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Kentucky Governor Steve Beshear unveils casino proposal

FRANKFORT, KY. — Gov. Steve Beshear unveiled a long-anticipated casino gambling amendment Tuesday that would allow five racetrack casinos and two others if legislators and voters approve.

The amendment, contained within a bill being sponsored by Georgetown Republican Sen. Damon Thayer, contains a list of potential uses for the revenue that would be generated, including education and local government along with help for the horse industry.

Such details would be dealt with in subsequent legislation should the amendment pass.

An amendment requires three fifths approval in both houses — 60 House members and 23 senators — and ratification by voters in the general election.

Beshear had hoped to release his proposed amendment in the first days of the 60-day session, which marked its 28th day on Tuesday. But he held off at Thayer's urging because of uneasiness by some potentially supportive legislators who didn't want to face a controversial vote before redistricting was finished and the candidate

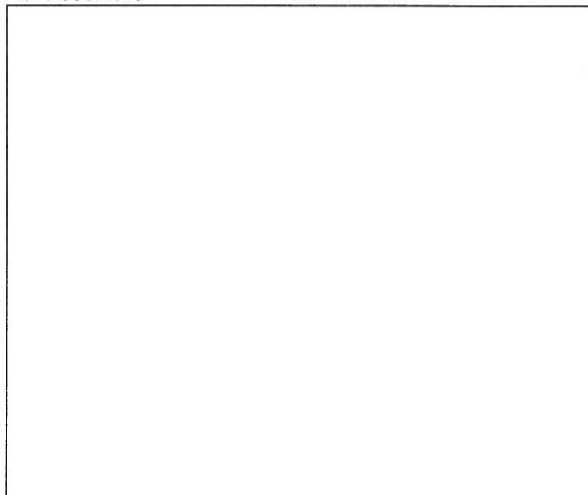
filing deadline passed.

The bitter redistricting battles over both the congressional and legislative maps put virtually every major issue — including gambling — on hold. Final approval of the congressional maps came Friday, as did a revised legislative filing deadline — after a Franklin Circuit Court judge declared the new legislative maps unconstitutional.

Questions over redistricting, however, could still pose problems for the amendment. The legislative redistricting issue remains tied up in the courts on appeal — and the issue could be sent back to the legislature. That could mean a reopening of the filing period.

Tuesday's filing comes four years to the day after Beshear — then fresh off winning his first term in a campaign in which expanded gambling was a centerpiece — unveiled his first amendment proposal. It would have allowed up to 12 casinos, which House legislators lowered to nine before the amendment ultimately failed.

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One of the criticisms of that proposal was its timing, which some viewed as late, on the 27th day of that session.

Beshear and Thayer have said they believe there's plenty of time left for legislators to take up the amendment this year.

Although recent years' public polling has repeatedly shown support for expanded gambling — or at least allowing voters to decide the issue — the track record for bills on the subject is littered with failures. Bills have failed in at least nine legislative sessions over the last 11 years.

Several proposals have passed House committees, but only a video slots bill during a 2009 special session actually passed one of the chambers. That bill died in a Senate committee.

The proposed amendment does not specify which racetracks would get casinos, or where the non-track casinos could be located.

Kentucky has eight racetracks and a ninth license available that has never been awarded. In previous proposals, the two Lexington tracks shared a license.

The opposition to expanded gambling is considerable, and the most powerful foe is Senate President David Williams, R-Burkesville. Williams has said the amendment will be sent to Thayer's State & Local Government Committee.

The Family Foundation of Kentucky is

among the most outspoken groups opposing expanded gambling and has already said Beshear's proposal is dead.

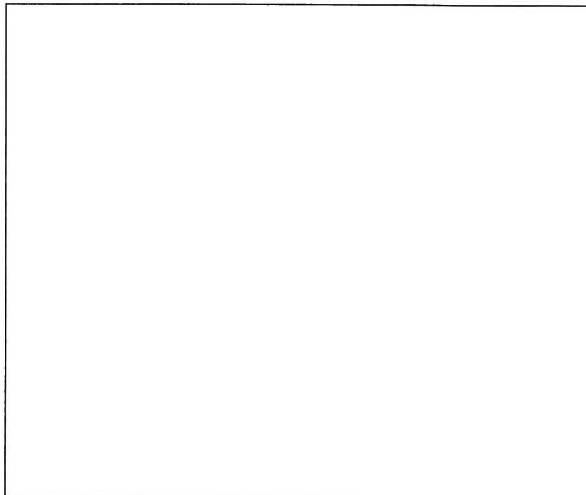
In a statement Tuesday the group's spokesman, Martin Cothran, said the governor's bill "is an attempt by wealthy horse track owners and casino interests to buy their way into the constitution like box seats at a ball game."

He said the attempt to write an industry into the constitution was "unprecedented" and added that Kentucky "has never amended its constitution to favor one industry like this."

One challenge for Beshear is lining up support among legislators who support expanded gambling but might have preferred an amendment that didn't guarantee any locations for racetracks or preferred an amendment that only allowed casinos at tracks.

Another wrinkle is House Speaker Greg Stumbo, the Prestonsburg Democrat who

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has supported expanded gambling but would prefer to do it by law without an amendment. Stumbo has said he is open to considering an amendment if it passes the Senate.

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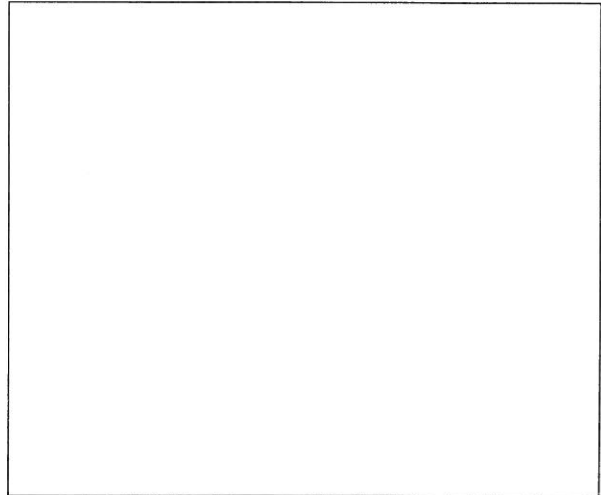
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