

Support grows for single sports betting



Passage of Bill C-290 would allow single-event sports betting, which would be a boon to Caesars Windsor. (DAX MELMER/The Windsor Star)



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Support is continuing to grow across Canada for passage of a single sport betting bill which has been bogged down in Canada's Senate for more than a year.

Chamber of commerce organizations in Windsor and Niagara, who have been in support of the bill since it was first tabled on Parliament Hill, have now been joined by chamber organizations in Quebec and Atlantic Canada, who have more than 250 members.

“When Senators return to their offices this morning, they will find evidence of growing national support for Bill C-290,” said Matt Marchand, president of the Windsor Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce. “We are gratified that other chambers are throwing their support behind passage of the bill.

“We are currently leaving jobs, wealth and prosperity on the table by not passing this bill,” said Marchand.

The bill, introduced by MP Joe Comartin (NDP — Windsor-Tecumseh), would delete provisions of the Criminal Code that make it illegal to bet on “any race or fight, or on a single sports event or athletic contest.”

From there, each province would be able to decide whether, and under what conditions, wagering on single sporting events will be permitted to occur.

MP Brian Masse (NDP — Windsor West), who has replaced Comartin as sponsor of the bill because Comartin is now deputy speaker, said “we’re trying to get as many partners on board as possible and counter some of the negative comments about the bill.

“This bill just gives the provinces the right to move ahead with single sport betting but the entire control rests in provincial hands,” said Masse. “It’s just very frustrating to see it get this far and then get bogged down.”

In Windsor alone, more than 3,500 employees of Casino Windsor would stand to benefit from single sport betting, which would give the local casino an edge over its cross-border rivals.

“It would be a huge boost to our casino and the thousands of jobs, it provides,” said Dave Cassidy, financial secretary of CAW Local 444, which represents casino workers. “We’re on the same page as the business community on this one because we both recognize how important it is.

“It’s very frustrating to see a bill such as this delayed in the Senate when it was given all-party approval in the House,” said Cassidy. “I believe it would be difficult for the Senate to reject this legislation if they see that business labour and the gaming industry are all pushing for the same result.”

But despite receiving all-party support in the House of Commons on March 2 2012, the Senate, which reconvenes today, has failed so far to bring it to a vote.

It faces stiff opposition from most of North America’s professional sports leagues, which claim it will do irreparable harm to their product.

Masse said it’s hypocritical for leagues such as the NFL to oppose single sport betting when so much of the interest in their sport is based on fantasy pools and other forms of gambling.

“The NFL issues its injury report on Thursday for no other reasons than to facilitate betting on Sunday games,” said Masse. “It’s ridiculous and totally hypocritical.”

Pierre Cadieux, president and chief executive officer of the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce, said “it is estimated that nothing less than \$14 billion of Canadian offshore and illegal betting goes under the taxation radar every year.

“In an era where governments are clamping down on tax evaders and cheats, it would seem a no-brainer that to move forward to legalize this type of betting would be a win-win for the Canadian gaming industry as well as for the Canadian taxpayer,” said Cadieux.