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**Subject:** Florida legislators to consider expanded gambling  
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Bradenton Herald

## Florida legislators to consider expanded gambling

Published: September 24, 2013 Updated 5 hours ago

By MARY ELLEN KLAS — Herald/Times Tallahassee Bureau  
TALLAHASSEE -- Imagine Florida with slot machines at several dog tracks, intended to lure Georgians to Jacksonville, Alabamans to Pensacola, high rollers to Palm Beach and race fans to Daytona.

That is one of the ideas gaining steam in Tallahassee as gaming promoters plan ways to expand Florida's gambling empire in exchange for closing loopholes that have exploded over the past few years.

The Florida Senate Gaming Committee has scheduled a series of hearings next month to travel to Jacksonville, Pensacola, Lakeland and Coconut Creek to hear from the public, as lawmakers embark on an ambitious rewrite of the state's gambling laws.

"The goal is to reform Florida's gambling laws in a way that will benefit Florida's economy and social welfare for years to come," said Sen. Garrett Richter, R-Naples, chairman of the committee.

Legislative leaders have signed a \$400,000 contract with Spectrum Gaming Group of New Jersey to assess the economic impact of existing and expanded gambling on communities in Florida. The report, due Oct. 1, will also offer some regulatory options before lawmakers draft the plan. Among the 10 options reviewed by Spectrum, only one would not expand gambling. The others range from allowing two so-called "destination resorts" in South Florida to limited expansion of gambling in certain regions of the state.

The timing of the legislative debate is significant. In 2015, the provisions of the state's agreement with the Seminole Tribe of Florida expire, requiring the state to renew the compact or establish new rules to allow the tribe to operate blackjack and other table games exclusively, in exchange for providing revenue to the state.

The re-opening of the tribal compact, as well as the perception that acceptance of casino games has increased among most Floridians, has made many legislative observers predict that Florida may pass wholesale gambling reforms in the upcoming session.

"It's much different this year than it's ever been before," said Al Lawson, a former veteran Democratic legislator from Tallahassee who supports expanding slot machines to North Florida. "Legislators are more open to give consideration to this than before."

Lawson predicted that the Senate hearings "will be packed" with supporters urging lawmakers to expand gambling in North Florida.

"Things have changed," he said. "We now load up two buses a week bringing people to casinos in Alabama and Mississippi. Why won't we take advantage of that?"

The first phase of Spectrum's report, which was completed in July, cited a 2013 poll by the American Gaming Association that found that 85 percent of all Americans now view casino gambling as an acceptable activity for themselves and others.

Senate President Don Gaetz and House Speaker Will Weatherford have indicated that they do not support expanded gambling, but many of their supporters believe that they may be open to a gradual expansion in exchange for closing the loopholes that have allowed "flag drop" racing as a pari-mutuel sport and drawn nearly two dozens lawsuits.

"Whatever the House passes will be the bill," said Brian Ballard, lobbyist for the Palm Beach Kennel Club, Genting and Donald Trump, noting that the more conservative House will dictate the gambling terms.

Meanwhile, the Senate's decision to hire Spectrum is coming under fire from the Orlando-based group No Casinos, which is supported by Disney and other Orlando-based tourist attractions. The group complains that Spectrum has close ties to the industry, with many gambling companies among its client base, and will not produce an unbiased report. The group launched a television campaign in Tallahassee this week to discredit the Spectrum report.

"You wouldn't want inmates running an asylum, nor burglars guarding a bank vault," the ad says. "So why is the gambling industry writing the official study on expanding gambling in Florida? Because your politicians are paying them to write it."

Richter defends the report, saying it will be chock-full of differing points of view, not just those supported by the gaming industry.

"When we get the report it will be literally like drinking out of a firehose, but we will absolutely not be able to state we don't have enough information to make a decision," he said.

As for the decision to conduct public hearings in the Panhandle communities that want gambling expansion, he was non-committal.

"The selection process wasn't scientific," Richter said. "These were areas we thought we could get to." The first hearing will be held Oct. 23 from 4-7 p.m. at the north campus of Broward College in Coconut Creek. Subsequent hearings will be held in Lakeland, Pensacola and Jacksonville.

