

MONTPELIER Over the counter at the Middle Road Market in Milton, customers talk to owner Ron Hubert about how they head to the Mohegan Sun and Akwesasne Mohawk casinos in nearby states. They grouse about how Vermont loses out on their businesses by not having casinos.

Hubert, a

Republican serving in his second term in the state House, decided he'd try to do something about that. Friday, he introduced a bill in the Statehouse that would allow one casino gambling site in Vermont. Sixteen other representatives signed on, most of them Republicans.

A lot of people in the state of Vermont are taking money outside the state to casinos, Hubert said. I thought there was certainly no harm in getting the conversation started.

Hubert might have started the conversation, but keeping it going could be tougher. Hubert said he has not discussed the bill with legislative leaders who oversee the legislative agenda.

House Speaker Shap Smith, D-Morris-town, said simply of Hubert's bill, I do not support casinos in Vermont.

Vermont has a long history of restraint when it comes to gambling.

Its going to be a tough sell, said Senate Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs Committee Chairman Vince Illuzzi, R-Essex/Orleans, who has watched other gambling efforts fail in his three decades in the Legislature.

The states lottery was approved in 1978, he noted, after a 10-year effort. The lottery's a stretch for a lot of folks, he said.

Rep. Helen Head, D-South Burlington, chairwoman of the House General, Housing and Military Affairs Committee, where Hubert's bill was sent, said she has also a lot of resistance to casinos. For decades, that fear has stymied efforts of the Abenaki to gain official recognition, she noted.

There is a lot of fear out there about casinos not being consistent with Vermont values, she said.

Hubert's argument that Vermonters are already gambling at out-of-state casinos has some validity, Illuzzi said.

The bill calls for the Vermont Lottery Commission to oversee the casino. Proceeds would go to the state Education Fund, as they do for lottery tickets now. A \$5 million licensing fee and \$50,000 application fee would ensure that only a professional group would be involved, Hubert said.

Hubert said limiting the casinos to one would prevent a Las Vegas-strip-like effect. With Vermont's permit regulations, there should be sufficient constraints to make sure any casino is tactful, he said.

Hubert said other small states have raised hundreds of millions of dollars from casinos. He said he'd like to see that money go to lowering property taxes.

Written by Administrator

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Hubert said he has no location in mind. Ideas he has heard are a floating casino on Lake Champlain or a train casino out of White River Junction.

As for Hubert, he said he hasnt been to a casino since the 1970s, nor does he have the money to become the licensee. He said he has talked to some people whod like to be.

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