

DeWeese drafting bill for full-service casinos in Pennsylvania

With only one slots parlor open in the state, the man expected to be the next speaker of the state House wants to up the ante by adding table games.

A staff member for Democratic Minority Leader Rep. Bill DeWeese, of Greene County, said he plans to introduce legislation next year that would legalize games such as blackjack and poker at casinos. It's expected DeWeese will be elected speaker when Democrats take over the House in January.

Table games would mean more money for property tax cuts and would help Pennsylvania stay competitive with surrounding states, said Mike Manzo, DeWeese's chief of staff.

„We just want to add it to a long list of things we will try to achieve,“ Manzo said today.

A Senate staffer who worked on the slots law said it's „premature“ to think about expanding legalized gambling. DeWeese's proposal would require approval from the Senate and Gov. Ed Rendell.

West Virginia lawmakers have considered allowing table games to answer Pennsylvania's opening of slots parlors. Legislators there are expected to vote in January on allowing table games in the four counties that have slots.

Rendell told the Trib this week he feels „vindicated“ by the amount of money being brought in by the state's first casino, Mohegan Sun at Pocono Downs, which opened Nov. 14.

Through Sunday, gamblers had wagered more than \$ 71 million at the casino. With a daily take per machine of \$ 513, the casino

has far exceeded the Rendell administration's projections.

To reach \$ 1 billion a year in property tax relief, Rendell has said the state needs at least \$ 230 daily per machine from 38,000 machines. The state's slots law allows as many as 61,000 machines.

„It's not only vindicated me, it shows that I'm ... conservative,“ Rendell said.