

Stakeholders head to Ottawa to push single-sports betting



CRAIG PEARSON, WINDSOR STAR

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Matt Marchand, president of the local Chamber Of Commerce poses at Caesars Windsor in Windsor on Friday, April 15, 2016. ADAM F. DULLUM / WINDSOR STAR

Stakeholders from across the country, including

the local chamber of commerce, will head to Ottawa Monday to put their money on single-sports betting.

Bill C-122: the Safe and Regulated Sports Betting Act, is up for debate and second reading on Tuesday in the House of Commons and a wide variety of supporters want to promote its benefits in advance.

“We want to make sure parliament is aware of the non-partisan support from business and labour for this bill,” Matt Marchand, president of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce, said. “We want to show support and generate awareness for Bill C-221.”

C-221 replaces Bill C-290, which actually passed the House of Commons before stalling for three years in the Senate. But after the last government changed, the new bill was introduced with the same intention: to allow single-sports betting in Canada.

“This would be a new gaming product and would allow Caesars Windsor to be first in the market place,” said Marchand, who travelled to Ottawa to support single-sports betting in 2013 and will do so again on Monday. “And we know once people experience Caesars Windsor they will come back and that will help drive tourism, jobs and revenue for the region.

“It’s a win-win for all of us.”

Marchand said the new gaming would provide Caesars Windsor a competitive advantage over casinos in Detroit and Ohio. He estimates allowing single-sports betting would create 100 direct jobs at Caesars Windsor and would put Canada at the forefront of a lucrative market that is now legally allowed only in Las Vegas and online through offshore sites.

Marchand will join representatives from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Gaming Association and others in Ottawa to spread the word about single-event sports betting.

Bill C-221 would amend the Criminal Code by repealing one section, allowing provinces and territories to decide if they will allow single-sports betting.

Windsor MP Brian Masse, who is leading the charge, feels hopeful the bill will become law this time around given a number of things have changed since it languished in the Senate.

Unlike before, the NBA now supports the concept, while the NHL has partnered with Draft Kings, where players can win money on fantasy sports. As well, by the time a new sports-betting bill would make it to the Senate, about 20 new senators will be in place.

Bill C-122 has the support of the NDP and some Conservatives. And Masse said he heard the Liberals will allow a free vote on the issue.

“We have been working with a number of different groups and MPs and senators to line this up,” Masse said, noting that a second debate could come within 30 days and that a vote might follow a week after that. “It could be fast and furious. It all depends on what else is happening on the Hill.”

Masse will have 15 minutes to discuss the merits of the initiative, plus a five-minute followup near the end of the debate.

“It’s about redirecting money from organized crime to that of a regulated, safer, accountable process,” said Masse, who estimates unregulated single-sports betting generates about \$10 billion a year in Canada. “This will allow for the creation of jobs in Windsor and Niagara Falls and elsewhere across the country. We have interest from British Columbia to Quebec on this.”

Meanwhile, Masse doesn’t believe legalizing single-sports betting would lead to more problem gaming. He said studies suggest the gaming would simply transfer from illegal to legal venues, where problem-gaming money and programs exist.

“I don’t think organized crime is donating to problem-gaming services,” Masse said. “So it would be much safer when it’s regulated.”