Cavacini says the tracks have always reinvested their profits to purchase new machines and make other improvements, but the recent competition has had an impact.

"It's not the fact that we can't spend our own money. We are spending," Cavacini said. "But we can't spend it at the rate it takes to modernize our floors."

The bill provides a total of \$10 million a year for the facilities from an existing lottery fund. They will have to spend their own money to draw down the new money. The money will be available for 10 years.

Not all think it's a good idea.

Del. Mitch Carmichael, R-Jackson, calls the bill the most "ridiculous" he's seen in several years.

"Why should we single out a particular industry, the gaming industry and the Greenbrier Hotel, to give them special \$10 million giveaways from the people of West Virginia?" Carmichael asked. "I just think it sets the wrong priorities."

Sen. Orphy Klempa, D-Ohio, says like or not, the state is now a partner with the gaming industry and must do everything possible to keep it competitive.

"That's what it's about," he said. "Just like any other industry, you've got to let them compete."