

# Opposition blasts push for casino sports gambling

Ontario's push to allow Las Vegas-style sports gambling in casinos in a bid to boost sagging revenues is an irresponsible move that could deepen a troubling trend of gambling addiction in the province, critics said Thursday.

Ontario casinos do have some sports betting but it's limited to the government-run Pro-Line lottery in which gamblers select the outcomes of three or more contests on a „parlay“ ticket.

The province is urging Ottawa to amend the Criminal Code to allow casino „sportsbooks“ – a section of the facility where gamblers could make bets on individual games, government officials confirmed.

Former Infrastructure Minister David Caplan – who was recently shuffled to the Health and Long-Term Care file – made the request last year in a letter to federal Justice Minister Rob Nicholson, said Caplan's former spokeswoman Amy Tang.

„There was a letter that came back from Minister Nicholson's office, saying ‚Thank you for the letter‘ and that was it,“ said Tang, who works for newly-minted Energy and Infrastructure Minister George Smitherman.

„(He said) he was going to give it some consideration.“

The Toronto Star has reported that Nicholson, who represents Niagara Falls, is receptive to the idea and the two levels of government are quietly co-operating, although no timeline has been set.

However, Tang said she wasn't aware of any talks.

„We're hopeful that they're going to make that change,“ she

added. „That would then allow us to investigate this as a possibility for an overall provincial gaming strategy.“

Darren Eke, a spokesman for Nicholson, wouldn't confirm whether talks were underway.

„The minister is aware of the views of the Province of Ontario with respect to single sport event betting,“ Eke wrote in an email.

„This government has put forth an extensive legislative justice agenda of which some legislation still remains in Parliament; we intend on continuing to take action on issues within the Justice portfolio in due course.“

Progressive Conservative Leader John Tory slammed the proposal as just another distraction concocted by the governing Liberals to draw attention away from the province's current economic troubles.

„We should have a discussion about sportsbooks at our casinos because they're in trouble,“ he said.

„But at the end of the day, what problem is this going to solve? Is it going to fix the economy? Will it fix C. difficile or long-term care, or will it fix even the government's revenues? No, it won't.“

But Conservative finance critic Tim Hudak said he's urged Nicholson and Smitherman to move quickly on the proposal.

„I do believe that this would be helpful to our casinos, to bring patrons back,“ said Hudak, who represents the riding of Niagara Falls-Glanbrook.

Expanding gambling at a time when the government barely has a handle on its problem gamblers is an „incredibly irresponsible“ move, said NDP critic Peter Kormos.

„What this does illustrate is that it's the province who has

the real gambling addiction, the real gambling dependency, because it's looking forward to those new revenues," he said.

If Ottawa agrees to the changes, the province could see sportsbooks in two Niagara Falls casinos, Casino Rama near Orillia and the new Caesars Windsor facility, as well as racetracks.

Currently, Canadian gamblers skirt the law by betting with sportsbooks in the Caribbean, the United Kingdom, and a slew of other countries.

North American sports leagues have traditionally opposed sportsbooks – one reason why Las Vegas is not home to a major league team.