

Tracking a tax cut

State tax cut on outstate horse racing won't help area tracks

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Michigan will cut its taxes on horse racing at outstate tracks, though it won't help Northville Downs or Hazel Park Raceway.

The Legislature passed House Bill 5400, sponsored by Mike Griffin, D-Jackson, in the closing days of the 1998 session.

It cuts the tax on simulcasting from 3.5 to 2.5 percent for holders of racing licenses whose average simulcast wagering is less than \$95,000 a day. The tax is on all wagers on interstate and inter-track simulcast races.

It will affect harness racing tracks in Jackson, Saginaw and Mount Pleasant. (The Muskegon harness track closed in 1997.)

Revenue loss will be \$630,000 a year, said the racing commissioner's office. The racing office opposed the bill, as did the Michigan Harness Horsemen's Association, the Michigan Horsemen's Benevolent Protective Association, the Service Employees International Union Local 79 and a representative of Hazel Park Raceway.

The Senate passed the bill overwhelmingly, but the House vote was a tighter, 67-28.

Here is how Eccentric area representatives voted:

YES - Barbara Dobb, R-Union Lake, Shirley Johnson, R-Royal Oak, Greg Kaza, R-Rochester Hills, Tom Middleton, R-Ortonville, Nancy Quarles, D-Southfield.

NO - Patricia Godeaux, R-Birmingham, Andrew Raczkowski, R-Farmington Hills.

ABSENT - Penny Crissman, R-Rochester.

A bigger cut

Race tracks would get a bigger cut of unclaimed winnings under a bill passed by the Legislature.

Instead of turning all unclaimed winnings back to the state, operators of standardbred programs could retain half and turn back half to the Michigan Agriculture Equine Fund.

Senate Bill 1314, when signed by the governor, will reduce state revenue by about \$3.5 million per year. Sponsor was Sen. George McManus, R-Traverse City. It required a two-thirds vote in each chamber because, under the constitution, the bill was an appropriation to private parties.

The bill sailed through the Senate on a 36-1 vote.

The House vote was 79-15.

Here is how Eccentric area lawmakers voted:

YES - Penny Crissman, R-Rochester, Barbara

Dobb, R-Union Lake, Patricia Godeaux, R-Birmingham, Shirley Johnson, R-Royal Oak, Greg Kaza, R-Rochester Hills, Tom Middleton, R-Ortonville, Nancy Quarles, D-Southfield.

NO - Andrew Raczkowski, R-Farmington Hills.

Late night vote

The Senate gave Gov. Engler a one-vote victory when it approved 19-18 his compact with four Indian tribes to set up casinos in western Michigan.

Ordinarily, a majority of 20 votes is needed, but in this case a mere majority of those present and voting was sufficient to approve House Concurrent Resolution 115.

Tribal casinos are planned for Battle Creek, New Buffalo, Manistee and Mackinaw City.

Voting yes were Loren Bennett, R-Canton, Mike Bouchard, R-Birmingham, Bill Bullard Jr., R-Milford, Bob Geake, R-Northville, and John J.H. Schwarz, R-Battle Creek.

Voting no were John Cherry, D-Clio, Matt Dunaskiss, R-Lake Orion, Gary Peters, D-Bloomfield Township, Alma Smith, D-Salem, George Hart, D-Deerborn, and Mike Rogers, R-Brighton.

Not voting was Dianne Byrum, D-Onondaga.

Alma Smith said she voted no because "the compact was written with no assurance that Detroit will be protected from any incursion within that 150-mile radius," despite Engler's assurances that Detroit wouldn't get nearly competition.

Sen. Art Miller, D-Warren, chided the state for giving in to more Indian casinos but failing to help Hazel Park Raceway and the now-closed Ladbroke DRC track in Livonia.

Sen. Dave Jaye, R-Macomb County, attempted to amend the resolution to require the Indian tribes submit to state audits, pay the same taxes as Michigan businesses, provide plaintiffs the same legal rights in tribal courts as they have in state courts, and stop gill-netting fish.

But Bouchard argued down the amendments, saying it is "not within the scope of authority of this body. There are not 148 members negotiating the individual provisions," Bouchard said. The Legislature was limited to voting up or voting down the resolution.

Rogers lost, 18-19, his amendment to make Indian casinos subject to the same regulations that will apply to Detroit casinos.

Sen. Bill Schutte, R-Midland, called the resolution unconstitutional, citing a ruling by Attorney General Frank Kelley that it would take a legislative bill (20 votes in the Senate, 55 in the House) to authorize the four casinos.

The House vote was 48-47.

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