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Destination Casinos Dead: Now Let's Shut Down Internet Cafés

(Tallahassee) – Last week's demise of the destination casino bill in a Florida House Subcommittee is not the end of the legislative discussion on stopping the expansion of gambling in Florida. Other important issues are still percolating in the legislative process, including a bill to close so-called internet cafés, which exploit a loophole in Florida law to offer online gambling in storefronts in many parts of Florida.

"Even supporters of the destination casino legislation decried that fact that internet cafés have popped up throughout Florida," said No Casinos President John Sowinski. "It is time to pass legislation to shut down these gambling houses that operate in a legal grey area and because they have never been sanctioned by the legislature or the voters."

House Bill 3, Sponsored by Representative Scott Plakon would do just that. The bill has passed through two committees and awaits floor action in the House. The Senate version of Plakon's Bill, sponsored by Senator Steve Oelrich, awaits action in Senate Regulated Industries Committee. Unfortunately this committee has passed a bill that would regulate – rather than shut down – these gambling parlors.

Regulating internet cafés instead of shutting them down is bad public policy for several reasons. First, because it grants amnesty for and rewards those who have chosen to operate in a legal grey area. It would also provide legislative authorization to these operations that would likely violate the Seminole Compact, costing the state hundreds of millions of tax dollars each year from tribal operations. Like all forms of gambling, wagering at Internet cafe's comes with associated social costs of addiction and crime.

"Now that the destination casino bill is dead, legislators can focus on truly controlling and harnessing gambling in our state – and the best place to start is shutting down these shady internet gambling cafés," said Sowinski.

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