

# Racinos going belly up? Right!

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Nothing in this state evokes more political acrimony than changes in the state gambling laws. Nothing.

And that's been proved beyond question in the past six days in Dover.

An excellent example of why it's true is the final position of the three racinos.

Instead of commenting publicly about how they appreciate the Markell administration's agreement to decrease its demand for a bigger cut of the daily action, they went around telling lobbyists they were "extorted" into an agreement with the Legislature.

And at Harrington Raceway and Casino -- now infamous for its CEO branding the discussions as a "pissing match" -- they even received a smaller increase in state give-back if their books next year show they didn't make as many millions as last year. Good luck to somebody in the Finance Department getting hold of Harrington's real books.

And all three racinos have the guarantee of the governor that table games will be pursued as soon as possible. What a change in the attitude in Dover. Only a few months ago, Gov. Ruth Ann Minner didn't want to be bothered with even thinking about new gambling propositions.

Now we've got sports betting heading this way, although it's almost certain to fall flat since the racinos fought tooth and nail against the governor's idea of adding new free-standing off-track sports betting parlors, some near the state lines.

The racinos also won a \$500,000 decrease in the cost of a sports betting licensing fee and a decrease of 1.5 percent in the state's share of slots revenue.

So where in the world does this "extortion" charge come from? Most of us would be thrilled with the final version of House Bill 100, especially since we still rank below most states for the amount of income the state receives from the state-owned gambling franchise.

And don't forget the state pays for the machines and 24-hour police protection and security.

That shameless pandering to lawmakers about the racinos going out of business if they had to share more with the public was the biggest bucket of horse droppings I've heard in many years. That gibberish cost the casinos a huge

amount of credibility with the public and even with some of the legislators who have long histories of racino connections.

The first time around, H.B. 100 came up two votes short of the three-fifths majority needed to pass. The second time, on Thursday, resulted in seven new yes votes, six of which came from Republicans, including Minority Leader Dick Cathcart. The others were Reps. Mike Ramone, Dan Short, Biff Lee, Tom Kovach and Bobby Outten. Democrat Bob Walls of Milford also switched, bringing the total vote to 30-4, five more than needed. They all should be thanked by the governor, if they haven't already been.

There were also a couple of representatives who left the building before the vote and two Ds and one R who didn't vote because of potential conflicts; Brad Bennett because his security firm does business with Dover Downs, Pam Thornburg because she's on the State Fair board, which runs Harrington Raceway, and Bill Oberle, whose wife sells trinket junk to Delaware Park. Thornburg and Bennett both sought Ethics Commission opinions, a refreshing turn of events from previous Legislatures and potential conflictees.

Now at least three members of the Senate, including President Pro Tem Thurman Adams and Sens. George Bunting and Gary Simpson, have to determine whether owning shares of Delaware State Fair stock would require recusing themselves from voting on H.B. 100. My guess is since the stock is virtually worthless from a fiduciary standpoint, it shouldn't. But that's why Thornburg didn't vote in the House.

Anyway, it's on to the Senate, where Adams has said H.B. 100 will probably pass, with or without his help.

And speaking of Delaware Park, I'm told by a good source that plans are under way for a new hotel and high-end commercial shops on the property. But I thought they were going broke?