

# Legislator disputes anti-gaming fears

Frankfort, Kentucky – A Northern Kentucky legislator whose suburban Cincinnati district is within miles of Indiana riverboat casinos said yesterday that he doesn't see the rash of social problems that some opponents of expanded gambling predict.

Rep. Arnold Simpson, D-Covington, questioned casino gambling opponents during their testimony to a House task force on the issue.

Gov. Steve Beshear is expected to propose allowing casinos at racetracks and other locations to help bring the state up to USD 500 million in tax revenue.

Several casino opponents testified yesterday before the task force, predicting spikes in social problems if casinos are allowed in Kentucky under a constitutional amendment that could come before voters this fall.

One of them, Kent Ostrander, executive director of The Family Foundation, said casino developers are „not looking for casino licenses, they're looking for hunting licenses ... on Kentucky families.“

Simpson, who said after the meeting that he is inclined to support a casino plan, then pointed to Indiana casinos. „We have gaming ... but we have none of the benefits,“ he said.

Simpson also said Kentucky already allows a lottery, horse betting and charitable bingo.

„In this environment, I don't see the great despair that you're talking about,“ he said.

Ostrander told the panel that to meet Beshear's revenue

projections, each Kentuckian regardless of age would have to lose USD 357.25 a year. Simpson countered that he believes that some money would come from out-of-state residents.

Ostrander disagreed, saying states that don't have expanded gambling „are falling like dominoes“ and that Kentucky won't be able to build the so-called „destination“ casinos that could act as tourism draws.

Rev. Nancy Jo Kemper, executive director of the Kentucky Council on Churches, said some money will come from out of state.

But the estimated USD 1.4 billion in gross revenues „will not fall out of the sky,“ she said. “ ... An awful lot of it's going to come from the heartland of the commonwealth of Kentucky.”

Kemper cited the case of Patricia H. Sherman, a Louisville woman who was charged last year with embezzling more than USD 7 million from the Obelisk Federal Credit Union in New Albany, Ind., where she worked as head teller. Prosecutors said she spent much of the money gambling at Southern Indiana casinos.

Kemper said a government that encourages citizens to gamble so that it can pay for programs is admitting that it cannot persuade citizens to pay for the public services they desire.

„I doubt that any state can gamble itself to fiscal health,“ she said.

Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates, which opposes casinos, said expanding gambling will do nothing to lessen gambling problems among adolescents.

The panel also heard from former Republican gubernatorial candidate Larry Forgy, who told the task force that approving casinos would lead to gambling syndicates taking over Kentucky politics. Forgy mentioned former Louisiana Gov. Edwin Edwards, who is in federal prison after being convicted in an extortion

trial in connection with the awarding of a casino license when he was in office.

Forgy predicted turf battles throughout the state over licenses, and questioned whether there would be an Eastern Kentucky casino, „turning Pikeville into the Las Vegas of Appalachia.“

Forgy, a former state budget director, said he doesn't believe predictions that casinos could produce tax revenues of as much as USD 500 million.