



Posted on Thu, Jun. 04, 2009

## Slots a possibility for special session, Beshear says

By Jack Brammer  
jbrammer@herald-leader.com

FRANKFORT — Gov. Steve Beshear might still ask lawmakers to consider allowing casino-style gambling at horse racetracks during a special legislative session that starts June 15.

While announcing his call Wednesday for a special session to amend a financially strapped state budget, Beshear indicated that a decision might come soon on whether he adds expanded gambling to the agenda.

The Democratic governor, who pushed for expanded gambling in his 2007 campaign, said he's working on a bill that would legalize video lottery terminals, or slots, at racetracks.

Beshear said he recognizes that it's "a very tough issue for people to deal with," but there's no clear way to gauge consensus on the issue "unless you just address it."

Only the governor can call a special session and set its agenda. He said his agenda would be finalized by the middle of next week, certainly before the special session begins.

Beshear has been pushing for slots at racetracks to increase prize money for winning horses. Without help, he said, some tracks might close within a year.

The Kentucky Equine Education Project, a horse industry group based in Lexington, said in a statement that it appreciated Beshear's statement and expects expanded gambling to be approved in the special session.

"His comments indicated that he clearly has a firm grasp of the plight we are in. We believe that the governor and a majority of House and Senate members recognize the risk facing our signature industry," said KEEP.

House Speaker Greg Stumbo, D-Prestonsburg, has said his chamber is poised to help the horse industry. He sponsored a bill in this year's regular legislative session to allow slots at the tracks but did not call for a House vote on the measure.

Senate President David Williams, R-Burkesville, said there is no sentiment in his chamber and probably in the House to approve slots at the tracks. He said he is looking at other ways to improve track purses, but provided no further details.

Beshear said he has not talked to Williams about his proposals but would be willing to listen to any ideas to help the horse industry.

Williams also said it would take about \$4.6 billion worth of gambling to create \$70 million for purses.

The Family Foundation, a conservative group based in Lexington, said last week it would file a lawsuit if the legislature approves expanded gambling without a constitutional amendment that would let voters decide the issue.

Rep. Jody Richards, a Bowling Green Democrat who lost the speakership earlier this year to Stumbo, has asked for an attorney general's opinion on whether a constitutional amendment is needed to allow slots at the tracks.

Besides expanded gambling, Beshear is considering adding to the call of the special session several other initiatives, including:

- Incentives to help bring a NASCAR Sprint Cup race to the Kentucky Speedway track in Gallatin County and land an advanced car battery plant in Hardin County.
- Creation of an authority that could fund the Ohio River bridges projects in Jefferson County, probably using tolls.