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## Senate OKs sports bets, table games

### Governor says he'll sign bill in next few days

By *GINGER GIBSON*  
*The News Journal*

DOVER -- Sports betting and table games such as craps and roulette will be legal in Delaware by week's end.

After less than 40 minutes of discussion and scant dissent Tuesday, the state Senate made no changes to the controversial gaming bill before passing it 17-2 and sending it to Gov. Jack Markell, who said he will sign it in the next few days.

The bill's quick approval by the Senate was a stark contrast to the reception it received last week in the House. There, a previous version of the bill was voted down before intense negotiations among Markell's administration, legislators and lobbyists led to the revised bill that was passed early Friday morning.

"I'm very pleased that the Senate acted quickly to pass the sports lottery legislation," Markell said. "I want to make clear that with the passage of this bill it's now time to move forward and work cooperatively with our business partners."

Sens. Thurman Adams, D-Bridgeville, and Gary Simpson, R-Milford, abstained because of conflicts of interest -- both sit on the board of the State Fair, which owns 76 percent of Harrington Raceway and its casino.

The two dissenting votes came from Sens. Colin Bonini, R-Dover South, and George Bunting, D-Bethany Beach. Bonini said he voted against the bill partially because of the warning from the NCAA that Delaware colleges and universities would no longer be permitted to host postseason games at home.

"It punishes athletes who are innocent victims," Bonini said.

Markell, who had asked the state Supreme Court to rule on the constitutionality of sports betting, said he will sign the bill later this week -- before the court responds to his request.

"We need to move forward with laying the groundwork to implement a sports lottery as soon as possible," Joe Rogalsky, the governor's spokesman, wrote in an e-mail. "The governor is signing the bill this week so that the foundation can begun to be laid."

The Senate heeded the governor's urgency, discussing the bill briefly in caucus Tuesday before voting to suspend Senate rules so that it could bypass the committee process and go straight to a vote by the full chamber.

On the Senate floor, only a few legislators spoke, most to express concern that no committee hearing had been held to give people time to weigh in on the legislation.

Sen. Dori Conner, R-Penn Acres, said she was unable to gauge the thoughts of her constituents, likely because most expected there to be a committee hearing before the bill was voted on.

To such concerns, Senate Majority Leader Anthony DeLuca, D-Varlano, said senators were involved in the process while the bill was being vetted in the House.

"We don't operate in a vacuum," he said.

Sen. Liane Sorenson, R-Hockessin, said the quick handling of the bill didn't give lawmakers time to review late-night revisions by the House, where a provision to legalize table games such as blackjack and craps was added. Legalizing table games on such short notice could create problems, she said, and she would like the Legislature to continue to monitor the progress of rules that will be developed in the next three months to govern those games.

She said she only voted in favor of the legislation because of its revenue-generating potential in the face of the state's financial problems.

As soon as the Senate vote was tallied, casino representatives -- who for weeks have been a constant presence with their aggressive lobbying against the bill -- filed out of Legislative Hall.

Ed Sutor, CEO of Dover Downs, sounded dejected after the vote.

"The governor got what he wanted, so what more can I say?" Sutor said.

He said casino operators will push for a few unspecified "technical" amendments.

"There was very little movement on the administration's part. They got what they wanted. They won."

Markell said he doesn't view the passage of the legislation as a victory for his camp, but a win for the taxpayers who deserved a fairer share of gambling revenues.

And the bill now awaiting his signature is far different than the one he initially proposed, which would have allowed up to three new casinos to be built in the state, up to 10 additional locations for sports wagering and an 8-point increase in the state's share of casinos' slot-machine revenue.

The new casinos and sports-betting venues were the first to go, under heavy lobbying from the casinos, but even that couldn't muster support in the House. The revised version passed early Friday gives the state 43.5 percent of lottery proceeds, up 6.5 percentage points from the current 37 percent the state gets, but lower than the 45 percent sought by Markell.

It also lowered the licensing fee from \$4.5 million to \$4 million, and allowed the state's casinos to add table games.

Tom Cook, with the Department of Finance, said when the Delaware Economic and Financial Advisory Council meets on Monday it will be able to factor sports betting into calculating the state's deficit -- if Markell signs the bill before then.

But Markell said despite that increase in the state's ledger book, the economy continues to struggle and revenue estimates could continue to slip.

"This is an important first step," Markell said. "We've got a significant way to go on the budget and we're going to be working closely with the members of the General Assembly."

## Additional Facts

#### WHAT THE SPORTS BETTING BILL DOES

- Legalizes table games and allows casinos to add them "as soon as possible."
  - Increases the state's share of slots revenue to 43.5 percent of the proceeds, a jump of 6.5 percentage points over the current 37 percent.
  - Provides an exception for Harrington Raceway and Casino, which if its revenues fall, would see an increase of only 5.5 percentage points in the state's slots share.
  - Establishes \$4 million licensing fee for sports betting, down from the initial \$4.5 million proposal.
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