

# National Journal

TECHNOLOGY

## Barton to Offer Online Poker Bill

By [Juliana Gruenwald](#)

Updated: June 16, 2011 | 5:57 p.m.

June 16, 2011 | 5:05 p.m.

Rep. **Joe Barton**, R-Texas, is readying a bill that would make it legal for Americans to bet money on online poker.

Barton said he was urged to act via Facebook by many of his constituents who play poker online and were upset by a federal crackdown in April on some online poker sites. Federal officials claimed the sites violated a 2006 law banning payments for online gambling and requiring payment processors to block payments for online bets.

Barton, a senior member of the [House Energy and Commerce Committee](#), noted that online poker is not illegal but that processing payments for online poker is unlawful – a discrepancy he said in an interview “doesn’t make sense.” His bill would authorize payments for online poker games in states where such gambling is legal now. He said he would introduce the bill soon.

Barton, who says he plays poker himself but not online, said he sees poker as different from other forms of online gaming. “Poker is a game of skill,” he said.

Supporters of legislation to legalize online gambling argue that laws trying to stop online poker are ineffective and have done little to stop millions of Americans from gambling online via offshore sites. They say instead of trying to prohibit Internet gambling, policy makers should tax and regulate it to ensure that those who gamble online are protected. Barton said his bill would put in place rules to regulate online poker and prevent fraud.

Supporters include the American Gaming Association, which represents many of nation’s biggest casino groups such as Caesars and MGM. In an interview last month, association President Frank Fahrenkopf said his group’s position on the issue has evolved from opposing all forms of online gaming to backing legislation that would fully legalize online poker now. He added that online poker is more acceptable than other forms of gambling because participants play against other players, not the house.

“We’ve seen technology does exist ... to really put in place regulatory regimes” that work, Fahrenkopf said.

In the last Congress, the [House Financial Services Committee](#) approved legislation on a bipartisan basis sponsored by then-Chairman **Barney Frank**, D-Mass., that would legalize and set up a regulatory regime for online gambling in states where gaming is legal now. Rep. **John Campbell**, R-Calif., has reintroduced a similar version of that bill with Frank, now the ranking member on Financial Services.

A Campbell spokesman said his boss is hopeful that he will get a hearing on his bill even though the panel's new chairman, **Spencer Bachus**, R-Ala., is a staunch opponent of the measure.