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**Subject:** NEWS ALERT: Seminole Tribe Shouldn't Be Allowed to Lock Up Gambling Activities, Voters Say  
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<http://www.sunshinestateneews.com/story/seminole-tribe-shouldnt-be-allowed-lock-gambling-activities-voters-say>

Sunshine State News

## **Seminole Tribe Shouldn't Be Allowed to Lock Up Gambling Activities, Voters Say**

Nancy Smith

April 11, 2014

Gambling options might be dead in the 2014 Legislature, but by a significant majority, Florida voters want more competition for Las Vegas-style gaming than just the Seminole Tribe's casinos.

Fifty-six percent of voters say they want other establishments to compete for licenses to offer the same gaming options, such as blackjack and poker, as the Seminole Tribe provides, according to a Voter Survey Service poll commissioned by Sunshine State News. Only 40 percent said the Indians' exclusive rights to Las Vegas-style gambling are good enough.

In fact, in all poll categories -- party, age breaks, racial background, gender, area breaks and vote history -- the only group that prefers keeping gambling as it is, with the Seminoles having exclusivity -- is voters in Northwest Florida and the Panhandle, by a margin of 45 percent to 50 percent.

*(For a complete breakdown of votes on the gambling poll question, see the cross tabs in the attachment below.)*

Gov. Rick Scott is currently in negotiations with the Seminoles on the tribe's contract with the state. The compact, as agreed until mid-2015, gives the Seminoles the exclusive rights to banked card games, including blackjack (but not craps or roulette), at five of its seven facilities. In return, the state gets \$1 billion over five years. Scott hasn't given the Legislature a timeline for completing the deal, which also must be followed by federal approval.

"A 16-point difference shows a fairly strong support for gaming opportunity in Florida," said James Lee, president of Voter Survey Service. "To me, the most surprising result is that Republicans want to expand beyond tribal gaming by nearly 2:1. It's usually the Democrats who come out strong for gambling and the Republicans who try to block it."

Some 63 percent of Republicans polled favor more gambling competition; 35 percent do not. Of Democrats, 48 percent favor competition; 45 percent do not. Independent voters opted for more

competition, 57 percent to 39 percent.

"That doesn't surprise me," said Capital City Consulting's Nick Iarossi, chief lobbyist this year for the Las Vegas Sands. "Republicans have no appetite for gambling done wrong. They're opposed to monopolies, which the Tribe is, and attracted to the 'best in class,' which integrated resorts are." Republicans, he said, are sold on the boost they would bring to the job market, tourism and the economy generally, particularly in local communities.

Last week Senate Gaming Committee Chairman Garrett Richter, R-Naples, threw in the towel on a sweeping overhaul that would have permitted two Las Vegas-style casinos in South Florida, one each in Miami-Dade and Broward counties. And Wednesday, House Speaker Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, told the News Service of Florida "the lights are out" on any gambling legislation this session.

Will big-name casino operators give up on Florida after pouring so much money into the effort and coming up empty? "They're very disappointed is all I can tell you," said Iarossi. "They had such high hopes after a \$400,000 gaming study. And we thought things were going in the right direction.

"They're going to continue to watch, wait until the end of the year and make a determination about next year then."

Brian Ballard, lobbyist for Genting/Resorts World Miami LLC, isn't worried. "We've seen widespread support for integrated resorts everywhere in Florida we've polled, even in Northwest Florida," he said. "This is all coming, it's going to happen, we're prepared to wait and we don't blame anyone for the delay.

"Casino gambling in Florida is the will of the people," Ballard said. "If the Legislature fails to get it done -- and I don't think they'll fail -- sooner rather than later the issue will turn up as an amendment on the Florida ballot."

The VSS-SSN poll of 800 Florida voters was taken March 31-April 3 and had a margin of error of +/- 3.46 percent.

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**Subject:** NEWS ALERT: Weatherford considers voter input on expanded gambling  
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**News Service of Florida**

# Weatherford considers voter input on expanded gambling

By DARA KAM

The News Service Of Florida

Published: December 2, 2013

TALLAHASSEE – [House Speaker Will Weatherford](#) is developing a new plan that could provide cover for Republican House members reluctant to expand gambling as the [Legislature](#) takes up the thorny issue during the upcoming session.

Weatherford wants to put a [constitutional amendment](#) on the 2014 ballot that would let voters decide if they should weigh in on the expansion of gambling.

