

John Conyers Allies With Online Gambling

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Michigan Congressman Questions Online Gambling Ban

Online gambling begins to pick up support in Washington, as more Congressmen come out of the wood works to voice their support for legalized and regulated gambling over the internet to be available in the United States. With two pro-gambling bills already circulating political circles across the District of Columbia, it is clear that the voice of online gambling has quickly grown to be a unified chorus.

The most recent round of anti-gambling legislation to target the internet was immediately met with boos and hisses as soon as it was signed into law by President Bush just over a year ago. Many critics of the bill pointed out the underhanded manner in which the bill was passed, being an 11th hour addition to a larger bill funding the security of America's ports and harbors.

Most of those who opposed the legislation declared that if the bill could not pass on it's own merits it should not be passed at all. Unfortunately, it is a simple truth that this is how things are done in Washington, so an alternate approach would be required to address the problem.

That new approach first appeared in the form of Barney Frank, who has a bill before Congress that would not only roll back the online gambling ban, but would legalize the betting to generate tax revenues for State and Federal Governments. Similarly, law makers from Florida have put forth legislation that would exclude online poker from the online gambling ban, stating that poker is a game of skill and deserves the same special exemptions that were given to lobbyists representing lotteries and the horse racing industry.

These sentiments have now been echoed by Congressman John Conyers, the Democratic head of the House Judiciary Committee. Conyers and others voiced concerns over why we were banning online gambling to begin with, and why, if a ban is required, it selectively prohibits some forms of online gambling while allowing others to go unchallenged. Even more important is the fact that the selective nature in which the United States is handling the issue has serious, far-reaching implications that hurt overseas relations.

The tensions with the relations can already be seen. The island nation of Antigua has been consistently winning cases against the United States on the matter for several years, although the official position of the US Government thus far has been to simply ignore the matter and to rewrite their own trade agreements. As a result, many European nations have now signed on to the WTO case against the US, and are seeking damages of as much as \$100 Billion on the matter – a high price to pay for an industry that most citizens say should be legally taxed rather than banned.

Although most involved with the Congressional hearing seemed to be in support of Chairman Conyers, the US Department of Justice never wavered in it's position that all forms of online gambling are illegal. U.S. Attorney Catherine Hanaway of Missouri's East District of the US Department of Justice stated as much in front of the House Judiciary Committee.

Hanaway, who has led the charge in the prosecution of foreign business men who own online gambling web sites, informed the panel that even if the recent legislation is repealed, there are other instruments available that will allow her office to continue prosecuting the online gambling industry.

With fierce statements being exchanged by those on both sides of the issue, it is clear that the subject of online gambling will remain a hot-button topic for some time to come. It is clear that the case for legalized internet gambling in the United States is quickly picking up steam, but with a Presidential election just a year away, few believe that any real resolution will be found to the issue before 2009.