



Congress may OK online gambling

By JOSH KOSMAN

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Americans appear closer than ever to being able to gamble online -- as a bill aimed at legalizing Internet casino gaming could find its way before [Congress](#) by the end of the year, people close to the matter tell The Post.

The confidence over the federal legalization of online poker and other games comes as momentum in Washington builds behind the effort.

“I think there is becoming a feeling in Congress that this is something that needs to be regulated and be done,” a source close to the discussions said. “I believe there is a possibility a bill will pass towards the end of the year.”

“The only question is how it is structured,” according to Roger Gross, the publisher of Global Gaming Business magazine.

The momentum is clear in at least three ways:

*Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and Republican [Jon Kyl](#) in the last few weeks asked the Justice Department to stop state efforts to legalize gambling, sources said.

If states act on their own, that could disrupt the federal effort.

* Large Republican donor and Las Vegas Sands CEO [Sheldon Adelson](#) is now on board with such a federal move, Gross said. Adelson, he said, sees the move as a window of opportunity to grow sales. Adelson is close to House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, who will be important for gambling advocates to win over. Adelson did not return calls for comment.

*House Speaker John Boehner is another important [Congressional](#) leader to get on board, and his long-time aide, Lee Askew, earlier this year became vice president of government affairs for the American Gaming Association .

The source close to the situation says he believes Adelson is neutral.

Kyl, essential for passage, also had a recent change of heart.

In July 2006, when the House passed a bill outlawing Internet gambling, Kyl likened the addictiveness of e-gaming to “crack cocaine.”

In April, Kyl changed his tune. His Web site said, “Efforts to carve out an exception for games like poker, which many believe is a game of skill, may be considered later this year.”

Many cash-strapped states would jump at the chance to add a new income stream.

Sen. [Jay Rockefeller](#) last month in an effort to win a debt ceiling extension proposed legalizing Internet gambling saying it could raise an estimated \$41.8 billion over 10 years, and an estimated additional \$30 billion for states, along with 17 other ideas.

While legalizing gambling would raise billions of dollars, Les Bernal, executive director of Stop Predatory Gambling, said, “This is a government policy that shrinks the middle class and pushes people in deeper debt at a time the government should be encouraging people to save more money.”

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