

Big bucks being spent surrounding Calif. online gambling bills

By Laurel Rosenhall, Sacramento Bee

Bills to legalize online gambling hit the state Capitol more than two years ago – and are likely headed for another year of debate.

Lobbyists and political campaigns are benefiting from the protracted discussion, collecting millions of dollars from the card rooms, racetracks and Indian tribes seeking to shape the future of Internet wagering.

The conversation centers on how it should be implemented and which of the competing interests will reap the benefits. That creates even more business for Capitol advocates, as they sort out differences among their clients.

“Any time there’s a major new legislative initiative that is contentious, the details of which have to be worked out, it’s good for the business of lobbyists, political consultants and lawyers,” said Howard Dickstein, a lawyer who represents several Indian tribes, including the one that owns Thunder Valley casino near Lincoln.

“Any issue where there is this much money involved is going to attract advocacy on all sides,” Dickstein said.

Gambling interests have long been big political spenders in California – even more so with the advent of Indian casinos in the 1990s. Moving the business online will require another political push.

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