

Sports betting passes Texas House but dies in Senate

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A bill to approve online sports betting in Texas passed in the House of Representatives by a thin margin, but it appears dead-on-arrival in the Texas Senate.

[HJR 102](#) by Rep. Jeff Leach, R-Allen, proposed submitting to voters in November a constitutional amendment to legalize sports wagering in Texas.

On an initial vote, the measure failed to receive the necessary two-thirds approval required. On a final vote, it passed the House with 102 votes in favor, but it lacks support in the Senate.

Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick [tweeted](#) on May 13: “I’ve said repeatedly there is little to no support for expanding gaming from Senate GOP. I polled members this week. Nothing changed. The senate must focus on issues voters expect us to pass. We don’t waste time on bills without overwhelming GOP support.”

In a follow-up post the next day, Patrick [tweeted](#), “Can’t waste committee/floor time in the last days” on bills that lack majority support in the Senate.

A coalition that included the owners of several major professional sports teams in Texas strongly supported the online sports betting bill.

Some supporters of sports wagering focused exclusively on Patrick’s opposition, but Rob Kohler, consultant with Texas Baptists’ Christian Life Commission, noted broad-based opposition to gambling expansion in the

Texas Senate.

“In the Senate, this kind of bill doesn’t have the votes. It’s not just one person. It’s a lot bigger than one individual,” Kohler said.

Casino bill goes nowhere

Meanwhile, in spite of the efforts of about 80 lobbyists working on behalf of Las Vegas Sands and other casino operators, a bill to allow resort casinos failed to receive the required two-thirds majority in the Texas House.

A bill that would have called for a statewide vote on a constitutional amendment to allow resort casinos failed to garner more than 92 votes in the House.

In the final days of this legislative session, Kohler said he is focused on raising awareness about the potential harm of a bill that would allow Texans to wager on charitable sports raffles on mobile devices.

“That means somebody sitting on his couch in San Angelo can take out his cell phone and buy a ticket for the Cowboys 50/50 raffle,” he explained.

Kohler noted the legislation would permit raffles for cash prizes, and that sort of gambling expansion should require a statewide referendum on a constitutional amendment, which the bill as introduced does not.

Russ Coleman, chairman of Texans Against Gambling, said he was pleased Texas legislators “yet again wisely kept casinos and sports gambling—mobile and bricks-and-mortar—outside our borders.”

“Texas’ decision to not follow the crowd of other states rushing to enable sports betting will prove wise when the significant social costs burdening taxpayers of those states and increases in crime increasingly become apparent,” Coleman said.

Looking ahead, Coleman acknowledged individuals and businesses with a vested interest in gambling expansion will continue efforts in the future, but he voiced continued opposition.

“The big gambling industries, their billionaire allies, and their hundreds of well-paid lobbyists will be back at the legislature to again attempt to addict and fleece vulnerable Texans,” he said. “We will again do what we can to preserve the Texas Constitution’s protections against the public harm that is the predatory gambling those industries peddle.”