

## Gambling Study Proposed For Florida

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[Tony Batt, GamblingCompliance](#) [1]

Weary of rancorous and inconclusive debates about gambling in the Florida legislature, House and Senate leaders in Tallahassee are proposing a study to develop a coherent strategy for regulating the gaming industry in the Sunshine State.

Incoming Senate President Don Gaetz and House Speaker-Designate Will Weatherford, both Republicans, are urging lawmakers to hold off on new gambling legislation until the study is completed, sources said.

“His position is that instead of a piecemeal approach, the state should follow a methodical and holistic approach to gambling,” Weatherford spokesman Ryan Duffy told GamblingCompliance.

Duffy declined to discuss specifics of the study proposal, but said: “The only deadline is 2015 when the Seminole compact expires.”

The Seminole Tribe [negotiated a compact](#) [2] with Florida in April 2010 giving the tribe exclusive rights to operate table games in exchange for payments to the state of at least \$1bn over five years.

Despite the absence of comprehensive regulatory scheme, Florida receives about \$233m per year from the gaming industry. This makes Florida America’s fourth largest gambling state, according to Republican state Senator Ellyn Bogdanoff.

A bill by Bogdanoff and Republican state Representative Erik Fresen that [would have authorized up to three destination resort casinos](#) [3] in Florida collapsed in February.

Similar legislation failed in April 2011 and Republican [Governor Rick Scott](#) [4] of Florida last year vetoed a budget proposal calling for a \$400,000 study on the impact of the state’s gambling industry.

“It is time for the legislative leaders and the governor to do what is right by Florida’s citizens, and as policymakers, fix what we currently have and recognize that the current structure affords Floridians all of the downside of a large gaming economy and very little of the upside,” Marc Dunbar, a pari-mutuel lobbyist, told GamblingCompliance in an email.

Still, it is not clear if Genting, Las Vegas Sands Corp. and other large casino companies that are eager to expand into South Florida will wait for the study to be completed before lobbying for the introduction of new legislation.

One person who does not intend to wait is Republican state representative Scott Plakon, who introduced bills to [ban Internet cafes](#) [5] this year and last year.

“I am in a tough re-election battle,” Plakon told GamblingCompliance.

But if he is re-elected, Plakon said he will introduce another bill in 2013 to “end the lack of clarity in Florida law,” prohibiting Internet cafes.

Bob Jarvis, a law professor at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, said there is a “real chance” for a gambling impact study in Florida because the state’s gambling policy “has gone topsy turvy in the last 25 years.”

But Jarvis is not optimistic that a gambling study group will clarify Florida’s regulatory policy.

“Politicians love to kick the can down the road, and a blue-ribbon commission to study gambling in Florida would allow them to do just that,” Jarvis told GamblingCompliance.

“When the study commission issues its report, like most reports, it will gather dust on a shelf,” Jarvis said.

Florida is [deeply divided on gambling](#) [6] and probably always will be, Jarvis said.

“Eventually, (the state legislature in) Tallahassee is going to come to the realization that it has to get out of this business and allow gambling policy to be decided by county options,” he said.



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