The proposal, still being developed, would set in stone any changes lawmakers agree to during the 2014 session and require statewide approval of any future gambling expansion. The proposal would require 60 percent approval by voters to pass.

Weatherford said it's part of the "holistic look at gaming" the Legislature is undertaking that includes a swath of issues from casino-style resorts to blackjack at South Florida tracks to getting rid of greyhound racing.

"I have become over the years very concerned with the drip, drip, drip expansion of gaming that's taken place in the state of Florida. I am certainly warming up to the idea of having a constitutional amendment that would require all future expansion to go before the voters. I'm very, very intrigued by that concept," Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, told The News Service of Florida on Monday.

Weatherford's proposal would be linked in theory to a comprehensive gambling bill that could include a rewrite of the state's gambling laws and regulations, the creation of a gambling commission and, possibly, a kitchen-sink of elements sought after by existing race tracks and frontons as well as destination resorts coveted by out-of-state casino operators.

Rep. Richard Corcoran, R-Land O'Lakes, is leading a group of conservative Republicans backing the idea of the constitutional amendment. House Select Committee on Gaming Chairman Rob Schenck, R-Spring Hill, is

Weatherford's chief negotiator on the sweeping gambling legislation.

"Everything is on the table," Weatherford said. "I've always been anti-expansion and continue to believe that unfettered expansion of gaming in Florida is bad for the state and bad for the citizens. However, we've been having expansion under our noses for the last decade or two. And it's been uncoordinated. It's been unstructured. The Legislature hasn't had its hands on the wheel. We have an opportunity to do that this year."

The possibility that 2014 could be the last opportunity for the Legislature to sign off on gambling changes without a statewide referendum intensifies the gambling industry's push to have myriad issues resolved during the upcoming session.

"There's no question that if everyone believed any future expansion after the 2014 session required a statewide vote, all the gaming interests would do whatever they could to try to include anything they could in the comprehensive legislation," said lobbyist Nick Iarossi, who represents Las Vegas Sands, one of the casino operators pushing lawmakers to approve at least one convention-style hotel and casino in Broward or Miami-Dade counties.

An overhaul of the state's patchwork quilt of gambling laws would likely rein in regulators at the Division of Business and Professional Regulation who have approved a variety of controversial practices such as barrel racing.

The bill may also include an effort to buy back or revoke dormant licenses and stop pari-mutuels from using licenses at one facility to operate card games or other activities somewhere else. And it could include lower tax rates for the pari-mutuels in Broward and Miami-Dade counties.

"What I believe is a very smart way to go is to fix the problems that are now existing in the gaming laws, consolidate them, streamline them, expand where it makes sense for both Florida's brand and Florida's economy, contract them where markets have gone away and it doesn't make sense," said lobbyist Brian Ballard, who represents Palm Beach Kennel Club, which is hoping to get slot machines, as well as Resorts World Miami LLC, the Malaysian casino giant pushing for a destination resort in downtown Miami. "In other words, let's fix it now, let's pull up the ladder and say that's it, we're done. We've reformed the system. Now the people will decide whether there's going to be an expansion or contraction of gaming. I think that makes absolute sense."

But enshrining the new laws so quickly into the constitution could be problematic.

For example, the gambling package is also expected to address problems with a new law banning Internet cafés now being challenged in court by senior arcade operators.

"You're going to reform 100 years of pretty poorly written law. And then on top of that you're going to say this is it and any changes require a constitutional amendment so we better be right. There won't be a tweak in the statute to fix things down the road. It's a great theory. It makes a lot of sense in theory. I worry about some unintended results. We just have to make sure whatever passes this year is done well," Ballard said.

Senate Gaming Committee Chairman Garrett Richter said he has heard of Weatherford's constitutional amendment but not spoken with his House counterpart about it yet.

“One of the things that became clear in the public hearings is that the voters want a referendum. So the distinction becomes whether it’s a statewide referendum or a local referendum. I’m not prepared to say where I would have a preference or not. But what did come through is that communities want to have a referendum ahead of an expansion of gaming in their communities,” Richter, R-Naples, said.

The constitutional amendment should remain separate from the overall gambling package, Richter said.

“I don’t think that initiative should draw the attention away from or to the objective to come up with something responsible for the state of Florida in the gaming arena,” he said. “Really what we’ve got to do now is determine what kind of meat we want to put on the bones. Whether it simply clarifies existing statutes or expands gaming or creates a gaming commission ... remains to be seen. But I think the next step ... is to begin to develop that legislation and then have people take a stance either for or against.”

