

# Detroit's casinos could be hit if state bans smoking in all workplaces

Detroit (AP) – If smoking is banned in Detroit bars, restaurants and workplaces, Betty Gilbert says it will hurt the city's casinos.

Gilbert, who was smoking a cigarette Friday with members of her bowling team on a sidewalk near Greektown Casino downtown, should know. The 69-year-old from Cape May County, N.J. – who said she usually gambles weekly in Atlantic City – plans to cut back when that city's smoking law goes into effect.

„If they cut out the smoking, they should also cut out the drinking,“ Gilbert said.

A ban passed by the Michigan Senate on Thursday now heads to the House, which passed a narrower bill five months ago. If the new bill becomes law, smokers could pass up the trip downtown to gamble and head instead to Indian casinos, which aren't affected, industry observers said.

But 37-year-old Yolanda Horne, who stays away from Detroit's casinos because the smoke inside is too much for her asthma, said she would reconsider if they went smoke-free.

„I think it's excellent,“ Horne, of Detroit, said of the anti-smoking legislation.

More than 30 states now outlaw smoking in public or workplaces, according to supporters of the ban, though some of the laws don't apply to restaurants and bars, while others make exceptions for casinos. Atlantic City's ban, which goes into effect Oct. 15, gives casinos the option to build enclosed, ventilated smoking lounges away from table games and

slot machines.

Smoking bans in other states have had negative impacts on casinos, said spokeswoman Jacci Woods at MotorCity Casino.

„We're not in favor of the smoking ban," Woods said. „We are very concerned it will create an unlevel playing field in regard to the tribal casinos.“

Casino analyst Jake Miklojcik, president of Michigan Consultants, said there will be an „impact," but it's not clear how big.

Someone who lives in Detroit might not make the 150-mile drive north to Mount Pleasant to the Saginaw Chippewa Indian tribe's Soaring Eagle Casino and Resort just to smoke, Miklojcik said. But smokers who live in Detroit's northern suburbs might be swayed.

Across the Detroit River at Caesars Windsor, Ontario's 2006 smoking ban has been blamed in part for a slowdown that led to job cuts. And a spokeswoman there cheered the Detroit proposal, saying it would put her casino back on similar footing to Detroit's.

„In any competitive market, it's always advantageous to have more of a level playing field, and it looks like this is what the legislation will do," Holly Ward, spokeswoman for the Windsor casino.

James Nye, spokesman for the Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomis Indians, also known as the Gun Lake tribe, said Michigan's 18 tribal casinos are too far away to draw Detroit gamblers in big numbers. The tribe has been working for a decade to develop a casino in Allegan County near Grand Rapids.

MGM Grand Detroit said no one was available Friday to comment on the proposal. And a Greektown Casino spokesman did not

return a telephone message seeking comment on Friday.

The bill now goes back to the House, which five months ago passed a similar bill that would have exempted casinos, bingo halls, horse tracks, cigar bars and smoke shops – provisions the Senate stripped in favor of banning smoking in all workplaces.

The House could send the bill as early as next week to Gov. Jennifer Granholm, who supports the broader ban.