

Lake County says 'No' to video gambling

By Mick Zawislak | Daily Herald Staff

Published: 10/13/2009 2:03 PM | Updated: 10/13/2009 5:27 PM

Lake County Board members decided overwhelmingly Tuesday to ban video gambling in unincorporated areas, joining Cook and DuPage counties and swelling the ranks of communities in opposition.

The board voted 18-4 in favor of an ordinance to ban video gambling in licensed bars, restaurants, fraternal organizations and truck stops. It came despite requests from several union members, bar owners and others to delay the vote until state rules could be finalized.

A motion to table the measure introduced by David Stolman of Buffalo Grove was soundly defeated, as a majority of the board apparently wanted to stake its position sooner rather than later.

"My message is, `State, do your job. Budget accordingly. Figure out a legitimate revenue source for a capital plan and then we can move forward,'" said board member Carol Calabresa of Libertyville.

The Video Gaming Act, signed into law in July, is earmarked to fund a third of the state's \$31 billion public works program known as a capital bill.

Supporters told the board the machines could be a boost to struggling businesses, and the revenue would provide needed jobs through capital bill projects.

Lake County Board members said video gambling revenue would not be reliable, and having games in bars and restaurants could lead to other problems.

Some also decried the inconsistency of an activity that would be legal in one area and not in another nearby.

"This is not the way to fund the government," said board member Craig Taylor of Lake Zurich.

According to information provided to the board, some 85 establishments in unincorporated areas - mostly bars - may have qualified to apply for a video gambling license.

If all of those establishments installed the maximum allowable five machines and revenue projections were accurate, the county could have received more than \$956,000 per year to use for any purpose.

Board member Angelo Kyle of Waukegan said the state is in a bad fiscal shape despite revenue from other forms of gambling, such as the lottery and riverboats.

Allowing the machines would "make it more convenient" for people to gamble, he said, and could compound problems such as foreclosures or other money woes that could adversely affect families.

Board member Aaron Lawlor of Vernon Hills, said Lake County has been saddled with bills due to unfunded state mandates. By allowing entities to opt out, the state is avoiding the tough decisions, he added.

"We as a county have gambled and lost with the state of Illinois," he said.

County Board Chairman Suzi Schmidt said there was talk of state legislators putting a time limit on when entities could opt out.

"If we don't do this today, we may not have the opportunity to do it later," said board member Steve Carlson of Grandwood Park. "The only way to send a message that means anything is to force them to find an alternative way to fund the capital bill."

Rita Pavlin, president of the Lake County Tavern Owners Association, said establishments known for trouble would not be able to secure a video gambling license. She urged the board to delay a vote until state guidelines are set.

"My people need this. We're suffering," she said.

Stolman and board members Melinda Bush of Grayslake, Audrey Nixon of North Chicago, and Terry Wilke of Round Lake Beach voted against the ban.