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**Subject:** News Alert: CRITICS QUESTION GENTING, GULFSTREAM DEAL  
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## CRITICS QUESTION GENTING, GULFSTREAM DEAL

By DARA KAM  
THE NEWS SERVICE OF FLORIDA

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THE CAPITAL, TALLAHASSEE, January 10, 2014.....Gambling giant Genting, Gulfstream Park and the horse industry may have mapped out a slot-machines happy ending, but the deal faces hurdles before the one-armed bandits start rolling in downtown Miami.

Under the proposal, Resorts World Omni, a division of Malaysian-based Genting Group, would operate 2,000 slot machines and a poker room at a hotel on Biscayne Bay. The slots machine license would be associated with a permit owned by a non-profit linked to Gulfstream, where the horse races would continue to run.

But the deal, first reported by The News Service of Florida on Tuesday, would also cost the state a portion of the gambling revenues it receives from the Seminole Indians, according to one of the crafters of the agreement with the tribe.

"Notwithstanding the legal hurdles to accomplish what's being proposed, if that were to occur that would impact the exclusivity provisions of the compact in Dade and Broward," said state Sen. Bill Galvano, R-Bradenton, who helped write the 2009 agreement with the Seminoles.

The agreement allows the tribe to have Las Vegas-style slot machines at each of its seven locations and gives it the exclusive rights to run banked card games such as blackjack at five facilities. In exchange, the tribe agreed to pay the state \$1 billion over five years. The card-game portion of the deal, called a compact, expires in 2015 unless lawmakers and the governor renew it.

The agreement allows the Seminoles to stop paying if slot machines exist anywhere outside of Broward or Miami-Dade counties, except on tribal lands. But the compact also allows the tribe to reduce its payments to the state if slot machines are allowed at any facilities that weren't already operating in Broward or Miami-Dade, except for Hialeah Race Track, when the deal was inked in 2010.

Under the compact, the tribe would have to show that revenues at its Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Broward declined after the new slots began operating. Then, the tribe could cut its payments to the state by half of the amount the Seminoles pay based on revenues earned at the Broward casino, Galvano said. The amount at stake is estimated to be at least \$40 million, based on an analysis of revenue projections by state economists.

But Resorts World lobbyist Brian Ballard said lawmakers shouldn't worry about the potential fiscal hit.

"Genting is prepared to work with the state to make sure the state suffers no impact," Ballard said. "This is manageable and we want to work with the state to figure out the most equitable outcome."

Ballard also said the state would be wise to hedge its bets by expanding its sources of gambling revenue.

"I would argue that having more than one large payer in South Florida is probably good for the people of Florida. It lowers risk. I wouldn't want to have one client as a law firm or lobbying firm because if the market changes for that client, you could have a real bad day," he said.

But opening a casino in downtown Miami would be a disaster, said Sen. Gwen Margolis, a Miami Democrat who sent a letter to Senate President Don Gaetz on Thursday objecting to the plan.

Margolis noted that the Resorts World property, in the center of her Senate district, is situated within two blocks of two museums, two performing arts centers and an arena in an already-congested area of Miami.

"It's outrageous," Margolis told the News Service.

Separating slot machine operations from pari-mutuel activities like horse and dog racing would set a dangerous precedent, Margolis warned.

"When we gave the ability to have slot machines to the pari-mutuels, it was because they complained they were hurting. Now everybody wants to have a different kind of deal. And the result of it is opening casinos all over the place by moving slot machines to some other area. That's something that will get out of control. You can't allow that to happen," she said.

Genting has "a ton of gall" for coming to the Legislature with the current plan after lawmakers rejected proposals for casino-style resorts in South Florida two years ago, said John Sowinski, president of No Casinos, a group that has long fought against expanded gambling.

And, Sowinski said, Genting is "essentially thumbing their noses at the voters" who approved a 2006 constitutional amendment that opened the door for slots at tracks and frontons in Miami-Dade and Broward counties. Voters believed all the gambling activities would be under the same roof, Sowinski said.

"It's sort of a give an inch, take a mile routine. This is not what voters approved. Not only do we oppose it but we think it's an affront to the voters of Florida," he said.

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