

US lawmaker to seek online gambling ban exemptions

Washington (Reuters) – A Florida congressman is expected to introduce legislation on Thursday exempting poker and some other games from the Internet gambling ban passed by Congress last year, the lawmaker's aide said on Wednesday.

The bill planned by Democratic Rep. Robert Wexler would carve out „skill games“ such as online poker, bridge, chess and mahjong from the online gambling prohibition that President George W. Bush signed into law in October.

„It allows Americans to play poker online as they should have every right to do,“ a Wexler spokesman, Josh Rogin said on Wednesday.

The online gambling ban passed last year made it illegal for banks and credit card companies to make payments to online gambling sites.

Wexler's bill will be unveiled the day before the House Financial Services Committee is scheduled to hold a hearing on the subject at the behest of Rep. Barney Frank, the committee chairman and an outspoken critic of the online gambling ban.

The subject of Friday's hearing will be legislation Frank introduced that would more broadly roll back the online gambling ban. Rogin said Frank, a Massachusetts Democrat, is also supportive of Wexler's bill.

Scheduled to testify at Friday's hearing are the heads of several online payment processors.

Wexler is a member of the financial services panel, as well as the House Judiciary Committee.

Rogin said skill games should be treated differently from

games of pure chance. „You win and lose based on your ability,“ he said. „It’s a deserving distinction.“

Frank has conceded he does not yet have enough support in Congress to rescind the online gambling ban. The ban won majorities among both Republicans and Democrats and opponents of online gambling have vowed to fight efforts to rescind it.

The ban also irked some in the European Union, which is home to some online gambling companies that were forced to withdraw from the United States. It has been closely monitored by investors in some British-based gaming companies, such as Partygaming Plc and 888 Holdings Plc.

In a crackdown on Internet gambling, U.S. prosecutors arrested BETonSPORTS’ then- chief executive in July and its founder last month. Two founders of payments processor NETeller Plc were arrested in January.