

House panel clears anti-Internet gambling bill

Washington (Reuters) – A U.S. House committee on Wednesday approved a bill aimed at stamping out the USD 12 billion Internet gambling industry by stopping businesses from accepting credit cards and other forms of payment.

The bill, cleared by voice vote in the House Financial Services Committee, would prohibit a gambling business from accepting credit cards, checks, wire transfers and electronic funds transfers in illegal gambling transactions.

Unlawful gambling, under the legislation, would include placing bets on online poker sites, for example, and any other online wager made or received in a place where such a bet is illegal under federal or state law.

By making it illegal to accept payments from people who live where federal or state law prohibits wagering, the legislation would impact offshore gambling Web sites used by many Americans to place bets.

The legislation carves out some exceptions, including wagering on horse races, governed under another U.S. law, and fantasy sports.

The bill now moves to the House floor for consideration.

Major professional sports organizations supported the legislation, including the National Football League and Major League Baseball, saying in a joint statement that sports betting „threatens the integrity of our respective sports.“

But Massachusetts Democratic Rep. Barney Frank, the top Democrat on the House committee, opposed the bill. He said Congress should not seek to control how adults spend their

money just because some lawmakers oppose gambling.

„Adults are entitled to do with their money what they want to do,“ he said.

A group called the Poker Players Alliance opposed the legislation as well.

„It is disingenuous to oppose Internet gambling and then write a bill that makes select forms of online gambling legal,“ said Michael Bolcerek, president of the group.

U.S. efforts to outlaw Internet gambling also have been opposed by the Caribbean state of Antigua, which has been trying to build up its Internet gambling industry as a way to make up for sharply declining tourism revenue.